

Media Coverage of Algerian Cultural Heritage: The Korandji Linguistic Variety as a Model

Baichi Abdelhamid

University of Adrar
(Algeria)

hamidbaichi@univ-adrar.edu.dz

Fatima Zahra Drim*

University of Adrar
(Algeria)

Fatima.drim@univ-adrar.edu.dz

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Abstract :

Discussing the duality of culture and media essentially clarifies the interrelationship between media, communication, and cultural heritage. It highlights the prominent role communication systems play in transmitting culture from one generation to another or from one society to another, and how media can enhance the identity heritage of any country through mechanisms of research, processing, presentation, publication, and promotion. Meanwhile, culture represents the subject of the media message, the essence of media content, and a priority in the programs of national and international media outlets.

In our analytical study, we examine the media content that addressed the linguistic heritage (the Korandji dialect) specific to the Tabelbala region, south of Bechar Province. We explore two principles samples; how national media (Bechar Regional TV station), as well as Western media (The Ethnographic Film Committee in France), helped define its origins, shed light on the formation of the linguistic mix among the region's inhabitants, and illustrate the transmission methods of this cultural heritage and its relationship with certain African countries.

Key Words: Media, Coverage, Cultural Heritage, Korandji, Linguistic Variety.

*Fatima Zahra Drim

Introduction:

Algerian society features several different languages, ranging from Classical Arabic and its vernacular dialects to Amazigh and its various branches, as well as the French language. This diversity is attributed to the historical, civilizational, and geographical backgrounds and compositions of Algerian society.

The Korandji or Korandjé variety, spoken in southwestern Algeria, in the Tabelbala oasis midway between Bechar Province and Tindouf Province, is considered by researchers to be one of the dialects that is neither Arabic nor Amazigh.

This is because the core of its morphology and lexicon is derived from Songhay, a language family primarily spoken in Niger and northeastern Mali, although mutual comprehension between the peoples is absent. Currently, it faces the risk of extinction as it is spoken by a minority, largely confined to the elderly who use it informally in the region.

Regarding the origin of this linguistic variety, Korandji, Souag (2015) describes the Northern Songhay language as "Shelha" or "Chelhou," which has connections to the Songhay spoken in the northern part of the Sahara in Mali and Niger. Previously, Champault (1969) classified it within the Amazigh language family, considering it a branch of the Berber lexicon related to Moroccan dialects and dialects close to Zenaga, Tuareg, and sometimes even Zeneta dialects, rather than just one specific dialect.

The following sections will shed light on the media's role in addressing this linguistic diversity as a heritage worthy of introduction both locally and internationally, through the following sub-topics:

- The origin of the Korandji linguistic variety and its relationship with Africa.
- Local media coverage of the Korandji variety.
- Western media coverage of the Korandji variety.

Methodological Procedures of the Study:

The study, titled "Media Coverage of Algerian Cultural Heritage: The Korandji Linguistic Variety as a Model," is positioned within descriptive or qualitative research.

It employs an online and offline ethnographic approach, fundamentally based on proximity and immersion within the community to understand the behavior of its members, as well as the key cultures and practices in a virtual space.

Interaction with the study sample was achieved through methodological tools such as participant observation, online interviews, electronic questionnaires, monitoring virtual discussion content, and semiological analysis of the electronic image.

Our study focused on monitoring the media content broadcast by local media, as well as French media.

It involved a simplified audio and visual analysis of this content by searching for media material in the virtual space and interviewing the participating parties online to obtain more information and achieve a closer understanding of the phenomenon.

Table 1: Study Sample (Content Monitoring)

Sample01	Video clips on Bechar Regional TV station
Source	https://www.facebook.com/tabelbalakorandje?mibextid=LQQJ4d
Sample02	Les pèlerins de l'eau [Cinema of the Ethnographic Film Committee in France]
Source	https://youtu.be/QplW_0tvpqQ

Table 2: Study Sample Details (Interview Tool)

Interviewees	Position/Role	Interview Method
Researcher Lameen Souag	Algerian researcher at a scientific research center in France	Via videoconferencing
Admin of the Korandji Facebook page	Member of the Korandji musical group	Via Facebook application

The Origin of the Korandji Linguistic Variety:

Tabelbala is a small oasis in the desert, situated in a sea of sand, approximately 1,400 km southwest of Algiers. It is bordered by Morocco and located 150 km from the Saoura Valley, separated by the Erg El-Raoui. The town extends within a palm grove 12 km long and 200 meters wide at its broadest point, itself enclosed between the Erg El-Raoui and Mount Kahal.

It consists of several small villages, the most important being two 'ksour': Sidi Zakri in the east and Ksar Cheray in the west. Tombstones dating back seven centuries and ancient giant burial grounds can also be found.

Tabelbala has long been a crossroads for numerous camel caravan routes, making its precise origins difficult to determine.

These routes include the Draa and Tafilalt on one side, and Sudan and Timbuktu on the other. (Bidi, 2024, p. 184)

Concerning the origin of this language spoken by the inhabitants of Tabelbala, which closely resembles Northern Songhay, its distance from its original homeland remains enigmatic.

It is possibly a result of the expansion of trade between Timbuktu and Sijilmasa around the 13th century.

This trade would have led to the development of agriculture in the oases along this route to feed travelers. It is likely this period that accounts for the few traces of

influence evident in Korandji from an Amazigh language very close to the Zenaga of Mauritania.

In subsequent centuries, Tabelbala experienced some growth.

A renowned scholar known for his fatwas on slavery, Sidi Makhlouf bin Ali (d. after 1533), was born there. However, following the decline of trade in the 16th century, the oasis's role diminished. Yet, those who remained continued to speak Korandji to this day, with it even becoming the mother tongue for a significant number of Arab and Berber families. This is what makes this language so intriguing. (Tilmatine, 1996, p. 163)

Regarding the phonetic aspect, researcher Lameen Souag states that Korandjé has undergone significant phonetic changes compared to original Songhay, notably the loss of tone, which has led to the creation of many homophones, alterations in the articulation points of some consonants, and changes in the system of certain vowels. (Lameen, 2010, p. 219)

This is because Korandjé has been profoundly influenced by both Berber and Arabic. While the core vocabulary is of Songhay origin, most words are not. For example, only the numbers 1 to 3 are of Songhay origin: 'affu', 'inka', 'inza'.

All remaining numbers come from Arabic ('rabaa', 'khamisa', 'setta'...). (Souag, 2010, p. 77)

Local Media Coverage of the Korandji Variety:

Media of all types (print, audio, audiovisual) fulfill one of their most important functions by incorporating artistic and cultural content into their daily or weekly program schedules. Indeed, the cultural aspect constitutes a significant segment within media institutions' program offerings, attracting large audiences who interact with it.

The terrestrial channel, Channel 6, and El Maarifa TV have broadcast Korandji songs within the "Sbahiyat" (Morning) program. Notably, the television station of Bechar Province has recently succeeded in highlighting the locally spoken Korandji linguistic variety, considering it an integral part of its heritage and cultural identity.

The station has included it in its media agendas and television programs, presenting it in the form of music videos and song recordings by the Korandji band from Tabelbala town.

These music videos feature songs in the Korandji linguistic variety, produced by the Korandji band, with lyrics, composition, and performance by the artist Makhlofi. (mekhlofi, 2021).

Analysis of the Study Sample:

Table 3: Musical pieces featured by Bechar Regional TV station

Title of Piece	Pronunciation in Korandji	Duration (minutes)
Desire to Return home	Acha temyar	5:50
How is that? (How can it be?)	Tamissi	4:01
The Language of Tabelbala	Kwarandi	4:10
My Father	Anebba	3:26
Peace Be Upon You /salutation	Maghnissi	5:23
Rain	Baghni	3:24

Source: Official Facebook page of the Korandji Tabelbala band.

The table provides a clear and valuable overview of the musical pieces featured by Bechar Regional TV as part of its efforts to preserve and promote the Korandji linguistic heritage of Tabelbala. It lists six songs, each with its title in English, its original pronunciation in Korandji, and its duration in minutes.

The pieces address a range of themes that reflect both universal human emotions and local cultural identity:

"Desire to Return Home" (Acha temyar) evokes nostalgia and belonging, while "My Father" (Anebba) touches on family ties.

Others, such as "The Language of Tabelbala" (Kwarandi), serve as a direct assertion of linguistic pride, and "Rain" (Baghni) reflects a connection to nature and daily life in the oasis.

The inclusion of a greeting like "Peace Be Upon You"/ Salam (Maghnissi) and a reflective title such as "How is that?" (Tamissi) demonstrates the expressive richness of the Korandji language.

By documenting these songs with both their local pronunciations and broadcast durations, the table offers valuable insight into how regional media can contribute to the documentation, revitalization, and visibility of minority languages, transforming them from oral traditions into produced artistic content suitable for modern broadcasting platforms.

The Bechar television station incorporated the six previous pieces by their creator Mustapha Makhoulfi and his band—comprising Abdesslam Abdou, Ali Sudani, Abdelmadjid Hadji, Abdelghani Talmani, Merzak Ibrahim, and Boualem Ousighier—into its media segments, presented as video clips filmed in Tabelbala.

Analysis of Form Categories:

This included the categories of expressive language, expressive forms, and media treatment.



The musical recordings were staged in a wide open space, featuring a distinctly traditional setting through the architectural decor and the furnishing of traditional objects (utensils, clothing, bedding, musical instruments). Members of the Korandji band, led by artist Mustapha Makhloufi, gathered here for approximately thirty minutes. The music featured slow triple rhythms, creating a meditative atmosphere with a variety of percussive beats and dense sounds from the oud (and gumbri).

KORANDJÉ (the speech of Tabelbala) was featured as the first title on a CD album containing six songs.

This album was produced by the High Commission for Amazighity (HCA) and is dedicated to preserving this endangered language, which is primarily composed of Songhay—a Nilo-Saharan language spoken in several Sahelian countries—enriched by Amazigh and Arabic influences.

This album was released for the initial phase in February 2021, responding to the urgent requests of the citizens of the Tabelbala region. It received support from the Algerian Press Service (APS), Algerian Radio, the Algerian National Commission for Education, Science and Culture, and UNESCO.

It is important to note that the album is "not for sale"; rather, it serves as a testament to the unique linguistic and cultural heritage in Algeria, deserving of documentation and preservation.

Analysis of Content Category:

Regarding the content of the pieces, the band's artist, Mustapha Makhloufi, who designed, wrote, and composed all the songs in the Korandji linguistic variety,

states that they contribute to rehabilitating the Korandji language and strengthening its cultural and artistic presence. They invite music lovers on a journey into a fused and multicultural heritage with original content, presented in modern forms and aesthetic arrangements.

This is achieved by evoking themes related to **the profound call of patriotism and nostalgia for deep-rooted authenticity, preserving the mother tongue, family relationships and strengthening familial bonds, peace and tolerance, as well as rain, a symbol of life's blessings and a way to introduce the region's ancient heritage.

The artistic project of Mustapha Makhoulfi, centered on preserving the Korandji linguistic heritage of Tabelbala, represents a multifaceted cultural initiative that invites listeners on a journey into a fused and multicultural heritage presented in modern forms with aesthetic arrangements.

The thematic content of the six songs on the "Korandjé" album reveals two primary dimensions: the profound call of patriotism and nostalgia for deep-rooted authenticity, most clearly expressed in "Acha Temyar" (Desire to Return Home), which evokes longing for one's homeland, and the preservation of the mother tongue through "Kwarandi" (The Language of Tabelbala), which celebrates the unique linguistic identity of the region.

Additionally, "Anebba" (My Father) elevates family relationships and strengthens intergenerational bonds by honoring the father figure as a symbol of wisdom and cultural transmission.

The remaining themes encompass peace and tolerance, embodied in "Maghnissi" (Salam Alaykum), which promotes values of harmony and mutual respect within Tabelbala's multicultural context, while "Baghni" (Rain) celebrates life's blessings and introduces the region's ancient heritage through the symbolism of water in the arid Sahara. Finally, "Tamissi" (How can it be?) invites existential reflection on life's mysteries, engaging listeners in philosophical contemplation. (mekhlofi, 2021)

These themes collectively transform music into a vehicle for language revitalization, directly responding to the urgent concerns expressed by Tabelbala citizens about their endangered linguistic heritage.

Western Media Coverage of the Korandji Variety:

Regarding Western media, the writings of the French colonizer, in particular, contributed to documenting a part of Algerian history and the socio-cultural issues of certain regions across the country.

The contributions of the French scholar Francine Dominique Champault and other writers and historians concerning the cultural heritage of the Tabelbala region stand as the clearest evidence of this. Media, in turn, can convey the message through research, presentation, and publication. (Paul A. Silverstein, 2020, p. 225)

We have chosen the historical film presented by the Ethnographic Film Committee in France in 1964, which was later adapted into a 486-page book published in 1969

titled 'Une Oasis du Sahara Nord-occidentale, Tabelbala' (An Oasis of the North-Western Sahara, Tabelbala).

Table 4: Semiological Analysis of the Historical Film

Film Title	Les pèlerins de l'eau (The Pilgrims of Water)
Presented by	The Ethnographic Film Committee in France
Directed/Produced by	Francine Dominique Champault
Editing	Philippe Luzuy
Year	1964
Duration	35:26 minutes
Source	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QplW_0tvpqQ

The film contains numerous scenes depicting the inhabitants of the Tabelbala region in their daily lives, accompanied by commentary from author Dominique Champault. It focuses on occasions when the community (men, women, children) gathers: prayer, Eid, animal sacrifice, agriculture and irrigation, celebrations. The film discusses the simplicity of life and the traditional methods used to obtain water and livelihood. It also includes a range of accompanying sounds such as chants and singing backgrounds in the Korandji language, interspersed with Arabic words. The following is an analysis of the film through its key scenes:

Scene One:

A father in a white robe and his son wearing trousers without a shirt, under the sun, struggle to extract water from the well with effort and hardship to water livestock and load water onto camels. The focus is on the traditional method of raising water from the well using a tripod and rope to irrigate crops. This activity is aided by a woman dressed in the two-layered black fabric known as "Elbzar," wearing silver anklets on her legs, as she tries to channel the water flow to the crops.

Scene Two:

The researcher transports us to a scene of Tabelbala's inhabitants preparing for the Eid al-Adha atmosphere. Men gather in a sandy square to perform the prayer, listening to the Imam reciting Surat An-Nas. Afterwards, the men proceed to another location to perform the ritual sacrifice collectively. Meanwhile, the voices of women and young girls rise in praise and song as they prepare themselves.

Scene Three:

This scene shows the men of Tabelbala gathered among the sand and palm trees, practicing traditional rifle shooting. In another area, women sing and chant around a tree. The scene then transitions to a moment of calm, showing a farmer returning to collect dates from the top of a palm tree, gathering the harvest (wheat ears), and carrying it on his head. It then shows a woman with her young child grinding grain and preparing bread in a traditional oven, assisted by a group of women who are also grinding dried dates in a *mihras* (traditional mortar).

Scene Four:

Women continue their domestic tasks, including weaving and crafting utensils for making couscous from palm fronds (*zouf*). The scene also depicts caring for a newborn and attempting traditional healing with herbs (using *moulinah*, salt, and mashed dates). These preparations were for the Ashura day celebration, an occasion where the community, especially men and children, gather and perform specific rituals accompanied by sayings, cries, and words in the Korandji language, along with various movements.

Scene Five:

The film portrays the preparations for a wedding in the village. It starts with building a house using sun-dried bricks (*toub*) and water, then shows the crafting of musical instruments like the *tara* and large drum using stretched and dried animal skin, amidst the clapping and singing of children and teenagers. Elsewhere, women gather collectively to prepare couscous through all its stages. The scene culminates on the wedding day, with the community gathering for the feast, the bride's dress being sewn and prepared (henna, jewelry, dress, hairstyling), and group dancing to the rhythms of songs in the Korandji language interwoven with Arabic words.

Overall, the film serves as a documentation of the historical daily life specific to the Tabelbala region and the rituals practiced during their occasions and festivals. Central to its content is the Korandji language, manifested in speech, praise chants, and singing, which is notably highlighted from the very beginning of the film. This underscores how media can shed light on a cultural heritage worthy of reviving the spirit of authenticity and belonging to the region.

Conclusion:

Frank Newfeld defines language as a complex system of communication specific to human societies, with dialect representing the main element of culture and identity, as it constitutes a living, daily practice of language.

Based on the presentation above, we conclude that the linguistic contact existing in the Tabelbala region, spoken by a tiny minority of its inhabitants and found nowhere else in the country, as indicated by the vocabulary of the study sample from local and French media, prompted us to investigate the pathways of transmission of African cultural heritage into Algeria. This heritage is represented by the varying proportions of Songhay, Berber, and Arabic origins in the language. The significant use of different languages—Arabic, Berber, and Songhay—has prominently contributed to the emergence of Korandji speakers.

It is observable that, at present, the rapid pace of developments and the mixing of cultures are so intense that many languages are threatened, ultimately being abandoned in favor of the languages that dominate them.

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