



Introduction

The Continuum Model in a Changing Sociolinguistic Reality

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When El-Said Badawi wrote his book on language levels some forty-five years ago, he proposed vertical (or social) and horizontal (or geographic/regional) factors to be the direct causes of language variation or Arabic polyglossia in Egypt. The book presented sociolinguists with a new model that factored in particular social variables that gave rise to varieties of Arabic that challenged the previous binary or three-dimensional linguistic reality presented earlier by Ferguson (1959a, 1996), Blanc (1960), and Mitchell (1978b, 1986, 1990). In the introduction to *Mustawayāt al-ʿArabīyya al-muʿāṣira*, first published in 1973 by Dar al-Maʿarif in Cairo, Badawi explained that the goal of the book was to describe the reality of linguistic use of the different levels of Arabic in Egypt. He argued that so long as researchers had not described the real variation in the use of Arabic in a particular speech community, no accurate statement could be made about such a linguistic situation. His research resulted in the introduction of the concept of language levels in Egypt, or the Badawi continuum model, to use a more popular name. The model has been adopted by many sociolinguists interested in studying the features of those levels and in examining how native speakers move across them in real-life situations and in different contexts. The model has also inspired further sociolinguistic research to identify functions of ‘switching’ or ‘mixing’ of the features of *ʿāmmīyya* and *fuṣṣḥā* Arabic, especially with respect to the third level, *ʿāmmīyyat al-muṯaqqafīn* or ‘colloquial of the educated.’

The linguistic reality in Egypt described by Badawi in 1973, however, has changed in radical ways since the book was published. Although the model continues to be applicable to some of the originally described contexts, many of its theoretical assumptions are now challenged. That is simply because the use of Arabic in Egypt, whether spoken or written, has varied over those forty-some years. At the spoken level, several of the situations that used to lend themselves to the use of a higher level of modern standard Arabic (MSA), have experienced variation with the inclusion of a larger component of colloquial. Moreover, the written language that had lived long years somehow protected, intact and away from the effect of mixing with colloquial, has been mixed in various degrees with colloquial in the past two decades, while documentation of the different features of the varying styles of written Arabic has remained scarce.

Language levels were introduced after the inadequacy of the H/L dichotomy to explain the reality of the linguistic situation as far as Arabic is concerned. In Badawi's model there are phonological, morphological, syntactic, and stylistic features that characterize each of the five levels, levels 1 and 2 being written varieties and levels 3, 4, and 5 being spoken varieties. The model relates the linguistic features of each level to certain topics and certain contexts, thus suggesting that certain varieties occur under certain circumstances. For example, discussion of serious topics such as politics or religion would be between *fushhā al-ḥaṣr* (Modern Standard Arabic, MSA) and *ṣāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafīn* (Educated Spoken Arabic) depending on the setting. Thus people who represent authority, whether religious or otherwise, are expected to use a higher level of Arabic when they preach or speak in formal or semiformal situations. Moreover, news broadcasts are described as falling under *fushhā al-ḥaṣr*, though these are spoken (that is, read). Badawi's later work on commercials revealed that the vast majority of advertisements featured a mix of both *fushhā al-ḥaṣr* and colloquial, and assigned roles to each variety when used to have an optimal effect on the audience (Badawi 1995, Bassiouney 2009b).

In assigning such roles and functions with the different language levels, Badawi emphasized that the 'linguistic ladder' is always accessible to educated native speakers, and they are able to move up and down according to the needs of the communicative event. Thus the reality of the linguistic situation was always looked at from a polyglossic viewpoint, where drawing a dividing line between what is *fushhā* and what is *ṣāmmiyya* is close to impossible when both varieties are used in combination.

Current Research on Arabic Diglossia/Polyglossia

Although the common understanding of the linguistic situation has been established to be one of multi- or polyglossia, the treatment of Arabic discourse in much of the current research still starts from a dichotomous point of view. In other words, treating Arabic as *fushā* vs. *ʕāmmiyya*. The concept of dichotomy continues to exist in Arabic sociolinguistic research, representing colloquial Arabic and MSA as two distinctive varieties. An example of this is the ongoing analysis of discourse based on ‘diglossic code-switching,’ even though the analysis is sometimes confined to Badawi’s level 3, *ʕāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafīn*. The binary view of Arabic is very obvious when in research we ask: Is this CA or MSA? When the language is spoken, we have usually the phonological features that could direct us to safely answer this question. But if it is written, or if it is identical in terms of pronunciation and morpho-syntactic features in both varieties, how could we possibly answer? This has led Bassiouney and others to call the shared items ‘neutral,’ or to lump all varieties that are not clearly MSA as ‘not MSA’ (NMSA), as El-Shami did in 2013.

Another trend in current research looks at alternating between the different linguistic features of varieties from an intentional point of view. In other words, the code-switching is actually a deliberate switch in order to realize certain sociolinguistic goals. An example of this is found in the analysis of Bassiouney 2006. Although the alternation between varieties or varieties’ features may occasionally happen to assume different roles when using different codes, we are commonly faced with numerous other situations where speakers use level 3, which is basically a mixed variety that could possibly include some kind of alternation between varieties, in order to address certain communicative situations appropriately. This level by definition, according to Badawi, features such fluctuation between colloquial and MSA, either in chunks of discourse or in mixed forms within the same chunk.

The third level in Badawi is the level where both Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) and MSA interact vividly. When he described it in his model, he explained that *ʕāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafīn* (the ‘colloquial of the educated’) is the spoken language of those who have received a high level of education and it is used among them to discuss issues related to different areas of interest as well as being their norm of expressing themselves with others. Thus the process is not one of code-switching between two varieties, or a mix of two levels. *ʕāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafīn* should be treated as spoken Arabic. Needless to say, this spoken variety would certainly vary according to style

and context, just like any spoken language in the world. Linguistically, we could certainly see features of what is classical and what is colloquial, but the outcome, or the final linguistic system that we use while speaking, is not merely a ‘mix,’ it is a new product that has its obvious linguistic features.

We could summarize current and recent research on Arabic varieties in the following way:

The Binary Approach

This started with Ferguson and the H/L categorization, then later his stressing the necessity to look at variation in between the two main varieties.

The Triglossia Approach

This is a popular approach: many linguists have examined, in addition to the main two varieties, the variety in the middle, as in Mitchell’s work on ‘educated spoken Arabic’ (1986, 1990), Parkinson (1993), Hary (1996), Eid (1982), and Blanc (1960). The middle variety has been variously referred to as the intermediate variety, formal spoken Arabic, or educated spoken Arabic.

The Code-switching Approach

Bassiouney (2006), Walters (1996), and others regarded the use of the two varieties in a mixed form as a conscious decision by native speakers. Hence, native speakers were regarded as practicing code-switching, or diglossic code-switching. In this area, research has been affected by the Myers-Scotton model on code-switching (1993).

The Levels Approach

This was initiated by Badawi with the presentation of five levels and the concept of overlap and gradation in use, and continued in work done by Gunvor Mejdell (2006b) based on Badawi’s model and the analysis of mixed styles. Mejdell’s contribution was closer in the understanding of level 3, as she wrote of “mixed styles” used in spoken Arabic and explained the phenomenon more in line with gradation in using different levels according to Badawi’s model.

The Changing Linguistic Reality in Egypt

The vast majority of research has identified the media as one popular area where educated or formal spoken Arabic is used. During the past decade, channels of media have been enlarged to include innovative means of communication such as online news, Facebook, Twitter, and to a lesser degree

SMS messages. In other ways, we now see that people are able to communicate through written forms of Arabic different from the traditional means of communication. And because these conventional channels carry, among other things, news, debates, advertisements, and commentaries, and since these channels have an audience that is getting bigger by the day, it has become of utmost importance that we look at the language used in such channels and see what the choices are.

Although it is still true that we find what Badawi had described in terms of his levels and language use, there have emerged other varieties and features that are used especially in the aural and printed media that require our immediate attention. During the past two decades, media in Egypt have regularly been using a combination of varieties that deviate in many respects from the long-standing continuum describing levels of contemporary Arabic in Egypt. Recently, we are seeing more and more people speaking in this variety in formal and semi-formal situations, and sometimes in functions that were long considered the domain of MSA. The contexts of these situations vary from religious preaching to political speeches to news analysis to sports programs to TV commercials. The linguistic reality in the Arab world has changed in radical ways in the last two decades.

The Egyptian TV news channel OTV was founded by Orascom (owned by Egyptian billionaire Naguib Sawiris) in 2007 and ceased broadcasting in 2011. It specialized in broadcasting international TV shows and movies, as well as world news in a program called *Hāl el-dunya* ('The State of the World'). According to its manager it consistently used different levels of ECA in all its programs. Sawiris said: "OTV aims to take a critical look at our society. I want Egyptians to see how our lives are, how life could be better, and how we can improve our country." He openly acknowledged that the channel had a vague political agenda, to counter what he considered the negative impact of "religious extremism" and to "build bridges between Egypt and the West, including America" (Oxford Business Group 2007).

In looking into the style and structure of the broadcast news of OTV, it was clear that there was a language policy to avoid using MSA. The channel consistently used *šāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafīn* to broadcast the news. Many of the lexical items were those shared between MSA and colloquial. On the phonological level, there were features that characterized the spoken varieties, including the use of *el* rather than *al*, pronunciation of *θ* as *ta* or *sa*, and *ḍ* as *za* or *da*, and *z* as *z* or *ḍ*. All are salient features of ECA. On the structural level, all the negations are in the *mif* or *ma—f* forms, the use of

future is marked by the prefix *ha* or *ḥa*, the majority of sentences are nominal, the relative pronoun *elli* is used instead the variants of *allaḍī*, there is constant use of the *bi* prefix for the habitual present, no dual verb agreement, and all the duals and sound plurals are used in the *īn/ayn* forms. Moreover, many of the set phrases used in media MSA were also included, such as *ṣilaqāt ḥunaʔiyya* ‘bilateral relations,’ *waqf iṭlāq al-naar* ‘cease-fire,’ *tabādul diblumāsi* ‘diplomatic exchange,’ and *ʔirtifāṣ al-asṣār* ‘price rises.’ In other words, the news was reported in *ṣāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafīn*, level 3 of the Badawi model.

The idea of associating *fushḥā* with formality, respect, and authority is not new. Almost all linguists who have written on the subject explain that *fushḥā* is highly respected among Arabs because of the heritage load associated with it. In spite of that, in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, Egyptians listened to religious lessons and Qur’anic interpretation from the late Sheikh Sha’rawi in what was basically *ṣāmmiyyat al-mutanawwirīn*, and he only used classical Arabic to recite direct quotes from the Qur’an. Another context that Badawi’s model describes as formal is religious discourse. This area, according to the continuum model, lends itself to level 1, that is *fushḥā al-turāḥ*, in which sheikhs from al-Azhar or similar religious institutions give religious talks or reply to people’s inquiries on television. However, it appears that there are topics and contexts within this area that justify the use of lower levels of the continuum to serve communicative functions: this was precisely the reason behind Sheikh Mitwalli Shaarawi’s choice of colloquial levels in his explanation of the Qur’anic text.

Although that phenomenon of using colloquial for religious discourse was justified as the only path to reach the vast majority of underprivileged Egyptians, what we have seen lately on TV from the former Grand Mufti suggests that the area of religious discourse itself could further be divided into levels according to the audience, the context, and the specific topic discussed. Below are three excerpts from two programs. One is him commenting on the program’s topic of discussion, the second is part of a lesson in al-Azhar, and the third is in answer to a question raised by the audience.

In Discussing the Issue of Drinking Alcohol on Social Occasions

*el-ṣaqd elli benhom ʔenfaṣam? el-ṣaqd elli benhom ʔextalla? ʔabadan!
lēh? qāl al-ṣulamā? liʔanna al-ḥarām-a la yuharrim-u al-halāl-a. fūf
el-qaṣda? ṣayzīn neḥfazha deyya: liʔanna al-haram-a la yuharrim-u*

al-halāl-a. ṣaqd el-zawāg da ḥalāl walla la?? ḥalāl. furb el-xamr da . . . ḥarām wala la?? ḥarām bittifāq. El-ḥarām yeḍdar yifukk el-ḥalāl? lā? la? mayeḍdarf waliḍālik-a ḥāḍihi al-maṣseya ḍallatī yaqaṣ fiha ḍālik-al-ṣāb al-muhtaram al-mumtāz dunyaweyyan. fa ḍinnahu law ertabatat bihi wa law tastameṣ ḍilā an-nasītha al-ḍigtimāṣeyya allatī nurīd bihā baqā? al-ḍusra wa-l-saṣāda wa ḍusra takūn qaweyya fa lābud min al-kaḥāṭa.

Was the contract between them terminated, broken, or breached? No! Never. Why? Religious scholars said because haram does not forbid halal. Can you get that rule? We want to implement that rule: because the *haram* does not forbid the *halal*. Is a marriage contract *halal* or not? *Halal*. Is drinking alcohol *haram* or not? All are agreed that it is *haram*. Can *haram* affect *halal*? No, it can't. So, that sin was committed by that decent guy. The wife continued with him and listened to the social advice that aims at keeping the family and happiness and keeping the family strong. So there should be balance and efficiency.

We notice that the Grand Sheikh has used what we can easily describe as *ṣāmmiyyat al-muḥaqqafin*. He used a mixed variety that features *fuṣḥā* and colloquial on the phonological, syntactic, and morphological levels. The use of the *ellī* relative pronoun, the *bi*-prefix in habitual present, and negation with *ma—f* are all features of educated spoken Arabic. Code-switching was also very obvious: once he wanted to quote or state a principle or a law, he resorted to *fuṣḥā* consistently. The *fuṣḥā* parts are underlined.

Here, the topic is religious, and the audience ranges in their education backgrounds. There is no doubt that the sheikh knows *fuṣḥā* and is capable of conversing in it. The topic naturally lends itself to the use of a *fuṣḥā* variety. The audience would feel comfortable if he decided to speak in a *fuṣḥā* form. However, he decides to use an elevated form of colloquial, possibly in order to appeal more to the public and to be able to reach them more effectively.

On the Dispute between Sunni and Shīʿa

wa kuntu katabtu maqālat-an f-il-ḍahrām qult fiha ḍannahum yakādūn la yaṣtabirūn ḍellā xamsa min al-ṣaḥāba fa radd ḍalayya ḍaḥad ḍaḍimmat al-ḥīṣa wa qāl lā ḍehna xamsa faqaṭ? tisṣa . . . ḍultilu tayyeb xalās tisṣa.

hab?a ?a?ūl tamanya, tes?a ba?d keda. al-?ahāba meyya wa-rba?itā?ar ?alf, al-wārid lanā bi-?asmā?uhum tes?at ?ālāf wa xamseme?a . . . wa xumsuma?a. wal-ruwāh: ?alf wa sab?eme?a wa tes?īn. Fa al-ruwāh dōl laysa fīhum munāfiq wa laysa fīhum maqdūh fīh. al-ruwāh dōl xulla?. ?enta . . . tes?a? tab ?afra tab meyya tab w-al-baqī? Fīh ?azma huna. Waheya sabb al-?ahāba. ?al-?amr aθ-θālīθ: al-tuqya, wahum biḏālīka yastahillūn al-kaḏīb. Wa laqad ?axaḏat al-?ixwān al-?irhābiyya hāḏīhi al-xa?la minhom. ?annahum yakḏībūn lillāh. ?ibādatan lillāh. la?an-nana lasnā menhom fa lābudda ?ann yuxfū ḥattā ya?īlu ?ilā al-ḥukm, fa ?istahallu al-kaḏība w-alyu?adubillah ta?ālā.

I wrote an article in *al-Ahram* newspaper where I said that they barely consider and acknowledge five of the Şahāba [Companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him]. One of the Shī?a imams replied saying not five but nine. I said okay nine, I will say eight or nine afterwards. The Şahāba are 114,000. What was reported and delivered to us with names are 9,500. The Ruwāh [narrators] are 1,790. The Ruwāh are not hypocrites and cannot be doubted. You are saying nine?! Even if 10, or 100? What about the rest? There is a crisis here. That is insulting the Şahāba. The third issue is that they are enjoying lying and making it allowed. The Muslim Brotherhood adopted this same trait from them. They lie as if it is a worship. Because we are not from them and not affiliated or belonging to them so they must disappear to reach power, so they allowed lying.

By contrast, we see that the sheikh has adhered in the majority of this discourse to classical and MSA. The used of colloquial is found on a very small scale, basically in saying the numbers and in joking with his students. The colloquial parts are underlined.

On Types of Marriage Contracts

el-sett sawsan betes?al ?ala el-zawāg el-?urfī. el-zawāg lama egtama?na fi magma? al-buḥūθ al-?islāmiyya . . . ?ala ?ayām sayedna raḥimahu-llāh ta?ālā al-?imām al-?akbar al-?ustāḏ al-duktūr muḥammad sayyid ?an?āwī li-l-?inwān dah el-zawāg el-?urfī. wagadna ?enno el-nās ebtadet tesammi zawagāt ke?ira ?addēna menhom tala?īn: zawāg ?abi? el-bu?ta, zawāg el-damm, zawāg ?ellet el-ḥaya, zawāg el-me?yāf,