CHAPTER ONE

Approaching Diglossia: Authorities, Values, and Representations

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THE DIMENSIONS OF LINGUISTIC VARIABILITY

Linguistic variation in a speech community may be viewed in a number of dimensions: a “horizontal” one of geographical dialect spread and contact, or a “vertical” one of sociolects and prestige and stigmatized dialects. It may furthermore be given a temporal dimension and be viewed through the prism of historical dialect change and the “rise and fall” of prestige forms. To each one of these may be added a further cultural, political, or gendered dimension, detailing the relative power of certain groups or discourses within a speech community at one period in time or over the course of time. Arabic diglossia in modern linguistic discourse has been examined primarily in a vertical dimension, as embodying a distinction between an archaic but prestige literary form and a related but stigmatized spoken form in a given speech community. Diglossia in Arab traditionalist discourse has taken a quite different form, one which problematizes it in educational and cultural terms, drawing on a long cultural legacy of situating Arabic and its speakers in relation to other languages, ethnicities, religions, and polities.

Each of these ways of viewing the peculiarities of linguistic variation in the Arab world contains insights about the linguistic reality which it represents, but they are subject to limitations which are an inherent feature of any cognitive representation of reality. The epistemological limitations of these kinds of representation are due in large part to the pressures exerted on a discourse by sociocultural and political factors seemingly extraneous to it but which nevertheless exert an influence on it by shaping it to the cultural and discipline-specific expectations of its intended audience. That is, language specialists have certain expectations and values which must be met in a linguistic representation or else it is deemed unacceptable, and these values are derived in part from the historical development of the discipline in a particular place at a particular time. Also, the sociocultural predispositions and assumptions which
delimit and frame the representations of language specialists may derive in part from (or be a negative reaction to) the predispositions and assumptions which help to shape native language users perceptions (conscious or not) of their language. These views and values of non-specialist language users may be reflected in their own linguistic usage and behavior, and may in turn be influenced (either positively or negatively) by the opinions and values of language specialists, especially if these values are institutionalized in the form of authorizing traditions such as educational systems, literary canons, and the like.

In this paper I will examine linguistic representations of Arabic diglossia and dialects as it relates to the above question, which may be paraphrased as examining the sociocultural limitations of specialists’ representations of others’ language behavior and non-specialists’ considerations of their own behavior. The framework in which this will be carried out is a sociological one, derived from Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the theory of practice, supplemented with Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism” as well as my own extensions of the theory. I will briefly outline the presuppositions and bases of this framework, and then proceed to examine the rhetoric of traditional Arab discourse on Arabic before turning to modernist linguistic analyses of variation in Arabic deriving from European and American linguistic discourses.

The construction of knowledge about language

The most basic notion underlying the present approach is that human beings view the world (indirectly) through the medium of “representations,” through a process of objectification or object construction. Representations such as this have also been termed ideologies, “theories” (whether as academic ones or metaphorically to refer to “ordinary” people’s representations), and have been treated under the notion of “mimesis.” These representations are constructs determined by social, cultural, and individual experience. They are social-historical phenomena or “practices,” and are by their very nature limited (focused on selected features) and contingent (rooted in a specific time and place — that is, they reflect a perspective).

The representation of “language” is one such cultural artifact. In one culture language may be viewed in several different fashions, as reflected in the popular, everyday notions about the way people speak (e.g., attitudes toward accents), what they mean or didn’t mean, word play, etc. At the other end of the spectrum there are the notions that language specialists have developed about language, whether as an object of study in itself (linguists), or as a subject to be taught in a curriculum of study (grammarians, first- and second-language teachers), or as a medium of literature (philologists). Each of these fields of representation has a history and reflects a particular social, cultural, and academic milieu. They may share culturewide presuppositions about language and its function in society, or may conflict with one another, or both. They may also derive from or be influenced by interactions with other cultures or subcultures.

This notion of a “field” of representation is derived from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu which offers a general and wide-ranging epistemological framework in which one can develop a critical approach to linguistic theorizing and language attitudes. It is because Bourdieu’s approach to language (and other types of social constructs) hinges on a dichotomy between two ways of approaching an object of study: viewing it “objectively,” from the outside, as a structuralist might proceed in uncovering the underlying structures of social relations or linguistic patterning, or viewing it “subjectively,” through the viewpoint of the object itself or the individuals involved in it, as is done in phenomenological approaches.

Rather than choosing between the two alternatives (subjectivism versus objectivism), Bourdieu works toward integrating them both into the analysis, as well as toward taking into account the stance of the analyst and how that might affect the representation. Another way of phrasing this, relating it to my previous comments, is to say that human perceptions and the representations that they give rise to are necessarily limited or biased in some way, and this approach offers a way of incorporating the consciousness of this bias into the evaluation of the representation.

Unlike Bourdieu, however, I assume that within a society there may be a number of such authorizing discourses, which I term “regimes of authority,” which may involve notions such as dominance, solidarity, opposition, etc. Each of the regimes of authority present in a society/culture may have an effect on the kind of language which is valorized, and on the metalinguistic views of language in general, and ultimately on the views and analyses of language professionals themselves (linguists, grammar specialists, language teachers, L1 and L2), who participate as well in their own discursive regimes of authority. In the present paper I will be referring to these regimes primarily in terms of the value systems which they incorporate, as expressed in the form of the cultural topos or commonplaces which are found in specialists’ writings and non-specialists’ views on language in general, and on the Arabic language in particular. It must be noted at this point that I view these regimes of authority as being alternative representations of linguistic reality (for specialists), as well as alternative inventories of linguistic forms (for non-specialists) from which individuals select the forms which suit their own particular vision of that reality. For each of these regimes there may be greater or lesser opportunity for choice depending on the society, or field, or discourse. More important, however, is the way that individuals react to and interact with, adopt or reject these systems of authorization, a process which I conceive to be “dialogic” in fashion. That is, as noted in Layne,

Bakhtin’s concept of dialogization has been glossed by Holquist as the process whereby “a word, discourse, language or culture ... becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things” (Bakhtin 1981:427). Dialogism refers to the constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. (Layne 1989:24-5)
That is, individuals do not always adopt the value system of one regime of authority alone and for all time, but rather manipulate the various regimes of authority and their differing systems of values (and thus the meanings that inher in them) in fashioning their own identity. This dialogic manipulation of values is reflected both in nonspecialists' use of language itself and in their metalinguistic views of it, as well as in specialists' methods of argumentation about how to represent certain linguistic phenomena. Rather than there being only one “dominant” against which individuals line up for or against, there are multiple regimes of domination or authority to which individuals situate themselves, fashioning an identity which is partially imposed and partially of their own choosing, and which may be at times rather fluid. So too specialists' views of linguistic representation, and of Arabic diglossia in particular, participate in a number of different regimes of authority and domination, and may touch upon or be influenced by different ones, even when the argument is overtly directed against these other regimes.

In the following I will present a brief overview of the value system of the most dominant form of the Arabic language regime of authority, and then I will briefly outline some of the most salient aspects of the various regimes of authority in Western linguistic discourse, before examining in more detail the various approaches which have been adopted in analyzing linguistic variation in Arabic, especially of the diglossic type.

TRADITIONS OF LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION EAST AND WEST

Issues in Arab discourse on language

The Arabic language occupies a central place in Arabic culture, both classical and modern, and is connected intimately with the place of Islam as the dominant religion of that culture. I have identified four recurrent motifs or topoi in the most dominant tradition about which Arab representations of Arabic cluster. These topoi are based in large part on the historical narrative of the Arab cultural tradition, tracing its rise, efflorescence, and recrudescence through the Middle Ages, and its rebirth and renewed efflorescence in the modern period.

First is the topos of unity: the Arabic language prior to Islam — as recorded in the collection of pre-Islamic poetry called the mu'allaqat — is a single language, uniting Arabs in single culture. With the appearance and spread of Islam this aspect of Arabic takes on a religious case and becomes even more pronounced: the Quran has been revealed in a “clear” language, understood by all Arabs, thus uniting them linguistically as Islam unites them doctrinally. Islam and the demands of the new Arab empire lead to the institutionalization and “authorization” of Arabic, which introduces a second topos, that of purity: The Arabic of the Quran is taken to be the dialect of the Prophet's tribe, Quraysh, which is thereby granted the status of being the “best” Arabic, seen as such and understood by all Arabs. However, with the Islamic conquests, and the spread of Arab tribes, the Arabic language comes into contact with non-Arabic languages and ethnicities, which leads to the contamination of Arabic, and hence to the need to preserve the purity of the language (ostensibly for a religious reason, to protect the proper reading of the Quran, but due as well to ethnic tensions and conflicts). This need results in indigenous attempts to record and systematize the language, which gives rise to the tradition of Arabic grammar in all of its various forms. These efforts at recording and systematizing the language result in the creation of a very strong cultural tradition of grammar study, rhetoric, and literary criticism alongside the religious and literary (poetic) tradition, thus introducing a third topos, that of continuity: The development of a complex and highly esteemed written tradition, which is passed down through the generations and in which inheres the most highly valued features of the culture. Such a tradition demands to be maintained and safeguarded, which helps to give rise to the final topos of the traditional cultural narrative of Arabic to be discussed here, namely that of conflict or competition with other languages, viz. Persian and Turkish: the initial contact and confrontation with these “other” Islamic languages favors Arabic, but in later centuries the rise of these other Islamic ethnicities to political and economic power leads to the “decline” of Arabic as a vehicle of general cultural transmission, until its reemergence as a language of general culture after contact with the West in the early nineteenth century.

Each of these topoi represents the valorization of specific cultural aspects of Arabic while it stigmatizes others, and each has a classical reflex as well as a modern one. The topoi of unity involves a valorization of one language — Arabic — its cultural universality, as well as its supposed sources — the Qurashy dialect — while it stigmatizes linguistic diversity, tribal parochialism, and the non-Qurashy dialects. In the modern period this topos has been reinterpreted in the service of various nationalisms, initially Islamic but most strongly and successfully for Arab nationalism and Arab unity: Classical Arabic as the common language of Arabs and their culture is the key to a common political goal. The topoi of purity on the other hand involves the valorization of Arabic as the source of Arab ethnicity, and “remote Bedouins” as the most faithful transmitters of that ethnic tradition. It at first valorized “orality” in the transmission, but with the development of the written tradition and its associated topos of continuity, however, the tradition quickly came to valorize specific written sources over oral sources, stigmatizing “foreign” (or non-Arab) ethnicities, urban language, and eventually the spoken language, or colloquial dialects. In the modern period the topos of purity is found most clearly in the very strong prescriptive stance of Arabic grammatical studies, which attempts to maintain the purity of the classically derived modern written language through education and language academies and stigmatizes in a very strong fashion the spoken Arabic languages, the “colloquial.” The topos of continuity valorized written as opposed to oral sources, and eventually (in the tradition of linguistic specialists) came to value specific analogical rules and their systematization over description of variation (exemplified in the “Basran-Kufan” schools). In the modern period the topos of continuity has been
reembodied in the topos of “rebirth” or renaissance of the nineteenth-century Arab cultural revival and in the reiteration and revalorization of the classical literary canon as the source of cultural values in the modern period. Finally, the topos of competition involves a conflict or competition with other non-Arabic languages. Initially this involved a cultural competition with other Islamic languages, notably Persian and Turkish, a cultural conflict which led to the eventual “decline” of Arabic as a language of culture, which may be seen as a devaluation of its cultural capital, as its capital was limited to fewer and fewer authoritative contexts, eventually becoming limited to religio-legal contexts. Thus while Arabic always maintained a highly valued place in all Islamic communities, it was – especially for the non-Arab Muslim ruling elites – a limited one. In the modern period competition in the linguistic sphere comes primarily from European languages, both those which derive from a colonial legacy in the Arab world (French, English, Spanish) as well as those which depend on postcolonial economic and political hegemonies (American English and Russian).

The narrative of Arabic briefly outlined here functions as the narrative for the Arabs themselves, and is the one that forms the most dominant and highly authoritative one. From an individual standpoint, this regime of domination represents one out of a number of different regimes of authority that Arab individuals have at their disposal in shaping their cultural and linguistic identities. Its reflex in an individual’s language behavior may vary depending upon access to education, type of profession, class, etc. – all of the common elements which have figured in sociolinguistic analyses of Arabic linguistic variation – but the strength of its reflex may also depend upon its (perceived) relationship to other regimes of authority present in the culture, which may tend either to limit its effect, or to strengthen it, or to otherwise affect it. For example, with regard to Arab language specialists in traditional areas of language study, these views of Arabic continue to have a very strong influence on their representations of Arabic in their writings and thought, despite differences between individuals in this field on specific points. Furthermore, through the institutionalization of these views in educational institutions and the authority that they convey in official pronouncements in the media and elsewhere, they have had a tremendous effect on the course of Arabic as actually used over the last half century following the spread of education and the rise in literacy following independence (a possible instance of what Bourdieu refers to as the “theory effect”). However, they have not had the full effect as originally intended by the modern linguistic authorities who originally set up the educational system or those who continue in those positions, namely, the replacement of the many spoken dialects by one classically based standard form of spoken Arabic. What they have produced is greater variation, of a different kind, in a different dimension, which has been termed “diglossia” in modernist linguistics. This kind of variation reflects the multiplicity of linguistic regimes at the disposal of an individual in the Arab world, and it is stigmatized by the most dominant of these regimes, which values “purity” and “unity” over “vitality” and “variation,”

the latter two of which form part of the value system of modernist linguistic approaches to language study, which I will now examine.

Issues in Western discourse on language

In general, premodern or traditional linguistic study in Europe shared many of the values of the Arab tradition: it valued written texts over oral speech, one language of culture over vernaculars, purism over variation, etc. However, these systems of values changed over the course of the nineteenth century, which can be most clearly seen in the ways in which variation of different types came to be handled: firstly, interest in “temporal” variation, or historical change, in the fields of Indo-European studies and comparative Semitic changed the focus of language study from being that of a single pure form of the language to being concerned with language variation over the course of time. The sound correspondences of Indo-Germanic, Indo-European, and comparative Semitic studies came to take on a more abstract form in the sound laws of the Jungegrammatiker, who valued the abstract and “exceptionless” rules uncovered by their method over the traditional, puristic grammar rules. However, despite a focus on sound correspondences and sound laws, comparative linguistics was still substantially text-oriented. Comparative dialectology studies, on the other hand, focusing on variation in geographical space, valued oral speech over written, and concrete data over abstract rules. Each of these modern approaches undermined one or more aspects of the traditional paradigm of language study (especially the notion of “purism”), and they culminated in Saussure’s views of language which encapsulated several of the contradictory strands of linguistic theorizing: on the one hand valorizing “spoken language” over “written language” as the source of linguistic theorizing, but at the same time valorizing “abstraction” and idealization (langue) over “concreteness” and actual language use (parole).

But each of these changes did not do away with previous views or approaches to language study – rather each of them left behind a tradition or approach which has its own methods and goals. They each form a kind of regime of authority with its own discourse, sharing some basic assumptions with other fields of language study but marking themselves off sharply from those other fields based on one or two salient defining features. That is, the various regimes of academic linguistic authority represent varying degrees of discursive otherness, which delimit an area of deictic value orientations: the discursive “other” is negatively defined or identified in the work of one group based on the presence of a certain stigmatized feature of analysis or the lack of a valued feature of analysis. Hence all specialists stigmatize the linguistic views of nonspecialists as “myths” because they contain features which all language specialists would agree are not properly part of a modern linguistic representation: favoring one language or language form as being inherently better than another, impressionistic characterizations of languages related to ethnic stereotypes (French is romantic, German is autocratic, etc.)

Language
specialists on the other hand seek to distance themselves from one another based upon the goals and methods of each of their subspecialties: the "prescriptivists" criticize the "structuralists" for failing to recognize minimum standards of use, for valorizing speech of any sort over a culturally select one, etc., while the nonprescriptivists rail against the selective tyrannies of the text-oriented, normative rules of the prescriptivists, for mistaking language behavior for moral behavior, etc. Among the nonprescriptivist language specialists, the applied linguists distinguish themselves from the nonapplied as being "practical" specialties (L2 teaching, speech pathology, computer applications [speech recognition, computer translation], etc.) with clear goals and methods which are lacking in the nonapplied fields. The nonapplied fields, however, value the degree of abstraction that comes with academic disciplines, allaying themselves either with a social science approach (sociolinguistics) or a positivistic, "scientific" approach (structuralist, generativist). The former (variationist) valorizes actual spoken language use, concrete data, heteronymy in the object of study, and sees the "rules" that it comes up with in social-behavioral terms. The latter (theoretical structuralist or generativist) criticizes the former for precisely these value orientations, and itself values introspective data, abstract theorizing and idealization, the positing of autonomous levels in a universal grammar which revolves around a syntactic core. Each of these latter two sees tendencies in the other which remind it of the more highly stigmatized traditionalist or prescriptivist type: The variationist sees in the generativist fascination with abstract rules and theorizing about a universal grammar a similarity to the prescriptivist focus on normative rules and textbook grammars, while the generativist sees in the variationist fascination with language use a prescientific and nonpredictive descriptivism.

Despite these differences, which may seem quite stark in the writings of the various subspecialties of linguistics, there is nonetheless a large fund of commonly held ideas in modernist linguistics which sets it apart from traditionalist or premodernist views: The first of these is the topos of "vitality": that the proper subject of modernist linguistics is "living" languages, not dead ones, as embodied in the view that the proper basis of linguistic study is spoken language, not written language. Related to this is the topos of the "native speaker": the source for the data of linguistic study is the native speaker, or one who acquires the language in question naturally, as part of an organic experience of growing up in the language. This native speaker takes different forms in variationist studies as opposed to theoretical/generativist ones. In the latter it is an idealized entity, realizable in eliciting introspective data from someone, but not in terms of actual use, while for the variationist the native speaker is an actual person on an actual street. Most modernist linguistic approaches, even of some in the language teaching professions, share in a third topos, that of "linguistic value-neutrality," or the notion that no language is inherently better than any other. This represents the triumph of "descriptivism" over "prescriptivism" in modernist language studies, but it is one area which separates out language specialists from vast stretches of the cultural landscape: most nonspecialists, and some specialists from a traditionalist background, find the inherent cultural valorization of a standard language — namely "theirs" — to be a natural and common-sense point-of-view, and one which has enormous cultural ramifications well beyond language use. This is especially so in a discourse such as that of native-Arab representations of Arabic which is dominated by a traditionalist point of view. Values such as those represented in the traditionalist notions of linguistic purity and cultural continuity clash with the modernist linguistic valorization of linguistic neutrality, "native speaker" usage, and linguistic vitality, while the traditionalist notions of unity and competition clash with the modernist valorization of variation and the underlying European-language (and especially English-language) bias of its representations, reflecting the cultural and political hegemony of these languages at the present time.

Before turning to consider how these different values have been registered in the representations of Arabic diglossia over the last fifty years or so, I need to make several caveats. The first of these is that what I am describing here are not hardfast and clearly defined institutions, but are rather somewhat amorphous, overlapping traditions of opinions, ideas, and approaches to language use and linguistic representation, sometimes embodied in authorizing institutions but not always. An individual speaker and an individual specialist may participate in more than one of these regimes of authority at one time depending on (for the speaker) the speech situation or (for the specialist) the context of his or her argument, and even a singular adherence to one authority over another may still be quite "dialogic" in nature, in that it is conditioned by the desire simply to be not the "other." A second caveat that needs to be made is that this approach may be misunderstood as one which is reifying these traditions of representing Arabic, which is engaging in another kind of essentializing discourse about Arabic. This is a danger which is inherent in any exercise in representation, especially one which is as abstract and general as the present one. Suffice it to say that the above "representation of the representations" is meant to be a first approximation to conveying the sense of these different traditions of linguistic authority in the East and West as seen by individuals who participate in those systems, who may well understand it in reified terms. My goal in this short overview of this approach is to note the limitations of these representations, to note how they reflect, or do not reflect, the value systems of the culture(s) as a whole, to what extent they overlap in the practice of the individuals involved, and to indicate (even though in a rough, preliminary fashion) the ramifications of that overlap both for linguistic usage in Arabic and for the specialist tradition of linguistic analysis. Finally, it is important to note that my ultimate idea is not to say that this side or that side is wrong. Rather, it is to say that what makes one side "right" in one area is oftentimes overextended to inappropriate areas, or used as "currency" (i.e., as a legitimating force) in making other statements in other unrelated areas or topics, resulting in the "inflation" of the original insight, and its possible subsequent devaluation as an intellectual currency, with the potential loss of the original insight.
ON VARIATION IN ARABIC

Each of the values representing these various regimes of authority, both traditionalist and modernist, have made an appearance at one time or another in the many representations of Arabic diglossia that have appeared over the last fifty years or so. Originally, Western representations of Arabic were influenced by traditional methods of grammatical analysis as found in the Western classical tradition: puristic, nonvariationist, text-based (the texts being most especially prescriptivist works of grammar). This regime still has great influence in Arabic L2 pedagogy, but in a much more simplified and watered down form. The actual analysis of Arabic grammatical texts as done by European and American linguists tends to have more of an historical character to it, with the grammar texts being the object of a historical analysis of ideas and their development rather than a source for direct linguistic understanding of “the Arabic language.” Each of the steps outlined above in the development of linguistic sciences in nineteenth-century Europe which served to gradually undermine the Western traditionalist approaches were retraced for Arabic, and each had its Arabic or Semitic counterpart. For example, the development of comparative Semitic studies in Europe followed the success and interest generated by comparative Indo-European studies, and represents a kind of counterpart to the latter tradition, as noted in Olender (1992). The application of the methods of dialect geography to Arab dialects began at a much later period than was the case for European dialects, beginning in the colonial period at the end of the nineteenth century in Arab regions occupied by the French and British (North Africa, Egypt, and later the Levant and Iraq). These approaches were for many decades carried out by Europeans for Europeans, and, with some important exceptions, still are, reflecting the wide chasm between the dominant traditionalist regime in Arab countries and one part of the variationist wing of modernist linguistic discourse.

Representations of Arabic diglossia

Dialect geography in fact represented the most dominant form of modernist linguistic analysis of Arabic until the 1950s, when more and more works appeared which analyzed Arabic within one of the discourses of linguistic analyses prevailing at the time, whether variationist or nonvariationist (descriptivist, structuralist, generativist, etc.). Among the most important of these works was Ferguson (1959) which introduced the notion of “diglossia” to American linguists, and helped to crystallize modernist notions about this phenomenon and set the agenda for subsequent studies. Unlike previous variationist accounts of region-based or class-based dialects, Ferguson pointed to another dimension of variation and different sorts of “sociolects,” ones which were dependent upon the interaction between a literary culture and a spoken linguistic culture within a single cultural tradition. Ferguson’s article spawned a whole subfield of subsequent sociolinguistic discourse about language variation, some of it critical of the limitations of the original proposal but all crucially dependent on its ideas and insights. These are approaches which include the “levels” approach (represented in Blanc 1960; Badawi 1973; and many others), the ESA approach (as found in the work of T. F. Mitchell and the Leeds project), the “radically modernist” linguistic approach of Kaye (1972), and the recent work on standard dialects. All of these approaches, being modernist, deal almost exclusively with spoken Arabic, and are concerned with describing the linguistic habits of the Arabic “native speaker,” but they interact in interesting ways with traditionalist discourse about Arabic especially with regard to the modernist topos of linguistic “vitality” (versus traditionalist notions of “continuity” and “competition”) and “value-neutrality” (versus traditionalist notions of “purity” and prescriptivism).

The most fruitful of these areas for Arabic diglossic research has been the “levels of Arabic” approach, which sought to deal with the variation delimited by the diglossic approach by dividing the linguistic continuum up into (more or less) discrete levels. In essence these analyses sought to decrease the amount of variation by assigning aspects of it to different and distinguishable parts of the continuum, thereby decreasing the amount of variation at any one level and making each level more amenable to analysis. The methods and labels used in these analyses derived from general sociolinguistic studies on social dialects, and referred to the influence of topic, context, education of speaker, relative status of speaker-hearer, among other factors, in conditioning the use of one or other of these “sociolects,” as seen in Ferguson’s initial labeling of fusha as the “high” (H) variety and colloquial as the “low” (L) variety Blanc (1960) used a rather small sample gleaned from Arabic speakers from different Arab countries residing in the United States, and referred to the levels he delimited in terms of their proximity to either the classical or to the colloquials. Badawi (1973), on the other hand, was concerned primarily with Arabic as used in Egypt, and used labels that referred to the proximity of the linguistic forms to one end of the continuum or the other, but phrased in such a way that it made explicit reference to the education level and possibly the social class of the speaker. Badawi’s work therefore made much more explicit claims about the social functions of these different varieties within Egyptian society than did other approaches, and made more reference than other analyses to the importance of the written tradition as part of the continuum, reflecting a traditionalist concern with “continuity.” In addition, Blanc, Badawi, and others have been careful to emphasize the abstract nature of the levels that they have delimited, and to warn against their reification. But some reification is almost inevitable even in the most careful analysis, and is unavoidable in analyses (such as those of the Leeds project on ESA) which strive to reify their chunk of the continuum.

Researchers on the Leeds project viewed ESA as an autonomous linguistic entity, worthy of its own grammar (albeit of a variationist sort). Also, whereas Badawi’s analysis was intradialectal (only concerned with Egyptian Arabic), those of the ESA group were explicitly interdialectal. In other words, the ESA group attempted to both describe and actively reify a transdialiectal form of Arabic. What...
they shared was a focus on a rather large slice of the continuum (it might almost be
called a "chunk" and not a "slice"), and they seemed to believe in it as an
autonomous language type, with more variation than most languages but one
which was nonetheless capable of being successfully analyzed enough to write a
grammar of it, in a variationist spirit. Even more so than the "levelers" this group
reified and canonized their chunk of the continuum. However, there are problems
with their representation of variation in Arabic, involving both internal
contradictions as well as in their manipulations of the various cultural topoi.5

Firstly, in distinguishing themselves from other diglossia researchers, they
sometimes run into contradictions. For example, Mitchell notes that "diglossia
does not provide an adequate descriptive framework for ESA" (1980:103), yet at
the beginning of the same paper he outlined five categories of style which look
suspiciously close to the "levels" one finds in a diglossic study. El Hassan (1977)
criticizes "diglossic" approaches for being either too fuzzy or not fuzzy enough,
and fails to recognize the same traits in his own analysis. For example, in
criticizing Ferguson he claims that the "specialization of function" for H and L
cannot be maintained because language is a fuzzy phenomenon which defies
rigidity. However he also criticizes Ferguson because of his failure to recognize
ESA as a separate and autonomous "level" from H and L, which is just about as
unfuzzy as one can get. El Hassan (1977) also criticizes Badawi (1973) because
there is overlapping between the proposed levels and their functions (i.e., it is too
fuzzy), but in El Hassan (1978) he notes that "the variants in [his own]
continuum are neither discrete nor homogeneous but gradual and varied." There
is further confusion as to the exact nature of ESA, and the extent of its autonomy
or dependence. El Hassan (1977) says that colloquial and ESA can and should
be distinguished analytically, and that one should study ESA without recourse to
Classical or colloquial, but El Hassan (1978) says that ESA draws on both
colloquial and MSA, and Mitchell (1980) claims that "every [ESA] form must
be passed through stylistic and regional sieves before it can be classified"
(1980:97). Mitchell (1985) makes the rather unclear claim that "ESA is its own
variety of Arabic, even though it draws heavily upon both MSA and the
vernacular" (1985:56) — that is, ESA is autonomous, but is also heavily
dependent. At several points Mitchell makes the claim that "as the koine needs a
vernacular base, so it needs a written superstructure" (1980:98), but this
statement runs counter to statements such as the following: "the lexico-
grammatical regularities of ESA are not those of MSA. . . . For example the
vernacular system of distinction in a given verbal tense is imposed throughout
the overall region on the MSA system, which provides the basis of stylistically
formal items in ESA" (Mitchell 1985:46).

For both El Hassan and Mitchell the image that was intended to be projected
in these analyses was that of a modernist analysis, with generative rules and
constraints of a linguistic science, but here too contradictions arose in their
critiques of others. For example, El Hassan criticizes Kaye's notion of Modern
Standard Arabic (MSA) as "ill-defined" and claimed that his own object of study
(ESA) had generative and predictive rules, yet later he also accepts Labov's

notion of "inherent variability," described as the inconsistent application of
rules, without any apparent motivation, or which are constrained in unknown
ways, which sounds very much like Kaye's "ill-defined."

In pursuit of uncovering these constraints and the rules governing variants,
both El Hassan and Mitchell were pursuing representations which are highly
valued in modernist linguistic discourse and which thus have the appearance of a
"science." Their application in this context, however, seems less than adequate,
in part because of the unseen contradictions of the approach (i.e., El Hassan's
notion of rule-governed constraints masks the arbitrariness and selectivity of
the process, making it appear much less fuzzy than even he himself thinks it to be).
However the analyses of El Hassan and Mitchell also reflect a deeper and more
abiding conflict, namely that between the values and the topoi of modernist
linguistics and those of traditionalist discourse. The difference between the two
researchers' stances can be seen most immediately in what they allow as being
typical ESA features and what they put on the periphery. For example, El Hassan
(1977) criticized others for saying that case vowels were not a part of ESA, and
claimed that they were not just present but were an important aspect of ESA:
"a fairly large proportion of educated spoken Arabic does carry full marks of
classical 'i'trab" (El Hassan 1977:121). Mitchell (1980:102), on the other hand,
states explicitly that case vowels are not part of ESA, and Mitchell (1986) also
contradicts El Hassan with the claim that while sentences containing the
negative particles lam and lan may be heard in ESA contexts, they nevertheless
are too "high-flown" for inclusion in ESA, along with the additional claim that
colloquial numbers are preferred in ESA, not classical.

Yet while El Hassan's views here may reflect an Arab bias, and Mitchell's may
reflect a non-Arab bias, they both interact with their cultural other to a sufficient
degree to make such a simple dichotomy impossible. That is, El Hassan uses
modernist methods and arguments in the pursuit of his (ultimately traditionalist)
goal, while Mitchell adopts what may be termed a "nouvelle traditionalist"
stance, in calling for a "new standard" based on ESA, not Classical Arabic. For
example, El Hassan (1978) criticizes the "prescriptive" approach of linguists (in
their talking of forms of the same language ["Arabic"], and not recognizing
variation), but when he reanalyzes "variation" as "change in progress" (1978:37)
and not as inherent variation, this leads to the explicit claim that colloquial is
"changing in the direction of "fuṣḥa, even to the point of his projecting the
existence of a "pure fuṣḥa" speaker based on his chart of that change:

[T]he grammar is dynamic — moving progressively away from the deep
basilectal (very stigmatized) forms /dawwati/, through less stigmatized, but
still basilectal form /dai/, to the prestige form /haaṣa/, and ultimately to the
most prestigious form of all /haadha/. The gaps in the table (i.e., at the
"highest" level) might conceivably be bridged if the sample were
representative of the population, in which case it is HIGHLY PROBABLE
that Lec 7 [a pure fuṣḥa speaker] might be proved to exist. (El Hassan
1978:50)
He ultimately inverts the relative weights of the two sides of the equation (spoken versus written) by implying that somehow the written language is the more unmarked or primary type, while the spoken has become (or is becoming) a limited and marked type:

[The basillect (i.e., colloquial dialect) is part of almost all educated Arabs’ passive knowledge and does remain available to them, to rather varying degrees, for such stylistic effects as the telling of folk tales, etc. (El Hassan 1978:50)]

In other words, El Hassan has used modernist methods and categories in order to prove or support a rather traditionalist view of the Arabic language situation, namely that SPOKEN ARABIC (i.e., ESA) IS BECOMING MORE “CLASSICAL.”

Mitchell also seems to subvert the modernist spirit of his analyses by engaging in a call for a new kind of prescriptivism, namely the normativization and institutionalization of ESA as a new standard for both writing and speaking. This is seen in Mitchell’s rather plaintive call at the conclusion of several of his papers for an official Arab recognition of the object of his research so that it might be further researched and an official and “authoritative grammar” finally written. Later he becomes more explicit in his criticism of “prescriptivist” views: Classical Arabic “inhibits the growth” of a spoken standard, it is an “artificial” and unintelligible one (1985:48). Yet even as he rails against this prescriptivism, he is prescribing another kind of spoken and written standard, but one which is closer to SPOKEN Arabic, and hence is more “living” and thus more highly valued in modernist, linguistic terms.

The interplay between traditionalist and modernist linguistic discourses in the works of the ESA school may account for some of the contradictions and tensions which are apparent in their work. It is also indicative, however, of the dialogic nature of their analyses: rather than being purely either modernist or traditionalist, their analyses interweave strands of each. At most times they consciously adopt one way of thinking (modernist) and define themselves against the other, but at other times they unconsciously adopt a position or stance associated with the “other.” Such a dialogic interweaving of positions is discernible in even the most overtly modernist and Western-biased analysis of diglossia, that of Kaye (1972). Whereas others saw diglossic variation as being amenable to analyses and understanding through partitioning and labeling and/or reification, Kaye viewed the kind of variation which appears in diglossic situation as being too “unruly” for proper linguistic analysis, and declared that the kind of Arabic described in diglossic situations was “ill-defined.” In claiming this, Kaye is a strict modernist, valorizing natively spoken language over all else: At one point he characterizes Classical Arabic throughout its history as “artificial” (and hence “ill-defined”) and, despite his avowedly antiprescriptivist attitude, prescribes a more “well-defined” substitute for MSA as a written language, namely the Arabic colloquials. To top it off, he also prescribes the use of Latin script for this new colloquial standard, since apparently even Arabic script is much too ill-defined for his tastes. But although

Kaye’s characterizations are exaggerated and rhetorically very negative toward Arabic (e.g., characterizing a language as “ill-defined” hints at the presence of an internal flaw or “illness,” and saying that it is “artificial” insinuates that it is “lifeless,” i.e., “dead”), his analyses still contain a degree of insight which cannot be overlooked, and they point to a problem which a great many people spent a great deal of time (and paper) trying to come to grips with, for the most part unsuccessfully, namely the huge amount of individual (and seemingly random) variation in the forms of Arabic as spoken by educated Arabs. One indication of the failure of these approaches to adequately handle this variation is the fact that both Kaye and the ESA group, despite their impeccably modernist credentials, contain prescriptivist tendencies, but in opposite directions: Kaye tries to valorize colloquial Arabic (and Latin script as well) as a vehicle of Arab high culture, while the ESA group try to valorize their own reification of a “middle layer” (namely, ESA) as a vehicle of literary culture, worthy of its own grammar and institutionalization. It is almost as if linguists, once they begin to discuss “standard languages,” somehow get pulled into a prescriptivist or normative vortex: an overt stand “against” one kind of prescriptivism engenders a new kind of prescriptivism, generally a valorization of one’s object of study.

**Parkinson on Arabic: The rhetoric of cultural diglossia**

Dil Parkinson’s work represents a quite different approach from the above, having not just a different goal in mind but one which adopts different values and a different methodological and rhetorical approach. Parkinson tries to mix or play off the valorization of both modernist linguistic views as well as traditionalist Arab ones, to directly confront Western views with Arab ones but using Western argumentation and values. His work, like the previous works discussed above, at times contains “prescriptivist tendencies” but these seem to be adopted as a rhetorical stance to further one strand of the overall argument, however they nevertheless have important implications for Arabic L2 pedagogy.

Parkinson (1990) uses two topoi from dominant Western linguistic discourses (variation and vitality) to order to support a view of Arabic which is more sympathetic in some ways to the dominant Arab view of their language, but which is nevertheless from a decidedly western vantage point. He argues against those Western linguists who have called MSA artificial (thus lacking “vitality”), by noting that since MSA is a written language, variation in orthography (based on varied “native-user” intuitions) is equivalent to phonological variation in a spoken language. The implication is that “variation = vitality” and thus MSA is a “living” language.

The distinction between “native speakers” and “native users” is an interesting turn in the argument, and it seems to capture an important insight which could be used to examine in more detail the nature of MSA and its functions. It is an insight, however, which is not extended or detailed in an explicit manner, perhaps because it implicitly distinguishes MSA from other, natively “acquired”
types of languages, an idea which would divert attention from Parkinson’s main objective of valorizing MSA as a “living” language, just like any other language.

The multifarious strands of this argument indicate that the definitions of a linguistic variety as “language” or “dialect”, as “real” or “artificial” are not done in a vacuum. Rather, they are definitions away from something and toward something else, mixing as they do aspects of different regimes of authority (or “cultural codes”) in a rather intricate and subtle manner. For example, explicitly, Parkinson is arguing against Kaye’s characterization of MSA as “ill-defined” and “artificial,” a definition which was based on the very thing that Parkinson uses to characterize it in the opposite manner as “living”, namely widespread seemingly unconditioned variation in MSA usage. In doing this, he is implicitly defining himself away from the view of modernist linguists that classical languages such as MSA are “dead” despite the fact that they still have social and cultural functions in a society. But this implies, at the same time, that he is also arguing for a viewpoint which is more in line with the Arab point of view, which takes it for granted that Literary Arabic is a part of the linguistic and cultural life of Arab societies, which, while it may be in need of better educational methods, is nonetheless vibrant and constantly evolving. However, in using “vitality” and “variation” as the basis for his arguments, Parkinson is also defining himself away from Arab traditionalists. What he terms “variation” (and hence “vitality”) is another man’s “ill-defined” (hence “artificial” as in Kaye) is still another’s “mistake” (hence in need of prescriptive rules), as in the Arab-traditionalist viewpoint. While the notion of vitality (as in “having native speakers”) has been for modernist linguists one of the most important criteria in characterizing Arabic in its various forms, for the Arabs themselves (both specialists and non-specialists) the notion of vitality appears hardly at all in most of the writings of the “language maven” (with the exception of Salama Musa who is explicitly dealing with Western conceptions of Arabic), and not at all in the writings of Arab-language specialists. Rather, there are other notions or topoi (noted above) which are far more important and which function in a way that is analogous to “vitality” for modernists, namely, the notions of “continuity,” as well as the topos of “purism,” from which derives the “prescriptivism” so criticized by modernists.

This topos of “prescriptivism” also plays an important role in Parkinson’s articles, which reflect the intricacies of mixing the various regimes of authority or cultural codes. Parkinson (1990) sets up as his opposition the prescriptivism of traditional Arab normative grammarians (influenced by the cultural valorization of Arabic linguistic “purity”) to which he yokes the abstractionism of modern theoretical linguists, both of which he criticizes for ignoring linguistic reality. But despite this antiprescriptivist stance, prescriptivist rules play an important role in his studies, serving both as the evaluative measure for his survey of “how well Egyptians know MSA” (Parkinson 1993a, 1996) as well as having important implications for the way that MSA is taught to L2 learners of the language (Parkinson 1993b).

Parkinson (1993a) uses a prescriptivist basis to evaluate native-speaker performance on proficiency-oriented (ACTFL-style) tests of four basic communicative skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening) plus grammar knowledge. Although he means to elucidate MSA as part of Arabs’ communicative lives (reflecting a modernist view), the structure of the test, and the basis for its evaluative measure is taken exclusively from the prescriptivist domain, and reflects a very traditionalist and classical bias. Parkinson (1996) also engages in this cultural codemixing by combining elements from an Arab perspective (prescriptivism, “unity,” and “continuity”) with modernist, sociolinguistic notions (“linguistic continuum” and “strategies of use”). His most prescriptivist pronouncements concern the “unrecognized norms” for producing fusha in noofficial settings with relaxed standards (“inabilities of speakers have led to avoidance of ‘imperfect’ norms” (Parkinson 1996:66)) to which he brings to bear the modernist notion that what speakers are engaging in here are not necessarily (or not just) “mistakes” but rather “strategies of use” whose goal is to make their speech different enough from colloquial to be as distinctive as the situation demands. These insights, derived from mixing the “codes” of traditionalist and modernist domains of authority, are then associated with a second insight, which also derives from mixing the value systems of the modernist and the traditionalist: the modernist view of diglossia as the “bilingualism of the monolingual” (i.e., that fusha and colloquial are a continuum conceived of as one system, reflecting modernist notions of linguistic continuity), meshes nicely with the Arab view of the cultural unity and continuity of their language both historically and in the present. This “mixed-code” analysis comes quite close to reflecting the native perspective of the unity of the system and thus provides an insight into one aspect of their language behavior.10

SUMMARY: REGIMES OF DOMINATION, LINGUISTIC, CULTURAL, AND ACADEMIC

In sum, Parkinson’s various articles on the subject of diglossia exemplify the diacritic nature of linguistic theorizing about Arabic diglossia: in changing or challenging one system of authority Parkinson (and other linguistic researchers) have borrowed a topos from one “regime of authority” (or discourse) and have used it in part to legitimate and support their argument for or against aspects of another (or the selfsame) “regime of authority.” Linguists work within various regimes of authority (traditionalist versus modernist, theoretical versus applied, sociolinguistic versus L2 pedagogical, etc.) and they may interact and crosscut with other academic disciplines with an interest in language (literary studies, history, etc.). In addition to these various regimes of academic authority and discourses, linguists may also cross the cultural divide at many points, adopting or rejecting (“defining away from”) many of the traditional concerns and ideas about what is important or valuable in Arabic from a cultural point of view or from an academic point of view. A linguistic analysis is best understood as the interaction of these various systems of authority and authorization.
In a similar fashion, the form of speech that a speaker of Arabic (or any language, for that matter) comes out with is a reflection of the intersection of a variety of regimes of authority or domination within his or her culture. In this sense a regime of domination is a focal point of individual and group feelings of identity and solidarity, and individuals create their identity based on the position they take vis-à-vis these various regimes — adopting them, rejecting them, sometimes doing both but at different times, or attempting a synthesis of sorts. One problem that linguists have had in dealing with diglossia is that they have tried to define these behaviors solely in linguistic terms, adding (perhaps) some social terms, but left out of the equation are whole areas of social life and behavior which stand behind these language practices and may not directly impinge on them but nonetheless do affect them in important ways. That is, some of the various “levels” represent distinct linguistic repertoires associated strongly or weakly with an aspect of a larger social or cultural endeavor or experience (authoritative practices such as writing, education, speeches, etc., solidarity practices such as social bonding, sports, entertainment, etc.), while other levels represent the interaction of these repertoires in an individual’s speech (such as koinéized colloquial or ESA). There are at least three primary “regimes of domination (or authority or solidarity)” which shape spoken Arabic linguistic repertoires: intranational or localistic, pan-Arab, and international. Localistic regimes of domination involve the valorization of the speech of local centers of linguistic autonomy, often that of the capital cities but sometimes that of a specific class. This is reflected in a dialect being termed a “prestige” dialect or a “nonstandard standard” and has been examined in more recent work in sociolinguistics such as that of Haeri, Holes, and others. The pan-Arab regime of domination valorizes Classical Arabic (or its modern reflex, MSA) and the cultural heritage, and is the most dominant and authoritative of these regimes in terms of institutional support and cultural weight. In general, studies of diglossia have been concerned with the linguistic reflexes of this regime of authority, since it is the interaction (or competition) of this regime with the localistic ones which has produced the types of variation labeled “interdialect Arabic” or “koinéized colloquial” or “ESA.” In addition to these intra-Arab relations of domination and authority, there is an “international” regime of linguistic authority or domination, which reflects the dominant economic, political, and technological status of European languages, primary among them being English. This regime is reflected in the conflict or competition between Arabic and these colonial and postcolonial foreign languages, as measured in the amount of borrowings from them, the extent of bilingualism, and the perceived necessity of foreign language education in these languages. These are not the only regimes of domination which affect speech — there may be others, just as each of these regimes may be viewed along different axes (historical) or according to different media (oral, written, printed, etc.). Individuals relate to these various regimes in a dialogic manner — that is, they go back and forth adopting the value system of one or the other as the context demands or as they see fit, in order to present themselves to others as a particular kind of person, thereby shaping and creating their own individual identity. Language specialists (especially those who try to straddle different domains as many Arabists do) do a similar sort of thing, shifting back and forth between different value systems, fashioning an analysis of “diglossia” which is itself “diglossic.”

NOTES
1 The following overview of the Arabic language value system is an attempt to summarize in a simplistic and superficial fashion a complex and variegated progression of ideas about Arabic as crystallized in discourse by Arabs about their language both directly (in grammatical and other linguistic studies), as well as indirectly (in historical and other nonlinguistic writings). It tries to represent in a succinct fashion the most dominant regime of linguistic authority in Arabic tradition, that of Classical Arabic, and due to space restrictions I cannot detail alternative regimes of linguistic authority which I refer to later as “regimes of solidarity” (dealing with colloquial-colloquial relations), and “regimes of sophistication” (dealing with Arabic-European relations).
2 Ferguson (1959b) presents a summary of some of these views on Arabic. As I have noted in Eisele (ms), Ferguson’s views themselves may be taken as reflecting a broader set of modernist linguistic “myths” or assumptions which must be recognized as such as well.
3 In the following I am limiting my description to Anglo-American analyses of diglossia, and cannot therefore discuss some important works which fall outside of that tradition, such as Diem (1974) and Cohen (1962), among others.
4 I will not have the space to examine the recent contributions of those who have pointed out the sociolinguistic importance of prestige or “standard” dialects, such as Holes (1986), Abdel Jawad (1987), and Haeri (1996). Even though researchers since at least Ferguson (1959) and perhaps earlier have noted the importance of “standard dialects” to the proper understanding of Arabic linguistic behavior, the study of this phenomenon generally took a back seat to diglossic analyses. Only recently have sociolinguists come to view the importance and effect of standard dialects on variation, and have viewed dialect prestige factors as more important in language description than diglossic effects. In one sense, this tendency represents a return to dialect valorization, but within a much more developed sociolinguistic framework.
5 The most immediately obvious problem with their representation involves the lack of data supplied by the various articles and books, given that upwards of twenty to thirty hours of ESA conversations were taped by the Leeds project. One indication of the paucity of data is that one sentence (concerning something a “gibal shilvas” said) is repeated in about five different articles.
6 Part of this may be explained by noting that out of the twenty-one hours of data he mentions as his database, only three and one-half hours come from radio/TV; but almost all of his examples of case endings in this context come from radio/TV, not from conversational contexts.
7 It is important to note that Kaye, against whom Parkinson is explicitly arguing, is dealing only with spoken MSA in his analysis which characterizes it as “ill-defined” or “artificial,” since he notes at one point that he would characterize written MSA as a well-defined language. Thus Parkinson’s remarks are slightly off the mark here. But note that this is a common problem in discussing diglossia: most writers (Parkinson excepted) do not make an explicit (or if they do, not consistent) distinction between written MSA and spoken MSA.
8 Parkinson’s anthropomorphic characterizations of MSA are quite strong and rhetorically effective in his argument that MSA is a “living, breathing” language: at one point MSA has a “will of its own,” while later it is characterized as having a choice in “the life it chooses to lead” (1990:293).

9 I am using the term “maven” in the (slightly perjorative) sense of a “nonspecialist expert,” as exemplified in the writings of William Safire and John Simon on the matter of English language use.

10 Parkinson (1993b) also contains an argument that contains an even more complex mixing of cultural codes, reflecting an even wider array of regimes of authority, whether traditionalist or modernist, Arab or Western, but space considerations do not allow a review of it.

REFERENCES


Eisele, John (ms). “Myth, Values, and Practice in the Representation of Arabic.”


