

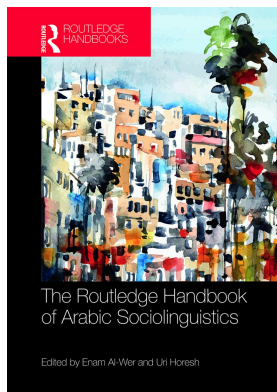
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16

DIGLOSSIA AND THE
NORMALIZATION OF THE
VERNACULAR

Focus on Tunisia

*Lotfi Sayahi***Introduction**

Major changes in political systems unavoidably lead to changes in power structures and a renegotiation of social norms that, in turn, affect the intersection between language and society. This has been the case in Tunisia during the recent periods of its history. Starting with independence from France in 1956, language planning policies were meant to maintain a situation of classical diglossia and educational bilingualism while at the same time marginalizing the indigenous Berber languages. Since the 2011 Revolution, however, at least three main currents have been reshaping the language situation in the country: increased use and acceptance of Tunisian Arabic and its regional varieties in public domains, continuing access to and commodification of French, and mounting efforts to reclaim Berber as an ethnic marker (Sayahi, forthcoming).¹

In this chapter, I discuss the sociolinguistic situation in Tunisia with a special focus on the linguistic implications that come with extending the use of Tunisian Arabic to formal domains, namely in scripted and unscripted official discourse. I examine some of the more salient grammatical features of Tunisian Arabic for official purposes to argue that, despite major divergences from Standard Arabic, these features are retained in official discourse, making the produced texts unequivocally in Tunisian Arabic. I will also argue that, at the lexical level, while French continues to enjoy a robust presence in the Tunisian linguistic market, its use as a source language for technical vocabulary is more limited in scripted official discourse than in unscripted speech. In effect, users, when communicating in their official capacities, draw primarily on the lexicon of Standard Arabic to fill any gaps in Tunisian Arabic.

For illustration purposes, examples of these features of Tunisian Arabic in official discourse come from four different sources. The first is a 12-page document published in Tunisian Arabic by the Ministry of Finance. The document, titled *mi:za:niyat al-muwa:tin li-sanat 2018* ‘Citizen’s budget for the year 2018,’ is one of the first documents to be published in the Tunisian dialect by a government agency (Ministry of Finance 2018). It contains approximately 1450 words. The second is a speech delivered by Prime Minister Youssef Chahed (YC) that was televised in 2018 (Chahed 2018). This speech has a duration of about 11:30 minutes, and when

transcribed it contains a total of 1575 words. Finally, examples are also drawn from two other speech samples, both extracted from a session of the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People in which the Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Riadh Mouakhar (RM), answers questions from Assembly Member Noomane El Euch (NE). The question period has a duration of a little under ten minutes, resulting in a total wordcount of 1050 words (El Euch 2018). For comparative purposes, the first 12 minutes of the response provided by RM are analyzed, adding about 1500 words to the corpus (Mouakhar 2018). The difference between the four samples is that the first two are scripted, one published in written form and one read aloud, while the other two are largely improvised, although the users seem to consult their notes from time to time as can be seen in the video recording. Proof of the extemporaneous nature of the last two samples is that RM describes his answer to the question asked of him in front of the Assembly as *?ije:ba fawriyya li-su?a:l jife:hi*: ‘an immediate answer to an oral question.’ He claims he would have prepared his response more thoroughly had he known the exact nature of the questions to be asked. It is quite noteworthy indeed that changes in the Tunisian political system now allow Assembly members to seek answers from senior members of the government in open sessions broadcast live on state television without censorship. This change has resulted in Tunisian Arabic being used extemporaneously in highly formal contexts more frequently than ever before.

Concerning Berber, given the scarcity of data currently available for analysis, the situation of this language will not be dealt with in this chapter. Many assumptions exist about the situation of Tunisian Berber, such as claims that about 1% of the population speaks it, but without a full-scale study of the current situation of this language, mere speculation dominates its description. It is worth noting, however, that research on the use and features of Tunisian Berber is increasing, as judged by the number of research projects in progress.

Diglossia and the normalization of the vernacular

In his discussion of the role of writing in the emergence and evolution of diglossic situations, Coulmas (2002: 62) postulates that “[w]riting is rarely explicitly acknowledged as an important factor in linguistic evolution.” Part of his explanation of why this is the case is the common perception that writing is a substitute for speaking. However, he notes that this perception does not capture “the sociocultural or the linguistic consequences” that the writing of a given linguistic variety can have on the course of its evolution. This is even more so in the course of the development of a diglossic situation, given the high prestige that the H variety has as the code most closely associated with literacy. In fact, the history of the Romance languages offers proof, as major changes in the status and structure of vernacular varieties occurred when they began to be used in written form (Wright 1982; Posner 1996). Other examples of linguistic systems that would fit under Ferguson’s (1959) definition of diglossia as L varieties and whose fate, i.e. eventual standardization and official recognition, was impacted by the move towards their use in written form include Demotic Greek (Alexiou 1982) and Afrikaans (Deumert 2004). Once a vernacular variety starts to be used in writing and in official settings, a need to develop grammars and dictionaries emerges, which in turn leads to efforts to standardize it and elevate it to the status of an official language. Often times, this transformation of a vernacular variety into a separate standardized language is a central part of efforts to establish a more distinct national identity. It is telling that the year 1492, the year when the last caliphate in Muslim Spain fell and the Catholic Monarchs established their control over all of Spain, is the same year that the first grammar of the Spanish language was published.

With respect to Arabic, the writing of the dialects has attracted attention that goes back to the writing of Andalusī Arabic in the *kharjas* of Muslim Spain (Thomas & Sayahi 2012) and the use of what is known as Middle Arabic by religious minorities in many points in time (Versteegh 1997). In the case of Tunisia, instances of the writing of Tunisian Arabic was until recently limited to folktales and timid translations of foreign materials (Walters 2003; Sayahi 2014). However, with the spread of digital communication, the use of a written vernacular Arabic has increased in Tunisia and across the Arabic-speaking world in general. This is true not only for private and quasi-private social media communication, but is also observed in mass media and increasingly in more formal domains. In their edited book, Høigilt & Mejdell (2017) present several articles on the increased writing of Arabic varieties and its implication for the Arabic language, with a special focus on Egypt and Morocco. Of note is an increase in the writing of the dialects not only in digital media, but also in literature and newspapers. Høigilt & Mejdell (2017: 3) argue, still, that except for the translation of the Tunisian constitution by an NGO, “[c]rossing into the written domains of the public political sphere is, however, a step remaining to be taken.”

All this renders the increased tendency of the writing of Tunisian Arabic even more significant for the language situation in Tunisia and beyond. Not only is the status of the dialect elevated by its use in writing, but also the act of writing in itself is a process of standardization in disguise. The decision that the author of a document makes regarding which structure to use or what word to avoid represents a type of prescriptive act, especially if the document is of official character. The same can also be said about spoken official discourse, which is presumed to be read aloud from a written script. Writing the vernacular in cases of classical diglossia, where the vernacular is not standardized or taught, yet is acquired as a native language, requires decisions about what to let into the written form and what not to include. An influence from the written standard variety would be expected, and decisions about internal variable forms and influences from other languages in cases of bilingualism would need to be considered as well.

With reference to the Moroccan context, Caubet (2017) draws attention to the fact that a process of literacy has been developing spontaneously as written output in Moroccan Arabic has increased in quantity and diversity of venues. She underscores the role of electronic writing in how users develop literacy in a language that has not yet been standardized. In a way, through writing first in Latin script and then increasingly in Arabic script as advances in technology permit, a certain type of standardization is allowing for a wider acceptance of writing and reading in Moroccan Arabic. Caubet (2017: 121–122) puts it this way: “The general attitude is ‘informality’ and ‘tolerance,’ and the absence of an official norm gives total freedom to the writers, as to which script to choose. No one is being reproached for his choice or for his spelling; everyone naturally understands the others without raising any issue.” Some of Caubet’s observations regarding the spelling of the *dārīja* include the lack of diacritic marks, simplification in the representation of interdental sounds, agglutination of some prepositions to the following nouns and variation in writing the reductions of the future marker and the article.

In the same context, Miller (2017) analyzes the different ideologies associated with the writing of Moroccan Arabic in order to document what she describes as *dārīja* literacy. She reaches the conclusion that: “it does not matter how people really write as there is no direct association between the real language level of the text and people’s perception. If the text is claimed to be in *dārīja*, if it contains a few *dārīja* tags (*wallu*, *zāma*, *‘alaš*), then it is perceived to be in *dārīja* whatever its level” (Miller 2017: 106). This is an important observation since, as I will argue below, the presence of not only discourse markers such as those mentioned by

Miller, but also a set of structural features, clearly indicates that the delivered text is in the vernacular even if it contains numerous lexical insertions from Standard Arabic.

In this chapter, I outline a few morphosyntactic vernacular features that are clearly divergent from the standardized form of the Arabic language as taught in schools, but which are consistently retained in Tunisian Arabic when used for official purposes. In other words, the objective is to determine the most salient features of Tunisian Arabic deemed appropriate for writing and communicating in formal public contexts. I do not aim to offer a comprehensive taxonomy of all divergent features of Tunisian Arabic from Standard Arabic. Rather, my purpose is to illustrate particularly salient features that allow us to determine that the text is produced in the vernacular.

Specifically, I will examine negation, the expression of the future and of possession, verb morphology, and the use of function words such as question words and discourse markers. In addition to these morphosyntactic features, I also analyze user lexical choice when employing Tunisian Arabic for official purposes. Of interest here are terms that are undeniably vernacular items that would not be acceptable in written Standard Arabic, and lexical insertions from both Standard Arabic and French. If the use of Tunisian Arabic for official discourse, no matter how spontaneous it may be, is being normalized, it is expected that a lexical expansion must be taking place to make up for lexical gaps resulting from the lack of standardization and the absence of published grammars and dictionaries.

My interest here is not to take part in the political debate to recognize Tunisian Arabic as the official language of Tunisia, but to examine what type of Tunisian Arabic is used in official discourse, and what are the linguistic consequences of writing government materials, giving speeches and engaging in legislative debates in the vernacular.

Some structural features of Tunisian Arabic for official purposes

Among the more frequent function words that help identify texts examined here as being in Tunisian Arabic, we find the quintessential Tunisian word *barfa*² ‘a lot’ (1), a term that is most easily recognized by speakers of other varieties of Arabic as a marker of the Tunisian dialect. In addition, we find words such as *ze:da* ‘also’ (2), *be:hi* ‘good, OK’ (3), *hakka* ‘therefore’ (4) and *be:f* ‘so that’ (5). This in addition to the very frequent discourse markers *mašne:ha/yašni* ‘meaning/it means’ (6) and the preposition *ki:ma* ‘like’ (7).

- (1) *wu barfa twe:nsa ke:nu yestane:u fiyya be:f nitkallim* (YC)
‘And many Tunisians were waiting for me to speak.’
- (2) *l-ħku:ma nijhit ze:da fi tanði:m awwil intixa:be:t baladiyya* (YC)
‘The government succeeded also in organizing the first municipal elections.’
- (3) *wu ?annu l-wađiš be:hi* (YC)
‘And that the situation is good.’
- (4) *wu hakka iraxxiš li-l-ħku:ma be:f titšarrif* (MF)
‘And therefore, it authorizes the government to act.’
- (5) *ašle:f hiyya tašit:ih d-dawla ha l-imtiya:ze:t he:điyya l-kul? be:f ifayyil f- jabe:b* (NE)
‘Why does the state give him all these privileges? So he provides employment for the youth.’
- (6) *huwwa mašne:ha izi:d yitha:yil šla d-dawla* (NE)
‘He, I mean, in addition he commits fraud against the state.’
- (7) *ki:ma mašru:f l-qa:nu:n l-mawju:d fi majlis n-nuwwe:b* (RM)
‘Like the bill project that is before the Assembly of the Representatives.’

Regarding question words, they are all produced in Tunisian Arabic, as shown in Figure 16.1. The words that appear in these texts include gender distinction in the equivalent of ‘what’: *fniyya* for feminine and *fnuwwa* for masculine (8 and 9). In addition, we see the use of all other question words, including *aʕle:f* ‘why,’ *wi:n* ‘where,’ *qadde:f* ‘how much/many,’ and *kife:f* ‘how.’

- (8) *fniyya mi:za:niyat d-dawla?* (MF)
 ‘What is the budget of the state?’
 (9) *fnuwwa qa:nu:n l-ma:liyya?* (MF)
 ‘What is the fiscal law?’

Negation is also categorically expressed in Tunisian Arabic. The use of the discontinuous structure: *ma-verb-/is* produced in all texts (10). This form of negation is also the one used in verbless clauses, as in (11).

- (10) *ʕajz ma-ifu:tif 4.9% min n-ne:tij l-maħalli:* (MF)
 ‘A deficit that does not surpass 4.9% of the net domestic product.’



Figure 16.1 Example of the use of Tunisian Arabic question words in writing (Tunisian Ministry of Finance 2018)

- (11) *ε:na ma-ni:f mitʃabbiθ bi-l-maṣab ma-ni:f ʃε:did fi-l-kursi: wu ma-ʃandi:f maʃru:ʃ ʃaxʃi:* (YC).
 ‘I am not holding on to the position. I am not clinging to the chair and I don’t have a personal project.’

A third Tunisian Arabic feature is the expression of the future. While Standard Arabic relies on the use of the particles *sa-* and *sawfa*, Tunisian Arabic uses the pre-verbal marker *bε:f* before a verb in the imperfective form. The vernacular structure is used almost exclusively in all four samples, as illustrated by the example in (12). In the text by YC there is an exception where he uses the particle *sa-* in what appears to be a case of diglossic code-switching from the L variety into the H variety (13). It is important to note that the particle *bε:f* has a double function, as pre-verbal marker to express the future, as well as denoting the equivalent of the English particle ‘so’ or ‘in order to,’ as in example (5) above.

- (12) *wu ε:na fi: l-ayyε:m l-qa:dma bε:f nwajjah daʃwa: li-l-aṭra:f l-ʔijtima:ʃiyya* (YC)
 ‘And I in the coming days will send an invitation to the social stakeholders.’
 (13) *wu raym l-ʃara:qi:l l-kul l-hku:ma wa:ʃlit wu sa-tuwa:ʃil taʃtayil* (YC)
 ‘And despite all the obstacles the government continued and will continue to work.’

With respect to verb morphology, Tunisian verb forms are the ones used overwhelmingly in all these texts. In addition to the use of the *n*-form with first-person singular in the imperfective (14), use of the first-person plural also shows Tunisian verb morphology, as in (15) where a complex cluster is created at the onset syllable. Some verbs clearly show the prevalence of the dialect of Tunis and the coastal region as evidenced by the diphthongization of the last vowel with the plural forms of verbs that are known in Standard Arabic as defective verbs. Verbs like *stanna:* ‘to wait,’ *bne:* ‘to build’ and *mʃε:* ‘to go’ are produced with a final diphthong. In (16) YC uses the form *yεstanne:u* instead of *yεstannu* ‘they wait’ and *yεbne:u* instead of *yεbnu* ‘they build.’ The lack of gender differentiation in second-person singular, also typical of Tunis and the coastal dialects, is evident in the use of the second-person singular subject pronoun *inti* in (14). Another feature of Tunisian Arabic is the lengthening of the initial vowel in hollow verbs in second-person singular form, which is shown in example (17) where *ku:n* replaces *kun*, and *qu:m* replaces *qum*. Finally, the common way to express deontic modality in these texts is by using the verb *yilzim+* (object)+verb, as opposed to other forms commonly used in Standard Arabic (18).

- (14) *l-hqi:qa ε:na ma nħammilifke:n inti l-masʔu:liyya nħammil kul l-wuza:ra* (NE)
 ‘The truth is I don’t make you the only responsible one, I make the whole ministry responsible.’
 (15) *nku:nu mitʃa:wni:n wu yid waħda* (YC)
 ‘Let us be helpful to each other and act with one hand.’
 (16) *iħibbu bi-l-ʃiʃl yibne:u niḏa:m di:muqra:ti:* (YC)
 ‘They really want to build a democratic system.’
 (17) *ku:n muwa:ʃin ʃa:liħ, qu:m bwe:jbik wu xalliʃ ḏ-ḏara:yib mte:ʃik* (MF)
 ‘Be a good citizen, perform your duty and pay your taxes.’
 (18) *yilzimum yiddaxlu* (YC)
 ‘They must intervene.’

Additional morphosyntactic features that are maintained in Tunisian Arabic for official purposes include the structure used for the expression of the progressive formed by *qa:ʕid+* verb, as in (19), and the use of the invariant relative pronoun and complementizer *illi* (20, 21).

- (19) *l-mana:tiq s-siye:ʕiyya ma-hi:f qa:ʕda tʕayyil fi l-ʕbe:d* (NE)
 ‘The tourist areas are not employing people.’
- (20) *ʕiyya l-waθi:qa illi thaddid mʕa:ri:f d-dawla wu mne:f titkawwin wu l-flu:s illi tnajjim tlimhum* (MF)
 ‘It is the document that determines the state’s expenses and what they are made of and the money that it can collect.’
- (21) *le:kin ε:na naʕrif illi t-twe:nsa ma-yaʕirfu:f ʕa:ja ismha mustaʕi:l* [YC]
 ‘But I know that Tunisians don’t know something called impossible.’

A final observation regarding the features of Tunisian Arabic for official purposes is the use of the analytic construction to express possession. Although this is not categorical, as there is variation in the use of synthetic and analytic possessive constructions (Sayahi 2015), the fact that the genitive exponent *mte:ʕ*, absent from Standard Arabic, is used in official contexts and, as example (22) shows even with insertions from Standard Arabic, is significant.

- (22) *naʕirfu n-ne:ss l-kul l-waδʕiyya l-ke:riθiyya mte:ʕ l-bi:ʔa mte:ʕna wu l-waδiʕ l-bi:ʔi:mte:ʕna* [RM]
 ‘All of us know the disastrous state of our environment and our environmental situation.’

Lexical features of Tunisian Arabic for official purposes

At the lexical level, it is well established that since Tunisian Arabic, and vernacular Arabic in general, is not standardized and there are not any formal processes of vocabulary expansion, heavy borrowing occurs from both Standard Arabic and European languages. While heavy lexical insertions from French have been well documented in sociolinguistic interviews, natural conversation and informal interactions in general (Belazi 1992; Sayahi 2011, 2014; Poplack et al. 2015, among others), in the two scripted texts examined here, the document published by the Ministry of Finance and the speech delivered by Youssef Chahed, there are no French insertions into Tunisian Arabic, regardless of whether it is an established loan, nonce-borrowing, or a case of code-switching. What is more frequent in these types of formal text, rather, is that when a Tunisian Arabic word is not readily available, the user resorts to words from Standard Arabic, usually adapted at some level to Tunisian Arabic in a process that could be described as one of vernacularization (Bauman & Briggs 2003).

In this section, I discuss three distinct types of vocabulary drawn upon when Tunisian Arabic is used for official purposes. First, there are the native words that have developed in Tunisian Arabic as it became a distinct variety, and which may show more distance from Standard Arabic. This is comparable to the situation of Romance languages where researchers speak of *palabras patrimoniales* ‘patrimonial words’ defined by Hualde et al. (2010: 291) in the case of the Spanish language as “the central, basic part of the vocabulary [that] comes from spoken Latin through uninterrupted oral transmission.”³ These are basic vocabulary items and frequent words that may show considerable change from their historical form in Standard Arabic.

Within this section, I will also make the case for the existence of a learned vocabulary inserted from Standard Arabic to fill lexical gaps in Tunisian Arabic. In the case of Spanish, Hualde et al. refer to a comparable situation where words were taken from written Latin later in the evolution of Spanish to fill in lexical gaps. They define learned words, *palabras cultas*, as “those words that in some historical moment were taken from the Latin of the books, without other changes than those necessary to adapt them to the morphological and phonological system of Spanish” (Hualde et al. 2010: 291–292).⁴

Finally, I will address cases of insertions from French as present in the two texts that are produced extemporaneously and are not written or read aloud.

Native vocabulary

As expected, and because of the diglossic situation, most Tunisian Arabic words, including basic vocabulary referring to body parts and kinship relations, are shared with Standard Arabic, albeit with varying degrees of morpho-phonological change. For example, numerals in the texts examined here are produced in Tunisian Arabic and are still easily understood by other Arabic speakers, even if they diverge to differing degrees at the morpho-phonological level from the way the numeral system is used in Standard Arabic. However, there are many words that have changed more substantially across time, and whose meaning may not be transparent to speakers of other varieties of Arabic. For example, in the texts examined here we find words such as *fadd* ‘to be tired of something,’ *najjim* ‘to be able to,’ *yizzi* ‘enough’ and *bi:du* ‘itself.’ Other words have undergone some semantic change, including semantic expansion, shift and bleaching, in addition to necessary morpho-phonological changes in adapting them to the structure of Tunisian Arabic. In the texts examined here such examples include *su:m* ‘price,’ *ʃhe:ri* ‘salaries’ and *ḍawwu* ‘electricity.’

It is important to note that the origin of these words in historical Arabic can be verified, but that through their natural transmission across time, they went through varying levels of change and have become more distant from their original meaning. Their frequency, on the other hand, gives Tunisian Arabic used in official contexts an undeniably vernacular quality that inserted learned vocabulary cannot reverse.

Learned vocabulary

Borrowing from more prestigious languages or from languages used more often in the domains of knowledge and education is a familiar process in many situations of contact between linguistic varieties of differing genetic distance. Borrowing from the H variety into the L variety of the same language in a diglossic situation is a very economical resource for lexical expansion in comparison with the costlier insertion of foreign words (Heath 1989). As mentioned above, this was a common process of vocabulary expansion in the case of Romance languages as they started being used for science, education and government. Words such as *ojo* ‘eye’ in Spanish developed with the basic vocabulary from the Latin noun *oculus*, but the adjective *oculista* ‘oculist’ was adopted from Latin later. Borrowing from Latin as a language of learning and knowledge, in fact, went beyond Romance languages and is present in other languages, including English.

To supplement Tunisian Arabic vocabulary with an adequate terminology for specialized fields such as government, science, technology and education, and at times to avoid native Tunisian Arabic words that may have acquired other connotations, users tend to freely insert lexical items from Standard Arabic which I will refer to here as ‘learned vocabulary.’ In the

texts examined for this chapter, there are examples of specialized words and expressions, in addition to words that replace Tunisian Arabic terms deemed too colloquial. Examples of this latter category include words such as *ʔuju:r* ‘salaries’ instead of Tunisian Arabic *ʃhe:ri*, *ʔiqтира:ð* ‘borrowing’ instead of *slaff* (23), and *ʔamða:* ‘to sign’ instead of Tunisian Arabic *ṣahhīh*, as in (24). Insertions from Standard Arabic are also used to replace borrowings from French, including those words that could be considered established loanwords used even by uneducated monolingual speakers. Some examples include *maka:n* ‘place’ instead of Tunisian Arabic *bla:ša* (cf. French *place*), *ʔar:iq sayya:ra* ‘highway’ instead of *autoroute*, and *ħa:wīye:t* ‘containers’ instead of *contenaires*.

(23) *fi l-ʔaʔra j-je:yya tu:nis be:f tuxrij taqtarið ʕala l-aswe:q l-ma:liyya* (YC)

‘In the coming period, Tunisia will go out to borrow on the monetary markets.’

(24) *l-amr me:zilt ki amði:tu wu mfe: l-riʔa:sit l-ħku:ma* (RM)

‘The order, I just signed it and it went to the presidency of the government.’

The most salient way in which users adapt Standard Arabic lexical items into Tunisian Arabic, beyond the loss of case marking, is the reduction or deletion of vowels. This is especially true in the case of a first vowel following the onset consonant, which leads to the creation of an initial consonant cluster that is a typical feature of Maghrebi Arabic in general. In (24) above, the vowel [u], present after the initial [h] in a standard pronunciation of *ħku:ma*, is deleted. In some cases, however, the use of a learned form triggers Standard Arabic morpho-phonology when the vernacularization of the Standard Arabic lexical item can lead to its confusion with a native item or one with a different connotation. An example is the verb *yidʕi* in Tunisian Arabic, whose use is restricted to conveying the meaning of the English verb ‘to supplicate,’ while the equivalent verb ‘to invite someone to one’s house’ is *yistadʕi*. To reflect the meaning of inviting some political parties to participate in an initiative, YC instead uses the verb form *ʔadʕu:* without the initial *n-* in order to avoid ambiguity (25). As is common in bilingual code-switching, switching to Standard Arabic for a specific lexical item may lead to a larger chunk in the H variety.

(25) *wu ħe:ða aʕle:f l-yu:m ʔadʕu: aħa:b n-nawa:ya ʕ-ša:diqa fi s-se:ħa s-siye:siyya* (YC).

‘And this is why today I invite those people with good intentions in the political arena.’

French insertions

Insertion of French items into Tunisian Arabic is observable in all types of informal communication, audiovisual mass media and even in written digital media. While in most of the cases the immediate function seems to be some lexical need, the other motivation mentioned by Weinreich (1963), prestige, cannot be discarded. Knowledge of French, as displayed through communication in that language or lacing Tunisian discourse with French items produced in French phonology, is not frowned upon and can even be expected within educated circles. However, the highly variable levels of bilingualism, and the degree of access to and comfort with the French language, tend to make many of the switches happen at the single word level, with many of the cases being lone noun insertions. A first distinction is that Tunisian Arabic is more open to insertions from Standard Arabic when it is used in formal contexts, especially in political discourse and other formal domains, including religious discourse as detailed in Sayahi (2014), while in non-official contexts French insertions find their way into the discourse.

In the current sample, we see that in the scripted texts in Tunisian Arabic, in the document published by the Ministry of Finance and the speech by YC, there are very few insertions from French or other languages. One example is the word ‘agenda’ used by YC, but which is considered an established loan in Standard Arabic as well. On the other hand, in unscripted discourse French insertions do occur, as in the case of the exchange in the Assembly. In the question period, NE uses the word *safiye:t* ‘plastic bags’ (cf. French *sachet*), a loanword that is used also in the Minister’s answer, along with the standard Arabic *ʔakya:s*. NE also uses a long-established loanword in Tunisian Arabic *ke:sa* for ‘treasury’ (cf. French *caisse*). As he moves into defending the action of his ministry and does not use his notes, RM makes use of more French insertions. Many of these words have to do with technical and specialized vocabulary related in this case to either the environment or the political system. In (26), RM’s search for the Arabic equivalent for ‘parliamentary initiative’ leads him to use the French *initiative parlementaire* which he later ‘corrects’ and with some hesitation inserts the Standard Arabic term, *muba:dara tafriʕiyya*. This suggests that insertions from the H variety are judged as being more appropriate by speakers themselves in this context, even if their educational background indicates French insertions to be the more accessible option. There are cases of code-switching, as shown in example (27), but insertions from French are mainly single word insertions. These lone word insertions would be better treated as borrowings rather than code-switching, given that they are adapted into the syntactic structure of Tunisian Arabic, even while maintaining their French phonology. Example (28) below shows how the word *comportement* ‘behavior’ takes the Arabic article and the post-nominal possessive marker of Tunisian Arabic, as opposed to these structures in French. This situation, where the inserted French noun follows the structure of Tunisian Arabic as opposed to that of its original language, in cases of conflict sites, is a common phenomenon, as noted in the study of Poplack et al. (2015).

(26) *θamma mafru:ʕ qa:nu:n wua illa wua illa eh initiative parlementaire maʕnitha eh muba:dara tafriʕiyya min majlis n-nue:b* (RM).

‘There is a bill project or eh a parliamentary initiative meaning a parliamentary initiative from the Assembly of Representatives.’

(27) *wu mfi:na fi l-ʕamaliyya wu d-dira:sa wufe:t et on va validé ensemble* (RM).

‘And we continued the operation and the study ended and we validated [the plan] together.’

(28) *bē:fyiste:nis fi l-comportement mte:ʕu* (RM).

‘So he gets used to his behavior.’

Conclusion

To sum up, Tunisian Arabic when used for official purposes maintains its major distinctive dialect features, as illustrated by a number of examples examined here regarding verb morphology, future expression, negation, possession, common function words and discourse markers. While it maintains its differences at the morphosyntactic level, Tunisian Arabic used in official contexts shows still substantial convergence towards Standard Arabic at the lexical level. In addition to native vocabulary, defined here as the part of the vocabulary transmitted naturally since the initial stages of the formation of the Tunisian variety, insertions to fill lexical gaps in both written form and spoken official discourse come from Standard Arabic and not French. This learned vocabulary refers to words consciously inserted from Standard Arabic, which is acquired only in formal contexts. In unscripted discourse some French insertions are noted, but they remain fewer than what occurs in private and quasi-private discourse and they seem

to be in competition with Standard Arabic words, as shown in excerpt (26) above. It is not an exaggeration, then, to say that, while French loanwords and other types of insertions make their way into Tunisian Arabic used in many domains, including mass and digital media, in the context of official discourse the use of French elements is consciously reduced. The real difference at the lexical level between Tunisian Arabic used in official contexts and Tunisian Arabic in informal contexts, then, resides in the purging of French insertions, the avoidance of code-switching and the preference for the vernacularization of lexical items inserted from Standard Arabic.

To go back to Coulmas's (2002: 62) comment about the role of writing in the evolution of diglossic situations, he also emphasizes that "[i]f people choose to become literate and if they choose to speak as they write or to write as they speak, a realignment of codes will be brought about." In the case of Tunisia, part of the realignment of Tunisian Arabic for official communication is leaving out insertions from French and realigning it lexically with Standard Arabic, while at the same time normalizing the use of its distinct structural features as discussed above. This normalization of the use of Tunisian Arabic in political and official domains and its public display, as is the case with parliamentary sessions aired live on state television, is due in large part to the political changes that followed from the Revolution of 2011. Before the installation of a democratic government, public discourse by political figures in Tunisia was severely restricted and almost always scripted in Standard Arabic.⁵

The fact that state institutions employ Tunisian Arabic is reminiscent of what happened in other cases of post-diglossic societies, including Romance-speaking areas and Malta. This early normalization of the use of Tunisian Arabic for official purposes goes hand in hand with a rapid increase in the use of Tunisian Arabic in creative writing, digital media and private and quasi-private modes of communication. Furthermore, the increase in the use of Tunisian Arabic in public spaces has allowed regional Tunisian varieties to make their way into the public sphere and be heard far more frequently on state media than in the past. These varieties from the interior regions of the country, often the subject of ridicule by the public in Tunis and the coastal region and mass media in general, are gradually becoming more visible and seen as a legitimate part of the Tunisian linguistic makeup. An example of this is the minister Majdoline Cherni from the northwestern city of Kef, who unapologetically uses a variety that maintains the highly stigmatized voiced uvular stop sound. In addition, with less state control and censorship, interviews and other forms of appearances by a variety of people on Tunisian media have increased the display of linguistic variation, unlike what was the case before the Revolution where the capital's dialect was the omnipresent variety.

Tunisians seem increasingly more open towards a normalization of the use of their dialect and its 'unofficial' recognition as an identity marker that goes hand in hand with the establishing of a democratic society. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the new constitution was one of the first documents to be translated from Standard Arabic into Tunisian Arabic. Both the speech by YC and the document published by the MF examined here promote a spirit of citizenship and civic engagement for the political and economic success of the democratic transition. Nonetheless, despite some timid efforts, standardizing and officially recognizing Tunisian Arabic, and finding a place for it in education, is still a very contentious issue, as it pits supporters of Tunisian nationalism against supporters of Arab nationalism and highlights the overriding role religion plays in the society.

Notes

- 1 Although the term ‘dɛ:rja’ is the one commonly used by Tunisians when referring to their vernacular, the term ‘lahja tu:nisiyya’ is also common. In this chapter, I will use the term ‘Tunisian Arabic’ to refer to all varieties of vernacular Arabic in Tunisia.
- 2 All Arabic material is reproduced in italics based on the IPA conventions, except for pharyngealized sounds, which are indicated with diacritics placed below the letter, the voiced palatal approximant, transliterated as *y*, and the palato-alveolar sibilant, as *j*.
Examples are identified by the initials of their authors as follows: Prime Minister Youssef Chahed (YC), Ministry of Finance (MF), Member of Parliament Noomane El Euch (NE) and Minister of the Environment and Sustainable Development Riadh Mouakhar (RM).
- 3 My translation from Spanish.
- 4 My translation from Spanish.
- 5 See Boussofara-Omar (2006) and Boussofara (2017) for a discussion of language use by former Tunisian presidents.

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