

## **Diglossia and Its Applications: The Case of Saudi Arabia**

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### **Abstract**

Until its comprehensive and systematic treatment by Ferguson in 1959 in his seminal paper entitled "Diglossia", Arabic diglossia had almost been absent from the literature. Subsequently, researchers have evaluated the linguistic situation in different Arab countries, stressing the threat it poses to the Arabic language as well as its negative impact on education (e.g. Maamouri, 1998). While there is a consensus among Arab linguists on the two varieties suggested by Ferguson, namely the High (H) and Low (L) varieties with their defined functional complementarity, discrepancy is still found in the emergent Arabic varieties, thereby widening the gap between the Classical (H) and the Colloquial (L) to form a multi-level continuum that represents the varieties of Arabic in Iraq, Altoma, (1969), Egypt, Badawi (1973) and Mejdell, (2006), and Tunisia, Walters (2003).

The present paper attempts to shed some light on Arabic diglossia with reference to Saudi Arabia, the largest country in the Gulf region, given that Arab linguists have given little or no attention at all to this particular issue. It also describes the relevant literature on diglossia in general and Arabic diglossia in particular and proposes a continuum of the diglossic situation in this part of the world. This new model delineates the size of the gap between the linguistic codes in Saudi Arabia that results from the immense geographic area and the diversified social structure of the Saudi society. The degree of overlap between different codes is shown.

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لم تحظى الازدواجية اللغوية في اللغة العربية بالنصيب الكاف من البحث والتحليل، إلى أن تناولتها دراسة فيرجسون في عام 1959م الموسومة بـ Diglossia. توالى بعدئذ الدراسات من قبل الباحثين الأجانب والعرب لمعرفة الوضع اللغوي في العالم العربي وتقويمه، والخطر الذي تشكله الازدواجية اللغوية على اللغة العربية وتأثيرها السلبي على التعليم (المعموري، 1998).

وقد لُحظ أن هنالك إجماعاً بين الباحثين فيما يخص توزيع هرم الأصناف اللغوية، والذي تتصدر الفصحى رأسه وتأتي العامية في أسفله، وذلك وفق ما اقترحه فيرجسون. إلا أن التباين وجد في الأصناف اللغوية التي أضافها الباحثون لاحقاً بين قطبي الهرم، والتي أسهمت بدورها في توسيع الفجوة بين الفصحى والعامية، الأمر الذي نتج عنه صعوبة في وصف تلك الأصناف وعلاقتها وتداخلاتها مع الفصحى والعامية. فعلى سبيل المثال قام بعض الباحثين بوصف أنواع العربية المستخدمة في مصر، وتونس، والعراق (Badawi، 1973 و Mejdell، 2006، Walters؛ 2003، Altoma، 1969) على التوالي.

إلا أن وضع الازدواجية اللغوية في المملكة العربية السعودية لم يحظى باهتمام الباحثين سواء من الأجانب أو من اللغويين العرب، وبالتالي تحاول هذه الدراسة أن تسلط الضوء على الازدواجية اللغوية في العالم العربي بوجه عام، مع التركيز على أنواع العربية الموجودة في المملكة العربية السعودية، وذلك بعرض وتحليل الدراسات السابقة في الازدواجية اللغوية العربية.

كما تقدم الدراسة أنموذجاً مقترحاً يصف الوضع اللغوي في المملكة العربية السعودية، أخذاً في الحسبان اتساع رقعة المملكة الجغرافية وخصوصيتها الدينية واللغوية وتركيبية مجتمعتها القبلية والتي أسهمت في توليد أصنافاً لغوية فريدة متعلقة بالمجتمع السعودي. كما توصف الدراسة درجة التداخل بين الأصناف اللغوية في الأنموذج المقترح.

## **Introduction**

Research on language and its relationship to society in this century has revealed several phenomena. One of these is diglossia which is a language situation characterized by the coexistence of two or more varieties belonging to the same language. The functional allocation of each code is mutually exclusive; one is used for writing and the other for everyday conversation.

Although the term “diglossia” was popularized by Ferguson (1959), its coinage goes back to 1902 and 1930 when German linguist Karl Krubacher and French linguist Marcus respectively used the term to describe the Arabic language situation Britto, (1986). Despite which, the impact of their discussion remained dormant until Ferguson’s seminal paper. The interest was awakened due to his comprehensive and systematic treatment of the subject as well as the inclusion of other diglossic situations such as Haitian French, Swiss German and Greek. In addition, diglossia is distinguished from other languages that bear some resemblance to it due to the employment of several codes in the same community. For example, Ferguson (1959) differentiates it from Standard-with -Dialects situations in which the standard can be the native language of some segment of the population. Diglossia is also different from bilingualism where there is an alternate use of two or more languages; however, the languages are usually separate ones. Moreover, bilingualism is a personal and psychological behavior, and thus it is characterized as individual language use while diglossia is a language and societal phenomenon as pointed out by Fishman (1967). This paper will discuss diglossia in general and then apply that discussion to diglossia in Saudi Arabic. To reach this objective, the researcher proposes a six-level model (continuum) which illustrates the varieties used in different Saudi communities.

## Literature Review:

Most of the literature on diglossia and its future was spurred by Ferguson's paper (1959). Researchers started to investigate speech distribution and its functional allocation in relation to social environment. Gumperz (1962) points out those codes are mostly differentiated in certain intermediate societies whether they are peasants, herder or tribal. Certain codes will be used for sacred and administrative functions and others for everyday communication. Hymes (1964) emphasized taking the community as a frame of reference whenever discussing a diglossic situation. Besides Ferguson, Fishman (1967) created more interest in the subject by extending the definition of diglossia to include situations in which varieties are not closely related such as certain bilingual communities. This extension was later criticized by others as Lenora (1980) as being a misrendering of diglossia and for blurring some useful distinctions. Fishman also emphasized the concepts of domain, roles and values associated with each code. For example, rigid functional compartmentalization of roles maintains diglossia by preventing competition between the codes. He theorized about the various combinations of bilingual and diglossic situations and their predictive value in regard to language maintenance. Recently, more research has been done on diglossia as it is applied to other languages, old and current. Deshpande (1991) discusses diglossia in the writing of Sanskrit Grammarians. Spolsky (1991) revives diglossia of the late second temple period while Comrie (1991) reflects on diglossia in the old Russian period. In current languages, diglossia is discussed in relation to Chinese and Tamil by Peyraube (1991) and Britto (1996) respectively. New syntactic theories in linguistics, such as Government and Binding are applied to diglossia by Paplillo (1991). In addition, other hybrid terms have been added such as biglossia by Fellman (1975) designating a mixture of bilingualism and diglossia and "triglossia" Mikilifi (1972).

**Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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Any discussion of diglossia has to start with its definition by Ferguson (1959, p. 245) who defines it as follows:

A relatively stable language situation in which in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards) there is a very divergent highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature either of an earlier period or in another speech community which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for the ordinary conversation.

The following table illustrates Ferguson's distribution of diglossia:

**Table 1: Ferguson's Distribution of diglossia**

| <b>Situation</b>                                    | <b>High</b> | <b>Low</b> |
|---|-------------|------------|
| Sermon in Church or Mosque                          | X           |            |
| Instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks  |             | X          |
| Speech in Parliament, Political speech              | X           |            |
| University lecture                                  | X           |            |
| Conversation with family, friends, colleagues       |             | X          |
| News broadcast                                      | X           |            |
| Radio "Soap opera"                                  |             | X          |
| Newspaper editorial, news story, caption on picture | X           |            |
| Caption on political cartoon                        |             | X          |
| Poetry  | X           |            |
| Folk literature                                     |             | X          |

The highly codified code is referred to as the "High" variety, while the dialect is referred to as the "Low" variety. Britto (1986, p. 8) classifies the above feature of the two varieties under nine rubrics as illustrated in the following table:

**Table 2: Britto's (1986) Rubrics of diglossia**

| Rubric            | Characteristic of High  | Characteristic of Low  |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Function          | Used for formal speeches, writing and such (H)igh functions.  | Used for conversations and such low functions  |
| Prestige          | More prestigious  | Less prestigious   |
| Acquisition       | Learned formally at school, in addition to L.   | Acquired naturally and informally at home or playground  |
| Standardization   | Highly standardized by descriptive and normative studies  | Poorly standardized though informal standard may exist   |
| Literary heritage | Vast amount. Highly esteemed literature   | Small amount. Less highly esteemed literature  |
| Stability         | Autonomous and stable. With some interference form L.   | Autonomous and stable, with some interference from H.  |
| Lexicon           | The bulk of vocabulary is shared with L. But there are also words used exclusively or paired with L.            | The bulk of vocabulary is shared with H. But there are also words used exclusively or paired with H. |
| Phonology         | With L constituents or single phonological structure. Features divergent from L are a subsystem or a parasystem | With H constituents or single phonological structure. L, however, is the basic system.               |
| Grammar           | More complex (highly inflectional)  | Simpler(lessinflectiona)   |

### **Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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Although these rubrics have diverse references, they are related to each other as Britto suggests. For example, ‘lexicon’, ‘grammar’, and ‘phonology’ can be put together in one category as structural relatedness between H and L. Similarly, acquisition, function, prestige, and standardization can be discussed under one category, namely "function". The relatedness of the varieties can be attested by similarities in morphology, grammar, lexicon, and phonology. However, the H variety is more complicated in regard to most aspects of grammar and morphology. The lexicon of the H variety has the technical and learned vocabulary while that of L contains items more frequently used words in everyday talk. The phonological system of the L variety is usually the basic system for both varieties, with some exceptions in Arabic L varieties as will be shown below.

The degree of relatedness between the varieties has been an important point of discussion in diglossia. Britto (1986) calls the middle range relatedness as ‘optimal relatedness’ and he calls the two codes as the ‘optimal codes’. While Ferguson calls the H and L as two varieties or major components, Britto calls them ‘diasystems’ or two systems with varieties. Other researchers have modified and extended Ferguson’s remarks on relatedness “in words that mask rather reveal the basic insight of Ferguson” (Britto, p. 11). For example, Morag (1969) considers diglossia more prevalent than Ferguson has originally argued, because the former includes sub-optimal varieties within it. Fishman (1967), on the other hand, considers some bilingual communities as diglossic by including super-optimal codes.

Functional complementarity is the hallmark of diglossia; the L variety is used for ordinary conversation while the H variety is used exclusively for literary functions. Ferguson explains this dichotomy as being the result of the way the two codes are acquired; the H is the superposed variety, the one formally acquired, while the L code is naturally learned. Fishman (1967) argues that this dichotomy is the result of two types of social compartmentalization, functional

compartmentalization as well as political compartmentalization that is distributed along population lines. Therefore, according to Fishman, diglossia is a reflection of the dichotomy existing in the society with regard to roles and values. As a result, diglossia exists in societies that have rigid functional compartmentalization of roles and Fishman suggests that it would be absent in societies with limited role differentiation.

Since the use of H presupposes that one also uses L but not vice versa, Britto (1986) refers to H as acquisitionally and functionally superposed. This unequal access to H led some scholars to condemn diglossia. Sotiropoulos (1977) thinks that diglossia is maintained by social inequality. Others differentiate between a 'good' diglossia (use-oriented diglossia) and a 'bad' diglossia (user-oriented diglossia) such as the one in colonial India, Halliday, McIntosh, Strevens (1968). In the former, functional norms are observed by the whole community with regard to H and L, while in the latter, these norms are manipulated by the elite to serve its own purpose. For example, the elite members may use H in conversation to identify their caste or origin. In addition, in the use-oriented diglossia there is a correlation between H mastery and other speaker characteristics such as social class, origin, or religion, Britto (1986, p. 38).

It seems, therefore, that use-oriented diglossia is more compatible with democratic principles than the other one. As such, it intends to be a stable situation that persists over a long period of time, as the discussion of Arabic diglossia will reveal in the next discussion.

### **Arabic Diglossia: A Historical Overview**

Historically speaking, when and how Arabic diglossia emerged remains a subject of debate. Some linguists believe that Arabic diglossia is traced back to the pre-Islamic era, where different dialects were spoken by different tribes, with one prestigious variety, the language of the poets. Others claim that it was not until the spread of Islam that Arabic diglossia emerged as a result of the linguistic contact with other non-Arabic speaking Muslims, where entries of



### **Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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different varieties were introduced to Arabic. Ferguson (1959), however, suggest that a variety spoken in the time of the Islamic expansion in the middle of the 7th century, which was distinct from the Quran, was the source of all other dialects that existed outside of the Arabian Peninsula.

Badawi (1973) is one of the early researchers who discussed in some detail the history of Arabic diglossia in his book *Mustawayaat 'al cArabiyya 'al-Mucaasira fi Misr*. He describes how the two varieties, the Fusha (Classical) and the cammiyyah, (Colloquial) emerged, yet referring to each variety as a “a linguistic level”. He states that Arabs, who lived in different tribes before Islam, spoke different dialects, and due to commercial, religious and social reasons, there was a preference for the Quraishi dialect to serve as the medium of communication for the various tribes. This step, in Badawi’s view, is more like a confession that such in-tribe dialects are no more capable of attending to the needs of their speakers, particularly in the new commercial, religious and social contexts. This new variety, or linguistic level, satisfied the desire of the members of the “community” by virtue of being efficient in expressing various aspects of life. This Quraish Dialect is what came to be known later as the “Classical” Fusha” or “Al-cArabiah”. Here, Badawi suggests that Arabic/Fusha was diglossic from the outset.

### **The Nature of Arabic Diglossia**

While it may not be very clear when Arabic diglossia actually emerged, a great number of linguists share a common view that it is the diglossic situation par excellence and is credited as the major contributor in the development of the concept of diglossia (Comrie, 1980). With the spread of Islam, diglossia became prevalent beyond the Arabian Peninsula and its treatment became a subject of study in philological and literary research as far as the 9th century (Altoma, 1969). However, it had never been viewed as impairment to literacy until the late 19th century and early 20th century, as will be discussed later.

Like many other languages, Arabic diglossia involves two main varieties, the Classical, which is acquired by formal education and is used for writing and speaking in certain formal situations, and the Colloquial, which is the mother tongue that is used for everyday communication. The two codes share many structural similarities although the Colloquial is a simplified version of the Classical. The Colloquial itself varies from one Arab country to another; it even varies within each country from one part to another. In the last few decades, however, the analysis of Arabic diglossia has been extended to include other varieties, e.g. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) which was added to the continuum. In Egyptian Arabic, Badawi (1973) places Fusha Al-Turath (Classical) at the top of the continuum and cAmmiyyat Al-Ummiyyiin (Colloquial) at the bottom. According to him, the latter carries very little features of the Classical. Three other linguistic levels are placed between the two ends of the continuum, as will be shown in his continuum below.

Regardless of how many varieties are included in the diglossic continuum, Classical Arabic will always enjoy the reverence of its speakers because it is the language in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed. Below is a list proposed by the present researchers of the variables that he believes set Arabic apart, not only from the Colloquial but from other languages as well.

**Table 3:**

**Paralinguistic Level:**

|                       | Classical Arabic   | Colloquial               |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Prestige - Sacredness | Very prestigious, having a mystical power due to its religious attachment.               | Less prestigious.        |
| Heritage              | It connects the Arabs to their huge literary heritage of which they are intensely proud. | Has less cultural value. |

**Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

|              |  |  |
|--------------|--|--|
| Universality | Universal among all Arabs and Muslims. As such, it is used as a vehicle of communication with other Arab and Muslim countries. | Not always intelligible to speakers of other dialects in the Arab /Muslim World(1) |
| Permanence   | Unchangeable and preserved by the Holy Qur'an  | constantly changing and some of its lexical items are fading out                   |

Therefore, the above religious, literary, and national reasons endear the Classical to most Arab and Muslim hearts despite its complex grammar and the hard effort required in learning it. Indeed, it is an essential part of their identity, dignity, culture and religion. The Colloquial, on the hand, is looked down upon with contempt as a distortion of the real language. Zughoul (1980) lists some descriptions given to the Colloquial by Arab writers, “tongue of the drunkards and servants”, “protégé of ignorance and imperialism”, unworthy to be called a language...and unfit to fulfill the aims of intellectual life”, (P.206).

The sincere feeling toward the Classical by Arabs has been criticized by Ferguson (1964), however, who attributes them to myths that the Arabs have regarding the two varieties. He thinks that these attitudes do not correspond to objective reality stating that, while Arabs take great pride in the symmetry and logic of the root and pattern symmetry of the Classical variety, they ignore the near chaos of the Arabic noun system. They despise the Colloquial although it is the language of songs, drama, and folklore. This position is echoed by Maamouri (1998, p.38) who states,

Fusha carries in its own etymology the myth about its eloquence and high degree of correctness. Moreover, Arabs despise the spoken

colloquial forms and even deny that they use them because they consider the colloquials they speak as ‘degraded’ and corrupt forms of the language. They give them derogatory names such as *barbri* “barbarian” or *yitkallam bi-l-fallaqi* ‘he speaks the language of woodloggers’.

To an outsider, this Arab attitude toward the colloquial may seem to be paradoxical, while, in fact, it is not. Arabic, unlike other languages, has some unique characteristics, one of which is that learning and teaching it are acts of worship, being the language of the Holy Book of Muslims. According to the Prophet's saying, “Arabic is the language of paradise.” To this end, Arabic is not merely a system of communication; it also carries a spiritual dimension that other languages lack. Linguistically, the root of the word "language" (*lughah*) is "*laghu*", means to err, and often has a negative connotation. Therefore, it is not found in the Holy Qur'an, and the term "tongue" is used instead. Surah 16, An-Nahl, for example, says:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ لِّسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ

"And indeed We know that they (polytheists and pagans) say: 'It is only a human being who teaches him (Muhammad SAW).' The tongue of the man they refer to is foreign, while this (the Qur'an) is a clear Arabic tongue."

The adjective "clear" in the verse above denotes clarity of speech, which entails that other varieties lack such a clarity. Therefore, speaking the Colloquial is considered to be a deviation from such ‘religiously desired clarity’, at least in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims. Furthermore, due to its strong attachment to the Qur'an, Arabic is considered unique compared to all other languages, and when Arabs use the Colloquials in religious contexts, they do so with a feel of inadequacy.

### **Attitudes of Arabs toward Arabic Diglossia and the Proposed Solutions**

Conflicting feelings toward diglossia emerged under the influence of orientalist who first became aware of the problem and who

### **Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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attributed the backwardness of the Arab World to this language situation. Swayed by this influence, some Egyptian writers such as Mahmoud Teymour and Salama Mousa attacked Classical Arabic. A movement toward the development of the vernacular sprouted in several Arabic countries, but this movement was considered with suspicion by ordinary people because it was encouraged by the West. However, several solutions were suggested, one of which was the promotion of each standard dialect (usually that of the capital) to a written form. Another was the promotion of one standard variety linked with the language of educated speakers as the future language.

Both of these solutions were doomed to be rejected because they would entail the demise of the Classical which would take away “the precious and irreplaceable symbol of all that Arabs have meant to themselves and the world” (Gibb, 1961, p.7). The same reasons that make the Classical dear to Arab hearts are always at work to resist any move from it; religious functions, fear of losing access to past heritage, and fear of isolation from other Arab and Islamic countries.

Another solution is geared toward the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language, with a special focus on the spoken language. This option is the Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA) that is adopted by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the US State Department to teach non-native speakers of Arabic assigned to posts in the Arab world. While FSA focuses heavily on raising the communicative skills of students, it does teach them how to write (Ryding, 1991). In her study entitled "Proficiency despite Diglossia: A New Approach for Arabic", Ryding (p. 215) proposes the FSA as a viable option, illustrating its features as taught at FSI. She claims that "the elements of this variety of Arabic... result from the insights and intuitions of the educated native speakers who form the staff of instructors at FSI, both in the US and abroad...and that its lexicon is largely that of MSA."

Nonetheless, the FSA examples provided are, to any Arab, more of the Egyptian vernacular, which is widely understood in many Arab countries due to the Egyptian media influence in the last four decades,

rather than to its putative resemblance to MSA or CA. The following examples from Ryding illustrate the divergence of the following items from the CA "shaaf (to see), jaab (to bring) raah (to go), ijaa (to come). To this researcher, educated speakers who use MSA would consider these lexical items more Colloquial than they are MSA items. In fact, many linguists classify MSA as an adjacent variety of CA and assert that there is a striking resemblance between them, especially in the lexicon (e.g. Mitchell, 1986).

One of the proposed solutions suggested using the Classical as a lingua franca in addition to a written colloquial, but this also faded. Advocates of the Classical proposed using it as a spoken language to preserve Arab unity. Though hard to implement, they argued, this proposition could only succeed by expanding educational facilities and discouraging the cultural use of the Colloquial. Altoma (1969) suggests that the latter proposition is undermined by the development of new genres such as drama, novels, and motion pictures that give the Colloquial a new function, in addition to the influence of some new political movements such as Arab Socialism, which sympathizes with the masses and their languages.

In a relatively recent discussion of this problem (Zughul, 1980), Arab graduate students at the University of Texas offered several solutions ranging from the ones stated above to other new ones. The use of the Colloquial as a national language was vehemently rejected for the same reasons mentioned earlier. The choice most agreed upon was in favor of using MSA as the future language in speaking and writing. This goal can be accomplished by simplifying the Classical through rewriting its grammar, mass literacy campaigns, reducing colloquial media, and training language teachers in more efficient methods of language teaching.

### **Diglossic Continua of Arabic**

In the last few decades, research trends have yielded a number of inclusions in the typical two-code (H-L) diglossic continuum in an attempt to elucidate how the linguistic system of Arabic actually works.

**Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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The first variety that was added to the typical dichotomy is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which Ferguson calls "Middle Language" and Educated Arabic (EA). While Educated Arabic is not very well defined and unstructured, it is spoken by educated Arabs throughout the Arab countries. Its structure and morphology is similar to that of the Colloquial, while its lexicon approaches that of the Classical. Freeman (1996, p. 7) describes this variety as "a very classicized version of dialect or a very colloquialized version of MSA". According to Freeman, there is a lot of borrowing from MSA into this variety.

MSA, on the other hand, became popular in journalism and the mass media and it is a slightly simplified version of the Classical. Its morphology and syntax are closer to that of the Classical but it differs from the latter in lexicon by using a simpler and more frequently used vocabulary. This distinction between MSA and the Classical is not very obvious to readers in the Arab World, and as Zughul (1980, p. 207) observes, "other than the specialists who received their training in the West, particularly America, few people recognize its existence". In sum, the two main codes have yielded another two slightly modified varieties to form the following continuum:

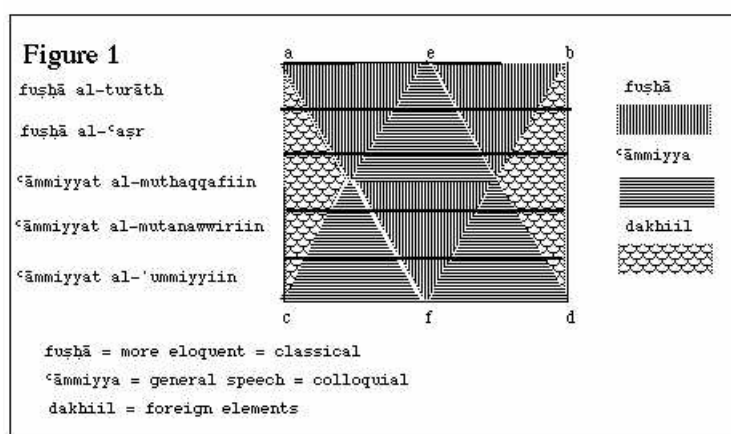
Classical ..... MSA.....EA.....Colloquial.

It should be noted that in this continuum each hybrid variety is closer in syntax and morphology to its related code but not in the lexicon. The impact of these new varieties has created conflicting attitudes toward diglossia in the Arab World reminiscent of those at the onset of this century.

Other linguists, such as Freeman (1996), refers to MSA as being closely linked to the CA and thus it is nearly uniform across a span of 1100 years throughout the Arabic speaking world. Badawi (1973) offers a five level Model that illustrates the levels of the Egyptian Arabic, where he places two types of Fusha (Classical) at the top and three levels of Colloquial at the bottom in an attempt to show the speech of an individual within the system (See figure 1). Below is Freeman's translation of the varieties in Badawi's continuum:

|                           |                                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Fusha al-turath           | the Classical Language of Tradition |
| Fusha al-casr,            | the Modern Classical Language       |
| Ammiyyat al-muthaqqafiin  | the Colloquial of the Educated      |
| Ammiyyat al-mutanawwiriin | the Colloquial of the Enlightened   |
| Ammiyyat al-ummiyyiin     | the Colloquial of the Illiterate    |
| Dakhiil                   | Foreign elements                    |

**Figure 1: Badawi's Model "Levels of Egyptian Arabic"**



Unlike Ferguson's description of diglossia, which states that the two forms are in complementary distribution, Badawi's continuum is intertwined, in that every variety includes mixing from other varieties. That is, individuals speaking Fusha may use items from Colloquial and the illiterate, and vice versa. Level and type of education are considered main variables for the use of the Classical by the speakers. While Badawi's model gives a good account of mixing between the five codes, it, however, fails to "show the unity of Fusha across the entire expanse of space and time at the High end of the spectrum nor the atomization of the dialects by person and location at the other." (Freeman, 1996, p. 6).



### **Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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These varieties, however, can by no means be applicable to the Gulf countries, where code-switching is between the CA and other varieties, on the one hand, and Arabic and English, on the other. Freeman (1996) casts doubts on this model questioning whether CA and MSA are used in extemporaneous speech. The present author, however, does not share the same reservation. As a matter of fact, Friday Sermon, which is always delivered in CA, is a weekly reminder of the rich input for the speakers of all varieties.

Walters also proposes a model of Tunisian Arabic in which even more varieties of Tunisian Arabic are added; namely, Informal Written Arabic (IWA), Oral Literary Arabic (OLA), Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), and Elevated Tunisian Arabic (ETA).

### **Diglossia in Saudi Arabia**

In order to set the scene for the discussion of the diglossic situation in Saudi Arabia, we need, first, to know some of the variables that set Saudi Arabia apart from other Arab and Gulf countries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia differs from other countries in a number of important variables: geography, population and its Islamic value. Geographically, SA is one of the largest country of Arabia, occupying 80% of the Arabian Peninsula, with a total of 2,150,000 square kilometers (830,000 square miles). (Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs). As to its population, according to the statistics of the Saudi General Department of Statistics and Information in 2009, the population of Saudi Arabia is over 25 million, 18 million of whom are Saudis speaking Arabic as their native language. As such, the country qualifies to be a fertile environment for linguistic diversity. Moreover, the structure of the Saudi society differs greatly from that of other Arab societies, in that it consists of five regions and more than 30 tribes, each of which is comprised of a multiple layers of sub-tribes. The distribution of such tribes is usually grouped under the region in which the majority of the tribe resides. For example, the Northern Region shelters the tribes, Enizah, Shammar, Shararat, Beli, Bani Attiyah, Alhuaitat, etc. Each one of such tribes speaks a distinct

dialect that can be recognized by individuals of other tribes, yet with increasing amount of similarity with the neighboring tribes.

The Holy City of Makkah is the place where the Qur'an was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and Madinah is where the second Holiest Mosque is located (the Prophet's Mosque). Such a religious value gives SA a spiritual value to all Muslims. It goes without saying that the Arabic language has a special attachment to the Holy Qur'an. Some non-Arabic speaking Muslims, often learn Arabic to be able to read the Qur'an, for it is not religiously sufficient to read a translation of its meanings in another language. It is not, therefore, surprising to find an Indian Muslim, for example, who can read the Qur'an, yet unable to understand a word of Arabic.

The diglossic situation in Saudi Arabia is, in principle, similar to that in Egypt, in that they both place the Classical/Fusha at the very top and the Colloquial at the bottom of the continuum. The variation, however, lies in the varieties between the two codes. Badawi's (1973) continuum of Egyptian Arabic refers to the Classical as Fusha Al-Turath, followed by Fusha Al-cAsr (the Modern Classical Language) or MSA, and then three types of Colloquials, thereby consisting of five linguistic levels, as illustrated in table 4.

### **The Saudi Arabic Continuum:**

The data of the present study is based primarily on the literature reviewed on Arabic diglossia as well as the researcher's personal documentation. The researcher, being a Saudi speaker of Arabic, proposes a continuum that describes the diglossic situation in Saudi Arabia. The continuum is comprised of six varieties, The Qur'anic Arabic (QA), the Classical Arabic (CA), the MSA, Regional Dialects (RD), Tribal Dialects (TD), and Village Dialects (VD). Such varieties are grouped under three main categories, The Fusha, which consists of the QA and CA, the MSA, and the Colloquials, which consist of RD, TD and VD, as illustrated in table 4 below.

**Table 4: The Proposed Continuum for Saudi Arabic**

| Variety    | Type                            |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| Fusha      | Qur'anic Arabic                 |
|            | Classical Arabic:               |
| MSA        | Modern Standard Arabic<br>(MSA) |
|            | Regional Dialects (RD)          |
| Colloquial | Tribal Dialects (TD)            |
|            | Village Dialects (VD)           |

(The wave line represents the overlap between varieties and its thickness represents the approximate divergence between adjacent varieties)

It is worth noting that, in this model, the Fusha (QA and CA), despite the similarities between its two types, in that CA shares most of its morphology, syntax and lexicon with the QA, they differ in a number of aspects. QA is the variety of the Quraish Dialect in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed, and thus, it is referred to here as the Qur'anic Arabic. With the exception of the skilled Qur'an reciters, this variety has no native speakers now, for a salient feature of such a variety is that its speakers make no mistakes in all levels of the language. Describing the CA to which he refers as Fusha, Maamouri (1998, p. 32) states,

Fusha cannot easily be considered a mother tongue. Fusha is nobody's mother tongue and is rarely or almost never used at home in the Arab world. It is only learned through schooling and used exclusively at outside official or formal functions.

The written forms that represent QA are the Holy Qur'an, books of Prophetic Sayings (hadeeth) and Pre-Islamic literature. Like the QA, CA has no native speakers, yet it is spoken formally by religious scholars, Arabic linguists, Friday sermon orators, and some university professors. Formal speeches in conferences and inauguration ceremonies are mostly delivered in this variety. Also most modern literature, court documents and school textbooks are examples of the written forms of CA. The Fusha (QA and CA) have a complicated grammar that has hardly changed in the last 1,400 years. They both have highly inflectional systems that include different cases for mood, number, and gender. The Colloquials, on the other hand, have lost those inflections as well as the dual except for the nouns. Though the Fusha and Colloquials share many lexical items, the Fusha has a richer lexicon with several new coinages. The vocabulary of the Colloquial contains more frequently used entries and more familiar, and is more open to borrowings. Phonology is the area mostly shared by the two varieties; however, some sounds are realized differently in different dialects as will be illustrated in examples 1 and 2 below, which show loss of inflections and varied phonological realizations.

1. raʔaytu walada:yni saʔi:rayni yalʔbani fiʔarici. (**Classical**)

(I saw two small boys playing in the street)

2. ʃuft waldayn sivar yalʔbun fiʃʔari' (**Colloquial**)

The verb 'raʔaytu' in the Classical is replaced by a simpler verb "ʃuft" which has lost its inflection 'u' for first person singular. The dual marker 'a:yni' for the accusative is simplified for the noun but totally lost for the adjective. The genitive inflection 'i' is also lost for the last word.

1. alqamaru dʒame:lun jidan ha ʔ ihi allaylatu. (**Classical**)

(The moon is very beautiful tonight)

**2.: algamar d3ameel alailah (Colloquial)**

In the above example, the phoneme [q] corresponds to [g] in the Saudi (as well as in many other Gulf and Arab countries).

The following table further illustrates some differences between the Fusha and Colloquials:

**Table 5: Differences between the Fusha and the Colloquials in the Saudi Arabic:**

|                         | <b>Fusha</b>  | <b>Colloquials</b>  |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Inflectional            | Highly inflectional with case endings for number, gender and tense  | Mostly no inflections and case endings (except for the noun)  |
| Word Order              | Mostly VSO, with permissible SVO in certain contexts (Noun Phrases) | Only SVO<br>(In certain contexts, the subject is deleted)   |
| Vocalic Representations | Structures are marked by short vowels                               | Mostly, no short vowels used  |
| Adjective Agreement     | Adjectives agree with nouns in number and gender                    | No agreement  |
| Vowel system            | Three long vowels and three short vowels                            | More complex vocalic structure with additional (e o)  |
| Consonant               | Twenty eight consonants   | Some consonants are modified and pronounced with different place or manner of articulation from the Classical (e.g. d□ (ض) changed to ð□ (ظ)) |
| Morphological system    | Use of singular, dual and plural nouns for masculine and feminine   | Only singular and plural. No dual form or feminine plural   |
| Lexicon                 | Richer and uses derivation  | Rich and uses items from foreign languages  |

### **Modern Standard Arabic**

The Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has been described differently by a number of researchers, some of whom consider it parallel to CA, (Freeman, 1996), while others like Mitchell (1986) describe it as the language of the educated, and others as a middle language that lies between the CA and the Colloquial. Other researchers have coined different labels to refer to, more or less, the same variety; Educated Arabic, Urban Cultivated Arabic, Middle Arabic, Pan Arabic, Inter-regional Standard, Super-dialectal L" SDL", Inter-Arabic, the "inter-Arabic Koine, the "Elevated Colloquial, Al-Lughatu Alwusta "the Middle Language", lughat al-mucaasira, lughat 'al-casr, or lughat 'al-jaraa'id , to name but a few, (Ryding, 1991 and Maamouri, 1998). While the label may not be of any importance to us here, the cleavage between the varieties of Arabic, more particularly between the Fusha (QA and CA) and MSA is an issue of particular interest. We should be cautious, however, of the inherent "fuzziness" when attempting to draw a picture of the actual characteristics of each one of such varieties due to their overlapping nature. That is, it is not easy to draw a line between the boundaries of each variety, nor is it easy to tell exactly the extent of resemblance between varieties in terms of linguistic levels (e.g. morphology, syntax, lexicon). In the Saudi proposed continuum, the MSA is similar to what other researchers have described in terms of its resemblance to CA in morphology and syntax (e.g. Mitchell, 1986).

Regarding its function, the MSA in the Saudi model, like in other Arabic diglossic situations, is used in both written and spoken language mostly by educated individuals in semi-formal contexts. In writing, it is used in journalism, press conferences, scientific and technological writing, law firm documents and private sector correspondence. In the spoken Arabic, MSA is used by some university professors, and in political speeches and media.

Colloquials: The geography and tribal structure of the Saudi Society results in a diversified distribution of varieties. In this

### **Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

continuum, the Colloquial is divided into three dialectal varieties; Regional Dialects (RD), Tribal Dialects (TD) and Village Dialects (VD). The RD represents the varieties spoken in the five main regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Central, Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern regions.

Each RD is spoken by the individuals of its region and can be easily recognized by others. The written form of RD's are mainly folk poetry, dances, and TV series/plays. Each RD's differs greatly from the Fusha and from other RD's in the Kingdom in many levels. That is, the further down the variety in the continuum, the lesser resemblance it will bear to the Fusha. As such, the RD bears less resemblance to the QA or CA, in all language levels. For example, the verb "to speak" (yatakallamu in QA/CA) is realized differently in the following RD's:

1. Yahatsi (Central -Najdi dialects)
2. Yahrij (Western Dialects)
3. Yatahcha (Eastern Dialects)
4. Yataharaj (Southern Dialects)
5. Yahchi (Northern Dialects)

Each RD, in turn, is comprised of a number of tribal dialects that differ slightly from each other in phonology and lexicon, but not in syntax. It should be noted here, however, that not all RD's have tribes, e.g. the Western region, but there are groups of locals unified by a geographical area which shares some linguistic similarities. For example, Jeddah and Makkah have a fewer number of tribes, but the varieties spoken in each city differ slightly from the other. Such differences are particularly clear to the locals of the two cities. That is, an individual from Jeddah would more likely recognize the dialect (accent) of someone from Makkah or Madinah, and vice versa.

Like RG's, speakers of a TD are individuals from the various main tribes in the Kingdom, with the folk poetry of that tribe representing its written form. The following are illustrations of the difference in the use of the phrase "My father" in a three neighboring Southern tribes

within one RD.

1. Abi = QA/CA
2. Ibi:h =Zahrani Tribe
3. A:bi = Ghamdi
4. Ubui = Shamrani

The final variety in the Saudi Model is village dialect (VD). Most of the Saudi tribes consist of a large number of villages, especially the Southern region. Other Saudi tribes, however, e.g. desert inhabitant tribes, do not have many villages, yet they do shelter smaller varieties, spoken by flocks of the tribes known as "faxð" (thigh), which is labeled metaphorically to denote the flock's importance as a major component of the tribe. In tribes where there are villages, similarities are found in lexicon, syntax and phonology. However, the more the villages are apart from one another, the greater the differences will be.

Interestingly, the dialects of village dwellers are dissipating due to their detachment from the younger generations who perceive them as stigmatized varieties spoken by the older illiterate people residing in those villages. Most young people have abandoned villages to live in the cities to pursue their education, seek a job, or do business, among other things, leaving behind older generations, who find life in the village appealing to their social and cultural needs. Therefore, it is not surprising for the newer generations to encounter some difficulties when communicating with their grandfathers in villages. It is unfortunate that these rich sociolinguistic environments are not investigated, simply because they do not appeal to Arab linguists as they deviate from the Fusha, and thus do not deserve to be tackled. In fact, dialectology, as a fundamental branch of sociolinguistics, is still an absent area in Arabic linguistics. The nature of the

### **The Relatedness of Varieties in the Saudi Arabic Continuum**

Another aspect of the varieties that need to be highlighted is the approximate relatedness between the adjacent varieties in terms of formality, difficulty and phonological discrimination. The level of



### **Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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difficulty is represented by the shaded area under (LOD) in table 6 below. The darker block denotes more difficulty for individuals of other varieties. It may be noticed that the two ends of the continuum indicate the most difficulty because of the difficulty associated with grammatical structures. Also, reading the Qur'an as well as pre-Islamic texts pose a difficulty for Arabs, hence the need for interpretation (tafseer) of the Holy Qur'an. For Arabs, the "i'irab" is considered to be difficult, and even very well-educated people can hardly speak for a few minutes without making a grammatical mistake. The VD, on the other hand, poses a difficulty for individuals of other varieties, particularly for speakers of other varieties in the continuum. The lexicon, syntax and phonology of the Colloquials (VD, TD and RD) are areas where most differences are found and thus where the difficulty lies. The plural noun "children" is realized differently in different RD's, TD's, VD's as shown below:

1. ʔbnʔ and ʔwlad= Fusha
2. ʕial = Central Region
3. Buzourah = Western Reigion
4. Buθo:r = Some parts of the Western Region and Southern Region
5. Wirʕ'a:n = Some parts of the Western Region and Southern Region.
6. dʕahalah or Ju;hal = Some parts of the Southwestern Region
7. Quhdan = Jazan area (in the Southwestern Region)

Without a shadow of doubt, a person from the Northern Region would find the word quhdan very difficult, particularly if it used in isolation. Syntactically, the difficulty is extant, yet it is alleviated by the context. For example, the question 'What is wrong with you?' is realized as follows:

Maða bika? = Fusha

ʔiʕ bek? = Western Region

ʔiʕ Fi:k? Or warak? = Central Region

Wiʕ bek? Ma:ð bek? ʔiʕ go:mak? = Different parts of the Southern Region

Phonologically, certain sounds are pronounced differently in some

colloquial varieties. The feminine object pronoun kitabuk (your book) in different dialects illustrates such a difference:

Kitabuk = Fusha (Note, the Fusha does not differentiate between masculine and feminine pronouns)

Kitabits = Central Region and some Northern Regions and most Bedouin dialects. This process is known as "kaskasah", where the [k] sound becomes [ts] after a short vowel in a final position.

Kitabitʃ = Some parts of the Southern Region. This process is known as "kaʃkaiʃah", where the [k] sound becomes [itʃ] after a short vowel in a final position.

In a similar vein, the sound [j] is realized differently in different varieties, as shown below in the word "masjid" (mosque):

Masdʒid = Fusha and Central Region.

Masjid = Western Region and most of the Southern Region, where the [dʒ] combination is changed to [j] as in (vision).

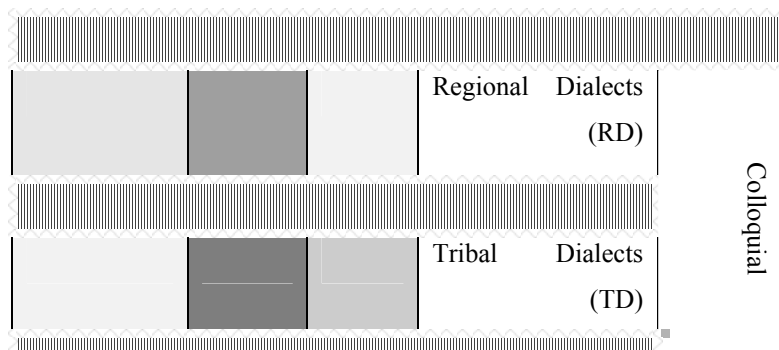
Masi:d = Some parts of the Southern Region as well as some parts of the Eastern Region, where the [j] sounds is changed to [y:].

Masgid = Some tribes in the North, where the [dʒ] sound is changed to [g] as in garden.

Masiid = some parts of the Southern Region, where the [dʒ] sound is totally deleted.

**Table 6: The approximate relatedness between linguistic codes in the Saudi Arabic**

| DOF | DOPD | LOD | Variety                      | Variety |
|-----|------|-----|------------------------------|---------|
|     |      |     | Qur'anic Arabic              | Fusha   |
|     |      |     | Classical Arabic             |         |
|     |      |     | Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) |         |



As to formality, the QA is the most formal variety of all others, for it is the language of the Muslims' Holy Book, the Noble Qur'an, followed by CA, which is spoken by religious scholars and specialists in Arabic. Such a degree of formality among speakers decreases as we go down the continuum, as indicated by the density of the darkness of the blocks. The degree of phonological discrimination is meant to indicate whether the accent of a speaker of a variety can be recognized by other speakers. For example, the Western or Southern individuals' dialects are easily recognized by speakers of other varieties. This, in fact, is a distinguishing mark of all other varieties, including MSA, except for the Qur'an recites and CA speakers. In table 6 above, the DOPD shows how the Fusha is accent-free, whereas the accent increases as we go down the continuum.

### **The Future of Diglossia in the Arab World**

Although diglossia is a language phenomenon, its paralinguistic factors play an important role in maintaining it. This is very true with regard to Arabic diglossia which feeds on religious, cultural and national feelings. Arabic diglossia, as predicted by Ferguson and Fishman, is likely to disappear with modernization and diminishing of the functional compartmentalization of roles in the community as well as competition among various varieties. These predictions are unlikely to be realized in the Arabic diglossia, simply because the sanctity

bestowed on the Fusha will keep the diglossic environment alive. Despite the fact that Arabs speak neither the QA nor the CA as a mother tongue, some admit that the varieties they speak are "incorrect" or even deny using them. Maamouri (1998, 37) states that "The superiority that Arabs bestow on their heritage language leads to a quasi-general denial of the existence of a home language, in this case Colloquial Arabic". Not only does such an attitude reinforce the continuation of diglossia in the Arab World, but also uncovers an unjustified silence by Arabs toward carrying out solutions to the situation. While there have been some mild attempts to address the problem, yet there haven't been practical solution to it. In fact, with the advent of technology, in tandem with the huge amount of Satellite TV channels, the gap between the Fusha and Colloquials seems to be widely increasing. In a recent Al Arabiya News Channel aired on 24 January 2010, it was revealed that Lebanese youth were found to favor English and French over Arabic, while some admitted that they did not know the Arabic alphabet. Ironically, while the Colloquials (e.g. VD in the Saudi model) are being stigmatized in Saudi Arabia, Arabic language is stigmatized by younger generations in the some Arab countries such as Lebanon. As such, it should not be a surprise that in the near future Gulf youth may develop a similar attitude. Until a decisive stand is taken to enforce the use of the Fusha in the media and in our school curricula in a communicative fashion, the diglossic situation in all Arab countries will more likely to exacerbate.

**Conclusion :**

The foregoing discussion of diglossia indicates that the diglossia in Arabic language is similar to other languages in having the High (Fusha) and Low (colloquials) varieties, with a middle language (MSA) that shares some of the characteristics of the H and L. Yet, Arabic is unique in its strong attachment to the Holy Quran. Such a privilege maintains the Fusha unchanged regardless of the emergent varieties.

**Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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It has also been shown that the geographical area coupled with the structure of the society and the uniqueness of Arabic (i.e. tribal vs urban) distinguishes the diglossic situation in Saudi Arabia from other courtiers, in that a number of varieties have been proposed in a continuum consisting of three main categories, the Fusha (QA and CA), MSA, and the Colloquials (Regional Dialects, Tribal Dialects, and Village Dialects) .

Similar research on diglossia has posed questions and concerns on the future of diglossia in the Arab World, particularly its impact on education, whether it will disappear or more varieties will emerge, and the solutions needed to remedy the problem. Such questions are not easy to answer, especially when taking into account that the speakers of the colloquial varieties are mostly young men and women who represent the majority of the populations of many Arab countries (e.g. 65% of the Saudi population). As mentioned earlier, younger generations are detached from the Fusha, due to (1)acquiring a variety of the colloquial and (2) the low quality educational preparation in their early schooling. While the Arabic Fusha is preserved by the Holy Quran, some varieties are liable to diminish, while some others may emerge, as such an accurate prediction as to the future of Arabic diglossia does not seem feasible.

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1. It should be noted that Egyptian Arabic, unlike other colloquial varieties, is intelligible to many Arabs and still enjoys some degree of prestige and cultural value

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**Mohammad ben Said. Al-Zahrani**

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