

1. Introduction:

Dialect change and maintenance are two undeniable outcomes when variation and contact of varieties come into interplay. Whereas the former refers to modifications applied in one's speech by either accommodating to, or diverging from, a particular addressee or a social group as a whole (Auer et al. 2009)¹, the latter is the result of the continuous utilization of a linguistic variety despite all the competing socio-linguistic challenges surrounding it from other regional and social varieties co-existing in the same society but possessing more power (Coupland 2007)². Both linguistic processes depend on many social and psychological motivations akin to attitudes towards or against a given variety of variant. These aspects are all variably found in any community where contact between dialects is taking place as is the case in Tlemcen speech community.

Tlemcen city has been considered as an antique sedentary center throughout history and its dialect is undoubtedly a reflective mirror of the region's urbanity and socio-cultural preservation (Dendane 2013)³. Tlemcen dialect is known by its softness namely the phonetic realization of Standard Arabic *qāf* as a glottal stop in addition to the absence of interdentalals and uniqueness of lexical entries as well (Marçais 1902)⁴. These facts make it distinctive from other Algerian Arabic dialects. However, due to contact with people from different origins, especially those coming from the rural background, this purely sedentary variety is threatened. Consequently, dialect change and levelling are taking place in the region, especially with the pejorative connotations associated with its peculiarities (Hammoudi 2017)⁵. For this, a crucial question has to be raised with regard to Tlemcen urban dialect (henceforth TUD): To what extent can we expect this sedentary variety to resist the massive continuous change?

A reasonable hypothesis to TUD resistance to dialect change can be summarized in the linguistic behaviour of female speakers who are seen to be sociolinguistically more preservative of prestigious and urban parameters of codes (Labov 2001)⁶. This study has therefore been designed to highlight the problematic issue of dialect preservation and maintenance in Tlemcen where women are the central speech actors in this linguistic operation. Put differently, this paper is addressed to answer fundamental sociolinguistic and purely dialectological queries including: a) Do female native urban Tlemcen dialect speakers change or maintain their home variety? b) In which way do they manage to preserve this variety despite its stigmatization? And finally, c) what are the reasons behind the maintenance of TUD?

2. Methodology

Triangulation of methods has always proved its efficiency in sociolinguistic research, especially in the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. For this, our investigation relies on two research methods, namely ethnography and survey, that allow us not only to obtain soft (attitudinal) and hard (numerical) data, but also to examine dialect contact methodically. The results in the selected speech community can be deeply elicited via a mixed-method approach as the final purpose of this research goes beyond describing to explaining the linguistic situation maintained by female speakers in Tlemcen speech community.

2.1 Instruments and procedures

This research is part of an ethnographic project. In fact, ethnography entails the researcher to be part of the whole speech community to become the reporting lens of the current situation especially when the subject matter is dialect variation. In order to dig deeper into the community, investigating attitudes are always the best to cross-check sociolinguistic data. Thence, in addition to long-term participant observation of the population, the researcher relies on a survey interview which proves to be efficient in both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data collected. A

face-to-face, non-intimidating survey, has been conducted in order to elicit opinions towards the use or non-use of TUD by female participants.

2.2 Participants

The data for this paper have been collected from a number of informants originally from Tlemcen city. The research relies on two methods of selection namely: judgmental and snowball sampling. Whereas the former refers to the choice of participants according to what fits the requirements of the research (choosing female speakers with the exclusion of males in the current investigation), the latter involves a friend-of-a-friend method where one participant can help by bringing others to their circle of discussion. Consequently, 63 female speakers have constituted our sample wherein the youngest is 5 years old and the oldest has reached her 80s. By reference to age as a social variable, this research is of a real-time goal since different generations (divided according to age in table 1) are surveyed and investigated at one particular point in time to allow sociolinguistic comparisons.

Table 1: The distribution of participants according to age

Groups	Age	Total	Remarks
Group A	[5-10]	(5)	Children and primary school pupils.
Group B	[11-15]	(13)	Middle school pupils.
Group C	[16-19]	(9)	Secondary school pupils.
Group D	[20-39]	(22)	Baccalaureate candidates and university students.
Group E	[40-60]	(10)	Shop-keepers and administration workers
Group F	[65+]	(4)	After the retirement period.

Table (1) displays the number of participants with regard to age, classified into six groups that constitute our sample population (from Group A to Group F). The number of respondents is smaller at the two ends of the age continuum (5 children and 4 elderly women), while the largest group consists of 22 informants. But in spite of the discrepancy in this number/age equation, the participants have allowed the researcher to make a detailed comparison between them as well as their socio-linguistic backgrounds.

3. Results

The results of the survey interview are reported in this section according to the global questions that have been raised with regard to dialect use, maintenance or avoidance in addition to their attitudes and motivations towards such a linguistic behaviour. Table (2) summarizes the answers that the participants have provided when asked about which variety of Tlemcen Arabic they speak at home.

Table 2: The dialects of Tlemcen spoken at home by the participants

Group	Total N°	Urban	Rural
Group A	(5)	5	0
Group B	(13)	12	1
Group C	(9)	7	2
Group D	(22)	19	3
Group E	(10)	8	2
Group F	(4)	4	0

As shown in the table above, 55 out of 63 informants use the urban variety at home. This explains that it is their mother tongue for it is used in intimate situations and natural contexts as with family members. However, once asked about whether they change their way of speaking once in mixed situations, i.e., with rural people, the results (in table 3) show that 16 informants out of the whole research sample shift to the rural variety while the remaining (47) give negative answers. A considerably high level of dialect maintenance is observed to be practiced by the participants.

Table 3: Participants' shifting from urban to rural

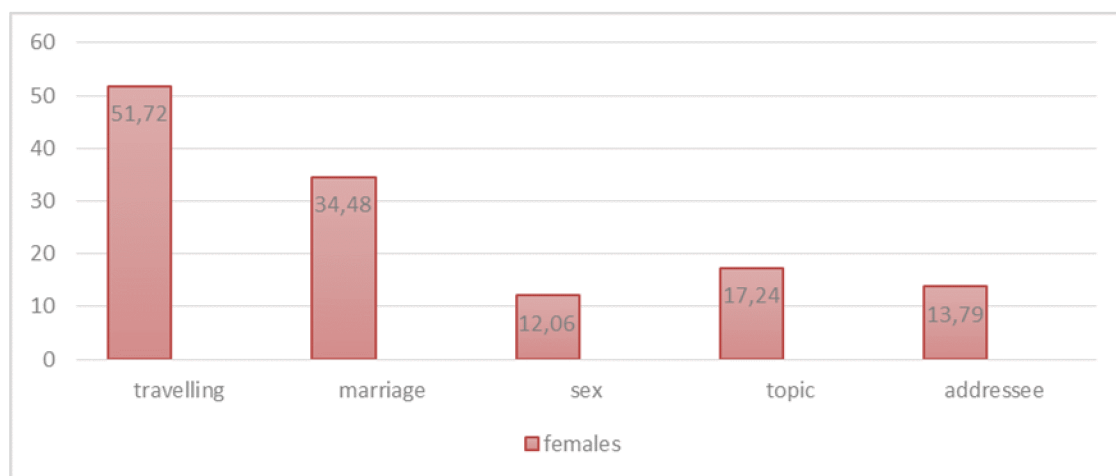
Group	Yes	No
Group A	0	5
Group B	3	10
Group C	4	5
Group D	7	15
Group E	2	8
Group F	0	4

Higher scores of dialect change are given by youngsters who are mainly university students aged between 18 and 30. This reflects that in a context of long-term contact such as university, some females do change their dialect. With the exception of this small proportion, it can be clearly deduced that Tlemcen dialect is still widely used by women who find less obligation to change or shift even in restricted or mixed contact situations. Children, elderly and old respondents are the ones that show no will to change or shift from urban to rural speech.

When asked to give a justification, most of the participants claim that it is according to the situation that the speaker changes their linguistic behaviour. Tlemcen female native urban dialect speakers do not switch or change their dialect except in situations where they feel embarrassed, under mockery, or not understood. Table (4), captured in figure (1), elicit circumstances which affect dialect use, maintenance and change.

Table 4: Motivations for dialect maintenance or change

Group	Travelling	Marriage	Sex	Topic	addressee
B	10	5	1	1	3
C	6	5	0	2	0
D	13	7	4	5	1
E	1	3	0	0	2
F	0	0	2	2	2

**Figure 1: Participants' reasons for dialect change**

The illustrations above mention the circumstances where participants are found to shift from their urban variety, with the exclusion of children. Tokens are consistent in groups B, C, and D. Accordingly, we notice that travelling scores the highest rate. In other words, 51.72% of the participants view that moving outside Tlemcen city makes them under the obligation of avoiding the urban variety, especially the use of glottal stop; they would say, for example, [gælli], ‘He told me’, instead of [ʔælli] with the glottal stop, the phonological feature most characteristic of Tlemcen speech. As for the second variable, we noticed that 34.48% of the participants consider marriage with a non-native of Tlemcen a strong reason not to use their home dialect. The topic of discussion (17.24%) is noted as important for them a bit more than the sex of the interlocutor (12.06%) and the status of the addressee (13.79%).

Because travelling scores the highest level of tokens for the participants and prevents them from maintaining the mother tongue, another question was asked on whether they feel embarrassed when using TUD out of home and away from friends. Surprisingly, as shown in figure (2), 87.93% of the participants, i.e., 51 out of 58, said they were never ashamed nor embarrassed by the variety they speak; it reflects their identity and they are deeply proud of it. Change is subject to the context only.

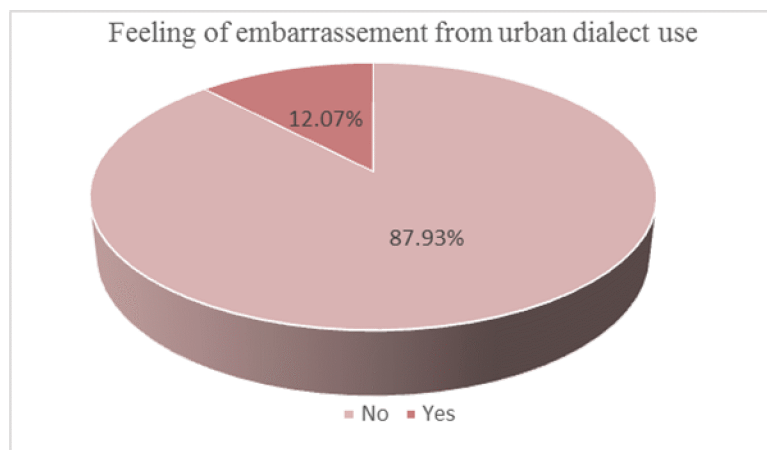


Figure 2: Degrees of embarrassment from urban dialect maintenance

Obviously, the last question in the survey was about the attitudes towards the urban dialect of Tlemcen. The motivation behind this question is to find reasons and explanations to aspects of the maintenance the urban vernacular. The participants' responses are categorized as follows

- It is part of the identity: speech reflects the social affiliation of speakers and their belonging to a particular group;
- It is used with the family as a social norm where divergence is forbidden and maintenance is required;
- It is used not only to show in-group belonging but also femininity and prestige as urban Tlemcen speech is the perfect linguistic dress of females in this community;
- It is a symbol of socially upper classes and people of higher-status, females feel more advantageous and socially more respected when speaking this dialect (despite all the stigma addressed to it by neighbouring towns and villages);
- Being raised with this variety makes it a natural and arbitrary behaviour (among all the other cultural practices that reflect belonging to Tlemcen city).

4. Discussion

4.1 Females' role in resistance to dialect-change and TUD maintenance

The results of the survey reveal that females show strong resistance to dialect change that occurs in Tlemcen speech community by maintaining their urban variety in and outside its skirts. The female community continues to use the sedentary dialect which highlights linguistic maintenance as defined by Hoffmann⁷ (1991:186). This conclusion goes in the opposite direction to what Labov⁸ (1991) has claimed about females being more innovative in their speech and leading in linguistic change, which is indeed a fact characterizing the Western world, particularly in urban contexts. Here in Tlemcen, women are strongly resistant to dialect change despite the social stigma and markedness of the vernacular.

However, it should be noted that the urban dialect of Tlemcen is often regarded as effeminate; that is, a dialect adequate for females only. This can be a good explanation of females' TUD maintenance. In this vein, it has been indicated that sex is not only a biological category but rather a social one as there is a significant distribution of "roles, norms, and expectations that constitute gender" (Eckert 1990: 246)⁹. Thence, using TUD is appropriate for females in terms of pronunciation regardless of other pejorative remarks such as discrimination.

4.2 Perpetuation of TUD among generations and the role of age in dialect preservation

Because this study happened in a real-time context, the data obtained allowed more concrete comparisons among generations as participants of different age cohorts have been investigated. Children aged between 5 to 11 have been observed to use the urban vernacular even outside family surroundings which reveals that the dialect is still being naturally acquired and used by children. On the other hand, older and elderly participants are also preservative and maintain the sedentary Tlemcen dialect. More to the point, despite the fact that younger females (from adolescence on) tend to ‘situationally’ change and adopt some rural variety features due to contact with outsiders, maintenance of TUD is still persistent and never shows to fade in their linguistic behaviour.

Speaking a given variety at home, where family members and children interact with their mother tongue, is central to its maintenance and preservation (Cardona et al. 2008)¹⁰. This is surely the case in Tlemcen speech community where using the urban vernacular is seen as the social norm for interaction, especially among females. Additionally, the use of TUD among children can be explained in terms of their exposure to it as an input home variety transmitted directly and daily from parents. Hence, aspects of socialization, linguistic norm transmission, and ‘socio-linguistic modelling’ (Leaper¹¹, 2002; Bornstein¹², 2013; Barbu et al.¹³ 2014) are present in Tlemcen children who reflect the persistence in the use of the urban dialect and resistance to outside dialect influence.

Similarly, and despite the fact that adolescence, teenage, and young aged-periods tend to be socio-linguistically different ages as they reveal changes in people’s behaviours, females in the studied speech community did not show such a behaviour. Tlemcen female speakers of these age categories show slight openness to other dialects due to extensive social contact and broader relations (Labov 2001; 2002; 2010)¹⁴ by exercising short-term accommodation which is only momentary and situational, but never exceeds the boundary of its conversational contexts. For this, accentuating the dissimilarities is always linguistically performed by females who reinforce their regionalism by the use of TUD. The findings of this research recall Campbell-Kibler’s (2010)¹⁵ assumption that social images are highly encoded in the linguistic practices of females in Tlemcen speech community where sedentary identity affiliation and the prestigious status are taken over communication goals.

4.3 The role of attitudes in TUD maintenance

The central aim of the survey interview has been to elicit attitudes towards the linguistic situation that is taking place in the community of Tlemcen and how female participants react to urban dialect change and the ruralization process. The results show that positive attitudes towards Tlemcenian urban variety lead females to maintain and stick to its ‘pure’ pronunciation despite the negative connotations spread in the society. This proves the importance of attitudes in the directions of linguistic change and maintenance by speakers as found in many previous studies in the literature (Gardner et al. 1985¹⁶, Holmes and Harlow 1991¹⁷). Although they strongly depend on social judgment (Riagain 2008)¹⁸, attitudes are crucial in explaining how the human brain functions and how social and linguistic behaviours are governed (Baker 1992: 10)¹⁹.

Maintaining TUD is equal to preserving the Tlemceni identity and culture and the reverse is impossible to occur not to lose the purity of origins. In this line of thought, Fishman (1989)²⁰ asserts the tight relationship between speakers’ ethnic belonging and their linguistic performance, namely home variety maintenance. Therefore, reflecting and preserving one’s ethnic identity, in-group integrity and the society’s cultural heritage can be mirrored in the spontaneous and continuous use of the variety they speak at home, which is the case of Tlemcen female participants in the current research.

5. Conclusion:

The main conclusion of this paper holds that female speakers play a crucial role in urban dialect preservation and maintenance in Tlemcen speech community. The results obtained show that despite the awareness of the social stigma addressed to TUD, females of all age cohorts insist on using and maintaining it in all contexts except when travelling or when not being understood. Despite the awareness of socio-linguistic variation performed in different regions of the community, female urban dialect speakers reveal more mindfulness of the social roles attributed to their dialect, mainly prestige and high status belonging. Thus, between attaining communicative relations and regional networks or reflecting one's identity through TUD, these female speakers resist all types of change by maintaining their home variety, an activity that is not only restricted to old people's behaviour but also transmitted to younger speakers and children. Taken together, the results advocate that in spite of the regional variation that pervades the society and the negative social connotation towards the vernacular, Tlemcen urban dialect will never disappear, mostly owing to native female speakers' maintenance of Tlemcen speech, its preservation and transmission.

However, it is worth noting that this research is limited to a small sample of people, which does not allow generalization to the whole community. Additionally, more social and psychological variables need to be investigated while our investigation is restricted to attitudes and some observed dialectal behaviour. More to the point, comparing the dialectal performance of both genders is of paramount importance, especially with regard to aspects of change and maintenance. For these reasons, further research is required to understand dialect maintenance in Tlemcen speech community amidst the 'threat' of dialect change.

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