

Diglossia as a Result of Language Variation in Arabic: Possible Solutions in Light of Language Planning

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Abstract—This study aims at investigating the nature of diglossia in Arabic, the different varieties of Arabic and the problems that cause diglossia. It discusses the current linguistic situation in the Arabic-speaking world and suggests a lingual plan for overcoming the problems caused by diglossia. The researchers survey what scholars and linguists claim about diglossia in Arabic and arrive at some conclusions and recommendations.

Index Terms—diglossia, language planning, Arabic language, Arabic socio-linguistics, Arabic varieties

I. INTRODUCTION

The first problem in any study of 'Arabic' is for one to specify what is meant by 'Arabic', because a diglossic linguistic situation exists in that language. The term 'diglossia' was first used in 1930 by the French Arabist Mar çais (*diglossie* in French), and introduced to English by Ferguson (1959) in reference to the situation in Arabic today as Ferguson explains it:

Diglossia in Arabic refers to the phenomenon of co-existence of two distinct language varieties in the same speech community each of which is used for specific linguistic and communicative purposes by its speakers. In the case of Arabic, the standard variety (classical Arabic) is used in formal speeches, university lectures and news media. In contrast, the colloquial variety is used in everyday speech in informal conversational situations by ordinary educated and uneducated Arabs alike.

II. PURPOSE

The primary function of this paper is to discuss the nature of diglossia as it exists in Arabic today as a result of language variation, the researchers first discuss the phenomenon of diglossia and linguistic variation in Arabic dialects. Second, they explore the concept of diglossia in its historical context. Third, they explain the present linguistic situation in Arabic. Finally, they propose a lingual plan for using modern standard Arabic before arriving at several significant socio-linguistic conclusions regarding the phenomenon of diglossia in relation to language planning in the Arabic-speaking world today.

III. METHODOLOGY

Since this study is theoretical and qualitative in nature, the researchers relied primarily on reviewing the already existing body of literature related to diglossia and the linguistic problems associated with it in various speech communities throughout the world. The diglossic situation in Arabic was compared and contrasted to similar diglossic situations in other speech communities taking in consideration how such communities and the governments in which they exist dealt with the linguistic problems that came as a result of diglossia. The researchers also conducted several personal and telephone interviews with linguistic scholars whose research mainly focused on the concept of diglossia in various speech communities both outside and inside the Arabic-speaking world. The interview questions concentrated mainly on issues related to the existence of diglossia and possible suggestions to tackle the problems caused by its existence with special focus on the Arabic-speaking world since diglossia in Arabic is the primary focus of this particular study.

IV. LIMITATIONS

Since this study primarily deals with diglossia in Arabic as mentioned above, it limits itself to the discussion of the diglossic situation in the Arabic-speaking world in particular excluding any other diglossic situation that exists in other parts of the world. Although the researchers know very well that similar diglossic situations exist in other speech communities outside the Arab world today; they do limit their study to diglossia in Arabic as a result of language contact and linguistic variation and the possible communicative and conversational problems that could come about as a result of this unique socio-linguistic situation in Arabic today.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Accordingly, there are different versions of the language for different purposes. There is the ‘high’ (H) variety, used for government, media, education, and/or religious purposes, and the ‘low’ (L), or colloquial, used for everyday purposes—shopping, with the family, and so on. Hudson-Edwards (1984) elaborates on Ferguson’s definition thus:

- There is sharp complement functionality between the codes in the code matrix.
- The elevated variety enjoys a greater measure of prestige than does the vernacular variety.
- The elevated variety has associated with it an extensive literary tradition.
- The vernacular variety is acquired through the normal processes of language acquisition while the elevated variety is acquired through some kind of explicit, formal educational process.
- The elevated variety alone is standardized.
- The functional relationship between the elevated and the vernacular varieties is stable over the long term, often over a period of centuries.
- The vernacular variety is grammatically simpler than the elevated variety.
- Despite sharing the bulk of their vocabularies in common, the elevated and vernacular varieties contain phonologically unrelated lexical doublets for common, everyday items.
- The phonology of the elevated variety is more marked than the phonology of the vernacular variety. (p. 8)

Varieties of Arabic

Arabic is a popular language spoken by millions of people and used in literature for over a millennium and a half. It offers an astonishing range of variation in terms of language varieties and dialects used in the Arabic-speaking world today. First, there is the classical variety the use of which extends from pre-Islamic poetry to modern technical journals. This variety shows the same sound systems and morphology but with a big difference and change in vocabulary, syntax and forms of discourse. Second, there is the colloquial Arabic, the regional dialects of the Arabic mother tongue spreading over different regions of the Arab countries.

Intermediate between the two varieties or sets of varieties (classical and colloquial) are many shadings of middle language. Some of these varieties may be viewed as Koines. In certain areas where Arabic has been used for limited purposes, pidginize forms have been developed with reduced vocabulary items and grammar, such as the Turku of the Lake Chad and Central Africa and the Bimbashi Arabic Southern Sudan (Ferguson, 1970).

a. Classical Arabic (CA)

Arabic has been in existence in the Arabian Peninsula for at least 2000 years. Classical Arabic is the formal dialect which was used in Hijaz area 1500 years ago. Written records of the language include poetry that was composed in pre-Islamic times. The Qur’an was revealed in classical Arabic, which is the main reason why the language has been preserved throughout the centuries. Thus, Arabs consider classical Arabic as an important and extremely significant inseparable part of their culture.

b. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

Modern standard Arabic is the modern counterpart of classical Arabic. It is the official language of the Arab countries where it is used in the oral and written form on all occasions. The main difference between MSA and CA lies in the vocabulary items used in each variety.

c. Colloquial Arabic

Colloquial Arabic is the spoken variety of Arabic used by Arabs in their daily lives in informal conversational settings. Unlike MSA, colloquial Arabic is subject to regional and geographical variation; not only between countries, but also among areas in the same country.

VI. DISCUSSION

The situation in Arabic is even more complex than this, in effect what one might call multi-glossic, in that two ‘high’ varieties coexist—Classical Arabic (CA), the traditional language of the Qur’an, used for religious purposes; and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the written language of contemporary literature, journalism, and formal education—as well as an intermediate variety, known as Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), between the high (standard) and low (colloquial) varieties. (However, in this study the term diglossic, or diglossia, will be used as a cover term, as it is still the standard term used for this concept). MSA is essentially CA, but with some modifications, particularly in vocabulary, and also in syntax. MSA is the Standard written Arabic of the entire Arab world, linguistically unifying it

today as CA once did (Kaye, 1990). Both of these varieties are 'learned languages', being no one's 'mother tongue'. Then we have (ESA), of which El-Hassan says:

Educated speakers in the Arab world use the variety of Arabic which we ... call Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), which draws upon both MSA and Colloquial Arabic [regional spoken varieties of Arabic] (1978, p. 32).

However, this form of Arabic was recognized well before El-Hassan. Frayha (1955) calls it 'Common Educated Arabic', the Arabic spoken by educated speakers when conversing with other educated speakers of other varieties of Arabic, or in some occasions with speakers of their own colloquial variety of Arabic, especially in an educational context (Shaaban, 1978, p. 7-8).

Kaye (1990) speaks of ESA as 'mixed language' or 'inter-Arabic'. Citing the speeches of former president Bourgiba of Tunisia as an example. ESA could, in fact, be considered a middle, or intermediate, variety. At the other end of the continuum are the local spoken varieties that are learned as 'mother tongues'—what Ferguson (1959) calls the 'low' (L) varieties. These varieties are the spoken language, used in everyday informal conversations, among family and friends, shopping, and so on. One characteristic of these colloquial varieties is that they may not be mutually intelligible to speakers of other regional colloquials.

The phenomenon of diglossia existing in Arabic today causes considerable problems to the linguistic community both inside and outside the Arabic-speaking world. It tends to contribute significantly to the obstruction of educational and economic development in the Arab world. Sotiropoulos (1977, p. 7) in a serious attempt to summarize the effects of diglossia on the Arab world states that:

.... if diglossia, objectively, is an ingenious device of necessity, nonetheless from the point of view of educational efficiency of hindrance. The presence of diglossia in a speech community has limiting and even crippling effects on its expressive capacity.

Although the problems caused by diglossia in speech communities are similar, the solutions are often different. The Arabic diglossic situation is linguistically unique. This comes as Arabic tackles a major socio-linguistic and educational problem that faces the Arabic-speaking countries today. Although several Arab and non-Arab linguists have dealt with the concept of diglossia over the past few decades, this phenomenon has not received the level of linguistic attention it deserves beyond the descriptive level. Moreover, no serious efforts were made by scholars and linguists to propose possible solutions for linguistic problems resulting from the existence of this phenomenon in the Arabic-speaking world. Freeman (1996) asserts "No discussion of Arabic is complete without at least a cursory discussion of diglossia" (p. 1).

The development of diglossia in Arabic has been the subject of discussion among linguists who attempted to come out with varying linguistic theories. Fuek (1981) for example, speaking of the Koine hypothesis, states that:

There were no more than tens of years through the Arab conquest, the Arab tribes took their dialects north to Palestine, Syria, borders of Turkey and Armenia to the east through Iraq to Iran; to the west through Egypt to North Africa (p. 18-19).

Language contact between Arabic and the conquered areas produced a lingua franca, which used simplified expressions, sound system and structure. This simplified language serves as the base for the development of the colloquial dialects of Arabic.

Another major theory attributes the development of the colloquial to language drift. Hashem-Aramouni (2011) for example claims that colloquial developed when marriages occurred in the days of the Islamic conquest which led to communication between the Arabs and the people of the conquered places. Their children acquired the pidgin turning it into a Creole. This language served as the bases for the colloquial. She further states that:

In many ways, the idea that Arabic is the language of Allah has defined how the Arabic language has behaved over the centuries. Of course, in the early years, before the advent of Muhammad, Arabic developed and grew, though it was largely localized among the tribes of Arabia. As the Islamic conquest took place, however, Arabic became the language of the conquered peoples both because it was the language of their conquerors and because it was the language of their newly adopted religion (p. 24).

Ibn Jinni, a pioneering Arab linguist in the field of socio-linguistics in particular, who lived during the tenth century, discussed the nature of the Arabic language in his book *Al-Khasaais* republished in (2006), states that classical Arabic was the dialect of the tribe of Quraysh. He wrote a brief description of how the Qurayshi dialect differed from other known Arabic tribal dialects phonetically at the level of sound. Ibn Jinni asserts: "The dialect of Quraysh has gone above the level of '9anqanah' of the Tameem tribe, the "Kash Kashah" of Rabeeeah, the "Kaskasah" of Hawazen, the "TaDajjua" of Qays, the "qajrafiyyah" of Dhabbah and the "Tatalah" of Bahraa" (p. 10-11).

Zughoul (2007) summarizes some of the peculiarities of Arabic dialects that survived till today. He asserts:

The 9an9anah is replacing the initial glottal stop (hamzah) /ʔ/ by /ʕ/ (voiced pharyngeal fricative) as by saying 9annak (you are) instead of 9annaka. The Kash Kasha is changing the /k/ to /sh/ when followed by /i/ specifically in the pronominal affix of the second person feminine singular as in 'alayki' (On you) going to "alayshi". The Kaskasa is changing the /k/ to /s/ when followed by /a/ in the pronominal affix for second person masculine singular as in /9alayka/ (on you) going into /9alaysa/. TaDajju9 is the deletion of /T/ and addition of /i/ thus a word like [iDTaja9aj becomes [iIDaja9a]. The "9aajrapfiyyah" of the tribe of Dhabban refers to the way connected speech is characterized by over-articulation of the emphatics and the plosives. The "Taltalah" of the tribe of Bahraa? is a change that survived in many contemporary Arabic dialects in which the /a/ of the second person future tense is changed into the vowel /i/ and thus a

word like '9lamuun' meaning (you know) is pronounced as ti, 9amuun. Anees (1965) in his known work about Arabic dialects collected other references to the variation in the speech of different Arab tribes. These include the 'FaHfaHa' of the tribe of Huthaylin in which the /H/ of 'lahm' (meat) is replaced by /9/ to become 'la9m'; the '9aj9aja' of the tribe of QuDa9a which is characterized by a shift of final /i/ to /j/ as in ma9ii (with me) becoming ma9ij; tarxiim or 'quT9a' of the tribe of lay characterized by the omission of the final unstressed consonant; 'TamTamaaniya' of the tribe of Himyar a known feature of the speech of Yemen in which the /L/of the definite article becomes /m/ as in Fialsafar (in travelling) changing to 'fi amsafar' and 'fimsafar' in connected speech; 'Shanshanah' of the Yemen where /k/ is changed to /sh/ as in labbayaka (Here, I come O' Lord) realized as 'labbayasha'; '?istinTaa?' many Arabic dialects of today, as in '?a9Taahu' (he gave him) becoming '?anTaahu', '?alwatm of the Yemen, where the Is! shifts into It! as in '?nnaas' (people) becoming '?annaat' (p. 34).

Badawi (1985), distinguishes five levels of contemporary Arabic. These levels are interesting as they reflect the views of an Arab scholar, who states that:

The classical language of *heritage* or tradition (Fusha al- turaath): It is the Fusha of the Holy Qur'an and it is restricted in use to the men of religion specially the 'ulama' (religious authorities) of Al-Azhar. It is also restricted in use to the religious programs on radio and TV which are prepared well in advance of casting. The *modern-classical language* or the Fusha of the time (Fusha Al- 9asr). This level represents a wider area and includes the news programs on radio and TV, formal talks and whatever is used in what has been called the variety other than what has been isolated as the classical language of the heritage. The colloquial or the *spoken Arabic of the educated*. (9aammiyyat al-muthaqqafeen). It is the variety of language used by educated people. This variety in its lexicon, expressions and flexibility has become "the storehouse of Egyptian civilization and the medium of contemporary knowledge". The colloquial of the *enlightened* (9aammiyyat al-mutanawwireen). It is the variety used by non-illiterates in conducting daily business like informing, selling, buying, talking to friends about food, clothes... etc. The colloquial or the *spoken Arabic of the illiterates*. (9aammiyyat al-ummiyyeen). It is the kind of Arabic used in plays and drama (p. 27-35).

A. Problems

Problems of diglossia start with the Arabs at a very early age as Arab children acquire the colloquial language first before they learn the modern standard variety at school, so their communication becomes distorted. Shoubi (1951) explains that there is a gap between the real self of the Arab and his ideal self. Also, those who use modern standard Arabic face many linguistic problems since they do not master it, therefore, most of their speech is not fluent, exerting a lot of efforts to produce a real modern standard Arabic sentence which gives the correct message.

Diglossia has spread to all Arab countries with the discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf countries. There was a need for manpower, which primarily came from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries. The languages spoken are mainly Asian which included Hindi/Urdu, Persian, Bengali, Tamil, Russian and other languages. This language contact produced a pidgin variety. Also, another pidgin developed in Southern Sudan which has been termed as Juba Arabic.

B. A Plan for Using the Classical Model

In light of the wide language variation that exists in the Arab world today as discussed above, there is a need for a linguistic solution to overcome the difficulties that could result from diglossia and language variation in Arabic today. This problem causes a great confusion among native speakers of Arabic as well as learners of Arabic as a foreign language. This necessitates an urgent need for language planning. In a serious attempt to find a solution for this problem through language planning, Al-Mousa (1987) asserts that there should be a lingual transfer within a modern theoretical vision supported by practical action steps based controlled lingual planning. At the same time, a political decision by governments is necessary to implement this project successfully.

Al-Mousa suggested that writing a book on spoken Arabic benefits from the relationship between classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic on the vocabulary and structural levels of the classical origins, saying the sentence without nomination except when necessary.

C. The Practical Side of the Plan

Re-accomplishment of using classical Arabic should start with the educational sector. The modern standard variety should be the language of teaching and learning Arabic and other subjects at schools. Using modern standard Arabic in television programs, series and radio programs will serve the purpose. An institution for children's literacy in modern standard Arabic should be established. Also, learning programs for the illiterate should be implemented in modern standard Arabic. To arrive at sound results, there is an urgent need for a political decision. These steps can be categorized as mass media, literature and arts and political decision (Al-Mousa, 2003).

D. Mass Media

It is important that any media material should be broadcasted or transmitted in classical Arabic, preparing the specialists in these fields linguistically.

E. Literature and Arts

Literary and artistic materials including novels, stories, plays and films should be written and implemented in classical Arabic. TV and Radio programs can be produced in classical Arabic addressing families at home, talking about farmers, workers, merchants and others.

F. Political Decisions

It should be noted that a plan for classical Arabic transference cannot succeed without a political decision which should be decisive and leads to a comprehensive solution in terms of using classical Arabic (Mousa, 2008).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the linguistic facts and logical theoretical principles outlined above, it becomes clear that classical Arabic is going through real problems, such as the lower standard achievement in the language and lower level competence, shift in language use towards foreign languages and cultural alienation, using alternatives other than Arabic media in instruction.

Scholars, linguists, researchers, language academics and people concerned about Arabic exerted a lot of efforts to face the diglossic problem by encouraging translation into Arabic and Arabization of university education. Modern Arab linguists including Nehad Al-Mousa suggest comprehensive lingual plans to use classical Arabic to keep Arabic away from lowliness, weakness and colorlessness in the spoken and literary varieties. However, the plans, suggestions and recommendations which can bridge the gap between classical and colloquial Arabic continue to wait for decisive linguistic, social and most importantly political decisions.

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(1) "The Effect of a CALL Program on Jordanian Sixth-Grade Students' Achievement. *Teaching English with Technology* (Journal of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language), 11(3), 3-24, Available on line at <http://www.tewtjournal.org/VOL%201/ISSUE3/ARTICLE1.pdf>.

(2) Jordanian EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CALL in TEFL *Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning* 9 (12), 3-16. 2012.