

## The Use of Dialect in the Algerian Novel in Tahar Wattar's *al-Laz*

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### **Abstract:**

Formerly, dialects were used mainly in every day speech. This is why, they were considered as rustic and deviant in formal use through diverse disciplines. Accordingly, the use of dialect in literature has long been marginalized, but this has changed, and writers are more agreed to use dialect in the written form. Dialect use in the novel is thoughtfully studied by dialect scholars and sociolinguists as well as stylisticians and grammarians; each has a central role in the study of literature as an art newly related to sociolinguistics. Through their developing perspective, the function of dialect in the novel is clearer and freer from its former traditional narrowed scale. Dialect awareness is gradually increased at schools, societies, and several sectors in life that, formerly, considered dialect a taboo. Recently, dialect has been welcomed by scholars who are drifted to institute it as a scientific element required at academic research needs. Thus, the aim of this paper is to highlight the function and the use of dialect in literature through Tahar Wattar's work *al-Laz* (2004) for the diversity of dialectal elements and rich Algerian folklore artistically compressed in the novel. Dialect in *al-Laz* (2004) is strikingly reflected in these elements of folklore such as: proverbs, popular songs, games and superstitious beliefs. The contribution that this study hopes to make by focusing on analysing dialect use in literature is to shed light on dialect use in standard literature and to raise dialect awareness among readers and to show to which extent its use may influence the literary text in an artistic and fictional work.

**Keywords:** *al-Laz*, dialect use, dialect awareness, Tahar Wattar

**Introduction:**

Dialect is part of daily conversations; everyone has special knowledge of his own dialect, so the difficulty for a literary writer is to know the features and specificities of the dialect he is going to use in his writings as pointed by Ferguson (1998:13) "the use of dialect in novels is inherently problematic, both technically and because of its sociolinguistic link, but it is also so potentially expressive that it is not easily avoided or controlled".

According to Riley (1892) the writer using dialect in literature is a master "it is this master only who, as he writes, can sweep himself aside and leaves his humble characters to do the thinking and the talking".

Henceforth, the following research questions are essentially exposed as:

- Why does the author use the dialect since he is writing in a standard language?
- To what extent does the author succeed to write novels using both the standard and the dialect varieties?
- Does the author choose to report the character's words in their own dialect to fulfill technical and /or artistic objectives that the standard language cannot offer? If so, how can he provide a homogenous literary text with all the linguistic diversity in it?

To find convenient answers to the aforementioned research questions, a study of Tahar Wattar's novel *al-Laz* (2004) is undertaken in order to depict the use of dialect in the novel. At this stage the following hypotheses are formulated:

- The lack of some dialectal forms in the standard motivates the novelist's use of dialect.
- A dialect in a standard literary text is a means to better send the message and then, the reader can identify the character when reading.
- There are some technical and artistic motives that stimulate the novelist to encompass a linguistic diversity in the novel writing.

The analysis of Algerian dialect in the novel has major benefits to reflect our socio-cultural background and demonstrate the usefulness of dialect in the standard Arabic text in duplicating the model of a specific society that has lifted a period of time which Algerian history has recorded.

Our choice has fallen on Tahar Wattar's *al-Laz* for the simplicity of the language used and for the diversity of dialectal elements and rich Algerian folklore artistically compressed in the novel.

**Tahar Wattar (1936-2010):**

Tahar Wattar is among the most important and highly acclaimed Arabic novelists and short story writers in Algeria he has published novels, plays and short stories in Arabic as: *al-Laz* (the Ace, 1974), *Urs baghl* ( the Mule's Wedding, 1978), *az-zilzel* (The Earthquake,1974). Wattar's novels are translated into many languages among them: French, English, German, Italian, Bulgarian, Hebrew, and many other languages.

Tahar Wattar's nationalistic work defends the socialist ideology and the role played by the communists in the Algerian war of independence. His novel *al-Laz* (2004) in particular, reveals the communists involvement in the fighting. He relies on analepsis and moving in time between present and past, to create present scenes of the war with the past background of the characters. It

is agreed that Wattar in his novel represents the individuals and the society in which they live as it was during the period of revolution. He is faithful to the place and the time in which the characters live.

The story takes place in one of the Algerian villages during the Algerian war of independence. It tells us about the militants' revolution with its positive and negative aspects. The novel is a product of various cultural factors. Besides it makes the reader know much about Algeria during the time of colonial rule and its struggle for liberation. *Al-Laz* is written in Arabic to take great pride and joy in that ignored part of Algerian Arabic literature.

***Al-Laz:***

The author uses the word al-Laz as a title and also to refer to one of the characters, it has got different meanings, and it has connotations of both: one who brings misfortune and hero.

Linguistically, the word al-laz is most probably a corruption of the French word l'AS signifying 'the Ace' in card game.

Wattar explains in his novel:

In dominoes, it represents the smallest number, the first number opposite to the blank. It represents in belote game the highest number... the only one in belote that keeps its value whatever the colour of the other cards is. (106)

In the Algerian dialect it is a nickname given to a person one does not want to see, someone thought to represent evil omen or harbinger of bad luck.

The negative sides of al-Laz character personify the Algerian understanding of the term al-Laz, while the positive meaning of this name and the personality in question are found in the French meanings of the word. For, 'the Ace', 'al-Laz', as described by Hamdi Sakkut (2000:123) "is the winning card in the hand of the commander of his unit .al- Laz is assigned the most difficult missions which no one can pull off".

However, this is the name of the hero, or anti-hero of the novel

**Dialect Representation of Cultural Aspects in *al-Laz*:**

The presentation of literary dialect in the novel *al-Laz* appears in a number of dialectal elements in addition to some folkloric beliefs that are still present in some communities which are part of the Algerian culture, among these, proverbs, popular games, riddles, superstition, the belief in sorcery, myth and legend.

***Proverbs:***

There are about fifteen proverbs which appear in the novel, different in meaning and in moral. The most important one is used by al-Laz and the other dialect speakers about twenty times in the novel. It is /ma: jabqa fel wadi xi:r hdza:ru/, "nothing remains in the valley except the stones", which means 'all what is thrown in the valley follows the flow of water, only stones'. This proverb refers to the colonizer, that is, in spite of the long years of colonization, there comes the time when he leaves the country that he has taken from its inhabitants, and all what remain in the country is the initial inhabitants.

Another proverb represent the belief of the result of the curse of grand fathers on parents and then on children in: /dʕa:w:i el wa:ld:in tanfud fe ɖna:ja/. So, if a man was disobedient to his father, the damage and the harm will reach his son as a punishment of his acts.

Or to learn from one's personal experience and to grasp its moral in the proverb: /sel lemdzerreb, wə la: tse:l eṭb:ib/, meaning "ask the man with experience and don't ask the doctor".

What makes the beauty of these proverbs is that they represent the truth; they are the creation of dialect speakers that result from their own experiences in life. Proverbs are transmitted from generation to generation and then are preserved as an oral heritage of grandparents' speech and culture.

### ***Superstition:***

Superstitions represent the cultural belief of the communities. These beliefs are found in the society because they are transmitted through generations from grandfathers.

### ***Superstition from Laughing:***

One of the superstitions used in the novel is the happening of ill omen after laughing. Algerians tend to interpret social problems because of laughing or because they laugh a lot.

The expression /allah ejxarrəj had əddahk ʕla xi:r/, "may god bring this laughter to a happy end" is often used by people in popular communities. This idea is used in different passages in *al-Laz* as when Zaidan tells al-Laz that when sleeping "he snores as a pig" /kunta tafxuru kəl xenzi:r/. al-Laz roars with laughter, but rapidly stops and says: /ja: rabbi: səmmaʕna: xi:r/. He wonders why people have this superstition after laughing, his father, Zaidan, replied that it is just a question of old people belief /hika:ja:t əlʕadʕa:ʕiz/. al-Laz is not convinced by his argument, he confirms that he has bad luck whenever he laughs a lot, as he says /wə haq rabbi: dʕarrabtuha, kullama ɖahiktu kaəi:ran ʔaša:bani: makrouh/

al-Laz returns to sleep after exchanging with his father his view about laughing; Zaidan wakes him up saying that they are in danger. al-Laz directly, thinks that this danger happens to them because he laughs a lot and says /dahket əl ba:reh lam taʕdʕəbni:/

The superstition about laughing exists and is current in the Algerian culture. People are superstitious to the extent that they refer to the happening of ill omen and all bad actions and things that happen to them to laughing.

### ***Superstition from Seeing a Blond:***

Another superstition is represented in the novel .It is the ill omen happening when seeing a blond, people believe to have and to be faced with problems and danger if ever you see or meet a blond.

In the novel, Hammu, Zaidan's brother, says when the blond from the army arrived /faʔajju ʕajʔin xaṭi:rin ja:tura: mina əlqija:dati maʕa ha:ða: əl aʕqar...?/ "What is the bad news that comes with this blond?"

Zaidan also says, even if he doesn't like the old people beliefs, that their grandparents were superstitious from "the blond, the shiny white, and they used to change their way when walking to the market if ever they saw a person or an animal from this kind" /ʔadʕda:duna: jataʔajjaru:na mina əl aʕqar wəl aʕhab wəl abjaɖi ənna:ʕiʕi, wa jaqtaʕu:na ʕari:qahum ʕila: əssu:qi aw ʕajriha: ,

ʔiða: ma: ʔiʕtaradqahum faxʕun aw hajawa:nun min ha:ða: ənnawʕ./ Because they believe that the blond and white are synonym of ill omen and danger, people accompany the bride at the back of a black mule /la: tuhmalu əl ʕaru:s ʔilla: ʕala: baylatun sawda:ʔ/

The cause of this superstition exists from the time of Roman conquest; Zaidan says that in all their legends, the monastic or the Romans are blond with blue eyes. From this superstition of the blond and the blue eyes that the following proverb was created /ʔazraq ʕajni:h la: tehrat w la tesreh ʕli:h/.

This cultural belief is not spread in all the Algerian communities. In opposite to what the novel states the majority of Algerians is optimistic and like the white colour. They see the black as the colour of sorrow and mourning. So, it is thought that the superstition mentioned in *al-Laz* may be frequent and used in some small part of the country only.

The purpose from mentioning this superstitious belief in the novel is to show that Algerians as well as other communities are superstitious about some colours and construct their lives and behaviour around them, what is ironic about these superstitions is that people consider them as a logical motive of what bad that happen to them.

### The Analysis of Dialectal Features:

For the sake of clarity and precision, the main endeavour in this chapter, will be to provide a distinct phonological and syntactical forms of dialect use in the artistic work of Tahar Wattar who strives to modify some Arabic standard words to be near to the dialect.

#### *The Phonological Level:*

Forms of non standard language are extensively apparent in the speech of many characters in *al-Laz*.

#### *The Drop of the Glottal Stop:*

We notice in the novel, the drop of the glottal stop in dialectal forms as shown in the following table:

**Table 1. Dialectal Expressions with the Glottal Stop Dropped**

Structure in Arabic	Dialectal Expressions with the Glottal Stop Dropped	Standard Arabic Expressions
- يا بن عمي، زيدان مريض، ضايح	/ja: ben ʕami:, Zajda:n mri:d , ɖa:jeʕ /	/ja: ʔibnu ʕami: , Zajda:n mari:d , da:ʔiʕ /
- راس الحانوت	/ra :s əl ha:nu:t./	/raʔs el ha:nu:t/
		/el xaʔin ... el harki:/

- ...الخاين ... الحركي	/el xa:jen...el harki:/	
- الشايب السبتي	/əʃfa:jeb əssebti:/	/əʃfa:ʔib əssebti:/
- شاب راسي	/ʃa:b ra:si:/	/ʃa:ba raʔsi:/
- راس سيدي البخاري	/ra:s si:di: əlbu:xa:ri:/	/raʔs si:di: əlbu:xa:ri:/
- وراس بن عمي فات الحال	/wə ra:s ben ʃami:, fa:t əl ha:l/	/ wa raʔs ʔibnu ʃami:, fa:t əl ha:l/
- قايد	/qa:jəd/	/qa : ʔid/

The word /ra:s/ is used with different meanings but with the same script i.e. /ra:s/ in standard Arabic is /raʔs/ رأس; however , in here, it is used without /ʔ/ to facilitate using it because /ʔ/, the glottal stop, in Arabic, is a plosive-like consonant sound whose closure is produced and released in the glottis. This sound is referred to as the laryngeal plosive, which makes it very difficult to pronounce. For the sake of simplicity which is a feature of dialect the /ʔ/ is dropped.

The word /ra:s/ , then, is linked to /ha:nu:t/, /ra:s/, /si:di: əlbu:xa:ri:/ and / ben ʃami:/

#### **Negation:**

Negation is expressed in Arabic with the annexation of /ش/ /ʃ/. It is taken from the word /ʃəjʔ/ شئ i.e 'something' in standard Arabic. It is added to a word to mean the negation. We can take as an example the negation used in the popular song used in the novel:

Ma: na:xudʃ əl ʃarbi: lebbe:s əlqa:ʃa na:xud əl dʒu:ni: jemʃi: bessa:ʃa

/ma: na:xudʃ/ is used in the dialect, however, in the standard we say /la: ʔa:xudu ʃajʔan/ .

We notice in dialectal negation that: / la: / is replaced by / ma:/ and the annexation of /ʃ/ to mean the negation.

/la: ʔa:xudu ʃajʔan/ → / ma: na : xudʃ/

Other dialect speakers use the negation as follows:

They keep the word /ʃajʔan/ that is used in standard Arabic, but they adapt it to the dialect by breaking the vowel of the word / ʃajʔan/, and drop the /ʔ/ so it becomes /ʃij /, and then, the negation is going to be for the standard Arabic expression /la: ʔaʃri: ʃajʔan/→/ma: nʌʃri: ʃij/ to mean: 'I buy nothing'

**Table 2. Phonological Features of Non-Standard Utterances.**

The Form of the Feature	Standard Utterances	Non-standard Utterances	Arabic
Replaced /ð/	/əllað i:/	/əlli:/	اللي / الذي
Contracted /d/	/Si:di:/	/Si:/	سيدي/سري
Annexation of /n/	/ʔa:xud/	/na:xud/	أخذ/ناخذ
Phonemic change	/taʔti:/	/tji:/	تأتي/تجي
Phonemic change	/ʒa:ffa/	/na:ffa/	جافة /ناشفة
Phonemic change	/ʔa:kil/	/wəkka:l/	وكل أكل

The use of contracted forms is a feature of the dialect because of rapid speech; as when he says: [ʒa:], instead of ʒa:ʔa ,Or the use of 'si' instead of 'sidi'.

The term 'si:' is repeated several times in the novel through dialogue between revolutionists in the mountain. In English, sir

- In the dialect we use /əlli: / with feminine and masculine Singular, so we say: / əlli: jdzi: / or /əlli: tdzi:/ however, in the standard we say for the masculine singular: /əllaði: jaʔti: / and for the feminine / əllati: taʔti:/

/əlli: / has no dual and no plural form, example: / əlli: jdzi: w/ for the masculine and feminine plural, however in the standard we say: / əllaði:na jaʔtu:na/ for the masculine for the feminine plural. plural, and / əllawa:ti: taʔti:na:/

- For the dual form in the standard we use / əllaða:ni/ and /əllata:ni/.

A summary of these specificities is presented in table 3:

**Table 3. Variation of /əlli: / from Dialect to Standard**

/əlli: /, /əlla ð i: /	Dialect	Standard
<b>Singular</b>	/əlli:/, /اللي/	/əllaði:/, /əllati:/, /الذي/
<b>Plural</b>	/əlli:/, /اللي/	/əllawa:ti:/, /əllaði:na/ اللواتي, /الذين/
<b>Dual</b>	/əlli:/, /اللي/	/əllaða:ni/, /əllata:ni/, اللتان اللذان

' in standard Arabic, so in the dialect, / ð الذي meaning ‘أل’ is from the اللّي: The origin of ‘/ əlli: / is replaced by /l/.

**The Syntactical Level:**

**Grammar:**

Some dialectal expressions are noticed in the novel, Wattar uses many non-standard utterances at the level of grammar they are not following the standard Arabic sentence structure.

Formal Arabic is a language that favours ‘Verb Subject Object’ sentence structure, however, in the novel, dialect speakers use ‘Subject Verb Object’ sentence structure, so we notice that in the dialect whether the verb is placed before or after the subject, doesn’t change the meaning of the sentence .SVO is more common in spoken Arabic.

**Table 4. Nominal and Verbal Sentences.**

Subject Verb Object word order as used in the novel	Verb Subject Object order after transformation	The Meaning in English
/əʃfa:j jʔajjar ənfɑ:s/	/ əʃfa:j ənfɑ:s /jʔajjar	tea disappears the want to sleep
/ənnɑ:s tqu:l/	/taqu: lu enna: su/	-people say.
/əl ʔixwa:n janta iru:naka ʕindi: /	/janta iruka əl ʔixwa:nu ʕindi: /	-brothers are waiting for you at my home.
/əɖɖi:m jhəjjəz kul ənnɑ:s/	/jhəjjəz əɖɖi:m kul ənnɑ: :s/	-Injustice exasperates all people.

Dialect speakers use the nominal sentences however; the standard Arabic language rather adopts the verbal sentence. Despite this change, the meaning of the sentence doesn’t change. Dialect speakers do not care about syntactic rules, what is important for them is to send the message as clearer as possible. Dialectal sentences change from nominal to verbal without having an impact on the meaning.

These are examples about the difference in sentence structure between the dialect and the standard.

**Arabized Terms:**

The novel contains many of arabized forms as table 5. shows:

**Table 5. Arabized Terms**

Borrowed Words in <i>al-Laz</i>	Phonetic Transcription
الشامبيط	/ əʃʃambi:t /
الكابورال	/əlka:bu:ra:l/
سيغارة سيغارا	/si:ʁa:ra:/
شوينقوم، شوينقومة	/ʃwinqu:m//ʃwinqu:ma/
هستيريا	/histi:rja:/
غولواز، جيتان	/ʁu:lwa:z//ʒi:ta:n/
كاراميل	/kara:mi:l/
اللاز	/alla:z/
تاكتيك-التاكتيك	/ta:kti:k//ətta:kti :k/

Concerning the arabized terms used in *al-Laz*, the novelist tackles the period of the revolution where the Algerian population was influenced by the French language. The reasons that make the population influenced by the French language are:

1. The 'National Service' that was obligatory for all Algerian Muslim since 1913.
2. Schools where Algerian pupils learned to read and write the French language.
3. Working with the French colonizer which was obligatory for some Algerian women and children.
4. The everyday communication with the French.
5. French: a legacy of colonialism. It can be considered as strongly established in the community as it has lead to heavy borrowings and code switching.

*al-Laz* has got various cases of simple and complex sentences, cases specific to the dialect and not the standard as: the negation and some other terms that are strange to the standard ,the arabized ,abbreviated or dialectal terms whether used in the cultural elements or through the characters' speech that appear in the dialect within a standard literary text.

*al-Laz* is an arabized term adopted from the French word 'As'. It is seen as a dialectal term because it is mainly used in cultural milieu. The term 'As' or *al-Laz* in Algerian dialect comes from the impact of the French language.

***Other Characteristics:***

We find in the novel, and especially in the folkloric elements, some expressions that are near to the dialect.

These folkloric elements and others are used in the dialect and not in standard Arabic because they are the peculiarities of dialect and dialect speakers.

The author, in his novel, *al-Laz* has used in a refined way a variety of cultural elements, proverbs, popular songs, superstition, and belief in sorcery and so on. We feel that the author has tried as much as he could to keep the original speech of the characters.

Wattar uses the standard Arabic in his novel but when faced with such cultural elements, he couldn't but use the dialect to be faithful to the context, and this is what makes the language of wattar varied and diverse from standard to dialect.

The use of such features, that is dialect and cultural elements appears all along the novel with different characters and in different situation as in the use of 'Si' instead of 'si:di:'.

### **Conclusion:**

Language is more and more reflective and representative of social behaviour and if at least every novelist may rely on in his work is language, thus, he uses the language in this sense to depict that internal and external world of a person, and for literature is a transfer of information about the person's inside feeling and outside behaviour.

The analysis at the phonological and syntactical forms of dialect use in the artistic work of Tahar Wattar shows that he strives to modify some Arabic standard words to be near to the dialect. Adding to this the interpretation of these dialectal elements related sometimes to society and another time to culture.

Through this research work, several conclusions can be drawn, mainly:

- The literary language offers a diversity which gives such privilege to literature.
- Dialect use in literature is not a minimization from its value but rather an enhancement to it.
- The novelist, when using dialect and the cultural aspects in the novel, is not obliged or incapable of using the standard form but, the major reason is, the relationship between dialect speakers and these expressions and cultural aspects. Novelist know that the use of such features make them nearer to the readers.
- Dialect speakers in the novel give a clearer idea about the real personality of the character and his belonging.
- The use of real language in literature i.e. dialect, associating different varieties make the text be authentic and mark the ordinary speech affecting the reader's emotion and character.
- The literary text is more complex that wrongly thought before for it engenders different subject matters, cultures and languages.

For everything that has been said so far it should be clear that this subject is not easily exhausted and whatever much is done about language and its varieties in literature, yet, it still seems very largely unexplored the field of scientific investigation of dialect as related to literature.

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