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# IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON ARABIC URBAN VERNACULARS : ADVOCATING A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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## INTRODUCTION

The meeting of Aida 5 in Cadiz created the opportunity for organizing a panel on Arabic urban linguistics.<sup>1</sup> This panel had two main goals: a) to put together and present some on-going research on Arabic urban vernaculars, and b) to set-up a research network of people working on Arab cities, and more specifically on the issue of “migration to the city and evolution of Arabic urban vernaculars”.

Some of the contributions of the panel are published in these proceedings. In this short paper, I will summarize the reasons for setting up such a research-network and present the main scientific guidelines and perspectives of the network. I will also briefly present a kind of “typological frame” where different types of urban setting can be categorized according to the potential impact of migration on the evolution of urban vernaculars.

### 1. THE RELEVANCE OF A RESEARCH-NETWORK ON ARABIC URBAN VERNACULARS

Two main social events have dominated the language setting of the Arab world during the 20<sup>th</sup> c. and more precisely since Independence :

- the spread of Education/Mass Media and the teaching of Classical/Modern Arabic leading to increasing contact between Arabic vernaculars and Classical/Modern Arabic
- the spread of urbanization and the high rate of in-migration<sup>2</sup> leading to increasing dialect contact within the main cities.

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<sup>1</sup> Participants were E. Al-Wer, D. Caubet, A. Hachimi, C. Holes, L. Messaouidi, C. Miller, J. Watson.

<sup>2</sup> The term In-migration is used here for the migration trends taking place within a given country (or a given region in the case of Jordan-Palestine for example), i.e. mainly from provincial and rural areas to cities.

The growing contact between Vernaculars and MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) has been relatively well studied. A large part of Arabic sociolinguistic studies has focused on the relationship between *'ammiyya* and *fusha* discussing at length the concepts of diglossia (or its various interpretations in terms of tri- or multiglossia), continuum, Educated Spoken Arabic, etc., and analyzing the various types and rules of code-mixing and/or code-switching between *'ammiyya* and *fusha* in the conceptual frames of either syntactic constraints (applying the model of Sankoff and Poplack) or matrix frame (applying the model of Myers-Scotton).

The linguistic impact of urbanization and in-migration has been far less systematically studied although many authors have pointed out the increasing influence of the main urban vernaculars which have become, or are in the process of becoming, regional or national standards (Ferguson 1987, Holes 1995, Ibrahim 1986, Palva 1982, and many others). The elevated variety of the urban dialects of cities such as Casablanca, Damascus, Cairo are often labeled Moroccan Arabic, Syrian Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, etc. These varieties arose from a more or less important koineization process and stabilized at a more or less early period following the history and rate of urbanization. But the Arab world presents a wide range of urbanization processes and urban sociolinguistic settings. Not all urban vernaculars have expanded or are expanding and some old-city vernaculars have been declining in the face of new koines brought by migrants. Assimilation and homogenization trends seem stronger in some cities than in others, known for the presence of different communal (religious-based or ethnically-based) varieties.

A comparative sociolinguistic analysis, which would take into account the history and social context of each case-city, would lead to a better understanding of the history, development, evolution and transformation of the various Arabic urban linguistic settings. It might help to assess the degree of correlation between types of urban setting and the various evolution patterns of the urban vernaculars. One of the main questions is to analyze the implications of "urbanization" at all linguistic levels (including here language uses but also language attitudes or, to put it in French, "pratiques et représentations") and to examine whether or not there is a clear correlation between social structures and language variables. This has to be done by taking into account the large literature produced in the field of Arab urban studies (including historical, sociological, anthropological, and cultural studies), which have provided much data concerning the social organization of the Arab cities, have discussed notions such as "citadinité vs urbanité", urban models, urban networks, social mobility and have questioned the concept of a specific "Arab Islamic urban model". Most of those urban studies do not include linguistic phenomena in their analyses of

urbanization and it will be time that linguists participate more actively in those debates.

A comparative analysis of Arab cities might also help to assess the extent to which the various processes recorded in Arab cities accord with more general sociolinguistic models, which have been predominantly drawn from North American and European urban settings (cf. relevance of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, education, social classes as main factors of variation and change, impact of contact on the various linguistic features, markedness, relation between language and identity, etc.). Arab urban centers might (or might not) show some specificity concerning the issues of standardization, prestige and norms due to the presence of various poles of prestige (Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Foreign Languages, Urban Vernaculars and sometimes Bedouin vernaculars) and the lack of official standardization of spoken vernaculars.

The idea of developing a comparative analysis is not new and has been already started by a number of researchers and teams. The present time might be appropriate for a hopefully successful enterprise. First, the Aida network has already helped establish contact between various researchers, and the development of the Internet allows easy communication between distant researchers. Second and more important, the last two decades have witnessed the publication of numerous research works on Arabic dialectology and Arabic sociolinguistics and have provided new data that might help a comparative analysis, because a sociolinguistic analysis cannot be undertaken properly without having adequate descriptions of the various dialects/varieties/levels in contact. This is far from being the case in every Arab country but progress has been done. Finally, it is clear that the general global context has changed quite radically in the last decade: globalization, weakening of the State, emergence or reinforcement of regionalism/local nationalism, new technologies of communication (mobiles, internet, channel TVs, etc.) have modified the sociolinguistic context, created new habits and new perceptions that need to be investigated.

## **2. IMPACT OF MIGRATION ACCORDING TO TYPES OF URBAN SETTINGS<sup>3</sup>**

In the Arab world, urban growth has developed considerably since the second part of the twentieth century, due both to in-migration and high fertility rate. In some Arab countries, urban development took place in pre-existing important

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<sup>3</sup> This part is a short version of a longer paper entitled « Variation and change in Arabic Urban vernaculars » that is going to appear in a collective publication ed. by K. Versteegh and R. Dejong .

old urban centers, in other countries it created new urban centers. Urbanization brought various dialects (and/or languages in the case of multilingual Arab countries) into contact and led to various phenomena such as dialectal accommodation, dialect shift, leveling and koineization, decline of some specific urban varieties, coexistence and maintenance of different varieties, dialectal variables becoming social variables, etc...

At this point, a number of questions can be raised:

- Does urbanization lead necessarily in the long term to a process of leveling/koineization and to the emergence of new urban vernaculars subverting the former communal distinctions and developing new types of social variants associated with age, gender, education and social classes?
- Is it possible to draw a correlation between types of socio-political urban setting and types of language change? Are there some rules and models that may explain the various types of urban linguistic development?
- Can we find linguistic regularities?, i.e. in case of dialectal accommodation for example, can we find an implicational scale? Do the same linguistic features always function as marked features?

The first two questions imply that we have some knowledge of the historical development of each city in order to analyze the present situation. Various contemporary Arab urban archetypes can be defined with regard to historical depth, degree of urbanization and impact of migration. Here I will isolate five main archetypes but more could be drawn and within each category there are additional differences due to specific historical events and specific social structuring.

1) *Old capital-cities with a prestigious and well-established dialect* that has become a (unofficial) national standard at least since the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. following large population movements. The dialect of the capital city expanded in neighboring areas and cities. At the present time, the migration trend no longer plays a decisive role in the development of the urban vernacular and does not initiate new radical processes of dialect leveling or koineization. The evolution of the urban vernacular is more induced by influence of fuṣṣā or by internal developments. Gender, age and education appear to be the main factors of variation. Migrants come with their own dialect, keep it during a transitory phase of acquisition and accommodation (the time to acquire the urban standard) or keep it as an intimate home language side by side with the urban standard. This seems to be the situation of cities such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and more recently Casablanca (the economic if not political capital-city of Morocco).

However, each city presents an historical specific context and we still have very little information about the linguistic uses/attitudes of the migrant population.

Cairo and Damascus are very old urban centers. Their vernacular developed long ago in a sedentary environment and the historical leveling processes did not seem to have led to radical structural changes.<sup>4</sup> Today there is still a kind of leveling process in the two cities: a number of lexical words, which were specific to the old urban vernacular before the 1950s, have been dropped and replaced by more common pan-Arabic words but this can be considered as a 'natural development'.

But the degree of homogenization seems weaker in Damascus than in Cairo. Many variables are recorded in Damascus associated to gender, age, place of residence and religious affiliation (Lentin 1981). This diversity seems to be considered as a 'natural phenomenon' by the speakers and does not impede communication, but it does raise the question of the existence of a shared norm. No specific sociolinguistic studies on the migrant population in Damascus is available, nor on residential variation. In Cairo, religious-based linguistic differences have usually been considered as limited, at least since the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. in the case of the Christians, including mainly lexical and idiomatic differences but not grammatical ones.<sup>5</sup> Today the assimilation trend seems strong among the second generation (i.e. born in Cairo) of the provincial migrant community. Speakers born in Cairo from non-Cairene parents speak almost exclusively Cairene Arabic, even in family interactions. But there is some indication that Upper Egyptian dialects play an important symbolic role<sup>6</sup> for the Upper Egyptian migrant community and that the prestige of Cairo Arabic is quite ambivalent (Miller 1997 and forth coming).

Baghdad is an old urban center that has known some historically dramatic events and a radical transformation of its vernacular around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the settlement of former Bedouin tribes (Blanc 1964). This led to the emergence of an urbanized-koinized *gilit*-type Muslim dialect, which became the present-day dominant Baghdadi vernacular. The non-Muslim religious minorities (Jews and Christians) are/were speaking, in non-public settings, *qeltu*-type varieties closer to old Baghdadi (cf. see in particular Abu-Haidar 1991). Abu-Haidar (1992) has indicated that the former division between the religious communities is now receding due to the acquisition of pan-MSA features by the

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<sup>4</sup> For the leveling processes of Cairo Arabic in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. see Woidich 1994.

<sup>5</sup> The status of the former Jewish Cairo variety has been discussed by various authors who do not agree on this point. (Blanc 1964, Tomiche 1968, and Rosembaun, this conference).

<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by Le Du et le Berre (1987) « les langues ne se rencontrent pas seulement dans la réalité directement observable. Leurs contacts dans l'imaginaire sont également complexes et importants à connaître ».

members of all communities. However, we have no information about the present situation of the migrant population, their demographic weight and potential linguistic influence.

Casablanca is a more recent town which started to develop in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. (J. Agudé 2002); its vernacular emerged as a urban-koinized form of various Bedouin/rural dialects and is now considered the national standard. However, the rate of rural migration to Casablanca is still very high and we are in need of more detailed studies according to residential quarters, regional origin and degree of accommodation. It is not certain that all migrants accommodate with the same rate, particularly regarding people coming from prestigious cities such as Fes (cf. Hachimi 2002).

To conclude for this type of capital-cities: their vernaculars seem to be well established and have acquired a national status which reflect the economic and political status of these cities. Former communal variables are said to recede due to social-spatial mobility and spread of education. But yet, a number of phenomena deserve more attention and more investigation: the status of the urban socio-linguistic variables, the reallocation phenomena (in Trudgill's terms, i.e. former dialectal variables becoming social variables), the eventual presence of specific sociolinguistic territories within or around the cities, the emergence of new registers, the symbolic function of some varieties. In fact, we know very little about the linguistic models and language uses of the young generation living in the huge new peripheries of these capital-cities. How far do they create new varieties, how far do they play with the dialectal diversity? These are questions that also concern other types of cities.

2) *Old-urban centers with a declining old dialect.* These centers have known important political and demographic renewals since Independence. Their old urban dialect is associated with the old urban elite; it is no longer prestigious enough to be acquired by new-comers, and is even declining among the young generations of the original urban dwellers. Instead, the new-comers adopt the national urban koine and urban dwellers tend to speak this urban koine in public space, keeping their own vernacular at best for family communication. This is the case in many North African cities like Fes, Tangiers, Tlemcen, and even capital cities such as Rabat and Tunis, where the old urban vernacular has become increasingly restricted to old women and is associated with an effeminate way of speaking (Caubet 1998, Dendane 1994, Iraqui-Sinaceur 1998, Jabeur 1996, Messaouidi 2001& 2002, Trabelsi 1988). The decline of the old-city vernacular has been clearly associated with the decline of the old-city elite and culture, like the « beldi culture » of Tunis (Trabelsi 1988). It is for this type of North African city that the distinction between « citadin and urbain » has been drawn (Messaouidi 2002).

The contemporary situation of these North African cities recalls the historical changes of Baghdad mentioned above when the Muslim Sunni elite got access to power during the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. and early 20<sup>th</sup> c. It is also the situation recorded in present-day Bahraïn by Holes (1987) with the public expansion of the Bedouin-type Sunni varieties upon the old-urban Shi'i variety. All these cases exemplify the fact that political changes and demographic renewal can lead to the decline of pre-existent city vernaculars associated with given social urban groups.

The decline of provincial city vernaculars due to the spread of a national standard has been and still is a quite common phenomenon. It is what happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. in a city like Alexandria (Egypt) whose population is said to speak Cairo Arabic now except in a few old popular quarters (Wahba 1996). Here also, Alexandria has witnessed important changes after the 1952s, with the decline of foreign and Jewish communities.

However, the relationship between important provincial cities and capital-cities must still be investigated. We tend to have a very centralized perception of the Arab world and to assume that the vernacular of the main capital-cities will automatically spread to the regional cities. But competition between cities/regions remains important in many countries. In Morocco, the Fasi status is still prestigious even if declining and it seems that Marrakesh keeps its strong linguistic personality. In Algeria, there is no indication that Orani speakers tend to imitate Algiers' speakers (see below for the status of Algiers). In Yemen, the competition between San'ani and Adeni/Ta'izzi appears to be important. In most countries, we need more information about the vernacular of important provincial cities and about the political and identity relationship between the capital and the provincial cities.

3) *Cities that have known recent demographic or political upheavals (war) leading to increasing linguistic diversity due to a very high rate of in-migration.* This seems to be the cases of capital cities such as Algiers, Beirut, San'a. In these cities, the long-term impacts of recent in-migrations are as yet difficult to assess. It is not sure that migrants will shift to the pre-existing urban dialects. They may keep their own dialects and reinforce dialectal diversity or they may participate in the elaboration of a new urban koine. In San'a (Watson, 2002), mixing between old San'ani citizens and new San'ani citizens is limited and each group keeps its own dialect. But old-San'anis speakers tend to replace specific Sana'i words by a number of pan-dialectal lexical items in public space. In Algiers, Boucherit (1986, 2002) questions the existence of a single urban norm. More data are needed on

Beirut with its post-war residential division.<sup>7</sup> Is there a clear correlation between communal affiliation (Christian, Sunni, Shi'i, Druze, etc.) and linguistic variables? Are there new varieties spreading after the post-war developments? Other non-capital cities have known important demographic or political events, such as the Palestinian city of Bethlehem with its large increase of Muslim population within a former important Christian city (Amara & Spolsky 2001).

4) *Emerging new cities with a mixed population* and koine in the making. Different dialects stand side by side and the weight of the migrant population is important. This was the case of Casablanca in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is now the case of Amman in Jordan. In this case, the dialectal varieties spoken by the various migrant groups might influence the development of the urban variety and sociolinguistic variation reflects the status of the various groups. In Amman, for example, one notes the coexistence of rural/urban Palestinian dialects and rural/Bedouin Jordanian dialects. Jordanian men are said to keep their Bedouin pronunciation (cf. \*q = [g]) and to have a favorable attitude toward it, while urban Palestinian men tend to hide their Palestinian identity and to adopt the Bedouin pronunciation (Abdel Jawad 1986, Sawaie 1994). It may be noted here, however, that maintenance of Bedouin features is recorded only at the phonological level (the famous \*q = [g] realization). However, there are some indications that a koinized vocalic system is emerging among the youth of Amman (Al-Wer 2002).

Another emerging city is Nouakchott in Mauritania, with the settlement of the former Nomadic Hassaneyya-speaking groups since the 1970s. Dialectal variation is reported to be limited in Hassaneyya (Taine-Cheikh 1994) but the urbanization process might create new urban styles and levels.

These new emerging cities may be viewed as 'open laboratories' to explore processes of urban vernacular formation.

5) *Cities in a complex multilingual environment*, with a high percentage of non-Arab population. Two types can be distinguished here. Cities such as Khartoum (Sudan), where the non-Arab migrants are national, might stay permanently and speak very different levels of Arabic (from a pidgin-creole type to regional dialectal varieties). Miller & Abu Manga (1992) have indicated that Sudanese non-Arab migrants speak Arabic predominantly but with a large number of non-standard Khartoum Arabic features. The same non-standard features were also found among their children who were born in Khartoum, a fact that might

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<sup>7</sup> Naim (1985) provides interesting information of pre-war Beirut. She is currently undertaking new sociolinguistic research on Beirut.

indicate the development of a non-standard Khartoum urban variety. This phenomenon needs further investigation due to the fact that the main migration wave is still very recent (1980s-1990s), but it is clear that the political context enhances the maintenance of Juba-Arabic as a strong identity marker among the Southern community (Miller 2002). Another type of city is found in the Gulf states (Dubai, Kuwait, etc.) with the presence of numerous foreign immigrants. A kind of pidgin Arabic, known as Gulf Pidgin Arabic, is spoken as a lingua franca between native Arab groups and non-native Arabs (Smart 1990, Wiswall 2002). How far this type of pidgin Arabic could affect the local urban vernacular remains to be investigated. Finally we have to mention all the cities where Arabic is becoming an important lingua-franca and even an important first language although it is/was not a demographically dominant vernacular. This includes cities such as Juba in Southern Sudan (Miller 1987), Habbeche and Ndjamena in Chad (Jullien de Pommerol 1997, Roth 1979), Massawa in Eritrea (Simeone-Senelle 2000), the cities of South Yemen and Dhofar (Simeone-Senelle 2002). All these cities are particularly interesting to study processes of vehicularization and vernacularization.

### 3. CONCLUSION

As stated above, this rough attempt of categorization and synthesis does not cover all the cases, especially regarding non-capital cities. But it helps to locate case-cities within a kind of typological frame according to its historical depth, history of settlement, degree of dialectal diversity or dialectal homogenization, etc. This brief survey of the various Arab urban sociolinguistic contexts indicates that, for the time being, the homogenization and standardization of the main urban vernaculars is not always achieved. The power relationship between the old urban elite and the new-comers is extremely important for determining the maintenance, spread or decline of a given urban vernacular associated with a given type of urban culture. A point which deserves more analysis is the fact that most historical cases of major dialect shift and dialect leveling (cf. the examples of Baghdad, North Africa, Bahrain) occurred in areas where groups claiming a Bedouin origin were demographically important. In areas with rural sedentary hinterlands (Northern Egypt/Syria), the impact of migration upon urban vernacular appears less radical.

Today, a number of urban studies point out that former urban models, inherited from the Ottoman period for the Middle East or from the Andalusian models for North Africa, have been subverted not only by Western models inherited from Colonial times, but by a kind of 'tribal model' similar to that of the Gulf cities, brought in by rural migrants (Naciri & Raymond 1997). It would

be interesting to see if linguistic data corroborate this perception. Is there still a kind a symbolic Bedouin linguistic prestige? It seems to be somehow the case in an emerging city like Amman. In other cities, is or will tribal/family affiliation lead to some kind of linguistic loyalty, to the maintenance of intra-group vernaculars acting as identity markers? Arabic urban dialectal studies have often been more concerned with religious-based linguistic differences than with tribal/regional based differences. Both are to be found with various degrees in the Arab cities and their respective social and spatial distribution deserves more attention. Today, with globalization trends, development of satellite TVs and the Internet, and also with Islamic political radicalization, special attention must be paid to the cultural and linguistic models of the urban youth, who form the majority of the population.

Many Arabic urban sociolinguistic studies have assessed processes of dialectal accommodation by studying the marked phonological features such as the realization of [q]. If phonological variables are important indices, we need more data on accommodation of other linguistic features, on language attitudes,<sup>8</sup> on speakers' own perception of markedness, on artistic expressions,<sup>9</sup> etc. before being able to draw conclusion on the degree of dialectal accommodation, dialect shift, leveling processes, and development of new urban varieties. In North Africa, development of French/Arabic codeswitching and cultural interaction among North African European-born young generation (particularly through Rap Music) seem to play important roles as symbols or urban identification. In the Mashrek, Educated Spoken Arabic is always described as the prestigious urban code and studies on youth languages, cultural interaction, etc. are extremely limited, and often restricted to cases of English-Arabic lexical mixing in the discourses of young educated speakers (Allam 2000). Movies, songs and literature often address the issues of young people's cultural and linguistic models, but still most sociolinguistic descriptions provide a very conventional and restrictive description of the Arabic urban reality.

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<sup>8</sup> See for exemple Bennis 2001, 2002

<sup>9</sup> See for exemple Caubet 2002, for codeswitching and of humor in Algerian Arabic.

<sup>10</sup> More references can be found in the full version of this paper. A Bibliography on Arabic Urban linguistics is also under construction and copy can be asked to the author.

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