

Description of Algerian Arabic, provided by Lameen Souag:

**Algerian Arabic**, known to its speakers as *darja* or 'ʿrbiyya, is the name given by the Ethnologue to the group of North African dialects spoken between the coast and the Atlas Mountains in Algeria. The term is extremely misleading insofar as it implies some sort of concrete linguistic separation from the dialects of Morocco and Tunisia, when the true situation is a complicated dialect continuum; the dialects of Algiers, Tunis, and Rabat are certainly more easily mutually comprehensible than, say, Cockney and New York English, or indeed perhaps than Algiers and some rural Algerian dialects. However, as a catchall term for Algerian dialects of North African Arabic, it is useful in lieu of a more detailed analysis of North African dialectology. It is spoken by roughly 25 million people (1998 census, assuming 80% Arabic on the basis of a survey in 1991; the Algerian census includes no question on languages, so reliable information is hard to obtain.)

### **Typology:**

Head-modifier, SVO. Nouns and prepositions take possessive suffixes; verbs modify according to subject, and take object and dative suffixes. Two genders. Noun plurals are extremely irregular. It has a complex verbal morphology, although slightly simplified from Classical Arabic. Like Classical Arabic, it strongly resists agglutination, and prefers internal change on the basis of roots.

### **History:**

Algerian Arabic is a group of dialects of North African Arabic, which descends directly from Arabic, a rather well-known Semitic language originating in Arabia (the precise sub-classification of Semitic is controversial), and ultimately an Afro-Asiatic language distantly related to the Berber, Cushitic, Egyptian, and Chadic language groups. The consonants are conserved better than most dialects: Arabic *ḍ* merges with *ḏ*, and Arabic *r, z, q* split into *r, z, z,* and *q, g*, but all other distinctions are the same, although *t* and *ḏ* are lost in many dialects. The main changes were related to vowels. All Classical glottal stops were lost word-initially and converted to long vowels medially; furthermore, short vowels disappeared entirely from open syllables (giving North African Arabic its distinctive consonant clusters) and *a* and *i*, and in most cases *u*, were merged into the single vowel *ə*, except in some eastern dialects. The grammar was modified significantly, often in different ways to Middle Eastern dialects; while it shared in the common trend of simplifying the negative to *ma...sh* and suffixing the dative pronouns to the verb, and of course losing declension of the noun, innovations such as the complete replacement of the Classical conjunctions 'inna, 'anna, 'in, 'an, or the copula in *ra-*, or the first person singular in *n-*, set North African Arabic apart.

Arabic was initially brought to North Africa by the expansion of Islam, starting 647 AD; at this time it displaced Berber only in some of the larger cities, but with the invasions of various nomadic tribes such as the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym, starting 1050 AD as a result of civil war in the Fatimid empire, it eventually became the primary language of most of North Africa. Some traces of these two distinct waves of Arabization are still to be seen in the contrast of Classical *q* in many cities versus Bedouin *g* in large parts of the countryside. A smaller third wave much later, in the 1500's, consisted of refugees from Muslim Spain, bringing a distinctive dialect and many cultural traditions, such as *andalusi* music.

Throughout its history, many dialects of North African Arabic have been influenced by regular contact with Berber, and Berber loanwords are found in all dialects. From the late Middle Ages up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, commerce and war led to significant influence from Spanish, Italian, and other Mediterranean Romance languages, as well as the Romance-based pidgin Lingua Franca, although many of these loanwords were later replaced by French ones. Under Ottoman rule, a small number of Turkish loanwords were introduced into most urban dialects. However, overwhelmingly the strongest foreign influence on modern North African Arabic in general, and Algerian Arabic in particular, is French, from which, as a result of the colonial period, it has absorbed an enormous number of words, including technological terms in particular but also words for which familiar native synonyms exist, such as *déjà* or *sauter*. As a result of universal education and the media, there has also been a slow but steady growth in borrowings of Modern Standard Arabic terminology, especially in political terminology.

### **Demography:**

Algerian Arabic is spoken by about 80% of the population, across most of the area of Algeria north of the Atlas Mountains; notable exceptions include the Kabyle area to the east of Algiers (centered on Tizi-Ouzou), the Shawi area in the Aures Mountains (centered on Batna), certain areas around Cherchell and Tipasa, and parts of the far west around Arzew. A large emigrant community also speaks it to varying degrees, especially in France (2 million) but also in most Western countries, as well as the Gulf and even Malaysia. However, any geographical classification inevitably misses the important fact that many if not most Algerian cities are to some extent multilingual as a result of internal migration; thus Algiers has very large numbers of Kabyle-speakers, and Adrar in the far south has significant numbers of northern Algerian Arabic speakers. Algerian Arabic is understood across virtually the entire country, and is a prerequisite for speakers of any other language who want to travel beyond their own region. Dialectal variations are the norm rather than the exception; the main areas are central (Algiers), western (Wahran), eastern (Constantine), with particularly large divergences in heavily Berber-influenced areas such as Jijel and among Bedouin tribes with unusually conservative dialects, as well as a more general distinction between urban, rural, and Bedouin dialects.

### **Sociolinguistics:**

Algerian Arabic is not particularly highly regarded by most of its speakers. While its perceived positive qualities, such as homeliness and expressiveness, are appreciated, it is regarded as an incorrect or even corrupted form of Classical Arabic, and socially ambitious speakers generally use copious amounts of Classical Arabic or French in their speech. There are indeed cases of particularly ambitious people insisting on speaking only French; as a result of Modern Standard Arabic's associations with tradition, however, it tends to complement rather than replace Arabophone educated speakers' native dialects. The language which most strongly influences educated speakers' speech generally reflects their political views as well as their social ambitions; for uneducated speakers, it more generally reflects their background, with urban speakers using more French than rural ones. Roughly speaking, Modern Standard Arabic is associated with religiosity and patriotism, while French is associated with sophistication and the West. Local dialects are widely divergent; rural speakers may be caricatured as having thick accents, while young urban speakers are caricatured as using excessive slang and loanwords to the point of

incomprehensibility. However, no regional dialect has achieved significant prestige relative to the others; the closest is Algiers Arabic, which tends to be used on the media more often than other areas' dialects. All highly public speech activities – such as speeches, writings, seminars, factual TV shows – use Modern Standard Arabic or French; interviews, being more oral, are a partial exception. The pre-colonial diglossic situation was significantly affected by the great decrease in Classical Arabic skills due to the unavailability of education under the French, and had to be revived after independence by importing large numbers of Middle Eastern teachers; hence the current triglossia. Official policy, supported by most Algerian Arabic speakers though opposed by a large minority, aims to eventually replace French as a prestige language entirely with Modern Standard Arabic; for the moment, however, French remains the language of a significant proportion of higher education.

### **Writing:**

For the sociolinguistic reasons mentioned above, very little written literature for Algerian Arabic exists, and the written form of the language is taken by most speakers to be Classical Arabic; a large amount of oral poetry and song exists, however, including epics and love songs, as well as popular stories. Algerian Arabic is written in some contexts, however, to record traditional lyrics or poetry, or for many plays, or by semiliterate speakers for letters, or sporadically in conversations within books, or in political cartoons; when written, it uses the Arabic script, usually with an extra letter for *g* (ق) and often with extra letters *p* (پ) and *ch* (چ.) The marginally phonemic distinctions between normal and emphatic *r*, *z*, and *l* are generally ignored. Under the French, occasional efforts were made to establish a Latin transcription, but these remained in practice mostly restricted to language manuals written for French settlers; occasionally in French-language newspapers' political cartoons, or on online chatrooms where Arabic keyboards are unavailable, an entirely French-based informal Latin orthography may be used for convenience, but this has no fixed orthographic standards. There are also a small number of pre-colonial Jewish texts written in Algerian Arabic using Hebrew characters, generally with the following emendations: *j* is *gimel* with dot below, *gh* is *gimel* with dot above, *kh* is *kaph* with dot above, *f* is *peh* with dot above, *s*, *ḏ* are both *sade* with dot above.