

Language and Society in Ottoman Algiers

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Abstract---This study examines the relationship between language and society in Ottoman Algiers, highlighting how social structures shaped linguistic diversity and reflected cultural hierarchy. Using a historical-analytical approach based on primary sources, it shows that Arabic, Turkish, Amazigh, Hebrew, and hybrid languages like *Lingua Franca* and *Ladino* coexisted within a complex social fabric. Arabic dominated religion and education, Turkish governed administration, and Amazigh persisted locally. The research concludes that Ottoman Algiers was a vibrant space of cultural synthesis where multilingualism became a hallmark of Algerian identity.

Keywords---Ottoman Algiers, Multilingualism, Social Stratification, Cultural Interaction.

Resume---Cette étude analyse la relation entre la langue et la société dans l'Algérie ottomane, en montrant comment la structure sociale a façonné la diversité linguistique tout en reflétant la hiérarchie culturelle. À travers une approche historique et analytique fondée sur des sources primaires, elle révèle la coexistence de l'arabe, du turc, du berbère, de l'hébreu et de langues hybrides telles que la *Lingua Franca* et le *Ladino* au sein d'un tissu social diversifié. L'arabe dominait les domaines religieux et éducatifs, le turc les affaires administratives, tandis que le berbère conservait une présence locale. L'étude conclut qu'Alger ottomane fut un espace vivant de synthèse culturelle où le plurilinguisme devint un trait fondamental de l'identité algérienne.

Mots-clés---Alger ottomane, Plurilinguisme, Stratification sociale, Interaction culturelle.

Introduction

The history of Ottoman Algiers stands as a remarkable laboratory of linguistic and cultural interaction in the Mediterranean world. Situated at the crossroads of Africa and Europe, Algiers in the sixteenth century was not merely a provincial capital but a dynamic cosmopolitan hub where political power,

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migration, and commerce converged. The arrival of the Ottomans, the influx of Andalusian refugees, and continuous exchanges with European powers created a unique social fabric marked by ethnic plurality and linguistic diversity. In this context, language became not only a means of communication but also a mirror of social hierarchy and cultural identity.

Despite the abundance of historical studies on Ottoman governance and military organization, the linguistic dimension of this period remains relatively underexplored. This research therefore addresses the following central question: **How did social structures in Ottoman Algiers shape its linguistic landscape, and in what ways did language reflect the city's complex social hierarchy and intercultural dynamics?**

To answer this, several subsidiary questions arise:

- ✓ What were the main social groups that composed the population of Algiers during the Ottoman era, and how did their interactions influence language use?
- ✓ Which languages and dialects coexisted in *Dar al-Sultan* (the capital city), and what social functions did each serve?
- ✓ How did contact between Arabic, Turkish, Amazigh, Hebrew, and European tongues give rise to hybrid linguistic forms such as *Lingua Franca* and *Ladino*?
- ✓ What elements of this multilingual heritage persist in contemporary Algerian Arabic?

Methodologically, the study employs a historical and analytical approach combining primary sources—travelers' accounts, diplomatic correspondence, and Ottoman administrative records—with modern sociolinguistic perspectives. This dual framework allows for both contextual depth and linguistic interpretation.

The aim of this research is to elucidate the correlation between social stratification and linguistic diversity in Ottoman Algiers, demonstrating how language functioned as both a product and a catalyst of social interaction. Ultimately, the study seeks to highlight the city's role as a cultural bridge between East and West, revealing how multilingualism evolved from a historical necessity into a defining feature of Algerian identity.

1. SOCIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF ALGIERS

The society of Algiers during the Ottoman era was distinguished by remarkable **ethnic and cultural diversity**. The German traveler **J. Wahnstreit** observed: "*The inhabitants of the Kingdom of Algiers are not all of the same origin...*"¹

Similarly, **Aziz Samih Ilter** described the human diversity of Algiers as follows: "On the eve of the 17th century, the population of Algiers reached one hundred thousand inhabitants. Among them were 300 families of captains and *raïs* (naval commanders), 6,000 Janissary families, 600 Turkish families, and 1,000 Andalusian families, among others... There were also mosques, two synagogues for the Jews, and a church for the Catholics."² This rich mosaic of ethnic groups naturally fostered linguistic diversity within the city, where multiple languages and dialects coexisted—reflecting Algiers' role as both a Mediterranean crossroads and a dynamic Ottoman metropolis.

This section explores the principal population groups that made up the city of Algiers during this period. It should be noted that other smaller or transient communities also existed, their presence often linked to specific **political, scholarly, or economic circumstances**.

¹ See: *Rihlat al-'Alim al-'Almani J. Wahnstreit 'ila al-Jazā'ir wa-Tūnis wa-Ṭarābulus (1145 AH / 1732 AD)*, trans., introd. & annot. by Nāṣir al-Dīn Sa'idūnī, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, Tunis, n.d., p. 2

² 'Azīz Sāmih al-'Ilter. *al-'Atrak al-'Uthmāniyyūn fī 'Ifriqiya al-Shamālīyya*. Translated by Maḥmūd 'Alī 'Āmir, 1st ed., Dār al-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya, Beirut, 1409 AH / 1989 AD, p. 145.

1.1. THE OTTOMAN TURKS

The Ottoman population of Algiers was distinguished by its **multi-ethnic composition**. They did not belong to a single ethnic or racial origin; rather, they included **Turks of pure Turkish descent**, as well as **Albanians (Arnauts), Bosnians, Kurds, Tatars, Bulgarians, Czechs, Romanians**, and others. According to **Diego de Haedo**, they occupied around **1,600 houses**, while the French spy **Taneval** reported that there were approximately **10,000 Turks** living in the city³. The Ottomans followed the **Ḥanafī school of Islamic jurisprudence**⁴.

The **governing authority** of Algiers was largely concentrated in Ottoman hands. According to the spy **Taneval**, “These men alone enjoy the right to rise to the highest positions of power.” Likewise, most members of the **naval corps (ṭāʾifat riyās al-baḥr)** were Ottomans. The French spy **Le Moy** described them as occupying **the top of the social hierarchy**, writing that: “They form something akin to a noble class, one endowed with special privileges.”⁵

This privileged position gave the Ottomans a **dominant role** in both governance and society. Their authority extended from the highest administrative offices to the maritime elite, solidifying their image as the **ruling aristocracy** of Ottoman Algiers⁶.

1.2. THE “ILĀJ” (EUROPEAN CONVERTS TO ISLAM)

The term “**Ilāj**” was used to refer to **European Christians who converted to Islam**. According to **Diego de Haedo**, the principal motive behind their conversion was the **desire to escape enslavement**, as most of them were former Christian captives who embraced Islam to gain freedom⁷.

The priest **Père Dan** estimated their number at **around 8,000**, but by the **second half of the seventeenth century**, their population began to decline, and by the **eighteenth century**, only **200 to 300** remained. The French spy **Taneval** further noted that, by his time, there were barely **twenty ‘Ilāj** living in Algiers, most of them having settled in **Oran**⁸.

Remarkably, several **‘Ilāj** attained high positions of authority in Algiers—**nine of them even ruled as governors**, while others held important administrative posts⁹.

1.3. THE “KOULOUGHLIS” (KARAGLA)

The **Kouloughlis**—known in Arabic as “**Karāghla**”—were the **offspring of Ottoman fathers and local North African mothers**. Despite their partial Ottoman descent and adherence to the **Ḥanafī madhhab** (the same legal school as their fathers), they were **barred from holding high administrative or military positions**.

According to the French spy **Taneval**, the Ottomans viewed this group with **suspicion and apprehension**, considering them a “**hybrid class**” whose inclusion in the army or administration might **threaten Ottoman dominance** in Algeria¹⁰.

³ *Amin Maḥraz, al-Jazāʾir fi ʿAbd al-Aghwāt 1659–1671*, Dār al-Baṣāʾir, Algiers, 2011, p. 141

⁴ ʿAzīz Sāmih al-ʾIṭer, *al-ʾAtrāk al-ʾUṭhmāniyyūn fi ʾIfrīqiya al-Shamaliyya*, trans. Maḥmūd ʾAlī ʾĀmir, 1st ed., Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʾArabiyya, Beirut, 1409 AH / 1989 AD, p. 143; Diego de Haedo, *Topographie et Générale d’Alger*, trans. from Spanish by Monneréau and A. Berbrugger, Éditions Bouchène, n.d., p. 61

⁵ Farīd Bennour, *al-Jawāsīs al-Faransiyyūn fi al-Jazāʾir 1782–1830*, Dār al-Wāḥa lil-Kitāb, Algiers, 2009, pp. 175–452

⁶ See also: J. Wahnstreit, *Riḥlat al-ʾAlim al-ʾAlmānī J. Wahnstreit ʾilā al-Jazāʾir wa-Tūnis wa-Ṭarābulus (1145 AH / 1732 AD)*, trans., introd. & annot. by Nāṣir al-Dīn Saʾidūnī, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, Tunis, n.d., p. 29; Cathcart, p. 78

⁷ Manūr Marwesh, p. 283; see also: Farīd Bennour, *al-Jawāsīs al-Faransiyyūn fi al-Jazāʾir 1782–1830*, Dār al-Wāḥa lil-Kitāb, Algiers, 2009, p. 131; Diego de Haedo, *Topographie et Générale d’Alger*, trans. from Spanish by Monneréau and A. Berbrugger, Éditions Bouchène, n.d., pp. 62–63

⁸ *Amin Maḥraz, p. 149; Farīd Bennour, op. cit., p. 177*, For a more detailed account of the **ʾIlāj**, see: Père Dan, *Histoire de Barbarie et de ses Corsaires*, 2nd ed., Paris, n.d., pp. 343–345.

⁹ *Amin Maḥraz, op. cit., pp. 147–148*

¹⁰ J. Wahnstreit, *Riḥlat al-ʾAlim al-ʾAlmānī J. Wahnstreit ʾilā al-Jazāʾir wa-Tūnis wa-Ṭarābulus (1145 AH / 1732 AD)*, trans., intro. & annot. by Nāṣir al-Dīn Saʾidūnī, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, Tunis, n.d., p. 29; ʿAzīz Sāmih al-ʾIṭer, *al-ʾAtrāk al-ʾUṭhmāniyyūn fi ʾIfrīqiya al-Shamaliyya*, trans. Maḥmūd ʾAlī ʾĀmir, 1st ed., Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʾArabiyya, Beirut, 1409 AH / 1989 AD, p. 143.

The spy **Le Moy** described the Kouloughlis as belonging to a “**well-to-do social class**”, enjoying certain material comfort though politically marginalized¹¹.

1.4. THE ANDALUSIANS

The presence of the Andalusians in Algeria predates that of the Ottomans¹², going back to the time of the Ziyānid rule over Algiers. However, their numbers increased considerably after the fall of al-Andalus into Christian hands and the promulgation of the expulsion decrees, which compelled these populations to migrate to Algeria. Khair ed-Dine Barbarossa brought about seven thousand Andalusians, and in a second phase, he instructed Sālīh Rāīs to lead a fleet to rescue these persecuted people and transport them to Algeria, thereby bringing back nearly five thousand six hundred Andalusians¹³.

In the seventeenth century, the number of exiled Andalusians reached approximately 116,022 individuals, and Andalusian migrations to Algeria continued throughout the entire Ottoman period¹⁴. After settling permanently in the country, these communities played an active role in political and cultural life and also distinguished themselves in artisanal crafts such as soap-making, jewelry, as well as in architecture and public works¹⁵.

1.5. THE ARABS

The Arab presence in Algeria dates back to the Islamic conquest of the Maghreb. The Arabs of the city of Algiers mainly belonged to the Tha‘āliba tribe, which succeeded in asserting its authority over the city between the 14th and 16th centuries. In the 15th century, this tribe also extended its domination over several neighboring towns such as Médéa, Miliana, Mitidja, and Ténès¹⁶.

1.6. THE BARANIA

The *Barania* were, for the most part, Arabs who came from various inland and Saharan regions of Algeria, such as Mzab, Laghouat, Biskra, Kabylia, and Jijel. According to the German traveler J. H. Ehrmann Habensstrait, these groups formed a visible and active component of Algiers’ social fabric, originating from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds¹⁷.

1.7. THE MOZABITES

The *Mozabites* were adherents of the Ibadi rite. Originating from the M’zab Valley, located in the Algerian desert, they came primarily from the city of Ghardaïa, considered the capital of this region. The M’zab Valley contained seven ancient *ksour* (fortified towns), most of which were founded in the 12th century of the Hijri calendar. It also included other localities spread along its banks, inhabited by populations following the Maliki rite — notably the Chaâmba, Medabih, Atatsha, Souayah, Makhadma, and Banu Marzouk¹⁸.

Their presence in the city of Algiers dates back to the 16th century (10th century of the Hijri calendar), as evidenced by their participation in the city’s defense against Emperor Charles V’s expedition in 1541. This urban community was part of the *Barania* and held an essential place in the economic sphere. Indeed, the Mozabites played a decisive role in commercial activity, acting both as merchants and

¹¹ See Farīd Bennour, *al-Jawāsīs al-Faransiyyūn fī al-Jazā’ir 1782–1830*, Dār al-Wāḥa lil-Kitāb, Algiers, 2009, pp. 132–175.

¹² Merouche Menouar, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

¹³ Nacir Eddine Saïdouni, *Dirasat Andalusia – Mazābir al-Ta’tīr al-Ibiri wal-Wujūd al-Andalouci*, Dār al-Gharb al-Islami, Beyrouth, 1424H / 2003, p. 18-25

¹⁴ Fouzi Saadallah, *Al-Chatat al-Andalouci fī al-Jazā’ir wal-‘Alam*, Dār Qortoba, Alger, 2016, vol. 2, p. 91-130

¹⁵ Nacir Eddine Saïdouni, *op. cit.*, p. 54, 62

¹⁶ Touwātī Boumeḥalla, *Mabātāt fī Tārikh al-Jazā’ir*, p. 119–124–125

¹⁷ J. Habensstrait, *Voyage du savant allemand J. Habensstrait en Algérie, Tunisie et Tripoli (1145H–1732)*, trad. et prés. Nacir Eddine Saïdouni, Dār al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunis, s.d., p. 33

¹⁸ Hammou Mohamed Issa Ennouri, *Dawr al-Mzābiyyīn fī Tārikh al-Jazā’ir qadīman wa ḥadīthan*, Matba‘at al-Ba‘th, Alger, s.d., vol. 1, p. 57, 126–128, 132; Belberouat Ben Attou, *Al-Madīna wa al-Rif*, Kawkab al-‘Ulūm, Alger, 2016, vol. 1, p. 292

intermediaries between the North and South of the country. They were also very active in the service sector¹⁹.

1.8. THE LAGHOUATIS

The *Laghounatis* formed one of the smaller *Barania* groups in the city of Algiers²⁰.

1.9. THE BISKRIS

The term *Biskris* refers to inhabitants who came from Biskra, the Ziban region, as well as from the areas of Oued Righ, Oued Souf, Touggourt, and Tolga. These individuals were often assigned to arduous and service-related tasks, such as cleaning streets and homes or performing night watch duties. The German traveler J. H. Ehrmann Habensstrait also mentioned the presence of these groups in the capital, emphasizing their functional role in maintaining the city's everyday urban life²¹.

1.10. THE KABYLES

The *Kabyles* represented the largest proportion among the *Barania* groups established in the city of the Turks. The Ottomans were particularly impressed by the intelligence of this community; thus, William Shaler reports: "...the Turkish government, whose men are jealous of the intelligence of the Kabyles..." According to Dauphin de Biviević, their number reached approximately 200,000 individuals. Lemay notes that the Kabyles engaged in various agricultural and artisanal activities, thereby contributing to both the urban and peri-urban economy²².

1.11. THE JIJELIANS

The presence of the *Jijelians* in the city of Algiers dates back to the early 16th century, when they accompanied the Barbarossa brothers in their expeditions aimed at liberating the Algerian coasts from Spanish occupation. The inhabitants of Jijel enthusiastically welcomed the Barbarossa brothers, even proclaiming Arudj Barbarossa as their sovereign. In return, the brothers rewarded them for their hospitality by granting them a share of the spoils obtained from maritime *jihad*. The Jijelians are considered one of the oldest *Barania* groups to have settled in the city of Algiers²³.

1.12. JEWS:

The Jewish presence in the city of Algiers is ancient (Katcart, p. 86). Historians have differed regarding the precise period of their settlement, yet they unanimously agree on the antiquity of their existence in Algeria. Some trace it back to the Phoenician era, while others to the Roman period. The significant increase in their number, however, is attributed by many historians to the fall of Granada—the last Islamic emirate in al-Andalus—in 1492 AD. This event triggered major repercussions, among which was the migration of Jews toward Algeria, alongside other communities expelled from Granada after its fall²⁴.

They were organized as a distinct community known as the *Jewish Guild*. According to French statistics, the Jewish population of Algiers before the French occupation was estimated at 5,000 individuals. Fawzi Saadallah, however, estimated their number between 20,000 and 30,000, while Aziz Samih Ilter placed it at around 2,000 Jews, divided into two categories: *native Jews* and *European Jews*. Some of them

¹⁹ Amin Mahrez, *Al-Jazā'ir fi 'Abd al-Aghwāt (1659–1671)*, Dār al-Bassā'ir, Alger, 2011, p. 153; Hammou Mohamed Issa Ennouri, *op. cit.*, p. 201–210–203; Belberouat Ben Attou, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 292

²⁰ Aïcha Gattas, *Les métiers et les artisans dans la ville d'Alger (1700–1830) : Approche socio-économique*, Éditions ANEP, Alger, s.d., p. 30

²¹ J. Habensstrait, *Voyage du savant allemand J. Habensstrait en Algérie, Tunisie et Tripoli (1145H–1732)*, trad. et prés. Nacir Eddine Saïdouni, Dār al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunis, s.d., pp. 33–34

²² Farid Benour, *op. cit.*, p. 132

²³ Hanîfi Hlelîli, *Anrâq fi Tārikh al-Jazā'ir fi al-'Abd al-'Othmāni*, 1^{re} éd., Dār al-Houda, Aïn M'lila, Algérie, 1429H / 2008, p. 171; Charles Féraud, *Tārikh Jijelli*, trad. Abdelhamid Sarhane, Dār al-Khaldouniyya, Alger, 1431H / 2010, pp. 98–99–102

²⁴ Fawzi Saadallah, *Jews of Algeria: Those Unknown People*, 2nd ed., Dar al-Umma, Algiers, 2004, pp. 28–134; Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, trans. al-Saffsafi Ahmed al-Qattouri, 1st ed., Dar al-Basheer for Culture and Science, 2015, p. 57.

had come from the Italian city of Livorno and practiced various professions—most notably trade and handicrafts. A report from the French Consulate stated: “*The Jews control all trade in leather and wax, and generally all other merchandise.*”²⁵

1.13. CAPTIVES:

The terminology used to describe captives varied between *white captives* and *black captives*. Those of lighter complexion were generally referred to as *captives*, whereas individuals of darker skin were called *slaves*. As for women, regardless of color, the term *ama* (female slave) was applied to them. The number of European captives—originating from most Western European countries such as France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Malta, and belonging to various Christian denominations (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox)—was significant in the city of Algiers. According to researcher Christy, their number reached approximately 3,634 captives. Haedo, however, estimated 12,000 Spanish captives, while Casnac placed the figure between 5,000 and 6,000. The number of English captives was estimated at around 3,000. By the late 16th century (10th AH), the total number of captives had reached 25,000, rising to 30,000 in the early 17th century (11th AH). However, by the 18th century (12th AH), the number declined to about 2,000, before rising again to 7,000 in the latter half of the same century. It later dropped sharply to between 500 and 122 captives by the onset of the French occupation of Algeria²⁶. Some captives were forced to work in the Dey’s palace, performing tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and guarding, under the supervision of the *chief of slaves*, known as *Capodigolfa*. Others were assigned to port labor, where they helped in ship preparation and related tasks²⁷.

1.14. THE BLACKS:

The Black population constituted a significant community within the city of Algiers. Their origins generally trace back to Western Sudanese regions, particularly modern-day Mali and Niger. By the 17th century, their number was estimated at around three thousand individuals. Tanfil noted that their population in the city was relatively high. Members of this group could obtain freedom through manumission, a practice whereby some Algerian families emancipated their slaves during special celebrations or joyous occasions²⁸.

1.15. FREE CHRISTIANS:

This group consisted mainly of European consuls representing countries such as France, England, Sweden, and the Netherlands, who chose strategic locations for their residences within the city of Algiers²⁹. Visual representation of the main social classes in Ottoman Algiers, illustrating the hierarchical order from the Ottoman authority to local and marginalized groups.

²⁵ Lemnour Marouche, *Studies on Algeria during the Ottoman Period: Currency, Prices, and Revenues*, Dar al-Qasba, Algiers, 2009, pp. 291–293. See also Aziz Samih Ilter, *The Ottoman Turks in North Africa*, trans. Mahmoud Ali Amer, 1st ed., Dar al-Nahda al-‘Arabiyya, Beirut, 1409 AH / 1989 AD, p. 145; Fawzi Saadallah, *Jews of Algeria: Those Unknown People*, 2nd ed., Dar al-Umma, Algiers, 2004, p. 133; and Farid Benour, *French Spies in Algeria, 1782–1830*, Dar al-Waha for Books, Algiers, 2009, p. 132.

²⁶ Hanifi Hlelaïli, *Papers on the History of Algeria during the Ottoman Period*, 1st ed., Dar al-Houda, Ain M’lila, Algeria, 1429 AH / 2008, p. 69; see also Katcart, p. 185; Lemnour Marouche, pp. 296–298.

²⁷ Katcart, *Memoirs of the Captive Katcart, U.S. Consul in Morocco*, trans. Ismaïl al-Arabi, Diwan of University Publications, 1982, pp. 25–26, 78–79.

²⁸ Amin Mahrez, *Algeria during the Period of the Aghas, 1659–1671*, Dar al-Basā’ir for Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 2011, p. 157; Farid Bennour, *French Spies in Algeria, 1782–1830*, Dar al-Waha for Books, Algeria, 2009, p. 177.

²⁹ J. O. Hebenstreit, *The Journey of the German Scholar J. O. Hebenstreit to Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, 1145 AH / 1732 AD*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Nasser al-Din Saydouni, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunis, n.d., p. 34.



Figure 1: Social Hierarchy In Ottoman Algiers
Source: Prepared By The Researcher

2. THE LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS IN DAR AL-SULTAN:

The German traveler J. O. Hebenstreit, who visited Algiers, stated: “The languages spoken in Algiers are diverse — Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew, French, and Lingua Franca.”³⁰

2.1. THE TURKISH LANGUAGE:

It was the language of the Ottomans and was known during this period as Ottoman Turkish. Its emergence dates back to the 15th century (9th AH). As the Ottoman Empire expanded and incorporated many linguistically diverse regions, the Turkish language absorbed influences—particularly from Arabic and Persian—which led to the formation of the Ottoman Turkish language, written in Arabic script.

The Ottomans preserved their language with great attachment, using it primarily among themselves. Over time, it also became the language of the “‘ilā” (foreign-born converts or servants). In Algeria, its use was mainly administrative, appearing in official correspondence with the Ottoman Caliphate and European powers, given that the Ottomans were the ruling authority³¹.

³⁰ J. O. Hebenstreit, *The Journey of the German Scholar J. O. Hebenstreit to Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli (1145 AH / 1732 AD)*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Nasser al-Din Saydouni, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunis, n.d., p. 39

³¹ William Shaler, *Mémoires of William Shaler, U.S. Consul in Algiers (1816–1824)*, trans. and annotated by Ismaïl Al-Arabi, National Publishing Company, Algiers, 1982, p. 39; Nour Eddine Abdelkader, *Pages from the History of the City of Algiers from Its Earliest Times to the End of the Turkish Era*, Dar Al-Hadara, Algiers, 2006, p. 243; Safsafi Ahmed Al-Qasuri, *A Glimpse of Turkish Culture and Their Ancient Civilization*, 1st ed., Cairo, 2006, p. 108

Due to the long Ottoman presence and continuous contact between the inhabitants of Algiers, the captives, and the Ottoman administrators, the locals gradually began to learn the Turkish language and incorporate some of its vocabulary³².

Most administrative and military titles were in Turkish, as were the names of utensils, dishes, garments, and musical instruments. Even the daily speech of the city's inhabitants adopted many Turkish-origin words, such as: *tabani*, *nishān*, *bāzār*, *bahlawān*, *jabadūlī*, *bashmaq*, *tibsi*, *tabūna*, *fanūs*, *rajina*, *shūsha*, *bōqāl*, *khishba*, *darbuka*, *duzan*, *sharbat*, *shūrba*, *baqlāwa*, *burak*, *samsa*, *rasha*, etc³³.

As for how European captives learned the Ottoman language, the German captive Simon Pfeyffer describes in his memoirs: "We did not know the Turkish language, so we were forced to learn it. It was extremely difficult for me at first, yet I gradually managed to acquire it. I learned words only by asking about things and pointing to them. I would write them on the wall with a nail or a piece of coal, and though I was beaten many times for doing so, I learned much. When I finally learned the sentences 'What is this?' and 'What's its name?', I didn't know how to use them, but eventually I managed. When a Turk was in a good mood, he would ask me again about the word he had taught me, pointing to something and asking 'What is this?' Once I began to understand a little, I listened like a mouse to the Turks speaking among themselves, until I dared to speak and started conversing with them..."³⁴.

2.2. THE ARABIC LANGUAGE:

The Arabic language was the dominant language among the inhabitants of Algiers³⁵. Nasser Eddine Saidouni divided Arabic in the Regency of Algiers into two main dialects: the Urban Arabic dialect, which dates back to before the Hilalian migration and is characterized by specific phonetic features such as the pronunciation of *tā'* as *tsā'*, and the use of the hard *qāf*, and the Bedouin Arabic dialect, which appeared later and used the voiced *qāf*. It was mainly spoken by the Arabs of Algiers, especially those belonging to the Tha'aliba tribe, and became the most widely used form of speech, remaining the closest to Classical Arabic³⁶.

Arabic was also more widely used than any other language since it was the language of Islam, of worship, Qur'anic recitation, sermons, and religious instruction³⁷. During this period, Arabic served as the language of education in Algiers, used in schools from the primary level up to higher education³⁸. As a result of its widespread use among the population, some Ottomans and captives were compelled to learn and use it in their daily lives³⁹.

2.3. THE AMAZIGH LANGUAGE

The Amazigh language is the native tongue of the people of the Maghreb. It belongs to the ancient Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic) language family and has long been used across Africa. In Algeria, it is mainly spoken in the northeastern regions, the northern Sahara, and other parts of the country, represented by several dialects such as Kabyle, Chaouia, Tuareg, Mozabite, and Chelhi, among others.

³² Saleh Abbad, *Algeria under Ottoman Rule 1514–1830*, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2014, pp. 356–357

³³ Nasser Eddine Saidouni, *Rural Life in the Province of Algiers, Dār al-Sultān in the Late Ottoman Period (1791–1830)*, Dar al-Basā'ir, Algiers, 2013, p. 394; Nour Eddine Abdelkader, *Pages from the History of Algiers*, op. cit., p. 252; Mehammed Ben Cheneb, *Mots Turcs et Persans Conservés dans le Parler Algérien*, Algiers, 1922, pp. 15–18, 21, 25, 27, 29, 31, 39, 41–43, 50, 53, 55–56, 62, 84

³⁴ Simon Pfeyffer, *Memoirs or A Historical Glimpse of Algiers*, presented and translated by Abu al-'Id Doudou, National Publishing and Distribution Company, Algiers, 1974, pp. 18–19

³⁵ William Shaler, *Mémoires de William Shaler, Consul of the United States in Algiers (1816–1824)*, translated and presented by Ismail Al-Arabi, National Publishing and Distribution Company, Algiers, 1982, p.39

³⁶ Nasser Eddine Saidouni, *La vie rurale dans la région d'Alger - Dar Essoltane à la fin de l'époque ottomane (1791–1830)*, Dar El-Bassair, Algiers, 2013, pp.393–395

³⁷ Louis-Jean Calvet, *La guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques*, translated by Hassan Hamza, 1st ed., Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2008, p.89.

³⁸ Abdelkader Halouch, *La politique éducative de la France en Algérie*, Dar Al-Ummah, Algiers, 2010, pp.25–27.

³⁹ Saleh Abbad, *L'Algérie sous la domination turque (1514–1830)*, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2014, p.356.

The French spy *Tanville* described it as “...a distinct dialect, quite different from Arabic...”⁴⁰. Rashid Najib praised it as a language that “...embraces a treasury of linguistic and lexical riches...”⁴¹.

Linguists have classified the Amazigh language historically and ethnically into three main groups: Sanhaja Amazigh, Masmouda Amazigh, and Zenata Amazigh—the latter being the dialect of the Amazighs of Algiers, including those from *Mzab, Ouargla, Toggourt, Aurès*, and *Kabylie*, who were known in the city as part of the *Barania* community⁴².

Nasser Eddine Saidouni further divided Amazigh in Dar Essoltane into two dialects: the Zenati Berber dialect, spoken by the inhabitants of western Algiers such as *Beni Salah, Beni Menacer*, and *Chenoua*, and the Sanhaja dialect, used by those living near the borders of Kabylie, also known as the Kabyle dialect⁴³. The use of Amazigh in Algiers was limited due to the small number of its speakers, mainly *Kabyles* and *Mozabites*. Saidouni attributes this decline to the tendency of some speakers to adopt the Bedouin Arabic dialect in daily communication⁴⁴.

Like other languages, Amazigh underwent linguistic influence from Arabic due to the long-standing contact between Arabs and Berbers since the Islamic conquest. As a result, it absorbed numerous Arabic words such as *Aṭhur* (purity), *Al-ḥisab* (calculation), *Aṣ-ṣalāt ‘ala anbiyā’* (prayer upon the prophets), *Tamettūt* (woman, from Arabic “ṭamth” meaning menstruation), *Axnufuf* (nose, from Arabic “khanūf” meaning to raise one’s nose in pride), *Alfaḥar* (sea), *Alaḥb* (games), *Axdām* (servants), and expressions such as *Kulle ‘uṭla fihā khayr* (every break has goodness) and *Entaḥat Rabbi* (God’s will)⁴⁵.

2.4. THE ANDALUSIAN DIALECT:

The settlement of the Andalusians in Algeria led to close contact with the local population, which resulted in a linguistic influence that left a clear mark on Algerian speech. The Andalusians managed to spread their Granadan dialect, known for its soft vocabulary and elegant expressions, and notably characterized by the pronunciation of the letter *qāf* (ق) as an *alif* (أ). According to Nasser Eddine Saidouni, since their arrival in Algeria in the late 9th century AH / 15th century CE, the Andalusians worked to disseminate the colloquial Arabic language—particularly in the mountainous regions near Blida and Cherchell. As a result, this dialect merged with the local Berber dialects, and the inhabitants of these areas began to speak, alongside their native Amazigh, the colloquial Arabic introduced by the Andalusians. However, Saidouni adds that the decline in the Andalusian population eventually led to the gradual disappearance of their dialect, which finally vanished after the French occupation of Algeria in 1830, surviving only in the Cherchell region⁴⁶.

2.5. THE HEBREW LANGUAGE:

Hebrew was used by the Jewish community in the city of Algiers, though its use was limited mainly to internal communication within the Jewish community. It is one of the ancient Semitic languages, having gone through several developmental stages, the last of which is the modern period, marked by the revival efforts of Jewish literary figures—particularly Eliezer Ben-Yehuda—who contributed significantly to the modernization of Hebrew. The modern form, as described, “relies mainly on the

⁴⁰ Farid Benour, *Les espions français en Algérie, 1782–1830*, Dar Al-Waha, Algiers, 2009, p.176.

⁴¹ Amal Kassimi, *Le métissage linguistique de la langue amazighe dans la pratique et la diversité linguistique en Algérie*, *Revue Maâlim*, special issue, 2021, pp.42–45; see also Mohamed El-Hadi Harrach, *Études sur l’histoire de l’Algérie – passé et présent*, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2013, pp.27–29.

⁴² Amal Kassimi, op. cit., pp.39–42.

⁴³ Nasser Eddine Saidouni, *La vie rurale dans la région d’Alger – Dar Essoltane à la fin de l’époque ottomane (1791–1830)*, Dar El-Bassair, Algiers, 2013, pp.394–395; see also Saleh Belaïd, *La question amazighe*, 2nd ed., Dar Houma, Algiers, n.d., p.45.

⁴⁴ Saidouni, op. cit., pp.394–395; see also Saleh Abbad, *L’Algérie sous la domination turque (1514–1830)*, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2014, p.356.

⁴⁵ Aljawhar Moudar, *Les structures morphologiques en arabe et leur traduction en amazighe – étude descriptive à partir de quelques traductions amazighes du Coran*, *Revue des Pratiques Linguistiques*, University of Tizi Ouzou, no.3, 2022, p.197; see also Amal Kassimi, op. cit., pp.47–48; Saleh Belaïd, op. cit., pp.48–49.

⁴⁶ Nasser Eddine Saidouni, *Études andalouses: Manifestations de l’influence ibérique et de la présence andalouse*, 1st ed., Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, 1424 AH / 2003, p.59.

lexical heritage of the Torah, as well as vocabulary from Mishnaic and Medieval Hebrew.” Like other languages, Hebrew also incorporated loanwords from Arabic, English, Russian, and other languages⁴⁷. The influence of Arabic on Hebrew can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when Jews had long been present in North Africa and lived alongside Arabs following the Muslim conquest and settlement of the Maghreb. As Masoud Kouati notes, “The Jews preserved their ancestral faith while embracing Arab culture in al-Andalus and across the Islamic Maghreb... They even preferred to write in Arabic”⁴⁸.

The linguistic contact between Jews and Arabs was especially intense in al-Andalus, where many Jewish scholars translated their Hebrew works into Arabic, demonstrating their mastery of the language. According to Amnon Shilo (as cited by Fawzi Saadallah), “The Arabic language transformed Hebrew poetry and prose... When the Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal, they carried with them a rich cultural heritage, including popular Castilian songs that were faithfully preserved in their new homelands”⁴⁹. This linguistic interaction between Jews and Arabs eventually led to the emergence of Jewish translators who rendered Arabic texts into other languages, particularly French⁵⁰.

2.6. THE LINGUA FRANCA

were a mixture of Arabic and several European languages such as Spanish and Italian (to a greater extent), as well as French and Portuguese. It was generally used for communication between foreigners and Algerians, especially between “‘Alāj” (foreign residents) of Spanish origin and the Andalusians, as well as between Arabic and Turkish speakers. This is because the Lingua Franca contained many Spanish words that the Andalusians continued to use, particularly from the Castilian dialect, which was the main language of the Spaniards and constituted the majority of the Lingua Franca vocabulary. As Menouar Merouche notes, “...most of the ‘*Alāj*’ were of Spanish origin, and their native language was familiar to the Andalusians in general—or at least, they shared a common hybrid language composed of simplified Spanish, Italian, and some widespread local words, known as the Lingua Franca”⁵¹. This language eventually became one of the most widely spoken languages in the city of Algiers⁵².

Among the Lingua Franca words, for instance, the Arabic “‘Id al-Fiṭr” corresponded to “Bayram” in Turkish and “Pasaca” (*Pasqua*) in the Lingua Franca⁵³. The use of this mixed language persisted in Algiers for about two centuries—from the 16th to the 18th century—as mentioned by several European travelers such as Laugier de Tassy, Shaw, and Vallière⁵⁴.

2.8. THE LADINO LANGUAGE:

Ladino was the language used by the Jews who migrated from Andalusia after its fall. These Jewish communities had mastered the Arabic language due to their long coexistence with the Arabs of Andalusia. When they were expelled and settled in Algeria, their Hebrew and Arabic linguistic background merged with the various languages then present in Algeria—namely Turkish, Greek, Spanish, and Portuguese. This fusion gave rise to a new language that they called *Ladino*⁵⁵.

⁴⁷ Rasha Al-Shami, *Qawa'id al-Lughah al-Ibraniyya*, 2nd ed., Cairo, 1997, pp. 11–15; see also Fawzi Saadallah, *Yahūd al-Jazā'ir: Majālis al-Ghina' wa-l-Ṭarab*, Dar Qurtuba, Algiers, 2010, p. 33

⁴⁸ *al-Yahūd fi al-Maghrib al-Islāmi min al-Faṭḥ ilā Suqūṭ Dawlat al-Muwahḥidin*, 2nd ed., Dar Houma, Algiers, 2009, p. 176

⁴⁹ *Yahūd al-Jazā'ir: Majālis al-Ghina' wa-l-Ṭarab*, Dar Qurtuba, Algiers, 2010, pp. 46–59

⁵⁰ Fawzi Saadallah, *Yahūd al-Jazā'ir: Maw'id al-Rahil*, Dar Qurtuba, Algiers, 2018, p. 191

⁵¹ Menouar Merouche, *Salīb 'Abbād: Algeria during the Turkish Rule 1514–1830*, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2014, pp. 285–286, p. 356

⁵² Nacerdine Saïdouni, *Andalusian Studies: Manifestations of Iberian Influence and Andalusian Presence*, 1st ed., Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 2003, p. 59; see also Nacerdine Saïdouni, *Rural Life in the Province of Algiers – Dar al-Sultan at the End of the Ottoman Period (1791–1830)*, Dar al-Basā'ir, Algiers, 2013, p. 393

⁵³ William Shaler, *Memoirs of William Shaler, American Consul in Algiers (1816–1824)*, translated and commented by Ismaïl al-'Arabi, National Company for Publishing and Distribution, Algiers, 1982, p. 39. Similarly, the German traveler J. A. O. Hebenstreit reported in his travel account *Voyage of the German Scholar J. A. O. Hebenstreit to Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli (1732 AD / 1145 AH)* that this language was still in use (translated and annotated by Nacerdine Saïdouni, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Tunis, n.d., p. 48

⁵⁴ Nacerdine Saïdouni, *Andalusian Studies: Manifestations of Iberian Influence and Andalusian Presence*, 1st ed., Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 2003, p. 59

⁵⁵ Yahya Mohamed Taher Al-Ghazawi, *The Role of Jewish Communities in the Slave Trade in Algeria during the 18th Century and up to the Mid-19th Century*, Maktabat Al-Adab, Cairo, p. 36

2.9. THE FRENCH LANGUAGE:

The use of the French language in Algeria at that time was limited to certain foreigners, mainly within workplaces and foreign agencies operating in Algiers⁵⁶.



Figure 2: Languages in Dar al-Sultan (Ottoman Algiers).

Source: Prepared By The Researcher

3. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the study of Ottoman Algiers demonstrates a profound correlation between social structure and linguistic diversity that characterized the city's urban life during this period. It becomes evident that social hierarchy largely determined the distribution and functions of languages: Turkish was associated with political and administrative authority, Arabic with religion and education, and Amazigh with local identity, making language a marker of social status and belonging.

Daily interaction among diverse groups — Turks, Andalusians, Arabs, Jews, and Europeans — reveals that language functioned less as a barrier and more as a medium of negotiation and coexistence. Trade, education, and religion fostered communicative bridges across communities, creating a dynamic multilingual environment. This constant exchange produced hybrid linguistic forms such as *Lingua Franca* and *Ladino*, contributing to the emergence of an urban Algerian dialect that blended Arabic, Turkish, and Andalusian elements — the foundation of modern Algerian Arabic.

The linguistic reality of Ottoman Algiers can be interpreted through the dual lens of *Social Interactionism* and Bourdieu's theory of *linguistic capital*. Languages operated not merely as tools of communication but as instruments of social positioning and interaction. Through daily exchanges, trade, and governance, linguistic practices both reflected and shaped the city's complex social hierarchy. Ultimately, Ottoman Algiers stands as a unique cultural model in which linguistic diversity evolved into social harmony. Language thus transcended its communicative function to become a **symbolic resource and a shared identity**, uniting the city's diverse populations within a common historical and cultural space.

⁵⁶ William Shaler, *Memoirs of William Shaler, American Consul in Algiers (1816–1824)*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Ismail Al-Arabi, National Company for Publishing and Distribution, Algiers, 1982, pp. 39–103

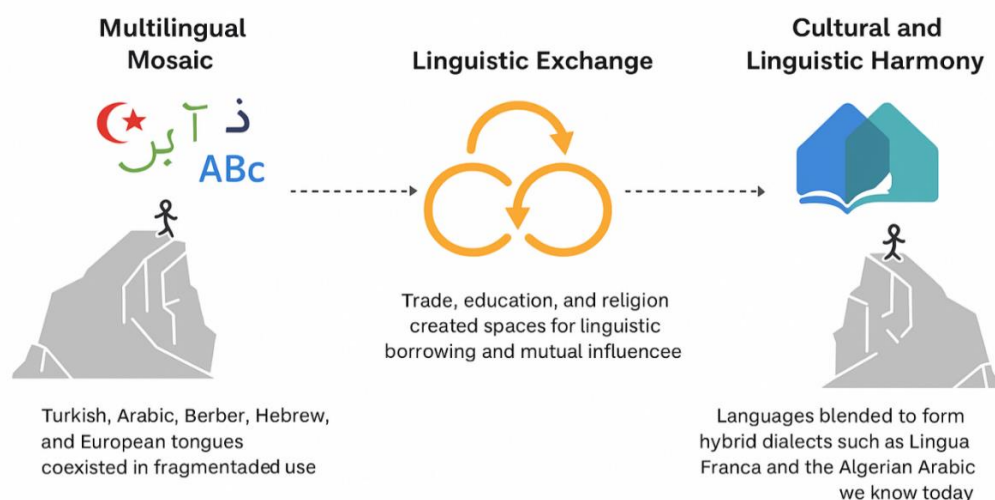


Figure 3 illustrates this transformation — from early multilingual coexistence to cultural and linguistic harmony in Ottoman Algiers.

Source: Prepared By The Researcher

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