

Some Aspects of Language Conservatism in Mazouna Dialect

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Abstract:

Mazouna dialect is a conservative dialect. Despite some phonological and semantic innovations that have occurred in the process of change of the latter, many aspects of conservatism are very noticeable and quickly perceived especially by non-native speakers of the dialect in question. The aim of this paper is to examine some of the lexical items that have resisted to language change and have kept their old forms.

1-Introduction

“Language Variation is subject to changes in time and space. The most obvious factors that trigger off change are the social environment (also referred to as “ecological structure”), population movements, dialect contact and ecolinguistic change. These affect language shift or change, lexical loss, and the emergence of new forms. At the same time, some old forms may resist to change.”

(F. Bouhadiba: 7)

The above quotation summarizes the linguistic phenomenon of language variation and language innovation (language dynamics) that is applied to all languages. Our concern is mainly geared towards the last sentence of the quotation, i.e. “Some old forms may resist to change” since this statement applies particularly to conservative dialects, like Mazouna dialect (Mazouna Spoken Arabic: MZSA).

Indeed, MZSA is par excellence a conservative dialect. Despite some phonological and semantic innovations that have occurred in the process of change of the variety of MZSA, some aspects of conservatism are very noticeable and quickly perceived especially by non-native speakers of the dialect in question.

Consider the following items that are very close to classical Arabic (or educated Arabic as is referred to today), mainly because of the fact that MZSA has not dropped the sound (dh) (th) and (dj) which are still present in a few Algerian dialects such as Mascara dialect.

The following symbols are used below:

1-MZSA words wit (dh) sound:

bidh	eggs	dhfer	the nail
byedh	white	dhraE	the arm
dhrab	he hit	dhiyaq	tight
dhrari	children	Hamadh	sour
dheben	flies	andhEar	he understood the
			lesson (he will never repeat the mistake)
Edham	a bone		
dhEif	weak	dhan	he thought
amdharba	a thin mattress	udhen	ear

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mardh	illness	dhif	guest
edhhar	the back	dhar	pain (or he did harm)
dhfar	nail		
dhHak	he laughed	dhaq	he tasted

2. MZSA words with (th) sound:

thum	garlic
theldj	snow
thaEleb	fox
thlatha	three
thgil	heavy

3. MZSA words with (dj)

djat	she came
djadja	a hen
djnen	a garden
djiEan	hungry

As already mentioned, a considerable number of words in MZSA have kept their old form. The following is a list of MZSA words that are still in use today despite the community mobility and the contact with other dialects, namely those spoken by people who came from many places of the west and the centre of Algeria especially during the last two decades or so.

Tifur	a low table	elmendjur	road
ghurfa	a room upstairs	erumiya	a variety of courgette
dar	a room (not a house)	fegus	melon
kawaba	courgette	aruda	a wheel
felfel	pepper	leluch	flowers
Taaga	window	flifla	capsicum
Sur	wall	atchiret	the girls
bechmaq	mules	luqEa	a meal
Saka	handbag	tematech	tomato
dhrari	children	elxasna	a wardrobe

mahazma	a belt	kebtcha	a ladle
tchebtcheq	a pot	qub	a pail
tandjra	a sauce pot	metwali	near
elfrech	bedding		
atawa	a pan		
elwsada	a pillow		
emreg	he went out	Ebaya	a dress

The followings are words and expressions that have almost totally disappeared from MZSA:

maEdjun	jam	semblia	a scarf
hayek	a veil	darbuz	a balcony
swarda	money	qulzu	on the edge
(about to fall)			
farah edhu	turn off the light	samar elbeb	lock the door
lelech	to blossom	atena	wait a minute
esbar	wait	elmdaredj	the stairs

These have been replaced respectively with the following new forms:

confitchir, khimar, djelaba, balco, drahem, Eelhafia, tafidhu, belaEelbeb, fteh, qareE, essana, drudj (or scali).

The old expression /mayeswach mizouna/ which means “he is not worth a cent” was replaced with “mayeswach doro” which also means “he is not worth a cent” then by ‘mayeswach basla’ which means “he is not worth an oignon.”

The expression /Samar elbeb/ which has almost completely disappeared from the MZSA repertoire means “lock the door” and not “shut the door”/belaE elbeb/. Notice that in most west Algerian dialects /belaE elbeb/ means both “shut the door” and “lock the door”. One particular expression widely used in MZSA is the expression /habenia/ which means both “O.K.” (I agree) and “and then.”

1-The expression above is used to mean “I agree” as in the following example:

A: manendjmuch gaE eruhu felotu rana bezef Hayet u
Amel eruhu mEa Yassine finaql
B: habenia

Translated into English this means:

A: We cannot all go in our car; we are numerous. Hayat and Amel will go with Yacine by bus.
B: O.K.

2-It is used repeatedly when a person is giving an account of an event that he Witnessed or heard about.For example:

Samir seb Djamilia galelha eEamia redat Elih galetlu kasuul habenia
 dja Eendi yebki gultlu ruh Eliya End emuk enta li dhlamtha.

Translated into English this means

‘Samir insulted Amel and told her “the blind”. She insulted him in return and told him “lazy boy”. He came to me crying. I sent him to his mother telling him “you insulted her first.”’

As far as the lexical innovation is concerned in MZSA, the new forms that were introduced in the linguistic repertoire of Mazouni people are generally words borrowed from classical Arabic. For example one hears:

/enaql/ echacha/ ezilzel/ elmuEalim/ el ard./ elmunawaEat/
 elimtihan/ elHiwar/ eEoTla/ elkism/

These classical Arabic items correspond to the following items of Oran dialect:

/ETruli/ etilifiziu/ezenzla/ achiix/ lard/farieti/ legzama/
 fechTa/Hiwaar/ vacans/ classa/

Another typical feature of MZSA is the ending in /u/ for the masculine. For example, /gulilu/ etaEu/ daru/ drahmu/ which respectively means: tell him, his, his house, his money.

It seems that lexical innovations in MZSA operates especially in some particular fields and situations such as “owning a car” and are often introduced by males. For example, types of cars are referred to as /mbalga/ bunya/kewkawa/merdasa/

Of course, the four items are shared by other western dialects, mainly Oran dialect. The reason for this lexical innovation is partly because Mazouni people always try to acquire a better and newer car to “keep with the Jonnesses”. Men’s daily

speech often revolves around the topic of “cars”. The lexical innovation in the females’ repertoire operates essentially in the fields of fashion in terms of jewelry, and clothing.

Two lexical items have recently joined the Mazouni repertoire: “uala” meaning “voilà” and “yapamoya” meaning “il n’y a pas moyen”. These new items are progressively being shared by the Mazouni community who borrowed them from the French channels.

For example:

1.

A: Raki truHi taqray?

B: Ila

A: elmuEalima machi mliHa oua tghayeb bezef?

B : uala !

2.

A: Sarah u Souad rahum metneyfin

B: Hih maEit neslah binathum u yapamoya.

Throughout this paper, my contention has been to observe and describe some linguistic aspects of the present Mazouna dialect. The latter “can be classified as a rural variety since it fulfills almost all of Cantineau’s criteria. This linguistic conservatism appears particularly at the lexical level where this variety has preserved a great number of its local vocabulary”. 2

Conclusion

In the light of these preliminary observations, one can say that MZSA remains a conservative dialect by excellence despite the fact that it could not resist innovation like any other Algerian dialect. For how long will it remain a conservative dialect is difficult to say.

Notes :

- 1-Bouhadiba, F. « *Some observations of language use and culture in Algeria* », Cahier de Linguistique et de Didactique, p. 7.
2. Boudjahfa, S. “*Aspects of Language use in Mazouna*”, Cahier de Linguistique et de Didactique, p. 52.

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- Bouhadiba Zoulikha, ‘ *Mazouna dialect : a highly idiomatic dialect*’, RML 1, 2002.
- Boudjahfa S. ‘ *Aspects of language use in Mazouna*’, Cahiers de Linguistique et de Didactique, Octobre 1999.