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THE STIGMATISATION OF THE GLOTTAL STOP IN TLEMCEN SPEECH COMMUNITY: AN INDICATOR OF DIALECT SHIFT

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ABSTRACT

Tlemcen speech, variety of Arabic, has long distinguished itself from other Algerian Arabic dialects by a number of linguistic features. Its most characteristic, an old urban phonological trait, not used anywhere else in the country, is the realisation of /q/, the Classical Arabic *qāf*, as a glottal stop [ʔ], as in [ʔæːl], 'He said', for CA /qaal/. But, as a result of the massive long-term migration of rural people towards the city and the contact of two types of Arabic dialectal forms, the recent decades have witnessed drastic changes in the dialect of Tlemcen. There is indeed much evidence that native speakers, particularly among younger males, tend to avoid the use of the glottal stop [ʔ] for its tight association with femininity and thus its strong stigmatisation and negative attitudes towards its users.

The present paper raises the issue of assimilation to rural forms of Arabic, in particular the displacement of [ʔ] in favour of the voiced velar [g]. On the basis of empirical investigations and the data collected in the early 1990s, then in the period 2000-2007 as well as the recent observations, we hypothesize that Tlemcen speech is moving towards a kind of dialect levelling, if not dialect shift. We assume, however, that in spite of this apparently high rate of assimilation or language replacement at the phonological level as well as morphological and lexical ones, female native speakers will preserve the substrate of Tlemcen speech and prevent its loss.

KEYWORDS: Dialect Shift / Leveling, Glottal Stop, Urban / Rural Dialect, Assimilation, Language Attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Synchronic variation at all linguistic levels is an inherent characteristic of language and necessarily leads to change over time, as documented in historical linguistics then, later on, in sociolinguistics whose methodology and approaches are primarily based on social explanations. Sociolinguistic research has shown the intertwinement of the two phenomena as they inevitably occur in big cities and urbanized areas and a great number of traditional case studies, particularly those concerned with phonological variation, have been exposed and described by scholars like Labov (1966, 1972), Fishman (1964…), Trudgill (1974,), etc. But the most dramatic and remarkable linguistic output of consistent choice of one variant over another is language shift, when members of a 'linguistic' group begin to use the language of another, usually that of the host community, which eventually results in the definitive loss of a native tongue and its replacement by a dominant one as a result of a number of reasons including, for instance, colonization, immigration, loss of identity, minorities or even negative attitudes towards one's own speech ways. A good example is the loss of Breton in many villages in France and the overall shift to the use of French even for everyday purposes.

If the relations between members of various groups in a multilingual community remain relatively stable, the languages in contact there may maintain their respective forms and functions as can be observed in a number of countries or in diglossic situations. But sociolinguistic research has shown that in most heterogeneous linguistic situations, these relations often become unbalanced and, for social, economic or other reasons, members of a group will fail to maintain

their language in a number of functions and domains and thus will increasingly assimilate to that of some dominant group in the community and eventually adopt it even in intimate conversation.

In the meantime, before such extreme language behaviour stage is reached, phenomena such as switching and mixing codes usually emerge and may last for a period of time, swinging between a maintenance-shift continuum – and thus bringing about a situation of multilingualism or multi-dialectalism, as in the case of the present description –, till the linguistic traits of one language or dialect start prevailing. Then, if members of the community, usually those belonging to the so-called 'subordinate' group, start dropping features of their mother tongue in a collective manner, shift begins to settle down and only reaches completion when all or most linguistic features of that subordinate speech are abandoned by native speakers and stop being transmitted to the next generations. In this regard, Hamers and Blanc (2000:297) say that

> When the subordinate groups' internal cohesion is affected, the dominant language spreads and gradually invades the domains, functions and forms of the subordinate language, or rather speakers of the latter gradually adopt the forms of the dominant language in more and more roles, functions and domains. When the family domain is invaded and parents cease to transmit their language to their children, and the latter are no longer motivated to learn it, language shift is almost complete.

Such phenomena necessarily occur whenever groups with different linguistic backgrounds get in contact, whether in multilingual settings or within one language as illustrated in studies on Arabic dialects and new vernaculars (Al-Wer 1997; Miller 2004, 2006; etc.).

Our aim in this article is to attempt to evaluate, through the investigation of the most significant linguistic variable (ʔ) as a reflex of Classical Arabic /q/, the rate at which, and the direction in which, Tlemcen Arabic vernacular is evolving today as a result of heavy migration from the surrounding rural areas and thus continual contact between the two dialects which should lead in the long run to a type of convergence or dialect levelling. But, quite surprisingly, as we shall see, it is the dialect of the majority, the supposedly dominant variety, which tends to recede in front of the rural form of Arabic. Obviously, there must be strong reasons for such language behaviour in Tlemcen, when we know that the norm in unstable language-contact situations is usually reflected in that the minority dialect assimilates to the dominant variety.

THE GLOTTAL STOP AS A TA PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLE

Our selection of the phonological variable (ʔ) as the focus for the analysis of Tlemcen speech community, among other linguistic items, is unavoidable in fact because of its salient character due to its extremely frequent distribution in TA lexicon, most particularly in the recurrent use of phrases consisting of the verb /ʔæːl/, 'to say, to tell', as in [ʔælli], [nʔullu], [ʔulli] (respectively, 'He told me', 'I (will) tell him' and 'Tell me'). The verb /ʔæːl/, in its different forms and tenses, has occurred no less than 63 times in the recording of a fifteen-minute talk between two Tlemceni women. The glottal stop variant can indeed be observed very easily in natural discourse and brief interviews, or just in rapid anonymous observation of native people's speech for, in addition to its omnipresence in the frequent uses of the verb /ʔæːl/, it is found in a great number of lexical items and in all positions, as in, for instance, [ʔaṭṭ], [maʔla], [ħmaʔ] (respectively, 'cat', 'frying pan' and 'crazy'). Furthermore, what makes the study of this phonological feature exceptionally attractive and rewarding at the same time is the fact that virtually all the people in the community, natives and non-natives, are consciously aware of it and regularly make comments about it.

As a consequence of such comments on [ʔ]-use, many native speakers tend to avoid it in certain contexts precisely because of the negative comments that it provokes. Such behaviour allows for a relatively easy observation of the use of

the three variants of /q/: [ʔ], [g] and [q], and their correlation with such social categories as age and gender. The point is that Tlemcen glottal stop has risen to a high level of social awareness and thus has been made to reach such a high degree of stigmatisation that it can be regarded as a 'highly developed sociolinguistic variable' or a 'stereotype' in Labov's terms (1972*a*).

Descriptive in intent, our investigation, carried out during the 1990s and early 2000s is to develop a way of evaluating the importance of the apparently on-going shift that we can easily observe in the use vs. non-use of the glottal plosive [ʔ] and, within the framework 'Arabic vernaculars' in urbanized areas in mind, to examine the reasons that have led to what may be seen as partial dialect shift, or at least as dialect levelling, in today's Tlemcen speech community.

A number of questions can be raised as to the actual linguistic situation in Tlemcen speech community:

- What is the output of such pervasive use of non-native speech in Tlemcen by native speakers, mostly males, and in particular the displacement of the glottal stop by the rural variant [g]?

- What governs this dialect behaviour? Purely social factors or psychological ones? Whatever factors are responsible for the influence, why does it occur mostly in one way?

- Will today's language behaviour of Tlemcen speakers and their negative attitudes towards their own speech features lead to dialect shift or to dialect levelling resulting in the emergence of a kind of *koiné* or a mixed urban vernacular? Or will a portion of the community consciously or subconsciously maintain the indigenous vernacular?

To address such questions, we have re-considered an empirical investigation on native Tlemcen Arabic (TA) undertaken in the early 1990's, then the results obtained in 2000-2006 by means of a number of research tools, in particular recorded conversations, participant observation and the matched-guise technique. The data collected and examined – some of which are presented in this paper – allow us to hypothesize that TA is undergoing a process of shift which concerns mostly the glottal stop, its most representative feature, but also some morphological and lexical items. As a matter of fact, TA lexical items such as [ntsina] 'you' to address both a man or a woman, or [ʔasəm] 'what', are often replaced by equivalent rural forms in mixed settings ([nta] and [nti] respectively; [waʃ]~[waʃta]), but also increasingly in unconstrained situations. Similarly, the 2nd person feminine verb suffix morpheme {-i}, as in [roːħ**i**] 'go' when addressing a woman, reappears along with other non-TA linguistic features.

Under the pressure of negative attitudes towards Tlemcen speech as a whole and in particular the strong stigmatisation of [ʔ]-use, young TA native speakers, mostly males, seem to be losing loyalty to their vernacular. Such language behaviour is likely to lead to dialect shift or at least, in the first stage, to the emergence of a neo-urban dialect, unless some other strong counter-pressure - women's conservatism apparently in our case - will maintain the old vernacular traits.

TLEMCEN, THE RESEARCH SITE
Historical Background

Extensive urbanisation in Algeria in recent decades has pushed great numbers of people to settle down in towns and large cities. These population movements have played a decisive role in dialect contact situations which in turn have resulted in the development of dynamic linguistic practices that bring together people speaking different dialects. But the overall sociolinguistic patterns of variation and change are different from those attested in class-based standard-with-

dialect societies (Trudgill 1974, 1983).

The present-day language situation in Tlemcen displays considerable variation at all linguistic levels. Its perceptible on-going process of change is not simply the effect of natural inherent variability within the vernacular variety itself; it is more importantly related to the co-existence of native speakers with the ever-increasing off-spring that results from the settlement of a large number of people who came for the most part from the surrounding rural areas.

Having grown into an agglomeration that could offer opportunities of work, especially land work in the countryside, Tlemcen attracts people, particularly from the rural areas nearby. Migration to Tlemcen undoubtedly dates back to the pre-colonial period, but, as Lawless and Blake (1976: 76) have observed,

> The scale which this movement achieved during the colonial period was quite new. It came to form a constant factor in relations between town and countryside, forging new links, economic and social, between urban and rural areas

Consequently, in addition to the socio-economic contacts established between the citizens of Tlemcen and the country newcomers, particularly during the French occupation, noticeable linguistic interferences started to emerge between urban speech and the rural variety, though we have no real-time data to demonstrate the extent to which, and the direction in which, the linguistic influences occurred. Later on, factors such as unemployment in the countryside, lack of facilities (schools, hospitals, and other amenities), greatly contributed to the acceleration of mass departure towards the town. Subsequently, throughout the first years of Algerian independence (early 1960s), increasing numbers of people from the rural areas continued to pour in towards the 'big' centre, drawn by various urban facilities, job opportunities and education for children.

Today, fifty years after independence, reliable sources (from Tlemcen Town-Hall records) reveal that the number of families of rural origin now settled in Tlemcen for a long time, and having maintained their speech forms on the whole, and [g]-use in particular, exceeds that of the native speakers. This factor is of great importance in the explanation of TA being strongly influenced by rural speech forms, as claimed throughout this work, the minority variety turning out to be a virtual majority, as it were.

The 'Urban' / 'Rural' Dichotomy

The Arabic variety of Tlemcen was regarded as one of the old 'urban' pre-Hilali forms of speech (Marçais 1977, Versteegh 1997, Miller 2007) brought by the first waves of Arab Muslim conquerors (*al fātiħīn*) into the Northern part of Africa during the 7th and 8th centuries. The Bedouin or 'rural' forms of Arabic are said to have been brought later on to what was then called the *Maghreb* with the second wave (11th C) consisting mostly of the nomadic Bedouin tribes called *Banu Hilāl*, with their specific dialect traits, particularly the voiced velar [g] for the Classical Arabic uvular *qāf* and lexical items specific to their dialect.

It may be useful to mention the way the two types of Arabic, 'rural' and 'urban', were contrasted, especially before the population movement towards big urban centres like Algiers, Constantine and Tlemcen in the second half of the 20th C. The two distinct varieties were considered as representing the speech of groups referred to in Arabic terms as *al'arab* for nomads and *alħadar* for sedentary people (Ibn Khaldoun). But, as a result of the countryside people's 'rush' towards the towns, and the subsequent intermingling of the two speech groups reflected in everyday interactions, the dichotomy *'arab/ħadar* seems to have disappeared from the people's tongues, though the distinction between the two kinds of Arabic dialects remains at the linguistic level, particularly in Tlemcen, whose speech is compared by Ph. Marçais (1977)

to "an islet lost in a Bedouin sea" (my translation of the French original text "un ilôt perdu dans une mer bédouine").

THE UVULAR CONSONANT *qāf* AS A GLOTTAL STOP

The Classical Arabic phoneme /q/ (CA *qāf*) is undoubtedly the most interesting phonological variable in terms of multiplicity in allophonic realisation throughout the Arabic-speaking world. The literature on Arabic phonology has not failed to show the important alterations that /q/ has gone through in time and space, and in particular the [q] ~ [g] allophonic variation in the Arabian Peninsula. It is believed that in the pre-Islamic era and into the first period of Islam, /q/ was realised as a voiced velar [g] by Bedouins (*al 'a'rāb*). The voiceless uvular [q] was then associated with sedentary people and regarded as more prestigious, most likely because it was the realisation used in reading the Qur'an.

Later on, with the spread of Islam in non-Arab regions, /q/ underwent more allophonic variation, in addition to [g]. Cantineau (1939:39) makes an interesting remark about the other variants which have changed the place of articulation but preserved the voiceless production in 'sedentary' parlances when he observes that only a 'silent' pronunciation of *qāf* has a decisive meaning; "all and only sedentary speech ways have such pronunciation." (My translation of Cantineau's French text: "Seule une prononciation sourde du *qaf* a un sens décisif: tous les parlers de sédentaires, et seuls les parlers de sédentaires ont cette prononciation." Taine-Cheikh (1998) too reminds us that in spite of the various realisations of *qāf*, dialectologists agree on the opposition of two types on the basis of voicing; she emphasizes this contrast between voiceless and voiced variants of /q/, associating the former with "sedentary populations and notably city-dwellers", and the latter, [g], with Bedouin and rural speech.

Much has been said about the reason(s) for which the place of articulation that CA *qāf* experienced throughout time in pre- and post-Islamic eras, and in particular how and why it shifted to a glottal realisation in a number of Arabic-speaking cities, including Damascus, Cairo, Beirut in the Levant , and Fes and Tlemcen in the Maghreb. The explanations of the allophonic variant [ʔ] appearance in areas so far apart as Damascus and Tlemcen, for instance, has not been documented in accurate ways. However, a few hypotheses have been put forward as to the origin of the glottal realisation, though, as Milroy, J. (1993:181) states "Sound change is probably the most mysterious aspect of change in language, as it appears to have no obvious function or rational motivation."

- Some traditional Arab grammarians (See Ibn Manthour's *Lisānu l 'arab*) proposed the idea that even in the classical form of Arabic, *al luɤa l fuṣħā*, a few words were equally pronounced with [q] or [ʔ], as in the verb [zana*q*a]~[zanaʔa], meaning something like 'being over-sparing towards one's family', or in the phrase [zuha:*q* miʔa]~[zuha: ʔ miʔa], meaning 'about a hundred'.

- It seems obvious that the uvular /q/ is the original phoneme in CA as it clearly contrasts with the 'real' glottal plosive called *hamza*, found in all three positions, as in /ʔamal/ 'hope', /biʔr/ 'a well' and /ma:ʔ / 'water'. A simple minimal pair supports the phonemic status of /q/ as opposed to that of / ʔ /; /faqr/ vs. /faʔr/ 'poverty' and 'mouse'.

- As to the allophonic realisation /q/ → [ʔ], we may put forward the assumption that the two speech sounds are quite 'close' to each other; same manner of articulation and no voicing.

- We suggest two elements that may explain the reason why /q/ shifted to a glottal plosive in some Arabic dialects: first, the uvular articulation requires much more energy than the glottal closure and release. Indeed, the sound [ʔ], as a necessary onset to vowel pronunciation in all languages, is easily produced to the extent that the speaker is

not conscious of it, as in French 'ami' or English 'hour'. Second, acoustically speaking, the [ʔ] plosion sounds much like that of uvular [q]. Thus, applying the law of least effort, we may accept the idea that some speakers 'decided' to make /q/ easier to pronounce so long as [ʔ] could convey the meaning.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC STATUS OF THE GLOTTAL STOP

The various allophones that the phoneme /q/ has 'acquired' are now distributed to different extents in terms of stability and consistency of use, some being very common and others more limited. But what is worth noting here is that, because of the increasing co-existence of urban and rural speakers in big towns and city centres, the different variants can be observed to correlate with different social dimensions such as solidarity, socio-economic status, gender, age, level of education, and so on. Furthermore, there is evidence that different attitudes may at times be exhibited by different interlocutors toward the same variant in the Arabic-speaking world. In Cairo, for example – as well as in other large urban centres in the Levant (e.g. Damascus, Beyrouth, etc.) –, [ʔ] is viewed as a prestige variant in everyday speech (apart from standard [q] which remains, of course, a high-status form for its association with CA / MSA). But in Tlemcen, [ʔ] has become extremely stigmatised and thus gradually shunned by an increasing number of native speakers, particularly among today's younger males, and more so in mixed settings, as our data have revealed.

Indeed, Tlemcen speech has become so deeply characterized by the use of the glottal stop that its users are instantly identified anywhere in Algeria as 'coming from Tlemcen'; as a result of such linguistic idiosyncrasy that strongly contrasts with the Algerian society-wide [q]~[g] pair, a few popular extremely mocking 'labels' can be heard in the description of men who use [ʔ], from non-TA speakers obviously, but also, surprisingly, from native people themselves sometimes. What is more, non-TA speakers often happen to mock at natives by teasingly over-imitating TA speech, by using [ʔ] where only [g] is appropriate, saying, for example, *baʔra* 'cow', pronounced [bagra] in all Algerian Arabic varieties including TA, or with some borrowings such as *lʔato*, for *lgato* 'the cake' (Fr. *gâteau*). The stigmatisation of the item becomes stronger when a native male speaker is called *ʔaw'ʔawa*, 'a peanut' (pronounced '*kewkew* in other dialects), to which the Arabic feminine morpheme particle {-*a*} is affixed in the end for a more mocking and 'womanizing' effect in a 'macho' context.

By way of analogy, we may match up this marked TA linguistic trait with the realisation of the English phoneme /t/ as a glottal stop in London Cockney accent and in Norwich (Trudgill 1974). Such pronunciation is said to be typical of working class vernacular speech: 'a little bit' is realised [ə'liʔl biʔ]. This allophonic realisation of /t/ may be related, in phonetic terms, to [ʔ]-use in Tlemcen speech, as in both cases it is a voiceless plosive realised as a glottal stop, most probably because of its easier articulation with much less energy than for the alveolar /t/ in English and the uvular /q/ in Arabic. Thus, just as (t): [ʔ] is a marker of Cockney accent, it clearly marks TA as a peculiar dialect in Algeria. But, as we have argued in a previous work (Dendane 1993:34), "neither of the terms 'marker' or 'indicator', in the sense used in Labov (1970, 1972*a*), would apply to such a characteristic as it does not vary according to socio-economic and/or style differentiation." As a matter of fact, because of the diglossic character of Arabic-speaking communities where high-status forms of Arabic are not acquired along with the mother tongue, the sociolinguistic structures are not to be dealt with the same way as in Western 'standard-with-dialect' speech communities. In effect, apart from the comparatively few people who have had much contact with MSA on formal occasions, speakers will normally use the Low variety both in stress-free situations and constrained ones, and in Tlemcen, higher or lower socio-economic positions are not correlated with the use or avoidance of [ʔ].

But what is certainly more attention-grabbing and more fruitful about the parallel drawn between Tlemcen glottal stop and that of London Cockney, is the relationship that may be established between the two background contexts from a sociolinguistic perspective. It is a reverse process that Tlemcen [ʔ] has been going through: while there is evidence that Cockney [ʔ] continues to spread in a wave-like motion to further areas (see Trudgill 1983a; Holmes 2001; Romaine 1994), TA [ʔ]-use has been gradually shrinking and may only be maintained in the long run by older people and womenfolk, in particular, in the inner city and in family domains.
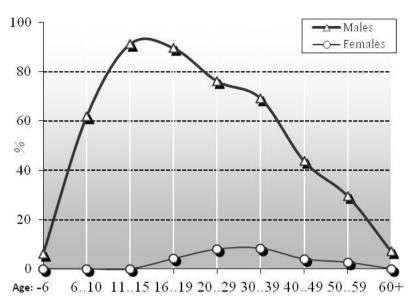
We are a long way from the time when [ʔ]-use was characterized by high prestige by virtue of the standing of Tlemcen town in earlier centuries, and thus imitated and used indeed by rural people living in its outskirts. So, whereas young Cockney speakers are proud of overtly using the glottal stop, and largely responsible for its spread out of London and deeper into the country, young male adolescents in Tlemcen seem to be suffering from the strong stigmatisation of [ʔ] and its association with femininity. We can consider that they are responsible for the spread of its avoidance, and thus of the use of its rural counterpart [g]. Indeed, as a consequence of such stigmatisation, an increasing number of people have been deserting the glottal stop for the voiced velar [g]. Since the change in question in Tlemcen is not related to a particular socio-economic class, we may consider such pressure on the native TA speakers as a 'change from outside' (Dendane 2007), i.e. from outside the vernacular of the community.

The Glottal Stop Variable and the Gender Factor

Gender is a major aspect of sociolinguistic variation in every society for, just as women differ from men in social behaviour, they also tend to acquire speech features that are specific to their social identity and to the role they are expected to play as opposed to males' linguistic behaviour. In language systems that distinguish between standard and non-standard forms, i.e. languages that are "linked to some kind of social-status hierarchy",

Hudson (1996:193) reports proportionally greater amounts of standard variants in women's speech by saying that "one remarkable pattern has emerged repeatedly in these studies: for virtually every variable, in virtually every community, females (of every age) use high-prestige standard variants more often than males do." Labov (1972*a*:302) explains the fact in terms of women's "sensitivity to prestige forms" and Coates (1993:78) confirms that they are more sensitive to linguistic norms in response to "their insecure social position", more linguistically status-conscious and thus more subject to 'pressure from above' (Labov 1972*a*). Men, in contrast, tend to react against normative pressures by virtue of their masculinity usually associated with toughness; they do not need to assert their social status, and thus feel no constraint in using non-standard forms.

A question to be raised here is whether such supposedly universal patterns of social pressures on language in relation to gender differentiation are applicable in Arabic-speaking communities. In Tlemcen, because of the diglossic character of Arabic, gender-differentiation does not actually reflect in TA speech, or in any other Algerian Arabic variety on a style dimension, the way it works when people style-shift on a scale of formality in western speech communities as documented in sociolinguistic studies. Rather, gender-differentiation in TA is reflected in the contrasting use of a number of morphological and lexical items, but most importantly in glottal stop use. As a matter of fact, the data obtained in a number of conversations recorded in different settings involving speakers of the two sexes of a wide range of ages show a clear-cut association between [ʔ]-use and female speech, on the one hand, and [ʔ]-avoidance and male speakers, on the other.
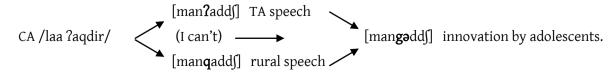
Consider the following results highlighting this gender-differentiation in combination with age.

Figure 1: Use of Variant [g] among TA Speakers by Age and Gender

Interpretation of the Results

What is certainly attention-grabbing about the graph, which contrasts males' behaviour with that of females as to the use of (ʔ):[g] in TA/non-TA speech interactions, is the configuration with very slight differences at both ends of the two curves: the youngest and oldest male informants use almost no [g]s in their speech (i.e. one little boy under six out of 16, and two sixty year-olds out of 28), while absolutely no switch to [g] occurs in the speech of the female counterparts, just like the girls aged 6 to 10 and 11 to 15 who also score 0% for the variant.

Then, while among all the other females very few sporadically use (ʔ):[g] (a total amount of 7 out of 158!), the males' scores climb up in a sharp slope to reach about 90% with the teenagers when interacting with non-TA speakers; and it is quite common to hear [g] instead of [ʔ] in the speech of some of them even when they interact with one another; that is, for an increasing number of young boys, it has become a speech habit to keep using [g] and other non-TA items even when there is no constraint or pressure to justify their conduct. Such regular avoidance of the stereotype [ʔ] may reflect the early stages of drastic linguistic changes in Tlemcen vernacular. The negative reaction towards the overall stigma of the glottal stop and the pressure of its counterpart [g] on TA male population are so strong that they have led not only to the rejection in some cases of TA vernacular forms, but also to the emergence of the phenomenon that Labov (1972*a*:123) calls 'hypercorrection' which plays an important role "in the propagation of linguistic change", as he states (ibid.). The TA phrase [manʔaddʃ], for example, meaning 'I can't', is normally realised [manqaddʃ], with [q], in non-TA speech or [manaqdərʃ] in other Algerian Arabic varieties; but, as a result of an over-generalisation of the shift [ʔ]-->[g], it has come to be pronounced [man**g**addʃ] with [g] by young TA speakers who are then imitated by their rural peers. The increasing use of the phrase may reach the 'completion of the change' (ibid.), the stage at which it will displace the competing form.

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                              [manʔaddʃ]  TA speech
                          ↗                              ↘
        CA /laa ʔaqdir/   <                                  [mangaddʃ]  innovation by adolescents.
                          ↘                              ↗
                              [manqaddʃ]  rural speech ↗
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Coates (1993) argues that "linguistic change can be said to have taken place when a new linguistic form, used by some sub-group within a speech community, is adopted by other members of that community and accepted as the norm."

The affirmative form of the above verb may be regarded as an innovation, or rather as an instance of dialect shift. The diagram reveals that the greatest amount of shift to [g]-use occurs with younger and less young adolescent boys, starting at or after the age of ten and going on into their early twenties. Then, along with the subjects' ageing, the males' slope starts going down in a quite steep way towards very little [g]-use among those in their sixties. We assume that such behaviour reflects the TA adults' moderate accommodation to rural speech, but also, at the same time, a certain commitment to the linguistic forms associated with their identity. Such language loyalty is obvious enough among the older ones reaching the age of 50 and beyond who produce the glottal stop much more than [g].

Another assumption that we attempt to explore in the examination of variable (ʔ) in Tlemcen is related to the increasing number of young male speakers whose use of non-TA features seems to be solidifying; that is, not only do they use, for instance, [g] instead of [ʔ] when interacting with non-TA people, but also in constraint-free situations. The age-grading effect in (ʔ) may be indexical of a linguistic change in progress, particularly if it is accompanied by more cases of hypercorrection in which even rural lexical occurrences of [q] are realised with [g] by these native speakers, as in the expression [g$_w$bæjəl], meaning 'a while ago', which is a 'ruralised' form of TA [ʔ $_w$bæjəl], the real rural equivalent being [g$_w$bilæ:t]. If nothing impedes such behaviour, and if such uses spread to a large majority of the native community, we will attest consistent dialect shift in the long run.

However, as we argue, with their conservative character and their overall indifference to the sitgma on [ʔ], women will perhaps never allow drastic changes to occur in TA speech, though they themselves increasingly seem to have negative attitudes towards men using the 'feminine' glottal stop. It appears that such association of the glottal stop with femininity is not specific to Tlemcen. The glottal variant [ʔ] was also used in urban areas of Jordan and Palestine, but, as Massad (1963:251) says, the Jordanian and Palestinian dialects "acquired a gender attribute" after the civil war and adds: After 1970, most urban Jordanian men began pronouncing all *qafs* as *ga*, asserting this as "masculine" and as "Jordanian", whereas Jordanian urban women retained their glottal stop as a "feminine" characteristic. Many young Palestinian-Jordanian urban men, feeling feminized by the new accent configuration, began using the *ga* instead of the glottal stop as an assertion of masculinity, especially when in the company of men. Similar observations in Amman (Jordan) have been made by Al-Wer (2007) as to this correlation between [ʔ] and female speakers, and [g] and males. Just as in Tlemcen, [g] bears 'toughness' as a social meaning and thus is favoured by male speakers. Interestingly, she concludes that "the girls too participate in the construction of this meaning through their expectance and acceptance of it, even though they do not implement it themselves".

CONCLUSIONS

The case of [ʔ]-loss in Tlemcen speech clearly appears to run counter to the principle, acknowledged in many sociolinguistic studies, that minority speakers tend to adapt their speech to make it resemble that of the majority. A set of recurrent questions arise again here. Why don't rural speech users living today in Tlemcen behave as if they regarded their variety as marked? In other words, why don't they adapt their way of speaking to the majority speech, a behaviour that is usually predictable in other situations of urban language contact? And why do native speakers feel *their* speech is marked, stigmatised, and thus 'have' to avoid the use of a number of TA linguistic features, not only in constrained situations but also, increasingly, during in-group speech interaction? Is this linguistic behaviour a precursor of dialect shift? Will the 'host' people definitely adopt in the long run the speech of their 'guests'? Or will this linguistic behaviour result in the adoption of a middle variety which will have the advantage of concealing idiosyncratic attributes? Or will women ultimately prevent the complete loss of [ʔ], the most characteristic phonological feature of Tlemcen speech?

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