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Diaglossia and Educational Development

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Abstract: *In most Arabic countires, there is a diglossic situation where two variteis are in use, namely Fusha and Darija. The former is the high variety that is considered as a formal language and functions as the official statanrd language in all Arab countirs and the latter is a low variey and can be considered as colloquial Arabic. Fusha can be seen as the modern descendant of Classical Arabic which is mainly used for writing in formal discourse in the Arab world and is learned through formal education. Darija, however, represents the mother tongue that is learned naturally and can be distinguished in a number of varieties that differ along geographical lines. The present paper focuses on the relationship between the Arabic diglosic situation and education. In such educaltional contexts, Fusha can be seen as a second language but in terms of teaching methodologies It is approached as the first language. This sociolinguistic situation delays literacy acquisition due to a lack of transparent relation between speech and literacy. There is a widespread of functional literacy due to diglossia, which has a negative effect on children's aability to acquire reading and writing skills in Fusha. Continuous efforts to improve language policies in the Arab world are taking place, most of these attempts focus on pedagogical and linguistic suggestions to facilitate the learning of Fusha, while ignoring the diglossic situation and its effects on the learning process.*
Keywords: *Arabic, darija, diaglossia, education, fusha.*
Résumé : *Dans la plupart des pays arabes, il existe une situation diglossique où deux variétés sont utilisées, à savoir Fusha et Darija. La première est la variété élevée qui est considérée comme une langue formelle et fonctionne comme langue officielle dans tous les pays arabes et la seconde est une variété basse et peut être considérée comme l'arabe familier. Fusha peut être considérée comme le descendant moderne de l'arabe classique qui est principalement utilisé pour écrire dans le discours formel dans le monde arabe et qui est appris dans le cadre de l'éducation formelle. La darija, cependant, représente la langue maternelle qui s'apprend naturellement et peut être distinguée dans un certain nombre de variétés qui diffèrent selon les critères géographiques. Le présent article se concentre sur la relation entre la situation diglosique arabe et l'éducation. Dans de tels contextes éducatifs, le fusha peut être considéré comme une deuxième langue, mais en termes de méthodologies d'enseignement, elle est abordée comme la première langue. Cette situation sociolinguistique retarde l'acquisition de l'alphabétisation en raison d'un manque de relation transparente entre la parole et l'alphabétisation. L'alphabétisation fonctionnelle est généralisée en raison de la diglossie, ce qui a un effet négatif sur la capacité des enfants à acquérir des compétences en lecture et en écriture de la Fusha. Des efforts continus pour améliorer les politiques linguistiques dans le monde arabe sont en cours, la plupart de ces tentatives se concentrent sur des suggestions pédagogiques et linguistiques pour faciliter l'apprentissage de la fusha, tout en ignorant la situation diglossique et ses effets sur le processus d'apprentissage.*
Mots clés : *Arabe, darija, diglossie, enseignement, fusha.*

Diaglossia in Arabic is manifested through the existence of both Lugha el Fusha that is classical Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and el Darija that is colloquial Arabic. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to MSA as Fusha and Darija for colloquial Arabic.

Fusha is described as a mainly written literary and formal language that displays a high degree of uniformity, and functions as the official standard language in all Arab countries (Al Toma, 1969). It is the language of Islam (the second largest religion in the world), of Pan-Arab nationalism, and marks the Arab identity (Haeri, 2000). Darija on the other hand is mainly a spoken dialect and represents the daily life communication vehicle and folk literature.

It varies widely along geographical, religious, and socio-economic lines from one Arab country to another and from one community to another within the same country (Holes, 1995).

Fusha and Darija diverge historically. Holes (1995) states that "although syntax, vocabulary and phraseology of Arabic have undergone considerable changes in the fourteen centuries since the Revelation (of the Quran), the common origins of classical Arabic and all other contemporary varieties of the language are still plain for all to see"(p. 4). Fusha, which is the modern descendant of the classical Arabic (the Language of the Quran) is a standardized variety that unifies the Arab world as it is used for writing and in formal discourse in the Arab world and is mainly learned through formal education. The colloquial Arabic varieties, on the other hand, are each the mother tongue that native speakers learn naturally, and which differ along geographical lines (Holes, 1995).

There is a lack of empirical study of the Arabic diaglossic situation and education. Research has focused on the effects of early exposure to literary Arabic texts on reading comprehension ability in Arab pre-school children (Abu-Rabia, 2000), (Eviatar & Ibrahim, 2000), the development of meta-linguistic awareness in either normally developing children or children with reading or learning disabilities (Abu Rabia, Share & Mansour, 2003); and on teaching Arabic as a foreign language within the existing diaglossic situation to another within the same country (Holes, 1995).

Within the context of native Arabic speaking students, there is a scarcity of studies examining educational methodologies, knowledge and attitude development within a diglossic framework. In particular, the study of the diglossic situation and education for Palestinian Arabic speaking children in Israelis sparse. There is a clear consensus in the literature that the differences between MSA and colloquial Darija manifest themselves in all language domains (Al-Toma, 1969; Holes, 1995). Many researchers proclaim that MSA can be viewed as a second language (Ayari, 1996; Eviatar & Ibrahim, 2000). Others propose that this sociolinguistic situation delays literacy acquisition due to a lack of transparent relation between speech and literacy (Abu-Rabia, 2000; Feitelson et al., 1993; Saiegh-Haddad, 2003). Ayari (1996) and Maamouri (1998) attribute the widespread functional illiteracy in the Arab world to diglossia, which is argued to have a negative impact on Arab children's ability to acquire reading and writing skills in Arabic, and consequently on their academic attainment in general.

Although several researchers claim that Arab children are not exposed to MSA until they enter school (Holes, 1995; Suleiman, 1986), children do have some MSA exposure before entering school through television programs and literacy events,

such as contact with stories, letters, and street signs. However, this exposure might be relatively limited depending on the child's environment.

A survey conducted by Reem Khamis Dakwar from the department of behavioral sciences in Columbia University, examined and reported knowledge, and difficulties towards the diglossic situation of first, second, and third grade Palestinian Arabic speaking students living in Israel. Palestinian Arab citizens in Israel today comprise a minority group of 1,245,700 Palestinian inhabitants constituting 18.9% of Israel's population and almost one quarter of school aged children (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003).

These children in particular, have limited exposure to Fusha, compared to children from the Arab world. This is due to the sociopolitical situation in Israel where Hebrew and English are the dominant languages (Spolsky, 1996) and Arabic is the minority language in the Jewish state (Amara, 2002).

At present, Palestinian Arab students are taught three languages: Fusha as the language of instruction, Hebrew as a second language starting in the second grade, and English as a foreign language starting the fourth grade (Amara, 2002; Spolsky, 1997) Israel's educational system is subdivided into a Jewish system and an Arab system.

These subdivisions give the system an appearance of educational pluralism, whereas in fact it is separate but not equal. The unequal separation in the educational system continues to serve official policies of domination and control (Abu-Saad, 2001; Amara, 2002; El-Haj, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Rouhana, 1997).

The Arab education system suffers from shortages in physical facilities, such as the number of classrooms, sport yards, and laboratories. There is also a shortage in educational and pedagogical materials where most of the educational materials used for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel are translated word-for-word from materials made for the Jewish educational system.

All Arab educational systems suffer from high repetition and dropout rates. In addition, illiteracy rates in the Arab world are higher than the average for developing countries and constitute a challenge for educational development (Maamouri, 1998; UNDP, 2003). Even though continuous efforts to improve language policies in the Arab world are taking place, most of these attempts focus on pedagogical and linguistic suggestions to facilitate the learning of Fusha, while ignoring the diglossic situation and its effects on the learning process (Maamouri, 1998). On the other hand, Maamouri claims that there is growing awareness among Arab educational specialists of the direct relationship between the use of Fusha in formal schooling and the high illiteracy rates in many Arab countries.

In recent years, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published The Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) as part of an ongoing series to identify and address problems and possibilities for human development in the Arab world. Authored by a diverse team of academics and development practitioners from across the region, the reports present a unified perspective on development concerns, identifying three cardinal obstacles to human development regarding (1) freedom, (2) women's empowerment, and (3) knowledge. The 2003

AHDR builds on this framework by focusing on the aspect of creating a knowledge society through educational reform as a means of overcoming these challenges. The report does not address, explicitly or implicitly, the diglossic situation as an intervening factor in the process of learning in the Arab world (Haeri, 2005). One of the conclusions of this report is that there is a need for "education reform," for which a "radical revision of education systems in Arab countries as they move into the twenty first century" is proposed (UNDP, 2003, p. 55).

Three strategies are suggested for the implementation of this radical educational reform: enhancing human capabilities, creating strong synergy between education and the socioeconomic system, and formulating a program for education reform at the Pan-Arab level. Educational development policy discourses in the Arab world currently fail to address the challenges posed by diglossia, which are particularly critical in developing appropriate educational methods and practices for literacy development.

There is an urgent need for greater understanding of the diglossic situation within the educational context, and its impact on learning, whether school-based or through informal structures. This study seeks to contribute towards this end through an investigation of the attitudes, knowledge, and learning difficulties, as perceived and reported by first, second, and third graders learning Fusha within the formal educational context of the school. It is hoped that the findings will draw attention to the importance of increased consideration and scholarship regarding Arabic diglossia as it pertains to educational attainment in the Arab world.

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