

Dialect Conflict and Identity Issues in Tlemcen Speech Community

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Abstract

The present article aims at serving as a reference work in the field of sociolinguistics. It also provides a concise summary of the sociolinguistic situation in an Algerian stereotyped speech community named Tlemcen. In addition, it sheds light on the status of its dialect, which most people consider as one of the most distinguished and stigmatized dialects in the Algerian society. This article also discusses the effect of bi-dialectalism on Tlemcen native speakers' identity. To reach the aim of the study, the following hypotheses are formulated: First, the widespread of the rural variety in Tlemcen speech community may affect the social and cultural identity of Tlemcenians. Second, Tlemcen native speakers show negative attitudes towards the use of the rural variety, especially among females. Yet, the mixed variety is gradually gaining a pleasant status in Tlemcen speech community and its adoption is rather acceptable. For the sake of collecting information about the issue, the researcher has used both qualitative and quantitative instruments. The research findings reveal that dialect shift has negative effects on the social and cultural identity of Tlemcen native speakers which may probably lead to an identity crisis among them. In addition, we have noticed that another variety, the mixed one (a mixture of urban and rural varieties), is progressively displacing the urban one, and may undoubtedly affect the maintenance of Tlemcen dialect.

Keywords: Dialect Contact, dialect shift, identity, language variation, Tlemcen Arabic

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Introduction

Language contact, bi-dialectalism and variation are nowadays among the most interesting subjects of sociolinguistic investigation. Variability is persistent and omnipresent in languages which do not vary only in different countries but also within a single speech community. When being in contact with each other, some changes affect dialects and languages. It is generally assumed that there are several reasons that may be the cause of dialect shift. It is probably due to the constant dialect contact or simply because of the speaker's aim in the identification with a particular speech community or with its values.

As far as Tlemcen speech community (TSC) is concerned, Tlemcen Dialect (TD) is considered as being one of the most distinguished and stigmatized dialects in Algeria since it is characterized by the use of the glottal stop [ʔ] instead of [q] in Classical Arabic (CA) Most of Tlemcen native speakers, more importantly, women are still using it and share positive attitudes towards the use of the glottal stop. Yet, nowadays, some changes have occurred in Tlemcen dialect; the most salient one is the insertion of the rural variety and the adoption of [g] instead of [ʔ]. The main reason is probably due to the internal migration from the rural regions towards the urban ones, and the constant contact between Tlemcenians and non-Tlemcenians. As a result, the rural variety is the dominant one and may eradicate TA one day. In this respect, Kingston (2000) agrees on the loss of dialects because of three main reasons: The first reason is due to population loss. The second one is caused by a forced shift whereby the language or the dialects are lost since their speakers abandon their dialect in favour of a more prestigious variety. The third and last one is due to its speakers' adoption of another variety rendering it superfluous for communicational needs.

What is happening nowadays in Tlemcen is that people from the new generation try to accommodate their speech by using, from time to time, the rural variety depending on the situation and the context they are in or on the person they are talking with. In this vein, we should state that Howard Giles has introduced the Communication Accomodation Theory (CAT) which is concerned with the links between language, context, and identity (Bates & Taylor, 2016). In this vein, Gallois & Giles (2015) say, "communication accommodation theorists focus on the patterns of convergence and divergence of communication behaviors, particularly when they relate to people's goals for social approval, communication efficiency, and identity" (pp.2). So, when addressing non-native speakers, Tlemcenians, more importantly, males and youngsters, try to avoid the use of the glottal stop in addition to some Tlemcenian words.

To highlight the impact of dialect shift on Tlemcen native speakers, the present sociolinguistic study attempts to investigate the impact of the widespread of the rural and mixed varieties in TSC and its effect on Tlemcenians' identity. It also tries to evaluate Tlemcen native speakers' attitudes towards Tlemcenians', more importantly, females' use of these two varieties.

To reach the target of the study, the author has stated two research question: First, will the spread of the rural variety in TSC influence Tlemcenians' identity? Second, Which attitudes do Tlemcenians have towards the increasing use of the rural variety, mainly among females?

1- Tlemcen Arabic

As an outcome of the rural exodus, Tlemcen speech community is witnessing considerable changes in its dialect which are occurring at several levels, more importantly, the phonological, the morphological, and the lexical ones. For example, today Tlemcen native speakers, especially males and youngsters, are most of the time dropping from the use of their native variety including the use of the glottal stop and adopting the rural variety which seems to be more suitable for them. In this context, the study of Fasold (1990) in Kamwangamalu (2003) about language shift shows that the need of adopting a new language is “a feeling that the language being shifted from is inferior to the one being shifted to” (p. 227). In other words, in the view of males, the rural variety is considered as being more suitable and convenient, less stigmatized comparing to the urban one. Another feature which is quite apparent in Tlemcen Arabic is the use of the feminine mark {- ڤ} of the third person singular which is dropped in verbs when addressing to females. For example, a Tlemcenian native speaker may say [kʰ: l] meaning ‘eat’ (the imperative form) instead of [kʰ: lڤ]. Another example is that in Tlemcen speech community, most Tlemcenian females, tend to use the sound /ʔ/ as it is used and pronounced in (CA). Contrarily, in mixed or rural variety, Tlemcen speakers use /ʕ/ instead.

Another feature in Tlemcen speech community is that the [q] has become a glottal stop [ʔ]. According to Dendane (2013), “The explanations of the allophonic variant [ʔ] appearance has not been documented in accurate ways. However, a few hypotheses have been put forward as the origin of the glottal realization” (p.5). Yet, due to the constant contact of Tlemcenians with people from rural areas, the domination of [g] instead of [ʔ] is becoming a serious problem which may probably lead to a dialect shift in (TSC).

2- Language, Identity, and Dialect Change

In sociolinguistics, language is closely related to identity. In this context, Tabouret-Keller (1997) says that “the link between language and identity is so strong that a single feature of language use suffices to identify someone’s membership in a given group” (cited in Kawangamalu, p.263). Being concerned with identity is being interested in the sense of self as the person grows up from childhood to adulthood. It is the way through which any individual distinguishes himself from the others in a given society. Accordingly, The relationship between language and identity is complex. Thus, maintaining a language or a dialect means transmitting it to future generations. Norris (2007) asserts that : “ Identity is constantly interactively constructed on a macro level, where an individual’s identity is claimed, contested and re-constructed in interaction and in relation to other participants” (p.657).

It is worth pointing out that several causes may put a dialect in danger of extinction. For example, when a person from a specific speech community is uninteresting, useless or unattractive when using that dialect, people show negative attitudes towards that speaker. As a result, the non-desired speaker may obviously feel the desire of being distant from the group or out of it. Consequently, the speaker may lose his/her social as well as his cultural identity. In addition, and according to Ennaji (2005):

Cultural identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social

class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity. (p.19- 23).

Personal identity and social one are two other types of identity. While the former focuses on the individual and identifies him/her as being different from the others, the latter considers him/her as a member of the society since social identity is the outcome of the individual's interactions with other members of the society. According to Tajfel (1972), *social identity* refers to the individual's awareness of belonging to a group, together with the emotional and evaluative significance of that group membership. In this respect, Giles & Smith (1979) assume that in intergroup social comparisons, individuals seek to find ways to make themselves positively distinct from the out-group to enhance their social identity.

Tlemcen, native speakers, especially old people generally show negative attitudes towards youngsters, more importantly, females using the rural variety, since this variety is considered of low status in terms of attitudes. Kaid Slimane. H (2017) says: "[...] the findings revealed that the urban variety is the most prestigious, the pleasant, and the well-considered variety in Tlemcen speech community" (p. 225). Thus, it is asserted that any language or language variety is closely tied to the speaker's personal, social and cultural identity.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research methods and sample

To explore the issue of dialect shift in TSC, the present study relies on two research instruments: a questionnaire directed to Tlemcen inhabitants and a matched-guise technique used to measure the attitudes of Tlemcen native speakers towards the use of the mixed variety. The sample population consists of 60 people chosen randomly (30 males and 30 females) divided into three age groups ([12-25], [30-50], [55-80]), for each age cohort, 10 males and 10 females were asked. It is worth mentioning that all informants live in Tlemcen speech community.

3.2. The Questionnaire

It is a mixed one which consists of closed-ended and open-ended investigative questions. It was administered to 60 Tlemcen native speakers from TSC. It aims at determining the effect of dialect shift on Tlemcen speaker's cultural and social identity.

Question n°1: Does the rural exodus affect Tlemcen dialect and its change?

Table1. Tlemcen native speakers' assumption about rural exodus effect

Answers Gender	Yes	No
Male	20	10
Female	25	5
Total	45	15
Percentage	75%	25%

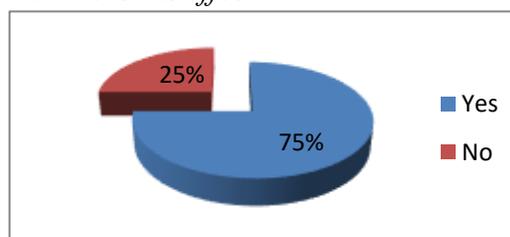


Figure.1 Tlemcen native speakers' assumption about rural exodus effect

From the results, we notice that the number of the positive answers are far more superior to those of the negative ones. Thus, most of Tlemcen native speakers agree that the rural exodus affects Tlemcen dialect which may lead to its change or substitution.

Question n° 2: Are you in favour of dialect shift in Tlemcen speech community?

Table 2. *Tlemcen native speakers' attitudes toward dialect shift*

Gender	Answers	
	Yes	No
Male	7	23
Female	2	28
Total	9	51
Percentage	15%	85%

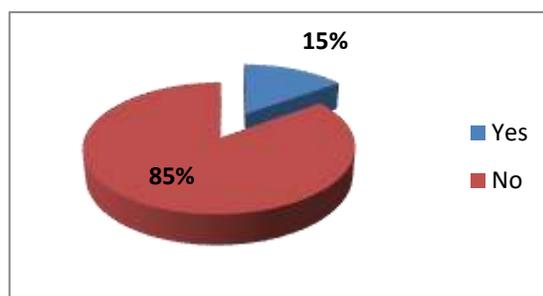


Figure.2 Tlemcen native speakers' attitudes toward dialect shift

The findings reveal that most informants of both genders, more importantly, females, are not in favour of dialect shift. They are opposed to the changes that are occurring to Tlemcen dialect. Some informants assert that by losing their native dialect i.e. the urban variety, they will gradually lose their identity. According to them, if the rural variety substitutes the urban one, Tlemcen native speakers will inevitably lose their culture and traditions. Surprisingly, a few of them 9/30 are not against dialect shift, perhaps it may be due to the widespread of the rural variety in TSC.

Question n°3: Do you think that dialect shift has an impact on your social and cultural identity? If yes, how?

Table 3: *The impact of dialect shift on Tlemcenians' social and cultural identity*

Gender	Answers	
	Yes	No
Male	16	14
Female	26	4
Total	42	18
Percentage	70%	30%

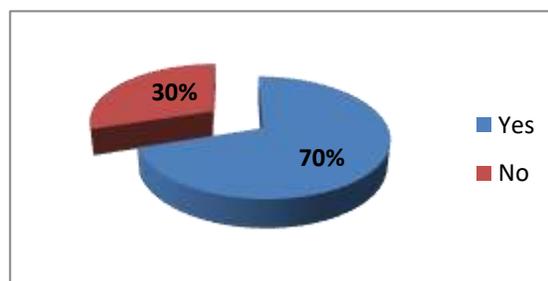


Figure.3 The impact of dialect shift on Tlemcenians' social and cultural identity

The general findings show that the majority of informants, more importantly females, agree that dialect shift affects their social and cultural identity. In addition, Kaid Slimane (2012) says that "Because speakers live in different socio-cultural environments, their language is exposed to variation and thus, to change. For this we have to postulate that the speech community is an important factor in language change since it provides a great influence on the speaker who is a member of it" (p. 123). In addition, most of the informants say that if Tlemcen Arabic (the urban variety) may be substituted one day by the rural variety, the Tlemcenians will adopt a different

behavior, and may probably behave differently or sometimes change their attitudes. As a result, they will gradually lose their social identity. Moreover, they also agree that being a member of Tlemcen community does not mean using the rural variety. Hence, the use and widespread of this latter will inevitably lead to a loss of Tlemcenians' social as well as cultural identity.

Question 4: In your opinion, will another variety substitute TA in the future? If yes, which one, the mixed or rural variety?

Table 4. Tlemcenians' opinion on the substitution of TA

Gender \ Answers	Yes	No
Male	19	11
Female	17	13
Total	36	24
Percentage	60%	40%

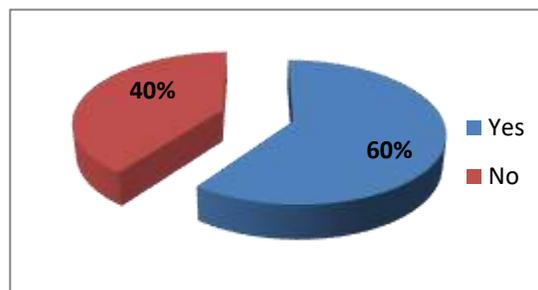


Figure.4 Tlemcenians' opinion on the substitution of TA

Most informants say that TA will be substituted by another variety one day. Most of them believe that the rural exodus affects dialect change and may lead to the eradication of the local variety. Yet, it is worth noting that the total percentage of negative answers is considerable and not very far from the one of positive replies which explains that a great number of Tlemcen native speakers do not admit the disappearance of TA.

Table 5. The substitute variety in TSC

Answers	The Rural Variety	The Mixed Variety
Number	14	22
Percentage	39%	61%

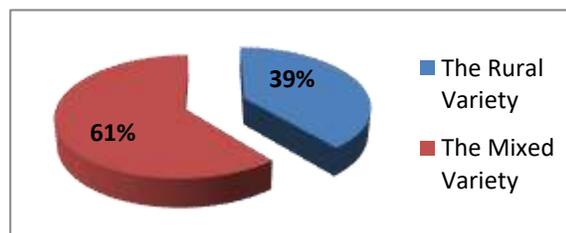


Figure.5 The substitute variety in TSC

Table five demonstrates that 61% of the informants answered that the mixed variety may substitute the urban one. However, 39% of them think that the rural variety may be the substitute variety. As a result, it is noticed that the mixed variety is far more acceptable by Tlemcen native speakers than the rural one.

3.3. The Matched-guise Technique

The current procedure aims to gather more qualitative and quantitative data. It also seeks to measure the judges' attitudes towards language forms which are performed by the same speaker but without knowing that the performer is the same person.

The matched-guise technique is the use of recorded voices of people speaking first in one dialect or language and then in another; that is two

“guises”...The recordings are played to listeners who do not know that the two samples of speech are from the same person and who judge the two guises of the same speaker as though they were judging two separate speakers. (Richards, Platt & Weber 1985, p. 171)

Lambert firstly introduced this technique in the field sociolinguistics. The target is to evaluate the judges’ attitudes (the judges consist of 15 native inhabitants of Tlemcen speech community i.e. the native speakers) towards the use of the rural variety and the mixed one instead of (TA) mainly among females. To check the informants’ attitudes towards the three varieties, we made them listen to a text passage which was performed in three language varieties: The urban, the mixed, and the rural. The judges were asked then to fill in a table considering their attitudes towards each guise-speaker taking into consideration: pleasantness, status, and consideration (see Appendix C).

- **Prestige and Attitude**

Question n°1: Which variety, according to you, is the most prestigious?

More prestigious.....Less prestigious

Table 6. Tlemcen native speakers’ evaluation of prestige

Guises	N=15	1=6pts	2= 5pts	3=4pts	4= 3pts	5= 2pts	6= 1pts	7=0pts
Females’ Tlemcen Urban Variety		7	6	2	0	0	0	0
Females’ Tlemcen Rural Variety		0	0	0	1	2	5	7
Females’ Tlemcen Mixed Variety		1	1	1	2	3	3	4

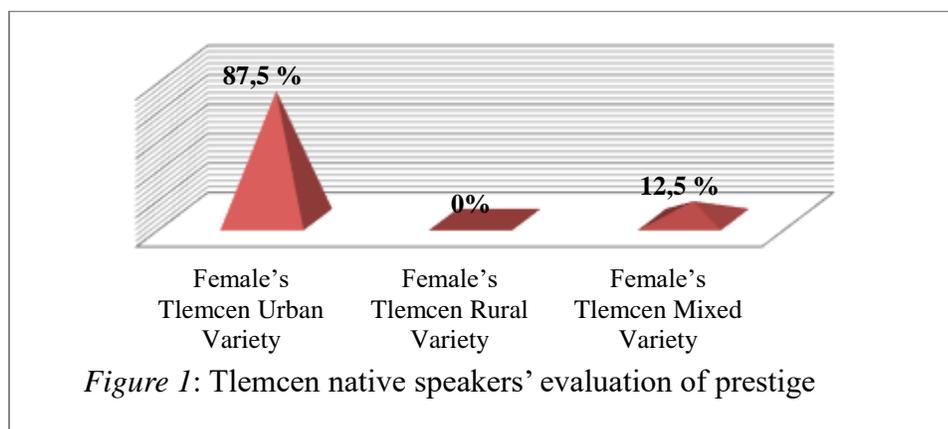


Figure 1: Tlemcen native speakers’ evaluation of prestige

The discernible findings show that Tlemcen urban variety has the highest score with 87.5% which explains that this variety is considered as the most prestigious. A lower score is attributed to the mixed variety. It is worth mentioning that the rural variety is considered as having no prestige at all.

Pleasantness and Attitude

Question n°2: How pleasant do you find each variety?

PleasantUnpleasant

Table 7. Tlemcen native speakers' evaluation of pleasantness

Guises	N=15	1=6pts	2= 5pts	3=4pts	4= 3pts	5= 2pts	6= 1pts	7=0pts
Females' Tlemcen Urban Variety		9	2	2	2	0	0	0
Females' Tlemcen Rural Variety		0	0	1	2	3	3	6
Females' Tlemcen Mixed Variety		3	2	1	1	1	3	4

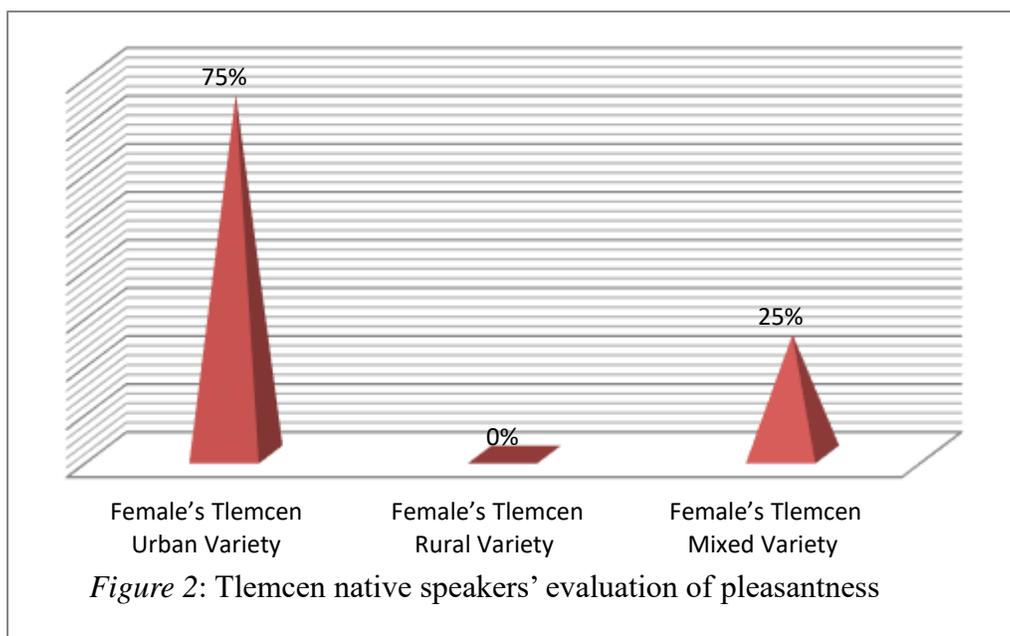


Figure 2: Tlemcen native speakers' evaluation of pleasantness

Similarly, the findings reveal that the urban variety is perceived as being the most pleasing in Tlemcen speech community with a percentage of 75%. In addition, we noticed that the mixed variety is considered to some extent by Tlemcen native speakers as pleasant. Here again, the rural variety does not each any degree of pleasantness.

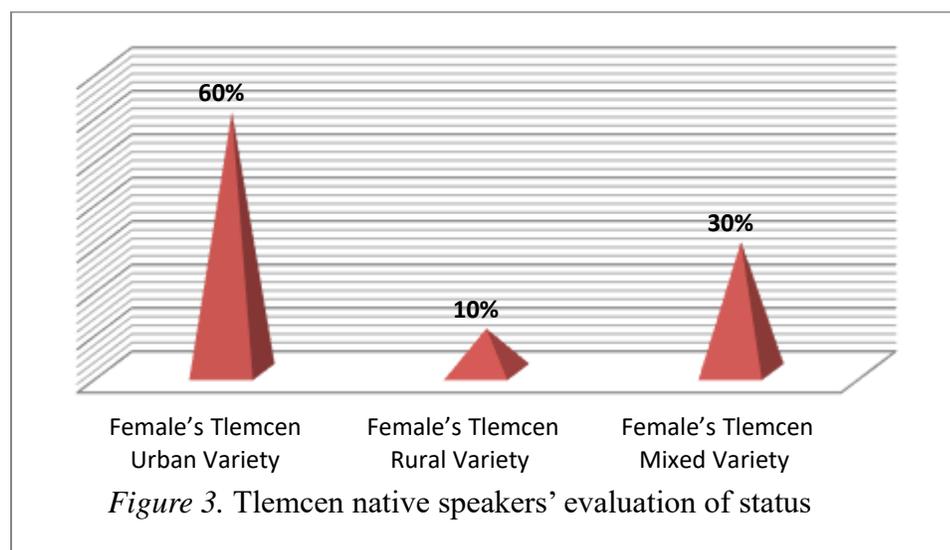
- **Status and Attitude**

Question n°3: How do you consider the status of each variety?

- High statusLow status

Table 8. *Tlemcen native speakers' evaluation of status.*

Guises	N=15	1=6pts	2= 5pts	3=4pts	4= 3pts	5= 2pts	6= 1pts	7=0pts
Females' Tlemcen Urban Variety		6	6	2	1	0	0	0
Females' Tlemcen Rural Variety		1	1	1	2	3	4	3
Females' Tlemcen Mixed Variety		3	1	2	2	2	2	3



The urban variety is on the top with a percentage of 60% which proves that this variety has a higher status than the other two other varieties having a score of 10% and 30% respectively. Surprisingly, as figure 3 shows, Tlemcen rural variety is gaining a certain status just after the mixed one. This confirms one of these two varieties may substitute the urban variety in the future since they are both gaining a certain status in Tlemcen speech community.

4. Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

The questionnaire results have revealed that most of Tlemcen native speakers assert that the rural exodus is an important factor in dialect change in TSC. Most of them do not approve this change; they are rather for the local dialect maintenance. In addition, the great majority of informants, more importantly, females, support the idea that dialect shift has a negative impact on their social and cultural identity. Moreover, a considerable number of informants assert that another variety will one day substitute TA. They think that it is the result of the constant contact with people coming from neighboring areas, more importantly from the rural ones. According to them, the salient factors of in-migration and the rural exodus have led to the emergence of a new mixed urban vernacular, a variety which encompasses a mixture of urban-rural speech, it is the mixed variety.

In considering the findings of the Matched-guise technique, we have noticed that Tlemcen native speakers showed negative attitudes towards the use of the rural variety, mainly among females since this variety is having no prestige and most Tlemcenians consider it as being unpleasant. Yet, surprisingly, we have noticed that this same variety and the mixed one are gaining an important status in TSC. Thus, we may predict that if no measures are taken to preserve Tlemcen dialect, it will certainly be substituted in the future by the mixed or rural varieties.

5. Conclusion

Being considered as a highly stigmatized dialect in Algeria, the current research attempted to shed light on a sociolinguistic and attitudinal phenomenon, the one of bi-dialectalism with its impact on the speakers' identity. The results discussed in this paper reveal that Tlemcen dialect is in a position of conflict since the rural and mixed varieties are gaining a non-deniable status in the community. They also show that most of the informants of both genders are not in favour of dialect shift and the change that is occurring in Tlemcen dialect which is mainly due to the stigmatization of the urban variety, including the use of the glottal stop [ʔ]. Some of them think that by losing their original dialect, the Tlemcenians will gradually lose their culture, traditions and may be their identity. In addition, the attitudinal procedure, shows that Tlemcen native speakers show negative attitudes towards the use of the rural variety, especially by females. Throughout this research, we attempted to modestly explore the intricate sociolinguistic situation which Tlemcen speech community is witnessing nowadays.

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Appendices

Appendix A :

Table 1. *Sampling and stratification*

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
12-25	10	10	20
30-50	10	10	20
55-80	10	10	20
Total	30	30	60

Appendix B : The Questionnaire

Question n°1: Does the rural exodus affect Tlemcen dialect and its change? Yes No

Question n°2: Are you in favour of dialect shift in Tlemcen speech community? Yes No

Question n° 3: Do you think that dialect shift has an impact on your social and cultural identity?

If yes, how?

Yes No

.....

Question n° 4: In your opinion, will TA be substituted in the future by another variety? If yes, which one, the mixed or rural variety?

Yes No

The Rural Variety

The Mixed Variety

Appendix C: The Matched-guise Technique (translated version). The passage below was read in the urban variety (TA), the rural one, and the mixed one.

The passage: I told my classmate that I couldn't revise my lessons since I was tired. I preferred going to the beach in order to relax. My mother told me to make some revisions but I disagreed, I couldn't open a single copy-book. I really wanted to have some rest. I asked my father to take me for a journey. He accepted. So, I asked my friend to come with me. It was Saturday, we went to Oran. We made some shopping and then went to the beach. We spent all day out. We were very tired but so happy and excited. What a marvellous day!

Table2. *Tlemcen native speakers' evaluation of prestige*

N = 15	X 6	%
Female's Tlemcen Urban Variety	42	87.5 %
Female's Tlemcen Rural Variety	0	0%
Female's Tlemcen Mixed Variety	6	12.5 %

Table3. *Tlemcen native speakers' evaluation of pleasantness*

N = 15	X 6	%
Female's Tlemcen Urban Variety	54	75 %
Female's Tlemcen Rural Variety	0	0%
Female's Tlemcen Mixed Variety	18	25 %

Table4. *Tlemcen native speakers' evaluation of status*

N = 15	X 6	%
Female's Tlemcen Urban Variety	36	60 %
Female's Tlemcen Rural Variety	06	10 %
Female's Tlemcen Mixed Variety	18	30 %