

Aspects of Language Use in Mazouna

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This paper gives an overview of our current work on language use in a rural context (Mazouna), with special reference to the phonological and lexical levels.

In this respect, we shall try to observe one of the most important and productive processes in this rural variety, which is “assimilation”. At the same time, some cases of sound shifts attested in Mazouna are noted. Part of our work is also to survey language variation at the lexical level, followed by an analysis of the most important factors responsible for this change.

We shall confine ourselves to the major structural environments as far as assimilation is concerned. Then, a brief summary of some sound shifts is given.

The process of assimilation is one of the most important factors of phonological change and therefore, of language dynamics. The most prevalent type of assimilation is the assimilation of the definite article {l} across morpheme boundaries. The definite article {l} is assimilated when followed by solar consonants, as in:

/l + dwa /	[ddwa]	medicine
/l + əuum/	[əəu :m]	garlic
/l + ðull/	[ððull]	shame

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The alveolar nasal is realised phonetically as a velar nasal [ŋ] in the environment of a velar or uvular, as in:

/manquul/	[maŋqu:l]	copied (masc. sing)
/ʕanguud/	[ʕæŋgu:d]	a bunch of grapes
/t + n + kwaan/	[təŋkwæ :t]	has been scorched (fem.sing.)

The alveolar nasal /n/ is realized as a labial [m] when followed by labial obstruents:

/ganfuud/	[gəmfu :d]	hedgehog
/kanbuuʃ/	[kəmbu :ʃ]	a turban
/qanbaʕ/	[qambæʕ]	to sit

Other cases of assimilation can be found across word boundaries¹. Some of these are:

- The weakening of /d/ to /t/, as in:

/grad # taabla/	[grɑt t :bla]	he broke a table
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- The weakening of /d/ to /t/, as in:

/baʕad + t/	[bæʕ t æt t]	I went far away
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- The voicing of /t/ to /d/, as in:

/χla t # darwak/	[χlɑ d d r w a k]	he has just arrived
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- The voicing of /t/ to /d/, as in,

¹.See Caubet, D. «Questionnaire proposé par Professeur D. Caubet», Journées d'études en Dialectologie du Magreb –CERBAM, 26 mars - 2 avril 1999, INALCO, Paris. p. 1.

/kriit # daar/ [kriidda:r] I rented a house

A look at the phonological system of Mazouna spoken Arabic indicates that this particular system has preserved phonemes such as /ə/ and /dʒ/. However, we notice some other shifts such as the substitution of the palato-alveolar /ʒ/ by the affricate [dʒ] and the uvular /q/ by the voiced velar stop [g]. In addition, there are other exceptions where the interdental fricative /θ/ is realised [f]. Some examples are given below:

/əamma/	[fəmma]	there
/əaani/	[fæ :ni]	also
/əalʒ/	[fəldʒ]	snow
/əalaaəa/	[flæ :əa]	three

The last two examples are perhaps exceptions, but they have been attested in the corpus under analysis.

The French consonantal sounds [p] and [v], are usually substituted by the corresponding labials / b / and / f /, as in:

/pla :s/	[blɑ :ʒ]	place / space
/vakã :s/	[fakã :s]	holidays

Nonetheless, we have noticed that a number of informants tend to keep the original pronunciation of loan words as in:

/valiz/	[valiza]	a suitcase
/vakã :s/	[vakã :s]	holidays

On the basis of dialect classification (Cantineau 1939) and applying it to the variety of Mazouna, one may say that the dialect under study is a rural variety. However, we have noticed a number of features indicating that Mazouna spoken Arabic is undergoing a process of urbanisation. Age and education level are among the social factors that seem to bring about this change. Another factor is probably the intrusion of the satellite dish.

Mazouna spoken Arabic can be classified as a rural variety since it fulfills almost all of Cantineau's criteria². The analysis of the data shows that this variety is particularly conservative. This linguistic conservatism appears particularly at the lexical level where this variety has preserved a great number of its local vocabulary. For instance, one hears the majority of the informants, no matter their age or their level of education still say : [wəllæ:l] «a pint », [læʕu :d] « perhaps », [wʕæɫ] « a bird » instead of their urban equivalents [ʕurra :f], [bælə :k], [za:wəʕ], respectively. Other similar examples are given at the end of this article. At the same time, a number of cases of classicism where the pattern in some items is kept as the source language, Classical Arabic is also noted. Examples:

[ʕari :ʕa]	religious law	[nafaqa]	alimony
[qism]	classroom	[ħiwa :r]	a discussion

Generally, these cases of classicism appear in specific registers, such as: religion, judiciary affairs, education and politics.

². See Cantineau, J « Remarques sur les Parlers de Sédentaire Syro-lybano-palestiniens », Bulletin de la Société Linguistique de Paris. Pp. 40.80-88 (1939).

The data collection shows a slight change at the lexical level. A number of new items appear in this variety, both from urban and foreign origins. These changes are probably due to dialect contact as well as to social factors such as age and education. However, the impact of the satellite dish is also responsible for change and variation. In fact, during the last two decades, the satellite dish has gained great importance in the daily life of the people of Mazouna. Nowadays, one can find at least one satellite dish in almost every home. Nevertheless, this invention has a different impact on this variety than on other varieties because of the linguistic conservatism mentioned earlier. People living in urban areas prefer French channels (TF1, M6, Canal+, etc.). This fact may explain the influence of French on their speech production. On the contrary, speakers of rural areas prefer to watch Arab channels (Nile TV, MBC, Dubai, etc.). These channels use a variety of Arabic that is relatively closer to Classical Arabic more than any other form. The permanent audio-visual contact with Arab channels allows speakers of Mazouna Spoken Arabic to acquire and add new vocabulary to their lexical repertoire, such as [ħiwa:r] «a discussion», [raʔi:s] «a president », [bɑʦɑl] «a hero». This may explain why arabisation is more accepted in rural areas than in urban ones.

As mentioned above, dialect contact is one of the reasons of language change. Because of this social factor, the variety of Arabic spoken in Mazouna substitutes a number of its vocabulary words at the expense of their urban counterparts. One hears, for instance, [ʦʔɑ:m] «couscous», [ddrahəm] «money», [bæ:b] «a door» instead of the typical Mazouna forms [mʕæ:ʃ], [ʃwɑ:rda] and [døffa], respectively.

We have tried to show that language is not a static, but a dynamic entity. We observe that although this rural variety

has preserved its most significant features at the lexical level, it has nonetheless undergone some changes which can be attributed either to contact with urban varieties or to the natural process of linguistic change .

The most noticeable feature of conservatism in Mazouna remains the retention of the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ and the emphatic /d/. At the lexical level, vocabulary with Classical Arabic influence (One of the most important Medersas was located in Mazouna) is still in use. Nevertheless, a innovation is observed. The main levels where considerable changes have taken place are the phonological and lexical levels. These are attributed to social factors such as education and age in addition to the incursion of the satellite dish. These innovations may also be related to the influence of the surrounding varieties which penetrate Mazouna through trade and commerce.

Local vocabulary:

/ṭaawa/	a sauce pan
/qubb/	a pail
/fliifla/	capsicum
/kawaba/	zucchini
/madwad/	trough
/ħ̣sa/	he recalled
/kaabṭʂa/	a ladle
/lalluuʂ/	flowers
/ʂaʕṭuuṭ/	peak
/tsagja/	sauce
/maħ̣suub/	that is to say...
/ʕaddam/	he cut himself

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/laʃuud/	perhaps
/naħʃa/, /loqma/	a mouthful

Cases of classicism in Mazouna

/baraʔa/	innocence
/fard/	obligation
/ʃaraf/	honour
/ʃariiʔa/	religious law
/ʔimaan/	faith
/waziir/	a minister
/ʔamaana/	thing entrusted to someone's care

Some French loan words:

/skaali/	stairs
/tijju/	a hose
/dabbiiʃ/	a telegram
/luuki/	a latch
/ʃiifu/	a headscarf
/rimurka/	a trailer
/kaaji/	a copybook

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