

Standard Arabic language and the Diglosic

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Abstract

Our study aims to find solutions to the dilemma that emerges in diglossic societies such as the countries in the Arab world. In the Arab world, learning Standard Arabic (SA) is difficult as it is not the native variation for most Arabic speakers. People are not exposed to it at the beginning of their lives. They start learning it at school entry age. At school they learn the grammar, but, outside the class, the speakers are exposed to different Arabic vernaculars. They speak the colloquial (C) variety in most of the domains. The study shows that a high percentage of the speakers do not use SA in their daily life. The study shows that SA is utilized in 9% of the total occurrences in young males, and

the rate of use is 11% in the speech of females. It shows that the use of SA was also very low in the speech of the middle-aged group. It was 12% and 8% in the speech of males and females, respectively. Elderly males and elderly females also use SA in a very low percentage. It was 4% and 6%, respectively. The researchers suggest some solutions that could change this linguistic behavior. The objective of these solutions is to suggest better ways that might lead SA to become an acquired variation rather than a learned variation

Keywords: *Standard Arabic, The Diglosic, Speech community, Vernacular*

1. Introduction

It cannot be denied that Arabic speakers face difficulties when it comes to the use of Standard Arabic language (henceforth SA) in their daily lives. Most Arabs in any Arab country speak colloquial Arabic (henceforth CA) in their daily life, especially before attending school. For example, Jordanians speak a Jordanian Arabic dialect. Moroccans speak their own dialects and so on and so forth.

Nevat et al (2014) points out that "In Arabic, the language used for everyday conversation ('spoken Arabic' ...) differs markedly from literary Arabic (LA), which is used for written communication and formal functions. This fact raises questions regarding the cognitive status of the two varieties and their processing in the brain" (p. 3387).

Hamdan and Hamdan (2020) state out that "Arabic, in its diverse varieties, is spoken by approximately 300 million people; however, its acquisition, particularly by native speakers, has not been well researched" (p. 2).

When Arabs got to school, that is to say, are of school entry age, they start with lessons in SA as though it is a second language. As Nevat (2014) puts it, "Previous studies using auditory stimuli suggested that LA [literary Arabic] is processed by Arabic native speakers as a second language" (p. 3387). In general, they are given a one-hour lesson three times a week. Outside the classroom, there are fewer opportunities to hear SA. Learning it in this way means they are learning but they are not acquiring. To differentiate between the two, Yule (2001) states out that "the term acquisition, when used of language, refers to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it

naturally in communicative situations", while "The term learning, however, applies to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language" (p. 191). In this speech community, Standard Arabic is rarely used. Even in the regions where SA is normally used, use of SA appears to be broken and it is not well-mastered (Ferguson, 1959).

According to Kaplony, " the Arab literati almost never wrote or indeed write in this ideal language, what actually matters is the distance from the ideal language" (p.312). Kaplony (2019) adds that the proper examples of SA are always taken from "bits and pieces from the three high prestige corpora: poetry (and the formal language of Bedouins in general), the Quran, and the Hadith" (p. 314). Mesthrie, et al (2000), stated out "Diglossia as it is used in the field of linguistics denotes "a situation where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout a speech community, with each being assigned a definite but non-overlapping role" (p. 39). This situation of diglossia where we can have (H) variety and (L) variety existed long ago in the Arabic community (Ferguson, 1959).. According

to Kaplony (2019), "Instances ... of nonstandard Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid Documentary Arabic have been found through the Arabic Papyrology Database (p. 323). This means almost 900 years ago as the Umayyad Caliphate was established in 662 AD.

Because this linguistic phenomenon (Diglossia) is an important linguistic situation in the Arab world, Nevat et al (2014) " assessed the neural basis of diglossia by analysing the processing of visually presented LA and SA words in adult Arabic speakers, and comparing both to the participants' formal L2 (Hebrew). Participants performed a semantic categorization task, previously shown to reliably activate left hemisphere language areas" (p. 3388).

The first variety, which is always observed as the most important, is SA, and it is called the High variety (H). The other is called the Low variety which is the colloquial in the society. Accordingly, Kindt et al (2016) is still viewed as the prestigious variety and there are reasons that help to make it retain this status. According to Kindt et al (2016),

"fushä [SA] retains its position as an idealized prestigious variety. These surprising results are explained by rising levels of literacy and the growth of computer mediated communication" (p. 324). So, Kindt et al (2016) believe that these results "encourage a rethinking of the language situation in the Arab world, supporting the view that diglossia is a social and cultural resource rather than a problem" (p. 324). . Though Ferguson states that each of these two varieties are assigned definite roles and domains where it could be used, it is normal, practically speaking, to find the two levels function together in some domains (Ferguson, 1959). For instance, in some domains, such as mosques, lecture halls or official meetings, SA (H) is used, while the Low variety is used in the street and homes. Use of the (H) variety in the wrong domain might cause the speaker to be ridiculed and criticized as he will be considered a user of a marked code. Kindt et al (2016) also pointed out that " it is found that fushä [SA] seldom appears, and that even on formal and semi-formal occasions, intermediate varieties dominate the picture" (327).

A marked code is the use of an unexpected dialect or speech in a given linguistic situation (Scotton, 1996). Thus, although SA is considered a prestigious code, it is not readily accepted for use in domains such as the streets or homes. Expected behavior in these domains is the use of the vernacular, which is the least conscious style of speech. Furthermore, these two domains, the streets and homes, are the domains in which people usually spend most of their time. As a result, the colloquial is then used much more than the Standard form of the language.

SA is commonly used in domains where it is known that individuals meet infrequently or occurrences are infrequent. For example, people do not hold official meetings all the time nor do people always meet in lecture halls. Even in these official meetings, English or possibly the colloquial is often used. At schools, SA might be used in Arabic language classes but not in other classes. On school and university campuses, the colloquial dominates. In addition, children are only exposed to the low variety during early childhood. They start learning SA when they reach school age, i.e. 6 years old.

However, SA is used in writing and reading and they practice this in their entire life, especially after joining schools as, according to Hamdan and Hamdan (2020) "children are not formally introduced to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) before schooling (p. 35).

. As a result, Nevat et al (2014) state out that when it comes to semantics "categorization task on visually presented words in LA [literary Arabic], SA [spoken Arabic] and Hebrew, performance on LA was better than SA and Hebrew" (p. 3387). Nevat et al (2014) add that " these results indicate an advantage for LA in the current study, presumably due to participants' proficiency in reading in this language" (p. 3387). When it comes to spoken Arabic, Nevat et al (2014) found out that "Activation in SA was stronger than in LA in left inferior frontal, precentral, parietal and occipito-temporal regions" (p.3387).

The Arab world is classified as a diglossic society. Hence, this conflict between the two varieties, the H and the L, exists in all of the Arab countries. Emotionally speaking, all Arabs have a high regard for SA as it represents their history, identity, religion and the glorious eras of their

civilizations. It is used as a lingua franca in any gathering where some colloquial variations of Arabic might not be understood by all speakers at these gatherings. However, that does not mean the speakers have fully mastered SA through using it. Nevertheless, the Arabic phonemes are then used in a clear manner to help facilitate mutual communication. Nevertheless, the speakers are not as proficient in SA as they are in their local dialects.

The local dialects of the different Arab countries vary. SA is used, as such, as a neutral code that can be understood by speakers of different Arabic dialects. It is uncommon to find an Arab speaker who can speak SA effortlessly and unconsciously. Simply put, SA does not have native speakers, but it is understood by most Arabic speakers although they may or may not speak it with ease. In other words, SA is learned at schools like any foreign language, but it is not acquired in natural linguistic contexts. It can be understood when used, but the speaker might find it difficult to obey all of the rules when speaking. In other words, what he says might flout the grammatical rules of SA but may still be generally understood. To illustrate, the following sentence is stated by a speaker intending to use

SA. There is a grammatical error. Nevertheless, the speaker was understood because that error does not change the overall meaning of the phrase

SA: Ja'a Al rajolo "The man came"

Colloquial: ja'a al rajol " the man came"

In non-diglossic countries, this linguistic and social dilemma does not exist. While the Low variety has its native speakers, the Standard variety also has its native speakers in that these standard varieties are varieties of certain regions and cities in a country. For example, SE (Standard English) is the native variety used in London. Therefore, the London natives would not need to study the grammar of the English language in order to speak or write correctly as in the case of Arabic language speakers. In other words, how they speak and how they write are identical. In contrast, in the Arab world, people speak in one way, but they write in another way because it is expected that written Arabic takes the form of SA in accordance with its grammatical rules. In the Arab world, no one can claim to be a native speaker of SA who has

acquired it as his local native variety and is able use it naturally and spontaneously in all of the possible domains. In short, in order to speak SA, one must attend special institutes and schools to learn its grammar. Nevertheless, even with this experience, one would have few opportunities to practice it naturally with everyone. For example, it would not be acceptable to use it with your relatives at family gatherings. Nor could it be used with friends in spontaneous gatherings.

2.1 Methodology.

This section provides a clear and detailed picture for the framework of the research methodology to achieve the objectives of the present study. This research begins with a logical basis behind the methodology adopted. It also comprises the design of research, the sample of the present study, and the procedures of collecting data and analysing them. In addition, this section presents the theory as well as the concepts adopted to analyze this work.

This study is conducted with respect to the Labovian Paradigm, and the quantitative approach is adopted. Our large social network enabled us to draw our sample from a variety of people and from both genders (El Salman, 2003, 2016). So,

the social network framework was followed and the informants were approached in the capacity of “a friend of a friend” or in some cases “a friend of a friend of a friend” (Milroy and Milroy, 1978). We also recorded some group conversations between Arabic speaker where this was possible. According to Labov (1972) the recorded conversations could be considered “a supplementary check on these face-to face tape-recorded interviews” (p. 13).

We used face-to-face interviews. The questions used to elicit data were random and they aim at helping the vernacular to emerge. Son each informants was subject to different questions. This was determined by the context of the interview and the nature of the informants.

To confirm our hypothesis and impressions gathered through our experience in the Arab world and based on our knowledge as native Arabic speakers, we rely on collecting naturalistic speech from 48 informants divided as shown in the table below (Table 1):

Table one

	M	F	Total
Sex			
Age			
Young	8	8	16
Middle	8	8	16
Elderly	8	8	16
Total	24	24	48

2.2 Data Collection and the Sample of the Study

Sample, in general, is the main part of participants or any discourse that are actually examined by a researcher in any empirical investigation (Dörnyei, 2007). The size of the sample is chosen to suit the quantitative approach adopted in our study. So we have chosen 48 informants of both genders and of different age groups. All of the informant are from Irbid city, a city which is located in the northern part of Jordan. We both

belong to this city and as a result our large social network helped us meet people easily and from both genders.

2,3 Data Analysis

Analysis of data will be used to make data in a meaningful form (Upreti, 2010).

We divided the sample into three groups according to the education level, gender and age. In order to gain a statistically accurate view of the use of SA or colloquial (C), a univariate analysis is employed (El Salman, 2003). For the purpose of using the univariate analysis, each group is presented as a number. Groups representing the level of education are given two numbers. The uneducated group is presented as number 1 and the educated group as number 2. The male group is given number 1 and female group number 2. The young age group is 1, the middle age group is 2 and the elderly 3 (El Salman, 2003).

After conducting the face- to- face interviews, we collected the data from the recordings and then we started

**analysing the data depending on the approach adopted-
quantitative approach. Tokens were counted and then we
started analysing the findings depending on what we found.**

3. Findings and Discussion

Table 2

The distribution of the variable (Q) by age and gender.

Gen		M				F			
der									
Age		[q]%	[g]%	[ʔ]%	N	[q]%	[g]%	[ʔ]%	N
You		9	81	10	517	11	2	95	511
ng									
Midd			86	12	500	8	12	70	412
le	12								
Elde	4	4	76	20	540	6	40	54	5500
rly									

[ʔ] = glottal stop

[q] uvular stop

[g] velar stop

To begin with, it is worth mentioning that the (Q) variable has four variants in the Jordanian speech community. Three of them are considered colloquial variants, and these are: the voiced velar stop sound /g/, the

voiceless velar stop /k/ and the glottal stop /ʔ/. The SA variant is the uvular stop /q/. In Table 2 we observe that the different age groups have not adopted the /q/ variant, which is the most salient feature of SA variety. It is clear that the key feature and the indicator of the use of SA is used in a very low percentage. The use of SA was very low in all of the age groups studied. The difference among them was not significant. As demonstrated here, SA has a rate of occurrence of 9% with young males and 11% with females. The table also shows that the use of SA was also very low in the speech of the middle-aged group. It was 12% and 8% in the speech of males and females, respectively. Elderly males and females also use SA in a very low percentage. It was 4% and 6%, respectively. Each gender and each age group has selected a variant which they perceived as prestigious, and, as such, use it intensively and in a high percentage. The SA /q/ is not used in a high percentage by any age group or by any gender. This reflects our hypothesis that SA is not commonly used in the daily life of Arabic speakers.

This linguistic schizophrenia between the desire of Arabic speakers to encourage SA as the dominant language and

their inability to use it, or their avoidance of using it in order to not make mistakes, confirm our hypothesis that SA is learned only in Arabic language classes and is not practiced or used outside these classrooms. As a result of the absence of SA in their daily lives, other colloquial variants replace it as variants of prestige. Each of these other variants is linked to a perceived prestige suitable to a given gender or age group. For example, the urban colloquial variant /ʔ/ became the prestigious variant of female groups as it reflects softness and urbanization because it is the native variant of some well-known urban centers in the Arab world, such as Cairo, Jerusalem and Damascus (Ibrahim, 1986). According to Daher (1998), “females avoid using the sounds associated with a rural background, lacking in what is perceived to be the superior status of city life (p. 198). Therefore, it is used in a very high percentage by young females although it is a colloquial dialect. The rate was 95%. This differs from the linguistic behavior of females in the Western world where univariate analysis they prefer is SE.

Women are known to have a tendency toward hypercorrect grammar and the use of standard forms (Echert, 1976). For

example, in England, SE is the native dialect of London, the capital. Thus, the use of SE means using an urbanized dialect as it is the native dialect of an urban center, which is London. Therefore, more females than males use SE as it reflects softness and it is the dialect of a city (Trudgill, 1974). Due to this difference in the social meaning of SA and SE, some Western linguists have misunderstood the linguistic behavior of Arab females because they think these women are different from Western females who all prefer the standard form. So, linguistically speaking, they behave contrary to the norm (Ibrahim, 1986). These linguists are not aware that although SA is linked to education and Arab civilization, it is not the native dialect of any of the urban centers in the Arab world. Women in general prefer the use of any dialect that supports their natural tendency to appear soft and urbanized. Using SA would not help them achieve this as it is not the native dialect of any urban Arab centers. Therefore, they choose the urban dialect although it is a colloquial. This urban colloquial is the cultural equivalent to SE in terms of granting Arab females the social meaning they seek.

Ibrahim refers to this urban dialect as Supra-dialectal low (Ibrahim, 1986).

Males seek the local variant relevant to their situation in order to associate themselves with the social meanings suitable to males. For example, in Jordan, the preferred variant is the local Jordanian colloquial. In this, young males stereotypically use the local variant [g]. According to Al-Wer (1991), “this is the most salient feature which carries the social meaning of locality and symbolizes Jordanian identity (p.75).

Because SA has been absent from the practical speech of Arabic speakers for a long period of time, it does not carry any new social meaning that can help it emerge again in daily life as a frequently used variety in any Arab speech community. As a result, Arabic speakers are losing the ability to master it and to use it unconsciously. As a result, we find its percentage of usage is lower than the percentage of the usage of the colloquial in every gender and in every age group. Thus, Table 2 confirms that the use of (C) dominates the speech of Arabic speakers in Jordan although each gender tends to use different key features of

the Arabic vernacular. The use of SA was very low in all of the age groups studied.

To conclude, the low level of the use of SA is clearly noticeable, and this complicates any ambition to facilitate the reemergence of SA as the prominent speech of Arabic speakers. Nevertheless, the researchers hope that through their suggestions, they could contribute to the previous attempts to solve this linguistic dilemma of claiming a variety as part of a true identity, mastering it and using it in writing but still not incorporating it in the daily lives of its speakers.

Educated and uneducated groups

Table 3

The distribution of the (Q) variable by level of education

Educational level	[k]		[g]		[ʔ]		[q]	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

UE	10/80	1.25	500/80	62.	230/8	28.	60/81	7.5
	0		0	5	00	7	2	
E	30/70	4.2	360/70	51.	200/7	28.	110/7	15.
	0		0	4	00	5	00	7

There is little significant difference when we make the comparison between the educated and the uneducated groups. It shows that uneducated speakers tend to use the colloquial in its different varieties in a high percentage (92%) while SA is used in a low percentage (7.5%). Although the percentage of the use of SA is higher in the educated group than it is in the uneducated group, 15.7 and 7.5, respectively, it is still less than the use of colloquial varieties which was 84.3%. Despite the fact that higher education increases exposure to SA, the difference is nevertheless not significant enough to reduce the gap between the use of SA and colloquial. This makes our suggestion for a radical change through language planning a necessity.

Solving the Problem

The term language planning refers to all conscious efforts that intend to change the linguistic behavior of a speech community (Haugen, 1987). The linguistic behavior of the members of the speech community in Jordan, for example, demonstrates the use of SA only where this is required for an official speech. In other words, in the domains that are suggested by Ferguson (1959) to suit SA, such as lectures, or the mosque. However, these same individuals use the Jordanian dialect in other domains. In other words, the Jordanian dialect is used in most of the domains, and it is acceptable to use SA only in a few domains known to last for a few hours. Part of the plan to solve this dilemma and encourage widespread use of SA is to increase the domains where SA could be used, and where the colloquial is not used.

Secondly, the government could support free kindergarten with the intent to use SA. Unfortunately, people send their

children to these schools to learn and acquire English as the children are young enough to be able to acquire any language to which they are exposed. Additionally, the media should be sufficiently controlled so that it uses SA all the time. Movies aimed at children shall be dubbed even if they are originally in another language.

Conclusion

It is a very well-known fact that it is difficult to acquire a language unless one is sufficiently exposed to it. Currently, people are not exposed to SA properly so as to enable them to develop competency. The study shows that SA is used in a very low percentage among all age groups and among males and females. People must be exposed to the language in order to acquire it. The Arab world is classified as a diglossic society as the colloquial dominates any speech community; most members of a speech community use the colloquial across domains.

Children are exposed to the vernacular at the beginning of their lives. SA is not considered to be the native variety of any Arabic speakers as they initially begin learning it in

school. They begin learning and using its grammar, but, at the same time, they do not use or hear it outside the classroom. As a result, language planning which enables governments to impose instruction in SA has become necessary. The domains where use of SA is acceptable shall increase in number. This requires a change in linguistic habits and corresponding behavior. For example, systematic media programs could promote the idea that it is a marked code for domains such as the house and the street, where language is used intensively. Another way to increase exposure to SA is to dub all movies and series. By doing so, children and even adults will be exposed to a greater amount of SA in greater frequencies.

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