

Sociolinguistic Study of Skikda's Dialect in Algeria: Case of Gender Neutrality in Interrogative and Imperative Statements

Nouar Hanene ^{1*}

¹ University of Mentouri Brothers, Constantine 1(algeria) , hanene.nouar@doc.umc.edu.dz

Le Laboratoire Langues et Traduction LLT

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ملخص: يستكشف هذا البحث السوسiolغوي ظاهرة الحياد الجندري في الأوامر والاستفهامات في لهجة سكيكدة. على عكس اللغة العربية الفصحى واللهجات الجزائرية الأخرى، تستخدم لهجة سكيكدة لغة شاملة للجنسين عند أداء الأوامر وطرح الأسئلة، دون علامات جندرية صريحة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استقصاء العوامل التي تؤثر على التنوع اللهجي بين سكان سكيكدة من خلال إجراء مقابلات واستبيانات، ويسعى هذا المقال إلى الكشف عن الدوافع وراء هذا التحول اللغوي بين مجموعات عمرية وجندرية متنوعة داخل مجتمع سكيكدة والانتقال نحو اللغة المميزة جندريًا عند التفاعل مع الغرباء. الكلمات المفتاحية: الحياد الجندري، الأوامر والاستفهامات، لهجة سكيكدة، اللغة العربية الفصحى، التحول اللغوي

Abstract:

The current sociolinguistic study explores the phenomenon of gender neutrality in imperative and interrogative statements within Skikda's dialect. Unlike Modern Standard Arabic and other Algerian dialects, Skikda's dialect employs gender-inclusive language in performing commands and questions, lacking explicit gender markers. The research aims to investigate the factors influencing dialectal variation among Skikda resident by employing interviews and questionnaire, the article seeks to uncover the motivations behind this linguistic shift among diverse age and gender groups within Skikda's community and the shift towards gender-marked language when interacting with outsiders.

Keywords: Gender-neutrality; imperative and interrogative statements; Skikda's dialect; Modern Standard Arabic; Linguistic shift.

*Nouar Hanene

1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria is a north African country known for its linguistic diversity, rich and ancient history that allowed it to be a great potential for several sociolinguistic studies. Skikda is a northeastern state in Algeria, which its people utilize gender inclusive language when referring to men and women regardless of their age, education, social class and background. This contrasts sharply with the wide-spread and dominant gender-marked linguistic systems prevalent in most of Algeria's dialects. It is observed that the locals of Skikda tend to switch their regular dialectal gender neutrality aspect when encountering outsiders from the region, who habitually visit the city for tourism purposes. This leads the researcher to make a reflection on the local dialect reality to wonder why do they switch and utilize gender markers when dealing with outsiders, however, they maintain their dialect with each other. The most common conception to this phenomenon is that it is a regular linguistic shift for the purposes to be understood by nonlocals, though, the differences of using gender-inclusive language or not, does not pose linguistic challenge for the outsider, despite the semantic clarity and comprehensibility of the gender-neutral form. Thus, the research aims to examine the factors influencing dialectal variation among Skikda residents, particularly the shift towards gender-marked language when interacting with outsiders. The research seeks to understand dialect variation and the sociolinguistic dynamics at play in the region of Skikda. Therefore, using a non-probability sampling technique, namely the convenience sampling, which means the selection was based on whoever was available and willing to participate. First, the study employs a closed-ended questionnaire addressed for the residents of Skikda, including shop owners, passerby, teenagers and aldermen in order to get a grip if they change their dialectal gender inclusive form and if so how. Additionally, it opts for a semi-structured interview in order to investigate why do they feel the need to shift their gender-

neutral dialect when dealing with outsiders. Therefore, the main questions that the research seeks to investigate are as follow:

- Why do people from Skikda use gender neutrality when producing imperative and interrogative statements?
- Do people from Skikda always shift their inclusive and gender-neutral dialect when interacting with outsiders?
- If they do, what are the factors that influence their linguistic dialectical shift?
- Are there differences between the perceptions and attitudes of people of different ages and genders concerning the willingness to shift their dialect's gender neutrality?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender Differences in Languages

Exploring previous research is significant for the enrichment of the current paper, however, it is noticed that most studies and books mirror issues related to gender differences in languages, especially with the rise of female culture in the 1980's that led to contrast the dominant male culture, it sought to demonstrate that women have their own voices, positions and thoughts. Thus, using language perpetuated through diverse communication styles is one way to display it. These numerous studies on gender differences usually probe for how language can be used to privilege one gender at the expense of the other, to marginalize certain groups or to promote negative and damaging stereotypes about women, such as the deficit approach. One of the prevalent studies in the deficit approach is of Robin Lakoff's "Language and Woman's Place", which was published in 1975. He contended that women have what is called women's language (WL) that is typically categorized by the frequent use of hedges, empty adjectives and using italics. The approach lacks rigidity and assertion; hence, it is deficient and fragile. With conviction, WL is inferior once compared with the male language, the claim is challenged since it hints that there is inherently something erroneous with the language of women. This also perpetuates the idea that the

male language is the norm and the standard that women must adapt to in order to be deemed correct and assertive (Coates, 2015).

2.2. Gender Neutrality in Languages

Studies related to gender differences are very common and prevalent in sociolinguistic research, particularly in Algeria. Additionally, the focus is usually devoted to languages rather than dialects, thus, probing for existing literature in this regard is a problematic aspect. Initially, we need to pinpoint the meaning of neutrality, according to Britannica, it is the legal position of abstaining from war participation between states and other countries. Thus, it is the maintenance of fairness and objectivity to the belligerents. In much simpler words, neutrality is the inclination of a particular agenda, person or nation from engaging in any sort of physical or political confrontation, hence, the involved parties do not pressure themselves with taking sides. As for the meaning of gender neutrality in languages, it refers to any linguistic system that eschews any clear signs of gender markers at some certain degree of grammatical aspect. According to the European Parliament, gender neutrality in languages is a standard term which refers to the lack of the use of sexist linguistic system, hereafter, it is a gender-fair language. It is usually utilized to eschew forms of bias and discriminatory language that could be negatively interpreted. By using a gender inclusive or gender fair language, all sorts of sexism can be eliminated, ergo, it increases the chances of social equality and equity between genders. However, this research argues that the dialect of Skikda, specifically, its neutral form at the level of performing commands and questions could be related to different matters than the definition provided by the European Parliament, 2018. As far as gender marked languages are concerned, they represent the opposite of what gender neutrality stands for. They are languages that are comprised of grammatical and lexical distinctions between male and female persons and objects. Some languages, such as French, Arabic and Spanish are prominent case of study. Unlike English,

its grammatical structure does not require gender marked expressions in some cases, such as the pronoun 'you'. The latter is neutral for both male and females. Moreover, English does not have masculine or feminine distribution to animals, it refers to them neutrally.

2.3. The Arabic Language

As a Semitic language, Arabic holds a great value to the Arab and Muslim nations around the globe. It possesses a historical heritage and carries within its core, the Islamic tradition through the most influential Islamic book known as the Holy Quran. Currently, it is one of the most spoken languages in the world and is the official language for about twenty-two countries, including Algeria. Nonetheless, the term Arabic is the standard term that encompasses three forms. The first one is Classical Arabic, this form is very ancient and presents the old literature and history. In fact, it is the language of Quran, it has a complex structure, including grammar and vocabulary choices. It is very difficult for beginners and requires years of learning in order to master its archaic vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. The second form is Modern Standard Arabic, which is the prevalent official language of the Arab countries. Essentially, it is a modern version of Classical Arabic, more understood and widely used in education, government affairs, politics, religious practices and News channels. It is not a first language to any Arab person, usually, it is taught and learnt since elementary education. The third form of the Arabic language is the Arabic dialects. The latter are known as a spoken vernacular or colloquial varieties of Arabic. They do not have a dictionary as a language does as it is not written as classical Arabic or modern standard Arabic. Furthermore, these dialects vary significantly due to the linguistic influences from Spanish, French, Turkish, etc. This makes these dialects special and unique to each their own set of words and grammar. In fact, it is possible to categorize these Arabic varieties according to their geographical whereabouts: middle-east dialects and Maghreb dialects. As far as middle-east dialects are concerned, they encompass the Gulf countries. It also has the Levantine dialect, which is widely spread in countries, such as Syria and Jordan. The

Maghreb dialects comprise of countries, such as Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya (Harrat, Meftouh, Abbas, Hidouci & Smaili, 2016). Within Algeria's dialect itself; several varieties can be found that differ by region and culture.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a hybrid approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain the most reliable and comprehensive results. The two data collection tools employed in the current research are a small Likert scale questionnaire and interviews with the research participants. Thus, the research aims to gather sufficient opinions and thoughts concerning the topic under investigation through the interview and the use of the Likert scale is to collect quantitative data to achieve statistical analysis and findings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data promises great results.

3.1. The Sampling Process and Interview Participants

For the sampling process, the research adopted the non-probability sampling reflected through the application of the convenience sampling; whoever was available and willing to take part in the study was considered as long as they fit the criteria opted by the researcher. Thus, ascertaining more degrees of reliability since the selected participants were randomly chosen. The structured face to face interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of Skikda residents, including shop workers, passersby, teenagers, and aldermen. The total number of participants is ten people. These interviews explored participants' language use in different social contexts, their perceptions of gender and language, and their attitudes towards the use of gender-neutral language, especially with outsiders. Using the same sampling technique, the convenience sampling, a Likert scale questionnaire was administered to Skikda residents to gather quantitative data on language use and attitudes. The small Likert scale comprised of questions assessing participants' frequency of using gender-neutral and gender-marked language in different situations, especially when dealing

with outsiders from the region. The number of the participants of the questionnaire was forty people of different ages, backgrounds, and genders. The research selected those who were more accessible and willing to answer from Skikda center and other places, such as university.

3.2. The Interview Participants

In order to develop the practical part of the present research, the study opted the following towns in Skikda: Skikda capital, Ramdane Djamal, Ain Bouziane, El Harrouch, Filfla, El Hadaik, Salah Bouchaour, and Collo. Hence, the interviews are conducted in various places in Skikda aiming to collect rich and reliable data findings. The following table demonstrates the research participants information, including their age, level of education, gender, and place of origin.

The Participants	Age	Level of education	Gender	Place of Origin
A	23	Master degree	Female	Ramdane Djamal
B	26	Master degree	Female	Skikda Capital
C	21	Licence degree	Female	Skikda Capital
D	29	Master degree	Female	Ain Bouziane
E	55	Uneducated/housewife	Female	El Harrouch
F	30	Licence degree	Male	Filfla
I	51	uneducated/Shop owner	Male	El Hadaik
J	46	Uneducated/passerby	Male	Salah Bouchaour
H	24	Bachelor degree	Male	Bouzaaroura
Q	19	Highschool student	Male	Collo

Table 01: The Participants according to Sociodemographic Characteristics

The structured interview took place from the 13th of June to the 26 of August 2024. Thus, it was conducted during the summer break, which facilitated the process of interviewing since people were available and accessible in the streets, coffee shops, beaches, stores, etc. The research opted for five female and five male participants of different ages and educational backgrounds, additionally, the selection of the towns varied significantly to ascertain that the

research covered the main areas of Skikda. The selection of the sample was not random as different characteristics had to adhere. One is that they are residents of Skikda and its various areas. Also, the researcher limited the selection of people based on gender to ascertain that there is an equal number of male to female's ratio. During the interviews, the research devoted attention to the following aspects:

1. The extent of using a gender-neutral speech on daily basis in interrogative and imperative statements.
2. The attitudes and perceptions of the sample towards using a gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements.
3. The dialectical shift that takes place during various social contexts. By the dialectical shift the research refers to the change that occurs at the level of ceasing the normal use of gender-neutral language to adapt to people from outside the Wilaya.
4. The factors that contribute to the shift if it exists.

3.3. Qualitative Data Analysis of the Interview

3.3.1. Gender Neutrality in Everyday Speech

The study found that gender neutrality in imperative and interrogative statements is prevalent in everyday conversations among Skikda residents. The research participants reported using gender-inclusive language without conscious effort, particularly in informal settings. One participant exemplified that as a mother, she might say: "Come to do your homework", (ارواح دير الواجب تاعك) (Arwah dir el wajeab taek) to her daughter and son alike despite that in other dialects, this is usually a command forwarded to a male person regardless of age and status. This also can be applied to interrogative statements wherein the structure is feminized for both men and women. Furthermore, the participants reported that using a gender-neutral language in performing interrogative and imperative statements has always been part of their everyday speech since they were young, and do not seem confused

or worried of being misunderstood since their immediate context adheres and utilizes the same aspects, ergo, if anything this has made them more confident than one might assume. The male and female participants both agreed in this regard, even so people of different ages. Thus, individuals of different ages and genders in the wilaya of Skikda seem prevalent and consistent in using a gender-neutral language in interrogative and imperative statements in everyday conversation and speech.

3.3.2. Attitudes and Perception towards Gender Neutrality

The interviews with the ten research participants indicated that most of them had positive attitudes towards gender neutrality. They viewed it as a natural and inclusive way of communicating with others, and it seems to be part of the linguistic and communicative aspect that did not disappear overtime even so in a digital age. They assume it is a deeply rooted part of the language and should not be viewed with pessimism. Participant (I) aged 51, reported that maybe in this new world, people would assume that this means that Skikda's dialect seems to favor a male gazed language particularly in performing imperative statements, however, it also has a female focused language when making interrogative statements. Hence, according to (I), this singlehandedly refutes any probable claims of sexism and favoritism in the dialect. However, a minority expressed concerns about the potential for misinterpretations or confusion when using gender-neutral language with outsiders. Those who expressed such concerns are mainly the participants aged between 21 and 30 years old. Gender had no place in this regard as both males and females of the aforementioned ages seemed worried that using a gender-neutral language when performing commands or questions would be disrespectful and rude to the outsiders who are probably clueless of the norms of their dialect. The research found that the older people (above 30 years old) seemed to have positive attitudes and perceptions, unlike the ones aged between 21 and 30 years old.

3.3.3. Dialectal Shift in Various Social Contexts

The interviews revealed a significant shift towards gender-marked language when Skikda residents interacted with outsiders, particularly those from other regions of Algeria. Participants explained that they adopted gender-specific language to be understood and respected, and most importantly to conform to societal expectations or behavior. Additionally, some reported that they tend to feel shy and anxious to refer to a woman similarly to men, though when they do it to the locals, it does not feel as offensive or rude. Since it is customary and usual, therefore, the linguistic shift at the level of imperative and interrogative statements occurs naturally with the outsiders. The grave motivation behind the shift is to portray signs of respect and politeness to the outsider's gender. Additionally, they do so to avoid issues and misinterpretation. Although, it is usually known that the visitor or outsider is the one to conform to the local language practices of the locals, in the situation of Skikda, this is not the case. Unexpectedly, the researcher assumed that since most of the participants aged above 30 years old hold positive attitudes and perceptions concerning gender neutrality in interrogative and imperative statements that they would insist on not changing, surprisingly, they reported that they do.

3.3.4. Factors Influencing Dialectal Shift

Through the analysis of the interview, numerous factors were identified to be the influence toward the dialectal shift. These factors are age, gender and educational background. The study devotes much attention to the first two factors, as it answers the third research question.

3.3.4.1. Age

Regarding the differences of perception and attitudes among people of various ages. The responses of the older participants revealed interesting takes. They demonstrated a strong and emotional attachment to the dialect of Skikda and its uniqueness, including gender

neutrality. The tremendous impact behind such pride in the inclusiveness of the language comes from a long history shared with working women in rural areas, especially in the agricultural field wherein men and women worked together without noticing gender markers or assuming them to be of significance in everyday regular speech. As far as the younger generation is concerned, there were also interesting takes that somewhat stood in sharp contrast with the older generation. They reported that they do not necessarily share a strong bond with the dialect, especially in its gender-neutral aspect. Moreover, they revealed that their dialect itself has been influenced from other regions, either from travelling or studying in other universities. They said that the influence occurred subconsciously and in fact, they do not mind it. Additionally, they reported that the rise of technology and the wide spread of mobile phones among teenagers and young adults resulted in the influence of foreign languages in their daily communication, however, they reported that despite learning foreign languages, such as English, they maintain gender neutrality in making both imperative and interrogative statements. As languages, such as English is gender neutral itself. Thus, to an average extent, they still believe that preserving their dialect, especially in gender neutrality aspects is vital. This does not mean that they would come face to face with potential linguistic shift unlike the older generation who contended that maintaining the dialect as it is shows pride and honor. The answers pinpoint the generational and sociolinguistic variations in the use of gender-neutral language.

3.3.4.2. Gender

The interviews revealed that female participants were more willing to change their dialect when interacting with outsiders than males. The latter reported that they do so in formal settings whereas females do so in general cases as well. The objective is to seem friendly and approachable. This does not denote that the male participants refuse to adhere to the gender norms in their language when interacting with outsiders, however, they tend to switch but they do so to be understood and not necessarily respected. This in fact is not similar. The

need to be respected or understood are not mutually comprehensive or synonyms. Thus, the female participants favor being respected and respectful to others whereas the male ones seek to be understood and understanding of others. In a nutshell, both genders seem to shift gender neutral language when performing interrogative and imperative statements when interacting with others but for different reasons.

3.3.4.3. Educational Background

Participants with higher social status or education levels were more likely to adopt gender-marked language in formal and informal settings when interacting with the outsiders whether in the Wilaya of Skikda or in a different place. They revealed that it is better to address males and females in a non-inclusive language to ascertain that people are not offended and to portray signs of respect. However, participants (E), (I) and (J) felt that there is no need to change their gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements. They also mentioned that changing it for others is a sign of weakness and disrespect to one's own dialect. Accordingly, they sometimes change it but it occurs subconsciously. This leads the research to realize that the shift could be underlying the reality that it occurs subconsciously despite of the personal feelings and attitude of the local people of Skikda.

4. The Questionnaire Design and Respondents

The questionnaire adopted in the article is a small-scale type of Likert scale consisting of seventeen (17) open-ended questions divided into three sections. The first one addresses factual information concerning participants' age, gender, place of residence and educational level. The second section deals with language use and performance of gender-neutrality in interrogative and imperative statements within the local and nonlocal context with locals and nonlocals. The third section is devoted to their attitudes, including behaviors and opinions concerning the dialectical shift with outsiders. By this, it addresses aspects of gender, age, and educational background to confirm the findings of the interview or refute

them. The process of gathering quantitative data using the questionnaire took about fifteen days (from the fifth of September to the Twentieth of September, 2024). The research focused on university and surrounding areas like Skikda center unlike the interview wherein the attention was focused on random coffee shops, beaches, stores, passersby, etc.

4.1. Quantitative Data Analyses from the Questionnaire

Section One : Background Information

4.1.1. Age of the Participants

Question 01

What is your age?
40 réponses

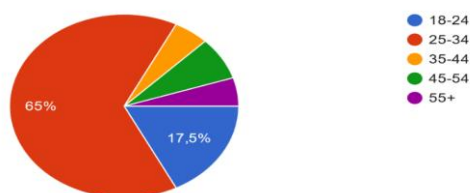


Figure 01: Age of the Participants

The first question seeks to find out the age of the research participants. The results indicate that the majority of them are aged between 25- and 34-years old scoring 65% followed by the age range of 18 and 24 years old at a score of 17,5%. Additionally, the remaining age ranges of 35-44 and 45-54 and 55+ equally scored 5,8% out of the total number of the research participants, this denotes that most of them are around 18-34 years old.

4.1.2. The Educational Background of the Research Participants

The following figure shows the educational background of the questionnaire respondents.

Question 02

What is your educational background?
40 réponses

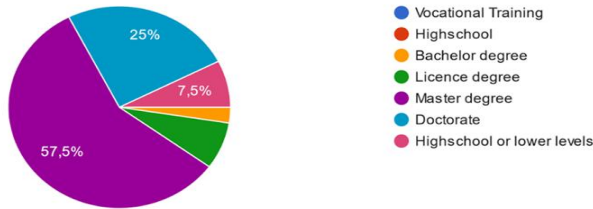


Figure 02: The Educational Background of the Participants

This shows that most of the respondents are master degree holders scoring 57,5%, followed by 25% of Doctorates. As far as high school or lower levels, it garnered around 7,5% as well as another 7,5% for Licence degree holders. As far as the bachelor degree, the results indicate only 2,5%. For vocational training, no one seemed to have taken a part of it.

4.1.3. Gender of the Respondents

The following figure reveals the gender of the questionnaire respondents wherein it demonstrates that females score 62,5% whereas males score 37,5%. The objective of the question is to find out the percentage of genders taking part in the questionnaire, however, having an equal number is not the ultimate objective. What is the research concerned with is to view statistically the distribution of male to female ratio. The female respondents are the majority in this case.

Question 03

what is your gender?
40 réponses

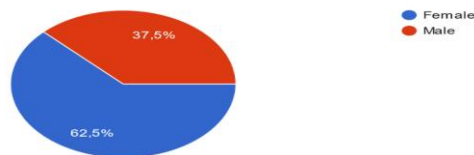


Figure 04: The Gender of the Participants

4.1.4. The Residence of the Participants

Question 04

What is your place of residence in Skikda?

Place in Skikda	Number of Respondents
Skikda Center	13
Filfla	5
El Harrouch	5
Collo	4
Ramdane Djamel	5
El Hadaik	3
Bouzaaroura	3
Azzaba	1
Ain Bouziane	1
Total Number	40

Table 02: The Residence of the Participants in Skikda

The objective of the question is to ascertain that the respondents reside in the Wilaya of Skikda to preserve the reliability of the findings. When viewing the responses, it is clearly found that all of the participants are residents of Skikda and its regional areas, such as El Harrouch, Ramdane Djamel, Filfla, Collo, etc. This adds value material and quantitative support to the present study.

Section Two: Language Use

4.1.5. The Use of Gender-Neutral Language in Daily Conversations

The Objective of the question is to find out the statistics of language use on daily basis at the level of gender neutral imperative and interrogative statements. The results indicate that 75% of the respondents opt for "always". 20% chose "often" and only 5% choose "sometimes".

Question 05

How often do you use gender-neutral language in your daily conversations?

40 réponses

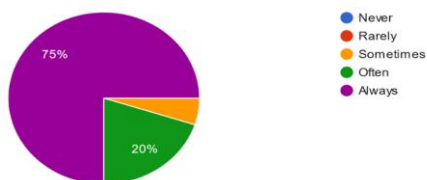


Figure O6: The Use of Gender-neutral Language on Daily Basis

This undoubtedly reveals that the respondents utilize a gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements when conversing, the majority at least seem to do so. The interesting part is that none of the respondents opt for “never” or at least “rarely”. Such answers reveal that the use of gender-neutral statements is an evident linguistic reality.

4.1.6. The Context of Using Gender-neutral Statements

Question 06

In which of the following situations are you more likely to use gender-neutral language?

40 réponses

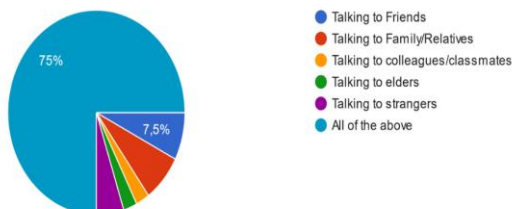


Figure 07: The Contexts of Using Gender-neutral Statements

When the respondents were asked about the situations that demand to use gender neutral interrogative and imperative statements as shown in figure 07 above, the majority scoring 75% opted for “all of the above”. This comprises the following: talking to friends, family/relatives, colleagues/classmates, elders, and strangers. Whereas ,5% reported that they so when talking with friends, the remaining options: talking to family/relatives, talking to colleagues/classmates, talking to elders and talking to strangers **respectively scored**. The

results indicate that the language use, gender-neutrality in interrogative and imperative statements predominantly occurs with all the individuals regardless of their social status, age and relationship. By this, it is evidentially demonstrated that the majority uses gender-neutrality with diverse people from their community with no issues or considerations to any factors, such as formality.

4.1.7. Respondents' Comfort in Using Gender-neutral Statements in the Local Context

Question 07

How comfortable are you when using gender neutral language in your local context?
40 réponses

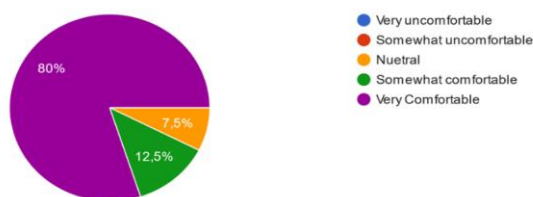


Figure 08: Respondents' Comfort in Using Gender-neutral Statements in the Local Context

The objective of the question is to realize whether the respondents feel comfortable using gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements in their local contexts. Since the results of the previous question indicate that the majority already utilizes it, it pushes the researcher to find out the proximity of their comfort in the local context followed by a question directed to their comfort with the outsiders. The comparison allows for better conceptualization and comprehensive understanding to their attitudes and perceptions towards the subject under study. The results revealed that 80% of the respondents feel very comfortable, 12,7% reported to feel somewhat comfortable whereas only 7,5% remained neutral to the situation. In fact, this shows that the respondents do use the neutral language and feel comfortable about it. It is part of the linguistic repertoire of the local community in

the Wilaya of Skikda.

4.1.8. Respondents' Comfort in Using Gender-neutral Statements when Interacting with Outsiders

Question 08

How comfortable are you when using gender neutral language in your local context with outsiders, such as people from Annaba and Guelma?
40 réponses

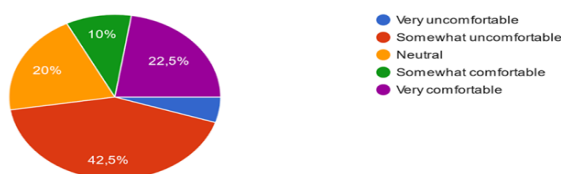


Figure 09: The Comfort of the Respondents in Using Gender-neutral Statements with Outsiders

When the respondents are asked about their comfort and feelings towards using a gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements with outsiders (People who originally come from different places than Skikda), 42,5% displayed that they feel somewhat uncomfortable doing so. Unlike the previous result of the question 08 wherein 80% seemed to be very comfortable doing so in the local context, which proved that it is a normalized part of the linguistic repertoire in Skikda. Additionally, 22,5% of the respondents stated that they feel very comfortable, 20% reported that they feel neutral about it. Only 10% chose somewhat comfortable. Thus, it is evidential to a certain degree that the respondents vary in their answers unlike the previous question wherein the responses were more definite.

4.1.9. The Importance of Gender-neutral Language in the Local Context

Question 09

To what extent do you agree or disagree that using gender neutral language is important in your local context?
40 réponses

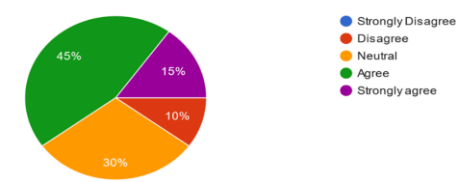


Figure 09: The Importance of Gender-neutral Language in the Local Context

When asked about the importance of using gender-neutral statements in the local context, 45% of the respondents reported that they agree with the question. They consider it to be of a value and has significance among the locals. This somewhat corresponds well with the findings of the interview, particularly the research participants above the age of 30 years old. Moreover, 30% chose neutral, 15% selected strongly agree and finally 10% opted disagree. Therefore, the answers display that the respondents in general do agree that their unique gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements have sentimental and social value in the local context.

Section Three: Attitudes Towards Gender Neutrality in Interrogative and Imperative Statements

4.1.10. The Importance of Being Understood by Outsiders

Question 10:

How important it is for you to be understood by people from other regions?
40 réponses

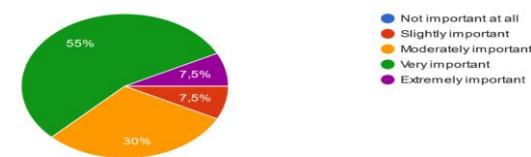


Figure 10: The Importance of Being Understood by Outsiders

Figure 10 demonstrates the attitudes of the respondents concerning the significance of being understood when using gender-neutrality in interrogative and imperative statements. 55%

of the respondents reported that they consider being understood by outsiders to be very important whereas 30% consider it moderately important. Furthermore, 7,5% informed that they find it extremely imperative, equally, 7,5% reported that find it slightly important. Thus, based on the results, more than half of the respondents find it important for them to be understood by people from other regions.

4.1.11. The Perception of Outsiders according to the Respondents' Experience

Question 11

Do you think using gender neutral language affects how people perceive you?
40 réponses

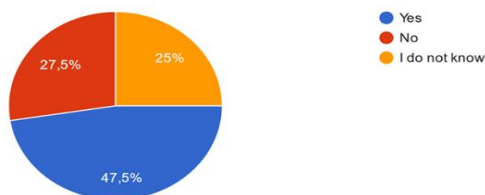


Figure 11: The Perception of Outsiders according to the Respondents' Experience

When asked whether using gender-neutral statements affect how people (outsiders) perceive them, 47,5% selected "Yes", 27,5% chose "No" whereas 25% reported "I do not know". This means that using this part of the dialect affect the perception of outsiders towards the respondents, however, it is not clear whether it affects so, negatively or positively. The following questions helps in shedding light to the matter.

4.1.12. Reactions to Using Gender-neutral Language

Question 12

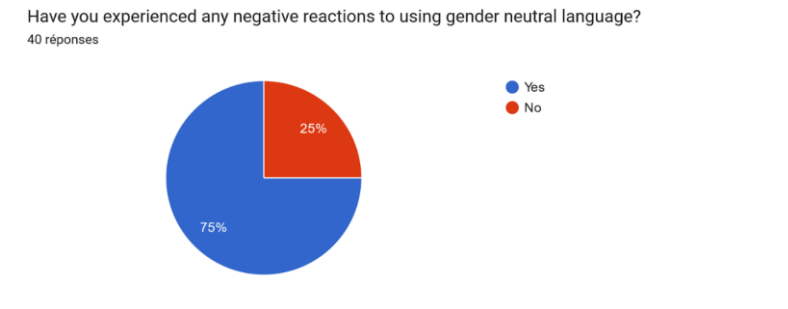


Figure 12: Reactions to Using gender-neutral Language

The answers predominantly display that the majority marking 75% of the respondents reported that they experienced negative reactions to using gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements. Whereas only 25% stated that they did not experience negative reactions. This means that nonlocals do not comprehend the mechanisms of the linguistic repertoire of the locals of the wilaya of Skikda, which possibly led them to misinterpret the intention of the communicative event, thus, it leads them to develop negative reactions. This could also explain why 42,5% of respondents revealed that they feel somewhat uncomfortable using gender-neutral language when conversing with outsiders (Check figure 09).

4.1.13. Attitudes towards the Correctness of the Gender-neutral Statements

Question 13

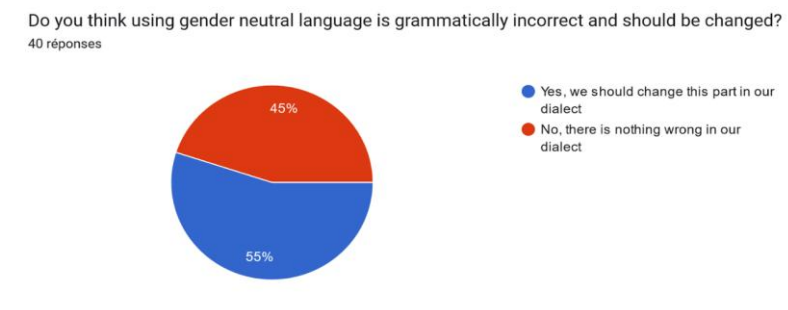


Figure 13: The Correctness of Using Gender-neutrality

The correctness of a language or dialect is always a subject put into consideration from a sociolinguistic perspective. Assuming that a language is correct or appropriate is usually deeply rooted in some factors, such as an appreciation to that language or complete inconsideration of it either by society or government policies or both. In this regard, based from the previous results indicating how uncomfortable they feel when interacting with outsiders, yet they feel a sense of appreciation to the uniqueness of their dialect, the research seeks to view how the locals consider it from a grammatical and structural lens. The results point out that 55% of the respondents think that there is nothing wrong with their dialect (Especially the part of gender-neutrality). Closely enough, 45% of the participants felt that they should alter gender-neutrality and adapt to the mainstream. Hence, it is possible to assume that a big number of them has no issue in changing this part if it means being understood by outsiders. Notice the table below:

Options	Percentage (%)	The Number of Respondents
Yes	55%	22
No	45%	18

Table 03: The Correctness of Using Gender-neutrality by the Number of the Respondents

There is a not tremendous difference between those who consider gender-neutrality incorrect and those who do not. Evidentially, this causes contradiction with their previous results that they indicate their sense of comfort with using their dialect. Clearly, they mean so at the level of external interactions with outsiders.

4.1.14. The Tendency of Changing the Neutral interrogative and Imperative Statements when Interacting with Outsiders

Question 14

Do you tend to change your neutral interrogative and imperative statements when interacting with outsiders?
40 réponses

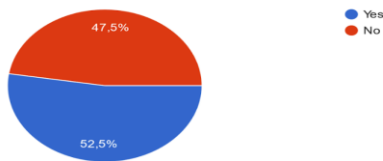


Figure 14: The Tendency of Changing the Neutral interrogative and Imperative Statements when Interacting with Outsiders

The results disclose that 52,5% of the respondents possess the tendency to change their neutral interrogative and imperative statements when interacting with outsiders whereas 47,5% do not seem to share the same willingness. The percentage reveals that not all agree or disagree to change or maintain their dialect. Notice the table below:

Options	Percentage (%)	The Number of Respondents
Yes	52,5%	21
No	47,5%	19

Table 04: The Tendency of Changing the Neutral interrogative and Imperative Statements when Interacting with Outsiders by the Number of Respondents

Interestingly, not a salient difference between 21 and 19 respondents. However, this does not change the reality that those who possess the tendency to change are more than the ones who do not. This corresponds well with the previous results that indicated their sense of discomfort when interacting with outsiders using the gender-neutral statements.

4.1.15. The Tendency of Young Locals in Switching the Gender-neutral Statements

Question 15

Do you think that young people in Skikda are more open to gender marked language than older people?
40 réponses

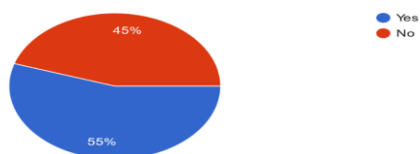


Figure 15: The Tendency of Young Locals in Switching the Gender Marked Statements

Whilst asked about who they think is more open to gender marked language concerning young and old people, 55% of the respondents chose “Yes” whereas 45% selected “No”. The difference is not enormous; however, it indicates the same findings from the interviews. Older people seem to be reluctant about preserving the linguistic heritage although young people do not seem to place it in the same high pedestal. This means the new generation could possibly emerge unto the mainstream gender marked linguistic systems of the other Algerian spoken varieties and dialects.

4.1.16. The Tendency of Women in Comparison to Men in Skikda to Gender Marked Statements

Question 16

According to you, are women in Skikda more open to gender marked language than men?
40 réponses

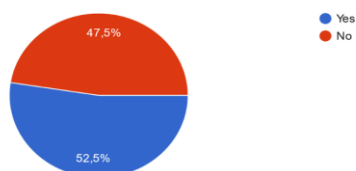


Figure 16: The Tendency of Women in Comparison to Men in Skikda to Gender Marked Statements

The results indicate that women are more open than men to using gender marked language scoring 52,5% whereas only 47,5% of respondents did not agree. This confirms the qualitative findings from the interviews. Women in Skikda seem to tend to change or modify their normally gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements when interacting with outsiders, furthermore, they are more open to the idea of switching to the mainstream Algerian dialects, which operate using a gender marked linguistic system.

4.1.17. The Tendency of People of Higher Educational Level to Gender Marked Statements in Skikda

Question 17

Do you find people with higher educational background in Skikda more open to gender marked language than people who do not?
40 réponses

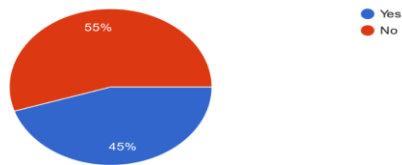


Figure 17: The Tendency of People of Higher Educational Level to Gender-neutral Statements in Skikda

According to the results, it is revealed that the respondents find that people of higher educational level are more open to gender marked linguistic systems marking 55% versus 45% of those who do not seem to agree with the presented notion. This supports the qualitative findings derived from the interviews. People of higher educational level seem to change their gender-neutral statements to adhere to a more acceptable form of gender marked variety.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate a strong discrepancy between young and old participants in how they approach to dialectical gender systems. Young participants are more inclined to shift their dialect to meet the expectations of outsiders. This shift is driven by a desire to conform to societal gender norms and to be understood in a broader communicative context. The use of gender-neutral language among young participants advocates a progressive attitude towards gender inclusivity. In contrast, older participants tend to maintain their dialect, particularly its gender-inclusive aspects. This maintenance is rooted in a desire to preserve linguistic heritage. The older generation's faithfulness to traditional dialect forms, particularly in interrogative and imperative statements, highlights a respect for cultural and linguistic traditions. The gender factor reveals differing attitudes and behaviors between men and women regarding the use of gender-marked language. Men predominantly use gender-marked language within local contexts and occasionally shift to gender-marked forms in formal settings with nonlocals. This occasional shift is primarily to maintain a formal tone and certify clear communication. The findings suggest that men do not feel a robust need to change their language use unless it is compulsory for comprehension or formality. Women, on the other hand, regularly attempt to use gender-marked language with outsiders. This regular shift is driven by both emotional and practical reasons, aiming to engage respectfully with others. The prevalence of gender-marked language use among women, both locally and with nonlocals, indicates a strong devotion to traditional gender norms in communication.

4. CONCLUSION

The present article is a sociolinguistic study that donates to the understanding of gender neutrality in languages by demonstrating the existence of a gender-neutral dialect in the Algerian context, specifically in the Wilaya of Skikda. People use gender-neutral interrogative and imperative statements. This makes it uniquely strange than other dialects. For that, the

study embarks on the journey of probing to decipher the sociolinguistic nature of the dialect by employing interviews and questionnaires to obtain valuable data.

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