THE INTERNALIZATION OF WESTERN TABOOS AMONG ALGERIAN YOUTH: THE N-WORD AS A CULTURAL FRAME

Hanene Nouar [1] Amani Boudada [2]
[1] University of Mentouri Brothers, Constantine 1 (Algeria)
hanene.nouar@doc.umc.edu.dz
Laboratoire de Langue et Traduction (LLT)
[2] University of Mentouri Brothers, Constantine 1 (Algeria)
boudada.amani@doc.umc.edu.dz
Laboratoire de Langue et Traduction (LLT)

Abstract: In the new era, the postcolonial world, in particular, has to a certain degree, shaped Algerian youth's attitude and linguistic behavior; thus, a new cultural challenge has emerged. With this, we reflect on an imported, originally American/Western taboo: the N-word. In the article, we examine the sociolinguistic dimensions of the N-word within the context of Algerian culture, focusing specifically on its prevalence among Algerian Generation Z and Millennials, and accounting for their attitudes and patterns of use in various activities, especially in reading, speaking, and texting. Drawing upon a mixed-methods approach, the research adopts a qualitatively-based behavioural observation of Generation Z. For the sample, we opted for 16 EFL students along with a set of structured interviews with a sample of 10 Millennials. Then, finally, using a Likert scale for quantitative descriptive purposes addressed to both Generation Z and Millennials, a total of 50 responses were received online through Google Forms. The findings reveal an intricate connection between globalized language appropriation; the research participants appear to be heavily influenced by Western culture, media, and history, which is reflected in their attitudes towards the N-word and its patterns of use, whether in speech, text, or reading. Thus, cultural mimicry extends to include even the foreign taboos, a worrying issue that indicates either the ability of Algerian youth to emerge into the global world easily or that they are passive recipients of Western beliefs, attitudes and taboos. Finally, this study's significance lies in its contribution to the lack of clear sociolinguistic discussion of the shift in the Algerian youth's perception of taboos, including linguistic terms irrelevant to Algerian history, which seem to be part of their day-to-day discourse.

Keywords: Algerian Youth, American Taboo, N-word, postcolonial world, western culture, Algerian culture, media and history.

How to cite this article:

---

[1] **Corresponding author:**Hanene Nouar **Authors' ORCID ID:** https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6101-4231

1. Introduction

In an era marked by the more and more seamless transnational flow of linguistic forms and cultural symbols, the appropriation of racially charged lexicons, such as the 'N-word', within contexts devoid of their original historical referents demands rigorous sociolinguistic scrutiny. Algeria, a North African nation with a complex colonial past and post-independence trajectory, finds itself entangled in global tides of digital consumption and identity performance, particularly among its younger generations. Of particular sociological interest is the observable uptake of African American vernacular expressions, most notably the N-word (According to Kennedy (2003), it originates from the Latin word for Black), within the discursive repertoires of Algerian Millennials and Gen Z youth.

Notwithstanding the N-word's origins in American chattel slavery and its deeply embedded racial connotations within the United States' sociohistorical milieu (Kennedy, 2003), its invocation among Algerian youth appears to traverse linguistic and ethical boundaries. The growing body of scholarship on global Englishes and youth cultural flows draws attention to the increasingly heterogeneous routes through which English lexical items, idioms, and ideological signifiers are recontextualized across diverse sociocultural landscapes (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2009; Makhlouf, Andersen, & Andersen, 2024; Rais Ali & Medjahed, 2024).

Within this paradigm, the N-word occupies a paradoxical space: simultaneously a vestige of racial violence and a performative symbol of cultural capital in African American hip-hop culture (Rahman, 2007). Its uptake by non-African American groups has generated big debate, particularly concerning issues of authenticity, appropriation, and transracial solidarity (Cutler, 2008).

In the North African context, however, such debates remain nascent. The intersection of Arab, Berber, and Francophone identities, along with Algeria's postcolonial legacy, renders its cultural and linguistic fields uniquely complex (Boukous, 2013). While previous studies have explored the influence of Western media and global youth culture in the Maghreb, little empirical attention has been directed toward the sociolinguistic implications of racialized lexical borrowing, particularly among digital natives for whom American cultural artifacts serve as identity prototypes.

Indeed, the very presence of the N-word in Algerian youth vernaculars may be read as indicative of a broader symbolic colonization, whereby ideologically loaded signs are stripped of their historical anchors and redeployed within semiotically impoverished but affectively resonant frameworks. The phenomenon raises pertinent questions, which we seek to answer through the article:

- Does the Algerian youth conceptualize the N-word in the absence of a domestic history of anti-Black slavery akin to that of the U.S.?
- To what extent does refraining from using it reflect mere cultural mimicry and taboo internalization?

To address these questions, we adopt a methodologically robust and theoretically situated examination of how Algerian youth internalize, reinterpret, and deploy the N-word in everyday discourse. Through a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative methods, it aims to add to and contribute to the existing stock of knowledge in sociolinguistics and address the "poor" literature discussion in relation to the Algerian cultural identity from a global lens.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Race and Language

Discussion about race and language is scarce, especially lately, with few scholars dealing with the area critically. Unfortunately, most useful sources for our study date back to the 1990s. In his 1992 work, Bourdieu posited that every linguistic exchange, regardless of its individual or intangible nature, reflects and perpetuates the prevailing social structure. Language, therefore, transcends mere information transfer, functioning as a mechanism of 'symbolic domination'. This form of domination is not overtly coercive but subtly manifests as exclusion from social institutions and restricted access to resources. The dominant societal group dictates the meaning of terms to differentiate themselves from others; hence, the whites and blacks of America. The former created stigma around the N-word and associated negative connotations with it to marginalize black Americans (Brown, 2019).

An illustrative example, as explored by Celious (2012), is the transformation of the term "bitch." Historically, a derogatory epithet used to oppress women and demean men, it has been re-appropriated by some women as a symbol of independence and power. This act of self-identification, Celious argues, is inherently empowering, as it subverts the term's original stigmatizing power, granting women a sense of agency over their identity. While "bitch" can still be used pejoratively, its meaning is now contingent on the speaker and their intent, a semantic shift akin to that observed with the N-word.

Within the American context, Bourdieu's concept of language as symbolic domination is profoundly exemplified in the realm of race. W.E.B. Du Bois, in his seminal 1903 work *The Souls of Black Folks,* introduced the 'color-line' to illuminate the pervasive role of race and racism in American history and society. This concept brings to light the intersection of race and class as a fundamental mechanism of domination. The color-line was symbolically constructed through the language of White individuals, notably the N-word, which served to delineate perceived inherent differences between themselves (and those they deemed White) and Black people. Consequently, whether used for self-identification or as a racial slur, the N-word has consistently served to maintain the division between Black and non-Black Americans.

Race, as a social construct, has historically been instrumental in categorizing people into distinct groups, forming the bedrock of much of the racial inequality and racism prevalent in society. While overt forms of racism, such as legally sanctioned racial segregation, are no longer acceptable, the language that underpinned these practices persists in contemporary lexicon. The insidious and often "colorblind" nature of modern racism can lead individuals to erroneously believe that racism no longer exists, thereby overlooking or denying ongoing structural racial inequalities. However, Myers and Williamson (2001) demonstrated how racist ideologies are perpetuated in private, everyday conversations. Their study, utilizing participant observation, analyzed "race talk", language that reinforces and legitimizes racist ideas. They discovered that White individuals, who would publicly disavow racist beliefs, would privately articulate them to friends and family. Myers and Williamson concluded that this individual-level language perpetuates a cycle of racist ideology, normalizing and supporting discriminatory practices. Therefore, whether expressed publicly or privately, the N-word and racist language in general remain potent tools in sustaining the symbolic power imbalance within American society (Myers & Williamson, 2001).

2.2 Situating the N-Word in American History

The genesis and evolution of the N-word have solidified its status as a singular "American racial name," due to its possession of remarkable resilience that enables it to persist across profound societal and cultural shifts in race relations. This persistence, as articulated by Asim (2007), allows the term to, at least partially, perpetuate the racial stratification that was once overtly manifest in the United States. While not the sole pejorative directed at groups based on attributes such as race, gender, or sexuality, the N-word demonstrably stands as one of, if not the most, incendiary. Asim (2007) elucidates this by contrasting it with disparaging terms for homosexuals, asserting that "Nigger'…is not one of those words of innocuous meaning that morphed over time into something different and harmful; it has always been tethered to notions of race and racial inferiority" (p.215). Asim (2007) indicates that the appropriation of the N-word by Black Americans commenced in the mid-1800s, subsequently permeating the lexicon of many Americans irrespective of their racial or ethnic heritage.

As illustrated by Fisher's (2008) research, which unequivocally demonstrates the divergent meanings of the N-word when uttered by a White individual and directed at a Black person. it is crucial to note that when a White person uses the N-word in reference to a Black person, it is overwhelmingly more likely to be perceived as degrading by a Black individual, even within the confines of a close personal relationship. Conversely, this same dynamic does not necessarily hold should a Black person use the term to refer to a White person. Fisher's findings therefore show the varied interpretations of the N-word and underline how its meaning is frequently determined by the prevailing social or cultural context of its deployment. The meaning intended by White people, whether said with good intentions or bad ones, leads to a dead end, possibly getting arrested for hate speech.

In 1837, Hosea Easton, a Black minister from Hartford, Connecticut, provided one of the earliest accounts by a Black intellectual on the pervasive use of the word "nigger." (Pryer, 2016). He detailed its omnipresence in the streets of the antebellum North, where White individuals used it to terrorize "colored travelers", a term adopted by elite African Americans with the means and desire to travel. Easton vividly depicted an urban environment where "little urchins of Christian villagers" harassed Black men and women as they went about their business. He observed that White parents and teachers employed the word to both instruct children on the supposed deficiencies of Black people and to emphasize the precariousness and shakiness of their own racial standing.   Additionally, White children were disciplined with tales of "nigger boogeymen" and threatened with a loss of "credit" akin to a "nigger" if they misbehaved. As a result, children internalized these racial lessons, reacting with overt hostility towards Black individuals.

2.3 The Postcolonial Sociolinguistic Situation of Algeria

According to Benrabah (2013), following Algeria's declaration of independence on July 5, 1962, the nationalist leadership confronted a myriad of sociopolitical and cultural challenges. A central concern was the reinstatement of the Arabic language's prominence within the societal framework, culminating in the establishment of the Arabisation Movement. It was a deliberate campaign to reassert Arabic as a cornerstone of national identity (Benrabah, 2013). Thus, the Arabic language became an integral part of the Algerian identity, alongside the Islamic tradition. Although efforts were prevalent in claiming an Arabic identity, demands for formal recognition of the Berber language surfaced during the 1980 protest in Tizi Ouzou

within the Kabyle region. After decades of activism, Tamazight was designated a *national* language in 2002 under President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's administration. Nevertheless, it was not until the constitutional revision of 2016 that Tamazight achieved the status of an *official* language, coexisting alongside Arabic (Aoumeur, 2023). With the recognition of Tamazight, standing on equal grounds with Arabic, the marginalization of the colonial language (French) was apparent. So then, we ask the question: Where is the place of the English language in the Algerian context, namely, a lingua franca of the world? It has been present since 1992 as an integrated subject of study in middle schools and high schools. It was not until 2022 that English earned a position in higher education by its introduction as a medium of instruction and was integrated in primary school; it was a progress (Messeded, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this article, we employ a mixed-methods research design to investigate the sociolinguistic attitudes of Algerian youth: millennials and Gen Z toward the N-word, with a particular focus on the influence of American media and cultural globalization. The decision to adopt a triangulated methodological approach stems from the necessity to capture the multifaceted and context-dependent nature of linguistic behavior, specifically, the use or avoidance of racially charged language in postcolonial, non-Western settings. We integrate three principal data collection methods: (1) structured qualitative interviews, (2) behavioral classroom observation, and (3) a quantitative Likert-scale questionnaire. This triangulation strategy is intended to enhance the internal validity, interpretive depth, and contextual richness of the findings. For the content validity of the questionnaire, we inquired about the opinions of some expert teachers before submitting it online.

3.2 Data Triangulation

Together, the triangulated data sources allowed for a robust epistemological cross-verification. Behavioral observations provided insights into the actual behavior of Gen Z participants, and interviews illuminated subjective rationales with Millennials. While the questionnaire yielded quantifiable data and generalizability. However, two limitations must be addressed before so, first we pinpoint that in the course of this behavioral observation, a total of sixteen students were observed. The limited sample size was primarily attributable to logistical constraints, including the designated observation period, classroom scheduling, and the availability of participants during the specified timeframe. Second, most questionnaire respondents were females; this was because they were more willing to accept taking part in the study as opposed to the male respondents.

3.2.1 Behavioral Observation

The first component consists of a naturalistic behavioral observation conducted with a cohort of Gen Z Algerian EFL students. For us to capture authentic behaviors of our target population, particularly Generation Z, we opted for sixteen EFL students from the department of English (University of 20 August 1955) during the 2024-2025 academic year. They belong to different levels: 5 first-year students, 5 second-year students, and 6 third-year students. Their ages oscillate from 19 to 23 years old. There were 8 female students and 8 male students.

Their consent was taken before administering the materials. The observation was made under controlled settings; they were aware that they were recorded and observed for research purposes. It was, in fact, needed to avoid frustration in case some participants do not like listening to music for personal reasons (Mostly for religious purposes). Participants were

selected purposively based on accessibility and willingness to engage in an English-language reading session. The selected demographic is digitally literate, socio-culturally responsive, and widely exposed to Anglophone media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Netflix, and Twitter/X. At first, the participants were asked to read aloud excerpts from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a text that contains recurrent instances of the N-word. The following is one of the excerpts that was used:

"Niggers is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hm! What you know 'bout witches?" and that nigger was corked up and had to take a back seat. " (Twain, n.d, p.6)

The objective of this observation was to assess spontaneous linguistic behavior in a classroom environment, where no explicit instructions were given regarding how to approach racially sensitive language. Particular attention was paid to non-verbal cues, verbal omissions, substitutions, and peer-influenced behaviors, such as the collective avoidance of the term. These behavioral responses served as unmediated indicators of participants internalized sociolinguistic norms and cultural sensitivities. Secondly, the researcher played music, namely that of Tupac (All Eyez on Me). The research participants were asked to sing along with the lyrics, and the researcher (1) showed them the written lyrics to ease the process. Again, the purpose was to observe their real-life attitude towards the use of the N-word by exposing them to both media and literature examples. The research participants were not aware of the actual purpose of the scrutiny, which is to view how they approach the N-word. The observation was performed on the 19th of February, 2025.

3.2.2 Structured Interview

The second method entailed a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with Algerian millennials aged 29–38. There were 10 participants (5 males and 5 females and they were all graduates from the English departments of the University of Skikda and the University of Constantine 1. The interviews sought to elicit personal reflections on the N-word, probing the extent to which it is employed, rejected, or debated in daily speech, digital communication, musical engagement, and literary consumption. Respondents were also asked to reflect on their own awareness of the term's racial history, emotional resonance, and social acceptability within Algerian contexts. The interviews were conducted through phone calls, which were recorded after obtaining permission. The interviews began from the 14th of April, 2025, to the 12th of July, 2025. It took a long time to find suitable research participants and reserve dates for the interviews in which it suits their personal planning.

3.3.3 Likert-Scale

To complement the qualitative data, a Likert-scale questionnaire was distributed to a broader sample of Algerian youth online through Google Forms. The submission was on the 28th of July, 2025. By the 7th of August, we received 50 answers. We consider the number to be significant. The instrument comprised items designed to measure attitudinal variables such as: frequency of exposure to the N-word, perceived offensiveness, willingness to use the term in specific contexts (e.g., singing, texting, reading), and the perceived influence of American media. Respondents rated their agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale. The inclusion of quantitative metrics enabled reinforcing the reliability of findings obtained through the other two qualitative instruments.

4. Results

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis of the Observation

When performing the observation of the Gen Z sample, several odd and strange behaviors were noticed; mostly paralinguistic and linguistic ones. First, we report reluctance among the majority of participants (14 out of 16 participants) to vocalize the N-word during oral reading; this transcends mere hesitation; it manifests as a deliberate and complicated pattern of avoidance, indicative of a profound socio-pragmatic awareness. The avoidance was met with hesitation that seemed to reflect some fear of judgment.

This avoidance was not monolithic in its expression but rather displayed a nuanced repertoire of behaviors: from the outright skipped articulation and swift verbal substitutions to the more subtle manifestations of hesitant pauses and a gamut of non-verbal cues, including nervous laughter and fleeting, sidelong glances. These acts, far from being random, presented as consistently applied and contextually significant, stressing a basic intentionality. Unlike when reading passages that did not include the N-word, in which they performed as they normally do, without these aforementioned odd behaviors. This suggests and confirms that the odd behavior was indeed due to spotting the word in the texts.

The explicit query from one participant regarding the possibility of bypassing the term altogether is a compelling testament to the conscious agency informing this avoidance, moving it beyond unconscious inhibition into the realm of deliberate choice. The initial participant's decision to actively circumvent the contentious lexeme appears to have catalyzed a cascade effect among subsequent readers. This emergent collective behavior suggests the rapid representation of a perceived normative response, wherein later participants seemed to conform to an unspoken expectation.

This phenomenon points to a shared socio-pragmatic understanding, meticulously cultivated and reinforced through ceaseless exposure to globalized cultural discourses concerning linguistic propriety. Such a dynamic stresses the potent influence of group dynamics and the subtle, yet prevailing, shaping of individual linguistic comportment by perceived communal expectations.

Therefore, it is constantly reported through the observation: the hesitation, the lowered tone when uttering the N-word or complete avoidance, the shyness and nervousness surrounding the lexical term, has shown us a simple demonstration of how a Western taboo turned to be an Algerian one. Cultural mimicry of a foreign taboo is present and alive, affecting the attitude of the sample. Thus, through the observation, we report linguistic and paralinguistic internalization of the tabooed term.

4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis of the Interview

Influenced by Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis framework, we coded various patterns of analysis to dissect the actual responses of the research participants (Algerian Millennials). In such a case, we focused on the following themes:

4.2.1 General Attitudes Towards the N-word: A Consensus of Discomfort and Historical Acknowledgement

We report that most respondents expressed discomfort with the word, which means they acknowledge its offensive history and its inappropriateness in modern discourse. This suggests a widespread and almost normative rejection of the N-word among Algerian Millennials. The anticipated "discomfort" is not merely an aesthetic preference but is

explicitly linked to an "offensive history," indicating an awareness of the term's profound roots in racial subjugation and violence. The acknowledgement of its "inappropriateness in modern discourse" further underscores a collective understanding that the word transgresses contemporary norms of respectful and inclusive communication. This anticipated consensus points to a successful transnational diffusion of ethical linguistic standards, wherein the historical weight of the N-word is recognized and respected even in contexts far removed from its primary historical origins. It implies that for this demographic, the word is not simply archaic, but actively problematic, resonating with a globalized moral lexicon.

4.2.3 Frequency of Use in Daily Speech

We found that the majority said no when asked about the use of the N-word, citing respect for cultural sensitivities and the word's offensive nature. With this, we report that mere rejection of using the N-word in daily speech speaks volumes about the internalized ethical frameworks of this cohort. The rationale provided "respect for cultural sensitivities," and the words "offensive nature" showed us a conscious and deliberate decision-making process. This avoidance is not merely a passive omission but an active act of self-censorship, driven by an ethical imperative. It implies that Algerian Millennials, despite potentially encountering the word in global media, consciously choose to exclude it from their active lexicon. This abstention signifies a recognition of the word's capacity to inflict harm and a commitment to avoid perpetuating such harm, even within informal conversational contexts. This reflects a sophisticated understanding of language as a tool capable of both communication and offense.

4.2.4 Use in Texts and Social Media

When asked about the use of the N-word in texts and social media in general, the majority stated that: "Most would likely avoid it, even when quoting someone else, to avoid perpetuating harm." So, what does this indicate? We suppose that this extends the ethical avoidance from spoken language to digital communication, a domain often characterized by greater informality and perceived anonymity. The anticipated reluctance to use the N-word, even in a "quoted context," is particularly revealing. This informs to us that there is an understanding that merely reproducing the word, regardless of intent, can contribute to its normalization or re-traumatization of those affected by its history. The phrase "to avoid perpetuating harm" is key, indicating a proactive stance against contributing to systems of oppression or pain, even inadvertently.

4.2.5 Reaction to N-word in Music

The majority reported that "They might choose to skip the word or mumble it". The anticipated choice to "skip the word or mumble it" demonstrates a surprising choice, given that Algerian society and history do not really concern themselves with the word. However, this shows that they show appreciation of the music without endorsing or actively vocalizing a term deemed offensive. This behavior signifies an "awareness of its sensitivity," indicating that the aesthetic pleasure derived from the music does not override a deeper moral consciousness. This selective engagement implies a conscious act of linguistic filtering, where the individual maintains agency over their own vocalization, refusing to become an uncritical conduit for a problematic term, even within a recreational setting.

4.2.6 Use in Reading

Most answers suggest that they most likely skip the N-word or substitute it with a less offensive term. We also noticed that the observation participants did the same thing. So, we find the act of "skipping it or substituting it with a less offensive term" when reading aloud reflects a deliberate influence from the American culture and media. This suggests that for Algerian Millennials, the act of vocalizing a word, even when embedded within a literary text, carries either a moral weight or the internalization of Western thoughts. Therefore, this implies that the historical and social implications of the word are so potent that they override the convention of verbatim recitation. This behavior reveals a conscious choice to prioritize some form of consideration over strict adherence to textual fidelity.

4.2.7 The Minority's Angle of Discussion

As far as those who did not exhibit similar responses to the previously coded themes are concerned, they seemed to favor the use of the word for various reasons. Participant 7's statement, "Honestly, I say it when I rap along to songs. It's not about race, it's just part of the lyrics... it feels cool," it indicates a prevalent phenomenon of linguistic assimilation driven by cultural consumption. This statement suggests that for this individual, the word has been largely decoupled from its historical and racialized connotations and recontextualized within the aesthetic framework of musical performance. We find the phrase "it's not about race" indicates a perceived neutralization of the term's inherent racial charge, a belief that its integration into song lyrics transforms it into a mere phonetic component devoid of its derogatory power. As for their motivation, "it feels cool" points towards a desire for cultural alignment or emulation, where the adoption of the lexicon of a particular musical genre, often hip-hop, where the N-word has been re-appropriated by Black artists (Tupac as an example), is seen as a marker of coolness or authenticity within that cultural sphere. This reflects a form of mimetic engagement, where linguistic patterns are adopted not for their semantic depth but for their associative value within a desired cultural milieu.

4.3 Quantitative Descriptive Analysis

In our small Likert scale, we made sure to simply submit relevant statements. First, we began by inquiring about factual data, including age and gender. Subsequently, we began to inquire about important details following a harmonious plan. It is crucial to note that some statements' figures were merged under one title to facilitate the analysis and synthesis through the use of AI tools. The figures obtained through Google Forms are then merged through the latter. The justification in this regard is to simply facilitate the synthesis and analysis by showcasing how relevant the statements are to each other by visual demonstration.

4.3.1 Age and Gender

Figure 1

*The Gender and the Age of the Respondents*
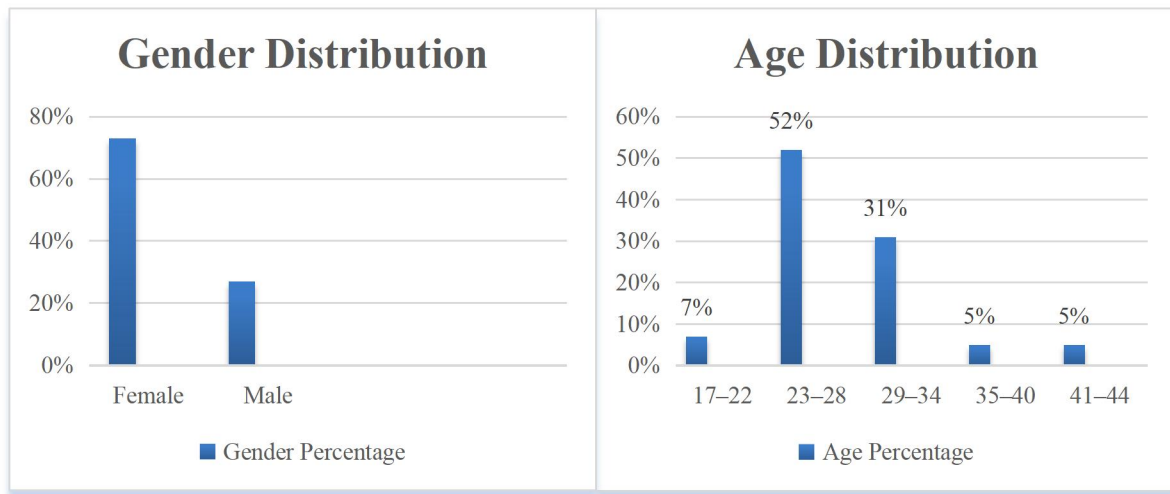
What we can observe is that the female respondents exceeded the male ones, as we report having (Females 74%), while the male respondents constituted only 26%. We do not consider the difference problematic by nature; however, it shows that we obtained valuable data on females more than we did with males. Future studies should account for this difference to avoid gender bias. As far as age is concerned, we notice that our sample's leading percentage is 52% for the age frame of 23-28 years old. Therefore, Gen Z is the most prevalent age group in answering this scale.

4.3.2 The Frequency of the N-word's Encounter on social media and Music and the Perceived Influence of American Culture

Figure 2

The Frequency of the N-word's Encounter on social media and Music and the Perceived Influence of American Culture
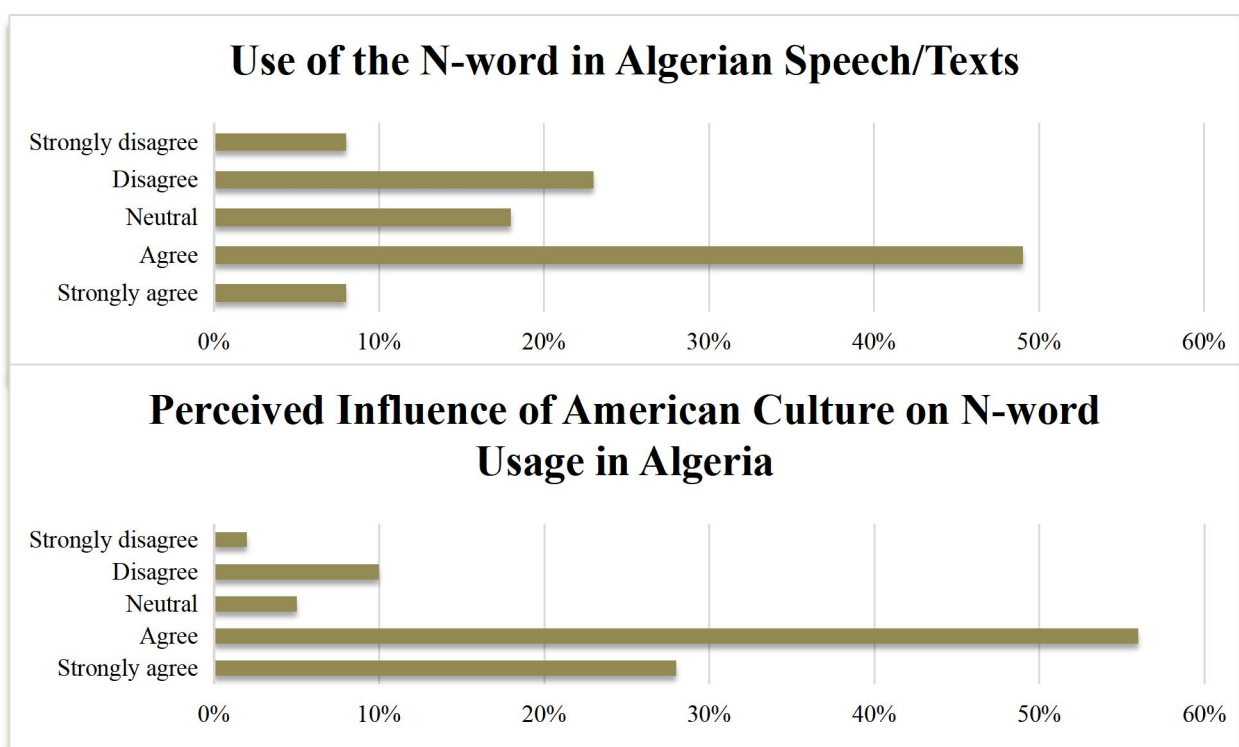
The results of Figure 2 indicate a notable awareness of the N-word's presence in Algerian linguistic contexts, specifically on social media and music. We find that a significant majority of respondents either "Agree" or "Strongly agree" with encountering the N-word, which suggests that the N-word is not an unknown term within these platforms in Algeria. Conversely, a smaller proportion of the sample "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree," indicating less frequent or no personal encounter with the term. As for the second part of the figure, we found that the data reveal a strong consensus among respondents regarding the role of American culture in the N-word's usage within Algeria. Similar to the previous finding, the visual evidence suggests that a substantial majority of the surveyed population "Agree" or "Strongly agree" that American culture influences the adoption and use of the N-word in Algeria. This indicates a perceived direct link between exposure to American cultural products (such as music and social media trends) and the presence of the N-word in the local context. A comparatively smaller segment of the respondents expressed "Neutrality," "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," implying that the perceived influence of American culture is a widely accepted notion among the surveyed group.

4.3.3 The Patterns of Use
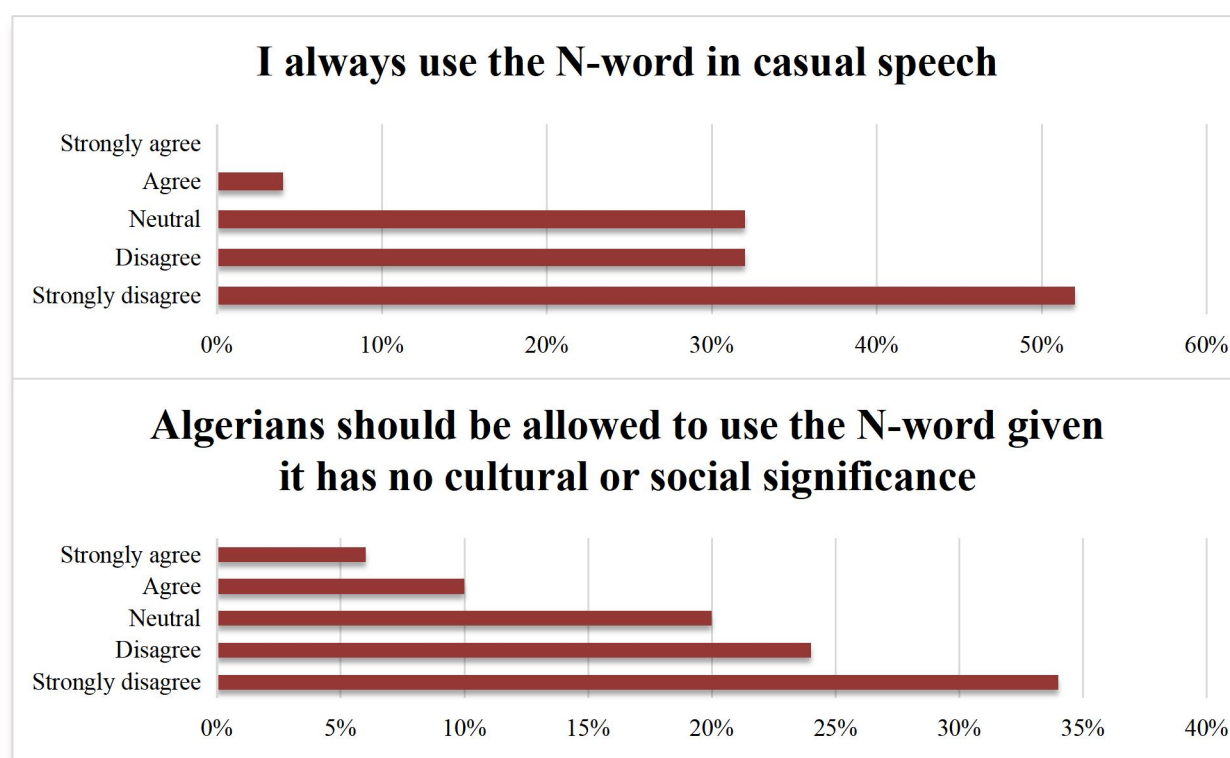
Figure 3

The use of the N-word

Figure 3 offered us insights into the personal usage of the N-word and its perceived social and cultural relevance within the Algerian context. On the statement "I always use the N-word in casual speech", we found the data overwhelmingly indicating a strong disinclination among respondents to use the N-word in casual speech. More than 50% of respondents either "Strongly disagree" or "Disagree" (Almost 30%) with the statement. This implies a widespread avoidance of the term in everyday communication within the surveyed group. Only a very small minority (Less than 10%) claim to "Agree" with using it, and

virtually no one "Strongly agrees." This finding is significant as it suggests that despite the perceived encounter of the N-word in media (As discussed in the previous figure), its active personal usage in casual conversation is low. This could imply a recognition of its controversial nature or a general disassociation from the word in personal communication, even if aware of its presence in external contexts.

On the statement "Algerians should be allowed to use the N-word given the fact that this word has no cultural or social significance", this statement explores a critical aspect for our article: the perceived relevance of the N-word within Algerian culture. The responses here are more varied than for personal usage, but still lean towards disagreement. A combined 58% of respondents "Strongly disagree" (34%) or "Disagree" (24%) that Algerians should be allowed to use the word based on a lack of cultural or social significance. This indicates that a majority of the surveyed population does perceive the N-word as having some form of cultural or social significance (likely negative or problematic) even within the Algerian context, thus justifying its restriction. However, a notable minority holds a different view. 10% of them opted for "agree" or "Strongly agree" (6%) with the statement, suggesting that for this segment, the N-word might indeed be considered devoid of the historical and social weight it carries in other contexts (e.g., African American communities). Furthermore, (20%) remain "Neutral," indicating uncertainty or ambivalence about the word's local significance and permissibility. This divergence in opinion shows us a potential debate or differing understandings of the word's impact when detached from its original cultural roots in our respective Algerian societies.

4.3.4 Beliefs About the N-Word

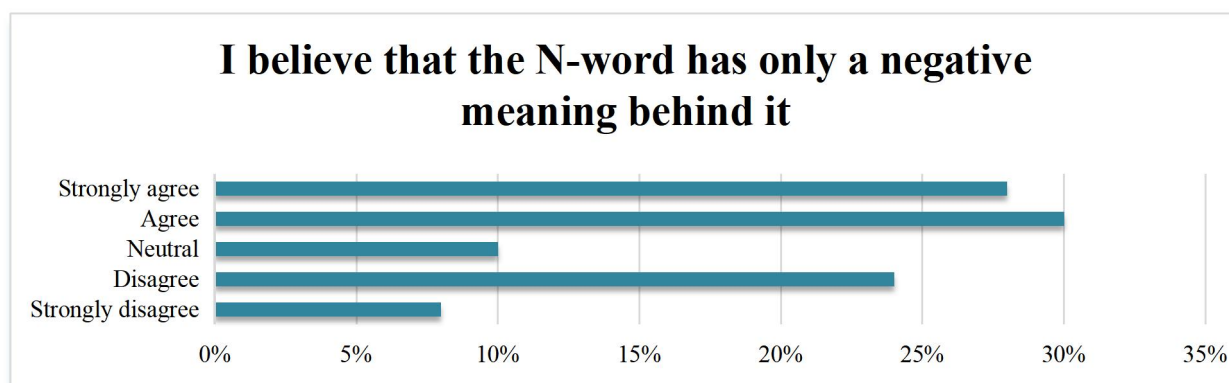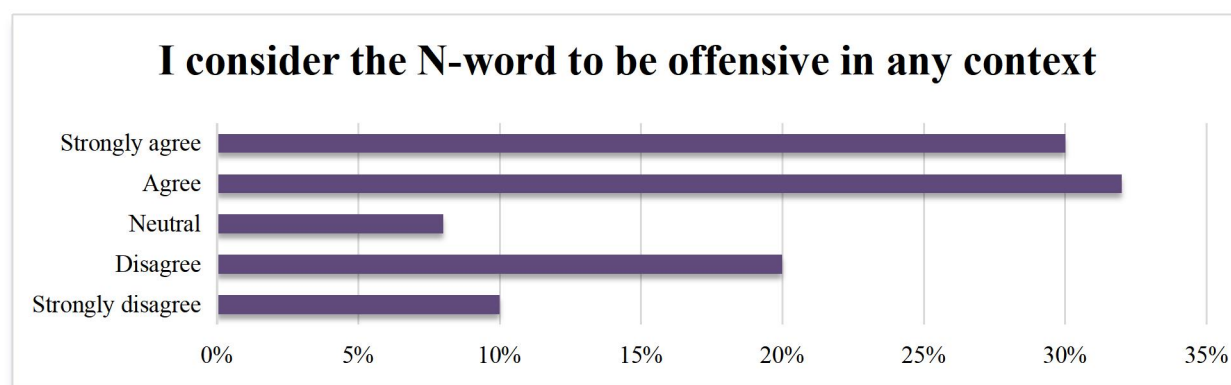**Figure 4**

Beliefs Surrounding the N-Word

Figure 4, a bar chart based on 50 responses, illustrates varying beliefs regarding whether "the N-word has only a negative meaning." While most of the respondents either "Agree" or "Strongly agree" that the word is exclusively negative, with a substantial proportion (25% to 30%) to which implies a perceived wider range of contexts for its use. Additionally, (10%) remained "Neutral." This distribution discloses a significant division in opinion, with a majority acknowledging the word's inherent and intrinsic negativity, but a notable minority holding a more complex view.

Figure 5

The Offensiveness of the N-word in Various Contexts

When compared to Figure 4 (which explored if the N-word only has a negative meaning), Figure 5 directly addresses its offensiveness. While Figure 4 showed a more divided opinion on the solely negative meaning, Figure 5 demonstrates a much clearer majority perceiving the word as offensive in all contexts. This suggests that even if some might debate whether it only has a negative meaning, a large majority still finds it offensive across the board. The results show us that there is a sensitivity surrounding the N-word and the prevailing perception of its offensive nature.

4.3.6 The Use of the N-Word in Non-American African Contexts

Figure 6

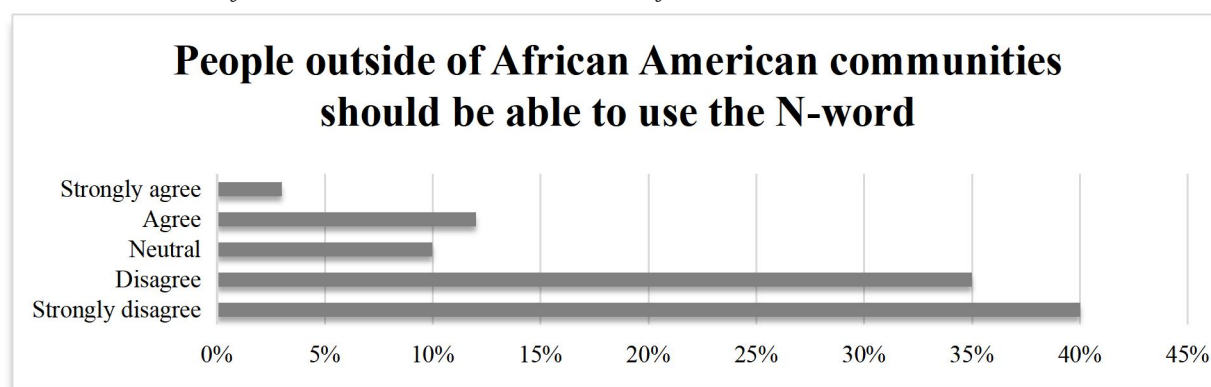*The Use of the N-word outside American-African Communities*

Figure 6 demonstrates a stark division concerning the use of the N-word outside African American communities. Approximately (37-41%) of respondents "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree" that individuals outside these communities should be able to use the word, emphasizing a view of restricted usage due to its historical context. Conversely, a percentage (Less than 5% to almost 13%) "Agree" or "Strongly agree" with its use by those outside the community, potentially rooted in beliefs about free speech or contextual interpretation. A small (10%) remained neutral. This close split stresses the contentious debate surrounding linguistic ownership, cultural sensitivity, and the boundaries of expression for a historically charged term, particularly when considered alongside Figure 5's strong consensus on the word's general offensiveness.

4.3.7 Comprehension of the Racial Implications of the N-word

Figure 7

Understanding the racial implications of the N-word

Algerian youth use the N-word without understanding its racial implications from an international scope
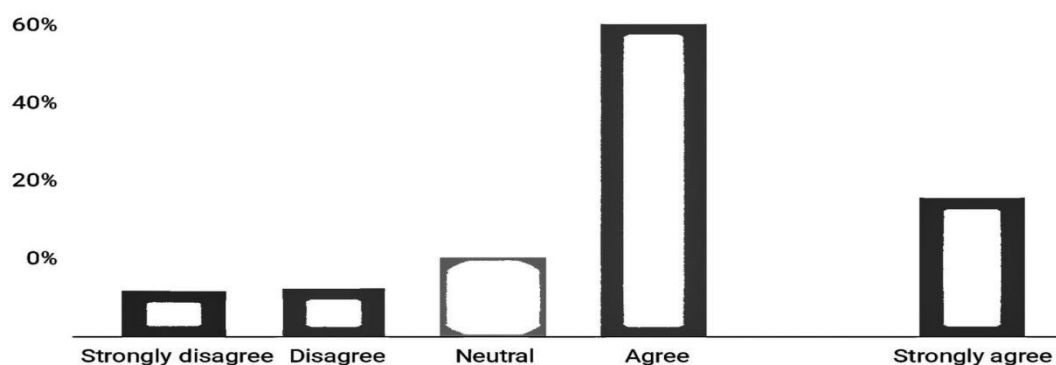
50 responses

Figure 7 overwhelmingly indicates that Algerian youth use the N-word without understanding its international racial implications. A striking 68% of respondents agree and 24% strongly agree with this sentiment, revealing a noteworthy perceived gap in awareness regarding the word's historical weight and global derogatory power. Minimal percentages for neutral and disagreement categories further accentuate this near-unanimous concern, stressing a potential need for greater education among Algerian youth.

4.3.8 The N-Word in Social Media

Figure 8

The N-word in social media and music

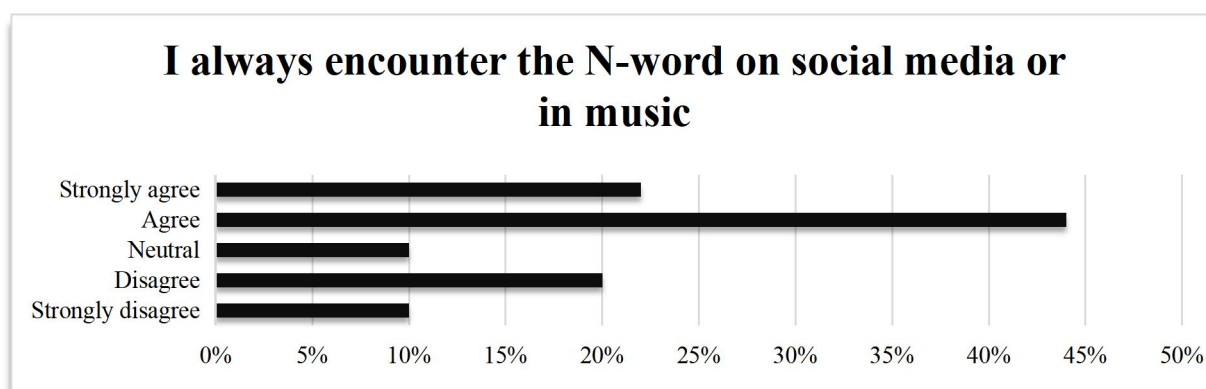I always encounter the N-word on social media or in music

Figure 8 illustrates that a significant majority of respondents, 66% (44% Agree and 22% Strongly Agree), report consistently encountering the N-word on social media or in music. In contrast, only 30% (20% Disagree and 10% Strongly Disagree) do not, while 10% remain neutral. This pinpoints a pervasive issue of media exposure to this racial slur within digital and musical contexts among the surveyed sample.

5. Discussion

By adopting a triangulated methodological approach, our article sought to answer two key questions. First, the findings reveal that while Algerian youth do not share the U.S. historical experience of anti-Black slavery, they nonetheless display a strong awareness of the N-word's offensive and racially charged nature. This awareness stems largely from exposure to American media and online content, which has embedded global ethical norms into their linguistic behaviour. Thus, even in the absence of local historical referents, Algerian youth demonstrate a conceptual understanding of the term's weight. Second, the widespread refraining from using the N-word reflects both cultural mimicry and a deeper internalization of Western taboos. The deliberate avoidance seen in reading, speaking, texting, and listening contexts is not simply imitative behaviour. Rather, it appears to be the product of a learned moral code shaped by transnational digital culture.

This moral deportment is reinforced by collective peer behaviour and social expectations, particularly among Gen Z, who are more immersed in global discourses about race and identity. Furthermore, the appropriation and in many cases, rejection of the N-word among Algerian youth speaks volumes about the shifting dynamics of postcolonial Algerian identity. Their linguistic choices illustrate how American cultural products serve as reference points for identity formation, even in Algeria, a non-Western society. This creates a paradoxical situation in which Algerian youth assert modernity and global belonging by adopting (or consciously rejecting) foreign cultural signifiers. By doing so, they are facing a complex identity space that is neither wholly indigenous nor fully global. From a sociolinguistic perspective, these findings show that cultural mimicry plays a key role in how Algerian youth adopt and internalize foreign taboos.

The decision to avoid the N-word is not based on Algeria's own history but on values and moral rules learned from global media, music, and online content, especially from the United States. This is more than simple copying; it shows that the taboo has become part of their own moral and social code. Over time, the N-word has gained a fixed meaning as a word that should not be used, and this meaning is kept alive by social pressure and group expectations. Therefore, not only do we develop cultural mimicry of social behaviours, but now it extends to include even foreign taboos. Does this mean Algerian youth is melting and adapting to global cultural changes and consequently abandoning their own? Or maybe not fully abandoning but concurrently mixing both (Their own culture, including taboos, with foreign and Western ones).

Now, then, we ask a serious question: Is that a positive or negative consequence for the Algerian youth? This is, in fact, a salient aspect to explore, in which researchers scrutinize how continuous exposure to global media influences the long-term adoption of foreign linguistic taboos among Algerian youth. This would involve examining whether the avoidance of such terms remains consistent over time, whether it weakens or strengthens with changing media trends, and how shifts in online discourse affect young people's linguistic choices. By focusing on this single dimension, future research could provide us with a profound knowledge of how moral values embedded in global culture are not only transmitted but also maintained within local speech communities, such as Algeria. Other studies should also explore other North African countries, such as Tunisia and Egypt.

6. Conclusion

The article reveals that cultural and media influences on the perception of the N word are not generation-specific, but rather affect Millennials and Gen Z similarly, leading to a shared ethical stance and avoidance of the word. A word that has no place or history in the Algerian context, yet somehow became a taboo among the youth. Therefore, cultural mimicry of the Western world extends to reshape postcolonial Algeria and, in this day and age, it involves even foreign taboos, a serious matter that presents a sociolinguistic dilemma. Ergo, we emphasize the urgency of fostering critical dialogue around postcolonial identity, media influence, and the sociolinguistic consequences of globalization in non-Western contexts, especially on younger generations.

References

Alim, H.S., Ibrahim, A., & Pennycook, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Global linguistic flows: Hip hop cultures, youth identities, and the politics of language*. Routledge

Aoumeur, H. (2023). Tamazight in the Algerian schools: Decisions and responses. In *Embracing change: Emancipating the landscape of research in linguistics, language and literature. Proceedings of International Conference of Research on Language Education (I-RoLE 2023), 13–14 March, 2023, Noble Resort Hotel Melaka, Malaysia* https://doi.org/10.15405/epes.23097.9

Asim, J. (2007). *The N word: Who can say it, who shouldn't, and why*. Houghton Mifflin.

Benrabah, M. (2013). *Language conflict in Algeria: From colonialism to post-independence*. Multilingual Matters.

Boukous, A. (2013). Revitalisation de l'amazighe : enjeux et stratégies. *Langage Et Société*, *143*(1), 9–26. https://doi.org/10.3917/ls.143.0009

Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Language and symbolic power*. Polity Press. https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Bourdieu_Pierre_Language_and_Symbolic_Power_1991.pdf

Brown, A. (2019). African American enslavement, Speech Act Theory, and the law. *Journal of African American Studies, 23*(3), 162–177. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-019-09431-z

Celious, A. K. (2012). *How "Bitch" became a good thing-or, at least not that bad*. Perspectives. (90-96). Department of Sociology, University of Michigan. https://prba.isr.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/celious.pdf

Cutler, C. (2008). "Keepin' it real": White Hip-Hoppers' discourses of language, race, and authenticity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 13*(2), 211–233. https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2003.13.2.211

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of black folk*. Oxford University Press.

Fisher, E. J. (2008). The N-Word: Reducing verbal pollution in schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies Issues and Ideas*, *81*(6), 278–281. https://doi.org/10.3200/tchs.81.6.278-281

Kennedy, R. (2003). Nigger: *The strange career of a troublesome word*. Vintage

Makhlouf, A., Andersen, I., & Anderson, R. (2024). Global warming's impacts and the role of education in shaping social responsiveness. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society (JSLCS)*, *7*(3), 159–168.

Messeded, M (2023). English as a medium of instruction in Algerian higher education: Lecturers' attitudes towards learning english in Blida 2 university. *Afak for Sciences Journal*, *8*(5), p. 35– 49.-

Myers, K., Williamson, P. (2001). Race talk: The perpetuation of racism through private discourse. *Race & Society, 4*(1), 3–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-9524(02)00032-3

Pryer, E., S. (2016). The Etymology of nigger: Resistance, language, and the politics of reedom in the Antebellum North. *Journal of the Early Republic, 36*(2), 203–245. https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2016.0028

Rahman, J. (2007). An ay for an ah: Language of survival in African American. *American Speech*, *82*(1), 65–96. https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-2007-003

Rais Ali, I., & Medjahed, Y. (2024). Media and history Dialectical relationship between media and history, documenting the historical memory with new visions in the frame of the information society. *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society (JSLCS)*, *7*(1), 126–142.

Twain, M. (1884). *The adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Charles L. Webster and Company.