

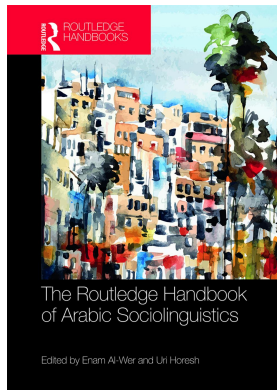
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9

PERIPHERAL VARIETIES

George Grigore

What are peripheral varieties of Arabic?

Peripheral varieties of Arabic are vernaculars “generally spoken by bilinguals, in a non-Arabic milieu” (Owens 2001: 354), i.e. beyond the confines of Arab countries. They were defined by Alexander Borg (2004: xix) based on three characteristics, as follows: geographical and cultural isolation from the Arabic-speaking countries; the core modification of their profile following language contact phenomena, as defined in historical linguistics, which makes them unintelligible to a contemporary native speaker of Arabic; the acculturation with respect to another particular language which will replace the functions once held by the high variety within monolingual diglossia in the Arabic-speaking countries. This diglossia will be replaced by bilingualism or plurilingualism. Peripheral varieties of Arabic are spoken within large communities in several regions of the world such as Turkey, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Cyprus. Besides these traditional communities, we can talk nowadays about Arabic-speaking minorities in South America and Western Europe as peripheral varieties of Arabic (see also Versteegh 1997: 211–225). In addition, there are Spain and Sicily, where two different Arabic varieties used to be spoken that are also considered peripheral: Andalusian Arabic and Siculo Arabic. Today, these are extinct. Maltese, a possible descendant of Siculo Arabic (Agius 1996), is a special case, as it became the official language of the Republic of Malta.

Being spoken outside the Arab states, these varieties of Arabic are also situated outside the diglossia area, and thus the organic, symbiotic link between them and the high variety of Arabic – i.e. *al-Fuṣḥā* – has been interrupted. This led to their particular evolution as they became “more divergent than the mainstream Middle Eastern or North African dialects.” (Kaye & Rosenhouse 1997: 263).

Some researchers consider that the notion of diglossia being inapplicable to these varieties of Arabic, and taking into account their historical, typological, cultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds, it is more realistic to consider them “as autonomous languages rather than simply as ‘Arabic dialects’” (Borg 2006: 537). As such, these varieties do not constitute a genealogical group with a linguistic unity as a branch of the Arabic language tree that would be labelled ‘peripheral,’ but would only be defined sociolinguistically.

The main Peripheral Arabic varieties

While there are no genealogical criteria that can serve as a basis for classifying these varieties, we will arrange them by regions, congruent with the continents where they are to be found: Asia, Africa and Europe.

Asia

Turkey

Otto Jastrow (2006: 87) groups the Arabic dialects spoken in Turkey in three areas: the Mediterranean Coast, some areas of Urfa and Eastern Anatolia.

The Mediterranean Coast comprises Cilician Arabic and Antiochia Arabic. Cilician Arabic is spoken in the Cilician Plain (Çukurova), within the urban settlements of Adana, Tarsus, and Mersin as well as in 25 other villages in the region. Cilician Arabic, which is a sedentary dialect, belongs to the Syro-Palestinian group, as it shares a series of common features with the Syrian coastal dialects. There are some disparities between the varieties spoken by different religious groups: Nusayri-Alawis, Sunnis and Christians (Procházka 2002: 2–12). Antiochia Arabic is also situated within the continuum of the dialects of Syria and is spoken in the province of Hatay – as it had been named when it became part of the Republic of Turkey in 1938, with its capital in Antakya, the former Antiochia. In Antiochia, Arabic is spoken by Nusayri-Alawis (in the western part of the province, beyond the boundary Iskenderun-Kiliçtutan), by Sunnis (East of Iskenderun – Kiliçtutan, and also in the city of Antakya), by Christians (in the cities of Antakya and Iskenderun) and by the Jewish population (in the city of Antakya) (Arnold 2006: 111).

The Bedouin Arabic of Urfa is spoken in a region delimited by the cities of Urfa, Siverek, Viranşehir, Ceylanpınar and Akçakale (Procházka 2003: 75–76). This variety forms a continuum with the Šawī-Bedouin group spoken in the Syrian desert (Jastrow 2006: 87). Procházka described it as: “the dialect of Urfa differs only slightly from those stated by Behnstedt [. . .] to be used north of ar-Raqqā in Syria” (Procházka 2003: 75).

Anatolian Arabic is spoken in Eastern Anatolia and is a part of the *qəltu* dialect continuum. It keeps the voiceless uvular stop [q] and the inflexional suffix *-tu* of the first person sg. perfect, and is classified in four groups, named after the main settlements where these varieties are spoken: 1) the Mardin group; 2) the Siirt group; 3) the Diarbakir group; 4) the Kozluk-Sason-Muş group (Jastrow 1994: 121). These varieties were well documented by Sasse 1971, Jastrow (1973, 1978, 1981, etc.), Talay (2001, 2002), Wittrich (2001), Lahdo (2003), Grigore (2007), Grigore & Biṭună (2012), Biṭună (2016), among others.

Iran

Estimates regarding the size of the Arab community in Iran fluctuate, ranging from 1.3 million to 5 million. These data are not very clear because it is not specified who these speakers are, whether local Arabs, new immigrants, Iranians who claim an Arab origin but don't speak any kind of Arabic, and various other definitions (Elling 2012: 36).

Ahwazi Arabic

Ahwazi Arabic – spoken in the Khuzistan Province (Layard 1846), located in south-western Iran, on the eastern bank of the Shatt al-Arab river up to the Zagros Mountains, and also

in the Bushehr Province and Deylam county – belongs to a Mesopotamian Arabic of the *gəlat* type (i.e. Bedouin). The Arab-populated area covers 65% of the Khuzistan Province, with its big cities including Ahvaz (*Ahwāz*), Khorramshahr (*Muḥammadarāh*), Abadan (Elling 2012:36).

The most distinctive features of this Arabic are the *g/ġ* as reflexes of the old *q, k/č as reflexes of the old *k, the *gahawa* syndrome which affects the structure of the syllable (*gahwa* > *gahawa* ‘coffee’), etc. This variety belongs to the continuum of dialects in the neighbouring southern area of Iraq, comprising the region between the South of Kūt on the Tigris River and Nāširiyyah on the Euphrates. As in most Arabic-speaking areas, Khuzistan Arabic differs significantly between the *ḥaḍar* (sedentary) norm and the ‘*arab* (nomad) norm. Moreover, in addition to these two norms, there is a third one, specific to this variety, i.e. the *ahwār* (marshland) norm. These three dialects are a continuum with the dialects spoken in southern Iraq and they are perceived “with a fair degree of gross generalization” (Ingham 2007: 571; also see Ingham 1973, 1976, 1982).

Coastal Arabic

Along the Iranian coast of the Persian Gulf, mainly in the Hormozgān Province, including its islands, and in the Bushehr Province, there live approximately 200,000 Arabic-speaking inhabitants, according to *Ethnologue*, named Bandari Arabs (*bandari*, related to Bander “Abbās,” the capital of Hormozgān Province). Their dialect is closely related to Gulf Arabic (“*arabī ḥalīġī*”), the variety named *al-Ḥasā* (from *al-Aḥsā*’, the well-known oasis, situated on the Saudi gulf shore, symbol of the Eastern Arabia region). In the early period of Islam, some Arab tribes, such as Banū Tamīm, Banū Ḥammād, al-Marāziq, al-Qawāsīm migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the southern Iranian coastal areas. Some of those tribes in their thriving periods even founded their own emirates on the Iranian shores (Elling 2012: 36).

Al-Ḥamsa Arabic and other varieties

Another Arabic-speaking group whose history dates back to the Islamic conquest of Persia in 633 CE is located in the Eastern province of Fārs (South-Western Iran) and is known as the ‘Arab tribe; it has two branches: the Jabbāra and the Šaybānī. The Russian orientalist A.G. Tumanskii stated that this tribe was composed of 19,870 families at the end of the 19th century (Tumanskii 1896: 79). This tribe became part of the al-Ḥamsa tribal confederation created in 1861–1862 by Nāṣer od-Dīn Šāh (1831–1896) as a counter initiative to the increasing Qašqā’i – a confederation of different ethnic groups, mostly Turkic – power in the area. He put together under the same leadership five (Arabic *ḥamsa*) nomadic tribes of sheep breeders (and some remain so today): ‘Arab (Arabic-speaking), Nafar, Bahārlū, Aynallū (all Turkic-speaking), and Basīri (Persian-speaking) (Digard 2011: 333). However, this mixture of ethnic groups came to be called Arabs, which creates some confusion, in contrast to the Turkic Qašqā’i (Sehām Pur 1999). According to *Encyclopædia Iranica* (IX, 362), some of the *al-Ḥamsa* Arabs still practice transhumance, by spending the summer months in the north-western shore of Lake Neyrīz to Dehbīd and Bavānāt in central Fārs, and the winter months around Fasā, Dārāb, Jahrom and Jūyom in south-eastern Fārs. Besides the *al-Ḥamsa* Arabs, there are also other Arab nomadic groups in Fārs, Kermān and Yāzd provinces. All of them speak varieties generically known as *al-Ḥamsa* Arabic, derived also from Gulf Arabic, but which differ from the *Ḥasā* Arabic spoken on the shore (*Ethnologue*).

Khorasani Arabic

In Khorasan, in the north-eastern part of Iran, at its borders with Afghanistan, there is an Arabic-speaking community who settled in this area during the Abbasid Caliphate (750 – 1513). Seeger identified – based on the Iranian geographical encyclopaedia of the year 1950 – *Razmārā: Ferhang-e ġagrāfiyā 'i-ye Irān* – 27 villages with Arabic-speaking inhabitants. At that time, almost all of them were spread across the Arabhâne district, south of Birġand, in the Zīr Kūh district, on the border of Afghanistan, and around Saraḥs, on the border of Turkmenistan (Seeger 2002: 629–630). In 1996, during his fieldwork in Khorasan, Seeger visited four of these villages with Arabic-speaking communities, located in the Zīr Kūh district: Ḥalaf, Darey Ćarm, Muḥammadiyye, Sarāb, and made the first recordings of this dialect (Seeger 2002: 631). The results of this fieldwork consisting of some ethnological remarks, a first grammatical sketch and transcribed texts can be found in Seeger (2002, 2009, 2013).

Among the most striking – to use Seeger’s expression – features of Khorasani Arabic are the shift of sibilants (after the loss of emphasis, where appropriate) to interdental: *lūf* (< **šūf*) ‘wool,’ *lultān* (< **sultān*) ‘sultan,’ *riḏī* (< **raḏī*) ‘child,’ and so on, and the assimilation of the /l/ of the definite article *al-* to any initial consonant of the following noun: *aḥ-ḥurme* ‘the women,’ *a* ‘-*arūt* ‘the bride,’ and so on Seeger 2002: 633–634).

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan the Arabic-speaking population lives in the north-east of the country in the villages of Yaḥdān and Ḥoṣḥālābād, situated in the Province of Balkh (the ancient Bactra), and Sultān Arigh and Ḥasanābād, situated in the Province of Jowzjān. Due to the instability of the entire region, the data collected about this variety of Arabic are still very poor. According to a much-quoted source dating from the 1960s, the estimated number of Arabs in Afghanistan at that time was about 5,000 (Farhadi & Raven 1967). It was described by Tsereteli (1956), Sīrat (1961), Sīrat & Knudsen (1973), Ingham (2006), Kieffer (1999). This Arabic variety was deeply influenced on all its levels, phonological, morphological and syntactic, by the neighbouring languages of Dari, Uzbek and Pashto, which led some authors to consider it a mixed language (Kieffer 1999: 188).

After comparing it with other Arabic varieties of Central Asia, it was concluded that the Arabic spoken in Afghanistan is nothing less but a branch of the spoken Arabic of Bukhara, where the label Tajiki Arabic comes from. This was expected, considering that Balkh was part of the Khanate of Bukhara except for a short period and the Arabs “were, up till the 19th century, involved in nomadic sheep husbandry” (Ingham 2006: 28). By the end of the 19th century, a relatively recent group arrived there, from what is now Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, following Tsarist Russia’s conquest of Central Asia (Barfield 1981:15).

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan Arabic splits into two dialects: (1) the Qašqa-daryā dialect (influenced by the Uzbek language) spoken in two villages, Qamaši and Ğeinau, in the Qašqa-daryā region of the Republic of Uzbekistan; a vast monograph written by Guram Chikovani (2008), a follower of the research conducted by Isac Naumotch Vinnikov and Georgi Tsereteli, is dedicated to this variety, and (2) the Bukhara dialect (influenced by Tajik) spoken in the villages of Ğōgari,

Čagdarē, Šoħanbeg, and ‘Arabħōne, amply presented by the same author, Chikovani (2009). The differences between these two dialects are so significant that their speakers, when confronted with the need of communicating between them, prefer to do it in Uzbek or Tajik, in order to avoid any syncope in the decryption of the message (Tsereteli 1970:168). Otto Jastrow considers that “in all the points where the Qašqa-daryā dialect differs from the Bukhara dialect, it aligns itself with Iraqi Arabic, more precisely the *gəlat* dialects. So even if it can be proven that Uzbekistan Arabic is based on a number of old Arabic dialects besides Iraqi, also dialects of the South-East of Arabia, the fact will remain that the Qašqa-daryā dialect in particular shows the closest affinity with the *gəlat* dialects of Mesopotamian Arabic” (Jastrow 2014: 211).

As Afghanistan Arabic, which can be considered a mixed language or a hybrid language, Uzbekistan Arabic has a lot of borrowings and calques from the neighbouring languages which change it structurally. For example, the Arabic construct state where the first noun is the possessed and the second is the possessor, is replaced by the Uzbek construct state where the order is reversed: *na‘aġāt šoħba* ‘the owner of the sheep,’ literally: ‘the sheep – their-owner’; *šurabāt gidira(h)* ‘the pan of the soup,’ literally: ‘the soup – its-pan’ (Chikovani 2003: 7).

Ethnologue also mentions the existence of 1,000 speakers of Tajiki Arabic in the Khatlon province of Tajikistan.

Africa

West Sudanic Arabic

West Sudanic Arabic – as Owens labels it – is spoken in Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and the Central African Republic. The Arabic-speaking tribes settled in these countries are also often referred to as the ‘Baggāra,’ as the anthropologist Ulrich Bräukamper terms them, a name derived from the Arabic word *bagar* ‘cow,’ meaning ‘cattle herders’ (Owens & Hassan 2006: 709). The Baggāra tribes are of Arab descent and mainly speak the Shuwa dialect of Arabic. They entered Western Sudan between the 12th and 13th centuries and have gradually moved East and West from there. By the 18th century, they were concentrated primarily to the north and east of Lake Chad. Their tribes continued moving eastwards until they became widely scattered across the horizontal plains of West Africa (Owens & Hassan 2006: 709). West Sudanic Arabic has at least two sub-dialects, one named by Owens Bagirma Arabic, and the other spread in the cities of Chad. This latter one is known as the Arabic spoken in Ndjamenā and it is described by Pommerol (1990). The Arabic spoken in Abbéché is described by Arlette Rott (1979). Bagirma Arabic – related to the Bagirma Empire – is spoken in the eastern Nigeria Arabic region (Owens 1998: 23–38), northern Cameroon, western Chad and south of Ndjamenā (Owens 1998: 84).

The African Arabic-based Creoles

Some authors, including Kaye and Rosenhouse, include in the category of Peripheral Arabic the African Arabic-based creoles, such as Ki-Nubi and Juba Arabic (Kaye & Rosenhouse 1997: 263). However, these are not Arabic dialects. We list them here only to illuminate their status. Ki-Nubi is a Sudanese Arabic-based creole language spoken in Uganda, around Bombo, and in Kenya, around Kibera, by the descendants of Emin

Pasha's Sudanese soldiers who were settled there by the British colonial administration. It was spoken by about 15,000 people in Uganda in 1991 (according to the census), and an estimated 10,000 in Kenya; another source estimates about 50,000 speakers as of 2001. Ninety per cent of the lexicon derives from Arabic, but the grammar has been simplified, as has the sound system (Tosco & Manfredi 2013: 503–504, see also Manfredi & Tosco 2014). Juba Arabic (*árabi juba*), genetically related to Ki-Nubi, is the major vehicular language of South Sudan. It is described as a pidgin-creole variety generated in the late 19th century and based on the Arabic spoken by Arab traders and on Nilotic languages spoken by local populations (Tosco & Manfredi 2013: 513).

Europe

Cyprus

In the north-west region of Cyprus there is an Arabic-speaking minority represented by the Maronite Christian community originating in four villages: Asomatos, Agia Marina, Karpaseia and, the largest of these, Kormakiti, which became a benchmark of this community (Makris 2010). The total number of speakers of this dialect, called *Sanna* ('our language') by its speakers, is around 1,300 (Borg 2006: 536). This Maronite community has been constituted from migrants from Lebanon and Syria between the 8th and 13th centuries (Hourani 1998). "Cypriot Arabic is, in essence," as Borg states, "the offshoot of a Medieval Arabic vernacular with a Christian communal imprint concomitant with its speakers' Aramaic ethnic origins and *dhimmi* status,¹ later evolving in a Greek-speaking cultural milieu" (Borg 2006: 537). Being an insular variety of Arabic in the true sense of the word, therefore isolated from the other Arabic varieties, it developed in its own specific way, which makes it unintelligible for other Arabic-speaking people (Tsiapera 1969: at 1).

In the past, Cypriot Maronite Arabic, which has never had its own writing system, is used strictly for communicating within the core family and for some religious affairs. Overwhelmed by Greek as the official language in all life domains, this vernacular variety lost ground and is subjected nowadays to a dynamic of eviction (Roth 2003: 89). In 2009, a writing system was created by the Committee of Experts for the Codification of Cypriot Maronite Arabic as part of the revitalisation efforts in the frame of the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages. "using the Greek script, but this was abandoned after the local community and the group of linguists chosen by the government decided to create a Latin-based writing system instead, following the example of Maltese" (Hadjidemetriou 2014: 64).

Two extinct Peripheral Arabic dialects: Siculo Arabic and Andalusí Arabic

Siculo Arabic

Siculo Arabic was a variety of Arabic first spoken in Sicily during the Islamic rule of the island (878–1091), and after its collapse too, during the Norman reign, until roughly 1300 CE, when the Muslim population – Arabs and Berbers – gradually left the island or converted to Christianity. Siculo Arabic was spoken by the Muslim population that has progressively settled in the island during its gradual conquest from the Byzantine Empire by an Aghlabid emir, Ziyādat

Allāh, and by locals who either converted to Islam or had trade relations with the Muslim population (Agius 2007: 26).

A trading pidgin based on Siculo Arabic seems to have survived in the Mediterranean ports for some time after its disappearance (Agius 2007: 33).

Andalusi Arabic

Andalusi Arabic is a Neo-Arabic dialect formed by the interfusion of a number of other Arabic dialects, most of them North African, which started to develop once Spain was conquered by the army of the Umayyad leader, Tāriq bin Ziyād, in 711 CE. It reached its peak between the 9th and the 15th centuries. Andalusi Arabic had a diglossia-type relationship with *al-Fuṣṣḥā* which was used as an administrative language by the state. We can talk about Andalusi Arabic as a peripheral dialect only from the end of the 15th century, once Granada was conquered by the Christian army. This point in time also marks the end of Arabic as an official state language and, by default, the disappearance of diglossia until the expulsion of the Arabs at the beginning of the 17th century. Unlike most Peripheral Arabic dialects that don't have any written form, Andalusi Arabic presents many written records, as inventoried by Federico Corriente in the preface of his Andalusi Arabic dictionary: "Manuscript or edited sources in Arabic script, such as *azjāl* and other kinds of dialectal poetry, proverb collections, personal and business letters, legal deeds and contracts drawn up in mixed register, low register literary works, *xarajāt*, lexica into or from Latin, [etc.]" (Corriente 1997: x).

The Maltese Language

Maltese, which was at its origins a Peripheral Arabic dialect that could be classified together with the North African dialects (cf. Camilleri, this volume), became the official language of the Republic of Malta in 1934. Its emergence as a Peripheral Arabic variety can be explained by the fact that the spoken Arabic of Malta lost its connection with *al-Fuṣṣḥā* around the 13th century and developed in a unique way. Agius (1996) considers that Maltese is the heir of Siculo Arabic, influenced afterwards firstly by Italian and secondly by English (Mifsud 1995).

Demographics of the Peripheral Arabic-speaking communities

What catches the eye in the studies made on the Peripheral Arabic-speaking communities is the number of speakers. Unless mentioned otherwise, all of the figures below are estimative, based on information obtained from the respective speakers, not from any official census. This fact can be observed from the rounded figures: 1,300 Arabic-speaking persons in Kormakiti, Cyprus (Borg 2006: 536), 1,500 in the village of Təllo near Siirt, in Turkey (Lahdo 2003: 51), 30,000 near Bukhara in Uzbekistan in 1926 (Seeger 2002: 629), between 5,000 and 10,000 in Khorasan nowadays (Seeger 2002: 631), or from counting the number of families: e.g. 19,870, not the number of individuals, as in the case of *al-Ḥamsa* Arabs in Iran (Tumanskii 1896: 79–81), etc. Besides these rough approximations, another problem in discerning the exact figures has to do with the fact that the level of knowledge of the Arabic dialect is not taken as a factor when counting. Taking into consideration the fact that Peripheral Arabic is in a continuous process of degradation due to many factors (see also *The linguistic asymmetry* section below), its level of knowledge differs within one community depending on age, gender and environment. When considering age, the level of knowledge decreases from elders to

youngsters. Thus, there are (i) people who speak Arabic quite fluently, (ii) people who understand some topics, but can only answer with difficulty, preferring the dominant language, like Turkish, Persian, Greek etc., and (iii) people who only know a few words that they use in a pidgin, like this example from Mardin, that can be considered Arabic only by the intention of the speaker:

klise meftüh bugün saat arba amam

‘The church is open today until four o’clock.’

(*klise* ‘church’ in Turkish, word borrowed from Arabic, *kanīsa* ‘church’ *meftüh* ‘open’ in Arabic, but with Turkish vowel harmony, *bugün* ‘today’ in Turkish, *saat* ‘clock’ in Turkish, word borrowed from Arabic, *arba’a* ‘four’ in Arabic, but without the pharyngeal /ʕ/, *amam* ‘in front of’ in Arabic) (Grigore 2003: 125). Also, a number of those registered as Arabic speakers do not speak it, nor do they understand it; they are only psychologically attached to the idea of Arabdom, as Seeger shows with regard to the Arabs of Khorasan: “here a few old Arabs still passively understand the Arabic of their parents, but they can no longer actively speak it” Seeger 2002: 631–632).

The linguistic asymmetry

Like in all insular linguistic communities, bilingual or multilingual, linguistic asymmetry also manifests within Peripheral Arabic-speaking communities. The linguistic asymmetry is based on three extremely important factors: qualitative, quantitative and political (Fishman 1967: 29–38).

The qualitative factor

As is already known, the linguistic situation of the Arab countries was defined by diglossia, as it was described by Ferguson in his famous article published in 1959:

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

(Ferguson 1959: 336)

In the case of Arabic, the two varieties – high, i.e. *al-Fuṣḥā*, and low, i.e. *al-‘Āmmiyya* – have a symbiotic relationship, each of them having its own functioning areas. Beyond the confines of the Arab states, where *al-Fuṣḥā* is no longer an official language, the Arabic-speaking communities use one vernacular variety of the language and, depending on the country where they live, an entirely different language: Turkish, Persian, Uzbek, Greek and so on, which in each respective community plays the role that high Arabic – i.e. *al-Fuṣḥā* – does in the Arab countries. While these languages are used everywhere in education, administration, media and literature, the local varieties of Arabic are only used in an intimate environment, at home,

within the family, between friends and acquaintances. Not one of the peripheral varieties of Arabic benefits from the high prestige of *al-Fuṣḥā* – under whose umbrella they could have been placed. Lacking, thus, this high prestige of *al-Fuṣḥā*, with the literary, scientific and religious treasures conveyed by it, and since they are exercised strictly orally, the peripheral varieties of Arabic have become stigmatized as a dubious gibberish. Generally, knowing such a linguistic code is not considered a special linguistic skill; as such, it is typical for their native speakers to deny knowing them. A Mardini Arab never admits immediately to speaking this variety; and, when they do, they apologize for speaking a decayed Arabic that cannot reach the level of the (dialectal) Arabic spoken in Mosul (Iraq) or in Aleppo (Syria); these two cities that represent the everyday trade partners of the inhabitants of Mardin are, in their eyes, centres of civilization par excellence. All Mardini Arabs try to learn a few phrases in these two Arabic varieties, in an attempt to prove their high prestige. This phenomenon is not observed only here, but also during conversations with Arabs native from Khoramshahr, Khuzistan, who saw Basra as a linguistic ideal, while the Arabs of Hormozgān assign this status to the United Arab Emirates. The fact that the high codified Arabic cannot be learned in schools results in an evident community-wide linguistic asymmetry. Not even the Islamic institutions, such as the mosque or the Koranic school, offer it anymore, because the recitation of the Koran – although it is naturally performed in Arabic – is adapted to the pronunciations of the respective countries. In the Koranic schools in Turkey, for example, the recitation of the Koran is taught with a specifically Turkish pronunciation (characterized, overall, by the lack of interdental, of emphatics, of long vowels, etc.). E.g.: *el-hamdü li-llah rebbi-l-alamîn* instead of *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l-‘ālamîn* ‘praise be to God, master of the worlds’ Q1:2 (see Grigore 2003: 122).

The quantitative factor

Another factor that influences the linguistic asymmetry is the number of speakers. For example, in the Mardin area, the number of Kurmanji Kurdish speakers is much higher than the number of Arabic speakers. This dialectal variety of Kurdish, even though, similarly to the local Arabic variety, has no written form and it is not taught in schools, benefits from a higher status in the area because of the much higher number of speakers. Because Kurdish is the dominant language in the area, most of the Anatolian Arabs also speak Kurmanji Kurdish in order to be able to communicate in the region (Dündar 1999: 101). The situation described by Bo Isaksson for Sason, Turkey, is very illustrative of this fact:

The autochthonous adult population in the Sason area seems to speak three languages: Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish. We asked several people how they learn those languages; Arabic is learnt at home, as vernacular, without any knowledge of writing it. Turkish is taught in school. That makes two languages. The children in Arabic villages apparently do not speak Kurdish. It should be kept in mind of course that the Kurds constitute the vast majority in this area.

(Isaksson 2003: 39)

The political (and judicial) factor

The most important factor that leads to asymmetry has a political and judicial nature – see also Henkin-Roitfarb (2011) regarding asymmetry in Palestinian Arabic vs. Hebrew in Israel.

The main source for inequality is the dissimilar judicial statuses of the languages that are spoken within the confines of a single state. A representative example of this is Turkey and the status of its minority languages. The Turkish Constitution (1982) stipulates: “No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education” (Turkish Constitution, Chapter 3, Section 2, Article 42). Thus, the other languages spoken throughout Turkey have not been accepted as languages of education, except the languages of some Non-Moslem minorities as agreed in the Lausanne Treaty (Treaty 1924: Article 40). This fact led to the underdevelopment of terminologies – scientific, political, economic etc. – in the other languages that therefore became neglected. Furthermore, during the 1930s, law students sponsored by the Turkish government initiated a campaign with the slogan *Vatandaş, Türkçe konuş!* ‘Citizen, speak Turkish!’, which was meant to discourage non-Turkish speakers from publicly using any language other than Turkish, and to fine them if they disobeyed. The effects of this campaign were dramatic for the non-Turkish communities that ended up limiting the use of their mother tongues strictly within the family (Balı 2006: 45).

In some states, such as Iran, the problem does not originate in the law itself, but in its exercise. In the Iranian Constitution, Article 15, it is stated that the ethnic groups within the country have the right to “the use of local and ethnic language in their press and mass-media” and also “teaching of their literature in school, along with Persian language instruction.” These provisions of the Constitution have been observed until now only sporadically and inconsistently (Elling 2012: 52).

In other regions, the Arabic-speaking community lives in sheer insecurity, with an unclear future, regardless of the local legislation, as is the example of Nigeria, a multi-ethnic state, with around 390–400 languages in use, out of which only three are recognized as major: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa (Oyedokun-Allil 2014: 52–53). Here, the conflicts between various ethnic groups spring up frequently, especially in the Borno State, where an important Arabic-speaking community lives and is affected by the regional insecurity: “Most of the time what is described as harmonious co-existence between groups is often very fragile and this snaps as soon as there is any slight provocation” (Akinsoyinu N.d p. 4).

The functions of the Peripheral Arabic varieties

Based on the taxonomy proposed by King (1989: 140), as outlined in the table below, we can discern the domains in which Peripheral Arabic varieties are used.

	<i>Minority language</i>	<i>Dominant language</i>
a	Traditional life	Modern life
b	Regional	National
c	Within the community	With the outside world
d	Domestic, private	Public
e	Inside the family	Outside the family
f	Informal	Formal
g	Intimate	Non-intimate
h	For solidarity	For power
i	For secrecy	For non-secrecy
j	Religious	Secular

As Tsunoda (2006: 66) notices, the functions of minority languages diminish from top to bottom in the above table, while the functions of dominant languages rise in importance, and the two linguistic codes that are in use are in a relation of inverse proportionality.

These varieties of Arabic are only used for traditional life, as they are not taught in schools, they are not used in the state administration, politics, economy, mass media, and as such they have not developed a vocabulary that could keep up with the modern life style. The development of such a modern vocabulary was only undertaken by the official languages such as Turkish, Persian and Greek. Also, when examining other collections of texts in these varieties of Arabic or descriptive articles, we notice that the words are part of the main vocabulary of any language. For example, with regard to Qaşqa-daryā Arabic, Guram Chikovani presents some lexical groups as parts of the body (*rōs* ‘head,’ *iğil* ‘leg,’ etc), colours (*ōbiz* ‘white,’ *aḥamar* ‘red,’ etc.), family relations (*bōba* ‘father,’ *walad* ‘son,’ etc.), time (*saḥriyya* ‘morning,’ *leyl* ‘night,’ etc.), clothes (*sōb* ‘shirt,’ *čalbar* ‘trousers,’ etc.) (Chikovani 2003: 8–12). With regard to modern vocabulary, the words may be borrowed from the official language, as is the case, for example, in the Arabic spoken in Khoramshahr (Khuzistan): *gūši* from Persian *guši* ‘earphone,’ ‘handset,’ *gōzarēš* from Persian *gozareš* ‘report,’ *yaḥčōl* from Persian *yaḥčol* ‘refrigerator’ (Grigore 2012: 95–97)

Otherwise, the transition to modern life severely affects these varieties of Arabic and they are compelled to compete with unequal chances right from the start with the official languages, as is the case with the Arabic of Khorasan, for example:

But Arabic will not remain here long: electrification connects villages to radio and television, the children attend school in Birğand during term time, and the men have cross-country motorbikes, so contacts to a Persian-speaking environment are increasing. Arabic gives the impression of a dying language most particularly in the region of Saraxs: here a few old Arabs still passively understand the Arabic of their parents, but they can no longer actively speak it.

(Seeger 2002: 631–632)

These varieties of Arabic are used only within their communities, while for communicating with any outsider, the official language or the dominant language in the area will be used. Even when Arabs meet in the same country, but originate from different regions, they resort to the official language in order to communicate; this is the case for the speakers of the two sub-dialects from Uzbekistan, Bukhara and Qaşqa-daryā, who use Uzbek or Tajik in order to understand each other (Tsereteli 1970:168).

Given the awareness of the functions of the languages known in a community, the Arabs of Mardin for example introduce themselves partly seriously, partly joking, in a very revealing manner:

ana tərki ana, abūy kərdi we w əmmi ‘arabiyye ye
‘I am Turkish, my father is Kurdish and my mother Arab.’

This utterance clearly reveals the importance that these linguistic codes have for the Mardin Arabs: Turkish as official and general language, then Kurdish as language used in the local community, considering that in the traditional Islamic societies only men have activities outside their home, while women only inside it and as such the mother’s language, Arabic, is used at home with the family (Grigore 2003: 123).

The Low varieties are used in informal occasions, in private conversations, such as conversations with family and friends. The intimate character of using these varieties of Arabic as a kind of secret that holds the group together creating a deep solidarity is also reflected in the terms with which these varieties of Arabic are referred to by their speakers, the emphasis being placed on the common good: *'arabīna* ('our Arabic'), a designation found with the Arabic communities in Anatolia, Khuzistan, and so on, *Sanna* ('our language'; *san* from Old Arabic *lisān* 'tongue,' 'language'), a designation used by the Maronite Arabic-speaking community in Cyprus and later used also by the outsiders: "This fact gives to the community and to its language, *Sanna*, a unique character among all the other Christian Arab communities and Arabic varieties." (Karyolemou 2012: 117).

When I asked a Mardin Arab what language he spoke, he answered tautologically: *aqčəm l-aqčəm* ('I speak what I speak'). The lack of name for the particular variety of Arabic can be explained by the fact that it does not circulate outside the community and therefore there is no need to name it in some way. This is also reflected in the fact that in the studies dedicated by linguists to these varieties of Arabic, they quite often propose a name for them such as the ones proposed by Jonathan Owens, e.g. *West Sudanic Arabic*, *Bagirmi Arabic*; he draws attention to the fact that there are other sub-dialects of these varieties of Arabic as well that do not bear a name (Owens 1998: 84). Very often the names refer to the locations in which the particular varieties are spoken: Ndjemena, Abbéché, Khorasan, Mardin, Bukhara, Qaşqa-daryā, etc.

As for the religious function, here the issues become more complicated when it comes to Peripheral Arabic. The only variety of Peripheral Arabic that has a religious function is the Maronite Arabic of Cyprus. Also, its liveliness in the Greek Orthodox context could be explained firstly by its religious function. In contrast, among Muslims, Koranic Arabic is used for religious purposes, but this variety is not understood by speakers of these Peripheral Arabic dialects without rigorous study. Also, if the Arabs are not part of a larger compact community in a particular area and thus able to have their own mosque, then the mosque is shared with other ethnic groups and the sermon is given in the official language of the country.

Peripheral varieties from a linguistic point of view

The peripheral varieties of Arabic have evolved in non-Arabic milieux, as on the one hand they are isolated from the vast mass of Arabic dialects and therefore they find themselves in the paradoxical situations of being repositories of archaisms, especially on the lexical level, and on the other hand they present innovations at all levels given by the direct influence exercised by the languages and cultures in the midst of which they have been surviving. This leads Alexander Borg to describe them plastically as having "a Janus-like character" (Borg 2004: 59), or two different, opposite faces.

Owing to contact with the official language and/or the dominant language in the area – for example, in the Mardin area the official language is Turkish and the dominant language in the area is Kurdish – the whole system of the Arabic variety is affected. At the phonetic level there are several phenomena that can be observed, such as hypo-differentiation and borrowing. Hypo-differentiation refers to the interpreting of the phonetic units of a language through the phonetic units of another language (Sala 1997: 91). The most widespread result of hypo-differentiation is given by the loss of the emphatic character of the old emphatic consonants – in many of these vernaculars – by borrowing the model of the dominant language

where the distinction between neutral and emphatic consonants does not exist. For example, in Afghanistan Arabic: *salōt* (<**salāt*) ‘prayer,’ *xōtir* (<**hātir*) ‘emotion,’ *ōrd* (<**arḍ*) ‘earth,’ etc. (Ingham 2006: 29–36).

Borrowing of phonemes takes place at the same time with massive lexical borrowing. One of the borrowed phonemes in all Peripheral Arabic varieties – from different source languages, of course – is the voiceless bilabial occlusive consonant /p/ that comes to form a stable minimal pair with the voiced bilabial occlusive consonant /b/ inherited from old Arabic. Examples are: in Spoken Arabic of Khoramshahr (Iran), borrowed from Persian: *padegān* ‘field,’ *pahrīz* ‘diet,’ *panḡare* ‘window’ (Grigore 2011: 94); in Spoken Arabic of Siirt, borrowed from Kurdish: *parpāre* ‘rock purslane,’ *čappe* ‘left side’ (Biṭunā 2014:81), etc.

Besides the phonetic, lexical and syntactic borrowings, these varieties of Arabic also include numerous grammatical, semantic and phraseological calques, code-mixing as well as code-switching. Even though superstrate influence is substantial, these varieties keep their Arabic identity (Owens 2001).

Conclusion

The Peripheral Arabic varieties are undergoing a process of continuous degradation that is caused by several factors which trace their origin to the linguistic asymmetry that characterizes the Peripheral Arabic speech communities. The Peripheral Arabic used in closed and traditional societies loses ground before the official languages in the context of the youth’s aspiration to integrate in modern life and in the life of the state, which presupposes the abandonment of the vernacular Arabic and the adoption of the official language of the state in which they live. Many studies show that elderly people in these communities still speak coherent Arabic, while the possibility of the younger generations to speak the Arabic of their parents diminishes year after year, as shown for Cyprus Arabic by Marilena Karyolemou:

There are no speakers of the language below the age of 25. Sanna speakers’ range of age confirms that natural intergenerational intra-family language transmission is not taking place anymore. Even in families where both parents are from Kormakitis and even when Sanna is used in their common language in everyday interaction, this is not usually the family language anymore.

(Karyolemou 2012:124)

Another author, Hadjidemetriou, considers that:

However, there are increasing numbers of semi-speakers. Some interviewees pointed out that their own knowledge of KMA (i.e. Kormakiti Maronite Arabic) was not good. They claimed that they understood KMA better than they spoke it. Speakers with even scantly knowledge of KMA were also appearing in the community: some young adults and teenagers claimed that they had a rudimentary knowledge of KMA only, just simple phrases or words. Two teenagers reported knowledge of phrases such as ‘I want some coffee’ and ‘our little dog is very nice’ because their parents used them often.

(Hadjidemetriou 2014: 58)

Note

- 1 *Dhimmi* is an Islamic term meaning a non-Muslim person living in an Islamic state under its legal protection.

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