

UNVEILING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EXPANDING THE ALGERIAN LINGUISTIC PALETTE: THE CASE OF ENGLISH IN E-COMMERCE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper revolves around the evolution of e-commerce and language choice in the Algerian virtual sphere since the Covid-19 pandemic. The main objective is to establish and confirm the link which lies between the pandemic and e-commerce proliferation, and then to reveal the position of English within the Algerian commercial process and its potential in naming Algerian online brands. The researcher opted for a mixed-methods approach, combining interviews with delivery agency workers and observations conducted in delivery agencies, and a netnography encompassing online immersion in small business accounts on Instagram. Results demonstrate that the exponential growth of e-commerce during and after the pandemic coincided with a marked increase in the use of English, particularly in brand names, bios, highlights, and hashtags by certain small business pages on Instagram. While French and Arabic remain central to online communication, English has acquired new symbolic capital, functioning as a marker of trendiness and global connectivity. These results extend prior research on Algeria's sociolinguistic dynamics by demonstrating how global disruptions such as Covid-19 can accelerate linguistic change in the digital marketplace.

Keywords: *Algerian, Covid-19, English, E-commerce, Netnography.*

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COVID-19’UN CEZAYİR DİL PALETİNİN GENİŞLETİLMESİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİNİN ORTAYA ÇIKARILMASI: E-TİCARETTE İNGİLİZCE ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZ

Bu makale, Covid-19 pandemisinden bu yana Cezayir sanal alanında e-ticaretin ve dil seçiminin evrimi etrafında dönmektedir. Temel amaç, pandemi ile e-ticaretin yaygınlaşması arasında yatan bağlantıyı kurmak ve doğrulamak, ardından da İngilizcenin Cezayir ticari sürecindeki konumunu ve Cezayir çevrimiçi markalarını isimlendirme potansiyelini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Araştırmacı, teslimat acentelerinde çalışanlarla yapılan görüşmeler ve gözlemler ile Instagram’daki küçük işletme hesaplarına çevrimiçi dalmayı kapsayan bir netnografiyi birleştiren karma bir yöntem yaklaşımını tercih etti. Sonuçlar, pandemiden önce ve sonra e-ticaretin katlanarak büyümesinin, özellikle bazı küçük işletmelere ait Instagram sayfalarında marka adlarında, biyografilerde, öne çıkarılanlarda ve hashtaglerde İngilizce kullanımında belirgin bir artışla ilişkisi olabileceğini göstermektedir. Fransızca ve Arapça çevrimiçi iletişimde merkezi diller olmayı sürdürürken, İngilizce yeni bir sembolik sermaye kazanmış, trend ve küresel bağlantılılığın bir göstergesi olarak işlev görmeye başlamıştır. Bu sonuçlar, Cezayir’in sosyodilbilimsel dinamiklerine ilişkin önceki araştırmaları genişleterek, Covid-19 gibi küresel kırılmaların dijital pazarda dilsel değişimi hızlandırabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Cezayir, Covid-19, İngilizce, E-ticaret, Netnografi.*

INTRODUCTION

The end of the year 2019 witnessed a worldwide sanitary condition which altered the reality of governments, nations and individuals. The Covid-19 pandemic put human life at stake and, thus, urged governments to adopt precautions to limit contagion, including social distancing and quarantine. People's usual course of life was altered in several aspects. To exemplify, educational institutions resorted to e-learning platforms so that students could resume their studies. A further instance which is relevant to our research context is e-commerce which involves ordering and buying groceries online and having them delivered to people's homes by delivery agencies.

In fact, the lockdown is said to have intensified people's reliance on digital means of communication, such as social media apps, for ordering products and serving their daily needs (Sheth, 2020). One aspect that our research is particularly interested in is the increase/ reliance of online communication for commerce purposes in the Algerian context, as "online trade has flourished during the period of confinement" (Derraz & Bessouh, 2023, p. 1388). Based on our initial observation, a number of small business pages on Instagram used the English language besides Arabic (classical and Algerian) and French for communicating information about their business. This is an unusual linguistic choice as far as the online Algerian context is concerned.

Furthermore, we found little to no statistical or ethnographic studies on how possibly the choice of English in Algerian e-commerce could emerge in the midst of COVID-19 chain of cause and effect. Thus, we set forth the following questions:

1. To what extent did the Covid-19 pandemic contribute to the rise of English in Algerian e-commerce, as reflected in small businesses' Instagram brand naming and content?
2. What specific linguistic patterns (e.g., monolingual English, code-mixing with Arabic/French, marketing-specific English terms) characterize the use of English on Algerian Instagram business pages?
3. How do Algerian small business owners position English within the linguistic marketplace of e-commerce compared to French and Arabic during and after the Covid-19 pandemic?

Therefore, the present work attempts to account for an emerging pattern of English language use in Algerian e-commerce as it coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic. The significance of this contribution lies in the fact that there has been little to no literature that investigates the role of Algerian small business owners in establishing new linguistic trends, namely the use of English for commercial purposes. A further gap lies in the apparent lack of research in Algeria with such participants as agents in the commercial domain, let alone in an online context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The work at hand draws on a theoretical framework which allows a clear visualization and critical conception of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, a combination of Kachru's model of English circles, the theory of linguistic marketplace, and Virtual Linguistic Landscape (VLL) is set forth to deal with the English phenomenon in the Algerian context. To elaborate, the notion of Kachru's expanding circle provides a sociolinguistic portrayal of the position that English holds in the Algerian context. Then, the theory of linguistic marketplace could explain the reason behind choosing English among other options in a given context. Most importantly, VLL takes us to the crux of the matter and frames our analysis of English use in the digital arena (i.e. Instagram within the scope of this study).

Ndiaye (2023) highlighted the extent to which English has become a lingua franca and stated that "English is spoken all around the world even in countries where it has no special status" (p.23345) This means that English is occupying a place even in non-English dominant countries, basically making up the expanding circle according to Kachru (1985). The current reality of globalization is related to an unprecedented need for a global language that facilitates worldwide communication in several aspects including business (Wiggers, 2018, p. 80). In this regard, the pivotal role played by the English language in international business has been thoroughly documented in the literature (Hejazi & Ma, 2011; Crystal, 2003; Wiggers, 2018; Rattan, 2024). What one needs to consider is the fact that the use of English for business extends to the expanding circle (Asadova, 2023, p. 303).

This circle happens to encompass countries where English is a foreign language and Algeria is no exception. The Algerian sociolinguistic situation is that of a multilingual country that includes Modern Standard

Arabic (MSA), Tamazight (Berber), Algerian Arabic, French, and English. The Algerian language policy recognizes MSA and Tamazight as official languages, while it considers French and English as foreign languages. In fact, Benrabah (2013) refers to the rivalry between French and English within the Algerian context, while Belmihoub (2018, p. 2) explains that: “With increased presence of English comes an intensified rivalry with French”. Nonetheless, both languages are used in certain contexts and the one which captures our interest is economic in nature. Economics and trade are said to be fields wherein French and English are used (Gheraissa, 2020). This is detailed by Belmihoub (2018, p. 12) where English enables business communication with foreign oil and gas companies, leaving a rather local task for the French language. He further pinpoints at the use of English for branding by owners of physical small businesses due to its prestigious effect (*ibid*).

As far as the status quo of English is concerned, such theoretical and contextual considerations could be explicated from the lens of linguistic marketplace theory. According to Bourdieu (1991), the linguistic marketplace stands for “social contexts where language use and proficiency are valued as economic, social, and cultural capital, influencing individuals’ power and status” (Perry, 2025, p.2). In other words, the tenets of this theory address the particular benefit, that is the social, economic, or cultural value that a given language variety displays in a given social context (or market). It is the reason why the linguistic marketplace can be relevant in explaining the reason for favouring some languages over others based on their linguistic capital. The latter is a term that represents the symbolic and material benefits that individuals gain from using a linguistic product in a given market (Zhang, 2005). In fact, the notions found in the theory of linguistic marketplace permit us to “explore the social and economic implications of language use and communicative practices” (Perry, 2025, p.2).

Considering the aforementioned points, English dominates the economy in many linguistic marketplaces at a global scale, and this expands to the expanding circle. One may infer that French and English maintain their linguistic capital in the Algerian linguistic marketplace, and demonstrate economic merits. The foregoing observations of Belmihoub (2018) entail that while the value of French is witnessed at the local level, English upholds a richer linguistic capital since it serves both local and overseas

communicative practices for economic purposes. Moreover, prestige can be considered as part of the linguistic capital of English as it is used by the owners of physical businesses, which then justifies its presence within the Algerian linguistic marketplace. Hence, e-commerce is one particular digital area that captures our interest to come up with such linguistic observations in the online context of business activities.

According to Shahriari et al (2015, p. 50), “electronic commerce, commonly known as E-commerce, is trading in products or services using computer networks, such as the Internet.” That is to say, e-commerce stands for using computer-based means, including social media applications, in the activity of buying and selling goods. Such transactions cannot take place without the use of language. Currently, there is scant research conducted on the status or “territory” occupied by French and English as far as Algerian e-commerce is concerned. The reason could be that the evolution of e-commerce is still at its “embryonic state” (Tabet Derraz & Bessouh, 2023, p. 1386). This might explain why, to the best of our knowledge, there is no work that has tackled the position of English within the development of Algerian e-commerce in the last few years, let alone literature which adopts the linguistic marketplace theory or Virtual Linguistic Landscape regarding English in Algerian e-commerce.

Nonetheless, a considerable amount of research has been conducted to account for the changes caused by Covid-19 pandemic with regard to e-commerce. Gao (2022) refers to the vital economic risk that the Covid-19 has caused to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), while Mermi (2020) adds that small businesses in the United States did not have any choice but to close and resort to the online alternative. The aforementioned idea is reinforced by the outcomes of Susanto et al (2021) wherein social media apps are considered to be the adequate medium through which small businesses could survive. The worldwide situation was not any different from the Algerian context since the latter witnessed the adoption of social media for commerce during the pandemic. (Tabet Derraz & Bessouh, 2023, p. 1387).

This could be a starting point for our investigation of the linguistic effect of Covid-19 on e-commerce, and how it influenced language choice in the Algerian context, specifically on Instagram for business purposes. We would attempt to discuss the linguistic capital of English within the

linguistic marketplace of Instagram. Therefore, the present research adopts the theory of virtual linguistic landscape (VLL) for its theoretical relevance in tackling our object of study (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009). VLL is “a recently developed concept that captures language representation within digital communities” (Alkhalil, 2025, p. 527). While traditional Linguistic Landscape (LL) studies language use in physical public spaces, VLL is a developed version and it allows us to determine and describe language choices in online communities and to identify the position and power relations among the “coexisting linguistic choices” (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009, p. 19) Therefore, VLL can be a suitable option for studying online multilingual contexts (ibid), which goes in line with the work at hand.

METHODOLOGY

Since the present research encompasses offline and online investigations, we set forth a multi-methods approach, which involves “two or more independent sources of data and methods of collection within one study” (Saunders, 2019, p. 218). In other words, the process of our data collection combines different research tools, contexts, and perspectives, in order to enrich our outcomes and understandings. On the one hand, we conducted the offline investigation through interviewing workers at delivery agencies and observing the brand names of randomly selected packages. On the other hand, we collected data from online business pages through doing a netnography. The latter is a research method that enables conducting research in online contexts. Established and developed by Kozinets since 1990s, netnography provides a number of methodological guidelines for gaining cultural insights through a qualitative exploration of “the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media” (Kozinets, 2020, p. 14). Given that the observed small businesses are active on social media, netnography is considered to be a relevant tool. Besides, Wu (2021, p. 90) pinpoints at the flexibility of netnography in embracing the multi-methods approach and allowing offline research methods including observation and interviews (see also Kozinets & Gretzel, 2023). This is why netnography would facilitate research triangulation and, subsequently, reliability of the outcomes. The three research methods will be explained in detail in what follows.

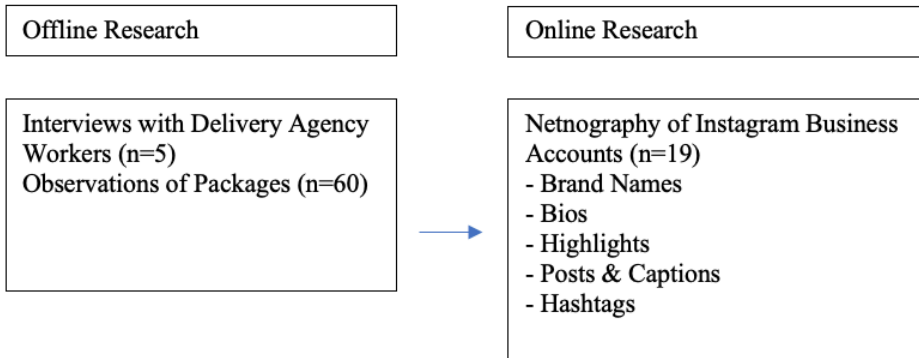
The first phase was conducted at national delivery agencies. The researcher conducted interviews with the workers of 3 delivery services: “Yalidine

El Djazair”; “Anderson Mostaganem” and “World Express”; all based in Mostaganem (see appendix). The total number of workers is five; we dealt with 3 workers in Yalidine, one worker in Anderson Mostaganem, and one worker in World Express. The main objective of the interview was to elicit workers’ perceived realities about e-commerce in Algeria. A number of 9 questions tackled the effect of Covid-19 on Algerian e-commerce, the linguistic aspect of Algerian small businesses, and the position of English within e-commerce and online businesses as well.

The interview was followed by a random collection and observation of 20 packages in each delivery agency. The goal here is to identify the language chosen by the business owners in naming their brands. The observation of the 60 packages in total involved analysing them linguistically with the aim to identify patterns which could characterize brand naming as far as Algerian online stores are concerned. The researcher was allowed to take notes of the brand names so as to search for them on Instagram and conduct the linguistic examination in the following online step. In fact, the brand names were a means of transition from the offline investigation to the online one. This is because the brand names are the only guide to search for their corresponding accounts on Instagram.

Figure 1.

Research Design and Data Collection Process



The netnographic phase took place after the offline research part and relied on Kozinets’ six research movements (Kozinets, 2020; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2022; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2024). During the initiation movement, we managed to find 4 Instagram accounts for Anderson Mostaganem, 6

Accounts for World Express, and 9 accounts for Yalidine. The business pages were about to undergo a deep linguistic analysis. Since the pages were pre-defined by the offline research part, we could do without the investigation movement. The researcher considered both English and non-English brands, she conducted the immersion movement, which involves the observation of digital traces while taking fieldnotes. Relying on an immersion journal, the researcher explored the Algerian business pages and took notes regarding peculiar patterns of English use across the observed corpora, which include the brand names, bios, highlights, posts, captions, and hashtags. This stratification of the corpus goes in line with the recommendations of an expert on digital media.

The notes were merely concerned with qualitative data, while including a few quantitative cues for the sake of triangulation. Therefore, the outcomes would include mainly descriptive data which are backed up by a few numerical data. Regarding positionality, the researcher has been an outsider because there was no interaction movement since we did not need to elicit information from the owners of the business pages. However, we did consider to contact them for getting their informed consent. This option was not adopted for the following reasons: 1. The pages content is public, which does not harm the privacy of the business owners. 2. There are no personal or sensitive data involved in our research of the business pages, keeping the owners' identity unknown. 3. Dealing with only 19 business pages is a relatively small sample, which could be even worse in case we asked for their informed consent and did not get it.

All in all, the offline part of the research was conducted before the online part, and the overall combination of the aforementioned steps is crucial in meeting our objectives and reinforcing the integration movement and the overall reliability of our research. As for ethical considerations, the ethics committee approval was received from the Social Sciences Ethic Committee dated on 20th January 2025. Besides, permission was granted by the three delivery agencies to conduct the interview, observe the packages, and eventually search for the business pages on Instagram. Regarding netnographic ethical guidelines, there were no obstacles when doing immersion given that the content was a public one. Besides, Kozinets & Gretzel (2024, p. 416) pinpoint at the importance of local laws in order to conduct ethical research. In fact, the Algerian law n° 18-07 of online content, issued on 10th June 2018, protects personal user data from usage

without permission. This means that when dealing with public content, no personal data should be affected. It is considered in this research and it goes hand in hand with both netnographic guidelines and the public status that characterizes the researched business pages.

Preliminary Suppositions

Based on the theoretical framework of the linguistic marketplace and Virtual Linguistic Landscape, this study advances the following hypotheses. First, it is hypothesized that the majority of Algerian small business Instagram pages created during or after the Covid-19 pandemic are more likely to adopt English in their brand names compared to those created before the pandemic. Second, English is expected to be disproportionately employed in marketing-related elements of Instagram business accounts - such as bios, highlights, and hashtags - rather than in general communication spaces like captions or customer interactions. Third, the frequency of English use in Algerian e-commerce is assumed to reflect its higher perceived linguistic capital relative to Arabic and French, particularly among entrepreneurs who are targeting digitally active and globalized markets. Finally, it is hypothesized that businesses dealing with trendy or internationally oriented products, including fashion, cosmetics, and accessories, will incorporate English more extensively than businesses offering traditional or locally oriented products such as food or home goods.

FINDINGS

The present section is intended to describe and analyse the data collected at each step of the research. The aim of the interview is to elicit the perspective of workers regarding the evolution of Algerian e-commerce, online business and the trends of English use within the online commercial context. Subsequently, the offline and online observations of the brand names and their respective pages on Instagram tackle a set of objectives as follows:

- Investigate the starting point of the business pages with reference to the timeframe of Covid-19 (confirm the impact of Covid-19 on e-commerce).
- Establish and confirm that the use of English coincides with the e-commerce wave heralded by Covid-19.
- Unveil the linguistic patterns of English use in those small business profiles.

The findings of each research method (interview, offline and online observations) are separately presented while attempting to establish patterns based on common results across the three delivery agencies.

Analysis of the Interview

The respondents' work experience ranges from less than a month to three years. The service provided by their respective agencies is to facilitate the transfer and delivery of products/ packages from sellers to consumers. Some specific answers included linking shops with clients at a national level, making deliveries at affordable prices, and allowing novice sellers who live in remote places to start their e-commerce activity. Regarding the impact of Covid-19, workers in Anderson Mostaganem, World Express, and Yalidine acknowledged that the pandemic led to the establishment of delivery agencies and their increase in number and activity. While a worker in Yalidine emphasized that "people were in their homes, they had to make purchases online, which means that they had to rely on the delivery services", another worker in Anderson Mostaganem stated that "Covid-19 caused the creation of new delivery services and the increase of their activity". This goes hand in hand with the adoption and increase of e-commerce and online businesses across various domains as the main resort for consumers during the lockdown. Nevertheless, one respondent noticed that the lockdown caused an instability in e-commerce activity, pinpointing that "e-commerce was increasing and sometimes decreasing depending on the measures of Covid-19 lockdown".

The remaining questions tackled online businesses, particularly those based on social media. Respondents almost agreed that Facebook is the main social media app used for e-commerce by Algerian small businesses, followed by Instagram and TikTok. The worker in Anderson Mostaganem added that Instagram happens to be more credible since there are not scams when using it for commercial transactions. The last four questions in the interview were dedicated to the linguistic aspect of e-commerce and online businesses. It is reported that Arabic is the main language used in e-commerce, followed by French. There was a peculiar observation shared by one of the workers in Yalidine about the use of English, considering it as "a new trend and it is increasing."

Moving further, most of the interviewees happen to read the names of the online businesses when dealing with packages. As far as language choice is concerned, French is the primary language used by the online business

owners to name their businesses, followed by Arabic, and then English. According to participants' answers such as "French, and rarely Arabic", "French, then Arabic, then English", and "mostly French", French is said to be the leading language in brand naming. Indeed, the participant from World Express considers French to be used more than English since Algeria is a Francophone society.

Conversely, English was claimed by a participant from Anderson Mostaganem to be more used, especially words like "shop" and "store". Another worker mentioned the same aforementioned point of using "shop" with another word (something or the name of the business owner) to form the brand name. In the same vein, a participant from Yalidine agency referred to a novice phenomenon taking place in the Algerian context: "Previously, shops were named in French. Now for newer online shops we notice more English than French especially by the new generations." The last question addressed the frequency of English use in naming the brands of online businesses and the majority of respondents recognize that English is increasingly a frequent language choice.

Analysis of the Observed Brand Names

The observation targeted the language chosen in naming the brands of the online businesses; it covered 60 packages in total divided between the three delivery agencies. Under the supervision of a worker in each agency, the researcher observed the packages and read the "expéditeur" (the sender) which demonstrates the seller's brand name. Results show that the brand names in English were estimated at 60%, 55%, and 40% in Anderson Mostaganem, World Express, and Yalidine, respectively. That is to say, among the 60 observed packages there were 31 packages which contained brands in English.

Table 1.

Language distribution in observed brand names (%)

Delivery Agency	% English Brand Names	% French Brand Names	% Arabic Brand Names	NA
Anderson Mostaganem	60 %	15%	20%	5%
World Express	55 %	10%	25%	10%
Yalidine	40 %	50%	10%	-

*NA refers to the brand names in symbols such as "MG T42" (Anderson), "Silina Massilla", and "KLAZ" (World Express).

Regarding the language patterns identified by the researcher, all of the English brand names consist of two or three words, usually containing “shop”, “store”, “shopping” as the last word in the brand name. To illustrate, there is the key word in English or Arabic followed by “shop” or “store” in “Kitchen shop”, “Bmb shop”, “Ayet store”, and “Watani store”.

Furthermore, the researcher considered the brand names in terms of monolingualism and code mixing and identified that there is a significant number of monolingual English brand names including “glow cosmetics”, “the queen”, “be simple”, “graduate dreams”, and “Vip marine service”. This pattern has been observed across the three agencies in addition to the apparent use of code mixing between English and Arabic, such as “djawda market”, “mazaya group”, “Asma beauty”, “watani store”, and “cases by Dalal”.

There are also few instances of English-French code mixing (“IQ parfum”), English-French-Arabic code mixing (“boutique baby Habibi”), and the use of symbols with English words such as “Dz shopping”, “Bmb shop”, “LMD optic”, “Mdhomedz”, and “DJOO shopping”. Some unclear terms were encountered with “Kiway shop” and “Mircato shop”.

Analysis of the Observed Instagram Pages

The main challenge in this research phase was finding the online pages that we took notes of during the offline observation. In fact, results in this sub-section include pages that we managed to find on Instagram and that have English and non-English brand names. The purpose here is to explore how English is used from a linguistic perspective and the extent to which it is adopted in the process of social media marketing. A further goal would be to find out whether using an English brand name for an Instagram business account implies the use of this language in the rest of the profile and vice versa. With this end in view, this sub-section tackles the pages of each delivery agency separately and divides the findings into English Brands and non-English brands.

Figure 2.

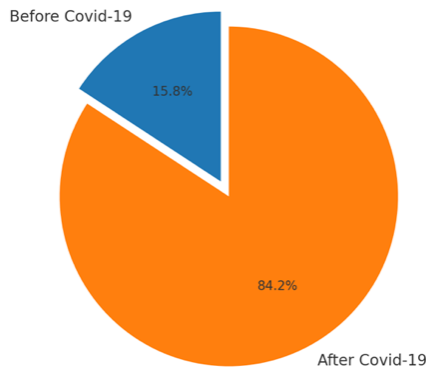
Screenshot of the Brand Name and Biography of a Business Account



Most of the observed online businesses were established after the outbreak of Covid-19, making the pandemic a significant turning point. Of the 19 Instagram pages analyzed, only 15.8% were created prior to Covid-19, whereas the vast majority (84.2%) emerged following the onset of the pandemic.

Figure 3.

Instagram Business Page Creation Relative to Covid-19



Besides, our observations pinpoint that the use of English was consistently specific to certain parts in the Instagram accounts, and that there is no clear pattern across the accounts. The length of the English parts shows variety between sentences, phrases, and words.

Anderson Mostaganem

The first two business accounts ‘cases by dalal’ and ‘glow cosmetics’ feature English as the main language used throughout their profiles (see Figure 2). While the bio of the latter is purely in English, the former uses it for just one phrase. Regarding highlights, there is an excessive use of English in both business accounts in the form of words (‘done’, ‘purple’), phrases (‘brown laptop case’, ‘ready to go’), or sentences (‘I enjoy making these bouquets’, ‘the bag is coming soon’) that name or describe products, or share information about the ordered products. Few instances of code-mixing are characterized by the use of Algerian Arabic or French besides English (‘vos commandes are ready’ meaning ‘your orders are ready’), (‘hada bouquet khdmto fi wst la fac Tlmm I don’t have time anymore’ meaning ‘I made this bouquet in the midst of university due to how I don’t have time anymore’).

Moving to the posts and their captions, there is a tendency to alternate between Arabic, French and English each now and then. For instance, there is a post in ‘cases by dalal’ which contains a sentence in Algerian Arabic ‘كي يسقوك علاش تختايجي هادو’ meaning ‘when they ask you why you need these’ accompanied by an audio utterance saying ‘because I’m just a girl’. The caption under it is a mixture of English ‘DM to order’ and code-mixing between French and Arabic ‘Pochette pc’; ‘Pochette srira’ respectively meaning ‘laptop pouch’ and ‘small pouch’. Hashtags tend to be a mixture of mainly English and French, while customers’ comments tend to vary between French, Arabic, and English. Regarding the two remaining non-English business pages (electronic accessories; clothes and shoes), English was limited to the bio of the account ‘lekidi.dz’ where two English phrases can be identified ‘welcome to Lekidi Dz’ and ‘our second page’.

World Express

According to the online observation of the business accounts, there are five English-branded pages (selling car accessories; men’s clothes; home decoration; kitchen tools and decorations; delivery service) that demonstrate little and scattered patterns of English use throughout the profiles. The business account ‘kitchen shop’ contains only French and Arabic in its content, so the use of English is limited to the brand name. In fact, the use of English in the bio is identified in ‘welcome to our store’ mentioned in the page ‘kiway shopper’. The other pages use French, Arabic, or a mixture of both. Moving on, there are only two English words in ‘be simple’ (‘new’

and ‘inside’) to inform or describe the products in the highlights.

The remaining content of the pages (posts, captions, hashtags) show a few instances across the business pages. Hence, there is the use of English words and phrases in posts (pictures, videos) such as ‘get it now’, ‘welcome’, ‘important announcement’, respectively found in ‘be simple’, ‘Mdhomedz’, and ‘world express’. Furthermore, the captions in English are very few and include ‘classic warm jacket’ found in ‘be simple’ and ‘the best’ identified in ‘Mdhomedz’. Nonetheless, hashtags exhibit a consistent use of English but in diverse ways. That is to say, ‘Mdhomedz’ includes English words along with French and Arabic ones according to the category of the product. The latter could be related to food or kitchen so the owner puts hashtags such as ‘food’, ‘pastry’, ‘delicious’, and ‘bakery’. If the product is about home decor, the business owner puts ‘candles’, ‘furniture’, ‘mirror’, inter alia. Conversely, the account ‘Drl Abya’ demonstrates the same English words repeated across the post hashtags, such as ‘lifestyle’, ‘viral’, ‘muslim’, and ‘Abayafashion’. A peculiar remark is that ‘Drl Abya’ is a non-English brand name despite the use of English in the hashtags.

Yalidine

The online observation of the business accounts collected in Yalidine service reveals that the use of English is restricted to specific parts of the Instagram pages including the brand names (‘mastersportdz.store’, ‘lmd.optic’, ‘vip marine service’, ‘djawda.com’ labelled in the logo as ‘djawda.store’, ‘bmbshop’, and ‘collectionglamour.official’). Besides, it has been noticed in the bios that English is used in the form of a marketing sentence ‘your story isn’t over yet!’ or an informative phrase ‘for her’ respectively found in ‘mastersportdz.store’ and ‘collectionglamour.official’. Highlights also contain English phrases only in the business accounts ‘lmd.optic’ (‘special offer’, ‘available Halloween lenses’, and ‘new arrival) and ‘la rose de guelma’ (‘review from our client’ and ‘much love from our roses’) despite the fact that ‘la rose de guelma’ is not an English brand name.

Findings of English use in the product posts (pictures, videos), captions, and hashtags would be presented with reference to ‘mastersportdz.store’, ‘la rose de guelma’, and ‘lmd.optic’. The reason that results are limited to the aforementioned profiles is that there is no use of English in the other business accounts. To start, ‘mastersportdz.store’ shows the use of an English phrase in a post ‘breaking news’, along with some hashtags

such as ‘pumashoes’ and ‘adidasoriginals’. Moreover, ‘la rose de guelma’ exhibits the use of English for marketing purposes in the captions ‘can’t get enough of the leo look’ and ‘in love with the black one’. The phrases demonstrated in the business account ‘lmd.optic’ include ‘new arrival’, ‘be scary together’, and ‘get this look’ in posts; ‘crazy lens’ and ‘Freshlook Pure Hazel’ in captions; and ‘magician’, ‘algeria’, and ‘dzpower’ in hashtags.

Summary of Analysis

The multi-method analysis reveals consistent evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for the growth of Algerian e-commerce and the increasing visibility of English in online commercial communication. Interviews with delivery agency workers highlighted the establishment and expansion of delivery services during the pandemic and identified English as a rising trend in brand naming, particularly among younger generations. While French remained the dominant choice, Arabic was used secondarily, and English was increasingly recognized as an emerging linguistic option that adds novelty and credibility to businesses.

The offline observation of 60 packages confirmed these perceptions, showing that between 40% and 60% of brand names across the three agencies were in English. Patterns indicated frequent reliance on formulaic structures, most notably the inclusion of “shop” or “store,” alongside examples of monolingual English names (glow cosmetics, the queen), as well as instances of Arabic-English and French-English code-mixing.

The analysis of 19 Instagram pages further demonstrated that the pandemic marked a turning point in online entrepreneurship, with 84.2% of pages created after Covid-19. English appeared most prominently in brand names, bios, highlights, and hashtags, while its presence in captions and customer interactions was less consistent. This suggests that English is leveraged primarily for marketing visibility and symbolic capital, rather than for everyday exchanges with consumers. Table 2 shows where English dominates vs. where it is secondary on the Instagram accounts.

Table 2.

Presence of English Across Instagram Account Features (n=19)

Account Feature	High Use of English	Moderate Use	Low/No Use
Brand Names	✓		
Bios	✓ (marketing phrases)		
Highlights	✓		
Captions		✓ (occasional phrases)	
Hashtags	✓ (consistently used)		
Customer Interaction			✓ (mostly Arabic or French)

When examining Instagram pages by agency, distinct patterns emerged. Some accounts, such as glow cosmetics and cases by dalal, integrated English extensively throughout their profiles, while others used it only in selected elements (e.g., brand names or hashtags). Usage also varied by product type: fashion, cosmetics, and accessories pages employed English more heavily than businesses dealing with traditional goods such as food or kitchenware. Overall, the findings suggest that English is strategically used in ways that complement but do not replace Arabic and French in the Algerian digital marketplace.

DISCUSSION

The section at hand attempts to discuss the research findings and find out links among the data gathered during the offline and online research phases. The findings confirm that the Covid-19 pandemic was a turning point for Algerian e-commerce, as also observed globally (Sheth, 2020; Susanto et al., 2021). However, we extend this discussion by showing that the pandemic not only spurred digital entrepreneurship but also reconfigured the Algerian linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 1991). The surge of Instagram business pages after 2020 demonstrates that language choice is now embedded in wider socio-economic shifts. Overall, there is a correlation between the workers' answers and the notes taken through the online and offline observations, though the latter is said to provide a clearer image of language trends in the Algerian commercial context.

To start with, the workers' replies regarding the impact of Covid-19 agrees with the timeframe within which the observed business accounts were created. The establishment of delivery agencies and their increase in activity goes in line with the creation and increase of online businesses especially on social media. The findings in our online observation confirms that the majority of the online businesses started after the pandemic. This entails that Covid-19 was the driving engine which caused the rise of e-commerce, delivery agencies, and online businesses in Algeria. In other words, it was observed that the outbreak of the pandemic triggered a shift in the linguistic marketplace.

Besides, workers' remarks on the emergence and gradual increase of English use in online businesses matches the outcomes of our offline observations, confirming the alternation which happened in the Algerian linguistic marketplace of social media marketing. The random selection and observation of the brand names reveal results that challenge the idea that Algeria is a francophone society and suggests that English is occupying a significant position given its appealing linguistic capital. Such results in the Algerian online linguistic marketplace refine our understanding of the evolving linguistic capital of both French and English. While the rivalry pinpointed by Belmihoub (2018) is still heated in the online market, both French and English serve economic purposes, as claimed by Gheraissa (2020).

However, Belmihoub's observations on English use could be refined in that Algerian overseas communication and offline small business brand naming are not the only contexts demonstrating English use. Rather, this language is favoured and opted for by online business owners, entailing that the offline linguistic landscape is not necessarily a valid reflection of the language choices and practices in the VLL. The findings support and extend Ivkovic and Lotherington's (2009) framework of the Virtual Linguistic Landscape. English appears not as a wholesale replacement of local languages, but as a strategic add-on that coexists with Arabic and French in hybrid code-mixed practices. Hashtags in particular demonstrate this hybridity: while English enhances visibility in global searches, French and Arabic sustain local intelligibility and cultural familiarity. The fact that the majority of the brand names are in English reflects a readiness from the part of Algerian business owners and consumers to include English within the context of commercial communication. Moreover, the particular use

of ‘shop’ and ‘store’ for naming the online brands is a common point in both the interview and offline observation. On the one hand, the full use of English in the brand names may indicate that owners are using it as a marketing element that symbolizes trendiness. On the other hand, the partial inclusion of English in naming online brands reflects that the owners want to preserve an Algerian aspect in order to appeal to the Algerian audience by using a language variety that is familiar to them (Arabic or French). Such instances unveil how English is valued differently by business owners, which suggests a rather heterogeneous linguistic capital as we shall elaborate.

Regarding the online observation of the business accounts, we could identify that the manner and account parts wherein English is used differs significantly from one profile to another, while the common pattern is the use of words, phrases, and sentences in English. It has been noticed that the quantity and consistency of English use may be affected by the type of products sold in the business account. That is to say, pages such as ‘cases by dalal’ and ‘glow cosmetics’ have English as the main language since products like cases or giftboxes are trendy and cute. Conversely, accounts that sell rather usual products such as car accessories and kitchen tools do not seem to use English that much. Other observations of bios, highlights, captions, and hashtags unveil an inconsistency in the use of English that was not revealed in the interview nor the offline observation. The observed VLL clearly represents the alternation between Arabic, French, and English in captions, product pictures, and highlights. Again, such linguistic flexibility found in a multilingual online context does not really match language practices in offline linguistic landscapes.

The linguistic intricacy is taken to another level when code-mixing between the three languages takes place in the same sentence posted in a highlight. Yet, English still performs a marketing role of describing and sharing information about products. Furthermore, it is suggested that business owners use hashtags in English since it could allow a wider audience to find their business page via searching. The final insight gained from the online observation is that the use of English in the brand name is not necessarily an indicator of its use in the rest of the respective Instagram page and vice versa. One may deduce that the use of English with trendy products, for hashtag research, in product descriptions, inter alia, goes in line with the ‘prestige’ as set forth by Belmihoub (2018), meaning that it

applies in both offline and online English use. However, we suggest that the online presence of English in the linguistic marketplace of Instagram small business endows more prestige and marketing usefulness as far as the linguistic capital of English is concerned.

At this point it is crucial to mention the challenges encountered during the research process. The first one was the lack of cooperation when asking some delivery agencies to take part in our research. Hence, it was paramount to ask as many agencies in Mostaganem as possible in order to maximize our chances to get a sufficient amount of data. A further limitation was at the stage of researching the online business pages of the observed brand names. For many reasons such as the use of the same brand name by many pages, it was almost impossible to identify the page which corresponds to the observed brand name. Therefore, it is advisable to set clear measures when searching for an online page in an offline context, such as asking the research respondents for links or QR codes of the pages under investigation. Last but not least, the number of packages (60) and Instagram accounts (19) represent a relatively small sample, which could considerably limit the research generalizability. More specifically, we recognize that the present work is mostly qualitative and the obtained results would not allow to picture the extent to which the phenomenon of English in e-commerce is taking place. Therefore, it may be suggested to conduct research at a bigger scale by increasing the number of the packages and Instagram accounts in order to obtain more generalisable results. Yet, it could be challenging to deal with a massive amount of data especially when it has to do with an online context. Accordingly, it could be recommended to limit the researched data into specific parts such as bios and highlights.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the circumstances which emerged during the covid-19 lockdown made it indispensable to resume commercial transactions in a virtual fashion. Indeed, e-commerce was among the coping mechanisms that the world in general, and Algeria in specific, had to resort to in order to back up business activities. This new reality resulted in an increase of online communication between Algerian small business owners and customers and it is here that English has emerged as a novice element in the Algerian linguistic palette.

The outcomes of the research at hand establish that English has become an active linguistic component since Covid-19 as observed in the owners' brand names and Instagram pages. The particular manner that the online business owners use it unveils the role that English is performing in digital marketing of online small businesses in general and in communicating brand and product information in specific. Nevertheless, the idiosyncrasy of English use by online small businesses reflects that the patterns and overall trend of English use is still growing and evolving. This is due to the considerations made by business owners such as the linguistic profile of their audience and the type of products they are trying to sell. These factors infer that trends of English use within Instagram business pages are still inconsistent, which invites future research and investigation to be conducted. The Algerian e-commerce is, indeed, witnessing a linguistic metamorphosis wherein English is an active component. This is claimed to be the effect of the pandemic on Algerian virtual communication as far as the commercial context is concerned.

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