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The Geographical Location of Tlemcen and Its Effect on the Dialect Formation of Its Inhabitants

Abstract

The city of Tlemcen has undergone several changes. Accordingly, we have reviewed the contributions of both ancient and modern scholars who studied and continue to explore the location of Tlemcen. The inhabitants of Tlemcen were influenced by wars, invasions, and geographical as well as social factors. Their dialect is characterized by a set of linguistic features shared by both urban and rural residents. These features are notably influenced by the city's geographical location, its historical periods, and the surrounding regions, which transformed Tlemcen into a center of scientific and cultural influence, an economic and commercial hub, and a destination for students and scholars from the East and the West. Yaqut al-Hamawi discussed it in his famous geographical dictionary, *Mu'jam al-Buldan*.

Keywords: *Tlemcen, urban and rural dialects, historical geography, cultural and scientific influence, economic and commercial hub*

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Tlemcenin coğrafi yerləşməsi və dialektə təsiri sakinlərinin formalaşması

Xülasə

Tlemcen şəhəri bir sıra dəyişikliklərə məruz qalmışdır. Buna uyğun olaraq, Tlemcenin yerini araşdıran və araşdırmağa davam edən həm qədim, həm də müasir alimlərin töhfələrini nəzərdən keçirdik. Tlemcen sakinləri müharibələr, işğallar, coğrafi və sosial amillərdən təsirlənmişdilər.

Onların ləhcəsi həm şəhər, həm də kənd sakinlərinin ortaq olduğu bir sıra dil xüsusiyyətləri ilə xarakterizə olunur. Bu xüsusiyyətlərə şəhərin coğrafi mövqeyi, tarixi dövrləri və ətraf bölgələr xüsusilə təsir göstərir ki, bu da Tlemcen elmi və mədəni təsir mərkəzinə, iqtisadi və ticarət mərkəzinə, Şərq və Qərbdən olan tələbələr və alimlər üçün bir məkana çevirir. Yaqut əl-Həməvi bu barədə məşhur coğrafi lüğəti olan *Mücmə əl-Buldanda* müzakirə etmişdir.

Açar sözlər: *Tlemcen, şəhər və kənd dialektləri, tarixi coğrafiya, mədəni və elmi təsir, iqtisadi və ticarət mərkəzi*

Introduction

Providing a historical overview serves as the foundation for this research paper and its connection with other societies, particularly those in the East, specifically the southern regions. Tlemcen's significance in Africa and the Maghreb aligns with the historical primacy of the Berbers across long periods. It is described as "a town in the Algerian region with Arabic schools and trade in grains, cork, and livestock" (Al-Hajj Ramadan Shaoush, 1983).

Research

Geographical Location in Antiquity: Tlemcen is located in the western region of Algeria at an elevation of 830 meters above sea level. It lies at the foothills of southern mountains covered with dense green pine forests.

To the north stretches the vast *El-Henaya* plain, connected in the west to the *Maghnia* plain. Tlemcen is about 30 km from the northern border, and to the northwest, the horizon is blocked by the Tarara heights, with the Flawsen mountains visible, while to the northeast rise the *Saba'a Shuukh* and *Tasla* heights (Ibn Khaldūn, 1981).

Several rivers and valleys run through the slopes of Tlemcen's mountains, including the *Tafna*, *Mafrouch*, *Chouli*, *Yesser*, and *Safsaf* rivers, most of which are seasonal. Tlemcen is situated in the first part of the fourth of Algeria's seven regions, at longitude 14°40' and latitude 33°42' (Al-Tlemcenī, I. ibn M. al-Sharīf al-Milī al-Madyūnī, 1980).

Thanks to its excellent geographical position, the region lies in the far northwest of Algeria, bordered to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the south by Naama Province, to the east by Sidi Bel Abbes Province, and to the west by Morocco. It contains 20 districts and more than 50 municipalities, denser in the north than the south, forming an almost continuous urban mass. Ibn al-Khatib described it as "a city combining desert and countryside, placed in a noble location as if crowned, surrounded by gardens and palms, with devoted inhabitants and beautiful adornments" (Mubārak ibn Muḥammad al-Mīlī, 1989).

Tlemcen Mountains – Names and Locations: Tlemcen's mountains, referred to by modern geographers as the "Tlemcen Mountains," consist of four nearly parallel ranges:

Tenouchfi Mountains: Highest peak at 1483 meters; overlooks the pass containing the town of Sebdou, approximately 37 miles south of Tlemcen.

Beni Ismail Mountains: Stretch from the village of *Ouled Mimoun* east to Sebdou west, with twelve peaks called "the Twelve Messengers," appearing like grand statues gazing at Sebdou.

Asfour Mountains: Highest peak at 1566 meters; overlooks the plain near Oujda close to the Algerian-Moroccan border.

Lalla Setti Mountains: Highest peak at 1306 meters; overlooks northern Tlemcen.

Additionally, the Flawsen Mountains bound Tlemcen from the north, forming a natural barrier against cold northern winds. Historically, the city was fortified, surviving sieges, including a ten-year siege by Sultan Abu Ya'qub al-Marini (Abu al-Fidā' al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad, 1840).

Ancient Gates of Tlemcen: Ibn Khaldun mentions five gates: *Bab el-Jiyad* (Qibla), *Bab al-Aqba* (east), *Bab al-Halwi* and *Bab al-Qarmadin* (north), and *Bab Kachouta* (west) (Al-Jilālī, 1982). Despite these defenses, Tlemcen experienced multiple invasions. Historically, the city comprised two towns, *Agadir* and *Taqrart*, now enclosed within one wall, with the latter larger and more significant.

The city's ancient name was Pomaria (POMARIA), meaning "the orchard," reflecting its fertile location with abundant water and vegetation (Ismā'īl al-'Arabī, 1984). Ibn al-Khatib remarked on its

water, air, and the seasonal *Metchkana* valley. The name “Pomaria” does not imply Roman origin; the city predates Roman presence and likely had a Berber name, later translated to Latin (Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī al-Rūmī al-Baghdādī, n.d.). After the Berbers consolidated power following the retreat of Romans and Vandals, they named it Agadir, meaning “old wall” or “fortified city” (Al-Maqqarī al-Tlemcenī, 1968). Some historians associate Agadir with the wall mentioned in the Qur’an in the story of al-Khidr and Moses, though Ibn Khaldun disputes this (Al-Marrākushī, 1963).

Eventually, the city became known as Tlemcen, from the Berber *Telm-Sin*, meaning “a gathering of two” (land and sea). Al-Maqrizi and later Arab geographers confirmed the use of the name Tlemcen (Al-Qalqashandī, n.d.). The city historically consisted of three successive towns: Agadir (east), Taqrart (center), and Mansoura (west), with only Taqrart retaining the name Tlemcen today.

Old Educational Institutions in Tlemcen: During the Zayyanid period, Tlemcen established five major schools:

1. The first school was built by Abu Hamu Musa I (707–718 AH).
2. Abu Tashfin I (718–737 AH) built the Tashfiniya School near the Grand Mosque.
3. Sultan Abu al-Hasan al-Marini built a school in the village of Al-Abbad (748 AH).
4. His son ‘Anan built another school near the shrine of the saint Abu Abdullah al-Shawzi al-Ishbili (754 AH).
5. Abu Hamu Musa II (760–791 AH) built the Ya’qubiya School (765 AH) near the tomb of his father Abu Ya’qub Yusuf and other family members; later, the scholar Ibrahim al-Masmoudi (804 AH) was buried there (Al-Tammār, 1984).

Tlemcen under Ottoman Rule: In 1555 CE, Rais Pasha of Algiers captured Tlemcen on behalf of the Ottomans. The Turks settled in the city, mixing with local residents. Native urbanites were called al-Haddar, while mixed Turkish-Algerian descendants were called Karaghla. Ibn Khaldun analyzed the Arab and Berber genealogies, noting that Sanhaja and Kutama Berber tribes had Yemeni origins, migrating before Islam (Wajdī, 1971).

Ibn Khaldūn (Ibn Khaldūn) explains this in detail in his Muqaddima, stating:

“Among the linguistic features of this Arab generation in our time, wherever they dwell in the lands, is their manner of pronouncing (qāf). They do not articulate it from the point of (qāf), as do the people of the towns, as mentioned in the works of Arabic philology, namely, from the deepest part of the tongue and the upper palate. Nor do they pronounce it from the point of (kāf), although that is slightly lower than the point of (qāf) and adjacent to it on the upper palate. Rather, they bring it forth as a sound intermediate between (kāf) and (qāf). This is found among all the Arab Bedouin generation, whether in the West or the East. The most apparent conclusion is that this pronunciation of (qāf), current among the Arab Bedouin, represents the original articulation of (qāf) among the earliest speakers of the language, for its point of articulation is broad: its uppermost from the high palate and its lowermost adjoining (kāf). Thus, pronouncing it from the high palate is the usage of the towns, while pronouncing it nearer to (kāf) is the usage of this Bedouin generation.” We may thus affirm that this development in the pronunciation of these two sounds is merely a continuation of their older forms. Accordingly, the dialect of Tlemcen remains close to Classical Arabic. It maintains historical ties and connections with the cities of the Arab East, particularly Cairo (al-Qāhira), and certain Yemeni tribes. From this perspective, we find that in the province of Tlemcen and its surroundings, three dialects are prevalent: the urban dialect (al-lahja al-ḥadariyya), the Bedouin dialect (al-lahja al-badawiyya), and the Hawzī dialect. (al-lahja al-ḥawziyya). All of these are derived from classical Arabic, which loses all of its case inflections, leaving every word-final position quiescent. Thereafter, changes entered into the pronunciation of specific letters, and some vocabulary was replaced by words from other languages, such as Zanāta (al-Zanātiyya), Turkish, and even Spanish and French, during the period of colonization.

The native urban element of Tlemcen’s population became known as *al-Ḥaḍar* (*al-Ḥaḍar*), with the ḍād pronounced open, and this designation was restricted to them alone. Their neighbours in the city, not of this element, were known as the Kūrugħla (*al-Karāghila*), that is, the *kouloughlis*, the offspring of Algerian mothers and Turkish fathers. Ibn Khaldūn (*Ibn Khaldūn*) recounts how Arab

genealogists agreed with Berber genealogists on the Arab origin of Berbers. Ibn Khaldūn, in his usual manner, critically discusses this attribution and disagrees with the genealogists concerning the Arabness of all Berber tribes. However, he acknowledges the Arab origin of the two greatest Berber tribes, *Şanhāja* (Şanhāja) and *Kutāma* (Kutāma). As the eminent historian, he affirms that they had migrated from Yemen in waves prior to the Islamic conquest, even before the Christian era. He writes:

“There is no disagreement among the Arab genealogists that the Berber peoples we have mentioned are all Berbers, except for *Şanhāja* and *Kutāma*. Among the Arab genealogists, there is disagreement, but the prevailing view is that they are of Yemeni origin and that when Afrīqus invaded Ifrīqiya, he settled them there... In my view, they are their brethren, that is.

Conclusion

The main phonetic changes in Tlemcen dialects, especially sounds at the back of the palate, as well as features like *kashkasha* and consonant shifts, are extensions of linguistic changes originating in the Arab East, particularly among Yemeni tribes and Cairene populations. Thus, Tlemcen dialects remain close to Classical Arabic.

Three dialects are identified in Tlemcen province: urban, rural, and oasis dialects. All originate from Classical Arabic, with loss of case endings and pronunciation changes influenced by Berber, Turkish, Spanish, and French languages during colonial periods.

Key Findings:

1. Dialects are significant linguistic phenomena, reflecting the evolving role of Classical Arabic.
2. Studying dialects aims to correct and integrate them into Classical Arabic, not to isolate them.
3. Tlemcen local dialects are essentially Arabic, evolved alongside Classical Arabic over centuries.
4. The coexistence of dialects and Classical Arabic is a natural linguistic phenomenon worldwide.

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