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# Introduction to African Arabic: Approaches to Dialectology

Mena B. Lafkioui

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# African Arabic: Approaches to Dialectology

# Trends in Linguistics

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# African Arabic: Approaches to Dialectology

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Mena Lafkioui

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# Introduction

*Mena Lafkioui*

Dialectology considers variation in language to be most commonly based on geographical distribution and its correlated phonological, grammatical and lexical features. There are two approaches to dialectology: synchronic and diachronic ones. Synchronic dialectology studies the synchronic linguistic proximity of geographically contiguous language varieties. Diachronic, or historical, dialectology describes and explains the language evolution and diffusion processes which lead to certain variations in form, meaning and structure by means of sociohistorical reconstructions. As these two approaches are interrelated, no clear-cut distinction can be made between them. Indeed, in variational linguistic research (viz. dialectology), any geographical diversity necessarily refers to temporal diversity (de Saussure 1973 [1916]; Lafkioui 2007). In addition to the horizontal (geographical, synchronic) and vertical (historical, diachronic) dimensions, linguistic variation also involves social diversity and individual diversity. The former – social diversity – includes parameters such as habitat (rural/urban), country of origin or country of immigration, gender, ethnicity, age, social class, educational level and educational type. The latter – individual diversity – partly overlaps with social variation, but also incorporates the ideological and psychohistorical aspects of the individual speakers (Lafkioui 2007, 2011a, Fc).

In the case of African Arabic, it is historical rather than synchronic dialectology which is in need of additional and advanced study. A notable exception is the research conducted in creolistics, which is not only beneficial to dialectological but also to linguistic geographical studies (e.g. Kaye 1985; Miller 2002, 2004; Owens 2001; Versteegh 1993). The present volume aims at filling this gap, at least to a certain extent, by presenting the state-of-the-art in research on African varieties of Arabic. It covers all the major areas of linguistic analysis (i.e. phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicology), and presents in a clear and concise way data and issues from a wide range of less-commonly-quoted languages, with special emphasis on language contact phenomena. It comprises nine closely linked but self-contained chapters. Chapters one to five are mainly devoted to grammar studies (including phonetics and phonology) and examine

theoretical and methodological questions related to African Arabic dialectology. They list some specific case studies of little studied or unstudied languages and language varieties marked by or derived from contact situations. Chapters six to nine address lexicological subjects, providing several unpublished datasets and casting fresh light onto the interface between lexical forms and semantic contents embedded in various socio-historical contexts. The different glossonyms used in this book are left unchanged to the authors' preference (e.g. Nubi = Ki-Nubi; Maghreb(i) Arabic = North African Arabic; Bongor Arabic = *túrku* = *túrgu*), so as to better represent both the diversity and the convergence in viewpoints. The same goes for the selected transcription systems, which reflect different theoretical accounts.

In the first chapter, Stefano Manfredi presents an in-depth sociolinguistic study of the different Arabic varieties attested in Kadugli, the capital city of the Southern Kordofan state in western Sudan. In this emergent multilingual "peripheral" urban centre, in which Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic-speaking ethnic groups from the Nuba Mountains come in contact with each other, the Arabic language has developed linguistic varieties that indicate the different socio-economic statuses of the respective migrant communities. Dialect levelling towards Sudanese Standard Arabic is one of the most observed phenomena in Kadugli: regardless of the retention trend of the phonological reflexes (e.g. *\*ġ* = [q]) produced by the urbanized Baggara Arabic-speaking Bedouins, these locutors are little by little losing the most socially marked morphological and lexical features of their dialect (e.g. feminine as morphological category, genitive exponent *hān*). The city of Kadugli is also interesting for the study of phenomena created by the coexistence of vernacular (L1) and vehicular (L2) varieties of Arabic, such as a high degree of phonological variation due to second language acquisition (e.g. *\*h* = [x, h, k]) among early-urbanized non-Arabic speakers. Compared to second-generation migrants, who are more affected by linguistic normalization, the language practices of the early-urbanized speakers seem to obstruct the surfacing of a local urban *koiné*. Drawing on a quantitative investigation on language uses and language attitudes in Kadugli, the author presents a theoretical framework for the analysis of dialect variation in urban settings, discovering general trends as well as more local issues in Arabic urban sociolinguistics.

Chapter two is dedicated to the investigation of how new negation patterns are engendered in Moroccan Arabic (Oujda region, North East Morocco) by contact with Berber (Tarifit, North Morocco). The several

discussed cases are related to contact-induced innovation processes in Moroccan Arabic negation, through which the morphological data as well as the syntactic structuring and semantic functioning have been transformed by analogy with Berber negation. North African Arabic negation is essentially based on the morphosyntactic opposition between “verbal negation”, having a verbal constituent as the incidence point, and “non-verbal negation”, which concerns different nominal constituents that usually function as a predicate. While the discontinuous marker *ma \_\_\_ š* (*ši/say*) and its optional or conditioned (modality and expressive conditions) variants are used for verbal negation in existential configurations, non-verbal predication is negated by means of the same discontinuous marker in existential contexts as well as by the continuous morpheme *maši \_\_\_* or *muš \_\_\_*, so as to convey semantic values that point to an identification of the referential object, its localization or its attribution to a specific semantic category. Based on her concepts of *basic negation* versus *marked negation*, the author classifies the North African Arabic negation system (especially the Moroccan Arabic one) as asymmetrical on the basis of detailed analyses and accounts of the various obligatory and optional marking procedures. With respect to this negation system, the Moroccan Arabic variety of Oujda has invented a new discontinuous marker, *ma \_\_\_ bu*, of which not only the post-head element is borrowed from Tarifit (morphological analogy) – which is the only Berber language where this morpheme occurs (Lafkioui, 1996, 1999, 2007, 2011a) – but also its combinatorial (structural analogy) and functional properties (functional analogy). The creation of this new hybrid negator *ma \_\_\_ bu* has triggered a restructuring of the negation system of Moroccan Arabic of Oujda on both the morphosyntactic and the semantic level. Additionally, this contribution confirms that the variational development of contact-induced innovations and their diffusion can also be motivated by system-based factors. In other words, it shows how extra-linguistic (contact) and linguistic (formal and functional) parameters interact precisely and, hence, how they can both be responsible for language change and diffusion (Lafkioui, 2009, 2011b).

The third chapter examines the prosodic systems of Juba Arabic, a partially creolized Arabic-based Pidgin mainly spoken in urban areas of Equatoria in Southern Sudan. A contrastive dialectological study between (1) the prosody structure of Juba Arabic based on Shuichiro Nakao’s own fieldwork research with Pāri and Tenet youngsters in Juba – confronted with established Juba Arabic accent descriptions (e.g. Nhial 1975; Nyombe 1986) – and (2) the Nubi prosody structure worked out by Gussenhoven

(2006), suggests that Juba Arabic mainly distinguishes between three independent prosodic systems as a result of profound language contact with Arabic and local languages of Southern Sudan. Furthermore, this contribution proposes to consider the mixed prosodic systems of Juba Arabic as a kind of “split prosody”, defined as one in which “the majority of its words are marked for pitch accent but an important minority are marked for tone” (Good 2004).

Chapter four is devoted to a thorough study of verb grammaticalization in Arabic of North Africa (Maghreb), and more particularly the case of the verb *raʿā*, which originally signifies ‘to see’ and which is currently grammaticalized into an enunciative particle that, together with a pronominal clitic, introduces utterances for temporal, aspectual and modal purposes. Catherine Taine-Cheikh confronts the remarkable variety of patterns and values observed for this morphosyntactic phenomenon throughout the whole dialectical area. Her comparative and explanatory findings are of great interest for studying the history of the Arabic dialects of Africa, as well as for understanding the universal process of grammaticalization in general.

In the fifth and last chapter of the grammar part of this volume, Xavier Luffin gives a detailed description of Bongor Arabic, an Arabic Pidgin/Creole spoken today in Chad, in the city of Bongor (Mayo-Kebi). Even if this variety proves to have various linguistic features in common with Ki-Nubi and Juba Arabic, it also exhibits important differences in phonology, morphology and lexicon. Based on new data recorded in Chad as well as on the former studies about Turku (e.g. Muraz 1930; Tosco and Owens 1993), this chapter aims at determining which features are attributed to the first lexifier(s), Sudanese and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, which were brought to Chad in the 19th century, and whose features relate to the most recent lexifier(s) of which mainly Chadian Colloquial Arabic is relevant.

In chapter six – which is also the first chapter devoted to lexicological topics – Giorgio Banti discusses in some detail the main layers of Semitic loanwords in Northern Somali. The focus is here on identifying and analyzing a number of loanwords and other contact phenomena in Northern Somali, which can be ascribed to three major Semitic language groups against the background of the described historical sceneries: (a) Ancient South Arabian, (b) Arabic, and (c) Southern Ethiosemitic. Banti’s analysis is based on Stein’s (2008, 2012) suggestion that Himyaritic was a

development of Sabaic.<sup>1</sup> Different phonological treatments of a number of Arabic sounds are examined as possible cues of an indirect transmission of some of these sounds through Southern Ethiosemitic, rather than a direct transmission from different Arabic dialects. Besides the more obvious loanwords from Harari, Northern Somali also provides evidence for the existence of several Southern Ethiosemitic loanwords in its core lexicon, such as *maalin* ‘day’ (and *máanta* ‘today’) and *badán* ‘be much, be many’. These data and analyses are preceded by a description of the East Cushitic dialects and languages Northern Somali is part of, i.e. the Somali cluster. Phonological distinctive isoglosses for Northern Somali and its closest relatives are presented with comparative illustrations, as well as the major isogloss that detaches eastern Northern Somali from its other varieties. Additionally, the languages that Northern Somali is now in contact with are described and a reconstruction is provided of the contact situations experienced in the past by the communities living in the areas where Northern Somali is spoken today. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* points to close contacts of the northern coast of present-day Somaliland with the port of Muza in south-eastern Yemen during the 1st century CE, in the area where the Himyarites would emerge as the dominant group in the following centuries. Moreover, this contribution examines the two major avenues through which knowledge of Arabic and of Islam spread to the eastern Horn: (a) the sea route along the northern and eastern coasts, and (b) the inland route of the caravans and medieval towns that connected the ports of Zeyla and Berbera to the Chercher Mountains and the lakes of the Rift Valley. Along this second route, speakers of Northern Somali also had early contacts with mainly Moslem speakers of different varieties of Southern Ethiosemitic languages. Even later, Harar was an important religious, political and commercial centre for many communities of the eastern Horn, among them also those who spoke Northern Somali.

In chapter seven, Lameen Souag investigates the impact of trans-Saharan trade – in particular the importation of slaves from the Sahel (especially across the oases of the Sahara and in some regions even further north) – on the linguistic landscape and the history of the region, a field that remains virtually undocumented despite the existence of significant study material. He provides an overview of sub-Saharan loans across the Maghreb and in doing so seeks to reveal which sub-Saharan African languages have influenced North Africa, and to what extent. His examination indi-

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1. See also Contini (1994) for more information about the origin of Himyaritic and its connection with Ancient South Arabic.

cates that such loans appear to be particularly conspicuous in the area of crop names. Unsurprisingly, these are most numerous in Hassaniya, e.g. *mâru* ‘rice’ (< Wolof) or the many Songhay loans documented in Heath (2004), but are not absent further north: probable cases include the widespread Maghreb Arabic term *kabuya/bkewa*/etc. (and Berber equivalents, e.g. Figuig *tkabiwt*) for ‘pumpkin’ (probably < Hausa); the Libyan Arabic term *gafuli* for ‘sorghum’ (< Kanuri); the Timimoun Berber term *dəmši* for ‘peas’ (< Songhay); the Ghadames Berber term *bârkano* for ‘chilli pepper’ (< Hausa, cf. Lanfry 1973); Tidikelt Arabic *agaşu* ‘gourd’ (< Songhay, via Tuareg); and the widespread *dəmman* ‘sheep breed’, popularly believed to have come from the Sahel (< Kanuri?). In some cases, the sense of the word has changed slightly, illustrating environmental differences between the source and the destination. A more socially restricted environment for sub-Saharan loans, preserving a richer selection of them, is the specific context of Gnaoua brotherhoods, their songs and their Arabic-based argot. This context has received some prior attention, as in Aguadé (2002) or Berjaoui (1997). However, the origin of most of these loans has not yet been pinpointed. The argot material provides a particularly rich source, making it possible to locate riverine Songhay and Bambara sources as well as Hausa; not all the terms have a clear origin, suggesting a greater diversity of sources. The borrowed names of certain musical instruments used by the Gnaoua, in particular the *ganga* drum (< Hausa or Songhay), also fit within this context, yet are different as they are widely known. Another “argotic” usage has so far only been attested in the Timimoun region: in curses and insults, words for body parts of sub-Saharan origin are substituted. Based on the analyzed evidence, the author confirms that the principal sub-Saharan influence on Maghreb Arabic comes from languages of the Sahel. For the most part, each region seems to be primarily influenced by the principal *lingua franca* of the part of the Sahel directly to its south, as might be predicted from the mostly north-south orientation of medieval trans-Saharan trade routes. However, the influence of Hausa at least is more widespread than this generalization would imply, and the distribution of argot terms indicates that, at least in some areas, speakers of many different languages must have mingled – a conclusion confirmed for some parts of the Sahara by first-hand testimonies.

The differences between western (Maghreb) and eastern Arabic dialects are considerable and the problems of mutual understanding are explained mainly by lexical variation, which is the topic under investigation in

chapter eight, illustrated by nineteen maps from the *Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* (Behnstedt and Woidich 2011; vols. I and II). Problems of understanding may result from “false friends”.<sup>2</sup> Some of the lexical differences are explained by semantic change such as extension and particularization, e.g. Classical Arabic *ḥūt* ‘fish, big fish’, but means ‘fish generically’ in Maghreb Arabic, while it stands for ‘whale’ in eastern Arabic. In this lexicological research, Peter Behnstedt postulates that many synonyms of Classical Arabic at the time of their compilation by the lexicographers were regional variants, a suggestion which is backed up by evidence presented in the form of maps exposing the dialectological variation for terms such as ‘threshing place’, ‘yoke’, ‘sesame’ and ‘beehive’. Furthermore, it is shown that some Maghreb Arabic forms refer back to Yemeni dialectal forms. Other lexical particularities of Maghreb Arabic are explained by loans from the Berber substratum, especially strong in Moroccan and Mauritanian Arabic, as exemplified by the designations for ‘key’ and ‘elbow’. However, the origin of some typical Maghreb Arabic forms like *atrūs* for ‘billy-goat’, *sardūk* for ‘cock’ is still obscure. Different Mediterranean languages also play an important role in the formation of the Maghreb Arabic lexicon. Examples are given for older loans from Greek and Latin (e.g. ‘chick’, ‘rabbit’, ‘stork’). In modern times, the lexical impact of the colonial languages such as French, Spanish and Italian is quite high, which is confirmed by the lexical variation map for ‘kitchen’, displaying forms from Italian and French. Other loans are also looked at on the various presented maps. As for loans from Turkish, they are present but less important in Maghreb Arabic than in eastern dialects. This is corroborated by two lexicological maps (‘spoon’ and ‘socks’), on which also loans from Spanish, French, Italian, Berber and Wolof can be found.

The last chapter of this volume deals with an original and lengthy manuscript containing an Arabic-Berber text of the Middle Ages, the *Kitāb al-barbariyya*, also known under the name *Mudawwana* of *Ibn R’anem* or of *Abū Gānim al-Ḥurāsānī*, which provides the first evidence of different phenomena related to language contact between Berber and Arabic in the Middle Ages. The exact date of composition of the text is not known, but the data (including the spelling of [g], transcribed with <ğ> instead of <q>) point to an early period (between the 10th and the 15th century), at least

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2. Some examples of these “false friends” are *xallaṣ* ‘to pay’ in Maghreb Arabic, meaning ‘to finish’ in eastern Arabic dialects; *bisbās* ‘fennel’ in Maghreb Arabic, signifying ‘macis’ in eastern dialects and even ‘hot peppers’ in Yemeni Arabic.



prior to the Hilali invasion or very close to it. In this respect, some remarkable linguistic phenomena can be found in the domain of borrowings. Even at an early stage, the text displays a number of Arabic loanwords in Berber, mainly related to the field of religion, while the language of this document preserves much of the native lexicon. An example showing this contact phenomenon is the following:

f. 2a.21-2b.2: *elferayḍ fell-aney yefreḍ Baba-nney, amm\_uzum, am teẓallit, am az-zakawat, am elḥeḡḡ i w'as-yezemren, am elḡehad eḡḡ\_ebrid en Yuc, am temmert (?) n elmeeruf, am ennehi af elmenker, am eleḥquq en yedaddayen, am eleḥquq en elḡiran, am twalaṭ en yemeslem am tebratt en yir eḡḡid*

‘the obligations God imposed upon us, like fast, prayer, pilgrimage for him who can afford it, the effort on God’s path, the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice, the respect of parents, the respect of neighbours, friendship of Muslims and hostility to evildoers’

In different parts of the manuscript, native and borrowed lexicon is used differently. Vermondo Brugnatelli attributes this to the fact that they were composed at a different time. This is for example the case with the Berber noun *asersur*, corresponding to Arabic *ḥuḡḡa* ‘(divine) proof, argument’ (f.96a, l.12). In the opening part, it is substituted by the loanword *lḥuḡḡet* (f.1a l.1 and *passim*), as this part was most likely composed after the rest of the work. Moreover, in some cases, the phonetic shape of the loanwords refers to particular phonetic and morphological processes in spoken Maghreb Arabic – which was already in the distant past distinct from “Classical Arabic”. The best way to prove this is by looking at the numerals of the second decade: *ṭnāš* <*ṭn’s*> ‘twelve’ (f. 124a, l. 8), *tmeṭac* ‘eighteen’ (f. 62b, l. 15), where it is plain that the the loss of the last part of the numerals and the pharyngalization of the internal *t* (> *ʔ*) is a trace of a dropped ‘*ayin*. The presence of these forms as loanwords in this ancient Berber text demonstrates that these phenomena, considered by Ferguson as belonging to an old “Arabic *koiné*”, had already taken place in early times (Ferguson 1959: 626, Brugnatelli 1982: 43). Borrowed numerals also provide proof for the early appearance of another feature typical of Maghreb Arabic, namely constructions with a particle *n*: *xamṣac n yum* ‘fifteen days’ (f. 42b, l. 3), *ṭnāš en wuḡiyya* ‘twelve ounces’, *ṭnāš en dirham* ‘twelve dirhams’ (f. 57b, l. 16). Sometimes, a borrowing even helps to find the original meaning of Arabic words which were apparently already forgotten or disputed in ancient time. For example, the text contains instances of the word *taklalt* that is borrowed from Arabic *kalāla*, a term that several scholars have attempted to explain (Cilardo 2005). Many of

them point to ‘weakness’ or ‘fatigue’ and to ‘distant relatives’ or ‘collateral relatives’ in the context of heritages. On the basis of cognates in other Semitic languages, it was also proposed to be a kinship term. Brugnatelli’s study confirms some of these analyses as *taklalt/kalāla* is repeatedly explained by the gloss *’aḥ min al-’umma*, that is to say, ‘maternal half-brother’ (e.g. f. 304b, l. 7, 15) in the presented manuscript.

This book brings together leading scholars from around the world who address topics that deal with language contact, the development of Arabic-based Pidgins and Creoles, synchronic language variation and diachronic language reconstruction. Furthermore, it includes the reports on their fieldwork and points out new interesting theoretical and methodological viewpoints on African Arabic dialectology and general dialectology as well as on contact linguistics. Its outcomes offer important insights for all linguistic studies and approaches, and directly connect with other research fields such as sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics and language acquisition.

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