



***Attitudes towards Social Stratification and Sound Change in Tlemcen
Speech Community***

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Received: 05 / 05 / 2021

Accepted: 08 / 12 / 2021

Published: 30 / 12 / 2021

Abstract:

This study in an attempt to investigate people's attitudes towards social stratification in relevance with linguistic variation mainly the use of the glottal stop, a sedentary realization of (q) in Tlemcen speech community. The corpus of research includes males and females from different age cohorts exercising life in the city. Data have been gathered via a survey interview and analyzed both numerically and qualitatively.

Results show that despite the paradox of opinions, participants agree on the existence of social classes in Tlemcen speech community and that dialect use is one strong parameter for which the glottal stop, despite being stigmatized, is a marker of the highly ranked ones. However, this stigma is leading people to change their dialect which, in turn, is paving the way for a neo-urban regional *koine*.

Keywords: *Attitudes; Glottal Stop; Koineization; Social Classes; Tlemcen Community*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Biology and body genesis have always been concrete scientific explanations to mere discrepancy between stretches of people with regard to their way of speaking where children use language in a different manner than adults, and so do males differ from females (Trudgill, 2000); however, social perceptions have also taken the lion's share in categorizing speakers' differences which have become nearly arbitrary in nature. Put differently, identifying people into groups according to their way of speaking goes beyond scientific idiosyncrasies to sociosymbolic parameters where the use of a given linguistic feature is directly perceived and associated to a category: of age, gender, ethnicity, and even class (Spolsky, 2010). In many contexts, sociolinguistic categorization occurs by merging a certain variant with economic power and social prestige. Therefore, in addition to the choice of pieces of clothing and way of behaving, differences in lexicon (Gardiner, 2008), syntax and variants choice are also pertinent in recognizing doctors from masons, city dwellers from outsiders, urban from rural, and higher from lower classes. Those sociolinguistic distinctively-put features are not only about men and women but are rather built on social classes.

Egalitarian to other social variables, class categories are artlessly percipient and evaluative. Esteem and contempt, pride and disfavor given to people is one of the ways that proves the social conjecturing lens of the inhabitants of a given society towards or contra each other. This is what is known as status: the belief of the value that people merit on whether they are socially respected, honored or disrespected and looked down. More to the point, possession of ability of control and influence or what is known as power is the other quintessence of categorizing people in classes. Thence, studying both or one of those parameters can allow recognize the state of language use in relation to class categories in a given society. This allows a significant query to be raised that in which ways and for which reasons do social groups diverge? In other words, which linguistic features make social distinctions that allow status and power comparisons.

This paper is an attempt to address many gaps found in the literature. As a matter of fact, social class as a parameter has not been well documented in previous dialectological works nor was it chosen as a common variable for language use explanation. Additionally, social stratification and classes in the Arab world have mainly been recognized in relation to economic power and material resources possessed by people; rarely are the studies that find how people in differing classes speak differently. More to the point, as for the investigated community, studies on Tlemcen dialects have never mentioned class to explain the linguistic situation taking place in that speech community. Put differently and precisely, the status of the glottal stop, an urban realization of Standard Arabic /q/, although being associated to prestige, has not overtly been explained in relation to social classes existing in the community especially with reference to people's attitudes. For all these pitfalls the present study is designed.

1. Class as a Social Variable

Social classification has always been documented as being an independent social variable in sociolinguistic studies starting from Labov (1966)'s investigations. In order to determine one's social class, some parameters need to be taken into consideration including wealth, education and occupation (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Jencks et al, 1972; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Sewell and Hauser, 1975). However, there is a second approach to determining social classes and stratifications, the one that concerns this investigation, which takes from people's attitudes as the parameter of study. This is known in literature as subjective social class, i.e., how people self-place themselves into categories and social entities (Diemer et al., 2013).

2. Social Classes in the Arabic Literature

Whereas social classes can be easily identified in the western world, it has not been that much studied nor well-documented in the Arabic-speaking world as the situation is said to be complicated. Studying social classes in this context has been identified as "difficult" or "an almost possible task" especially in relation to socio-economic and political variables as stated by Farsoun (1988: 1). By then, he has suggested or more correctly expected the Arab world to

achieve a considerable stratification by the twenty-first century where the economic, cultural, social as well as political structures are dependent on oil (ibid: 15). As observed, language has scarcely, if not at all, been cited as a parameter of class categorization although many studies have clearly highlighted the urban vs. rural and sedentary vs. Bedouin issues in the Arabic-speaking world where linguistic change can cause and be caused by social change (Eckert, 2016; Burnett, 2017; Beltrama, 2018; Acton, 2019, 2020).

3. The Linguistic Variant [?]

Around all parts of the Arab world where the glottal stop is spoken as an allophonic realization of Classical Arabic Qaf, research has always mention it as a prestigious form that is used in urban areas and cities as opposed to other variants akin to [g] which has been associated with bedouin traditions. (Al-Wer, 2013; Hammoudi, 2017) In Tlemcen city, the glottal stop has been mentioned as an old-sedentary variant coming from the pre-Hilali period which has all the time been reflective of her people and speakers as possessing stronger roots, preservative norms, and exercising an urban lifestyle (Dendane, 1993). However, connotations and prejudices towards this variant have witnessed a considerable change especially when many outsiders of differing origins -namely rural- came to share life in the city causing dialect contact that is now threatening the purely sedentary variants to be lost in favour of the rural ones.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

For the previously highlighted issues and motivations for research, this paper aims at answering the following questions:

- 1- Is there truly a social stratification in Tlemcen as an Arabic-speaking community? If yes, what are these according to its inhabitants? And which parameters, apart from economy, can be used for this social order?
- 2- Can one relate social classes to certain linguistic markers in this case study? Which marker for which class is prominent in the sample under investigation with regard to the urban and rural realizations of Classical Arabic *Qaf*?
- 3- How can attitudes relate to social and linguistic change in the studied speech community? And what are the other expected results (in society stratification and dialect use) that can emerge from those attitudes? Are the negative perceptions and stigma of the urban Tlemcenian sociolect a reason for the emergence of a new dialect (koineization process)?

Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

- 1- Yes, social stratification is pertinent in the community of Tlemcen where upper and lower classes are defined via two parameters namely origins and the variety used.
- 2- Sure, some linguistic variants are used by and therefore associated to peculiar social classes as is the case with the use of the sedentary glottal stop by upper-class people in Tlemcen.
- 3- Attitudes tend to be the most important notion that can show the social norm as well as social conflict which, in turn, lead to the avoidance of socially stigmatized linguistic features in favor of the commonly accepted ones forming a new regional koine in the province.

II. Methodology:

1. Informants

A convenience sample of one hundred participants living, working, and studying in Tlemcen city was selected to form the nucleus of this research. The participants included people from different age cohorts; the oldest was 80 years old and the youngest was 13. Of course, as attitudes were needed, both genders were involved in this survey in order to cross-check the variability of subjectivity among them.

2. Instruments

A survey interview was the method of this study. The questions asked were similar and conversation was dependent on the participants' motivation. Semi-structured survey interviews were recognized as very efficient once dealing with attitudes and perceptions of the social reality (Codo, 2009). As part of the interview, a 'Community Ladder Ranking' which is a scale of measuring social status (Adler and Stewart, 2007) was implemented in order to query people to show where they stood in Tlemcen community with regard to the varieties used.

III. Results and discussion :

After the phase of data collection, analysis had to take place. In fact, the current study relies on qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The raw data were coded and then themes were deductively extracted according to the number of questions asked to and answered by the respondents.

Theme 1: Social connotations associated with the use of the glottal stop

When asked about the social connotation associated with the use of the glottal stop in Tlemcen speech community, respondents showed approximating attitudes. The results portrayed that these social connotative aspects ranged from very positive to very negative forming an attitudinal continuum. First, Tlemcen native urban dialect speakers had positive attitudes towards this variant. They claimed that the glottal stop had reflected the culture and heritage of the city. It is a sign of belonging to the urban identity. Therefore, it holds positive social connotation and is therefore highly valued by them. Another group of participants claimed that the glottal stop had negative connotations. They explained this by making reference to aspects of: social class stratification, gender discrimination, effeminateness, and linguistic racism in the society not only Tlemcen but also outside of it. A group of participants took a middle position; these were generally speakers of a mixed variety that is neither urban nor rural but approximating both. They stated that the glottal stop was particular to Tlemcen city, it belonged to a certain class but not all inhabitants should talk in it to sound Tlemcenian; rather, each one should behave linguistically as they want without any restrictions.

Theme 2: The association of the glottal stop use with racism in Tlemcen speech community

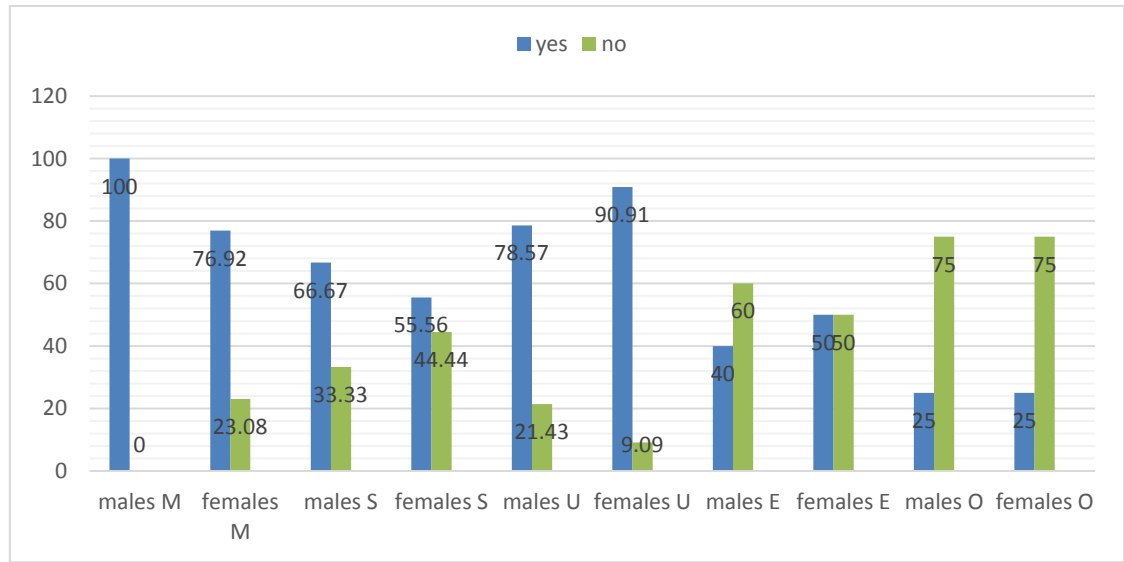
The question that was asked to the respondents was whether they thought that the Rural-Urban dialectal dichotomy found in Tlemcen gave a racist society. Answers were tabulated and summarized as follows.

Table (1): Participants' attitudes on whether the linguistic urban-rural dichotomy causes racism in Tlemcen society

Respondents	Gender	No	Yes
Middle school Respondents	Males	0	6
	Females	3	10
Secondary School Respondents	Males	2	4
	Females	4	5
University Respondents	Males	3	11
	Females	2	20
Elderly	Males	6	4

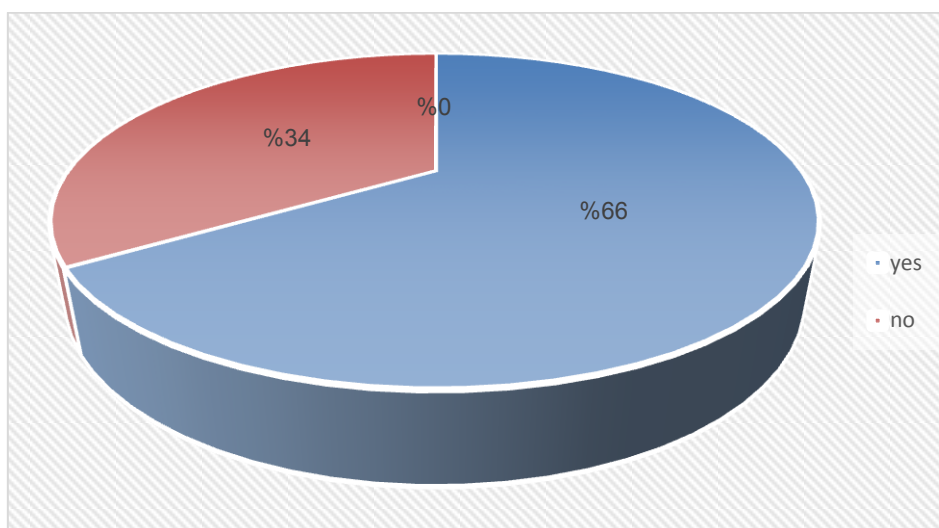
Respondents	Females	5	5
Old Respondents	Males	6	2
	Females	3	1

Figure (1): Males' and females' answers regarding the glottal stop as a racist society marker



According to the Table (1) and the Figure (1) above, an obvious remark is the existing of a considerable belief that the rural-urban dialectal dichotomy could cause a racist society in Tlemcen city. We notice that positive answers were way far from negative ones. Put differently, both males and females especially of younger ages viewed that the linguistic variation that is found in Tlemcen district had caused a kind of disequilibrium among members of the society. This opinion was getting lesser percentage in samples of older age. 55% of elderly participants and 75% of old people claimed that the glottal stop is just a way of speaking and there was no place for racism to be there. Responses of Tlemcen participants in relation to racism and the glottal stop are summarized in the following pie chart (figure 2). It can be seen that people were aware of the sociolinguistic situation that is taking place in Tlemcen city. 39.64% claimed there was no racism associated to the use of the glottal stop, whereas 60.36% claimed the opposite.

Figure (2): Attitudes towards the glottal stop as a marker of a racist society



The concept of racism was more often used in Tlemcen. The glottal stop really created a racist society. Youngsters were more aware about that social phenomenon especially when being in frequent contact with others, i.e., in circumstances where rural and urban people came into touch, they generally noticed and felt the social inequality that was placed between the two groups of speakers. This idea had been reinforced by the discussion that was informally opened by the participants who we asked. Respondents from rural origins strongly claimed that they felt inferior to those speaking using the glottal stop especially in administrative issues, in schools, and so forth. Though they felt embarrassed, rural variety speakers stated that they did not have to change their way of speaking in order to gain social status; this was their personality and they did not have any obligation to switch or shift.

On the other hand, urban dialect speakers tended to hesitantly say that what they were using was only a way of speaking; a variety like any other dialect used in the country. Yet, our observations and some honest answers from young pupils and students showed a complete difference. They claimed that the glottal stop was a specific characteristic of their behavior, it belonged to them; it reflected their culture and mirrored their identity. Those who did not use it are just outsiders and did not belong to the urban Tlemcenian group. Some of the observations done during the same random interview were that females are strongly attached to this variety. They even claimed that they could not get in contact with rural *tough* people (specially to get married with them, etc.) This obvious observation, which they did not want to label racism, was completely racist. Language can create racism.

Theme 3: The glottal stop as a parameter of social stratification

The question that was later asked to the respondents was the possibility to consider the urban Tlemcenian variety as a parameter for social class division. Table (2) summarizes the answers.

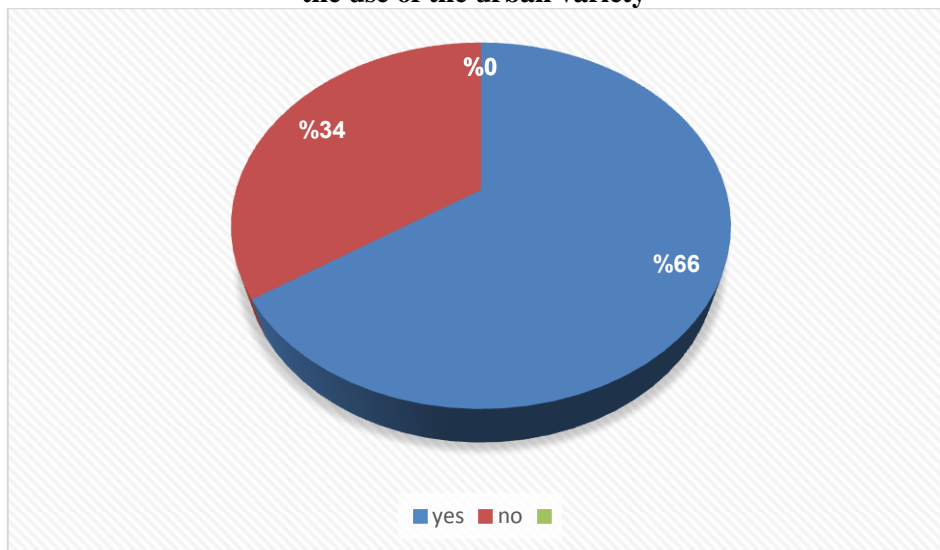
Table (2): Participants' awareness of the social stratification caused by the use of the glottal stop in Tlemcen

Respondents	Gender	No	Yes
Middle school Respondents	Males	0	6
	Females	4	9
Secondary School Respondents	Males	1	5
	Females	2	7
University	Males	4	10

Respondents	Females	4	18
Elderly Respondents	Males	7	3
	Females	5	5
Old Respondents	Males	6	2
	Females	2	2

The tabulated data show that most of the informants were aware of the social reality that was happening in Tlemcen. They thought that, from a very long time, the glottal stop belonged to a certain group of people. Therefore, it only marked them. This group of people occupies higher social positions and good jobs. Thus, the glottal stop belongs to people from this social group who constitutes a specific social class that is highly ranked. We also noticed that old people did not prefer this label; they stated that the glottal stop is just a way of speaking and not necessarily a social class indicator by adding that not all rich people speak in [ʔ] nor do all speakers of [ʔ] have higher positions of work. Their statement sounds logical, but reality is different, claimed other respondents. Once someone uttered the glottal stop, they directly check their family names by saying [tina bentmen/ weldmen] meaning 'who is your father or your family name', and then associate the urban variety with development, advancement, culture, richness, education, prestige and civilization.

Figure (3): Whole percentage of speakers' awareness of the social distinction caused by the use of the urban variety



Generally speaking, as far as the researcher's intuitive knowledge and the participants' responses, the city of Tlemcen has always been documented as being the center of educated people (Marçais, 1902; Dekkak, 1979; Dendane, 2007; Hammoudi, 2017). Those people who entered different schools and institutions. Therefore, we notice that most of the real, original inhabitants of the city are doctors, teachers, lawyers, and so forth. Individuals occupying these positions have Turkish family names. These names are well known everywhere as belonging to a specific family of a higher rank. The dialectal variety that is used by this group of people has always been the urban Tlemcenian; a variety that makes them divergent from other places (not only other districts in Algeria but also in the surroundings of the city itself). Some doctors and old professors still use the glottal stop in their speech as a significant marker of belonging to a certain class and a social indicator of urban Tlemcen identity affiliation. It is only after independence that the city of Tlemcen witnessed a considerable wave of migrants searching for opportunities of work that the [g]-variant started to be somehow accepted in the environment.

More interestingly, this group of people do only shift to the [q] realizational variant and rarely to the [g] since the former is still considered as an urban linguistic feature. They, thus, consist their own class viewed in the district as a high social class. Therefore, the glottal stop is a parameter of social stratification in Tlemcen. According to the results, we may deduce that though the glottal stop is stigmatized and negatively seen, it still prevails a great social power which makes it a social class indicator. Figure (3) reveals that 65.69% believed that the glottal stop was a social class marker.

Later questions were related to labels and expressions addressed to Tlemcen urban dialect speakers. The words that were generally given by the respondents were: [hadri] 'civilized', [sfer] 'yellow', [manar] 'a name of a singer who is gay', [ʔaw'awi] 'from the word peanut generally pronounced as [qawqaw, kawkaw] by rural variety speakers', and [bogos] 'handsome'. Along this list, we see that there are both positive and negative perspectives. There are words that refer to civilization, Turkish ancestry and beauty; others that reflect pejorative markers. The social connotation that is associated to those words can also be divided into two aspects: positive and negative. Whereas the former reflects civilization and cultural advancement, belonging to a rich family, and the fact of having a good-looking appearance, the latter refers to bad connotations addressed especially to male speakers of the glottal stop. They are generally described as effeminate with a weak character.

As far as the expressions given to address rural dialect speakers, results showed that nearly the same list of words and labels was elicited from the participants. These included expressions akin: [gali:t] 'outsider, someone with no origin', [ʔru:bi] 'an arab', [treiz virgule] 'outside the district of Tlemcen that its number is officially 13', [kavi] 'someone who knows nothing and who is not civilized'. Indeed, the respondents agreed that the social connotation that was associated to them was, all in all, negative and could cause embarrassment to the addressee and might sometimes lead to conflicts of 'who are the original inhabitants of Tlemcen' and 'to whom it belongs'. Backwardness, less culture, poor, ugly looking, someone who knows nothing, the son of the village, etc. were all labels directed to the rural variety speakers. This is how Tlemcen is witnessing a racist situation where all aspects of social interaction are taken into account: the dialect used is one of these aspects.

Theme 4: The glottal stop as a marker of social power among genders

Among the questions asked: How can the urban Tlemcenian dialect be considered as one of the causes of gender discrimination? Following the respondents' answers, the City of Tlemcen is witnessing a noticeable process of gender discrimination in the use of its dialects. It is already stated in previous research (Dendane, 2013; Obeidat and Hammoudi, 2019) that males feel more ashamed to use the glottal stop in their speech rather than females. This psychological treatment leads them to be socially discriminated. In other words, the urban variety is having the idea that it should be used only by women, and therefore, it is female stereotype. If it is observed to be used by males especially youngsters, then they will be considered as effeminate. Some male participants showed a high disagreement on this social fact by claiming that if they were born and raised in an environment that used the glottal stop in their speech, how could they avoid using it? It is a matter of primary socialization which caused them to learn how to speak this urban variety. They added that it was not their mistake to grow in urban families nor was it a feminine behavior to talk in [ʔ]. It is only society that is shaping their linguistic behavior which influences their psyche and therefore they find themselves switching to the rural variety just to avoid the genderly negative connotation that is socially associated with the use of the glottal stop by males.

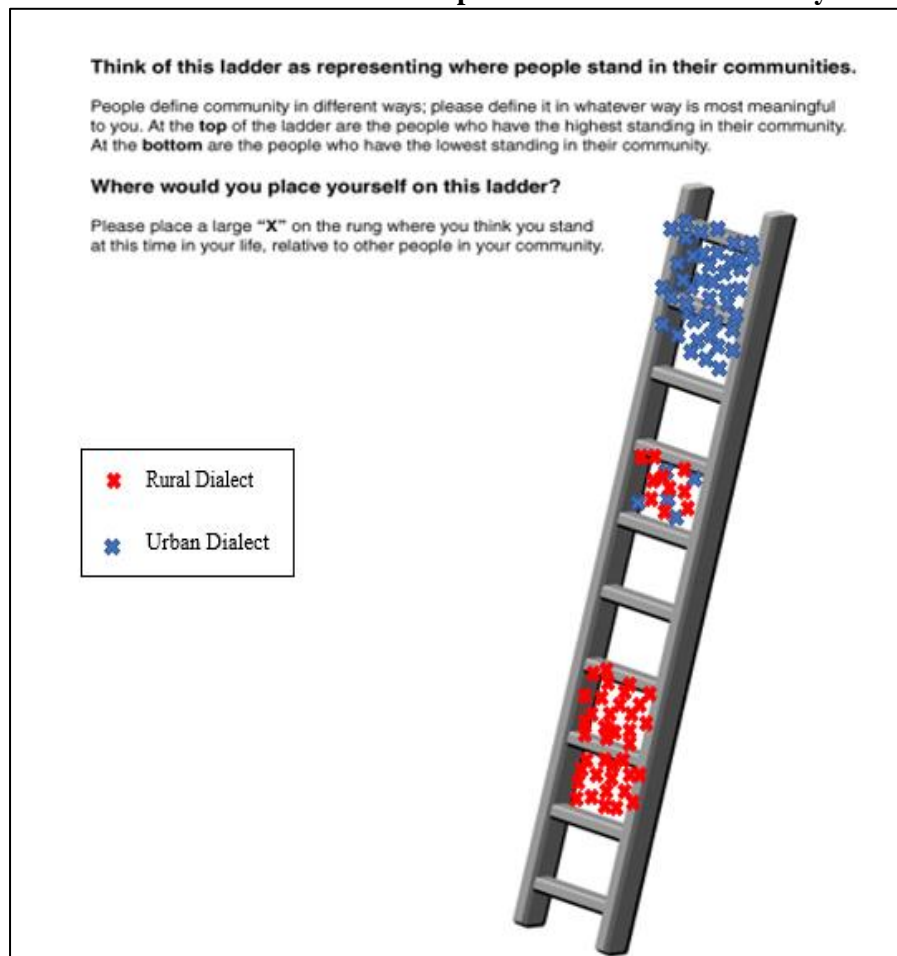
Theme 5: Respondents' social positioning in Tlemcen community

The last phase of the survey was devoted to the use of McArthur scale of measuring subjective social status that is linked to standing in one's community, i.e., the Community Ladder. This instrument proved to be of great importance in reflecting how and where the participants categorized themselves within the community. The classification in this study was

based on the variety spoken. Interestingly, as shown in figure (4), participants who were speakers of the sedentary variety characterized by the sound [ʔ] have all mentioned themselves as belonging to the higher class of Tlemcen community; whereas those who spoke the rural or bedouin varieties reflected themselves as having a lower social status compared to the urban variety.

It shall be also noted that 15% of the sample categorized both varieties as being of a middle-positioned class. When asked to give an explanation related to this evaluation, participants justified their answers with reference to other parameters rather than the linguistic one. They stated that there were some people who speak the rural variety but are economically and financially way better than people speaking the sedentary dialect. On the other hand, there are some urban dialect speakers, though very few, who are not that much wealthy nor having a fancy life style; accordingly, they cannot be recognized as members of an upper class. Aspects of education have also been introduced as, said the respondents, university students and many intellectual people coming from villages, mountings and very remote areas from the city which qualifies them as bedouin. In this vein, it is clear that the respondents included the place of residence and origin as other parameters of social classes in Tlemcen community. They added that the situation in Tlemcen city is no more as was in previous years. Some rural respondents have even stated that [tlemcen mafi ʔi l sħab a:li otlek ħatta ħna negzistiw neqraw w neħedmou w balak welina ga3 ʔir menhoum hu:ma ʔi daw ʃiħa] *'Tlemcen is not only for urban dialect speakers; we [the rural] exist too, we study, we work and probably we have become even better than them'*. Consequently, one can conclude that the respondents are aware of the social situation occurring in Tlemcen community since the majority (75%) managed to related the urban dialect with the upper class and the rural with the lower one.

Figure (4): Reporting Community Ladder results on where the respondents socially rank the urban and rural dialects spoken in Tlemcen community



Source: adapted from <https://macses.ucsf.edu/research/psychosocial/commladder.php>

Following these results, it can be claimed that attitudes and evaluations towards dialect use can reflect the social reality. Although classes cannot be easily detected on an economic basis in Tlemcen community, dialect use has proved to be a strong parameter of distinction between highly or poorly perceived ones. Whereas upper class people are seen as urban dialect users, bedouin dialect speakers are evaluated and regarded as having a lower social status and therefore belonging to a lower social class in the community of Tlemcen.

IV. Conclusion:

This study in an attempt to investigate people's attitudes towards social stratification in relevance with linguistic variation mainly the use of the glottal stop, a sedentary realization of /q/ in Tlemcen speech community. The corpus of research includes males and females from different age cohorts exercising life in Tlemcen city. Data have been gathered via a survey interview and analyzed both numerically and qualitatively.

Results show that despite the paradox of opinions, participants agree on the existence of social classes in Tlemcen speech community and that dialect use is one strong parameter for which the glottal stop, despite being stigmatized, is a marker of the highly ranked ones. However, this stigma is leading people to change their dialect which, in turn, is paving the way for a neo-urban regional *koine*.

Unlike other sociological studies which focused on the possession of material resources in the stratification of social classes, this study emphasizes on the linguistic dimension; more precisely, on sociolinguistic choice and use of some dialectal variants which, in fact, differentiate between upper and lower classes in Tlemcen speech community as a case. This empirical investigation has answered some crucial questions related to the linguistic situation in Tlemcen urban dialect and its explanation vis-à-vis social class. Results show that social stratification is pertinent in Tlemcen community, knowing that our data gathering process did not include any purely economic or sociological features; rather, aspects of status and people's attitudes were substantial.

The study findings recall that social classes are present in Tlemcen speech community even when taken from a subjective approach. According to informants' attitudes, these classes are the upper and the lower. Whereas the former refers to the inhabitants of the city who speak the pure urban Tlemcenian variety characterized by the realization of Classical Arabic qaf as a glottal stop, the latter refer to rural and bedouin dialect users which is recognized by the voiced velar variant [g]. An interesting fact dictates that despite the economic situation a person holds, urban variety speakers are said to belong to the upper class; similarly, whatever status might a bedouin person possess, they still remain as members of the lower class having less social prestige. Stronger exegeses are provided to explain this sociolinguistic juvenile: first, the pre-Hilali dialect is seen as antique reflecting belonging to ancient urban prestigious roots and sedentary ancestry that females of all ages are proud of and still use and preserve it; second, its bestowing marks the speaker as a city dweller that even if s/he lives in a bedouin area, the urban dialect still marks them as prestigious and therefore belonging to an upper class which has never been the case for rural dialect speakers. This paradoxical situation is very dandy as it confirms our hypothesis that some linguistic features can be markers of social class strata predominately if fostered by people's perceptions and attitudes.

However, in spite of the fact that social classes are indeed related to certain linguistic features that divert to be class markers where the upper class is seen to use the glottal stop whilst the lower class is perceived as speaking the other phonetic counterpart [g], people's attitudes are still socially antithetic. For elucidation, negative attitudes, of the majority, that are associated with the use of the glottal stop, especially by male youngsters, lead them -even as upper-class members- to switch to use the [g] variant. The purpose for this behaviour is not, by any means, to lower status; actually, other linguistic features as the urban accent remain untouched. In the meantime, rural vernacular speakers who are of a lower-class tend to keep the [g] variant with softness in speech by both males and females (and change in other phonological

and lexical features to match urbanization) for the use of the glottal stop is really a shame for them. Pride of affiliation and belonging in addition to the social tension between the two groups lead rural dialect speakers to keep using [g]. Yet, change from the urban to rural in many conversations (except intimate ones) by upper-class men is explained by other motivations including reflecting manhood, gaining power, and avoiding social stigma. The combination of both social and psychological reasons leads one to deduce a koineization process to take place. That is, a neo-urban Tlemcen regional dialect is formed by speakers coming from both classes. In other words, change occurs with regard to what is widely common and regionally more accepted so that to avoid the stigma of attitudes and social strata as well. For this, we conclude that a regional koiné is taking place in the speech of Tlemcen community where all marked features, including the upper-class sedentary glottal stop, despite being a marker of the sedentary dialect of upper-class Tlemcenian people, are all levelled out; a fact that shows the emergence of a dialect of a middle-position which, in turn, leads to the emergence of a middle class in the community by males while females are revolting against shift and foster preservation of the urban variety (mainly the glottal stop) and maintenance of social distinctiveness.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the results of this research are limited in certain points which need to be reconsidered in other works. This applies especially when dealing with class as a social variable in the Arabic-speaking societies in relation to dialect use and globally linguistic variation and change. Social stratification and class order are very sensitive topics to tackle, this is why literature remains limited; and this piece of research is an endeavor that encourages other attempts in the field of dialectology and sociolinguistics in general.

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