Aspects of Women's Speech in Tlemcen

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It has been suggested in many sociolinguistic investigations (e.g., Labov, 1966, 1972; Lakoff, 1973; Kramer, 1974, 1975; Trudgill, 1972, 1974, etc.) that sex as a variable correlates with linguistic variation, and one of the most striking findings is that while the versatile nature of male speakers is reflected in the fluctuations of their speech patterns and its accommodation according to the situation, women tend to be conservative and they hardly ever change their way of speaking in informal settings.

However, in the modern western society, where women have played an important role in work and business areas and in politics, too, sociolinguistic research has shown that female speakers often use the prestige accent, for they have become aware that it confers considerable social advantages. Indeed, some linguists say that sociolinguistic research in the United States (Labov, 1963, 1966) and in Britain (Trudgill, 1972, 1974, etc.)

> '*has shown that women tend to produce more prestigious pronunciation patterns than men particularly as the formality of a social situation is increased* '.

(Elyan, Smith and Bourhis, in Trudgill's ed. 1978:125)

Nevertheless, such linguistic behaviour in the western world is far from being comparable to the one attested in Arabic-speaking communities. Such linguistic concepts as prestige or formal vs. casual speech are almost irrelevant considerations in Arab communities for their acknowledged diaglossic character. In such communities, the only cases of shift towards Classical Arabic or the High variety as Ferguson (1959) puts it, can be observed in formal situations such as education, religious preaches, television and radio news, the written form, etc. Otherwise, in everyday communication, it is the Low variety that is normally used, though further research on the Algerian speech community or other Arabic speaking societies, may reveal an increasing importance in the use of classical lexical items and phrases, and a kind of middle variety in certain contexts such as the administration in which we may say that speakers style-shift.

In the case of everyday linguistic variation in the speech community of Tlemcen, either urban / rural code-switching or linguistic variation that is inherent to the local variety are put to work. In spite of this basic difference in the status of language, i.e., the clear contrast between standard language and casual speech in western communities, on the one hand, and Classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic with its regional dialects on the other, the conservativism in women's speech may be regarded

as a universal trait in the sense that western female speakers tend to preserve the features of the vernacular in informal situations in much the same way as the women in Tlemcen do.

1. The Speech Community of Tlemcen

Tlemcen speech is characterised by a number of linguistic features that make it almost an accent itself. Some of these features are: the glottal stop [ʔ] instead of the urban [q] or the rural [g] found in other varieties of Algerian Arabic as in [ʔu:l] instead of [qu:l] or [gu:l] for 'say, tell'; the drop of the feminine ending {i} in verb forms as in   [ro:ħ] instead of [ro:ħi] for 'you (f.s) go'; and in a number of other expressions such as [ʔædʒi] for 'you come' and [χaj] for 'my brother'.

The recent investigation that we have undertaken on the speech community of Tlemcen (Dendane, 1993), with an attempt to investigate linguistic variation in correlation with social parameters has proved quite fruitful. Thanks to the Labovian methodology and other elicitation techniques (questionnaires, recorded conversations, etc.) we tried to shed some light on the overall linguistic situation in Tlemcen and to describe the socio-linguistic behaviour of speakers of this area. The results obtained clearly show that a very high rate of male speakers tended to avoid the stigmatised features mentioned earlier

and especially the feature of [ʔ] when interacting with rural speech users. The most obvious reason, it appears, which accounts for such a speech attitude is that Tlemcen speech as a whole and its use of the glottal stop in particular is regarded as an 'effeminate' stigmata, 'not fir for men' as some informants see it. Indeed, an increasing number of male speakers, mostly among the young ones, tend to replace such 'markers' in Tlemcen speech by rural ones which are usually associated with manliness and toughness.

Women, however, stick to these characteristics of Tlemcen speech whatever the situation may be. In addition, to this conservative attitude that most women of Tlemcen exhibit in contrast with male speech, there are a good number of lexical items and speech forms that may be seen as virtually specific to women's speech, as we shall see below.

2. Some Linguistic Features of Female Speech in Tlemcen

There are many linguistic features that are clearly indicative of women's speech in Tlemcen. These are so much regarded as specific to female speech that a man who uses them may readily be seen as using 'effeminate' speech. He may even be turned to derision for such a verbal behaviour.

2.a. The phonetic marker / ɖ / → / ʈ / in Female Speech

The most obvious of these characteristic features in female speech is the de-voicing of the velarized (emphatic) dental stop represented here as / ɖ/[1] in almost all words and in all positions. The table below illustrates this:

/ ɖ / → / ʈ /

TLEMCEN	ELSEWHERE	LEXIS
ʈahri	dahri ~ ɖahri	my back
χʈar	χdar ~ χɖar	green (m.s.)
bjaʈ	bjad ~ bjaɖ	white (m.s.)

Scores of the variable (ɖ) in correlation with the sex variable are summarised in the table below. The informants were asked to translate ten simple sentences in which there is one word including / ɖ / in different positions. The translation had to be from French to Tlemcen Arabic for the sake of the investigation. This straightforward technique allowed us to get some interesting results as far as the contrast / ɖ / ; / ʈ / is concerned.

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[1] . Both 'ض' and 'ظ' (daad / dhaad) of Classical Arabic are realized [ɖ] in Tlemcen arabic

	/ ɖ /	/ ʈ /
Females	15%	85%
Males	97%	3%

Scores of / ɖ / vs. / ʈ / in % in correlation with sex

The high number of occurrences of / ʈ / in female speech clearly shows that the de-voicing of   / ɖ / can be considered as a feminine feature. This obvious sex-differentiation feature (it may indeed be considered as a sex-marker) is sharpest in the inner city; but its use is also widely spread elsewhere among younger women and little girls. It often happens that little boys too, use / ʈ / more frequently as they acquire their first language behaviour from their mums more so than from their dads. But, surprising as it may seem, very early in life, boys usually become aware of the difference it makes to use / ɖ / or / ʈ / in words like /beɖa/ 'white (f.s.). That is, they realise quite soon that / ʈ / in such words is used by women only, and thus they see it as 'inappropriate' for males. So they shift to / ɖ / as soon they start going to school where the contact is with other boys of the same age. Reciprocally, little girls 'discover' that / ɖ / is reserved to the domain of boyhood and thus they avoid the realisation with [ɖ], like their mothers by saying [

mre: ʈa] instead of the male version [mre: ɖa] 'ill (f.s.)'. This sex-related opposition / ɖ /: / ʈ / appears to be in relatively stable balance that prevents the neutralisation of one variant by the other. Presumably, if little boys did not react the way they do with respect to the opposition / ɖ / : / ʈ /, the voiceless stop would 'overcome' in distributional terms and displace its voiced counter-part as a result of the mothers' influence, and probably all native speakers would produce [be: ʈa] in lieu of the most frequently distributed [be: ɖa] in other variety in the vicinity of Tlemcen.

A phonetic rule that is related to a social factor can thus be formulated in this context as:

$$\text{Rule: } (ɖ) \rightarrow \begin{cases} [ɖ] \text{ voiced in male speech} \\ [ʈ] \text{ voiceless in female speech} \end{cases}$$

There are, however, cases of young educated girls who attempt (consciously or unconsciously) to break such a rule and may sometimes say [mre: ɖa] instead of [mre: ʈa] for 'ill (f.s.) because they may consider the use of / ʈ / a misuse, given that the Classical Arabic word is / mariiɖa /. On the other hand, we have recorded a rather

negative attitude from some women towards the female users of / ḍ / for it seems 'to deviate' from the social norm for women speech acts, and those who do use it are often looked at as imitators of male speech.

 Nevertheless, there are exceptions to our rule above / ḍ / → / ṭ /, for which we cannot give any explanation for the moment. In fact, nothing shows why a form like /ḍarbo/ 'he hit him' is realised [ḍarbo] by all women, and why the rule for de-voicing fails to apply in this context as well as in some other words and phrases. Besides, there are a few lexical items that derive from the same root √ x yz   but the realisation of any radical containing /ḍ/ escapes the rule given above. Such examples as [əṭṭɑw]² for 'the light' but [ḍɑːwja] for 'lightened (f.s.)' or [əṭṭlɑːm] for 'the dark' while only [ḍlɑmni] 'he was prejudicial to me' is attested. What appears to be the case here is that / ḍ / is realised [ḍ] by all women in one derivation of the root while it is realised [ṭ] in the other derivations of the same root.

As far as male speech is concerned, the realisation [ḍ] is generalised to all words with the emphatic / ḍ /; men

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² . /ṭ/ is geminated in [əṭṭɑw] as the result of a regressive assimilation of /l/ for the definite article {al} 'the' to the emphatic /ṭ/.

would not say [əṭṭlɑːm] for 'the dark' but [əḍḍlɑːm]. They only use [ṭ] where the underlying phoneme is / ṭ / as in / ṭaar/ 'it (f.s.) flew' which comes from the Classical Arabic form / ṭ aara /. The rule above may raise a number of questions such as why is the use of either [ḍ] or [ṭ] readily (and exclusively) predictable as a sex variable? Do men use [ḍ] precisely for its [+voice] feature which may supposedly be associated with male roughness of voice and toughness? Or does the drop of the feature [+voice] in female speech reflect their femininity and 'mild' voice? These questions remain open to debate for the moment. What can be said, however, is that men are more aware of the social meaning that the opposition [ḍ] : [ṭ] entails as they seem to drop the rule / ḍ / →   / ṭ / which is applicable to female speech at an early stage of their mother tongue acquisition process as mentioned earlier. Moreover, this shift to male speech with the use of [ḍ] leads some men to hypercorrection in some cases by forcing upon an underlying / ṭ / a surface [ḍ] as in [t$_s$ χ a l l ḍ a t$_s$] 'it (f.s.) got mixed' which derives from the verb form / χ a l l a ṭ a / of Classical Arabic for 'to mix'.

2.b. The case of / ʔaalatli / → [ʔætli] → [ʔæ tₛ i]

'She told me'

Another characteristic of female speech in Tlemcen appears in a complex process of phonological assimilation and deletion that occurs in the very frequently distributed complex form for 'She told me'. The underlying form /ʔaalatli/ which is composed of the stem {/ʔaal/} plus the feminine suffix marker {/at/} plus the inflectional suffix marker {/li/} for the object pronoun 'me' is often reduced to [ʔætli] by most speakers. This appears to be a case of vowel drop for ease of articulation where the short vowel /a/ of the second syllable is so weak and unaccented that it usually drops. This drop brings about the cluster */ltl/ which is difficult to pronounce. Thus /l/ is in regressive assimilation with /t/ to give /ttl/. Then, the first /t/ drops to give /tl/. Another explanation would be that we have here a case of haplology where the whole syllable /lat/ in /ʔaalatli/ drops altogether. Such a process operates in other varieties of Algerian Arabic as in [qatli] [gætli]. But while Tlemcen speakers say [ʔætli] in general, most women produce the form [ʔæ tₛ i][3] with the drop of /l/ . The same optional rule /l/ → ∅ applies when

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[3] . [tₛ] loses its affriction before /l/ for their homorganic relationship. Notice that once the phoneme /l/ drops as in [ʔæ tₛ i] the affricate realisation appears again.

the verb is followed by the suffix morphemes {lak, lu,...} for 'to you' and 'to him' respectively, as in [ʔæ tₛək] 'she told you' or [ʔæ tₛ u] 'She told him'. Here again, it must be noted that such a realisation is so specific to women that male speakers who use it are seen both by men and women as imitating female speech, and they are therefore ridiculed in Tlemcen speech community.

Conclusion

The data obtained from the speech community of Tlemcen clearly reveal the importance of sex as a social factor which is tightly related to language conveying different linguistic behaviours in male and female speeches. While a high percentage of variation has been attested in men's speech, women exhibit that universal trait of conservatism and preserve the most stigmatised linguistic items of the vernacular by using a number of linguistic features that are obviously associated with them.

Will the rural variety co-existing with Tlemcen speech impose some of its features, as it appears to do in many settings, and displace the local linguistic features? or will the feminine community overcome and prevent drastic changes in the variety of Tlemcen Arabic? Only a general survey with extensive data on the sociolinguistic situation in Tlemcen both in real and apparent time can perhaps provide adequate answers.

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