

## AN ENDANGERED ZENATI DIALECT: EXPLORING THE USE OF SOME SURVIVING LEXICAL WORDS AMONG 'BENI ZIDAZ' OLD PEOPLE IN 'BENI SNOUS'

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper endeavours to review, through a preliminary investigation in the region of 'Beni Snous', and exactly in a village called 'Beni Zidaz', some surviving Berber (Zenati) lexical words that are up to now preserved in the vocabulary bulk of a limited number of old people. It fundamentally seeks to uncover the nature of those words that are articulated side by side with the Arabic dialect of this category of people, and it further explores the contexts where they are uttered and with whom they are used. The data collected have been mainly interpreted qualitatively. After the analysis, this Zenati variety has been identified as a 'Severely Endangered Language' that is solely used by few aged speakers who are all members of the grandparent generation and up.

**Keywords:** 'Beni Zidaz' community, Endangered Language, 'Tamazight', Surviving lexical words.

### INTRODUCTION

Considering the Berbers as the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa in general, their different linguistic varieties, from the Afro-asiatic language family, persisted and are still spoken throughout many regions in spite of their long co-existence with the Arabic varieties of *Arab Fatihins* (especially *Banu Hilal*), during the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, who implanted many urban and bedouin Arabic dialects in the Maghrebi countries in general. (Millon C. (1937), Cantineau J. (1938-1939-1940), and Marçais Ph. (1960)) For instance, the Algerian Berber language, with its distinct dialects, is still used in many regions along the Algerian territory. The major Berber groups are the 'Kabylia' mountains east of Algiers, the 'Chaouia' of the Aures south of Constantine, and in many scattered regions in the southern part of the country, including 'Mزاب' and 'Touareg'...etc. In fact, these Berber varieties have been maintained in those Algerian regions despite the widespread arabization and the reinforcement of its policies that have been launched right after the independence.

Yet, in some mountainous areas such as 'Beni Snous'; an agricultural region that is situated in the western part of Tlemcen, where geo-demographic unrest particularly maintains the local dialects in use unstable, only few old speakers speak a Berber variety in specific contexts; a fact that represents the core of this sociolinguistic investigation and will be revealed in the details below.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Indeed, the current paper attempts to review, through a preliminary investigation in this region, and exactly in a village called 'Beni Zidaz', which is situated some kilometers south

'Beni Snous', some surviving Berber (Zenati) lexical words that are up to now preserved in the vocabulary bulk of a limited number of old people. It also seeks to unveil the nature of those words that are articulated side by side with the Arabic dialects of this old category of people, and it further explores the settings where they are uttered and with whom they are used. In doing so, the present investigation aims fundamentally at assembling the available oral data for constituting a Berber dictionary of such an 'Endangered' Tamazight of 'Beni Snous' as an effort to preserve its linguistic heritage which involves, reflects and perpetuates the socio-historical realities, and the cultural patrimony of this society. In reality, the anthro-linguist Edmond Destaing was the pioneer in studying the Berber dialects of Beni Snous in 1907 when he wrote a book entitled: *Etude sur le dialecte Berbère des Beni Snous* in which he studied both the phonology and the morphology of these varieties in comparison with other Algerian Berber dialects, and another dictionary exposing its rich Zenati vocabulary bulk, labelled: *Dictionnaire Français-Berbère (Dialecte des Beni Snous)* in 1914.

But, before exhibiting the results of the present study, a geo-historical overview is offered at first to better localize the speech community under investigation. Then, some key-concepts such as: an endangered language, degrees and levels of endangerment, which are thought to be relevant to this sociolinguistic topic, are roughly exposed, besides a detailed research design is presented for showing the research tools which were opted for to carry out this study. Furthermore, the informants who participated in conducting the interviews are also described.

### **'BENI SNOUS': A GEO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

'Beni Snous', according to the colonial anthropologist Canal, J. (1891), was a confederation of three parts: 'El-Kaf', 'El-Azails', and 'Khemis'.

- ❖ 'El-Kaf' contains the village of 'El-Kaf' itself and eight "douars". The majority of its inhabitants were Arabs living in tents.
- ❖ 'El-Azails' comprising four villages: 'Zahra', 'Tafessra', 'Tleta', and 'Beni Bahdel'.
- ❖ 'Khemis' contains fourteen villages such as, 'Ouled Hammou', 'Khemis', 'Beni Zidaz', 'Dar Ayyad', 'Ouled Bouchamma', 'Beni Achir', 'Ouled Zfizef', 'Ouled Moussa', 'Ouled Arbi', 'Ziahira', 'Aghraouane', 'Ouled Chayeb', 'Ouled Ali' and *douar* 'Edwebra', in addition to 'Mazzer' that is isolated from 'Khemis', and forms itself a village comprising two *douars*: 'Zawiat Sidi Ahmed' and 'Zawiat Ouled Ben Ammar'.

The confederation of 'Beni Snous' occupies a large piece of the mountains of 'Tafna Valley' (*Oued Tafna*) in addition to the valley of 'Khemis' (*Oued El-Khamis*) which wells from the 'Mchamich' mountains in the Moroccan frontiers. It is bordered by 'Beni Boussaïd' in the West, 'Beni Hédial' in the North, 'Sebdou' and 'Sidi Djilali' in the East, and the 'Mchamich' mountains along the Moroccan border in the South-West.

As this paper is interested in 'Beni Snous' society in particular, accurate information are to be presented about the history of this region. One may raise the following question: Were its inhabitants Arabs, Berbers or of other races?

During tackling the present research, we have found some papers which talked about the Tlemcenian families in general, and the works of some sociologists who dealt with few historical facts about the region of 'Beni Snous' in particular. In addition, other colonial

anthropologists, especially Edmond Destaing, whose works were mainly linguistic, have been also consulted as it has already been stated. The anthropologist Canal, J. (1890:390-405) stated that 'Beni Snous' dwellers are Berbers; members of a Zenati tribe, related to their land, and cannot accept easily any foreign interference in their lives. According to Edmond Destaing (1907: XXIII), this region was occupied by the Dryites (hommes de chênes), in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, from a Berber tribe called: 'Beni Habib'. The traces which still perpetuate the existence of this tribe are not rare; they are still embodied as souvenirs in this area's legends. Canal, J. (1890: 64)

As a matter of fact, the Berber inhabitants of 'Beni Habib' were converted to Islam thanks to Mouley Idris. But later, these have been cursed by Sidi Ouariach, and left to Morocco. E. Destaing (ibid) Then, some tribes coming from Figuig have established in their lands near the region of 'Khemis'. Destaing (1907: ibid)

Destaing (1907: XXIV) asserted that the Arab geographers have never mentioned the *Beni Snoussi*. Léon l'africain and Marmol have only written some details about 'Tafna Valley' and 'Tafessera'. Yet, Ibn Khaldoun's historical book: *El ibar* just states that the tribe of 'Beni Snous' belongs to a Zenati tribe called: '*Banu Koumia*'; the mother tribe of Abd El-Moumen Ben Ali, the real founder of Ed-dawla El-Mowahhidia, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In that century and after the departure of '*Banu Koumia*' to Morocco, 'Beni Snous' got in touch, later, with the family of Yaghmoracen during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Bell, A. translated by Hamdaoui, M.M. (2000:51-102)

In the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, seizing the decline of the Abdelouadites, Obeid Allah, from the Malikian tribe, established first in the Tell, in the area stretching from Tlemcen to Ouadjda, and forced the sultan to grant them Ouadjda, Nedromah, the Beni Izenacen, Mediouna, and Beni Snous, in addition to the taxes that these regions got used to pay. René Basset (1902: 14-15)

In 955 heg.; (1548-1549), when Sidi Abderrahmane El Yaaquoubi tried to form a league against the Christians, the Cheikhs of 'Beni Snous' signed the act of union with those of the Angads, the Traras and the Madgharah. René Basset (1902: 57) In 1061 heg.; (1691), the Moroccan chief of the second dynasty of *Chorfas*, Mouley Mohammed Echerif, after devastating the territory of Beni Izenacen submitted to Beni Snoussi and Ouled Zekri. René Basset (1902: 16) Their second invasion, which took place in 1089 heg.; (1678), was conducted by Mouley Ismail who invaded the whole western part and reached what is known nowadays as Chlef.

The Turkish era knew frequent famines, and the Turkish themselves had left very bad souvenirs in 'Beni Snous'; as its inhabitants were obliged to pay to "Kaïd Labeled" a tribute of sixteen horses and a considerable quantity of beautiful weaved carpets. Walsin Esterhazy (1840:271)

During the French occupation and starting from 1842, the majority of 'Beni Snous' villages were under the French authority. Its inhabitants like all Algerians resisted against the French colonizer and they have also participated in the revolution till independence.

Nowadays, this area occupies a surface of 3700 hectares and comprises 20 villages scattered on the foot of its mountains. 'Khemis' and 'El Fahs' represent the most important villages which comprise all administrative, socio-economic and cultural institutions which are

common places where ‘Beni Snous’ dwellers meet for daily life practices. ‘Beni Zidaz’, which is the speech community where this study took place, is located some kilometers far from ‘Khemis’.

## DEGREES/ LEVELS OF ENDANGERMENT

Broadly speaking, an Endangered Language is a language or a linguistic variety that is at risk of falling out of use as its speakers die out or shift to speaking another language. The level of endangerment of the threatened languages is measured in different ways throughout the world and as an example; the following table reviews the degree of endangerment and the speaker population focusing on the age/generation, domain of use, and the number of individuals speaking any endangered language:

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
Safe	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
Unsafe	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
Definitely endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
Severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
Critically endangered	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
Extinct	0	There exists no speaker.

Table 1/ Levels of Endangerment

(Table adapted from: Moseley, Christopher, ed. (2010). *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Paris: UNESCO Publishing)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To carry out this study, some interviews have been conducted with some informants to check the availability and retention of Tamazight words in their vocabulary bulk.

### Description of the Informants

On the whole, most of the data were collected in the participants' homes where they felt comfortable to respond to the questions being raised. The informants who took part in this research were 5 participants; 3 males and 2 females who are originally from ‘Beni Zidaz’ (hereafter B.Z), and who spent all their lives in this area. Their age ranges from 60 to 90 years old. These informants speak both dialectal Arabic and a Tamazight variety; however, this latter is spoken with varied degrees of proficiency in particular settings and with particular speakers as their speeches demonstrate. Female speakers spent their whole lives as housewives who master many hand crafts. Male informants, on the other hand, were all land labourers.

## Basic Data Gathering Instruments: Interviews and Tape-recordings

Due to the fact that this category of people is illiterate, the researchers have opted for an interview that has been conducted in the Arabic dialectal variety to avoid any misunderstanding and to facilitate the task of assembling the necessary oral data for undertaking this study. These interviews were at the same time recorded so that they could not miss any Berber word uttered by those old informants. Later, the obtained data were transcribed and classified according to their nature, then, represented in the form of tables as it will be shown in the analysis.

### The Structure of the Interview

For the sake of gathering the data, the researchers employed a semi-structured interview accompanied with an interview guide prepared, which was essentially an informal grouping of words and questions that could be asked in different ways for the five participants. The informants were asked whether they still use or remember a set of words which were mainly about every day greetings, kitchen utensils, names of colours, animals, food (vegetables and fruits...), clothes, and days of the week, in addition to other words which were provided spontaneously by informants during the interview.

## DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

After recording the interviews, the whole oral data have been attentively listened to and transcribed phonetically, then finally, classified according to the nature of each lexical element. The following section exposes the analysis of the data collected:

### Speaking B.Z Tamazight: With Whom? and Where?

The analysis of the recorded data has shown that all informants speak Tamazight in their village, but only with old people (both men and women); either their parents or their grandparents, who are the only fluent speakers in this Zenati variety which is mostly mixed with their region's dialectal Arabic. Moreover, they also assert that the young generation neither speaks it nor understands the old persons when addressing to them, i.e., they solely interact in their Arabic local dialect. Therefore, the obtained data reveal that the Berber speech spoken in B.Z nowadays is on the way of falling out of use at an accelerating rate as it is spoken, just in an increasingly reduced contexts, among groups of aged people whose Tamazight variety ceased to be passed on to their children. Thus, there are no novel speakers; adults or children. Accordingly, one may safely state that this dialect is classified as a '*Severely Endangered*' Language since it is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, but they do not speak it to children or among themselves.

As the village of B.Z is a mountainous region, all informants maintain some names of food and kitchen utensils, few names of clothes and many names of domestic tools and words related to agriculture and land in general.

### Names Related to Agriculture and Commerce

The following table gathers all words that the researcher could record during the interviews and what is remarkable that those informants generally retain words that have a tight

relationship with agriculture, their life style, and the utensils they are constantly using and which characterize their mode of life.

Dialectal Arabic Gloss	B.Z Tamazight	English Gloss
[zraʔ]	[tɪmzɛ:n]	“Barley”
[gamħ]	[ɪrdan]	“Wheat”
[jaħrat]	[jəkkras]	“He plows”
[jaħsɔd]	[jathasɔsɔd]	“He mows ”
[jneħhi]	[jattakas]	“ He picks up (vegetables or fruits)”
[jbi:ʔ]	[snu:zan]	“He sells ”
[jaʔri]	[jasʔɪ]	“He buys ”

Table 2/ B.Z Tamazight Words Related to Agriculture and Commerce

### Kitchen Utensils

All informants’ answers reveal that they sometimes utter some Tamazight names referring to the following kitchen utensils, but with varied degrees of maintenance as two men do not remember some words as the third column clearly shows in the table below:

Dialectal Arabic Gloss	B.Z Tamazight	Number of Informants	English Gloss
[ mʔ ɪlqa]	[tæʔanza:jət ]- [tɪʔanza:jən ] (pl.)	5	“ Spoon(s) ”
[qadra ]	[ tæjdu:rt]	1	“A cooking-pot”
[ ka:nu:n]	[tæfa'qqunt ]	1	“Traditional fire place”
[lamna:ʂab ]	[ɪnja:n](pl.)	5	“ Stones by which the fire place is built”.

Table 2/ B.Z Tamazight Maintained Words of Kitchen Utensils

### Names of Clothes and Colours

This preliminary study reveals that even the old people of B.Z do not have Berber items for clothes apart the word [ħalwa:n], meaning “clothes” or [kɪswa] in Standard Arabic, which was said by only one man from the present sample. All informants claim that they use Arabic words to refer to all kinds of clothes. In addition, the same man provided the word [taɖo:ft]: which means “wool” when he was asked to remember the Tamazight word for “a winter coat” which is knitted from wool.

Concerning colours, the three men and one woman know the names of colours in this variety, but the other woman forgot many of them, as it is clearly displayed in table three:

Dialectal Arabic Gloss	B.Z Tamazight	Number of Informants	English Gloss
[bjad ]	[æmɔ'llal]	5	“White”
[kħal]	[æbərka:n]	5	“Black”
[ħmar]	[æzu'gga:ʔ]	4	“Red”
[χɖar]	[æzi:za]	4	“Green”

[ʃfar]	[æwra:ɣ]	4	“Yellow”
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Table 3/ B.Z Tamazight Maintained Words of Colours

Many other colours are lost and fell out of use such as: the “blue”, “brown”, and “orange”.

### Names of Food

Table four assembles some words that are still retained in the minds of this investigation’s participants who easily remembered the words referred to in the following table:

Dialectal Arabic Gloss	B.Z Tamazight	English Gloss
[χubz ]	[æɣro:m]	“ Bread”
[lħəm ]	[æjsu:m ]	“Meat ”
[ be:ɖɑ]-[be:ɖ ]	[tæmalla:lt ]-[tɪmalla:li:n]	“An egg ”/ “eggs”
[ laħli:b]	[æɣɪ]	“ Milk”
[laʔsal ]	[tɪmmɪ]	“Honey ”
[lban]	[æɣɪ æssama:m]	“ Buttermilk”
[kabu:ja ]	[ ta:χsa:jət]	“Pumpkin ”
[ddqi:q ]	[æran ]	“Flour ”
[karmo:s ]	[ta:za:rt]	“ Figs”
[ʔɪnab ]	[æsammu:m ]	“Grapes”
[χurʃaf]	[ʔa:ga]	“Artichoke”

Table 4/ B.Z Tamazight Maintained Words of Food

But, some food names (both vegetables and fruits) fell out of use and are currently substituted by the local Arabic words as most informants asserted such as: [baʔaʔɑ]: “potatoes”, [ʒalba:n]: “peas”, [lu:bjɑ]: “beans”, [zro:dɪja]: “carrots”, [baʒla]: “onions”, [falʃal]: “pepper”, [taʔffa:ħ]: “apples”, [χu:χ]: “peaches”, [maʃma:ʃ]: “apricots”, [tmar]: “dates”, [llu:z]: “almonds”.

### Names of Animals

Dialectal Arabic Gloss	B.Z Tamazight Words		English Gloss
	Sing. Form	Pl. Form	
[ ɖɖarba:n]	[ æjru]	∅	“Skunk”
[lqanfu:d ]	[ɪnsɪ ]	∅	“A hedgehog ”
[ lqaʔ]	[ 'mmoʃ]	∅	“A cat”
[kalb ]	[æjdN]	∅	“ A dog”
[lug <sup>w</sup> ni:na]	[tæqni:nat]	[tɪqna:jan]	“Rabbit(s)”
[ħaʒla]	[tæsakku:rt ]	[tɪsakkuri:n]	“Partridge(s) ”

[χro:f ]	[tɪzmart]	[ɪzmæri:n]	“Ram(s)”
[dʒa:ʒa ]	[tjaze:ʦ ]	[jazɪdʒan]	“Hen(s) ”
[farro:ʒ]	[ħaqu:l]	∅	“A cock ”
[fallu:s ]	[fi:fu ]	[ɪfi:fwan]	“Chick(s)”
[ħma:ma ]	[tæħma:mat ]	[tɪħmami:n]	“Dove(s)”
[ baqra]	[tæfuna:st ]	[ɪfuna:san]	“Cow(s) ”
[ħma:r ]	[ æʏju:l]	∅	“ A donkey”
[ byal]	[æsarɗu:n]	∅	“A mule ”
[ʕawɗ]	[ ɪjjəs]	∅	“A horse ”
[maʕza ]	[ ʦʏa:t]	[tɪʏəʦʦan]	“Goat(s) ”
[ħallu:f ]	[ɪlaf ]	[ɪlfa:n]	“Pig(s) ”
[ sbaʕ] and [nnmar]	∅	∅	“Lion” and “tiger ”

Table 5/ B.Z Tamazight Names of Animals

What is striking and worthy to note in table five is the fact that B.Z speakers only preserve the names of domestic animals which constitute an important part of their bedouin life, that is, home pets or animals which they hunt, or live in the neighbouring forests. For instance, these speakers do not know Tamazight word referring to a lion, yet its name [æjra:d] represents a carnival that is celebrated in the new year ‘ennayar’ to wish an excellent harvest season.

### Names Related to Weather and Water

Dialectal Arabic Gloss	B.Z Tamazight	English Gloss
[ 'nnu ]	[tbi:ka ]	“Rain ”
[talʒ]	[ æɗfal]	“Snow”
[ʃʃams]	[tfu:jət]	“Sun”
[lbard]	[æʒamme:d]	“Cold”
[lʕi:n ]	[ʦe:ʦ] - [tɪʦa:wan]	“Source ”/ “sources”
[lma]	[æma:n]	“Water”
[lwa:d]	[ɪʏzɔr]	“River”

Table 6/ B.Z Tamazight Words Related to Weather and Water



## DISCUSSION

After analyzing the answers of these informants mainly qualitatively, this investigation demonstrates that the Zenati dialect under study is a 'Severely Endangered Language' as its speakers shifted to communicating through the current local Arabic dialect; a linguistic behaviour that resulted in this partial abandonment among old speakers and in a total ignorance of this Tamazight by the new generation. This language shift is attributed to the absence of the intergenerational transmission of the language at home; an important factor that contributes in passing on the language to the next generation. Consequently, the domains where this variety is currently used are more and more limited, as explained in the aforementioned settings, among the remaining speakers who are few members of the grandparent generation and up.

In fact, assessing its real degree of endangerment requires determining many sociolinguistic variables: knowing the exact number of its speakers, their gender and age and the personal attitudes towards its use... and is fundamentally based on undertaking profound sociolinguistic and anthropo-linguistic field studies. Further research in this area of investigation is intended for the sake of establishing a Berber-Arabic or Berber-French dictionary for this threatened dialect that will be preserved for the future generation documenting their ancestral cultural legacy.

## CONCLUSION

At the end, in an attempt to explore the use of the aforementioned Berber lexical words, this concise research paper has been undertaken and the exhibited results have shown that the speakers in the area under study still maintain many Tamazight words which have a tight relationship with their mode of life. But, only few speakers use these words and who are all members of the grandparent generation and up. More profound research is intended in this region and satisfactory results are hoped to be offered in the next investigation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks for the subjects who accepted to be interviewed despite their old age and health status.

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