

Diglossia: A Linguistic Phenomenon of Arabic in Jordan

Prof. Mahmoud Qudah

Princess Sumaya University for Technology, Jordan

Abstract

This study sought a better understanding of diglossia, as a phenomenon that repeatedly occurs in Arabic. Diglossia involves the use of two varieties of the same language by the same society for different functions. The study gave a brief analysis of the origins of diglossia in Arabic and made use of five recordings of both formal and informal speech. The recordings were of three of the Jordanian Parliament members, a speech of a religious man and a member of the researcher's own family. Data analysis indicated that diglossia was found in two varieties, high and low Arabic and that these varieties are found in most situations.

Key Words: Diglossia, Arabic language, Language variety, Low variety, High variety

1.0 Introduction

Sociolinguistics is “that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon. It investigates the field of language and society and has close connections with the social sciences, especially social psychology, anthropology, human geography, and sociology” (Trudgill, 1995).

Sociolinguists have recently investigated many new language phenomena, such as language varieties, speech communities, colloquialism, vernaculars, dialects and diglossia. Diglossia refers to “the presence of a high and a low style or standard in a language, one for formal use in writing and some speech situations and one for colloquial use” (Harris and Hodges, 1981)

In many speech communities where speakers use two or more varieties of the same language in different situations, a phenomenon called diglossia exists. The purpose of this paper is to focus on diglossia in Arabic, which is one of the languages that have been mentioned by

Ferguson (1959) to be examples of diglossic languages.

Diglossia is a phenomenon that occurs simultaneously by Arabic speakers. Diglossia involves the use of two varieties of the same language by the same society for different functions. The study discusses the origins of diglossia in Arabic and analyses five recordings of both formal and informal speech. The recordings were of three of the Jordanian Parliament members, a speech of a religious man and a member of the researcher's own family.

The study is an attempt to show that diglossia can be found in most speech contexts and that the different levels of a language, i.e. High and Low varieties, are usually complementary.

2.0 'Diglossia' as a linguistic term

It is said that the term diglossia was introduced from French ‘diglossie’ by Ferguson (1959), who first used this term in an article he wrote in 1959. According to him, diglossia refers to ‘one particular kind of standardization where two varieties of a

language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play. (Ferguson, 1959)

This means that when two languages or language varieties exist side by side in a speech community and each one is used for different purposes, diglossia exists. According to Richards et al (1992), one is a standard variety called the high variety or (H- variety) which is used formally. The other one is called the low variety or (L- variety) and is used informally in family contexts and social interactions.

3.0 Literature review

Ferguson wrote his paper on diglossia in 1959 and encouraged more studies on this issue by stating the existence of 'an appeal for further study of [diglossic] phenomenon and related ones' (Ferguson, 1959). Therefore, linguists have made various efforts and studies on this phenomenon. In the following, I will consider some of these studies and how they tried to reach a better and comprehensive understanding of diglossia as a linguistic phenomenon.

Trying to explain how the linguistic system of modern standard Arabic works, the

Egyptian linguist, Badawi (1973) presented a study on the sociolinguistic situation in Egypt. His study was applied on most of the Arabic contexts. Badawi finally rejected Ferguson's analysis of diglossia which assumes that H and L varieties are in complementary in the Arab world and other communities (Versteegh, 2004)

In contrast with Ferguson's model and in attempt to fill the gap between the two varieties of standard and colloquial Arabic, Badawi has stated the following five-level model:

1. Classical Arabic, which is only used in Qur'anic recitation.
2. Modern standard Arabic, which is used in formal contexts nowadays.
3. Colloquial of the intellectuals, which is the formal spoken language of educated people
4. Colloquial variety of the literate, which is the informal spoken language of educated people.
5. Colloquial of the illiterate, which is the language used by uneducated people.

It is noticed from the above levels that Badawi's study represented the different classes of the Egyptian society. His study supported the assumption that language can be classified according to social domains. Badawi also showed that there is a gap between standard and colloquial Arabic, and claimed that there is no duality in the Arab world, but certain levels of language. He viewed the colloquial Arabic not as a corrupt and independent from the standard Arabic, but as one of these levels mentioned above.

While Badawi's study dealt mainly with Arabic language levels, this study will deal only with two levels, the standard and the colloquial Arabic.

Unlike Badawi, Kaye (1975) viewed Ferguson's study from another angle. According to him, Ferguson neglected an important point, which he thinks to be very important. He says that his assumption of an H variety (classical Arabic) and the L variety (colloquial Arabic) seems incorrect. (Kaye, 1975)

Kaye introduces the argument that C (colloquial Arabic) is always a well-defined system of language, whereas classical Arabic is ill-defined. In other words, all colloquial forms of Arabic are

learned natively and must, according to Kaye, be well defined systems. On the other hand, the non-colloquial forms of Arabic, which are learned non-natively, as those learned in school, for example, classical and modern standard Arabic are ill-defined. Kaye (1975) assumes that the Arabic diglossia involves 'the interaction of two systems, one well-defined, the other ill-defined'.

Kaye also states that most linguists agree that modern standard Arabic is the marked system of Arabic; whereas the colloquial is unmarked, i.e. modern Arabic marks many more categories of grammar than does any form of colloquial Arabic. He resumes that Colloquial Arabic can have both marked and unmarked grammatical features, which sometimes are in line with classical and sometimes not. However, Colloquial Arabic is grammatically simpler than classical Arabic.

A third study on diglossia was conducted in America in 2011 by Eva Hashem Aramouni from California State University. The purpose of her study was to review the core Arabic curriculum in higher education at four-year colleges and language institutions in the United States.

In her study, she investigated students' perceptions and learning preferences for spoken Arabic. She also examined instructors' perceptions on teaching preferences of spoken Arabic. The students interviewed for this research had all traveled to the Arabic speaking world for language immersion study, and were considered to have acquired high-intermediate proficiency. The primary countries of destination were Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

The main question aimed at finding the impact that diglossia has on the quality of Arabic language instruction of undergraduate students in the United States. To answer this, the second question investigated the students' learning preferences and the third question investigated the instructors' teaching preferences. The last one attempted to find the differences between students who study spoken Arabic before immersion and those who do not.

Based on four research questions, the findings of the study indicated that diglossic situations and usefulness of MSA top the list of the students' and instructors' themes that emerged from data analysis. The study revealed that some Arabic programs are not preparing the students sufficiently in the Arabic spoken language acquisition. However, it also documented that both student and instructor participants think Modern Standard Arabic should continue to hold a prominent place in the Arabic curriculum.

This study is going to be different. It will depend on recording the speech of certain in a Jordanian environment. The speakers are both highly educated and non-highly educated. The target speech will be analysed to reach specific results.

4.0 Theories of the origins of diglossia in Arabic

Researchers and scholars tried eagerly to investigate the origins of diglossia in Arabic. Therefore, they put many theories to handle this issue.

4.1 Koine

This theory is considered to be the most dominant theory in terms of the origins of the Arabic diglossia. The term Koine was

'derived from Greek denoting a lingua franca that develops out of a mixture of languages or dialects' (Freeman, 1996). It is assumed that the common source of all the Arabic dialects that exist outside the Arabian Peninsula was a variety spoken in the Islamic military camps at the time of the Islamic expansion, and this variety was different from the language of the Quran. In other words, these dialects are not considered to be corrupt form; however, they have always had a separate existence from the classical language since they have existed outside the Arabic peninsula. (Freeman, 1996)

This assumption indicates that most modern Arabic dialects were derived from a Koine which existed alongside the classical Arabic and was not based on any particular regional area. Bishop states that, According to Ferguson, diglossia started as a result of the Koine and considered to be the origin of Modern colloquial Arabic. (Freeman, 1996)

4.2 Language Change

This theory assumes that the differences between modern standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic are simply a matter of language drift. It is known that languages change over time, so Arabic is subject to change. It's believed that natural Semitic change tendencies (as Arabic is one of the Semitic languages) and basic effects among others are the real reason behind diglossia in Arabic.

It is also agreed that language changes likely occur in town dialects rather than in the dialects of the Bedouin tribes who live in the Arabian deserts. This is mainly due to the fact that dialects remained unchanged for several centuries after the arrival of Islam.

On the other hand, there are claims that Ferguson's argument in terms of the Koine is not convenient. He argues that the opposite of his argument was correct, i.e. the Koine itself was resulted from the changes of the Arabic dialects, and not as Ferguson said that the Koine was the origin of the modern Arabic dialects. (Kaye, 1975)

4.3 Pidginization and Creolisation

According to Richards et al (1992), Pidgin means a 'language which develops as a contact language when groups of people who speak different languages try to communicate with one another on a regular basis'. In other words, when speakers of one language, for example, engage in trade with speakers of another, and neither knows the other's language, the language used between them is called Pidgin. Creole on the other hand, arises when a pidgin language becomes the native language of a new generation of children as a result of this contact.

Versteegh (2004) argues that the two theories mentioned above regarding the development of Arabic diglossia are either a focus on an explanation of the similarities or the differences of the dialects without treating the other side. In his estimation, Versteegh argues that an affective theory should deal with both sides of the Arabic dialects.

By this hypothesis, Versteegh dealt with both the similarities and the differences between the modern dialects of Arabic. To prove his hypothesis, he gave an example of mixed marriages between Muslim Arab men and non-Arab women of the conquered peoples during the Islamic conquest. This marriage, he said, would likely have led to communication using a

pidginized form of Arabic and the children who would be delivered as a result of this marriage would have probably spoken a creolised Arabic.

5.0 Data collection

The process of collecting the needed data depended on recording the speech of two different types of people. Some of them were members of the Jordanian parliament, whose speech were taken in two different contexts. One took place in the parliament by one of the members and the second, in which two parliament members were engaged, occurred during a programme on the Jordanian television. Other speeches included a religious speech through a religious lesson and of a member of the researcher's own family.

6.0 Data Analysis

Having been collected, the data was analysed to see the extent to which every speaker used the high and low varieties of Arabic language. It was to be a difficult task because it was very important to keep up with every single word said and then to classify these words according their being of the low or high varieties of the language.

The results of the analysis were then shown as proportions in per cent, so that clear indicators can be taken and depended upon when discussing the data. The following table shows the percentage of using the high and low varieties of Arabic by every target speaker. Notice that 'Pm' means a parliament member and that the time was taking by minutes.

Speakers	Length of Speech	High Variety Use	Low Variety Use
Pm 1	15.6 m	42%	57%
Pm 2	15.6 m	30.4 %	69.5%
Pm 3	12.4 m	98%	2%
Person 1	9 m	92.4%	7.6%
Person 2	9 m	8.8%	91.2%

The above table can give us a clear indicator that the low variety and high varieties of Arabic are used in almost every situation. All the above speakers have used the low and high varieties. For instance, the first two members of the parliament used the low Arabic variety more than the high one despite the fact that they were appearing on one of the TV programmes. The third parliament member showed a great mastery over the standard Arabic, i.e. the high variety, and used it almost all the time.

The high variety can also be used much in other situations rather than the parliament. The fourth speaker, who was giving a religious talk, also showed a good competency in using the high variety of Arabic. The last speaker was, in contrast, using the low variety for much of his speech.

It seemed that their use of language were affected by several factors, which included their different occupations, the level of their education, the social context in which they were speaking as well as their relations with the participants.

7. Discussion

In this section, I discuss some of the notes that appeared through the study. These notes deal with some aspects of diglossia.

7.1 Diglossia and Literacy

Literacy is a very important factor. A person's level of education can affect his/her choice of words and style. The above table showed that educated people are usually able to use standard Arabic in more than those who did not have a chance to learn, i.e. illiterate people or those who are not well-educated.

It seems that there is a real connection between diglossia and literacy. In a society where literacy prevails, less percentage of diglossia will be used. This is due to the fact that the linguistic items, i.e. the words, of the H variety will be known and used on a large scale. This means that literate people will normally be affected by what they learn at schools or universities.

7.2 Partial vs. Total Diglossia

This refers to the assumption that the H and L varieties of a language can be complementary to one another. A speaker can change his variety according to the situation that takes place. The speaker can then shift totally or partially from one variety to another. This could be illustrated either by a society where everyone controls L, but only some actively control H, or the opposite case where everyone speaks and writes H, but some also control an L variety.

The data above shows that every person used both levels of the language, i.e. High and Low varieties of Arabic. I believe this refers to the lack of the real competency when using the standard Arabic of much of the speakers. It seems that the low varieties

of Arabic are used more than the High variety in most social contexts.

7.3 Diglossia and 'Power and Solidarity'

In diglossic situations the use of H or L varieties in a given social context seems to be affected by the relationships among speakers. The use of L may be an expression of solidarity and may not be offered to speakers whose social position is superior or distant. Using L can show the intimacy or the close relationship between speakers. Similarly, H may be the only variety appropriate in a given situation because the use of L would imply a solidarity that is only reserved for members of a particular group.

The recorded speech showed that the use of both H and L varieties can give an indicator of the relationships between the participants. If their relation is close, they tend to use L, and when their speech is formal H is the alternative.

8.0 Different features of diglossia and their relation with the findings

Ferguson (1959) suggests that the different uses of H and L varieties can be described with reference to the following criteria:

8.1 Specialized Functions

One of the most important features of diglossia is the 'specialization of function for High and Low forms'(Ferguson, 1959). This means that each form has special domains to be used in. For example, the High form is used in religious sermons, letter writing, parliamentary speech, university lectures, whereas the Low form is used in informal situations such as family conversation. Sometimes the two forms might be used in one domain by switching from H to L and vice versa.

The above table shows that the High variety was used formally by the third parliament member and by the religious man, which shows that the High variety of Arabic, i.e. the standard Arabic is typically used in formal situations.

8.2 Acquisition

Low (L) is the mother tongue of speakers. All speakers learn it as a first language at home as they are more comfortable in the L form than the H. The H form is normally learnt by formal in schools.

The speech of the first parliament member and that of the fifth speaker showed that the Low variety of Arabic represented their mother tongue. They used the High variety occasionally, but they had a natural tendency to use the low variety, which was easier to them than using the High variety.

8.3 Standardization

In all the defining languages, i.e. the languages in which diglossia is existed, H is highly standardised and may have a long tradition of grammatical study associated with it. In other words, grammars, dictionaries are a large literature which is associated with it. The L form may not be standardised. In Arabic, for example, the L form has no standard grammatical rules as it differs from one Arabic region to another region, and every Arabic community has its own local L form (dialect).

The speech of the target speakers proved that the standard Arabic to which we refer as H or the High variety is really highly standardized. H variety is usually of an elevated style and certain categories that are not found in L varieties.

8.4 Prestige

H is always considered to be more highly valued than the L as a result of the fact that

the H variety is used in literature, religious texts, public speaking etc. The L variety is less associated with the written word and is often considered to be a corrupt version of H.

In other words, H is a prestigious variety of Arabic. It gives an indicator that the speaker is well-educated and of a certain social position. The third parliament member got a real competency of H variety, which showed that he is an educated and qualified person who deserves his social position as a parliament member.

8.5 Grammar and lexicon

The syntactic system of H varieties are generally thought to be more complex than the L in terms of grammatical features such as, tense, gender and number. The lexicon of the two varieties, on the other hand, is largely shared but there is a difference on account of the specific domains in which each is used. H and L may share the same phonological system, but even at this level of grammar, the H variety is felt to have more complicated phonetic features.

9. Conclusion

Having described the diglossic situation in Arabic, it seems clear that Arabic mainly has two different forms used in different domains, classical standard and colloquial Arabic. However, colloquial Arabic is very much spread in various contexts among speech communities within the Arab region, and Arabs are simply the native speakers of non- standard Arabic, whereas standard Arabic is formally and prestigiously used in some restricted domains like media and religion.

In addition, the Arabic world is a very big area with hundreds of different dialects,

which I think have not yet been studied from the point of view of diglossia by researchers and scholars. Moreover, Arabic dialects sometimes are completely different and therefore difficult to understand, especially those, which are very far from each other. In other words, the more distance between them, the more different they are.

I believe that it is natural for a language like Arabic, being used across very large areas of the world by millions of speakers of different origins, different cultures and

References:

1. Aramouni, E. (2011) The Impact of Diglossia on Arabic Language instruction in Higher Education ,California State University
2. Badawi (1973)Diglossic Situation in Egypt: Past, Present, Future
3. Ferguson C.A. (1959)Diglossia, Word, 15 (1959), pp. 325–340
4. Freeman, Andrew (1996) "Andrew Freeman's Perspectives on Arabic Diglossia" http://www-personal.umich.edu/~andyf/digl_96.htm.
5. Harris T.L. and Hodges R.E. (1981) A Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms, International Reading Association, Newark, DE (1981)
6. Kaye A.S. (1975)More on diglossia in Arabic, International Journal of Middle East Studies, 6, pp. 325–340
7. Richards, J. C., Platt, J. and Platt, H. (1992). Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics, 2nd ed. Essex, UK: Longman Publishers.
8. Sources based on WWW.Youtube .com included the speech of three Jordanian parliament members and a religious speech.
9. Trudgel, P. (1995) Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language Society, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
10. Versteegh K. (2004) The Arabic Language, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh

different social contexts, to have such strange mixtures of varieties. Language is a living thing that lives with people, so as long as we change language will change. Consequently, we cannot prevent language from changing, because change is something of its distinctive features.

People tend to use diaglossia in order to simplify the situation in which they are to show their intimacy, i.e. their being of the same social position or being equal.