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## The State of Shelha in Benisnous

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fulfilment for the requirements of the Master's Degree in English  
"Language Studies"*

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## Dedication

*I dedicate this piece of research to:*

*all the people I encountered in my life journey; the good people by whom I have been blessed; the people who helped me become who I am today;*

*my dearest parents for their love and support, without whom I would never succeed in my life;*

*my brother, sisters and nieces for their presence whenever I needed them;*

*my friends who believed in me and gave their moral support that contributed in the achievement of this research.*

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## **Abstract**

The region of Benisnous has witnessed significant changes at the linguistic level throughout its history. The original inhabitants of the region spoke a Tamazight variety known as Shelha. However, this variety has approximately disappeared from the region as a result of the introduction of Arabic with Islamic, and the imposition of French during the colonial era. These historical stations affected the position of Shelha in its native land. This study aimed at identifying the state of Shelha in the region under investigation. The study was also meant to measure the attitudes of the native inhabitants towards their ancestral language. The results confirmed that Shelha is still alive in Benisnous. However, its existence is limited to some region, and it is only spoken by a marginal minority of old people. As far as attitudes are concerned, the informants are divided in that some of them showed positive attitudes while still others exposed negative attitudes.

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## General Introduction

Broadly speaking, language is a system of communication and exchange in a given linguistic community. It is also the means that helps to establish social relationships among members of the community. As such, sociolinguistics has developed as a sub-discipline of linguistics with the aim to investigate correlations between language and its social context. It is obvious that language lives only when speakers in the community use it. When people cease using a given language, the inevitable result will be the death of that language.

The present research considers a variety of Tamazight which is spoken in the extreme west of Algeria in a region called Benisnous. Such locality used to be entirely Berberophone. However, many conditions (historical, economic, social, religious, etc) have influenced the linguistic structure of this community. Now Tamazight sounds alien in its native land which has been swallowed by the Arabic language. Therefore, this research work is meant to investigate the current situation of Tamazight in Benisnous. In other words, the central aim of this investigation is to provide a measure of the health of this variety; this includes attitudes of the indigenous inhabitants towards their ancestral language. The work also will consider (analyze) reasons behind the (partial) disappearance of this Tamazight variety from the region. Accordingly, this research is guided by three questions, mentioned below:

1. What are the characteristics of the linguistic profile of Benisnous?
2. To what extent has Arabic influenced the Tamazight variety in Benisnous?
3. What are the attitudes of the native inhabitants towards Tamazight?

On the basis of the above mentioned research questions, the following hypotheses are put forward:

1. Benisnous identifies two main language varieties, namely Arabic and Berber with Arabic as the dominant language.

2. Arabic has had a strong impact of the Tamazight variety of Benisnous to the extent that this latter is only spoken by the elders.

3. The native inhabitants of Benisnous show positive attitudes towards Tamazight as they give much value to the language of their ancestors that reflects their cultural heritage and identity.

In order to find satisfactory answers to the raised questions, the research builds on a case study using two data collection tools. A semi-structured interview will be conducted with eight inhabitants, whereas the questionnaire will be administered to forty inhabitants randomly selected. The data will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

In terms of structure, the present research work includes two chapters. The first one constitutes the literature background upon which the field work will build. It reviews some basic concepts, such as language policy. It also reports information about the site of research. The second chapter begins with the methodology opted for in the realization of the field work. It also provides analysis of the data with a discussion of the results.

## **Chapter One**

## **Theoretical Background**

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## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the theoretical background of the dissertation. It is divided into three parts. The first one gives brief definitions about some sociolinguistic concepts that have a relation with this investigation. The second part reviews the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria. The last part includes sheds the light on the speech community of Benisnous.

## **1.2 Language Planning**

Scholarship about language planning has developed enormously after the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In what ensues, we provide a brief introduction to this field of research. The term language planning is proactive; it is considered as a problem solving process for the language community. Besides, it gives a framework for people to take the best decision for the future. Through this process people negotiate solutions to their language problems taking into consideration their limits of control and cognition (Fishman, 1987). There are several kinds of planning, such as social, political, economic, etc which are embedded in the whole process of the development of those kinds of planning. Rubin (1973:7) describes language planning as a “new and developing discipline which can offer valuable insights into the nature of language”. Haugen also defines language planning as “the activity of preparing normative orthography, grammar and dictionary for the writers and speakers in non-homogenous speech community” (in Fishman, 1972:673).

Generally, language planning can be assigned to three major activities. Firstly, status planning is assigning a status (e.g. official, national, etc) to a given linguistic variety. Such status will define the domains in which this variety must be used. Secondly, corpus planning includes a variety of activities, such as standardization and codification. In other term, corpus planning aims at fixing the grammatical rules governing the correct use, establishing a dictionary and deciding on a writing system. The other important process is acquisition planning that relies on using strategies in order to increase the users of language.

### **1.2.1 The Linguistic Policy of Arabization in Algeria**

Right after independence in 1962, Algerian political leaders declared Arabic as the only official language in Algeria. Such policy has acquired the label ‘Arabization’. This step was taken believing that Algeria was in need for one unifying language. Second president of independent Algeria, Houari Boumedienne (1968), stated that “without the recuperation of this essential and important element which is the national language, our efforts will remain useless, our personality incomplete and our entity a body without soul” (Benrabe, 2007 c). The authoritarian president made serious legislations to restore the pre-colonial value of Arabic. Such legislations reinforced the status and role of Arabic in most walks of life, including education (Benrabe, 2013)

Previously, during the colonial era, French was the official language and therefore those who attended the French schools were only educated in French; Arabic remained a foreign language in its own land (Grandguillaume, 1983). After regaining independence and launching the Arabization policy, the country was in urgent need to teachers who can lecture in Arabic. The Middle East countries formed supply resources, especially Egypt and Syria. Not only education was targeted by the Arabization policy but other domains were also of high concern, such as administration, media, politics.....etc. However, this policy has divided Algerians between cons and pros. Arabization was supported with strong enthusiasm by a large group of nationalist proponents of Arabic. It was at the same time subject to harsh criticism by those who wanted to maintain French as a working language and a key to international communication.

### **1.3 Language Death**

One of the central topics in sociolinguistics is language death. If a language becomes less used in daily life conversations or as a tool of communication within its speech community it gradually face disappearance. When there are no users, it will be declared a dead language. “To say that a language is dead is like saying that a person is dead” (Crystal, 2000:1). Language is always related to its native speakers; it exists just with the existence of persons who use it.

Language death can occur within the whole society as it may occur at the micro level, i.e., individual speaker. This second type is clearly noticed with regard to immigrants. The presumption is that whenever language is used by a small number of speakers, it can be in a dangerous situation. This is a situation in which language is threatened (Crystal, 2000). Crystal (ibid:68) reports the following:

The community and only the community can preserve a living language, if the community surrenders its responsibility to outsiders or even to a few persons within the community (such as school or teachers) the language will die. Language preservation efforts must involve the total community and not just a part of it

Brenzinger (1992:3) observes that “a language is considered to be extinct when there is no longer a speech community using the language”. This implies that a language cannot be considered alive unless it is used by more than one person.

#### **1.4 The Sociolinguistic Situation in Algeria**

Broadly speaking, the linguistic situation in Algeria is complex. This is due to the fact that it is a multilingual country. Such complexity is the product of historical reasons which have introduced a strong impact on the current linguistic situation (Benrabeh, 2014). The Berbers are the natives of Algeria and North Africa as a whole. However, the region witnessed different invasions and expansions. This had a linguistic dimension as the Berber language left room for other languages to take control over the region, except in some remote and mountainous areas where foreign presence was not that strong, if not absent.

The sociocultural history of Algeria witnessed several invaders through a period of time. The Berbers were first ruled by Phoenicians for about seven centuries, and then came the Romans. The other significant domination was led by the Arab Muslims since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The widespread of the Ottoman Empire throughout the world allowed the Turks to rule Algeria. The Turkish domination came to an end with the introduction of the French colonialism since 1830 until 1962. Such amalgamation of foreign control has resulted in an intricate multilingual sociolinguistic context. In fact, among all the groups the most significant impact

came from the Arabs and the French (Benrabeh, 2007 a). One is allowed to claim so as the dominant languages that shape the profile of Algeria in the present time are Arabic, French and Berber.

Arabic reached North Africa when Islam spread to such region. The Berbers shifted allegiance and adopted the Arabic language and gradually abandoned their mother tongue, because of the strong relation between Arabic and Islam. Also, Berber, unlike Arabic, existed for millennia only orally (Bentahila, 1983, p. 2). In the long run, many Berbers became arabized, and many others could be bilinguals with a command of both Berber and Arabic.

### **1.4.1 A Multilingual Context**

The above mentioned historical event made present time Algeria a multilingual country. The dominant languages are Arabic, which appears in two forms (standard and colloquial), French, which is the legacy of a long-lasting colonial period, and Berber, or Tamazight, the indigenous tongue of the region.

#### **1.4.1.1 Arabic**

Just like the other Arabic-speaking countries, Algeria considers Arabic the main official and national language. In fact, Arabic is perceived as a revered language due to its religious value. In this respect, it is said that “the Arabic language and Islam are inseparable. Arabic has a privileged position as it is the language of the Koran and the prophet and the shared language of all Muslims in the world, language of science, and language of culture” (in Benrabeh, 2007 a:67)

Indeed, Arabic exists in two forms: standard and colloquial. This renders Algeria, like other Arabic-speaking countries, a diglossic speech community. Standard Arabic, also known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), represents the high variety (H), whereas Colloquial Arabic stands for the low variety (L) according to Ferguson’s (1959) characterization of diglossia. Therefore, Standard Arabic is used as a formal language and for official settings. It is also the language of written documents. It is the variety used for literacy in educational institutions. It is the variety that learners are introduced to since the primary school. Like the situation in

most other diglossic communities, Standard Arabic is socially esteemed and regarded as the correct form of language.

On the other hand, Colloquial Arabic, or Algerian Dialectal Arabic, is a collection of regional dialects scattered throughout the country, and which show significant differences, especially in terms of vocabulary and pronunciation. Yet, such varieties are still mutually intelligible and their speakers face no real barriers to understand each other. In this vein, (Kaye, 1970:67) states that:

It refers to the colloquial language known as Ammia, Darija or Lahja (dialects); the colloquial varieties number in the hundreds. Being spoken and not written, they are distinguishable from classical Arabic as a result of general grammatical simplification in structure with fewer grammatical categories

Colloquial Arabic constitutes the everyday medium of communication in the home, the street and the market. It is actually the mother tongue of the majority of Algerians. Dialectal Arabic has been deeply influenced by foreign languages mostly French, Turkish, Spanish and English. This is apparent in the large corpora of loanwords characterizing colloquial speech (Ferguson, 1957).

#### **1.4.1.2 French**

The existence of the French language in Algeria is related to the long-lasting French colonization to the country. During colonial rule, the French imposed their language as the only official language, neglecting local languages namely Arabic and Berber. Their acculturation policy was implemented under the umbrella of civilizing the inhabitants through a new language and a new culture. They started with controlling education spheres. This was “the most effective means to make their progress and domination in this country” (Turin, 1983:40).

After the independence in 1962, Arabic was declared the official language of Algeria. However, the population was deeply influenced and French remained rooted in the daily linguistic behavior of the inhabitants. Algeria’s first president Ahmed Ben Bella perfectly mirrors the situation arguing “we think as Arabs, but we

speak French” (Heggoy, 1984:115). Taleb Ibrahimi (2000:66) summarizes the situation as follows:

The French language which was imposed on the Algerian by fire and blood, constituted a fundamental element in the French policy of depriving people from their identity

In the present time, French is considered as a foreign language in Algeria. It is part of the school curriculum from the primary school till the last year of secondary school. It is even a major in most Algerian universities. Besides, it is the language of instruction at the university in most scientific majors, such as medicine, biology, technology, mathematics, chemistry, etc. French is also used in many walks of life, ranging from the most formal (government, administration, etc) to the most colloquial (the street and family). This implies that Algeria is actually a multilingual speech community although French is politically claimed to be a foreign language. Bilingualism is rather a prevalent phenomenon that characterizes the society at large as the individuals.

#### **1.4.1.3 Berber/Tamazight**

Historically, the Amazighs (also known as the Berbers) existed before the advent of the Arabs while spreading Islam. Such indigenous people had their own language of communication, known as Berber or Tamazight. This language is made up of a number of dialects spoken in different parts of North Africa. Algeria is the second country in terms of Berberophones, after Morocco. However, Berber remains only a minority language in the country. The major Berber varieties spoken in Algeria include:

- Kabylia, which is considered as the largest variety in the country in terms of speakers. It is used in TiziOuzou, Bejaia, Boumerdes and Bouira.
- Chaoui, which is mainly spoken in Aures, including Batna, Khenchla, and OumBouaghi.
- Mzabi, which is used mostly in Ghardaia.

- Targui, spoken mainly in Sahara like Tamenrasset and Ahaggar

## **1.5 The Berbers**

The Berbers are an ethnic group belonging to North Africa. They are divided into several tribes. Each tribe has its own name and a variety of speech.

### **1.5.1 The Names of the Berbers**

The first great Amazigh tribe was called Lebo which they fought against the ancient Egyptians in 1227 BC; it is currently settled in Libya (Chafik, 2000). Then, while the Phoenicians colonized North Africa and flourished there, the Greeks and Romans took place in the southern coast. Therefore, the Amazighs were named as the Levars by the Greeks and Latins and subsumed them to Libyans, Numidians and Morin (Chafik, *ibid*). As it can be seen in the book of ‘Bouziani Derraji (2007)’ that the names; Robby, Abra and Berber were launched on the Maghreb inhabitants since the ancient times. It is thought that the word Berber originates from the Greek word ‘varvaros’, which means the confusion and the overlap voices in a speech. Thus, the word was named for all those who did not speak their language (Derraji, 2007)

However, a consideration of old writings found in the ‘temple karnak’ in Egypt which is related to the period of ‘Ramses 2’ introduces issues to the earlier-mentioned view. This shows that the ‘Pharaoh’ has subjected people in the south who were named as ‘Berbereta’. This implies that through this passage the Greek may take the word Berber from the Egyptians (Derraji, 2007).

The history of Maghreb societies shows that a group of ‘Lewata’ tribe was sent by ‘AmrIbn Al-aas’, Wali (governor) of Egypt, to ‘Omar Ibn Al-Khattab’ (Kalifa) in Medina, and they were asked about their origins and the case was that their grandfather is ‘Mazigh’ in which this word was related to the ancient Greek (Belaid, 1999)

The Berbers generally use their indigenous item Yamazighen to name themselves. It is agreed among them that such a label means bears the significance of ‘the free man’ (Bousquet, 1961)

### 1.5.2 The Origin of the Amazighs

In fact, historians believe that the oldest Maghreb inhabitants are Amazighs, but when dealing with their origins (pedigree) many and different views surface. Leblanc (1930) notes that the Berbers came as a consequence of entanglement of people coming from Europe and Asia within different periods. He justifies his claim arguing that there is no relation between Tamazight of Benimezab and Tamazight of the great tribes' area. Saadi (1996:72) reports that "the word Berber has no ethnic origin; the Berbers were known in the history with the amputation and sometimes with cloths more than they were called by Berbers"<sup>1</sup>. Saadi even goes further claiming that the Berbers are descendents of the Arabs.

There is even a view which stipulates that the Amazighs belong to the folk of 'ham', son of 'Noah'. Ibn Khaldoun (1377/1981), for instance, has this to say<sup>2</sup>:

the Berbers genealogists claim some of their people to be Arabs, like Louata who claim to be Himyar, and as Hawara who claim to from Kinda [...] and like Zinata who claim to be from the Giants who escaped from the Israelis [...] all these also claim to be from Himyar.

Some other researchers believe that the Berbers belong to a grandfather named Berber Ibn Tamla Ibn Mazigh Ibn Canaan, son of Sam; some others relate it to Giant son of Laud Ibn Aram (Derraji, 2007:23). In fact, arriving to a consensus among historians and researchers remains beyond reach.

### 1.5.3 The Tamazight Language

It is agreed on that the Tamazight language was written with Tifnagh alphabet, which is taken from the ancient Libyan alphabet; such a way, writing system is still perpetuated on stones in the Ahaggar and Tassili in Sahara. Tamazight was influenced by the Phoenician language, it is the main reason why that language is written (Tifinagh) from right to left (Derraji, 2007). Belaid,

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<sup>1</sup> My translation of the Arabic text

<sup>2</sup> My translation of the Arabic text

1999:91) observes that the term Tifinagh is made up of two items: 'Tifen', which means to discover, and 'Anegh', which means ours.

The Tamazight language consists of many dialects which show slight to significant differences. Some specialists divide the Amazigh into three groups, which are considered as the main tribes that make up other subdivisions (Bousquet, 1961:20-21):

1. The Amazigh Zinata belong to the Tamazight dialect in Libya and some Algerian dialects as, Mzabi, Ouargla, Touguart and dialects of BeniSnous (Beni Zidaz).
2. The Amazigh Sanhaja which settled first in the North of the Sahara, then after the advent of Islam they spread to reach Senegal and Niger. Therefore, since the ninth century AD they took place in Morocco and even in the East of Algeria.
3. The Amazigh Masmouda and Kutama speak Shelha.

#### **1.5.4 The Geographical Areas of the Berbers in Algeria**

The Amazighs tribes dwelled North Africa since a long time ago, and they are considered as the indigenous population. They were distributed across a wide area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sudan (Haddadou, 2000). However, the situation enormously changed as a result of the spread of Islam, and hence the Arabic language which has gradually dominated North Africa Islamic countries. Consequently, Tamazight disappeared in many areas, and it could survive only in mountainous and remote regions, as shown in the figure 1.1, presented below.

Berber could survive in the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) and also parts of Egypt (Haddadou, 2000). The majority of the Berbers are found in Morocco followed by Algeria. The western part of Algeria, namely the borders with Morocco, was once a Berberophone region. The widespread of Arabic could make such region lose its native tongue. Among the few areas where Berber could survive we mention, Beni Bousaid and BeniSnous in the wilaya (department) of Tlemcen. This latter mountainous area forms the focal zone in this research.

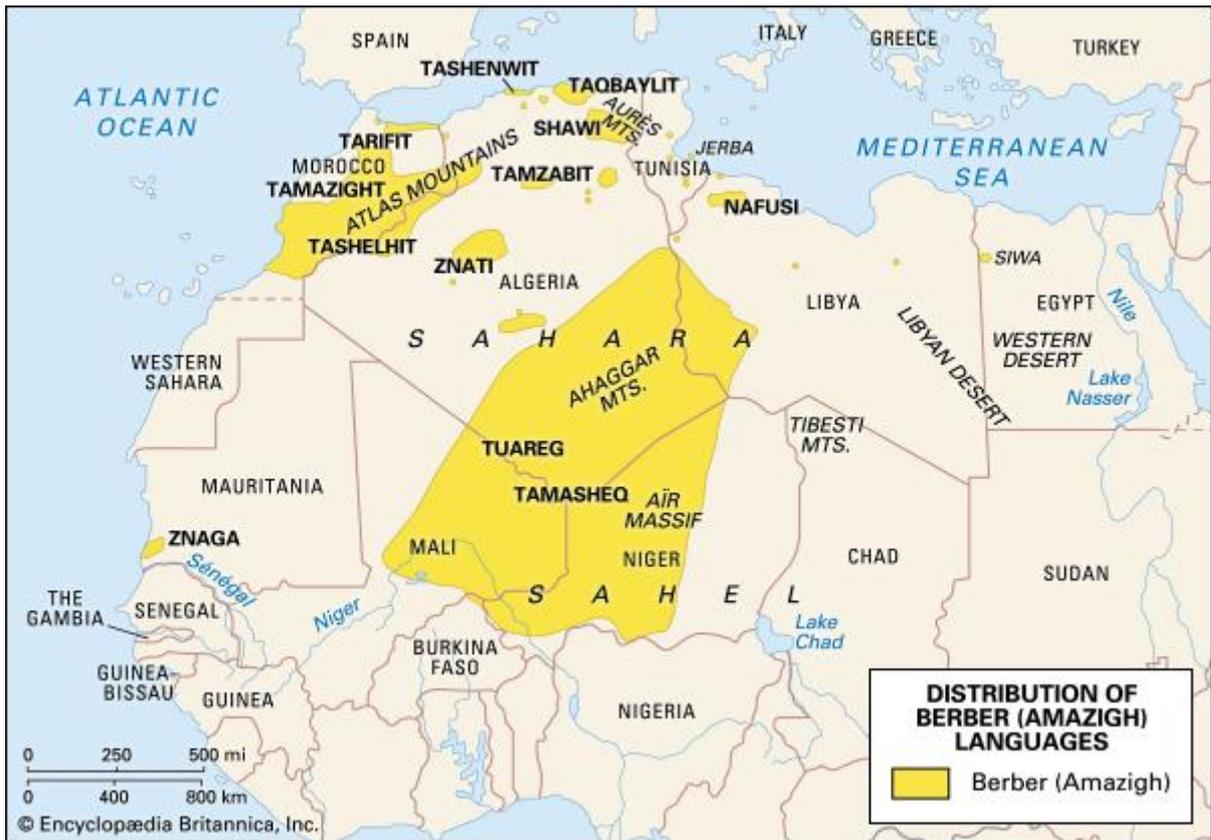


Figure 1.1 Geographical Distribution of Tamazight in Africa (worldmapfinder, 2018)

## 1.6 Benisnous: An Introduction

The region of Benisnous constitutes the site in which the present study took place. Therefore, it is found necessary to present a general picture about such region.

### 1.6.1 The Geographical Location

Benisnous is about 35 kilometers southwest of Tlemcen city. It is bordered by Beni Bousaid from the west, Sidi Djillali and Sebdou from the east, Beni Hedia from the north, Tirni from the northeast, and the mountains of Mchamich from the south at Morocco borders. It occupies large pieces of mountains which are known as Oud Tefna and Oud El Khemis (Benaissa, 2003). Figure 1.2 shows the administrative frontiers of Benisnous and its neighboring localities

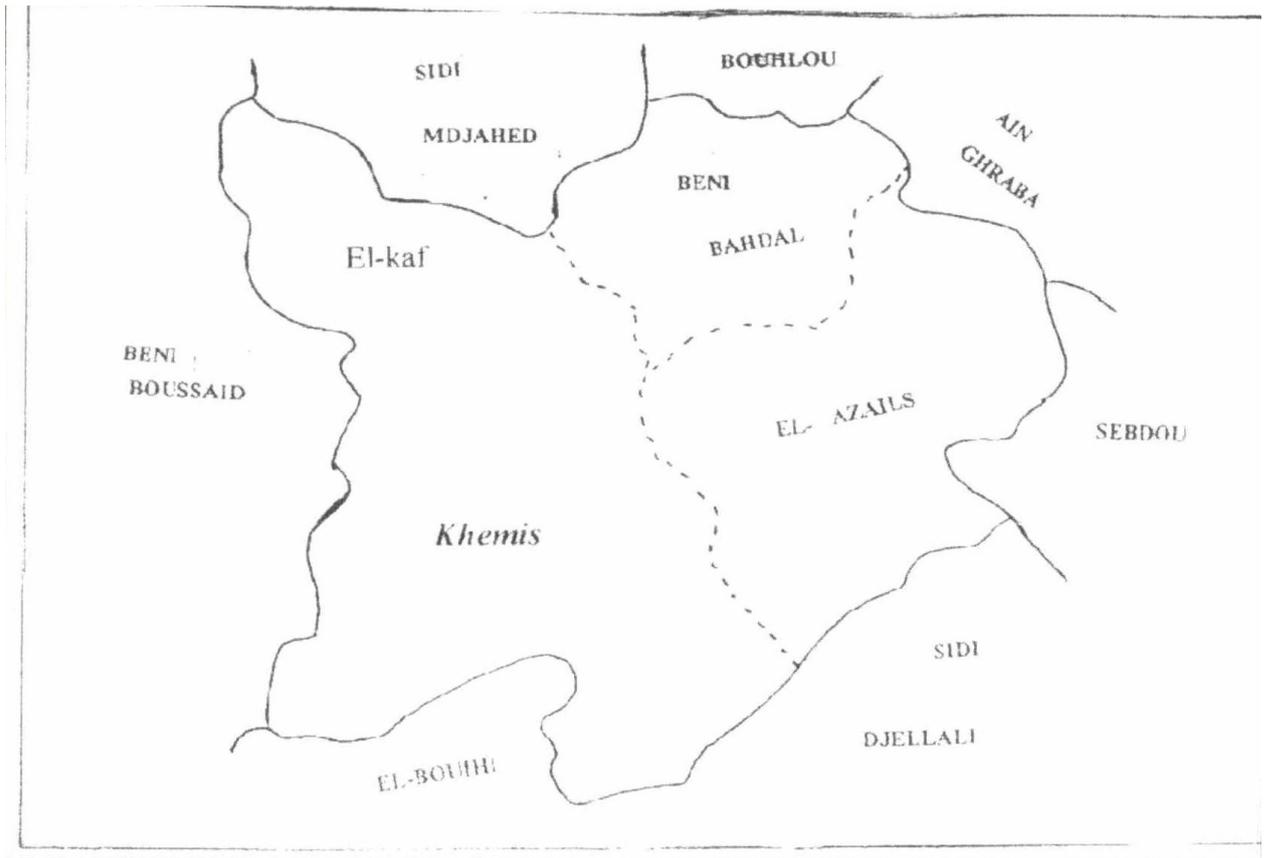


Figure.1.2 Administrative Frontiers of Benisnous (Benaïssa, 2003:39)

Benisnous is administratively divided into three main parts (as show in the figure sketched above): Azail, Beni Behdel, and El Khemis; each of these regions also includes small areas which are:

- ✓ El Khemis: the largest area in Benisnous which contains some ten villages, namely Fahs, Ouled Moussa, Ouled Arbi, Dar Eyyad, Beni Achir, BeniZidaz, Sid Arbi, Mazer, Ouled Maakel and Ouled Chayeb.
- ✓ Azail: it contains six villages; Zehra, Memlouh, Jealin, Mghanine and Diar El Arab.
- ✓ Beni Behdel: This includes three villages, namely Kadara, Tassa and Gaada.

Benisnous is actually a mountainous region, in which the chain of mountain stretches from the south west to the north east. The region is covered by heavy forests with different kinds of trees. Its hills are covered with a large quantity of herbs, which are used by the inhabitants of the region either for their traditional manufacturing or in their drugs (Bell, 2001). Figure1.3 is a photo of the biggest

agglomeration in Benisnous, namely El Khemis, whereas figure 1.4 is a photo of the mosque of Tefessra, which is classified as the oldest mosque in the wilaya of Tlemcen.



Figure 1.3 El Khemis in Benisnous



Figure 1.4 the old Mosque of Tefessra

### **1.6.2 The Population**

The name Benisnous is made up of two parts: 'Beni' signifies 'son' in Arabic, and it stands for 'ayt' in Berber, whereas 'snous' or 'asnous' is the Berber name for 'donkey'. Therefore, 'Benisnous', or Ayt-asnus, stands for 'son of donkey'. It was also called before 'Sanousa' to mean 'the green mountain' (Saridj, 2001). The villages of Benisnous were contracted since the Amazigh era and were named according to indications. For instance, 'Tefessra' stands for 'cave'. El Khemis is named after the weekly market which takes place in the village each Thursday (khemis in Arabic)

It is thought that the inhabitants of Benisnous belong to a Zenata tribe. Ibn Kheldoun noted that Benisnous are from the Zenati tribe of 'Banu Koumaya'; the mother tribe of "Abd El Moumen Ben Ali" who is the founder of El-Dawla El Mowahhidiya in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Benisnous were in contact with 'Banu Yaghmorassan' during the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Bell, 2001). Canal (1981) States that Benisnous are Berbers who are attached to their land and who refuse any foreign interference in their lives. It was depicted that they were members of a Zenati tribe; they were called "El Quabails" to differentiate them and to refer to their origins.

Also, there are some places which have Roman names, such as the village of Azail which contained a Roman heritage called 'Koudiat El-Roms', which means the Romans ridge. Those Romans undoubtedly are Berbers who were pushed out from their places, so they came to enjoy their kindred who lived in this region. Also, the Jews were living in Benisnous, exactly in 'Mghanine'; most of them were selling eggs or repairing shoes to earn a living (Fardheb, 1952)

### **1.6.3 Islam in the Region**

The village of 'Tefessra' was ruled by the Roman 'Charouan' who claimed to be Muslim in the era of the Arab conquests in order to preserve the presidency in this village. The Muslims entered to the region and subsumed it with the help of Charouan (Wakdi, 1966). The inhabitants of Benisnous were converted to Islam through the first Sultan 'Idris' who invaded the Maghreb regions. Then, several tribes came to the region within the Islamic migrations; most of them were from 'Figuigue' and they settled in El Khemis, Ouled Moussa and Beni Achir (Bell,

2001). This is strongly supported as the local Berber variety spoken in Benisnous contains many words like that spoken in Figuigue.

Converting to Islam, Benisnous attracted the attention of many people who travelled there to learn the Quran which was taught in schools and also caves. Those schools were free for the poor (Saidouni, 1984).

#### **1.6.4 Traditions and Customs of Benisnous**

The inhabitants of Benisnous used to exchange their trade on a weekly basis when they used to meet in the village of El Khemis each Thursday. Also, the region had many business relationships with other regions, such as Tlemcen and Morocco, but the conditions were very difficult for them to move to other regions. Therefore, they used to take their goods on the backs of horses, donkeys and mules, and they crossed dangerous roads through mountains and forests like ‘Ras-Asfour’ (Saridj, 2001).

Moreover, Benisnous is known for its olive production. Among the famous traditional handcrafts is the manufacture of mats or ‘Hssira’ as it is locally called (see Figure1.5). Local inhabitants depended on mud to fabricate their kitchen utensils. Women are known for their high qualification in sewing cloths (e.g. Jellaba). However, modernization seems to diminish, if not to exterminate, many of the traditional crafts (Saridj, 2001)



Figure 1.5 the Manufacturing of Hssira

### **1.6.5 The Celebration of the New Year in Benisnous “Airad”**

History data relates the Amazigh year with the victory of the Amazigh king ‘Chichnag’ over the Egyptian pharaoh ‘Ramses III’ in 950 BC. The Amazigh thought that the battle took place in the region of Benisnous. Therefore, people of this region, besides Berbers all over North Africa, still celebrate the event each year. This event is locally referred to as ‘Airad’, to mean ‘lion’ as an indication to power.

As part of the celebration, Benisnous inhabitants follow many traditions. Boys, for instance, put masks of the lion. Women prepare traditional dishes, such as Trid, Msamen, Couscous, etc. Celebration lasts for three days. This is an opportunity for the inhabitants to organize shows in which they expose hand-made products.

### **1.6.6 Language of Benisnous**

Although the Amazigh culture and traditions is still dominant, the inhabitants of Benisnous, as most parts of the country, speak Arabic. The region has been largely arabized. However, Berber traces in Colloquial Arabic are abundant. In fact, many Berber words are used on a daily basis. These words are like those used in Feguigue in Morocco. In fact, an apparent-time study of Colloquial Arabic in the region is supposed to show significant differences among old and young speakers. The old generation has frequent use of Berber words. However, it is noticed that the young generation are ceasing using many of such items (Saridj, 2001)

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a theoretical background of the study. It included a short review of the sociolinguistic profile of Algeria. It also sketched information about the Berber people and their language in general. Then, it gave a description of a minority Berber community known as Benisnous, which forms the site where our investigation will take place.

## **Chapter Two: Data Analysis and Discussion**

### 2.1 Introduction

### 2.2 Part 1: Methodology Consideration

#### 2.2.1 Research Design

#### 2.2.2 Description of Sample Population

#### 2.2.3 Data Collection Tools

##### 2.2.3.1 The Interview

##### 2.2.3.2 The Questionnaire

### 2.3 Part 2: Data Analysis and Discussion

#### 2.3.1 The Interview Results

#### 2.3.2 The Questionnaire Results

### 2.4 Discussions of the Results

### 2.5 Conclusion

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter represents the procedures followed to conduct this research in order to answer the research questions and to verify their associated hypotheses. It is divided into two parts. The first one includes the research design, instruments, and sample population. The second part deals with data analysis and discussion.

## **2.2 Part I: Methodology Considerations**

This part gives a brief description of the methodology adopted for the realization on the current study. This includes the research design, sample population and data collection tools.

### **2.2.1 Research Design**

It is very important for each researcher to adopt a research methodology to carry on his work in order to collect available and relevant data and to use techniques for the analyses (Kothari, 1990). Hence, a research is kind of a process that produces several questions, problems or hypotheses, which help to collect reliable data through these questions, and then to analyze the results related to these questions (Nunan, 1992). The research methodology chosen for the present investigation was a case study. According to Yin (1984:23), the case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomena within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. (Yin, 1984) notes three categories of the case study, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. The current research work is an explanatory descriptive case study. It includes a full description about a specific phenomenon in which the researcher tends to report and describe the data as they occur.

## **2.2.2 Description of the Sample Population**

It is necessary that the researcher provides details about the sample population of the study. Kothari (1990:152 ) defines sampling as “the process of obtaining information about an entire population by examining only a part of it”. The term population refers to the members of the broader group of people, to whom the researcher is interested into generalizing the results of his investigation where the sample is taken for the analysis, whereas the sample is a subset of the population (Thomas, 2001). Morgan (2008:797) defines the sample as “the set of actual data sources”.

The present research is concerned with a group of inhabitants of Benisnous who were randomly selected. The sample was divided into two subgroups according to the place of residence. The first group includes old inhabitants of BeniZidaz whose ages range between sixty-four to eighty years old. They are eight respondents (6 males + 2 females). The second group is made up of forty informants aged from nineteen to fifty-four. These informants are from different places in Benisnous. All the selected informants are from and living in Benisnous; half of them are university graduates. The informants were randomly selected (randomization in sampling)

## **2.2.3 Data Collection Tools**

In the current study the researcher used two main research instruments to collect her data, which are the semi-structured interview and the questionnaire. This could allow us to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, as discussed below.

### **2.2.3.1 The Interview**

Interviewing is one of the data collection methods. It is a kind of conversation between two persons who are the interviewer and the interviewee. In this vein, Mackey (2005:173) states that the “interviews can allow researchers to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable, such as learners’ self-reported perceptions or attitudes”. There are different types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured.

As mentioned before, the present work builds on a semi-structured interview which requires the researcher to use a list of written questions to facilitate his work, but the researcher has the freedom to modify the questions (Mackey, 2005). Although there are guiding lists, the format is open ended for it encourages the interview to elaborate as the issue raises in an exploratory manner (Dorenyei, 2007). The semi-structured interview was used to allow the researcher to probe deeper into the given situation. The researcher can also be able to explain and rephrase the questions for the respondents when ambiguity arises.

The semi-structured interview was conducted with the first group of the sample population (8 aged informants). The answers were recorded after having got the permission for recording. The interview was conducted in Dialectal/Algerian Arabic (the everyday medium of communication). It contains twelve pre-fixed questions (see appendix A)

### **2.2.3.2 The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers” (Brown, 2001: 6). The questionnaire is of three types: structured, unstructured and mixed. The present study builds on a mixed questionnaire, containing both closed ended and open ended questions. This translates that this questionnaire would allow the researcher to obtain quantitative as well as qualitative data. The questionnaire was meant to enlist the respondents’ beliefs and opinions that are relevant to the research. It was handled to the second group of the sample population. In other words, it was addressed to forty informants representative of different ages (18 males + 22 females). It is written in Standard Arabic. It contains simple sentences to avoid misunderstanding. It is made up of twelve questions, categorized in three rubrics. The first one was designed to gain information related to the respondents (biodata). The second rubric looks for the linguistic abilities of the respondents as far as Berber is concerned. The last rubric is designed to identify the respondents’ attitudes towards their ancestral language.

## **2. 3 Part II: Data Analysis and Interpretations**

This part is a space for exposing our data. The results will be sorted according to the research instrument used.

### **2.3.1 The Interview Results**

The interview results will be presented separately from those of the questionnaire. Each interview question will be analyzed individually.

**Q1:** How do you consider Berber: a language, a dialect or anything else?

This question was asked to determine the respondents' perceptions of Berber. The result was that the majority of respondents (75%) considered Berber as a language, but the others (25%) took it as a dialect. Some of those who stated that it is a language mentioned that it was used as a language before the French colonialism. Those who considered it as a dialect justified their answer stating that it only has an oral tradition and it is not a written language. They also argued that it is a localized variety characteristic of few regions.

**Q2:** Is Berber still spoken in your region?

The respondents did not deny that Benisnous as a whole used to be Berberophone. However, they confirmed that Berber is now used in no other than Benizidaz and Ouled Moussa. They also added that this Berber variety is known (and rarely used) only by some old people.

**Q3:** How do you call this Berber variety?

This question was asked to identify the variety used in Benisnous. The respondents seemed to meet agreement about the name, labeling their variety 'Shelha' or 'Tashalhit'. However, some informants mentioned the name 'Zenatiya'.

**Q4:** Do you find that the everyday language (Dialectal Arabic) contains linguistic elements of Berber?

The respondents were firm in their answers, approving the existence of Berber words in their Dialectal Arabic. Some respondents went further illustrating their answers with concrete examples. Table 2.1, sketched below, includes some of the items that are used on a daily basis.

Table 2.1 a Sample of Berber Words in the Speech of Benisnous

<b>Berber words</b>	<b>English Gloss</b>
Aghrum	Bread
Akchich	Boy
Argaz	Man
Azoul	Go
Ayrou	Come
Aghdou	Mat
Akjoun or Aydi	Dog
Kartass	Go to sleep
?aman	Water
3alouch	Sheep
Tazloukhat	Girl
Tarag	Kidding
Joughnin	Money

**Q5:** What type of elements is mostly attested: lexical, phonological or morphological?

From the interviewees' answers, it could be concluded that lexical items are the most frequently displayed Berber elements in the everyday dialectal communication. Interviewees are probably not aware of morphological or syntactic features of Berber although they might show them regularly in their conversations.

**Q6:** Do you still use it inside the home with the family members?

The results told that the clear majority of respondents (75%) do not use Shelha inside their homes for family communication. They justify such stand arguing that it is useless to use as their progeny neither use it nor understand it. The 25% of the respondents who claimed to use Shelha at home reported that they also do not use it with all members of the family; it is restricted to the old people (grandparents).

**Q7:** why did not you stick to your ancestral language?

The respondents argued that it is difficult to maintain their ancestral tongue for a variety of reasons. They reported that the speech of the region has drastically changed through time, because of the admixture of the inhabitants of this region with people from other regions who do not speak the same language (mostly Arabophones). This made them adopt the language of the majority (Arabic) to ease communication and to integrate in the dominant speech community.

**Q8:** are the youngsters able to use it or at least to understand it?

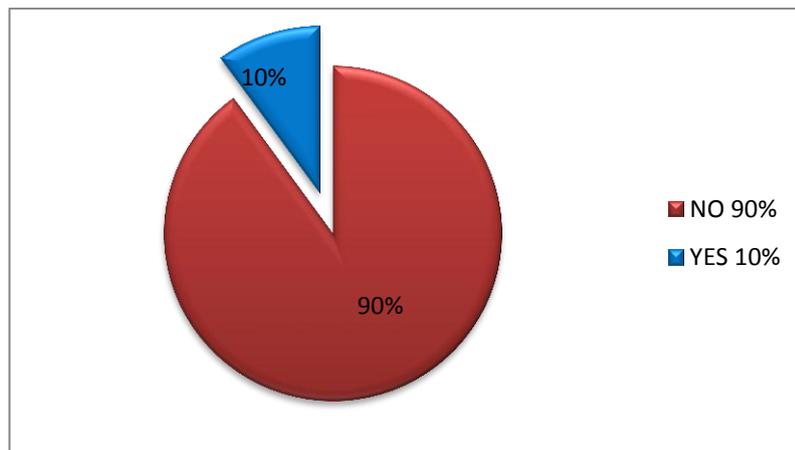


Figure 2.1: the Youngsters Ability to Use Shelha

From the above-mentioned figure it is observed that the majority of youngsters 90% are not able to use this variety even to understand it. While others 10% said that they can use or understand only some words.

**Q9:** Why did you cease using Shelha at home?

This question was formulated to know the main reasons that led the respondents of Benisnous to abandon their variety in the large community as well as the home. Thus, they reported that they are no more using Shelha at home because the members of their family do not understand them, and it is difficult to get in touch with them if they would use it

**Q10:** Do you think it will disappear totally in the future?

The answers showed that more than half of the respondents (60%) think that Shelha will not disappear from this region arguing that it is an old language with an identity value. They raised the point that such variety will be revived and promoted in the future. Those who reported that it will disappear (40%) observed that its preservation in the region is only through introducing it in the school.

**Q11:** what are the reasons that may lead to its disappearance?

The use of Shelha in the region of Benisnous decreased for many and different reasons. Therefore, the respondents claimed that Shelha disappeared from their speech community because its users ceased using it for intra communication. The most important fact is that the inhabitants did not appreciate the value of their language. Also, the main reason which led to its noticeable disappearance is that the grandparents did not ensure the linguistic transmission to their progeny. They are the first to blame when they did not make the children acquire it as a mother tongue.

**Q12:** Do you prefer that the young generation learn and use the Berber language again? And why?

The results demonstrated that the majority of the respondents (80%) do agree with the fact that the youngsters should learn this language. Thus, they said it is their ancestral language, and it can help them in the future saying that it helped people during the French colonial era, especially when they wanted exclude other persons form the conversation. Those who opted for the 'no' option (20%) observe that it is so difficult and useless.

### 2.3.1 The Questionnaire Results

❖ The first part of the questionnaire is analyzed separately from the second part.

**Q1:** Do you know that Shelha was spoken in Benisnous?

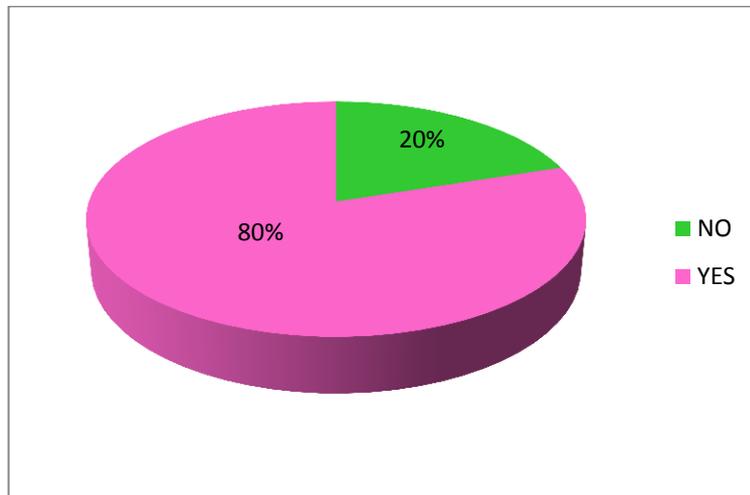


Figure 2.2: the Respondents' Awareness about the Existence of Berber in Benisnous

The results show that 80% of the respondents are aware about the historical presence of Shelha in Benisnous. Yet, still some inhabitants, though they form a minority (20%), ignore their ancestral past.

**Q2:** Do you know people who still speak Shelha?

Around 60% of the respondents claimed that they do not know people who still speak Shelha. However, 40% of them proclaimed to know, and are in contact with, people who speak such a variety.

**Q3:** I can speak / a Berber variety?

The bar-graph presented below in figure 2.3 exposes diversity in answers. 65% of the respondents do have no control over Shelha; 30% of them include some words integrated in their daily Dialectal Arabic. No more than 5% of the respondents can use Shelha, and even in this last case the use is only to a certain extent. This translates that good command of Shelha is absent among the sample population.

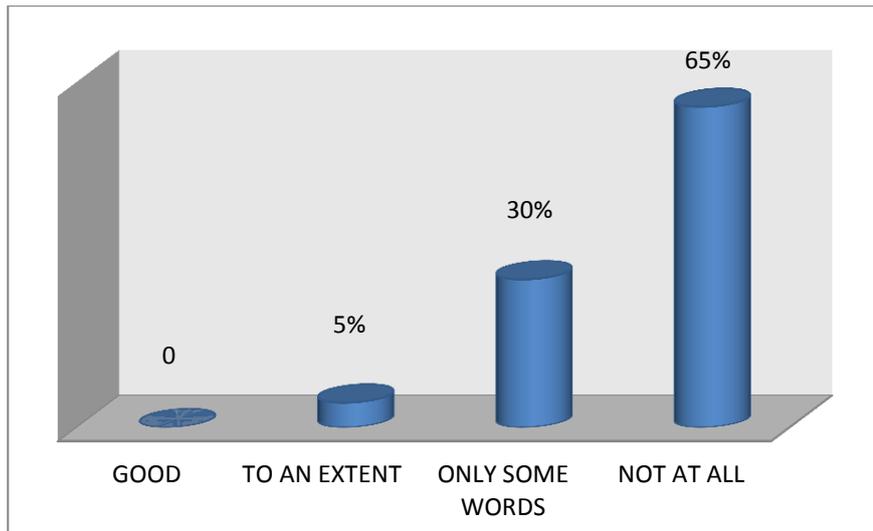


Figure 2.3: the Respondents' Proficiency in Shelha

**Q4:** I understand people when they address in Shelha

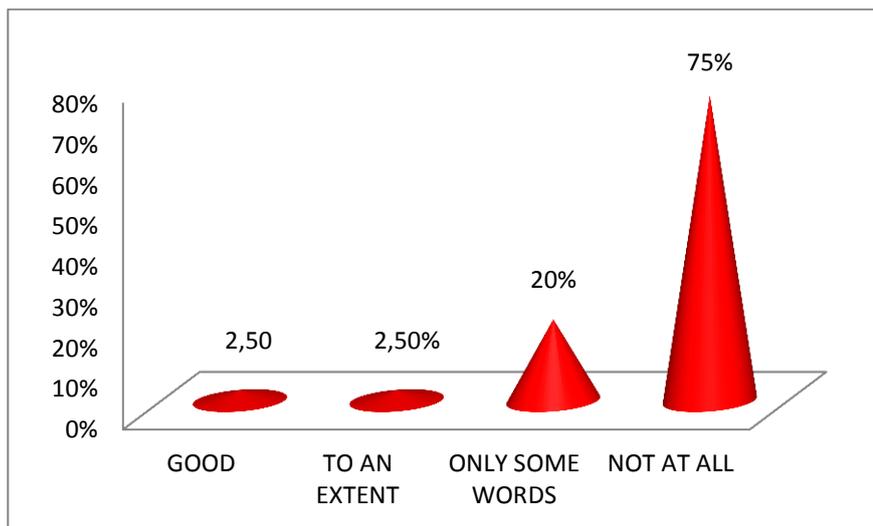


Figure 2.4: the Ability to Understand Shelha

As it is illustrated in the above-mentioned figure, a clear majority of the respondents (75%) totally do not understand Shelha. No more than 20% of them figure out the meaning of some individual words. Those who partially or entirely understand it form a marginal minority.

**Q5: My parents can speak Shelha**

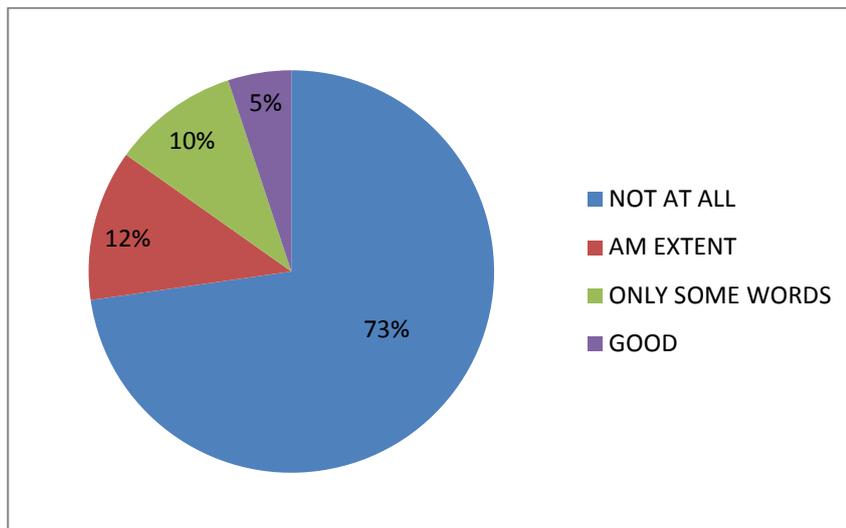


Figure 2.5: Parents Ability to Use Shelha

Figure 2.5 graphically tells that most parents have lost their ancestral language. Only 12% of the respondents claimed that their parents can, to an extent, use it.

**Q6: do your parents understand people when they address you in Shelha?**

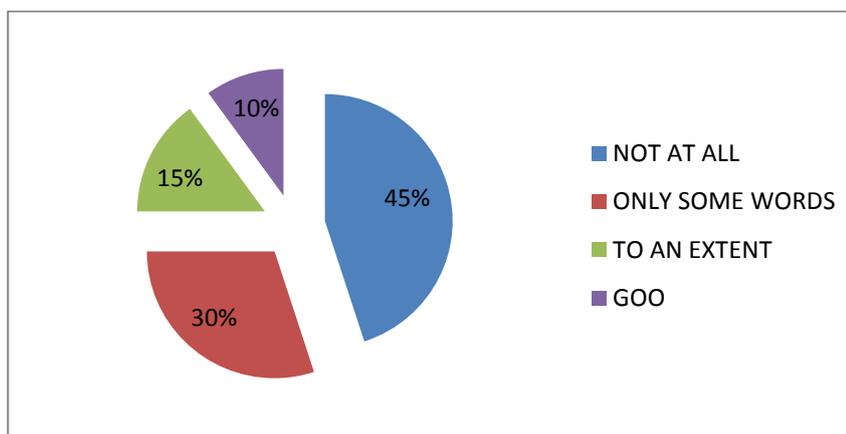


Figure 2.6: Parents' Understanding of Shelha

This question was asked to know if the respondents' parents can at least understand Shelha even if they cannot speak it. Therefore, the results revealed that 50% of their parents do not understand this Berber variety. However, 30% of them

claimed that their parents can understand some words of this variety. Again a minority of respondents (10%) have parents who can understand this variety.

**Q7:** I want to learn Shelha and transfer it to the future generation because it is my ancestral language.

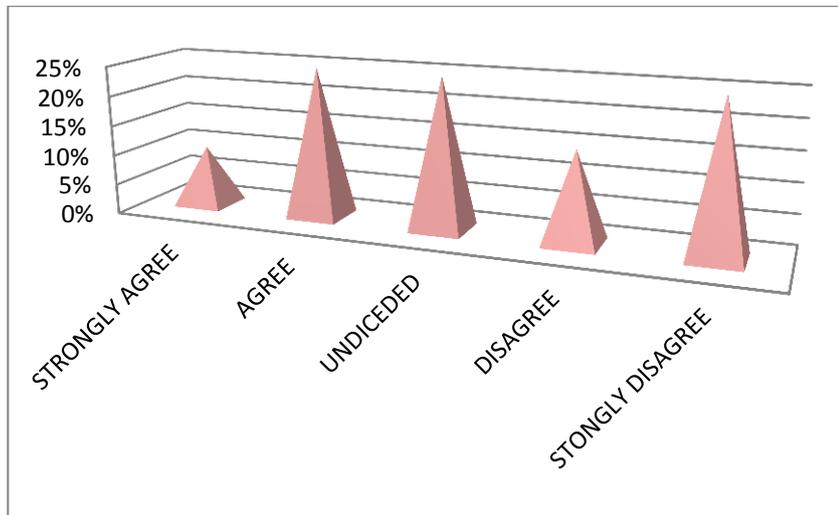


Figure 2.7: Attitudes towards Learning Shelha

The results were somehow close to each other. Many respondents showed positive attitudes towards learning Shelha. Equally, many others expressed negative attitudes. Those who did not express their opinions formed  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the sample population.

❖ The second part of the questionnaire contains five questions. Each one will be examined and discussed separately.

**Q8:** have you tried to learn your ancestral language before?

The results show that the majority of the respondents (80%) have never tried to learn Shelha. They justified their answer with a number of reasons, arguing that it more preferable to learn Arabic and other languages. They added that Shelha is not recognized at the international level, and it is on the way of extinction. Another strong reason relates to the instrumentality of the language as Shelha is perceived a useless language. They also observed that there is no available references to learn/teach this variety. Another view was strongly prompted by the respondents

perceiving Shelha as a ‘dialect’ and not a ‘language’; such societal judgment makes Shelha downgraded. Some of the respondents put the blame on the grandparents who ceased using their ancestral language.

On the other hand few respondents defended Shelha and reported that it must be integrated in the Algerian school. This is one way to diffuse it in the community. Around 20% of the respondents argued that they have previously tried to learn Shelha on the basis that it is an important aspect of their identity and their cultural heritage.

**Q 9:** How do you perceive people who still can speak Shelha in Benisnous?

The majority of the respondents said that those people are preserving the language and authenticity of the region. Such people are further perceived as identity guardians. They are also seen as conservative people who cannot be easily subsumed by other cultures.

**Q 10:** How do you perceive Shelha or Berber in general?

Some respondents said that it has an important role in representing their traditions and beliefs. They made the point clear that it is legitimate to officialize it alongside Arabic. They argue that it is a must to preserve such old cultural heritage. However, there are still some respondents who consider Berber in general no more than a dialect with no important utility.

**Q 11:** Are you for a revival of Shelha in your region?

The results were varied. Half of the respondents opted for a revival of their ancestral language. They argued that the revival of Shelha leads to a revival of the heritage and ensures the life of the traditions and customs of their community. The other half did not support the same initiative arguing that Shelha does not fit the present time in the sense that it has no communication value outside its small community which is integrated within a larger Arabophone society. They even put the finger on the useless of this variety internationally.

**Q 12:** According to you, what are the main reasons that led to the disappearance of Shelha in Benisnous?

The respondents stated different answers as mentioned below:

- a variety only spoken and not codified
- The ancestors did not pay much attention and interest to preserve and transmit it to the next generations.
- The spread of other languages, namely Arabic and later French, led to minimization in the use of this variety
- Some respondents argued that the French colonists ignored this variety.

## **2.4 Discussion of main the Results**

Through the analysis of the results of the semi-structured interview, the researcher wanted to investigate the existence and the use of Shelha in Benisnous, exactly in BeniZidaz. The results showed that the majority of the respondents preserve their tongue and give it a significant importance. Concerning its use in Benisnous all the respondents confirmed that such idiom is only used among some aged people. Furthermore, the interviewees made it clear that Dialectal Arabic of the region is full of Shelha linguistic features, especially lexical items. As far as the home context is concerned, Shelha is largely marginalized on the basis that family members, especially the youngsters, neither speak it nor understand it. This is the rule throughout Benisnous to the exclusion of some old individuals who still use it as a means of communication (between old couples and other old family members)

The interviewees raised the point that people abandoned Shelha in its native land as a result of the communication barrier facing them with speakers of other varieties, especially Arabophones. This has gradually led to the loss of this tongue among the following generations. Now, most of them do not speak it, and very few individuals can understand it (without producing it). The interviewees think that Shelha could survive if the number of users was kept higher, and communication between the in-group members was conducted via Shelha.

The questionnaire results revealed that the majority of the informants are conscious about their ethnic belonging. This is manifested not only in the remaining traces of the language but also in the traditions and customs of the community. As for their attitudes towards learning and/or reviving Shelha in the region, the results were actually divided with pros and cons. However, the results showed that Shelha is downgraded, being considered a ‘dialect’ and not a ‘proper language’. Negative attitudes towards Shelha also build on the instrumentality of this variety outside its original borders; this variety is negatively perceived because it does not meet their communication needs either locally with the large Arabophone community or internationally. The point which should be stressed is that the informants do not reject their belonging to the Berber community; they stress their amazighity although they shifted allegiance to other linguistic varieties, not least Arabic. Shelha, or Tamazight in general, is attributed a symbolic value, being the language of ancestors and cultural heritage.

The results confirm the first hypothesis in the sense that Benisnous identifies two main varieties, namely Arabic and Tamazight (or precisely Shelha). It goes without saying that Arabic remains the dominant language, whereas Shelha is on its way of disappearance. The results also confirm the second hypothesis showing that Arabic has had a strong impact on the linguistic structure of Benisnous to the extent that it has become the medium of communication among this Berber community. In fact, Shelha is rarely used; it is also known only by a limited number of old speakers. As for the third hypothesis, it is neither confirmed nor rejected as the informants were divided with some of them showing positive attitudes and others holding negative attitudes towards Tamazight.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter constitutes the cornerstone of this research. It represents the field work conducted to answer the research questions. It has been shown that Shelha is still alive in its native land (Benisnous). However, this variety is used only by a limited number of old speakers. This implies that such variety is facing extinction from Benisnous if no language revival measures are taken to ensure its

survival. Shelha does not compete Arabic which has become the dominant language and the medium of inter-group and outer-group communication. However, Dialectal Arabic of Benisnous identifies a large number of Tamazight linguistic features, especially in terms of vocabulary. As far as the attitudes are concerned, the inhabitants do not show the same attitudes although they do not deny their Berber belonging.

## **General Conclusion**

The native people of North Africa are known to be the Berbers or the Amazigh people. Therefore, the original language of the region as a whole, including Algeria, is Tamazigh. This language manifests a number of varieties scattered in different parts of North Africa. The region of Benisnous speaks one of these varieties. However, such a variety lives a critical situation as the number of its users is in continuous decrease.

The results showed that Tamazight is on the way of disappearance in Benisnous because its transmission from the old generation was not kept. Many grandparents ceased using the language with their progeny. Tamazight ceased to be used even as a language for in-group communication. Even those old people who might know it to some extent stopped communicating through it, to the exception of few people who still use it with their age group members.

Also, it is demonstrated that dialectal Arabic has a strong impact on Tamazight language. It has dominated the speech community of Benisnous, and Tamazight became limited which is used only by few members of the society; basically by old-aged people. Moreover, preserving this variety was quite difficult because the language contact did not stop at the level of mixing two languages when speaking, but it led to language shift.

Then, some inhabitants of Benisnous showed positive attitudes toward the Tamazight; they value this language and consider it as a mark of their identity ancient heritage, and supported the idea for the revival of the language of their ancestors. However, others have negative attitudes about the use of Tamazight, because this variety is on the way of disappearance which makes the language useless for the future generation.

This dissertation began with a theoretical chapter based on a set of definitions of the main concepts which are related to this research study: language planning, the linguistic policy of Arabization, language death and the sociolinguistic situation in Algeria. Then it moved to a description about the history of the Berbers and their

geographical locations in Algeria, and it focused on the region of Benisnous and the Berber variety used there.

The second chapter was devoted to the methodology underlying the case study in order to provide answers for the research questions and to confirm the hypotheses. The study was undertaken in the region of Benisnous. Then, the study relied on semi-structured interview and questionnaire to gather data from different sample population.

Unfortunately the researcher found some difficulties to translate the references that dealt with studying the speech of Benisnous, because these references are only in French and Arabic languages.

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## Webography

### Geographical Distribution of Tamazight in Africa

[https://www.google.dz/search?rlz=1C1CHNY\\_frDZ789DZ789&biw=1355&bih=643&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=33z4WuHwNcGIUYCXs7AN&q=Distribution+of+berber+langugaes++in+Africa&oq/](https://www.google.dz/search?rlz=1C1CHNY_frDZ789DZ789&biw=1355&bih=643&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=33z4WuHwNcGIUYCXs7AN&q=Distribution+of+berber+langugaes++in+Africa&oq/) (Dec. 15, 2017).

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Questionnaire

The questionnaire in front of view is a part of research for master degree; it is designed to find out whether Shelha is still used in the region of Benisnous. Also, the inhabitants' attitude toward this variety. Your option is very important. Hence, you are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Thank you for your corporation. Please use a cross (x) to indicate your answers.

#### Part one

-Gender:                      -Male                        
   -Female                     

-Age:

-Place of residence:

#### Part Two

1) Do you know that Shelha was spoken in Benisnous?

-Yes                                            -No                     

2) Do you know people who still speak Shelha?

Yes                                            -No                     

3) I can speak / a Berber variety

Good                       to an extent                       only some words                       not at all

4) I understand people when they address me in Shelha

Good                       to an extent                       only some words                       not at all

5) My parents can speak Shelha

Good                       to an extent                       only some words                       not at all

6) Do you parents understand people when they address you in Shelha  
Good  to an extent  only some words  not at all

7) I want to learn Shelha and transfer it to the future generation because it is my  
ancestral language

Strongly agree  agree  undecided  disagree  strongly  
disagree

**Part Three**

8) Have you tried to learn your ancestral language before?

Yes

No

Why?

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9) How do you perceive people who still can speak Shelha in BeniSnous?

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10)How do you perceive Shelha or Berber in general?

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11) Are you for a revival of Shelha in your region?

Yes

No

Why?

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12) According to you, what are the main reasons that led to the disappearance of Shelha in Benisnous? And why?

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## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

**Question1** this question aims to identify the inhabitants' attitudes toward Berber language.

**Question2** is asked to determine the existence of Berber language in the region.

**Question3** aims at defining the variety of Berber language used in Benisnous.

**Question4** and 5 are designed to know if there are some Berber words used and mixed with dialectal Arabic, and to see if it is just spoken or even written.

**Question 6** and 7 these questions were asked to point out the old generation use of Berber language with their families, and to know the main reasons if they do not use it.

**Question8** and 9 to see if the youngest generation gained the language from their grandparents, and to identify the cause behind changing the language with old generation.

**Question10** and 11 are formulated to know whether Berber language will not be used anymore, and the reasons that can affect the value of this language in the region.

**Question12** this question opens the section for the aged persons' attitudes and suggestions about the reconsideration and use of Berber language or Shelha within the future generation.