

FORM AND IDEOLOGY: Arabic Sociolinguistics and Beyond

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■ **Abstract** The aim of this review is to contribute to a dialogue between anthropologists and sociolinguists who work on the Arab world. One of the most distinctive features of the Arab world is that Classical Arabic co-exists with national vernaculars such as Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian, and so on. The first is the language of writing, education, and administration, whereas the latter are the media of oral exchanges, nonprint media, poetry, and plays. The proximity or distance between the “Classical” and the “colloquials,” whether the latter are also “Arabic” or have been so accepting of foreign borrowings that they ceased to be so, whether they are languages or “inferior dialects” are all contentious issues that continue to be debated within the Arab world. In fact, such debates have become inseparable from the central concerns and dilemmas of social and intellectual movements in this century. After providing a broad outline of work in Arabic sociolinguistics, the review moves to the literature on education. Debates on education are intimately linked with larger questions regarding colonialism, nationalism, and modernization. The last part of the review is devoted to anthropological works on the region. The complexities of the sociolinguistic settings in the Arab world provide promising and challenging grounds for contributions to anthropological theory.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this review is to contribute to a dialogue between anthropologists concerned with the Arab world, linguistic anthropologists exploring the relations between form and ideology, and sociolinguists who work on the Arabic language. A number of anthropological studies have made significant contributions to our understanding of the relations between language, culture, and politics in the Arab world. However, on the whole, the many implications of the language situations have not been systematically pursued. As such, a series of basic and important questions remains unposed.

Geertz (1968, 1973) argued expressly for a semiotic approach to the interpretation of cultures. But his work on Moroccan culture is surprisingly silent about the role of language in the possibilities of interpretation and thick description. With a very different approach, Gellner (1969, 1981) discusses Muslim societies and their political structures, nationalism, and modernity, but again there is no exploration of the implications of the fact that Islam and Classical Arabic are mutually constitutive, that the latter is also the language of the state in the Arab world, or that language plays a central and complex role in different kinds of nationalisms within the region (Khalidi et al 1991, Suleiman 1994). Said (1978) gave a famously devastating critique of Orientalist scholarship and its exclusively textual approach to the "Orient." The influence of that work on the anthropology of the Arab world seems to have been an unwitting reinforcement of the field's overwhelming focus on small, tribal communities whose members apparently never read, write, perform religious rituals, or acquire posts in the civil service (Shyrock 1997:51). From Said's work, we understand far better the relationships between colonialism, Orientalism, and the texts out of which local communities were fashioned. But we understand less about how elite and nonelite Arabs view and contest the relationships between their communities and the texts that are, in ways yet to be satisfactorily defined, a part of their past and present.

With the aim of a dialogue in mind, this is a critical rather than an exhaustive review. In order to articulate some of the ways in which language is centrally involved in the histories, cultures, and politics of the region, I use a number of review essays to select questions and critiques that are central both to cultural anthropology as a whole and to the anthropology of the region. The review begins with a brief section on the major kind of research that preceded sociolinguistic work. From there it moves to Arabic sociolinguistics, and then to research on education. The literature on education allows discussion of a number of topics of interest to anthropologists, such as ideology, nationalism, and modernity. Having provided a broad outline of sociolinguistic works, I then turn to a number of anthropological critiques of research on the Arab world. Although broadly defined, all research that examines language in its sociocultural context can be categorized as either "sociolinguistics" or "linguistic anthropology," terms that in the North American academy are generally distinguished from each other; linguistic anthropologists carry out ethnographies (Gumperz & Hymes 1972), whereas sociolinguists rely on tape-recorded interviews, quantitative techniques, and anecdotal observations (Labov 1972). A brief general background section is provided below to facilitate following the various discussions and controversies presented.

What has come to be known as "Arabic sociolinguistics" emerged in the mid-1970s. It arose as a consequence of the pioneering works of Weinreich and Labov, which inaugurated quantitative sociolinguistics (Labov 1966). In 1959, a number of works by Charles Ferguson (see Ferguson 1996; 1997a,b) had launched a surge of research on Arabic, particularly after his controversial article on "diglossia" (see Ferguson 1996). Both frameworks fall under the term sociolinguistics and both led to a series of new and productive questions. We review each in some detail.

One of the most distinctive features of the Arab world is that Classical Arabic coexists with such national vernaculars as Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian, and so on. The first is the language of writing, education, and administration, while the latter are the media of oral exchanges, nonprint media, poetry, and plays. In certain respects, the differences between Classical Arabic and any of the national vernaculars parallel those between standard, written varieties and their spoken counterparts. However, the linguistic distance between Classical and nonclassical Arabic varieties is far greater, particularly on the syntactic and morphological levels (see section on Dialectology). But beyond linguistic facts the proximity or distance between the Classical and the colloquials, the question of whether the latter are also Arabic or have been so accepting of foreign borrowings that they ceased to be so, of whether they are languages or “inferior dialects” is a contentious issue that continues to be debated within the Arab world. In fact, such debates have become inseparable from the central concerns and dilemmas of social and intellectual movements in this century. As anxieties about modernization, decolonization, independence, and political pluralism mounted in the course of this century, Classical Arabic came to stand, often simultaneously, as a language incapable of responding to the modern world, as the supreme vehicle for an indigenous and authentic modernity, as an essential ingredient of Arab identity regardless of religion, and as a language that insures a specifically Muslim identity. The nonclassical varieties, likewise, came to be regarded as impediments to “progress” that needed to be overcome “exactly like poverty and disease” (N Mahfouz quoted in Dawwarah 1965:286). They also represent the “real self” (El-Messiri 1978), true symbols of local national culture, and transnationally divisive because unlike Classical Arabic, they differ from country to country. Within the Arab world, there is hardly an intellectual who has not written on “the language question,” and many issues of journals have been devoted to language (e.g. *Al-Fikr Al-Arabi* 1994, No. 75, *Al-Qahira* 1996, No. 163, *Qadaya Fikriyya* 1997 No. 17/18; see also Chejne 1969, Altoma 1970, Gershoni & Jankowski 1986).

Although the term Arabic is used often and unselfconsciously in social scientific writing in English, it refers to Classical Arabic in most studies. This usage, inescapable as it has come to be, has served to simplify an otherwise highly complex and interesting set of sociolinguistic settings. Locally and regionally, Classical Arabic is referred to as *al-lugha al-‘arabiyya al-fusha*, “the eloquent Arabic language,” or for short *fusha* (the “s” and “h” are pronounced separately, i.e. fus-ha), *fasiih*, or *al-lugha al-‘arabiyya*. The national vernaculars (for lack of a better term) are referred to by the cover term ‘ammiyya, “the common,” or by local names such as Egyptian (*masri*), Syrian (*shami*), and so on¹. Within the English-speaking world, they are designated most often as “colloquial Arabic,” whereas

¹The terms ‘*arabiyya* and ‘*ammiyya* both begin with a pharyngeal spirant. The transliteration used in this article represents this sound with a single apostrophe. However, in order to make the reading of Arabic terms easier, the transliteration is broad and does not show phonemic distinction—for example, those between emphatic and nonemphatic sounds.

the terms Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic are used sometimes interchangeably and sometimes as representing two distinct varieties (see below). Because there are no terms in Arabic that would translate into “modern standard Arabic,” I use the term Classical Arabic as the traditionally accepted translation of *fusha*. If we define “mother tongue” as a language that is learned at home without instruction, there is no community of native speakers of Classical Arabic. At the same time, it is the language of Islam, of the state, and of pan-Arab nationalism, and it is explicitly foregrounded as a central marker of “Arab” identity.

DIALECTOLOGY: The Study of Spoken Arabic

Roughly from the 1880s to the 1950s, most work on the Arabic language (as opposed to Arabic literature) was dialectological (Bakalla 1983, Eiseles 1987, McCarus 1987)². Dialectological works were carried out by linguists, missionaries, and colonial officers. Thanks to this sizable body of research, we have some understanding of the past(s) of non-Classical Arabic varieties (Spitta 1880, Cantineau 1934, Mitchell 1956, Blanc 1964). In one fundamental respect dialectologists were different from the stereotype of Orientalists: Their approach to the locals they studied was not a textual one. It could not be textual because what they were interested in—the spoken languages—was largely unwritten. Unlike the Orientalists’ preoccupation with antiquated forms of Classical Arabic, dialectologists were mainly concerned with writing grammars of the spoken languages. At the same time, they were proficient in Classical Arabic and published comparisons of the latter with the dialects they investigated (Ferguson 1997a, Fleisch 1964). The study of the spoken languages remains largely confined to foreign researchers. Systematic attention to them has been often considered suspect because unlike Classical Arabic, they threaten to divide rather than unite the Arabs (Said 1964, Armbrust 1996; C Ferguson, personal communication). Several grammars of spoken Arabic have been written by Arab linguists for the purposes of teaching foreigners. These textbooks are used in many Western universities and some regional ones, such as the American University in Cairo.

DIGLOSSIA: The Coexistence of Two Languages

In North America, the history and direction of the study of Arabic have been profoundly marked by the publication of Diglossia in 1959 of work by Ferguson (see Ferguson 1996). This brief article turned the gaze of a variety of scholars and launched hundreds of other studies, which continue to the present. Although the

²I have attempted to limit this review in as much as possible to works in English. The literature in other languages is vast. See for example Berque (1981) for works in Arabic, French, and other European languages.

term was first applied in the 1880s to the Greek language situation (Mackey 1993), and then again in the 1930s to Arabic (Marçais 1930, 1931), it was Ferguson's article in 1959 that introduced it to English-speaking readers. He defined diglossia as "a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation" (see Ferguson 1996). The language situations that Ferguson characterized with this definition are reflected in the Arab world, Haiti, Greece, and Switzerland. In each case, there are two coexisting languages for which there are local names. He went on to compare the two in terms of function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, and standardization. There are distinct domains where the use of one or another is deemed appropriate. The "High" language is used for writing, formal occasions, religious sermons, political speeches, literature, and so on. The "Low" is the medium of oral communication, and there is generally some literature in this variety in the genres of epic and poetry. The superposed variety has more "prestige" than the "primary dialect": "In all the defining languages the speakers regard H as superior to L in a number of respects. Sometimes the feeling is so strong that H[igh] alone is regarded as real and L[ow] is reported 'not to exist.' Speakers of Arabic, for example, may say (in L) that so-and-so doesn't know Arabic. This normally means he doesn't know H, although he may be a fluent, effective speaker of L" (Ferguson 1996). The perceived superiority of the superposed variety is sometimes connected to the fact that religious texts are written in that language: "the appearance of a translation of the New Testament in dhimotiki [as opposed to Katharevousa] was the occasion for serious rioting in Greece in 1903" (Ferguson 1996). Ferguson noted a fundamental difference in what he called the "method of acquisition" of each variety: "L is invariably learned by children in what may be regarded as the 'normal' way of learning one's mother tongue... the actual learning of H is chiefly accomplished by the means of formal education, whether this be traditional Qur'anic schools, modern government schools, or private tutors.... The speaker is at home in L to a degree he almost never achieves in H" (Ferguson 1996).

In all these language situations, there is a lengthy tradition of grammatical study for the superposed variety in the form of numerous grammars, dictionaries, manuals of style, and so on. Although the primary dialects lack written grammars and are generally considered to be nonstandard, where they belong to important urban centers, such as Athens or Cairo, they represent a sort of urban standard variety that has prestige and that those outside of such centers must learn for purposes of communication and assimilation. Ferguson's article is marked by a great deal of prescience and acute observation. It encouraged linguists to step back and reflect on how aspects of the sociocultural setting, including the communities'

ideas about norms, can affect the very systems they are trying to describe as well as the changes the systems go through.

Ferguson's article (see Ferguson 1996) proved to be controversial for a variety of reasons and did not receive positive reaction from all quarters—particularly from Arab and non-Arab linguists. Aside from being irritated at his prediction that the standard variety that will develop in the future will be based largely on the primary dialect “with heavy admixture of H vocabulary,” linguists reacted to what they perceived as too dichotomous a framework (Badawi 1973, Badawi & Hinds 1986, Daher 1987). One of the arguments against the diglossic analysis was that a new and distinct variety was emerging among educated Arab speakers—“Educated Spoken Arabic”—which was neither colloquial nor classical (El-Hassan 1977, Mitchell 1986). Others argued that there are different kinds of Classical Arabic with various degrees of simplification and “modernization,” and therefore there are not just two languages. Instead of a dichotomy, many characterized the existence of levels of Classical Arabic as constituting a continuum with colloquial and Classical Arabic on each end (Abuhamdia 1988).

Caton (1991:145) responded to the enduring dispute about the perceived inadequacy of Ferguson's model by pointing out that it was not one of “actual language use” but rather of the metapragmatic norms that prevailed in the speech community (see Ferguson 1991). That is, Ferguson did not offer rules that would account for when and under what conditions one or another of the languages would be chosen by speakers. What he offered was a model of what the community perceives as appropriate usage based on historically and institutionally inculcated norms.

One of the reasons for the unending disputes about whether there is di-, tri-, or quadroglossia (Meiseles 1980) is that in practice, stylistic levels are defined purely on the basis of linguistic data. Whether such levels are in fact perceived by and are meaningful to members of the community, or even a part of it, is a question that has not been pursued. Despite the variety of criticism, from 1960 to the present, studies inspired by Ferguson's work number more than 2900, according to the latest bibliography on the subject (Fernández 1993). This annotated bibliography contains works in several languages on some 175 language situations around the world. The popularity of the concept of diglossia is in part due to Fishman's (1972:92) redefinition of it to include any sociolinguistic setting in which two or more languages, dialects, registers, or “functionally differentiated language varieties of whatever kind” are employed. An earlier bibliography that concentrates more on works in English has 1092 references (Hudson 1992). Both bibliographies offer useful indices according to language and author.

The term diglossia also became a short-hand for a convenient albeit controversial description of Arabic-speaking speech communities. Whether or not scholars found it wanting, most did not pursue detailed field research into the linguistic practices and ideologies of individuals or groups (Kay 1972). A large part of this literature implicitly or explicitly conveys the impression that domains of appropriate usage for either variety never change, touch, or merge, let alone what would be the conditions under which such changes would be possible. Most scholars who

wrote on Arabic in this period were trained as linguists, so their primary interests remained the analysis of various syntactic, morphological, or phonological constructions. It became customary to refer to diglossia at the beginning of an article or book by pointing out the existence of high and low Arabic or Classical and colloquial and then to carry out a linguistic analysis. As such, this research failed to attract the attention of scholars outside linguistics. At the same time, diglossia, or the coexistence of Arabic varieties, however defined, did not attract the attention of anthropologists and therefore no linguistic ethnographies appeared offering a more detailed, complex, and realistic analysis of the language situations. None have appeared to date.

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN LANGUAGE CHANGE

The second moment that occasioned particular interest in the study of Arabic was the general controversy in sociolinguistics on the role of gender in language change (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, Eckert 1999). The variationist paradigm, also referred to as quantitative sociolinguistics, is centrally concerned with understanding the causes of language change. Although languages may change for internal, systemic reasons, stylistic variation has been shown to be a necessary stage in the process of change (Weinreich et al 1968). Along with social class and ethnicity, gender turned out to be intimately involved in the creation of linguistic styles—"different ways of saying the 'same' thing."

Following Labov's study (1966) of New York City, variationist studies of Arabic-speaking speech communities soon appeared (e.g. Schmidt 1974, Royal 1985, Haeri 1991, Abdel-Jawad 1981, Al-Wer 1992, Holes 1987, Al-Muhannadi 1991; for a more detailed review, see Chambers 1995). In line with the prominence of phonology in this framework, styles that were examined were based on phonological differences, for example the relative frequencies with which women and men use pronunciations that belong to the urban vernacular varieties as opposed to Classical Arabic (e.g. *'amar* vs *qamar*, respectively, for "moon"). The study of stylistic variation and change in Arabic and the role of gender in such processes provoked a number of debates on standard varieties, on their relations to class, and on the relationship between linguistic behavior and ideology.

Labov (1982) assessed the results of research in this framework and observed that whereas women in Western speech communities have been found to use standard forms more frequently than men did, studies of Arabic speech communities show the reverse: Women use standard forms (i.e. Classical Arabic) significantly less frequently than men do. Instead, they use nonclassical, urban forms (e.g. Amman, Cairo) in seeming preference. This was an unexpected result. Interpreting the use of standard forms as constitutive of "conservative" ideologies, women in such communities were expected to show linguistic conservatism. It was argued that women in these societies lack access to the standard variety—they operate in the "private" domain—whereas Classical Arabic belongs to the "public" domain

(Abdel-Jawad 1981; Labov 1982, 1990). Therefore they use standard forms less than men do because they do not know them. But in the same studies, comparisons between women and men were made across the same levels of education and therefore “access” could not provide a global explanation for all women (Haeri 1987). Nevertheless, the question of why there should be a difference in this case between men and women remained. The controversy generated by the generalization offered by Labov (1982) forced a series of productive reconsiderations—for example, sociolinguists’ assumptions about standard varieties. Before returning to subsequent writings on the role of gender and language, a brief summary is necessary.

STANDARD VARIETIES AND THEIR SOURCES OF AUTHORITY

In the kinds of speech communities that formed the basis of Labov’s (1982) comparison, the standard variety was identified and defined as the one that is the closest to the speech of the upper classes (Ibrahim 1986). It is this variety that is the medium of education and administration, and knowledge of which is necessary for social mobility. But Classical Arabic as a standard variety only partially fits this description. The prevalence of views that characterize Classical Arabic as the most “correct,” “powerful,” and “beautiful” of languages is inseparable from the fact that it has been the language of the most significant texts of Islamic civilization, including religious, literary, legal, and scientific works (Haeri 1996). Hence, a large part of the authority of Classical Arabic as a standard language is based on the centrality of such texts. Messick (1993) explores some of the bases of this “textual authority.” But the language of these texts does not belong to any social group as their ordinary means of communication, unlike for example, the relationship between written English and the speech of the upper classes.

Furthermore, as Ibrahim pointed out, “there is an important difference between standard Arabic (H[igh]) and standard English. It is possible for an individual to acquire standard English simply by belonging to a particular socioeconomic class.... Social status and mobility in any Arab society, however, are insufficient for the acquisition of the H[igh] language [i.e. Classical Arabic]” (Ibrahim 1986:119). Classical Arabic is not learned simply because one belongs to a particular social class. In fact, often the higher one’s social class, the less likely it is that one will learn it well. Upper class Egyptians, for example, generally attend foreign language schools—these are mostly missionary schools—and although multilingualism is a mark of their class, Classical Arabic is not necessarily one of the languages they learn (Haeri 1996). There are of course members of the upper classes across the Arab world who are proficient in Classical Arabic, but the proficiency cannot be assumed to exist automatically. Many factors contribute to lowering the value of knowledge of Classical Arabic: missionary schools, British and French colonial rule, the integration of the region’s economies (to various degrees) into the world

capitalist market, higher-paying labor markets that demand knowledge of European languages, the mediocre state of public education; cosmopolitan desires, and so on (Haeri 1997). In short, although the emergence and imposition of a standard variety always involves forms of power configured and exercised in different ways, this fact alone does not render them identical.

Returning to the question of the role of gender, the variationist paradigm assumes a direct one-to-one relationship between speakers' (linguistic) behavior and their ideology. But that relationship is complex and many scholars have been trying to unravel its various aspects (Williams 1977, Woolard & Schieffelin 1994, Gal & Irvine 1995). To explain any individual's or group's linguistic behavior, it is not sufficient to find out whether they have access to any given linguistic variety. Given the fact that the symbolic values of Classical and nonclassical Arabic are multiple and contradictory, their use or nonuse is not simply a question of knowledge and access. In addition to a historically informed analysis of women's access, we need some understanding of what Classical Arabic symbolizes for women and men of varied backgrounds.

Haeri (1996) found that although upper class men in Cairo spoke far more about the political importance of Classical Arabic in forging pan-Arab identity, in resisting colonial domination, and as a cultural and political weapon against more recent forms of foreign domination, their actual use of Classical Arabic forms did not match the overt importance they attached to this language. Such characterizations of Classical Arabic were not as readily present in interviews with women, and they also did not use such forms as often as men did. Hence the question of why women use Classical Arabic forms less often than men do cannot be answered without understanding why men have lower frequencies of usage than their expressed ideologies would lead us to expect. We may ask what is at stake for women and men in their use and evaluation of Classical Arabic and its features.

The study of the role of gender in stylistic variation provides fruitful grounds for analyzing the relationship between form and ideology. A distinction between two kinds of forms might prove analytically crucial in disentangling the form-ideology dialectic. At times, linguistic elements that belong to certain linguistic varieties become overt objects of commentary by members of a community as part of larger sociopolitical discourses. Their forms, meanings, and cultural significance are evaluated and debated. This is the case with Classical Arabic and the use of its forms. Clearly, not all linguistic forms used in speaking and writing rise to such attention or become enmeshed in what are largely nonlinguistic debates. The uses of such forms and their relations to ideology might therefore be quite different. Research on the role of gender in Arabic-speaking communities could contribute to social theory by attempting to explain both the "match" and the lack of match between what individuals assert to be the language that fits their cultural, political, and religious ideals, and their actual linguistic production (see Haeri 1996, Ch. 5; Eckert 1999).

So far, too little is known to enable one to explore these issues further. The question of the role of gender awaits further studies of stylistic variation on levels

of linguistic structure other than phonology (Walters 1991). It also awaits ethnographic studies of the multiple social meanings of Classical Arabic and the use of its features by different speakers. Haeri (1994) documented a phonological innovation spearheaded and propagated by women of different ages and social classes and which was largely absent in the speech of men. But one cannot conclude from these kinds of findings that “women” globally are either “innovative” or “conservative” or that they use only what they have access to. Once there are further studies, they need to be integrated into the research that has been done by other social scientists and historians, particularly those whose work on gender also discusses questions of language use. For example, the works of Badran (1995), Malti-Douglas (1991), Kapchan (1996), and Ahmed (1999) not only show the complex and ambivalent values of Classical Arabic for different kinds of women, they also show that the issue of access is not always a result of the confinement of women to the “private” domain. In fact, almost all Arab feminists write in Classical Arabic. Although some of the reasons for this might be obvious, the question is still worth posing, particularly because some have characterized it as a “male language.”

There are a number of works on gender that do not fall within the variationist paradigm (Saada 1970, Trablesi 1991, Eid 1994, Sadiqi 1995). The first two are on Tunisia. Saada makes a number of interesting but anecdotal observations, and Trablesi discovers that the phonology, morphology, and lexicon of younger women and men are closer to each other than to that of “middle-aged women.” Eid examines women’s obituaries in Egypt in the last several decades and finds that they reflect some of the changes in the status of women. Sadiqi (1995:66) provides data on 175 Moroccan women’s views of Moroccan Arabic, Berber, and French.

I review one last sizable body of research on Arabic before turning to our final discussion of anthropological works. Mass education, curricula, contents of textbooks, and particularly choice of language comprise topics Arab scholars have written about, many in English.

IDEOLOGY, EDUCATION, NATIONALISM, AND ARABIZATION

Debates on education subsume the larger debate on the “language question”—which language should be the medium of instruction—and more frequently on whether and how to “modernize” Classical Arabic. Only when state schools as opposed to the traditional Qur’anic ones (*kuttabs*) began to be founded could such a question emerge because the latter largely taught reading, recitation, and memorization of the Qur’an, which is in Classical Arabic. Although French colonial rule attempted to eradicate the *kuttabs* in North Africa, the British used them as quasi state schools and expanded their curricula to include nonreligious subjects (Heyworth-Dunn 1968). The expansion of state-sponsored mass education in this

century (Aroian 1983) led to concerns about the “difficulty” of the grammar and orthography of Classical Arabic. For most Arabs, Classical Arabic had not been a language they had to learn to write in or take exams in, but one that belonged to readings of the Qur’an and their obligatory daily prayers. Little knowledge of its syntax or any of its intricacies, rhetorical styles, genres, and so on, was necessary for such ritual activities. Transforming Classical Arabic into a language for mass education, to make pupils use it actively in writing and reading, was considered a task of monumental magnitude given the differences between it and the spoken languages.

Some have suggested that the very posing of the problem of the “difficulty” of Classical Arabic is a consequence of colonial rule whose (Abu-Lughod 1975) contempt for Arabic came to be shared by some of the local intellectuals. There is no doubt that colonial rule explicitly and implicitly undermined the propagation of Classical Arabic. And discussions with regard to its various “problems,” including the difficulties of its orthography, often show an unabashed admiration for European languages on the part of some intellectuals, particularly those who advocated modifying it or changing it to the Latin alphabet (Musa 1964). Given the fact that most regional governments have failed to invest a sufficient part of their national resources on public education, it remains unclear exactly to what degree the difficulties of Classical Arabic are responsible for the continued low levels of literacy. At the same time, the distance is not a product of colonial contempt (Seckinger 1988, Parkinson 1993). Arab educators and scholars who have written on educational problems have not merely been duped by colonial rule or its legacy into thinking that the differences between the two varieties cause problems for increasing the level of literacy. It would not be, at least in this respect, different from a situation in which Italian children today were faced with classical Latin as their medium of education.

The search for solutions to the various dimensions of choosing Classical Arabic as the medium of education can be summarized under the general headings of Arabization (*ta’riib*), grammatical and orthographic simplification (*tabsiit*), and lexical and syntactic modernization (*tahdith*) (Mathews & Akrawi 1949; Chejne 1969; Altoma 1977; Stetkevych 1970; Abu-Absi 1984; Ibrahim 1983, 1989; Doss 1992, 1996). A very detailed and careful study by Altoma (1970) covers these discussions in several parts of the Arab world in the postwar period 1945–1965. I use his article to provide a background to more recent debates. First, he defines Arabization as “a process aiming at achieving maximum use of Arabic in different Arab countries in oral and written communication. It covers issues ranging from the general question of making Arabic the official language of the state, the language of instruction, to matters related to the preparation of technical and scientific terminology in Arabic. In this broad sense, all Arab countries are faced with one phase or another of Arabization” (Altoma 1970:695). Noting that the speech habits of children at school are based on nonclassical varieties (Iraqi, Syrian, etc), he discusses the many new habits they must internalize in order to learn Classical Arabic—a task also faced by their teachers (Altoma 1970:690–91). As a solution

to this problem, some suggested measures to restrict the study and use of the colloquial so that eventually Classical Arabic would become both the spoken and the written language. As was mentioned earlier, Arabic orthography was thought to present special problems for the reader: It does not indicate short vowels (it does indicate all long vowels), and for every letter there are four possible shapes depending on where it occurs in the word. Several solutions were offered, ranging from adding to and modifying the existing orthography, to switching completely to the Latin alphabet.

But others argued that the problem of orthography cannot be separated from its interconnection with grammar. The Classical Arabic cases (*al-i'raab*) of nominative, accusative, and genitive (and modifications thereof, depending on other phonological and grammatical features) are indicated by short vowels that are represented orthographically as diacritics placed above the last letter of the item that is declined. In most adult texts, particularly if they are not religious texts, such diacritics are not indicated at all (Mahmoud 1979). Reformers argued that it is the case system that poses serious problems to readers because the nonclassical varieties lack such a system. Given great opposition to the suggestion of making the national vernaculars the language of education (Altoma 1970:693, Hussein 1954), some called for "renovating" Classical Arabic in such a way as to bring it closer to the grammar of nonclassical varieties. For example, Musa (1964:143) and Frayha (1955) argued in effect for the writing of sentence structures whose understanding does not depend on the prior mastery of the case system.

But calls for changing Classical Arabic by avoiding older or archaic vocabulary, accepting foreign borrowings, use of shared cognates with the nonclassical varieties, avoidance of some of its syntactic constructions, and so on, proved to be highly contentious. The dilemma of those who viewed this "renovation" as the only solution was how to produce and write a language that was "simpler" and more "modern" but still looked and sounded—was recognized as—Classical Arabic (see below). As a result of several major conferences, great efforts began to be expended on producing and publishing lexicons and dictionaries for various scientific fields, standardizing the terminology across the Arab world, commissioning more up-to-date textbooks, training teachers, and modifying the curricula. There continues to be a great preoccupation with lexical expansion and modernization (El-Mouloudi 1986). Such efforts were undertaken by the Institute for Studies of Arabization, the Permanent Bureau for Arabization under the Arab League, and the various language academies of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt (Hamzaoui 1965, Abu-Absi 1984).

Most of the same debates over educational problems continue to the present (Ibrahim 1983, 1989; Abdul-Aziz 1986; Abu-Absi 1986, 1990; Alrabaa 1986). Many reform proposals submitted to the language academies were either not followed or were implemented briefly and then stopped because of opposition from various sources (Altoma 1970:714, Doss 1992:238). Changing the orthography is no longer a major point of concern. Most agree that there continues to be a great need for more effective teaching material and better teacher-training programs.

That these can go a long way is demonstrated by the fact that the teaching of Classical Arabic to foreigners in programs within and outside the Arab world is generally successful and produces many proficient graduates. As Doss (1992) mentions, Syria is often invoked as the country with maximum success in mass literacy in Classical Arabic, but relevant studies seem to be lacking.

North African (Maghreb) countries joined in the debates on education and language reform after their independence from French colonial rule, although the question of language had also been a part of the anticolonial discourse before independence as well (Grandguillaume 1983, 1991; Bentahila 1983; Ennaji 1988, 1991; Elbiad 1991; Djité 1992; Wagner 1993). Here, Arabization came to mean the replacement of French with Arabic in education, administration, and the media. Grandguillaume (1983) covers Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco and succeeds in conveying the many political and cultural dilemmas faced by North Africans after independence. A valuable longitudinal study of literacy in Morocco by Wagner (1993) reports on the results of 5 years of research in various locations with different populations. Djité (1992) provides a short but very useful chronology of some of the most relevant events in Algeria before and after independence.

She mentions a manifesto published by the Association of the Algerian Muslim Ulemas (clergy) in 1936 denouncing the assimilationist policies of the French in the following terms: "We have searched through the pages of history and in the present, and have come to realize that the Algerian nation has developed like all other nations, and exists as do all other nations. This nation has its own history, illustrated by many great deeds. *She has her linguistic and religious unity.* She has a culture of her own, her own traditions and customs, good and bad, like all other nations. We go on to say that this muslim Algerian nation is not France.... On the contrary, this is a nation totally removed from France, *by her language*, her customs, her ethnic origins, and her religion. This nation does not want assimilation" (see Djité 1992:17–18, emphasis in the original). The natural link that such intellectuals saw between Islam and Classical Arabic created difficulties for their nonreligious counterparts. The latter needed assurances that "Arabic" did not automatically mean "Islam." Perhaps for this reason, when the Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella came to power, he insisted that Arabization was not the same as Islamization (Grandguillaume 1983:184). Whether the use of Classical Arabic implies a de facto "Islamization" deserves in-depth research as the question continues to be debated. Nonreligious nationalists of various persuasions take the position that the language has been "modernized" and in its present forms is very different from the language of Islam and its texts. Grandguillaume (1983:25) characterizes "l'arabe moderne" as the language of a "translated" world, implying that translations from European languages have created a rootless form of Arabic. He believes that this "language" has no "cultural reference" and no community and it is for this reason that against all odds, the proponents of Arabization purposely want to blur the distinction with what is their mother tongue (see below). In English, the use of the term Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is a way of establishing the factual existence of the language that is based on Classical Arabic but also removed from it. In the Arab

world, there is no term that can be translated into MSA but there are hyphenated terms, such as the Arabic of the press, contemporary-classical, and so on, used by some intellectuals (*fusha al-sahaafa* and *fusha al-mu'aasira*, respectively).

“MODERN” TRANSNATIONAL ARABIC: Illusive Communities?

What is at stake in alternately rejecting and asserting the historical relationship between Arabic and Islam? Pan-Arabism emerged as a movement for Arabs of all faiths, with many Christians playing major roles in the articulation and propagation of its aims. Its choice of Classical Arabic represents the hope of some of its adherents (perhaps correct) that the language's embodiment of Islam will eventually fade, the new genres of Arabic derived from it will acquire authority, and where necessary the link between religion and language can continue to be stressed. Within and outside the Arab world, those who insist on the existence of “modern Arabic” as distinct from Classical Arabic generally do so to substantiate their claim that secularism has become a major force within the cultural and political life of at least parts of the region. On the one hand, there exists much writing whose prose does not break the rules of Classical Arabic but does not follow its canonical rhetorical styles, word order, vocabulary, and the like. These kinds of prose attempt not to exemplify the famous saying that in order to read a piece in Classical Arabic correctly, one has to have understood it first. On the other hand, the recognition of MSA by and its reproduction in the lives of different people await research. There are no texts whose use of MSA have been recognized as marking the birth of a language that would rival the religious, cultural, aesthetic, and political significance of the language of the Qur'an. The social reproduction of Classical Arabic for most people outside the reading-writing elite is mainly through their performance of religious rituals, particularly the performance of the daily prayers. Where are the sites of the social reproduction of MSA in their lives? The most obvious answer to this question is the state educational system. Indeed, in Egypt for instance, state institutions (whether under Farouk and the British, Nasser, or Mubarak) have been the major sites of the reproduction of a transformed and renovated Classical Arabic. However, at state schools, children are also told that they are learning Classical Arabic (not MSA), and they spend most hours per week in classes on the grammar and rhetorical styles of Classical Arabic, its literary masterpieces, and religious subjects (Wagner 1993, Starrett 1998). The state therefore faces a number of potential contradictions in reproducing its own official language (Haeri 1997). An ethnography of the public educational systems with a nuanced linguistic orientation would shed much light on these and other questions.

Eickelman (1992:647), an anthropologist who has not only worked on education in Morocco and Oman but has paid attention to some of the sociolinguistic issues involved, believes that “the standardized language of mass higher education encourages new senses of community and affinity.” He speaks of MSA or

“modern formal Arabic” as having contributed to altering the “style and content of authoritative religious discourse” (Eickelman 1992:648). The question is where the authority of this “modern” Arabic comes from and whether and for whom it brings about new senses of community. How is the “modernity” of this kind of Arabic defined and how is it perceived?

Eickelman (1992:647) believes that “with modifications,” Anderson’s (1991) premise that the spread of print technology created new, national communities “can be transposed to many Islamic contexts” (see also Zubaida 1989). A crucial component of Anderson’s argument rests on the fact that the Bible eventually came to be translated and published in the then “humble vernaculars” of Europe. Europeans came to read Christianity’s central text in their own languages. It is certainly the case that print and the spread and variety of mass media in the Arab world have altered linguistic varieties and ideologies, as well as their respective domains of usage. However, unlike in Iran (and Turkey) for example, where the Qur’an came to be translated into Persian and where bilingual editions are ordinary objects to be found in many homes, the Qur’an has never been translated into any of the Arabic vernaculars. Hence, no matter how widely available print versions of the Qur’an have become, they are not read in the local languages. In my own fieldwork in Cairo, Egyptians of diverse backgrounds were not only greatly surprised at the question of whether the Qur’an should be translated, they also gave similar answers as to why that cannot and should not be done. They argued that the form and meaning of the holy book cannot be separated. That is, the form is as important as the meaning and because one cannot translate form, much can be lost in translation. In other words, they do not consider, in this case, the relation between the signifier and the signified as arbitrary. The language of the Qur’an, they explained, is after all the word of God and one must read His word and not some translation of it. Furthermore, they said that as they are “Arabs” and already speak “Arabic,” there is no need for translations. Hence, it remains unclear though desirable to see how Anderson’s thesis can be applied to the Arab world. With respect to language and its relations to religion, nationalism, and “modernity,” there are similarities but also significant differences among “Middle Eastern” countries.

Parkinson (1991) reports on his fieldwork in Cairo where, among other things, he tried to “search” for “modern fusha.” This kind of research is both valuable and rare, and I therefore provide an extensive quote.

There are language columns in Egyptian newspapers and magazines that continually blur the line between classical fusha and modern fusha, on the assumption that any word, form, or structure sanctioned long ago is also fine today. Thus, one common theme of these articles is to take a colloquial word that writers avoid in modern fusha and show that it in fact exists in Classical Arabic and therefore could or should be used today. They do this with wanton disregard for the modern nuances and meanings the word has developed over the intervening centuries, and on the assumption that how modern users feel about a particular word has no bearing on its correctness

or lack thereof in a particular context. Even the Arabic Language Academy, whose mission is to modernize fusha, has published a dictionary recently with an absolutely confusing mixture of archaic, classical, and modern meanings under almost every entry, with no marking whatsoever on which are likely to be understood by modern readers, and which are entirely out of date, *as if the unity of classical and modern fusha was a political imperative to be enforced* (Parkinson 1991:36, emphasis added)

All indications are that that unity, almost regardless of the variety of lexical usages and sentence structures, is in fact a political imperative. Why MSA has little independent authority and what this absence implies has crucial cultural and political implications that remain unexplored. Its unity with Classical Arabic as Djité (1992) and others argue is increasingly manipulated by various groups and particularly by governments to illustrate their commitment to “Islam.” The law of Arabization that was voted by the Popular National Assembly of Algeria in 1990—the strictest such law in the Arab world—required not only the Arabization of administration and of tertiary education (primary and secondary had already undergone Arabization), but also that all imported technology, media, billboards, and road signs be exclusively in Arabic (Djité 1992:15). Although there was “immediate and unequivocal disapproval” of the law of 1990 in Algeria, it stayed in place. Hocine Ait Ahmed, the leader of the Front of the Social Forces, an opposition party that has a large Berber constituency, called it the “wicked law” (Djité 1992:27). Djité argues convincingly that the law was imposed after the electoral victories of Islamists to placate the latter and draw attention away from other crises, such as the high rates of unemployment gripping the country.

Mouhssine (1995) identifies a nationalist, Islamist, and governmental discourse on Arabization in Morocco. King Hassan II argued against an exclusive reliance on (Classical) Arabic for Moroccans: “We are for Arabization. But if that is a task, bilingualism [Arabic/French] is a necessity” (Mouhssine 1995:49, my translation). The nationalist discourse calls for “total Arabization”—meaning the elimination not only of French but also of “local dialects, Berber, or Arab”—and considers there to be a “secret war aimed at Arabic, the language of the Coran” (Mouhssine 1995:47–48, my translation). It is significant and ironic that it is the “nationalist discourse” that includes a call for the elimination of the mother tongue of most Algerians, not the Islamist one. For the latter, Arabization is seen as the primary means to “Islamize” and find an “authentic Islam, a source Islam, purified of the avatars of the Occident and of its modernism” (Mouhssine 1995:51).

ANTHROPOLOGY AND “ARABIC”

A number of anthropologists have criticized the fact that most anthropological work on the Arab world has been carried out in small tribal and rural communities (Abu-Lughod 1989, Gilson 1990, Lindholm 1995). These authors discuss in

some detail why this should be the case and what the politics of scholarship are in the selection of locations, communities, and topics. Urban and at least partly literate communities, some of whose members write and publish a great deal on topics of national and international concern, seem to have proved too complex and perhaps too close to the “self” to study (Abu-Lughod 1989:300). But the choice of tribes or small rural communities does not fully explain why anthropologists have not systematically engaged with language issues. In such communities, there are religious and state schools, and many people perform religious rituals, read the Qur’an, listen to radios and political speeches (Holes 1993, Mazraani 1997), watch television (Palmer 1993), and participate in various ways in political processes. Their use of language is surely tied to their local and national identities. Although Said (1978) is correct in criticizing an exclusively textual approach, Muslims and Arabs, “the people of the Book,” whether “literate” or not conceive of their tradition as a literate and textual one (Messick 1983, Wagner & Lotfi 1983). And “literate” still does mean, though not as much as in the old days, a person who can read the Qur’an.

Of Geertz and his disciples, Ortner (1984:129) says that their “focus on symbols told them *where* to find what they wanted to study” (emphasis added). But why would language in Morocco not be one of those sites? If one can “read” a bazaar as a text (Geertz 1979), why not informants’ oral or written utterances? Bourdieu (1979), who worked in Algeria, went on to write a great deal about the sociology of language in France. His attempt at reconciling semiotic and political economic approaches to language with the aid of the concept of “symbolic capital” may be profitably used for analyses of Arabic (Haeri 1997). But in his work on the Berbers, who generally speak both Berber and Arabic, and who may have some knowledge of Classical Arabic, at least for religious purposes, little is said. What, one wonders, is the significance of the Berber movement (Boukous 1995, Miller 1996) that has as a major demand that Berber be taught at schools? The study of the language situations in the Arab world do not only implicate its Muslim inhabitants. In Egypt, the Bible and prayer books of Copts are also in Classical Arabic. Understanding when the translation took place, by whom, and for what reasons would illuminate in key ways a host of issues with regard to their community and its relationship with the larger Muslim community.

The social, cultural and political implications of the language situations reflect, refract, and are enmeshed in many of the research questions that have concerned anthropologists of the Arab world: religion, ritual, the debate on modernity and tradition, the problems of translation, and ideas about the self including questions of national identity, gender, authority, the state, and so on. Caton’s body of work illustrates particularly well the fruits of integrative attempts between sociolinguistics and anthropology. Caton (1987:78) called for an analysis of power at the intersection of sociolinguistics and political anthropology, and an integration of “indigenous models” (1987:89) for understanding social action. In a number of works (Caton 1986, 1990), he has argued for a reevaluation of the concept of power that would avoid treating it simply as brute force. Disagreements, feuds, competitions

for resources are often settled through persuasion—verbal persuasion. The segmentary model, Caton argues (1987:96), would have to be revised according to the role this manner of exercising power plays in the lives of tribes. In an earlier article (Caton 1986), using greetings in Yemen as semiotic acts, and taking advantage of Ferguson's pioneering article on greetings (Ferguson 1997c), he shows their centrality to the Yemeni concepts of person, honor, and piety. Although Eickelman (1978, 1985) does not examine how Classical Arabic and the cultural and political forces he discusses mutually affect each other, his sensitivity to language issues renders his research on education, mass media, and religious discourses amenable to further research by linguistic anthropologists. (A number of suggestions in this regard were made earlier in the section on education.)

Armbrust (1996), Shyrock (1997), and Starrett (1996, 1998) similarly provide contexts in which questions of language can be pursued with the benefit of their ethnographies on popular culture, nationalism, and education, respectively. Armbrust's discussions of language and modernity in Egypt, through an analysis of contemporary poetry, plays, novels, and movies, are valuable. Armbrust (1996:8) rightly points out that in Egypt the relationship between modernity and nationalism shows itself "most clearly in language." But his conclusion that there are therefore "two national vernaculars" might sweep under the rug the complexity of the variables involved. Classical Arabic has many proponents whose justifications are expressly against any "classicist" desires. As Armbrust argues, Classical Arabic is "deeply valued" but those values are not the same for everyone, nor are they free of ambivalence. We can compare, for example, the views of nonreligious pan-Arab nationalists with followers of the Muslim Brotherhood with regard to this language.

Shyrock's sensitive study of the attempts by a Jordanian tribe to write down their history opens up several areas for further inquiry. After transcribing the tape-recorded genealogies, one wonders whether their eventual publication did not entail a translation into some version of Classical Arabic. Or could the "spoken" history appear in print unchanged? Citing Anderson (1991), Shyrock (1997:326) concludes that "If popular *linguistic* nationalism compelled Hapsburgs, Romanovs, and other European dynasts to adopt nationalism as official policy in the nineteenth century..., the opposite is happening in twentieth century Jordan. Official nationalism, fostered by the Hashemites on behalf of their subjects, is giving birth to popular *genealogical* nationalism." On the one hand, there need not be only one basis for nationalism. On the other, it is difficult to imagine that at least the tribesmen who are, according to Shyrock, university professors, engineers, graduate students, clerks, secretaries, and school teachers (1997:51), stand outside of the history and rhetoric of the relationship between "Arabic" and Arab nationalism, or that they do not have views regarding the language they had to learn in order to acquire those posts.

Starrett (1996) reports on his research on religious literature for children in Egypt. Writing on the "child's encounter" with new texts that attempt to be interactive, simple, and arranged with pictures, he finds that the children are introduced "to the sacred and the written word with simple, accessible vocabulary." The content of the textbooks are designed to have "immediate relevance to the child's

experience, and to involve children in sacred history by linking events of long ago and far away to the familiar world around them” (Starrett 1996:120). Again, the problem of how to keep the word “sacred” while simplifying it is longstanding and far from resolved (Abu-Absi 1990). And no matter how “simple,” the language is not the familiar, everyday language that children speak. If the sacredness of the written word is to be preserved, the nature of its relevance to the child’s experience must be spelled out. Such an analysis seems easier when we consider Classical Arabic in the domain of religion than when this language serves the state and its educational institutions.

Starrett writes (1996:120) that these texts are “read aloud as the teacher corrects mistakes of pronunciation....” In classrooms all over the world, such an activity is ordinary, save for children who come to school not already speaking the national standard. In her recent memoir, Ahmed (1999:243) begins a chapter entitled “On Becoming an Arab” by recounting an anecdote about being corrected in class during her school days in Egypt:

The teacher called on me to read. I started haltingly. She began interrupting me, correcting me, quietly at first but gradually, as I stumbled on, with more and more irritation, leaving her desk now to stand over me and pounce on every mistake I made. She was an irascible woman, and I had not prepared my homework.

“You’re an Arab!” she finally screamed at me. “An Arab! And you don’t know your own language!”

“I’m not an Arab!” I said, suddenly furious myself. “I am Egyptian! And anyway we don’t speak like this!” And I banged my book shut.

The tensions between “Arab” and “Egyptian” identities are crystallized here through the force of the official language of Egypt. Ahmed examines the emergent “Arab” identity in the 1950s in Egypt and finds the use and spread of Classical Arabic (emergent modern Arabic?) and the attendant rhetoric about language to be one of its most salient features. As everywhere else in the world, language is quite clearly involved in questions of identity, ideas about the nation, hierarchy, and authority.

In his article on the anthropology of Islam, Asad (1986) clarifies a number of grand and unexamined assertions about Islam by writers such as Gellner. The conceptual beginning for an anthropology of Islam, he argues, should be a “discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur’an and the Hadith,” and its theoretical beginning should be an “instituted practice ... into which Muslims are inducted as Muslims” (Asad 1986:14–15). One may ask whether, and if so in what ways, it is significant that so many of the instituted practices of Islam must be carried out by believers exclusively in Classical Arabic (Bowen 1989, 1993). Is that part of the discursive tradition of “Islam” and/or an old power struggle with the newly conquered and converted Muslims who spoke different languages? We know so little about the complex ways in which Islam and Classical Arabic have emerged as mutually constitutive. What is the significance of the historical

resistance against translating the Qur'an, and if it is read in another language, why is it not considered as fulfilling the religious obligation of Muslims? As Asad asserts, "orthodoxy" is a "relationship of power" (Asad 1986:15). Is this power—provided in part by means of a sacred language—used to create and maintain local and transnational hierarchies among Muslims? How do matters such as class and gender figure in this relationship of power? During my fieldwork in Cairo in 1995–1996, many Egyptians told me that they must know Classical Arabic because they are Muslims (see also Wagner 1993:19). Why is language so important? Mitchell (1988) rightly wonders why al-Jabarti, the great historian, was so concerned with the grammatical mistakes in the Arabic of the French Proclamation at a moment of great upheaval. As a sociolinguist, I am not as surprised by this as Mitchell, but the question is worth posing. In his discussion on cultural translation, Asad (1993:189–90) speaks of the inequality between Western and "third world languages" such as Arabic. As he argues in this article, the inequality has many important implications. One must add though that the inequality between Classical and non-Classical Arabic and between the latter and minority languages also has profound political and cultural implications for the region that deserve attention (Asfaruddin 1997, Miller 1985, Akinnaso & Ogunbiyi 1990). These lines of inquiry are in line with Asad's conclusion that "[a]n anthropology of Islam will therefore seek to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation—and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence" (Asad 1986:17). A part of this discursive tradition is the great attention that Muslim scholars have paid to grammar and rhetoric—activities that were not seen as separate from Qur'anic exegesis and that put language in the same conceptual paradigm (Bohas et al 1990, Versteegh 1993, Killean 1984). Hence, an anthropological study of the discursive traditions of Islam should include the many discussions, debates, and writings of Muslim scholars on language.

Abu-Lughod (1989:294) reminds us that an anthropology of Islam "cannot be made to stand for the anthropology of the Arab world ... because not all practices and discourses in Arab societies refer or relate to an Islamic tradition." Equating the "Middle East" with Islam is prevalent, and even sophisticated analyses show the equation. Grandguillaume (1991:47), whose body of work on language in North Africa constitutes a great contribution, offers a number of provocative ideas on the debates on native languages and Arabization—for example his discussion of language as law. However, the discussion suffers from the fact that he conceives of everything that is not "Islamic" in North Africa as "modern," and the latter squarely overlaps with the West: "The presence in the Maghreb of values foreign to the Islamic tradition, a presence likely to induce changes, is not recent. It dates from the beginning of colonization" (Grandguillaume 1991:46). But, surely, North Africa minus its colonial past and its consequences does not equal "Islam." Still, in the study of language in the Arab world, we have yet to disentangle in what ways Islam plays a role in "current practices, meanings, and social contexts" (Abu-Lughod 1989:296) whose pursuit need not stand in opposition to investigations concerned with literacy, texts, and Islam.

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

A number works by scholars with diverse academic backgrounds show great promise for interdisciplinary approaches to the sociolinguistic settings in the Arab world. These are nuanced analyses of the emergence of new genres in Arabic (Cachia 1989, 1990; Somekh 1991; Gully 1993; Doss 1996; Farag Allah 1996; Allen 1997) and of the roles of print culture in its legal, linguistic, and technological aspects in the Arab world (Atiyeh 1995, Eickelman 1995). The recent controversy about Anderson's thesis on print culture among political scientists and historians (Smith 1997, Gershoni & Jankowski 1999) could benefit from anthropological approaches to language. Genre analysis of the kind carried out for other languages (Hanks 1987, Kuipers 1998) could serve as an interdisciplinary site for linguistically informed anthropological analyses (Duranti & Goodwin 1992, Briggs & Bauman 1992). Genres emerge under specific social, cultural, and historical conditions, and they offer ways in which a Bakhtinian approach to the emergence of new genres could deepen our understanding of the Arab world. Future work on print culture can lay the foundations for a social history of Arabic (Versteegh 1997)—research that is badly needed for historically informed linguistic and anthropological analyses (Doss 1993, Al-Qattan 1994, Crozet 1996, Michel 1996, Abou Ghazi 1996). Such studies provide the groundwork for fascinating comparative work between Arabic, Sanskrit (Pollack 1998), Hebrew (Alter 1994), and Greek (Herzfeld 1996). These kinds of research serve as bridges between anthropology, linguistic ethnography, and sociolinguistics.

As this review has tried to indicate, much work remains to be done and linguistic ethnographies will be essential in laying the foundations for future research. Language is involved in a host of questions central to anthropology: social reproduction, modernity, colonialism, religion, governance, inequality, and social change. In order to "bring the region into historical time," as Abu-Lughod (1989) puts it, we cannot continue to pretend that the Arab world is merely made up of tribes, that its cultures are "primarily" nontextual, that its natives are all nonliterate, or that its intellectuals' various critiques of their own situations are merely a result of wool over their eyes left on by colonial legacies. The complexities of the sociolinguistic settings in the Arab world provide promising and challenging grounds for contributions to anthropological theory.

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