TEENAGERS' NEW LANGUAGE IN TEXT MESSAGING: ATTITUDES TOWARDS CODED FORMS

ميول المراهقين لاستعمال النماذج المشفرة كلغة جديدة في الرسائل النصية

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ABSTRACT:

A bunch of scholarly investigations were conducted on the language being used by people in text messaging in mobile phones. It is apparent that it results in the innovation of codes which have affected the syntactic features of languages. In this sense, the current study sought to explore the new integrated linguistic features employed by Algerian teenagers in their messages. The second aim is to examine this new phenomenon where the structure of the language is a mixture of dialectal Arabic, French language and coded forms written in Latin scripts. The study also pursues to provide an in-depth look on the attitudes of the teenagers towards the inclusion of these new codes and the motives behind their introduction. To this end, the sample was chosen randomly from Tlemcen society for the questionnaire and about 50 texts were selected from the participants. The findings showed that teenagers develop a special register called textese to show their solidarity. Most importantly, the analysis of the texts demonstrated that the use of these textese affect their language performance.

Keywords: Attitudes, Linguistic features, Mobile messaging, Sociolinguistics, Texting, Teenagers.

الملخص:

لقد ثم اجراء الكثير من الابحاث حول اللغة المستعملة من طرف الناس في الرسائل النصية للهاتف النقال. و من الواضح ان هذه الظاهرة أدت الى ابتكار كلمات مشفرة والتي اثرت على الجانب النحوي للغات. وعلى هذا تسعى هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف الميزات اللغوية المستعملة في الرسائل النصية من طرف المراهقين في الجزائر. اما الهدف الثاني هو دراسة هذه الظاهرة الجديدة من حيث البنية اللغوية والتي تتكون من الدارجة الجزائرية، اللغة الفرنسية بالإضافة الى التركيبات المشفرة المكتوبة بالحروف اللاتينية. كما تسعى كذلك الى دراسة ميول ودوافع المراهقين من ادراج هذه التركيبات المشفرة. وعلى هذا، قد ثم اختيار مئة مشارك عشوائيا لاستبيان من المجتمع التلمساني وخمسون رسالة نصية . ولقد أثبتت النتائج ان المراهقين قد قاموا بتطوير نموذجا جديدا لإظهار انتمائهم. والأهم من ذلك، اظهر التحليل كذلك ان استخدام هذه النصوص يؤثر على ادائهم اللغوي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الميول، الميزات اللغوية، رسائل الهاتف النقال، اللسانيات الاجتماعية، الرسائل النصية، المراهقون.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of technology has taken a spindle place in the lives of all humans in the last few decades. It becomes inseparable from their daily lives and communicative practices. People begin to depend to a great extent on the different technological tools in their communication with their friends, family, relatives and even for professional purposes. Admittedly, this affects the structure of the language being employed in daily written texts. As a matter of fact, new linguistic forms and vocabularies are replacing the language being used. For example, they tend to utilize '4ever' instead of 'forever' in English. Giving these points, one should inform that this change in the written language has triggered scholarly intention in the field of sociolinguistics. Most researchers agree on the view that technology has taken the primer place in affecting language use. In this light, Guth (1980) highlights that it is the need of technology to harness more abbreviated forms which open

the gate for new expressions and slang words to be created and practised. These forms help in the creation of new linguistic features called *textese*[1](Elvis, 2009, p. 25).

Correspondingly, the spread of text messaging after the invention of mobile phones has changed communication, especially between teenagers. The latter has spread and become a necessity in their communication; consequently, they felt the need for new linguistic features that facilitate their interaction. Among the reasons that encourage the use of abbreviated forms is the limited space for text messaging in addition to their need to protect their privacy, especially from adults. Indeed, teenagers show positive attitudes towards the creation and use of these expressions in texting.

In the light of this tight, the focal point behind the research work under scrutiny is to shed light on the new linguistic phenomenon and its impact on language performance of the *texters*[2] (Elvis, 2009, p. 25). Eventually, it intends to provide a glimpse on the structure of the new linguistic forms. Lastly and most importantly, this study sought to examine the attitudes and the reasons behind the reinvention of a slang employed between Algerian teenagers in messaging. To realise these research objectives, the following peripheral questions are put forward:

1- What are the attitudes of Algerian teenagers towards the new linguistic forms introduced in text messaging?
2- What is the form of the textese employed by Algerian teenagers?
3- Do these linguistic features influence their language performance?

In order to answer these concerns, the following points are hypothesized:

1. It is hypothesized that Algerian teenagers shared positive attitudes towards the abbreviated forms in texting. They tend to create linguistic features which are developed into slang.
2. It is predicted that the textese consist of a mixture of dialectal Arabic, French expressions, numbers to create abbreviated forms that suit the length of the message.
3. These syntactic features may affect deeply their language use in academic contexts.

As a matter of fact, this research work seeks to explore the structure of the new integrated linguistic forms in text messaging produced by teenagers by taking a sample from Tlemcen speech community since it is impossible to conduct a research from all districts in Algeria. Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 100 informants. It is also supported by the collection of 50 messages for examination.

2.   Review of the Related Literature

Text messaging emerged on mobile phones in 1993 while it was created in 1982 through which people can write messages. This new emerging form of texting becomes popular all over the world, although it was very pricy in the first years of its invention. The new emerging phenomenon has opened the scholarly appetite of many researchers like Crystal (2009) and Thurlow (2003)…etc. They tend to explore these texts in relation to the social motives of individuals, i.e., the social dynamic of texting. It is until recently that sociolinguists study the impact of text messaging on the writing skill of the individual (Crystal, 2009).

When it comes to the classification of these linguistic forms, the issue has raised much controversy among some sociolinguists like Crystal, Eckert and Trudgill. They resort to give the topic a sociolinguistic interpretation since in their view, slang is distinguished from a dialect. They also confirm that slang can never be regarded as a language, although the former has its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax. In this vein, Anderson & Trudgill (1992) maintain that:

> There are perhaps a handful of features which could be regarded as typical of slang grammar, but there are very few compared to the enormous number of words belonging to slang. Hence, slang is first and foremost a question of vocabulary.   (p. 73)

This means that slang is a set of common linguistic features developed by a group of people in order to develop a sense of identity and mutual intelligibility. These forms cannot be understood by other people. On the other side of the corner, some researchers like Danesi stress the point that this form is not necessary called slang since it does not take the same characteristics. He pickets the term pubilect which he divides into categories including emotive language, connotative language in addition to clique-coded language (Danesi, 1994, p. 97).

Taking a cue from the most influential investigations on teenage language, one cannot proceed further in the analysis without providing a glimpse on Eckert's views on the subject at hand. In her part, Eckert (1997) calls such innovation or change linguistic movers and shakers. She notices that youths are always looking for things that distinguish them from adults, so that they apt to use abbreviations and coded forms. Therefore, Eckert comes to the point that youth language gives a fertile soil to investigate language change. In this vein, she posits that it is "a prime source of information about linguistic change and the role of language change and the role of language in social practice" (Eckert in Coulmas, 1998, p. 52).

It may be helpful to add that teenagers can even borrow new words and expressions from other languages to show their unique identities. For this reason, this phenomenon is regarded as a marker of innovation in the field of linguistics, although these expressions are not supported by adults. In the light of this idea, Thurlow (2003) confirms that "adolescents are routinely misunderstood by adults and whose communicative power or capital is greatly reduced i.e., devalued or dismissed" (p. 50).

Supporting the previous claim on language change, one may add that youngsters are the leaders of innovation in language use since they tend to prove their identities and show their belonging to special groups. According to Keller (1994), teenagers always want to attract attention and reveal their existence; hence, they resort to a number of maxims in order to "attract attention, be understood, save energy" (p. 105). In the same line of thought, Labov (2001, p. 364) supports the view claiming that language change takes place in a given social network and the changes differ from one group into another. A good example, if we take youngsters from the United States and others from the United Kingdom, one can feel that the forms they are employing are unintelligible, although they are speaking the same mother tongue which is English.

Given this oversight on language change, on should also add that many researchers believe that even though youngsters share positive attitudes towards change in the syntactic level of the language and its pronunciation, they keep the same grammar. This view is supported by Andersen (2001) when he highlights that teenagers keep the same form of their grammar and the adoption "is achieved through a secondary modification of the speaker's usage rules" (p. 232).

Additionally, there is an obvious argument that language change is intertwined with language attitude; they cannot be explored in isolation. It is commonly agreed that the attitudes towards certain varieties or forms differ from one speaker into another depending on certain linguistic variables including age and gender in addition to other social variables. Besides, attitudes can be positive or negative since they are deeply rooted in the social norms of a given society. For this reason, it is the norm of the society which makes a word taboo or not for instance. As a matter of fact, adult people share negative attitudes against any change in the form of language by teenagers.

Talking about language attitude as the only ingredient in language change is not enough without providing an in-depth look on the concept of language identity. Many research works

take into consideration exploring identity effects on the linguistic production used by youngsters. It is also important to add that their identity is influenced and directed by the socio-cultural milieu of the societies in addition to the impact of media.

Arguably, technology as a source of communication has taken the lion's share in the process of innovation. The spread of mass media including TV, radio, net, and newspapers has resulted in a deep impact not only on youngsters but also adults. It leads to the creation of new expressions.

From the foregoing discussion, it is unfair to dig deeper on the issue of youngsters' innovative language without providing a glimpse on language in Algerian context from which the researcher can pave the way for readers to understand the terms being collected and analysed.

3.   Language Context in Algeria

As many communities, Algerian society is characterised as a diglossic speech community where there is the existence of a standard language called Modern Standard Arabic in addition to a set of regional varieties which are mutual intelligible without forgetting Tamazight with its regional variation. The standard language or as Ferguson (1959) calls it the high variety is employed in formal contexts like education, while other varieties which represent the low variety, are used in informal settings. A look on the standard form and the informal varieties, one can catch the difference between them.

Beyond this diglossic situation, one cannot forget the concept of bilingualism. Bilingualism refers to the capacity of speaking two different languages. This is the case of Algerian people who tend to utilise two different languages mainly Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and French language. Both are employed in education, administration, economics and financial field, although the latter is spoken even in informal contexts for the view that it is a prestigious language used by educated people.

Keeping the language situation in Algeria in focus, one has to give a cursory account of the phenomena of code switching and borrowing. Code switching is defined as switching from one language into another depending on the context of use and the topic being discussed, although scholars disagree on the exact definition of the term. Switching according to the context of use and the topic results in what is called situational code switching and the latter is metaphorical switching. In his part Gumperz (1982) introduces the third type 'conversational switching'. In case of borrowing, people tend to take words from other languages to explain their views, especially when their language or varieties of their language lack certain expressions. Moreover, the process of borrowing does not stop at the level of borrowing words, but also mixing the systems of both languages (Hudson, 1999).

The famous type of borrowing is the use of loanwords which are borrowed and adopted phonologically and morphologically as they are a part of the native language. A good example is the immense number of borrowed and adopted words from French language into Algerian Arabic (AA). For instance, [τΘβλΘ] for 'la table', [κλΘσσΘ] for 'la classe'…etc. According to Herbert (2001), people tend to borrow nouns more than other forms including verbs, adjectives and adverbs since they feel the need to name new things that have no names in their mother tongue (Herbert in Kastovsky & Mettinger, 2001). Furthermore, it is also important to mention that Algerians tend to borrow from other languages such as English and Spanish. In fact, some words borrowed from Spanish exist due to the commercial contact in the borders in towns like Oran, Mostaganem and Gazawet in Tlemcen.

4.   Research Methodology and Design

The data set for this research work was collected quantitatively and qualitatively through a questionnaire and texts messaging of fifty participants since most of them refused to give the researcher their texts due to their privacy. These texts were collected non-randomly from the participants on the form of words and expression after asking them to provide the researcher with a sample from the messages being sent to their friends. The fact that the informants refused to cooperate with the researcher; therefore, she collected texts from those she knew.

A questionnaire was designed and administered to one hundred and fifty teenagers; however, only one hundred of the participants returned the questionnaire with full answers of the questions. Fifty six of the informants were females and forty four were males; their age was between 18 and 22 years old.

5.   DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As far as the questionnaire is concerned, it contains three sections, the first one is about the participants' age and gender, and the second one is devoted to test their attitudes towards the use of coded forms while the last section is assigned to take an overview about the form of this linguistic production. Therefore, the researcher took the most important questions that have a great link with the peripheral questions.

Question One: Do you think that the language used by adults and youngsters is different?

- Yes
- No

Table.1. Youth's knowledge of language differences between adults and teenagers

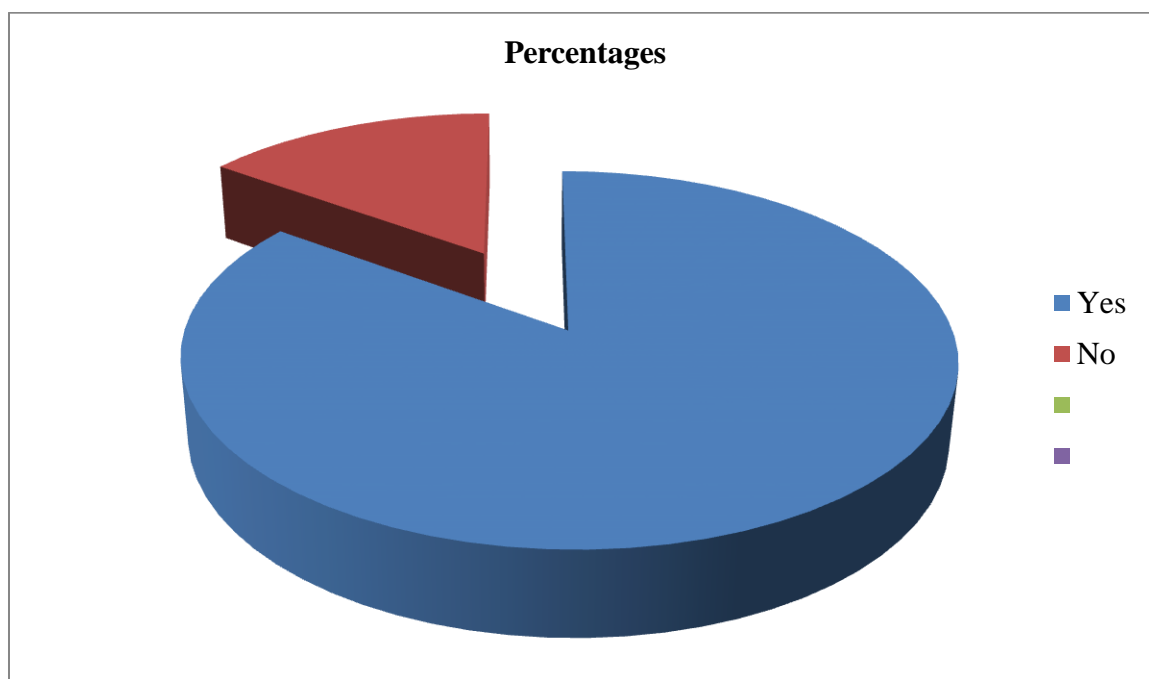| Answers	Males	Females	Percentages
Yes	32	53	85%
No	12	03	15%
Total	44	56	100%

Fig.1. Youth's knowledge of language differences between adults and teenagers

Table 1 and figure 1 reveal that most participants are fully aware of the differences between teens and old people in general in selecting language, words and expressions, while about 15% of them have no idea about the topic.

Question Two: What language do you use in your messages?

- Standard Arabic
- Algerian Arabic
- French language
- A mixture of French and Algerian Arabic

Table.2. Type of the language used in text messaging

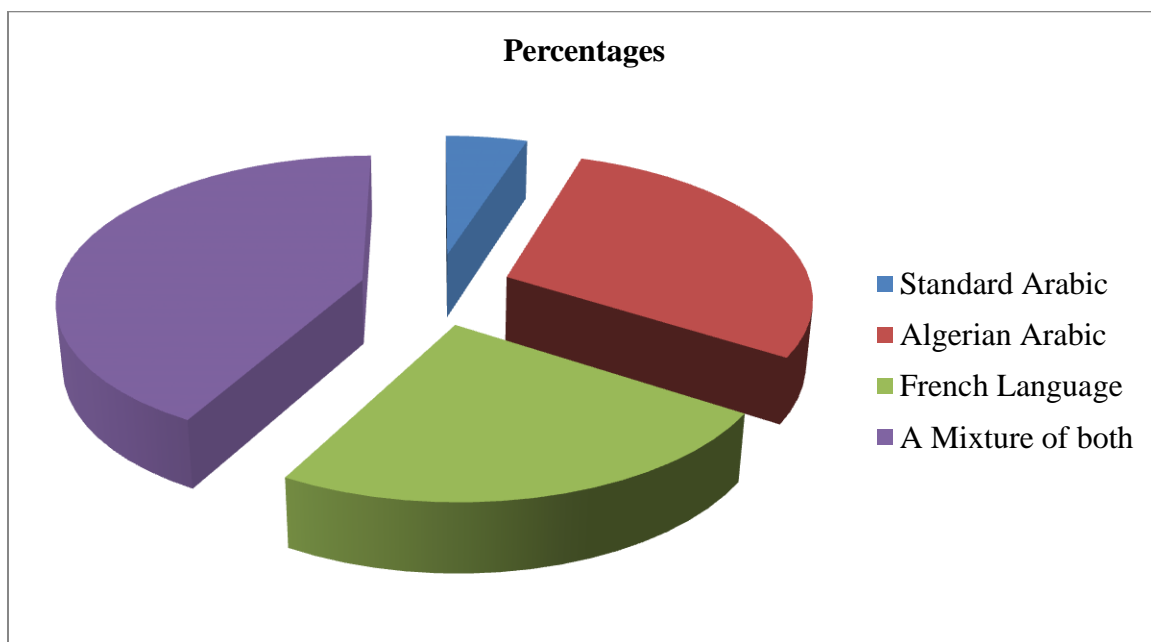| Answers	Males	Females	Percentages
Standard Arabic	02	03	5%
Algerian Arabic	17	12	29%
French language	09	15	24%
A mixture of both	16	26	42%
Total	44	56	100%

Fig.2. Type of the language used in text messaging

As it is obvious in the previous table and figure, half of the participants highlighted that they tend to mix French with dialectal Arabic in all their text messages, while others claimed that they employ either dialectal Arabic or French language. The findings also show that females prefer to use French more than the dialectal form of Arabic.

Question Three: For what reason do you use coded forms in your texting?

- To protect my privacy
- To show my unique identity

- To show my belonging to the young generation

Table.3. The intention behind the use of coded features in texting

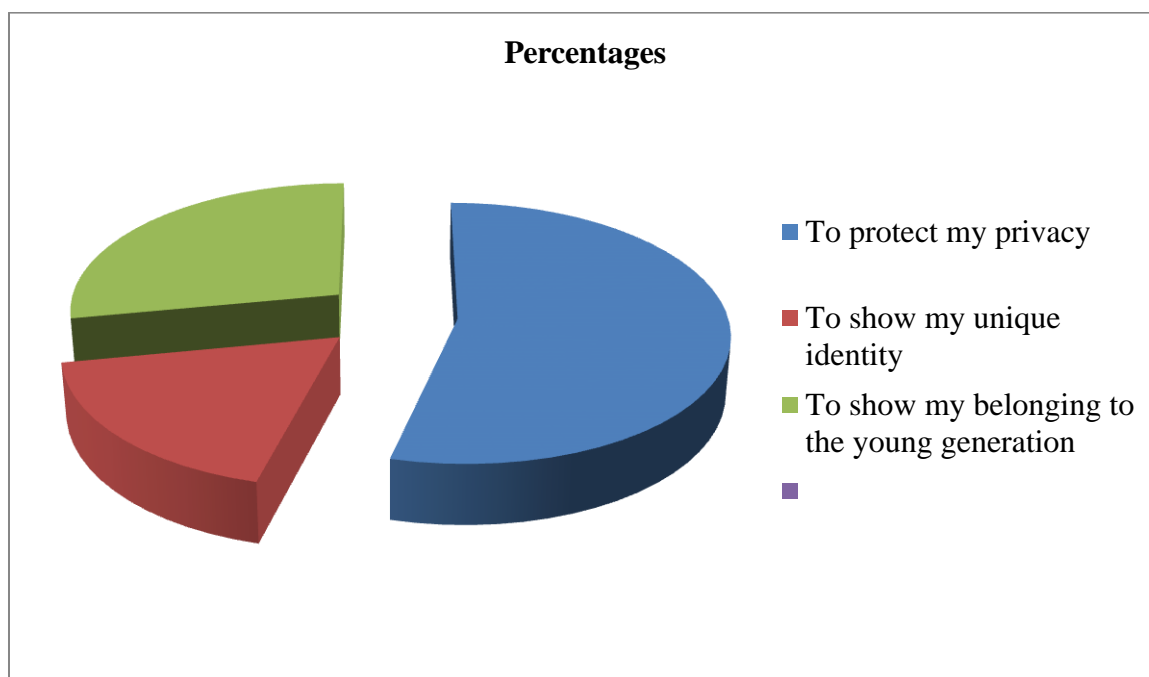| Answer	Males	Females	Percentages
To protect my privacy	23	31	54%
To show my unique identity	11	07	18%
To show my belonging to the young generation	10	18	28%
Total	44	56	100%

Fig.3. The intention behind the use of coded features in texting

About half of the participants were with the idea that they employ coded texting to protect their privacy from their parents and family since these linguistic features are not understood by old people. On the other side of the corner, about 28% of the informants confirmed that they tend to create new expressions that reveal their belonging to the youngsters. They added that they tend to use new linguistic forms that go hand in hand with the new changes in the world, while 18% of the participants said that these expressions and linguistic features show their unique identity and distinguish them from old people.

Analysis of Text Messaging

As it has already been mentioned, the researcher selected fifty texts non-randomly from the participants, although it was a hard task since it is regarded as a personal privacy. They gave us some expressions and sentences. This section probes to test the impact of the new linguistic

features on writing style of the youngsters. Throughout this analysis, the researcher is going to analyse the structure of the features used.

Table.4. The main linguistic features used by youngsters

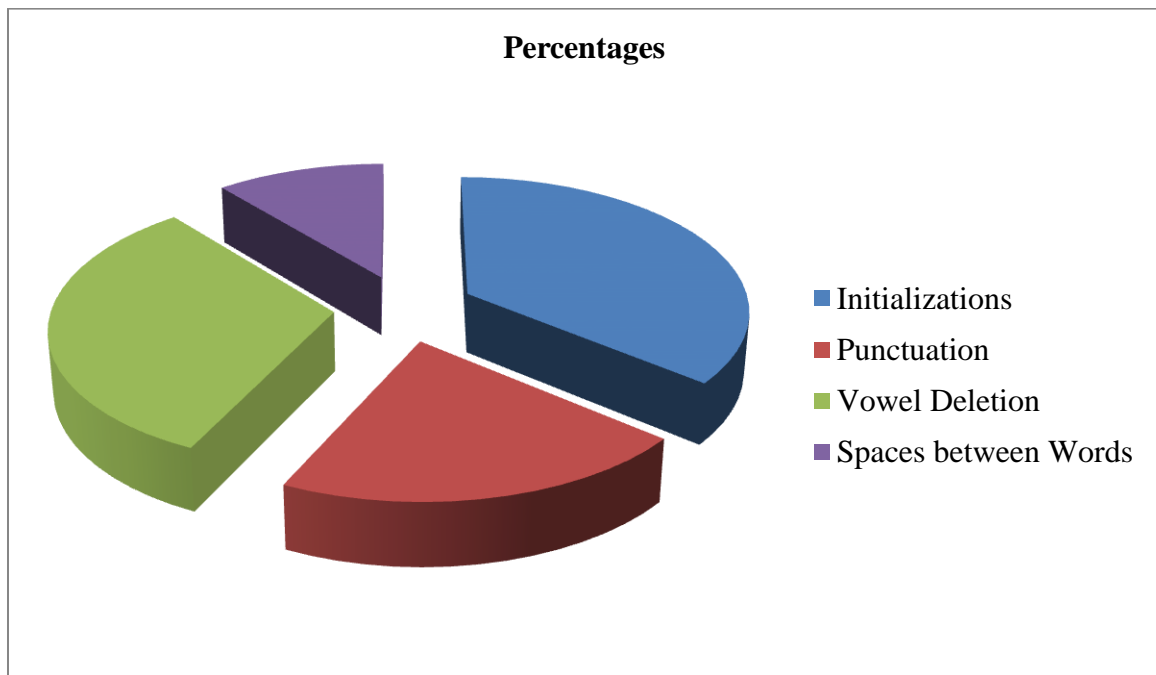| Answers	Females	Males	Percentages
Initialization	22	14	36%
Punctuation	11	10	21%
Vowel Deletion	17	15	32%
Spaces between Words	06	05	11%
Total	56	44	100%

Fig.4. The main linguistic features used by youngsters

The findings show that youngsters prefer to employ initialization in their text messaging. It is also found that 21% of the informants claimed that they did not respect punctuation like the use of the full stop and commas. The analysis also reveals that they prefer exclamation and question marks, while the use of vowel deletion becomes a favorite feature in their texts.

- **Initialization**

Initializations are employed to represent a whole sentence or expression, it is the mostly preferred technique utilized by the young generation. These abbreviated symbols for those sentences and words are apparent in all messages of the texters. The researcher collected them as follows:

Table.5. Some widely used initializations

Initializations	Real Meaning
Cul	See you later
Brb	Be right back
Pcq	Par ce que
Je re or re	Je reviendrai/ reviens
Att	Attends
Mdr	More de rire

Table 5 demonstrates that initializations are like abbreviations used by youngsters for the sake of shortening their conversations. It is also apparent from these examples that teenagers tend to use initializations from both French and English more than Arabic.

- **Vowel Deletion**

The above results reveal that about 32% of the participants prefer vowel deletion in texting. Deletion takes place by omitting vowels in words while the texter depends just on consonants. What can be also noticed is that youngsters resort to the use of French sentences and expressions with the feature of deletion in their texting. The researcher presented in table 6 the most used features:

Table.6. Some widely used forms of deletion

Forms with Deletion	Real Meaning
Mlg	Malgré
Tlf	Téléphone
Dsl	Désolé
Nn	Non
Dnc	Donc
Alrs	Alors
Dacc	D'accord
Bnjr	Bon jour
Jcp or jc	Je sais pas or je sais
Cv	Ça va

- **Letter Homophones**

It is replacing a letter with a number. This feature is mostly found between teenagers due to the fact that they suffer from the lack of letters that represent some Arabic scripts in Latin. In this regard, the researcher asked them about the reasons behind the inclusion of homophones.

Question Four: What is the motive behind the inclusion of homophones in your texting?

- Lack of letters in Arabic
- For the purpose of making the message shorter

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Table.7. The inclusion of homophones in text messaging

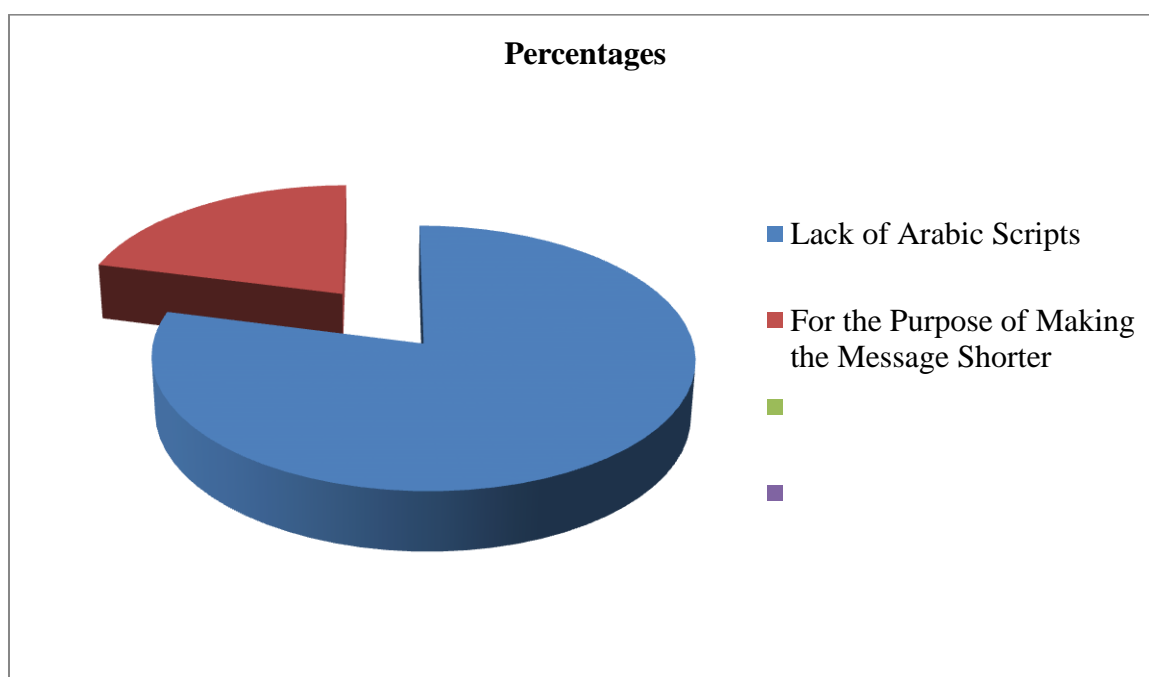| Answers	Females	Males	Percentages
Lack of letters in Arabic	42	37	79%
For the purpose of making the message shorter	14	07	21%
Total	56	44	100%

Fig.5. The inclusion of homophones in text messaging

The results reveal that 79% of the informants explained the reasons behind the use of numbers instead of letters is the absence of letters to replace Arabic scripts since all the informants informed that they utilize Latin scripts in their texting. On the other hand, 21% of the participants declared that numbers are more workable in texting since they make their letters shorter. In their view, this feature is found even in English and French languages; thus, it is not the lack of Arabic scripts. The researcher also took some samples from the messages of the informants which are represented in the following table:

Table.8. Some homophones borrowed from both English and French

Some Homophones	Their Real Meaning
B8	Bon nuit
B1	Bien
Gd ni8	Good night
442	For you too
Me 2	Me too

From the table above, one can notice that teenagers have also included borrowed homophones from both English and French for the purpose of facilitating interaction and due to

their innovative nature. Besides, the researcher made also a list of Arabic scripts and the homophones used to replace them as it is represented in the following examples:

Table.9. Homophones replacing Arabic scripts

Homophones	Arabic Scripts	Examples	Meaning in English
3	ع	[3labali]	I know
7	ح	[ro7t]	I went
9	ق	[9rit]	I learnt
5	خ	[5sni]	I need
6	ط	[6wila]	Tall
2 and 1	ا، ء	[2mantek]	I believe you

As these examples reveal, all the participants resort to the use of Arabic numerals to replace scripts which are not found in Latin list for the purpose of facilitating their interaction and distinguishing their writing style.

From the foregoing analysis, four main findings emerged in the current study. First of all, there is a deep impact of social media on Algerian youngsters in general. This is apparent through the use of abbreviated forms taken from English, although French is the dominant language. Secondly, it is also found that code switching is present in their messages between dialectal Arabic and French language as it is previously mentioned in data presentation. Thirdly, Algerian teenagers include initializations, vowel deletion, and homophones to display their unique nature and belonging to the young generation which likes innovation. Another focal point that should be put under the lens is the mixture of two languages which has led to the fact that youngsters have developed a poor linguistic style in both Arabic and French due to the phenomenon of code switching.

The gathered data also show that youngsters are unique in their behaviour, language and emotions because they are always looking for motives to prove their identities and build a place for themselves in their society where their parents no longer take control over them. As a matter of fact, parents are always looking after their children when they become teenagers. This idea supports Eckert's claim when she maintains that "Parents quake as their children approach adolescence; they read self-help books; they may even seek professional advice. One would think that adults had never been adolescents themselves…" (Eckert in Coulmas, 1998, p. 362).

Another important finding from the present study is that Algerian teens develop their own unique pubilect as Danesi (1994) calls it, although the latter is not accepted by old people, it remains their own way to prove their belonging and display their emotions through employing initializations, vowel deletion, homophones, and elongated words…etc.

6. Limitations of the Study

Although the present research provides an inkle eye on the issue of teens' language and coded forms, there are still some stumbling blocks that hinder the researcher among which the participants were not collaborative at all, especially in collecting texts messaging. For this reason, this research work cannot be representative for all Algerian teenagers. Stated differently, this study paves the way for more exploratory scholarship by sociolinguists in order to understand the nature and the structure of youngsters' pubilect.

Another important point that the researcher did not want to conclude without giving an account of it is that teens' language in Algeria still needs further scholarship because this current research covers a small part in exploring coded forms. Researchers can tackle; for example, grammatical errors in constructing sentences. They can also investigate verb form errors,

sentences' complexity, subject omission, and lexical influence...etc. Besides, the study of the linguistic features produced by teenagers needs to open a gate way for more investigation on gender differences in text messaging in Algerian context. Another vital point that researchers should also come across is the structure of the new coded forms and the status of language production for teens in Standard Arabic and French language. Therefore, what Algerian youngsters have created is a new form which does not represent any feature of the aforementioned languages, i.e., Standard Arabic and French language and results in what Anderson & Trudgill (1992) call 'bad language'.

7. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis and discussion, one can conclude that the focal point behind the present research work was to provide a glimpse on the different linguistic forms that Algerian teens have developed due to the overuse of social media and networks which results in the birth of a new form which Danesi (1994) coins pubilect. This form adopts the linguistic structure of both Algerian dialect and French language which in turn gives birth into a new form which has no identity because Arabic language represents the components of its people's culture and Arabic scripts and linguistic features are part of it. This case is not only found in Algerian context but in all Arab communities which suffer from the deep impact of English.

In nutshell, it is important to state that further studies on the structure of the teens' new coded forms should go beyond the linguistic features into the cultural components brought through these forms, i.e., the influence of English and French in addition to the role of social media like movies and music. In short, these are just some guidelines conducted with a small sample from Tlemcen community which cannot be representative for the whole Algerian society, but it can pave the floor for more scholarship.

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Footnotes

1. Textese: is a term used to describe text messages in mobile phones.
2. Texter: is the person who sends the text message.
3. Pubilect: is a term coined by Danesi (1994) which is employed to describe the linguistic features characterizing teens' speech, it includes the use of slang expressions.