Dialectologia 11 *(2013), 1-28.*
ISSN: 2013-2247

Received 22 March 2012.
Accepted 3 July 2012.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION IN ARABIC: A NEW THEORETICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper argues that the linguistic situation in Arabic defies any rigid demarcation and dichotomization; therefore, it proposes an alternative approach to the analysis of the Arabic linguistic situation — the *Variation Approach*. The proposed approach assumes that (*a*) the probabilistic use of linguistic items correlates with an index of stylistic, economic, and socio-political variables shared by all members of any Arab speech community, and (*b*) in dealing with variation in Arabic, it is important to study (1) each individual linguistic variable and its behavior as an independent unit within the same linguistic level, and (2) the relationship between variables across linguistic levels, *i.e*. the hierarchy and implication of the application, and (3) the variable sensitivity of the linguistic variables to socio-stylistic contexts and social evaluation within the same community and across communities. In light of the new model, the paper highlights some of the most common variation patterns that may exist in any given Arab speech community. Finally, it surveys the major factors that may influence and shape the dominant patterns of variation in the Arab world.

Keywords

variation, pluricentricity, colloquialization, hybridization, standardization

VARIACIÓN SOCIOLINGÜÍSTICA EN ÁRABE: UNA NUEVA APROXIMACIÓN TEÓRICA

Resumen

Este trabajo sostiene que la situación lingüística en árabe desafía cualquier rígida demarcación y dicotomización; y por lo tanto, propone un enfoque alternativo para el análisis de la situación: el *Enfoque de Variación*. El enfoque propuesto supone que: *a*) el uso probabilístico de elementos

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lingüísticos se correlaciona con un índice de variables estilísticas, económicas y sociopolíticas compartidas por todos los miembros de cualquier comunidad de habla árabe, y *b*) en el tratamiento de la variación en árabe, es importante estudiar: 1) cada variable lingüística individual y su comportamiento como una unidad independiente dentro del mismo nivel lingüístico, 2) la relación entre las variables a través de los niveles lingüísticos, es decir, la jerarquía y la implicación de la aplicación, y 3) la variable sensibilidad de las variables lingüísticas en contextos socioestilísticos y la evaluación social en la misma comunidad y entre las comunidades. A la luz del nuevo modelo, el artículo pone de relieve algunos de los patrones de variación más comunes que pueden existir en cualquier comunidad de habla árabe. Por último, examina los principales factores que pueden influir y dar forma a los patrones dominantes de la variación en el mundo árabe.

Palabras clave

variación, pluricentrismo, coloquialización, hibridización, estandardización

1. Introduction

Ever since Ferguson wrote his seminal article about diglossia in 1959, linguists and Arabists have busied themselves trying to work out a model and framework for analyzing the complex Arabic linguistic situation by attempting to account for observed patterns of language switching and/or variation. Between the two polar varieties of Arabic, Standard Arabic (SA) and Colloquial Arabic (COL), linguists have recognized a continuum of varieties. A major issue, which has occupied them for several decades without being satisfactorily resolved, is how to define and establish distinct boundaries between the proposed varieties on this continuum. Studies by Ferguson (1959), Blanc (1960), Badawi (1973), Meiseles (1980), and Hussein (1980), among many others, have proposed the existence of a number of varieties, using different criteria in categorizing them. This approach can be referred to as the *Variety Approach*. To overcome problems associated with this approach, the Leeds group[1] introduced the notion *Educated Spoken Arabic* (ESA) to refer to an intermediate variety, covering a wide continuum between SA and COL (El-Hassan 1977; Meiseles 1980; Mitchell 1986). However, Ibrahim (1985) maintains that even this intermediate continuum, which he refers to as 'supra-koine', cannot be described adequately and precisely. He adds that since "a great deal of hybridization is taking place, it is impossible to measure the

[1] A group of linguistics students working with Mitchell at the University of Leeds in the seventies and early eighties of the 20th century.

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continuum and the contribution of each polar variety to this hybrid with any degree of precision" (Ibrahim 1985: 7).

Despite the limitations of the previous studies, one cannot dismiss all these attempts as inaccurate, inappropriate, or inadequate because they were the product of their time and circumstances. It has to be admitted that each approach has its own merits and contributions within the time, political circumstances, and the socio-cultural context in which it was introduced. For instance, Ferguson's study, which has been widely criticized (see El-Hassan 1977), should be appreciated for its pioneering contribution, as it has prompted extensive and ongoing research in this area (see e.g., Bassiouney 2009; Holes, 2004; Palmer 2008; Stadlbauer 2010). In fact, it explains the state of the art at its time, and many aspects of Ferguson's work still holds true in many situations and domains, especially in normal contexts where a speaker may use his COL vernacular in relaxed situations and SA in more formal contexts. Any violation of this diglossic pattern does not necessarily invalidate it, as there is ample evidence that such violations are in most cases systematic and functional (Mazraani 1997).

However, a major criticism of the different models within this *Variety Approach* is the arbitrariness, fuzziness, and impracticality of their proposed stratification of discrete and dichotomous varieties (Abdel-Jawad 1981; Holes, 1995; Ibrahim 1985; Mazraani 1997, among others). This paper argues that the linguistic situation in Arabic defies any rigid demarcation and dichotomization. It proposes an alternative approach to analysis of the Arabic linguistic situation — a *Variation Approach* which does not rely on demarcation or classification. This new approach is intended to offer an optimal solution to the problem of classification of variation and shifting observed in the use of Arabic.

The proposed approach assumes that the probabilistic use of linguistic items correlates with an index of stylistic, economic, and socio-political variables shared by all members of any Arab speech community, i.e. all speakers exhibit a similar, though sometimes a statistically different variation pattern, which can be referred to as the *vertical dimension.*[2] This pattern can be stylistic, so the likelihood of the occurrence of a certain linguistic variant correlates with the formality/informality of the situation.

[2] The vertical dimension assumes that a similar pattern of variation is used by each and every individual in the community, exhibiting features used across individuals, which means that the description of one individual and one individual community can be generalized to all other members.

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Similarly, it can also be social, political, ethnic, or economic, where the occurrence of a certain variant correlates with the social, political, ethnic, or economic scale, which the speaker generally desires to place himself/herself on. In this pattern of variation, which is based on probabilities and tendencies, it is possible to locate and identify different levels, which often correspond to bundles of variables at changing points. As Holes (2004: 345) points out

> Levels can ... be identified as discrete at points where a number of variables have all changed from being typically realized as variant (a) ... to being typically realized as the rival … variant (b). Not all variables are similarly calibrated to the demands of changing formality/informality of context, however, so there are fuzzy areas between one discrete level and another.

In the following section, the paper will (*a*) delineate the basic principles of the proposed *Variation Approach*, (*b*) explain some of the most common variation patterns which may exist in any given Arab speech community, and (*c*) highlight the main factors that shape these patterns.

2. The Variation Approach: Basic principles

This approach assumes that in dealing with variation in Arabic, it is important to study (1) each individual linguistic variable and its behavior as an independent unit within the same linguistic level, and (2) the relationship between variables across linguistic levels, *i.e*. the hierarchy and implication of the application (see section 2.2 below).

2.1 Treatment of individual linguistic variables: Linguistic nature of variation

The new approach is based on the premise that every linguistic item can be considered as a variable which can be studied in its own sociolinguistic and stylistic contexts to establish a correlational scale for its distribution. This means that some linguistic features can be variably realized in a probabilistic manner ranging from categorical use of the SA variant to zero use of the COL variant and vice versa. These

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different linguistic variables are themselves variably sensitive to socio-stylistic contexts and social evaluation within the same community and across communities. In this regard, several patterns can be realized.

First, different linguistic variables are evaluated differently within the same community (*intra-dialectal variation*), and therefore they vary in different ways along somewhat different sociolinguistic parameters. For instance, in Jordan and Palestine /k/ is variably realized as [tʃ] in rural areas and [k] elsewhere. The former variant is often stigmatized, and speakers tend to avoid it and adopt the latter, which happens to be both the standard and socially accepted and prestigious variant. However, /Q/ is variably realized as a uvular [q], corresponding to the standard form in the diglossic pattern, a voiced velar [g], a voiceless velar [k], and a glottal stop [ʔ]. While the [q] variant is the prestigious form used in SA, it is often stigmatized at the social level, since it is associated with the spoken dialects of certain groups such as Gypsies, Druze, Alawites, and the dialects of some cities such as Nablus and Tira in Palestine. Abdel-Jawad (1986) and Habib (2010, 2011a) found that members of some of these groups tend to avoid this pronunciation in cross-dialectal communications to avoid being negatively marked or labeled by others. The other COL reflexes of this phoneme (variable), i.e. urban [ʔ], Bedouin and rural Jordanian [g], and rural Palestinian [k], are less marked in informal settings. In contrast, the SA pronunciation [q] assumes supremacy in formal settings.

Despite this, it is rather inaccurate to claim that this pattern of variation applies equally to all phonological variables. Consider, for instance, the interdentals where the non-standard forms are increasingly used even in the most formal contexts (Abdel-Jawad & Awwad 1989; Habib 2008, 2011b). Among urban speakers, the interdentals are far less sensitive to stylistic variation than the uvular stop. In one analysis Abdel-Jawad (1986) found that [q] was used in 85% of the cases, while the SA pronunciation of the interdentals, i.e. [θ], [ð] and [ð̲], were used only in 30% of the cases by the same speakers in the same contexts, which means that there is more standardization of the uvulars than of the interdentals. This shows that speakers can be more sensitive to certain variants than others and are quick to mark them as stigmatized (stereotypes) or prestigious forms, and that some linguistic forms are more sensitive to social and stylistic variation than others. Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968: 181) explained this phenomenon by emphasizing that “for some variables, the level of social awareness is

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so high that they are prominent topics in any discussion of speech." Consequently, in most patterns of variation, it is these forms that usually become more subject to variable usage.

In cross-dialectal settings, speakers of one variety do not often switch completely to a new variety; instead, they only use the most salient distinguishing characteristic features of the new variety. When urban male speakers, for instance, switch to the local Jordanian variety, they very often replace their own characteristic urban glottal [ʔ] for the typical Jordanian [g], which is a reflex of SA /Q/. Simultaneously, these same speakers tend to retain the urban pronunciation of the interdentals and are likely to maintain most of the typical urban lexical items. This makes the [g] a more salient marker of social status and background than all other phonological variables. Thus, it can be concluded that the linguistic items exhibit a hierarchy of social evaluation, and therefore a hierarchy of application.

Second, the same linguistic item may also be variably evaluated across community boundaries (*inter-dialectal variation*); thus, a certain variant may be stigmatized in one region or in a specific social group but not in another, where it may receive neutral or even prestigious status. Therefore, such variants are likely to be avoided in the first case but maintained or adopted by other groups in the second. The following example illustrates this point: The affricate realization of the velar /k/, [tʃ], is generally stigmatized in the Levant. In fact, it is one of the most stigmatized and stereotypical features of the peasantry, though it may act as a symbol of local identification among peasants. In cross-dialectal communications, these speakers are quick to abandon this pronunciation. However, this same variant is not stigmatized in the Gulf States and Iraq, where it is considered to be the norm, is widely used in urban centers, and is adopted by the elite and the ruling classes. Thus, while in the Levant, this feature is associated with traditional rural values, in Iraq and the Gulf States it is associated with the values of the dominant social ruling group. Similarly, while the glottal pronunciation [ʔ] of SA /Q/ is highly valued in the Levant and Egypt, as mentioned above, as it is associated with urban groups' values, it does not have the same prestigious status in Iraq and the Gulf states.

Third, some linguistic items are sensitive to sociolinguistic variation and evaluation at both the inter- and intra-levels, while others are not. For instance, at the phonological level, consonants such as /k/, /q/, and interdentals are subject to

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variation while other consonants such as /b/, /m/, /n/, /f/, etc. generally show little or no variation at all. While items in the first group often exhibit variable stylistic and social distribution, members of the second group are not associated with any social or stylistic values, i.e., they are not markers or indicators, and thus they are categorically used by all speakers in all contexts. Even within the first group, some items are more sensitive to variation than others; for example, among peasants in the Levant /k/ is more sensitive to variation than /q/, which in turn is more sensitive to variation than interdentals. Consequently, these items can be arranged on a scale of social and stylistic sensitivity.

Fourth, variants of the same linguistic variables may exhibit more advanced standardization, urbanization, or hybridization in one region or even one state than in others. Consider again the distribution of the variants of the SA /Q/; it is variably realized as [ʔ] in urban areas in the Levant and Egypt. However, a closer examination of its distribution across lexical items in these areas reveals that this urbanization (the use of [ʔ]) applies in more contexts in Lebanon than in Egypt and Syria and more so in Egypt and Syria than in Jordan and Palestine. Words like *raqam* 'number', *mawqi3* 'location', *nuqTa* 'point', *huquuq* 'rights', *qawaaniin* 'laws', *muwaafaqa* 'consent, approval', *wiqaaya* 'prevention', and *quwwa* 'force' are often realized with [ʔ] in the former regions but rarely, if ever, in the latter two regions. The same pattern applies to interdentals. It is important to add that since phonological variation is somewhat lexically-conditioned (see Abdel-Jawad & Suleiman 1990; Habib 2011b), certain variables are far more advanced than others; they apply in more lexical items in one region than in other regions.

Finally, variation seems to apply in a hierarchical manner across linguistic levels. In this regard, phonological variables are more sensitive to both stylistic and social influences than morphological or syntactic features. Therefore, they exhibit more sociolinguistic variation, as will be explained in the next section.

2.2 Hierarchy of application of variation across linguistic levels

In the application of variation, there are mainly two dimensions of hierarchy: (*a*) hierarchy of application within the same level, *i.e.*, hierarchy among the phonological variables, discussed above, and (*b*) hierarchy across linguistic levels: phonological,

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lexical, morphological, and syntactic.

Different linguistic levels vary in their sensitivity[3] to social and stylistic evaluation in a descending order, which is: phonological, lexical, morphological, and then syntactic. This means that speakers are more likely to shift from COL variants to their corresponding SA ones in semi-formal and sometimes formal contexts (e.g., interviews, talk shows, discussions, meetings, classrooms, etc.) by first adapting their speech phonetically, then lexically, morphologically and syntactically respectively. Even within these different levels, some features seem to resist modification more than others; for example, interdentals, question words, negative markers, passive forms, etc. are less likely to undergo modification than other linguistic markers.

As mentioned above, within each linguistic level, different linguistic items vary in their sensitivity to context. For example, at the phonological level, consonants are more sensitive to variation than vowels. Moreover, within consonants the velar and the uvular consonants are more sensitive than others. In the case of vowels, there is an extensive amount of variation and alternation in the use of vowels and diphthongs: the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ are often realized as the long vowels /ei/ and /oo/ respectively even in very formal contexts. For instance, *zeit* 'oil' is realized as *zeet* and *maut* 'death' as *moot*. In general, vowels do not have social and stylistic values attached to them like some consonants, and thus vowel variation seems to be in Labov's (1972a) terms "below social awareness".

At the lexical level, a considerable number of new lexical items, neologisms, have infiltrated both the COL and SA varieties at the same time. For example, words like *3awlama* 'globalization' *xaSxaSa* 'privatization' and *shafaafiyya* 'transparency' have been newly coined or derived. Therefore, they are new to SA and COL and are used identically in both varieties. However, lexical borrowing from SA to spoken varieties is increasing with the spread of education and the advances in communication. In such borrowings, both phonological and morphological modifications, i.e. colloquialization, may take place. In this case, if a form is modified morphologically, it must be modified phonologically, but if it is adapted morphologically, it may or may not be modified phonologically (see Abdel-Jawad & Suleiman 1990).

It is, therefore, logical to conclude that linguistic variables seem to be implicationally ordered, i.e. if a speaker uses SA phonological features in his speech,

[3] Sensitivity refers to speakers' awareness of the social and stylistic values of certain elements.

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this does not necessarily imply that he will use SA morphological patterns all along; however, if the same speaker uses the SA morphological variants, he is likely to standardize phonologically. For instance, the word for 'advanced' in SA is ***mu****ta****q****addim*, where the word starts with the SA prefix ***mu-*** and thus must have the SA velar sound [q]. In contrast, the COL morphological form starts with the prefix ***mi-***. Thus, forms like ****mu****ta****g****addim, ****mu****ta****ʔ****addim,* or ****mu****ta****k****addim* are not acceptable or predictable because the morphological pattern of the word is standard which prevents the use of any non-standard phonological variants such as [g], [ʔ], and [k] in the above examples.

On the other hand, using the non-standard morphological pattern (***mi-***) in the same word as in ***mi****t****ʔ****addim, ****mi****t****k****addim, ****mi****t****g****addim* does not prevent the use of a standard phonological form such as ***mi****t****q****addim*. Similarly, the word for 'I'm certain' in SA is '***mu****tʔa****kk****id.*** In this word, the occurrence of ****mu****taʔa****čč****id* is not attested because it has the standard morphological pattern which does not collocate with a non-standard phonological form such as [čč]. In contrast, in COL the form can be ***mi****tʔa****čč****id,*and *mitʔakkid*. It should be noted, however, that this ordering does not apply to all phonological variables equally. For example, in the case of interdentals, many lexical items can be realized with standard morphological structures but with non-standard interdental pronunciation. For example, the word for 'organized' is '***mu****naDDam*', which can also be heard as ***mu****nazzm* [4] showing a standard morphological structure used with a non-standard phonological interdental variant.

2.3 Idiosyncrasies of application

2.3.1 At the individual level

In spite of the general conclusions made above, empirical evidence (see Abdel-Jawad 1986; Holes 2004) indicates that native speakers of Arabic are not consistent in their application of standardization/colloquialization rules. They often shift from one variety to another unpredictably within the same context, discourse and even within the same word or sentence. Features from the two poles, SA and COL, are densely

[4] This is significant to the concept of sound change in progress where some sounds like interdentals in Arabic in some Arab communities like Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt have almost completed its change cycle into their alveolar counterparts. This is unlike other variables such as /Q/ and /k/ which still seem to be at the variable stage.

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intertwined on a wide continuum of variation between the two to the extent that no part of them can actually be marked as pure SA or COL. In such cases, there is a real mixture of codes (cf. Abdel-Jawad 1981; Bani Yasin & Owens 1987a, 1987b). This mixture results from the variable application of what Ibrahim (1985) calls *Hybridization*. This process takes the form of "standardization" at the lower end and "colloquialization" at the higher end. Such processes are optional, variable, and freely ordered, resulting in remarkable inconsistency in their application.

2.3.2 At the community level

Within the same community, different groups of people go through various socio-economic, political and cultural processes, resulting in competing patterns which may lead to inconsistencies in the application of variation (Abdel-Jawad 1987; Habib 2011a). For example, the Bedouin varieties may be seen as the norm in some communities because they are associated with dominant and powerful groups in places such as Jordan and the Gulf region (Sulieman 2004). Moreover, urbanization, one of the socio-economic processes, is usually faster among certain social groups than others. For instance, non-urban women (peasants and Bedouins in Jordan and Palestine) who move to urban areas tend to be quicker in adopting urban linguistic features than their male counterparts (Amara 2005; Habib 2010). This creates a situation whereby in the same household three different patterns may co-exist: the parents' patterns, which usually preserve the original domestic forms; female patterns, which usually adopt the urban features; and male patterns, which retain the dominant Bedouin features.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that there seems to be an implicational and hierarchical pattern of linguistic adaptation across ecological groups (urban, rural, Bedouin). Urban speakers rarely adopt the peasant or Bedouin features. Bedouins, on the other hand, may adopt the urban features but never the peasant features. However, peasants may adopt both the urban features and sometimes the Bedouin features at varying degrees. This complex situation may be due to the fact that there are at least two competing prestigious non-standard norms: the Bedouin and the urban. Bedouins historically have had a strong attitude towards other groups, as they felt superior to them. In addition, Bedouin varieties are associated in certain areas

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(Jordan and the Gulf region) with power groups, which gives these Bedouin varieties certain status, prestige, and political clout. This explains why non-Bedouin males tend to adopt some Bedouin features (Suleiman 2004). On the other hand, the urban varieties are considered to be prestigious forms in most Middle Eastern communities, especially among females; therefore, urban features are generally preferred by female speakers from all groups (see gender pattern below).

3. Patterns of variation

Ibrahim (1985) made a useful distinction between variation relative to *a*) the universal prestigious variety, i.e. SA, and *b*) the local prestigious varieties. Thus, at least two patterns of variation can generally be identified: The diglossic pattern and the urban pattern. Another widely-spread variation pattern is gender-based[5].

3.1 The Diglossic pattern of variation

Diglossic variation refers to linguistic switching in every Arabic-speaking community relative to the universal Arabic prestigious variety, i.e. SA. This pattern is common to all Arab communities and is strongly related to the formality scale and may be referred to as "stylistic variation or shifting". Standard Arabic is used in the most formal contexts, while COL is used in the least formal ones, which is in line with Ferguson's (1959) classification. However, the present study concurs with El-Hassan (1977) and Meiseles (1980) position that in explaining the distribution of spoken Arabic varieties, it would be a serious mistake to assume the existence of a rigid one-variety-one-context situation, partly because the reality of contemporary Arabic "is such that every text embodies an incommensurable amount of variation and shifts alternating between one variety and another, even within the frame of a sentence" (Meiseles 1980: 132). Consequently, the expected general language framework where SA is supposed to be selected, according to Ferguson's (1959) classification, is the High Variety; however, quite commonly, within the same situation some non-standard

[5] These three common patterns do not rule out the existence of other region and/or community-specific patterns.

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elements are commonly used.

As mentioned before, the diglossic model suggested by Ferguson has been widely criticized (see, El-Hassan 1977; Daltas 1980; Fasold 1985). The present paper supports Daltas' (1980: 69) position that "the distinction of two, five, seven or even more varieties is … unhelpful as a frame work for objective description of the linguistic reality" in these diglossic language situations. If the distinction of such intermediate discrete varieties is possible, the co-occurrence restrictions that govern this distribution must apply to identify each variety with its linguistic features. So far, with the exception of the High Variety in Arabic, not a single intermediate variety has been linguistically identified. Even the *Educated Spoken Arabic* variety, proposed by Mitchell and his Leeds group in the seventies cannot be easily delineated; on the contrary, it is characterized by an extensive amount of variation. Data analysis of any sample of the variety used by educated speakers reveals that speakers use various variants differently, making use of unlimited possible combinations. All educated speakers seem to move towards SA in different degrees. They are not consistent in their application of what may be referred to as "standardization" rules and/or what Ibrahim (1985) calls "hybridization" or "koineization" rules. Moreover, they often shift unpredictably within the same context and sometimes within the same lexical items.

Analysis of recorded texts/discourses reveals that the two polar varieties, SA and COL, are in fact so densely intertwined in the intermediate varieties that none of them can be actually characterized as pure SA or COL. Thus, it is more accurate to assume the existence of a mixture of varieties where segments from each code are used interchangeably and variably. This mixture of codes has resulted from the variable application of "hybridization" which takes place at both ends of the diglossic scale in the form of "standardization" of the lower varieties and "colloquialization" of the higher ones. Therefore, the outcome of this admixture will be the production of hybrid forms and constructions. In other words, there is blending or combination of forms which results from the variable application of a series of optional rules on the same base forms, producing in many cases forms carrying traces of both codes. As mentioned before, these rules are optional, variable, and freely ordered within the same linguistic level, i.e. phonological, morphological, etc.

Analysis of variation in a corpus of data collected from various types of formal and semi-formal situations shows that in analyzing variation in such contexts, it is more

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appropriate to utilize Hymes' (1974) speech units of analysis, i.e. speech situation, speech event, and speech act. For instance, in speeches (political, religious, etc.), which are very often read from a written script, where the speaker is addressing a public audience with minimal interaction, the SA variety may be categorically used with minimal shifting to non-standard forms. In fact, this situation corresponds to the "reading" style in Labov's methodology. However, in situations where there is some form of speaker-listener/audience interaction, such as a press conference, an interview, a debate, a religious lesson, or a lesson in the classroom, it is expected to have a wide range of shifts in events and acts. This will lead to a variable use of language where the SA variety may be the dominant one, but an extensive amount of shifting and/or mixing of varieties will likely occur, depending on the nature of the speech event or act in addition to other social factors such as the gender, background, and education of the speaker.

3.2 Urban variation

Miller (2004: 177) states that "urbanization has been one of the greatest social changes of the last century in Arab countries, as well as in many other parts of the world." The continuous and steady migration of huge numbers of peasants and Bedouins to urban canters in many Arab countries has contributed to the creation of complex urban varieties, which interact with the surrounding local dialects in some sort of diglossic situation (Habib 2010). This situation has led to the creation of different types of regional and national standards competing with the pan-Arab typical standard (Ibrahim, 1985; Abdel-Jawad 1987). Accordingly, a new pattern, referred to as urban variation, has emerged. This pattern is characterized by a shift from the local varieties of the surrounding areas to the varieties of the urban centers in these areas.

According to Miller (2004: 178), "The evolution and history of urban vernaculars are reflected in a number of contemporary linguistic variations correlated with communal affiliation, i.e. religious or ethnic, regional, age, gender, and social class." This type of linguistic variations is based on the speakers' perception of the urban linguistic models of the city which are seen as a "cultural frame of reference." In most Arab countries the urban varieties of the main urban centers, especially the capital, seem to act as regional standards. These urban dialects are characterized by a number

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of features associated with koineization, simplification, and innovation, as opposed to Bedouin dialects, which are considered to be more conservative. According to Miller (2004: 181)

> One of the characteristics of the Arab urban setting, compared to other non-Arab settings, might be that different linguistic varieties, associated with different and ambivalent values, have been, and still are, competing norms: *fusha [SA],* associated with literacy, high education and religion but also with formality and conservatism; urban dialects, associated with modernity and urban cultural models but also sometimes with effeminacy and decadence; - Bedouin dialects, associated with *asala* (i.e. purity of origin) and Arab tradition but also sometimes with backwardness and toughness. According to each urban socio-historical context, the degree of competition between each of the three main norms varies. The distribution of linguistic variables reflects the direction of change and the weight of each respective variety.

The urban varieties are predominantly characterized by extensive and often unsystematic variation, where multiple competing forces are at work (political, cultural, religious, etc.), which may affect or curb the direction of normal and expected forms of shifting. For example, in Amman, the political division (Palestinian vs. Jordanian) often plays a significant role in variation, where the Bedouin velar variant [g] stands for power and political domination associated with the Jordanian political elite (army, senior officials, etc.) and acts as an "in-group marker" (Suleiman 2004), and thus it competes with the dominant urban glottal stop [ʔ] variant.

In general, it is not easy to locate a single unified urban standard vernacular in these urban centers due to their complex and heterogeneous demographic structure. In many of these centers, there have been demographic islands which correspond to linguistic islands (such as Palestinian Refugee Camps, ethnic and religious neighbourhoods, community-specific neighbourhoods, etc.), where local native historical varieties are often maintained. This explains "the presence of various linguistic strata... or that of different varieties within the same city" (Miller 2004: 182).

In the diverse urban centers, it is possible to observe some common trends pertinent to gender and age variation. First, in some cities (Nablus in Palestine, for instance), the old urban vernacular features are often maintained by old women.

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Second, in the same cities newly emerging urban features are acquired by young women faster than their male counterparts. Furthermore, young educated women tend to use more lexical foreign items and to switch more easily to foreign languages associated with modernity than men (Amara 2005). Third, in older cities, such as Cairo and Damascus, which have already developed their characteristic urban varieties, young educated women tend to initiate new linguistic changes, which eventually become prestigious norms associated with femininity and refinement. Such features are often considered "femininity markers" and may be perceived socially as "more 'effeminate" than Bedouin/rural dialects (Miller 2004), and therefore they will not be readily adopted by the male counterparts.

In conclusion, the continuous influx of rural and Bedouin immigrants to the major urban centers has resulted in "urban destabilization," which itself has a major influence on reshaping the linguistic situation in these centers (Miller 2004). Thus it is foreseen that new linguistic models or urban varieties will keep developing in such centers.

3.3 Gender-based variation

Sociolinguists seem to agree that gender-based variation is very common in all languages. Evidence adduced largely from Western languages indicates that, all other things being equal, women tend to consistently produce more prestigious speech forms than men do (see Smith 1979; Holmes 1984, 1985, 1986, for a comprehensive review of studies that deal with this issue). Studies conducted within the Arabic context (see e.g, Abdel-Jawad 1981, 1986; Daher 1998; Amara 2005; Bassiouney 2009; Habib 2010, among many others) reveal the existence of significant gender-based patterns of variation in spoken Arabic. Such patterns seem to apply at all social levels, starting with the lower social unit, the family. Abdel-Jawad (1986) found that in newly emerging urban centers, distinct patterns of gender variation exist at the family level. Parents, especially fathers, tend to be more conservative in that they often maintain their own vernacular forms with minimum switching to alternative urban variants. On the other hand, younger members of the family are more inclined to abandon their parents' vernacular forms to adopt other local forms: the daughters increasingly adopt the most distinguishing urban variants, while the sons adopt either the SA forms or

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more frequently the local Jordanian forms to substitute for the most stereotypical vernacular features of their speech (Abdel-Jawad 1986).

The social evaluation and attitudes towards the various local varieties usually sharpen these gender-based patterns of variation. Urban varieties, as mentioned above, are viewed by the majority as more feminine and at the same time are more socially prestigious, while rural forms are viewed as more masculine. Standard Arabic is neutrally viewed, as it is the national standard implying formality and seriousness. Such attitude and social evaluation usually determine the use and spread of certain features from different language varieties from one group to another in cross-dialectal settings. Feelings and attitudes towards these varieties may rise to the level of social awareness, so parents, for instance, may interfere in the way their children speak, trying to correct them or direct them. Many parents reported (personal communication) that they do not like their sons to use the urban variety and may rebuke them when they use it on the ground that they will sound “effeminate”. The same parents, however, do not mind their daughters using the urban variety, as it suits their feminine nature. Many urban mothers reported that their sons use the family vernacular at home, but they switch to the local Jordanian variety outside home, especially with their peers. They attribute this to the sons' fear of being isolated among their friends, or being labeled as “lame” in Labov’s (1972b) description of people like them in his New York study. These cases are by no means exceptions; they are very common, as they reflect the general pattern of societal attitudes towards the use of language varieties. This social pressure may contribute to gender segregation in language use. Men and women are expected to behave linguistically differently with each gender having its own typical characteristic features.

A long-standing sociolinguistic principle states that people usually accommodate or adapt their speech according to their interlocutors. Quite often, gender of the addressee may determine the direction of adaptation. It is a common practice among men in Arab communities to switch to the urban variety when talking to women. Women, on the other hand, rarely switch to men's variety when talking to them. Long observation of some popular radio programs, e.g. live transmission, confirms this conclusion. When alternation is between the polar ends of the diglossia, i.e. SA and COL, Arab women tend to use the standard forms less often than men do. At the level of individual linguistic variables, women are found to use the SA forms less often than

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men do (see also Abdel-Jawad 1981; El-Hassan 1978; Sallam 1980; Schmidt 1974). The same pattern repeats itself at the wider language component scales, e.g. the discourse level.

It would be a serious error to construct a general sweeping principle that women always behave like this. In fact, a woman's linguistic behavior depends largely on her role in her community, her job, her mobility, and her social contacts and network. For example, rural women are far more conservative than rural men. However, once these women get into public life by having a job or taking role in some societal activities, they are quick to adapt their speech to the more socially prestigious variety (Abdel-Jawad 1981). Thus, it can be safely assumed that the more social contacts a woman has and the wider social networks she belongs to, the more linguistic change, adaptation, and variation she will exhibit. Abdel-Jawad (1981) recognized two patterns of linguistic variation among women: *a*) women, who are excluded from public life and whose social networks are closed and limited to the local community, tend to use the COL vernacular, and they exhibit minimal variation; b) women, who have a more active role in the society with more open and wider networks, tend to lead in language change and in adapting to the prevailing socially prestigious forms.

In conclusion, gender of the speaker and/or addressee often determines the variety one uses. At the societal level, certain linguistic features may acquire some social evaluation and are associated with one sex or the other. Ideologically speaking, the use of language can be an expression of the individuals' attitude towards the opposite sex. Males and females differ in their outlook, their evaluation of linguistic items, and their role in the society. These differences will be reflected in their usage of language. It is thus imperative to include gender as one of the primary variables in studying any kind of language or linguistic variation in Arabic.

4. Factors shaping variation

In studying variation in any Arab community/country, it is imperative to consider a set of factors which influence and shape the dominant patterns of variation in the Arab world. It should be noted that despite their paramount contribution to the linguistic situation in this part of the world, these factors can hardly be quantified

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following the standard qualitative analysis of variation. These factors include but are not limited to the following:

4.1 Historical patterns of colonization and occupation

Most Arab countries were under Western colonization for most of the twentieth century. This has left a clear linguistic impact on their spoken varieties. For example, the spoken Arabic varieties in north African countries are highly influenced by French at various linguistic levels, while Arabic in Jordan and Iraq is influenced by English. In Palestine, the situation is even more complicated, as the Israeli occupation has left its direct impact on Arabic with an influx of lexical borrowings. The evident impact of colonization and occupation contributes to the complexity of the linguistic situation and patterns of variation in the Arab World.

4.2 Internal structure

Most Arabic countries consist of multi-ethnic/national groups which tend to use their native languages along Arabic. This situation has resulted in the creation of multilingual communities, and has ultimately contributed to the patterns of variation in Arabic. Various studies (e.g. Abdel-Jawad 1986; Suleiman 2004) have shown that these ethnic and national groups vary in their adoption and use of the majority language (i.e., Arabic), resulting in the maintenance, shift, or death of their native languages. This will ultimately add to the complexity and multiplicity of variation patterns in Arabic.

4.3 Internal conflicts and power changes

Since many Arab countries consist largely of different ethnic or national groups, the relationship between these groups reflects directly on the linguistic situation. Different groups may resort to their "native languages and/or varieties" as a symbol of identification and to create a distance between them and other groups, especially when tension arises. In Jordan, for example, when internal political and tribal conflicts appear on the surface, this strategy becomes very evident. Young women of Jordanian origin who live in urban centers normally use the urban variety, which is widely

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associated with Palestinians. Yet, in cases of political tension between the two groups (Palestinians and Jordanians), they tend to switch back to their native so-called pure Jordanian variety, i.e. from [ʔ], which is the glottalized reflex of /Q/, to velarized [g], which is a clear case of clustering and polarization and alignment. This linguistic shift is often accompanied with changes in other symbolic items, such as the head-dress, folk-dances, and dress.

4.4. Power structure

Within Arab countries, some groups (national, social, ethnic, tribal) entertain more political, economic or tribal power than others, which ultimately gives their varieties a high status in these countries. In certain contexts, these varieties are associated with the ruling class, as is the case in Bahrain (Holes 1995a, Holes 1995b). Very often, speakers tend to switch to the politically dominant group variety to identify with it. In this context, the powerful group represents, in Phillipson's (1992) terms, the "core group" while the others represent "the periphery". Such a division exists in many Arab countries such as Jordan and the Gulf countries. In some cases, members of the second group usually attach themselves to one of the "core" tribes and take its name, yet they remain "the marked group". In the same way, speakers who come from the less powerful group may switch to the dominant group's variety. The relationship between the two groups is related to a set of socio-psychological and cultural factors as well as political ones. In Jordan, for instance, some families which have originally migrated from Palestine and still carry names, which indicate their place of origin, tend to hide their identity and associate themselves with the dominant group for reason of integration and protection of interests.

4.5 Media changes and globalization

In the Arab world, profound changes are taking place as a result of advancement in technology and communications. The widespread of satellite TV has led to the infiltration of English into Arabic. This has added another dimension to variation, as many new words have entered Arabic spoken varieties, which has ultimately gave dominance to English in different contexts. The media, especially the availability of TV

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channels from all Arab countries, has also led to convergence of language. Nowadays, for a TV channel to succeed and attract a wider audience, it has to use a variety of Arabic which is comprehensible to audiences that speak different local varieties.

4.6 Type of communities: Closed vs. open communities

Generally speaking, one can divide the Arab communities into two major groups in terms of their openness, adaptability, and acceptability of others: open and closed communities, corresponding to Milroy's (1980, 1987) "hard-shelled" vs. "soft-shelled" communities, with some major differences. One group is a "digestive" group, which tends to attract members of other groups who quite often switch to the norms of this group, including their language variety. For example, Egypt has been a center of attraction to many Arabs who may go there for education, official duties, but most importantly, to work in entertainment as singers, actors, etc. These people usually switch to the Egyptian spoken variety of Arabic over a short period. On the other hand, this same community which digests others seems to shield itself strongly against any outside influence. Therefore, an Egyptian living in an Arab country, no matter how long his stay is, will always maintain his Egyptian variety.

The Arab Gulf communities, on the other hand, are "non-digestive" in that very few outsiders (Arab expatriates) seem to adopt the local language varieties regardless of the length of their stay in the Gulf area. In some cases, children born and brought up there rarely use these Gulf varieties. This can be attributed to two major conflicting factors. On the one hand, these expatriates generally feel they are culturally, educationally, and socially superior to the local cultural, educational and social norms. On the other hand, the Gulf natives feel that they have the financial power and status as employers, so they tend to maintain their identity symbols and markers of which language stands out as the most remarkable and distinguishing indicator. In addition, these communities are considered to be culturally conservative, so they make "hard-shelled communities" which are closed to outside influence.

When two dialects are in contact, it is expected that a great deal of variation or convergence will occur, depending on several factors. However, this variation or convergence may be constrained by the types of communities involved. As we mentioned above, open communities are more likely to exhibit greater amount of

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variation while closed ones will not. One illustrative example is the case of Palestinian diaspora. It is important to note that due to their political situation, Palestinians attempt to maintain their identity. However, in some communities, they tend to switch to the local varieties of the host countries, such as switching to the Egyptian dialect in Egypt. Another example comes from the Gulf area. Taking all other factors into consideration, the Gulf communities in general are considered closed communities; therefore, most Arab immigrants in these countries do not often show any linguistic convergence with members of these communities (lack of inter-dialectal variation). On the other hand, those who go to Egypt, often switch to the Egyptian dialect over a short period of time, because the Egyptian community is an open community.

4.7 Emergence of urban centers and pluricentricity

While major Arab cities such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and Jerusalem have their distinct and long-established varieties, several new emerging metropolitan centers such as Amman, Muscat, and Dubai have not yet developed distinct varieties that can be referred to as Amman's variety, Muscat's variety, or Dubai's variety respectively. These cities have become major urban centers over a short period of time. For instance, Amman's population in 1900 was approximately 1500; however, in 2010 its population is estimated at 2.5 million, with a heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, multi-national demographic structure. In such places, different varieties are influencing each other, which will ultimately lead to the emergence of a common variety. Similarly, in major Gulf centers such as Muscat, Dubai, and Kuwait, the linguistic situation is as complex as their demographic structure, with its ethnic diversity and influx of expatriates from more than 100 nationalities. In Muscat, for instance, the diverse demographic situation has created a linguistic heterogeneity with no specific linguistic variety of Arabic that can characterize it, resulting in the mixing of varieties (Al-Busaidi 1995: 106). According to Suleiman (2004: 59), this "mixing of varieties in discourse is characteristic of the diglossic nature of the Arabic language situation".

In all Arab countries, and sometimes in every region of a country, there exists regional varieties which act as standard spoken varieties in their respective regions (Ibrahim 1985), so speakers of other local varieties tend to switch to these regional standards for social upward mobility, to integrate into the new communities, and to

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conceal their original identity. The young generation, especially females, tends to switch to urban varieties to dissociate themselves from their backgrounds and to identify with what they believe to be a more socially prestigious one. This is what can be referred to as *relocation of identity*. For example, in Egypt, cities like Cairo, Alexandria, Ismailia, etc. act as regional centers, which set the standards for the surrounding areas (see Haeri 1996; Miller 2005). Likewise, in Palestine, big urban centers such as Jerusalem, Nablus, Gaza, Hebron, etc. act as regional standard centers (see Amara 2005; for more cases from other Arab countries, see Hachimi (2007), discussing the case of Casablanca, and Habib (2008, 2010) regarding Hims in Syria). This situation has given rise to two types of standards in Arabic: the main SA standard and the regional standards, which is a clear case of pluricentricity (Abdel-Jawad 1991).

4.8 Patterns of immigration

Over the last century, various patterns of migration/immigration have surfaced in the Arab World: internal migration, migration between Arab countries, compulsory migration (Palestinians and Iraqis), political migration (Belushis and Zanzibaris in Oman). These patterns have played a major role in determining the linguistic situation among these immigrants. In some cases, they have influenced the communities they have immigrated to (Palestinians in Jordan), and in other cases, they have either been influenced by the new communities (Palestinians in Egypt) or maintained their original varieties (Palestinians in refugee camps, Arabs living in the Gulf area). This has added more complexity to the pattern of sociolinguistic variation in the Arab World, and thus must be considered seriously when studying the linguistic situation in this part of the world.

Palestinian refugees, who settled in the capitals of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt as well as other major cities which have already developed their local prestigious spoken urban varieties, are most likely to acquire these varieties and use them. On the other hand, those who have settled in Jordan not only have maintained their native varieties, especially in urban centers, but they have also set the standards for the rest of the country, as argued by Ibrahim (1985) when he said that “Jordan itself, with such linguistically heterogeneous towns as Amman, Zerqa, and Irbid, is a good illustration of this claim: there can be little doubt that the most highly valued speech varieties in

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Jordan are those characteristic of urban Palestinian population" (1985: 7). Furthermore, those who settled in the Gulf states have not adopted the local varieties, but instead have either maintained their own varieties or adopted the urban Palestinian varieties.

Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan resemble islands in that the refugees live in distinct communities, each of which represents the native town or village from which they have migrated. These people tend to retain their native varieties (of their original cities or towns) and pass them to their children. These camps represent a national symbol of identity and commitment to the native home towns; they are the embodiments of the native towns and villages. Speakers in such camps tend to retain their varieties, with minimal switching to the majority ones, as a symbol of identity and as a sign of remembrance and sometimes for feelings of nostalgia. However, some families or individuals may leave the camp and live in other neighborhoods, especially affluent areas in the big cities (e.g. moving from Al-Wihdaat refugee camp to Western areas of Amman). These people seem to be released from the local confinement of their camp-communities. Thus, they feel released of their identity constraints, and they attempt to relocate their identity by adopting the prestigious urban variety as a mark of upward social mobility.

4.9 The role of gender (genderlects)

The distinct roles of both genders in the Arab communities have often led to the emergence of very common patterns, which can be referred to as "genderlects" with features often socially seen as masculine or feminine. In general, in the processes of urbanization and immigration referred to above, women tend to be quicker in switching to the urban varieties (Amara 2005; Habib 2010). Male speakers, on the other hand, are less likely and often slower to switch to new varieties and may insist on maintaining some features of their local varieties, usually considered to be a symbol of identification. Young men may regard this behavior as a symbol of their "machoness" and "manliness", and as a sign of holding on to their roots. This may be understandable considering what has been mentioned above about different evaluations of different varieties by various social groups.

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5. Conclusion

The discussion above suggests that similar but not necessarily identical patterns of variation occur in different Arab communities/countries. Such patterns exhibit tendencies and trends of divergence and convergence, depending not only on typical socio-linguistic variables but also on a host of factors which seem to play a major role in shaping the linguistic situation in the Arab world. These may include political (wars, occupation, peace process, internal conflicts, power changes, peace process, Arab Spring), ethnic, social (urbanization, pluricentricity, immigration, economic (globalization), and cultural factors (types of communities, media). Despite the paramount role which these factors have in determining the nature of the linguistic landscape in the Arab world, they cannot be easily rendered to standard quantitative analysis; therefore, qualitative explanations are needed along with the dominant quantitative and correlational ones when investigating the nature of variation in the Arab world.

The Variation Approach proposed in this study suggests that instead of dividing the linguistic space into distinct varieties and busying ourselves with setting boundaries between them, it is more realistic and plausible to study this phenomenon in terms of variation, where speakers have at their disposal several layers of linguistic items (phonological, morphological, lexical, etc.) from which they can choose and mix according to a set of social, stylistic, and linguistic factors. These linguistic items can be placed on a hierarchy based on their social sensitivity as well as their linguistic nature. Furthermore, another important assumption of this approach is the reconsideration of the concept of domains as suggested by Ferguson (1959) by subdividing the different domains into their smaller interactional units of analysis, following Hymes' (1974) units of analysis (situation, event, act). This study suggests that the nature and direction of variation are often determined at these sub-divisions.

The model of language variation envisaged here proposes the existence of discrete co-existent layers, defined by strict co-occurrence rules, which are functionally differentiated. It also assumes the existence of intrinsic variables, defined by co-variation with linguistic and extra linguistic elements. The linguistic change itself is rarely a movement of one entire system into another. Instead, speakers tend to adopt only the most socially sensitive variables of the new system. Thus, every linguistic

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variable seems to have a life of its own, and it usually has a continuous range of values, since it includes the frequency of occurrence of individual variants in extended speech.

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