



Feminine Gender Assignment in Algerian Arabic (AA)

Asignación de género femenino en árabe argelino (AA)

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Resumen: Este artículo explora la variación de género en el árabe argelino (AA), destacando el proceso complejo y evolutivo de asignación de género influido por las interacciones sociolingüísticas con el árabe estándar moderno (MSA) y el francés. El género en AA va más allá de categorías biológicas, ya que implica un sistema flexible y dependiente del contexto, moldeado por percepciones sociales de feminidad y masculinidad. El estudio investiga cómo ciertos sustantivos en AA cambian de género —por ejemplo, *cartable*, de masculino a femenino— y los procesos semánticos subyacentes que impulsan estas transformaciones. Se sostiene que la realización del género en AA resulta de cambios no sistemáticos, como la transición del masculino al femenino basada en rasgos semánticos como el tamaño, la especificidad o las asociaciones culturales, más que de reglas lingüísticas rígidas. Asimismo, el artículo examina cómo la influencia del francés, especialmente a través de diminutivos y formas específicas de género, ha contribuido a la reasignación de género en sustantivos prestados, y aborda el papel de categorías culturalmente significativas — como la comida— en la asignación del género femenino. En conjunto, el trabajo demuestra que el género en AA constituye una regularidad derivada de asignaciones semánticas inconscientes más que de reglas formales, revelando una interacción altamente dinámica entre lengua, cultura y género en el discurso argelino.

Palabras clave: Asignación de género; variación; árabe argelino (AA); cambio de género; diminutivo femenino; fluidez de género; feminización.

Abstract: This paper explores the gender variation in Algerian Arabic (AA), highlighting the complex and evolving process of gender assignment influenced by sociolinguistic interactions with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and French. Gender in AA reflects more than biological categories; it involves a flexible, context-driven system shaped by social perceptions of femininity and masculinity. The study investigates how certain nouns in AA shift gender (e.g., "cartable" from masculine to feminine) and the underlying semantic processes driving these transformations. It posits that gender realization in AA results from non-systematic shifts—such as the transition from masculine to feminine based on semantic features like size, specificity, or cultural associations—rather than rigid linguistic rules. The paper also examines how French linguistic influence, particularly with diminutives and specific gender forms, has contributed to the gender reassignment in borrowed nouns. Additionally, it addresses the role of culturally significant categories, like food, in assigning feminine gender in AA. The paper demonstrates that in AA, gender is a regularity derived from unconscious semantic assignments rather than formal rules, revealing a highly dynamic interplay between language, culture, and gender in Algerian discourse.

Keywords: Gender assignment; variation; Algerian Arabic (AA); Gender shift; Diminutive feminine; Gender fluidity; Feminization.

Introduction

Gender is the social elaboration of biological sex and carries biological differences which are not typical and becomes, through time, subject to emergent models reflecting often sociocultural orientations. Gender is no longer looked at as prototypical, but it is rather social often subject to variation and violation of linguistic assignments. In that, gender and variation present a complex phenomenon, particularly in those societies where language use is set to the imposition of high linguistic interaction between linguistic codes with one of the languages, or varieties, providing more sources than the other but in a non-systematic way. The case in Algeria, as far as gender variation is concerned, acknowledges a choice of male or female nouns attributed to unclear source of choice. That is, why a given noun is chosen to be male or female is set to a semantic assignment that recognizes analogy (look for the word in English) towards a feminization of nouns originally assigned masculine. Though the biological criteria set the male-female distinction not well set as several male nouns turn to be female and vice versa. Why some nouns are female nouns and turn to be male nouns? The present paper treats the issue of how nouns' gender changes as the result of sociolinguistic interactions, and why it does not change along a regular line? For example, the word "cartable" is used in spoken discourse in a female form whereby its origin is "cartable", the same as "bibrona", "chapona" and other words. At the same time, other words persisted to this change and kept their gender whether coming from Arabic

or French? In other words, there is a tendency towards a female-driven nominalization.

In this paper, we offer evidence that feminine driven gender comes from people's notion of extrapolation of the feminine to the gender order in general without a real implication or deliberate option for such a choice. That is, a lot of nouns are feminized as the result of approximations established in the assignment of gender without any particular appeal to the gender real state.

We raise the hypothesis that gender realization in AA, which is the result of an interaction with other existing languages such as MSA and French, is assigned semantically from the interaction between rules in a structured way. Both MSA and French provide a source of assignments of gender of nouns the inherent, the borrowed and the modified Arabic nouns. Gender in Arabic started its earlier change with the loss of some formal properties for simplification purposes and through time, new assignments gave birth to new nouns assigned, therefore, differently from the source languages being MSA and French. That is, gender realization in AA adopts already existing principles with more extensions. The natural gender rule does not apply to a large number of Algerian Arabic nouns which do rather acquire gender from other regularities attributing the feminine to shape and quantity. Properties of the referent may have values of masculinity or femininity not in the referent itself but in its derivations which are attributed by a particular system of assignment, originating principally from the speakers' conception of femininity and masculinity.

1. The Semantics of Arabic Gender System

In Arabic, grammatical gender is organized into two categories, masculine (المذكر) and feminine (المؤنث), with a further distinction between real and metaphorical gender (الجنس الحقيقي / الجنس المجازي). Besides, another category includes both masculine and feminine. The masculine gender is unmarked while the feminine is morphologically marked by adding the consonant "t" at the end of nouns. This includes:

(1) تاء التأنيث

(2) تاء التأنيث المقدر

(3) ألف التأنيث المقصورة و الممدودة

In Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, the feminine derives from the masculine gender with the exception of certain Arabic Feminine nouns and Arabic adjectives which do not have any of these three signs and are considered feminine. While in Algerian Arabic (the Arabic spoken variety in Algeria) a grammatical change occurred with the loss of "تاء التأنيث" and its replacement with "الفتحة":

Masculine in MSA	Feminine in MSA	Masculine in AA	Feminine in AA
أستاذ	أستاذة	أستاذ	أستاذة
طبيب	طبيبة	طبيب	طبيبة
صديق	صديقة	صديق	صديقة

Even “ألف التأنيث المقصورة” was lost and changed by “الفتحة” in Algerians’ daily speech:

صَحْرَاءَ (dessert) becomes صَحْرَ
حَمْرَاءَ (red) becomes حَمْرَ

While the change above was morphological, another change in Algerian Arabic is lexical where a lot of nouns and adjectives changed other words different from their counter parts in MSA:

Masculine in MSA	Feminine in MSA	Masculine in AA	Feminine in AA
عُصْفُورَ	عُصْفُورَةَ	فرخ	فرخ
قَتَى	قَتَاةَ	طفل	طفلة
جَمِيلَ	جَمِيلَةَ	زين	زين

The same loss occurred to “تاء التأنيث المقدرّة” as no feminine word in Algerian Arabic ends with. It can be concluded that feminine words in Algerian Arabic lost the morphological mark in favor of “الفتحة”.

Gender in Arabic is featured also with the real masculine/real feminine and tropical masculine and tropical feminine. The semantic feminine gender referring to feminine nouns lacking “تاء التأنيث”, and masculine nouns having a feminine marker called tropical feminine.

Real Masculine	Real Feminine	Semantic Feminine	Tropical Feminine
عمر	عائشة	سعاد	اسامة
حصان	طبيبة	عين	حمزة
طالب	إمرأة	نار	سلامة

The same principle of losing “تاء التأنيث” occurred to the feminine gender in Algerian Arabic: طبيب عائش and امرأة. Similarly, tropical feminine lost “تاء التأنيث” in Algerian Arabic whereby words in the table are used as: حمز, أسام and سلام.

The unreal gender exists in inanimate nouns with the feminine including nouns like “شمس” and the masculine including nouns such as “نهار”.

A last category includes dual gender which refers to nouns that are both feminine and masculine. Examples include adjectives such as صبور and مغشّم. Similarly, there are proper nouns used for both male and female:

نهاد and صيڤاح. And there are also dual nouns such as “غنم” (sheep) and “طيور” (birds).

2. Gender Agreement in Algerian Arabic

Genders are defined as systems of agreement classes, and the assignment of nouns to genders is reflected in the agreement they consistently trigger on associated elements. Audring (2008) defends the view that gender agreement is not only an overt manifestation of gender assignment, but those properties of agreement systems can themselves constrain the assignment systems they express. Semantic considerations overrule syntactic conventions because the semantic account of a given noun is created in a sociocultural context when a speech community attributes a different morphology to nouns that generally have another identity and changed to take a different gender.

Gender realization is determined either syntactically or semantically because assignment depends on the form and meaning of nouns. However, recent studies raise the view that gender realization is set to semantic core. Native speakers work out the gender of nouns, as put by Corbett and supported by several researchers who abandon the syntactic view. Corbett argues that the rise of gender depends on a semantic classification as the result of the following factors: (1) the fusion of genders led to the weakening of semantic systems; (2) the semantic criteria can be absolutely clear-cut especially with nouns that resist classification such as “wind”; (3) the change in the worldview of the speaker where a lot of nouns are left standard with gender no longer predictable from their meaning; (4) the mechanism of cross-classification with the interdependence of semantic criteria especially with isolated hybrid nouns; and (5) the factor of derivational morphology with those suffixes which extend meaning and affect the order of distribution (Corbett, 1997).

The semantic assignment to gender develops in the language or variety depending on the influence of varied factors as speakers of a given language may adopt new forms resulting from their linguistic repertoire which can be more interactive especially with the presence of languages and varieties existing together and of which can act as source languages for developed gender. As opposite to the language, the dialect is more interactive and allows for syntactic change as native speakers make more innovations and change with the dialect and less with the standard language. As far as gender is concerned, native speakers could make assignment systems about gender. Corbett (1997) summarizes this in three main points:

- (1) The native speaker remembers gender intuitively.
- (2) Borrowed words from other languages acquire a gender (may change their first gender) and this shows that there is a mechanism of assigning.

- (3) There is a high consistency in the assignment of gender to new invented nouns (1997: 7).

Algerian Arabic presents cases of gender change from the standard variety to the dialectal one. The linguistic peculiarity of this variety is that it is acknowledged as a spoken language but lacks its own written form because it descends structurally from MSA. The latter prescribes the usage to AA despite the fact that AA developed through time its distinctive features which often break with MSA rules. Studies in Arabic gender are descriptive in scope and approach the subject of feminine and masculine variation prescriptively by referring to MSA and ignoring the structure of the spoken Arabic which is subject to marked changes in gender. To understand gender in AA, we need to see how rules of gender changed or had been violated in AA, created as primitive gender, or even, changed in another order.

The main change that occurred to gender in MSA is the loss of the feminine marker. Mohamed Idris reports on other researches mainly the work of Ahmed Harredy who recognized the change in Arabic gender with the loss of “تاء التأنيث”. He said:

These feminine morphemes-phonemes, *ā* and *ā'*, have for long gradually dying out, and replaced by their supposedly historical parent *-ta'at-ta'nīt-*. This is especially true of colloquial Arabic, where a salient *t* tends to replace *ā* and *ā'* (1999: 37).

In fact, this is one of the main changes that occurred to gender in the spoken variety and paved the way to further changes emerging in regularities rather than rules. Other changes include the loss of *al-'alif al maqṣūra* and *al-'alif al mamdūda* in favor of *ta'at-ta'nīt*. They are morphological changes resulted from a process of simplification similar to the process of feminization that marks a large number of nouns in nowadays Algerian Arabic whereby nouns loose *ta'at-ta'nīt* in the feminine category, and others change from masculine to feminine with the same feature of loosing *ta'at-ta'nīt* and ending with the feminine “ ”. In Algerian Arabic, the feminine marker historically associated with *tā' marbūṭa* is often realized as a final vowel, reflecting morphophonological reduction rather than a simple loss or replacement.

The over simplification of grammatical forms in the dialect helped in gender change with the adoption of new forms constructed from local meaning and often different from their counterparts in the standard variety. In that, gender is motivated semantically in the sense that gender resolution is assigned semantically while in the standard varieties the resolution tends towards syntactic agreement. That is, the resolved form is motivated by semantic considerations which break with the standard rules of gender realization and adopt instead what Conzett (2006) called regularities: “Regularities showing a more or less strong degree of consistency are often

referred to as tendencies, whereas more highly consistent regularities are often given the status of rules” (2006: 225).

The syntactic resolution fails with AA because there is a gender attrition of nouns used in MSA when moved to AA. These nouns lose their gender; and in this way, they apply more to a semantic resolution than to the syntactic. Many nouns acquired a different gender in AA and which goes against the gender of the same noun in MSA. Corbett (1991) describes the attrition as language loss but in the same language. The case here is that the attrition occurs to the sub-variety of the language. When the standard variety was simplified and grew up diachronically as a dominant linguistic code, it lost some of its basic features and acquired others. It is more precise to discuss gender in terms of variation, where the same noun may be assigned different genders in different contexts

2.1. General to Specific Shift

In Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), general gender rules establish a correlation between feminine grammatical forms and nouns that denote female beings, as well as a preference for feminine markers on nouns ending with a final accented vowel (e.g., -ة). In Algerian Arabic (AA), however, these rules can become more fluid, as some male-referencing nouns may adopt feminine grammatical markers, while feminine-indicating endings can also appear on male-referencing nouns (Caubet, 1993; Holes, 2004). There is a tendency to move from the general to the specific attribute of nouns, and which is often with feminine assignment. This is seen in terms of plural-to-singular shift, masculine to feminine shift and the diminutive feminine.

One notable phenomenon in AA involves a plural-to-singular semantic shift, where words such as "meat" (اللحم) are narrowed contextually to refer to a singular, tangible piece of meat (اللحمة), marked with feminine gender. This semantic transition reflects a move from uncountable to countable usage, aligning with Arabic morphosyntactic patterns where concrete, delimited objects are often grammatically feminine (Owens, 2006; Djennane, 2014). The following table illustrates more:

Gender in MSA	Gender in AA	Attribution and Displacement
قَدْر (pot)	قَدْر /9adra/	“قَدْر” is attributed a feminine gender displaced from the feminine gender of “makla” (food). It becomes a feminine noun in Arabic of the middle east and some areas in Morocco to mean a dish. It is attributed a feminine gender displaced from the Arabic noun “makla” in MA and “okla” in MSA.
قَمَر (moon)	قَمَر /9amra 9amra/	“قَمَر” is used in the general sense to mean moon. 9amra is used feminine in some areas in the East of Algeria.

اليوم (This day)	لُيُوم / lyouma/	“لُيُوم” is the mostly used form but lyouma becomes frequent in the center of Algeria especially Algiers.
حُوت (fish)	حُوت /houta/	“حُوت” Hout is masculine in MSA. It is feminine in AA in some usages. In the general use, it is “hout”. In the singular, it is always feminine “houta”.
لباس (dress)	لبس /labsa/	“لبس” took a feminine gender in AA in any use of the noun.
خضار (vegetables)	خضرا /khathra/	“خضرا” has a feminine gender in AA in any use including the plural and the singular.
دلو (countainer)	بيدون /bisouna/	“بيدون” is used in general to mean countainer. It can be used as “bidouna” feminine to refer to particular use in some areas in Algeria.
فتانت (crumbs)	فتت /ftet/	“فتت” was masculine in MSA and took a feminine gender when used to mean less than “foutet”.
لحم (meat)	لحم /lahm/	“لحم” is used masculine in general to refer to the “flesh” and “meat”. It is used feminine to refer to a small muscle called “lahma”.
عنب (grapes)	عنب /3enba/	“عنب” 3neb is plural masculine noun in MSA. In some areas like Oum Boughi, it can be used feminine as “3anba”.
خبز (bread)	خبز /Khobsa /	“خبز” Khobz is plural masculine in general. It becomes feminine in the specific use.
فرد (pair)	فرد /ferda/	“فرد” refers to one pair generally used with shoes. It takes a female gender in reference to the female noun “فرد” (one in English).
ماء (water)	ميتها (mayha)	“ميتها” takes a female gender when used to refer to a small quantity of water. In the general use, it takes a male gender.
إزار (clothes)	تازير /tazir/	“تازير” refers to clothes, used in the South of Algeria. In MSA it takes a male gender which turns to be female in AA.
حرق (miigrants)	حراق /harag/	“حراق” is used in AA to refer to people migrate illegally. Its origin is the male noun “حرق”. It acquired a feminine gender “حراق”.
يخط (set in)	خط /hata/	“خط” is used in AA to refer to luxury class. It derives from the arabic verb “يخط” but the meaning of “خط” took other values than just « to put ».
السوس (weevel)	سوس /sousa/	“سوس” is an Arabic masculine noun refers to weevel. It acquires a feminine gender when used in AA to refer dental caries. The feminine attribution is due to the small form of “black substance” on the teeth.
درج (straiway)	درج /darja/	“درج” derrives from the male noun in MSA. It takes a female gender in AA when used in the singular. It takes a male gender when referring to straiway in general. By

		contrast, when it refers to a small number, it takes a female gender. “دَرَجَاتٌ”.
جَبْدٌ (long distance)	جَبْدٌ /jebda/	“جَبْدٌ” comes from the AA verb “يَجْبِدُ” and means literally “brings from”. It derives from the MSA verb “جَبَدَ” (to pull) with /th/ changed to /d/. The noun is feminine and means long distance.
الرَّغْبُ	رَغْبٌ /zeghba/	“الرَّغْبُ” is a male noun in MSA and takes a female gender in AA referring to a very small quantity.
كَفْلٌ	كَفْلٌ /kofl/	“كَفْلٌ” means in MSA a tool for closing. It derives a female noun from the MSA noun to mean a button.

The nouns in the above table are male nouns in MSA. They turn to be female nouns or used to mean the feminine in AA. Gender regularities come from an order of assignment which allows for an attribution of gender to a noun out of estimation or a analogy established unconsciously by natives of AA. In that, the native speaker attributes a new gender to an already gendered noun as the result of discourse matters that through time created a kind of pattern whereby the process is likely to be similar in the way how a gender attribute is adopted from an already existing gender. In that, some words in AA preserve their meaning when they acquire a male gender including, for example, “فَرْدٌ”/“فَرْدٌ”; “جَبْدٌ”/“جَبْدٌ”; and “مَاءٌ”/“مِيَاهٌ”. Others undergo a lexical semantic derivation by taking a one attribute and making an AA word totally absent in MSA and peculiar to AA. This includes words such as “حَرْقٌ”/“حَرَاقٌ”; “رَغْبٌ”/“الرَّغْبُ” and “كَفْلٌ”/“كَفْلٌ”.

The lexical semantic derivation can take far attributes and change constantly from the MSA meaning. For example, the noun “bread” is masculine in MSA “خَبْزٌ” but turns to be feminine in AA when used in the singular and when used to mean “gaining money is hard”:

- (1) A3tini khobza/give me one bread
- (2) Lkhobza mora/ Gaining money is hard

The gender of the noun “خبز” is masculine in MSA. The same gender is used in AA when bread is used in the general sense of talking about any bread:

- (3) Chrit khobz/ I bought bread

However, when used in a specific context, the noun bread changes to feminine. For (1), the feminine gender of the noun is attributed to the number: أعطيني خبزة وحدة. (give me one bread) That is, when just one bread is concerned, the speaker says “خبزة” which is feminine. However, when the speaker talks about bread in the plural or in general, he/she uses the masculine. In other words, there is a kind of displacement by means of

estimation of a gender to nouns originally having a different gender, and the attribution comes out of discourse matters making a given noun one time masculine and another time feminine, depending on the context.

Displacement results from measuring something out of something else. The feminine gender of “makla” (food) is displaced to objects related to its use and took its gender indeed. The gender of 3anba is displaced from the feminine noun of vine “كرمة” which is feminine too. The motivation behind such usage is purely semantic emerging from sociocultural considerations manifested unconsciously in the used variety. The vine is feminine in AA and its fruit “3neb” takes its gender though originally masculine. Gender in the dialect is a regularity and not a strict rule because it comes of the speaker’s own construction and does not stand on rules established cognitively as other speakers of a similar community may find the gendered form strange or unaccepted since its process of creation is rather a tendency and cannot be a rule. For example, in Algeria when MSA is used, gender kept the same throughout all the country because it applies to the same rules that speakers have not transcended. By contrast, with AA gender is subject to change in the same geographical area because nouns are assigned gender out of regularities and not rules. In the East, the noun “countener” (bidoun in Arabic) is used differently despite the general linguistic similarities of the dialect used:

Bidoun in Constantine

Bidouna in Batna

The case of these nouns can be described as gender values whereby the same noun can take two genders because it is assigned two values. One value is being generally masculine: “Chrit bidoun zit”, and another value is feminine: “chrit bidouna homos”. “bidouna” is used feminine in Batna and other eastern cities in Algeria to refer to another type of container which is made with metal and has a cover. It is like a food contained. It cannot be known why it took through time a feminine gender but it may come out as a kind of analogy in relation to a small object differentiated from the big object by means of its small form. This can be the case due to the existing cases with other nouns. For example, the noun “foutat” is masculine in MSA. A smallest form is called “ftita” and takes a female gender. All the illustrated cases show a tendency of moving from a general category which is masculine by its linguistic first occurrence as a source language (MSA) to a specific category which is feminine as the result of gender attribution. This context-dependent shift, driven by pragmatic needs to specify or particularize, illustrates the flexibility and fluidity of gender assignment in AA. Furthermore, this phenomenon mirrors cross-linguistic tendencies where abstract categories are semantically reinterpreted to express concreteness or specificity, influenced by cultural and linguistic practices (Manfredi, Tosco, 2013; Lakoff, 1987).

Native speakers of a dialect have more influence in the change of gender than the standard language as the result of making semantic assignments originating from a set of regularities that they exhibit to the dialect with other aspects of the language. Gender in the standard dialect whether CA or MSA is rational and based on sex orientation while in AA it is less regular and have rather tendencies and not rules because of the lack of the strict consistency¹ between the form and its gender.

2.2. French Masculine to Arabic Feminine Shift

In Algerian Arabic (AA), a significant number of nouns have retained the same gender as in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). However, a subset of nouns has undergone a masculine-to-feminine shift, often motivated by semantic and pragmatic factors. One common explanation for this shift is the movement from general to specific, where the latter, being more delimited and concrete, often aligns with feminine grammatical marking. This reflects a morphosyntactic trend where the feminine form in Arabic signifies tangibility, particularization, or delimitations, as noted in studies on Arabic grammar and discourse strategies (Caubet, 1993; Holes, 2004).

An additional type of gender reassignment in AA arises from its interaction with the French language due to colonial history. During the French occupation of Algeria (1830–1962), French became a dominant linguistic influence, resulting in widespread bilingualism and significant lexical borrowing. This borrowing not only introduced French nouns into AA but also led to shifts in morphological aspects like gender marking. Interestingly, many borrowed French nouns with masculine gender were reinterpreted and assigned feminine gender in AA. The shift follows the broader tendency in Arabic to mark concrete, delimited, or contextually specific objects as feminine, thereby harmonizing borrowed forms with existing AA grammatical conventions (Djennane, 2014; Owens, 2006).

For instance, words such as *la viande* (meat) retain feminine gender as in French, but the singularization of nouns like *le chocolat* (chocolate), which is masculine in French, becomes feminine when used in specific contexts, adopting شوكلاطة in AA (chocolate). Other nouns undergo a systematic gender realignment to fit AA's morphosyntactic patterns, reinforcing this tendency.

This process reflects the adaptive nature of AA's linguistic system, which integrates foreign elements while restructuring them to align with its gendered grammatical framework (Mion, 2016). Below is a table grouping examples of masculine French nouns that have been reassigned to the feminine in AA.

¹ See Conzett, 2006 for more clarification on the distinction between regularity and rule.

French Nouns	Gender in French	Gender in AA	Attribution and Displacement
Cartable (school bag)	Masculine	/Caratabla/ Feminine	“Cartable” is used masculine all over Algeria. In Annaba, it acquired a feminine gender “cartabla”.
Chapeau (hat)	Masculine	/Chapona/ Feminine	In Annaba, the noun “chapeau” turns to be feminine “chapona”.
Savon (soap)	Masculine	/Sabona/ Feminine	“Sabona” is a feminine gender in some East cities like Annaba, skikda and Taref and a masculine gender in other cities “saboun”.
Fromage (cheese)	Masculine	/Formaja/ Feminine	“Formaj” is the generally used form to talk about cheese. When just one portion is used, the noun turns to be feminine: “formaja”.
Gateau (cake)	Masculine	/Gatoa/ Feminine	The noun “gateau” is used masculine. In cities like Constantine and Batna, the noun “gateau” takes a feminine gender when it is used to refer to just one cake, or a small portion of a cake.
Mouchoir (tissue)	Masculine	/Mouchwara/ Feminine	“Mouchoir” keeps its masculine gender in general and when used as compound noun “papier-mouchoir”. It becomes feminine when just one element is meant; “mouchwara”.
Torchon/ (rag)	Masculine	/Torchona/ Feminine	Both “torchon” and “chiffon” take in general the masculine gender. In some cities like Annaba, El Taref, Skikda and Soug Ahrass, they are used in the feminine: “torchona” and “chifona”.
Ballon (ball)	Masculine	/blota/ Feminine	“Ballon” is the most used form of the noun which keeps masculine. In some cities of the East like Batna, it is feminine: “blota”.
بَشْتُول (pistolet)	masculine	/bachtola/ Feminine	بَشْتُول is an Arabic noun means « gun ». Its

			origin comes from the masculine French noun « pistolet » and it acquired a feminine gender once used in AA.
Camion (truck)	Masculine	/camiona/ Feminine (van)	Camiona is used in the feminine to refer to a “van”.
سُكُول (school)	Masculine	/chkoula/	سُكُول is used in Algiers to mean “school”. The French noun undergoes a morphological change (/s/ to /ʃ/). It acquired a feminine gender in AA.
Sociala	Masculine	/sociala/	Sociala is an adjective in French. It turns to be a noun in AA with a feminine gender as the noun attributed to females only referring to a women who has high social involvement in every thing.

Some nouns in AA Arabic take their gender from the French language because all the mentioned nouns above derive their morphology from the French nouns and the difference lies in the feminine gender mark /a/. Morphologically, the same Arabic rule of adding the feminine “-” applies to the above nouns. These nouns assign their gender from a displacement of a gender value attributed to a given quality to the noun in AA. “Cartabla”, “chapona”, “sabona”, “formaja”, and “gatoa” assigned a feminine gender coming from the diminutive quality or the small quantity. “Cartabla” (backpack) is the beg wear by a small child; “chapona” (hat) stems its gender from the small hat; “sabona” from a small piece of soap; “gatoa” from one piece or just one cake; and finally, “formaja” from one piece or one portion of cheese. Thus, nouns’ gender is displaced by means of measuring a quality of the small to the noun to become feminine while in the source language it was masculine. The assignment is referred to the value of the small because the native speakers of AA make assignments from a given language as the result of the dominating language. For example, the noun “ball” becomes feminine “blota” in reference to a small ball. It could not be assigned from MSA “kora” because this language is not influential at the spoken level. In Egypt and some other Arab countries where MSA is influential, the noun “kora” is used to talk about “ball”. The case of AA is that it modified the noun “ballon” to “blota”. The latter, later, moved to a general use whereby “blota” in Batna and some other cities of the East is used to describe the game: Na13bo blota/ballon.

The same thing can be said about the noun “torchona”. A lot of people who use fluent French use the noun masculine as in the French language. However, in more interactive settings especially in friendship

domain, family domain and neighbors too, it can be the case to hear the feminine noun “torchona” or even “chifona”. The feminine assignment to these nouns comes from the shape of the object which is generally smaller than a big object existing in the linguistic repertoire of the speaker. In other words, speakers assign feminine value to nouns which have their counterparts in another use. “Chifona” exists in opposition to a big piece of tissue. The small portion becomes feminine as the result of displacing the feminine value.

There are feminine French nouns which keep the French gender along the process of gender attribution by adding the final feminine marker /a/:

Perioda (Période Period)
Bata (Boite countenair)
Tabla (Table Table)
Copina (Copine girl-friend)
Casrona (Casserole saucepan)
Coverta (Couverture blanket)
Smena (Semaine week)
Sintura (cinture belt)
Viyouza (veilleuse night light)
Farchita (fourchette Fork)
Basina (bassine basin)
Cousina (une cuisine kitchen)

The above nouns have double feminine as two different languages contribute to their gender. The first gender value derives from French and the second is added from AA by adding the feminine suffixe "a". Now, how these nouns get feminized may not adhere to arbitrariness since other nouns seen in the previous table do not follow a particular rule of gender assignment. It is rather motivated by the first feminine gender of the noun.

It should be noted that the displacement of the feminine value in Algerian Arabic is not systematic; it does not uniformly apply to all nouns. Instead, some nouns may undergo a shift to feminine value, while others resist this displacement. In some cases, the same noun may exhibit dual gender forms, with the masculine form often linked to a larger or more abstract version of the object and the feminine form associated with a smaller or more specific variant. This phenomenon can be observed in French, where diminutives like *gare/garoutière*, *maison/maisonnette*, and *barque/barquette* demonstrate a similar pattern. Despite the morphological distinction, the gender remains feminine across these variations in French, adhering to established norms of grammatical gender and derivational morphology (Corbett, 1991; Harris, 1978). In Arabic varieties, including Algerian Arabic, a comparable interplay between size, specificity, and gender occurs, but with greater variability, where gender may shift from masculine to feminine under the influence of pragmatic or contextual factors (Caubet, 1993; Djennane, 2014).

This dual-gender assignment reflects semantic motivations, aligning with theories of gender assignment that emphasize conceptual properties

such as size and specificity rather than grammatical rules alone (Holes, 2004; Tucker, 1971). Moreover, the persistence of feminine marking in diminutives across both languages reveals a deeper cross-linguistic tendency where diminutive forms align with feminization as a marker of diminishment or delimitation (Lakoff, 1987).

2.3. The Diminutive Feminine

The tendency of making the small takes the feminine gender arbitrarily in AA seems to apply even to primitive lexis. There are words in AA which do derive neither from MSA nor from the French language but developed as peculiar to AA. Their gender applies to the semantic assignment of attributing feminine to small objects. The following table groups nouns that are purely AA and which took arbitrarily a feminine gender:

	Gender	Attribution and Displacement
فَلَيْشْ (zucchioni)	Feminine	Like several vegetables in AA, "فَلَيْشْ" takes a feminine gender.
جُعْمٌ (little water)	Feminine	"جُعْمٌ" is used in AA to mean small quantity of water. It has a primitive gender as the words lacks in both MSA and French
شَوِي (little)	Feminine	"شَوِي" is used in AA to mean little. It has a primitive gender as the words lacks in both which uses "الْقَلِيلُ" and French which uses "un peu".
دُبْر (a hit in the face)	Feminine	"دُبْر" means a hit in the face. It is a primitive noun in AA and takes its gender value from the feminine "ضَرْبٌ".
تَشْوَحَن	Feminine	"تَشْوَحَن" is a primitive meaning refers to hidden angle or place or corner in a hiding place. It takes a feminine gender
تَشَاك (injection)	Feminine	"تَشَاك" refers to means injection. It has a feminine gender.
بُحُوش (insect)	Feminine	"بُحُوش" means a type of insect. Like many insects in AA, it takes a feminine gender.
"كَبُوس" (small hat)	Feminine	"كَبُوس" is the small hat wear in North Africa by old men. It takes a feminine gender.
تَحْش	تَحْش	"تَحْش" refers to the sweep inside the house. It takes a feminine gender.

تَشْتَقَلْ	Feminine	“تَشْتَقَلْ” means in AA the house sandals, that is, the sandal wear particularly at home. It takes a feminine gender. Synonyms are : “بِشْمَانْ”, “شَبَابْ”, “بَلِيغْ”
بُطْم (mole)	Feminine	“بُطْم” is used in the region of Setif to mean « mole ». It takes a feminine gender.
خَنُوف (nose)	Feminine	“خَنُوف” is used in AA to refer to the small part in front of the nose.
خُرْش (fearful)	Feminine	“خُرْش” is used in AA to refer to someone who is very fearful. It is firstly used to describe small trees and the attribution was given later to a fearful person.
حُوم (avenue)	Feminine	“حُوم” means the area outside the house where generally men stay when free.
غُرُوط	Feminine	“غُرُوط” refers to a small bag.
شَائِي (small hut)	Feminine	“شَائِي” is a small hut put in the Maghreb. It redeives from “شَائِي” which is used by Amazigh tu cover all ahe head and parts of the face. When used to cover just a small part of the head, it takes a feminine noun “شَائِي”.
بُورْس Bourssa	Feminine	“بُورْس” is used in the west of Algeria and refers to a small bag.
تَلُو (coffee grounds)	Feminine	“تَلُو” in AA refers to the rest of coffee which remains after drinking.
الْتَبْكَ (small sand)	Feminine	“الْتَبْكَ” refers to the sand, generally small in quantity, that the wind carries in the dissert.
نَعْم (kouskous)	Feminine	“نَعْم” is used in Algiers to mean kouskous. It takes a feminine gender.
نَنْتْش (small bread portion)	Feminine	“نَنْتْش” means in AA a bread small portion. It is also used to refer to a very young girl.
لَقَعْمُور	Feminine	“لَقَعْمُور” is the small part at the end of the bageutte bread. It takes a feminine gender and used in all Algeria like this.
فِين (bunny)	Feminine	“فِين” is the reptile’s child. In AA, the child takes a feminine

		gender regardless of its real sexe.
قَمْبُوعٌ	Feminine	“قَمْبُوعٌ” means in AA the upper side of an object, the head or the cover. It also refers to something that stands without moving.
مَحْرَمٌ (small veil)	Feminine	“مَحْرَمٌ” refers to a small and thin veil wear by old woman or by women doing house cleaning.
تَكْلُولٌ (earring)	Feminine	“تَكْلُولٌ” refers to earring and the noun is primitive as it does not exist in MSA.

Several nouns referring to small objects take a feminine gender implying a close relationship between the feminine and smallness. Names of small cloths such as huts and jewelries are feminine even if wear by men. The same thing can be said about nouns referring to small quantity of things. This includes the second list above where nouns like جُعْمٌ (little water) and تَلْوٌ (coffee grounds) take a feminine gender instead of masculine. Similarly, nouns referring to insects and small hard objects have tendency towards the feminine gender. In the third list, the noun خَنْوْفٌ (nose) which is the corner of the nose takes a feminine gender despite the fact that the nose in AA and even in MSA is masculine. The same thing for the noun أَفْعُمُورٌ (end of bread baguette). Bread baguette is called « bread » or « bagitta ». “bread” is masculine in both AA and MSA; but in AA, its small portion end takes a feminine gender.

2.4. The Dominant Attribute

Another way of gender assignment in Algerian Arabic (AA) involves the influence of dominant and recurrent attributes, particularly in culturally significant categories like food and vegetables. A group of nouns with feminine gender in AA may derive this attribution not necessarily through inherent semantic traits but through shared cultural or perceptual values. Examples include:

Batata (potatoes),
Chtiitha (pasta)
Macarona (macaroni)
Chorba (soup)
Kefta (Meatballs with Sauce)
Dolma (stuffed vegetables)
Chtiitha (egg sauce)
Chakckouka (Onion Scrambled Eggs)
Rechta (pasta)

These are just some examples while in reality the number of feminine-named meals is largely superior to the masculine-named gender. The gender assignment can be attributed to an uncounscious analogy of an

attribute similar to another attribute in the same group. An argument that reinforces this claim is seen also in attributing feminine gender to food objects. Several names of food objects in AA were masculine and changed, either from MSA or French, to be feminine, or were originally feminine in MSA:

قُذْر (kettle) قُذْر
Couteau (knife) سِكِين
صَفَاي (strainer) مَصْفَاة/ passoire
طَبُون (cooker) فُزْن
قَصْع (bowl) قِصْع
عَجَان (Kneading-machine) مَعِين

Another example of feminine-attributed gender is seen with vegetables. The latter are called “خُضْر” with the “fatha” at the end. Surprisingly, the big majority of vegetables in AA take a feminine gender:

بَطَاطَا (potatoes)
طَمَاطِم (tomatoes)
سَلَاط (lettuce)
سِنَارِي (carrot)
جُرَوَات / قَلِيَش (zucchini)
فَوَال (fava beans)
لُوبِيَا خُضْر (green beans)
جَلْبَان (pea)
قُرْنِين (thistle ribs)

The assignment of gender in language, particularly in relation to nouns like vegetables and cooking objects, reveals complexities that are not governed by systemic set of rules. While tendencies exist for certain attributes to influence gender assignment — such as vegetables often being feminine in languages with grammatical gender — this is not a universal or reciprocal phenomenon. For instance, not all vegetable-related nouns follow the feminine gender, and similarly, cooking utensils are not consistently feminine across all instances. The assignment of a dominant gender attribute to a noun is less about strict grammatical rules and more influenced by recurrence, convention, and habit (Stern, 2003). Interestingly, while feminine gender assignment tends to be more prevalent, especially for nouns associated with domestic or nurturing contexts, there is no parallel system for male-associated gender. This reflects a socio-cultural tendency, likely rooted in gender stereotypes and historical roles, where femininity has been closely linked with nurturing and domesticity (Lakoff, 1975). As Lakoff (1975) discusses, such linguistic gender patterns might indicate underlying cultural perceptions that shape language, but they cannot be generalized to all nouns within the same category, further illustrating the complexity and arbitrariness of gender assignment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender variation in Algerian Arabic (AA) reflects a dynamic interplay of linguistic, cultural, and social factors. Unlike the rigid rules of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), AA exhibits a fluid and context-dependent approach to gender assignment, which often leans towards feminine attribution. This phenomenon is not governed by a fixed set of grammatical principles but arises from the speakers' socio-cultural perceptions and pragmatic considerations. The influence of French, particularly during the colonial period, has added another layer to this shifting system, as many French loans are re-gendered in ways that align with AA's own linguistic patterns. Furthermore, factors like size, specificity, and cultural associations often prompt the assignment of feminine gender, especially in diminutive forms or in the case of items that are perceived as smaller, more intimate, or domestically significant.

A dominant regularity of the feminine assigned in direct attribution with quantity is noticed in all the presented patterns in the present paper. Moving from the general to the specific attribute of nouns with feminine assignment has to do with reduced quantity as several nouns take a feminine gender when used to express small portions. This same regularity is frequent with a category of French masculine nouns changing to Arabic feminine nouns not interference to the structural derivations from MSA but rather in relation to a singular act of occurrence which make a noun like track (camion) feminine in AA as it is small in shape compared to other big tracks. Even native words in AA Arabic follow the tendency of taking the feminine when they occur in small quantity and which reflects a dominant pattern of assigning the feminine to smallness.

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