

**Language, Gender and Hate Speech**  
A Multidisciplinary Approach

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# **The Feminisation of Titles, Office and Profession Nouns in Algerian French**

## The Case of the Press in the International Women's Day

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**Abstract** After 132 years of colonization, French remains anchored to Algeria. With nearly 14 million French speakers (33% of its population) is an interesting field of study. An analysis of the press released in March 2018, around the date of the international celebration of Women's Day, will show that the use of professional nouns is quite diverse according to speakers, due to absence of established rules.

**Keywords** Algerian French. Feminisation. Algerian press. Nouns of occupations. Language emancipation.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Women's Emancipation in Algeria. Sociocultural Features. – 3 Gender, Feminisation, and French Language. – 4 Use of Feminisation of Nouns of Occupations, Titles, and Offices in the Francophone Algerian Press. Case Study. – 5 Final Remarks.



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## 1 Introduction

After 132 years of colonization, French remains nowadays anchored to Algeria. With nearly 14 million French speakers, or 33% of population, Algeria is the second largest francophone country in the Euro-Mediterranean space after France.<sup>1</sup>

Algerian French in recent years has undergone an interesting evolution linked to changes in its society.

From this point of view, the sociolinguistic phenomenon that caught our attention is the feminisation of titles, office and profession nouns, a fashionable phenomenon in France and in Northern Francophones countries such as Québec, Belgium and Switzerland, in which structures used to refer to some names are quite different depending on the speakers, explaining the absence of fixed rules in the Francophone space, or even non-observance or exceeding, according to requirements, communication skills.<sup>2</sup>

This study, oriented by a sociolinguistic and lexicometrical approach, focuses specifically on the feminisation of titles, office and profession nouns in the above-mentioned Maghreb region at a time of the year when the Algerian press focuses especially on women, that is the “Journée internationale des femmes” or “International Women’s Day”.

The question of the feminisation of titles is very interesting because it deals with the present sociolinguistic situation of Algeria, use, lexical innovation, lexical instability characterized by variation, syntax, discourse analysis, with contact between languages and cultures, as well as the speaker’s and its relationship with the language, with himself and with others.

The approach adopted combines two contradictory methods, one regulatory concerning the linguistic habits of a foreign language learned at school, and the other innovative, revealed by actual linguistic practice in its diversity, based on the concern for the visibility of women and especially on the simplification of French language.

The aim of this contribution is twofold: to understand the phenomenon and describe it in a French-speaking area, Algeria, where

**1** Cf. <http://observatoire.francophonie.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Francophones-Statistiques-par-pays.pdf>.

**2** As Elmiger affirms: “en comparant les décisions politiques en matière de féminisation, on est étonné de constater que chacun des pays francophones a choisi des solutions propres pour son espace, sans concertation formelle avec les autres régions francophones. Cela s’explique de différentes façons. D’une part, les décisions ont été prises à des moments différents et par des instances politiques indépendantes, parfois au gré des nécessités politiques propres à chacun pays. D’autre part, les propositions de chaque région ont intégré les particularités régionales [...]. On peut néanmoins se demander pourquoi il n’y a pas une collaboration plus poussée à travers la francophonie, comme elle a été recherchée ailleurs, par exemple dans la réforme de l’orthographe” (2011, 77).

French turns out to be the privileged foreign language (Azouzi 2008, 49) – unlike the status of native language or official language in other French-speaking countries – and try to understand the problems and constraints arising from contact between languages and cultures. Our quantitative-qualitative analysis mould concerns the use of feminised structures in the francophone press in Algeria, a breeding ground promoting lexical innovation, choice for his role in lexical transfer in media and political-institutional discourses (cf. Cerquiglini 2018).

## 2 Women's Emancipation in Algeria. Sociocultural Features

Algerian women have always been present in the sociopolitical history of the country. In particular, they are remembered for the liberation of the country from the colonial yoke because they took part in the anticolonial fight of resistance (cf. Amrane 1991). The liberation of the country, the power of globalization, economic upheavals social evolution have made Algerian women want to change their own destiny and erase the past, when a strong sexism reigned (Taraud 2011), and they were crushed under the weight of the duties and stripped of their rights.

The desire to overcome the archaic mindset, to appear and become fully integrated in the socioeconomic, cultural and political life of the country and to break the image of oppressed women, excluded from society, manifests itself in a variety of ways, including school and education in general, which represents for them the only chance for freedom and openness to the outside world.<sup>3</sup>

Dealing with a series of various political and sociocultural constraints, Algerian women fight for their presence and recognition in various spheres of society, including those in which they had always been under the hegemony of men, working in various professions and assuming increasingly important positions (cf. Talahite 2008).

The appearance of lexemes and phrasal nouns in feminised forms in Algerian French such as “demandeuses d’emploi” (women searching for work) becomes fashionable at that time. Thus, the woman is no longer called “femme au foyer” (housewife), but rather “chômeuse” (unemployed); several rating groups appear in parallel to this concept, such as “femme au foyer partiellement occupée” (housewife partially occupied, 1997), “Autres inactifs” (Other inactive, 1987)

<sup>3</sup> As Mohsen-Finan (2008, 11) says: “[...] si, pendant les luttes pour les indépendances, les femmes ont dû se fondre dans le combat national et appuyer les hommes qui portaient cette lutte, la volonté de beaucoup d’entre elles était de bénéficier des changements politiques en cours pour acquérir davantage de visibilité, de responsabilité et de respectabilité”.

and “Travailleuses à domiciles” (women workers to services, 1989).<sup>4</sup> This round of changes, which gave rise to a new profile for Algerian women, is proof of a firm desire on the part of women in the struggle for gaining recognition in Algerian society. The factors that pushed to get the social emancipation are:

- the educational system: the universalization of compulsory education has promoted gender equality in the various educational levels and allowed some girls to advance in studies (cf. Boutaleb, Boualali 2003);
- the struggle waged by women’s associations and by human rights organisations that defend the fate of women and struggle to promote equal opportunities in work and in politics;
- economic openness to international markets and to globalisation that allowed women to access other types of work related to new technologies.

Nowadays, Algerian women have managed to overcome various challenges and enter into a world formerly reserved exclusively to men. Improving their social status, and gaining visibility, several areas of work therefore feminised. This demonstrates a real revolution for women and even a prevalence of women in the labour market that explains the feminisation of certain professions in Algeria.

### 3 Gender, Feminisation, and French Language

With the increase of women in the labour market, the process of feminisation of French language acquired greater weight within the countries of the francophone space. In this regard the work of researchers Anne-Marie Houdebine (1998) and Éliane Viennot, of whom we mention the two fundamental works of 2016 and 2017.

Nowadays the main suggested (cf. Khaznadar 2015) morphosyntactic practices for the application of feminisation in the French language are, first, the feminisation of names of occupations, titles and offices (controlled by two circulars of the French government of the 1986 and 1998), such as: *Madame la directrice* instead of *Madame le directeur*; *Madame la préfète* instead of *Madame le préfet*; *Madame la professeure* instead of *Madame le professeur*. Furthermore, we have the use of doublets for the inclusion of both men and women: *toutes*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Actes du Colloque International “Marché du travail et genre dans les pays du Maghreb. Quels marchés du travail ?”*, Document de travail no. 11, Rabat, 2006, <https://www.genreenaction.net/Marche-du-travail-et-genre-dans-les-pays-du.html>; <http://www.genreenaction.net/Femmes-et-Travail-en-Algerie.html>; <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/algerien/13438.pdf>.

*et tous; elle et il; Français et Françaises*; the use of epicene terms, such as lexemes whose form is invariable to masculine and feminine, such as: *un/e élève, un/e Membre, un/e fonctionnaire*; the use of ‘en-casing’ forms that avoid gender stereotypes, such as: *les droits humains* in the place of *droits de l’Homme/homme; personnalité politique* instead of *homme politique; la population française* for *les Français; les êtres humains* in place of *les Hommes/hommes*. Finally there is the use of various contractions or short forms through some gimmicks as the use of *point médian*, following the composition of generic order word: root word + masculine suffix + midpoint + feminine suffix + possible further period followed by ‘s’ in the case of the plural (e.g. *l’enseignant·e; les musicien·ne·s; des conseiller·ère·s; la·le chercheur·e; ceux·elles; des intellectuel·le·s; un·e programmeur·euse; médicaux·ales*); often we tend to prefer the median point to the so-called single end point for reasons of easier typing, for example on computer keyboards (e.g. *la·le sénateur·rice; chargé·e·s* etc.); the use of slash, (e.g. *lycéen/ne*), the parentheses, (e.g. *citoyen/ne*), the capital ‘E’ (e.g. *motivéEs*) and the hyphen (e.g. *professionnel·le·s*).

In other Northern Francophone countries<sup>5</sup> such as Switzerland and Belgium the question of gender on nouns referring to professions is widely handled with greater attention using a non-sexist language, and particularly in Québec, the Francophone province of Canada in which the lexical feminisation as well as the full use of inclusive writing are encouraged since 1979 by the *Office québécois de la langue française* (cf. Vachon-L’Heureux 2007), and a series of linguistic resources,<sup>6</sup> useful for the comprehension of the dynamics of the French language, are made available on its Portal since the beginning of the 2000s.

#### 4 Use of Feminisation of Nouns of Occupations, Titles, and Offices in the Francophone Algerian Press. Case Study

In this quantitative and qualitative study, a question arises about the use of feminised structures in the current language of Algerian francophone press, a fertile ground that favours lexical innovation (cf. Altmanova 2013). In order to use a rich and varied corpus, our choice has been focused on French-language online Algerian newspapers characterized by huge spread and therefore considered most read throughout the national territory, for a total of six newspapers:

<sup>5</sup> The expression “francophonie du nord” was used in French sociolinguistics by Bulo and Blanchet (2013, 81) in order to indicate the Francophone European and North-American countries.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. [http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/gabarit\\_bdl.asp?Th=1&Th\\_id=274](http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/gabarit_bdl.asp?Th=1&Th_id=274).

*El Moudjahid, El Watan, Le soir d'Algérie, Le quotidien d'Oran, Liberté, Horizons.*<sup>7</sup> The choice of these newspapers was done according to a survey by the Algerian Ministère de la Communication on the circulation of newspapers.<sup>8</sup>

Through a quantitative analysis of the terms used in the articles processed by descriptive-analytical study and using an analytics lexicometrical software such as AntConc, a qualitative analysis has also been carried out on the linguistic results obtained.

The data collection period spans the entire month of March 2018, trying to compare some results with some data reported in the newspapers in question in March 2010, in order to provide a broader overview of the phenomenon in question. The choice of this period is due to the fact that March is worldwide considered the month of women, for the occurrence of 8 March with the “Journée internationale des Femmes” (International Women’s Day). As a result, the issue concerning the female gender has a special coverage in journalism speeches, which responds to the object of this research for a highly diversified list of names of trades, titles and functions collected that relate to women at a time when the occurrence of this type of lexemes is highly visible compared to publications distributed during the other months of the year.

The perusal of online newspapers<sup>9</sup> allowed to collect 2074 nouns of occupations, functions, grades and titles, 1589 of which are visibly feminised forms, namely 87.75% of structures collected and 231 forms whose meaning is masculine, referring to a female figure expressing the perpetuation of masculine form and then the endurance to the feminisation, namely the 12.25% of the total number of nouns.

Before investigating the feminisation of titles of profession, for they are articles published during the month dedicated to women, it was appropriate to statistically calculate the relative frequency of the lexeme *femme* found in the analysed texts in March 2018,<sup>10</sup> and then to compare it to the frequency of the same lexeme in the month of March 2010:

<sup>7</sup> Cf. [http://www.denisdar.com/index.php%3frub=pieds\\_noirs&p=8](http://www.denisdar.com/index.php%3frub=pieds_noirs&p=8).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/actualite/les-algeriens-et-limpact-des-medias-32967/pprint/1>.

<sup>9</sup> Implemented through the transformation into Word format of the selected items, and then in txt format for lexicometrical analysis through the AntConc software.

<sup>10</sup> Obtained by dividing the frequency of the lexeme with the total number of lexemes in the corpus analysed (cf. Muller 2000; Brezina 2018).

**Table 1** Occurrences of lexeme *femme* (woman) – March 2018

Number of articles – March 2018	150
Total number of words	45.000
Occurrences of lexeme <i>femme</i>	223
Relative occurrence	49.5 %

**Table 2** Occurrences of lexeme *femme* (woman) – March 2010

Number of articles – March 2010	150
Total number of words	39.400
Occurrences of lexeme <i>femme</i>	141
Relative occurrence	35.7 %

Based on what emerges from statistical-contrastive analysis, the lexeme *femme* in the month of March 2018 not only is present in almost all the articles studied, but often occurs multiple times for different linguistic reasons, presenting a percentage of 49.5%.

In March 2010, however, the term is used in a smaller percentage (35.7%), also due to the increased use of the generic masculine referred to professions carried out by women. As regards the corpus of 2018, instead, it has been observed that some journalists do not encounter any difficulty with the feminisation of titles by profession, encouraging this perspective, which translates into a systematic feminisation.

Among the different processes of feminisation of titles found in the Algerian francophone press, there are epicene forms. The term “epicene” in morphosyntax means “ambi-genders” (Riegel et al. 2014), i.e. both masculine and feminine, as defined in *Trésor de la langue française informatisé*:<sup>11</sup>

ÉPICÈNE, adj.

GRAMM., rare.

**A.**– [En parlant d’un nom d’être animé] (Terme générique) qui sert à désigner une espèce, sans préciser le sexe. *Les mots Enfant, perdrix sont des noms épiciens* (Ac.1932).

**B.**– [En parlant d’un subst., d’un adj., d’un pron.] Qui a la même forme au masculin et au féminin. (cf. Dupré *Lex.* 1972)

In the reference corpus there are some epicene nouns that end with the suffix *-e*, accompanied by a feminine article:

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/epic%C3%A8ne>.

**Table 3** Some epicene nouns that end with the suffix -e, accompanied by a feminine article

Article	Epicene noun	Article	Epicene noun
La	Ministre	La	Scripte
Une	syndicaliste	Une	Scénariste
		La	spécialiste
La	parlementaire	La	photographe
Sa	diplomate en chef	La	styliste
		L'	interprète
L'	activiste	Une/la	chorégraphe
Une/ la	membre de	La	peintre
La	commissaire (du police)	La	terroriste
Une	gendarme	Une	athlète de judo
La	secrétaire	Une	politologue
Cette	cadre	Une/la	sociologue
Une	titulaire		la chimiste
La/ une	juge		la biologiste
Une /la	sage-femme		une architecte
Cette	dermatologue		
“ la ”/ ma/une	gynécologue		
La	thérapeute		
La	néphrologue		
Une	psychologue		
La/une	journaliste		
la	réceptionniste		

Adding the lexeme *femme* (woman) before or after the epicene terms promotes the formation of compound words:

**Table 4** The lexeme *femme* (woman) before or after the epicene terms

Before	Epicene noun	After
Femme	Ministre	
Femmes	Syndicalistes	
Une femme	Commissaire	
Les femmes	Les cadres	Femmes
Ces femmes	Fonctionnaires	
	Une gynéco	Femme
La (les) femmes	Journaliste (s)	Femmes
-femmes	-cinéastes	



Before	Epicene noun	After
- femmes	- peintres	
- femme (s)	- artiste (s)	
- la femme	Artiste (s)	- femmes
- femmes	- artistes peintres	
- dames	- artistes peintres	
- femme(s)	- arbitre (s)	
- femme(s)	pilote(s)(de chasse)	
	- copilotes	
- jeunes femmes	- bédéistes	- femmes

It has been noticed that journalists often use the term *femme* in the formation of the feminine epicene names, especially in the case of plural where the kind of gender is not obvious or when it comes to a name that does not require the article. In both cases a simple process of feminisation is used: it consists of a simple addition of the lexeme *femme*.

Another language strategy adopted in the journalistic discourse in question is to identify the gender through a female proper name. It is a name that specifies the sex, and it is placed before or after the name in issue.

Ex. : l'artiste-peintre *Djahida Houdef* / l'artiste peintre *Samia* / l'architecte *Zaha Hadid* / *Nabila*, architecte / *Beihidja Rahal*, interprète de musique andalouse / *Aicha Saidi*, journaliste / *Sabiha Adadiche*, artiste peintre / *Souad Driss*, interprète pour sourds-muets.

The development of this policy was based on one of the three linguistic approaches summarized by Jonasson (1994, 114) (cited in Friburger 2006) on the semantic level, including the second that:

soit le sens du nom propre est une description du référent : nous considérons qu'il a un sens fort et qu'il identifie de manière univoque un référent ou qu'il a un sens réduit à des traits sémantiques généraux: trait féminin/masculin, humain/non-humain, etc. (Friburger 2006, 638),

unlike the first approach that, on the contrary, states that "le nom propre est vide de sens" (638).

Another version used is the principle "Mme + last name and/or the female name", just because the name acts like the female determinant. Among the few examples there are:

Ex. : *Mme Saidani*, standardiste au niveau de Sonatrach / *Mme Id-ami*, chorégraphe / *Mme Rahmani*, membre de la commission exécutive nationale / *Mme Amine*, fonctionnaire

There is the case in which the gender of the person exercising the profession is determined in relation to the adjective that goes with it: the latter is before or after placed:

Ex. : artiste peintre *espagnole* / quatre artistes *françaises* / de nombreuses artistes / différentes artistes peintres / la défunte artiste peintre / je suis la seule interprète / les athlètes *algériennes*

In this specific situation, the qualifying adjective hides the other processes of feminisation and its use is sufficient to distinguish the gender of a person.

The examples in which names whose feminine forms a homophone are reported in a few cases, namely when the feminine in the corpus leads to a polysemy placed on a continuous axis between the different uses of the language, ranging from a simple polysemy through semantic vagueness (Aarts et al. 2004) to the rejection of the feminine form, and then to the retention of the masculine in terms of adaptation.

To get a better understanding of this case let us consider the example of the lexeme *médecin*, among the most common occupations in our corpus. In the articles analysed, the addition of the suffix *-e* to the word *médecine* describes the object of the profession exercised by the person rather than the title of female profession.

To avoid confusion about *médecine* (understood as ‘medical science’), with *médecine* the ‘medical profession’, journalists use ‘avoidance procedures’, as the female name next to the name of the profession (*Sakina*, médecin, *Mme Demèche Dehbih*, médecin chef) or adding the lexeme *femme* (la première *femme* médecin). Otherwise it keeps the masculine form through periphrasis like “l’une est médecin de profession” (Elmiger 2011, 77).

Finally, with regard to loanwords, it has been reported the presence of many verbs from the English language and, obviously, from the Arabic (the official language in Algeria along with the Berber language) has been reported (Sebaa 2002).



cause the reporter considers the article sufficient to consider it a feminine name) as well as some variations, such as *les top modèles* (addition of *-e* as feminine marker) and the *desperate maman model* (in this case, there is a threefold feminisation: feminine article + *maman* which has the same meaning as *femme* + suffix *-e* as a feminine marker).

## 5 Final Remarks

Equality and the feminisation of nouns denoting occupations, titles and functions can be seen as a complement and a lexical enrichment of Algerian French, which is imposed (by use) to overcome some language gaps of this diatopic variety of the French language that has emerged under the current political, economic and sociocultural circumstances (cf. Serres 2019).

This is a process of linguistic mutation that affects of course all world languages in a particular political and historic context.

In the case of French considering the differences in terms of language used in the processes of feminisation of profession titles in the various context of French-speaking countries, it is advisable that the French-speaking countries strengthen their efforts in finding a feminine equivalent in all existing profession titles, in order to overcome this language deficiencies which divide the *Francophonie* in facing some sociolinguistic changes.

With a brief contrastive period in March 2010, featuring selected articles it has been recorded that the feminisation of occupations, titles and names of functions is widely used in 2018 compared to the linguistic data available on newspaper articles written in March 2010, and this is because of a recently greater and widespread sensitivity in Algeria to the theme of gender representation in the French language,<sup>12</sup> under the influence of various political and institutional debates in French-speaking countries, such as the use of *écriture inclusive* (inclusive writing) (cf. Charaudeau 2018) in the media.

Even if this research remains legitimately open to the study of other feminisation processes adopted in the current Algerian press, the different uses and different positions of the Algerian francophone speakers towards feminisation in the French language have been highlighted, carrying out a synchronic analysis which aims to be representative of the reality of the situation.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the Moroccan press: “La presse, en français notamment, multiplie les portraits et les interviews de femmes remarquables. À la lire, on a presque le sentiment que le Maroc est un pays de femmes, femmes politiques, femmes de la société civile, femmes de secteurs sociaux, femmes artistes, écrivains, peintres, photographes, cinéastes” (Daoud 2008, 24) e “la presse en français encourage la modernisation en rendant compte de la féminisation de la société et en la poussant en avant” (22).

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