

The Implications of History on Language in the Urban Communities of Tlemcen

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Abstract:

Language varieties in the urban communities of Tlemcen in the northern part of Algeria are interesting and varied. Language there had strongly been influenced by history. Because the town was invaded by various peoples including the Romans, the Berbers, the Arabs, the Spanish, the Turks, the Jews, and later the French, it was subject to many cultural and linguistic influences over the years. With each conquest, changes took place in linguistic life. Interestingly, the Arab invasions had perhaps the most lasting and extensive effects. Yet, there are linguistic signs of the other cultures all over the land.

The present work will, thus, be an attempt to show the linguistic influence of these cultures over the Tlemcenian peoples' speech by providing samples from each influence. In this respect, phonetic, phonological, and morphological levels will be taken into account. This work will also be an answer to the following questions: how was this linguistic influence achieved in a society like Tlemcen? Did the terms keep their original semantic meaning and their pronunciation or did they receive some modifications?

The evolution of the language of what is nowadays known as Tlemcen took place in an atmosphere of change manifested largely by the continuous migration of different peoples from the outside world. It was not only invasion but rather a steady flow of peoples from all directions bringing additional experiences and elements of other cultures that improved language in Tlemcen. By the end of the nineteenth century, Tlemcen had become the crossroads of civilisation through which passed the Arabs, the Berbers, the Turks, the Jews, the Spanish, and the French. Some of these people remained temporarily while others stayed indefinitely. In either way, these different influences integrated linguistically in various ways.

Thanks to its geography, being the crossroads of the North-South ways towards black Africa (Sedjelmaça and Mali), East-West (Morocco, Tunisia, and Lybia), and in connection with Europe (Andalusia and France) by the ports of Oran and Honaine, Tlemcen attracted different civilisations and dynasties throughout its history. These forces included the Romans, the Berbers, the Arabs, the Spanish, the Turks, the Jews, and the French. Not only did these influences bring social, economic, and political reforms over the land and its people, but cultural and linguistic changes as well.

The Berbers, tribal people of an unknown origin, were among the earliest inhabitants of Tlemcen. They invaded the area in the third century, and could play an eminent impact over the land and its people. When they went away, the Berber tribes left a rich vocabulary which had been transmitted from one generation to another. The Berber linguistic influence can be, for instance, resented through the use of words like: \zeli:f\ (head of the sheep), \fekru:n\ (turtle), and \li:dem\ (grease). Other Examples of Berber words used in the Tlemcenian dialect are given in table one below. The selected words are classified according to their grammatical function as it is illustrated:

List One

1. Nouns:

Noun	Transcription	Berber meaning	English meaning
كاغظ	/kæʁɑtʃ/	kayet /kaghat/	paper
محبس	/mæħbas/	mahbas /mahbəs/	a jug
الكرموس	/lkærmu:s/	oukermousse /ukərmu:s/	figs
الكانون	\lkæ:nu:n\	kanune \kanu:n\	a furnace

2. Verbs:

Verb	Transcription	Berber meaning	English meaning
كب	/ikʊbb/	ikubb /ikʊbb/	He spills
ترفد	/tarfad/	tarfad /terfed/	(You m.s.) / She lifts
كمس	/kamas/	ikumas /ikmuməs/	He wraps

3. Adjectives:

Adjective	Transcription	Berber meaning	English meaning
مليح	/mli:h/	aməlhane /aməlhɑ:n/	Nice (m.s.)
مظلمس	/mʈɑlmas/	Atellmisse /æʈlami:s/	Myopic (m.s.)
مسوس	/massu:s/	amssas /aməssæs/	Inspid (m.s.)
باين	/bəjan/	ba:yan /bə:yən/	Obvious (m.s.)

4. Other word categories:

Items	Transcription	Berber meaning	English meaning
بصح ؟	/baɣɣaħ/	bassah \\baɣɣaħ/	Is it right?
على خاطر	/ʕlaχa:ɟar/	âla khatar /ʕlaχa:ɟar/	Because

Around the end of the seventh century A.D, the Arabs emerged in Tlemcen. They conquered the area and introduced the religion of

Islam and the Arabic language. It is worth noting that the Arabic language became widespread in the sedentary areas of North West Africa and had been overrun by relatively small groups of Arab conquerors who settled for the most part in urban centres like Tlemcen for instance. By the tenth and the eleventh centuries, the process of arabisation was to take place thanks to the efforts of Banu Hillal and Banu Selim. These people, in fact, came from El Hijaz. They were headed by a famous linguist called Abou Amru Ibn El Alaa. The language they introduced at that time became known as “Pre-Hilali Dialect”. The introduction of the Arabic language in Tlemcen did not lead to the extinction of the Berber language. In fact, both languages- Arabic and Berber- co-existed and gave birth to a mixed language known in history as the Arab-Tamazight language.

The Arabic language in Tlemcen is not used in its correct form. It had experienced some phonological and morphological modifications. Indeed, the Arabic language in Tlemcen had been affected by some foreign items of other languages notably, the Berber language, the Spanish language, the Turkish language, and the French language. For instance, the urban communities of Tlemcen do not differentiate between the phonemes /ð/ and /d/. They tend to pronounce both phonemes as [t]. In addition, they pronounce the Arabic phonemes /ʒ/ and /t/ as [dʒ/ and [ts] respectively. Words like /tmar/ (dates) and /ʒnæ:n/ (garden) are pronounced by the natives as [tsmær] and [dʒnæ:n/. Another instance is related to the suffix morpheme {ah} of the third person singular (masculine) which is pronounced by the natives as [u]. A sentence like /naddarbæh/ (I hit him) is rather pronounced as [nəddabu]. Similarly, a word like /ktæ:bæh/ (his book) is pronounced as [ktæ:bu].

After the emergence of the Spanish in Tlemcen by sixteenth century, new linguistic items were introduced in the Tlemcenian dialect. Indeed, the Andalusian tradition formerly dominated the linguistic life of Tlemcen. The inheritance of the Andalusian linguistic items stemmed basically out of art and music which prospered in Islamic Spain between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries. The Andalusian

musical traditional form swept beyond *El Andalus* over the North West African littoral in Morocco and Tlemcen for instance. The introduction of the Andalusian music as well as other crafts in Tlemcen could but help the expansion of various items and words like: tableta [t̪ɑbl̪e:t̪ɑ] (a small table or a bar - of chocalte for instance), t̪abla [t̪ɑ:bla/ (a table), and serdj [sərdʒ] (a saddle) which are widely used among the Tlemcenian urban community nowadays. Other examples of Andalusian linguistic influence over the Tlemcenian vocabulary are given in table two below:

List Two

1. Nouns:

Noun	Transcription	Andalusian meaning	English meaning
صباط	/ʃabba:t̪/	zapatots	Shoes
الماريو	/lmæɾjʊ/	armario	cupboard
دورو	/do: r o/	Douro (5 pestas)	old money

2. Verbs:

Verb	Transcription	English meaning
أدجي	/ʔæ dʒi/	To come
خبي	/χabbi/	To hide

3. Adjectives:

Adjective	Transcription	Andalusian meaning	English meaning
باراطو	/bara :t̪ o/	barato	Cheap
مفئظ	/mfant̪ az/	Fantasia	Snobbish
لاركو	/largo/	largo	Big

The Spanish influence over the Tlemcenian dialect is also felt throughout the use of the voiceless glottal stop /ʔ/ or “al hamza” as a variant of the Arabic qâf. Therefore, words like: "قالي" (he said to me), and "قهوة" (coffee) are pronounced respectively as [ʔælli] and [ʔæhwa]. Similarly, a sentence like "راه نقي" (it is clean), is pronounced as [ri:hənʔij].

The Turks settled in Tlemcen in the sixteenth century. Their commercial motivations could but help shape linguistic life in the area. The Ottoman period was, in fact, characterised by fierce trade competition among rival Mediterranean seaports, both Christian and Muslim. The interaction between Turkish traders and native peoples stimulated the introduction of Turkish items in the local speech. Turkish vocabulary was further adopted through the different marriages of Turkish soldiers with native women as it is illustrated in table three below:

List Three

1. Nouns:

Noun	Transcription	Turkish meaning	English meaning
بشما	/bəʃmæ:ʔ/	baçmak /batsmak/	Woman's shoe
طربوش	/t̪arbu:ʃ/	terbuş /terbuS/	Red hat
بوراك	/buræ:k/	börek /borek/	A traditional cake
كفتة	/kaftsæ/	köfte /kofta/	Mince meat
صمصا	/ʃamʃa/	samsa /samsa/	A traditional cake

2. Verbs:

Verb	Transcription	Turkish meaning	English meaning
تشرشأ	/tʃartʃaʔ/	çirçir /tSirtSir/	To spill water
شو	/ʃu : /	Ss /Su/	Look!

3. Adjectives:

Adjective	Transcription	Turkish meaning	English meaning
مشرشف	/mʃaʃaf/	çerçev /tSertSev/	Twisty shape
مطروزة	\maʔru:za/	terzi /terzi/	Decorated

After the Turks, Tlemcen as the whole of Algeria witnessed a colonial period which could, in its turn, bring different linguistic changes in the area and exercised an influence on its people. As a matter of fact, in Tlemcen the French language is regarded as a language of prestige spoken among old generations as well as younger ones. Nonetheless, French had undergone some modifications, and words like “infirmier”, “fourchette”, “lampe” and “collège” for instance are respectively pronounced [fərmlɪ], [fərʃi:ʔa], [ləmba] and [ku:li:dʒ].

In addition, people tend to combine Arabic and French to produce utterances like: [wʃɔlna lla pla:ʒ æ dizɜ:r fə ʃʃɔħ] (we arrived to the beach at ten in the morning).

The emergence of different civilisations throughout the history of Tlemcen deeply influenced the linguistic aspects of the Tlemcenian speech variety. It was, in fact, the adoption of different foreign lexical items from the Berber, the Spanish, the Turkish, and the French languages which have made the Tlemcenian dialect quite different from the other Algerian varieties. The Tlemcenian dialect’s peculiarity also reflects the natives’ ethnic identity.

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