Journal of Social Science Development 18(2). september.2026 (129-141) | ISSN: 1112-9212/ EISSN 2602-5043

Semantic and Connotative Variations in Algerian Dialectal Arabic

Nadia Ghounane[1,*] , Asma Rahmani[2]
[1] University of Saida Dr Moulay Tahar (Algeria)
[2] University of Batna 1 (Algeria)

Received: 22 April 2026 ; **Accepted:** 18 September 2026 ; **Published:** 30 September 2026

Abstract: The Algerian linguistic repertoire consists of a set of regional dialects. About 17 dialects are part of the Tamazight language, while others speak Algerian Arabic varieties, as well as Arabic varieties spoken in Arab countries. Algerian Arabic dialects (AA) are rich in words that have connotative meanings. Algerians use many terms borrowed from Classical Arabic (CA) and the Quran in daily conversations; however, they do not know their true meanings. In this vein, the focal aim behind this pertinent inquiry is to unveil the nature of these expressions. It also attempts to cover up the real meaning of these words through conducting a study in Tlemcen city, West of Algeria. The researchers conducted a corpus-based analysis of a set of terms used in the Tlemcen variety. To support the validity of the findings, the researchers conducted a questionnaire to test Tlemcen speakers' attitudes towards these expressions. Grounded in down-to-earth evidence, this study reveals that Tlemcen speakers use some of these expressions as their daily politeness strategies, such as الله يخليك and لعقوبة ليك انشاء الله. The findings also show that Tlemcen speakers have limited background knowledge of the real meanings of some terms used as insults, such as الله يعطيك النو. The results also demonstrate that most of these words were introduced into Algerian dialects by the ancestors of the Jews, although they are borrowed from Classical Arabic.

Keywords: Algerian Arabic, attitudes, Classical Arabic, connotative meaning, semantic variation, Tlemcen speakers

1- Introduction

The Algerian sociolinguistic profile is rich in Tamazight varieties. The Algerian people speak about 17 varieties of Tamazight. These varieties are mutually intelligible among Tamazight speakers. Not all Algerian people speak Tamazight varieties. The Algerian linguistic profile includes a set of mutually intelligible Algerian Arabic dialects. Each dialect is spoken in a given region. For this reason, one may describe them as regional dialects. Given accents also characterize these dialects. Hence, by hearing speakers, one can guess whether they are from the East, the West, the South, or the North.

Algerian Arabic (AA) is a dialect of Arabic used in *informal settings*. In contrast, Standard Arabic is used in *formal settings* such as schools and the administration, though French has a strong influence due to long-term colonization. Algerian policymakers failed to replace French with Standard Arabic, particularly in the administration and higher education, even though Arabization had already succeeded in the primary, middle, and secondary schools. Similarly, Algerian dialects failed to create their vocabulary. Algerians tend to borrow an unlimited number of words from French for their daily use due to the *language gap* between these dialects and the deep impact of French. Algerian Arabic dialects are also rich in loanwords borrowed from Tamazight varieties, Turkish, and Spanish. For this reason, they are not mutually intelligible to people in the Arabian Peninsula.

Algerian dialectal Arabic represents a fruitful field for sociolinguists interested in studying *linguistic phenomena*, particularly code-switching and code-mixing between French

* Corresponding author, e-mail: nadia.ghounane@univ-saida.dz

and Arabic, and Arabic and Tamazight. Other instances of these linguistic phenomena are multilingualism, bilingualism, and borrowing.

Like other Arabic dialects, Algerian Arabic is characterized by some lexical issues, mainly the connotative meanings of words borrowed from Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. Algerians use some Arabic words; however, these loanwords carry connotations they do not understand. A good example is the term هود/hawed (to come down). Some linguists said the term is derived from the word التهويد/etahwiùd/ (Judaization), while others claimed its origin is the Arabic verb هوى/hawaù/ (fall). Hence, to pursue the broadest lines of inquiry in a scientific investigation, the current research aims to shed light on these words and their connotative meanings by taking the Tlemcen dialect as a case in point. It also attempts to explore the origins of these terms and the Tlemcen speakers' attitudes towards their real meanings. For a more prismatic picture of the subject, the arguments of this paper are designed chiefly to investigate the following research questions:

- Are Algerian people aware of the connotative meanings of some Arabic words borrowed into Algerian dialects?
- What are the attitudes of Algerian people towards the daily use of these words?

2-Literature Review

2-1-Algerian Arabic

About 70% of Algerians speak more than 20 Arabic vernaculars, while 30% use Tamazight varieties, as already stated. These varieties are limited to informal settings, such as the home and the market. According to Derradji et al. (2002), the dialects can be divided into four varieties according to regions, mainly "the Oranais: is the variety spoken in the west of Algeria, precisely from Moroccan Frontiers", secondly, "Algérois: this variety covers the central zones of Algeria to Béjaia and it is widely spread", thirdly, "Rural: the speakers of this variety are located in the East of Algeria like Constantine, Annaba or Sétif", and finally " Sahara: is the dialect of the south of Algeria population". (as cited in Saadane & Habash, 2015, p. 70) Most of these varieties follow the phonological and syntactic rules of Standard Arabic (SA), though they differ from the written form of SA. At the phonological level, Algerian dialects share all the consonants found in SA. What characterizes these dialects is the inclusion of the phonemes/g/ and /v/, such as in قال/gaùl/ (said).

AA is rich in vocabulary taken from SA, with an influence of Tamazight varieties, such as in the word السروال/esirwaùl/, which becomes /?asrawel/ with more focus on the/?/ sound, although elhamza is omitted in many cases (Harrat et al., 2016).

The sound ج in SA has many realizations in AA, mainly /dʒ/ and /dʒ/, such as تجي/dʒi/ for جاء (he came). Another instance of phonological variation is assimilation. Some consonants are assimilated, like ق/q/ into /k/ or /tS/, like the Ghezawet dialect, which is spoken in a region West of Algeria. The/q/ sound is assimilated into /k/ in all Algerian dialects, as in قتل, which becomes كتل/ktel/ (he killed). Hence, قلبي (my heart) becomes /kalbI/or /tSalbI/. The assimilation of ث/T/ into ت/t/ is found in all Algerian dialects. The assimilation of أ/?/ into /l/ sound, such as اعمى (blind), becomes لعمى/laÀma/. Elision is also apparent in Algerian dialects. The first instance is ا/?/, mainly in the middle position, such as in الكأس, which becomes لكاس/lkaùs/ (cup).

Other languages influenced AA over centuries, mainly French, Turkish, Italian, Berber varieties, and Spanish. Saadane and Habash (2015) presented some loanwords that were borrowed from other languages (See appendix A)

The Algerian dialects are also characterized by vowel shortening or extension due to the impact of Tamazight varieties. For example, تقول لهم becomes تقل لهم/tqulhem/ (Saadane & Habash, 2015).

Without delving deeper into the characterization of Algerian dialects, particularly at the phonological level, one should note that there are differences in the use of the same dialect. These differences are not linked to the class factor. The dialect spoken in rural areas differs from that used in urban areas. In this vein, Haak (1997, p. 12) maintained that "the distinction between urban and rural dialects is not based entirely on the current social status of the speakers, and should thus partly be regarded as a genetic classification" (as quoted in Boumaiza, 2018, p. 21). In his part, Marçais (1960) observed that there are phonological, lexical, and morphological differences between urban and rural dialects. A good example is provided by Ammour (2012), who noted that the addition of /u/characterizes urban dialect, whereas rural dialect uses /ah/, as in/daru/ and /darah/ (his home).

To conclude, Algerian dialects are characterized by phonological, lexical, and morphological properties that affect the pronunciation of Arabic as a standard language and make them distinct from the Arabic dialects spoken in the Arabian Peninsula. Another important feature that distinguishes Algerian dialects is their regional variation.

2-2- Tlemcen Dialect

Tlemcen is a town located in the Northwest of Algeria. It is in the borders of Morocco. The town has a very rich cultural heritage due to the influence of Arab, Andalusian, Berber, and Turkish civilizations. The town was called Pomaria by the Romans and later became Tlemcen among the Zenata Berbers. In Berber culture, the term Tlemcen refers to the land and the sea, or to the region that contains a lot of water. In his part, Benhellim (2015, p. 19) claimed that the term is divided into "Tlem which means 'group and 'san' which means 'two', that is to say, it is a group of two things; the land and the sea or the mountain and the dessert" (as quoted in Abdellaoui, 2016, p. 19).

Like other Algerian dialects, the Tlemcen variety is characterized by certain phonological features. In his part, Dendane (2013) highlighted that the Tlemcen dialect is distinguished from other dialects by "several linguistic features" (p. 1). Among these features, the use of the glottal stop /?/ instead of /q/ and /g/, such as قالك/qalek/, becomes ألك/?alek/.

Another phonological feature that distinguishes the Tlemcen dialect is the assimilation of some sounds. For example, the dental /T/ is replaced by the alveolar /t/ and the /D/ becomes /d/. In his part, Marçais (1902) noted that the Tlemcen dialect is similar to the Egyptian and Syrian varieties. They replace /T/with/t/. He added that "the T and t are confused in Tlemcen speech and pronounced as a unique sound ts; the ts is not a pure dental, it is, in a way, a double letter identical to ts pronounced in a single emission of voice" (p. 13). There is also the assimilation of the phoneme /Z/to a back velar /g/, as in المعقاز/elmaàgaùz/, which is taken from the Arabic word عاجز; however, it means a person who is lazy in the Tlemcen dialect.

At the lexical level, variation is significant in the Tlemcen dialect due to the impact of conquerors who settled in the town (See Appendix B).

By examining variation within the Tlemcen dialect, one can see that its use varies between urban and rural areas. In terms of phonological variation, the urban variety is regarded as the most prestigious, spoken by a small minority who consider themselves native inhabitants of the city. Urban people tend to use the glottal stop /?/. On the other hand, rural people employ /g/ or /q/ such as /gali/ and /qali/ (he told me). This view is supported by Obeidat and Hammoudi (2019), who pointed out that:

Two varieties co-exist with a greater effect of the rural on the urban. This results in replacing the urban glottal stop with the rural velar [g] by the vast 'virtual' majority of Tlemcen native dialect speakers. The former begins to be stigmatized for the negative social connotations attached to it (…). This is why [g] becomes widely accepted and used, especially by men, due to their frequent contact with outsiders. (pp. 372-373)

This is an overview of some features that characterize the Tlemcen dialect. Variation in the dialect occurs in all linguistic levels, mainly at the phonological and lexical levels. The main aim of this review of the literature on Algerian varieties, in general, and the Tlemcen dialect, in particular, is to provide an overview of the linguistic features that characterize these varieties.

2-3- Algerian Politeness Strategies

Politeness is an important feature through which individuals can maintain social order in interaction. All societies have established certain norms of language use to maintain social order. Hence, any individual who does not respect these norms is regarded as an impolite person. Any contact that violates these norms may lead the person to lose face or to engage in what is called a *face-threatening act.* To practice positive politeness, individuals must follow the norms society imposes. These norms become a part of what is called *politeness strategies.* The focal aim of this paper is not to delve into the issue of politeness, but rather to provide an overview of the concept of politeness in the Algerian context and to outline some politeness forms that are wrongly used in Algerian dialects, despite having connotative meanings.

As for Algerian politeness strategies, Algerian dialects are characterized by many polite forms borrowed from the Quran and Classical Arabic. It gives importance to the face of society, rather than to the individuals. In this regard, Ghounane, Serir-Mortad, and Rabahi (2017) posited that:

Politeness is linked to honor and the image of others in most Muslims societies. Indeed, politeness in Muslim culture, in general, and Algerian traditions, in particular, takes the face not only of the individual but also of all people in society. (p. 220)

The concept of politeness in Algerian culture and traditions is linked to the notion of الادب, which is a part of Islamic traditions (Ghounane et al., 2017).

When it comes to polite forms, Algerians use certain words to express gratitude, make polite requests, and offer compliments. In their part, Ghounane et al. (2017) maintained that Algerians use polite forms with religious connotations, such as الله يخليك, الله يرضى عليك, and الله يحفضك.

2-4-Semantic Change

Researchers in diachronic linguistics define semantic change as a shift in the meaning of a given word. This shift may give the word a new denotation or alter its connotative meaning. Studying the meanings of words and their evolution over time gives rise to a new field of research that examines *semantic change* in languages and their varieties. According to Mahdad (2012), semantic change is a shift that affects:

the meanings of words in relation to the factors that affect the interpretation of linguistics structures. The process is involved whenever a new sense becomes attached to a word or conversely when a new word becomes attached to a sense. (p. 25)

The change is driven by many factors, mainly psychological, cultural, social, and linguistic forces (Blank, 1999; as cited in Mahdad, 2012). In his part, McMahon (1999) claimed that language change leads to changes in the lexical inventory. He added that people can resist other changes and show little resistance to semantic shift (as cited in Mahdad, 2012).

To understand the nature of the semantic change in these words, researchers must grasp the socio-cultural background of the society that employs them. Besides, changes in the meanings of old words can give rise to "denotation and connotations" (Mahdad, 2012, p. 26). This means that the word can gain a new meaning or lose an old one. According to McMahon (1999), there are three types of semantic change: mainly semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, and semantic shift.

Semantic broadening refers to the extension of meaning "from a subordinate level to a superordinate level, i.e., a generalization process" (Mahdad, 2012, p. 27). Semantic narrowing is the narrowing of a word's meaning by limiting its context of use. On the other hand, the semantic shift occurs mainly through metaphors and metonymy (Warren, 1992).

As far as semantic change in Arabic is concerned, عبد التواب (1983) noted that it occurs when the meaning of a word changes over time. Similarly, باقر (1980) maintained that semantic change is the tracing of how the meaning of a word changes over time (Kadhim, 2012).

In terms of mechanisms of semantic change, mainly in Arabic dialects, most Arabic scholars tend to employ Western approaches to study them. Anis (1984) is among the scholars who explored mechanisms (AlBader, 2017). According to AlBader (2017), the main reason Arab scholars used Western approaches to study semantic change was that "there is hardly any general literature on semantics in the Arabic tradition" (VERSTEEGH, 1997, p. 277, as quoted in AlBader, 2017, p. 78). AlBader also highlighted that numerous scholarly works have been conducted on the subject since English became an international medium of research worldwide.

2-5- Semantic Change Theories

Three main theories are employed to study semantic change, mainly Meillet's Model, Ullmann's Functional classification, and Stern's empirical system.

Meillet Model

This model concerns the causes of semantic change. The founder of the approach was Meillet, who claimed that it is difficult to determine the reasons for semantic change. He (1905, pp. 5-6) positedthat "it est souvent- et peut-étreméme le plus souvent-impossible de déterminer les causes d'un changement de sens particulier » (as quoted in Riddell, 2019, p. 2).

The first reason Meillet chose is the linguistic one. The second reason is limited to variation within the language and its effects on word use. The third and last reason, according to Meillet's point, lies in "the contact between different social strata and the lexical borrowing which results" (Riddell, 2019, p. 2). Riddell gave the example of the verb 'arracher' in French, which meant in Latin 'tirer la racine' (pull out the roots). He added that the term was used in the lower class in agriculture. After that, it becomes part of daily speech throughout the community. Riddell further highlighted that the term has become a part of the French vocabulary. The term is used figuratively rather than pulled out by the roots.

Ullmann's Functional Classification

Ullmann highlighted some weaknesses with Meillet's model, claiming that the system "fails to provide a separate category for psychological causes such as taboo, euphemism, etc." (Riddell, 2019, p. 3). Ullmann proposed a functional classification that should take into account the following points:

A. Semantic changes due to linguistic conservatism;
B. Semantic changes due to linguistic innovation;
I Transfers of names:
a) through similarity between the senses
b) through contiguity between the senses
II Transfers of senses:
a) through similarity between the names
b) through contiguity between the names
III Composite changes

(Riddell, 2019, pp. 3-4)

Ullmann focused on two types of changes, mainly linguistic conservatism and linguistic innovation. In his view, most of the changes are linked to linguistic innovations which took place either "conscious or unconscious, deliberate or involuntary, accompanied or unaccompanied by extra-linguistic reforms" (Ullmann, 1951, p. 211, as quoted in Riddell, 2019, p. 4).

Ullmann (1951) divided transfers into those of names and those of senses. The first type was later named *metonymy* by linguists (Riddell, 2019). A good example proposed by Ullmann is the word town which is employed to mean the place or its inhabitants. The second type is called *folk etymology*. Ullmann (1951) gave the example of sam-blind, which turns into sand-blind (Riddell, 2019).

Stern's Empirical System

The approach was developed by Stern, who distinguished between *change and fluctuation.* Through this approach, Stern stressed the study of the psychological factors that lead to semantic change. Stern introduced the term *referent*. He claimed that meaning is linked to "the referent, the subject (speaker or hearer) and the word itself, these relationships being called the referential, subjective and verbal relations" (Redell, 2019, p. 6).

Stern (1931) linked the semantic change to external and linguistic causes. He also highlighted that change takes place due to non-linguistic factors. He divided change in the referent into a "factual change" which causes "sense change in words" and "a change in our knowledge of the referent, although the referent remains unchanged" (Riddell, 2019, p. 4). Stern (1931) also maintained that "a change in our attitudes to the referent often brings about sense change" (Riddell, 2019, p. 4). Stern (1931) divided sense change into six categories. The first one is *an analogy*. The analogy has three types, mainly combinative and correlative analogy, and phonetic associative interference (Riddell, 2019).

The researcher's concern is limited to Stern's model since it shows how psychological factors can lead to sense change. The current study focuses on the attitudes of Tlemcen speakers towards the connotative meanings of some words; therefore, Stern's model is useful for examining how changes in people's awareness of the connotative meanings of these words may lead to changes in their attitudes and, in turn, affect word sense.

2-6- Connotational Drift in Arabic Dialects

Connotational shift or drift takes place when a word encompasses a set of meanings. A word has two poles in meaning. One is positive, and the other is negative. The connotation is deeply connected to the context of a word. In his part, Boussidan (2013) pointed out that connotation "is deeply rooted in context use. A word acquires its connotation in context, and the contexts of use become part of the word's implicit features" (p. 6).

When it comes to research on the connotative meanings of Arabic words that occur in almost all Arabic dialects, one should note that no studies have been conducted on the subject, either in Arabic or in English. Arabic dialects have taken about 80% of the words from Classical Arabic (CA) and the Quran. Some sentences or terms are taken from Quran verses and are utilized as polite forms to express compliments, congratulations, and requests. For example, Arabs tend to use certain terms to express compliments, such as "انت شاطر" (you are good). The term is employed in Arabic dialects to mean that the person is intelligent and good, but in its real meaning, it means that the person is) خبيث malignant((2017 ,بلدنا اليوم).

Another example is the word مبروك (congratulations), which is used to congratulate a person for their achievements. The origin of the term is the Arabic verb برك. The real meaning was used to describe camel sitting (2017 ,بلدنا اليوم). Some linguists claimed that the term, found in CA, has a different meaning. They also highlighted that people should employ بارك الله فيك or مبارك and not (2017 ,بلدنا اليوم) مبروك.

Some linguists went to study what they called *linguistic errors* in some words in Standard Arabic (SA). According to Al-Mokhtar (2020), people tend to take words from CA and use them in SA or other languages without checking their real meanings. These words, which are intrusive to SA, have become a part of the language. Al-Mokhtar gave an example of الماء الشروب. He claimed that, according to the Arabic dictionary, the term الشروب means ماء غير عذب (waterless). Another example is the term سائر, which does not mean 'all' but 'some of' (Al-Mokhtar, 2020).

In a nutshell, this field of research has not yet attracted significant scholarship due to a lack of prior studies. Most studies are not published in Standard Arabic. Regarding Algerian dialects, no study has been conducted. Hence, there is a scholarly gap that encourages the researcher to explore the topic.

3- Method and Tools:

The researchers conducted quantitative and qualitative research using two main research instruments: a questionnaire and a corpus analysis of a set of expressions used in Algerian dialects, with the Tlemcen dialect as a case study. The study took place in 2019 in the town of Tlemcen. Many experts in Arabic from the Department of Arabic at Tlemcen University helped the researcher. The study was also conducted with the help of some linguists and religious men.

3-1- Instruments

The researchers used two research tools, primarily a semi-structured questionnaire administered to 66 participants in Tlemcen town. To support the study's findings, the researchers also relied on corpus analysis. Through this method, the researcher collected a good deal of expressions from Algerian dialects in general and the Tlemcen variety in particular. Collecting the corpus took one year.

Regarding the semi-structured questionnaire, the research employed both open-ended questions and a Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 participants; however, the researcher received only 66 completed questionnaires, with all questions answered.

3-2- Participants

The data was collected in Tlemcen town. It took one year to collect the corpus. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 participants of different ages and genders. The researchers used a simple random sampling. Data collection took about three months. Only 66 participants returned the questionnaire (See appendix C).

As for the sample description, only 11 females agreed to complete the questionnaire, while most men expressed a willingness to discuss the issue. The main reason is that women are afraid to discuss sensitive topics. Table three shows that most of the informants are between 25 and 60 years old. Although the selection is a simple random sample, most participants have a strong educational background and knowledge of subjects related to language use.

4- Results

4-1- Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of three sections. In the first section, the participant must select their age and educational background. The second section contains questions on the informants' background on some expressions used by Tlemcen speakers to express compliments or requests. The last section was aimed at testing their attitudes after giving the informants an overview of the hidden meanings of some expressions used in Algerian dialects, mainly the Tlemcen variety.

Table four shows that the most used expressions by Tlemcen speakers to express compliments are ربي يخليك and الله يعطيك الصحة. The results revealed that 48% of the informants prefer to use ربي يخليك, and 12% choose to employ الله يعطيك الصحة. On the other hand, 6% of the informants, mainly religious people, prefer to keep you.

Question Two: What are the mostemployed expressions in Tlemcen dialect to express requests?

- لوجه رب
- برحمة الوالدين
- الله يشدلك في لميمة

Table 5. *The most used expressions for requests*

Expressions	participants
لوجه رب	48%
برحمة الوالدين	6%
الله يشدلك في لميمة	12%

Table five reveals that the most used sentence to express requests among Tlemcen speakers is لوجه رب with 48%. Tlemcen speakers also employ الله يشدلك في لميمة. This sentence is used when people know each other.

Question Three: What are the most employed expressions to express solidarity with the relatives of the dead person?

- فلان ربي تفكرو
- ربي حبو وعباه

Table 6. *The most used expressions to show solidarity with the relatives of a dead person*

Expressions	participants
فلان ربي تفكرو	30%
ربي حبو وعباه	36%

According to table six, Tlemcen speakers tend to use ربي حبو وعباه more than فلان ربي تفكرو. These sentences are regarded as euphemistic expressions that people resort to instead of فلان مات.

Question Four: Do you know the origins of the expressions and sentences you are using to express compliments and requests?

- Yes
- No

Table 7. *The speakers' knowledge of the expressions and sentences employed to express compliments and requests*

	participants
Yes	60%
Yes	6%

Table seven shows that most Tlemcen speakers have a good knowledge of the expressions they use to express compliments and requests, while others claim they do not know their origins.

Question Five: Expressions that have connotative meanings are seeded in Algerian dialects after the arrival of the Jewish community.

Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree

Table 8. *People's attitudes towards the origins of some expressions*

Participants	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Females	5	5		1
Males	6	43	3	3

The main aim of the question is to test Algerians' knowledge of and awareness of some expressions in Algerian dialects. About 48 informants claimed that the origins of many words Algerians use in daily communication are rooted in Algerian dialects and date back to the arrival of the Jews. Some of them gave the example of الله غالب, which was used by Algerian people in business with the Jews. When a Jew wanted to buy some goods from Muslims and wished to reduce the price, the Muslim merchant said الله غالب, and the Jew answered that there is no God in business. One of the informants claimed that we should check the hidden meanings of words before using them. Another informant gave the example of ماكان الله, which means that there is no need to say or to do that. When it comes to its hidden meaning, he claimed that the Jews of Algeria inserted the expression through their contact with the Arabs. The real meaning is that there is no God.

4-2-The Corpus Analysis

The researchers selected a set of expressions and sentences for analysis. Most of these terms are employed to express compliments, requests, and even insults. Comments from linguists support the corpus analysis, and religious men gathered during the questionnaire distribution.

Sentences and Terms Used to Express Insults

Many expressions were taken from SA, and others were brought by those who colonized Algeria, and even by the Jewish settlers.

Table 9. *Terms used to express insults*

Terms	The hidden meaning
يادين الزح	Zoh is a God in ancient Greek mythology For God's sake!
وراس ربي	I swear, it's true
يابو رب	Oh my God!

Table nine reveals that most of the sentences used as insults express blasphemy. The expressions يادين الزح or يازح are employed among Algerian people to insult each other; however, people do not recognize that they worship another God, not Allah. The term وراس ربي is also utilized as a form of insult, and Algerian people forget that we cannot draw an image of Allah and the Prophet. The third sentence is blasphemy, but people still use it and ignore its hidden meaning. It means that Allah has a father, and this sentence was borrowed and incorporated into Algerian dialects by Christian settlers during French colonization.

Table 10. *Terms used to express negation, opinions, and problems*

Terms	The hidden meaning
والله والو	There's nothing at all
راني في النازعات غرقا	I'm completely overwhelmed
جابلي ربي	It came to me by God's will

Algerians tend to use words and phrases to express their opinions, to negate, and to show their problems. The sentence والله والو means that the person does nothing, but when it comes to its real meaning, it expresses a blasphemy, as Table 10 demonstrates. Algerians resort to Quranic verses to discuss their daily situations and problems. Among these sentences, راني في النازعات غرقا, which represents a good example. Individuals use this sentence to talk about the problems they face, but its hidden meaning is distinct. The sentence جابلي ربي is used to express an individual's opinion; however, anyone can infer its hidden meaning.

Table 11. *Terms used to express opinions*

Terms	The hidden meaning
الواحد ملايكتو تقال	He feels burdened
ربي يعطي اللحم لماعندوش السنين	Blessings go to the wrong people
نتكل على الله وعليك نتكل عليك	I trust in God and I'm counting on you

Algerians resort to certain words and phrases to express their opinions or convey their grief. They use الواحد ملايكتو تقال to imply that the person has a bad character or that they do not like him, while the hidden meaning is that angels are not good. They also resort to employing ربي يعطي اللحم لماعندوش السنين to express the idea that Allah gives some people good things. They also utilize نتكل عليك or نتكل على الله وعليك.

Table 12. *Other expressions*

Terms	The hidden meaning
ياشمس عطيطك سن لحمار وعطيني سن لغزال	Praying to the sun as God
يابليس فك الكيس	A humorous/ironic way of expressing frustration when something is stuck or difficult (Not actually praying to the

	devil)
خمس و خميس في عين بليس	A phrase used to ward off the evil eye
والله ولا لو	Absolutely not
لاسمح الله	I hope that never happens
ماتكتبتش	It wasn't meant to be
لوكان عطان ربي كمانيش هنا	If things had gone my way, I wouldn't be in this situation
علاه ياربي انا واش عملت	Why me? What did I do to deserve this?
انا عملت اللي علي و الباقي على ربي	I've done my part; the rest is in God's hands

Table 12 presents some sentences used in Algerian dialects in general, reflecting beliefs ingrained in Algerian culture over time. Some people tend to tell their children to hide their tooth and throw it in the morning, and they should say يا شمس اعطيطك سن لحمار وعطيني سن لغزال. Although most people know that it is wrong to teach their children to think in this way, some families still use such expressions, mainly among illiterate people. The evil eye also plays an important role in the beliefs of most Algerians. They think that, by using expressions like خمس و خميس في عنين بليس or خمس في عنيك, they can protect themselves and their children from its effects.

Some sentences were seeded by Jewish settlers in Algerian dialects and are still used. These expressions were employed to insult the Prophet by this small minority, and Algerian people did not know their real meanings or the reasons that led the Jews to employ them. For example, the expression عايشة و باندو is used in most Algerian dialects to describe two people who do not leave each other, while its hidden meaning is to refer to our Prophet and his wife. Even in Algerian dialects, the expression is used to insult both people. There are other expressions like عايشة الراجل or عايشة البواسة. Algerians use these expressions to describe women who behave like men. These expressions were seeded in Algerian dialects after the arrival of the Fatimids in North Africa.

Other expressions that are seeded in Algerian dialects are linked to Allah. For example, والله والو is used when people refuse a gift, an invitation, or help; however, they do not know that they employ negation to show that Allah does not exist. Another sentence, which addresses Allah's help to people, as in لو كان عطاني ربي وكمارانيش هنا, is used to show that the person has bad luck, although the meaning is different.

Expressions Linked to the Name of Allah

There are many intrusive words and expressions that Algerians tend to use in their daily speech. Many linguists and religious men claimed that some of these expressions are dangerous since their real meanings address the name of Allah. Table 13 gives an overview of some expressions:

Table 13. *Expressions that address the name of Allah*

Terms	The hidden meaning
ربي هو لي مليح/ لمليح ربي	Only God is truly good
ربي يدبر راسو	God will take care of it
ربي على بالو	Their behavior is so strange it's
الي خلقهم حار فيهم	beyond understanding

The first example aims to show that no one is good except Allah; however, Algerians forget that Allah's goodness cannot be compared to human goodness. The second example suggests that Allah cares for people by guiding them; however, its hidden meaning addresses the shape of Allah. These expressions are refused by religious men, claiming that it is *polytheism*.

5-Discussion

Through this study, the researcher sought to provide an in-depth account and a succinct overview of some dangerous expressions in Algerian dialects, using the Tlemcen variety as a case in point. The analysis reveals that these expressions can be classified as polite forms used to express compliments, gratitude, requests, congratulations, and greetings (Ghounane et al., 2017).

Regarding the research questions, most Algerians know the origins of these expressions but are unaware of their connotative meanings. They still use them in their daily communication, both as politeness strategies and as forms of insult. As such, they share positive attitudes towards their use. The results also demonstrated that Algerians are aware of the connotative meanings of expressions referring to the name of Allah and the Prophet.

The findings also revealed that Algerian dialects have their roots in Arabic. Most of the words were borrowed from Standard Arabic and the Quran; however, some of these expressions were misinterpreted, leading to the creation of new words with connotative meanings.

The results also showed that most informants shared positive attitudes towards some expressions, although they were aware of their connotative meanings. They claimed that these terms and expressions form part of Algerians' linguistic repertoire and cannot be omitted. They are employed randomly. They added that it depends on the speaker's intention in using these expressions, not on their hidden meanings.

The results also revealed that some words were adopted in Algerian dialects due to contact with Jews who settled in Algeria after the French arrival. At the same time, other expressions were borrowed from Classical Arabic and the Quran. However, these expressions were misused, such as لعقوبة ليك, which is used to wish someone good; in reality, it means punishment. Indeed, the real expression is العاقبة ليك. The findings revealed that most expressions and words linked to religion have connotative meanings. For example, Algerians use the expression الله يخليك to express gratitude or make a polite request. However, the expression means that Allah will no longer care about the person. This is the connotative meaning of the expression, while people can resort to الله يحفظك and الله يعزك instead of الله يخليك.

6-The Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is the literature review section, as the researchers did not find sources on the study of the connotative meanings of words and expressions in Arabic varieties in general and Algerian dialects in particular. Another limitation of the study is the corpus analysis and data collection. The researchers had to check the meanings of these expressions across different Algerian dialects and found that not all of these words are used in all dialects. The corpus is limited to a small sample in Tlemcen town.

7- Conclusion

The focal point of the current research was to shed light on the connotative meanings of some expressions in Algerian Arabic dialects that people are unaware of. The findings revealed that Algerians have positive attitudes towards certain words and expressions used in their daily communication. Some of these expressions are used as polite forms of gratitude, compliments, requests, and congratulations, while others form part of insults. The analysis also showed that they are aware of the hidden meaning of some expressions, mainly those linked to the name of Allah, and still use them, claiming that this depends on the speaker's intention. The results also demonstrated that most of these expressions were borrowed from Standard Arabic and the Quran. At the same time, other terms were inserted in Algerian dialects after the arrival of the Jews.

This small-scale study provides an in-depth look at a small sample and cannot represent all Algerian dialects. It also sheds light on a limited number of expressions, whereas Algerian dialects contain an infinite number of terms derived from Classical Arabic and modified to suit

the varieties. Hence, this study can open the door to further scholarship regarding the connotative meanings of these words and sentences.

Appendix of Tables and Figures:

Appendix A

Table 1. Some loanwords and their origins

Words	Translation	Transliteration	Origin
فكرون	a tortoise	*Fakruwn*	Berber
شلاغم	Moustache	*šliAyam*	
قرجومة	a throat	*Qarjuwmaħ*	
تقاشير	Socks	*tqaAšiyr*	Turkish
سكارجي	a drunkard	*sukaArjiy*	
زردة	Feast	*Zardaħ*	
فيشطة	Party	*fiyšTaħ*	Italian
زبلة	Foul	*Zablaħ*	
صوردي	Money	*Suwrdiy*	
سيمانة	a week	*siymaAnaħ*	Spanish
سبردينة	Snickers	*Spardiynaħ*	
سُكويلة	a school	*Sukwiylaħ*	
طابلة	Table	*TaAblaħ*	French
تيليفون	Phone	*Tiyliyfuwn*	
فرملي	Nurse	*Farmliy*	

Note 1. Adapted from Saadane and Habash (2015, p. 74)

Appendix B

Table 2. Lexical variation in Tlemcen variety

Classical Arabic	Tlemcen Dialect	English
/ταʔα͡λα/	/ʔαδΖι/	Come here
/ʔαντα/	/ντινα/	You for male

Appendix C

Table 3. The sample population

Participants	Females (11 females)	Males (55 males)
Age	Between 30 and 45 years old	Between 25 and 60 years old

References

Abdellaoui, F. (2016). *Some Aspects of Sociolinguistic Variation in Tlemcen Speech Community: Urban Dialect of Tlemcen Town and Rural Dialect of BeniSemiel*, (Unpublished Master's thesis). Tlemcen University, Algeria.

Ammour, M. N. (2012). *A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Variation in Speech Community of Nadroma*, (Unpublished Magister thesis). Tlemcen University, Algeria

Boumaiza, F. (2018). *Phonological Variations and the Adding of the Particle "ma" in Mascara Dialect, (*Unpublished Master' thesis). Mostaganem University, Algeria.

Boussidan, A. (2013). *Dynamics of Semantic Change: Detecting, Analyzing and Modeling Semantic Change in Corpus in Short Diachrony*, (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). UniversitéLumiere- Lyon 2, France.

Dendane, Z. (2013). The Stigmatisation of the Glottal Stop in Tlemcen Speech Community: An Indicator of Dialect Shift. *International Journal of Linguistics and Literature, 2*(3), 1-10.

Ghounane, N., Serir-Mortad, I., & Rabahi, H. (2017). Politeness Strategies Employed towards Linguistic Taboos in Tlemcen Society. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, *7*, 217-228. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2017.75016

Harrat, S., Meftouh, K., Abbas, M., Hidouci, K., & Smaili, K. (2016). An Algerian Dialect: Study and Resources. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, *7*(3), 384-396.

Kadhim, L. A. (2012). The Semantic Change in English and Arabic: A Contrasting Study. *Journal of Al-Qadisiya University*, *15*(1), 7-23.

MacMahon, A. M. S. (1999). *Understanding Language Change.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mahdad, H. (2012). *Language Change and Lexical Variation in Youth Language*, (Unpublished Magister thesis). Tlemcen University, Algeria

Marçais, Ph. (1960). The Arabic Dialect of Algeria. *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: Brill.

Marçais, W. (1906). *Dialecte Arabe Parlé à Tlemcen.* Paris : France

Obeidat, H., & Hammoudi, K. (2019). Men as Leaders of Linguistic Change: Case of Tlemcen Speech Community. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literature*, *11*(3), 371-384

Riddell, P. G. (2019). Theories of Semantic Change: Three Approaches from the First Half of the 20th Century. *SageSumissions*, 1-5.

Saadane, H., &Habash, N. (2015). A Conventional Orthography for Algerian Arabic. *Proceedings of the Second Workshop on Arabic Natural Language Processing*, 69-79.

Warren, B. (1992). *Sense Developments: A Contrastive Study of the Development of Slang Senses and Novel Standard Senses in English.* Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksel International.

البلاد اليوم (2017)."ربنا يخليك" يدعو عليك لا يدعو لك.. تعرف على ابرز المعاني الخاطئة للكلمات.
https://www.baladnaelyoum.com/news

المختار، ش (2020). 10 اخطاء لغوية شائعة تجنبها.

How to cite this article by the APA style:

Nadia Ghounane, Asma Rahmani (2026). Semantic and Connotative Variations in Algerian Dialectal Arabic. ***Journal of Social Science Development.*** 18 (2). Algeria: Djelfa University. 129-141