



Universidad Nacional de Catamarca - Facultad de Humanidades
Instituto de Investigación en Teorías del Arte y Estética
Revista Rigel –ISSN 2525-1945.

The Djelfawi Dialect Between Arab Heritage and Colonial Influence: A Sociolinguistic Study of Representations and Language Interferences

Ziani Ibrahim el Khalil¹ Ziani Fatiha²

1-Yahia Fares University – Medea, Faculty of Languages, Literature and Arts, Laboratory of Language and Art of Communication, Algeria, Ziani.ibrahimelkhalil@univ-medea.dz

2-Ziane Achour University – Djelfa ,Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Laboratory of Prevention and Drug Control Strategy in Algeria, Zianifatiha1979@gmail.com

Received: 15.04.2026 Accepted: 02.09.2026 Publishing: 08.10.2026

Abstract:

This sociolinguistic study explores the Jelfaoui vernacular as a complex linguistic phenomenon shaped by intersecting dimensions of identity, history, and social stratification. Using a historical and sociological approach, the paper analyzes how the Jelfaoui dialect emerged from the interaction between the Arab Hilalian linguistic heritage—marked by eloquence and religious depth—and the French colonial influence, which introduced a hierarchical diglossia that reinforced social and cultural differentiation. The study shows that the use of French remained limited to specific elite families possessing linguistic capital and reproducing it across generations. Meanwhile, the Jelfaoui dialect maintained its position as a daily language with symbolic legitimacy. Hybrid linguistic forms such as the French-Arabic *sabre* have also emerged. Ultimately, the study argues that language representations in Djelfa reflect complex symbolic dynamics, making language not just a communicative tool, but a means of social positioning and cultural belonging.

Key words: Language and Dialect; The Djelfawi Dialect; The Social Reprsentations of Language; The Linguistics capital; Habitus.

Introduction:

Language is a complex social phenomenon that extends beyond the boundaries of simple communication; at its core, it represents a tool for expressing cultural identity and social belonging, while also playing a pivotal role in shaping collective consciousness across time. Algerian society constitutes a unique model of linguistic interaction, given the succession of civilizations, the shifting of ruling powers, and the contact with diverse nations and tongues it has witnessed—factors that have rendered its linguistic landscape a rich mosaic of plurality and interweaving.



Within this context, the region of Djelfa stands as a subject worthy of study, for its local speech—known as the Djelfawi dialect—reveals the depth of the transformations that have affected the linguistic structure of the region's inhabitants. In this dialect, the Arabic heritage, rooted in classical Mudari eloquence and the tribal environment, interacts with the colonial influences introduced through the gateway of the French language, particularly under the French educational and cultural policy during the occupation.

The significance of this research lies in its shedding light on the sociolinguistic dimension of the Djelfawi dialect, through an analysis of the social representations of language, and an understanding of how certain tongues—such as Arabic and French—come to carry connotations that extend beyond their communicative function to meanings tied to social standing, religion, modernity, and symbolic power.

Research Problem:

This research proceeds from an attempt to understand the complex relationship between the Djelfawi tongue and its multiple frames of reference, within a social, cultural, and political context charged with change. Accordingly, the central problem of the research may be formulated as follows:

How does the Djelfawi tongue interact with the classical Arabic heritage and French colonial influences? And what is the nature of the social representation of this tongue within local discourse?

First: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

To grasp the problem at hand and analyze the available data, it is necessary to establish the following theoretical concepts:

1. Tongue and Dialect:

- **The tongue** as presented by Ibn Khaldun, is not confined to vocabulary and grammatical rules but encompasses the acquired grammatical faculty¹.
- **The Djelfawi dialect** represents a local variant of Arabic, carrying within it traces of classical eloquence and tribal dialects, in addition to foreign elements resulting from interaction with French².

2. The Social Representation of Language:

The concept of "social representations" refers to the collective mental constructs that individuals form regarding social or cultural phenomena. These are not merely personal opinions but constitute a repository of images, judgments, attitudes, and values circulating within a given group toward something—be it a language, a dialect, or a linguistic phenomenon.

In the linguistic context, the "social representation of language" refers to those images and symbolic contents with which speakers associate a language or dialect, which in turn influences its use, preference, or rejection.

Pierre Bourdieu, for his part, linked these representations to what he termed the "linguistic habitus" (*habitus linguistique*)—that is, the unconscious dispositions that individuals develop toward language through social upbringing, which lead them to favor or disdain a given language within a particular symbolic field³.

Representations do not merely influence linguistic choice; they are also employed as "means of social positioning," meaning that an individual uses a particular language because they wish to be perceived in a certain way within society (refined, educated, religious, modern...).

3. Linguistic Code-Switching and Diglossia:

- Diglossia (*Diglossie*) refers to the coexistence of two linguistic levels within a society: a formal classical language, and a colloquial spoken one⁴.
- Linguistic code-switching is the use of more than one language within a single context to express different intentions, which is clearly manifest in the blending of Arabic and French in Djelfawi discourse⁵.

4. Linguistic Capital and Habitus:

Pierre Bourdieu holds that language is not merely a tool of communication but a symbolic capital distributed unevenly among social groups. Djelfawi families who inherited French from the colonial period thus practice a "reproduction" of this cultural privilege across generations⁶.

Second: The Local Djelfawi Community: Location, Naming, Social Composition, and Successive Civilizations

Many who know nothing of the wilaya of Djelfa are familiar only with the image occasionally shown on television screens—a few tents and abundant flocks of sheep. Though this image is in itself evidence of authenticity, Arab heritage, and a simple way of life far removed from the complexity and problems of the city, and stands as a testament to the continuity of generations and the extension of the pure Arabs (*al-'Arab al-'āriba*) and the caravans of nomadic Bedouins who imprinted the dialect—closely tied to classical Arabic—with its particularity and distinctiveness⁷.

However, the body of scholarship has established that the tongue of the region was not Arabic prior to the Hilali migration into the area, but rather knew other languages as a result of successive colonial campaigns. It is therefore necessary to review the region's history in order to understand

the impact of successive civilizations on the Djelfawi linguistic capital—this following an introduction to the Djelfa region in terms of location, naming, and social composition.

1. Location:

The wilaya of Djelfa constitutes the capital of the steppe High Plateaus, situated south of the Tell Atlas mountains, at a distance of 300 km from Algiers, between longitudes 2° and 5° East and latitudes 33° and 35° North. It is bordered to the north by the wilayas of Médéa and Tissemsilt, to the east by the wilayas of M'Sila and Biskra, to the west by Laghouat and Tiaret, and to the south by the following wilayas: Ouargla, Ghardaïa, and El Oued, as shown in Appendix (03). This location makes Djelfa a central hub of Algeria's steppe region and a link connecting the country's various regions. The wilaya covers an area of 32,194.01 km², representing 1.36% of the country's total area, and currently comprises 36 communes within 12 districts⁸.

2. Naming:

The name of the wilaya, 'Djelfa,' is traditionally traced to as "Djelfa" traces back to the inhabitants of neighboring regions, who used to organize a weekly market that drew visitors from all directions and distant places, and who grazed their livestock in this area, irrigated by the flooding of the wadis, where the soil was fertile and the water fresh. However, the region's exposure to drought caused the formation of a crusty layer on its lands, known as "al-jalāf," from which the region derived its name "Djelfa."⁹

The inhabitants of the Djelfa region are likewise attributed with the designation "Ouled Nail," which traces back to the forefather of the tribes that settled the region. Sidi Nail was Muhammad ibn Abdallah, whose lineage traces back to Fatima al-Zahra, daughter of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), as recorded in the book *Tuhfat al-Afadiil bi-Tarjamat Sidi Nail*, and the book *Tuhfat al-Sa'il bi-Baqat min Tarikh Sidi Nail* by Sheikh Mahfouzi Amer, among other books that have addressed research into the origin of the region's inhabitants. His lineage is as follows:¹⁰

Muhammad ibn Abdallah (Sidi Nail) ibn Allal ibn Musa ibn Abd al-Salam ibn Ahmad ibn Allal ibn Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish ibn Bubakr ibn Ali ibn Harma ibn Harma ibn Isa ibn Salam ibn Marwan ibn Ali (Haydar) ibn Muhammad ibn Idris al-Asghar ibn Idris al-Akbar ibn Abdallah al-Kamil ibn al-Hasan al-Muthanna ibn al-Hasan al-Sibt ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatima al-Zahra, daughter of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him).

Genealogists have differed regarding one of Sidi Nail's ancestors, namely (Marwan): some have recorded him as (Mzouar), such as Sheikh Si Atiya in his genealogical tree found in the book *Tanbih al-Ahfad bi-Manaqib al-Ajdad*, page 141; others have recorded him under the name Marwan, such as Sheikh Si Amer in his book *Tuhfat al-Sa'il bi-Baqat min Tarikh Sidi Nail*, page 12, and *Ta'tir al-Akwan*, page 14, 1916 edition; while others have recorded him in the genealogical trees as (Mzour).

The true name of Sidi Nail was Muhammad ibn Abdallah, by which he was known until the second half of the 15th century CE, when he was a student under Sidi Ahmad ibn Yusuf, master of the zawiya of Miliana, along with other students. It is said that when the sheikh wished to test his students' love for him, their sincerity, and the strength and steadfastness of their faith, he informed them that he would sacrifice seven of his students, as the Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) was approaching and he had nothing to offer as sacrifice. However, when the feast arrived, many of the students fled, and only Muhammad ibn Abdallah and six others remained. The sheikh led them to believe he had indeed sacrificed them. It is said that the sheikh found steadfastness and faith in none but Muhammad ibn Abdallah, who remained resolute when his turn came. The sheikh then turned to him and said: "You have attained all goodness and righteousness," and from that day named him "Nail" (one who attains), for having attained honor and eminence through obedience to God Almighty and through the saints, the righteous, and the people of piety and devotion¹¹.

3. Social Composition:

It is said that there are 24 tribal confederations ('urūsh) (according to the French administrative organization), each of which is divided into numerous clans and, further, into still more families. These 'urūsh are not concentrated in any single area but are dispersed across the country, most of them in the desert and Tell regions.

The population of Djelfa is composed of four major tribes: first, the Ouled Nail, who comprise several sub-branches and dependent groups and are considered the largest tribe across the entire Maghreb; second, the Saharis tribe, most of whom inhabit the region of Hadd al-Sahari and its surroundings—Ibn Khaldun noted that they are a branch of the Banu Nadr al-Hilaliya; third, the Ouled Rahman tribe, concentrated in the north of Djelfa, specifically in Ain Oussera and its outskirts, extending to the border of Médéa wilaya to the north, Tiaret wilaya to the west, and M'Sila wilaya to the east—they belong to a genuine Arab tribe called the Riyah al-Hilaliya, and have adopted the black tent as their emblem, distinguishing themselves from the Ouled Nail, whose emblem is the red tent; and fourth, the Abaziz tribe, whose members mostly reside in the town of Charef, west of Djelfa, and who, according to the most prominent accounts, trace their lineage to Ali (may God ennoble his countenance). Despite the multiplicity of tribes constituting the region, they have known a coalescence among themselves owing to marriage alliances, commercial exchange, social contact, and bonds of religious affection—factors that led to the region's development within a short span of time¹².

4. Successive Civilizations in the Djelfa Region

- The Roman Presence in the Region

The history of human presence in the region dates back to prehistoric times, as rock engravings, drawings, and Libyco-Berber inscriptions have been discovered, the oldest of which date to

approximately 9000 BCE. The presence of Berber tribes in the vicinity of the Djelfa region is ancient; Father François Devillary notes that the region and its surroundings belonged to the Berbers from 1500 BCE until 1000 CE, and that there existed a Berber people who practiced nomadism, known as the Gaetuli, who spoke the Berber language, and who, since prehistoric times, had assembled remnants of Neolithic peoples together with groups that had migrated from Palestine or southern Yemen and from Sardinia in the west¹³.

- **The Islamic Conquests of the Region**

The sociologist Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddima*, took a keen interest in the history of the Berbers in the Djelfa region; notably, he did not employ the term "Gaetuli" but instead referred to the region's inhabitants as Berbers, focusing on the Zenata Berbers and citing the branches of this tribe that formed Djelfa and its surroundings. Among the civilizations that settled the region was the Roman civilization, whose remains persist to this day—fortifications (the *limes*) and fortresses (the fortress of Diemidi west of the town of Messaad, and others south of Gahoura and in Ain Rich, all situated along a strategic extension controlling the territory stretching south of the Hodna basin)¹⁴. Through the Islamic conquests of 704 CE, and the arrival of the Arabs in the Maghreb to spread Islam, the Hilalis settled the region and left their mark on the tongue of its inhabitants, such that Arabic became the language of communication among the Berber tribes. The sustained contact of the Hilalis with certain tribes, such as the Zenata tribes of the Sahara, proved a decisive factor in the complete Arabization of these tribes.

- **The Ottoman Presence in the Region**

Bey Osman organized several campaigns aimed at seizing the Djelfa region, but each time failed to subdue it. After 1775, the Pasha of Algiers had come to fully appreciate the difficulty of simultaneously managing the affairs of the two largest population groups marked by unrest and rebellion against the Turkish conquerors—namely, the Kabyle population in the north and the inhabitants of the Djelfa region. He therefore decided to attach the Kabyle region to Algiers itself, placing it under the charge of the Agha of Algiers, while the Djelfa region was attached to the seat of the Beylik of Titteri in Médéa, south of the capital. Mustapha al-Waznaji was appointed Bey of Titteri from 1775 to 1794, during which period calm was restored and economic activity developed.

- **The French Presence in the Region**

Arnaud records that the Ouled Nail, in their struggle against the French colonizer, rallied under the banner of Emir Abd al-Qadir in 1836, their men divided into six legions, each legion headed

by a sheikh. Si Abd al-Salam was the first commander, later succeeded by his nephew Si al-Sharif Belhrach, who placed himself in the Emir's service, and to whom the Emir granted the title of Khalifa of the Ouled Nail.

In keeping with this allegiance, the Ouled Nail took part in Abd al-Qadir's famous siege of Ain Madhi against Ahmed al-Tijani in 1877, and also assisted the Emir in disciplining the tribes that had declared allegiance to the French. The flame of revolt and rebellion against the colonizer did not die out in the Djelfa region after Emir Abd al-Qadir's departure, as several figures assisted the tribal confederations in mounting insurgent movements, among them: Caid al-Tilli Belkahel, al-Tayeb Bouchendouka, and others.

The inhabitants of the region carried out heroic operations during the War of Liberation, even though the leadership of the Revolution intended for the region—where the colonial presence was more military than civilian—to serve as a supply center and a place of rest for the National Liberation Army. In the period between 1954 and 1956, bold guerrilla operations took place to sabotage colonial installations. The year 1956 in particular proved decisive, as Omar Idris and Zianne Achour were assigned to establish a base at Mount Boukahil and begin recruiting mujahideen, undertaking training and armament. Following the Soummam Congress, Djelfa became part of Wilaya VI, with Colonel Ali Mellah appointed as its commander, followed by Colonel Si El Haouès.

Third: The Arabic Heritage in the Djelfawi Tongue

Despite the numerous successive civilizations that passed through the region and the diverse tongues they brought with them, the present-day Djelfawi dialect still retains a character of eloquence owing to its proximity to classical Arabic, or the "Mudari" tongue that the Hilalis disseminated in the region following the Islamic conquests. This is what led Ibn Khaldun to remark regarding the tongue of the first tribes that inhabited the region: "...among them are the eloquent orator in their assemblies and gatherings, and the poet well-versed in the styles of their language, and sound taste and natural disposition bear witness to this, even if one cannot say the same of the state of the recorded [written] tongue down to the inflectional endings of words alone."

Perhaps the transformation of the Mudari language in Djelfa into the Djelfawi dialect is owed to the linguistic mixing it underwent as a result of incoming languages, foremost among them French—what Ibn Khaldun calls the "corruption of language": "...then this faculty became corrupted wherever non-Arabs came to address them, and the reason for its corruption is that the rising generation began to hear, in the expression of intentions, modes different from those the Arabs used to express their meaning, owing to the great number of non-Arabs mixing with the Arabs; they would also hear the modes of the Arabs, and so the matter became confused for them,

and they took from both, thereby forming a new faculty—one deficient relative to the original. This is the meaning of the corruption of the Arabic tongue."

Perhaps this is what led the zawiyas, or what were formerly known as maḥāḍir and are known today as kuttātib and Quranic schools, which children attend alongside formal state schooling, to take care in disseminating classical Arabic through the memorization of the Quran and Hadith and the teaching of the rules of tajwid, in preparation for the learner's subsequent acquisition of other sciences.

To this end, the Djelfa region became known for numerous zawiyas spread throughout its territory, attesting to its people's devotion to the Quran and the religious sciences. Sheikh Amer Mahfouzi—may God have mercy on him—records in his book *Tuhfat al-Sa'il* a total of twelve scholarly zawiyas, among them: the Zawiya of Sheikh Ibn Ar'ar, the Tahiriya Zawiya, the Zawiya of Sheikh Boularbah ibn al-Mahfouz, the Zawiya of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Marzouq, the Zawiya of Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Na'as, the Zawiya of Sheikh Si Atiya ibn Ahmed Beid al-Qawl al-Jalaliya, the Zawiya of Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Tahiri, the Zawiya of Sheikh al-Salami, the Idrisiya Zawiya, the Zawiya of Sheikh al-Sadiq ibn al-Sheikh, the Zawiya of Sheikh ibn Muhammad ibn Atiya, and the Zawiya of Sheikh Ahmed ibn Suleiman.

Mubarak Belhadj notes that most of the zawiya sheikhs were active participants during the liberation movements and during the War of Liberation, contributing both money and effort, mobilizing the masses, and preserving national identity and the Arabic language. Some of these zawiyas, however, ceased their activity for financial or social reasons, or both, while others remain active to this day; more recently, certain more modernized and organized zawiyas have emerged, such as the Zawiya al-Azhariya.

The Djelfa region has also been distinguished by prominent names in Arabic scholarship and literature, reflecting the educated elite's commitment to the Arabic language despite their full command of French. Sheikh Amer Mahfouzi cites many of these names in his books *Al-'Ulama' al-Ajilla wa al-Budur al-Ahilla* and *Tuhfat al-Sa'il*, in which he provides biographies of numerous scholars, including: Sheikh Naim al-Naimi, Sheikh Abd al-Qader al-Mas'adi, Sheikh al-Sharif ibn Lahrach, Sheikh Belkacem Belhrach, Sheikh al-Mukhtar ibn Ahmed ibn al-Sharif ibn Lahrach, Sheikh Yahia al-Shawi al-Naili, Sheikh Mustapha Hachi, Sheikh Lakhdar ibn Khelif Rahmoun, Sheikh Ma'mar ibn Othman Hachi, Sheikh Abd al-Hamid Rahmoun, and Sheikh Ahmed al-Saghir Sadiki—may God have mercy on them all.

As for the influence of Turkish on the region's inhabitants, it appears to have been limited, given that Ottoman rule did not extend south of Boughezoul—the furthest point of Ottoman suzerainty—until 1725, after which the region came under the authority of the Beylik of Titteri, founded by Hassan Pasha in 1547. The tribes of the region were consistently rebellious against the

Ottomans, given that their sole connection to the Turks was taxation; as such, the region's inhabitants had no real relationship with the Turkish language¹⁵. In this regard, Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi holds that the Ottoman presence influenced the urban linguistic varieties in particular—Algiers, Médéa, Tlemcen, Constantine—through the borrowing of numerous Turkish words connected to daily life, without, however, producing any significant change in the country's overall linguistic landscape.

In contrast to the absence of influence from Turkish and other colonial languages on the Djelfawi tongue, the French presence in the region resulted in the spread of the French language among a small segment of the population, owing to the weak uptake of French education among the region's inhabitants. Among the few educational institutions built at the time were two schools for girls, the first in 1912 and the second in 1928, with French education reserved exclusively for the children of the educated class and the notables—even including the children of religious and scholarly figures who were loyal to the colonial authorities and employed within its administration. These were typically drawn from old, well-known, and influential families, among them urban families removed from the rural and Bedouin populations, for the men of Sufism strongly opposed education in the French language¹⁶.

Notably, according to Saadallah, while the Association of Muslim Algerian Ulema taught exclusively in Arabic and called for freedom to teach in it and for its official recognition, it did not object to Algerian children also learning French—indeed, it considered French one of the instrumental sciences a citizen needed in life. Thus, by the time of the Second World War, this new bilingualism had become the defining feature of general education¹⁷.

There existed, too, another segment—found scattered across all regions of the country, including Djelfa—that was not persuaded by Arabic education and instead called for French education. This was the assimilationist segment, whose origins trace back to the officials whom France had favored above others when schools were opened; they enjoyed material and educational privileges, as their fathers had served the French administration in the army or in various *caïd* posts and other positions. The French regarded them as fortunate, having enjoyed the blessing of learning the French language and having been employed in the military and civil posts open to the local population.

Fourth: French Influence: Class Structure and the Reproduction of Linguistic Capital in Djelfa

Unlike the Ottomans, French colonialism produced a gradual and profound influence on language and society in Djelfa, though this influence remained confined to particular social groups. France did establish a number of schools, but these were directed primarily toward:

- The children of notables and the upper classes.
- The families of officials or those loyal to the colonial administration.
- The assimilationist segment, whose fathers had served in the army or within the traditional leadership structures.

This segment, as Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi explains, was regarded as "fortunate," in that it possessed what may be termed "French linguistic capital" and was able to transmit it to its children through private education or foreign missions—thereby forming a local model of the "social reproduction" theorized by Pierre Bourdieu.

On this basis, the use of the French language in the Djelfa region, up until the first years of independence, remained largely confined to certain families of social standing, social privilege, or material advantages inherited from the colonizer. This is confirmed by Saleh Belaid in his hypothetical schema, in which he observes that the use of French pertains to the highest social ranks, with the colloquial varieties occupying second place, classical Arabic third, and the local varieties each occupying their own particular standing.

Given the possibility of the intergenerational inheritance of cultural and linguistic capital, and the transformative nature of linguistic habitus across generations, those families connected to the French language preserved the continuity and transmission of this language to their children—supporting their children's acquisition of the language within the family, enrolling them in foreign schools, or providing them with private tutoring, among other means. This represents an example of Pierre Bourdieu's strategy of social reproduction,¹⁸ as practiced locally, since the colonial occupation, by certain Djelfawi family lineages.

Fifth: Social Representations of French in Djelfa: Between Class Privilege and Linguistic Deficiency

The Djelfawi tongue cannot be studied from a sociolinguistic perspective without pausing on the social representations that surround it—that is, the mental images, attitudes, and values that individuals and groups hold toward this tongue and toward the other languages circulating in their environment (classical Arabic, colloquial Arabic, French). Language in this context is not merely a tool of communication but a cultural symbol, a class marker, and a collective identity, as held by sociolinguists foremost among them Pierre Bourdieu, Charles Ferguson, and Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi.

Given that the French language in Djelfawi society has been associated with families of high social standing and with prestigious, important specializations in education (medicine, pharmacy...) and in professional life (administration), positive representations of this language have taken shape, giving rise to code-switching in which French appears within discourse otherwise dominated by

Arabic among some speakers. The deployment of certain French words or expressions can lend these speakers a sense of distinction and enhanced status, particularly among women, who exhibit a markedly frequent pattern of code-switching, believing that this linguistic behavior represents them as modern women and allows them to convey a more persuasive message through this language of social prestige.

The Djelfawi society's representation of the French language is a composite one, entailing symbolic tensions arising from the historical and social context in which the relationship between the local population and the French tongue was formed. On one hand, French retains a heavy colonial memory, which has led to its rejection—within religious and traditional discourse—as a tool of cultural penetration and an attempt to erase identity. On the other hand, for certain groups, particularly the educated elite, it has become a symbol of refinement, openness, and elevated social positioning, such that it is acquired not merely as a language of communication but as symbolic cultural capital, in Bourdieu's terms.

This duality in representation manifests through clear linguistic behaviors, such as inserting French words into everyday discourse to lend it an "elite" or "modern" veneer—known as decorative code-switching (*code-switching décoratif*). These behaviors are reinforced among certain groups, particularly urban women, in what Ibrahimi termed the "gendered representation of French," whereby the language is used to signal belonging to an elevated class or to construct the image of the liberated, modern woman.

The most prominent manifestation of the representation of French in Djelfa, however, lies in its being a language inherited within particular families historically connected to colonialism or the French administration, such as the Belhrach, Ben Cherif, and Belabbes families. These families accumulated what Bourdieu terms "French linguistic capital" through schooling in French institutions or foreign missions during the colonial era, and subsequently worked to reproduce this cultural privilege across generations—by supporting their children with private tutoring or steering them toward university specializations that rely on French as the primary language of instruction, such as medicine and engineering.

Thus, French in Djelfa is invested as a symbolic language of class and social distinction, rather than a merely functional one. It is not in wide circulation as it is in the capital, but when it is used, it is invoked with cultural connotations tied to status, elitism, and social standing. The representation of French in Djelfa thus reveals a complex social-linguistic intermingling, one that reproduces itself through representations, educational choices, marriage alliances, and even through the sub-dialects it has influenced.

Moreover, when the local speaker—and the Algerian speaker in general—resorts to French, they regard it as the language of modernity, one that permits the transgression of taboos, particularly

sexual ones, with greater ease, whereas Arabic is not perceived this way, owing to the image closely tied to it and associated with religious and moral prohibitions. Here, Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi poses the question: why does a young man find it difficult to say to his girlfriend "I love you" (*je t'aime*) in Arabic, while it is so easy and readily available to him in French? She answers this by drawing on the views expressed by Mohammed Tayebi and Amine Zaoui during the colloquium "The Novel, Novelists, and Society in Algeria," namely that Arabic is a language laden with religion and stifled by the weight of doctrine, and that, being sacred, it remains the language of chastity and of distinguishing the licit from the illicit.

This code-switching between Arabic and French is locally deployed, on this reading, as a code-switching of deficiency—that is, as a strategy for compensating for inadequacy by turning to Arabic at times and to French at others in order to achieve effective communication. At the same time, this code-switching may also indicate bilingual competence, which, within the local community as among all Algerian speakers generally, is regarded as a rare commodity.

There also exists a local segment with no ties to the French language, owing to their family background, and whose formal schooling in French has been limited or nonexistent, especially following the process of Arabization and up to the present day. This segment has nonetheless benefited from the linguistic mixing resulting from coexistence with French-speaking groups—what Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi terms a French-Arabic *sabir*, which existed even before independence as a result of the local population's coexistence with the French, and which reflects a lack of genuine command of the French language. The following is a sample of this phenomenon of linguistic mixing: *mā trakrūchich* (don't hang up the line), *brōpōzīt* (proposed), *al-blāṣa* (the place), *ṭābla* (the table), *anīvirsīr* (birthday), *afīshīnā* (an advertisement), *dīwaqtīt* (bored), *darksū* (the direction), *kāya* (the notebook), etc.

Likewise, verbs of French origin retain the same meaning when integrated into colloquial Arabic—that is, they preserve their meaning while taking on a prefix "n-" at the beginning of the verb when the subject is the first-person pronoun "I," and "y-" when the subject is the third-person pronoun "he," along with a suffix at the end of the verb. Thus, when the verb *camoufler* is used, we obtain "*nkamūflī*," meaning "I conceal something." It becomes clear that when verbs of French origin are used and inserted into colloquial Arabic, grammatical modifications are applied to them so that they conform to the grammatical structure of colloquial Arabic, without any change to their meaning.

We have thus observed how elements of the French language are blended with elements of the Arabic language, particularly among urban youth circles. We may go further still and say that these elements have been integrated into the very core of the linguistic system, as French verbs are conjugated just as Arabic verbs are conjugated, through the addition of their characteristic prefixes and suffixes. This constitutes the tragedy of an inability to express oneself properly in either

language—a failure that, according to Khaoula Taleb Ibrahimi, stems from the shortcomings and failure of an educational system that was not founded on realistic sociolinguistic studies.

Sixth Towards a Sociolinguistic Approach to the Preservation of the Jelfaoui Vernacular and the Valorisation of Linguistic Diversity

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Jelfaoui vernacular constitutes a significant component of the region's linguistic and cultural heritage. It is not merely a local mode of communication, but a sociolinguistic resource through which collective memory, historical experience, social belonging, and forms of symbolic identification are expressed. Its linguistic features reflect the historical interaction between the Arab-Hilalian heritage and the linguistic and cultural influences resulting from the colonial experience.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the preservation of the Jelfaoui vernacular should not be understood as an attempt to isolate it from linguistic change. Rather, it should be approached as a means of documenting and understanding the mechanisms through which linguistic practices evolve within a changing social environment. The coexistence of Arabic varieties and French, as well as the recurrent alternation between them, reveals the dynamic nature of linguistic practices and the unequal distribution of linguistic capital among different social groups.

Furthermore, the social representations associated with French and with the Jelfaoui vernacular demonstrate that language practices are closely related to processes of social distinction and symbolic positioning. The use of French may, in certain social contexts, function as a marker of educational and cultural capital, whereas the Jelfaoui vernacular remains strongly associated with local belonging, collective memory, and social proximity. Consequently, the sociolinguistic study of these practices makes it possible to move beyond a purely structural analysis of language and to examine the social meanings attributed to different linguistic forms.

The preservation and documentation of the Jelfaoui vernacular therefore require an approach that recognizes linguistic diversity as a social and cultural resource. Such an approach should take into account linguistic practices across generations, social groups, educational contexts, and emerging digital spaces. It should also consider the ways in which younger generations negotiate their linguistic identities within increasingly diversified communicative environments.

Conclusion

This sociolinguistic study reveals that the Djelfawi tongue constitutes a complex linguistic phenomenon, one bearing intertwined historical, social, and cultural dimensions that render it more than a mere local dialect—rather, a mirror reflecting the transformations of identity and of social and symbolic positioning within Djelfawi society.

On one hand, the Djelfawi tongue emerges as an authentic language that has preserved many of the features of classical Arabic, owing to the Hilali tribal heritage and to the significant role played by the traditional *zawiyas* in consolidating Quranic Arabic and religious formation. Together, these factors have helped protect the tongue from disintegration and have granted it a form of local cultural legitimacy.

On the other hand, French colonial influences imposed a new linguistic dynamic, giving rise to a diglossic bilingualism and a class-based representation of French as a tool of social advancement and belonging to modernity—without, however, displacing the Djelfawi dialect from general circulation. This hybrid contact produced what is known as the "French-Arabic *sabir*," whereby French came to be integrated into the local linguistic structure, with words retaining their original meaning while being grammatically adapted within the rules of colloquial Arabic.

As for social representations, the study has revealed that Djelfawi, classical Arabic, and French each play different roles tied to context, gender, and social standing, such that the linguistic actor moves between them according to need—within a linguistic landscape described as a "code-switching of deficiency," as Khaoula Taleb Ibrahim terms it.

The particularity of the Djelfawi tongue lies in its capacity to adapt to various changes without losing its original identity—a fact that calls for further in-depth field studies of linguistic phenomena in the country's interior regions, on the premise that dialects are not merely tools of communication, but sociological manifestations reflecting a community's history and its position with respect to power, identity, and education.

Recommendations

Conduct extensive field-based sociolinguistic studies in different areas of Djelfa in order to identify the linguistic variations and social factors underlying the use of the Jelfaoui vernacular. Develop a documented linguistic corpus of the Jelfaoui vernacular, including lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic features, as well as oral narratives and everyday expressions. Examine Arabic-French language contact and the mechanisms of code-switching and linguistic borrowing within different social and communicative contexts. Integrate the sociolinguistic dimension into educational research, particularly with regard to the relationship between pupils' linguistic repertoires, their social backgrounds, and their acquisition of French.

Investigate social representations of languages and linguistic varieties among different generations, social categories, and genders in order to identify the symbolic values attributed to Arabic, French, and the Jelfaoui vernacular. Promote the cultural and scientific valorization of the Jelfaoui vernacular through academic research, local cultural initiatives, and documentation projects.

Undertake comparative sociolinguistic studies between the Jelfaoui vernacular and neighboring Algerian Arabic varieties in order to identify common features, divergences, and historical patterns of linguistic contact. Avoid hierarchical judgments concerning linguistic varieties, particularly representations that associate certain varieties with prestige and others with linguistic deficiency. A sociolinguistic perspective should instead examine the social conditions under which linguistic forms acquire different degrees of symbolic legitimacy.

Pay particular attention to younger generations and digital communication, as social media and new forms of communication contribute to the emergence of new linguistic practices and forms of language mixing. Establish a digital archive of the Jelfaoui vernacular, incorporating recorded speech, oral histories, lexical inventories, traditional expressions, and other forms of intangible linguistic heritage in order to preserve this linguistic legacy for future generations.

References:

1. Ibn Khaldoun – *Introduction à l'histoire des Berbères* – translated and annotated by William Marçais – Paris – 1903 – p. 12.
2. Al-Zubairi, Mohammed – *Arabic Dialects and Their Cultural Influences* – Al-Nahda Al-Arabia Library – 1995 – p. 112.
3. Bourdieu, Pierre – *Language and Symbolic Power* – Seuil – 1991 – p. 45.
4. Ferguson, Charles – "Diglossia" – *Word* – Vol. 15 – No. 2 – 1959 – p. 325.

5. Hassan, Khaled – *Linguistic Alternation in Contemporary Arabic Discourse* – Dar Al-Nahda – 2010 – p. 77.
6. Bourdieu, Pierre – “Linguistic Capital” – *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* – 1977 – p. 4.
7. Hassan, Hicham – *The Art of Djelfa Speech* – Proceedings of the Second National Conference “Djelfa : The City and Society” – Islamic Cultural Center – Djelfa – 19–20 April 2008 – pp. 44–46.
8. Wilaya of Djelfa, Directorate of Programming and Budget Monitoring – *Monograph of the Wilaya of Djelfa* – 2016 – p. 3.
9. Mohamed Belkacem Chayeb – *Djelfa : History and Contemporary Times* – edited by Mohamed Sebaa – Dar Osama for Printing, Publishing and Distribution – Algeria – pp. 13, 66.
10. Lembarki Belhadj – *Images and Characteristics of the Ouled Nail Society* – Al-Sahl Publications – Algeria – 2009 – pp. 11–14.
11. Ali Abdelaziz Adlaoui – *Popular Proverbs: Rules and Principles — The Djelfa Region as a Model* – reviewed by Bachir Hazrashi – Al-Wafaa Series for the Revival of Djelfa Heritage – Algeria – 2010 – pp. 15–16, 23–24, 26, 30–34.
12. François de Villaret – *Centuries of Steppe : Milestones in the History of Djelfa* – Part One – Centre de Documentation Saharienne – Ghardaïa and Algiers – 1995 – p. 26.
13. Bouzar Wadi – *The Movement and the Pause : Views on Algerian Society* – Société Nationale d’Édition et de Diffusion – Algiers – 1983 – p. 372.
14. Mustafa Daoudi – *A Brief History of Djelfa in the Islamic and Ottoman Periods* – Historical Research on the History of Djelfa Through the Ages, 1962–2012 – Djelfa – pp. 13, 19.
15. Khawla Taleb Ibrahim – [previous reference; full bibliographic information not provided in the original list] – pp. 26, 84, 109–111, 114–115.
16. Abu al-Qasim Saadallah – *The Cultural History of Algeria, 1830–1954* – Vol. 6 – Dar al-Gharb al-Islami – Beirut – 1998 – pp. 329–330, 334–335.
17. Ahmed Benani – [previous reference; full bibliographic information not provided in the original list] – p. 33.
18. Ahmed Boukous – *The Amazigh Language: Pathways, Challenges and Strategies* – translated by Fouad Saa – reviewed by Al-Hussein Al-Mujahid and Al-Wafi Al-Nouhi – Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture – Rabat – 2013 – pp. 37–38.