

---

# RECENZE

---

**Abdulkafi Albirini: Modern Arabic Sociolinguistics: Diglossia, Variation, Code-switching, Attitudes and Identity. London, New York: Routledge, 2016. xiv+424 pp.**

The linguistic situation in the Arabic-speaking countries is very complex and brings forward many interesting problems to study. In the situation where there are many language varieties, most of them functioning within a limited range in terms of place or social strata, yet still in constant contact, many remarkable phenomena occur. There are regions with strong central governments, where language planning takes place, but also regions where the evolution is rather spontaneous; often, both types of regions can be found within one state. The high style is occupied by Classical Arabic; in daily communication, various types of varieties are used, with clear differences between the urban, rural and Bedouin dialects, with other languages (esp. Berber and Kurdish, but many other small languages, too) present on the scene, as well as the sensible influence of Western languages (esp. French and English). The use of all of these language varieties can overlap. Such a situation is rich in various types of linguistic phenomena that are connected with the functioning of the language in society and its use by particular groups of people, from whatever angle these are defined.

Arabic and sociolinguistics have been together since the early times when sociolinguistics emerged as a branch of research. The famous article defining diglossia by Charles Ferguson (Ferguson 1959) is based on data from Arabic, together with Modern Greek, Swiss German and Haitian Creole, and it is certain that Arabic, with its wealth of various levels of language usage, all of its dialects, styles or registers, represents a linguistic laboratory for the study of such phenomena. On the other hand, variationist studies concerning Arabic started to flourish rather late, and the switch from purely regionally oriented variation (i.e., the study of local dialects of Arabic) can be seen only at about the beginning of the new millennium, when programmatic articles such as the one by Jonathan Owens (Owens 2001) started to appear. In spite of the fact that the studies of Arabic dialectology started rather early, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and that some indications of a different, not only region-oriented approach can be found in the early times (such as the analysis of the confessional group dialects in Baghdad by Haim Blanc (Blanc 1964)), the major impulse for the rise of variation-oriented studies in Arabic came from English-language sociolinguistics, from the students of William Labov and Peter Trudgill. Purely quantitatively, it was those scholars (especially Niloofar Haeri, Hasan Abdel-Jawad and Enam Al-Wer) and their students (with the Essex school holding a prominent position) who contributed most to the start of the new wave of variationist studies in Arabic. The French school of sociolinguistics also had a strong influence, with the prominent scholars Dominique Caubet and Catherine Miller, and significant impulses came from other places and scholars, too. At the same time, a major improvement can be observed both in the quality of data acquisition for the studies as

well as in the methodology implementation in the analyses. The focus on methodology can also be seen in general overviews (e.g. Al-Wer 2013).

On the other hand, the above-mentioned stream of research is focused primarily on linguistics, especially language variation and change, and questions of societal functioning are not of primary interest. In this sense, the present book offers a rather wide palette of topics that touch upon the functioning of the language in society and the speakers' attitude to the varieties used in their environment. It should be also noted that in this sense, the book can be considered the first complex introduction to Arabic sociolinguistics.

The book consists of nine chapters, eight of them analytical, and a rich appendix. Following the Introduction, the second chapter deals with Arabic varieties and diglossia, providing a thorough analysis of the linguistic situation in the Arabic world. This chapter is also used for the taxonomy of the most common concepts connected with Arabic, such as the relationship between Standard and Colloquial Arabic as well as their varieties, the problems of diglossia, polyglossia or contiglossia, the questions connected with the problem of the existence or non-existence of native speakers of Standard Arabic (a high style variety), and the questions of language prestige and cohabitation with other languages prominent in the Arab world, such as Berber, Kurdish, English and French. The third chapter deals with methodological considerations, where the basic issues connected with carrying out research are discussed. The fourth chapter deals with language attitudes in the Arab context in connection to phenomena such as language standardization, diglossia, Arabicization or code-switching, as well as the dynamics of these attitudes. In this chapter, we also find a case study on language behavior based on research on Egyptian, Jordanian, Moroccan, and Saudi college students using a questionnaire (available in the appendix). The fifth chapter considers social identity and its relationship to language. After a short historical sketch, the author addresses the interplay of various types of identities present in the Arab world, such as national and/or regional vs. pan-Arab identities, ethnic and religious identities and their projection into language attitudes. A case study on identity sentiment in several Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia) is presented there as well. In the sixth chapter we find issues connected to language variation and change, where regional varieties, as well as the processes of koineization and contact forms (pidgins and creoles) and the relationship to various social variables, such as gender, education, ethnicity and religion, but also to time and locality, are addressed. The seventh chapter deals with code-switching, starting with its typology (code-switching, code-mixing, style shifting, borrowing) and bringing a brief overview of the theoretical aspects to the Arab context, studying the code-switching between Arabic and Western languages (French, English) as well as the problems of the changes between the standard and colloquial styles. A short remark on the relationship between code-switching and diglossia, attitudes and identity can be also found here. In the eighth chapter, the author addresses the language in connection with the digital media and changes in the usage and prestige of various language varieties, especially the relationship between Standard Arabic, Colloquial Arabic, and also English, the language prominent in the new media. The last

chapter is dedicated to the so-called heritage speakers of Arabic, i.e. speakers of Arabic in non-Arab countries, especially in the United States. There, the linguistic situation is completely dissimilar, most of the influences are dramatically different and the use of Arabic is restricted to special environments, such as family and relatives or heritage communities. Finally, we find the general conclusion, where in a rather brief form (slightly more than seven pages) some aspects of the current state-of-affairs, but also possible future trajectories, are explored.

Generally, it is visible that the author is competent and informed in the field, both from the point of view of the methodological issues and the situation in Arabic. The passages are informative and the structure of the chapters is clear and well organized. Each chapter starts with a rather general, theoretical introduction, where the main concepts relevant for the chapter are presented, as well as useful instructions for the data collection, in case of this book especially various types of questionnaires. The literature is up-to-date, the list of references is exhaustive (pages 333–376), and the individual titles are well positioned in the text, which underlines the clear organization of the book.

The author approaches the linguistic situation without prior judgments, and the language varieties are equal in his analyses, including the position of Standard Arabic. In Arabic Studies, this is not to be taken for granted, although the situation has improved greatly, and the prominence given to the classical language both by the Arab and Muslim authors, where the prestige of the language of the Quran is understandable, and by Arabic and Semitic language scholars, who tended (and some of them still do) to ascribe a special status to Classical Arabic. The author's attitude is free from such prejudices, which can be seen as an advantage not only in the classical sociolinguistics topics, but also in the chapters on the non-Arabic languages in the region (esp. Berber and Kurdish), in the study of language attitudes, and the styles in digital media language. It is also obvious that the author is fluent in Arabic, mastering various styles, ranging from Standard Arabic to several dialects.

In some individual parts, especially those where the author offers an exposé on various topics, there is certainly room for discussion. In some passages of this type, the author sometimes presents an overview (usually well-informed) of the approaches taken in the studies of the topic, and his own opinion does not always take on a clear shape. For example, in the discussion of koineization (p. 180–181), it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the views of the author from those of the quoted works, and the necessary stylistic levelling of high and low forms is not completely clear from the passages. This primarily concerns the overview of the 1959 study by I. Anis on the relationship between Classical Arabic, the dialects and the pre-Islamic koiné, where some passages could be interpreted as connecting the urban dialects of that time (especially the one in Mecca) with the koiné used in poetic and ritual language. It is true that Mecca had its own dialect and was an important center of life at that time in the Arabian Peninsula and that this dialect had its influence on the ritual koiné, but the role of this dialect in the formation of Classical Arabic seems exaggerated in these parts of the book. It was not only Mecca and its dialect, but also Medina and other cities that started to appear. But at the same time, the emergence of Classical Arabic is a process of the

emergence of a language with high societal status. The main sources must have been the language of the Quran and the poetic and ritual koiné (connected also to the Bedouin speech), where the scope of use was broadened from ritual to official and high-status communication, and dialects did play a role in this respect, but not a decisive one. Such parts are, however, infrequent.

From the point of view of various types of analyses and data collection methods, it can be said that the observations based on phonetics and phonology are not as prominent as in a number of other studies. This may correspond to the system of transcription, in which the author seems to aim at readability by an American or British reader, and where small nuances need not necessarily be recorded. Some minor mistakes can be found, usually in vowel quantity, such as *al-Farahi:di:* (corr. *al-Fara:hi:di:* – a prominent Arab medieval grammarian) or *muḥaḍara:t* (corr. *muḥa:ḍaraat* – ‘lectures’). At some points, it seems that the author displays a slight preference for social aspects over linguistic ones, although this could also be due to the types of topics addressed – this preference is typical, for example, for the chapters on language policy and planning or attitudinal studies.

Concerning the data collection methods, the author seems to rely above all on questionnaires and interviews, while methods closer to ethnographies or anthropological analyses are not as prominent. In this respect, it seems from the text that the author is considered native by the Arabs, which is certainly helpful (but not a given) in creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding without the necessity of playing language games connected to the pragmatics of the situation, which often results in speakers using a language variety reflecting the roles ascribed to the dialogue participants by the speakers, and not a spontaneous one. This type of behavior, the selection of the appropriate linguistic register, is typical for native speakers of Arabic, for their pragmatic abilities are typically very high. As this represents a crucial obstacle for most researchers from non-Arabic speaking communities, this is obviously not the problem of the author of the book; as a result, this issue does not receive very much attention.

The book offers a considerably extensive and informed overview of the situation in Arabic. The language is viewed in its many facets, from the historical point of view to the relationships between Classical Arabic and the dialects, as well as contact with other forms existing in the area, both indigenous (esp. Berber and Kurdish) and foreign (western languages, esp. English and French, whose impact began mainly with colonialism or later with the process of globalization). Contemporary domains of language use, such as digital media, are investigated, and the language of the Arabic minorities in the Western world (esp. the U.S.A.) is explored as well. In comparison with the other types of studies, the focus on the social aspects is also present here, thus the questions of the attitudes towards language varieties, language policy and other types of societal issues are addressed in detail.

The range of interesting problems of Arabic is, however, much wider. Basically, the book focuses mainly on the situation of urban dialects and the traditional Arabic states. Many issues connected with other types of usage of Arabic outside the “prototypical” Arabic states (in this study, typically Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia)

are not in the focus of Albirini's study, and less central topics or regions, such as Kordofanian Arabic or Israel, where there are many native speakers of Arabic, are not covered. At the same time, it should be noted that the inclusion of these areas (and the related problems) could easily result in the doubling of the book's length, and many of these not-so-central areas and problems are currently rather understudied.

All in all, the book is undoubtedly recommendable as a starting point for further research in Arabic sociolinguistics, as it provides an informed examination of the situation in the core Arabic regions, and it can also serve as a manual for students of Arabic and sociolinguistics. It offers an excellent overview of the typical sociolinguistic problems connected with Arabic and its speakers in the typical Arabic states.

## REFERENCES

- AL-WER, E. (2013): Sociolinguistics. In: J. Owens (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 241–263.  
BLANC, H. (1964): *The Communal Dialects of Baghdad*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.  
FERGUSON, C. A. (1959): Diglossia. *Word* 15, 325–340.  
OWENS, J. (2001): Arabic sociolinguistics. *Arabica* 48, 419–469.

Petr Zemánek

*Institute of Comparative Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Charles University  
Celetná 20, 116 42 Prague 1, Czech Republic  
<petr.zemaneck@ff.cuni.cz>*

**Mia Halonen – Pasi Ihalainen – Taina Saarinen (eds.): Language Policies in Finland and Sweden: Interdisciplinary and Multi-sited Comparison. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2015. 266 s.**

Na severu Evropy se sociolingvistické studie v poslední době věnují rychle se proměňující jazykové situaci v multietnické, multikulturní a multilingvní společnosti (z dřívějších prací srov. např. knihu J. Blommaerta et al., 2012, recenzovanou na stránkách tohoto časopisu, viz Fárová – Dlask, 2015). Aktuální publikace sestavená mezioborovým týmem z Univerzity v Jyväskylä se zabývá jazykovými politikami ve Finsku a Švédsku; v podtitulu nese název Interdisciplinární a multilokální komparace, přičemž termín multilokální si autoři vypůjčují ze společenských věd, konkrétně etnologie. V ní nejsou současné výzkumy prováděny pouze v jedné lokalitě, ale záměrně na několika různých místech (ve smyslu sociálním, geografickým aj.). Na základě zkušeností ze zkoumání nadnárodní historie a jazykové politiky hledají autoři knihy odpovědi na otázky, jaké nové možnosti výzkumu se nabízejí nejrůznějším oborům, budou-li vycházet z diskurzu multilokální jazykové politiky, a jak jsou diskurzivně konstruovány jazykové politiky ve Finsku a ve Švédsku a v čem se liší.

Úvodem je třeba vysvětlit, proč je srovnávání jazykových politik právě těchto dvou zemí inspirativní půdou sociolingvistického bádání. Odpověď se – zjednodušeně formu-