

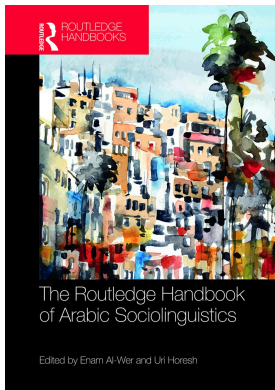
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6

STYLE AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Jonathan Owens

Style

I use style as a cover term for linguistically discrete genres defined in discourse, and embedded in normative speech practice. Style in this perspective is structural, not personal, and it targets in particular the realities of Arabic in which formal and informal domains of linguistic interaction are indexed with Standard or dialectal varieties. By the same token, not all exponents of style in Arabic are related to this fundamental contrast.

Style and situation

Ferguson's (1959) classic characterization of diglossia equally defines one of the ways that Arabic among the world's languages is set apart from others. His well-known division of the 'same' language with H(igh) and L(ow) varieties describes Arabic, Greek, Swiss German and Haitian Creole.¹ Of these four languages, Greek has largely gone over to the L variety Dhimotiki/Demotic (as Ferguson predicted diglossic languages tended to do), the status of Haitian Creole as a variety of French is controversial from the beginning (cf. e.g. McWhorter (2004), vs. DeGraff (2002)), leaving only Swiss German and Arabic as undisputed classic examples of diglossia.² As is well known, the H variety is used in formal contexts (news reading, ceremonial political speeches, the practiced Arabic of major news channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al-ṢArabiyya), while L is used in informal domains (friends, family, also most soap operas, movies). H is maintained by formal practice, beginning with its exclusive privileges in formal education, whereas L is the native variety. Various studies (see especially Bentahila 1983b, also Brahimi & Owens 2000; Diem 1974 for a good early overview) within the Sociology of Language perspective have documented how, in theory, different varieties are apportioned among different socially defined domains.

As Mitchell (1986) made explicit, in actual discourse the linguistic boundaries between H and L are typically fluid, not hard and fast ones. Elements of both varieties may occur cheek by jowl, within one and the same word or clause, as in the following (1986: 24).

- (1) *ma fiš ʔand-i ḥaaga ʔu-dif-ha ʔila ma(a) qaala-hu l-giniraal*
 not there have-I thing I-add-it.F to what said-it.M the-general
 'There is nothing I have to add to what the general said.'

The clause begins in L, *ma fiš ʔandi haaga*, then switches in curious hybrid manner at *ʔuḍifha*, the form IV verb being entirely H, but the shortening of the long /ii/ < *ʔuḍiifha* in a closed syllable being completely a L phonological rule, followed by a largely H sequence, *ma(a) qaalahu l-giniraal*. Related to this, note that *ʔuḍifha* lacks the -u mode ending of the Standard Arabic imperfect verb. I consider the linguistics further below. Mitchell appropriately termed this mixed variety ‘Educated Spoken Arabic’ because it manifests itself in the spoken language and because it can only be used by those who have learned Standard Arabic, which typically is acquired formally. I will continue to use this as a cover term for what encompasses a range of styles, without embracing Mitchell’s detailed characterizations.³

Diglossic style is engendered by the broader social norms of speaking which values the use of Standard Arabic, imperfect or not, in various situations. It is relatively easy to define linguistically (see below), since wherever there is a structural disjunction between SA and NA, the effect of SA interpolations is readily identifiable. Stylistic variation within native Arabic, on the other hand, is, by its nature, less easy to characterize. It is less easy because as a rule differences are of a graded, more-or-less, rather than either-or character. For instance, historical narrative style will often use more perfect verb forms than imperfects, though there is nothing which inherently prevents the use of both forms in the style. I discuss these below.

Before examining our initial characterization of style in greater detail, it is relevant to point out an obvious though important reality, namely that between SA and NA, it is NA, native Arabic, which is the unmarked linguistic variety. Markedness relations can, in classical structural terms, be read off of parameters defined against the entities that are compared. Two of these are suggested in (2).

- (2) Markedness among Arabic varieties
 mixing defined against NA norms
 Genres defined within NA, not SA

As will be seen in greater detail below, in Educated Spoken Arabic it is NA which provides the unmarked variety. In (1), for instance, it is an NA phonological rule which obtrudes into the SA lexical item, *ʔuḍifha*. Furthermore, one can, as far as spoken Arabic goes, speak of different oral styles only among NA varieties. The base, or unmarked variety against which style in spoken Arabic is understood is the native variety.⁴

Formally constrained variation

The easiest type of stylistic variation to characterize is situationally informed by degree of formality. Here it is easy to speak of a continuum of variation defined at the one extreme by full adherence to norms of Standard or Classical Arabic, and at the other by native Arabic. In this case there are situations which demand either one variety or the other. Intra-family conversations will nearly always expect native Arabic, whereas an al-Jazeera newscast will demand Standard Arabic. In between is a long cline of variation defined in part by situation, in part by the ability of interlocutors to actually use Standard Arabic, the marked medium.

The relation between situation and variety is most readily apparent in set, staged events, the best example being political speeches. As is well known, the Egyptian President Gamal Abdu l-Nasser perfected the political use of stylistic variation, alternating between Standard Arabic and Egyptian (Holes 1993; Mazraani 1997). Nasser’s style set the tone of subsequent politicians (Mazraani 1997 on Saddam Hussein, Muammar Al-Gaddafi, Nasser, Bassiouny 2006 on Mubarak). Typically, a greater use of SA signals authority, abstractness and distance

between ruler and ruled, whereas a greater use of NA symbolizes the solicitude of a leader for his people, a recognition of concrete problems and national interests. As one moves away from the highly constrained and controlled format of the political speech one finds a similar stylistic variation linguistically, but variation is open to a greater number of influencing factors. For instance, Mejdell (2006) describes a panel discussion among four Egyptian professors where there are considerable differences among them as to the degree to which they adhere to SA norms. Her speaker, AUC2 uses far more SA than EgA for the features analyzed, whereas AUC4, on the same panel discussing problems in higher education, uses far more EgA (Mejdell 2006: 375–376). The setting and topic are identical for all, but individual differences are readily apparent. Mejdell further shows that even within what she terms an extemporaneous or “mentally rehearsed” format, a different panel speaking in a literary seminar as a whole uses far more SA than does the AUC panel. Clearly venue, participants, audience and topic all play a role in how Educated Spoken Arabic is delivered.

Genre-controlled variation

A more mundane variation is that related to different spoken genres wholly within the NA domain, mundane because it is probably universal in that every language will have linguistically differentiated genres. A central difference pertains to narrative as opposed to conversation. Narratives typically have fewer speaker turns than does conversation and will be dominated by a single speaker, are defined by a single storyline in which topics remain topics for long periods of time, depending on topic, may be characterized by a sequential introduction of thematic subjects, and topic switches may be introduced with particular linguistic characteristics. Conversation, on the other hand, involves more speaker turns, may include multiple speakers, has more backchannel markers and interruptions and has a story line which develops on the fly so that topics may be short and be interrupted and changed. I consider this parameter in 3.2 below.

Linguistic attributes of stylistic variation

In this section I summarize prominent linguistic aspects of stylistic variation.

Educated spoken Arabic

Studies on Educated Spoken Arabic concentrate naturally on structures with clear differences between SA and NA. These have included, besides lexicon, relative pronouns, demonstratives, negation, sentence complementizers and word morphology (see Meisele 1980 for early treatment). Of these, the last is the most complicated, as the other features in nearly all cases are either/or, e.g. either SA *haada* or EgA *da*.⁵ A basic tendency at the word level, identified by Mitchell himself (1986: 19) is for SA stems to occur with NA affixes, but not vice versa (in following, NA elements are in italics in examples). His own (elicited) example is that one can have *waṣal-it* ‘she arrived,’ but not **wiṣl-at*, with SA FSG suffix *-at*, but EgA stem *wiṣl-*. In natural texts one finds, for instance, internal passive stems (SA) with an EgA prefix, *b-*, *b-yuqbal* ‘it is accepted’ (Bassiouney 2010: 111), or *ḥa-na-nqud* ‘we will criticize’ with SA stem + preformative vowel + EgA future prefix (Mejdell 2006: 421), or *ḥawwal-it* ‘it.F got changed,’ with EgA *-it* suffix, derived EgA *t-* prefix and SA stem (Mejdell 2006: 420)

There is much mixed phonology, e.g. *taaliθ* ‘third’ (and later in the same discourse *saalis* then *ḥaaliθ* then *taalit*, Mejdell 2006: 421), *yi-qawm-u* ‘they struggle against it,’ with NA

prefix and suffix, but also the EgA phonological rules (unstressed short high vowel deleted in open syllable and VVCC > VCC) applied to the SA stem, *-qaawim- (Bassiouney 2010: 110). Large-scale, systematic treatments of phonology in ESA style are largely lacking.⁶

While the overwhelming majority of mixed forms follow the tendency, SA stems allow NA affixes but NA stems do not allow SA affixes, there are always counterexamples which suggest that with larger corpora, a simple rule-based treatment would be inadequate. For instance, Mejdell (2006: 426.6.38) records, *sa-ti-šrab* ‘FT-she-drink’ with SA prefix and NA stem and person prefix, followed in the next line with the same structure, *sa-tu-ftur* ‘she will have breakfast,’ or *a-t-šawwar* ‘I imagine’ (2006: 426.6.3) with SA first person prefix *a-* (EgA expects *ba-* here), and, probably SA stem, but the form *V* verb prefix *t* conforming to the EgA lack of the vowel /a/.

A recent study looks at the exponence of nominal case endings in educated spoken Arabic using a quantified spoken corpus (Hallberg 2016). Among other findings, it shows that the short vowel case endings show striking differences of frequencies according to their morphological context (2016: 210). They are virtually non-existent when the noun bears the definite article (*al-šifaar-u* ‘the slogan’), have slightly higher frequencies, though hardly above 5%, when the noun is a *muḏaaf* (possessed) or in indefinite form (*šifaar-u-n*), but show a dramatic jump to 43% when followed by a possessor pronoun (*šifaar-u-haa*). Obviously, it is when a suffix is added to a noun that speakers need to make a choice about adding or not adding an intervening short case vowel, and this is the factor favoring the higher incidence of case marking. Interestingly given the large potential on a token basis for making ‘mistakes,’ the speakers in the sample (from Al-Jazeera broadcasts), rarely use wrong case endings, should they use them at all (2016: 245). Hallberg’s study further shows that the most frequent case marking is accusative, but that this higher marking is due almost entirely to speakers ‘vocalizing’ an orthographic alif (*-an*). Effectively this means that adverbial usage (e.g. *tamaam-an* ‘completely,’ *awwal-an* ‘first’) accounts for a great part of case usage.⁷ In passing it can be noted that this is one justification for Mitchell’s emphasis on ‘educated’ spoken Arabic, as it indicates that speakers of this style can mimic orthography in their spoken rendition, orthography being a learned expertise par excellence.

Various models have been applied to account for the ESA style. The earliest approaches, and those still followed in Mazraani (1997) and Bassiouney (2006), are the ‘levels’ model, first introduced by Haim Blanc (1960) and extended by El-Badawi (1973). Both Blanc and El-Badawi distinguish five levels of Arabic. The two scales are somewhat different in their emphasis, but Blanc’s can be given as an example.

1. *Standard Arabic*.
2. *Modified Classical*. Classical Arabic with dialectal admixtures.
3. *Semiliterary* or *Elevated Colloquial*. Any plain or koineized colloquial that is classiced beyond the ‘mildly formal’ range.
4. *Koineized Colloquial*. Any plain colloquial into which levelling devices have been more or less liberally introduced.
5. *Plain Colloquial*.

Mitchell himself (1986: 19) adheres to a levels model of his own creation, but as Magidow (2012: 84) points out, a basic criterion for identifying ESA, namely total lack of case and mode endings, is violated frequently (cf. Mejdell AUC2 408–14 for extended text with heavy mixture of case/mode and caseless/modeless endings and Hallberg 2016). Mejdell, on the other hand, relies on indices of individual features. Given the high degree of probabilistic variation

that cuts across one and the same discourse, the range of features which can be mixed, the differential tendencies particular to each and the inherently unequal competences in SA and NA, I think this is a more promising way forward, though is only a first step. Moshref (2015), has suggested that Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model (MLF) (CR Lahlou/Ziamary),⁸ which was developed in the context of codeswitching, is an appropriate way to understand the variation. One can be cautious in this regard. The basis of Ferguson's characterization of classic diglossia is that the related varieties are varieties of the same language. This will have structural effects in their interaction. To give a simple contrastive example, any combination of function and content word will result in a similar type, regardless of the varieties combining. *sa-ti-šrab*, *ħa-na-nqud*, *b-yuqbal* and other words cited above slide relatively effortlessly between affix and finite stem. This is a different situation from, say, French-Moroccan Arabic switching (Bentahila & Davies 1983). In this variety, the typical embedded French verb is always in invariable infinitive form, e.g. *t-at-gratt-er* 'you keep scratching' (315) and is never inflected for person, **ana vais* (1983: 312). The often drastic phonological adaptations, such those as cited above, are possible precisely because of the basic structural congruence between the varieties. The critical point here is not that the MLF cannot be adapted to 'explain' the data. No doubt it can be. It is rather to ask what is gained by applying a model which is not originally designed for the type of data such as is found in ESA. Evoking the MLF (or any other model) only becomes interesting when such questions are explicitly addressed (for further, see Bentahila et al. 2013: 336–341). Hallberg's recent study eschews the application of any given model in favor of a detailed descriptive statistical treatment. This approach avoids the danger of matching data with *a prioristically* conceived categories developed in a different socio-cultural world, and by the same token, expects that when statistical trends do become clearer, categorical tendencies will be identified (as in mainstream sociolinguistics). Unfortunately, the relative dearth of empirical studies in this domain means that one is not yet in a position to take this next step.

Narrative vs. conversation

A basic contrast can be drawn between narrative and conversation or dialogue. Three studies which have looked at narrative in some detail come to a common conclusion. Among the eastern dialects, the only ones which have been subjected to detailed treatment, narratives are marked by VS order, with backgrounded interpolations tending to SV order (Dahlgren 1998; Holes 2010: 62–65). Dahlgren, whose study is based on an examination of an extensive corpus of published texts, further notes that VS order is typical of foregrounded stretches of narrative, and SV of backgrounded (also Holes 2010: 65–67). Dahlgren also suggests that narratives are dominated by use of the perfective verb. Owens et al. (2010) point out that narrative and conversation can alternate freely within the same macro situation, with interlocutors engaging in heated conversational exchanges, these giving way to stretches in which one interlocutor in narrative fashion describes an opinion or event in their life. Typically, the narrative segment is marked by an increased proportion of VS (see below).

In linguistics in general, the study of word order variation is often phrased in terms of the issue of basic word order. A study such as Dahlgren's might be used, for instance, to argue that Arabic (or eastern Arabic) is a VS language.⁹ Even Dahlgren (1998: 219–222), however, qualifies this perspective, saying only that narratives tend towards VS, whereas dialogue tends towards SV, foregrounded material to VS, backgrounded to SV. The three studies cited here are in agreement on this point, namely that the eastern spoken Arabic varieties use VS in narratives and SV in dialogue, a generalization that points away from considering Arabic to have

a basic word order. Rather, the dialects considered here have a pragmatically defined word order, sensitive to the type of discourse interlocutors are engaged in.¹⁰

More than this, however, the subtleties defining word order factors suggest that thinking in terms of SV vs. VS is not a particularly productive perspective. To a large degree, the choice between the two is only free to a limited degree when the factor of the lexical nature of subject is taken into account. In particular, pronoun and pronominal subjects, the latter including demonstratives, quantifiers such as *kull* ‘all,’ *baʿṣad* ‘some,’ *(al)-waahid* ‘one, someone,’ question words and numerals are overwhelmingly SV, to the extent that, as suggested in Owens et al. (2013: 24–25), their propensity to SV order is encoded in their lexical entry. Generic nouns such as *naas* ‘people’ equally have an SV tendency, so that in general subjects whose reference can be termed ‘available’ (Naro & Votre 1999: 88–89), have a strong inclination to SV order. Similar tendencies have been identified in Dahlgren (1998)¹¹ and Holes (2010: 65). Effectively, only definite nouns (marked by *al-* or possessed by a definite possessor) which have a specific (in some sense) reference, and to a lesser degree, indefinite nouns, have a free SV vs. VS choice which may be deployed in discourse according to the information status of the noun.

These basic observations can be applied to a brief case study which elucidates the difference between narrative and conversational style. The data comes from a conversation recorded in Washington D.C. between two native Saudi women from Jeddah (included in the studies in Owens et al. 2009, 2010, for details). The oral recording covers a span of subjects, and clearly the two women had different perceptions of the country, one quite critical (= ‘the critic’) of it for different reasons, the other defending it (= ‘the defender’). These basic differences led at times to somewhat heated dialogues between the two, one of which was triggered by the name ‘Persian Gulf.’ The critic noted that it was anachronistic for Arab countries in schools to term it the ‘Arabian Gulf,’ when the rest of the world called it the ‘Persian Gulf.’ The defender countered by saying that the Saudi terminology was quite appropriate. The conversation became heated at points, as in the following excerpt, where HA counters HB and cuts her off with a dismissive definitiveness, delivered with a high pitch.

HB . . . *leeṣ? eeṣ? eeṣ al-yaḷaṭ yaṣni? hummo al-xaliij al-ṣarabi mi-l-ṣarab ihna nsammi l-xaliij l-ṣarabi bass iiraan . . .*

HA *ma ḥad yisammi xaliij ṣarabi!*

HB: why, what? So what’s the mistake? Those ones, the Arabian Gulf . . . We call it the Arabian Gulf, it’s just the Iranians. . .

HA: ‘No one calls it the Arabian Gulf!’

The same interview had largely monolingual narrative portions as well, one of which described parties which mothers would have to look for suitable brides for their offspring. In this segment, one event followed another sequentially. The two segments consist of about 1525 and 292 words, respectively, and as expected, are markedly different in their turn interaction. The narrative text has only three speaker turns (one is obviously very long), whereas the conversation has 61 (97 vs. 25 words per turn, on average).

How different the conversational and the narrative segments are can be seen by quickly examining the status of subject in each. The subject, as Chafe (1994, also Prince 1981) emphasizes, is the key discourse entity in that the ‘aboutness’ of a discourse is built around the identity of the subject. How it is represented, as an overt noun, as a null element (in Arabic) or otherwise tells a great deal about where the information focus at a given moment in the text

lies. A good way to understand the sensitivity of subject to style is to quantitatively compare its attributes in the two opposed types of texts. This will be done in a quick presentation of relevant parameters in the form of frequency tables. In them, the 'expected count' is given in order to allow quick reference to the direction of statistical bias. For instance, in Table 1, there are on a token basis more overt noun subjects (26) in the conversation than in the narrative (20). However, the raw frequencies need to be balanced against the fact that the conversational text is considerably longer, and in this respect, the occurrence of noun subject is overproportional in the narrative. This can be seen in the fact that the count expected in the conversation given a random distribution is considerably lower (20.7). All distributions are highly significant (at least $p > .00$, most .000), though a chi square distribution is not of great significance against the many factors which need to be taken into account (see below).

I should note that the data includes only subjects of morphological verbs. Verbless sentences, and existential predicates with *fi/bi* or *find*, are excluded, since the former are nearly always SV while the latter equally are nearly always VS, i.e. these categories of predicate do not allow for a great deal of stylistic variation. Imperative predicates have also been excluded, as they tend very strongly to occur with null subjects.

Table 6.1 summarizes the type of subject found in each text type. In the conversational text, pronouns dominate, whereas the narrative has a preponderance of nouns. Table 6.2 summarizes what is termed 'status of subject,' by which is meant occurring in SV, VS, or as a null subject. The narrative is characterized by a high degree of V-S. Interestingly, the narrative has, relatively speaking, a higher degree of null subject. I will comment on this below. Finally, in Table 6.3 is given the occurrence of person of subject (whether or not the subject is expressed overtly). The conversational segment is marked by a high usage of first- and second-person subject, the narrative by third person. In most cases, the two discourse types

Table 6.1 Type of subject, if overt

		<i>conversation</i>	<i>narrative</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pronoun	Count	43	4	48
	Expected Count	33.2	13.8	48.0
Noun	Count	26	20	48
	Expected Count	32.4	13.6	48.0
Pronominal	Count	10	9	19
	Expected Count	13.4	5.6	19.0
Total	Count	81	33	115

Table 6.2 Status of subject

		<i>conversation</i>	<i>narrative</i>	<i>Total</i>
SV	Count	67	20	87
	Expected Count	67.5	19.5	89.0
VS	Count	14	13	27
	Expected Count	21	6.0	28.0
null	Count	141	31	172
	Expected Count	133.5	38.5	49.0
Total	Count	222	64	286

Table 6.3 Person of subject

		<i>conversation</i>	<i>narrative</i>	<i>Total</i>
1st	Count	90	6	96
	Expected Count	74.5	21.5	106.0
2nd	Count	43	1	44
	Expected Count	34.2	9.8	63.0
3rd	Count	89	57	154
	Expected Count	113.3	32.7	158.0
Total	Count	222	64	286

Table 6.4 Category of subject

<i>SV</i>	<i>Pronoun</i>	<i>Pronominal</i>	<i>Noun</i>
Conversation	43	6	18
Narrative	4	5	11
<i>VS</i>	<i>Pronoun</i>	<i>Pronominal</i>	<i>Noun</i>
Conversation	2	4	8
Narrative	0	4	9

have quite different subject profiles, as the raw frequencies alone usually show, and even when the frequencies are relatively equal, as in the VS order in Table 6.2, subject status, it is clear that proportionally VS is far more frequent in the narrative text, as a comparison of observed and expected confirms. Perhaps the only category where the two converge is SV in Table 6.2, a point taken up below, however.

Taken in conjunction with a reading of expected frequencies, the raw statistics, therefore confirm that the expression of subject can be said in a sense to be dependent on discourse type. The differences between the two intuitively ‘make sense.’ Conversations (Table 6.3) necessarily involve first- and second-person referents, while narratives, as in the current one, will generally be about non-speech situation entities. Since the conversation participants are inherently present, a high degree of null marking of subject is not surprising (Table 6.2).

The raw statistics, and basic 2 x 2 crosstables, it needs to be emphasized, merely provide the entry point to a complex issue. In Table 6.2, for instance, it appears that SV word order is roughly equal proportionally between conversation and narrative styles. A closer look at the nature of the subjects, however, is elucidating. It turns out that pronouns (Table 6.4) are overwhelmingly SV, regardless of genre. As far as pronoun subjects go, it appears that SV as such is not a factor that can be considered independent of the nature of the subject. If the subject is a pronoun, in these varieties of Arabic one expects SV.

It is equally clear that the overproportional occurrence of VS in narratives is due in particular to nouns, perhaps to a degree to pronominals as well (see below). In the same vein, it emerges from Tables 6.1 and 6.2 that Arabic conversational discourse favors a high degree of overt 1SG, *ana* – 30 of the 43 pronouns are 1SG – even though this referent is situationally given (see discussion of this point in Owens et al. 2013: 20, 21 and p. 29 n. 8 for comparison to Hebrew). A simple crosstable hides many interesting interactions.

Admittedly the observations based on two short segments runs the danger of cherry-picking the texts in order to substantiate the contrasts which are developed here. Indeed, I have pointed

out that the parameter of null subject in general is an unmarked option in oral Arabic discourse (Owens et al. 2009, 2010, 2013) and that in any context, narrative or otherwise, wherever an overt subject is not ‘needed,’ the subject will be null. Many rehearsed, folktale narratives (e.g. Al-Rawi 1990: 121), for instance, are delivered with only two or three overt subjects in the entire discourse.

Nonetheless, rather than view these two examples as market-tailored products, it is more fruitful to view them as the basis of hypotheses which could be developed should the databases needed for their full-scale testing become available. One reasonable hypothesis, for instance, is that given a large enough sample of narrative and conversational texts, and a detailed enough morpho-syntactic tagging of the nouns and verbs in them, that the discourse type will be characterized by the type of subject, that one will have a good idea whether a discourse is conversational or narrative simply by examining the nature of the subjects. This hypothesis does not exclude individual exceptions, but the purpose of having a larger sample would be to start at a general level and work one’s way through more specific, individual factors which override a general trend.

Indeed, the critical look at the two exemplifying texts leads precisely to the point which is being made here, namely that from a linguistic perspective, ‘narrative’ and ‘conversation’ as such are convenient composite heuristics and are not themselves independent variables. The linguistic challenge is rather to isolate the individual elements (e.g. subject status, person, as above in Tables 1–3) and to describe how they multivariantly combine to produce what are often striking contrasts.

As a final word of caution, there has been very little systematic study of spoken Arabic style based on adequate databases. One problem is simply that such oral databases are few and far between. Even if they exist, in order to be able to systematically consider all of the factors which have been suggested as important in Arabic and in other languages – tense, length of clause, transitivity of predicate, foreground vs. background, to add to the list of parameters discussed here – requires having quite large text collections. The study in Owens et al. (2009), for instance, was based on barely 30,000 words for three different dialects, which is certainly too small a number for studying all of the relevant interacting factors. By the same token, as soon as data bases become available it is a relatively easy matter to apply statistical measures, multivariate analysis for instance, which filters out the types of interaction problems discussed above around Table 4.¹²

Codeswitching and other stylistic elements

As a final aspect of oral style, the factor of codeswitching should be mentioned. Studies over the last 35 years (e.g. Bentahila 1981; Bentahila & Davies 1983; Chebchoub 1985 for Algeria, Boumans 1998; Owens 2005; Ziamari 2009, see Bentahila et al. 2013 for overview) have shown that both in Arabic countries and among Arab populations in the diaspora multilingual usage in the form of codeswitching is a regular part of oral repertoires. Bentahila & Davies (1992, 1998) suggest that the style of codeswitching correlates with fluency in the languages involved, so that those who have a better knowledge of French will tend to have longer switches between Moroccan Arabic and French than those who do not, where lexical or phrasal switching in French is greater. At the beginning of codeswitching studies (e.g. Gumperz 1982) it was common to link codeswitches to linguistic function (e.g. repetition for emphasis, convey greater authority), and early studies on Arabic-French switching followed this trend (Bentahila 1983a; Chebchoub 1985). Subsequent research also showed, however, that a codeswitching style among fluent multilinguals may simply involve using the different languages without there being a specific functional flag for each switch.

There are many other stylistic sub-genres which deserve closer study, including music (e.g. Bentahila and Davies 2002), recited poetry (e.g. Holes 2013: 286–291), secret languages (Owens & Hassan 2000; Wolfer 2011) and the stylistics of oral narrative itself (e.g. Sowayan 1992; Henkin 2010; Holes 2016: 434–466) so that all in all the study of style in spoken Arabic runs a very wide gamut of genres (see summary article, Holes 2013). How these can be integrated into variationist sociolinguistics is at this point subservient to the descriptive challenge of building a broad and deep analytical framework which gives due attention to the many aspects of oral style in Arabic.

Style and linguistic variation

The current article makes clear that stylistic variation plays an enormous role in the formation and organization of Arabic discourse. Only a basic sample of the linguistic reflexes of this variation have been presented. At the same time, the fact that at this juncture in Arabic linguistics in a summary article on this subject it is still appropriate to present a relatively large amount of basic data, indicates that the study of oral discourse in Arabic is still in its infancy. From the perspective of variationist sociolinguistics, it follows that integrating the loosely phrased variable ‘style’ into variationist studies proper remains a project yet to be undertaken.

Notes

- 1 The much larger range of functional diglossia (Fishman 1967) utilizes similar parameters as Ferguson’s classic diglossia, describing complementary distribution of functions among different languages. Functional diglossia exists wherever multilingual speech communities utilize a dominant language for given communicative purposes.
Abbreviations are as follows: CA ‘classical Arabic,’ EgA ‘Egyptian Arabic,’ ESA ‘educated spoken Arabic,’ H ‘high,’ L ‘low,’ NA ‘native Arabic,’ S ‘subject,’ V ‘verb,’ SA ‘Standard Arabic.’
- 2 Of course, other languages might fit this mold as well, e.g. the dialects of Italian (if they can be called that) vs. Standard Italian (e.g. Alfonzetti 1998). However, the point remains that Ferguson’s classic diglossia pertains to a small minority of the world’s languages and is nowhere so pervasive as it is in Arabic.
- 3 E.g. that ESA definitionally lacks case endings.
- 4 It should be remarked that there is a further, central aspect to Mitchell’s concept, ESA, which will not be addressed here. This is that among competing NA variants there is a strong tendency for what he terms ‘stigmatized’ variants to be filtered out. For instance, the Jordanian Arabic demonstrative *haada* loosens out to a non-emphatic variant (see El-Hassan 1979). Mitchell suggested that regional koines were based on selected NA features.
- 5 The lion’s share of studies relates to Egyptian Arabic. Of course they would have to be adopted differently for dialects where there is no difference between the two, e.g. Eastern Libyan, *hada* ‘this.M’.
- 6 Thus Moshref’s observation that “An ECA lexeme can only have an MSA pronunciation in limited contexts, either jokingly, or when a speaker attempts to project an educated image of him/herself” (2015: 99) would seem to suggest that the MLF model need not worry about phonology. While this may apply to her corpus, her characterization hardly fits the examples given above.
- 7 In terms of overall tokens. While nearly half of all nouns which had a suffix pronoun were case-marked, their overall total of 442 in the sample means that they contribute relatively little to the overall frequency of case marking (or lack thereof) in the sample. Indefinite nouns, on the other hand, at 3,996 tokens are nearly ten times more frequent, so even a smaller percentage of case marking on them can yield a relatively high number of absolute tokens.
- 8 It should be noted that Myers-Scotton has only dealt with Arabic codeswitching so far as it concerns native Arabic and another language (e.g. 2010), not the relation among ESA varieties. This a theoretical challenge which needs to be systematically addressed.
- 9 As indeed, is done by Retsö (2011: 804), citing the same Dahlgren. Retsö seems to miss the irony of his own observation, however, that VS and SV correlate with foregrounded/backgrounded information;

- i.e. he correctly recognizes the discourse pragmatic basis of sentential word order variation, even while maintaining the old Semiticist adage that Arabic is a VS language.
- 10 And in a comparative study, Owens and Dodsworth (2010) generalize this to Biblical Aramaic, which similarly alternates between VS vs. SV along the same parameters defined for spoken Arabic.
 - 11 Dahlgren's sample of eastern dialects is based on published texts from various eastern dialects. His categories are not always comparable to our own, though three are, pronouns, definite nouns and indefinite nouns. Of these, overall pronouns are strongly SV, though in narratives may be majority VS. Definite and indefinite nouns tend to VS (1998: 229–251).
 - 12 And indeed in other studies. Dahlgren (1998), for instance, presents a wealth of interesting data in the form of extensive tables, but in the end it is almost impossible to gain an overview in all the detail. His study cries out for a dedicated statistical analysis using multiple independent variables to explain the simple SV-VS word order parameter.

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