

20 Language and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa

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1. Introduction

This chapter aims to review the most prominent results and interpretations emanating from research on the interaction between language and gender in the Arabic-speaking countries.¹ The vast majority of research on Arabic in this field follows the variationist sociolinguistic paradigm. (See Meyerhoff, Chapter 4 in this volume, for an overview of the treatment of gender within variationist sociolinguistics.) The early findings from Arabic appeared to contravene the general pattern of gender differentiation found elsewhere in sociolinguistic research by suggesting that Arab women use standard forms less frequently than Arab men. This apparent divergence from the pattern thought to be common forced scholars in the field to consider the case of Arabic as some sort of an anomaly. For instance, Labov (2001, 270) considered it “a widespread reversal of the positions of men and women predicted by Principle 2.” By way of interpretation, the Arabic results were attributed to Arab women playing a less prominent role in public life, a domain that was presumed to require the use of standard linguistic features. Some scholars have also suggested that the pattern found in Arabic can be explained with reference to Arab women having less opportunity for access to standard linguistic features since a functional knowledge of the Standard variety is accessible only through formal education, and illiteracy levels are generally higher among female adults in many parts of Arabic-speaking communities. However, it is now widely accepted that the early findings from Arabic were misinterpreted. An alternative and more realistic interpretation was first put forward in Ibrahim’s seminal article of 1986. Ibrahim’s framework was consolidated by the findings and interpretation of gender-differentiated patterns in Haeri’s Cairo study (1987), and by Al-Wer (1997), where findings from a range of Arabic speech communities are cited.

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The reinterpretation of gender-differentiated patterns in Arabic has led to a critical review of the traditional ways of analyzing variation in Arabic altogether, and to fundamental changes in the methods and analytical framework adopted in current research on Arabic (see Al-Wer, 2013). The bulk of this chapter will be dedicated to these issues, which will at the same time provide a review of the major works on gender differentiation in Arabic as well as future directions in the field. We begin with some necessary background information about Arabic and Arab societies.

2. Arabic and Its Milieu

Arabic is spoken as a native language by some 250 million people in 22 separate countries collectively known as the “Arab world,” which stretch from the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. Arabic is also spoken as a minority language in a number of neighboring locations, for example, Iran (Khuzestan), Uzbekistan, and Cyprus.²

Throughout the Arab world, the linguistic situation can be described as diglossic. Classical Arabic is the official Standard language (henceforth SA), used or required for use in the formal domains of the media and education and for all written purposes, while the dialects are used in informal domains and for everyday purposes. Typical of such situations is that the formal Standard language, here Classical Arabic, is not the mother tongue of anybody and while the spoken vernaculars, the mother tongues of Arabs, are extremely diverse, SA is almost uniform throughout the Arab world.³

Notwithstanding the apparent similarity in the linguistic situation as described above, it is important to emphasize that the countries of the Arab world are diverse in the ethnic composition of their populations, in social and political history, economic resources, and means of production. Literacy rates and gender parity in literacy and participation in the labor force vary tremendously. In some regions the literacy rate of the adult population of both sexes is similar to that of the developed world, whereas in other regions, the female literacy rate is as low as 28 percent. Typical of the countries of the Arab world, as of developing countries in general, is a relatively wide gap between the city and the countryside in development and access to resources and services. These sharp differences across countries and within communities have parallel social, cultural, and socioeconomic differences that influence the daily pursuits and future prospects of individuals. Therefore, global generalizations with respect to language and gender issues in Arabic as a whole remain superficial unless the analysis begins at the level of the local dialect and is situated in the local social context.

Analyses of gender as a social construct and its dynamics in Arab societies are still in the early stages of development, although important contributions have been made, especially over the past two decades, by intellectuals, social scientists, and feminist writers whose primary concern is gender inequality and questions of women’s rights.⁴ The lagging behind of Arab societies in this area is closely

connected with underdevelopment in the political systems of the Arab countries as a whole. Issues of gender politics are often treated as nationalist issues, which are tied up with the political history of the region in various ways. While the general paucity of sophisticated analyses of gender in Arab societies has adversely affected the ways in which Arabic data have been interpreted, more acutely the problem can be described as a lack of integration into sociolinguistic interpretations of the advances that have been made in other disciplines, particularly in sociology, political theory and anthropology. It is fair to say that while there has been a marked improvement in research methodologies and more generally of the quality of the data obtained from sociolinguistic research, the interpretation of gender-differentiated patterns in Arabic continues to rely on a stereotyped understanding of gender, with a few shining exceptions that will be pointed out in the course of this review.

With this background in mind, I now turn to reviewing the major findings from sociolinguistic research. I begin with the studies and analyses that deal with gender differentiation in some aspect of "discourse" and "code choice."

3. Research on Language Use and Code Choice

As mentioned above, the bulk of research on gender differentiation in Arabic is variationist in approach, dealing with variables at the level of the word for the most part and covering structural features in phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax. Research on gender differentiation in language use in Arabic, of the type that investigated the use of some of the features mentioned by Lakoff (1975), for example, "tag questions," "hedges," "interruptions," and so on, or research that deals with conversational/discourse strategies in Arabic is rather thin on the ground, and most such research focuses on explaining the behavior of women.

In the field of "code choice," and focusing in particular on Morocco, an important analysis is Fatima Sadiqi (2003).⁵ Sadiqi presents a view of the interaction between the Arabic language and gender from the perspective of "sites of power" in the Arab Islamic World, namely religion, politics, the law, and literacy, such that the domination of men in these arenas and the exclusion of women from them has created an association between the use of SA and male speech, thus establishing what Sadiqi calls "sociolinguistic androcentricity" paralleling the social and cultural patriarchy of Arab Islamic societies which is based on "space dichotomy": men are associated with the public space and women with the private space. There are thus two components to this analysis: (1) SA is associated with the public space while vernacular Arabic is associated with the private space; the exercise of real power takes place in the public space. (2) In the public space, men are dominant while women are marginalized (see Philips, Chapter 15 in this volume.) In religion, she suggests that the language of the Quran, SA, is both more accessible to and more significant for men than for women. This is because although Arab Muslim women may express strong belonging to their religion, and, by association, to SA as

the medium through which the religion is practiced (e.g., prayer and religious sermons), *public* religious practices are largely confined to men. In cases where women venture to express views on religious matters in public they are often severely rebuked and their views are seen to lack authority. For instance, Sadiqi draws attention to the hostile reactions of some sectors in Arab societies across the Arab world against the well-known thinker Nawal El Saadawi who often speaks out on controversial religious matters. Sadiqi further suggests that the confinement of women's "religious space" also leads to women having less exposure to, and hence less proficiency in, SA. In politics, Sadiqi's second site of power where SA rules supreme, women's public space, is just as marginalized, which is clearly reflected in Arab women's modest participation in political activity overall, although there are significant variations across different countries in this sphere. In literacy, women's marginalization can be seen in the gender disparity in literacy. Where gender disparity exists, it is always the women who lag behind. Since a functional knowledge of SA is closely connected with formal schooling, the relatively high rates of illiteracy among women in some parts of the Arab world denies them an important tool of competition in the public space. Literate and highly educated women can also be marginalized in this sphere; women writers, for instance, are relatively scarce. Sadiqi makes the interesting observation that "knowledge" in general is seen to threaten women's femininity, a highly valued attribute that women are expected to possess. The marginalization of women in the law can be connected with illiteracy. In this case, illiterate individuals are less likely to understand the language of the law and hence are often ignorant of their rights. The advances that have been achieved by women in the public sphere in some countries of the Arab world are recognized by Sadiqi to have linguistic consequences. Interestingly, not only is there an increase in the use of SA by women in public debates in Morocco, as a means to gain legitimacy and to compete on equal grounds with men in the public space, but there also seems to be an increase in the use of the vernacular in the media, a domain in which SA is predominant; the implication being that the increase in women's visibility in the public space has widened the domains in which the vernacular is used. This is an interesting hypothesis, although there is as yet no empirical data to establish a direct link between the increase in the use of the vernacular in the media and women's involvement. Arab women's success in gaining some recognition in the public space may be seen as a development toward recognition of the rights of marginalized groups in general, and thus the inclusion in the public domain of the vernacular, a marginalized code that is accessible to all rather than being the monopoly of an elite, may be considered as a concomitant development.

Within the same area of inquiry, code choice, Reem Bassiouney (2010) investigated gender differentiation in the use of SA and the Egyptian vernacular by educated men and women in talk shows, factoring in the intended audience and topic of discussion, in addition to the educational background and expertise of the participants in the topic of discussion. Her results overall show no differences in the frequency of usage of SA and Egyptian vernacular features between the women and the men participants, and in some cases the women in fact used SA features

more frequently than the men. The significant factor that showed positive correlation with the frequency of switches to SA features in this study was expertise in the topic of discussion rather than the sex of the speaker. Bassiouney interprets this finding as a projection of "identity." For instance, when the topic of discussion was poverty and street children, the woman participant who was a director of a nongovernmental organization that cares for street children interrupted a male journalist participant and switched to SA, thus displaying her expertise knowledge on the subject. Another extract shows a female judge switching to SA when the topic of discussion fell within her area of expertise. In this example the use of SA can be further interpreted in terms of "indexicality"; SA is associated with authority in the courtroom, and the speaker appropriates this association to give her statements an authoritative tone. Similarly, in an extract from a male member of parliament addressing the Egyptian assembly on the matter of sanctions on Iraq the speaker uses SA, rather than a mixture of SA and the Egyptian vernacular as often happens in the Egyptian parliament. Bassiouney interprets the use of SA in this example as indexing both authority and a pan-Arab identity (rather than a narrower Egyptian identity). Both the female and male participants in this research were found to appropriate the values associated with the use of SA and the Egyptian vernacular in a meaningful way.

In another study, Bassiouney (2009) investigated the language of commercials on Egyptian television in relation to the target audience. Her findings confirm a popular perception of a link between women and vernacular speech on the one hand and between SA, men, and professionals (of both sexes) on the other. For example, in an advertisement for ghee (purified cooking butter) targeting housewives the language used by the female character is purely vernacular Egyptian. In a commercial advertising baby food targeting professional women a mixture of both codes is used. Interestingly, the code used when advertisers targeted housewives in the ghee advert is the same code used in an advert employing talking cockroach cartoon characters to advertise a brand of insecticide.

In a unique study of its kind on Arabic, Barontini and Ziamari (2009) analyzed the discourses of a middle-aged peasant woman (M) who worked in a male-dominated rough environment and six young urban women aged 17–20 from Meknes, Morocco. The analysis revealed a tendency in all women informants to adopt features of speech and strategies that are widely recognized as representing "masculine talk." In the case of M, learning to talk like a man is a survival strategy in the harsh chauvinistic environment of the workplace. It is a way to gain some respect. Talking like a man involves learning how to take control when confronted with verbal abuse and harassment, to be witty, and to return abuse tenfold. So, when a male colleague refers to a woman (not present) as a "whore," M responds by calling him a "jackass son of donkeys" (159); and if a man "curses the religion of her God" she responds by "cursing his mother's religion" and threatens to "shred his face and knock him senseless" (160) – in this way "she gains respect" (162) and "they do not come anywhere near her again" (163). M says "the women who do not respond to abuse are abused further" – "it takes guts, a scared woman will not respond" (161).

In the case of young urban women, “masculine talk” involves using specific linguistic features. These include terms of address like “my friend,” “my brother” (both used with masculine grammatical endings); using masculine grammatical inflections and endings on verbs, adjectives, and participles; phonetic features widely recognized as being characteristic of male speech, for example palatalization of /t/ as /tʃ/ rather than /tʰ/ which is characteristic of women’s speech; lexical features such as the use of obscenities and insults. For the young women, integrating features of male speech into their discourse is a way of self-representation, a rebellious act to free themselves from the prescribed social rules about how women should behave. In this network, this way of talking was used also as a symbol of “bonding” and “fitting in” among the network members; it is a “fun game” that breaks normative rules (164–165).

4. Variation in Vernacular Arabic and Gender Differentiation

Interest in vernacular Arabic began with research in Arabic dialectology, which goes back to the late nineteenth century, that is, around the same time that studies on the dialect geography of European languages were being developed.⁶ Early work in Arabic dialectology, and to some extent sociolinguistics, suffered methodological drawbacks similar to those found in the early dialectological research in Europe, in terms of the predominance of male researchers and the under-representation or absence of female and younger informants, in addition to focusing on rural/tribal dialects. Naturally, in this type of research it is rare to find data dealing with gender differentiation. A rather unique study in this field is Roux (1925), which investigated the Muslim dialect of Meknes, Morocco, in particular his report concerning the use of three innovative phonetic features exclusively by the women of Meknes.⁷ These features are: fronting of /ʃ/ and /z/ to [s] and [z] respectively, and a uvular [ʁ] pronunciation of /r/. Although Roux’s claim regarding “exclusive usage” of the innovative sounds by the women of Meknes cannot be verified (and may well be exaggerated), his findings can be taken to indicate sound changes in progress, especially since the sounds considered to be innovations in Roux’s research are now known to be widespread in various dialects of the Maghreb (e.g., in Jewish Algerian and in Fes in Morocco). In other words, what Roux’s study seems to have captured may have been early stages of sound change which was led by female speakers.

While sociolinguistic research in North America and the United Kingdom from the start anchored its findings on dialectological descriptions where available, regrettably for Arabic sociolinguistics it is rare to find references to dialectological research in studies of variation in spoken Arabic. In this sense, Arabic sociolinguistics has remained disconnected from Arabic dialectology, although this situation is beginning to improve. A fundamental problem that may have contributed to this disconnection is a top-down approach to the analysis of Arabic data, which begins

with “diglossia” as the framework of analysis, thus presenting variation in spoken Arabic as a case of opposition between standard and nonstandard features/varieties.⁸ Since the norms of SA are strictly prescribed throughout the Arab world, this framework of analysis is tantamount to assuming that the structure of variation and the course of language change in Arabic are invariant, which is of course incorrect. In Arabic, as in all other languages, linguistic variation and change is structured by an interaction between linguistic and social variables, and both types of constraints are peculiar to each dialect and each community. Importantly, the linguistic constraints on variation are dictated by the respective native Arabic dialects of each community, not by structures or features found in the Standard variety (see below). The failure to account for these basic facts in the analysis in some of the research on Arabic has led to all sorts of misleading conclusions, including conclusions about gender differentiation.⁹

One such conclusion regarding gender differentiation in Arabic, made on the basis of research findings from the 1970s and 1980s that analyzed variation in spoken Arabic as a case of approximation to or divergence from the Standard variety, claimed that Arab women contradicted the pattern found elsewhere by *not* using “standard prestigious features” as frequently as Arab men.¹⁰ This was found to be a misconstrued generalization by Mohammad H. Ibrahim (1986). He pointed out a number of problems in the interpretation of Arabic data in general, which stem from what he identified as confusing the notions of “standard variety” with “prestigious variety.” He suggested making a distinction between the status of the Standard variety as a transnational norm, and the status of the spoken dialects, which have their own hierarchy of prestige at the local and regional levels. On the basis of her data from Cairo, Niloofar Haeri (1987) also refuted the claim that gender-differentiated patterns in spoken Arabic were anomalous in any way. I have argued (Al-Wer 1997; 2013) that while Standard Arabic clearly has a function in Arabic-speaking societies, as the norm used in formal written and spoken domains, and it undoubtedly also has a psychological claim on native speakers of Arabic, it does not play a role nor does it have a normative effect on the structure of variation in spoken Arabic in the core domains of phonology, morphology, and syntax (nor on the direction of language change in the vernacular).¹¹ Its involvement in studies of variation in spoken Arabic seems to be based on ideological considerations rather than on empirical data.

A related problem in the interpretation of data from Arabic concerns the use of labels such as “prestige” and “stigma” without prior analysis of the factors that may have given rise to such values, and in some cases in contradiction to the empirical evidence. The controversy surrounding the notion of “prestige” is widely recognized in sociolinguistic research in general but while the problems associated with the use of the term largely arise at the level of data interpretation in the case of English, in the Arabic case the problems extend to the analytical framework, yielding contradictions between the empirical findings and the interpretation of these findings. For instance, in many cases of change in progress a “standard” feature is abandoned in favor of a “nonstandard” feature and in all such cases the leaders of the change are the most educated and the most upwardly

mobile members of the community. To illustrate this point, consider the case of the interdental variable (θ) in Jordan which has two variants: the variant [θ] is characteristic of the traditional Jordanian dialects and at the same time is a standard feature; the variant [t] is characteristic of the new city dialects and is the variant found in all of the urban and dominant varieties in the region as a whole. The results from five studies in Jordan¹² found that a change is in progress led by young and highly educated speakers from the local (and standard) feature [θ] towards the new supralocal (and nonstandard) feature [t]. Clearly, the standard feature is not the target in this change. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to interpret this result as an abandonment of a standard feature; rather, the departing feature just *happens* to be identical to the feature found in the Standard variety. The data available so far suggest that the Standard variety is simply irrelevant in the processes of variation and change in vernacular Arabic.

Data from research on Arabic are not always presented in such a way as to make it possible to test them against generalizations in the field, in addition to the fact that the research available so far covers only very few communities relative to the size of the population of native speakers of Arabic. Put as closely as possible in the terms of the two generalizations about gender-differentiated patterns (Labov 1990), data from Arabic seem to confirm both generalizations. Other things being equal, the female speakers use features which are “rated favorably” or have positive connotations of various sorts and for various reasons more consistently than men. The notions of localized versus supralocal features (Milroy et al. 1994) aptly describe the results from Arabic. In these terms, women favor supralocal forms whereas men tend to use localized forms more consistently. In cases of change in progress, the available evidence suggests that women are ahead of men.¹³ In the data available, women are sometimes ahead of men by a whole generation. For example in Al-Wer’s (1991) investigation of the use of four phonological variables in three towns in Jordan, the men were found not to participate in the variation between the local and nonlocal features at all. In a follow-up study in one of these towns 10 years later, the young men were beginning to participate in the variation that involved three sounds /θ/, /ð/ and /dʒ/. In the dialect of Amman, the female speakers were found to lead in all cases of divergence from the traditional features.¹⁴ A counterexample to these findings is reported by Atiq Hachimi (2011) in Casablanca with reference to the behavior of male and female speakers from a Fessi background, that is, descendants of families who originally came from the city of Fez, Morocco. One of the features that distinguish between the dialects of Fes and Casablanca is the phonetic quality of /r/. The traditional Fessi dialect has a postalveolar approximant [ɹ] while Casablanca has alveolar trill [r]. Hachimi found that among this migrant group in Casablanca the Fessi men lead the Fessi women in adopting the Casablancon trill pronunciation of /r/.¹⁵

A very interesting pattern of variation is reported by Aziza Al-Essa’s research (2008; 2009) of dialect contact in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Overall, she found that among the oldest generation, the women were considerably more conservative with respect to the traditional (Najdi dialect) features, which is explained with reference to “social segregation” and thus lack of contact with and access to the

target (Hijazi dialect). The Najdi community in Jeddah impose strict rules against mixing with members of the majority community (Hijazi), and this prohibition is stronger on the women. However, as the social restrictions were eased off in successive generations, the women outscored the men overall in adopting new features that were characteristic of the dialect spoken by the wider city community. In this study, the effect of frequency of exposure to the target features and social restrictions on socialization is demonstrated quite dramatically in the case of the morphophonemic variable *-ik*, the second-person singular feminine suffix. Tokens of this variable can occur *only* in the context of a female addressee. Because interaction between women and men outside the family is heavily restricted, the men end up having less frequent encounter with the target variant *-ik*. The findings show that while in the oldest generation the men use a higher proportion of the target feature than women, in the middle age group the women score 100 percent success in adopting the target feature. Walters (1991) reports a similar finding in Korba, Tunisia, where due to isolation the old women maintain the usage of stigmatized raised variants of /ɛ:/. Jabeur (1987) found a similar pattern regarding the use of diphthongs versus monophthongs in Rades, Tunisia.

In the world's oldest city, Damascus, Hanadi Ismail (2007; 2009) investigated variation and change in the use of two linguistic variables, one of which turned out to be in stable variation and the other in change in progress. Ismail's analysis of the community's history in relation to the socioeconomic changes in Damascus showed that as a result of the physical expansion of the city, which began in the early 1970s, new dimensions of linguistic variation emerged which related to two aspects of life in Damascus, namely residence in a traditional inner city district (Shaghoor) versus in a new satellite suburb (Dummar). These in turn broadly correlated with two different "life modes" (Højrup 2003), self-employed versus professional, respectively. She found very little variation across age and gender groups with respect to the stable variable. The second variable, (r), is a new variable that concerns lenition of /r/. Four types of variants were identified: trills (the traditional variant), retroflex, fricative, and approximant. In all, 4,763 tokens were coded for five phonetic environments. The results of the GoldVarb analysis showing the most advanced (innovative) nontrill variant are displayed below.

Statistically all correlations were found to be significant and the variable of age was found to have the most significant effect, indicating a change in progress toward an approximant type of /r/. The results also show that the locus of the change is the suburb (Dummar), where the new pronunciation appears in significant proportions also in the speeches of the middle and old age groups. The gender effect is particularly interesting: here we notice that while in the suburb the young female speakers have a clear lead, in the inner city locality of Shaghoor it is the young male speakers who lead the change. This finding is explained in relation to the employment situation. At the time of research, all except one of the women in Shaghoor were unemployed and all of the men were employed in the retail sector, which brought them into direct and regular contact with customers from all walks of life and from all parts of the city.

Table 20.1. Distribution of (r) by age groups and gender in Dummar and Shaghoor (based on Ismail 2007, 207)

		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Shaghoor	Y	29% (406)	23% (407)
	M	4% (294)	5% (449)
	O	1% (380)	3% (393)
Dummar	Y	19% (422)	27% (499)
	M	21% (414)	10% (393)
	O	4% (379)	20% (427)

Atiqa Hachimi's research in Casablanca (mentioned earlier; also see Hachimi 2007; 2012) is the first study in Arabic to use the "communities of practice" methods. It focused on style and dialect leveling; in particular it investigated the linguistic and social outcomes of contact between the Fessi (from Fez) and Casablancon dialects in the speech of a group of women in the city. She shows how growth and increasing heterogeneity in the city's population have disrupted the old rural/urban dichotomy, the once dominant characteristic of Moroccan city dialects and identities. In Casablanca, mass migration has created a new linguistic urban model. Fessi is a well-established old urban dialect but Casablancon in contrast is a newly formed koine. Among the linguistic variables investigated, two are phonological, (r) and (q). These variables distinguish between the Fessi dialect, an old urban dialect that enjoys considerable prestige, and Casablancon, a fairly new urban dialect. The results overall show that the speakers use the linguistic forms as a resource in the construction of identities and different styles that are directly related to their lives and daily pursuits in the city. In addition to the old identities, such as "pure Fessi," and their linguistic correlates (maintenance of the heritage variants), the speakers construct hybrid identities, which correlate with hybrid linguistic behavior. For instance, for a Fessi to become Casablancon, the heritage Fessi variants [ʔ] and [q] are selectively filtered in favor of [g] in [ga:l], and the Casablancon trilled /r/ is adopted instead of the Fessi approximant [ɾ]. Importantly, in addition to denoting the status of "becoming Casablancon," this combination of features, [g] and trilled [r], is central to becoming "tough," "street smart," and "independent." Sounding "tough" is valued positively by the Fessi women in Casablanca as a criterion that distinguishes them from the Fessis from Fez. The stylistic shifts in the informants' speech is not dictated by the diglossic situation or by the shifting of task or topic, but by a dynamic that is directly related to the everyday realities which inhabitants of a heterogeneous city have to negotiate on daily basis. The studies by Hachimi and by Barontini and Ziamari

(see above) clearly demonstrate the inadequacy of a stereotyped understanding of gender differentiation in Arabic. In both studies, female groups behave in a manner that contradicts popular perceptions of “feminine” linguistic behavior.

A recent analysis of “the lifecycle” of the variable (q) in Jordan traces all stages of development in the progression of the change from [g] to [ʔ] in the dialect of Amman, the capital city of Jordan (Al-Wer and Herin 2011). The analysis is based on nearly 90 hours of recorded material, collected intermittently over the past 25 years. The Amman community is made up of two Arabic-speaking ethnic groups: a Jordanian group and a Palestinian group. Variation in (q) involves Jordanian [g] and (urban) Palestinian [ʔ]. The urban Palestinian variant [ʔ] is also found in all major city dialects in the Levant region as a whole, such as the dialects of Damascus, Beirut, Aleppo, and Jerusalem. In this sense, [ʔ] can be considered a supralocal variant. On the other hand, the variant [g] is characteristic of less dominant and more provincial dialects, although it can be found in all of the dialects in southern Syria as well as all of the indigenous Jordanian dialects. In the Levant region, [g] can be considered a localized feature. Amman is an ancient location whose long history goes back to the eighth century BCE, but it was established as an Arabic-speaking city only in 1921. Therefore, it has no traditional dialect and only three generations of native inhabitants.

Regarding the variable (q), the results from Amman show that across the three generations, gender has a consistent effect, although it interacts with other social variables differently in different generations. In the first generation, there is a high degree of maintenance of the respective heritage variants. However, two groups of speakers diverged from this pattern. The Palestinian men, whose heritage variant is the glottal stop, used a few tokens of Jordanian [g] (7/52 tokens); the other group that showed divergence from the heritage dialect was the Jordanian women. They used a few tokens of the glottal stop (5/48 tokens). The remaining subgroups, the Palestinian women and the Jordanian men, consistently used their respective heritage variants and thus showed no variation. The divergences by the Palestinian men and the Jordanian women of this generation, although relatively low in frequency, are the first signs of some of the trends that became established in successive generations. In the second generation, there is no change to the patterns found among the most conservative groups, the Jordanian men and the Palestinian women. On the other hand, the divergence we saw in the first generation on the part of the Jordanian women and the Palestinian men increases considerably. In this generation, the Jordanian women use [ʔ] predominantly (65/74 tokens) and the Palestinian men use the Jordanian variant [g] in nearly 50 percent of the total number of tokens (59 tokens). In this generation gender differentiation emerges as an important variable, and the significance of ethnicity (or dialectal background) is blurred since speakers from both backgrounds use both variants.

In the third generation, there are two important developments. First, in addition to gender and ethnic affiliation, context and interlocutor emerge as further constraints on the choice of (q) variants for the men. Second, gender emerges as

the *major* organizing category while ethnic affiliation assumes a subsidiary role in influencing the speakers' choices. In this generation, the female speakers simply advance the pattern that was set out by their mothers' and, to some extent, their grandmothers' generations. They use the glottal stop consistently (regardless of their ethnic origin). On the other hand, the men's choices are constrained by three variables: *dialectal background*, *gender* and *context*. The expansion in the use of the glottal stop can be taken to indicate a change in progress since all of the young female speakers, regardless of their origins, use this variant consistently. Furthermore, regional koineization clearly plays a role in advancing the glottal stop.

This example from Amman is particularly interesting because it is not often that one comes across cases where it is the male speakers who do more work, so to speak, in shifting their speech in social interaction. In particular, the finding that the male speakers (especially those from a [g]-speaking background) also use the glottal stop, a sound that is widely described as "feminine" and "soft" in the literature on Arabic, is significant. The expansion in the use of the glottal stop among the young men can be explained in relation to the creation of new job opportunities in the private sector, especially in the financial sector and tourism, which have created new types of employment for the younger generation in particular. Importantly, the new types of employment have expanded the linguistic market of the glottal stop as a variant that symbolizes supralocalism and a transnational and cosmopolitan character. These attributes have become precious commodities to acquire, especially for the mobile, outward- and forward-looking younger generations (of both sexes). The glottal stop has therefore acquired a new set of social meanings (in addition to the old meanings), which are relevant to the daily pursuits of the young man as well as the young woman in various arenas. This expansion in the value of the glottal stop has not been achieved at the expense of the value of the local variant [g], but has proceeded alongside it. The variant [g] continues to be a valuable commodity, especially for the male speakers, and the old associations with male power and influence continue to exist and are functionalized when required by the context. For instance, it is normal for a young man in Amman to use [g] when interacting with male friends and to switch to [ʔ] when addressing a young woman in the same group; or to use [g] when running an errand in a government office and to switch to [ʔ] if he answers his phone in the same place. We can thus see that it is not an issue of one variant being prestigious while the other variant is stigmatized. Rather, both variants are valuable commodities to have, and the sociolinguistically competent speakers know how to appropriate variability in social interaction.¹⁶

Finally, there has been a marked and much needed increase in the number of variation studies on various Arabic-speaking communities, especially from the early 1990s or so, and many of the new generation of studies include "gender" as a variable. A notable development, also seen in studies on English, is the tendency to focus on smaller communities and to provide more sophisticated analyses. A much welcome development for the future would be more consistent integration into sociolinguistic research of findings and analyses from related social sciences.

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NOTES

- 1 The bulk of the material presented in this chapter comes from work published in English.
- 2 In dialectological terms, Arabic dialects are classified into two major types: (1) the Eastern type (*Mashreqi*), which includes the dialects of the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine), Egypt, and the Sudan; (2) the Western type (*Maghrebi*), which includes most of the dialects of North Africa. The isogloss between the two types runs through western Egypt. Egyptian dialects can thus be considered the “bridge dialects.” Despite Egypt’s geographical location in North Africa, most of its dialects, including Cairo, are classified as Eastern dialects.
- 3 The term “diglossia” is used here in accordance with the definition in Ferguson (1959). Classical Arabic, the High code, was codified during the eighth century. Whether Classical Arabic was a single variety or an amalgam of varieties is subject to debate among Arabists. The language of the holy book of Islam, the Quran, and pre-Islamic poetry are examples of Classical Arabic. A modern version of this variety is called Modern Standard Arabic, which it although preserves the essential syntactic structure and morphological paradigms of Classical Arabic contains some innovations, especially in the lexicon. Modern Standard Arabic is the language used in newspapers, and generally in the written media.
- 4 Contributors in this field include the famous thinker and novelist Nawal El Saadawi, the sociologist Fatema Mernissi, and the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod.
- 5 A synthesis of her multifaceted contributions can also be found in Sadiqi (2007).
- 6 A succinct history and review of the early work in Arabic dialectology can be found in Behnstedt and Woidich (2005).
- 7 The findings of Roux (1925) regarding some male/female phonetic differences are presented in an article by Harry Stroemer (2004). All of the details cited here from Roux (1925) are derived from Stroemer’s article.
- 8 The problem discussed here is not concerned with research that specifically aimed to investigate the ways in which Arabic speakers sometimes resort to the use of SA as a stylistic resource in specific domains, but with research that assumes that diglossia is the key to understanding variation in Arabic altogether.
- 9 For a detailed critique of this approach, see Al-Wer (2013).
- 10 Among the early studies, and which have been widely quoted in the sociolinguistics literature, are those by Abdel-Jawad (1981), Bakir (1986), Kojak (1983), and Schmidt (1974), which investigated variation in the use of a few phonological variables in Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, respectively.
- 11 This conclusion is backed up by a large body of empirical evidence covering a wide range of communities throughout the Arab world.

- 12 Abdel-Jawad and Awwad 1989; Al-Khatib 1988; Al-Tamimi 2001; Al-Wer 1991; El Salman 2003a.
- 13 See the findings in Abdel-Jawad 1981; Al-Essa 2009; Al-Khatib 1988; Al-Shehri 1993; Al-Tamimi 2003; El Salman 2003a; 2003b; Haeri 1996; Ismail 2009.
- 14 See Al-Wer 2002; 2003; 2007.
- 15 Hachimi's analysis of the social meanings associated with the use of these variants reveals that the approximant (Fessi) feature or lack of trilling of /r/ has come to be associated with "erectile dysfunction and homosexuality."
- 16 A comprehensive interpretation of these data can be found in Al-Wer and Herin (2011).

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