

The Perception of Lexical and Spatial Variation

by Young Tuat Arabic Speakers

إدراك التنوع المكاني والمعجمي لدى شباب توات المتحدثين بالعربية

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ملخص

يتمحور المقال حول كيفية استعمال تقنيات البحث الميداني التي وضعها "علم الإدراك الحسي اللساني" (بريستون 1986، 1989 و1996؛ غاريت 2001)، "علم الأحياء الشعبية اللساني" (بينسون 2003)، أو "اللغويات الشعبية" (نيدزيلسكي و بريستون 2000) إلى مجتمع يتسم بازدواجية اللغة، مجتمع توات. ويهدف إلى إظهار أن الأحداث التاريخية تبرر "الخرائط المعرفية" و "إنثوديالكتولوجية" (أور، 2005) للمتكلمين اليوم وخاصة تصورات حدودهم اللغوية، حيث إن للأحداث الماضية تأثير على تصورات الناس العاديين من حدود لغوية الخاصة بهم. وهكذا، فإن التاريخ يؤثر على تشكيل الحدود الجغرافية السياسية وكذلك على تمثيلاتهم المعرفية والخيال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علم الأحياء الشعبية اللسانية-اللهجة التواتية-علم اللهجات-تبدل معجمي- الخرائط المعرفية

Abstract

The present research uses field research techniques developed by 'Perceptual dialectology' (Preston 1986, 1989 and 1996; Garrett 2001), 'Folk dialectology' (Benson 2003), or 'Folk linguistics' (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) to an Arabic diglossic speech community, the Tuat. It aims at showing that historical events justify today's speakers "cognitive maps" and "ethnodialectological" (Auer, 2005) perceptions of their linguistic boundaries, for past happenings affect lay people's perceptions of their own linguistic frontiers. Thus, history impacts on the shaping of geo-political borders as well as on their cognitive representations and imagination.

Keywords: Folk linguistics, Tuat spoken Arabic, dialectology, lexical variation, cognitive maps

1. Introduction

The Tuat society consists of multiple characters. Next to the first inhabitants, the Zenets and the Tuaregs who settled on the area hundreds of years ago, there are pre-Hilalian and Hilalian Arabs. The latter either sought refuge in the desert or conquered its territories during the first centuries of the Muslim conquest of North Africa.

History mirrors past events and helps in understanding why and how language change and variation take place in any given speech community. It is generally accepted that historical happenings account for speakers "cognitive maps" and "ethnodialectological" (Auer, 2005) perceptions of their linguistic boundaries. It is also well known that past and present political events deeply impact on the shaping of geopolitical borders; consequently, they affect the lay people's perceptions of their own linguistic frontiers.

The current study introduces lexical variation as a phenomenon that prevails in an Arabic-speaking diglossic speech community, the Tuat. The superposed High variety (H) is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), while the low varieties (L) are Tuat Spoken Arabic (TA, Touatia), Zenet (Taznatit), and Tamachek (Targui/Tuareg). TA's lexical level is characterized by the existence and use of doublets and by different lexical forms for the same meanings (Ferguson, 1959; Bouhania, 2002). The discrepancy includes items found in the low varieties (L) and not in (H).

In the Tuat, lexical variation illustrates not only the split between H and L, since it is not a standard-with-dialects situation, but it is also noticeable in between the local vernaculars, too. This is mainly due to the presence of a Tamazight substrate, Zenet and Tamachek (Heath, 2002). As such, the Tuat represents a "dialect mixture region" (Benson, 2003) where various language varieties are in contact. Accordingly, linguistic overlaps occur particularly at the lexicon.

The actual research applies the methods and techniques developed by 'Perceptual dialectology' (Preston 1986, 1989 and 1996; Garrett 2001), 'folk dialectology' (Benson 2003), or 'Folk Linguistics' (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) to an Arabic diglossic speech community, the Tuat. The focus is on dialect isoglosses and spatial boundedness which, according to the informants' cognitive

representations and ethnodialectological perceptions, delimit their idioms.

The sample consists of twenty-five (n=25) male and female students from the department of English, University of Adrar, Algeria. The analysis of the `folk-dialectological` hand-drawn maps of the dialects reveal the informants' subjective judgments illustrated by inconsistent language boundaries and transition zones and sharply delimited dialectal areas. It shows that socio-historical factors still play a role in the respondent's representation of geolinguistic boundaries.

In the following lines, a short geographical and historical description of the Tuat is introduced. It provides a general idea about the people and the area where they live.

2. Geographical situation

Since 1974, the Tuat area is administratively referred to as the Wilaya (province/district/department) of Adrar. It is a Saharan district situated in southern Algeria at 1500 kilometres south of Algiers, the capital-city. Adrar is the second widest administrative department in Algeria. Its capital-city, Adrar is located in Timmi district.

Historically, the Tuat splits into Gurara in the north, Tuat in the centre, and Tidikelt in the south. The three areas have always constituted one geographical and historical entity. They also share the same physical and human characteristics.

The geography of the Tuat accounts for the existence of dialect boundaries, for the Sahara decreases the contact between the north and the south of the country¹. Vast desert zones, such as the Tanezroufts, compartmentalise both sedentary and nomad populations, favour the superposition of linguistic limits, and promote the existence of linguistic boundaries.

3. Historical background

The history of the Tuat reports the meeting of different peoples (Arabs, Sudanese, Tuaregs, and Zenets), and religions (Judaism, and Islam) on the same area for centuries (Trimingham 1962; Braudel

¹ Peter Auer (2005) asserts that there is a tight link between geographical space and language variation.

1993). Historical events, such as the changing dynasties and governing centres of the Maghreb have left significant imprints on the society as well. They elucidate the predominance of Arabs over both Berbers (Zenets and Tuaregs) and Sudanese, most particularly after the coming of the Shorfas (the Nobles) from Tafilalt in actual Morocco.

The Tuat was a refuge to the defeated Muslims, such as the Baramika/Barmecids and the Guedoua of Iraq. It was not only a refuge, but also a relay and a sanctuary to the pursued and the conquered people. The Zenets (Iloumen and Ouamanou) settled on the Tuat area around 680 AD; their principal villages were Bouda and Tamentit. In Gurara, TAbit and Timimoun were their main dwellings. (Bouhania, 2012)

The Arabs reached the Tuat in waves. The first faction consisted of the Barmecids and the Guedoua, Meherza, and Khnafsa (10th c. AD) of Iraq. The latter settled in Reggane and Tadmait regions, while the former took Oudghagh in the Tinerkouk as their new homes.

In the second half of the 10th century AD, the Arabs settled on the Tuat at the period when the markets of gold, salt, and slaves shifted from Umayyad Spain to Fatimid Egypt. (Laroui, 1975:123) The fight between Umayyads and Fatimids for the control of the routes and markets of gold engendered mass exodus of Zenets towards the Tuat-Gurara area. As a consequence, the Zenets became sedentary people. (Julien, 1994)

The Bani-Hilal and Bani-Sulaym (12th c. AD), represent the second wave of Arab emigrants. (Laroui, 1975:141) They are at the origin of the Arabicisation of North Africa and the Islamisation of the Zenets. (Julien, 1994:411) The Shorfas (16th c. AD) are the last migrants. Their resettlement took place amid political break ups of Muslim Caliphates and the instability of their leaderships.

3.1 Past Political Splits

During the 12th and mid-13th centuries, a rivalry between the king of Andalusia, Al-Mamun, and the king of Marrakech, Yahiya Ibn Nassir took place. (Julien, 1994:458-459) In the Gurara-Tuat-Tidikelt area, the shift of political allegiance resulted in a separation between Arabs or 'Yahmed', and Zenets or 'Sefyan'. The former took position for the Andalusian king; whereas, the latter supported the king of

Marrakech². Hence, impermeability characterised both their geopolitical and linguistic frontiers. Whole areas, districts and Ksour (traditional villages) were either pro-Yahmed or pro-Sefyan. As an instance, Gurara was pro-Sefyan /Zenet and Tuat pro-Yahmed/Arab. Their respective zones of influence were referred to as Sfayna or Yahmeda. (Trimingham, 1962)

At the linguistic level, allegiance to either side was reflected in the language variety used, Arabic for the pro-Yahmed, Zenet for the pro-Sefyan. The speakers' ethnodialectological representations of dialectal space were structured according to the centre/periphery model, whereby allegiance is for some remote core areas without any determinate outer limits.

That linguistic split is still felt nowadays in the young TA speakers. As it will be shown in the next sections, the impact of the past history of the Tuat is well felt in the speakers' perceptions of their present linguistic boundaries. In particular, it is noticeable in the students' ethnodialectological hand-drawn maps where former political borders cut across actual dialect continua creating language islands.

From another angle, the students' ethnodialectological hand-drawn maps confirm Simmel's theory that space is not a physical phenomenon, it is a mental one (1903, in Auer 2010). Mental representations of space account for the speakers' feelings of proximity or distance vis-a-vis neighbouring areas and peoples. More than that, historical borders are also responsible for the speakers' present ethnodialectological representations of the social groups within and on the other side of the border.

4. Theoretical background

Ferguson (1959) says that in a diglossic speech community, lexical variation is a significant linguistic trait. Its lexical level is one aspect of the split that exists between H/L varieties. The differences are noticeable in the form and use of the various doublets. Sometimes the discrepancy reaches the semantic level where the meanings of original

² De Swaan (2010) asserts that: "A powerful center extends its political, economic and cultural control over the periphery, be it adjacent or overseas, and its language spreads across the new territories" (p:66)

(MSA) words are changed in the L variety to refer to new concepts. It goes further to enclose a number of items found in L and not in the superposed H variety.

In *Dialectology: An Introduction* (1983), W.N. Francis asserts that the lexicon “is the least structured part of the language...” (p:20); it is the level which receives, or borrows, several words from other languages without disturbing the system. He further states that the lexicon is “more susceptible to incidental variation than to systematic” (ibid.). In other words, the lexicon is flexible and can accept new words by sheer necessity without any impact on the language.

In the case of TA, variation is due to the coexistence of Zenet and Tamachek with Arabic on the same region and used by the same people. TA lexical level varies from that of MSA, and characterises the various dialects that compose it. TA, it is worth noting, is a language variety full of Zenet and Tamachek as well as African (Bambara, Fulani, and Hausa) items found in nouns and verbs (Bouhania, 2002). Within the Gurara-Tuat-Tidikelt area, vocabulary differences signal the speaker’s geographical as well as linguistic background. Hence, lexical variation is an identity marker.

5. The Research

The present study uses research methods based on those of “Perceptual dialectology” (Preston, 1989, 1993 and 1996; Niedzielski and Preston 2000 cited in Garrett, 2001:627) or “folk dialectology”³. The sample consists of forty-two (42) second year students from the department of English of the University of Adrar, southern Algeria. However, the number of active participants is twenty-five (25). These last answered the questionnaires and handed hand-drawn maps.

Both male and female TA speakers sketched hand-drawn maps according to their perceptions of the dialect boundaries of their own mother tongues. The questionnaires consist of one simple question: “What are the words that characterise your mother tongue compared to others?” It is important to note that the students are on an equal footing and do not need the presence of a guide to help them participate to the

³ According to Benson, (2003:307) “folk dialectology” is concerned with the beliefs that nonlinguists- “the folk”-have about language variation, factors that can play a critical role in language maintenance and change”.

study. Moreover, the sex of the speaker is not considered as a variable, for the research does not seek any change instigated by women, nor does it look for the effect of gender on the perception of linguistic borders.

The analysis of the results shows that certain non-linguistic (social and historical) factors play a significant role in the final drawing of the “linguistic boundary marker” (Benson, 2003) or dialectological boundaries.

6. TA and Spatial Variation

Under the influence of the Zenet substrate, spatial variation, or dissimilarity within a short geographical distance, is well perceptible. The variation affects the lexical level in a considerable manner. Within the same area, neighbouring Ksour have distinguishable vocabularies; some use Arabic words others use Zenet ones. As a way of illustration, the Ksour of Tilouline and Ikkis (both in Middle-Tuat), south of Adrar, are thirty kilometres far from each other. The difference regarding their local vocabulary can be summed up throughout the following examples:

Tilouline	Ikkis	Gloss
[bQr br a]	[ZQùka]	‘big cauldron’
[marzən]	[ʃba:ra]	‘big sauce vessel’
[dablaʒ]	[sanqù]	‘bracelet’
[maḥbas]	[xa:tam]	‘ring’
[xi zzu]	[zru:di]	‘carrots’
[assafja]	[arradfa]	‘hot soil used for cooking’
[mardu:f]	[mbɑtʃɑn]	‘traditional bread’
[aqar bi ùS]	[za:maʃ]	‘mosque, madrasa’
[t umgaùl]	[xubz əʃʃi:r]	‘traditional barley bread’
[mardu:d]	[bar kuùkas]	‘traditional dish’
[zgæ:g]	[zənga]	‘street’
[manzah]	[lʃa:li]	‘closet, attic’

(Words in bold and italics are either Zenet or African in origin)

6.1 TA Isoglosses

Out of the hand-drawn maps (see Appendix n°1), one can deduce that the informants have divergent views about the linguistic frontiers of their own dialects. The informants' attitudes towards their own mother-tongues are influenced by their society, in particular the parents, the school, the media⁴, culture and history.

The maps reveal three different tendencies. The first is that there are three major dialect boundaries. The second is that there are no real and sharp linguistic boundary markers between the various language varieties of TA. And the third is that the transition zone is not well delimited by the respondents.

6.2 *Major Dialect Boundaries*

There are three major dialectal zones in Tuat-Tidikelt-Gurara. The first split is between the Tuat and Gurara; the second divides the Tuat and the Middle-Tuat (Reggane). The last borderline is between the Middle-Tuat and the Tidikelt (Aoulef) (see Map1: Major Dialect Boundaries of TA).

The linguistic frontier between Tuat and Gurara starts in the village of Sbaa, thirty (30) kilometres to the north of Adrar. The second dialectal boundary, between Tuat and Middle-Tuat, starts in Tamentit, twelve (12) kilometres south of Adrar, and stops in Reggane at one hundred and ten (110) kms to the southeast of Adrar. According to the respondents, the last linguistic boundary is between Reggane and Aoulef in the Tidikelt. Aoulef is situated at two hundred and ten (210) kilometres southeast of Adrar.

6.3 *Minor dialect Boundaries*

The other significant result of the hand-drawn maps is that the informants do not agree about the dialectal limits between Tuat and Gurara Arabic varieties. For some, the boundary is TAbit on the route towards Timimoun, at forty kilometres north of Adrar. For others, the split is Aougrou, which is located at one hundred kilometres north of Adrar and less than ninety kilometres south of Gurara. (See Map2: Minor Dialect Boundaries and Transition Zone of TA)

⁴ Concerning the media, Garrett says; "The media undoubtedly play an important role in the formation and maintenance of attitudes..." (2001:629).

The second minor boundary is that between Tuat and Middle-Tuat. Still, the informants have two contradictory views concerning the dialectal limits. Some students believe that Tamentit splits between the two regions. Others think that Fenoughil, thirty (30) kilometres south of Adrar, is the area where the divide takes place.

The divergence about TA linguistic boundaries reflects the dialectological principle concerning isoglosses whereby “geographical abruptness” (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998:105) does not exist. Additionally, it reveals that variation follows a continuum, and does not know polar extremes.

6.4 TA’s Transition Zone

The transition zone delimits the area where two accents, or more, are used in free variation. We can find different pronunciations between two Ksour or more; we can as well find different lexical items. The following list compares between some MSA lexical items and local ones. The cognates are taken from Deldoul (in Gurara) as this village is situated within the transition zone. The Zenet words of the list are reported in bold characters:

MSA	Deldoul	Gloss
[saħa:b]	[ləmzan]	‘clouds’
[dazi:ʒ]	[hara:ʒ]	‘noise’
[wazh]	[ka:ʃʒa]	‘face’
[ʔulba]	[qɑ:bʒa]	‘box’
[mala:bis]	[ħwa:la]	‘clothes’
[qifl]	[aùf k «r]	‘door lock’
[ħadi:qa]	[aùZd «l]	‘garden’
[tari:q]	[ləmri:ra]	‘the path’
[ʔarɖ]	[nabka]	‘soil’
[xubz]	[t aŒunt]	‘bread’
[ʒafi:r]	[zambu]	‘wheat’
[tafa:m]	[wuSSu]	‘couscous’
[naxla]	[t i zaŒt]	‘palm tree’
[bajɖ]	[i zal t]	‘eggs’
[razul]	[awgi ùd]	‘man’
[ʔimraʔa]	[t anjùut]	‘woman’
[ʔawla:d]	[t af axt]	‘children’
[ʔirfid]	[Saÿÿ □]	‘take’
[kani:f]	[t aqZ «m]	‘toilette’
[ʔistabl]	[asr Qùg]	‘stable’

There are terms which are used in Deldoul Arabic but not in Adrar Arabic:

[lɛfda : m] ‘basis of palm tree branch’,

[saùkl u] ‘corridor’,

[t gaùzza] ‘clay place’,

[lqɑʒri] ‘vessel where couscous is prepared’, l

[qɑnni : t] ‘core of palm tree’, and

[tada : ra] ‘traditional basket made of palm tree leaves’.

7. Interpretation and Conclusion

The effects of the historical and linguistic split that existed between pro-Sefyan and pro-Yahmed are apparent in today’s TA speakers. As mentioned above, the pro-Sefyan were Zenet speakers and the pro-Yahmed were Arabic language users. This is why the young speakers do not agree upon definite language boundaries, since within the transition zones there are areas where Zenet is spoken in one Ksar and Arabic in the next one.

Concerning this kind of linguistic and socio-historical phenomenon, Chambers and Trudgill agree that: “...isoglosses may be thought of as one aspect of the local culture of the region which they delimit, in so far as a distinctive regional speech contributes to a sense of community. Dialectologists have occasionally noted that their isoglosses correlate fairly closely with some other aspect of local culture. In so doing, they have been able to add a linguistic dimension to the social history of that region.” (1998:100)

The transition zone shows that the discrepancy regarding dialectal boundaries is influenced by the fact that Arab and Zenet Ksour are scattered around the area. Both Arabic and Zenet speakers live side by side on these regions. Present-day TA speakers feel that there is a difference of accents between those living within the transition zone and those living on both sides of it. TA speakers bear in mind their socio-cultural differences and, as such, project them both in their use and attitudes towards the various speech forms.

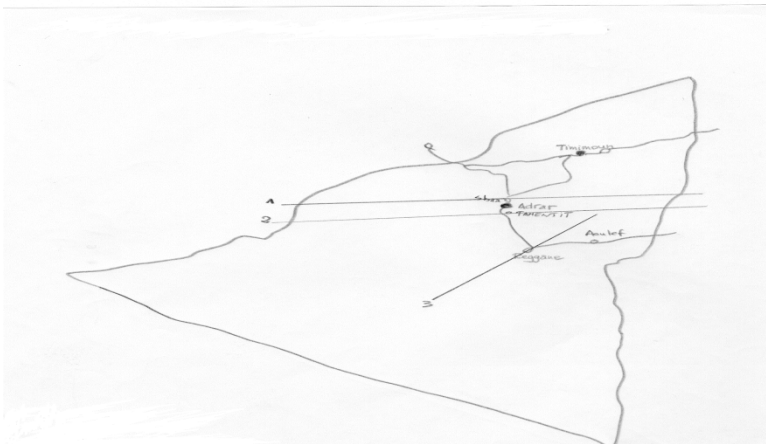
Appendix n°1

Map 1: Major Dialect Boundaries of AZRA

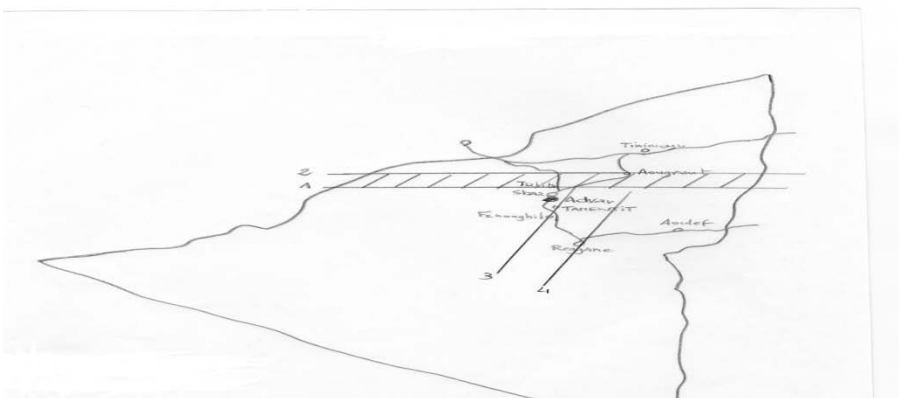
1: Major Split Touat-Gurara

2: Major Split: Touat-Middle Touat

3: Major Split: Middle Touat-Tidikelt



Appendix n°2: TA's minor dialect boundaries and transition zone



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