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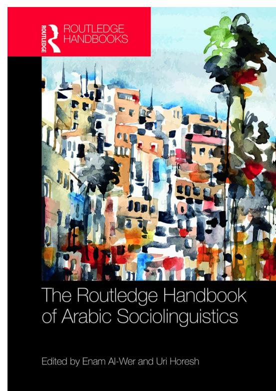

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Syntactic variation

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13
SYNTACTIC VARIATION

Lina Choueiri

Introduction

The study of syntactic variation has posed challenges for conventional approaches to language variation as well as for linguistic theory. Research in dialectology and in variationist sociolinguistics has traditionally focused on phonetic, morpho-phonological and lexical variation, at the expense of syntactic variation. Linguistic theory, particularly within the generative paradigm, has also, until recently, eschewed the investigation of syntactic variation, albeit for different reasons.

Variationists have relied primarily on Labov's concept of a *linguistic variable*, a language unit with identifiable variants, whose distribution is governed by social factors (Labov 1966). Originally, the identified variants had to be 'semantic equivalents' (Chambers & Trudgill 1998), as in the alternation between velar nasal [ŋ] and alveolar [n] for the *-ing* variable, one of the most studied linguistic variables in the English language. Semantic equivalence is clearly harder to establish for syntactic variation, and the issue of whether the concept of a linguistic variable could even be extended to study syntactic variation has been discussed in the variationist literature since the 1970s (see Cheshire 2005 for more recent discussions). This open debate is, in part, the reason for the conspicuous deficit in studies dealing with syntactic variation.

More importantly, identifying patterns of syntactic variation requires significantly more data than the study of phonological variation, since phonological variables generally occur with much higher frequency. The traditional sociolinguistic interview was not well suited to provide enough instances to quantify patterns of occurrence of certain syntactic variables. This resulted in limiting the types of syntactic variables that could be studied to those, like negation or agreement, which are used at relatively high frequencies. Nowadays, the increasing availability of large computerized corpora of written and spoken languages has provided linguists with new opportunities to perform meaningful quantitative analyses of syntactic variation.

In contrast, generative linguistic theory developed models of linguistic competence on the assumption that the observed variation was not relevant for the resulting explanatory formalisms. It was also noted that syntactic patterns seemed to show relative stability across varieties

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of the same language. Following Chomsky (1965) in particular, syntacticians idealized language as the object of study away from the variation that occurred in its actual use. Standard varieties became legitimate objects of investigation (Adger & Trousdale 2007).

The study of variation came into focus within the Chomskyan theoretical framework in the 1990s: the main claim was that, while languages appeared to be diverse, it could be shown that their apparent diversity was constrained by grammar. This effort led to the comparative study of unrelated languages, for the purpose of identifying the common core and the locus of variation in human languages, especially as it related to their syntax. This period of activity resulted in the publication of in-depth syntactic descriptions of many languages, including standardized varieties and spoken vernaculars. In parallel, micro-comparative studies of dialectal varieties of the same language or closely related languages were also undertaken, and increasingly so by theoretical linguists (e.g. Kayne 2012; D'Alessandro et al., 2010).

This chapter on syntactic variation in Arabic tries to answer a question about the dearth of literature on the topic, despite a growing interest in the language in all its varieties. In the next section, I trace some of the issues raised in variationist studies, as well as in Arabic dialectology, which are relevant for the investigation of syntactic variation in Arabic varieties. This will be followed by a discussion of recent approaches to syntactic variation. This section centers on two different studies, illustrating both cross-dialectal micro-variation (Ouhalla 2013) and individual variation (Adger & Smith 2005), and it demonstrates how generative syntactic theory and its methodological apparatus can be constructively integrated in the study of syntactic variation. I then examine two empirical domains of syntactic research, namely negation and resumption, which have been investigated by descriptive and generative grammarians in various Arabic dialects. I synthesize results of current syntactic research on those topics and suggest questions for future research in syntactic variation. The final section presents a conclusion.

Linguistic variation in Arabic

Generally, what we know about linguistic variation in the Arabic-speaking world results originally from the work of dialectologists, and more recently from variationist studies within sociolinguistics. Overviews and discussions of relevant findings can be found in the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* and *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics* (Owens 2013), as well as in Owens' review of Arabic sociolinguistics (2001), and in references therein. My goal here is not to present or review these findings, but to discuss the important insights that also have consequences for the study of syntactic variation in Arabic.

The philological approach to Arabic has a long-standing tradition, but its main focus was on Classical Arabic and its written texts. It is well known, however, that in writing, the tendency is to suppress naturally occurring variation. Nonetheless, Owens (2001) highlights the fact that the "Arabic language which Sibawayhi 'constructed' (a grammar by definition is a formal construct) was a variable object" (p. 430) and that Sibawayhi legitimized certain forms of social variation in his *kitāb*. It was dialectology, and more recently variation studies, within sociolinguistics that brought spoken Arabic varieties to the forefront of linguistic research. Behnstedt and Woidich (2013) note that attention to the spoken varieties of Arabic was brought about by an increased interest in tourism in the Arabic-speaking world during the course of the 19th century. In linguistics, studies of Arabic dialects were undertaken at the same time as large national dialectology projects in France and Germany were under way, and the first systematic grammars of spoken Arabic dialects were published toward the end of the 19th century. Research on Arabic dialects continues to this day, benefitting greatly from the

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technological advances in data collection and storage. Its challenges remain the political and economic developments in the Arabic-speaking world.

Arabic dialectology has produced comparative studies of modern spoken dialects in relation to Classical Arabic, as well as grammatical sketches of specific local dialects. However, as pointed out by Al-Wer (2013, 2011), Arabic dialectology focused mainly on stable rural dialects, and more specifically on their phonological and morphological description. With few exceptions, Arabic sociolinguistics developed separately from Arabic dialectology (Al-Wer 2013): sociolinguists working on Arabic were mainly interested in investigating language variation and change, and they conducted studies in urban contexts, focusing on establishing systematic correlations between social and linguistic variables. Special efforts were made to collect data representing natural speech. For Arabic, this has led to important discussions of how to identify characteristics of the various Arabic vernaculars, especially in light of the complex relation that exists between them and Modern Standard Arabic (Owens 2001; Al-Wer 2013). In a critical review of sociolinguistic analyses of Arabic, Al-Wer (2013) discusses the influence the 'diglossia model' has had in perpetuating certain 'myths' within Arabic sociolinguistics, such as the association of features of the standard with highest prestige. Diglossia, according to that review, is the framework within which much of the early studies in Arabic sociolinguistics are interpreted, and which results in setting the Arabic vernaculars in opposition with the Standard, and at equal distance from it, despite the differences that may exist between them. An important consequence is that no efforts were made to investigate variation within Arabic vernaculars, or micro-variation across those vernaculars. This has been slowly changing, and more recent studies within Arabic sociolinguistics have identified new meaningful linguistic variables for research in which standard features have been playing a lesser role (see, e.g. Miller & Caubet 2010; Al-Wer 2013 and references therein).

Current approaches to syntactic variation

So far, it is clear to those involved in the study of linguistic variation in general that little is known about syntactic variation, despite a growing interest in the topic. Recently, it is not only those working within the variationist paradigm who have tried to develop models for syntactic variation. New accounts have also been emerging in the generative literature that indicate that syntactic variation is not always to be characterized in terms of geographic or social differences. The result of those efforts is a more comprehensive picture of how syntactic variation works in human languages (Cornips & Corrigan 2005).

Consider, for instance, the analysis of *was/were* alternation in Buckie, a Scottish dialect of English, in Adger & Smith (2005). Buckie displays a number of nonstandard features that have been documented in other English vernaculars. The occurrence of nonstandard *was*, for example, in the contexts where we expect standard *were*, is one of the most widely studied alternations. In Adger & Smith's (2005) corpus of transcribed casual conversations with speakers of Buckie (40 hours or 300,000 words, approximately), *was* predictably alternated with *were*. The overall distribution of *was/were* is summarized in the table in (1) (Adger & Smith 2005: 155), and relevant examples are in (2–6). All speakers recorded showed this variable behavior.

(1) *Was/were* alternation

Overall distribution of *was/were* alternation		
were	was	Total
46	54	1313

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(2) Second person singular pronoun *you* (Adger & Smith 2005: 156)

a. He says 'I thocht *you were* a diver or somethin'
He said 'I thought you were a diver or something.'
b. 'Aye, I thocht *you was* a scuba diver'
'Yes, I thought you were a scuba diver.'

(3) First person plural pronoun *we*

a. There was one nicht *we were* lyin' at anchor
There was one night we were lying at anchor.
b. We played on 'at beach 'til *we was* tired, sailin' boaties, bilin' whelks
We played on that beach until we were tired, sailing boats, boiling whelks.

(4) Third person plural pronoun *they*

a. *They were* aie sort o' pickin' on me, like
They were always sort of picking on me.
b. *They were* still like partying hard
They were still partying hard.

(5) Third person plural *full NP*

a. Buckie *boats were* a' bonny graint
Buckie boats were all nicely grained.
b. The *mothers was* roaring at ye comin' in
The mothers were shouting at you to come in.

(6) Plural existential *there*

a. *There were* a puckle thatched houses like that
There were a couple of thatched houses like that.
b. Oh, *there was* a lot of coopers 'at time
There were a lot of barrel makers at that time.

What Adger and Smith also noted is that two types of patterns emerged from the data: first, what they called a categorical/variable distinction, and second, the effect of age. When the occurrences of *was* and *were* were organized in terms of grammatical person, it became clear that *was* alternated with *were* in all contexts except with the third person plural pronoun *they*; *they* occurred only with standard *were* (4). This was termed the categorical/variable distinction and its conditioning was related only to the morphosyntactic features of person and number associated with the two alternating lexical items *was* and *were*, rather than to a given social variable. However, in the alternating cases (2–3) and (5–6), social variables, such as age for instance, were at play. It was shown that nonstandard *was* was used less frequently by young people, indicating an influence of the prescriptive norms of the English standard on the Buckie dialect. Adger and Smith's analysis applies concepts from Chomsky's (1995, 2000) Minimalist Program to the categorical/variable distinction and shows how this framework allows different syntactic representations, which then result in the observed *was/were* alternation, for the same semantic output. Essentially, they show how the concept of the Labovian linguistic variable can fit within a Minimalist approach to syntactic variation. The details of their analysis are not relevant for our immediate purpose here, which is to present an example of syntactic variation that is not simply conditioned by geography or by social factors, and to reveal a renewed interest in the study of syntactic variation outside of the variationist paradigm.[1]

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The work of typologists, such as Joseph Greenberg (see, e.g. Greenberg 1966 [2005]), investigating language universals and language change takes cross-linguistic syntactic variation as a given. Starting from the assumption that variation is constrained across languages, this type of work aims at determining the scope of this variation among human languages, through a comparative analysis of language structure. In (micro-) comparative syntax (Kayne 2012), on the other hand, the languages being studied and compared are closely related to each other, such as the different Arabic or English dialects. This presumably reduces the number of variables that need to be controlled for in the analysis. An important ingredient of (micro-)comparative syntax is the careful study of each of the languages undergoing comparison. This is in part what Kayne (2012) refers to as *observational adequacy*. While observational adequacy is about getting the facts of the languages under study, *descriptive adequacy* is achieved when one can express generalizations about those facts.

A recent study by Ouhalla (2013) on possessive predication in Arabic can serve to illustrate the (micro-) comparative approach. Ouhalla (2013) uses this approach to reveal the syntactic variation that exists across Arabic varieties, particularly between Palestinian and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), on one hand, and Western Arabic dialects like Moroccan Arabic, on the other. Palestinian Arabic, like MSA, expresses possessive predication using the preposition *ʕind*. This is illustrated in the parallel examples in (7).

(7) a. (kāna) ʕinda r-ražul-i māl-un *MSA*
(was) at the-man-gen money-nom
'The man has(/had) money.'
b. (kān) ʕind l-walad ktāb *Palestinian Arabic*
(was) at the-boy book
'The boy has(/had) a book.'

Palestinian Arabic, like other Arabic vernaculars, lacks overt case-marking, but what is noteworthy about the example in (7b) is the fact that the possessor can be expressed as a full noun phrase complement of *ʕind*. What also characterizes possessive predication constructions in MSA is that the verbal copula *kāna*, when present, does not agree with the possessee, as one would expect a verb to agree with its subject. In MSA, verbs agree with their postverbal subjects in gender (8a), but *kāna* does not agree at all with the possessee in (8b).[2]

(8) a. waṣala*(-t) l-muʕallimāt-u
arrived*(-3fs) the-teachers.f-nom
'The teachers arrived.'
b. kāna(*-t) ʕinda-hu bint-un murāhiqat-un
was(*-3fs) at-him girl-nom teenage-nom
'He had a teenage girl.'

Following Freeze (1992), Ouhalla (2013) notes the parallelism between possessive predication constructions and existential constructions in MSA (9).

(9) (kāna) fi-l-bayt-i banāt-un murāhiqāt-un
(was) in-the-house-gen girls-nom teenage.p-nom
'There are(/were) teenage girls in the house.'

As in possessive predication, in the existential construction in (9), the verbal copula *kāna* does not agree with the theme, namely *banātun murāhiqātun* 'teenage girls'; in both existential and

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possessive predication constructions the prepositional phrase needs to precede the theme/possessee, as illustrated in (8b) and (9). This is what has been termed *locative inversion*.

Ouhalla (2013) analyzes the prepositional phrase undergoing locative inversion in possessive predication (and existential) constructions as the subject of predication. This is the case in both MSA and Palestinian Arabic (see also Freeze 1992). This analysis can explain the observed word order, since the prepositional phrase headed by *ʕind* always precedes the possessee, and the lack of agreement features on the verbal copula when it is present.

In Moroccan Arabic, possessive predication constructions resemble their counterparts in Palestinian and Modern Standard Arabic, but they have different characteristics (Ouhalla 2013). First, the object of the preposition *ʕand* in Moroccan Arabic is obligatorily a clitic pronoun (10).

(10) a. ʕand-a džaža *Moroccan Arabic*
at-her chicken
'She has a chicken.'
b.* ʕand Mimouna džaža
at Mimouna chicken
'Mimouna has a chicken.'

Second, in order for the possessor to be realized as a full noun phrase, it has to be expressed at the beginning of the sentence and linked to the clitic pronoun attached to *ʕand*, as seen in (11).

(11) Mimouna ʕand-a džaža
Mimouna at-her chicken
'Mimouna has a chicken.'

Ouhalla (2013) further argues that, in Moroccan Arabic, the possessor is in fact the subject of predication in possessive predication constructions. This is evident in a new pattern of agreement that can be observed in (12).

(12) (ana) kun-t ʕand-i džaža
(I) was-1s at-me chicken
'I had a chicken.'

As seen in (12), when the verbal copula is present, it can agree with the possessor, as it would with a subject. The agreement morpheme on the verbal copula *kunt* duplicates the clitic pronoun obligatorily attached to *ʕand*. As such, the sentence in (12) behaves like sentences where *kan* occurs with a main verb and both of them express agreement with the subject (13).

(13) Mimouna kan-t ka t-skun f Marrakech
Mimouna was-3fs Asp 3f-live in Marrakech
'Mimouna used to live in Marrakech.'

It may be important to note here that Moroccan Arabic also makes use of the no-agreement option in possessive predication (14), as it is the case in MSA and Palestinian Arabic.

(14) (ana) kan ʕand-i džaža
(I) was at-me chicken
'I had a chicken.'

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Additional evidence of the status of the possessor as subject of predication comes from the fact that it can be an indefinite noun phrase introduced by *ši* (15).

(15) ši mra (kan) ʕand-a džaža
some woman (was) at-her chicken
'Some woman has/had a chicken.'

The possessor in (15) is an indefinite noun phrase, which cannot be a sentence topic, as evidenced by the contrast in (16).

(16) a. *ši džaža šri-t-a l-barħ
some chicken bought-1s-it the-yesterday
'*Some chicken, I bought it yesterday.'
b. ši mra šra-t džaža
some woman bought-3fs chicken
'Some woman bought a chicken.'

What (16) demonstrates is that an indefinite noun phrase introduced by *ši* 'some' in Moroccan Arabic can occur as a preverbal subject (16b), but not as a sentence topic (16a) (see also Brustad 2000). Therefore, the indefinite noun phrase possessor in (15) must be the subject of predication in that sentence. Moroccan Arabic, Ouhalla (2013) concludes, is a variety of Arabic where the possessor has been reanalyzed as the subject of the possessive predication construction. This conclusion is consistent with Comrie's (1986) own conclusions about the syntax of possessive predication in other Western vernaculars of Arabic, including Tunisian and Maltese Arabic.

In addition, the complex element *ʕand+clitic* is reinterpreted as a verbal element. The verbal characteristics of *ʕand+clitic* have been noted in several descriptive grammars of spoken Arabic varieties (see e.g. Cowell's (1964) discussion of *quasi-verbs* in Syrian Arabic and Brustad's (2000) examination of *pseudo-verbs* in Egyptian, Kuwaiti, Moroccan and Syrian Arabic as well). The most salient of those characteristics is related to the distribution of sentential negation. Thus, consider the sentences in (17) and (18).[3]

(17) a. Mimouna ma-šra-at-š džaža
Mimouna neg-bought-3fs-neg chicken
'Mimouna did not buy a chicken.'
b. Mimouna ma-ši f Casablanca
Mimouna neg-neg in Casablanca
'Mimouna is not in Casablanca.'

(18) a. Mimouna ma-ʕand-a-š džaža
Mimouna neg-at-her-neg chicken
'Mimouna does not have a chicken.'
b.* Mimouna ma-š(i) ʕand-a džaža
Mimouna neg-neg at-her chicken
'Mimouna does not have a chicken.'

The examples in (17) illustrate the difference between verbal and non-verbal sentences with respect to negation. In (17a), the verb is sandwiched between *ma* and *š(i)*, whereas in the

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context of non-verbal predication, the two parts of the negative element are merged into *ma-š(i)* (17b). As the contrast in (18) shows, the complex element *ʕand+clitic* is negated like a verb, by being sandwiched between the two-part negative element (see also Cowell (1964) and Brustad (2000) for a similar contrast in Syrian Arabic, Egyptian Arabic and Kuwaiti Arabic).

Summing up the discussion so far, while Moroccan Arabic possessive predication constructions make use of the same lexical element used in Palestinian Arabic and MSA to express possessive predication, we have seen how Ouhalla (2013) has argued that the syntax of those constructions in Moroccan Arabic is different from their syntax in Palestinian Arabic or MSA, at least in terms of the categorial nature of the subject of predication: a prepositional phrase in Palestinian Arabic and MSA, and, in Moroccan Arabic, a noun phrase related to an obligatory clitic pronoun attached to the preposition *ʕind/ʕand*. This discussion has also illustrated the micro-comparative approach and the difficulty of achieving observational adequacy, since it turns out that using the same lexical item to express possession in possessive predication constructions does not necessarily entail that the languages under discussion share the same syntax for those constructions.

Toward the study of syntactic variation in Arabic

Generally speaking, the study of syntactic variation can be categorized as falling within two types: first, (what I will call) *individual* variation, which is the variation that we observe in the linguistic behavior of an individual speaker (or groups of individual speakers) of a given language. This is the kind of variation that has been studied by sociolinguists and for which the elementary unit of analysis has typically been the Labovian linguistic variable. The example of Buckie discussed earlier illustrates this type of variation and its sensitivity to both morphosyntactic features and social variables. The second type of syntactic variation is the one we observe between languages or closely related varieties of the same language, and which forms the basis of the (micro-)comparative approach, also illustrated in the discussion of possessive predication in Moroccan Arabic, Palestinian Arabic and MSA (Ouhalla 2013). The research I have conducted for the purpose of writing this chapter leads me to conclude that, to this date, no work on the syntax of any variety of Arabic has analyzed individual variation. Very little work has also been done on cross-Arabic syntactic variation. The reason is most likely that systematic syntactic descriptions have remained marginal in Arabic dialectology, in Arabic sociolinguistics, and in the study of Arabic syntax more generally.

In what follows, I present elements that can form an empirical basis upon which a study of syntactic variation in Arabic can be carried out. I consider two domains which have been extensively researched in the syntax of Arabic: namely, those of negation and resumption. For each of those domains, I examine results of current syntactic research, bringing together different accounts of syntactic phenomena in particular varieties of Arabic, and making suggestions for future research in syntactic variation.

Negation

In a study that examines spoken Arabic varieties in four different regions, including Egypt, Syria, Kuwait and Morocco, Brustad (2000) underscores the importance of comparative syntactic data for understanding the nature of language (micro-)variation as well as for testing and generating syntactic theories. Brustad's (2000) review of Arabic dialect grammars on the

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topic of negation reveals however the absence of systematicity in the approaches taken, which weakens any generalizations one might arrive at based on those grammars. Nevertheless, an important finding emerges that, despite the diversity of ways in which negation is expressed in Arabic, most dialects seem to make use of two basic forms of sentential negation. Other forms may exist, but with limited distribution, and they will not be discussed. My discussion here focuses on the different realizations of sentential negation and on what they tell us about the study of syntactic variation in Arabic varieties more generally.

Consider the table in (19), which provides the different forms to express sentential negation in MSA, Moroccan (MA), Egyptian (EA), Levantine (LA), Gulf (GA) and Sanaani Arabic (SanA) (Benmamoun et al. 2014).[4]

(19) **Negation in different varieties of Arabic in verbal and non-verbal contexts**
(Benmamoun et al. 2014, Table 2, p. 126)

	MSA	MA	EA	LA	GA	SanA
Verbal	*lā, lam, lan, mā*	*ma-š*	*ma-š*	*ma-š, mā*	*mā*	*ma-š*
Non-verbal	*laysa, mā*	*maši*	*muš*	*miš*	*mū*	*miš*

What is interesting in (19) is that, for the most part, sentential negation in the various Arabic varieties takes two different forms: Benmamoun et al. (2014) refer to them as *verbal* and *non-verbal* negation. Brustad (2000) refers to these two basic forms of sentential negation as *verbal* and *predicative* negation. Following Soltan (2014), I will refer to them as *dependent* (for *verbal*) and *independent* (for *non-verbal* or *predicative*) for reasons that will become clear shortly.

Benmamoun et al.'s (2014) distinction between verbal and non-verbal negation is purely for convenience; the authors note that existential and possessive predication in the spoken varieties of Arabic deploy what they call 'verbal' negation, although those types of constructions are non-verbal in all those varieties. Therefore, they acknowledge, the verbal/non-verbal distinction is not the determining factor for the distribution of the two basic forms of negation in the spoken varieties of Arabic. Brustad (2000) describes the distinction between 'verbal' and 'predicative' negation as basic, but not absolute. She discusses violations of the 'rules' underlying this distinction, as in (20), for instance.

(20) ma-muwžūd-š *Moroccan Arabic*
neg-present-neg
'He is not here.'

For Brustad (2000), the use of 'verbal' negation in a predicative context like (20) is marked pragmatically, in the sense that it indicates that the speaker is denying a presupposition. In (20), a caller has asked to speak to a hotel guest, and the hotel clerk who utters the sentence in (20) denies the presupposition that the guest is in his room. Nevertheless, Brustad (2000) mentions that 'verbal' negation can be used with non-verbal elements in unmarked pragmatic contexts. A relevant example is given in (21), from Fayyum, in rural Egypt.

(21) ʕalašān ma-ħagā-š tixušš-u
so-that neg-thing-neg enter.3fs-it
'So that nothing can enter it.'

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Soltan (2014) also discusses the alternation between bipartite *ma-š* and *miš* in Egyptian Arabic (22).

(22) a. ma-biruħ-š ig-gamʕa
neg-goes-neg the-university
'He does not go to the university.'
b. miš birūħ ig-gamʕa
neg goes the-university
'He does not go to the university.'

In (22), the imperfective verb *birūħ* 'goes' can occur either with 'verbal' negation (22a) or 'non-verbal/predicative' negation (22b) without any difference in pragmatic context. This alternation can also be found in other Arabic varieties, like Lebanese Arabic, with future verb forms. The main difference between (22a) and (22b) is that, in (22a), the bipartite negative element is morpho-phonologically dependent on the verb. It cliticizes on it. In (22b), however, *miš* is an independent morpheme, which does not need a host. That is why I follow Soltan (2014) in calling the two forms of negation *dependent* and *independent* negation. Soltan's (2014) proposed account for the distribution of the two forms of negation points to the determining role of morphology: the bipartite negative morpheme is an affix in need of a host. The morphosyntactic features of syntactic categories determine whether those categories can host negation. When a given syntactic category can act as a host, the result is the deployment of dependent negation; if a given syntactic category is not specified as a host, the result is the deployment of independent negation. Soltan (2014) further notes the cross-dialectal differences in what syntactic categories can act as hosts for negation. For instance, in unmarked contexts, the Cairene variety of Egyptian Arabic differs from Moroccan Arabic, in that it does not allow the dependent bipartite negative element to be hosted by nouns, as illustrated in the contrast in (23).

(23) a.* Aħmad ma-doktoor-š *Cairene Arabic*
Ahmad neg-doctor-neg
'Ahmad is not a doctor.'
b. huwa ma-fəllaħ-š *Moroccan Arabic*
he neg-farmer-neg
'He is not a farmer.'

Soltan's (2014) proposal remains incomplete in that it does not specify a systematic way to identify which syntactic categories can serve as hosts for dependent negation, and in which Arabic varieties. Nevertheless, this proposal provides a simple account for why sentential negation is expressed via two basic forms across the spoken varieties of Arabic. It can thus serve as a blueprint for a systematic investigation of the distribution of sentential negative forms within and across Arabic. In distinguishing between marked and unmarked contexts, Brustad (2000) highlights the role of pragmatics in a comprehensive account of this distribution. As in the case of Buckie English, discussed earlier, it may be that a categorical/variable distinction can be made to account for some aspects of the distribution of sentential negative elements within Arabic varieties. Soltan (2014) has noted the alternation between dependent and independent negation in some unmarked contexts, which was illustrated in (22). Brustad (2000: 303) reports that Al-Tonsi (personal communication) observes that the occurrence of constructions like (22b) are on the rise and that females use the independent negative morpheme in such contexts more than males do. If that is indeed the case, this would provide a

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case of social variation in the syntax of Egyptian Arabic. Further research would need to be conducted however to reach a more definite conclusion.

Another interesting observation that the table in (19) reveals is the contrast between the negative forms in MSA and those of the spoken Arabic varieties. Benmamoun et al. (2014) point out that the spoken dialects of Arabic have innovated in the domain of sentential negation, and many of them make use of a bipartite negative morpheme *ma-š(i)*, where Classical Arabic and MSA have a single morpheme, generally *lā, lam* or *lan*. Furthermore, in MSA, *lā, lam* or *lan* occur most frequently with verbs (96% of the time), whereas *mā* occurs only 4% of the time in those contexts. With non-verbal categories, *mā* occurs only 3% of the time.[5] Thus, the negative forms used in the spoken dialects of Arabic correspond to the least frequent forms in MSA. This brings up again the comment by Al-Wer (2013) that the features of MSA are not always associated with highest prestige in the spoken dialects (see above). The observed dichotomy between MSA and the spoken varieties of Arabic in the domain of negation poses interesting questions for research on the relation between the syntax of spoken Arabic varieties and that of MSA in the historical development of negation. The latter has been a topic of interest among historical linguists and recent studies have investigated the genesis of the negative enclitic *-š* in spoken varieties of Arabic (see Lucas 2007, 2010; and Wilmsen 2014, among others).

To conclude the discussion of negation as a domain for the investigation of syntactic variation in Arabic, I point out the availability of comparative studies (e.g. Brustad 2000; Benmamoun et al. 2014) of a group of Arabic varieties, which provide a starting point for the examination of syntactic variation across those varieties. A more systematic and focused approach should be deployed to answer questions about the distribution of the two basic negative forms across spoken varieties of Arabic and about the variable alternation between these forms within given varieties, as we observed in the discussion of Soltan's (2014) Egyptian Arabic example in (22). This would open the door for the investigation of individual variation in the syntax of Arabic varieties.

Resumption

In contrast to negation, which has been studied both descriptively and historically, resumption in Arabic has been of concern mainly to generative syntacticians. It may be simply that resumption is essentially a complex sentence phenomenon, and as other pronouns, resumptive pronouns serve mainly as cohesive discourse devices, whereas descriptive grammars focus on the syntax of simple sentences. Consequently, even when they include a syntactic sketch, descriptive grammars of Arabic varieties do not systematically tackle the topic of resumption. Nevertheless, some of the recent work dealing with resumption within the generative literature has started making reference to the variation that exists across Arabic varieties and within those varieties (see, e.g. Aoun & Choueiri 2000: Aoun et al. 2010: Benmamoun & Choueiri 2013; Choueiri 2016).

By definition, resumption is a mechanism available to human languages, which can serve to establish a dependency between a nominal antecedent that appears in a position at the left periphery of a clause and/or a sentence, and a pronominal element inside the sentence, which depends on the antecedent for its interpretation, as illustrated in (24).

(24) a. ʔayya mmasle šifti-*a* b-l-maṭʕam? *Lebanese Arabic*
which actor.fs saw.2fs-*her* in-the-restaurant
'Which actor did you see in the restaurant?'

b. žbart l-ktāb lli nsiti-*h* f-l-qism *Moroccan Arabic*
found.1s the-book that forgot.2s-*it* in-the-class
'I found the book that you forgot in the classroom.'

In (24a), for example, the interpretation of the clitic pronoun *-a* 'her,' attached to the verb *šifti* 'saw' inside the sentence, depends on that of its antecedent, the wh-phrase *ʔayya mmasle* 'which actor,' which appears at the left edge of the sentence. In current syntactic literature, the italicized pronouns in (24) are referred to as resumptive pronouns, and they are a widespread phenomenon in the syntax of complex sentences in Arabic. Generally, resumptive pronouns can alternate with gaps, whose position is marked with *e* in (25). The contrast between (24) and (25) illustrates this alternation.

(25) a. ʔayya mmasle šifte *e* b-l-maṭʕam? *Lebanese Arabic*
which actor.fs saw.2fs in-the-restaurant
'Which actor did you see in the restaurant?'
b. žbart l-ktāb lli nsiti *e* f-l-qism *Moroccan Arabic*
found.1s the-book that forgot.2s in-the-class
'I found the book that you forgot in the classroom.'

In this chapter, I focus my attention on the observed variation in the distribution of resumptive pronouns across and within spoken varieties of Arabic.

The distribution of resumptive pronouns is not uniform across spoken varieties of Arabic. For instance, while Lebanese Arabic makes use of both the gap and resumptive strategies in forming constituent wh-questions, as exemplified in (25a) and (24a) respectively, Egyptian Arabic seems to prohibit the use of the resumption strategy in those contexts (26) (see Wahba 1984; Aoun et al. 2010; Soltan 2011).

(26) * miin ʔinta šuft-*u* imbaariħ *Egyptian Arabic*
who you.ms see.2ms-*him* yesterday
'Who did you see yesterday?'

The table in (27) summarizes the variation observed in the literature concerning the availability of the resumptive strategy in wh-questions in a group of three spoken Arabic varieties.

(27) **Cross-Arabic availability of the resumptive strategy in wh-questions**

	Resumptive Strategy
Lebanese Arabic	YES
Moroccan Arabic	NO
Egyptian Arabic	NO

On the other hand, within a given variety, the availability of resumption and the alternation between gaps and resumptive pronouns depends on the construction type. In Lebanese Arabic, for instance, the gap strategy is readily available for wh-questions, as illustrated in (25a), but not for restrictive relatives (28).

(28) a.* l-mmasil lli šifte *e* b-l-maṭʕam miš mašhuur
the-actor.ms that saw.2sf in-the-restaurant neg famous.ms
'The actor that you saw in the restaurant is not famous.'

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b. l-mmasil lli šift-*i* b-l-maṭʕam miš mašhuur
the-actor.ms that saw.2sf-*him* in-the-restaurant neg famous.ms
'The actor that you saw in the restaurant is not famous.'

The contrast in (28) can also be observed in other varieties of Arabic, including Egyptian and Syrian Arabic (Brustad 2000) as well as Palestinian Arabic (Shlonsky 1992). Moroccan Arabic alternates between the use of the gap strategy and the resumptive strategy in relative constructions. This is illustrated in (24b) and (25b). Based on a sample of three spoken Arabic varieties, and considering two types of constructions, namely restrictive relatives and wh-questions, the table in (29) sums up the variation in the availability of resumption depending on the construction type and the possibility of alternating between the gap strategy and the resumptive strategy.

(29) **Availability of the gap and resumptive strategies depending on construction type in three Arabic varieties**

	Gap Strategy	***Resumptive Strategy***
Lebanese Arabic	Wh-questions	Wh-questions Restrictive Relatives
Moroccan Arabic	Restrictive relatives Wh-questions	Restrictive Relatives
Egyptian Arabic		Restrictive Relatives

It is interesting to note the absence of resumption in wh-questions in Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic, but not in Lebanese Arabic. The picture is more complex when we add restrictive relatives, since resumption is available for those constructions in both Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic. Thus, the ban on resumption in Egyptian and Moroccan Arabic is construction specific. Another interesting observation is that Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic differ from each other in that the former allows gaps in restrictive relatives (25b) (and wh-questions). Egyptian Arabic is thus like Lebanese Arabic in allowing only resumption in restrictive relatives. The study of resumption has yet to broach the topic of syntactic variation across varieties of Arabic; the observations made here thus remain open questions for future research. The same can be said about the alternation between gaps and resumption within a given variety. We have observed that, in Lebanese Arabic, for instance, wh-questions can make use of both strategies: (24a) and (25a) are repeated in (30).

(30) a. ʔayya mmasle šifti-*a* b-l-maṭʕam? *Lebanese Arabic*
which actor.fs saw.2fs-*her* in-the-restaurant
'Which actor did you see in the restaurant?'

b. ʔayya mmasle šifte *e* b-l-maṭʕam?
which actor.fs saw.2fs in-the-restaurant
'Which actor did you see in the restaurant?'

(30a) and (30b) share the same pragmatic context: in both cases, the speaker presupposes that the hearer has met a female actor at the restaurant and he or she is asking about her identity. Contexts such as these, which allow alternation between two different syntactic representations having the same interpretation, may be conditioned by social or geographic factors. This line of inquiry may be worth pursuing more systematically in future research.

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Conclusion

This chapter started with a question about the absence of a body of literature on syntactic variation in Arabic. My research revealed that the study of syntactic variation, not only in Arabic, has faced important methodological challenges. In the particular case of Arabic, the 'diglossia model' perpetuated the 'myth' of high prestige of the features of MSA, and it also influenced how variation in the spoken varieties of Arabic was studied. Specifically, the spoken varieties of Arabic were set in opposition with MSA, assuming they were all at equal distance from it. Thus, variation among the spoken varieties of Arabic was ignored and no efforts were initially made to investigate it.

Recent theoretical developments in syntactic theory and technological advances in computing have renewed the interest in syntactic variation. The availability of large computerized corpora can help linguists perform powerful and meaningful research on the scope and frequency of syntactic variation in naturally occurring speech. The careful and detailed investigations of particular languages or groups of related languages, as exemplified in studies like Adger & Smith (2005) and Ouhalla (2013), apply the methods of generative linguistics to questions of syntactic variation. They result in an integrated and more complex picture of the mechanisms of variation, both cross-linguistically and within a given language.

By reexamining the results of current research in the domains of negation and resumption, I hope to stimulate research on variation in the syntax of spoken Arabic varieties. Such research will necessitate a successful collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, between sociolinguists, dialectologists and syntacticians, as well as computer scientists. This, to my mind, is the immediate challenge that those interested in the study of syntactic variation within and across Arabic will have to overcome.

Notes

1 As Adger and Smith (2005) point out, other earlier models have been proposed to integrate an account of variation within syntactic theory. Sankoff and Labov (1979) develop the idea of variable rules in grammar, and Kroch (1989) builds on the idea that speakers have access to multiple grammars. All these models deal with syntactic variation at the individual level.

2 (8b) is unacceptable under the possessive reading, where *-hu* 'he' refers to the father of a teenage girl. There is, however, another felicitous reading for (8b), the locative reading. Under the latter, a specific teenage girl is in the presence of the referent of *-hu* 'he'. This reading is not relevant for the discussion in the text.

3 (18b) is unacceptable under the possessive reading. That is what the star indicates. It may be interesting to note that a similar sentence would be acceptable under the locative reading, where the speaker denies the presence of a particular chicken at Mimouna's (i). The possessive reading, on the other hand, is not available for (i) (Ouhalla 2013).

(i) Mimouna ma-š(i) ʕand-a d-džaža
Mimouna neg-neg at-her the-chicken
'The chicken is not at Mimouna's.'

4 Levantine Arabic includes all the Arabic varieties spoken in the Levant region, which includes Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. Gulf Arabic in Benmamoun et al. (2014) refers to the Arabic varieties spoken in Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The authors acknowledge that this categorization is used for convenience and that Levantine Arabic, Gulf Arabic, as well as Moroccan, Egyptian, Sanaani Arabic may not be homogeneous dialects and may consist of different varieties, which are worth investigating in and of themselves.

5 The MSA corpus on which Benmamoun et al. (2014) base their study and from which the percentages are extracted is the LDC Penn Arabic Treebank Part 1 v2, and it consists of 140,265 tagged words.

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