

Contrastive Analysis and Diglossia

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Abstract: *This paper starts by discussing the relation between contrastive analysis and diglossia, attempting to find out whether the colloquial dialects of Arabic have any influence on the learning of English by speakers of those dialects. If it does, then colloquial, as well as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), has to be contrasted to English for pedagogical purposes. So far, most contrastive analysis studies have dealt only with MSA as though colloquial has no influence on learning English.*

Evidence from university students' writing in MSA and English is presented to prove that colloquial does influence these students' learning of MSA and English. The paper concludes that this influence of colloquial is sufficient justification for including the colloquial dialects in Arabic-English contrastive studies, MSA alone being not enough for pedagogical purposes.

The title of this paper expresses the hope that what will be said here about Arabic is also relevant in other diglossic situations, that is, wherever two distinct varieties of the same language are used in the same speech community each for a certain set of situations. The Arabic situation will be briefly described in Section 1 below, and some notes on contrastive analysis (CA) and its application in this situation will be given in an attempt to see which variety of Arabic should be contrasted to English for pedagogical purposes. For this purpose, we will start, in Section 2, by dealing with how colloquial Jordanian affects the learning of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Section 3 presents a few notes on the influence of Arabic, both MSA and colloquial on Arabs' learning English as a foreign language.

1

The Arabic diglossia exhibits two different modern varieties of the same language used side by side, each for a separate set of situations (cf. Ferguson 1959a). Roughly, MSA is associated with written uses and colloquial Arabic with speech, each Arabic-speaking community having its own spoken dialect. This is not to say that MSA is the same all over the Arab world in all aspects. (See, e.g., Mitchell and El-Hassan [1989:63] for an example of how speakers of different dialects of Arabic pronounce the same MSA sentence with different intonations). Nor can a speech community with a given dialect be definitively

defined or delimited, the situation being fuzzy (cf. El-Hassan 1977:113ff.). However, these theoretical assumptions about two varieties can be useful in dealing with the situation.

1.1. A speaker of Arabic is then exposed to MSA and the colloquial dialect spoken in the community s/he lives in. S/he learns colloquial at home in the natural manner of acquiring a mother tongue, but MSA is always there even in one's early years as a young child. Suffice it to know that the majority of television cartoons are mostly in MSA, to name only one favorite children's pastime as an example. However, colloquial remains the medium of an Arab's most basic uses of language in his everyday activities. It is therefore closer to a mother tongue status than MSA, which is more formal and is taught in formal classes (cf. Bakir 2000:229 & Ferguson 1959a:330) very much like a second language. This status is, however, different from that of a second language in one important respect: MSA is socially and culturally claimed to be the 'real', 'pure' tongue (cf. Ferguson 1959b:397), colloquial being only a dialect stigmatically defined as a distorted form of the 'real' thing.

1.2. With these notes in mind, we now turn to contrastive analysis (CA) whose pedagogical applications are hoped to help learners of a foreign language overcome some of the difficulties they encounter in the task of learning their second language (L2). CA is supposed to enable educators to spot areas of difficulty arising from differences between the mother tongue (L1) and L2. The assumption and rationale of CA rely on the psychological hypothesis "that the learning of a task is either facilitated [...] or impeded [...] by the previous learning of another task," to use Sridhar's (1981:211) words. [See also James 1980:11 & James 1981:59] Learners transfer their earlier habits to the new task they are learning. It is the negative effects of this transfer that CA is hoped to counter. When the learner uses a certain rule from L1 in his interlanguage, this reflects his unconscious assumption that this rule is universally applicable, and, hence, s/he applies it as if it were a rule of L2.

1.3. In our case, the task of Arabs learning English as a foreign language (EFL learners) is either facilitated or impeded by their earlier task of learning Arabic. The main question asked by Bakir (2000:229) is "Which of the two forms of Arabic does L1 interference initiate from?" Does that interference come from MSA, from colloquial or from both? It seems natural to assume that both varieties have a share in this interference, since a speaker of Arabic has already gone through two language-learning tasks before he embarks on the task of learning English. However, Bakir (2000:229-230) proposes using colloquial in

the study of interference in those linguistic aspects related to speech, but MSA where writing is involved, for example for purposes of translation since translation is predominantly written.

1.4. CA, therefore, should contrast both forms of Arabic on the one hand with English on the other. Nevertheless, it is the practice of most contrastivists to take MSA as their reference point for Arabic. Bakir (2000:229) reports that in a survey he conducted of a number of CA studies involving Arabic and English "the overwhelming majority of these studies choose [M]SA as the form of Arabic to be contrasted to English." [See also Bakir 2000:231] An example of these studies is Khalil (1996:6) who recognizes the presence of colloquial in an Arabic speaker's repertoire and admits the possibility of interference from this form and, yet, restricts his description to MSA throughout his book.

1.5. A realistic approach to this problem should look at EFL data in the context of Arabic and identify the possible sources of errors keeping in mind that these sources can include MSA as well as colloquial as initiators of transfer. Such an approach has the prerequisite of understanding the structure of colloquial and according it the status that it deserves by recognizing it as the mother tongue of speakers of Arabic. Such a state of affairs has yet to be seen, the usual practice being to shun away from this recognition to avoid antagonizing different socio-religious forces in the society, which see in the colloquial a rival to the 'sacred' language of the tradition. Even academics listening to a paper given at a professional conference that calls for using colloquial to compare to English in this kind of context would at best pretend apathy to avoid the 'guilt' of participating in such an act of giving colloquial a status it does not deserve at the expense of the 'noble' language.

1.6. One question that could be asked here: is the difference between the two varieties of Arabic sufficient to warrant treating each separately from the other? If the learning of MSA can be negatively affected by the previous learning of colloquial, and if errors in the learning of English by Arabs can be traced to MSA and to their spoken dialect, then this is enough reason to deal with both in CA.

2

To look into the first of these two points, forty paragraphs written in MSA by fifty Jordanian second year university students taking an English writing course were inspected for the purpose of identifying errors which could be traced to spoken Jordanian. To encourage the students to do their best, the teacher told them they would be given

extra credit for good performance on this task although this assignment was not part of their course.

2.1. Errors in the use of inflections expressing case were the easiest to spot. Colloquial Jordanian, like all spoken dialects does not show case: the morphological form of a noun is invariant regardless of whether it is subject, object, or in any other syntactic position in the sentence (See Ferguson 1959a:333). In contrast, a noun in MSA can be *marfuu9* 'nominative', *manSuub* 'accusative', or *majruur* 'genitive'. The choice among *tadmiirun*, *tadmiiran*, or *tadmiirin* 'destruction (Nom., Acc., or Gen., respectively) is determined depending on whether the word is subject, object, or prepositional object. In one of the subjects' writing, however, *tadmiirun* (or *tadmiirin*) is used in object position (that is where *tadmiirran* is the correct form). Thirty-five such mistakes were detected in the forty paragraphs under investigation whose average size was 100-110 words. These 35 errors, however, represent only the tip of the iceberg. In the Arabic writing system, as most commonly practiced, *tadmiirun* and *tadmiirin*, for example, look the same, because most short vowels are not represented in writing. As a result, only mistakes involving *tadmiiran* can be detected.

2.2. The use of the wrong preposition is another common type of mistake found in these compositions. Instead of writing *al-ghaDab min 'ulaa'ika*, a student wrote *al-ghaDabu 9ala 'ulaa'ika*, following his colloquial *izza9al 9ala haTHlaak* 'anger with those', the colloquial preposition being *9ala* not *min*. The words *fii 'aqSaa sur9atin* used where MSA *bi-'aqSaa sur9atin* 'with top speed' should have been used is a case of hypercorrection, since both MSA and colloquial use the preposition *b-* in this case, but there are many cases where MSA uses *fii* and colloquial uses *bi-*, e.g., MSA *fii l-bayti* 'at home' for colloquial *bi-lbeet*. The use of *9an* in *daxaluu l-'islaama 9an raghbatin minhum* is colloquial, MSA requiring no preposition in this expression.

2.3. The wrong form of the verb is another type of error. *lam yaziid* rather than *lam yazid* is the use of the indicative mood where the jussive is the grammatical form after *lam* in MSA, colloquial having only one form *yaziid*. The phrase *yi9tabruuh* 'they consider it', the only form in colloquial, is used where MSA *ya9tabiruunahu* in the indicative mood should be used and which contrasts with the subjunctive and jussive *ya9tabiruuhu*. (In written form *ya9tabiruuhu* and *yi9tabruuh* look the same.)

2.4. Phonology is possibly the source of one of the students' misspelling '*ayDan* 'also' as '*ayTHan*. Colloquial Jordanian does not have a /D/

phoneme; where MSA has a /D/ and where it has a /TH/, colloquial has a /TH/. A speaker of Jordanian Arabic has to learn to differentiate between words with /D/ and those with /TH/. Sometimes s/he fails to do that, and the result is 'ayTHan for 'ayDan, or hypercorrecting MSA 'al-9uTHma 'the greater' to 'al-9uDma.

2.5. These are only representative examples of errors committed because of transfer from colloquial into MSA; presenting the whole body of data is beyond the scope of the present paper. Suffice it to say that this type of error is very common in these compositions.

3

The next point to consider is to look into Jordanian EFL learners' writing in English and examine some of the errors they make as a result of transfer from MSA and colloquial. The same students were asked to write a paragraph on a different topic as a home assignment to count as part of the work required for the course. These paragraphs were inspected for interference from Arabic. On each sheet, the errors were circled, and, in the margin, each error was marked 'Ar' if the source of interference is Arabic where MSA and colloquial are similar. The error was marked 'MSA' if MSA is the source. If the source is colloquial, it was marked 'CA'. This simplified the final count.

3.1. The problem I had not anticipated was the difficulty in distinguishing MSA from colloquial as a source of transfer. Out of the 132 errors identified as the result of transfer from Arabic, only ten could be exclusively attributed to MSA interference and twenty to colloquial; the remaining 102 can be the influence of either MSA or colloquial. The latter category of errors was clearly due to transfer from Arabic, but the similarity between the two varieties of Arabic makes it impossible to decide whether an error comes from the influence of one or the other.

3.1.1. An example comes from the syntactic difference between Arabic and English in the use of relative clauses describing indefinite nouns. Whereas Arabic, both standard and colloquial, does not require a relative pronoun in sentences like (1a) and (1b), its absence is ungrammatical in English. It is here that the learner may come up with the erroneous (1c).

- (1) a. hunaaka 'unaasun laa yastaTii9uuna (MSA)
 There people(NOM) NEG can-they(INDICATIVE)
 b. fii naas maa btigdar (Colloquial)
 there people NEG can(INDICATIVE)
 c. *There are people cannot (Error)

3.1.2. A morphosyntactic example is the use of *the competition* where *competition* is the correct choice that is due to the difference between English and Arabic in using the definite article with abstract nouns used generically. Both varieties of Arabic use this definite article (MSA *'al-munaafasah* and colloquial *'il-munaafasih*) where English does not. Another example is adding the plural *s* to an adjective in describing the students' becoming more *confident*s which reflects the learner's thinking of MSA *yuSbiHuuna waathiqiina* ('become-they [INDICATIVE] confident [ACC-PLURAL]') or colloquial *biSiiruu waathqiin* ('become-they [INDICATIVE] confident [PLURAL]').

3.1.3. Phonology is possibly the reason for spelling *sex* as *six*. This spelling error is probably because Arabic, both colloquial and standard, has only one vowel here, namely, the one closer to that in *six*. Arabic speakers, therefore, are likely to confuse *sex* with *six* (cf. 2.4 above).

3.1.4. The use of the wrong preposition (cf. 2.2 above) is very common in these learners' interlanguage. The use of *enjoy in* instead of *enjoy* (without a preposition) reflects the MSA *yatamatta9u bi-* and the colloquial *yitmatta9 b-, bi-* and *b-* being the equivalent of *in* in many contexts. Using *in outside* for *outside* (or *abroad*) is another example where the learner models his interlanguage on the MSA *fi l-xaarij* or the colloquial *b-il-xaarij*. Both MSA *fi* and colloquial *b-* are the equivalent of English *in*.

3.1.5. Omitting the copula is an interesting type of mistake. A student wrote *Terrorism against Islam* when s/he meant *Terrorism is against Islam*. Arabic, both MSA and colloquial, does not show a copula in a sentence like this. However, this is not necessarily the reason for the mistake. Copula deletion has been mentioned in the literature as a universal tendency to simplify linguistic structure and is found in other types of linguistic activities (such as pidgins and creoles) beside EFL interlanguage (Krzyszowski 1981:74). Another student wrote *...more than when girls and boys together*, omitting the copula before *together*, although English, MSA, and colloquial Arabic require a copula in this position. The learner must have opted for "simplification [as] an attempt to adjust the language behavior to the interest of communicative effectiveness," to use Krzyszowski's (1981: 74) words.

3.2. In all these cases, the source of interference can be either MSA or Arabic colloquial. The problem is certainly compounded by the continuous, reciprocal influence of the two varieties on one another (Cf. Ferguson 1959a:330). The amount of give-and-take between the two affects their similarity so much that it is hard at some points to

determine whether an occurring form is appropriate in one or whether it is the result of transfer from the other. That is exactly what was borne out in our data: the vast majority of the errors attributed to Arabic could not be unambiguously referred to one variety rather than the other.

3.3. Still, if our data are to be taken as faithful representation of the situation, colloquial seems to deserve the first position to be contrasted with English for pedagogical purposes. If the 102 errors mentioned above are the result of transfer from either variety of Arabic, then they should not affect our choice of variety one way or the other. The examples that can be exclusively traced back to one but not the other should make the difference. Here colloquial has twice as much influence as MSA has. The influence of MSA is still substantial, but colloquial is more so, and this is quite natural bearing in mind our remark above that colloquial is closer to the status of mother tongue.

4

Having seen that colloquial Arabic does influence Arabic-speaking EFL learners more than does MSA, we propose that colloquial receive appropriate attention in CA studies in the context of teaching English. But MSA should also be considered since its influence is not negligible. However, if the trend to contrast only MSA to English continues, a considerable portion of the task is done. The remaining, undone part of the job would be unfortunate but not disastrous.

The practical approach to this CA task is best accomplished through error analysis. It seems to me that only large-scale teamwork to compile dictionary-like lists of errors can be of use to educators. Contrasting linguistic systems (e.g. phonologies, morphologies, etc.) would be too theoretical. An error a teacher encounters might not fit any of the straitjackets of theory; it can be idiomatic in nature, and it is here (in the idiom arena) that errors abound.

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