

Aspects of Taboos Surrounding Algerian Females' Daily Issues and Language

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Abstract

The present article focuses on gender differences in using some types of taboos. In this sense, it explores the world of Arab women and investigates aspects of taboos surrounding their issues and language use. In other terms, the focal point of this paper is centered on the linguistic devices that females employ to express taboos. This paper also evaluates women's discourse and the reasons that keep their lives surrounded by mystery and ambiguity. Hence, Arab females' issues and language are investigated in the light of the stereotypes Westerners have about the Islamic religious beliefs. Our study further explores the lexicon related to females' topics like virginity, menstruation, menopause and their body parts. To this vein, a thorough examination was made depending on the informants' gender, age and their sociocultural background with the support of a structured questionnaire, a focus group interview and participant observation. The findings demonstrate that Algerian females' issues are directed by the cultural norms of their society. The results also reveal that speakers resort to euphemistic strategies to speak about women's private lives, although Algerian dialects are rich in euphemistic expressions related to females' sensitive issues.

Keywords: Algerian society, females' tabooed issues, social norms, taboos

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Introduction:

Males and females differ from each other not only on how they behave, but also in the language they use. Many studies have shown that women are conservative in nature and prefer more polite forms of language, whereas men are more attached towards the use of offensive expressions and taboo words. Therefore, society is split into males and females and this is apparent in the beliefs which they follow and the language they use.

Additionally, the societal norms have created a gap between men and women in the way they behave and speak. In fact, these differences are seeded in the minds and beliefs of people from their childhood. Thus, it influences the linguistic devices they tend to employ. In here, there have been a remarkably great number of gender studies. Most of them focus on gender differences in using linguistic devices in relation to certain sociolinguistic parameters including age, gender, the educational level and the socio-cultural background. Besides, most of scholars have turned their attention towards women's use of language. However, studying gender differences in using linguistic taboos is a recent topic which has been regarded as a sensitive issue related to the field of sociology.

Aside from the study of gender differences in using taboos, another focus which has recently gained the interest of sociolinguists is women's sensitive issues and the linguistic devices related to the subjects of menstruation, virginity, pregnancy, menopause and female's body parts including vagina, bosom and ass. Still another focus of sociolinguistics is the substitutions that women have created in order to lessen the damaging nature of taboo words related to their issues while using them in some contexts.

As far as Arab females are concerned, this study tends to explore women's tabooed issues in Algerian varieties in general and Tlemcen dialect in particular. Secondly, this paper concentrates on gender differences in using taboo words. Besides, it is interested in describing topics of menstruation, virginity and menopause in relation to the socio-cultural and religious norms of Algerian society. To these ends, it aims to explore the following research questions like: are Tlemcen speakers conscious of the tabooed status of females issues? And what are the different women's tabooed issues that exist in Algerian culture? Or do Tlemcen speakers differ in using lexicons related to females' body parts?

Trying to find reliable answers to these research questions, this study is based on three hypotheses:

In fact, the consciousness of a given person is related to the norms that the society has imposed. Females differ from males in perceiving the tabooed status of their issues since they are always aware of hiding these sensitive topics from other sex. In other terms, discussing females' issues is restricted by the religious norms of the society. Secondly, Islam has made women's life taboo through restrictions on their speech, clothes and behaviour. Among Arab females' tabooed issues, we have menstruation, virginity, pregnancy and body parts. Lastly, Tlemcen speakers may differ in using taboos related to females' issues since Tlemcen women may create their own vocabulary to discuss their topics. They avoid dealing with these issues in mixed sex groups.

Algerian Socio-cultural and Linguistic Profiles:

A lot can be mentioned about the history of Algerians, their culture and language, but since our main work is limited to explore taboos surrounding females' issues and language, we are not supposed to dig deeper on the Algerian linguistic profile. Notably, Algerian culture constitutes a mosaic picture as a result of the successive comings of different civilisations starting with the Romans, then the Islamic Empire which left a great impact on the people's traditions in addition to the French occupation which had lasted for 130 years. What can be also noted is that the French influence is deeply rooted in the Algerian culture as well. Kaye & Zoubir (1990) have summarised the most important stages in the Algerian history as follows:

Before the Arab conquest in the seventh century and the Islamization of the Berbers, Algeria was annexed by the French in the nineteenth century, who subjugated the Berbers and the Arabs in the sixteenth century, turned Algeria into a pirate state open to a multiplicity of cultural models during two centuries of Ottoman presence (p.69).

Furthermore, the national language of the country is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as all Arab Muslim countries. MSA is used in formal prestigious situations including education, press and administration, whereas Algerian Arabic (AA) or 'darija' is employed as a code in informal settings such as family conversations, markets and streets...etc. In order to explain this idea, Oakes (2008: 18) writes that "Most people speak a dialectal form of Arabic, known as Algerian Arabic or *Darija*". Along with the same line, Ruedy (2005) explains this idea as follows:

The Arabic speech most widespread in Algerian today is a dialect descended from these nomadic invaders. The sedentary Arabic dialects presumed to be pre-hilalian are limited to the Arabic speaking parts of the lesser Kabylia [...] Algerian Sahara was dominated by a nomadic group known as the Towareg. The Aures and most of the Nementcha mountains were home to Chaouia (p.10).

What can be understood from the above extract is that Algerian linguistic profile constitutes a fertile land for researchers in language variation which is not our cup of tea in this article.

Types of Females' Tabooed Issues in Arabic Culture:

First of all, it is worth noticing that Islam has created boundaries that restrict its people's daily speech as well as their behaviours. The most vital topic, that Islam has regulated, is Muslims' sexual life. In this case, the latter remains taboo since religion has put restrictions on it as Ali (2011) has affirmed that "Faith and sexuality are hand in glove concepts of life. It is religion that makes it look alien and taboo" (p.11).

According to Islam, the most tabooed topic is adultery which is defined as an illegal intercourse between a man and a foreign woman. In this sense, Amer (2008) defines the term as a:

vaginal intercourse between a man and a woman who is neither his lawful wife nor his concubine [...] zina is emphatically and unambiguously condemned in both the Qu'an

and the Sunnah, and has traditionally been the focus of Islamic scholars and of jurisprudence (p.11).

It is also essential to inform that everything related to women is subject to taboo including dress, speech and behaviour. Thus, it is considered as a shame to utter their names in friends' meetings. According to Sadiqi (2003) Arab societies have made some topics taboo in order to protect women. In this respect, she states that "The use of taboo to protect collective and public identities, as well as property and social identity, is a peaceful, but very powerful means of keeping women invisible and legitimizing their exclusion from what culture considers 'serious' domains" (p.78-79).

Interestingly, one should note that the strongest linguistic taboos, in Muslim societies, are related to female body and its changes since girls "socialize in an environment where sexual discrimination is sanctioned by society. This explains the spread of taboos related to sexuality" (Sadiqi, 2003: p. 80). Hence, there are three major tabooed issues in Arab females' lives related to sex including virginity, menstruation and menopause.

As far as the subject of virginity is concerned, it should be noted that the latter is a symbol of honour of both girls and their families as it has been noted by Sadiqi when she (2003) writes:

Virginity symbolizes the honor of both girl/women and family. Just as motherhood is venerated after marriage, virginity is venerated before marriage. The great value attributed to virginity [...] is attested in the fact that girls are more 'watched' than boys before marriage (p. 80).

Henceforth, virginity is so sacred for all Arab females and is seen as the most sensitive issue in their lives and for this reason it takes the first place in the topics that should be avoided in mixed sex groups. This idea can be explained by Sadiqi (2003) when she maintains that "Girls are continuously 'hammered' with the importance of virginity since a very young age and they grow up in the fear of losing it. This phobia often creates psychological traumas that deeply affect girls' and women's lives" (p. 81).

Another sensitive issue is menstruation. The latter is regarded as a taboo topic in Islamic teachings since females are considered vulnerable, weakened, polluted and impure. Therefore, they are not allowed to pray, fast, read Quran or have intercourse because menstrual blood is 'najis': 'dirty' since Allah values people who are clean and pure. In this vein, Sadiqi (2003) mentions that "Another reason for the taboo status of menstruation [...] is understood to be najasa 'dirty', 'soiled' or 'ritually unclean' and is often cited in religious prescriptions as a reason for impurity" (p. 82).

Sadiqi reveals the fact that religion has made menstruation taboo since women are forbidden from praying, entering the mosque, fasting and touching the holy book. Another reason is that society has also made this subject taboo. In other words, girls, in most Arab societies, are obliged not to talk about this period. Thus, the restrictions of the society have made menstruation as the most tabooed issue in females' lives. In this vein, Sadiqi (2003) points out that "menstruation is surrounded by taboos. The taboo surrounding menstruation is related to the

'unclean' state-post partum of women. This taboo is mainly due to the negative attitudes of the family and society towards the female body" (p. 82).

As for menstruation, menopause is an important step in the lives of Arab females since they fear it and tend to hide its beginning. Indeed, some women even try not to discuss the problem. This psychological step leads into a moral crisis including sadness and anger. For this perspective, Sadiqi (2003) tries to throw some light on menopause in Moroccan culture when she states that "Another experience in the lives of women which is associated with taboo in Moroccan culture is menopause. Menopause is perceived in this culture as 'old age', 'failure', and the beginning of the end" (p. 81).

Apparently, Arab people avoid talking about this period in order not to hurt women's feelings. Besides, menopause is like menstruating stage since girls try to hide this reality. With this point in mind, Sadiqi further maintains that women try even to hide this stage from their husbands, fearing that they will marry. In this sense, she (2003) states:

People do not talk about menopause because it is considered as a phase in the life of women in particular; feel more ashamed to talk about menopause than to talk about menstruation or virginity. This is mainly due to the fact that this attitude is basically male (p. 81).

Sadiqi (2003) completes her idea saying that "a woman knows that old age may lessen her prestige in the eyes of her husband, who may start thinking of remarrying a younger wife" (p. 82-83).

In all cases so far mentioned, it has been very important to show that these stages, namely virginity, menstruation and menopause, are of great importance in women's lives since they are followed by moral, physical and psychological changes. Moreover, these topics are the most discussed in public either by men or women themselves. In order to explain more this idea, Sadiqi (2003) writes that "The experience relating to a woman's body and cycles of her life are generally talked about in public from a male viewpoint. This explains the fact women's lives are surrounded by powerful taboos" (p. 83).

In sum, sexuality and changing of female body are considered taboo not only in Algerian society, but in all human cultures. In this regard, Kelly (2002) avers the view that "Human sexual expression in general is something few people in this society, in fact few people in the world, wants to talk about" (p. x).

Taboo Words Related to Arab Females' Issues:

First of all, the study of taboo words can be included in Arabic lexicography which may be of great importance to the fields of sociolinguistics and dialectology. However, our main concern, in this regard, is to investigate the different taboo terms that Arab females employ to talk about menstruation, virginity and menopause.

Additionally, some neutral words can become taboo when they are used by females to talk about the topic of menstruation such as [ddem]: (blood). In this context, Sadiqi (2003) posits the following idea that:

Menstruation is referred to by special terms that are not taboo out of context, but become so when associated with menstruation: [...] *ddem* 'blood'. The usual sense of *lbuluy*, for example, is not taboo when it is used to explain the puberty of boys, and its taboo sense becomes clear when it refers to menstruation. The same is true of *ddem* when is used to refer to menstruation (p. 81).

Admittedly, it should be stated that words which are used to talk about menstruation differs from one region to another and from one dialect to another, for example, the word [əɫʔa:dæ]: 'the habit' is employed in Morocco and Yemen. According to Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazaka et al (2009), there are a set of words used to talk about menstruation in the Arab world by women (p. 35). To explain more this statement, they state that "The term /əɫædæ/ 'the habit, the custom' is sometimes combined with the adjective /əɫʔæhrɪyyæ/ 'monthly' and found from Morocco in the West to Yemen in the East" (p. 34), whereas terms like [ħæjɔ] and [əddæwræ] are used in Damascus, Jerusalem and Morocco. However, the term [ddem] can be also used in sentences such as [ʔa:tɪ ddem] or [ra:hæ ʔli:jæ ddem]: 'I am menstruating'. These expressions are restricted to females' use and found in Morocco, Algeria and Cairo. In this regard, Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazka (2009) highlight that "The word *damm* for 'menstruation' is also combined with prepositions like *ala* and *fi* (for instance in Cairo and Khartoum) for expressing 'she is menstruating': e.g. *aleha d-damm* heard in Cairo" (p. 34).

Furthermore, Maghrebian dialects are rich in other terms denoting menstruation such as [bɪnt əɫʔhær]: 'the daughter of the month' or [tæriq əɫʔæhær]: 'the road of the month'. These expressions belong to Moroccan females' words. In her part, Sadiqi (2003) declares that most words, denoting menstruation, are related to the unclean state of women such as [ræni mwæsχ]: 'I am dirty'. In fact, they also tend to employ the euphemised term [læwsæχ]: 'dirt' which is [əɫɪuslæ]: 'washing'. The latter is mostly used in Algerian and Moroccan dialects. Sadiqi (2003) further claims that the pain of menstruation is referred to as [əmərd]: 'illness' (p. 82).

As far as the issue of virginity is concerned, the Arabic term [əɫbɪkɑ:ræ]; 'virginity' is not used in Arabic dialects. They have created euphemistic expressions which differ from one variety to another. According to Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazaka et al (2009), Arabs use other words that cover up the term *bikara* such as [bɪnt]: 'girl' or [bɪnɪjæ] which are found in Baghdad, [bɪnt bunut] in Cairo and Beirut, whereas countries like Algeria and Morocco use [ʔæzbæ]: 'young' or [ʔɪ:ræ]: 'girl' or [ʔa:tɔ] especially in "The Algerian dialects of Talga

and Sidi Aissa" (idem) and when the girl loses her virginity after marriage, she is called [mræ]: 'a woman' (p. 38).

Concerning defloration especially of a non-married girl, there are many terms that are used by men including [mæftu:hæ]: 'opened' and [mænqu:bæ]¹ or [mætqu:bæ]: 'pierced', whereas Moroccan and Algerian people employ different terms which are most vulgar than those used in the Middle East such as [χærgu:hæ] or [təqbu:hæ]: 'she is pierced'. In the light of this idea, Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazaka et al (2009) state that:

Many different lexemes are reported for 'defloration' in the Maghribian dialects and there are often three or more words used for it in one single dialect. [...] the connection with 'opening' through the *məħlula* is found in the urban Moroccan dialects of Fes and Sefron. Much more widespread are roots bearing the actual meaning of 'piercing'- for instance the passive participles of χ-r-q, q-r and t-q-b in Algerian and Moroccan dialects other roots used in the context of 'deflowered' are the passive voice of χ-ṣ-r 'destroyed' (/muxæssara/) in Algeria and Morocco (p. 39).

As for defloration, the wedding night has also taken a great part of Arabs' interests. In this sense, they have created terms [ədduxlæ] or [əlħænnæ]. These terms are used in all Arabic dialects, whereas terms referring to defloration differ from one variety to another. Indeed, the blood of virginity is related to the honour of the girl and her family for this reason, in some regions like Cairo, they use [dæmm əʃʒæræf] (the blood of honour).

Pregnancy is another issue which is handled with care in most Arab societies since it is seen as a sensitive issue in women's lives. Therefore, they have developed a rich vocabulary referring to pregnancy. Among the terms which they employ, we have [mætæqlæ] and [ħa:mi:l]: 'pregnant'. The latter is found in Eastern dialects, while the former is used in Bedouin dialects of Maghreb countries. On the other hand, urban people, in these countries, prefer French loanwords such as [ɒnset]: 'pregnant'.

Female Issues in Algerian Dialect:

According to Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazaka et al (2009), the sex of the person determines his/her selection or choice of words and expressions. In this sense, they highlight that "a woman will certainly use different words regarding her menstruation when talking with another woman than when talking with a male member of her family. And many words considered as taboo will often be alluded to euphemistically" (p. 33).

As far as Algerian women are concerned, the terms, that they use when talking to each other about menstruation, are different from those which they employ with men. In effect, they avoid talking about menstruation in the presence of males. Among the expressions that Algerian females employ, we have [raħa ʔlija ħaq əʃħar]: "I have the right of the month", or [rani msħa]: "I am dirty" since menstruation is seen as a dirt in the beliefs of most Algerian people

and other important examples lie in [raha ʕlija damm]: “I have blood”, or [raha ʕlija lʔusla]. Moreover, they have also borrowed words from French including [rani rɛgli], or [rani indspøzi]. This idea is better explained by Sadiqi (2003) when she states that “many linguistic strategies are used amongst women as euphemisms and metaphors to refer to menstruation: *ħaq fħhar* ‘the right of the month’, *lwsax* ‘dirt’, *lmarD* ‘illness’, or simply *ħadik* ‘that one’” (p. 82). They even try to talk about menstruation by using indirect expressions such as in [raha fi ja ħadi:k], or [ʒatni]: “it came to me” or [ħadi:k]: “that one”. In this sense, Marçais (1955)² talks about the expressions that Algerian women use regarding menstruation including “andha-ħādūk ‘elle a ceux-la’ i.e. ‘elle ses menstrues’” (p. 342).

Furthermore, another taboo topic related to females' body, we have virginity. However, the latter “is widely used among educated people in many, especially urban dialects of the Meghrib” (Marçais, 1955: p. 39). In fact, when it comes to violation of a virgin through an illegal relation, males and females share the same words including “x-r-q, q-ʕ-r and t-q-b in Algerian and Moroccan dialects” (Marçais, 1955: p. 39)³.

Interestingly enough, the stage of menopause is also surrounded by taboos for this reason women resort to employ some strategies to hide their shame as Daniluk (2003) has explained when she declares that “Women sometimes feel shame about experiencing this inevitable biological process. This is apparent in the euphemistic language women often use in reference to menopause (e.g., “change of life”, “the change”)” (p. 276). Interestingly, Algerian women fear this stage; as a result they employ euphemistic expressions including [mɛʃatħa ɛlʔusla]: “she lost her period”. On the other hand, pregnancy is also regarded as a taboo topic. Consequently, women resort to euphemisms as in: [ra:ħa məttaqla] or [ra:ħa mri:dqa]: “she is ill” instead of [ra:ħa bəlkərʃ]: “she is pregnant”.

Research Design:

Materials:

First of all, one should inform that taboos related to females' issues and their substitutions are parts of oral culture for this reason we have focused on an interview and a semi-structured questionnaire which was distributed for 110 participants from Tlemcen city since it will take time to do the research in all Algerian towns. Thereby, this research has taken about one year and the age of the group sample is between 18-25 years, 26-35 years and over 45 years of age. In fact, we tried to select an equal number of both sexes in order to test their attitudes towards Arab females' tabooed issues. Indeed, we have also selected men to know more about their attitudes and motivations towards females' tabooed issues.

It is also important to note that the levels of education and occupation of the informants give us a general idea about their knowledge. Henceforth, the participants belong to various professions and cultural backgrounds.

Data Preparation, Analysis and Interpretation:

Questionnaire:

- How do you call a prostitute?

- [χa:mʒa].
- [marju:la].
- [qaħba].
- [ba:ʔiʕatu əlhawa:].
- [pas].
- [bent blaʒa].
- [fla:na rabbi jahdi:ha].
- Suggestion
-

Table 1. Words Referring to ‘a Prostitute’

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[χa:mʒa]	13	5	18
[marju:la]	5	8	13
[qaħba]	8	16	24
[ba:ʔiʕatu əlhawa:]	2	4	6
[pas]	5	4	9
[bent blaʒa]	8	/	8
[fla:na rabbi jahdi:ha]	14	18	32
Total	110		

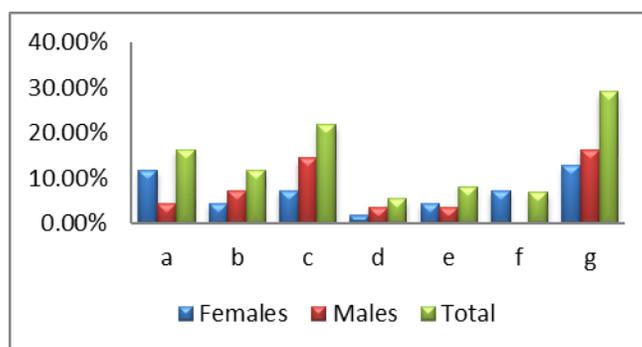


Figure 1. Words Referring to ‘a Prostitute’

As it is shown in the previous table and figure, there is a difference between respondents' answers about this question due to its sensitive nature. It is estimated that (29.09%) of the

informants claimed that they resort to the substitution [fla:na rabbi jahdi:ha] “X may God guide her” since the previous choices represent a direct attack towards such type of women. In contrast, the term [χa:mʒa] is almost spoken by (16.36%) of the participants. Thus, this forbidden act is illegal and is seen as a dirty behaviour which is banned in Islamic Norms and the cultural values of Algerian society.

Furthermore, the comments of the informants were very rich since they added other terms connected with the word [χa:mʒa]. However, males and females differ in the expressions they use. In women's part, the most tabooed terms are represented in words like [matəswa:ʃ] or [χa:rʒa tri:g]: “she is out of faith” and [ħamu:ja]. All these expressions indicate this dirty forbidden act. On the other hand, males employ different terms such as [nta:ʃ tul mɔ̃nd]: ‘she belongs to all people’. Indeed, all these words and sentences have the same meaning of “a prostitute”.

- How do you call a menstrual woman?

- [ra:ha mwesχa].
- [ra:ha mri:ɖa].
- [ẽdispɔze].
- [rɛgle].
- Suggestions.

Table 2. Taboos and Euphemisms Related to Women's Menstrual Period

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[ra:ha mwesχa]	/	12	12
[ra:ha mri:ɖa]	1	13	14
[ẽdispɔze]	24	7	31
[rɛgle]	30	23	53
Total	110		

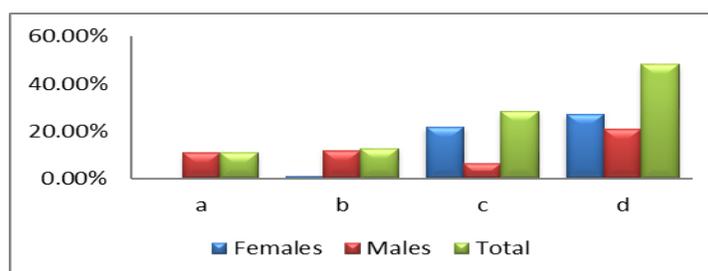


Figure 2. Taboos and Euphemisms Related to Women's Menstrual Period

What can be summarised from these results is that the term [rɛgle] remains the most used word especially among females with a percentage of 50 percent. In fact, menstruation is regarded

as the most tabooed step in women's life because of the sensitivity of everything related to their body since they are seen as [ʔawra] and are banned to expose. In the second position comes the term [ẽdispɔʔe] with a percentage of 28.18 percent. This proposition realises nearly an equal rate of use for females. In this regard, this fact draws us to say that both males and females tend to borrow French taboo words in order to lessen the effect of [ra:ha ʔlija ħaqq əʃʃhar]: 'she has the right of the month'.

Arguably, the results show the fact that teenagers tend to employ [ra:hæ rɛgle], whereas adult women use [ra:ha ẽdispɔʔe]. In men's part, they also tend to employ other euphemistic substitutions such as [ra:ha mri:ða] to indicate that the female is either pregnant or passing her menstrual period. However, the informants gave no suggestions due the sensitive nature of this question.

- How do you call a virgin girl?
 - [ʃa:tek].
 - [ʃæɖra:ʔ].
 - [ʃæzbæ].

Table 3. Names Referring to Virginity

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[ʃa:tek]	15	22	37
[ʃæɖra:ʔ]	10	5	15
[ʃæzbæ]	30	28	58
Total	110		

As it is shown in the table, most of the respondents (52.52%) selected the last choice which is a substitution related to virginity. The latter is mostly used by Tlemcen urban people, whereas the term [ʃæzbæ]: 'a girl' is found in rural regions of the city such as Sebdou, Ain Fezza, Beni Snous and Maghnia...etc. On the other hand, [ʃæɖra:ʔ] is used by few people since it is a word that exists in standard form of Arabic. Hence, one may claim that the topic of virginity is a sensitive issue for all Arab girls and is avoided in from discussion in mixed sex groups.

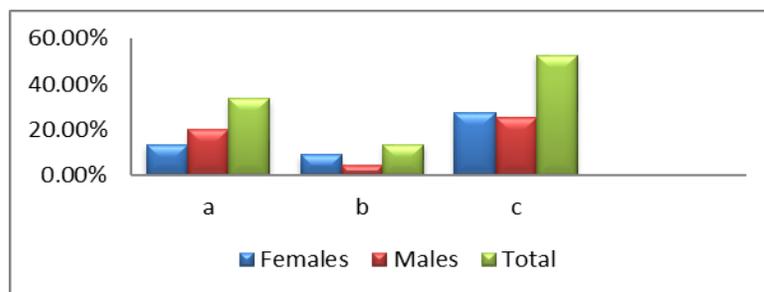


Figure 3. Names Referring to Virginity

- How do you call a pregnant woman?
 - [ra:ha mri:ɖa].
 - [ra:ha məttaqla].
 - [ra:ha belkarʃ].
 - [ãsent].
 - [ħa:mil].
 - Comments.

Table 4. Taboos Related to Pregnancy

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[ra:ha mri:ɖa]	7	13	20
[ra:ha məttaqla]	4	6	10
[ra:ha belkarʃ]	20	26	46
[ãsent]	24	8	32
[ħa:mil]	/	2	2
Total	110		

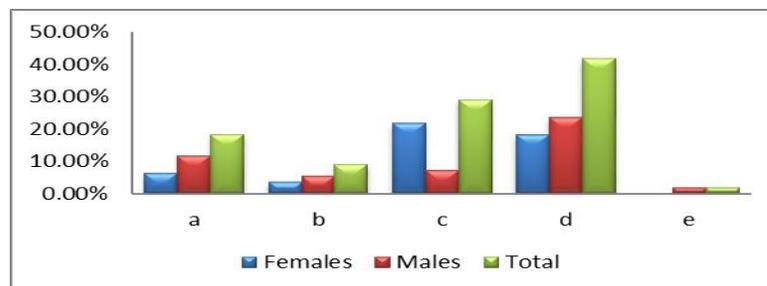


Figure 4. Taboos Related to Pregnancy

As we went back to the questionnaire, we have observed that these expressions are typical of women’s vocabulary. We have also noticed that the use of substitutions is a basic feature of Algerian speakers’ daily interaction. Thus, the results of the previous graph demonstrate that the

notion of [ləhʃu:ma] is still existing in Tlemcen society in contrast with other parts of the country. What can be also observed from the results is that all participants display different views towards the above propositions. Therefore, this question clearly shows that the participants' selection is strongly related to their attitudes. Hence, such results demonstrate that the majority of informants (41.81%) declared that they use the word [ãsent] in their daily interaction. In contrast, some of them (29.09%) reported that they employ [ra:ha belkarf] which is considered taboo though it is employed unconsciously. On the other hand, about (18.18%) of the participants declared that they use [ra:ha mri:d̥a].

- How do you call women's sexual organ?
 - [əlkarmu:sa].
 - [ʃeiʃa].
 - [fanʃɔ:ra].
 - [sawwa].
 - [əlfaraʒ].
 - Suggestions and comments.
 -

Table 5. Taboos Related to Woman's Sexual Organ

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[əlkarmu:sa]	3	3	6
[ʃeiʃa]	18	1	19
[fanʃɔ:ra]	2	/	2
[sawwa]	18	34	52
[əlfaraʒ]	1	6	7
Total	86		

A closer look at the previous table reveals that 24 of the participants refused answering this question due to its sensitive nature, although they answered the previous one. The main reason is that we do not give them any substitution as a proposition in this question, whereas the choices of the remaining informants were so varied. They have showed their positive attitudes towards the use of such terms and they have justified their selections claiming that they use these words when they are angry or as a kind of jokes between each other. Besides, they continued stating that they employ such words with their intimate friends of the same age. Moreover, some of the comments of the informants revealed that some girls or boys especially teenagers employ these expressions to attract the attention of each other or to show their belongings to their groups.

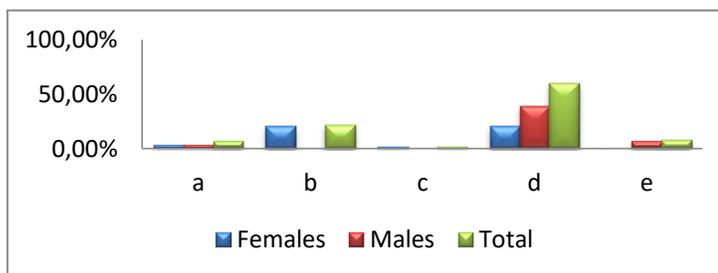


Figure 5. Taboos Related to Woman's Sexual Organ

This figure clearly shows the difference of use between participants. (60.46%) of them took the fourth proposition which is considered as the most tabooed word related to the body of women, whereas (22.09%) chose the second proposition. In fact, naming sexual organs after the names of people is used by women more than men since females tend to create code words for their interaction between each other such as [rani ma:ʃja nɔfliksi] which means that “I am going to the toilet”. In terms of this question, males tend to employ terms different from females including [lmɔʃmɔ:ra] or [lbɛkku:ʃa] or [ʃanfu:fa], whereas women use special words such as [ʃbi:za] or [bubu:ʃa] or [ssfanʒa] and [fula wɔ nqɛsmɔt ɣla zu:ʒ]...etc.

- How do you call women's breast?
 - [tɔffa:ħat].
 - [rmmana:t].
 - [ʃdar].
 - [bza:zal].
 - [le sin].
 - Suggestions.

Table 6. Taboos Related to Woman's Breast

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[tɔffa:ħat]	11	18	29
[rmmana:t]	4	2	6
[ʃdar]	3	3	6
[bza:zal]	7	16	23
[le sin]	17	5	22
Total	86		

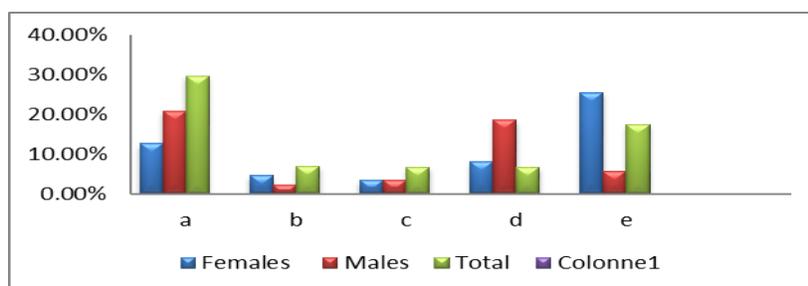


Figure 6. Taboos Related to Woman's Breast

Most of the propositions are similes which are used as substitutions in order to lessen the harm of certain taboo expressions. In fact, Algerian varieties are rich in similes related to human body. The main aim behind the creation of such terms is to decrease the power of taboo words that exist side by side with substitutions in these dialects. Besides, Algerian speakers do not stop at this stage, but they tend to borrow from other languages expressions which may diminish the harmonious power of the local words as the case of this question.

Henceforth, the terms [təffa:ħat] and [bza:zal] have nearly equal percentages, though the former represents (29.72%) of the respondents' selections i.e., this term is the most obviously used in Tlemcen dialect, whereas the latter is employed by almost (26.74%). In fact, [taffa:ħat] can be considered as a lexicon of man's language, whereas women resorted to the use of French taboo word [le sin]: "breast" thinking that this latter is more acceptable to mention rather than [bza:zal]. Consequently, men have created certain expressions to use, whereas women have developed more positive attitudes towards the use of French taboos and euphemisms. Among males' expressions, we have [ḍraʔ] which is only spoken by old males in addition to [nhu:d] or [ləʔda:jal]...etc. On the other side, women tend to create feministic expressions which suit their views and attitudes such as [ʔamʔu:ma:t] or [bəkbu:ka:t].

- How do you call women's ass?
 - [lχarza].
 - [lʕaqlija].
 - [matɛrijel].
 - [mʂa:ʂi:t].

Table 7. Taboos Related to Woman's Ass

Suggestions	Females	Males	Total
[lχarza]	10	7	17
[lʕaqlija]	1	4	5
[matɛrijel]	15	23	38
[mʂa:ʂi:t]	16	10	26
Total	86		

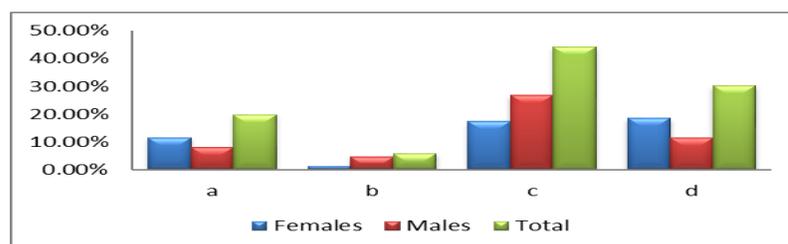


Figure 7. Taboos Related to Woman's Ass

From the assessment of the results, it seems that (44.19%) of the participants selected [matɛrijɛl] which means 'a woman's ass'. The latter is a French term, which is used in Algerian varieties, to denote the different sexual parts of females' body including breast and ass. Men, however, use the latter in their speech to refer to 'a woman's ass' since it has not the same degree as [mɕa:ɕi:t], whereas (30.23%) of the informants chose this term especially women. Thus, it should be noted that this latter is a character of women's speech, although it is used by men. The results also show that (21.81%) of the informants refused answering this question because of its sensitive nature

Interview:

One should note that the social norms, which the Arab societies have created regarding females' tabooed issues, have become a part of the members' attitudes and how they perceive these subjects. Besides, it is worth mentioning that female's body is still seen as the most fearful subject from which taboos begin since Islam has put restrictions on women's dress, speech and behaviour.

In fact, to collect our data we have focused on a focus group interview. Therefore, we have selected two groups of ten individuals from different ages, educational backgrounds and occupations. Five females, who were given the questionnaire, were interviewed at the same time, whereas five males were only interviewed since they have refused answering the questions of the questionnaire because of their sensitive nature.

Findings:

One should note that our findings supported the idea that Arab females' life is surrounded by taboos which are created by Islam and practiced by society. Moreover, what we have also understood from this interview is that the perception of females' issues as taboo subjects differs from one individual to another depending on certain socio-cultural parameters including age, gender and the socio-cultural background of the person.

Additionally, we have also noticed that people, whose age is between 45 and 60 years, are more attached to the norms and taboos that society has put on females' sensitive issues, whereas young people show less interest towards these subjects especially females due to the social changes that Arab societies have recently witnessed, although these restrictions do not change. In other words, the new generation seems far from the practice of the ancient habits such as the wedding night tradition and proving virginity. Furthermore, this generation tends even to borrow substitutions from other languages to cover up the tabooed meaning of the local words as the case of menstruation and pregnancy. The results of the interview have also revealed that women

tend to create an acceptable vocabulary to discuss their sensitive issues. They have even developed lexicons denoting their body parts including vagina, ass and bosom.

Conclusion:

Females' issues, in the Arab world, are always on the centre of the society's duties and restrictions since Islam has made women's body, speech and behaviour as the most sensitive subjects related to sexuality which is regulated by norms and taboos for this reason everything related to females are taboos. Hence, this subject was avoided from academic research either by sociolinguists, sociologists and dialectologists. It is until the emergence of the feminist movement that this subject has gained some interests from scholars. Furthermore, one should inform that social norms have also restricted women's use of language since females are always expected to use appropriate words and expressions unlike the other sex.

Last and not least, the attitudes of females towards these issues and the use of taboo words related to virginity, menstruation, women's body and menopause differ largely from men according to certain socio-cultural parameters including gender, the social milieu, age and these factors play a substantial role in directing the speaker's attitudes, views and, therefore, his beliefs.

About the author:

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Footnotes:

1. It is used in Iraq.
2. As quoted in Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazaka et al (2009: p. 37).
3. As quoted in Ritt-Benmimoun & Prochazaka et al (2009: p. 37).

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