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Zeglamia: a Code among the People of Constantine

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Abstract

Ludlings, or language games, have been observed all over the world to conceal speech or for entertainment purposes. In Algeria, in the city of Constantine speakers use a language variety known as Constantine dialect. A communication code called Zeglamia is used among a minority within the speech community. Lack of interest in Algerian dialectological studies dealing with ludlings is the principle reason for these varieties being stigmatized and under-resourced. The primary goal of this study is to allow the validation of this code's existence and help preserving it as common heritage. This paper aims to understand this linguistic phenomenon and discern the reasons for which the interlocutors adopt it by means of examination and the observation of the rules involved in its creation and formation process. Zeglamia speakers are interviewed to discover the source of the code acquisition and the settings and objectives of use. Their speech is also analyzed to determine the different mechanisms. The findings can be summed up in the generation of Zeglamia's definition and the identification of the mechanisms which are involved in the creation of its varieties.

Keywords

Constantine Dialect ;
Zeglamia ;
Language games..

زقلامية: شفرة مبهمة بين سكان قسنطينة

ملخص

فقد لوحظت الالعاب اللغوية ، في كل انحاء العالم لإخفاء الكلام او لأغراض ترفيهية . وفي الجزائر، في مدينة قسنطينة، يستخدم الهجة القسنطينة. وكما تُستخدم زغلاميا بين أقلية داخل مجتمع النطق. قلة الاهتمام بالدراسات بهذا النوع من الممارسات هو السبب الرئيسي في وصم هذه الأنواع ونقص مواردها. والهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو السماح بإثبات وجود هذه الممارسات اللغوية والمساعدة على الحفاظ عليها بوصفها تراثا مشتركا وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فهم هذه الظاهرة اللغوية ومعرفة الأسباب التي دعت المحاورين إلى اعتمادها من خلال فحصها ومراعاة القواعد التي تنطوي عليها عملية إنشائها وتشكيلها. وتجري مقابلات مع الناطقين بزغلاميا لاكتشاف مصدر اقتناء وسياقات الاستخدام وأهدافها. ويجري أيضا تحليلها لتحديد مختلف الآليات. ويمكن تلخيص النتائج في تقديم تعريف لزغلاميا وتحديد الآليات التي تشارك في إنشاءها

الكلمات المفتاحية

الهجة القسنطينة؛
الالعاب اللغوية؛
زغلاميا.

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I- Introduction :

The dialect of Constantine is an under resourced one where there are few studies dealing with its description (Ait-Oumziane 1981; Mercier 1910 [2] ; Laraba 1981; Benlaksira 2020) [1] [2] [3] [4]. Besides the dialect of Constantine which is used unanimously on a daily basis by its speakers, there is a secret code called Zeglamia used by few occasionally. This ludling has never been the interest of any scientific study and has never been dealt with in the literature. To shed light on this secret code among the people of Constantine, an ethnographic research analysis of the code is conducted to comprehend its mechanism and underlying patterns. This investigation attempts to provide a clear understanding of Zeglamia, the way it is constructed, and functions.

I.1. Language Games:

A language game, also referred to by the term "ludling", combining the Latin words for "games" and "language" "lingua", was created by Laycock (1972) [5]. Davis (1994) [6] defines ludling as "a widespread language play phenomenon in which phonological forms of words are systematically altered so as to disguise what they are" (p.1980). Furthermore, the concept of ludling can "exist in virtually every culture, usually among adolescents, either for the social function of group membership […] or in order to encode/hide information from one's parents/rivals" (Nevins & Endress 2007, p43) [7]. As stated in the quote, ludlings are used for numerous objectives, such as concealing speech from outsiders or simply for pleasure and amusement as a play language. These game languages enable their speakers to communicate discreetly and foster a sense of exclusivity.

There are many examples of ludlings across the globe and throughout history. In this paper, namely Back slang, Verlan and Ubbi Dubbi are provided to illustrate the concept of language games. These three examples belong to different cultures, used for different objectives, and adopting different patterns. Back slang is used to describe a language that is written and spoken backwards primarily employed in English-speaking countries. "Secret languages . . . have an obvious appeal for those who have something to hide"(Barnett, 2009) [8]. An example is provided by Adams (2009) [9] to show its use and function; "If you really want to speak freely around those who shouldn't know your secrets, learn how to form back slang or center slang. When, you are next in your local, order a top o' reeb instead of 'pot of beer" (p.37), when it is impossible to pronounce words backwards. "The result is that the 'back slangster' adopts not only an arbitrary spelling, but also an arbitrary pronunciation of his own"(Slang, 1893) [10]. Saying the letter rather than its sound is another option when the backward reverse is impossible. Likewise, Opie and Opie (1959) [11] provide an example of such case 'Uoy nac ees reh screckin ginwosh' (You can see her knickers showing). Another language game is Verlan which is a kind of French slang that operates at the level of the syllables. In this precedence-modifying ludling syllabus order is reversed in a word (Nevins & Endress, 2007) [7]. Its proper name is the best example of how it functions; verlan comes from *à l'envers* that means backwards. Ubbi dubbi is another example of well known ludlings which is used among North Americans. This type of ludling emerged thanks to the program "Zoom" in the 1970's. It has been set as an amusing way to change words and establish a private language among youngsters within a certain speech community. This language game consists of adding the syllable /ʌb/ before each vowel sound. Alan (2008) [12] exemplifies and demonstrates how it functions: "Certain varieties of North American English, for example, have a game called Ubbi-Dubbi, in which -ub-, phonetically [ʌb], is inserted before the nucleus of each source syllable (e.g., speaking spubeakubing [ˈspʌbiˌkʌbɪŋ], extra ubextruba [ˈʌbɛksˌtɪʌbə])"(p.516). Even if the three language games are used for cryptic messages and communications, Verlan has significantly impacted the French language and culture, coexisting alongside French and has an upgraded status rather than just being a language game (Peters 2016) [13].

I. 1.2. Second Subtitle Ludling Mechanisms

One or more of the four mechanism of insertion, rearrangement, substitution, and deletion are frequently used in ludlings (laycock 1972[5] ; Davis 1994 [6]). To begin with, i**nsertion** involves inserting a sound or a string of phonemes into a word, which is also known as iterative infixal in which the inserted string may vary in size and segmental content (Alan, 2008) [12].Kurabe (2021) [14] asserts that the insertion in language games most of the time is realized by including either a consonant or a whole sound string. On the one hand, *Basque* is given to illustrate a ludling that is realized by the insertion of a vowel sound + p. ni > n**ip**i 'I' or tren > tr**ep**an 'train'. The same principle is adopted by *Tagalog* spoken in the Philippines. On the other hand, a vowel sound +g is added sino > S**ig**in**og**o 'who'. A Turkish ludling is another ludling, which adopts insertion for its realization. However, in this language game a whole sound sequence in added. Seni which means 'you' can be changed to se**ge**eni**gi** se**bir**e**bir**ne**bir**i**bir kutu**se**kutu**ni seni**bayrum**. Secondly, **rearrangemen**t, labled as reversal (Bagemihl 1996) [15], in ludlings can be demonstrated in *Taglog* where the speakers reverse the syllables of the word: pater > erpat 'father' and idol > lodi 'idol'. Rearrangement is also part of Turkish ludling where the sounds of a given word are reordered or even read backwards; seni > nise or ines 'you'. Kurabe (2021) [14] affirms that compared to insertion and rearrangement, substitution and deletion are said to be less common. The best example to illustrate the **substitution** mechanism is the ludling *Jinghpaw* spoken in some parts of China, where rhymes of words are

substituted by others. E.g. s**a** > s**oy ‘go’ pr**u > pr**oy ‘come out’** (Kurabe 2022) [16]. Furthermore, **deletion** is present in Javanese. E.g. **Tra**si > si ‘fish paste’ **ba**kar > kar ‘rosat’ (Laylock 1972) [5]. As demonstrated by the examples, deletion consists of omitting a part of the word.

With this background Zeglamia can be described and analyzed based on the aforesaid examples. This study aims to define the ludling used in Constantine, its origins and highlight the mechanisms involved in Zeglamia. Before tackling the aforementioned aims, a historical overview of the city and its dialect are presented.

I.2. Constantine Dialect

Constantine is a north eastern Algerian city. The city was built on a rock at 650 meters above sea level. It is framed by a deep ravine, which is crossed by several bridges. This explains the label given to the region “The City of Bridges”. The city has a rich history and has served as a crossroad for numerous civilizations. Constantine was Numidia’s capital, the center of the Eastern Beylik of Levant in the Ottoman era of the country, and the chief town of the eastern department during the French colonization. The city is currently the financial and cultural capital of eastern Algeria, whose linguistic profile has been impacted by said history, making it eclectic and difficult to characterize (Benlaksira 2020) [4] .

The Arabic spoken in the city of Constantine is known as the Constantine dialect. It belongs to the Algerian dialects and, hence, shares most of the Arabic language traits (Miller 2004) [17]. Unlike Standard Arabic which is used formally in the media and schools, Constantine dialect is utilized by the people of Constantine in their daily lives. Linguistically speaking, there are many peculiar features to the dialect allowing it to receive an immense interest during the French colonization leading to the conduction of several dialectological studies. However, after independence there have been few sources dealing with the dialect, which explains the lack of updated references. The phonological demarcation of the dialect is the /tʂ/. This denal-alveolar affricate replaces the unvoiced dental Arabic /t/. It also substitutes the interdental /θ/. The same goes for the sound /d/ which replaces /ð/. The /r/ in the dialect of Constantine is a voiced alveolar rolling one, referred to as /ṛ/. Another feature of the dialect is the presence of French sounds like /p/ and /v/ (Laraba (1981) [2] ; Boucherit & Lentin (1989) [18] ; Benlaksira (2019) [19]). Morphologically, speakers of the dialect make a distinction between the genders of the second person singular, for both pronouns and verbs. Another distinctive feature of the dialect is the use of the diminutive form of the words Ostoya-Delmas (1937) [20]. Concerning the syntactic aspect of the dialect, the sentence can be structured in three different ways: Kamel ate bread can be S-V-O / kamel kla lxobz /, V-S-O / kla kamel lxobz /or V-O-S / kla lxobz kamel/, Ait-oumeziane (1986) [21]. The negation is formed by adding to a conjugated verb /ma/ as a prefix and /ʃ/ as a suffix. The indefinite article /waḥd/ ‘a certain’ is widely used among the speakers. Lexically, the lexicon of the dialect is of different origins and could be of direct borrowing from Berber, French, Spanish and Turkish and indirect borrowing from Latin, Greek, Persian and even Dutch (Benlaksira 2019) [19].

I.3. Zeglamia

Zeglamia is a ludling used in the city of Constantine based on the dialect of Constantine. There is no clear definition to this language game; the only definition provided in the literature is given by Merdaci (2008) [22] where he defines Zeglamia as phonological reversal of words, a practice essential to the musicians’ register. Many hypotheses are generated about its origins and uses. Yet, no research has a record about its emergence or functions. As mentioned above the aim of this research is to define Zeglamia, its origins, uses and mechanisms. To do so, data is collected and a research analysis is designed.

II– Methods and Materials:

The present research is an auto-ethnographic research as the researcher is an in-group member of the speech community and is an active participant. Besides the ethnographic side of the research, a ground theory approach is adopted. The latter helps to provide an established definition to Zeglamia, its origins and mechanisms from the gathered data. The ground theory approach permits generating theoretical frameworks based on the informants’ input. To achieve the objectives of this paper, qualitative data is collected by means of semi-structured interviews. It is worth mentioning that the sample is collected through a snowball sampling approach (a friend of a friend or network sampling) adopted from the study conducted by Milroy (1987) [23]. As its name entails, participants choose each other rather than being chosen by the researcher (Kumar 2010) [24].The interviews explore the participants’ knowledge about their secretive code: the origin, their manner of acquisition, the settings of their use, as well as their intention in preserving it as a common heritage. The thirteen participants are also asked to exemplify the variety of ludling they use for phonological analysis of Zeglamia segments. This analysis is adopted by Bagemihl (1996) [15] in his work dealing with analyzing language games. The interviewees were all male, as there were no female speakers suggested by the snowball sampling approach. The participants belong to the city center of Constantine are of different ages, 20 to 60 years old. The interview involved first personal questions to enquire about their age, source and the Zeglamia ludling’s settings of uses as well as their intension to keep using and transmitting the code. After, the participants were asked to interact spontaneously and later sentences tackling everyday interactions were suggested for transformation.

III- Results and discussion:

The research study, as explained in the methodology, tackles two different objectives. On the one hand, the collected data based on the ground theory, developed by Barney and Strauss in 1960's, provides an established definition for Zeglamia. On the other hand, the phonological analysis demonstrates the patterns of its functions and the mechanics adopted.

III.1. The Definition of Zeglamia:

In the interviews, the participants are asked to define Zeglamia to provide a historical background to elaborate more about its origins. Their answers vary between those who ignore the source and others whose answers ranges from it emerging during the colonization period, to those who claim it to be part of the artistic musical milieu of Malouf: a famous music genre in the region. As soon as France colonized the country, the French authorities understood how crucial the Algerian dialect mastery was for controlling Algeria. To achieve this goal, the researchers and dialectologists engaged in studying the Algerian varieties. Cheronneau (1869) [25] was among the very first works to study the dialect of Constantine. The inhabitants of Constantine opted for Zeglamia to cipher their communication and avoid being understood by the enemy. *Zdjal* is a Malouf category particularly used in Constantine, which developed between the 16th and 20th century (Saidani 2006) [26]. In this form of Malouf, the masters called *el Mshayekh* used to utilize Zeglamia to transmit private messages or comments during a performance in parties or weddings. When it comes to the source of acquisition, the participants answered similarly affirming that the street is their unique way of acquiring that code, adding that they have learned it through friends. However, one of the interviewees gave a different source. He asserted that his Malouf music fellows are the reason behind his acquaintance and mastery of the code. As the source of acquisition implies, Zeglamia users use it outside their houses: in the street within their network both inside and outside of Constantine. The participants affirm that they do not use Zeglamia inside the house because there is no need for them to encode anything in the presence of their family members. Therefore, the reasons behind using Zeglamia vary according to its speakers' interests. However, the users agree on one sole target: they aim to communicate privately and avoid being comprehended by others. Some have mentioned that the reason behind using Zeglamia is to gossip and bully others without being explicit. Others, who are illegal merchants, say that they use it to convey information to other merchants about the whereabouts of the police. Interviewees also mentioned that they use Zeglamia outside of Constantine in order to avoid being discriminated against because of their accent. Overall, Zeglamia's use varies according to the speaker's intention and contexts.

III.1.1. Zeglamia Mechanisms

Like all ludling, Zeglamia abides by mechanisms. These patterns are extracted and recognized after the phonological analysis of the segments provided by the interviewees. The analysis demonstrates that Zeglamia can be constructed through two different mechanisms, insertion and rearrangement. This would generate two different versions of Zeglamia. In the data analysis tables, Constantine dialect expressions and their Zeglamia version are transcribed adopting Javed's (2013) [27] phonetic alphabets Appendix 1.

III.1.1.1 Insertion

Insertion in Zeglamia can be devised through the inclusion of a syllable or different syllables inside each word of a sentence resulting in infixal Zeglamia. This type of Zeglamia is mainly used by the younger participants in the sample. Table 1 presents how expressions from the dialect of Constantine can be transformed in Zeglamia along the inserted phoneme(s) and the English translation.

Table 1. Infixal Zeglamia

Original expression	Insertion	Zeglamia	English
/ṣbaḥ elxiṛ/	/f+v/[1] /ns+v/[2] /fns+v/[3]	/ṣbfaḥ elxifiṛ/ /ṣbnsaḥ elxinsiṛ/ /ṣbfnsaḥ elxifnsiṛ/	Good morning
/ʃkun/	/f+v/[1] /ns+v/[2] /fns+v/[3]	/ʃkufun/ /ʃkunsun/ /ʃkfnsun/	Who?
/nṛoḥu/	/f+v/[1] /ns+v/[2] /nsb+v/ /nsg+v/ /fns+v/[3]	/nṛofoḥu/ /nṛonsoḥu/ /nṛonsboḥu/ /nṛonsgoḥu/ /nṛofnsoḥu/	We go

Infixal Zeglamia, as the table shows, can be formed in different ways. The insertion is done by adding a syllable [1] as well as by including a consonant cluster followed by a vowel sound [2] and [3]. All the insertions are done in the middle of the word after the first syllable, never at beginning or at the end.

a. An interrogative sentence like /ʃkun dʒa w ḥal el bab/ might be /ʃkfnsun dʒafansa w ḥafansal el bafansab/ 'who came and opened the door?'

As table 1 shows, there are varieties of insertion, however these varieties do not get mixed. The speakers adopt only one type of insertion, either /f+v/ /ns+v/ /fns+v/, /nṣg+v/ or /nṣb+v/. When participants practicing that type of ludling were asked on which basis they can justify their choice of insertion, they answered it depends on how easy it feels to the speaker as it is a personal choice. They have also added that the more phonemes, the more professional the speaker would sound. They further pointed that inserting just a phoneme sounds rather novice. The more sounds the speakers add, the more the words get encrypted and get difficult to be understood. The informants also noted that there is another factor to the mastery and the fluency of the speaker which is the speech rate. Therefore, it is up to the speakers to choose the sound string that would permit them to have an accelerated speech rate and a more coded speech. Hence, insertion in Zeglamia can be of different varieties; however, its speakers do not consider this to be a problem as they proclaim to be able to understand all possible versions. The table demonstrated that the insertion happens after the first syllable. The vowel adds depends on the original vowel in the initial syllable of the word. The following examples can illustrate the case, /**ns**+v/ the vowel can be /a/, /i/ or /u/.

b.

c.

/daṛ/	/ndʒiw/	/xuya/
/da**nsa**ṛ/	/ndʒi**nsi**w/	/xu**nsu**ya/
House	We come	My brother

Additionally, this type of Zeglamia, infixal, transforms all the words of the dialect including the monosyllabic words: /dʒa/ > /dʒansa/ or /dʒafnsa/ 'he came', proper names /yaser/ > /yafansaser/ and even the borrowed ones /vwala/ > /vwalansa/ 'voila' or /alo/ > /afansalo/.

III.1.1.2. Rearrangement

Rearrangement in Zeglamia is formed by reordering the syllables of the word to create another word without inserting any additional sound resulting in Reversal Zeglamia. This type is more frequent among the elderly and Malouf practitioners both amateurs and professionals. Table 2 shows data collected through the interviews. The table offers exemplifications about Rearrangement Zeglamia. In addition to the same examples presented in Infixal Zeglamia for the sake of the comparison between the two varieties, other examples are provided.

Table 2. Rearrangement Zeglamia

Original expression	Zeglamia	English
/sma/[4]	/msa/	The sky
/ḥutṣ/[5]	/tṣuḥ/	fish
/ṣbaḥ elxiṛ/[6]	/ṣḥab elṛix/	Good morning
/ʃkun/[7]	/ʃnuk/	Who?
/ʃikula/ [8]	/kiʃula/	Chocolate
/nṛoḥu/[9]	/nḥoṛu/	We go
/welilha/[10]	/lewilha/	Come back to it/her
/ma/[11]	/ma/	water
/li :l/ /leil/[12]	/li:l/ /leil/	night
/ʤadʤa/[13]	/ʤadʤa/	a hen

Table 2 provides examples of Rearrangement Zeglamia. From the examples, the mechanisms are highlighted. Monosyllabic words /ccv/ or /cvc/ like in [4]and[5]. The vowel is kept in its place during the reversal process. For words with consonant cluster /ccvc/ like in [6] and [7], the vowel does not get rearranged, but the second and the last consonants are exchanged. Words of more than two syllables, Arabic or borrowed, like [8] /c_1.v_2.c_3v_4.c_5v_6/ would be transformed to /c_3v_2.c_1v_4.c_5v_6/, the same would go for /siwana/ > /wisana/ 'umbrella'. Morphologically speaking, words in the dialect of Constantine, like words from modern Arabic, have the different types of pronouns attached to the word itself. Words like [9] and [10] contain attached pronouns. In [9] both /n/ and /u/ are attached. /n/ is a prefix that refers to 'we', whereas; /u/ is a suffix that refers to the present tense. In [10] /ha/ is attached to the verb as a suffix to refer to 'it' or 'her'. In the Rearrangement Zeglamia the attached pronouns do not get transformed; they keep their original positions and the reversal happens in the main stem of the word.

At the level of the sentence, the rearrangement Zeglamia would operate similarly. The same example above is used

(2)

/ʃkun dʒa w ḥal el bab/ > /ʃnuk *dʒa* w laḥ el *bab*/.

It could be noticed that the verb */dʒa/* 'came' and */bab/* 'door' could not be transformed as */dʒa/* is a monosyllabic word /cv/. In both /cv/ monosyllabic common or proper words like [11], the reversal process is not possible. */bab/* cannot be reversed as it is a palindrome word; the same goes for [12]. Words with reduplicated syllables, like the case of [13] as well as the words /mama/ and /papa/, are of impossible transformation. The rearrangement of the syllables in such words would lead to the creation of the same exact word. Thus, in practice, users of Rearrangement Zeglamia would keep them as they are.

From the analysis of the segments provided by the informants, it could be said that the Rearrangement Zeglamia operates differently from the infixal one. However, the second version of Zeglamia has some limitations and rearrangement does not always work.

From the results provided, a definition of Zeglamia can be generated. Zeglamia is a ludling native to the city of Constantine and is particularly restricted to the city center. It dates back to emergence of the *Z'djal*. It was used by the masters of Malouf to pass on comments on special occasions. Later on, it was adopted by the fighters during the Algerian revolution to encrypt their communication in order to plot against the French colonization. Currently, Zeglamia is used among the speech community more like a ludling rather than a cryptolect. The users still use it to encode messages within their social network to communicate privately and amusingly. Be it in the past or in the present, Zeglamia has never been used in family settings. It has been acquired outside the household by friends and fellows and has served for cryptic and ludic purposes. There are two versions of Zeglamia. Each version adopts a mechanism (insertion and rearrangement). The deletion or substitution mechanisms do not take place in Zeglamia. The versions of Zeglamia do not overlap as each of which is used separately and never combined. Moreover, the use of the two versions depends on the age of the speakers. The old generation uses the rearrangement Zeglamia; whereas, the younger one uses the insertion version. This could be due to the limitations that the reversal version has. Both versions are still used for the speakers show interest and intention to keep using it as a spoken heritage.

IV. Conclusion:

The purpose of this study is to generate a definition to Zeglamia as well as to understand the phonological configuration and the mechanisms that lay behind such ludling. The analyses of both the answers and the segments provided by its speakers permitted a well defined Zeglamia concept that includes its origins, acquisition process, uses, and objectives. The analysis of the segments demonstrates the Zeglamia mechanism and versions. Zeglamia holds importance for the residents of the Constantine (city center) as it is an integral part of their identity and pertinence.

Appendix

Arabic	Symbol	Word	English
أ	ʔ	/qoṛ**ʔ**an/	Koran
ب	b	/ṭ**b**i**b**/	Doctor
ت	tˢ	/**tˢ**lʌ**tˢ**a/	Three
ث	ɵ	-	-
ج	ʤ	/**ʤ**a**ʤ**a/	Hen
ح	ḥ	/**ḥ**emaːṛ/	Donkey
خ	**x**	/mu**x**/	Brain
د	d	/**d**aṛ/	House
ذ	ð	-	-
ر	ṛ	/**ṛ**aːs/	Head
ز	z	/ḥe**z**aːm/	Belt
س	s	/**s**ma/	Sky
ش	ʃ	/‘a**ʃ**ṛa/	Ten
ص	ṣ	/**ṣ**abuːn/	Soap
ض	ḍ	/**ḍ**alma/	Darkness
ط	ṭ	/**ṭ**maṭam/	Tomato
ظ	ḏ	-	-
ع	‘	/**‘**ṭaʃ/	Thirsty
غ	gh	/**gh**eṛab/	Crawl
ف	f	/**f**aːs/	Pickaxe
ق	q or g	/zla**q**/-/zeṛa**g**/	He slipped-Bleu
ك	k	/**k**as/	A glass
ل	l	/**l**iː**l**/	Night
م	m	/de**m**/	Blood
ن	n	/**n**aṛ/	Fire
ه	h	/**h**wa/	Air
و	w	/**w**aṛqa	paper
ي	y	/**y**suːm/	He asks for the price

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