

Gender Differences in Using Taboos and Euphemisms in Algerian Context**الفرق بين الجنسين في استخدام الطابوهات وكلمات الملاطفة في الجزائر****Dr. Nadia GHOUNANE ***

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Received 04/01/2021 Accepted 07/03/2023 Published 20/03/2023**Abstract:**

The present research paper attempts to investigate the differences between Algerian Males and Females in their attitudes, perception and use of both taboos and euphemisms. It also endeavours to explore the differences between males and females in terms of the context in which they tend to employ taboos and euphemisms. To this end, data were collected randomly from Tlemcen society through the help of a questionnaire and an interview. Henceforth, the findings revealed that Tlemcen males and females differ largely in using taboos. The analysis also demonstrated that they prefer to discuss tabooed matters in single-sex groups. The results confirmed that they also differ in using euphemistic strategies.

Keywords: Attitudes, euphemisms, gender differences, politeness, taboos, Tlemcen speech community

الملخص:

تحاول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة الاختلاف بين الجنسين في استعمال الطابوهات و كلمات الملاطفة. كما تهدف كذلك الى معرفة السياق الذي يعتمد عليه كل من الإناث و الذكور في استعمال الكلمات الفاحشة و عبارات الملاطفة. وعليه فان الباحثة اعتمدت على استبيان و مقابلة شفوية لجمع البيانات. ولقد أجرت الباحثة هذه الدراسة بولاية تلمسان من خلال اختيار المشاركين عشوائيا من الجنسين مع مراعات السن، المستوى الدراسي و الثقافي. لقد بينت النتائج أن هناك اختلاف كبير بين الذكور و الاناث في استخدام الطابوهات. كما بينت كذلك أن كلا الجنسين يستخدمان الطابوهات في المجموعات الأحادية الجنس. و كما بينت البيانات الاختلاف الكبير بين الإناث و الذكور في استعمال عبارات الملاطفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ميول، عبارات الملاطفة، الاختلاف بين الجنسين، الادب، الطابوهات، المجتمع التلمساني

1.Introduction:

Taboos exist in all languages and cultures, although each society has its norms and taboos. Besides, they are also related to the cultural beliefs of the society. This means that there are taboos which are universal and others are culture-specific as it will be explained throughout this paper. Moreover, to avoid embarrassment and face-losing, people try to look for substitutions that can hide or cover up the harmonious power of taboo words. Consequently, euphemisms are employed to replace offensive expressions that can cause harm and shame for speakers. These expressions are linked to the religious and cultural

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beliefs of a given society and define its socio-cultural structure. Besides, the use of taboos varies from one individual to another depending on certain social factors such as anger, frustration, and annoyance...etc.

Interestingly enough, one can add that gender, age, and the educational background of the speaker play a paramount part as social variables in analysing language in a given society because males and females use speech differently depending on their age. Women tend to employ more appropriate and prestigious language, whereas men search for different ways to communicate.

Trying to apply previous scholarship into an Algerian context in general and Tlemcen speech community in particular, the present work aims primarily at exploring the Algerian cultural norms, values, and beliefs. It also describes the context where both males and females discuss taboo topics, hoping that it may help us in exploring some linguistic features that characterise and distinguish males' and females' speech. Therefore, this study puts forward some clarifications on the structure of Tlemcen speech community and how it affects the individual's use of language with the age and sex constraints. It also aims to test males' and females' attitudes towards the use of euphemistic substitutions.

In the light of what has been discussed before, the current research paper under scrutiny attempts to check gender differences in Tlemcen speech community in relation to language use and cultural norms. Thus far, the following research questions are suggested as follows:

- Do Tlemcen males and females differ in using taboos?
- Do they differ in employing euphemisms?
- Do they differ in the context of use?

To this vein, these research questions are hypothesised as follows:

- Tlemcen males and females differ in using taboos, although they share negative attitudes towards linguistic taboos in general.
- Tlemcen females tend to employ more euphemistic strategies in daily interaction more than men.
- Both males and females prefer to discuss taboo topics in single-sex groups.

2. Literature Review:

The term taboo was introduced into English by Captain James Cook in 1777. He linked the term to forbidden issues (Ghounane, 2013). The term taboo is difficult to define since every society has expressions or behaviours that are considered taboo, although taboo language and topics are universal (Ghounane, 2013). In his part, Wardhaugh (2010) highlighted that the concept and perception of taboo are universal. In this regard, he stated that:

Each social group is different from every other in how it constraints linguistic behaviour in this way, but constrain it in some such way it certainly does. Perhaps one linguistic universal is that no social group uses language quite uninhibitedly. (p. 236)

The use of taboo language is linked to certain parameters, mainly cultural norms, gender differences, and the consequences of speech. To avoid embarrassment or face-threatening situations, the speaker tends to avoid. However, these expressions sometimes can express solidarity and humour between a group of people (Ghounane, 2013). Similarly, Jay (2009) maintained that “speakers will use curse words based on their social utility” (p. 155).

It is a daunting task to try to define the concept of taboo since it is linked to the society's cultural norms and its use and perception differ from one society or speech community to another. Digging deeper on the meaning of the concept is not our concern in this paper since the researcher is dealing with gender differences in relation to taboos and euphemisms.

2.1 Factors behind the Use of Taboos

In his part, Jay (2000) claimed that some motivated factors push people to use taboos in given contexts. He added that these factors can be cultural, linguistic, social or psychological. He stressed the point that psychological factors are seen as the first motivating factors. He further pointed out that “psychological factors are necessary, but not sufficient” (p. 95). On the other hand, some scholars claimed that taboos can be used as a factor to reduce personal stress or show emotional stability (Crystal, 1995; Montagu, 1967).

Additionally, some scholars maintained that people can use taboos for multiple reasons such as jokes and humour. This means that they do not always have negative results. In his part, Pilkington (2000) stated that other factors push people to use taboos, mainly in single-sex groups. He added that men can sometimes employ taboos to show their belonging or to express solidarity. On the strategies used by men and women when gossiping, it is of particular interest. A study conducted by Hughes (1992) provides a good example of this claim. Hughes conducted the study with the lower working-class women. She found that these women used a set of taboo words to show their belonging. The study also revealed that children started learning some taboo expressions from their mothers.

2.2 Euphemisms

The term euphemism originated in Greek culture and was used to mean good speech. People tend to look after their speech; for this reason, they try to protect their faces by using euphemistic expressions in their daily speech. To support this claim, Pyles and Algeo (1970) observed that “Euphemism is any term that replaces a taboo word in a language” (pp. 201-2). In a similar vein, Lakoff (2004) believed that people resort to using euphemisms to protect their faces on one hand and overcome the embarrassing nature of some taboo words. Similarly, Kenworthy (1991) posited that the creation of euphemisms is linked to the existence of taboos. He also maintained that euphemistic expressions are employed to protect the people's faces during their social interaction. In his part, Rawson (1981) linked euphemisms to the societies' cultural norms. They go hand in hand with taboos i.e., each taboo word or topic has a euphemistic expression to cover its nature. Hence, euphemisms are also universal or share universal features worldwide since all cultures tend to use euphemisms to hide the embarrassing nature of taboos and protect their faces during the interaction.

2.3 Algerian People's Attitudes towards Taboos

The use of language is directed and controlled by social norms that each society has created. They also represent the concept of Face-saving. Face-saving is linked to the concept

of politeness which is a part of the societies' social norms. These social norms are directed by some factors such as people's attitudes. The concept of politeness gains a special position in Arab culture and the notion of fact-saving has a special position and is linked to the use of euphemistic strategies. Arab people always look after their faces. Therefore, they tend to use euphemisms as a part of their daily speech. In his part, Farghal (1995) pointed out that Arab people resort to euphemisms to realize politeness in their speech since it is an integral part of their culture. Farghal also maintained that there are many words with connotative meanings. He added that connotation is linked to people's attitudes i.e., words are also related to what he termed as "attitudinal dimensions" (p. 366).

Algerian people always look after their language. Their attitudes reflect the social and cultural norms of the Algerian society. These attitudes are the results of religious and cultural factors norms which play a vital role in restricting their behaviour and language use.

2.4 Algerian Politeness Strategies

The notions of honour and shame are two fundamental principles governing interaction in most Muslim societies (Ghounane, 2013). They are employed in every social context from a casual conversation in an informal situation to a formal talk in a more prestigious setting. Honour, in general, is the collective property of the Muslim societies, and, once lost, is difficult to regain. Indeed, it is a part of social etiquette and determines social status and relations between families (Ghounane, 2013). Algerian society makes no exception. The concept is of great importance in the value system of this society. It is a norm that can regulate daily interaction, the choice of words and expressions. It is seen as a strategy to avoid loss of face and shame. Besides, the notion of "honour" constitutes an important part of the honour of the Algerian society. Any violation of female sexual honour will have a severe impact on the honour of the whole family. In this vein, Alli (2011) believed that:

Euphemism is used on all levels, in literary and non-literary texts; in classical Arabic and modern Arabic; written as well as spoken forms of Arabic [...] They are also used functionally to make remarks less direct, less blunt or harsh, and to add a touch of politeness to certain expressions which otherwise seem unpalatable and hard to digest. (pp. 25-26)

Algerians have developed many communicative strategies for daily interaction taken from Islamic teachings and the socio-cultural background of their society.

2.5 Algerian Euphemisms

Algerian Arabic owns a rich vocabulary related to daily use of euphemisms to promote politeness in speech as the researcher has already mentioned. These expressions revolve around some tabooed topics such as sexual matters, death, and illness...etc. For instance, Algerians employ expressions such as *راها عيانة* instead of *راها مريضة* (she is ill).

Algerian people also resort to the use of euphemisms to talk about subjects related to some diseases like 'cancer'. They avoid employing the word 'cancer' and tend to use euphemistic expressions with the patients and their families. For example, when a patient is going to die, doctors will inform his family that they should take him home such as in *مليح تدو* (it is preferable to take your patient to his home). They also say *فلان راه فيه هاذك المرض* (he has that illness, may God keep us safe) or *راه مريض بهذاك المرض الله يعافينا* (he has that illness, may God protect us).

Algerian people, like many other Arab societies, tend to use euphemisms related to excretion since the term toilet is regarded as taboo in Islamic culture. for example, they resort to بيت الماء, بيت الراحة, or sanitaire in French, while some people tend to employ بيت الخلاء, or دورة المياه. The last two terms are found, mainly in a formal context. However, the use of euphemism is not only limited to diseases and excretion, Algerians have also developed more expressions for daily communication. For instance, they try to avoid employing terms referring to poverty including فقير (poor), they use instead مسكين, قليل, زوالي, or فلان الله غالب عليه.

Algerian Arabic is also rich in what Gramps (1984)² called double negation i.e., replacing words by employing negation of its opposite. He adds that grammarians use ‘meiosis’³ instead of double negation. In this regard, he stated that “There are occasions when a writer’s meaning may be conveyed more exactly by ‘not un-device’, for example, ‘not unkindly, ‘not unjustifiably’,’ then by kindly” (p. 227). In the case of Algerian Arabic, the Algerians have a rich vocabulary including دار تربية referring to reformatory instead of لحبس: (prison). They also use فلان دخلوه للحبس instead of فلان هبطوه (they took X to the prison). They also employ فلان عند راسو (a difficult man) instead of فلان واعر (a rude person). They also resort to فلان قواليبي or فلان الهضرة or فلان يدخل ويخرج في الهضرة instead of كذاب (a liar) (Ghounane, 2013).

3. Methods

3.1 Population

The target population of the current study comprises participants who are randomly selected according to gender and age factors since these sociolinguistic variables play a vital role in knowing the cultural and linguistic levels of the respondents and, therefore, the degree of taboos and euphemistic usage. Besides, data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and a focus group interview through making a comparison between males and females from different ages, occupations and socio-cultural background.

3.2 Data Preparation, Analysis and Interpretation

3.2.1 Questionnaire

- Do Tlemcen males and females differ in using taboos?
 1. Yes
 2. No

Table 1. Gender differences in using taboos

Answers	Females	Males	Total	Expressed in %
Yes	42	44	86	78.18%
No	13	11	24	21.81%
Total	55	55	110	

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Figure 1. Gender differences in using taboos

As the previous table and figure demonstrate, most of the informants agreed on the view that Tlemcen males and females differ largely in using taboo language, while a small minority of the respondents highlighted that both males and females in Tlemcen speech community use taboos and they do not differ in the frequency of usage.

- Do Tlemcen males and females differ in the context of use?
 1. Yes
 2. No

Table 2. Differences between Tlemcen males and females in the context of use

Answers	Females	Males	Total	Expressed in %
Yes	41	33	74	67.27%
No	14	22	36	32.72%
Total	55	36	110	

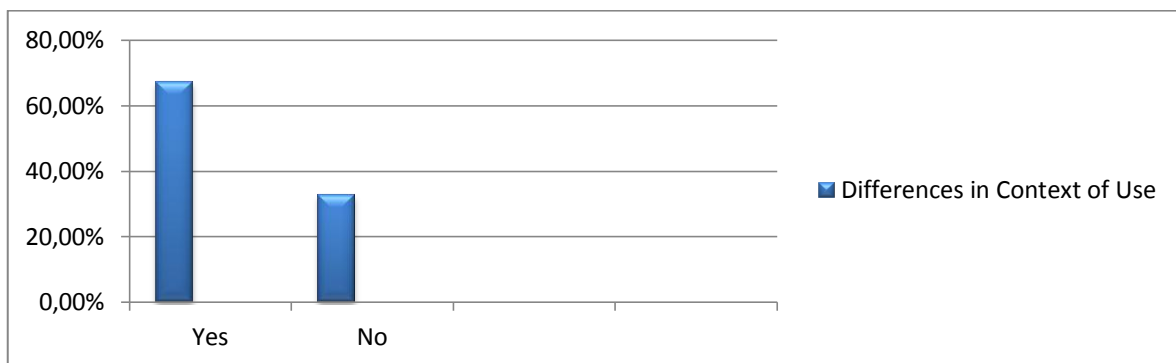


Figure 2. Differences between Tlemcen males and females in the context of use

The tendency, for discussing taboo topics namely sex, differs between genders. For instance, females prefer to talk about sexual matters with their intimate friends and family members including sisters and sometimes their mothers, whereas males rarely discuss their private sexual life with their brothers since such behaviour can diminish their respect to each other. In other words, the aspect of الحشمة (shame) and the notion of العيب (taboo) can be seen as the first factors that push them not to discuss it with their brothers.

- What is the most tabooed topic between Tlemcen males and females? Do they differ in considering the most tabooed topic?
 1. Sexual matters.
 2. Religion.

Table 3. Gender differences regarding the most tabooed topic

Answers	Females	Males	Total	Expressed in %
Sexual matters	43	16	59	53.63%
Religion	12	39	51	46.36%
Total	55	55	110	

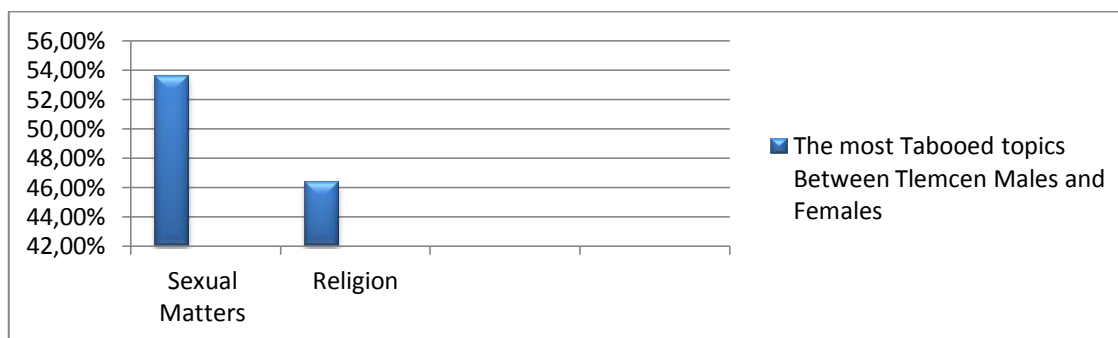


Figure 3. Gender differences regarding the most tabooed topic

Both males and females differ in their attitudes towards the most tabooed topic. In their view, men consider insulting religion as the first taboo topic, whereas females take the first suggestion. Sexual matters are regarded as the first tabooed subject for females since it is related somehow to their tabooed issues.

- Do Tlemcen males and females differ in using euphemisms in daily speech?
 1. Yes
 2. No

Table 4. Differences in employing euphemisms between Tlemcen males and females

Answers	Females	Males	Total	Expressed in %
Yes	41	34	75	67.27%
No	15	21	36	32.72%
Total	55	55	110	

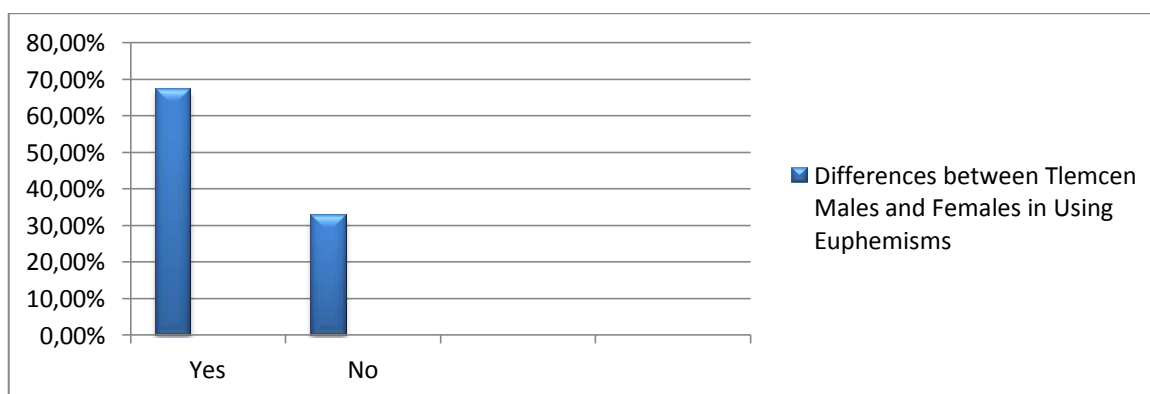


Figure 4. Differences in employing euphemisms between Tlemcen males and females

It is important to mention that the use of euphemisms is a part of the conservative nature of Tlemcen speech community and a part of its people's daily speech. Besides, society imposes on females to control their speech and behaviour and, henceforth they are always looking after their language. Therefore, euphemisms are found in both males' and females' daily speech, but the percentage of use differs between them. The use of euphemisms is seen as a sign of females' conservative nature.

3.2.2 Interview

Concerning the interview, we have selected 100 interviewees depending on their age, gender, educational background and occupation. We have based our data collection on a comparison between males and females to test their attitudes. We have also relied on what is called a focus group interview. The main purpose of this latter is to provide an appropriate atmosphere for a normal conversation.

As far as the results of the interview are concerned, one can state that the use of taboos is seen as a part of male's dominance, whereas the use of euphemism is considered a part of women's conservative nature since their speech and behaviour are controlled by the society's norms and traditions, although the usage is directed by the social and psychological states of each individual. Besides, the results showed the use of taboos is found mainly in single-sex groups, while it is rarely addressed in mixed-sex groups. The results showed that psychological motives are the first factors that may lead both genders to use taboos in mixed-sex groups.

4. Conclusion

Linguistically and culturally speaking, people try to look for substitutions to hide the harmonious power of linguistic taboos. These substitutions are called euphemisms which are parts of people's daily interaction and politeness strategies. Indeed, the use of taboos differs between males and females depending on their age and the motives that push them to break down taboos in daily interaction, while women try to resort to euphemisms that are taken either from their dialect or French language to talk about their sensitive issues and other subjects.

To wrap it up, this study endeavoured to offer a new perspective regarding research on language in relation to culture. It illustrated males' and females' differences in using taboos and euphemisms and their willingness in discussing taboo topics and the positive attitudes they display afterwards.

It may be also helpful to state that the areas of euphemisms and taboos remain behind the backdrop, although many researchers try to open the gateway for a scholarship to understand the human psyche. Thus, these are some outstanding points that this research work strived to explore from a sociolinguistic point of view, hoping that they can be taken as a map road for other researchers to investigate what is hidden in both society and culture

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6. Footnotes:

1. Retrieved from:
http://www.stanford.edu/~tylers/notes/papers/emotion/Emotion_in_linguistics_Schnobelen.doc
2. Retrieved from: http://Euphemism_Bocrawler.htm.
3. Meiosis is an understatement by employing a negative form to emphasize the contrary or to represent something as, more or less, milder than it is. For example, 'untruthful' for 'a liar', 'intemperate' for 'rude', 'unwise' for 'fool' or it was easy for it was very difficult.