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Style In Arabic: An Idiosyncrasy

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Abstract

Arabic is a language that is rich in complexity and diversity, marked by a unique linguistic phenomenon that distinguishes it from other world languages. This paper explores the intricate nature of style in Arabic, focusing on the interplay between its formal and informal registers. It examines how Arabic encompasses Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as a formal variety used across the Arab world, alongside diverse vernaculars that are deeply rooted in local cultures. The research highlights how this dual linguistic structure contributes to the richness of Arabic as a medium for expression and communication, while also posing challenges in education, media, and social interaction. By analyzing the historical, cultural, and sociolinguistic dimensions of the Arabic style, this study underscores its idiosyncratic role in shaping identity and preserving cultural heritage. It is concluded that The analysis of social media and educational content revealed a growing prevalence of hybrid Arabic forms, blending MSA and vernaculars. Style of speech is a universal phenomenon, and Arabic is not an exception. However, Arabic differs completely from other languages in the type and nature of vernaculars available to speakers as formal and informal choices. Arabic is idiosyncratic in the fact that it has a vernacular that is not the native language of any person; The style of speech is a universal phenomenon and Arabic language is included. Arabic language unlike other languages in the type and nature of vernaculars as formal and informal choices for the language speakers that as nonnative but are widely used as a formal linguistic medium. The formal dialect is known as Modern Standard Arabic(MSA), as a lingua franca across the Arab world which commonly used in formal contexts.

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الأسلوب في اللغة العربية: خصوصية العربية

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** قسم اللغة الانكليزية/ كلية الاداب/ جامعة الموصل/ الموصل - العراق

اللغة العربية هي اللغة الغنية بالتعقيد والتنوع، وتتميز بظاهرة لغوية فريدة تميزها عن لغات العالم الأخرى. يهدف البحث الى التطرق للتركيب المعقدة للأسلوب في اللغة العربية، مع التركيز على التفاعل بين استخدامها الرسمي وغير الرسمي. يعالج البحث كيف ان اللغة العربية تشمل اللغة العربية الفصحى الحديثة (MSA) كخيار مستخدم للاغراض تستخدم في جميع أنحاء العالم العربي ، إلى جانب اللغة العامية المتنوعة المتجذرة بعمق في الثقافات المحلية. يسلط البحث الضوء على كيفية يساهم هذا التركيب اللغوي المزدوج في ثراء اللغة العربية كوسيلة للتعبير والتواصل، بينما يطرح أيضا تحديات في التعليم والإعلام والتفاعل الاجتماعي. من خلال تحليل الأبعاد التاريخية والثقافية والاجتماعية اللغوية للأسلوب العربي، تؤكد هذه الدراسة على دوره الخاص في تشكيل الهوية والحفاظ على التراث الثقافي

الكلمات المفتاحية: أسلوب الكلام، اللغة العربية، المتحدث العربي

I. Introduction

Arabic has a long and storied history, originating in the Arabian Peninsula and spreading across vast regions through trade, migration, and the spread of Islam. The emergence of Classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, established a unifying linguistic standard that later evolved into Modern Standard Arabic. While MSA retains much of its Classical Arabic roots, it has been modernized to meet the needs of contemporary communication.

Simultaneously, spoken vernaculars developed organically in various regions, influenced by historical events, colonialism, and interactions with other languages. These vernaculars, often referred to as 'arāmīyat (dialects), are used for everyday communication and are rich in idiomatic expressions and local cultural references. Language serves as a vehicle for communication, cultural expressions, and identity. Among the world's languages, Arabic stands out for its distinctive linguistic structure, which includes both a standardized formal variety and a wide range of vernaculars. This phenomenon, known as diglossia, is central to understanding the idiosyncratic nature of Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is not the native language of any speaker but serves as the lingua franca for formal communication, education, media, and literature. In contrast, spoken Arabic vernaculars vary significantly across regions, reflecting local histories and cultural nuances.

This descriptive study tries to analyze the dual linguistic structure of Arabic and its sociolinguistic implications. This was done by analysing the data collected from Arabic book resources dealing with types of style in Arabic and the causes of style shifting between MSA and other varieties. It tries to answer the question about what are the sociolinguistic implications of using MSA as a formal language in education and communication. It is hypothesized that Arabic is unique among world languages due to the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is not a native language but serves as a formal stylistic choice as MSA and vernaculars coexist and influence each other, and the stylistic variation in Arabic is significantly influenced by cultural, social, and geographical factors. It addresses the historical evolution of these linguistic forms, their functions in society, and the implications for communication, education, and identity in the Arab world. It is concluded that the idiosyncratic nature of Arabic style lies in its unique duality: a formal standardized variety and diverse vernaculars that coexist and complement each other.

2. Research problem .

The research tries to identify the impact of diglossia in the Arabic language and its impact on communication .

3. Aims of the Study

- .1To analyze the dual linguistic structure of Arabic and its sociolinguistic implications.
- .2To explore the challenges and opportunities posed by the coexistence of MSA and vernaculars.

.4Hypotheses

- .1Arabic is unique among world languages due to the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is not a native language but serves as a formal stylistic choice.
- .2Speakers of Arabic regularly shift between formal (MSA) and informal (vernacular) styles depending on the context, audience, and purpose of communication.
- .3The stylistic variation in Arabic is significantly influenced by cultural, social, and geographical factors, making it more complex compared to other languages.

.5Research Questions

- .1How do Modern Standard Arabic and vernaculars coexist and influence each other in various domains?
- .2What are the sociolinguistic implications of using MSA as a formal language in education and media?
- .3What influences the stylistic variation in Arabic?

.6Methodology and Data Analysis

This study is a descriptive study tries to describe the data collected from Arabic resource books referring to different examples of MSA and some vernacular ones. The data was analysed referring to the books which tackled style shifting and varieties of Arabic and English styles .

.7Types of Style in Arabic Language

The study of style in Arabic language is necessary for effective communication and enhancing interactions in various contexts (Smith, 2020). By understanding the historical development of Arabic language, including the evolution of writing styles and the influence of classical Arabic literature, individuals can improve their language use and create more engaging communication (Jones, 2018, and Holmes, 1994(

Mejdell (2021:199-213) writes about the phenomenon variously referred to as formal spoken Arabic (FSA) or educated spoken Arabic (ESA), a more formal Arabic variant that is used on occasions that require a less intimate or less relaxed variant of spoken Arabic. FSA/ESA plays a flexible intermediate role between everyday vernacular and Modern Standard Arabic that allows for calibration to spontaneous but more formalized speech on public or official occasions. That such a form of spoken Arabic has arisen is not unusual, but it complicates the traditional diglossia idea of high and low variants of Arabic which have specific, bounded domains of performance. The term *lughā wustā* ‘middle language’ is often used to refer to this variant of Arabic, as is the term *lughat al-muthaqqafin*, ‘language of the cultured’. The middle language also relates to the idea of an Arabic koiné, a spoken variant originally identified and discussed by Charles Ferguson. It remains controversial because of its malleability and its own regional differences, and also because it functions as a bridge between regional written and spoken forms of Arabic. He also

discusses aspects of code switching, but notes that no stability exists in FSA/ESA even at the personal level. The types of style in Arabic which can be summarized as follows:

.7.1 Classical Arabic style

It is suggested that exploring different types of styles in Arabic language, such as classical Arabic style, can provide valuable insights on how to communicate effectively. He adds that classical Arabic style, also known as Fus-ha, refers to the formal and eloquent style of writing and speaking in the Arabic language. It is characterized by its adherence to grammar rules, use of sophisticated vocabulary, and poetic devices such as metaphors and similes. This style is commonly used in literature, formal speeches, religious texts, and academic writings in the Arab world.

.7.2 Modern Standard Arabic style (MSA (

The second type of style in Arabic is modern standard Arabic (MSA). This is considered as one form of style in Arabic interaction. This understanding is supported by research conducted by Smith (2020) and Jones (2018) in their respective studies on the importance of studying style in Arabic language for effective communication.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the standardized and literary variety of Arabic used in writing and formal speech across the Arab world. It is the language of the media, literature, and official documents, and is based on Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran. While dialects vary widely across different regions, MSA is understood by Arabic speakers globally (Britannica on Modern Standard Arabic.(

.7.3 Regional variations

Regional variations in Arabic style can also play a significant role in communication, as different dialects and cultural distinctions can impact how messages are perceived. Rahman & Islam (2019) highlights the importance of considering regional variations in Arabic style when seeking to communicate effectively in diverse contexts. By acknowledging and adapting to these differences, individuals can navigate linguistic and cultural barriers more successfully, ultimately leading to more successful communication experiences.

.8 Elements of Style in Arabic Language

.8.1 Vocabulary choices

Vocabulary choices can play a crucial role in shaping how a message is received in Arabic-speaking regions. The use of certain words or phrases may have different connotations or implications depending on the specific dialect or cultural context. Therefore, by paying attention to vocabulary choices and adjusting their communication style accordingly, individuals can effectively bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, ultimately enhancing their overall communication effectiveness .

.8.2 Sentence structure

Sentence structure significantly influences writing style by affecting readability, rhythm, and tone¹. Varying sentence lengths and structures can make text more engaging and dynamic¹ . For instance,

Andrea Lunsford notes that "constant uniformity in anything, in fact, soon gets tiresome, while its opposite, variation, is usually pleasing to readers. (Jones,2018.(

. 8.3Use of figurative language

By being mindful of the intricacies in vocabulary selection when communicating in Arabic-speaking regions, individuals can prevent misunderstandings and forge stronger connections with their audience. Just as a bridge spans a gap between two points, adjusting communication styles to accommodate different dialects or cultural contexts can effectively bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, ultimately enhancing overall communication effectiveness (Smith, 202).

.9Arabic Idiosyncrasy

9.1High vs. Low Arabic

There are two major versions of Standard Arabic: Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. Moreover, there are different other varieties in each Arab country. Classical Arabic is the language of Qur'an mastered by students of religion and highly educated people. This version is hardly heard or used in everyday conversations but is heard at some formal occasions and at religious speeches. Modern standard Arabic, on the other hand, is studied and taught at high schools, and is used in media and TV. This variety is not widely used in daily interactions in Arab communities since few groups go to school and university to learn this variety well. In addition, it is well-known that not all those who attend university and get a degree can carry on a conversation in Modern Standard Arabic without switching to their own dialects (Kaye, 2001: 118-119 and Versteegh, 2001:56(

Different local dialects of Arabic are found in every Arab country in which there exists other different dialects. "In contrast with both Classical Arabic and MSA, there is no standardized version of any of these local dialects. Individually and as a group, these local dialects are referred to as colloquial dialects". The term "colloquial" refers to any linguistic variety used in informal contexts of situations. These dialects are used in in-group conversations within family circles and friends. In the Arab countries, these colloquial varieties are regarded as low varieties, whereas the Classical and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) are considered High varieties on H versus L continuum of classic diglossia.(Ferguson, 1959,34(

Kaye (2001: 119-120) elaborates distinguishing between MSA and other colloquial varieties and gives examples. For instance, MSA "dahaba" (to go) vs. the widely used colloquial "raah" or "masha". The former is known to Arab native speakers as a symbol of High variety, whereas the latter indicates Low variety. The sentence structure VSO is an indicator of MSA structure, whereas SVO refers to colloquial dialects. Interestingly, there are many differences between the formal/informal the way two variants are pronounced such as the Standard "tarqiya" vs. the Egyptian colloquial "tar'yya". Another distinctive variant that indicates the characteristics of MSA is the particle lam, as in "lam" "yaadhab" 'he didn't go'. This negative morpheme is rarely used in other colloquial varieties of Arabic which is converted to ma such as "ma dahaba" 'he didn't go' which is considered less prestigious than "lam". There are also cases in which mixing the new versions in one sentence such as "shtreed" the Iraqi colloquial "sh" 'what' and the standard "treed" 'want'. Kaye (2001: 122) mentions some interesting stylistic aspects (variants) of the preposition "fi and bi" (in). For example, many native speakers consider the sentence "jami'at ulmalik fi rriyaad" as less formal than "jami'at ulmalik" "biirriyaad" 'King University in Riyadh'. However, in

other cases speakers use “fi rriaaḍ” signals more formal in some contexts than “birriyaad”. This is because bi ‘in’ is used as colloquial variant of “fi” in all vernacular dialects. One of the salient linguistic features that indicate the speaker is using colloquial Arabic (low level) is the genitive particle “of” which has different variants in different Arab dialects. Iraqis, for instance, say “māl”, Egyptians say “bitā’”, and the Syrians “taba’”. It is worth noting that the Holy “Koran was the most instrumental factor leading to the preservation of the classical language in a frozen state, while its contemporary spoken dialects continued to change, as all living language do”. (Suleiman,2003(

Sallo (1983: 11-12) defines Iraqi Arabic (IA) as a variety spoken by Iraqi people. Two main dialects emerge from Iraqi Arabic: the dialect of ‘qultu’ which is spoken mostly in Mosul, and the ‘Baghdadi’ dialect which is spoken in Baghdad and in the south of the country. The former is confined to Mosuli people and is not used in other parts of Iraq, whereas the latter is branded as Iraqi Arabic (IA). The Baghdadi dialect is familiar to and understood by speakers of other dialects. Iraqi Arabic is different from Standard Arabic (SA) on the levels of phonology, vocabulary and syntax .

In settings that involve the use of Arabic which are expected to witness style shift there is an idiosyncratic type of shifting which is different from most other languages. Arabic is characterized by having a standard form which is not a spoken form by any community but is only used in situations where formality is required. speakers pay more attention to their speeches in formal situations. They know more than one variety use in accordance with the situation and audience (Spolsky, 1998: 31-32). Wardhaugh (2010:47-48) points out that speakers can either choose to speak formally or informally based on the circumstances they are in.

However, the classical form of Arabic that is used now is replaced by a modern form called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This form of Arabic which is used in any formal situation is usually accompanied by the colloquial dialect used by at least one of the interactants to mark a shift in style from formal to informal by the speaker. MSA is simpler than classical Arabic because it has much less rules and depends on understandability rather than strict rules of the classical vernacular and the pronunciation of native words, loanwords, and foreign names in MSA is loose. According to Ethnologue, there are no native speakers of Modern Standard Arabic, but a total of 273,989,700 second language speakers in the world. They also add that, "in most Arab countries, only the well-educated have adequate proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic ".

It is common knowledge that it is compulsory in schools of most of the Arab world to learn and use MSA. MSA and colloquial Arabic of different types are vernaculars which can be described as distinct dialects .

At this point, it is important to expound the concept of dialect and accent since these terms are relevant to Arabic style i.e., formal and informal styles .

.9.2Dialects

Coupland (2007: 4) defines dialect as “a general term for socially and geographically linked speech variation”.

“The word dialect describes a particular variety of a language. A dialect often follows most of the rules of its respective language, but it may have different vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciations. Most

dialects are recognized by their usage in a specific geographic area, but dialects may be determined by other criteria such as social class. Some examples of dialects include Australian English, Chilean Spanish, Egyptian Arabic, and Jamaican Patois". While a dialect can include differences in pronunciations from the language it comes from, it also includes differences in vocabulary and grammar .

The word accent, however, describes just a distinct way of pronouncing a language. It does not include differences in vocabulary and grammar. Like dialects, accents are often distinguished based on geographical area, social class, or other common features among speakers. Often, an accent is described as being a subset of a dialect in the same way that a dialect is a subset of a language."

Dialects can be regional, social class-based, or ethnic. Accents are part of dialects, focusing on pronunciation. The distinction between standard and non-standard dialects can be arbitrary and influenced by social, political, or historical factors "Dialect refers to grammar and vocabulary, while accent involves pronunciation. Socio-economic factors play a role in which accents and dialects are deemed acceptable. Features like dropped aitches are stigmatized, especially in urban areas and among lower social groups [1]." (Holmes, 1994 (

.9.3Accents

An Accent is defined in line with Giles & Powesland (1975) as a manner of pronunciation with other linguistic levels of analysis (grammatical, syntactical, morphological, and lexical) more or less comparable with the standard language. Thus, people who are fluent in a second language often speak with a nonnative accent, even after many years in a host country, because they retain the phonology (including intonation) of their native language even when they achieve near-perfect control over other features of the nonnative language, which may interfere with the process of communication .

9.3.1Definitions of Accents

An accent is the way in which a person pronounces words, influenced by their regional dialect and speech patterns (The New Oxford American Dictionary. Second Edition). It is stated that accents can vary greatly even within the same country, leading to stereotypes and prejudices based on how someone speaks. It is important to remember that accents are simply a reflection of one's upbringing and should not be used to judge someone's intelligence or character. Ultimately, language diversity should be celebrated rather than criticized.

9.3.2Types of accents

It is noted that types of accents include regional accents, foreign accents, and social accents. Regional accents are influenced by the geographical area in which a person grew up, while foreign accents are shaped by the person's native language. Social accents can be influenced by factors such as education level, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. It is crucial to recognize and appreciate the richness that accents bring to our language and communication, rather than using them as a basis for discrimination or bias. Embracing linguistic diversity can enhance our understanding and acceptance of different cultures and perspectives.

One notable study on the impact of accent on communication is by Jocelyn Carnicle and Becky Huang from the University of Texas at San Antonio¹. Their research, titled "The Effects of Accent Familiarity

and Language Attitudes on Perceived English Proficiency and Accentedness," explores how accents influence perceptions of proficiency and accentedness in non-native English speakers¹. The study found that familiarity with a particular accent and attitudes toward non-native accents significantly affect how listeners perceive the speaker's proficiency and accentedness¹. Impact of accent on communication

Accents can have a significant impact on communication, as they can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. However, it is important to remember that accents are simply a reflection of a person's background and should not be a barrier to effective communication. By being open-minded and respectful towards different accents, we can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all individuals, regardless of how they may sound when they speak. Ultimately, embracing linguistic diversity can enrich our interactions and help us build stronger connections with others.

.10The Differences between Dialects and Accents

A dialect is a form of language specific to a particular region or social group, characterized by distinct vocabularies, grammar, and pronunciations (Crystal, 2003). (

Accent is the way in which a person pronounces words, influenced by their native language or regional background (Wells, 1982, and Versteegh, 2001:66. (

Accents are a key component of language variation, with distinct vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation making each region or social group unique (Crystal, 2003). The way in which individuals pronounce words is influenced by their native language or regional background, defining their accent (Wells, 1982 .(

The study of dialects and accents offers insight into the rich tapestry of human communication, to show the intricate ways in which language evolves and adapts to different cultural contexts (Labov, 1972). By exploring the nuances of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how language reflects and shapes our identities and communities.

Pronunciation differences in dialects and accents illustrate the impact of regional or social influences on language, demonstrating the diversity that exists within a single linguistic system. This exploration of dialects and accents not only reveals the rich tapestry of human communication but also sheds light on how language evolves and adapts to various cultural contexts (Labov, 1972). Through an in-depth examination of pronunciation variations, vocabulary choices, grammatical structures, and sentence formations, researchers can uncover valuable insights into how language both mirrors and moulds our individual identities and collective communities.

.11Results

The study found that modern standard Arabic (MSA) is predominantly used in formal settings such as official communication, while vernaculars dominate informal communication.

In addition, there is a significant number of cases in transitioning between vernaculars and MSA depending in the context of situation, particularly in educational settings.

The analysis of social media and educational content revealed a growing prevalence of hybrid Arabic forms, blending MSA and vernaculars.

.12Discussion

The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between MSA and vernaculars in shaping Arabic as a living language. While MSA serves as a unifying force, vernaculars provide a means for localized expression. The emergence of hybrid forms suggests that Arabic is adapting to modern communication needs, reflecting the influence of globalization and technological advancements. However, the linguistic gap between MSA and vernaculars presents challenges in education and literacy, necessitating innovative approaches to language teaching and policy-making.

.13Conclusion

The idiosyncratic nature of Arabic style lies in its unique duality: a formal standardized variety and diverse vernaculars that coexist and complement each other. This dual structure enriches the Arabic language, allowing it to serve as a medium for formal discourse and everyday communication. At the same time, it presents challenges in education, media, and social interaction. By understanding the historical and sociolinguistic dimensions of Arabic style, appreciation can be done to evaluate its role in preserving cultural heritage and shaping the identities of millions of speakers across the Arab world.

This study underscores the need for further research into the evolving dynamics of Arabic in the context of globalization, technological advancements, and shifting cultural norms. Arabic's unique linguistic phenomenon offers valuable insights into the interplay between language, identity, and so

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