

Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World

Algerian Judeo-Arabic

(4,707 words)

Algerian Judeo-Arabic, spoken and written by *Algerian* Jews, is part of the sedentary Maghrebi Neo-*Judeo-Arabic* dialect ensemble, that are classified either as pre-Hilālī or non-Hilālī urban *Arabic* dialects. Various levels of dialectal differences between Jewish and Muslim dialects are documented throughout the *Arabic*-speaking world. In some cases, the differences between these dialects are major. This is the case in Oran (Wahrān) and some smaller *Algerian* towns near the capital Algiers, where the Jews spoke a sedentary dialect while the Muslims spoke a nomad dialect. An intermediate level of differentiation was documented in Algiers and Tlemcen. In Algiers there were phonological differences between the Jewish and Muslim-*Arabic* dialects: Classical *Arabic* (CA) /q/ is pronounced by the Jews as [ʔ] while the Muslims pronounce it [q]; CA /t/ is pronounced [t] by Algiers's Jews but [t^s] by its Muslims.

The history of Algeria's Jews, being subjected to Roman, Spanish, Arab, Turkish, Berber, and French colonial rule over the centuries, had left its mark on their language. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries *Algerian* Jews lived in a multilingual environment that included, in addition to their communal *Judeo-Arabic* dialects, also Muslim-*Arabic* dialects, French, and their historical cultural languages Hebrew and Aramaic. Hence, *Algerian* Jews lived in a state of *multiglossia*, a term that refers to a situation where a group of people use multiple languages on a daily basis to communicate with their surrounding societies for distinct purposes. Namely, *Algerian* Jews used their local *Judeo-Arabic* dialects for intracommunity interactions, French for official discourse with the colonial authorities, local Muslim-*Arabic* to interact with their Arab neighbors, and Hebrew for religious rites. With the increase of French influence and the integration of *Algerian* Jews into French society (especially after receiving French citizenship – see Crémieux Decree) their multiglossia had gradually shifted. While the older generation used *Judeo-Arabic* as the primary language for intra-community discourse, the younger generations favored French over *Judeo-Arabic*.

Table of Contents

[Orthography](#).

[Phonology](#).

[Morphology](#).

[Lexicon](#)

[Bibliography](#).

Linguistic differences among social groups within the Jewish community are often referred to as *sociolects*. In particular, proficiency in Hebrew (and Aramaic) varied among the community members. While the rabbinic elite was well versed in Hebrew and Aramaic, other members of the community knew just enough Hebrew to participate in religious rituals at the synagogue, and uneducated men and the community's women had only limited knowledge of Hebrew. A notable exception were female family members of local rabbis, who were often well versed in Hebrew.

Orthography

Like most other Jewish languages, *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* is written in Hebrew characters. This orthography assigns a Hebrew letter to each *Arabic* consonant and is based on the similarity between the Hebrew and *Arabic* consonant system: /p/ = פ, /b/ = ב, /d/ = ד, /h/ = ה, and so forth. Diacritic points were added when additional distinctions were necessary: אָ or אֵ denotes /g/ while אַ or אִ denotes /g̃/; כּ, כִּ denote /k/ while כֶּ, כֵּ denote /x/; שׂ, שִׂ denote /s/ while שׁ, שֵׁ denote /d̥/. As in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* the fricative interdental consonants *t̪*, *d̪*, and *ð̪* were not preserved, there was no need to use diacritics to distinguish them from their plosive counterparts *t*, *d*, and *ð*. The *shadda* is marked by doubling the character. Unlike the classical *Judeo-Arabic* script that was used in medieval *Judeo-Arabic*, the script of *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* is more phonetic in nature, reflecting the spread of emphatic pronunciation, consonant shifts, and vowel quality.

Phonology

Consonants

The split between the two main realizations of the CA phoneme /q/ is well known. While unvoiced realizations, such as [q], [q̥] or [k], are characteristic of sedentary *Arabic* dialects, voiced realizations, mainly [g], are characteristic of nomad and rural *Arabic* dialects. Since the Jewish communities in Algeria were predominantly sedentary, the /q/ is realized in these communities as an unvoiced consonant. The [q] realization is found among the Jews of Constantine, while the [q̥] realization is pronounced by the Jews of Algiers. In some *Algerian* Jewish dialects, the /q/ had fronted to the velar unvoiced consonant [k] or to the medio-palatal consonant [kʲ]. This realization is characteristic of the *Judeo-Arabic* dialects of Oran and Tlemcen in western Algeria, and in Oujda in northeastern Morocco near the *Algerian* border. It is noteworthy that while the Jews of Tlemcen pronounce /q/ as [k] the Muslims of that city pronounce this phoneme as [q]. There are a few words in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* in which /q/ is realized [g] due to borrowing from nomad or rural Muslim dialects, often from the semantic fields of agriculture and nomad life, e.g., *bəqra* (=cow), *gəmra* (=moon), *grūn* (=horns).

The *Judeo-Arabic* dialects of the cities of Algiers and Constantine preserve the distinction between the four sibilant phonemes /s/, /š/, /z/, and /ž/, e.g., *nsa* “women,” *šra* “to buy,” *zbəl* “garbage,” and *žbəl* “mountain,” unlike many *Judeo-Arabic* dialects in Morocco and Tunisia in which the distinction between the sibilant pairs s/š and z/ž is neutralized. The Jews of Constantine realize the phoneme /ž/ either as [ž] or [ǰ] (= [dž]). When two sibilant phonemes

appear within the same word, assimilation or dissimilation may occur, for example, CA *šams* “sun” undergoes assimilation to *šamš* in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers, and CA *ğayš* undergoes a dissimilation to *ğays* by the Jews of Constantine.

The shift of the interdental fricatives to their plosive dental-alveolar counterparts $\underline{t} > t$ (ث < ت), $\underline{d} > d$ (ذ < د), $\underline{ḏ} > ḏ$ (ض < ظ) is characteristic of urban North African dialects. This shift is prevalent in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects as well, as the majority of Jews in this region were city and town dwellers (sedentary dialects). Examples are **tāni* > *tāni* “second,” **drāʿ* > *drāʿ* “arm,” **ḏalām* > *ḏlām* “darkness.”

The realizations of the synchronic phoneme /t/ vary from one dialect to another regardless of its origin (*t* or \underline{t}). The realization [t] is found in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers. This realization is also heard in Constantine, although [t^ʕ] is the prevalent pronunciation of /t/ in that city’s dialect irrespective of position in the word, for example, *yat^ʕkallām* “he talks/he will talk,” *t^ʕkalt^ʕ* “I trusted.” The affrication [t^ʕ] is frequent in Constantine in final position, for example, *imūt^ʕ* “he dies/he will die.” Both [t^ʕ] and [t^ʕ] are found throughout the entire borough of Constantine.

The glottal stop /ʔ/ weakened in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects, regardless of its position in the word, whether initial, medial, or final. In many dialects the glottal stop was lost in an initial position, for example, *ʔyyām* > *iyyām* “days,” *ʔana* > *ana* “I,” *ʔinsān* > *insān* “man.” The glottal stop sometimes disappears together with its vowel: *ʔawlād* > *ulād* “children.” At times, the silencing of the /ʔ/ causes a morphological change, such as the disappearance of the fourth verbal stem *ʔafʕala* from the dialects of Algiers and Constantine. For example, *ʔaʕta* > *ʕta* “gave” that subsequently conjugates as the first verbal stem. The weakening of the initial glottal stop also affects the morphology of the pattern *ʔafʕalu* that is used to denote colors, disabilities, and the relative (for example, CA *ʔaswad* “black,” *ʔawar* “blind,” and *ʔasfal* “lower”). In Algiers and Constantine these terms are constructed using the pattern *fʕal*, for example, *swəd* “black,” *ʕfal* “lower.” In a medial position, when the glottal stop appears in CA with a *sukūn* it drops in these dialects, and the preceding vowel is lengthened, for example, *bʔr* > *bīr* “a well,” *kaʔs* > *kās* “a glass.” When the medial glottal stop is vocalized with a *kasra* it weakens and is realized as [y], for example, *dāʔim* > *dāyām* “always,” *qāʔim* > *qāyām* “exists.” Silencing of the glottal stop in final position is also common, for example, *bukāʔ* > *bka* “cry,” *šaqāʔ* > *šqa* “hard work.” Similar examples are found already in medieval *Judeo-Arabic* manuscripts, for example, *samāʔ* > *sama* (סמם) “sky.” The silencing of the glottal stop may lead to changes in conjugation of verbs whose roots contain a glottal stop (see below). In Constantinian *Judeo-Arabic* the glottal stop is sometimes preserved between two vowels, either within a single word or between two consecutive words. The glottal stop is preserved in Constantine also in monosyllabic words such as *ʔl-ʔax* “the brother,” and in some retained CA words.

The glottal fricative /h/ is preserved in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Constantine (as well as in many Moroccan *Judeo-Arabic* dialects and in most Muslim dialects throughout North Africa). An exception is the enclitic 3MSg pronoun *-hu* > *-u* postconsonantal, for example, *fūmm-u* “his mouth.” versus *waaʕārū-h* “respect him!” In contrast, in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers the glottal

fricative /h/ has dropped, leaving only the accompanying vowel, for example, *den* (< *dhen*) “he painted,” *alāl* (< *hilāl*) “crescent moon.” In some cases, the missing *h* is echoed by compensatory lengthening of the adjacent vowel or doubling of the adjacent consonant, for example, *qāwa* (< *qahwa*) “coffee,” *ddab* or *dabb* (< *dahab*) “gold.” In Algiers, the /h/ was silenced in the speech of most of the city’s Jews, and could be heard mainly in eloquent speech where the /h/ was reconstructed imitating dialects that retained this consonant.

In *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* the voiced and unvoiced fricative pharyngeal consonants /ʕ/ and /ħ/ are preserved. They undergo assimilation when adjacent to each other or adjacent to the glottal fricative /h/: ‘*h* > *ħħ*, ‘*ħ* > *ħħ*, *ħħ* > *ħħ*, and *ħħ* > *ħħ*. For example, *itebbaħ-ħum* (< *itebbaħ-hum*) “he will chase them,” *bruhħa* (< *bi-rūħihā*) “by herself.” The voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/ is occasionally lost in the X-teen numerals, for example, *ħdāš* “eleven,” *tnāš* “twelve.”

Emphatic pronunciation of consonants via pharyngealization (or velarization) is fundamental to *Arabic* and is known as *tafxīm* (تفخيم). The emphatic consonants in CA are /ṭ/ (ط), /ḍ/ (ض), /ḏ/ (ظ) and /ṣ/ (ص). In most modern *Arabic* dialects the presence of an emphatic phoneme in the word causes adjacent consonants to be pronounced emphatically and adjacent vowels to be lowered or backed. This assimilation is often denoted as “spread of emphasis” or “harmonization.” In *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects emphasis may spread to the entire word (and even beyond the word boundary), and it may spread in both directions, affecting phonemes that precede or follow the emphatic CA consonants. Emphatic pronunciation of consonants that were not emphatic in CA is usually not phonematic, except for the *r*, as there is a phonematic distinction between /r/ and /ṛ/, for example, *žrā* “to run” vs. *žṛā* “to happen.” Consonants that tend to accept secondary emphasis are first and foremost the nonemphatic counterparts /t/, /d/, and /s/ of the emphatic CA consonants /ṭ/ (ط), /ḍ/ (ض, ظ), and /ṣ/ (ص). Other phonemes that may accept an emphatic realization are *b f l n m ɣ w z*. Examples include *ṭlābt* (< *ṭalabtu*) “I asked,” *əṣ-ṣəltān* (< *əṣ-sultān*) “the sultan,” *dāləm* (< *dālim*) “unjust,” *mabṣūt* (< *mabsūt*) “satisfied,” *fi d-ḏayqa* (< *fi d-ḏayqa*) “in distress.”

Vowels

The CA vowel system includes three long vowels (*ā*, *ū*, *ī*), three short vowels (*a*, *u*, *i*) and the *sukūn* (سُكُونٌ), which marks the absence of a vowel after a consonant. The three long vowels *ā*, *ū*, *ī* were preserved in most *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects. Short vowels are often omitted in open syllables. In the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers and Constantine there is only a single centralized short vowel phoneme /ə/, which may be colored as [a] adjacent to emphatic and back consonants, as [i] near the consonant *y* and as [u] when adjacent to labial consonants.

In the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers the CA short diphthongs *ay* and *aw* are frequently monophthongized as *ay* > *ī* and *aw* > *ū*. In contrast, in the *Judeo-Arabic* dialect of Constantine (and of Tunis) these diphthongs are typically preserved, although they are monophthongized in certain contexts, for example, *kayfa* > *kīf* “how,” *yawm* > *yūm* “day.” In Constantine the monophthongization is sometimes *ay* > *ē* and *aw* > *ō*, for example, *lawz* > *lōz* “nut,” *rā’iħa* > *rayħa* >

rēḥ “smell.” New diphthongs were formed as a result of processes such as the addition of the plural morpheme *-u* to verbal singular forms ending with a vowel, for example, *ktābtī + -u > ktābtīw* (Constantine), *bakā + -u > bkāw* (Algiers).

Consonant Clusters and Syllable Structure

A conspicuous feature of Maghrebi dialects is the omission of short vowels in open syllables, which results in consonant clusters even at the beginning of words. For example, *buhūr > bhūr* “seas,” *šariba > šrāb* “he drank” (Constantine), *qafaṣ > qfōṣ* “cage,” *tābsu > tābsu* “you will wear” (Algiers).

In *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* long vowels can occur in a closed syllable (in contrast to CA), for example, *zdād* “born,” *tqūm* “you will rise” (Constantine). Of special note is the imperative Sg form of hollow verbs: *qūm* (قُمْ) “rise!,” *xāf* (خَفْ) “fear!,” *fīq* (فِقْ) “wake up!,” which is common to many Maghrebi dialects, including the Jewish dialects of Algiers and Constantine.

Morphology

Verb

The most noticeable morphological phenomenon that characterizes *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* as Maghrebi *Arabic* dialects, distinguishing them from other *Arabic* dialects, is the conjugation of the imperfect 1Sg and 1Pl forms. In Maghrebi dialects the 1Sg form has the prefix *n-* (and not *ʾa-* as in CA and in eastern dialects) and the 1Pl form receives the transparent plural morpheme *-u*. Thus, in the first verbal stem these forms are *naḥʿal* (1Sg) / *naḥʿlu* (1Pl), while in CA the forms are *ʾaḥʿalu* (1Sg) / *naḥʿalu* (1Pl). An example of verbal Stem II: *nkāddeb* / *nkāddebū* (Algiers).

Like other Maghrebi sedentary dialects, the distinction between the 2mSg and 2fSg perfect forms was lost, and the common 2cSg form that is used is *ktābt* (Algiers). In Constantine there is a free alternation between the two 2cSg perfect forms, *ktābt* and *ktābtī*. This phenomenon reflects the location of the city of Constantine on a regional dialectal junction, where the form *ktābt* is used to its northwest (for example, Algiers’s Jews and Jijel’s Muslims) and the form *ktābtī* is used to its northeast (for example, Skikda and Edough Muslims). When a pronominal object suffix is added to a 2cSg perfect form in Constantine’s *Judeo-Arabic* the alternant *ktābtī* is always selected, for example, *ktābtīh* “you wrote it.”

The distinction between 2mPl and 2fPl forms in the perfect conjugation has ceased to exist in many sedentary *Arabic* dialects. The common form in *Algerian* dialects ends with the suffix *-tu*, for example, *ktābtu* (“you [pl.] wrote”). However, in the *Judeo-Arabic* dialect of Constantine the 2cPl perfect suffix is *-tīw*, for example, *ktābtīw* “you (pl.) wrote.” In this form the plural morpheme *-u* is realized as a semi vowel *w* when added to the 2cSg morpheme *-ti* that ends with a vowel: *ktābtī + -u > ktābtīw*.

In CA, verbal Stem I verbs are classified according to the C₂ vowel in their perfect form – *CaCaCa*, *CaCiCa*, or *CaCuCa*. While a distinction according to stem vowels is preserved in most modern *Arabic* dialects, it is not preserved in North African *Judeo-Arabic* dialects due to the phonetic processes that converged all three forms to a monosyllabic form *CCəC*, with the short central vowel ə, for example, *kataba* > *ktəb* “wrote,” *fahima* > *fhəm* “understood,” *katūra* > *ktər* “increased (in number).”

The CA verbal Stem IV (*ʾafʿala*) is no longer a productive category in Maghrebi dialects, including *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects. A few participle forms of this verbal stem are found in the conservative language of the Bible translations (*šurūḥ*) from Constantine. Such forms were also documented in the *Judeo-Arabic* dialect of Algiers, where they are used as adjectives or nouns. Examples are the adjective *muxīf* “awe-inspiring, revered,” *muġīt* “savior.”

In CA the passive voice of Stem I may be denoted by verbal Stem VII (*ʾinfʿala*). In *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* the passive voice may be expressed either using a verbal stem with an initial *n-* that originates from CA verbal Stem VII (*ʾinfʿala* > *nəfʿəl*) or a verbal stem with a prefix *t/**tt-* (*ttəfʿəl*, *tʃəfʿəl*). The *n-* stem is in common use, often alongside the *t/**tt-* stem, in the western and central Maghreb, including the *Judeo-Arabic* dialects of Algiers and Constantine. Examples for *n-* stem forms include, *ntəmm* “was finished,” *yingāt* “will be saved,” *nəġla* “he was exiled”; examples for *t/**tt-* stem forms include, *ttənsīt* “I was forgotten,” *yittərma* “he will be thrown.”

The use of verbal Stem VIII with the infix *t* (*ʾiftʿala*) has weakened in Maghrebi dialects, including *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects. This verbal stem, *CtəCC* (< *ʾiftʿala*), is documented mainly in *Judeo-Arabic* Bible translations (*šarḥ*, pl. *šurūḥ*) from Constantine (and from Morocco), a literary genre that is known to preserve many archaic language features, for example, *irtaʿdu* (ירתעִדוּ) “they will tremble.” Limited use of verbal Stem VIII is found in the *Judeo-Arabic* dialects of Algiers, for example, *xṭār* “he selected,” *zdād* “he was born.”

The modern *Arabic* verbal stem *stəfʿəl*, which reflects CA verbal Stem X (*ʾistafʿala*) without the prosthetic *alif*, is common in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects, for example, *stənġəm* “he consulted the stars.” The initial *st-* is often pronounced emphatically *ṣṭ-* when the adjacent consonant is emphatic, for example, *ṣṭarġūt* “I hoped.” Assimilations of the prefixes *st* > *ss* and *ṣṭ* > *ṣṣ* are frequent and freely alternate with the unassimilated forms, as in *ssənna* (< *stənna*) “he expected,” *əṣṣarġa* (< *əṣṭarġa*) “hope!”

The verbal stem *fʿāl* is used to indicate a process of change in the properties of an object or a person, for example, *smān* “to gain weight,” *dyāq* “to become narrow.” It was suggested that this verbal stem originates either from CA verbal Stems IX or XI that denote colors and defects. In *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* the *fʿāl* stem has a much broader use, also indicating a process of change in material properties and human psychological aspects.

The silencing of the glottal stop has led to changes in conjugation of verbs whose root's first radical is a glottal stop. In the *Judeo-Arabic* dialects of Algeria the perfect forms of the CA verbs *'akala* (أَكَلَ, "ate") and *'axada* (أَخَذَ, "took") reflect a weak trilateral stem, *kla* and *xda*, while their imperative forms are *kūl* and *xūd*, reflecting a hollow trilateral stem (similar to the *Judeo-Arabic* dialects of eastern Morocco, Tunis, and Tripoli in Libya).

In some *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects future actions are denoted by preceding the imperfect form with the future preverb *maši* "lit. going," for example, in the *Judeo-Arabic* dialect of Algiers, *māši naxrəǧ* "I am about to exit."

Pronouns

The demonstrative pronouns for near deixis in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Constantine are *hāda* (mSg), *hādi* (fSg), and *hādu* (cPl). In Algiers the *h* is often omitted: *āda*, *ādi*, and *ādu*. These pronouns reflect the phonetic shift of the fricative interdentals to their plosive counterparts (*d* > *d*) that is characteristic of urban North African *Judeo-Arabic*: CA *hādā* (هَذَا) > *hāda*, CA *hādihi* (هَذِهِ) > *hādi*. Before a definite noun, a single short form *hād* (or *ād*) is used regardless of gender or number, for example, *səddūr hāda* but *hād əs-səddūr* "this book," *hād əl-bnāt* "these girls." In the conservative language of the Bible translations (*šurūḥ*) from Constantine the plural demonstrative pronoun for near deixis is *hāwlay* (הָאוּלַי), which reflects the CA form *hā'ulā'i* (هُؤُلَاءِ) and differs from the local dialectal form *hādu*, for example, *hāwlay əd-ḏālḡmīn* (הָאוּלַי אֶלְצ'אַלְמִין) "these evil people."

The demonstrative pronouns for distal deixis in the *Judeo-Arabic* dialect of Constantine are *hādāk* (mSg), *hādīk* (fSg), and *hādūk* (cPl). In Algiers the *h* is often omitted: *ādāk*, *ādīk*, and *ādūk*. The corresponding CA pronouns are *dālīka* (ذَلِكَ), *tilka* (تِلْكَ), *'ulā'ika* (أُولَئِكَ).

In *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* dialects (and throughout the central and eastern Maghreb) the relative pronoun is *əlli* (*lli*, *li*). The main relative pronoun used in the conservative language of Bible translations (*šurūḥ*) from Constantine is *əldi* (אֶלְדִּי), which reflects the CA form *'alladī* (الَّذِي). In contrast to the inflection of *'alladī* in CA, the pronoun *əldi* is invariable in the Constantinian *šarḥ* (it was already mostly invariable in medieval *Judeo-Arabic*). Example, *əldi tḡabba 'la Yehuda wi-Yerušalayim* "(a person) who prophesized on Judea and Jerusalem" (Isa. 1:1).

The possessive (genitive) pronouns are *ntā'* (also *mtā'* and *tā'*) and *dyāl* (also *di*). All, except for *di*, may accept a pronominal suffix, for example, *mtā'-u* "his," *dyāl-hum* "theirs." These forms are used interchangeably in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic*. While *dyāl* is frequently used in Constantinian *Judeo-Arabic* alongside *ntā' ~ tā'*, the short form *di* is not attested in this dialect. The assimilation *ntā'-hum* > *ntāḥ-ḥum* may sometimes occur: *l-mḡabba ntā'-kum* "your love" (Ghardaia – see Mzab), *məsyāsa mtā' addāb* "a gold bracelet" (Algiers), *l-kəlb tā'-kum* "your (pl.) dog" (Constantine), *l-braxa dyāl neṡīlat yadayim* "the blessing of washing hands" (Constantine), *ət-tšuva dyāl-u* "his repentance" (Algiers), *l-'amr di bənadam* "the life of a human being" (Algiers).

Lexicon

The Jews of Algeria lived in a thriving multilingual environment that included local *Arabic* and Berber dialects, European languages—mainly French, but also Spanish and Italian—alongside Hebrew and Aramaic, which are at the heart of their Jewish culture and heritage. The aforementioned languages have left imprints on the lexicon of *Algerian Judeo-Arabic*.

Hebrew (and Aramaic) component

Like all other Jewish languages, *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* has significant Hebrew and Aramaic components. It includes Hebrew words, terms, and phrases that reflect Jewish religion, culture, and heritage, Jewish calendar and life cycle events, communal functions, and more. The Aramaic element is used mainly by the rabbinic elite, who possessed broader knowledge of Aramaic. The Hebrew and Aramaic loanwords undergo phonetic, morphological, and semantic adaptations when embedded in *Judeo-Arabic*.

Among the considerable Hebrew component, we find many Jewish religious and communal concepts, such as *t-tora* “the Torah” (< תורה); *qa^hal* “congregation” (< קהל), *šammāš* “beadle” (< שמש), *māšva* “a commandment to be performed as a religious duty” (< מצווה) (Algiers), *meggid* “a person who assists the reader of the Torah in the synagogue” (< מגיד) (Constantine). Nonetheless, Hebrew secular concepts are also in wide use, for example, *mamon* “money” (< ממון), *maggefa* “plague” (< מגיפה) (Algiers). Hebrew elements are prominent in blessings, greetings and similar expressions exchanges between community members, such are *šabbat šalom* “a peaceful Sabbath” (< שבת שלום), *šabu‘a tob* “have a good week” (< שבוע טוב), *barux hab-ba* “welcome!” also “you are free to do what you like” (< ברוך הבא), *rabbano šel ‘olam* “Good Lord!” (< ריבונו של עולם; lit. master of the universe!).

Some Hebrew roots were interlaced in *Arabic* verbal stems, thus making them an integral part of the *Judeo-Arabic* dialect. Examples from Algiers include, *tməlšən* “to inform on (someone)” (< Heb. *malšin* מלשין “informer”), *tšabbāš* “to be confused, bewildered, perplexed” (< Heb. root $\sqrt{šbš}$ “to disrupt”), *itmūmar* “to convert” (< Heb. *mumar* מומר “a convert”).

Plural forms of Hebrew loanwords sometimes follow the *Arabic* broken plural form, for example, *gzāyər* (גזאיר, “decrees”) plural of the Hebrew noun *gzera* (גזרה, “decree”) used in Ghardaia, and *sdādar* (סדאדר; “prayer books”) plural of the Hebrew loanword *saddur* (סידור; “prayer book”).

While many Hebrew loanwords are shared by Jews across many communities (with local adaptations), some vary from area to area. An example is the term used to denote the “bath used for ritual immersion.” The Jews of Algiers and Constantine use the original Hebrew term *miqve* (מקווה), while in western Algeria (and in Morocco) it is referred to as *ṭabila* (טבילה “immersion”), probably referring to the term בית טבילה “house of immersion” that is used in the Mishnah. Another example is the variety of Hebrew terms used in different communities to denote the anniversary of the day of death of a loved one, also known by the Yiddish term *yahrzeit*. In Constantine (eastern Algeria) the term for *yahrzeit* was the Hebrew word *həzkir* / *həzker* (< הַזְכֵּר);

from the root \sqrt{zkr} that denotes “memory”), in the towns of Tlemcen and Aïn Témouchent (western Algeria) the term was *həsgir* (< הֶסְגִּיר, from the root \sqrt{sgr} that denotes “closure”), although some speakers in these towns use the Hebrew term *naḥala* (< נַחֲלָה, “heritage”).

Some Hebrew words preserve archaic traditions of Hebrew terms or expressions. For example, while the pronunciation *ha-qadoš barux hu* “God” (lit. the Holy One Blessed be He) (< הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא) is common across North Africa, the Jews of Algiers pronounce this phrase *a-qodeš baruxu*. The pronunciation *qodeš* (and not *qadoš*) preserved an archaic version of this expression, which is documented in ancient manuscripts of rabbinic literature (הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא).

Occasionally the Hebrew component was used by community members as a concealed language, enabling merchants and traders to communicate without being understood by others, namely, in certain circumstances Hebrew words were used instead of their *Arabic* counterparts, and Hebrew numbers or Hebrew letters (*gematria*) were used for counting. Thus, when Algiers’s Jews wanted to silence each other in the presence of strangers they said *bla dabar* (< בְּלֹא דִבּוּר *bəlo dibbur* “without speech”) avoiding the more common Hebrew word *šeket!* (< שֶׁקֶט! *šešet!*) due to its similarity to the *Arabic* word *uskut!* (أَسْكُت).

Romance Component

French was the lingua franca in Algeria during much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hence, numerous French words were integrated into *Algerian Judeo-Arabic*, especially after 1870 when *Algerian* Jews received French citizenship. The French component was adopted to denote modern (typically secular) concepts, administration, government organizations, and officers, technology, and the like. Examples for French words in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* are *journal*, *commander*, *franc*, *bureau*, *monsieur*, *prezidan* (Fr. *le president*), *l-kumitē* (Fr. *le comité*), *timbr* “stamp” (Fr. *timbre*), *lavyon* “airplane” (Fr. *l’avion*). French loanwords were sometimes embedded in *Arabic* noun patterns, such as the use of the *Arabic* broken plural form, for example, *kanāsil* (“consuls”)—plural of *konsul* “consul” (Constantine)—or the use of the *Arabic* plural morpheme *-āt*, for example, *numrawāt* (“journal issues”; Constantine), *provāt* (“testimonies”; Algiers).

A smaller number of Spanish loanwords is found in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic*, hailing from Castilian-speaking Jews, who fled the Iberian Peninsula for Algeria in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Among the Spanish loanwords in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers are *šitā* “brush,” *šnūḡa* “synagogue,” and *šlāda* “salad.” Spanish words that were borrowed at a later period are *kānṭaṣa* “small chest” and *botālya* “bottle” (Sp. *botella*). Spanish words are more common in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Oran due to its long history under Spanish rule and its status as a port city.

A limited number of Italian words are present also in the *Judeo-Arabic* of Algiers, due to immigration of Jewish traders from Livorno to Algeria. Among the Italian loanwords in Algiers’s *Judeo-Arabic* are words such as *sōldi* “a silver coin,” *mərkāṭi* “trader” (It. *mercante*) also used to denote “a rich person,” and *pyano* “floor” (It. *piano*).

Berber Component

As the Jews of Algeria were a sedentary, predominantly urban, population their interaction with the nomad Berber tribes was fairly limited. Hence, Berber loanwords are rare in *Algerian Judeo-Arabic*, and have most likely reached the Jewish dialects via the neighboring Muslim dialects. Examples are *šlāḡam* “mustaches” and *fəkrūn* “torture, suffering” (Algiers). Only a few Berber words were documented as being used by Jews but not by their Muslim neighbors, for example, *zāwāš* “sparrow” (Algiers).

[Ofra Tirosch-Becker](#)

Bibliography

Bar-Asher, Moshe. *La composante hébraïque du judeo-arabe algérien: communautés de Tlemcen et Aïn-Temouchent* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992).

—. *Traditions Linguistiques des Juifs d'Afrique du Nord*, 2nd extended edn., (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1999).

Blanc, Haim. *Communal Dialects in Baghdad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

Cohen, Marcel. *Le parler arabe des Juifs d'Alger* (Paris: H. Champion, 1912).

Fischer, Wolfdietrich and Otto Jastrow. *Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980).

Marçais, Philippe. *Esquisse grammaticale de l'arabe maghrebin* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1977).

Tirosch-Becker, Ofra. “A Characterization of the *Judeo-Arabic* Language of Constantine,” *Massorot* 3-4 (1989): 285–312 [Hebrew].

—. “Linguistic Analysis of an *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* Text from the 19th Century,” *La Linguistique* 55 (2019): 192–211.

—. “Mixed Linguistic Features in a *Judeo-Arabic* Text from Algeria: The *Šarḥ* to the *Haftarot* from Constantine,” in *Language and Nature: Papers Presented to John Huehnergard on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, ed. R. Hasselbach and N. Pat-El (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2012), pp. 391–406.

—. “A Reflection of a Linguistic Reality: An *Algerian Judeo-Arabic* Book for the New Year,” in *Studies in the Culture of North African Jewry*, vol. 3, ed. M. Bar-Asher and S. D. Fraade (New Haven, CT/Jerusalem: Yale University Press/The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2014), pp. 193–216.

—. “Two *Judeo-Arabic* Translations of the Scroll of Antiochus from Ghardaia (Algeria),” in *Darchei Noam: The Jews of Arab Lands*, ed. C. Schapkow, S. Shepkaru, and A. T. Levenson, (Brill: Leiden, 2015), pp. 185–213.

Cite this page

Ofra Tirosh-Becker, "Algerian Judeo-Arabic", in: *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, Executive Editor Norman A. Stillman. Consulted online on 13 November 2022 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1878-9781_ejiw_COM_000873>

First published online: 2022