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**Representing Marrakesh: The Interplay of Tour
Guides' Professional Status, Language, Narratives, and
Site Selection in Tourists' Perceptions**

MA in English Studies: Linguistic, Literary, and Sociocultural Perspectives

Treball de Fin de Màster/ MA dissertation

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2025/2026

Statement of Intellectual Honesty

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Acknowledgements

Above all, I want to sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr Melissa Moyer, whose persistent patience, encouragement, and dedication to my vision established the foundation of this research. Her meticulous guidance helped me navigate obstacles with ease and confidence. I will always be grateful for the space she gave me to grow into my own as a researcher.

My heartfelt thanks also go out to all my professors, whose constant support and understanding have guided me throughout this journey. Their mentorship motivated me to believe in my abilities and their insights truly shaped the scope of this work. I am also grateful to the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona for providing the academic environment and resources that made this Master's programme a transformative experience.

I would also like to thank my classmates for the camaraderie, peer feedback, and the countless moments that made this experience unforgettable. This work was made possible through our collaborative and supportive environment.

My family, my circle of love and support, deserves a very special thank you. To my parents and my brothers, thank you for your everlasting patience, especially during the moments when I felt overwhelmed. I found the strength to keep going because of your love, care, and constant belief in me. You have provided everything I needed to thrive, and I am forever committed to doing my best to make you proud.

To my chosen family, my closest friends, thank you. Being surrounded by your friendship has shown me that some of life's deepest bonds are the ones we choose, and I am endlessly grateful for having you by my side.

Lastly, I express deep gratitude to the scholars whose works inspired and informed this research. Their intellectual contributions provided the theoretical lenses necessary for my analysis and have ignited a lasting passion for my continued work in this field.

Abstract

While previous research has framed Marrakesh as a static museum, this ethnographic study shifts the analytical focus to the micro-level communicative practices of tour guides. It investigates how professional status, specifically whether a guide is licensed or unlicensed, functions as a primary filter determining the construction of the city's image through a tripartite model of language, narratives, and site selection, and how these interactions subsequently reshape foreign tourists' perceptions. Drawing on two weeks of intensive ethnographic fieldwork, including observations and interviews with guides, tourists, and administrators, this study reveals that professional status indeed creates a fundamental divide in interactional practices. Licensed guides attempt to demonstrate their institutional legitimacy either by emphasising official symbols or by relying on the cultural capital they have accumulated over time. Conversely, unlicensed guides, who are in direct and constant competition with their licensed counterparts for the same tourist clientele, employ survival tactics such as speeding up movements, fabricating stories, and maintaining clandestine networks to counter state attempts to eliminate them. Yet, these findings reveal that both formal and informal guides share the same commercial aspirations. Marrakesh, therefore, is a site of sociolinguistic and institutional conflict over the right to represent the city and make a living from it.

Keywords:

Marrakesh, Tourism, Guides, Language and Representation, Professional Status

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1. Introduction

The traditional definition of tourism as the simple logistical movement of travellers has been superseded in the current globalised period. It has developed into a sophisticated, multidimensional social and economic sector that serves as a "contact zone" (Pratt, 1991), a dynamic setting where identities, cultures, and economic interests encounter, compromise with, and reshape one another. Marrakesh, a major tourism hub at the forefront of the Global South's tourism economy that attracted four million tourists in 2024 (Morocco World News, 2025), has emerged as an example of this phenomenon. Imagine standing at the very heart of Jemaa el-Fna square: the echoes of Gnawa rhythms and Halqa performances blend with the competing voices of tour guides narrating the city. Those guides are the essential architects of the visitor's experience, bridging the gap between their initial assumptions and the destination's lived reality.

However, the conditions of this profession in Marrakesh are fractured. On one side stands the licensed guide, operating under official state certification; on the other, the unlicensed guide, navigating an informal and often clandestine economy. This research argues that professional status is far more than a simple administrative designation. It is the primary filter that determines how the city's image is constructed linguistically, narratively, and spatially.

Previous scholarship has extensively mapped Marrakesh from architectural, economic, and anthropological perspectives, often framing the city as a living museum or a colonial stage (Schmitt, 2005; Minca, 2006). Yet, these studies have largely treated the urban fabric as a static spatial structure. This dominant macroeconomic focus overlooks a crucial analytical juncture: the dynamic, micro-level interactions that truly animate these spaces. As Brito (2020) notes, the institutional division between formal and informal guiding remains rarely problematised. Consequently, a theoretical blind spot

exists regarding how legal status functions not just as an administrative classification, but as a primary variable dictating a guide's interactional priorities. This research seeks to fill this void by shifting the analytical focus from static spatial analysis to examining how institutional legitimacy, or the lack thereof, fundamentally shapes guiding practices and eventually the representation of the city.

To address this, this research employs an ethnographic approach to examine the tour guiding profession, focusing on the discursive practices that define the tourist experience. Central to this study is a tripartite model of place representation. This framework integrates three analytical levels: language, analysed through the lens of linguistic commodification (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010); narrative, investigated via the mechanisms of storytelling and institutional mediation (Salazar, 2010); and site selection, conceptualised as the guide's "prescriptive power" to physically manage the tourist's experience (Simon, 2008). Through this model, this study further explores how these representations engage with the imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) that tourists carry with them. Since visitors rarely arrive with a blank slate, the guide functions as an essential mediator tasked with confirming, reconstructing, or challenging these preconceived images.

Ultimately, by moving beyond the study of static urban space, this research depicts the dynamism of Marrakesh's tourism economy. It addresses three central questions: 1) How do licensed and unlicensed guides differ in their linguistic repertoires and narrative strategies when constructing representations of Marrakesh? 2) How does the strategic selection of sites by these guides physically and semiotically contribute to the representation of the city? 3) To what extent do these interactions reshape tourists' own pre-existing images of the destination? By answering these, this study provides a ground-level view of who possesses the power of speech (Bourdieu, 1991) and the legitimate

authority to represent the city in contemporary tourism, focusing on how these distinct conditions result in varying practices within the same profession.

2. Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a critical and synthesised reading of the existing literature underpinning this study, establishing the conceptual framework necessary to examine how the profession of tour guiding constitutes a space for sociolinguistic negotiation. Instead of viewing tourism solely as a commercial industry, this review positions tourism as a dynamic contact zone characterised by cultural dynamism and transnational linguistic exchange. To deconstruct these communicative mechanisms, this chapter is divided into five essential and interconnected sections. First, it establishes the epistemological foundation of the study by linking the sociolinguistics of tourism to the methodological importance of ethnography to capture those fleeting and dynamic moments of communication. Second, it frames the profession of tour guiding as an interactive mediation process, tracing the historical evolution of the guide from a mere transmitter of information to a dynamic cultural mediator. Third, it discusses tour licensing policies, moving beyond their administrative nature to view them as institutional gatekeeping tools. Fourth, it shifts the perspective to that of the tourist, examining how historically imagined communities and the algorithmic gaze of social media today exert performance pressure on the guide. Finally, it brings together all these dynamics and places them in the context of Marrakesh, leading to the formulation of the research gap, namely the critical lack of comparative and interactive studies that show how the legal and professional status of the guide controls their guiding practices.

2.1. Sociolinguistics of Tourism and the Linguistics of Contact

Tourism is increasingly approached within contemporary scholarship as a form of continuous movement, functioning not merely as travel between points, but as an encounter between the self and the unfamiliar. This phenomenon constitutes a profound cultural mobility as much as a geographical one, because the tourist does not just move

across a physical map, but transports their linguistic and cultural identities into a locale characterised by different ones. This intersection creates a fluid space for negotiation, a living experience in which cultures meet, interact, and mutate. Such a dynamic aligns closely with what Jacquemet (2005) describes as “transidiomatic practices,” where human communication is no longer bound by territorial borders but operates as an integral part of a global cultural flow. This flow does not merely represent a pre-existing reality of Marrakesh; rather, as critical sociolinguistics research demonstrates, tourism is “instrumental in producing” the very culture that tourists set out to know. This suggests that the interactional encounters between guides and tourists within the city are part of a broader “moiré effect,” a complex semiotic meshing of translocal and transcultural identities where local resources are strategically recycled or appropriated to satisfy the “tourist gaze” (Nuselovici, Davidson & Mason, 2009; Urry, 2002, as cited in Heller, Jaworski & Thurlow, 2014). This perspective provides the analytical tools to understand how cultural and historical resources are negotiated and adapted to external expectations without losing their original linguistic and cultural value. If sociolinguistics studies language at the heart of society, tourism provides a live arena where these social interactions are observed in direct contact. Therefore, the role of tourism is not simply to provide a passive context for speech, but to shift the analytical focus toward a “linguistics of contact.” This approach prioritises the fluid, fleeting, and “fugitive moments” of interaction that define the tourist experience (Heller et al., 2014).

Given that tourism is conceptualised as a vital sector of contact linguistics, it can be argued that this phenomenon cannot be fully understood through laboratory settings or office-bound research relying solely on quantitative surveys and decontextualised data. These traditional methods often rely on a Saussurean synchrony in which language is “undressed, so to speak, and robbed of the spatial and temporal features” that define its

“occurrence, meaning and function in real social life” (Blommaert, 2010, p. xiv). To capture these dynamic linguistic practices, researchers are compelled to utilise ethnography, which entails an active physical presence and live observation during fieldwork (Makihara & Rodriguez, 2020). Ethnography enables the researcher to be immersed within the social experience, capturing not only the spoken word but also the ways in which meaning is negotiated based on the immediate context and participant reactions. An ethnographic approach is essential because tourist communicative events are “always multimodal,” extending far beyond the spoken word to include physical and social interactions. By being physically present, the researcher can document the “tourist linguascape,” which involves the deliberate “semiotic framing and management of space and place” (Jaworski et al., 2003, as cited in Heller et al., 2014). This perspective allows for a critical analysis of how site selection itself acts as a managed environment that structures the tourist experience. Thus, this methodology presents itself as a highly effective framework that allows researchers to produce “theoretically grounded and sophisticated descriptions” (Blommaert, 2010, p. xiv) for explaining how interactional practices play out in real-life settings. In brief, it provides the necessary tools to generate a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) that reveals the hidden layers of linguistic interaction, an insight that arguably remains inaccessible through desk-based analysis or the isolated evaluation of numbers and forms.

2.2. Tour Guiding as Mediation and Interactional Practice

In the live arena of tourism, guided tours serve as communicative practices that shape tourist perceptions of a given place (Dann, 1996). Specifically, these practices go beyond the exchange of information to become experiences in which collective meaning is constructed (Cohen, 1985; Bruner, 2005). Within this space, language is not only a tool to convey historical facts but a mechanism that forms how newcomers perceive a new

environment, necessitating a delicate balance between what is scripted and prepared and the spontaneous events that happen impromptu. All these social and cultural dimensions integrate to make the tour valuable to the tourist. Crucially, this interactional operation focuses on a core component: the guide. The aforementioned construction and curation of the perception of a place is done through the guide who is positioned as an intermediary who constructs representations. By strategically choosing what to tell and what to omit, as well as which language to use or avoid, they ensure that the picture they want to convey is clear. Consequently, the guided tour emerges as an actual performance that constructs realities to make them a cultural and touristic product to be consumed by the visitors (Heller, 2010).

Alongside the growth of tourism research, interpretations of the mediating role of tour guides have simultaneously continued to evolve. Reflecting on the history of the profession, McDonnell (2001) identified that the modern tour guide has evolved from two distinct antecedents: first, the pathfinder, centred on showing the tourists the path, and second, the mentor, focused on the transmission and interpretation of information. In terms of traditional industry standards, a tour guide was often defined as an individual, typically a professional, who guides people around places and interprets cultural heritage in an entertaining way (European Federation of Tour Guides Associations, 1998, as cited in Weiler & Black, 2015). However, such definitions restrict the functions of tour guides to an enclosed one-way process. In contrast to these earlier “presenter” or “entertainer” models, contemporary research portrays the guide as a dynamic intermediary. For instance, Salazar (2005) frames them as cultural mediators who balance local knowledge with global expectations, producing what he terms “glocal” representations. In a related vein, Gurung et al. (1996, as cited in Dahles, 2002, p. 784) assert that the guide is “someone who builds bridges among different groups of people through the deployment

of money, services, access, and information.” This definition highlights that the guide’s function transcends passive storytelling; by managing the flow of resources, access, and information, the guide actively acts as a socio-economic gatekeeper, determining which local services are highlighted and how, thereby directly influencing the economic outcomes of the encounter. Ultimately, this mediating role is highly relevant and most probably inherent in the nature of guiding, notwithstanding the fact that research continues to diverge in the way researchers specify and develop that role.

Having demonstrated the significant importance of guiding practices, it is now essential to examine how these practices are implemented and how the guide plays this interactive role within the tour. In this regard, this research proposes that these practices are primarily undertaken to construct a specific representation of the destination, a process heavily influenced by the legal and institutional frameworks governing tourism. According to Law No. 05.12 (2012), the Moroccan Ministry of Tourism has official control over the guiding profession and has organised regional committees to monitor guide accreditation and tourism product criteria. By ensuring that professional guiding practices are in conformity with national tourist plans and official destination representations, these institutional procedures work as the sector's major architect. As a result, the representations provided by guides are negotiated constructions that achieve a balance between professional industry requirements, state-led tourist objectives, and the individual guide's agency. Crucially, this study asserts that this representation is structurally composed of three fundamental levels: language, narrative, and site selection. By establishing this tripartite conception of place representation, this thesis offers its central theoretical contribution, bringing together and integrating dimensions that previous field research has often explored in isolation.

To lay a sound and robust academic foundation for this framework, this study draws upon well-known critical references in the field to justify the importance and utility of each of these three elements. Firstly, the level of language functions as a fundamental semiotic resource; as Thurlow and Jaworski (2010) demonstrate in their research on tourism discourse, the mediated linguistic choices, multilingual practices, and the use of specific languages or dialects within the conversation are mechanisms of “linguistic commodification” that shape and furnish the cultural landscape of the trip and give the place its touristic character. Secondly, the narrative level represents the primary discursive mechanism of representation; it is here where the structuring and framing of the city's portrayal within the guide's stories and anecdotes construct identity. As Salazar (2010) explains, through storytelling, guides strategically manipulate narratives and history, by choosing what to voice and what to silence, to produce or modify the imagination associated with the tourist destination. Thirdly, this research shows that these linguistic and narrative representations do not occur in isolation but are physically connected to the ground through site selection. Based on Simon (2008), this component represents the “prescriptive power” of the guide, that is, their ability to control the physical paths of the tourists and direct their visual focus. Simon argues that the guide's role exceeds giving information to shaping tourists' visual focus, noting that guides are often caught between simply presenting the famous places that tourists expect to see and their desire to share a different, less conventional side of the city. However, in the context of Marrakesh, it is important to acknowledge that the guides' repertoire is still constrained and enabled by the aforementioned national legislation, which defines the boundaries for official site interpretation and professional conduct.

2.3. The Politics of Licensing: Legitimacy and Institutional Gatekeeping

While these evolving definitions, mediating roles, and structural levels of representation outline how guiding is conceptualised, their practical execution is deeply fractured by questions of institutional legitimacy. This distinction has long been documented across many fields, but it manifests itself with particular prominence within the tourism sector (Bourdieu, 1991; Wilensky, 1964). This is largely due to the fact that guiding constitutes a highly dynamic sector where local youths are often exposed to the industry from a very young age, which facilitates their integration without formal training (Crick, 1992; Salazar, 2010). Because such skills can be “learned on the job,” institutions often struggle to establish an “exclusive jurisdiction” over the craft, leading them to use licensing as a “weapon in the battle for professional authority” (Wilensky, 1964, pp. 138, 145). Dahles (2002) argues this institutional intervention is necessary because the view of guides as independent mediators is an idealised picture that “fails to capture the political component” of guiding (p. 785). The state views the tourist guide not just as a source of information, but as a face of the country. If someone speaks without authorisation, the state fears damaging its tourist image or spreading misinformation about history or politics, which is why it tries to control every word spoken. While both types of guides perform the identical function of representing a place, Dahles contends that institutions justify their strict division based on anxieties and fears regarding the dissemination of unverified information, thereby rendering professional status a pivotal issue.

We must view this official licence not as an administrative paper or a neutral organising and legal protocol but as a regulatory mechanism that acts as an institutional gatekeeper (Shohamy, 2006; Spolsky, 2009). When the institution imposes a licence to exercise guiding, it is in fact deciding who is the legitimate speaker to represent the general public and who is considered mistaken and illegal (Bourdieu, 1991). The state

makes decisions through the Ministry of Tourism. If it allows everyone to operate without regulation, it will lose control over the tourist product and would lose tax revenue due to informal guides working independently. This simple badge allows authorities to filter communicative practices, which involves requiring specific linguistic standards, such as mastering foreign languages, and representations that are agreed upon (Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Del Percio, 2018). Hence, this licence formalises and objectifies the power relations turning language into a monopolistic capital regulated by law, and those who do not possess it risk being linguistically delegitimised and economically marginalised (Bourdieu, 1991; Park & Wee, 2012). This marginalisation begins when the state imposes an academic language and standards of perfect linguistic registers. Those who lack this linguistic capital appear to the administration as ignorant or fraudulent, forcing them out of the formal market and into the informal sector, as they cannot keep up with the standards set by the state. By doing so, the state enforces a dominant order of indexicality, a stratified system that converts minute linguistic differences into social inequalities by indexing specific standards as legitimate and others as abnormal (Blommaert, 2010). In practice, this order of indexicality functions as a social hierarchy. If a person speaks a certain foreign language fluently and has a diploma, they are considered professional, whereas a person who speaks an intermediate foreign language and has no diploma is treated as unprofessional. In other words, the state turns the differences in language proficiency and education into a rigid moral judgment that divides society into classes and neglects the importance of experience.

This institutional oversight is of great analytical importance because it is directly linked to the commodification of place and identity (Greenwood, 1977; Heller et al., 2014). In today's global context, governments treat local cultures, including the history of the place and its residents, as national brands that must be marketed to tourists in the

best possible way. Here, the licensed guide is employed as a tool for constructing marketed representations of authenticity (Silver, 1993; Bruner, 2005). The narrative presented by the licensed guide is frequently analysed in the literature as being subject to institutionalised scriptedness (Heller et al., 2014), where political or social contradictions may be filtered out to maintain the destination's polished image. This scriptedness functions as a “scale-jump” (Blommaert, 2010), where the state attempts to lift situated local interactions to a general national scale, prioritising uniformity and predictability for the global market over individual agency. In other words, the licence guarantees to the state that history and culture will be consumed by the tourist as a pure and regulated product, which transforms the guide's communicative practice into a performance subject to a pre-defined set of ideological and economic parameters (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1985). Consequently, the licence establishes a “regime of truth” (Foucault, 1980) that defines what counts as the place and dictates who are the legitimate performers of local culture. This process aims to ensure that any political or social contradictions are filtered out, leaving only a version of history that is tamed for the market.

One of the significant theoretical issues raised in this regard is the sharp dichotomy between formal and informal (Schneider, 2014), which reveals a real struggle over the “power of speech” (Bourdieu, 1991). Extant literature demonstrates that this legal division often criminalises popular and local linguistic practices that occur outside of administrative control (Blommaert, 2010). These unlicensed guides, although the system considers them intruders, are often positioned within literature as representing the linguistics of resistance and adaptation (Scott, 1985). They are not bound by a rigid official narrative, and to survive and persuade tourists, they develop flexible communication practices and alternative narratives that can be positioned as being closer to lived reality and more spontaneously authentic than what is institutionally planned. For

example, Crick (1992) identifies “tactics talk,” a strategic blend of ambiguous friendship and local cultural capital, as the primary mechanism through which informal guides provide alternative narratives and services that are pointedly excluded from official institutional publications. Therefore, the critical issue here is how licensing transforms the tourist space into a site of class and linguistic conflict, where institutional discourses clash with the survival mechanisms of the street. This conflict illustrates the polycentric nature of the tourist space, where guides must navigate multiple, often conflicting, centres of authority, the legal norms of the state versus the authenticity demands of the market (Blommaert, 2010). This dichotomy illustrates a broader “struggle over who gets to decide what the nature of the commodity is,” meaning what will ultimately count as place, language, and identity, and who is permitted to “legitimately participate in its production” (Heller et al., 2014, pp. 449-450). While the licensed guide operates within the state's regime, the unlicensed guide may speak back to this power, using flexible practices to challenge the institutional monopoly of authenticity. These flexible practices constitute what Blommaert (2010) calls a “truncated repertoire,” highly specialised linguistic resources that are functionally successful in local niche markets despite being disqualified by the state's formal order.

2.4. Tourist Imaginaries and the Algorithmic Gaze

To fully understand the overarching process of place representation, it is essential to analyse how tourists themselves understand and interpret these representations during the tour, and how this interaction affects the pre-existing mental images they brought with them of Marrakesh. This research suggests that this process is not mechanical but rather functions as a space of negotiation where guides, contingent upon their institutional status, play a pivotal role in either confirming or challenging this pre-existing tourist imagination.

Regarding tourists' perceptions, it is crucial to understand that tourists rarely arrive with a blank slate regarding a place; on the contrary, they usually arrive packed with a pre-imagined cultural construct. Though grounded in nationalism, Benedict Anderson's (1983) famous theory of "imagined communities" provides the structural framework to understand how these processes play out in the field of tourism; tourists belong to a globalised society where they share similar semiotic signs and symbols of a locale before even visiting it. This shared imaginary is forged through what Anderson calls "simultaneity," where individuals proceeding through "homogeneous, empty time" understand themselves to be part of a "horizontal comradeship". Just as 19th-century newspaper readers are linked by the simultaneous consumption of the same news, tourists are linked because they consume the same digital content at the same time. Anderson describes this type of connection as an "extraordinary mass ceremony" performed in "silent privacy, in the lair of the skull," where each person is "well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (p. 35).

In the context of Marrakesh, the romanticised vision of the city did not arise from a void, but is a result of centuries of Orientalist discourse, colonial narratives, and old postcards that built Marrakesh as an exotic, magical, and timeless wonderland. This phenomenon falls under what Urry (2002) named the "tourist gaze," and the idea of the hermeneutic circle of tourism, where the visitor travels to verify the images they came across in books, movies, or media. This shared imaginary shifts into a rigid benchmark that the tourist uses to judge the lived realities; they are not searching for the real Marrakesh as much as they are looking for a reproduced authenticity that matches the pre-packaged notions they held in mind.

In the contemporary era, this Orientalist imagined community is no longer confined to books and traditional cinema but is continuously nourished and rebuilt daily through the hyper-visual digital regime imposed by platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Marrakesh, like many other touristic hubs, has transitioned from a geographical space into an Instagrammable destination, where the commodification of the place occurs through visual consumption and the mediated gaze; this exemplifies what, in the tradition of Lefebvre (1991), can be understood as the “multimodal reconstruction of space,” where the commodification of a destination is driven by an extremely semiotised discourse dominated by the visual (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2010). This algorithmic shift functions as a digital evolution of Anderson’s “map-as-logo,” a process in which a territory is detached from its geographic context to become a pure sign that is instantly recognisable and infinitely reproducible. The Instagrammable coordinates of Marrakesh are the digital version of this logo, a simplified, colourful emblem of the city that replaces its complex reality. This algorithmic shift prompts the tourist to travel as someone who wants to live within a hyper-reality or simulation, in the language of Jean Baudrillard (1994), where the filtered image of the city substitutes for the real one. Thus, this digital revolution exercises intense performance pressure on the tour guide. Mirroring Anderson’s (1983) analysis of institutional custodians, the guide’s role is no longer limited to narration or even mediation; they must act as an Oedipus who explains the enigma of the city’s past to satisfy virtual expectations. As visual directors, they steer tourists toward museumised aesthetic coordinates, sites often kept empty of people to serve as exotic regalia for the visitor's gaze. By preventing exposure to ordinary spaces that might break the idealised biography of the city, the guide’s linguistic and interactional practices negotiate a staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) to ensure economic satisfaction. Crucially, MacCannell argues that this staging responds to a genuine modern quest for reality; rather than seeking

superficial “pseudo-events,” tourists actually demand experiences they perceive as authentic.

2.5. Contextualising Marrakesh and Formulating the Research Gap

The institutional tension between the state-regulated narratives and unregulated street economies is not unique to Morocco; rather, it represents a pervasive phenomenon across the Global South. This structural clash was critically examined by Dahles (2002) within the scope of her political economy and anthropological study on touristic politics in Indonesia. Dahles demonstrated how state institutions exercise strict censorship and police informal tour guides, referred to in her study as “unlicensed” or “street” guides, because they view their presence as a threat to the state’s “carefully manufactured imagery” (p. 790). Specifically, she observes that these rules are “enforced by the provincial Department of Justice and implemented by the tourist police,” effectively barring those without formal certification from the industry (p. 792). Through this perspective, institutional licensing functions not merely to regulate the quality of guiding practices, but primarily to control the dominant discourse and pre-empt alternative interpretations of lived realities, thereby operating as an aggressive mechanism of state narrative management (Salazar, 2010).

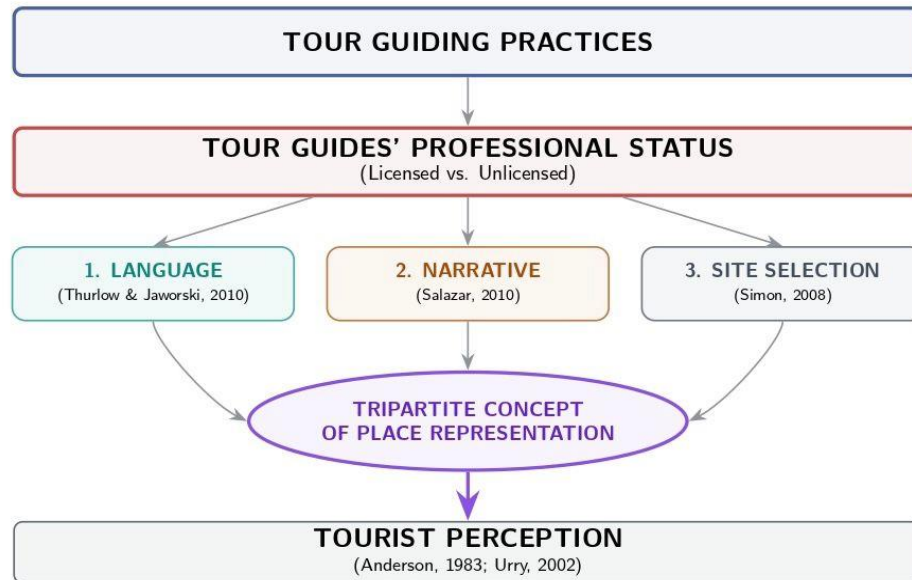
When translating these dynamics into the local context of Marrakesh, existing literature has focused predominantly on the spatial, architectural, and anthropological transformations of the city. For instance, Claudio Minca (2006) critically analysed how the urban fabric of Marrakesh functions as a metaphorical “colonial stage” designed and tailored for Western consumption. In contrast, scholars such as Thomas Schmitt (2005) have examined how the UNESCO's classification of Jemaa el-Fna Square effectively fossilised the space, converting it into a heritage commodity. While these studies accurately demonstrate how geographical spaces are transformed into “living museums”

detached from the current lived reality, a significant analytical blind spot remains at the interactional level despite these well-mapped macroeconomic and spatial dimensions. Hence, relevant concepts such as institutional legitimacy, resistance, and negotiation are not merely legal abstractions but are systematically ignored; in particular, the existing literature ignores the interactional dynamism that tour guides must navigate on a daily basis.

To address this gap, the present study focuses on a critical analytical point: the distinct lack of comparative research addressing licensed and unlicensed guides. As Brito (2020) notes, this institutional division is rarely problematised, leaving a critical void regarding how these two contrasting structural positions shape representations of a locale. More importantly, Brito insists on how the limited available literature touches upon general factors such as a guide's formal education or historical knowledge, while frequently ignoring professional and legal status as a primary driving variable. It is this institutional status that dictates a guide's interactional priorities: a licensed guide operates to maintain systemic legitimacy before both the tourist and the state, whereas an unlicensed guide must constantly perform under the looming threat of state criminalisation, surveillance, and legal prosecution. This structural variance radically and permanently alters how Marrakesh is represented to the tourist. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework designed to examine this dynamic. By positioning professional status as the primary filter for the tripartite model of language, narrative, and site selection, this study moves beyond static spatial analysis to capture the live, interactional reality of the city's guide economy.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: The Impact of Professional Status on the Tripartite Model of Place Representation



Note. Original framework designed for this study using LaTeX, May 2026.

2.6. Synthesis

In summary, existing literature demonstrates that tour guiding is fundamentally an interactive communicative performance deeply intertwined with institutional power, historical narratives, and the pursuit of economic survival. As established across this chapter, tourism cannot be fully understood through purely quantitative approaches; rather, it requires an ethnographic analysis capable of following the spontaneous and dynamic negotiations within zones of linguistic contact. When applied to the context of Marrakesh, this theoretical deficiency becomes even more apparent. Previous studies have exhaustively mapped the architectural and spatial transformations of the city, but they have completely ignored the dynamic communicative interactions that animate these spaces.

More importantly, existing research has remained fragmented, failing to examine how institutional licensing functions as the primary variable shaping the interactional choices of guides. By neglecting this communicative divide between licensed and unlicensed guides, current scholarship overlooks how institutional legitimacy, legal precarity, and digital performance expectations are negotiated socially, linguistically, and diplomatically within the Marrakesh tourism scene. This analytical gap is precisely what this study aims to fill, shifting the focus from the study of static spaces to the dynamic, live interactional landscape of Marrakesh's guide economy. To address this empirical void, the following chapter details the methodological design, fieldwork logistics, and ethnographic methods used in this research.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to examine the sociolinguistic elements of tour guiding practices in Marrakesh, involving how the professional status of guides influences the representation of the city and the ensuing perceptions of tourists. Specifically, it details the transition from the initial research design to the reflexive adaptations necessitated by the fieldwork's sociopolitical realities.

3.1. Original Research Design and Participant Selection

This study adopts an ethnographic approach, leveraging my positionality as a Moroccan researcher and a native of Marrakesh. This insider status (Holmes, 2020) was instrumental in building rapport with participants, allowing me to access nuanced linguistic layers, such as the fluid code-switching between Arabic, Tamazight, and French, that might remain opaque to an external observer unfamiliar with the city's specific multilingual reality.

The study's initial target sample of 16 participants ($n = 16$) was divided into two primary groups: eight tour guides and eight tourists. These cohorts were subsequently divided into subgroups of four (licensed and unlicensed guides and their corresponding visitors) to address the primary research questions concerning professional status. This 4×4 structure was intended to facilitate methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012), potentially allowing for a more thorough understanding of the different factors influencing the representation of Marrakesh by tour guides and the resulting tourists' perceptions.

Concerning the recruitment procedure, the study used a hybrid approach. Initial outreach was conducted through online professional platforms to pre-identify participants; however, this was not successful as most candidates withdrew before the actual fieldwork took place. On-site convenience sampling, on the other hand, allowed

for immediate engagement as it was more assuring for participants to speak in real time and know more about the study. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active guides (formal or informal) conducting English-mediated tours, as this was generally the primary linguistic medium for the narrative and linguistic analysis.

As for representativeness of the socio-professional tensions between formal and informal tourism sectors, this study did not aim for generalisation across Morocco. Instead, it sought phenomenological representativeness, or what Sandelowski (1995) described as “informational representativeness,” where a small sample is chosen to “stand for other persons with similar characteristics” (p. 181).

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

The data collection instruments were designed to capture data chronologically: obtaining consent, participant observation or shadowing (McDonald, 2005), and semi-structured interviews. Particularly, I prioritised interviewing tourists immediately following the tour; this was because I sought their instant engagement and aimed to prevent probable participant attrition due to holiday schedules. On the other hand, interviews with guides were frequently more accessible locally and could even be conducted subsequently. Before the actual fieldwork, a protocol was developed to manage the data collection process.

To guide observations, I emphasised five main components documented using concurrent field notes and audio recordings of the tour on a backup mobile device. In terms of site selection and spatial logic, I first intended to map the individual stops to classify the path as monuments, artisan workshops, urban modern places, or strictly commercial zones. I also intended to note commercial anchoring and whether the guide had a personal connection to any venues, such as a specific shop, café, or hidden spot that they preferred to recommend over others. I also aimed to examine narrative framing to

comprehend how the city's image is constructed for visitors. I wanted to determine if Marrakesh is presented as a historical museum, an exotic or oriental dream, or a thriving commercial hub, and if the narrative source is based on local and personal memory or institutional history. In addition, the linguistic landscape was a top concern. I planned to concentrate on recurrent language forms, such as specialised terminology, and observe when and why the guide alternates between languages to determine if the code-switching is performative (e.g., for authenticity) or functional (e.g., for translation), or both. I also aimed to further examine interactive engagement by looking at directive language, such as "look at this" or "notice that," as well as distinct physical movements used to direct the tourist's gaze and finally how they react to unexpected, unscripted questions from the tourists. Finally, I focused on identifying omissions or silent data utilising my insider knowledge to detect non-represented spaces and stories by spotting what the guide is not showing or telling and whether these elements are bypassed or just not encountered.

To triangulate the field observations, I created two semi-structured interview guides for both tour leaders and visitors to cross-reference the guides' stated accounts with their observed performance and the tourist's subsequent interpretation of the experience. Guides' professional paths were given priority in the questions, with particular attention paid to their training, experience, and licensing. I aimed to uncover their self-defined role and the sources of their knowledge. Furthermore, I wanted to explore their attitudes toward one another and the logic behind their actions, including their commercial and local ties. For the tourists, the questions focused more heavily on their initial "imagined" images of the city and the sources that shaped them. This allowed for a deep pre- and post-tour reflection, gathering tourist perceptions on critical issues such as trust, awareness of the professional status of guides, and a short discussion of some recurring digital images of Marrakesh.

3.3. Fieldwork Realities, Ethics, and Reflexive Adaptations

The observations and interviews were successfully implemented within the formal sector. I had the opportunity to take part in two four- to six-hour guided tours with two different licensed guides. I successfully completed my observations and gathered field notes during these sessions. Following the first tour, one tourist agreed to an interview, while the second tour resulted in two additional interviews with tourists who were more than willing to contribute. Regarding the guides, I dedicated separate days, coordinated with their schedules, to extensive interviews, both of which were thorough and productive.

While the original approach worked perfectly for licensed guides, engaging with the informal sector necessitated immediate reflexive adaptations. I soon discovered that the authorities were handing out one-month prison sentences to any informal guide they caught. This climate of fear caused these guides to avoid participating in the research, which is a justified response; indeed, even after I convinced one guide to take me on tour, they eventually withdrew before the observation could take place.

Because of the limited timeframe and the challenges in securing participants, I decided that to gather necessary data while protecting my participants' safety, I had to adapt my approach on the spot. I implemented non-participant or naturalistic observation (Angrosino, 2007). This strategy shift corresponds with Mason's (2017) framework, which considers the researcher a thinking, reflective practitioner who must actively overcome research challenges. Following local advice, I conducted three sessions of non-participant (naturalistic) observation at high-traffic hubs in the Medina. During these three sessions, I monitored congregating informal guides to spot opening techniques, linguistic methods, and spatial preferences from a distance. According to Heller, Pietikäinen, and Pujolar (2017), this shift reflects a reflexive engagement with the

complexity of fieldwork realities, where the researcher must negotiate unanticipated sociopolitical limits to collect authentic sociolinguistic data.

Concurrently, efforts to recruit unofficial guides were maintained. Luckily, I came across a veteran informal guide with 40 years of experience. Though he refused to be observed or sign the consent form, he verbally agreed to participate in a short interview, during which he summarised his experience, explained the typical structure of his tours, and justified why he could not take me on one. This guide was very honest and transparent when discussing sensitive topics related to his profession, which significantly deepened the value of my analysis.

Due to these changes, I decided that further triangulation was necessary for thorough analysis within the tight timeframe of this ethnography. Interviews with two administrative staff of the Delegation of Tourism in Marrakesh comprised the new component that I was able to obtain. Conducted entirely in French and Moroccan Darija, these sessions followed an emergent thematic guide designed to capture the institutional perspective. Specifically, the themes explored the state's criteria for authorised representation, the strategic terminology used to categorise the informal sector, relevant legal frameworks and statistics, and the institutional and sociopolitical boundaries held against informal guiding practices. This reflexive method aligns with Smith's (2005) framework for institutional ethnography, which maps how the "local actualities" are connected into "extended social relations of ruling" and legal frameworks.

3.4. Data Processing and Analysis

All interviews and interactional segments were transcribed verbatim. Translations of Moroccan Darija and French transcripts into English were performed by the researcher with a focus on contextual analysis. To preserve the sociolinguistic integrity of the data, key cultural terms and direct non-English participants' quotes are retained in italics

alongside their English translations. The analysis employed a thematic coding approach. Since I entered the field with observation and interview guides, my field notes were initially organised deductively. Following the fieldwork, I reviewed all transcriptions and field notes to identify patterns and deviations across both formal and informal sectors, allowing for an inductive approach where new, unanticipated insights, such as the institutional constraints mentioned by administrative staff, were integrated into the final analysis.

3.5. Summary of Fieldwork Data

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the participant demographics and data collection events conducted over the two-week period (3–18 April 2026) of this ethnography, reflecting the transition from the original research design to the reflexive adaptations necessitated by the sociopolitical context of Marrakesh.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Role	Age	Gen.	Nat.	First Lang.	Other Lang.
LG1	Formal Tour	25-30	M	Morocco	Darija/Ar/Tam	English
LG2	Formal Tour	55-60	M	Morocco	Darija/Ar/Tam	English/French
IG1	Informal Tour	55-60	M	Morocco	Darija	English
T1	N/A	55-60	F	Australia	English	N/A
T2	N/A	35-40	F	Philippines	Tagalog/ English	Spanish/French
T3	N/A	35-40	M	USA	English	N/A
AS1	Delegation	45-50	M	Morocco	Darija/Ar/Tam	French
AS2	Delegation	55-60	M	Morocco	Darija/Ar/Tam	French

Note. Gen. = Gender; Nat. = Nationality; Lang. = Language; Ar = Arabic; Tam = Tamazight; "Delegation" refers to the Regional Tourism Delegation. Age ranges are estimates. Participants: LG1 & LG2 = Licensed Guide; IG1 = Informal Guide; T1, T2 & T3 = Tourist; AS1 & AS2 = Administrative Staff.

Table 2*Fieldwork Data Collection*

Data Event	Type	Dur.	Language	Date
Tour 1 (LG1)	Part. Obs.	5h	English	Apr '26
Post-Tour 1 Int. (T1)	Semi-struct.	27m	English	Apr '26
Post-Tour 1 Int. (LG1)	Semi-struct.	55m	Eng/Darija	Apr '26
Tour 2 (LG2)	Part. Obs.	6h	English	Apr '26
Post-Tour 2 Int. (T2)	Semi-struct.	24m	English	Apr '26
Post-Tour 2 Int. (T3)	Semi-struct.	29m	English	Apr '26
Post-Tour 2 Int. (LG2)	Semi-struct.	40m	English	Apr '26
Interview (IG1)	In-depth	32m	Eng/Darija	Apr '26
Obs. (3 IG)	Naturalistic	3h	English	Apr '26
Interview (AS1)	Semi-struct.	35m	French/Darija	Apr '26
Interview (AS2)	Semi-struct.	1h	French/Darija	Apr '26

Note. Part. Obs. = Participant Observation; Int. = Interview; Semi-struct. = Semi-structured; Dur. = Duration. All fieldwork conducted 3–18 April 2026.

4. Results and Discussion

During the first stages of this project, the research questions regarding differences between licensed and unlicensed guides were very clear and straightforward resulting in the expectation of finding equally straightforward answers. However, after experiencing the fieldwork and its harsh realities, these primary questions seemed somewhat incomplete and did not fully reflect the true situation.

The reality is shocking; the division is not just between the formal and the informal, but there are deep internal divisions and conflicts even among the same groups. These contradictions and the chaos that exist in reality are what made this chapter ideal for conducting an in-depth thematic analysis to clarify the nature of guiding practices behind the scenes, focusing on the main parties whom this conflict concerns: formal guides, informal guides, and the state institution, while tracing how foreign tourists navigate these fractured realities and have their own perceptions of the city reshaped through these interactions.

4.1. The Formal Sector: Internal Fractures and Structural Divisions

This section investigates the diverse professional trajectories within the formal tourism sector, illustrating how institutional certification creates distinct hierarchies of legitimacy. It reveals that licensed guides are not a monolithic group, but are stratified by their adherence to, or departure from, institutionalised performance and symbolic norms.

4.1.1. Institutional Pathways and the Performance of Legitimacy

While this research initially expected to find differences only between licensed and unlicensed tour guides, ethnographic field data demonstrates that even licensed tour guides do not form a homogeneous professional group. Instead, they are internally divided by the specific institutional pathways through which they secured state

certification. This divergence in structural trajectories is not merely bureaucratic; it translates directly into distinct semiotic and embodiment practices, specifically influencing how guides navigate self-presentation and negotiate legitimacy in the presence of tourists and within the contested space of Marrakesh. This internal stratification reveals that the tourism market is a highly polycentric environment where guides evaluate their own professional legitimacy through contrasting semiotic frameworks.

An examination of Licensed Guide 1 typifies a trajectory of state-supported institutional integration. Approximately 30 years old, this practitioner started his career as an informal guide at a young age, only recently transitioning into the formal economy via regularisation exams organised by the Ministry of Tourism in 2023. Structurally, this examination functioned as a political and institutional strategy to alleviate market tensions and integrate some of the informal guides, who are deemed worthy of the position, into the official grid. This process directly reflects what Wilensky (1964) conceptualises as the institutional battle for exclusive jurisdiction over a craft. Because guiding skills are easily learned on the job through early exposure to the industry (Crick, 1992; Salazar, 2010), the state utilises regularisation exams as a gatekeeping mechanism to formalise authority over an otherwise fluid street economy.

This specific background and newly acquired legal status are mirrored through this guide's distinctive physical appearance. Ethnographic observation reveals that he is very careful to display all the visual and physical symbols indicating his licence; he wears his official licence badge around his neck while dressed in traditional Moroccan attire (*jellaba* and *tarboush*) just like many other official guides spotted in the city, and he carries a microphone so that his group, of about 18 tourists, can hear him clearly (see Figure 2 for an illustration of this leadership dynamic). Sociologically, this exaggeration

display of symbols may serve to protect him from the surveillance of the tourist police, given that traditional attire appears to be a standard institutional expectation for licensed guides, although its enforcement may vary. Because this guide has only recently transitioned from the informal sector, his legitimacy appears to be experienced as fragile, necessitating continuous materialisation and performance.

Figure 2

Guided Tour Dynamics in the Medina's Alleyways Showing the Group Composition and the Guide's Positioning at the Forefront



Note. Captured by the author from a non-identifiable perspective, April 2026

By hyper-displaying these signs, the guide submits to what Blommaert (2010) calls a dominant order of indexicality, a stratified system where the state indexes specific visual standards (the official badge, traditional dress) as signs of absolute legitimacy. This dress code is actively monitored by the inter-departmental evaluation committee, consisting of members from the delegation of Tourism, the Tourist Police (*Brigade Touristique*), the Province of Marrakesh, and the Regional Association of Tourist Guides

(ARGTMS). In essence, the regularised guide uses hyper-visibility to prove his alignment with the state's "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1980), transforming his body into a visible node of the institutional framework to protect himself from legal precarity and the panoptic gaze of local authorities.

In contrast, Licensed Guide 2 exemplifies the classic academic and elite path. This guide has 30 years of experience in the profession, having entered it when the state required a university degree in foreign languages. As a history and culture enthusiast, he resigned from teaching to become a tour guide. He has developed his knowledge through his direct work with specialised university professors and international companies interested in Moroccan culture and history.

Crucially, ethnographic observation reveals a contrasting approach: Licensed Guide 2 has completely abandoned all classical, formal, and material trappings. He does not wear traditional clothing, but rather casual, modern attire (jeans and a jacket), he does not wear his licence badge around his neck at all, and he does not carry a microphone or any other guidance device. Instead, he walks with the tourists, who were only two people staying at the luxurious La Mamounia Hotel, as if he were walking with his friends.

This non-materialisation of self-presentation indicates a profound shift from objectified symbolic capital to internalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Unlike Licensed Guide 1, whose legitimacy is fragile and must be hung around his neck, Licensed Guide 2 has fully internalised his professional authority. His long expertise and the elite socio-economic sphere of his clientele serve as self-evident markers of prestige. He has no need for the "institutionalized scriptedness" (Heller et al., 2014) of traditional clothing or technological amplification. His legitimacy is so absolute that it overrides standard bureaucratic surveillance; as he noted in his interview, "The evaluation committee knows me by heart and exempts me from standard regulatory dress codes."

This highlights an internal elite stratification within the formal sector, where deep cultural capital grants certain actors the freedom to bypass the very institutional regimes that regularised guides must use as armour.

4.1.2. Spatial Geographies between the Street and the Enclave

Having seen how institutional disparities manifest in appearance and legitimacy, this difference extends directly to the spatial style and the geographical selection of routes within the city. The choice of places and landmarks each licensed guide visits is not arbitrary, but rather a socio-economic process that shapes the image of Marrakesh and drives its economic fluidity. The guide here acts as an economic gatekeeper that directs tourists' money where he wants it; he diverts consumption to a network of people he knows. This spatial orchestration demonstrates what Simon (2008) terms the “prescriptive power” of the guide, where controlling physical paths and directing the visitor's visual focus serves as a fundamental tool of place representation.

The itinerary of Licensed Guide 1 strikes a deliberate balance between monumental history and vernacular, everyday geography. Moving a large group on an intensive route from the Koutoubia Mosque toward the Royal Palace, Bab Agnaou, and the Kasbah, his trajectory intentionally weaves through one of the Medina's *souika* (a small, traditional outdoor daily market) and the narrow residential alleyways of the old city before finally concluding at Jemaa el-Fna square.

While Guide 1 walks his group past major commercial *bazaars* (marketplaces) without a single pause or mention, he consciously stops at the *souika* to give tourists a real look into everyday local life. He brings this ordinary space to life by sharing a personal family story: "I just took my mother to this *souika* yesterday; she did her shopping here and bought vegetables to make Moroccan Couscous." He reinforces this

localized immersion by guiding them to a small neighbourhood stall to try *chfenj* (Moroccan donuts), insisting on this specific vendor out of his personal preference.

This spatial strategy relies entirely on a geography of proximity and realism, utilising lived space to legitimise his authority as an organic “son of the city who knows its popular secrets,” as he claims. By weaving his own life story into these ordinary sites, he easily satisfies what MacCannell (1973) terms the modern quest for “staged authenticity,” turning a mundane neighbourhood into a memorable, authentic experience.

At the same time, this focus on the vernacular functions as an economic anchoring strategy. When he plays the role of the local guy who knows the neighbourhood, he builds a high level of trust with tourists, lowering the tourist’s perceived risk of being commercially targeted. This trust functions as a strategic mechanism, allowing him to seamlessly redirect consumption away from mass-market commercial bazaars toward his preferred low-stakes, highly localised consumption, encompassing the neighbourhood *chfenj* stall, local rooftops, and informal culinary spaces encountered along the path. This clever way of recommending places allows him to keep his narrative of raw authenticity completely intact while actively directing the economic flow of his tour toward working-class actors within his personal social circle.

Interview data from tourist 1 who accompanied him further confirm the psychological efficacy of this spatial approach. The tourist mentioned that her first night in Marrakesh brought on an intense culture shock, pointing to the chaotic motorcycle traffic and the confusing alleyways near her rented riad, which left her feeling anxious and unsafe. However, navigating these local neighbourhoods with Guide 1, while observing his fluid daily interactions with locals amidst the crowds, served as a perfect orientation. As the participant noted:

I'm glad that we did this tour this morning because he's taken us through similar kinds of places and it sort of feels a bit more normal now. It doesn't feel as overwhelming because we've seen how he has interacted with people and vehicles and feel a lot more relaxed. It's almost like an orientation to how to be in this busy, chaotic environment.

This shift illustrates how a guide's spatial choice can actively reshape pre-existing perceptions, directly dismantling the geographies of fear that frequently emerge when newcomers clash with an unfamiliar landscape.

On the other hand, the second tour guide chooses a route focused strictly on curated, monumental environments. Starting his tour right from the luxury Mamounia Hotel, his itinerary targets high-profile architectural and botanical landmarks: the Koutoubia Mosque, a private riad owned by a personal associate, the Secret Garden, and the Ben Youssef Madrasa.

In sharp contrast to the open-air trajectory of the first guide, Guide 2's path is defined by institutional containment and gated access. Here, local popular spaces are entirely absent. This guide selects enclosed environments of high cultural and architectural value, frequently requiring paid admission, such as the Madrasa and the Secret Garden, that align precisely with the intellectual and aesthetic expectations of his clientele. Talking to his tourists made it clear that they associate quality and safety with formal, exclusive spaces, which is why they prefer these regulated settings.

This strict filtering of space works as an institutional "scale-jump" (Blommaert, 2010), where the unpredictable, messy interactions of the street are completely bypassed to show a uniform, polished image of the country. Because of this, even commercial interactions follow a strict, professional protocol. Guide 2 selects luxury boutiques and manages the encounter with precise professional directives to the shop owners, noting: "Shopping Day is tomorrow; today they're just here to take pictures." We see this control in action again when he coordinates the owner of a designer boutique to pre-pack a dress

his client admired, securing the transaction for the following day. By acting as an exclusive commercial filter, Guide 2 elevates shopping from a simple street transaction into an elite boutique experience. His recommendations are structural, pre-arranged, and rooted in luxury spaces that protect his own standing as an elite cultural broker.

4.1.3. Linguistic Repertoires and the Politics of Belonging

Alongside internal differences in symbolic self-representation and site selection of each licensed guide participant, field data reveal another profound contrast in how these two employ linguistic components during their tours. In the Marrakesh tourism sector, language is not merely a neutral tool for communication, but rather symbolic capital used in entirely different and strategic ways; either to impose academic authority or to build an emotional connection that reflects the city's popular culture.

When we examine the linguistic phenomenon of Licensed Guide 1, we find that the dominant feature of his style is the heavy reliance on code-switching and the use of Moroccan Darija within his tour, which is primarily conducted in English. This guide seamlessly and continuously incorporates words in Darija, especially the imperative commands he uses to control the movements of his group of tourists. He keeps repeating phrases like *Yallah Yallah* and *Zid Zid*, meaning “let’s go,” throughout the journey, without translating them into English, because these expressions have become an integral part of the dynamic movement within the city's hustle and bustle.

Moreover, this guide strategically employs Darija to immerse the tourist in the experience. When he arrives at a landmark or place, he gives its name in Darija first, then translates it; for instance, when introducing the term *souika*, he delays the English translation until the very end of his explanation, keeping the local term central. By doing that, he facilitates an experience of authenticity and fosters a sense of belonging to the place. He transforms language into a form of symbolic capital, offering the local Darija

terminology as a distinctive, value-added insight that validates the tourist's sense of experiencing the real city. Similarly, he weaves popular proverbs combining Darija and Spanish, and humorously refers to El Garrab, a traditional water seller, as "Aquaman" to bridge the cultural gap. Another clear illustration of how he prioritises local terms before bridging cultural gaps through cross-cultural analogies occurs during his explanation of the Kasbah:

Now if you pay attention we have entered now to this whole art area that we call the Kasbah through this gate right here now what's the Kasbah and what's the purpose behind it I will try to explain by giving you a very simple example. We all heard about the White House, right? The White House, United States, that's an official residential area to the president. The kasbah in Morocco, and since the 7th century, we're talking about a very long time ago, it was an official residential area to the sultan, to the king, and his entire family. That's the same job of the White House. But there's two differences in between two buildings. The United States, they only have one capital. Washington. Therefore, they only have one white house. But in Morocco, if you remember, how many capitals we had? Four. Any city of this, you go, you find a proper Kasbah exactly like this one. The White House in the United States it is only one single large building. In English as a language, safe to call it a palace. Safe to say. But the kasbah, on the other hand, we cannot call it a palace. Why? Because these royal families will have multiple buildings within the Kasbah, starting with their own palaces, schools, hospitals, mosques, anything they needed, it will exist within the kasbah. So my opinion, the kasbah in English language, it is more like a citadel, a fortress. Is it clear?

These examples confirm that the guide intentionally distinguishes his narrative from the static knowledge associated with institutional training; instead, despite occasional fluctuations in his English grammar and syntax, his use of code-switching acts as a tool that helps him bridge the cultural gap between his own culture and the tourists' global frames of reference.

On a different note, the ethnographic observations and audio recordings of Licensed Guide 2 present a completely different linguistic practice: absolute English monolingualism and a total absence of linguistic alternation within the historical narrative. This guide speaks native-like American English characterised by a high degree of idiomatic fluency without linguistic interference from other languages. His sociolinguistic strategy is based on rationalisation and prior translation of cultural

phenomena: he relegates the local language to a labelling device for space that has already been fully framed through English-centric historical lens. For instance, when introducing the concept of a *foundouk* (a traditional North African merchant inn), this guide avoids the local dialect at first until the very end of his explanation. Rather, he provides a detailed description of the space using historical and modern analogies before attaching the local label:

I will show you something like a medieval caravanserai. There are many of them here, and this street has small ones that still function kind of like hotels today, providing just rooms and space for merchandise. As I told you before, everything in terms of palaces and old buildings is concentrated in this part of the city. These spaces were historically used to receive craftsmen and caravans... and these spaces were called foundouks.

Here, the guide links his description to historical terms familiar to tourists, such as caravanserai and hotels, explaining the entire cultural space in English before introducing the local term “foundouk.” Through this strategy, the guide does not employ the local language as a living medium of communication; instead, he presents it as a carefully curated, translated historical artifact for tourist consumption.

This method shows that the second guide maintains a monolingual English register that reinforces his image as a cultural mediator; one who possesses both the bicultural knowledge of the city and the high-level English proficiency required to translate that local knowledge into a globalised, academic frame. This performance is consistent with the expectations of his clients, who equate his standardised linguistic style with professional reliability. As tourist 3 explicitly stated:

Speaking refined English with precise and understandable intonation is the standard that makes me feel the guide’s professionalism and helps me grasp the architecture and history of complex spaces like the Ben Youssef Madrasa. I trusted la Mamounia’s recommendations and I insisted on the very best guide. And so...They delivered. Duh. As I specifically requested of them.

In sum, this stark linguistic divergence between both guides builds upon and nuances the traditional scholarly view of tour guides as straightforward cultural mediators

tasked with building bridges between the local reality and the expectations of visitors. Rather than contradicting the model, the field data demonstrates that language selection enriches the process, reflecting the specific sociological positioning of each guide. Guide 2's strict reliance on English for semantic clarity positions a global standard as the baseline for professional legitimacy (Blommaert, 2010). Meanwhile, Guide 1's strategic deployment of the local dialect to establish authenticity or to clarify complex concepts, transforms these indigenous linguistic resources into a valuable cultural asset for the tour (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010). Ultimately, both guides are actively managing the cultural value of the experience through their contrasting linguistic boundary practices.

4.1.4. Narrative Ideologies and the Reinterpretation of Heritage

Narrative analysis of the attended tours reveals that the way the image of Marrakesh is constructed differs structurally between these two licensed guides; while Guide 1 bridges the state and the self, Guide 2 isolates the monument from its social context. The historical narrative within the tour is not merely a neutral recounting of events, but rather a process of ideological and cultural production that employs political, national, and personal narratives to give meaning to space.

The examination of Licensed Guide 1's narrative content reveals that it is characterised by a direct link between the political structure of the state and living family memory. As he explains: "We mentioned that we've been occupied by the French... our grandparents, including my own grandfather, they did not like this situation and they started fighting back...." By positioning his own grandfather as an active agent within this historical struggle, he transforms grand political concepts into human, relatable history. Hence, while this guide devotes considerable space in his discourse to reinforce the image of Morocco as a sovereign state with a strong and long-established political

system, his narrative does not remain at the official level, ultimately grounding these political concepts in the human and personal experience.

This emphasis on the kingdom's institutional and religious structure is actively justified by the guide's own perception of his professional role; When questioned about it, he firmly rejects the idea that referencing the kingdom is an external restriction or a boundary:

Researcher: "You're always talking about the history of the kingdom. Is it a necessary thing for you to tell stories about the kingdom itself, or is it a creative choice?"

Guide: "Because we are a kingdom... I am working in the kingdom, and the things we tell [are] about the country itself, an Islamic monarchy. That's why I keep mentioning the terms of the kingdom... so people can have a clue at the end that they are visiting a kingdom... I always tell the right information about the country, which is the kingdom."

This means that this guide internalises his discourse as a core professional responsibility, viewing himself primarily as a representative of the country whose mission is to project a proper and dignified image of Morocco. Additionally, driven by a genuine affection for his hometown and nation, he utilises this state-centric narrative to actively dismantle the frequent misconceptions that foreign tourists bring regarding the kingdom and its Islamic monarchy framework. As he explained during our interview:

We always face a lot of misinformation about the kingdom and the city itself. We try to provide the right information so people will understand... We don't have one way to tell narratives for everybody, but we always try to tell the right information about the country, which is the kingdom.

This guide views himself as an ambassador for his country. His statements reveal a strong sense of responsibility to correct the stereotypical pre-images tourists held of Morocco. He tries to balance his personal identity with his professional duty, which leads him to carefully select what constitutes accurate information to convey. In other words, he determines what should be seen and understood in a way that aligns with the values of the Kingdom.

On the other hand, an analysis of Licensed Guide 2's narrative demonstrates that he adopts a rational, architectural, and refined elitist narrative, completely avoiding this personal framing of history. This guide constructs his historical account akin to an academic lecturer, focusing heavily on precise engineering systems, specifically the ancient irrigation networks, *khettarat* in Darija, and the history of the ruling dynasties that built the major monuments. This choice, too, is strongly defended by Guide 2 in his interview; he claims that his high-end clientele expects an intellectualized, aesthetic escape that transcends local socio-political struggles. For him, introducing personal anecdotes or heavy political discourse would disrupt the premium, curated atmosphere of historical grandeur that affluent tourists pay to experience. His focus on the mechanics of the space is evident in the following segment regarding The Secret Garden:

It's here where religion and architecture come together because when people built their homes, dwellings, palaces and everything... they thought exactly of the gardens as depicted in the gardens of paradise in the Quran; which is exactly what the original owner did... But the gentleman who bought this, being Italian as I told you, wanted to give a universal side to his garden and so he added this part here and he collected plants from different parts of the world. Look this is from Australia and that's from Japan and we'll also find plants from Vietnam, South Africa, South America, Mexico, and from everywhere.

By first acknowledging the original Islamic intent and then immediately contrasting it with the Italian owner's universal botanical collection, this guide defines his narrative through cultural management; he universalises the place to meet his clienteles from a wealthy background, keeping the discourse far removed from everyday political and local details.

In conclusion, we are faced with two approaches to constructing the city's narrative: Guide 1 produces a vibrant political-familial narrative that connects the kingdom's rich history and the strength of its system to the lived experiences and real memories of the country's inhabitants, utilising it as an emic tool for cultural

representation and national validation. In contrast, Guide 2 produces an elitist and filtered academic-architectural narrative, presenting Marrakesh as a global cultural masterpiece to be read through strict academic and rational frameworks to satisfy the class expectations of an elite consumer base. Ultimately, both distinct strategies reveal that narrative framing is a site of active negotiation, where guides must structurally reconstruct the pre-imagined spaces of their clients (Anderson, 1983), either by leaning into intimate cultural defence or by curating a flawless aesthetic space to satisfy the parameters of the tourist gaze (Urry, 2002).

4.1.5. Professional Reflexivity and Market Boundaries

This final section on licensed guides forms the essential analytical bridge that directly connects us to the reality of the informal sector. Through semi-structured interviews, we discover how these two licensed guides perceive the professional boundaries of their work, and how they position themselves in the face of the intense and continuous presence of informal guides in Marrakesh, revealing a contrast in the sociological understanding of the concepts of legitimacy and competition in the workplace.

When we analyse the discourse and self-reflexivity of Licensed Guide 1, we find that he adopts a solidarity-based, flexible, and compassionate perspective towards the informal sector. This guide, having experienced it firsthand before the 2023 integration, completely rejects drawing exclusionary boundaries within the market. Instead, he views these unofficial guides as the backbone of the community and a symbol of its authenticity, stating emphatically: “The city will never be without these people. The city is them, and they are the sons of the land... The city needs them.” For him, their value lies in their role as street-level conduits of local life, which no classroom-trained guide can replicate, as they maintain the city’s spontaneous and raw energy.

The institutional licence has not severed his identity or his sense of duty and love for his hometown, claiming that he is still the same person he was when he was an informal guide. He views the market as an open field for natural competition, where survival and success depend on creativity, communication skills, and creating enjoyable tours, not just on wearing a legal badge. While he acknowledges that the licence demands a certain accuracy of historical facts and linguistic proficiency that some of the unlicensed guides do not possess, he refuses to see the informal sector as a threat. He champions an inclusive vision that sees the unofficial guide as an authentic element of the community simply trying to earn a living in their country.

On the contrary, the interview with Licensed Guide 2 offers a rigid boundary-making perspective. This guide sees the licence as an indispensable intellectual and ethical bulwark for protecting the country's reputation and image in the world. For him, the unregulated presence of unlicensed guides poses a real, ongoing structural threat:

I mean, a licensed guide should be meeting clients via a source: a travel company or a hotel... But the other ones [unlicensed guides], they just meet tourists in the street. They run into them and try to seduce them one way or another... coming up with all kinds of fake stories as in showing them something extraordinary, or a market that is taking place there that day.

He argues that these seductions are all deployed to trap tourists and siphon their money without possessing any intellectual capital or historical accuracy. He labels most of them as “uneducated” individuals whose primary motive is “making quick money, which ultimately leads to distorting history and ruining the tourist experience.”

In a crucial snapshot revealing how tourists themselves internalise this institutional anxiety, the tourists accompanying Guide 2 explicitly mirrored his strict view of professional boundaries. When asked about their perception of informal guides, Tourist 2 noted:

Maybe this is the wrong perception, but I think informal guides promoting a more authentic experience is just a selling point to convince tourists. As someone who has travelled to more than 56 countries, I always doubt their credibility and I'm also worried for my safety since I've already heard many stories, well then why would I choose it right?

However, Licensed Guide 2 still demonstrates a kind of flexible reflexivity because he does not generalise. Given his seniority of 30 years in the field, he acknowledges that he has some experienced friends in the informal sector who provide a stylish and professional service, just like the formal ones. But he remains adamant that the real barrier and deciding factor is historical and linguistic accuracy and deep, rooted knowledge gained through evidence and reading. For him, the unofficial guide remains a disruptive element, and the lack of academic and linguistic training among most of them may result in a distorted narrative driven solely by profit, which is why the licence is the state's seal of approval that differentiates a civilized pedagogical discourse from unrefined storytelling.

In brief, both perspectives pave the way for understanding the informal sector. Guide 1 redefines professional legitimacy as an extension of organic local identity, where, as Guide 1 suggests, the "sons of the land" status provides a form of legitimacy that transcends the state's formal documentation. In contrast, Guide 2 constructs legitimacy as a class-based, academic, and closed institutional immunity, viewing the informal sector as a structural threat to the city's image, except in exceptional cases related to experience and maturity. This internal ideological split within the formal sector perspectives contextualises the broader systemic friction that shapes the fieldwork dynamics, state surveillance, and underground strategies analysed in the following section.

4.2. The Informal Sector: Geographies of Fear and Shadow Identities

This section explores the tactical survival mechanisms employed by unlicensed guides operating within the city's unregulated spaces. It examines how these actors navigate

state-imposed precarity through kinetic velocity, narrative fabrication, and the strategic deployment of linguistic repertoires.

4.2.1. Strategic Silence under the Penal Campaign

The ethnographic fieldwork regarding the informal sector initially encountered a form of methodological obstacle. This methodological challenge was, in itself, a revealing sociological and ethnographic reality. During attempts to recruit informal guides to participate in this research, either to observe their guided tours or to conduct interviews, there was a systematic, collective refusal from many unlicensed guides approached in the field.

The primary and most telling response articulated by most of these guides upon hearing about the nature of this research was a definitive "ما قدينا على صداع" (we don't want to get involved in trouble.) Meanwhile, the other half would refuse to make eye contact, quickly vacating the space with cautious, fearful expressions, despite several attempts to assure them that the study aimed to shed light on their structural struggles and socio-economic precarity. This collective refusal reveals a state of pervasive suspicion; the academic researcher is semiotically collapsed into a state-affiliated threat who could expose their clandestine professional practices and precipitate legal repercussions.

This apprehension and outright refusal to participate is empirically justified by the intensification of the Tourist Police. While their surveillance role was previously noted, it is essential to emphasise that this unit functions as the state's primary enforcement arm. Through conversations with residents and subsequently with a few unofficial guides, it became evident that the state was executing an aggressive security crackdown against informal guiding. This crackdown transcended ordinary administrative fines; the legal penalty could entail up to a full month of imprisonment for any unofficial guide caught operating in *situ*. As Dahles (2002) similarly observes in the context of Indonesia, this

aggressive mobilisation of the state's penal apparatus functions as an institutional mechanism of narrative management, designed to clear the field of alternative, unregulated voices that threaten the state's monopoly over the city's representation, transforming a daily livelihood strategy into a high-stakes gamble fraught with existential terror.

This pervasive presence of the Tourist Police, conspicuously deployed throughout the arterial alleys of the Medina to monitor guiding practices, uncovers a spatial and class paradox that reflects the rigid delineation of institutional legitimacy: when accompanying licensed guides, encounters with the Tourist Police were characterised by professional camaraderie, mutual respect, and formal recognition, as both actors represented authority, order, and state law within the space. In contrast, from the perspective of an unofficial guide, this same unit force functions as a criminalising apparatus that transforms their presence in the public sphere into a punishable offence. This structural hostility forces these unlicensed guides to inhabit shadow identities, avoiding any form of documentation and navigating sites with extreme caution, illustrating how the presence or absence of a physical badge legally translates similar spatial and communicative practices into either legitimate professional authority or a criminal transgression.

4.2.2. Kinetic Velocity and Institutional Camouflage

After navigating numerous field rejections, securing an in-depth interview with an industry veteran with 40 years of experience in the informal sector provided an ethnographic goldmine regarding the kinetic modalities and defensive tactics that informal guides rely on to survive. From the outset, this key informant refused to allow the observation of his tour. This refusal was rationalised by the high-risk, fluid geography in which he operates. He explained that unlike his licensed counterparts, as an informal guide, he possesses no guaranteed clientele; he must actively venture into contested hubs

to solicit tourists, primarily executing this geographic pursuit on a motorcycle. As he explained:

I don't wait for tourists to book me; I hunt them instead. I use my motorcycle to move fast between the Medina gates and the tourist hotels. The police can't stop me if I'm moving, and I can detect who looks lost so I can help them. It's all about speed.

ما كنتسناش السياح يجيو عندي، أنا كنصيدهم. كنركب على الموطور باش نتحرك بزربة بين المدينة والهوتيلات. البوليس ما يقدر وش يشدوني إلا كنت غادي بالموطور، ماشي بحال إلا كنت غادي على رجلي، وكقدر ندور عليهم وهما غاديين باش نشوف شكون اللي كيبان تالف نمشي عندو القضية فيها غير السرعة هادشي اللي كاين.

This systemic reliance on the motorcycle highlights a calculated strategy of territorial evasion. Upon spotting potential clients, he intercepts them on his motorcycle, attempting to negotiate a transaction at breakneck speed. Here, temporal and spatial velocity serve as the primary shield protecting him from sudden arrest. This veteran informant added that his refusal to take part in tour observations is also paternalistic, as he cannot expose a young researcher to such environments, a choice that underscores his awareness of the city as a panoptic and hazardous terrain.

Through this extended dialogue, the informant unveiled some of his persuasion strategies deployed during periods of economic pressure.

You know, when I see couple walking, I look for woman first. Always. I go to her, I put a big smile, I say, 'Come, quick ride, beautiful city.' If she say yes, if she jump on my bike, her husband? He have no choice. He just come and follow and pay. It's not steal, no, no. It's business, is... how do you say it, smart selling? I take her, show her the magic of the city in five minutes. When we come back, she is happy, she love it, he see her smile and he happy too. Everyone is good. It's simple.

Although it might initially seem frightening or strange to a foreign tourist, the guide insists that this manoeuvre has nothing to do with harassment or kidnapping but is rather a rigorous, strategic persuasion tactic. Unlike licensed guides, who rely on pre-established institutional bookings via travel agencies or hotel contracts, this informal actor must manufacture his own first impression through this high-velocity hospitality. This

interaction functions as a raw manifestation of what Scott (1985) terms the “weapons of the weak.” Unbound by any rigid, institutional narrative, the unlicensed guide relies on this rapid psychological reading and flexible tactics of survival to penetrate tourists' defences during moments of vulnerability, turning a fleeting street encounter into an alternative space of economic opportunity.

While the motorcycle serves as a vehicle for physical evasion on the move, the informant's tactics of survival also extend to a form of sedentary, institutional camouflage designed to bypass state surveillance entirely. Beyond these high-velocity street interactions, his decades of field experience have enabled him to build an underground network to circumvent institutional barriers. He confessed to establishing clandestine agreements with hospitality staff, including hotel and guesthouse employees. These insiders recommend him to residing tourists, allowing him to subsequently meet the clients under the assumed guise of a licensed and official guide. In these interactions, tourists rarely demand a legal badge or documentation, as trust has been pre-emptively established via recommendation. This symbiotic agreement illustrates how the informal sector penetrates formal institutions, creating protected, highly lucrative micro-spaces shielded from the gaze of authorities.

4.2.3. Narrative Fabrication, Commission, and the Commodification of Heritage

The veteran guide's testimony exposes the underlying commercial blueprint driving informal guiding, which operates on an intricate system of commercial commissions, a pre-arranged percentage of the sale usually agreed upon by the shopkeeper and the guide before the tour begins, and the strategic fabrication of historical narratives to drive tourist consumption. For this informal guide, heritage or the city tour does not function as a textual, academic body of knowledge intended for historical education as it does for licensed guides. Instead, it is utilised as instrumental capital deployed exclusively to

facilitate economic survival and maximise profit margins, a process that exemplifies the profound commodification of linguistic and cultural resources in the globalised economy (Heller, 2010). For the tourist, the choice between the two often reflects a specific psychological preference: those seeking a safe and verified history opt for the licensed guide, whereas those pursuing a raw, unfiltered experience are naturally drawn to the informal ones. However, this preference can also be tied to economic factors; as Guide 2 noted, “There are cases where the only reason tourists choose informal guides is that they do not require a high amount of money for their services.” Ultimately, the selection of a guide can also serve as a manifestation of the tourist’s personal requirement and economic priorities, rather than a pure cultural and ideological pursuit.

This commercial penetration is illustrated by a vivid scenario provided by the informant. One of his contacts, employed at a local hotel, informed him of a group of tourists seeking transport to a specific monument, explicitly stipulating that the guide must not divert them to external commercial spaces, such as bazaars or artisan markets. This prior condition demonstrates that the consumers were aware of guiding manoeuvres and had constructed conscious structural defences to evade them.

Nevertheless, the informant managed to systematically dismantle these defences through sophisticated interactional labour. He escorted them to their requested destination, but along the transient route, he utilised his advanced communicative repertoire to redirect them into a luxury carpet bazaar. Once inside, he successfully persuaded them to purchase rugs for significant financial sums, thereby securing a substantial commission from the vendor. When asked whether this process was executed solely for the commission, he spontaneously clarified that financial gain was the foundational motivator for him, and that the act of guiding takes place entirely within this commercial framework. In his words, the interaction achieves functional equilibrium

because everyone leaves satisfied: “هما كيعيشو تجربة زوينة وأنا كنصور طرف دالخبز” (Tourists engage in a beautiful experience, and I secure my livelihood).

This capacity to influence cautious, highly resistant consumers relies on narrative fabrication. When asked how he engineered the transaction despite the tourists' explicit anti-shopping mandates, the informant admitted to inventing stories:

You're asking me how I got them to buy, even though they told me they didn't want to shop? It's easy! When I saw them talking about things they saw in online pictures, I realized these people needed a fantasy story. I made up a tale that some rugs came straight from a 'Festival of Colours' that had just finished that week in the suburbs of Marrakesh, and I started spinning stories about the symbols and pigments like they were ancient myths. I kept embellishing the details until they were imagining it like a Disney movie, and in the end, they couldn't do anything but pull out their cash and buy!

سولتيني كيفاش خليتهم يشريو وحا قالو ليا 'ما باغيين نشريو والو'؟ ساهلة! ملي شفتهم كيحضرو على داكشي اللي شافو فالتصاور وفالإنترنت، قلت هادو خاصهم شي قصة ديال الخيال. اختارعت ليهم قصة بلي شي زرابي جاو نيشان من 'مهرجان الألوان' اللي بلاه سالا هاد السيمانة فواحد البلاصة فالنواحي د مراكش، وبديت كنعاولد ليهم على الرموز والألوان بحالا راهم شي أساطير قديمة. بقيت كنزوق فالكلام حتى ولاو كيتخايلو داكشي بحالا فشي فيلم د ديزني، وفي اللخر ما قدرنا يدبرو والو من غير يخرجو الفلوس ويشريو!

This strategy reveals that the unofficial guide possesses an intuitive understanding of Western tourist psychology, a perception likely honed through years of veteran experience, specifically recognising how social media platforms have primed foreign consumers to be deeply captivated by the exotic, the folkloric, and the temporal alterity of the Orient (Anderson, 1983). By this, he exploits the tourist's desire to perceive Marrakesh as a space existing outside of modern, linear time, offering them an escape into an imagined, timeless past. Rather than challenging this virtual expectation, this unlicensed guide exploits it by actively deprioritising historical accuracy in favour of the persuasive efficacy of an invented myth. Here, narrative fabrication becomes an essential semiotic tool for a staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) that reshapes local heritage and transforms ordinary commodities into rare, hyper-cultural treasures to ensure financial survival within a precarious urban economy.

4.2.4. Visual Mimicry and Truncated Repertoires as Survival Tactics

To deepen the ethnographic resolution of these daily survival mechanisms, a non-participant observation methodology was adopted at two high-tension sites within the Medina: the crossroads of Sidi Abdelaziz and Dar Dbagh neighbourhood. Licensed guides and locals frequently warned against accessing these areas, describing them as “no-go” zones characterised by intense territoriality, where law enforcement officers avoid patrolling due to the risk of confrontation. These sites are essentially unregulated zones where informal guides operate outside the view of state-sanctioned tourism, creating a space where only those with deep local ties can navigate safely.

The informal guides at these intersections were attired in pristine, traditional clothing (jellaba and tarboush) that flawlessly mirrored the sartorial codes deployed by licensed, institutional practitioners like Licensed Guide 1. This phenomenon brings us back to the tactics of resistance we discussed earlier. Deprived of official legal capital, these informal actors engage in a visual appropriation of the state’s approved indexical tokens. They utilise the jellaba and tarboush as semiotic resources to actively blur the boundaries of the official grid, but the structural limits of this performance are still exposed by the absence of an official badge.

On a sociolinguistic and narrative level, field observations revealed that unlike licensed guides, who rely on complex historical narratives and educational storytelling, these informal actors avoid long, scripted monologues and rely solely on short impactful claims, such as suggesting places or helping tourists. The linguistic gambits utilised to initiate contact intentionally avoid the legal signifier of tour guide to evade statutory penalties. Instead, they rely on benign, spontaneous offers of spatial assistance or direction-giving, such as: “Do you need help?” or “Do you want to go somewhere?” Through linguistic documentation, it became evident that these actors possess highly

fragmented, pidginised English, relying on isolated, ungrammatical lexemes to convey basic movement directions. Rather than a sign of communicative failure, these highly specialised, localised resources constitute a “truncated repertoire,” linguistic tools that remain functionally successful for street-level navigation despite being disqualified by the state’s formal standards (Blommaert, 2010).

Documented linguistic utterances from the field include:

- A syntactically fractured phrase, “You out this out,” a literal conceptual translation of the Moroccan Darija phrase meaning, “This is the way out if you wish to exit.”
- Abrupt, intermittent directional markers, such as: “Excuse me, the square,” “This way, souqs,” and “This way, this way.”

Crucially, these interactions were accompanied by a complete absence of smiles or affective labour, reflecting the immense psychological pressure and anxiety these unofficial guides experience under the panoptic gaze of the state. When tourists noticed them, their reactions were polarised: some became visibly guarded and started walking faster, while others simply smiled, said “no, thank you” and went on their way. This divergence reveals that some tourists perceive the approach as a security threat, while those who smile are engaging in performative politeness to de-escalate the encounter.

Furthermore, field data revealed a high degree of linguistic flexibility and strategic code-switching. An informal guide was observed attempting to engage a tourist cohort in broken English; upon recognising their lack of comprehension, he instantly code-switched into basic Spanish, uttering “*Paella la mercado*” (market Paella). This rapid linguistic pivoting, even when restricted to fragmented, almost incomprehensible vocabulary, functions as a tool for negotiation and a vital interactional mechanism to bridge communicative ruptures and hopefully retain potential economic prospects.

A final, critical encounter was captured when an unofficial guide successfully persuaded two foreign tourists to follow him to a commercial outlet. Tracking their movements from a discrete distance, the guide adopted an accelerated walking pace through the labyrinthine alleys, speaking in muted, hushed tones while steering them directly toward the shop. This frantic speed and whispered communication manifest the somatic reality of his fear of state arrest; his objective was to finalise the transaction and deliver the clients to the commercial shop before being intercepted by the Tourist Police. This encounter confirms that the informal workspace is heavily saturated with mutual suspicion, mistrust, and anxiety, forcing the unofficial guide to permanently navigate a tense dialectic between the imperative of economic survival and the imminent threat of state incarceration.

4.3. Institutional Surveillance: State Discourses and the Erasure of the Shadow Sector

This section analyses the administrative mechanisms of control and exclusion enacted by the Regional Tourism Delegation. It demonstrates how the state utilises linguistic denial and narrative gatekeeping to define and protect its monopoly over the representation of Marrakesh's tourism assets.

4.3.1. Institutional Denial and Legal Cartographies of Exclusion

When transitioning the fieldwork focus to the administration at the Regional Tourism Delegation, the primary phenomenon observed is an organised form of institutional denial of the informal sector. The first representative encountered (Staff 1) rejected the designation “unlicensed guides,” explicitly stating that, as a representative of the ministry, he did not recognise their existence. Paradoxically, at the very moment this claim was being made, a demonstration by unlicensed guides was taking place directly in front of the administration building (see Figure 3). This position manifested by an institutional

representative demonstrates how the state utilises a mechanism of linguistic exclusion; to maintain institutional legitimacy, the informal sector must be completely erased from official discourse, and its practitioners stripped of the designation “guides.”

Figure 3

Unlicensed Guides Gathering in a Peaceful Demonstration outside the Regional Tourism Delegation



Note. Captured by the author from a non-identifiable perspective, April 2026

Furthermore, this bureaucratic refusal is structurally reinforced by strict legal texts that constitute the regulatory framework of the profession. The delegation relies on the legal transition from Law 03-96, which divided roles between national, local, and auxiliary guides to the new, decisive Law 05-12, which created a unified designation: city and circuit tour guide and mountain guide. While licensed guides are regularly labelled within institutional discourse, the informal guides still receive zero formal recognition. Despite rejecting this designation, However, Staff 1 stated that they are informally referred to as “field experts,” “intruders,” *Faux guides*, and occasionally *Gamanat*, the Moroccan Arabised plural of the French *gamin*, meaning little boy. Licensed Guide 2 previously confirmed this term, exposing a clear pattern of linguistic infantilisation that

aims to humiliate these informal guides and eventually reduce their agency as active actors in the tourism sector.

4.3.2. High-End Tourism as an Economic Locomotive

The second official (Staff 2) provided the essential sociological and economic depth regarding the state's vision. In the ministry's discourse, Marrakesh is not built on cheap mass tourism; rather, the state strategically focuses on high-end, elite tourism. The administration views the sector as a primary engine of socio-economic development, as the official articulated:

The tourism sector is a sector of socio-economic development because it is an engine that attracts other sectors such as crafts, transport and services, and it is a sector that draws in foreign currency and generates employment.

Le secteur du tourisme c'est un secteur de développement socioéconomique parce qu'il est une locomotive qui attire d'autres secteurs comme l'artisanat, le transport et le service, et c'est un secteur qui draine les devises et génère l'emploi.

Additionally, he noted that even with 80% of tourist activities concentrated around traditions, markets, and historical monuments, the state aims to present these traditions within a modern, organised framework. As a result, the demand for a well-trained, certified guide who can balance local heritage with sophisticated modernity is more critical than ever. This institutional gatekeeping ensures the legal and tax-compliant flow of foreign currency into the formal economy while representing Marrakesh in the best way possible.

4.3.3. Epistemic Surveillance and the Battle for Narrative Monopoly

Institutional representatives indicate that the state's primary anxiety regarding unlicensed guides is not merely economic, the loss of taxes and commissions, but rather an epistemic and narrative threat. The administration seeks to impose a standardised linguistic register, a high-level, academic, and polyglot lexicon that avoids slang and exaggeration, alongside a unified historical narrative derived strictly from official history books. Even

licensed guides operate under constant surveillance of the committee; their individual initiative is restricted by the parameters of their official badge, prescribed routes, what they say, and what they omit. If a licensed guide is spotted making an error, such as failing to pause at a designated historical site or providing inaccurate information, they face punitive measures and risk having their badges permanently revoked. As Staff 2 explains:

With Law 05-12, we established a tourist circuit that includes the essential historical monuments of Marrakesh, starting from the Koutoubia and traversing the Medina, palaces and plenty of landmarks. It is not necessarily mandatory to complete the entire route if time is limited, but the principle is clear: if the guide chooses to visit a site, they must deliver the official historical content and ensure nothing is neglected.

Avec la loi 05-12, nous avons instauré un circuit touristique qui comprend les monuments historiques incontournables de Marrakech, en commençant par la Koutoubia et en traversant la Médina, les palais et d'autres monuments historiques. Ce n'est pas forcément une obligation de tout faire si le temps manque, mais le principe est clair : si le guide choisit de faire visiter un site, il doit obligatoirement délivrer le contenu historique officiel et ne rien négliger.

Given that the administration fears even highly trained guides might make mistakes, its perception of informal guides as a source of disruption and a direct threat to the official narrative follows a clear institutional logic. Even though Staff 2 acknowledges the “street multilingual abilities” of these unlicensed young people, he still considers them legally and ideologically dangerous because their practices do not convey the approved, institutional message; instead, they focus exclusively on commercial areas and markets to secure profits through vendor commissions. He explicitly states: “*Souvent, ils disent des histoires incorrectes juste pour vendre des choses, ce qui est en contradiction avec l'éthique de la profession.*” (Often, they tell incorrect stories just to sell things, which is in contradiction with the ethics of the profession).

In the eyes of the state, this overly commercialised focus projects a distorted image and an incorrect history of the city. However, because licensed guides frequently engage in similar commercial practices, this justification reveals a deeper contradiction. It

demonstrates that the state's anxiety remains partially economic; it lies not in the potential distortion of history, but in the unregulated, untaxed, informal accumulation of capital that bypasses the state's financial flow. Ultimately, this tension exposes a structural conflict over who holds the legitimate right to define and profit from the city's tourism assets.

4.3.4. Institutional Aspirations for the Structural Erasure of the Informal Sector

The underlying analytical conclusion reveals that the relationship between the formal and informal sectors is governed by a fluctuating dynamic of institutional pragmatism, shifting alongside cycles of economic stability and crises. During periods of market growth, the tourism authority tends to turn a blind eye; however, during economic disruptions, for example COVID19, security campaigns and arrests intensify to protect the interests of the formal sector from any external competition.

This calculated institutional intervention is visible in the timeline of the exceptional examinations organised by the state. These were not social integration programmes; they were calculated regulatory containment strategies. The 2018 examination was conducted for a purely structural purpose: to address the numerical and logistical shortages plaguing the formal guiding system at the time. In contrast, the 2023 examination served as a security and regulatory mechanism to contain and control unlicensed guides and to curtail the rapid expansion of the sector (Staff 1 and Staff 2).

However, these containment attempts remain structurally inadequate in the face of the empirical gap revealed on the ground. Marrakesh, despite its immense global tourism weight, has only about 800 licensed and administratively documented tour guides. In stark contrast, when the state opened applications for these exceptional exams, the delegation was met with a shockwave of more than 5,000 applications submitted by unlicensed guides.

This numerical gap (800 vs. 5,000+) exposes a deep mismatch. The streets are overflowing with thousands of young people practising the profession under a shadow identity as a desperate means of survival, while the state's institutional channels remain extremely confined to a closed circle. This massive reserve army of unlicensed guides is perceived as a security and control crisis for the administration. From its perspective, this uncontrolled proliferation is the ultimate obstacle to modernisation. This posture perfectly exemplifies Dahles's (2002) analysis of state narrative management, where the total erasure of the informal economy is framed as an ideological prerequisite for national progress. As the official concluded his remarks with bitter realism:

Whether we like it or not, if we want to progress, the law must be applied and the informal sector must be eliminated, because what has ruined Morocco is the informal sector across all fields.

Qu'on le veuille ou pas, si l'on veut progresser, la loi doit être appliquée et le secteur informel doit être éliminé, car c'est le secteur informel, dans tous les domaines, qui a ruiné le Maroc.

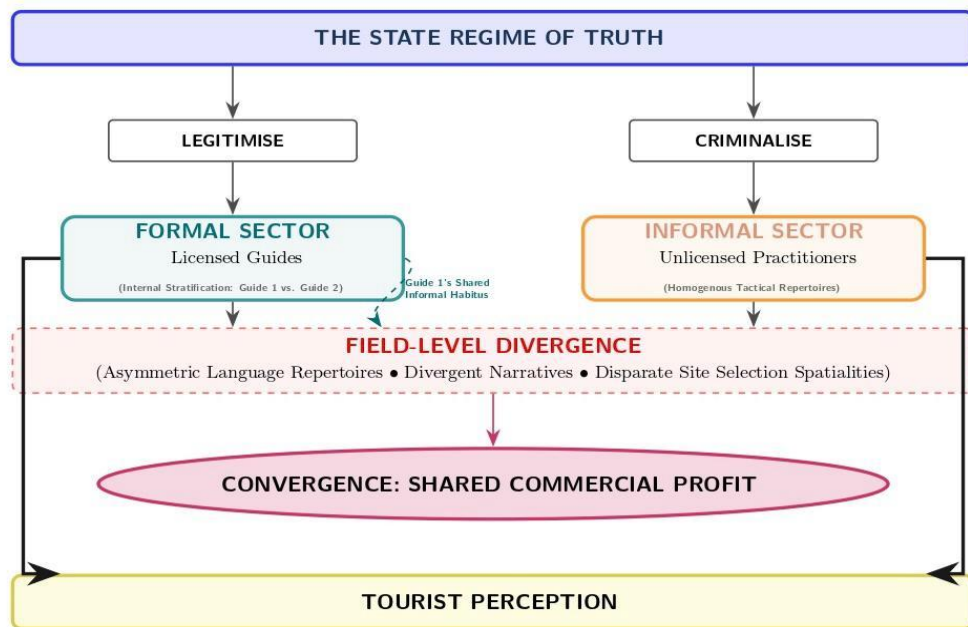
4.4. Summary

Revisiting the overarching research objectives, this study initially sought to determine whether there is a difference between licensed and unlicensed guides in how they portray the city through language, narratives, and spatial choices. The straightforward answer is: Yes, there is a difference. The research findings reveal that the significant differences we anticipated finding between guides, with and without badges, were indeed present and quite pronounced. For instance, while licensed guides operate within an institutional framework of vetted historical narratives and standardised linguistic registers, informal practitioners rely on truncated repertoires, designed to evade authority and secure immediate commercial transactions. However, the most compelling finding lies elsewhere; the additional difference we found was among licensed guides themselves. Sociologically speaking, these differences stem from a shared sense of informality. Even

though these two licensed guides have state badges, the first one (Guide 1) still carries the habitus and mindset hailing from an informal background, a continuity that underscores how informal dispositions persist even after formal institutional recognition.

These dynamics are synthesised in the structural model presented in Figure 4, which maps the Marrakesh sociolinguistic field. The model illustrates how the "State Regime of Truth" functions as the primary arbiter, legitimising the formal sector while criminalising the informal one. However, the model highlights a critical tension: despite the divergence in field-level practices, such as asymmetric language and disparate site selection, both cohorts converge at the level of "Shared Commercial Profit," ultimately shaping the tourist's perception through a complex, often overlapping, transactional reality.

Ultimately, this section demonstrates that Marrakesh is not just a tourist hub but a battleground over who has the right to represent the city and make a living from it and who does not. Authorities want to impose a single narrative and official history and insist on erasing informal guides from existence, while licensed guides themselves occasionally work independently under the name of authority. If this tells us anything, it is that in this globalised world, each individual's aim, no matter to which professional cohort they belong, is to make a living while maintaining their agency despite all the rules.

Figure 4*A Structural Model of the Marrakesh Tour Field*

Note. Original model designed for this study using LaTeX, June 2026.

5. Conclusions

This research aimed to answer the fundamental question: how does the professional status of a tour guide (licensed or unlicensed) shape the way a place (Marrakesh) is represented? Based on our ethnographic analysis, we concluded that professional status is indeed not only an administrative credential, but also a primary filter that determines how a guide utilises language, constructs narratives, and curates the city's spatial experience. The primary finding of this study is the sharp, systemic difference between the formal and informal sectors, a divide exacerbated by state control. Crucially, however, the research revealed that this divide is not a simple binary; the formal sector itself is internally fractured. We observed a spectrum of legitimacy where newly licensed guides perform hyper-visibility to compensate for their recent transition from the informal sector, contrasting sharply with elite licensed guides whose accumulated cultural capital grants them immunity from such performative symbols. This internal tension, far from contradicting our main finding, further confirms that professional status and its associated institutional precarity, or lack thereof, is the fundamental driving variable in how these actors operate.

The informal sector is an entirely different world defined by fear and security pressures, forcing its practitioners to operate in the shadows. Yet, this situation has led them to develop clever survival tactics, such as using motorcycles for quick escapes, building clandestine networks with hotels, and inventing exotic stories to entice tourists and secure commissions. Meanwhile, the Marrakesh tourism authorities adopt a policy of denial, attempting to erase the existence of unlicensed operators from official discourse and portraying them as an obstacle to the country's modernisation. This perspective is a failed attempt to impose a single system of truth that tries to depict Marrakesh as a sanitised tourist product and decides who has the right to represent it.

This approach goes beyond classical studies that portray Marrakesh as merely an open-air museum, focusing instead on fleeting moments of interaction. We have shown that tourism is a battleground where guides, tourists, and the state all engage and interact. We have also shown that the gap between 800 official guides and the thousands demanding integration is a socio-economic time bomb that cannot be ignored. Marrakesh is a living city; it cannot be mummified by an administrative decree. It is a stage for live performance, unfolding daily in its lanes. The official guide speaking academic English and the young man in the market speaking broken English are both sides of the same coin: the struggle to secure a livelihood. To truly understand Marrakesh, we must stop focusing solely on historical monuments and start observing the interactions happening in every corner, as they are the true pulse of the city, where profit, survival, cultural performance, and the struggle for agency all remain inextricably intertwined in a permanent, daily dialectic.

Naturally, this ambitious research has limitations due to the field conditions. The tight timeframe and the tense, unexpected atmosphere prevailing in the informal sector due to security campaigns forced reflexive adaptations in the methodology. These limitations, however, are not considered a shortcoming, but rather part of the nature of ethnographic research, and a vital component of the research findings.

In this context, I propose two directions for future research. First, future research should focus on scaling up the sample size to allow for statistical generalisation and explore the diversity of these processes across different Moroccan tourist hubs. Second, I propose conducting comparative studies that bring together tourist destinations in the Global South with those in the Global North. The aim is to determine whether these exclusionary structures and competition between formal and informal guides are specific

to the fragile socio-economic context of the Global South, or if they represent a universal feature of globalised tourism.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form: Participant Tour Guides (provided in English and Arabic)

Research Project Title / عنوان البحث

Representing Marrakesh: The Interplay of Tour Guides' Professional Status, Language, Narratives, and Site Selection in Tourists' Perceptions

تمثيل مراكش: التفاعل بين الوضع المهني للمرشدين السياحيين، والسرديات، واختيار المواقع في تصورات السياح.

Researcher / الباحثة

I am Narjisse Youbi, a Master's student at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. This study is meant to fulfil the requirements for my MA thesis in "English Studies: Linguistic, Literary, and Sociocultural Perspectives."

أنا نرجيس يوبي، طالبة ماجستير في جامعة برشلونة المستقلة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكمال متطلبات أطروحة الماجستير الخاصة بي في "الدراسات الإنجليزية: منظورات لغوية وأدبية واجتماعية ثقافية".

Research Aim / هدف البحث

The primary goal of the study is to examine how licensed and unlicensed tour guides in Marrakesh represent the city through their narratives and site selections. I am interested in how the interplay between their professional status and place representation shapes tourists' perceptions. This research seeks to contribute to the fields of tourism studies and sociolinguistics.

الهدف الأساسي من هذه الدراسة هو بحث كيفية تمثيل المرشدين السياحيين (المرخصين وغير المرخصين) في مراكش للمدينة من خلال سردياتهم واختيارهم للمواقع. يهمني معرفة كيف يشكل التفاعل بين وضعهم المهني وتمثيل المكان تصورات السياح. يسعى هذا البحث إلى المساهمة في مجالات الدراسات السياحية واللسانيات الاجتماعية.

Implications of Participation / تبعات المشاركة

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to discontinue your participation at any moment without giving a reason or facing any consequences. Your information will be eliminated if you withdraw.

مشاركتم في هذه الدراسة تطوعية تماماً، ولكم الحرية في التوقف في أي لحظة دون إبداء الأسباب أو مواجهة أي عواقب. سيتم حذف معلوماتكم في حال انسحابكم.

If you agree to participate, I will join one of your tours to observe and take field notes. We will have a semi-structured interview (approx. 30–45 minutes) to discuss your guiding practices and the factors influencing them.

في حال موافقتكم على المشاركة، سأقوم بمرافقة إحدى جولاتكم للملاحظة وتدوين الملاحظات الميدانية. بعد ذلك، سنجري مقابلة شبه منظمة (حوالي 30-45 دقيقة) لمناقشة ممارساتكم في الإرشاد والعوامل المؤثرة عليها من وجهة نظركم.

Pseudonyms will be used to keep your identity completely private. The audio recordings will be securely stored and deleted after 5 years. All data will be used for academic purposes only in compliance with European Regulation on data protection (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and the Spanish Organic Law 3/2018 (LOPDGDD).

سيتم استخدام أسماء مستعارة للحفاظ على سرية هويتكم تماماً. سيتم حفظ التسجيلات الصوتية بشكل آمن وحذفها بعد 5 سنوات من انتهاء مشروع البحث. يتم معالجة بياناتكم الشخصية للأغراض الأكاديمية فقط وفقاً لللائحة

الأوروبية لحماية البيانات (GDPR) 2016/679 (EU) والقانون التنظيمي الإسباني رقم 2018/3 (LOPDGDD).

تسجيل المعلومات / Recording

أوافق على التسجيل الصوتي / I agree to the audio recording of the tour. / لا No/ نعم Yes [] []
للجولة.

أوافق على التسجيل / I agree to the audio recording of the interview. / لا No/ نعم Yes [] []
الصوتي للمقابلة.

الموافقة / Consent

I have read and understood the information provided.

لقد قرأت وفهمت المعلومات المقدمة.

I agree to participate in this study.

أوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Contact Information

You may contact me or my supervisor for further information about the project or your participation.

Narjisse Youbi

Email: [Redacted]

Telephone: [Redacted]

Dr Melissa Moyer

Email: [Redacted]

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form: Participant Tourists

Research Project Title

Representing Marrakesh: The Interplay of Tour Guides' Professional Status, Language, Narratives, and Site Selection in Tourists' Perceptions

Researcher

I am Narjisse Youbi, a Master's student at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. This study is meant to fulfil the criteria for my MA thesis in the "English Studies: Linguistic, Literary, and Sociocultural Perspectives" programme.

Research Aim

The primary goal of the study is to examine how licensed and unlicensed tour guides in Marrakesh represent the city through their narratives and site selections. I am interested in how the interplay between their professional status and place representation shapes tourists' perceptions. This research seeks to contribute to the fields of tourism studies and sociolinguistics.

Implications of participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to stop at any moment without giving a reason or facing consequences. Your information will be deleted if you withdraw.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- Provide basic demographic information (nationality and age group).
- Take part in a semi-structured interview (approx. 15–25 minutes), discussing your pre-visit expectations of Marrakesh and your later experience after the tour.

Pseudonyms (such as "Tourist A") will be used to keep your identity completely private. The audio recordings will be securely saved and deleted 5 years after the research project is over. Your personal data is processed only for academic purposes in compliance with European Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

Recording and Use of Information

☐ Yes ☐ No I agree to the audio recording of my interview.

☐ Yes ☐ No I authorise the use of anonymised quotations from my interview in academic publications.

☐ Yes ☐ No I authorise the use of my audio contributions for the purposes of presenting research.

Consent

I have read and understood the information provided.

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Contact Information

You can get in touch with me or my supervisor for further information on your rights regarding data access, correction, or deletion.

Narjisse Youbi

Email: [Redacted]

Telephone: [Redacted]

Dr Melissa Moyer

Email: [Redacted]

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form: Participant Administrative Staff (provided in French)

Titre du projet de recherche

Représenter Marrakech : L'interaction entre le statut professionnel des guides, la langue, les récits et la sélection des sites dans la perception des touristes.

Chercheuse

Je suis Narjisse Youbi, étudiante en Master à l'Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Cette étude est réalisée pour satisfaire aux critères de mon mémoire de Master au sein du programme « English Studies: Linguistic, Literary, and Sociocultural Perspectives ».

Objectif de la recherche

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'examiner comment les guides touristiques agréés et non agréés à Marrakech représentent la ville à travers leurs récits et leur sélection de sites. Je m'intéresse à la manière dont l'interaction entre leur statut professionnel et la représentation des lieux façonne les perceptions des touristes. Cette recherche vise à contribuer aux domaines des études touristiques et de la sociolinguistique.

Implications de la participation

Votre participation à cette étude est totalement volontaire, et vous êtes libre d'arrêter à tout moment sans avoir à fournir de motif ni à subir de conséquences. Vos informations seront supprimées si vous décidez de vous retirer.

Si vous acceptez de participer, il vous sera demandé de :

Participer à un entretien semi-directif (environ 45 à 60 minutes) portant sur la vision de l'institution concernant la question du formel versus l'informel dans ce secteur.

Des pseudonymes (tels que « Participant A ») seront utilisés afin de préserver strictement la confidentialité de votre identité. Les enregistrements audios seront conservés en toute sécurité et supprimés 5 ans après la fin du projet de recherche. Vos données personnelles sont traitées uniquement à des fins académiques, conformément au Règlement européen (UE) 2016/679 (RGPD).

Enregistrement et utilisation des informations

☐ Oui ☐ Non : J'accepte l'enregistrement audio de mon entretien.

☐ Oui ☐ Non : J'autorise l'utilisation de citations anonymisées issues de mon entretien dans des publications académiques.

☐ Oui ☐ Non : J'autorise l'utilisation de mes contributions audio à des fins de présentation de la recherche.

Consentement

J'ai lu et compris les informations fournies.

J'accepte de participer à cette étude.

Nom du participant

Signature

Date

Signature de la chercheuse

Coordonnées

Vous pouvez me contacter, ou contacter ma directrice de recherche, pour toute information complémentaire concernant vos droits d'accès, de rectification ou de suppression de vos données.

Narjisse Youbi

E-mail : [Redacted]

Téléphone : [Redacted]

Dr Melissa Moyer

E-mail : [Redacted]

Appendix D: Observation Guide

A. Site Selection and Spatial Logic

- The Route: I will be mapping the specific stops to categorise the path. Are they monuments, artisan workshops, urban modern places, or purely commercial zones?
- Commercial Anchoring: Following your suggestion, I am noting if the guide has a personal connection to specific venues (e.g., a particular shop, café, or hidden spot they prefer to recommend over others).

B. Narrative Framing

- Image Construction: How is the city's image being built for the tourist? Is Marrakesh framed as an "oriental or exotic dream," "a historical museum" or a "living economic hub"?
- The Source: Is the narrative anchored in institutional history (dates, official records) or personal and local memory (personal stories, neighbourhood arafolklore, lived experience)?

C. Linguistic Landscape

- Recurring Language Forms: I will be focusing on specialised terminology versus colloquialisms.
- Code-Switching: I will be observing when and why the guide switches between languages. Is the switch functional (e.g. for translation) or performative (e.g. for authenticity) or both?

D. Interactive Engagement

- Directive Language: I will be observing the use of expressions (like "look at this," "notice that") and specific physical gestures used to orientate the tourist's gaze.
- Handling Questions: I will also be looking at how they respond to unscripted questions from tourists.

E. The Omissions (Silent Data)

- Utilising my insider knowledge, I will be detecting "non-represented" spaces and stories. What is the guide not showing or not telling? Are these spaces and stories being bypassed, or are they simply not encountered?

Appendix E: Interview Guide for Guides

A. Background Information

- How long have you been showing the city to visitors? (Experience)
- Did you follow any formal training or programmes? Do you currently hold an official licence? (Training and licensing)

B. Professional Identity and Knowledge

- How would you describe your role? (e.g., are you a teacher, a storyteller, a local friend, or a business mediator?) (Self-defined role)
- Where do the stories you tell come from? Are they from books and official records, or are they personal and ancestral stories passed down to you? (Sources of knowledge)
- What is the one thing you believe every tourist must understand about the city before they leave?

C. Professional Status and Perspectives

- In your experience, what is the main difference between a licensed tour and a non-licensed/informal tour?
- For licensed guides: What is your view on the presence of informal guides in the Medina?
- For unlicensed guides: What unique value do you provide that the "official" tours might miss?

D. Spatial and Narrative Choices

- Why did you choose the specific route we took today? Do you always explain the same sites, or do you adapt based on the tourists' interests? (The logic of the path)
- How do you decide which local businesses (cafés, workshops, shops) to incorporate into the tour? (Commercial and local ties)
- Do you change your narrative when you have tourists who seem more "specialised" or who have seen specific things on social media? (Adaptation)

Appendix F: Interview Guide for Tourists

A. Background Information

- Is this your first time in Marrakesh or Morocco? Do you usually prefer guided tours or exploring on your own? (If it's your second time, can you tell me briefly about your previous experience/experiences?)
- What is your native language, and how comfortable do you feel navigating the city in English?

B. Pre-visit Expectations and the "Imagined Marrakesh"

- Before arriving in Marrakesh, what were the first three words or images that came to your mind when you thought of the city? (Initial images)
- Did you see specific recommendations or photos on social media (Instagram, TikTok) or travel blogs before your trip?

C. The Post-Tour Reflection (Confirmed vs. Challenged)

- After today's tour, does the city match the "image" you had in your head?
- Did the guide show or tell you anything that surprised you or completely changed a stereotype you previously held?
- What is the most authentic thing you feel you experienced or learned during this specific tour?

D. Trust and Professional Authority

- What made you choose this specific tour? (e.g., price, a personal recommendation, or a feeling that it would be more "local/real"?)
- Were you aware of whether your guide was officially licensed or not? (Awareness)
- Does the guide's professional status (having a licence) change how much you trust the historical facts they share or the prices they quote you at local shops?
- Do you feel that a "local friend" or someone who lives in the neighbourhood gives a different perspective than a professional, officially licensed guide?

Appendix G: Interview Guide for Administrative Staff (in French)

1. Évolution du secteur et contexte actuel

- Comment la situation du guidage touristique à Marrakech a-t-elle évolué cette année suite à la mise en place de nouvelles réglementations ?
- Quelles sont les statistiques actuelles concernant les guides touristiques agréés par rapport à ceux opérant sans licence ?
- Le contrôle a-t-il été renforcé récemment ? Quelle est la raison principale de l'intensification de ces campagnes de contrôle ?

2. Identité et représentation

- Comment la délégation distingue-t-elle le « guide agréé » du « guidage informel » ? Quelles sont les caractéristiques requises pour un guide représentant la ville ?
- Dans le discours officiel, quels termes utilisez-vous pour qualifier le guidage non réglementé ? (Par exemple : « faux guides », « intrus »...)
- Quelle image de Marrakech le ministère souhaite-t-il transmettre aux touristes étrangers à travers ce système d'agrément ?

3. Discours et qualité du récit (narrative)

- Quelle est la principale préoccupation de l'État concernant les guides non agréés ? S'agit-il de la sécurité des touristes, de l'enjeu économique, ou de la véracité du « récit » (narrative) historique transmis sur la ville ?
- À votre avis, les guides sans licence proposent-ils une perspective historique ou des récits différents de ceux validés par les autorités ?

4. Langue et formation

- La délégation propose-t-elle une formation linguistique ou des scripts spécifiques aux guides agréés ? Existe-t-il un registre de langue ou une manière de s'exprimer que vous privilégiez ?
- Comment l'État perçoit-il les guides pratiquant un « multilinguisme de rue » sans formation académique préalable ? Est-ce considéré comme une compétence ou comme un problème ?

5. Perspectives d'avenir

- Quel est l'objectif à long terme de ces mesures ? S'agit-il d'intégrer ces acteurs informels à terme, ou de mettre fin définitivement à ce secteur non réglementé ?