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LANGUAGE CONFLICT AND IDENTITY: ARABIC IN THE AMERICAN DIASPORA

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This empirical study focuses on Arab-American communities in and around Dearborn, Michigan. These include Palestinian, Egyptian, Iraqi, and Yemeni groups. A major question is whether Arabic in its American diaspora follows the linguistic path of other diasporic contexts of the language, such as Moroccan Arabic in Holland or Algerian Arabic in France. The paper discusses the major features of change under borrowing and interference, attrition, and post-1960s attitudes toward ethnicity. Arab-American students (total seventy-nine) gave the following as their reasons for studying standard Arabic: ethnic identity (38%), religious affiliation (34%), fulfillment of academic language requirements (33%), importance of Arabic from a global perspective (24%), and influence of parental advice (5%). The conclusion sums up the major changes in diasporic Arabic in these Arab-American groups.

Introduction

As an Arab-American and a linguist, I have been interested in the spoken language used by Arab-Americans in Detroit for some time. Detroit is a unique laboratory for the study of Arabic as an ethnic minority language because the Detroit metropolitan area has the largest concentration of Arabs outside the Arab world. Their number has been estimated at between 260,000 to 350,000 in the southeastern part of Michigan, which consists of Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties.

The sociolinguistic approach of this paper examines the ways in which language contact and conflict situations explain changes that have occurred in the Arabic spoken by first-, second-, and third-generation Arab-Americans.

Arab immigration to the U.S., and to Michigan specifically, began in the 19th century. The majority of immigrants came from what was then called Greater Syria. They were mostly unskilled males and, for the most part, Christians. The second wave of immigration occurred after World War II. Among these new im-

migrants were Muslims from Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, as well as Christian Iraqis, mostly Chaldeans (Abraham & Abraham 1981:18).

In the 1950s and 60s, a third wave of Arab immigration landed in the U.S.; many of these new residents were students and professionals. They were Egyptians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians (El Kholy 1969). A fourth wave of immigrants consisting mostly of Lebanese and Palestinians occurred in the 1970s and 80s, owing to the war in Lebanon, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Finally, in the 1990s, a fifth wave came to the U.S., consisting of Palestinians, Lebanese, Egyptians, and Iraqi Muslims. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), from 1988 to 1990, approximately 60,000 Arabs took up residence in the Detroit area alone.

At first, the early-comers took up residence in the Dearborn area, which is located southwest of Detroit. Like any group of immigrants who first come to the U.S., Arab-Americans upon their arrival congregated in a neighborhood where they could mix with other Arab-Americans. They lived in this first community among people who try to maintain psychological, social, cultural, and linguistic support with their original homeland.

Some of Arab immigrants have remained within these early-established communities. Others, when they became economically better off, established themselves in different parts of the Detroit metro area. But, whenever possible, Arabs still congregate and establish specific speech communities whose members share common linguistic, social, and cultural features. For example, there is a Palestinian community in Livonia, on the west side of Detroit; an Egyptian group in Troy, on the east side of Detroit; and a large Iraqi community on Seven Mile Road, east of Detroit. A second Iraqi community was established in West Bloomfield, which is one of the most affluent suburbs in the Detroit metro area; and there are two Yemini communities, one in Hamtramack, north-east of Detroit, and a larger one in the Dearborn area. There are also Arab-American professionals that are scattered in the various suburbs around Detroit.

The Arab-Americans who have lived for years in the Dearborn area have recently been coming into contact with a steady flow of new Arab immigrants from the Arab world. After the Gulf war in 1990-91, many Iraqi Shi'a (40,000) were given refuge in the U.S., most of them coming to Michigan. This group consists largely of people who opposed the Iraqi regime and defected, first going to Saudi Arabia. But since the Saudis refused to give them permanent residence, they were allowed into the U.S. Another 15,000 to 20,000 Iraqis working for the CIA were also given refuge in the U.S. The majority of this group has settled in the Dearborn area. Actually, these refugees were first settled by the U.S. government in different parts of the country; but many decided to move to Michigan because of the large number of Arab-Americans already established in the area. This recently-arrived group consists of Shi'a as well as Sunni Kurds all of whom speak Arabic. Their children, who spoke only Arabic on arrival in the U.S., are presently attending American public schools. Taking into account these new arrivals and

the older members of the Arab community, 70% of the students in the Dearborn school system are of Arab-American background. Thus, all members of the well-established Arab-American community in Michigan, young and old, are coming into daily contact with the newly arrived Arabic-speaking immigrants.

It is commonplace to refer to 'Arab-Americans' as an entity. It should be noted, however, that the Arab-American community is a microcosm of the Arab world with all its varieties and divisions: politically, economically, religiously, and, of course, linguistically.

Thus, in the Detroit metro area there is an interesting double language-contact situation. In the first contact situation, different Arabic dialects come into contact, and in the second situation, different languages come into contact: Arabic, a minority language, is in contact with the dominant language, English.

The question is, then: What will the future of Arabic as an ethnic language in the Detroit metro area be? Or: How generally-representative is language contact within the Arab-American community in Michigan? Furthermore, one may ask whether Arabic in its American diaspora follows the linguistic path other languages in contact, such as Moroccan Arabic in Holland, or Algerian Arabic in France, have taken. With regard to any such questions the diglossic nature of Arabic is a factor that must be taken into consideration.

Data and focus

Most of the data presented in this paper was obtained from specific neighborhoods in Detroit, from my interviews during my visits to schools, during family gatherings such as weddings and other celebrations, and from a set of tape-recorded interviews conducted by my colleague May Seikaly for her research on an oral history of Palestinian Americans. Seikaly's interviews were not intended to examine the language situation of the speakers; however, they have been an interesting source of information for my research. These taped interviews consist of natural conversations between Seikaly and the mostly elderly participants. In these interviews, I was able to observe phenomena of code-switching and borrowing under very natural conditions. In Labov's terms, it was an observation of the vernacular: 'the style that is most regular in its structure and its relation to the evolution of language ... in which minimum attention is paid to monitoring speech' (Labov 1972a:112; 1972b:208).

I have categorized the speakers on the basis of their competence and performance in whatever language they speak. At one extreme, there are those who speak only Arabic. They live in neighborhoods inhabited mostly by newly-arrived Arab immigrants, so they rarely need English. People in this category have developed a pidginized variety of English, which they use in their limited dealings with monolingual English speakers. They are, for example, storekeepers, garage mechanics, or small grocers, and they use this pidginized variety mostly for business transactions. However, this form of pidginized speech is not acquired by the speakers' children, who learn Standard English at school for more informal inter-

actions with peers. Hence, this pidginized form evolved only for temporary use and has not creolized.

At the other extreme are those Arab-Americans who use only English. These monolingual English speakers have a very limited Arabic vocabulary, which consists mainly of lexical items related to food, or curse words. For example, one of the women Seikaly interviewed spoke English fluently and no Arabic whatsoever; however, she used a specific insult she remembered her father having used, to refer to a woman of ill repute (*sharmuta* — 'slut').

Between the two extremes, there are those speakers who use English for as many functions as they do Arabic. These communicatively bilingual speakers are categorized here according to their degree of bilingualism, based on the author's judgment of their competence and performance in Arabic and English. They are well-educated newcomers, or Arab-Americans married to Americans, or first-generation immigrants who have kept in touch with their parents' original homeland.

As mentioned previously, Detroit's Arab-Americans have immigrated from different parts of the Arab world; hence, they spoke different dialects of Arabic. They constitute a diverse linguistic community that incorporates many different speech subcommunities. Gumperz (cited in Hudson 1985:26) defined speech community as being 'any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use.'

As a sociolinguist I am interested in examining the 'body of verbal signs' within the different speech communities to determine the choice of languages made by the speakers. In doing so, I will be looking into both the 'social restraints' as well as the 'grammatical restraints' (Gumpers 1964:138) that result from the language or dialect-contact situations.

Whenever languages are in contact three linguistic phenomena occur: code-switching, borrowing, and interference.

Code-switching occurs in the speech of competent bilingual speakers when both speaker and listener know the two languages involved well enough to differentiate items from either language at any moment during their speech. The speakers, when code-switching, alternate their use of the two languages within a single sentence or more. Linguistically speaking, as Michael Clyne stated, 'it {CS} often occurs within structural constraints which may be language specific or even universal.' (cited in Coulmas 1997:313) Sociolinguistically, Carol Myers-Scotten defined code-switching as '... an in-group mode of communication, rather than one used with strangers.' (cited in Coulmas 1997:232) In other words, code-switching occurs when the speakers share the same channels of communication and feel at ease with the two languages. The definition of code-switching I find clear and indicative is that of Einar Haugen (1973:521) who defined code-switching as 'the alternate use of two languages including everything from the

introduction of a single, unassimilated word up to a complete sentence or more in the context of another language'.

Borrowing, on the other hand, involves the transfer of lexical items from one language to another, not the alternating use of two languages. The borrowed items are either unchanged, or inflected like words of the same grammatical category in the borrowing language. The speaker is not necessarily a competent bilingual. He or she borrows from the socially dominant language and not from the language he or she knows best.

Interference occurs when grammatical rules of the dominant language affect grammatical rules of the subordinate language or borrowing language. Scotten explains convergence as a 'rearrangement of how grammatical frames are projected in one language under the influence of another language.' (cited in Coulmas 1997:229) Borrowing and interference are closely related. When borrowing occurs without interference, it is usually considered a code-switch.

Borrowing and interference

There are different points of view on borrowing and interference in the literature. Weinreich 1963 stresses the fact that differences in linguistic structures play a major role in the quantitative and qualitative aspects of borrowing and interference. Bickerton 1981 states that 'languages ... are systems, systems have structures, and things incompatible with those structures cannot be borrowed' (1963:50). Meyers Scotton & Okeju emphasize the importance of the 'sociocultural context' in borrowing. They maintain that the sociocultural context, not the structure involved, seems to be more important. In their study of Ateso (spoken in Uganda and Kenya), they wrote that 'the languages from which Ateso has borrowed so heavily all have very alien structures' (1973:889). This same idea is expounded by Thomason and Kaufman who observed that 'it is the social context, not the structure of the languages involved, that determines the direction and the degree of interference' (1988:19).

I am of the opinion that both the linguistic systems of the languages involved and the social context determine the amount and the types of borrowing and interference that occur when languages are in contact. For example, if we consider the structure of Arabic, a Semitic or Afroasiatic language, and that of English, an Indo-European language, such incompatible systems will not allow any borrowing, according to Bickerton. This statement can be refuted based on the research conducted on Arabic-English contact situations. Borrowing occurs easily on all linguistic levels in spite of the incompatibility between the structures of Arabic and English.

In examining the process of borrowing in the speech of Arab-Americans, I tried to answer the following questions: what can be borrowed, why is it borrowed, and how does interference, at the different linguistic levels, occur?

It was apparent in my data that the process of borrowing occurs in both directions, from English to Arabic and from Arabic to English. The process follows the pattern that has been observed in other borrowing situations. For instance, the largest number of borrowings, from English into Arabic, occurred in the category of nouns (Rouchdy 1992:39). They are nouns borrowed for items that are new to the speakers, or nouns that already exist in Arabic, but for which the existing word does not convey the same idea as the English noun: e.g., (1) *is-sitizen*, 'the citizen'; *il livin ruum*, 'the living room'. Other borrowed nouns are considered unnecessary borrowing such as: (2) *ikkaar*, 'the car'; *iddoor*, 'the door'; *ikkoot*, 'the coat'; *ishshooz*, 'the shoes'; where the definite article *al/il* is usually attached to the borrowed noun and the process of assimilation is applied. Thus, the Arabic phonological rules are applied to the borrowed English lexical items.

There are differences in the patterns of borrowing between the educated and semi-educated or less-educated speakers. For instance, a semi-educated person would say:

  (3)   *tabax 'ala-l-stuuv*   'he cooked on the stove'

  (4)   *tarakitha bi-k-kaar*   'she left her in the car'

An educated speaker would be more likely to convey the same meaning by saying:

  (5)   *tabax on the stove*   'he cooked on the stove'

  (6)   *tarakitha in the car*   'she left it in the car'

In (3) and (4), the prepositional phrase consists of an Arabic preposition and English derived noun. This is an example of borrowing. In (5) and (6), an English preposition is used with the English noun. It is a code-switch.

An additional difference between the linguistic performance of educated and semi-educated bilinguals, is the pronunciation of borrowed English lexical items. The semi-educated person pronounces English lexical items as closely as possible to the English phonotactic system. For example: 'dirty' is given as (7) *dary,* 'water' as *warer.* Intellectuals tend to borrow foreign words through their eyes, while others borrow through their ears' (Higa 1979:284).

Scotton & Okeju have observed that 'borrowed verbs are relatively few; in general they stand for new concepts' (1973:887). In my data, this did not prove to be the case; and verbs constituted the second largest category of borrowing. For example;

  (8)   *fakkasna assayara*
        Fixed-we-the-car
        'We fixed the car'

  (9)   *kalniit il-beet*
        cleaned-I-the-house
        'I cleaned the house'

(10) *kolmi bukre*
       'call me tomorrow'

These concepts are not new to the speakers. These items are an 'unnecessary' borrowing resulting from the strong contact between Arabic and English, among these speakers.

Nicholas Sobin, in his study 'Texas Spanish and lexical borrowing', described borrowed lexical items in terms of 'semantic/syntactic features,' meaning 'features of lexical items which play a role in syntactic (transformational) behavior of sentences containing these items' (1982:167). He found a restriction in the English verbs borrowed into Texas Spanish. Such verbs can be 'freely replaced by a form of *do so*... and only Vs replaceable by ... *do so* in English .... have been borrowed' (1982:168-9).

In the case of U.S. Arabic, speakers borrow both types of verbs, the *do so* and the non-*do so* verbs. However, there are restrictions that shape the borrowing process with each type; some of these restrictions are syntactically determined, others semantically determined. For instance, the *do so* verbs in the following example take an object that can be replaced by a pronoun; that pronoun is never borrowed. The Arabic object pronoun is always suffixed to the borrowed English verbs:

(11) *kalneet id-daar*
       Cleaned-I-the-house
       'I cleaned the house'

(12) *baraknaa-ha*
       Parked-we-it
       'We parked it'

It would be ungrammatical to say:

(13) *barakna-it*
       'We parked it'

Here the English verbs are adapted to the phonological patterns of Arabic grammar, but most importantly, the morphological patterns of Arabic grammar are also adapted.

The non-*do so* verbs follow a different pattern.
For example:

(14) I see inti sayra *muthaqafa*
      'I see you became educated'

(15) I swear inti *majnuuna*
      'I swear you [are] crazy'

(16) I know inti *ju9ana*
      I know you [are] hungry

The verbs, *see, swear,* and *know* are not adapted to the Arabic morphological pattern. The restriction results from the syntactic characteristics of the verbs; the non-*do so* verbs in the above examples have complement-clause boundaries rather than the strict noun-phrase boundaries of the *do so* verb sentences. In the case of non-*do so* verbs, the speakers transferred the English verb and pronoun into the Arabic structure without modification: these are instances of code-switching.

In addition to this syntactic restriction on the process of verb borrowing, there is a semantic restriction. The non-*do so* verbs used in the speech of Arab-Americans expressed a state of mind; this was not characteristic of *do so* verbs (typical examples are *see, believe, swear, understand, etc.*). Furthermore, these verbs in context are not easy to translate into Arabic. A literal translation does not convey the exact meaning. For example,

(17) I swear *inti majnuuna*
     'I swear you [are] crazy

The phrase *I swear* would be translated literally into Arabic as *Hhlif*. However, the statement (17) **aHlif inti majnuuna* is unacceptable. The correct translation would be

(18)*wallahi inti majnuuna!*
    'By God, you [are] crazy'

Where the underlying structure is:

        'I swear by God that you are crazy!'

Thus, when borrowing, the bilingual speaker automatically conducts a linguistic analysis: verbs with a literal equivalent in Arabic are easily borrowed. For example:

(9) *kalneet id-daar*
    Cleaned-I-the-house
    'I cleaned the house

The verb *to clean* has the Arabic equivalent *nathaff* with similar semantic features. The sentence *kalneet id-daar,* 'I cleaned the house,' is semantically acceptable in the speech of Arab-Americans. This is a simple verb with no restrictions on its selection. But verbs with complex restrictions are code-switched. Cases where Arab-American speakers use unacceptable structures such as (17) *ahlif inti majnuuna!*, to translate the English, 'I swear you [are] crazy,' reflect in Nancy Dorian's words, 'asymmetry' (1981:155). Asymmetry occurs when the linguistic skills of a speaker are unbalanced; such a speaker is a noncompetent bilingual, or 'semi-speaker,' whose linguistic production is similar to other reductive language systems, such as the language of children or pidgin language.

Adjectives are usually not easily borrowed but are code-switched. Nicholas Sobin found only one adjective borrowed from English into Texas Spanish (*tofudo* for 'tough'). According to Sobin, the Texas Spanish speaker did not con-

sider it an adjective and added the 'adjectivalizing suffix -*udo* (1982:169). In another study on Australian English and German, Clyne noted that 'transferred adjectives are almost invariably left uninfected'(1967:35-6).

My interpretation of the Arabic spoken by Arab-Americans supports those mentioned in the above studies (Rouchdy 1992). Arab-American speakers use borrowed English adjectives without inflecting them, unlike Arabic adjectives, which must agree with the noun they modify in gender, number, and definiteness. For example, 'you (fem) [are] lucky' would be given as:

(19) *inti laki*

(20) *inta leezi* for 'you (ms) [are] lazy'

It would be ungrammatical to use Arabic morphology and say:

(21) **inti lakiyy-a*

(22) *hiyya beautiful-a, 'she (is) beautiful'

Why are adjectives switched rather than borrowed? Do adjectives and verbs share similar semantic features in this regard? This point has been discussed by Lakoff 1966 and Sobin 1982.

Adjectives such as *beautiful*, *cheap*, *lazy*, and so on, denote a state of mind, they are restricted like non-*do so* verbs and cannot be borrowed: they are switched. During my observation, one of the speakers made the following statement:

(23) *nayselluh*
      Nice-you (mas)-to-him
      'Say something nice to him'

In this case he makes a verb out of the adjective *nice*. The hypothetical sentence 'John nayselu and Bill did so, too' would be accepted by the speaker involved. Thus, the verb created from the adjective *nice* is a *do so* verb, which can be borrowed and adapted to the Arabic grammatical pattern. Additional research on the borrowing of adjectives in other situations of language contact will contribute greatly to the analysis of restrictions on borrowing.

Attrition of ethnic languages

Most studies of minority languages or ethnic languages are consistent in their conclusions that the use of ethnic language gradually decreases with successive generations due to a process of assimilation. There are certain events, however, that might lead to an ethnic revival. In an article entitled 'The third generation in America', Marcus L. Hansen (1952:496) points out that ethnic identity takes place in the course of three generations, and that there is a return to ethnicity in the third generation. Nahirny & Fishman on the other hand, maintain that 'the ethnic heritage, including the ethnic mother tongue, usually ceases to play any viable role in the life of the third generation.' (Nahirny & Fishman 1965:311). In

general, both views are correct. In order for the third-generation Americans to re- turn to their ancestral ethnicity, there are certain social events that must take place. Subsequently, this rise in ethnicity might lead to the learning of the ethnic language.

Fishman (1985:114) wrote about the attrition of ethnic languages such as French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, and Yiddish in the United States based on 1960 and 1970 census data, and stated that most who claim non-English mother-tongues no longer use them. Except for Spanish, the attrition rate of the other languages is 36%, while for Spanish it is 19%. This is, of course, due to the large number of those who claim Spanish as mother-tongue, and due also to the con- tinuous waves of new immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries.

Arabic speakers in the Detroit metro area share with Spanish speakers these two factors: first, the continuous arrival of new immigrants in their neighbor- hoods. Second, a large number of Arab-American speakers maintain that Arabic is their mother-tongue.

How and why do Arab-Americans become so inclined toward their heritage language, especially since this has not always been the case? Early in this cen- tury, the idea of maintaining minority languages or enhancing 'cultural pluralism' was not favored by politicians, academicians, or the public in general. Gleason (1984:222) stated that the fear that immigration in the U.S. could affect 'national culture' led to the 'espousal of the idea of assimilation and amalgamation. As- similation was then used interchangeably with Americanization.'

The earliest group of Arab-Americans who immigrated after World War II tried to disassociate themselves from their ethnic heritage, especially its language, because of the way they were viewed by others. Actually, as a reaction to the prevailing anti-ethnic feeling and the pressure for conformity and assimilation, some Arab-Americans went as far as to Anglicize their names to escape discrimi- nation at work, or when applying for a job such as: Mohamad became Mike, Saleh became Sally, Bushra became Bouchard, and Asham became Ashman

A quotation from Gregory Orfalea's 1988 book, *Before the Flames: A Quest for the History of Arab-Americans*, reflects the attitude of Arab-Americans to- wards their ancestral language or heritage language in the early part of this cen- tury.

It was for this generation, … the most Americanized of all, that Arabic was a tongue whispered in warmth or shouted when a glass was bro- ken at the dinner table. It was not the language that made friends or se- cured work, and it certainly was not useful in assembling a field rifle in the army (Orfalea 1988:107).

This quotation vividly reflects Arab-American attitudes, at that time, towards the use of Arabic. Where was Arabic used? It was used secretly within one's home. It was used to express one's emotion, 'a warm whisper of love', or 'a shout' to rep- rimand a loved one. But it was not considered an appropriate language to be

used outside the sanctity of one's home. It was not the 'language that made friends,' and if used it would isolate and alienate its speakers who will never be accepted in American society at large, not make friends, nor become good patriots, since 'it certainly was not useful in assembling a field rifle in the army.'

Later, however, there were some social factors that had an impact on the use of Arabic in the American diaspora, and altered the feeling of paranoia that prevailed among Arab-Americans. These factors affected the maintenance of the language, and led to its transmission to subsequent generations.

Post-1960s attitude toward ethnicity

Since the mid-1960s, there has been a shift towards an acceptance of ethnicity, although somewhat hypocritical. This shift is due to three major social changes, both in the U.S. and the Arab worlds. These social changes have had an impact on the use of minority languages in general and led to the revival, or rebirth, of an ethnic pride and identity.

First, the civil rights movement in the U.S. during the latter part of the 1950s and in the 60s encouraged the assertion of racial and ethnic identity and the rejection of the traditional concept of the melting pot. This led to the promulgation of legislation prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender.

Second, the convoluted political realities widespread in the Arab world continue to provide strong reasons for immigration from Arabic-speaking countries. Hence, the number of fluent speakers, many of whom are well educated, is increasing in the U.S. and there is a larger social context within which it is appropriate to speak Arabic.

Third, the revival of a Muslim identity in the Arab world and among Arab-American Muslims, has created a need for the language with which they can fulfill their religious duties and a pride in their identity as Muslims. In other words, this revival of Muslim identity created a special function for Arabic — a religious function, because only Arabic can be used to fulfill the obligation of the most important pillar of Islam, the prayer.

This revival of a Muslim identity is apparent on Fridays in Dearborn, where mosques are full at the time of the noon prayer, and where many women walk to the mosques wearing their Islamic attire. In fact, the wearing of Islamic attire by Muslim women in the Dearborn area has been on the increase. It is noticeable in the streets and in some schools.

In an article entitled 'Divided loyalties: Language and ethnic identity in the Arab world', Holt stated that 'Given that language is probably the most powerful symbol of ethnicity, it therefore forms a basis of identity for millions who are politically separated' (cited in Suleiman 1994:11-24). In other words, language dis-

tinguishes one person from another, and one group from another group. This is quite true, but Holt's remark was in connection with ethnic languages in the Arab world where minority languages are indigenous to the area — languages such as Kurdish, Berber, or Nubian. These are indigenous minority languages that are in contact with a dominant language, Arabic. In these situations of language contact, the ethnic-minority language might erode, and such an erosion might lead to language death.

Arabic, on the other hand, as an ethnic language in the diaspora, faces a totally different fate. It might be affected linguistically by English to the point where it ceases to be used among some Arab-Americans, but it will never die. Hence, the difference between these two cases of language contact and conflict is that in the first case the ethnic language might be totally eroded, but in the second case the language is only attrited and can be retrieved and learned at any time.

In reference to ethnic languages in 'Ethnic Unit Classification', Narroll (1964:283-312) stated that there is a 'mouth to mouth' and 'mind to mind' transmission between different generations of both ethnic groups and speech communities. This statement expresses well the situation of Arabic in the diaspora. 'Mouth to mouth' refers to the transmission of the dialect spoken at home, while 'mind to mind refers to the transmission of ideas. The idea of the Arabic language is what we refer to as the standard of classical Arabic language. It is this aspect of Arabic that acts as a unifying force among all speakers of the language. It is a common denominator that is bringing Arab speakers together, whether in the Arab world or among ethnic groups in the diaspora. It is an expression of identity. One might use here the defunct term of 'Pan-Arab' identity.

Thus, the classical/standard form of Arabic creates a sense of ethnic identity among Arab-Americans who belong to different speech communities. Suzanne Romaine, when referring to the sociolinguistic variation in speech communities, said the 'individuals [in a community as a whole] may share the same *Sprachbund* without necessarily sharing the same *Sprechbund*' (1982:24). Classical Arabic is the *Sprachbund* that acts as a symbol that differentiates or identifies not only those who use it, but also those who understand it, as being different from others, the non-Arabic speakers. It is a language from which members of the different speech communities draw support and upon which they build their Arab-American ethos in the diaspora. Hence, it creates a bond of solidarity and an ethnic identity that raises a feeling of 'us versus them'.

There is another factor that comes into the picture in which the 'us versus them' feeling is also expressed, and that is the diversity of dialects. Using Romaine's terminology, Arab-Americans do not share the same *Sprechbund*, since they came from different parts of the Arab world. They have different dialects, which they use in their daily contact with each other. This situation also erects a barrier between 'us' and 'them', them being those from other dialect areas. Hence, this multiple dichotomy between Arabs and non-Arabs, and between Arab

speakers of different Arab dialects, shapes the expression of the Arab-American identity. It is a dichotomy that has both a negative and a positive linguistic impact. It is negative in the sense that the language can go through a process of attrition, and a positive impact in the sense that a new linguistic form can develop that is understood by members of the different Arabic speech-communities.

In *The Arabic Language in America* (Rouchdy 1992), there are reports of three studies in which the fate of Arabic in the diaspora is viewed differently. First, Badr Dweik in his study 'Lebanese Christians in Buffalo: Language maintenance and language shift' concludes by saying that 'Arabic was abandoned because it had no religious or nationalistic value to these Lebanese.' (Dweik 1992:117)

On the other hand, Linda Walbridge, in her study 'Arabic in the Dearborn Mosque', discusses the relationship between Islam and the retention of Arabic in Dearborn. As she points out, the long-term future of Arabic depends on its survival as a medium of religious ritual (Walbridge 1992). Third, Sawaie in his article entitled 'Arabic in the Melting Pot: Will it survive?', states that the large number of Arab immigrants who came to the U.S. from 1900 to 1910 were determined to protect the mother tongue' (Sawaie 1992:94). Arabic seems to be the social glue that bonded the community together at that time, reinforced by its use in some churches, mosques, and community newspapers. However, with the change in the political climate and the incessant attacks on Arabs in the West, the second generation of Arab-Americans gave up their loyalty to their heritage-language, standard or dialect. Sawaie predicts that the language of the Arabic-speaking immigrants who have recently arrived in the U.S. will erode. I disagree with Sawaie's prediction and with Dweik's assessment, especially in a city such as Detroit for the following reasons.

Recently, in Detroit, there has been a revival in the use of Arabic among Arab-Americans. This revival is reflected in the increasing number of Arabic TV programs, Arabic newspapers, and cable networks that transmit directly from the Arab world. Furthermore, national religious academies have been established and private schools in which Arabic and Islamic studies are taught have been opened. Arabic as a foreign language is taught in some public schools. Moreover, there is a definite increase in enrollment in Arabic classes in the different universities in Michigan. This has also been pointed out in New York (*New York Times Sunday*, November 8) where there are 13 Arabic schools with an enrollment of 2,400, and in New Jersey there are at least 10 private Islamic schools.

I recently conducted a survey of 79 Arab-American students studying standard Arabic as a foreign language at Wayne State University: 77 out of the 79 stated that Arabic is very important to them. The subjects gave the following categories of reasons for their interest:

38% Ethnic identity

34% Religious affiliation

33% Fulfilling a language requirement

24% The importance of Arabic from a global perspective

5% The influence of parental advice

The students who responded to the questionnaire belonged to different speech-communities: they have different dialect backgrounds. They are studying standard Arabic as a foreign language. Thus, it is standard Arabic that bonds these students together. Furthermore, it is standard Arabic that also bonds non-student Arab-Americans in the different speech-communities to form one large linguistic community referred to by everyone as the Arab-American community in Detroit.

The diglossic nature of the Arabic language itself creates a strong relationship between the learning of standard Arabic as a foreign language, and the maintenance of the different dialects. This association is what differentiates Arabic from other ethnic nondiglossic languages in the diaspora. The question to ask here would be: Does the learning of standard/classical Arabic as a foreign language help maintain the spoken language that is used at home among Arab-Americans?

Indeed, the formal learning of standard Arabic might revive the student's ethnic identity and spiritual motivation, which could lead to a retrieval of the spoken language. However, the learning of standard Arabic will not prevent the changes that occur whenever the different dialects or languages come into contact.

As a result of this language-contact situation, an ethnic language develops, a language that is used among speakers in the diaspora. It does not correspond to any specific dialect variety, nor does it correspond to standard Arabic. It is a situation of language-shift that creates an ethnic language, or a lingua franca, understood only by members within this specific linguistic community and that has a specific functional use.

This lingua franca is not understood by Arab immigrants outside the U.S., as in France, or Holland, or Germany. Comparative research of the use of Arabic in different parts of the diaspora will be of great value to the field of sociolinguistics. For instance, how does Arabic, a language in contact in the U.S., differ linguistically and sociolinguistically from Arabic in different non-Muslim Western countries, on the one hand, and in Muslim non-Western countries, on the other hand?

Conclusion

To sum up these thoughts about Arabic as an ethnic language in the diaspora and its future, I would like to stress two points. First, there will always be skill-attrition in the Arabic spoken in the diaspora because of constant contact with a dominant language. However, when skill-attrition occurs, it is only in the immigrants' linguistic repertoire, and such attrition can easily be reversed for the language to be learned. Usually, it is the standard Arabic language that is formally learned. Such

learning of the standard, in many cases, leads to the acquisition of a specific dialect.

Second, the changes that occur in the ethnic language, because of contact with the dominant language, should not be considered as an erosion of the speaker's competence in Arabic, but rather as an accomplishment of performance resulting in an ethnic language, or a lingua franca, that acts as a bond among Arab-Americans and that might also help toward the learning or maintenance of one's ancestral language.

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