

## EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE DIGLOSSIC SITUATION IN AN ALGERIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is, in fact, an attempt to unveil the underlying pedagogical implications of the diglossic situation in Algeria that seems to be strongly influencing the teaching/learning situation in general and, the course of the lecture in particular; in terms of maintenance and transmission of the Arabic standard language. In this respect, this paper seeks to reveal the linguistic gap existing between two distinctive varieties (standard vernacular) and how they co-exist within an educational context, highly characterized by an infinite number of variables, which interplay at different levels.

**KEYWORDS:** Arabic Diglossia, Algeria, Language Teaching, & Educational Implications.

### INTRODUCTION

Communicating via language, as a natural phenomenon has always inspired various scholars and linguists who have been active and triggered to uncover some of its fascinating aspects fundamentally, related to its regular use. As a matter of fact, it has been given considerable attention by different disciplines in human and social sciences, notably, *Anthropology, Dialectology, Sociology, Psychology, Pragmatics etc.* These linguists, namely, Charles Ferguson has been largely interested in investigating it; being thus, as the first to deal with the concept of *diglossia* in his article entitled “Diglossia”, in 1959 published in a journal called “Word”; and then, Joshua Fishman in 1967 who dealt with “extended diglossia” associated with languages even of different language parent families.

Ferguson (1959), tried to develop the concept of diglossia referring to four cases in different countries: Greece, Switzerland, Arab countries, and Haiti. Ferguson’s examples take into account, Standard German (H), Swiss German (L), Standard Arabic (H), Vernacular Arabic (L), Standard French (H), Creole (L) in Haiti, Katharevousa (H) and Dhimotiki (L) in Greece. Ferguson, thus, uses four modern language stations as the legs for his table (Swiss, German, Arabic, Haitian Creole, and Modern Greek), in addition, he described a particular form of bilingual community in a special relationship which existed between its primary languages, which he labeled simply as the high and low cards. Watt in Porter (2000:18-19)

The concept of diglossia, however, has been institutionalized after the contribution of many scholars like, Ferguson and Fishman. After his famous article about the definition of diglossia in 1959, Ferguson revised his paper and evoked the weak points of his original article in his *Diglossia Revisited* (1991), printed in the *Southwest Journal Linguistics*. For the most part, he gave new supports to his original article, but he did criticize his ambiguity on specifying that, his definition for diglossia was putative. Yet, according to Fishman (1967), diglossia can be example of different countries and languages for example Alsatian in Alsace as (L) and French as (H). This is why, (H) is usually the written language used in formal situations; while the (L) is the spoken one used in informal situations. Apparently, Fishman (1967)

also seems unsatisfied about the first definitions asserted about diglossia: What he effectively demonstrated was the need for increased flexibility in Ferguson's paradigm. What he appears to have lost in the process was, a definition for the application of 'diglossia' to multilingual situations would soon become so broad, and one might wonder multilingual situation is not diglossic at present. Watt in Porter (2000: 19)

In fact, Fishman (1967) extended the concept of diglossia to include several separate codes, and recognized two types of compartmentalization: functional and social/political (Chen 1997:4). That is why, Watt in Porter (2000:18) claims that there were "philosophical differences between the conflicting traditions of Charles Ferguson (1959; 1991) and Joshua Fishman (1967; 1971) – something that has animated much of the broader literature on diglossia". Since that, there were many discussions necessary to provide a better understanding or at least modifications about diglossia that explains that Ferguson's self-modified (1991) version of his landmark 1959 article that contains the necessary definitions and constraints needed for a productive application of the term. It comprehends the undeniable fact that, tertiary languages and spoken variety of high forms are present in the speech repertoire of many communities.

The differences about the concept of diglossia are mainly due to the complex situations of language systems in the world, particularly in the Arab world, characterized by multilingualism. In other words, understanding Arabic Diglossia, as Heller (1988; 1992) remarks, necessitates knowing the linguistic peculiarities of the Arab world, burdening the linguist thus, with the task of accounting for the different historical and social contexts, in which it occurs.

In this respect, it is worth noticing that Arab scholars have been interested in Arabic linguistics, and dialectology and topics related to, dialects and languages in addition to the linguistic variation at all levels:

The systematic study of dialect geography is known to have been as a typical development of Western European nineteenth-century linguistics. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suppose that, the Arabs themselves were not aware of the variation in speech in the Arabophone world. (Versteegh 2001:130)

The Arabs were basically aware of dialect studies through the movement of many scholars to remote places and recording the data from different tribes, with the objective to save the Arabic tongue from erroneous uses of language, which they call 'Lahn al a'amma'. There are many proved evidences through the phrases, "kama qualat tamim" or "lughat hadil".

The Muslim Holy book "Qur'an" repeatedly emphasizes the "Arabness" of its language, and remains a tangible reference to prove the advent of Arabic in the field of dialects, by having included more than the dialect of the Kuraychi tribe at all the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels. Aba hiyan al-andalousi includes 63 readings, including dialects in his interpretation of the Qur'an. Sibawayh says that the verse "mahada bacharan" is with fath tanwin while with banu tamim mahada bacharun" bi raf'e tanween. Others like Gahiz (d, 255\868) does not notice the difference in the talks of speech in a particular geographical area:

At an early date, Gahiz informs us that the people in the cities talk according to the language of the Bedouin immigrants who have settled there, which is why you find lexical differences between the people of Kufa, Basra, Syria and Egypt. (Versteegh 2014: 172)

Moreover, Ibn Kaldun in al Muqaddima who devoted a whole chapter about:

The differences between sedentary and Bedouin speech, entitled the language of the sedentary population and the

city-dwellers is an independent language, differing from the language of Mudar (Ibid)

It is true that the Arabs classified, categorized and discovered, the dialectal phenomena, described the phonetic variation in everyday speech, even knowing the diseases of the tongue like, taetaa or faefaa but could not go further through instituting and coding systematic rules about dialects to create an independent discipline for it called, dialectology. This task was done by the Germans and the French before the English started with traditional ways of collecting the data through climbing rocky mountain regions in the remote rural areas, to gather the different features of dialects from the speech of old people, with the intention to save such dialectal heritage, before they died.

Recently, methods of research in dialectology have radically changed, especially within the advent of Sociolinguistics and other disciplines like, discourse analysis and pragmatics; thus, the use of some innovative research tools to develop the analysis of data is primordially required like, the use of questionnaires, interviews and maps originally used through the development of technology and computer assistance.

### **DIGLOSSIA AS A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PHENOMENON AND ITS EFFECTS ON EDUCATION**

In the context of education, teaching Arabic posed many problems often related to the complicated diglossic situation of Arab countries. Teachers had to cope up with their teaching, especially with, vocabulary and syntax. Young learners may find themselves dealing with almost new language structures as these often depart from the normal dialectal structures with which they have been familiar. Gradually, spoken Arabic has been relegated to a lesser status. According to Palmer (2007:111), it is “often stigmatized as a less prestigious variety of Arabic and is less worthy of study, even though it is the language of choice for day to day Communication for native speakers.” Similarly, Versteegh (2001) believes that, unlike SA, the QA varieties have traditionally been considered as a distorted, debased, and deficient forms of SA – a form that necessitates consistent rectification (Versteegh, 2001). As an Lahn “eccentric accents,” QA varieties were often viewed as a mark of ignorance. Salama Ben Abdulmalik is reported to have said: “The lahn in the speech is uglier than the chickenpox on the face” (Ibn Qutayba’ *Ṣuyūn Al-Akhbaar*, 1996, p. 197) in (Albirini 2016:81)

The view that spoken Arabic is an inferior form of the language is not without a historical precedent. Besides, the view that spoken Arabic is nothing more than, a distorted form of the original, as it was, a prevalent pessimistic attitude towards spoken Arabic that has been reinforced to a lesser degree by nonprofessionals, and to a larger degree by intellectuals. Accordingly, many in the Arab World still entertain the conviction that, the simplified grammar of the spoken form does not amount to the sophistication of the original and the logic of the original. Albirini (2016).

Moreover, many scholars stress the need to constantly examine the Arabic sociolinguistic setting in which diglossia has perpetuated till date. The sustainance of this long-standing paradigm of dichotomy, or sharp cleavage between literary and colloquial Arabic has both weakened the effectiveness of Arabic language teaching, and undermined the appeal of Arabic as a learnable and useful foreign language. Thus, leaving the field in crisis for many years, they protest, vehemently against the interference of some colloquial forms within standard Arabic, fearing dreadful educational quality results. Among these scholars Maamouri (1989) who alarms about “the growing use of the colloquial forms in formal and non-formal education and in other numerous everyday activities” (Mambourin, 1989: 68).

While other scholars regard the diglossic situation where, el fusha is involved within other varied vernacular forms of Arabic, which may have a positive effect in the Arab world like Zughoul who refers this to the elevated amount of illiteracy as a reason for the gap between el fusha and Arabic dialects, were quite noticeable.

Kaye (2001: 119) mentions, that, diglossia and bidialectal variations exist in Arabic-speaking countries, “Some educated Arabs find it difficult to carry on a conversation in Modern Standard Arabic”. Unfortunately, in the Arab world, there is a negative impact when the phenomenon of diglossia interferes in the reading and writing skills of the learner, in schools because of the different forms between, colloquial and standard Arabic. Consequently, the phenomenon of diglossia in school engenders not only poor results of literacy but also, very bad achievements, failure and poor feedback in schools.

Therefore, low linguistic attainment in almost all Arab schools urges national authorities, supported by language policy-makers, sociolinguistic researchers, as well as college educators to inquire about the linguistic reality of the Arabic language and its negative consequences on learner’s abilities and competencies to conduct an academic course.

Considering Modern Standard Arabic as nobody’s mother tongue, almost not used at home or for daily life activities, that are manifested through a range of colloquial varieties, it has been thought to bridge the difficult gap existing between written and spoken skills, especially at the beginning, and intermediate levels.

Such a situation marked a remarkable number of pedagogical implications, which is hard to get control over. It delineates how colloquial Arabic has seriously weakened the effectiveness of, not only language teaching, but also the process of learning. Among these weaknesses, one may advocate at first place the idea that Arabic is becoming a learnable foreign language dealing with functions and topics of a very classical and traditional approach, relying much more on linguistic rules and norms rather than practicing it as a medium of communication and interaction, i.e., lack of practical experience. In this sense, Attia points out: “the four linguistic skills cannot be fulfilled unless the Arabic is thought functionally”

## **PEDAGOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The UNESCO suggests a shift from mother tongue to language learning, in parallel with illiteracy to literacy: “It is better, psychologically and pedagogically, to achieve literacy by two short jumps (that is, from illiteracy to literacy in the mother tongue, and from literacy in the mother tongue to literacy in a second language) than by one long jump (that is, from illiteracy in the mother tongue to literacy in a second language”. (1968: 699). This, largely means that, the language of instruction is in deep relationship with the learner’s attainment in schools.

Maamouri (1983) opts for a literary Arabic for good learning, plus having a better chance for work in the future. He wrote:

The choice of MSA for adult education, seen as the acquisition of basic reading and writing skills, seems to be a logical one. Any literacy teaching in TA, would have been laughed at, and looked down upon by the potential literates themselves, who would have considered it a sub-standard and therefore a useless form of education, which was not likely to secure them a better job, or improve their low social status.

Quoted in Ayari (2009 :247)

It is then highly recommended to strengthen standard Arabic in schools for a better academic success

## CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of diglossia has widely been studied by different contexts and countries globally, agreeing on a firm and adequate definition of it, interpreted upto the nature of mother tongue coexisting with other varieties. In countries where more than one language exists, spurs the phenomenon of diglossia, where it becomes more importantly viewed when it drives pedagogical implications; particularly in the Arab world, in which Arabic is a strong reason for diglossia, for the big effect it has on education and, thus, it makes it an inevitable sociolinguistic phenomenon. The diglossic community transits to schools, to deal with languages of instruction and learning, with the aim to promote proficiency, and widen communication to dominate the shift from home to school.

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