An Anthropological and Sociocultural Analysis of Algerian Religious Expressions

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Abstract

As far as anthropology and language are concerned, anthropologists have constantly deemed linguistics as a substantial subfield of their discipline. This traditional discipline focuses on the historical development of human languages as it studies the interrelation between distinct societies where it seeks to explore the real meaning of the concepts used within groups. In other words, anthropology is the study of humans through their use of language i.e. how language creates communication and shapes social memberships since it helps persons to organize substantial ideologies and beliefs that reveal their culture and religion.

Key Words: Anthropology, beliefs, culture, ideologies, language.

1- Introduction

Boas 1944 and Sapir 1956 are considered as the preeminent pioneers in linguistic research especially in the domains of styles and registers, conversational analysis, the ethnography of speech, language and culture and other related topics. Actually, the study of behaviour has been accounted by anthropologists who consider culture as a conceptual system, while linguists focus on grammar. This implies that the anthropological linguists should consider different cultural and religious components in order to assign specific ways of speaking to a given group. This fact enables them to understand the whole meaning of the information they want to convey. It also

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necessitates from the linguists to understand the function of the speech forms of the grammatical patterns they want to analyze.

In fact, in accordance with several surveys done at the field of anthropology, five fundamental aspects portray the worldwide cultures, namely culture is learned, shared, based on symbols, integrated, and dynamic. Indeed, an insightful study of these characteristics leads the researcher to recognize the importance and the function of culture and religion on language and society namely people's ways of conduct. Thus, according to what has been mentioned above the following research questions need further examination: what is the relationship between language, culture and religion? How does culture influence the way people speak and behave? The aforementioned questions lead to the production of the following hypotheses: language and culture cannot be dealt with separately since language is used to transmit norms, values and also many other cultural components such as religion. Moreover, language use is also restricted according the learnt principles. Thus, this tight relationship results in a strong influence of culture on language use.

2- Literature Review
2-1 Anthropologist's Main Concerns

2-1-1- Religion

Anthropologists' chief interest is provide people with insightful realities about their beliefs relying on their culture and language. Boas (2014:15) contended that: "The anthropologist is more deeply interested in the social aspect of the linguistic phenomenon in language as a means of communication and in the interrelation between language and culture" Actually, in a given society we may find mutual language, culture and religion. These shared items encompass values and norms that restrict individuals' behaviour and conduct them to the right way of dealing with each other in order to achieve understanding and peaceful coexistence. In fact, religion constantly separates the sacred from the profane. This dichotomy has been emphasized by the anthropologists of religion to set up their ideas and arguments and also to distinguish between good deeds and bad ones. In the same line of thought, (Greetz 1973:4) argued that:

> Religion is, (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men

by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with order of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Accordingly, religion as a whole offers answers and explanations to all what surrounds us and sheds light on the prevailing ambivalences. It alleges for society's union and exhort reciprocal courtesy and tolerance as it accentuates norms of conducts, principles and values. Moreover, certain situations and incidents necessitate referring to religion in order to fix them. Henceforth, religion works on unifying societies through common beliefs which help to keep peaceful and successful interaction.

2-1.2- Language

Language as a trivial medium in humans' life serves to point out people's origins, identity, feelings, intentions and assumptions. The latter have a close relationship with culture and religion which play a crucial role in shaping individuals language and reflect their belonging. Yet, language as a code in addition to the persons' way of talking enable us to realize the individual's status effortlessly.

Thus, language, the means through which people communicate can be discerned within the society where it is practiced. Consequently, successful and suitable communications perquisite a vigorous recognition and differentiation of the kind of relationship between language and the people who use it. This step, indeed leads us to have a clear understanding of the reasons behind using different ways of expressions to communicate with others. For instance, the use of formal language with deans, teachers and people of higher ranks and informal language with friends, colleagues and members of the family. (Danesi 2008:3) said that:

> Perhaps, no other faculty distinguishes humanity from other species as language does. Humans use language to encode knowledge, to pass it on to subsequent generations, to investigate reality, to communicate among themselves, to entertain themselves, and so on and so forth. It is no exaggeration to say that the very survival of human civilization depends on the preservation of the world's languages.

All these accomplishments entail a profound understanding of language in addition to culture and the society where they are exerted.

2-1.3- Culture

Culture, usually refers to intellectual and creative products; it also includes beliefs, practices, traditions and the religion of a society. The previous definition can give us hints about what is culture, but we may find plenty of other abstract or concrete elements that may be assigned to culture. Hinkle (2001: 1) argued that: "It may not be an exaggeration to say that there are nearly as many definitions of culture as there are fields of inquiry into human societies, groups, systems, behaviour, and activities". As far as these fields of study are concerned. Corbett (2003) added that:

Culture is the object of study of a range of different research disciplines. For example anthropology investigates in general how membership of a particular social group is related to particular sets of behaviour; ethnography seeks, partly through structured exposure to other cultures, to explore and describe how the speech systems and behaviours of groups are related to either social structures and beliefs; and cultural studies seeks to understand and interpret the way that members of a group represent themselves through their cultural products … dances, graffiti or sport events. (p.5)

Therein, the term culture is used differently by cultural anthropology and linguistics. The former is interested only in the artefacts of a community, such as its music, theatre, clothing, whereas the latter relates to learning and knowledge. It involves all the essential elements related to knowledge of beliefs, traditions and mode of life so as to be able to behave in a good manner in a given speech community. In other terms, a person must possess norms of life from his society in order to get through the task of daily living. Schiffman (1998) added that:

The study of how language is used, and how members of the culture acquire and display knowledge of usage has been approached in different ways (…) these approaches to the cultural context of language all recognize that the formal study of linguistic code is necessary but not sufficient to our understanding of how people communicate.(p.7)

In brief, this kind of knowledge plays an influential role when we communicate with other people, particularly when we use language, the verbal expression of culture. Culture and language are thus linked since culture activities are generally carried out through the use of language. In

other words, culture includes ideas, customs and beliefs of a community which go along the population's language, whereas language serves as a medium of communication and interprets everything a speaker can think about and even his way of thinking. Haviland et al (2010:28) in their comparative study of many human cultures argue that anthropologists who studied the most important elements of the existing cultures have reached the idea that culture which is represented by shared symbols and norms is not acquired but rather learned.

De facto, sociolinguists invoke language and culture interchangeably whenever they decide to study a given linguistic phenomenon. Depriving one of the other may lead to a set of ambiguities which need more clarifications in order to reach satisfactory research outcomes.

3- Characteristics of the Algerian Speech

As far as our research paper is concerned, the researcher puts emphasis on the way Algerians use religious in their daily speech in order to thank people or wish harm to them. Algerians do indeed use some expression that are full with the name of the ALMIGHTY GOD. Bouherar (2020) cited in Bouherar and Ghafsi (2022 p. 12) asserted in this context that: "It is religion that shapes the cultural assumption and the cultural practices in Algeria". This tradition of inserting names of God is inherited from their ancestors though we have noticed that there is a degradation in their usages. In fact, Algerians have changed a lot of their habit and this is due to the religious channels such as Iqraa, Qanat El Khamisa and have stopped to use some words that they used to employ such as [b' rɑs wəldi] which means "I swear on my son's head". This kind of utterances are not permitted in our religion since Islam forbids swearing using other names expect the ones of ALLAH, but people employed them daily because their ancestors used to utilize them in the past.
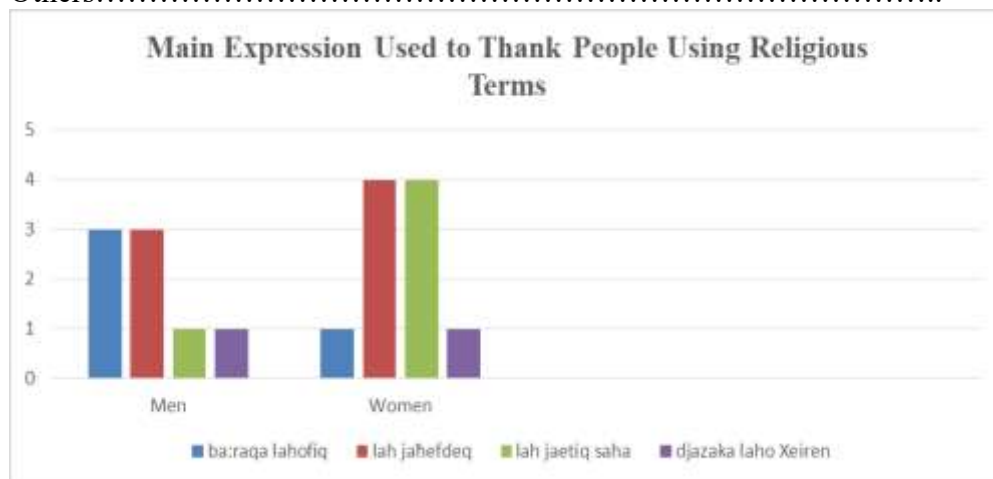
4- Methodolgy of Research

The researcher employed two research instruments namely a questionnaire and participant observation so as to collect valid and dependable data. We opted for a triangulation application for the sake of obtaining confident results and reinforce them and also to target different but complementary questions in the same survey Arksey and Knight (1999 p.25). Kasper (1998) cited in Barron (2003 p. 81) pointed out that: "they include firstly the reduction of any possible task-bias and a consequent increase in the level of objectivity of findings".

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The sample population is represented by a random selection of people from different levels of education. Indeed, 8 men and 10 women whose ages vary from 21 to 53 years old have answered our questionnaire which is composed of 3 multiple choice questions. Whereas, the second instrument i.e. participant observation was realized through a 2 weeks observation of all the person met at the level of the university of Moulay Tahar Saida including teachers and students in addition to members of the family and friends in Tlemcen.

4-1- The Questionnaire

1- Which of the following expressions do you use when you thank someone? Others…………………………………………………………………..
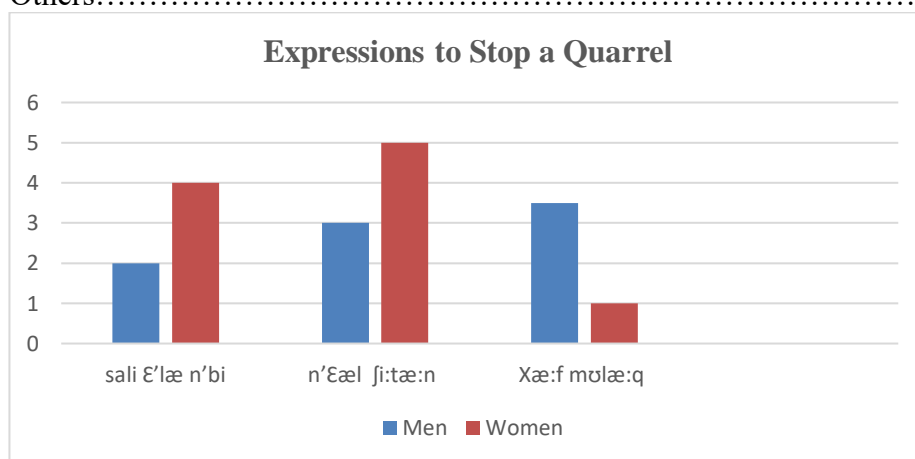

Graph 1: Expressions of Thanking

The above graph demonstrates that men have a tendency to use [ba:raqa lahofiq], [lah jaħfdək] and women prefer using [lah jaɛtik əsaħa] more than [djazaqa laho Xeiren]. So, we can easily noticed that Algerians are influenced by their religion and this can definitely be reflected through the use of the name of ALLAH in their speech. The reason behind this is that including Allah in ones' utterances may have a powerful influence on the addressee. As far as the other suggestions provided by the sample are concerned, they suggest [jaerħam waeldiq] [may God have mercy on your parents], also [lah jaeftaeħɛ ǀiq] and [nɣɑdohaeləq fəl xi:r] which stand [for God bless you] and [may Allah help me to stand you but in better conditions]. As we can notice that all of the words used in the aforementioned expressions

are positive and reflect good wishes and deeds that Islam insists on in order to live in peace and to keep on going people's relationships.

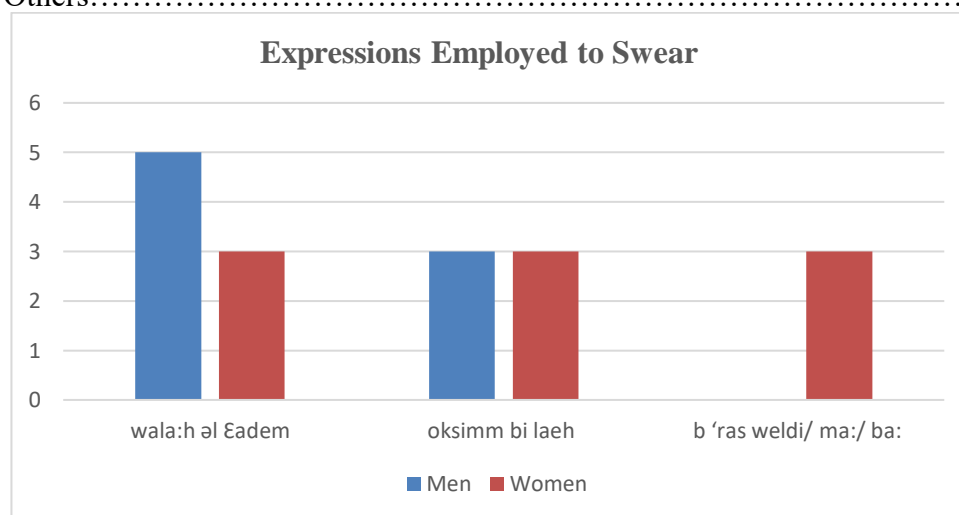**2-** What are the main religious expressions that you use to avoid a quarrel? Others…………………………………………………………………..

Graph 2: Expressions of Stopping a Quarrel

This graph shows that the expressions of [sali ɛ'læ n'bi] peace upon prophet Mohammed and [n'ɛæl ʃi:tæ:n] [damn the evil] in addition to [Xæ:f mʊlæ:q] [fear God] are all found in Algerians speech as remedy to stop a quarrel and are employed by both men and women in an approximate percentage. For the option of others only three participants have suggested the followings [ha: barqana] which "means please stop quarreling" [ɛofna məl mæʃaqil] that stands for "needless to a new problem", [Xalina meno] "ignore him" these expressions can be detected in Algerians daily speech in addition to the ones mentioned in the graph. Notwithstanding, not all Algerians speech include religious terms.

3-   What are the main religious expressions that you employ when you swear?
Others…………………………………………………………………………

Graph 3: Swearing Expresions

In this part, we ask our participant to select the swearing utterance that they employ in their daily conversations. Thus, we can notice that [wala:h əl Ɛadem] and [oksimm bi laeh] are the most pervasive swearing expressions in the Algerian society whereas the last choice namely; [b 'ras weldi/ ma:/ ba:] is used by women only. Here, we can see that men and women may differ in their speech since some words are attributed to women and if men will use them, they will be accused of femininity. Moreover, almost all the Algerians are aware of that using other words excepts those of Allah in swearing is a sin. This is why people have started to avoid employing [b 'ras weldi/ ma:/ ba:] and use only the words allowed in our religion.

 4-2- Participant Observation

To enlarge our scope of study we used participant observation as a second instrument of this research. This tool permits us to observe plenty of sociolinguistic phenomena but we have put emphasis on the way Algerians use religious words in their conversations. In fact, throughout our observation which lasted for two weeks and based on our proper knowledge of the Algerian society as a member who shares the same language/ dialect, culture and religion, the task of retrieving data for our research was spontaneous and not complicated.

In fact, we have noticed that almost all the Algerians conversations either the ones between intellectuals (students, teachers and secretaries) at the level of our university or the other members of the family and friends are full of religious terms. Expressions such as: [t'ba:raq lah], [maʃa:lah] and [lah ja'satraq məl Ɛaejn] " God Bless you" are used as compliments for someone who looks nice. [wala:h la ʤi tegƐdi] "Please sit down" [jarħæm buk Xalini n'fut] "God have mercy on your father, let me pass", [la:h j'Xa:li:k Ɛteni stilo] " please, give me a pen" are utilized to invite someone or beg him to do an act.

5- Discussion of the Results

The results attained throughout this paper affirms the two hypotheses i.e. inquiring a population's language require an extreme association to its culture. The latter deciphers the reasons behind some specific usages of language or dialect. For instance and according to what have been obtained by the questionnaire and participant observation, almost all Algerians have the culture to use Names of Allah in their everyday conversations to have a strong influence on the addressee or to make their speech look more eloquent and sincere or to seek individuals' trust. Undoubtedly, Algerians are affected by Islam which provides us with all the necessary principles of dealing with people and how to be kind and indulgent. Accordingly, the obtained results manifested that there exist numerous religious expressions which reflect the influence of religion for the sake of keeping the relationships and not breaking them effortlessly. Politeness, kindness and admiration are the major aspects of these expressions: [t'ba:raq lah], [maʃa:lah] " God Bless you" [wala:h la ʤi tegƐdi] "Please sit down" [jarħæm buk Xalini n'fut] "God have mercy on your father, let me pass". Furthermore, even if a quarrel takes place there are remedial utterances such as [n'Ɛæl ʃi:tæ:n] [damn the evil] and [Xæ:f mʊlæ:q] [fear God] to repair the situation and prevent infringement.

6- Conclusion

Sociolinguists whose main interest is investigating language and society have always referred to anthropology in addition to many other disciplines in order to scrutinize a given linguistic phenomenon from different angles. Actually, language use cannot be understood without referring to the culture and the religion that it belongs to since they can provide us with indications about why and when such an utterance is used or avoided.

This survey undeniably confirms the tight relationship between language and culture (religion, traditions, customs) and demonstrates the extent to

which culture and religion affect Algerians' ways of speaking and this is clearly discernible in their daily speech. Yet, Algerians have particular ways of speaking that require investigations and explanations. In this research, we have taken the use of religious terms in daily conversations, and thanks to the two instruments employed i.e. the questionnaire and participant observation, we can say as a conclusion that Algerians' speech is determined by their culture and religion as two main criteria which give birth to peculiar ways of talking and addressing people. In other words, Algerians use religious terms to ask for permission, to thank, and to compliments.

The present research paper focuses on the role of culture and language in addition to religion through the use a qualitative and quantitative data approach. However, because of time constraints, the number of informants is too limited. Therefore, another future research to expand the scope of study with larger sample population and adding another tool of gathering data is extremely recommended.

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