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BOOK REVIEWS

Enam Al-Wer, Uri Horesh, Bruno Herin and Rudolf De Jong, *Arabic sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xvi + 238.

Marwan Jarrah, The University of Jordan

This book provides an excellent overview of important aspects of Arabic sociolinguistics (e.g. the effect of gender, age, education, social stratification, and religion and ethnicity in constraining the variable expression of several linguistic features). It outlines the key themes and concepts of (variationist) sociolinguistics, such as vernacular speech data, change in progress, ethnographic, qualitative, and quantitative methods, external factors, and processes of diffusion, with focus on their manifestations from various Arabic dialects. The authors have made a concerted effort to present and evaluate various methodological, interpretive, and theoretical accounts that have been tested over the years in relation to sociolinguistic and ethnographic research on Arabic dialects. The book is generally aimed at scholars and students who have no solid background in sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, it succeeds in presenting a comprehensive analysis encompassing almost all pivotal themes relevant to contemporary research in Arabic sociolinguistics. It effectively stands as an indispensable addition to the library of contemporary Arabic linguistic scholarship.

While overall the book is excellent, three issues can be identified. First, the authors critique the influence of Standard Arabic (SA) on conditioning the variant choice of several linguistic features in Arabic dialects. Although the authors are correct in asserting that the impact of SA is often overstated in discussions of the trajectories of change and sociolinguistic stratification in Arabic variationist research, a more comprehensive analysis of the primary motives behind this 'purported' role of SA would have been warranted. Such an analysis would present studies that addressed lexical and syntactic variation in which the effects of SA are often referenced and attributed to. Additionally, while the book presents significant aspects of Arabic sociolinguistics, the primary discussions are confined to variationist encounters, with minimal attention given to non-variationist studies. Moreover, the book heavily centres on the works of Al-Wer and her associates (collaborators and former PhD students), which, while valuable and illuminating, results in overlooking findings of other important studies that discuss relevant topics of Arabic variationist sociolinguistics (e.g. Abdel-Jawad 1981; Habib 2008; Al-Shawashreh 2016; Bassiouney 2020).

The book consists of nine chapters. Each chapter ends with a few engaging exercises (except Chapter 1) and a suggested list of authoritative readings,

chronologically ordered to reflect the evolution of the discussed theme. The 'Introduction' focuses on major works on Arabic dialectology. One important claim here is that recent research on Arabic sociolinguistics is preoccupied with the concept of diglossia and the processes of standardization and colloquialization. The authors ascertain that diglossia and its related processes are overemphasized despite the obvious evidence that (phonological) changes occurring in a single dialect follow a single trajectory linked to a change to supralocal urban variants. In their words, 'Standard Arabic does not play a role, nor does it have a normative effect on the structure of variation in the core areas of the grammar of the vernacular' (4). This chapter touches on the relationship between code-switching and language variation and change. It also highlights the study of variation as an apparent time construct.

In 'Methodology: Principles and Practices', the authors provide guidelines for conducting a successful variationist study, starting with the selection of the topic that should relate to a feature in which one variant of it is used in casual speech. Data collection should be conducted using a descriptive approach, with minimal intervention of the fieldworker. Reliance on the researcher's intuition or the intuition of native speakers must be avoided, as the aim of the research is exploratory, not confirmatory. This chapter presents the advantages of coding the data by an insider, although an outsider to the community can succeed in doing successful research when they familiarize themselves with the language, the structure of the community, and social values. This chapter addresses the observer's paradox, listing the major techniques to reduce its effects during the collection of vernacular data. This chapter also highlights the importance of group interview and ethnographic approaches, which enable researchers to discern social meanings and details of linguistic practices and social evaluation of the use of different variants. Decent discussions regarding the definition and types of variables are also offered. Focus is placed on the effect of age on linguistic expressions, highlighting the difference between the *etic* approach and the *emic* approach in defining age divisions. This chapter discusses the major steps followed in transcription (broad vs. narrow), coding, and modelling as well as the significance of multivariate analysis and data-driven interpretation. Several broad terms of research ethics are mentioned, with a crucial note on linguistic discrimination and why it should be challenged in Arabic and beyond to generate solid assumptions regarding linguistic variation.

The major findings that pertain to gender-differentiated language patterns in Arabic are discussed in 'Gender'. Based on data coming from several Arabic vernaculars, relevant research points to the tendency that women, unlike men, prefer supralocal features over localized ones. Women produce linguistic features which are closer to prestigious norms. This chapter succinctly reviews the major findings of 11 studies featuring gender as a social variable. These studies conclude that gender determines the structure of variation and is a 'predictor of the trajectory of language change' (55). Nonetheless, the interpretation of the effects of gender (gender differentiation) varies according to the context of the dialect, as each speech community exhibits unique local social dynamics, intimately connected to the

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linguistic changes therein. Gender roles can also be better understood in conjunction with other social variables, which may vary across generations, social classes, and degrees of mobility.

One overarching motif highlighted in 'Education' is that education is a 'proxy' variable, which acts on behalf of other variables like mobility and the speaker's social network. This chapter reviews the findings of four works which operationalize education as a social factor. Education is shown to be a complex element in the speaker's experience; therefore, its sociolinguistic effect should be explored within its local context. The findings of two other studies exploring the effect of the type of education (public vs. private; monolingual settings vs. bilingual settings) on the speaker's linguistic output are also reviewed. The outcomes imply that the type of education can significantly influence linguistic transfer, which can be inherently linked to the educational milieu.

In 'Social Stratification', the authors discuss the role of the socio-economic hierarchy in several contexts in the Arab World. Although social class is not considered a universal sociolinguistic variable, the correlation between class membership and linguistic behaviour is shown to be evident in Cairo, Mecca, and Damascus. This chapter introduces the social-network approach and its advantage to allow for a more nuanced account of the relation between linguistic usage and the speaker's immediate social contacts. This chapter also investigates the role of the speaker's regionality as a social factor in identifying the catalysts behind the use of heritage and target variants. This chapter discusses evidence that a life-mode can affect the linguistic behaviour of some speakers. It cites an example from Damascus, where separation between work and leisure proves significant in triggering innovation with respect to the use of linguistic variants and hence reinforces the need for a classification of speakers that goes beyond mere economic considerations. This chapter ends with a brief description of the concept of 'community of practice' that can detect a socially meaningful association of linguistic variation.

'Religion and Ethnicity' primarily reviews Arab world-based studies in which religion or ethnicity are quantified as social indexes. These two factors are shown to be sometimes significant given different lineages and the prevalence of social barriers in the Arab world. The major communities cited in this chapter include the Jewish community in Morocco and Tunisia, Druze in the Levant, three Baghdadi communities (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim), Bahrain (Arab and Bahrana), Al-Ahsa (Sunna and Shi'a), and Christians and Muslims in Jordan. In these communities, the religious affiliation is a factor influencing variation. However, the socio-political status of some ethnic groups (like Druze in Jordan) or the demographic changes and marriage traditions followed by religious groups (like Christians in Jordan) can help maintain group boundaries and their linguistic idiosyncrasies within a larger community with a distinct ethnic (and religious) affiliation. The importance of historical circumstances in understanding current configurations of local dialects in a certain community is also discussed. Although religion and sect can emerge as significant sociolinguistic factors in some communities, their effects may decrease even if they survive for a given period of time.

They are bounded by social dynamics (e.g. the rising effect of national identify over sectarian affinity). Finally, this chapter addresses the effect of the dominant group's religion on language shift. Instances from the Ajam Group in Kuwait and Circassians and Chechens in Jordan are cited.

'Language Change' touches on the general methods of historical linguistics in identifying language change and variation. It supplies a detailed description of the concepts of language change (e.g. S-curve) with examples from studies on Arabic dialects. Additionally, methods of studying change (real time vs. apparent time) are presented with an account of their (de)merits and their application, especially in conjunction with real-time methods (trend vs. panel studies). The phenomenon of age grading, which is evidence that variation can occur without change, is also featured. The chapter ends with a description of the types of change (change from above vs. change from below).

In 'Spatial Variation', the authors discuss the effect of natural barriers on linguistic configuration, emphasizing the relationship between linguistic differentiation and the physical environment as well as their effects on shaping the linguistic profile of regions. This chapter presents a short overview on earlier linguistic atlases by Bergsträsser and Cantineau. The chapter shows how data presented in atlases can be reliable resources for dialect documentation and identification of changes in progress. Political divisions and waterways are also shown to play an important role in creating new contexts that can render formerly close dialects more divergent. Evidence from Horani and Nile delta dialects is cited in this regard. The relevant dichotomy between focal and relic regions is also discussed. The concept of language islands and the importance of their linguistic profiles, especially in connection to the preservation of relic features, is explored with focus on Cypriot Arabic. The chapter ends with a short discussion of Arabic-based creoles with Juba Arabic as a prominent illustration.

The last chapter 'Contact and Diffusion' presents an account of processes of diffusion and the major principles that regulate them, citing representative examples from Arabic dialects. The chapter starts with the concept of regional standards and their relations with political borders. It also discusses the concept of substrate influence, discussing the effects of Aramaic on Levantine dialects and Amazigh on North African Arabic dialects. This chapter pays attention to areal features with examples from Uzbekistan Arabic. Types and models of diffusion (i.e., the wave model, the gravity model, and contra-hierarchical diffusion) are presented. The chapter ends with an overview of transitional zones and interdialectal forms with examples from the Nile Delta.

Overall, this book is a significant addition to Arabic sociolinguistics research, offering meticulous explorations of key sociolinguistic concepts and their manifestations in Arabic dialects. It provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of variation and its evolution in the Arab world, shedding light on how various linguistic elements undergo change. Scholars with interests spanning (Arabic) ethnography, sociology, culture, and pragmatics would also benefit from reading this book and incorporating it as a foundational resource in their respective studies.

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Deborah Arbes (ed.), *Number categories: Dynamics, contact, typology (Studia Typologica 32)*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2023. Pp. vii + 183.

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The miscellaneous book under review is a collection of papers dealing with the category of number in different languages and under different perspectives. After a very short preface by the editor, the book is composed of five different chapters, all of which are based on presentations given at a pre-conference workshop on 'number categories' for the 4th Diversity Linguistics Conference on 3 June 2021, in Bremen, Germany. The chapters do not follow any particular thematic order but analyze some phenomena related to (nominal) number.

Chapter 1, 'The tonal marking number on nominals in the Wagi dialect of Beria', by Katharina Gayler, Elsadig Omda Ibrahim and Isabel Compes, investigates number marking through tonal changes on nominals and noun phrases in the only surviving Eastern Saharan language Beria, spoken between Chad and Sudan. More specifically, the chapter focuses on Wagi (undocumented so far), one of the four different varieties of Beria. After presenting some phonological and morphosyntactic properties, the authors point out that Wagi shows three tones that can be combined, resulting in at least six different combinations (but probably more), and these allow phonemic distinctions both at the lexical and the morphological (number on nouns and verbs) levels. So, Wagi displays seven different nominal classes (where 'nominals' include nouns, property concepts, possessive pronouns and specifiers – basically demonstratives and anaphoric markers) according to which tonal contour they present in the singular forms and in the plural forms.