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## Variation and Change in Arabic urban vernaculars

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### Prologue

The work of Manfred Woidich (in collaboration with Peter Behnstedt for the Atlas of Egyptian Arabic) is one of the most valuable sources for Egyptian Arabic. It is now difficult to imagine the state of Egyptian dialectology without his major contribution. One of my favorite paper is Woidich's 1994, which discusses the social context of the formation of modern Cairo Arabic in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It is in reference to this particular paper, that the following contribution has been written.

### 1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to review what kind of linguistic dynamics have been recorded in Arab urban contexts in both contemporary and historical settings. Urbanization has been one of the greatest social change of the last century in Arab countries, as well as in many other parts of the world. Consequently urban sociolinguistic studies have known important theoretical and practical world-development in the last decades (Calvet 1994, 2000, 2002; Bulot et al. 2002). At another level, the concept of a specific model of the "Islamic city" prevalent in the Orientalist studies came to be more and more criticized by historians and geographers working on the Arab world (Naciri & Raymond 1997). By reviewing the existing linguistic literature on the Arab cities, I will try to see if the descriptions fit usually with a more general or universal frame or tend to indicate some specific characteristics. A number of recent publications present the State of the Arts for both Arabic linguistics (Eid 1990, Versteegh 1997) and more precisely for Arabic sociolinguistics (Daher 1987, Haeri 2000, Owens 2001). Owens (2001) offers a comprehensive analytical view of the advances and shortages of present-day Arabic sociolinguistics and there is no need to come back on some rather

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well-known issues such as the question of Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) or the nature of the relationship between *ʔāmmiyya* and *fuṣṣā*<sup>1</sup> in daily dialects. This is not to disregard the importance of education and of *ʔāmmiyya-fuṣṣā* contact in the evolution of contemporary urban dialects but these issues have already attracted a lot of attention. Haeri (2000) also provides important remarks for further anthropological linguistic researches on Arabic.

This paper will focus on the impact that migration and population changes might play, under specific circumstances, on the evolution of urban dialects. Both sociolinguistic and dialectal references have been reviewed for this matter, because they provide complementary information. The references are many and I could not review all, particularly with regards to dialectal references. I certainly missed or misinterpreted important facts and this paper will definitely need further additions.

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 or regional affiliation), age, gender and social classes. Linguistic variations raise the question of the prestige of the urban linguistic models (the city as a "cultural frame of reference"). History and contemporary settings indicate that there is no unilateral development nor a single model. In many occasions Arabic urban dialects that were associated with particular urban classes came to recede in front of new urban forces with a rural or Bedouin background. In other areas, urban dialects expanded towards rural areas and became the prestigious regional/national standard. The various developments might reflect the somehow ambiguous status of the urban cultural models ("modèles citadins") in many Arab countries.

When trying to compare the data provided by the Arabic linguistic descriptions, on the one hand, with the data provided by historical, sociological or urban studies, on the other hand, one is struck by the prevalent lack of 'dialogue' between them (although there are happily some exceptions). Urban studies on the Arab world tell us about urban models and attitudes, 'citadinité', urban development, movements of population, social groups, clustering in specific neighbourhood, networks, etc., but hardly say anything about language use.<sup>2</sup> Few linguistic studies take the time to incorporate their findings within a more global frame that will help to understand the nature and dynamics of the urban setting. All in all, we still mainly rely on very incomplete perceptions of Arabic urban dialects. Interestingly enough, we may know less about the evolution of urban dialects in areas with long-standing urban development like Bilād al-Shām or Egypt than in areas with later or lower degrees of urbanisation (Maghreb, Mesopotamia, Bahrain).

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<sup>1</sup> Following Haeri 1996, I will use the term *fuṣṣā* for both Classical and Modern Standard Arabic. Both are distinguished under two labels by linguists. But Arab speakers themselves do not usually make this distinction (cf. *al-fuṣṣā* vs. *al-fuṣṣā al-muʿāʔira*). The term *ʔāmmiyya*, is usually translated as 'dialect' in English although a number of authors find the term dialect quite derogatory (Haeri 1996, Owens 2001). I will not enter into this point and I will use alternatively the terms dialect or variety.

<sup>2</sup> References on Arab urban studies are too many to be quoted. See for example the various contributions in Escallier & Signoles eds. (1995) and particularly the chapter V (L'insertion des migrants dans la ville : problèmes économiques, sociaux et culturels), Lussault & Signoles eds. (1996), Naciri & Raymond eds. (1997),

In the following pages, I will first discuss the importance of urban dialects within Arabic linguistics. I will then present some historical examples illustrating the transformation of urban vernaculars due to migration and renewed patterns of settlement and I will discuss the complex issue of the origin of urban religious variables. Shifting to contemporary trend of koineization, I will raise the question of the maintenance of communal variables versus social variables (linked to age, sex, education, social class) and present a broad typological classification of present-day main urban Arab centres.

## 2. Are Arabic urban vernaculars prestigious linguistic norms?

The importance of urban dialects has been outlined for both the earlier historical period and the contemporary period. For the earlier period, Arabization is thought to have started first in urban centres before to expand to whole areas. In the contemporary period, the urban vernaculars of the main capital cities are often considered to play the role of regional or national standard.

At the time of the first wave of the Arab conquest (7th-8th centuries), the urban and military centres are supposed to have acted as starting points for the Arabization process and to have played an important role in the formation and diffusion of the 'modern' dialects (Blau 1965, Cohen 1962, Ferguson 1959 & 1989, Fück 1955, Versteegh 1984, 1993, 1997). If the authors do not agree and still argue on the processes of emergence and diffusion of the dialects as well as on the degree of simplification and restructuration (from Ferguson's single military koine to Cohen's various urban koines to Versteegh's process of pidginization), they agree on the importance of the military camps and the cities as poles of early Arabization and linguistic innovations for the conquered territories. These early urban dialects are characterized by a number of features associated with koineization, simplification and innovation as opposed to Bedouin dialects considered as more conservative and to classical Arabic.<sup>3</sup> But the influence of the earlier cities as starting points for the Arabization of the rural areas is debatable. Bedouin migrations seem to have been a major factor of Arabization in rural areas (Djem 1978).

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> c., the dialects of the main cities are often emerging as national or regional standards in both the Maghreb<sup>4</sup> and the Middle East. In this respect, they are competing with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA- *fuṣṣḥā*) as prestigious norms in the Middle East (see among others Abdel Jawad 1987; Daher 1999; Ferguson 1987; Haeri 1996; Holes 1986 & 1995; Ibrahim 1986; Palva 1982; Walter 1991; etc.). The language change is not uni-directionally from dialects toward MSA but also from sub-standard colloquial variations to urban/regional standard. In case of inter-dialectal contact, speakers that had features close to MSA might drop them and acquire non MSA

<sup>3</sup> For the list of the features and their discussion see Cohen (1962:125-142), Ferguson (1959 reprinted in 1997:53-58), Versteegh (1984:82-106).

<sup>4</sup> cf. see Bouamrane 1986, Boucherit 1986 for Algiers and Marçais 1960, Levy 1998 for Cassablanca.

standard urban/regional features in some contexts (cf. see in particular Abu Haidar 1990, 1991 for Baghdad; Abdel Jawad 1986 & 1987 for Jordan and Holes 1986, 1987 for Bahrain).

But the large diversity of Arab urban contexts prohibits generalisation and there are still many exceptions regarding the emergence of unified regional/national standard varieties born out from urban vernaculars. There is not always a single urban standard vernacular and a single dialectal norm. In case of inter-dialectal contact within the city, the levelling/koineization process is not systematically, and at all linguistic levels, in favour of the pre-existing urban dialect. This raises the question of the factors enhancing koineization versus the factors enhancing maintenance of specific varieties. In sum, why and how an urban dialectal standard norm can or cannot develop?

As pointed out by Holes (1995: 285), “which of the communal dialects which could potentially become the basis of the new (urban) standard actually ends up becoming it or making the major contribution to it depends not just on the size of the community that speaks it but at least as much on that community’s political importance, which can change over time”. We shall see below some historical examples where the koineization/levelling process has been done largely at the expense of the former urban dialects (North Africa, Iraq, Bahrain). Contemporary interesting cases can also be found in emerging new cities such as present-day Jordanian cities (Amman, Irbid).

The structures, status and evolution of each Arabic urban dialects cannot be analyzed in isolation, e.g. without taking into account the larger sociolinguistic background and the presence of the other varieties, namely the *fusṣḥā*, the Bedouin and the rural sedentary dialects. 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: - *fusṣḥā*, 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 *ḥaṣāna* (i.e. purity of origin) and Arab tradition but also sometimes with backwardness and toughness.<sup>5</sup> According to each urban socio-historical context, the degree of competition between each of the three main norms varies. The distribution of linguistic variables reflect the direction of change and the weight of each respective variety.

### **3. The role of migration in the development of urban dialects: some historical cases (14<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

The historical evolution of the main urban vernaculars can be divided into two main types of processes. In the first case, the migration to the city produced a considerable transformation of the urban vernacular (Iraq, Mesopotamia, North Africa, Bahrain). The former urban vernacular became

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<sup>5</sup> Non-Bedouin rural varieties seem to have a low prestige in most urban contexts and do not become potential urban norm. But this point needs additional researches.

restricted to religious minorities and/or to women while the koineized Bedouin variety ended up as the dominant public urban standard language. In the second case, migration produced a levelling of the urban vernacular but without radical transformation (Cairo, Damascus). In those cities and areas, religious-based variables are considered as less important than in the first case. This would indicate that religious-based variables are more important in cities where migration led to important linguistic transformation than in cities with more stable linguistic development. This point clearly needs additional researches especially in cities known for their traditional religious/communal-based social organization.

### **3.1 Bedouinization of old urban dialects: the Maghreb, Mesopotamia and Bahrain**

One of the important contribution of urban dialectal studies has been to highlight how the different historical phases of urbanization and settlement are still reflected in the presence of various linguistic strata (old urban features together with later urban features closer to Bedouin or rural varieties) or different varieties within the same city. This phenomenon has been mainly described in the North Africa and in Mesopotamia, two regions which went through historical phases of urban destabilization. In many cities of these two regions, a later Bedouinization process of urban dialects took place, following population movements and the settlement of former Bedouin/rural population in towns that led to the emergence of urbanized Bedouin dialects. The presence of different historical linguistic layers within the same city has been particularly (but not exclusively) highlighted in cities with communal/religious varieties. In Baghdad like in some North African centres (Oran, Tripoli, Algiers), religious minorities - Christian or Jewish – tend(ed) to speak old urban dialects while Muslim speakers, especially men, tend(ed) to speak more Bedouinized koineized varieties (cf. Abu Haidar 1991, Bouamrane 1989, Blanc 1964b, Cantineau 1940, Cohen D. 1973 & 1981, Cohen M. 1912, Levin 1994, Levy 1998).

In North Africa (Aguade et al. 1998), the relationship between different dialectal varieties or features and different phases of urban settlement has been first described through the distinction, drawn by Marçais and Colin, between pre-Hilali (urban and rural) and Hilali dialects (i.e. the dialects brought by the Bedouin Beni Hilal migration from the 12th -13th centuries). Subsequent re-classifications have highlighted the diversity of the pre-Hilali (or non-Hilali) dialects, the role of the Andalusian migrants in the 15-16th centuries as well as the influence of Berber language and Bedouin dialects (Levy 1998a & b, Caubet 1998). There are many examples of urban discontinuity and of ‘mixed urban dialects’ incorporating features of both sedentary and Bedouin dialects. Historical dialectal studies on the Maghreb benefited from the advances of Maltese and Andalusian studies that helped the comparison between these old-attested varieties and present-day North African colloquial varieties (see in particular Ferrando and Vanhove in Aguade et al. 1998). Generally speaking, Pre-Hilali and Andalusian urban dialects are/were found in old urban centres like Algiers, Blida, Constantine, Fes, Nedroma, Rabat, Sefrou, Tanger, Tetouan, Tlemcen, Tunis where the Andalusian

migrants had an influential role while sedentarized Bedouin dialects were/are spoken in more recent cities like Casablanca, Fes Jdid, Oran, but also some old cities like Marrakech, the former capital of the Almohades (Bouamrane 1989, Iraqui-Sinaceur 1998, Levy 1998). Since Independence, the national/urban koines of the capital cities (Cassablanca, Algiers, Tunis) are expanding and the general national trend towards koineization is leading to the progressive attrition of old urban dialects that are now mainly spoken by old women (Boucherit & Lentin 1989, Caubet 1998, Jabeur 1987 & 1995, Messaoudi 1998 & 2001).

In Mesopotamia, the Bedouinization of former urban-sedentary dialects took place between the 14th-18th centuries following a phase of de-urbanization and re-tribalization and the migration of North Arabian Bedouin groups into Lower Iraq (Blanc 1964b, Palva 1994). The relationship between the urban communal varieties of Baghdad (and also Basra) and the rural sedentary dialects spoken in Northern Mesopotamia have been highlighted by the studies on the *qeltu* dialects (Jastrow 1978 & 1994, Levin 1994). Blanc's (1964b) study on Baghdad indicates that the Baghdadi Jewish and Christian dialects are/were close to the sedentary dialects spoken at the time of the Abbasid era. But shift of political power and instability induced a decline of the urban models and led to de-urbanization and re-tribalization of Lower Mesopotamia from the 14th centuries onward. The population of Baghdad and other urban centres grew back again in the 18th - 19th centuries with the settlement of former rural and Bedouin groups. The dialect of those groups, first demographically then politically dominant (20th c.), became progressively the standard urban dialects of the Muslim communities while the non-Muslims stuck to the old varieties which became associated with specific communities and became restrained to domestic uses. Today, all Baghdadi varieties are under the pressure of MSA- *fuṣṣā* and the gap between them is lessening (Abu Haidar 1992).

The Bedouinization of former urban/sedentary dialects happened in other cities and town of South Mesopotamia like in the city of Salt (Palva 1994) with its mixed dialect. The interesting fact, however, is that Bedouinization did not occur at all linguistic levels but, in the case of Salt, is restricted to phonological and lexical features. This seems to indicate that the linguistic process of accommodation to the Bedouin dialect was only partial et was restricted to the most salient Bedouin markers.<sup>6</sup> This is not without parallel with present-day Amman (cf. below §5).

Another case is Bahrain (Holes 1983, 1986, 1987; Prochazka 1981), where the Shi'i/Sunni sectarian distinction reflects a former sedentary/Bedouin distinction. The Shi'i Baharna represent the old Baharna population and speak a sedentary dialect while the Sunni represent the Bedouins who arrived in the 18th century and speak a Bedouin-type dialect. The two communities have lived cheek by jowl for more than two hundred years but, up to the mid-seventies, they were living separated from each other in different villages or different urban quarters and no inter-marriages were taking place. The economical changes of the 20th c. narrowed the divide between the two sectarian communities

and led to the emergence of an intercommunal standard urban dialect spoken in public contexts and mainly based on the Sunni dialect, due to the political weight of the ruling Sunni families. The urban Shi'i Baharna tend, at least in public setting, to drop their sedentary features and to acquire the Sunni Bedouin features, even when the Baharna feature is closer to MSA than the Sunni one (cf. realization of /j/ as /y/).<sup>7</sup>

The historical processes of Bedouinization/koineization of a number of urban dialects and the attrition of former old-urban dialects are important phenomena because they point out how population changes in specific political contexts may lead to the renewal of urban dialects. It indicates that urban cultural models associated with specific urban groups can be swept out by 'new social forces' and become restrained to 'minority' groups such as religious minorities (Jewish in Maghreb, Christian/Jewish in Lower Iraq, Shi'i in Bahrain) or to women, e.g. groups that were subjected to various degree of exclusion or segregation in public spaces (see below section 4).

### 3.2 Koineization and Levelling with maintenance of urban dialectal features: The case of Cairo

In areas like Upper Iraq (Mosul), Bilâd al-Shâm (Damascus) and Egypt (Cairo), the main urban dialects<sup>8</sup> were not subjected to such a levelling-Bedouinization process, simply because the migrant population came mainly from the neighbouring rural areas and were speaking sedentary rural dialects. Interestingly enough, few variation correlated to religious affiliation has been recorded in these cities and, according to Blanc (1964b), all religious groups are said to speak more or less the same urban/sedentary varieties.<sup>9</sup> However the exact status of religious-based linguistic differences in these areas need additional investigation because linguists do not always agree on this matter (see below for variables used by the former Jewish community in Cairo) and because more recent descriptions have indicated the presence of religious-based variation in a number of Syrian cities (e.g. Behnstedt 1989 & 1992, Lentin 1981).

It is important to note here that we still have very little information about the historical formation and evolution of these urban dialects until the 19th c., time of the first recorded dialectal descriptions. In Cairo Arabic (CA) for example, historical information is drawn from semi-literary

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<sup>6</sup> Studies on contact between languages or between dialects have indicated that salient features such as lexical items and phonemes are the first features to be borrowed (cf. Trudgill 1986, Thomason and Kaufman 1988)

<sup>7</sup> The situation however is quite complicated and Holes (1987) gives many interesting informations about variation within the Sunni and Shi'i communities and the influence of MSA among the educated class of the two groups.

<sup>8</sup> Note however, that not all the urban dialects of these areas fit within the traditional 'sedentary/urban' classification. A number of urban dialects like those of Upper Egyptian cities are structurally close to the regional Bedouin/rural dialects (cf. \*q= [g]). Many former Bedouin groups came to settle in Upper Egypt in the 13th-15th c. but we have no information about the linguistic history of these regional urban centres.

<sup>9</sup> Blanc (1964) considers that the towns of Greater Syria, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula and Upper Iraq (Mosul) are characterized by minor religious linguistic differentiation and that linguistic difference is mainly reported at the lexical level.



texts which give an indication of non-standard realizations but not a real picture of the spoken varieties.<sup>10</sup> Davies (2000) rightly points out that a literary text like 17<sup>th</sup> c. Yusuf al-Shirbini's *Hazz al Quhûf*, which is supposed to present dialectal samples of peasants' speech and is one of the rare pre-19th century sources, is not reliable for contrasting urban versus rural dialects. It is therefore difficult to assess the evolution of CA compared to its neighbouring rural varieties.

According to Woidich (1994: 506), present-day CA might be the result of a levelling process which occurred in the second part of the 19th c. following a renewal of the population due to the plague of 1835. CA is described as "a Central Delta dialect with an admixture of features pertaining to neighbouring regions. (...) This leads to the conclusion that more than one dialect has contributed to the development of CA". Today CA exhibits many features common to Delta dialects, few features similar to Upper Middle Egyptian dialects and few specific linguistic features (cf. in particular lack of final pausal *imalah* that was in use in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. cf. Blanc 1973). The hypothesis of a levelling occurring as a result of massive population migration sounds quite probable in the 19th c. Cairene changing social context, where many economic and social factors (e.g. the agrarian reforms and the urban reform of Mohammed Ali) led to a renewal and a redistribution of the Cairo population (Arnaud 1998, Kharoufi 1997, Raymond 1993). Many of these migrants were coming from the Delta (Menoufiyya and Daqaliyya Provinces) and were speaking a sedentary rural variety closed to CA, a fact which explains that the degree of levelling and transformation of CA was far less radical than in Baghdad.

It may be worth mentioning that, in spite of further important rates of mass-migration, no more levelling, due to the influence of rural dialects, seems to have affected CA since the early 20th c.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, many features (common to both CA and rural dialects) that were present in CA at the beginning of the 20th c. are now considered 'non-standard CA' or 'rural features', and have been either dropped out or are looked down upon, like the 1<sup>st</sup> person sg of the imperfect of the n-verbal stem (*niktib* 'I write', *men'ullak* with *b > m* in front of *n*, 'I tell you'), reflexive forms with *in-*, 3rd pers. pl. in *-um* (*katabum*, *yiktibum* "they wrote/write" instead of Standard Cairene *katabu*, *yiktibu*), etc. (cf. Blanc 1974). It seems therefore that the on-going influx of rural migrants till the 1980s has created an adverse linguistic reaction. Cairene speakers (including the former rural migrant population) tend to drop what they consider 'rural features' and shift to a more elevated urban style.

No mention of specific ethno-regional variables appears in modern description of CA. However most of the linguistic descriptions (such as Broselow 1979, El Tounsi 1992, Gamal-ElDin

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<sup>10</sup> Main sources concerning historical studies on Cairene or Egyptian Arabic can be found in Birkeland (1952), Blanc (1973), Davies (2000), Doss (1979 & 1995), Garbell (1958), Palva (2000), Woidich (1992). One of the oldest reference on Egyptian reference, al-Maghribi dictionary is currently studied under the direction of M. Woidich.

<sup>11</sup> The percentage of migrant population within Cairene population has been high since 1846 (date of the first national census). Migrants form 35% of Cairo population in 1846, 25.7% in 1907, 37.5% in 1960, 26.8% in

1967, Harrell 1957, Abdel-Massih & al. 1978, Mitchell 1956, Tomiche 1964, Wise 1975) provide a very homogenous and normative perception of standard CA. In fact non-standard or 'rural features' might be far more widespread than usually recognized. A glimpse of this can be found in a remark from Woidich (1994: 496) who indicates that the suffixation of prepositions with a long /i/ like *gambīha* 'near her' is a feature shared by both CA and Middle Egypt dialects. He adds 'no description mentions this fact which is very common in Cairo'.<sup>12</sup>

Concerning the presence of religious distinction, Tomiche (1968:1178-1180) mentions a specific Jewish variety, spoken by the Jewish communities of Alexandria and Cairo till the sixties, and characterized by specific features (such as no emphatics, *n+verb* and *n+verb+u* for 1st sg. and pl. Imperfective verbal form, presence of Ladino words and specific expressions). The concept of a specific Jewish variety has been refuted by Blanc (1974) who prefers to speak of "non-standard CA", because a number of these features are shared by other groups: the *n+verb* and *n+verb+u* is a North African feature which is to be found in other areas of Egypt such as Western Delta, Western Oases and some parts of Upper Egypt (Behnstedt and Woidich 1985-1994), lack of emphatics was also common among the Syrian Arabic-speaking Christian community of late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> c. (Tadié 1994) and weak pharyngealization is frequent among middle-upper class women of both Cairo and Alexandria (Royal 1986, Wahba 1996).<sup>13</sup> The presence of a specific Egyptian Judeo-Arabic has been again recently, and not very convincingly, advocated by Rosembaum (2002) who mainly provides a list of specific lexical items.<sup>14</sup> Concerning the Christians, linguistic differences are recorded only at the lexical level in address terms and religious terminology (Abboud 1988, El-Zeini 1985). Therefore, religious-based differences in Cairo have been recorded mainly at the lexical level and appear structurally less important than in North Africa or Baghdad. There is no indication that Christian or Jewish varieties could represent an 'older urban form' *vis à vis* Cairo Muslim Arabic.<sup>15</sup>

The absence of past/present distinctive communal varieties (religious or ethnic or regional) in a city like Cairo does not fit with the traditional descriptions of the social organisation of the city. Historians and geographers<sup>16</sup> describe pre-20th c. Cairo quarters (*ḥāra*) as relatively segregated areas with ethnic or religious or professional clustering. Three hypotheses can be raised: a) the Cairene society was maybe less segregated than previously thought (Alleaume and Fargues 1998); b) the linguistic descriptions failed to grasp the diversity of the language uses; c) spatial and social

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1976 and 19.5% in 1986 (sources National Egyptian Censuses-Observatoire Urbain du Caire Contemporain, Cedej).

<sup>12</sup> When translating data recorded among migrants from Upper Egypt, I have come across this long /i/ many times but Cairene speakers were considering this feature as non-CA.

<sup>13</sup> We could add that we have no data asserting that the various social strata of the Jewish community in Cairo were speaking the same variety.

<sup>14</sup> The non lexical elements provided by Rosembaum are non-convincing because they can be found in other Egyptian varieties.

<sup>15</sup> but the Jewish variety seems to have been quite similar to the old variety of Alexandrian Arabic.

<sup>16</sup> cf. see in particular Abu Lughod (1971), Baer (1964), El-Messiri (1978), Raymond (1974 & 1993).

segregation did not result in sociolects having different morpho-syntactical features and a few lexical items were used as religious/communal markers.

This last point illustrates that correlation between linguistic variables and social structures is not always easy nor systematic. The fact that religious-based linguistic differences are(were) less important in Cairo than in Baghdad or Fes, says nothing, by itself, about the social status or the degree of integration of each respective Jewish community. Linguistic differences and variables are not necessarily perceived as salient socio-linguistic markers associated to specific groups by the speakers and, adversely, minimal distinctions like a few specific lexical items can function as markers of specific sociolects (Lentin 2002). When comparing the various historical linguistic impacts of migration on urban vernaculars, it is not easy to establish what have been the more relevant factors of differentiation between the different cities: is it the “ethnic” origin of the migrants (Bedouin groups in Mesopotamia and North Africa versus more rural sedentarized groups in Egypt or Bilad al Shâm) or the political context (access to power) or the pre-existing social structures of the cities? At this point, I would think that linguistic data alone cannot answer without referring to precise socio-historical information. Before to address the contemporary situation, I would like to come back on the issue of religious-based varieties because, as we have seen, they are historically related to patterns of migration and because they have often been considered as one of the main factors of socio-linguistic diversity in the “traditional” Arab cities. Today there are many questions concerning the contemporary relevance of linguistic religious differences versus other social-linguistic differences.

#### **4 The historical relevance of communal/religious differences within urban vernaculars**

The status of colloquial religious varieties<sup>17</sup> have attracted a lot of attention, particularly regarding Jewish varieties (e.g. among others : Bensimon-Choukroun 1997, Cohen M. 1912, Cohen D. 1975& 1981, Jastrow 1990, Khan 1997, Levy 1990, Mansour 1991, Melar 1995, Piamenta 2000). The debate concerns the origin and the sociolinguistic relevance of colloquial religious/communal linguistic differences within Arabic cities. The debate is far to be close because the data are quite ambiguous and contradictory and because the ideological factors play an important role in deciding the social status of a given variety.

Concerning the origin of religious-based variety, authors like Blanc (1964b) unlike Fück (1955) think that religious linguistic differences are not inherent phenomena within the Arab cities. It came out as a result of population and political changes (related mainly to the sedentarization and

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<sup>17</sup> I am not addressing here the question of written Judeo-Arabic or Middle Arabic, although there have been also a lot of discussion concerning the relevance of the religious characteristics of these varieties.

urbanization of former Bedouin groups described in 3.1) and therefore reflect more an original ethno-regional differentiation (urban versus rural/Bedouin) than a purely religious differentiation. In the first centuries after the Arab conquest, there were no or few linguistic differences among the various urban religious communities, this being corroborated by the fact that, in countries like Mesopotamia and North Africa, the Christian/Jewish varieties are/were structurally close to some neighbouring Muslim sedentary dialects (qeltu dialects in Mesopotamia, Andalousian and non-Hilali dialects in North Africa).<sup>18</sup>

The social status of Jewish varieties has been particularly discussed for North Africa where the Jewish varieties do not form homogeneous linguistic entities at the regional level. Jewish dialects vary (varied) from one city to another and can sometimes be closer to their urban/regional neighbours than to each other (Cohen 1981, Chetrit 1998). The degree of Hebrew interference is/was correlated with styles of speech, gender, education and age. High interference of Hebrew vocabulary characterized topics linked with Jewish religion and Jewish literary tradition. Therefore a more specific Jewish-Arabic variety is/was mainly spoken by literate rabbinic scholars while a large part of the daily language and oral literature, i.e. tales, proverbs, songs, poems, narratives is/was common to both Muslim and Jewish groups (Chetrit 1998).

However, in most Arab cities, religious minorities tend to live in specific areas and to develop different linguistic models. The examples of Baghdad and Fes indicate that, after the population change and for centuries, religious communities kept their vernaculars and did not tend to acquire the dialect of the demographically dominant Muslim communities. This reflects a *de facto* certain degree of spatial and social segregation within the city, but also the fact that the Muslim urban Arabic dialects were not associated with power and prestige. In many Arab cities, the political power was in the hand of non-Arab foreign rulers up to the beginning of the 20th c. In North Africa, Jewish communities developed other linguistic models first in contact with the Spanish Andalusian speakers (15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> c.), then with the Italian in Tunis and later on with the French in the 20th c. under the French Colonial Power (Cohen 1981).<sup>19</sup> It is only recently, during the 20<sup>th</sup> c., because of the political emergence of the local Muslim groups that the new urban Muslim-based koine developed and expanded in cities and countries with former religious distinction (e.g. Baghdad, Abu-Haidar 1992).

Therefore, the historical linguistic situation seems to indicate that strong religious linguistic differentiation in Arab cities arose only in specific political and demographic contexts but was maintained due to spatial, social and political segregation. Various degrees of variation related to

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<sup>18</sup> Today some historians also criticized the concept of ethnic or religious segregation as the main base of social organization in the early traditional Arab cities. They consider that more strict religious segregation developed mainly during the Ottoman period (Miura 1997; Raymond 1997). However, the evaluation of segregation is extremely complicated and varies according to the level of analysis (spatial, economical, social, etc.).

<sup>19</sup> North African Jewish Arabic varieties are said to have been declining quickly during the French Colonial Power and it seems that the Jewish speakers were more keen to shift to non-Arabic varieties (French in case of Maghreb) than their Muslim urban fellows.

religious affiliation have been an important component of many Arab cities till the early sixties. But since then, the relevance of religious linguistic distinction seems to be restricted to few cities due either to the koineization trend or to the out-migration of religious minorities: most Jewish communities have left their previous country and do not any more represent an important social component of Arab cities, except in Palestine and Israel. Many studies on religious varieties present therefore historical (i.e. pre-mid twentieth c.) rather than contemporary situations.

However, the contemporary setting needs more detailed investigations, particularly regarding the status of Christian and non-Sunni varieties in the Middle East. Apart from Baghdad (Abu Haidar 1991) and Aleppo (Behnstedt 1989), where important structural differences have been recorded between Christian and Muslim dialects, we still lack systematic detailed description in order to assess the relevance of religious differences in the urban settings compared to other types of difference (age, sex, social class or regional origin). In Damascus, Lentin (1981) recorded many sociolinguistic variables which seem to be correlated with religious affiliation (Christian vs. Muslim) but there is also a frequent ambivalence, a variable is described as both “Christian, popular and old” for example, or another as “Christian, sophisticated, more recent”, etc. In Nabk, a city 80 km north of Baghdad, no differences between Muslims and Christians have been recorded and the main factor of variation is linked to age, the youth speaking more and more Damascus Arabic (Gralla 2002). In the Jordanian cities (Amman, Irbid), variables are related to regional and ethnic origin (rural-urban Palestinian versus rural-Bedouin Jordanian) or to age and gender but not to religious affiliation (Abdel Jawad 1986, Al Wer 2000, Ibrahim 1986, Sawaie 1994).

The relationship between religion- social classes - gender needs to be particularly investigated in present-day Lebanon and Palestine due to the religious conflicts, the population movements and the important political transformation of the last decades. In Beirut, Naim-Sambar (1983, 1985) reported religious-based and gender-based phonological distinctions concerning the realisation of emphasis (strong among Muslim men living in the western part and weak among the educated Christian women living in the eastern parts). But we have no data concerning other levels of differences (morphological or syntactical), nor on the consequences of post-war population redistribution in Beirut, nor on the potential sunni/shi'i distinction. A recent study on Bethlehem in Palestine (Amara & Spolsky 2001) indicates that Christian speakers (both women and men) tend to use more urban features like /□/ than Muslim speakers who tend to use MSA /q/. Another study on Nazareth (Havelova 2000) indicates that gender more than religion is directing phonological variation. More women, whatever their religion, tend to use the urban variant /□/ while most men tend to use the rural variant /k/. In Jerusalem, and since the 1950s, the linguistic split between Jewish and Muslim communities is said to have been increasing at the lexical level: Jewish Arabic integrated many Hebrew borrowings and Jewish

speakers are shifting to Hebrew while Muslim Arabic is moving toward MSA (Piamenta 2000).<sup>20</sup> Sectarian variation (Sunni vs. Shi'i) has been recorded mainly in Bahrain (e.g. Holes 1983a&b, 1987). But, according to Abu Haidar (1996), Shi'i and Sunni Baghdadi Arabic also differ at the lexical level: Sunni B.A. uses more Turkish lexical items than Shi'i B.A.

All the above-mentioned studies refer almost exclusively to phonological or lexical variants and we need additional data before to be able to reach more definite conclusions concerning the contemporary social relevance or religious-based linguistic differences in the changing Arab urban centres, particularly with regards to modern trends of koineization.

## 5. Contemporary Migration, Urban koine and variation within the city

The main advance of studies on communal variation has been to highlight that migration and subsequent koineization processes have played an important role in the transformation or evolution of many urban dialects before the twentieth century. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., most capital cities of the Arab world have known a tremendous increase of population, due to rural-urban migration. The question is, whether or not, urbanization leads necessarily in the long term to a process of levelling/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. This conceptualization of the city as a 'melting pot' creating new urban identities, not related to primordial affiliation (tribe, ethnic group, etc.), has been for long a dominant thesis of urban sociology (Grafmeyer & Joseph 1979).

Five Arabic urban archetypes can be defined with regards to the impact of migration and the degree of koineization:

- 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-cities is expanding in neighbouring areas and cities. At the present time, the migration trend does not play any more a decisive role in the development of the urban vernacular and does not initiate new processes of dialect levelling or koineization. The evolution of the urban vernacular is more induced by influence of fuṣṣḥā or by internal developments (e.g. palatalization in Cairo, Haeri 1996). 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 like

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<sup>20</sup> Piamenta (2001) claims that there is also a lexical difference between Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem. Christians are supposed to be more inclined to European borrowings and less to MSA borrowings than Muslims. This kind of generalization between religious affiliation and language uses needs to be demonstrated with

Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and now Casablanca, although we are in need of more detailed studies of linguistic use according to residential quarters, regional origin and degree of accommodation. In Damascus for example, the degree of homogenization seems weaker than in Cairo. Many variables are recorded associated to gender, age, place of residences, religious affiliation (Lentin 1981). In Cairo, migrants tend to cluster in peripheral districts and there is not always a clear distinction between popular variables versus rural variables, but migrants' children born in Cairo shift mostly to CA (Miller 1997).

- Capital cities of countries that have known recent demographic or political upheaval (war) with a still very important rate of rural or provincial migration. In these cities, the impact of recent migration is 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 koine. This seems to be the cases of cities like Algiers, San'a, Beirut. In San'a (Watson 2002), Sa'anis speakers tend to replace old 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 these three cities and particularly on Beirut with its post-war residential division.
- old urban centres with a declining urban elite and important population renewal. The old urban dialect is no more prestigious enough to be acquired by new-comers and is even declining among the young generations of the original urban dwellers. The new-comers adopt instead 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 of many North African cities like Fes, Tangier, Rabat, Tlemcen and even Tunis, where the old urban vernacular tends to become more and more 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). This is also what happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. in a city like Alexandria (Egypt) whose population is said to speak now Cairo Arabic except in a few old popular quarters (Wahba 1996).
- emerging new cities with mixed population and koine in the making. Different dialects stand side by side and the weight of the migrant population is important (Amman in Jordan). In this case, the dialectal variety of the rural/Bedouin migrants might influence the development of the urban variety. In Amman, one notes the coexistence of rural/urban Palestinian dialects and rural/Bedouin Jordanian dialects. Jordanian men are said to keep their Bedouin pronunciation (cf.

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statistical data. Other studies indicate that Hebrew borrowings penetrate Muslim and Christian Palestinian

\*q = [g]) and to have favourable attitude toward it while urban Palestinian men tend sometimes to hide their Palestinian identity and to adopt the Bedouin pronunciation (at least the \*q = [g] in Irbid) (cf. 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, cf. Abdel Jawad 1986). There are indication that a new urban koine is emerging among the youth of Amman who used a mix vocalic system (Al-Wer 2002). Another example of emerging new city is Nouachkott (Mauritania) but, as dialectal divergence is said to be very little in Hassaneya (Taine Sheikh 1994), urbanization and migration might not have the same linguistic impact.

- cities with a high component of non-Arab migrants. Two types can be distinguished here. Cities like 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 the Sudanese non-Arab migrants speak dominantly Arabic but with a large number of non-standard Khartoum Arabic features. The same non-standard features were also found among their children born in Khartoum, a fact that might indicate the development of a non-standard Khartoum urban variety. But this phenomenon needs further investigation due to the fact that the main migration wave is still very recent (1980s-1990s). Another type of cities are the Gulf cities (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.

This broad categorisation indicates very different sociolinguistic situations according to the patterns of migration and to the socio-political development of each city. For the time being, the urbanization process is still very much on the making in many Arab cities and the development of the urban vernaculars can be influenced by the presence of various communal (i.e. regional, ethnic or religious) varieties. How far these communal varieties will be maintained or will melt or will disappear in the various urban contexts will depend of the socio-political evolution of each city and each country, and there is, today, no indication of a single common linear development that will led ineluctably to the development of standard urban varieties spoken, in all speech-contexts, by the whole urban population of each city.

There are however some common trends that have been observed concerning gender and age variation with regards to acquisition of urban vernaculars. First, and as already mentioned, in cities where the old urban vernacular has been replaced by a new koine, old women (as well as members of



religious minority) tend to keep the specific linguistic features of the old urban dialects (e.g. diphthongs in Tunis,  $\text{š} > \text{s}$  in Fes and Rabat). Second, in context of dialectal contact and changes, young women tend to acquire the urban variables faster than their male counterparts. Men tend to use more MSA/ *fuṣṣā* norms or to keep regional/communal variables, particularly at the phonological level.<sup>21</sup> It seems also that young educated middle-class women tend to use more lexical foreign items than men or to switch more easily to foreign languages associated with modernity (cf. Lawson-Sako & Sachdev 1996 for Tunis). Third, in cities with more stable urban vernacular, like Cairo, middle-class women initiate new phonological changes (Haeri 1996 for palatalization in Cairo) and variables related to middle-upper class women tend to become prestigious norms associated with refinement (cf. the status of weak pharyngealization, Boucherit & Lentin 1989, Cohen 1973, Naim-Sambar 1983, Royal 1986, Wahba 1996).

An interesting consequence is that sedentary-based urban dialects are often perceived as more ‘effeminate’ than Bedouin/rural dialects (and *fuṣṣā*). Some urban variables will be often considered as marks of femininity, and will not be quickly acquired by male immigrants and will be even deleted by male urban dwellers. This correlation between gender and linguistic features seems to be particularly operative at the phonological level,<sup>22</sup> like in the case of the variable \*q = [q], one of the most salient and marked Arabic phonological feature. In Tlemcen (Algeria), Tlemceni men shift to the koinized Algerian [g] while Tlemceni young women appear here conservative, do not shift to the new urban koinized [g] and keep the traditional Tlemceni variable [q].<sup>23</sup> Today speaking with a [q] in Tlemcen is considered as a sign of femininity (Dendane 1994)<sup>24</sup>. In Tunis, men in certain speech contexts will use the Bedouin [g] to look more virile (Traboulsi 1988). In Jordan and Palestine, men tends to use MSA [q] or Bedouin [g], while women tend to use urban Palestinian [q]. In Egypt, Upper Egyptian migrants consider that Cairo Arabic is more soft, sophisticated and effeminate than their own Upper Egyptian dialect and a number of male-workers consciously keep the [g] pronunciation (Miller 1997). In most Arab cities, men tend to use more the MSA [q] than women.

The “prestige” of the urban vernaculars is therefore very ambiguous, particularly among male immigrants, a fact that can explain why shift or accommodation to urban vernaculars is far to be total. For the time being it is difficult to assess if this gender phonological distinction will maintain in the long run in urban context and if migrants will maintain communal varieties. Attitudinal factors can converge here with social factors. The large majority of the immigrants came usually to stay in

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<sup>21</sup> cf. see among others Abdel Jawad 1986, Al Wer 2000, Ibrahim 1986, Sawaie 1994 for Amman; Benrabah 1994 & 1999 for Oran, Caubet 1998 for Fes, Daher 1999 for Damascus, Havelova 2000 for Nazareth, Walters 1991 for Korba in Tunisia.

<sup>22</sup> The symbolic values associated with specific phonemes need to be more systematically explored (Gordon and Heath 1998). It seems that features like glottal stop /ʔ/, raising of the /a/ in imalah (Walter 1991), weak emphatization are often associated with femininity in the Arab world.

<sup>23</sup> But note that in Fes young women drop traditional Fasi [q] and shift to Moroccan koinized [q] (Caubet 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Owens (2001) quotes another reference on Tlemcen which has not been available to me (Dekkak 1979)

specific quarters (either at the periphery or in the old centres that have been deserted by the former old urban families that moved to new residential quarters), belong to popular or middle-class and often develop their own professional and societal networks. Their interaction with the ‘traditional urban dwellers’, particularly the urban elite, is not always easy, to say the least. Like in many other countries, the massive rural migration is often considered to be an important factor of urban destabilisation and rural migrants are often associated with negative stereotypes. What type of cultural, social and linguistic models are presently being developed in these new urban territories remains a major domain of investigation, which, strangely enough, remain very little studied compared to other type of variation.

## Conclusion

Many sociolinguistic studies on the Arab world have focused on the MSA/dialect contact and indicated that education, social class and gender were the main factor of differentiation regarding the use of MSA versus dialectal features or the degree of MSA/dialect mixing. Most of those studies were not concerned by the dialectal diversity, which seems to have been considered as a secondary or a minor phenomenon. The fact that many of those studies were done in a city like Cairo, with its well established urban vernacular, might partly explain the focus on what has been known as ESA (Educated Spoken Arabic).<sup>25</sup> However, the modern sociolinguistic situation of the Arab countries is far to be restricted to this question, and the question of dialect contact and koineisation, related to the formation of urban models, is still a major issue of many Arab urban centres.

The present review has highlighted that, in specific historical contexts (e.g. North Africa, Mesopotamia), some urban vernaculars have been subverted by new koines brought by non-urban groups, and particularly Bedouin groups. This phenomenon has been also largely described by urban studies which mentioned the decline of former patterns of urban sociability (e.g. the “Andalusian model of *citadinité*” of the old North African cities, or the Ottoman model of the old Middle Eastern cities) and the emergence of new urban “tribal” models in cities with important population renewal (Beyhoun 1997, Ben Achour 1996, Chabbi 1997, Naciri & Raymond 1997).

Today, the prestige of the urban cultural and linguistic models is often ambiguous, as urban dialects are often associated with modernity but also sometimes with femininity and over-sophistication. A rather specific phenomenon of the Arab world, compared to Western countries, is the social importance and the prestige of tribal and communal affiliations. The ‘Bedouin factor’ still

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<sup>25</sup> For all the discussions concerning the development of Egyptian ESA – Educated Spoken Arabic -or the presence of various sociolinguistic varieties within the di-tri-pluri-glossic frame or the phenomena of borrowing and code-shifting see Abu Melhim (1991), Badawi (1973 & 1995), Bassiouney (1998), Eid (1988), El Hassan (1977 & 1978), Elgibali (1993), Gully (1997), Harrell (1964), Mazraani (1997), Mejdell (1994 & 1995), Mitchell (1979, 1980, 1986), Parkinson (1991), Rabie (1991), Schmidt (1974), Wilmsen (1996).

play an important role in many Arab cities, although this statement might sound too 'culturalist-oriented'. But tribal and communal affiliation must not be over-estimated.

There is therefore a need here for a better investigation of the language uses and attitudes of the millions of new urban-dwellers in various contexts and at all linguistic levels (and not only at the phonological level) including idiomatic expressions, poetic devices, musical choices, etc. One of the main shortages of current Arabic sociolinguistic studies is their systematic restriction to a few phonological variables, while we know that in case of language contact the selection of features operate differently at each linguistic level.

Another direction of research might be youth languages. Today the youth represents the outstanding majority in most Arab urban centres. Yet we know almost nothing about youth language use in Arab cities,<sup>26</sup> while youth language appears to be an important urban phenomenon in many other countries (Kiesling and Mous 2001). It is now time to describe more in detail the way they speak and to which model they identify. This has started to be done in the Maghreb with regard to Arabic-French code-switching among the youth (Caubet 2000, Laroussi 1999). There is indication that, in North African urban centres, code-switching has become the informal urban code of some social classes.

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<sup>26</sup> Two small studies are available for Cairo (Allam 2000 & Leigh-Peterson 2002).

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