

# Diglossia: the state of the art

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## *Abstract*

*Although the French term diglossie was introduced by the Arabist William Marçais in 1930 (Marçais 1930), it is the late Charles A. Ferguson who is most often credited as the first to introduce the notion of a “high” (H) and a “low” (L) variety or register of a language in a classic (1964 [1959]) article in the journal *Word* with the now famous one-word title, “Diglossia.” The gist of his widely influential essay was to demonstrate that the idea of H and L registers best explained the pervasive linguistic distinctions observable in a few speech communities concerning the strict complementary distribution of formal vs. informal usage. For Ferguson, who calqued the term from the French, there were only four “defining” languages that he considered representative: Arabic, Swiss German, Haitian Creole, and Modern Greek. This essay reviews some of the voluminous diglossia literature and focuses on the linguistic situation in the Arab world, presenting ideas about future research prospects (such as the diglossic continuum).*

Although the French term *diglossie* was introduced by the Arabist William Marçais in 1930 (Marçais 1930), it is the late Charles A. Ferguson who is most often credited as the first to introduce the notion of a “high” (H) and a “low” (L) variety or register of a language in a classic (1964 [1959]) article in the journal *Word* with the now famous one-word title, “Diglossia.” The gist of his widely influential essay, which has been reprinted several times, was to demonstrate that the idea of H and L registers best explained the pervasive linguistic distinctions observable in a few speech communities concerning the strict complementary distribution of formal vs. informal usage. For Ferguson, who calqued the term from the French, there were only four “defining” languages that he considered representative: Arabic, Swiss German, Haitian Creole, and Modern Greek. Since then, many other languages (in actuality, the speech communities that speak them) have been reevaluated as diglossic,

although most, to be sure, are far less diglossic than Arabic is (see further Ferguson 1996 [1991] and also below). In fact, Ferguson predicted what was to come when he affirmed (1964 [1959]: 429), “It is likely that this particular situation in speech communities is very widespread, although it is rarely mentioned, let alone satisfactorily described.” Needless to say, there is no working sociolinguist anywhere who is not familiar with diglossia.

Ancient languages have also been reconstructed as being diglossic (see, e.g., Kaye 1993). It is important to emphasize that Ferguson’s original conception of diglossia sharply contrasted with bilingualism, since he states that diglossia is different from “the analogous situation where two distinct (related or unrelated) languages are used side by side throughout a speech community, each with a clearly defined role” (1964 [1959]: 429).

I focus in this essay on the case of Arabic, the area of my fieldwork expertise. A number of different dialects will be discussed as well as the modern standard language. Although Arabic diglossia is similar to that of other diglossic speech communities, there are some noteworthy differences. Ferguson (1996 [1991]: 63) points out that, until recently, an after-dinner speech in Greek would have had to be given in *katharevousa* (H), but nowadays, *demotiki* (L) is acceptable. However, in south India, the Telegu community would never use H that way, and Ferguson further elucidates, “People write articles, and especially poetry, in it, but it is never used in speaking on formal occasions” (1996 [1991]: 63). In the Arab world, however, a native speaker of an Arabic dialect may compose poetry in either H or L (so-called folk poetry), depending on the mood and perhaps the subject matter of the poet (or would-be poet).

Over the past few years, the notion of the continuum has proved useful in attempts to redefine diglossia as it relates to triglossia, tetraglossia, and multiglossia or polyglossia (Kaye 1994). The notion of the dialect continuum has even entered the introductory linguistic textbook (see, e.g., Yule 1996: 230–233). This latter perspective, as known especially from pidgin and creole linguistics (see, e.g., Mühlhäusler 1997: 211–221), represents the current linguistic scene, particularly as it applies to the world’s most complicated, in my opinion, diglossic situation, viz., Arabic (see, e.g., Kaye 1994; Hary 1996). As illustrative, consider that ‘what do you want (m. sg.)’ is *maa(δaa) turiid* in Modern Standard Arabic (hereafter MSA, a modern version of Classical Arabic), whereas an Egyptian would say in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) for the very same thing *ʕaawiz* or *ʕaayiz eeh*, a Saudi Arabian *ʔees tibya*, a Yemeni *ʔees tašti*, Sudanese *daayir šimu*, and a Lebanese *šu baddak*. (We shall return to this point below.) Diglossia can, however, border on bidialectalism, perhaps even on bilingualism, depending on the situation,

since some native speakers of Arabic would be hard-pressed to understand a radio or TV news broadcast in MSA, let alone comprehend the oral rendition of an essay on a modern technological or literary theme in that brand of the language. Native oral and written knowledge of and fluency in MSA are entirely different matters, however, which need not concern us here (see Parkinson 1991, 1993, 1996). Of course, it is important to recognize that an Arab deprived of an education will have far less knowledge of MSA than a university graduate. This does not mean, however, that every university graduate is able to speak extemporaneously for hours in MSA, nor does it mean even for an hour. Some educated Arabs find it difficult to carry on a conversation in MSA. By that I mean sticking to its use without switching back (or back and forth) to their colloquial (native) dialect. Code switching is, however, a familiar scenario throughout much of the Arab world in the daily discourse of many native speakers and beyond the scope of the focus of this paper.

Let us now consider an English parallel (although it is a rough one only) to the classical diglossia of Ferguson (1964 [1959]). English has a formal style or register: “To whom do you wish to speak?” corresponds to its informal equivalent, “Who do you want to talk to?” Further, one may also compare the triglossic verbs *wed* — *get married* or *marry* — *get hitched*, the diglossic verbs *put out* (say, a cigarette) vs. *extinguish*, and the different nuances conveyed by the nouns *kids* vs. *children* vs. *offspring* vs. *progeny* (see Kaye 1991 for details). English even has a difference in H and L prepositional usage (see below for remarks on a parallel case in Arabic). Consider *upon* vs. *on*, as in “Upon arrival, go directly to the baggage claim area.” Further down the continuum ladder in the mesolect, one may utter “On arrival ...,” or “On arriving ...,”. If one were uttering this sentence to a friend (toward the basilect), though, it would come out something like, “When you get there, go straight to get (or pick up) your luggage.” It is the different vocabulary items in particular that instantaneously mark a speaker as using the H “classical/standard,” or the L “colloquial/vernacular/patois.” A particularly good example of this phenomenon is MSA *dahaba* ‘to go’ vs. the very widespread vernacular *raah* or *maša/miši*. It is the utilization of the former that would be interpreted by a native speaker as a symbol of H, whereas the use of the latter would be indicative of L. Other MSA markers include the use of the suffixes known as *ʔiʔraab* and *taškiil*; for example, *xabarun wa ta9liiq* ‘news and commentary’, or *barnaamajun Pusbuʔiyyun min ʔidaaʔat irriyaad* ‘a weekly program from Radio Riyadh’. We should also note grammatical markers, such as the relative particles *ʔallaḏii*, *ʔallatii*, etc., nominative dual and sound masculine plural in the noun, dual for the adjective, pronoun, and verb,

particles such as *(li)kay* ‘in order to’, and so on. VSO word order over SVO word order tends, to some extent at least, to mark MSA over colloquial Arabic dialects.

Not very well investigated is the notion of the acrolectic (=formal) pronunciation of a given word at various levels. As an example, consider ECA *tarqíya* vs. the normal (basilectic) ECA *tarʔíyya*. Other Arabs pronounce the same word as *tárqiya* in their acrolects. Very often the same lexeme may be pronounced in two fashions: one MSA and the other in a given dialect: MSA *huwiyya* ‘identity card’ and Saudi Arabian *hawíyya*. Compare also such common adjectival formations such as *ʔana mišri* (acrolectic) vs. *ʔana mášri* (mesolectic) vs. *ʔana mišri* (acrolectic, pausal) ‘I am an Egyptian (masc.)’.

A particularly prominent MSA marker is the particle *lam*, as in *lam yaktub* ‘he did not write’, since this negative morpheme does not occur in any Arabic vernacular, insofar as I am aware. The *lam* construction is even regarded as more prestigious by many speakers than its *maa* counterpart (e.g. *maa kataba* ‘he did not write’), although the latter construction, in fact, does occur in the Holy Koran. There is no universal consensus of opinion on the matter, however.

Out of the two MSA interrogative markers, it is *ʔa-* that is rarely borrowed by colloquial dialects, as opposed to *hal*, which does occur, although rarely so. Colloquial dialects have lost these morphemes, since phonetic means (i.e. intonation) tend to mark interrogation nowadays. Thus, there is no longer any need for an interrogative particle to signal a question in initial position.

Let us now turn, albeit briefly, to the intricate phenomenon of register mixing/switching/variation. First of all, even Ferguson himself admits that he failed to examine this topic in the 1959 paper (1996 [1959]: 61). It would be considered very odd (read: ungrammatical) to mix registers in the wrong fashion, although all sorts of register–dialect mixing regularly occur throughout the Arab world. Thus, *maa(ʔaa) ʕaawiz* (MSA ‘what’ + ECA ‘want’) would be perceived as most awkward — in fact, downright bizarre. It simply does not and would not occur. By a similar token, speaking MSA to one’s maid at home or bargaining over the price of an item in a crowded market in MSA would be absurd, even ludicrous (unless one was trying to be facetious, weird, or sarcastic; however, non-Arabs can and often do use MSA in these and related situations and can get away with it — part of the native’s tolerance of the speech of the non-native). This violates the “normal” functional constraints on when and how to mix MSA and a colloquial dialect. On the other hand, ECA *da ma biyustaxdamš* ‘this is not used’ is perfectly acceptable, with its MSA imperfect internal passive plus the ECA -š

'negative'. The aforementioned examples bolster the viewpoint (brought to prominence by Dell H. Hymes) that native speakers possess an overall "communicative competence" rather than a mere "grammatical competence."

Before taking up the details concerning the function, acquisition, grammar, and phonology of MSA and colloquial Arabic dialects, let me state that a phenomenal number of works on diglossia stemming from Ferguson (1964 [1959]) have been published. In fact, one might wonder if any other sociolinguistic topic has generated such a prodigious research effort over the same forty-year time span. There is one book-length bibliography (Fernández 1993), and another monographic compilation appeared at about the same time in the leading sociolinguistic journal (Hudson 1992). Much of this prolific scrutiny has centered upon investigating diglossia in other speech communities. Indeed, we possess studies of diglossia in Bengali, Sinhalese, Kannada, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Chinese, Japanese, Persian, Old Russian, Ottoman Turkish, Irish, and Welsh, to mention but a few languages. Some researchers, such as Joshua A. Fishman, have even deemed a very specialized case of bilingualism to be diglossia. He affirms that the H and L varieties in Paraguay are Spanish and Guaraní respectively (Fishman 1971: 75, originally formulated in Fishman 1968). Furthermore, Fishman (1971: 74) has also claimed that the use of any two varieties of a language in different situations constitutes diglossia. We may refer to this as "extended" diglossia, which, in essence, leads to labeling all speech communities diglossic (what is the point of the term, then, if the concept is watered down?). At the very heart of the term, it seems to me, is really the matter of degree, which is why the notion of the continuum is so useful in the analysis being presented in this essay. The continuum has been defined as not having any "sharp breaks from one region [or lect: ASK] to the next" (Yule 1996: 230). Diglossia in Arabic is a different phenomenon from diglossia in English — quantitatively more than qualitatively — especially when one notes the extreme, all-encompassing pervasiveness of the Arabic H–L dichotomy vs. the limited extent of formal vs. informal English stylistic variation. With this in mind, it appears safe to assert that diglossia is holding steady or is on the increase in the English-speaking realm but declining in Arab countries such as Egypt, where ECA is becoming increasingly more acceptable in written form (e.g. in advertisements) and in some formal oral situations, such as certain political or religious contexts (e.g. the speeches of Gamal Abdul Nasser or the Koranic commentary by the late Sheikh Muḥammad Mutawalli Shaḡraawii). Egypt is the most populous Arab country, and the one that has the greatest tendency to use its dialect for cultural identification and nationalistic

purposes in situations bordering on the unthinkable or nearly unthinkable in other Arab states.

Let us now examine some colloquial markers from the Egyptian dialect of Cairo. Upon hearing any of the following words or expressions, one will immediately perceive that the language is not MSA. Consider; *battal* 'to quit; give up' for MSA *kaffa ʕan*; *natiiga* 'calendar' for *taqwiim*; *xallas* 'to finish' for, say, MSA *ʔakmala*, *ʔatamma*, or *ʔanhaa*. The latter verb, Cairene *xallas*, in fact, means 'to rescue; save' in MSA. Furthermore, *faakir* 'remember' vs. MSA 'think', *sankuuḥ* 'good-for-nothing', *zumbagi* 'back-stabber', *harabangi* 'one given to evading commitments', *zayy izzift* 'awful', *dilwaʔti* 'now', *kuwayyis ʔawi* 'very good', *tamalli* 'always', *xarram* 'to take a shortcut' (=MSA *ʔixtaʕsar aʔtariiq*). Many more examples can easily be listed.

I believe it is safe to say that all Arabic colloquials have informal renditions of MSA vocabulary (perhaps it is better to say informal pronunciations of words that correspond to MSA vocabulary). Consider *dayman* for *daaʔiman* 'always', or *feen* or *ween* for *ʔayna* 'where'. All Arabic dialects have unique words and expressions (idioms) as well. A good example of this is Saudi Arabian Arabic *mukaasara*=MSA *musaawama*, *mufaaʕala* or *fiʕaal* 'bargaining; haggling'.

There are also some structural features separating MSA from various colloquials (which, in my opinion, have not been studied in great detail). These include the lack of the definite article in some words: Cairene *ʔiskindiriyya* for *al ʔiskandariyya* 'Alexandria', *gooz hind* for *jawz ulhind* 'coconut', and *baakistaan* for *albaakistaan* (Wehr 1974: 40), although the latter country occurs presently without the definite article throughout the Arab world, both formally and informally.

The full story regarding the stylistic aspects of the prepositions *fii* and *bi-* 'in' remains to be investigated. Many native Arabic speakers are of the opinion that, for example, *jaamiʕat ulmalik suʕuud fii rriyaaḍ* is less formal than *jaamiʕat ulimalik suʕuud birriyaaḍ* 'King Saud University in Riyadh'. This certainly explains why 'King Faisal Hall in Riyadh' is called *qaaʕat ulmalik fayʕal birriyaaḍ*, and why 'The American University in Cairo' is known as *aljaamiʕat ulʔamrikiyyatu bilqaahira* — and not *fii lqaahira*. Other native speakers have reported that in other contexts differing from the aforementioned ones *fii rriyaaḍ* is more formal than *birriyaaḍ* because the *bi-* 'in' commonly occurs with that meaning in a number of colloquial dialects.

In general, the use of the analytic genitive particle 'of' immediately informs the listener that the speaker is on the L level. Consider but any of the following: Arabian Peninsular *ḥagg*, ECA and Sudanese *bitaaʕ*, Moroccan *dyal*, Tunisian and Algerian *m/ntaaʕ*, general Syrian *tabaʕ*,

Palestinian *šwyl*, Iraqi *maal*, and Nigerian *hana*. Further, colloquialisms of all sorts, especially common functors and short words, point conspicuously to the colloquial level. Consider: *šalašaan* or *šašaan* ‘in order to’, *šaywa* ‘yes’, *lee(š)* ‘why’, *ee(h)* ‘what’, and so on.

It is important to keep in mind that diglossia was slow to evolve. In the case of Arabic, Blau (1977: 190) is of the opinion that diglossia is not pre-Islamic but began as the Arab armies spread out of Arabia conquering foreign lands such as Egypt in 640 A.D. This is a controversial view not shared by all Arabists. Be that as it may, the Koran was the most instrumental factor leading to the preservation of the classical language in a frozen state, while its contemporary spoken dialects continued to change, as all living languages do. It is generally agreed that the most classical (read: most elegant or best variety of H) Arabic today is, as has always been the case, the language of the Koran. It is considered to be the model of Classical Arabic as well as MSA.

### **Function**

Ferguson (1964 [1959]) noted that H is apropos for sermons, all sorts of letters, speeches, university lectures, news broadcasts, and poetry, whereas L is appropriate when talking to servants, waiters, clerks, and workmen, conversing with family, colleagues, and friends, and in soap operas, captions on political cartoons, and folk literature, including folk poetry. Thus, for example, it is inconceivable that a husband would tell his wife that he loved her using anything other than L (unless he was being whimsical or just plain weird). In a similar vein, a parent scolding a child (or two children conversing) would use L. However, a professor giving a lecture would be using MSA, although there might be some L interspersed, especially in a country such as Egypt. In some genres of university lecture one can often hear more ECA than MSA. A thorough investigation of this point is sorely needed — for Egypt as well as the whole Arab world.

### **Acquisition**

Modern linguistics distinguishes between language acquisition and language learning. Thus, it is axiomatic that native languages are acquired, whereas superposed varieties (and foreign languages taught to adults in schools) are formally learned. Every Arab grows up speaking his/her native dialect and is formally taught MSA, given the opportunity. To

reiterate, no one speaks MSA as his or her mother tongue. Exposure to MSA was definitely on the increase throughout the Arab world in the twentieth century, although a few Arabic-speaking communities have had little or no exposure to it, thus preventing the development of diglossia. These are Afghani, Uzbeki (Bukhara), Cypriot, Chadian, and Nigerian dialects, not to mention Juba Arabic, the Arabic pidgin and creole of the southern Sudan. Of course, one must make allowances for exceptions, and I readily admit that some Nigerians and southern Sudanese, for example, have studied MSA. The best-known case, however, of an Arabic dialect without diglossia is Maltese. I hasten to add that I consider Maltese to be an Arabic dialect from a diachronic viewpoint only. Synchronically speaking, there are many reasons to consider Maltese a Semitic language in its own right. Mutual intelligibility is not a very good gauge for the division of Arabic dialects, since some speakers of rural Moroccan Arabic dialects would be hard-pressed to understand their counterparts in Saudi Arabia or Yemen and vice versa. In this connection, we may, as we have done with Maltese, want to consider these dialects to be dialects only in the diachronic sense, as is the case with Arabic pidgins and creoles. On this latter point, I certainly disagree with Jonathan Owens (2000: 36, note 41), who does not consider Juba Arabic (spoken in Equatoria Province, southern Sudan) and Ki-Nubi (spoken in Uganda and Kenya) to be dialects of Arabic. Would he also, in the light of what is discussed above, toss out various Moroccan, Saudi Arabian, or Yemeni dialects from the Arabic dialectological world?

Of course, linguists are still struggling to overcome Max Weinreich's great line of yesteryear: "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy." Owens's pronouncement was, allegedly, based on his reasoning that since Arabic creoles are not mutually intelligible with other noncreole varieties of Arabic, they are not a "form of Arabic" at all (2000: 20). By this type of reasoning, then, other varieties of Arabic would be considered not to be designated thus either. Clearly, then, this topic requires a detailed monographic exploration, which is beyond the scope of our remarks here.

## **Grammar**

One of the major characteristics of H is a more involved grammar. Ferguson (1964 [1959]: 435) calls H "grammatically more complex." Basically, MSA may be viewed as a marked system, and colloquial Arabic as unmarked (see Kaye 1972 for details). That is to say, MSA marks many more categories of grammar: nominative, genitive, and accusative cases,

duality in the pronoun, verb, and adjective, and so on. No Arabic dialect has retained these grammatical categories, which have been lost over time.

Let us now consider a simple sentence: ‘I saw the man going to his house’.

(1) MSA: *raʔaytu rrajula ɖaaħiban ʔilaa baytiħ.*

(2) ECA: *šuft iṛraagil raayih beetu.*

In addition to the different lexemes for ‘see’ and ‘go’, MSA marks the noun ‘man’ with *-a* ‘accusative masculine singular’, also observable in the accusative *-an* in the following active participle. Moreover, the preposition *ʔilaa*, absent in ECA, governs the genitive case of the following noun, which would, in its nonpausal form, be *baytihi* (the form *baytiħ* is pausal, since it occurs in final position, i.e. before pause).

### Phonology

It is well known that the MSA voiceless uvular plosive corresponds to a glottal stop in ECA, Syro-Palestinian dialects, etc. (see Kaye and Rosenhouse 1997 for the details of cross-dialectical comparisons). However, a native knows that *alqurʔaan* ‘Koran’ is to be pronounced only with /q/. Ferguson correctly concluded that the L phonology is thus the basic system (1964 [1959]: 435). Thus, it is of great importance to realize that MSA pronunciation is not uniform throughout the Arab world. This is one of the reasons for my claiming that MSA is ill-defined, while ECA and all colloquials are well-defined (Kaye 1972). The most important factor determining MSA phonetics is the nature of the L underlying input (assuming a solid background of schooling in the language). Thus, ECA speakers, such as President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, pronounce the letter *jiim* as *giim* (a voiced velar stop for the voiced palato-alveolar affricate) because this is the ECA reflex of the *jiim*. There are ECA stress patterns that are carried over to the MSA as used in Egypt; for example, *tajannábataa* ‘they (f.) both avoided’ (Mitchell 1990: 103). As Mitchell succinctly points out, “‘Vernacular influence’ is nowhere more clearly in evidence than in the matter of accentuation” (1990: 103).

### Writing

One can also examine the influence of the native dialect on the written language, so-called Modern Written Arabic (e.g. Wehr 1974). Bakhali (1997) has examined a plethora of data relating to the influence of the colloquial language on written MSA by a close scrutiny of texts written by

university-level students in Riyadh. One such example, which was very revealing, was that structures such as *muwaḏḏāfi ddawla* ‘the employees of the state’ (1997: 138) were written with the *-n* of the non-*ʔidaafa* form *muwaḏḏāfiin*. This example is more than likely just an error based on lack of utilization of the rule on *n*-deletion; however, a sentence such as *hum šadiidiin alḥirš 9alaa ḏaalik* ‘they are very strongly wishing for that’ (1997: 138) for *hum šadiiduu ḥirš ...* shows an influence from the native dialect’s oblique case over the correct MSA nominative case marker. The *-uu* nominative plural does not survive in any Arabic dialect (of which I am aware — bedouin or sedentary).

Perhaps even more interesting than the above examples are the colloquial words and expressions that have crept into formal written discourse. Consider that *ʔihna* ‘we’ occurs for MSA *naḥnu* (1997: 171–172). Influence (=interference modification) is the only possible interpretation of the facts here.

One section of Bakhali (1997: 174 ff.) deals with the influence of translated structures on the MSA written language (we could call this language variety Modern Written Arabic; cf. the title of Wehr’s famous dictionary). The author makes a good point that the English verb ‘play’ has exerted its influence on Arabic *laʕiba dawran* ‘play a role’ for *ʔaddaa dawran* (1997: 175). Although this might have been true at one time, I believe most, if not all, native users do not consider this an odd (and calqued) construction. The phrase *laʕiba dawran* occurs in Wehr as such (1974: 868). Thus, it has been used for at least a quarter of a century, if not more.

Perhaps one of the clearest cases of colloquial influence on Modern Written Arabic is the case of *xabar kaana* ‘the predicate of the verb “be”’, which governs the accusative case (1997: 103–108). Here we find 57 examples of the use of the predicate without an overt case marking, reflecting a situation of its being processed in the native dialect in which case is no longer operative. Consider No. 56 (1997: 107): *waʔaṣḥaḥa lʔamru muṣaqqad liḷyaaya* ‘and the matter became extremely complicated’ for the correct *muṣaqqadan*, which would be signaled (or marked) by an *ʔalif mamduuda*.

## Conclusions

Kaye (1972) concluded that MSA is, to an extent at least, unpredictable, and thus ill-defined. There are so many varying microscopic details, since MSA is used in many different countries by many people with different educational backgrounds. Hary (1996: 84) refers to this state of affairs when he affirms, “In the middle [between H and L: ASK], the mesolect,

one finds almost countless variation, or lects, used by native speakers, on different occasions and under various circumstances.”

### **The continuum between the most acrolectic MSA and the most basilectic colloquial dialect**

There is often a continuous mixture of MSA and a colloquial in the Arab world. ECA speakers might talk of ‘these armed forces’ as *haazihi lquwwaat ilmussallaḥa*, and in the very next sentence this very same expression may show up as *ilquwwaat ilmussallaḥa di* (not *\*il?uwwaat*, incidentally). I have over the past many years referred to MSA as (basically) ill-defined simply because it is not possible to predict what a speaker may do (see above). Many variations occur reflecting a vast continuum. There certainly is influence of the native dialect on the MSA produced. This cannot be denied. One splendid illustration of this is the traffic sign in Morocco and in the United Arab Emirates, in which ⟨syr⟩=[siir] ‘Go!’ (which is the colloquial Arabic pronunciation in those two countries) occurs for MSA ⟨sr⟩=[sir], and another is an expression like *qaṭaṣa taḍkaratan* (for *taḍkiratan*) ‘to buy a ticket’, lit., ‘to cut a ticket’.

A colloquial dialect is best thought of as a well-defined system. Consider once again the high degree of predictability in a sentence such as ‘what do you want?’ (masc. sing.): ECA *ṣaawiz* or *ṣaayiz ee(h)*, Moroccan *eš bayi*, Saudi Arabian *eeš* or *wiš tibya*, Gulf *eeš tabi*, Yemeni *eeš tašti*, Sudanese *daayir šinu*, Lebanese *šu baddak*, or MSA *maa(ḍaa) turiid*. However, one observes MSA oral renditions such as *maa tariid* or *maazaa turiid*. It is the variation in the code-mixing that is impossible to predict, thus fostering the ingredients of an ill-defined system.

### **Diglossia in English and Arabic: a comparison**

Diglossia in English resembles bidialectalism, whereas diglossia in Arabic is more like bilingualism, although the Arab perception of the phenomenon is more along the lines of bidialectalism. Diglossia in Arabic is a different phenomenon from diglossia in English — quantitatively much more than qualitatively — particularly when the *ṣaammiyyaa–fuṣṣḥaa* (classical–colloquial) dichotomy is taken into consideration vs. the rather limited extent of formal vs. informal English stylistic variation. It is mainly the vocabulary that indicates the register in English (see Kaye 1991

for details). In Arabic, however, phonetic matters are probably just as important in the long run in the actual choice of the lexical item; for example, *qaššar* 'he peeled' is MSA, whereas *ʔaššar* is ECA (and a number of other dialects as well).

Undoubtedly, diglossia in Arabic, in English, and in general will continue to attract the attention of linguists in the new millennium. New ideas and new proposals will come into being that will increase our understanding of the phenomenon, and older concepts will proceed with refinement. It is only fitting and proper that science should progress thus.

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