BOOK REVIEWS

Bassiouny, Reem (ed.). *Arabic and the Media: Linguistic Analyses and Applications*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010.

The present work aims at answering several different questions. At the top, we find if media, here mostly *printed written media and audiovisual media related to information*, influence the development of Arabic? A related subject is if media give rise to new “hybrid language forms”? And, finally, if media, or rather the language of media, conversely, is in fact influenced by Arabic? In order to address these questions as well as “to further our understanding of the mechanism at work in the development of modern Arabic...”, the present work pinpoints a number of crucial issues: one is if the language of newspapers differ from other media? Another, if the language of media is exclusive to MSA? A further issue to be focused on is if media affect language on a more general level? Finally, the present work focuses on how Arabic in media reflects the social and linguistic realities of Arab speaking audiences, and, how our knowledge of the linguistic realities of media in the Arab world contribute to teaching this language variant to foreigners. In short, the contributors aim at covering every aspect of media Arabic.

Without in any way disregarding the great qualities the present work indeed has, as well as the many, in their own right, interesting contributions, it is still burdened by the obstacle to keep the many diverging directions together within the frames of the book. Indeed, most contributions are about media Arabic. Focus is, however, quite different from one author to the other, and, arguably, the common thread is not the most obvious to see. This is, of course, a recurring

problem with collections of this kind. If we, on the other hand, consider each section of the work separately subject harmony is a more dominant feature.

The first section deals with language choice in newspapers. Starting with Jean Aitchison, and she is contradicting the last statement in that she does not deal with Arabic at all, even if she nevertheless presents a kind of introduction to a larger, universal, subject of media language. Her focus is on global similarities of newspaper language in style as well as to objectives that are irrespectively of language. Interesting as her analysis is, this book is no place for it, and, reflects perhaps a general trend in Arab studies to include studies of abstract theories and frames, rather than, indeed frequently without, measurable content, certainly without any Arabic.

What remains from the first section is, on the other hand, very appropriate. Both Zeinab Ibrahim and Dilworth Parkison deal with related areas of Arabic media language. While using a small corpus Ibrahim nevertheless is able to present some interesting indications. Among these is that Egyptian colloquial is in varying degree, among opposition newspapers, appearing in the place of some variant of MSA. Even as the advancement of Egyptian colloquial as a language variant in media language has been observable for some time, the present article is interesting as it underpins arguments for code-switching in media with small, but informative statistics. Parkinson, with the last contribution in this section, that previously, among other things, has taken an interest in if media language is primarily to be considered of word order VSO or SVO, now writes on local variations of MSA in media. The fact of these variations, formerly established also by Van Mol in a corpus of radio broadcasts in different Arab states, is almost revolutionary, as it presents an embryo to a possible future appearance of distinctly separated (MSA) Arab languages. The scope of this article is limited to the use of lexical items only in Egyptian MSA, or, only in Lebanese MSA, respectively, such as grammatically correct variations in the writing of *hamza*, variations in the choice of the particle for future and smaller, almost insignificant distinctions of that kind, but the conclusion, so far, is abundantly clear: There is not one MSA in Arabic news, rather, we have a number of coexisting MSAs, where Lebanese media MSA will have features not found in Egyptian MSA and vice versa.

Part second of the work deals with language variation in Media Arabic, as in the two last articles, however, while the contributions of Ibrahim and Parkison deal with written media Arabic, this section, beginning with Marc Van Mol, is dedicated to studies on spoken media Arabic. In an attempt at bridging the last to this, Van Mol attempts in his article at defining what constitutes 'Media Arabic', surely no easy task to embark on, especially so since the term 'Media' in itself could arguably include just about everything. However, Van Mol, chooses to limit the definition with regard to the instruments where this language is expressed. The definition is not entirely satisfactory as an article on literature in a newspaper might have quite a literary language, and, a language quite distinguishable from the language in the news report. Be that as it may. Interestingly, Van Mol decides that such a definition is possible to agree upon, and, that the "typical substratum of written media is easier to define" than is its oral counterpart. Indeed, the basic problem with this article, disregarding how fascinating and interesting Van Mol's work is despite that, lies in its main task, the definition. Oral media language, even when limited to certain fields of professions in media production is, as Van Mol emphasises, nevertheless, quite heterogeneous. Even if Van Mol in his attempt at defining oral media to media with information going top down (a journalist to the viewer) and responses to these, the difficulties seem to remain in e.g. satellite television as we are dealing not only with workers producing this language to the public and viewers, persons interviewed responding to that. Indeed, oral language encompasses the language of the sports journalist and the football player, the news anchor as well as the host in the program discussing modern trends in Arab literature, the host in children programs or the Mufti discussing what is *sharī'ah*, and what is not. Seems to me an impossible task to define as *one version of* language, and, while Van Mol acknowledges the weakness of a possible definition, he insists on the possibility of one. That kind of political science argumentation is, in my view, contradicting to the normal transparency and clarity of his otherwise fascinating work. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect from the analysis of Van Mol is his critique of different systems of classifications in the study of media language, and, his open suggestion, without conclusion, towards a new approach when deciding on classification.

Carol Myers-Scotton continues her work on her influential theory of the *Matrix Language Frame* model, a model that first appeared in a context of code-switching between English and Swahili. Here she discusses some steps towards a developed theory fitting to Arab media language where we, instead of two distinctly separate languages as Swahili and English (or Hebrew-Arabic as in my own borrowing of her model), have two language variations within one language. What, asks she, is the grammatical structure regulating switches between MSA and local colloquial variants? A novelty here, in comparison to her previous model, is that *both* variants may contribute to the forming of the morpho-syntactic structure framing the clause. Somewhat irrelevant to the stimulating issue at hand (that of switching between two Arabic variants – possibly also in writing), albeit interesting for someone who is not that familiar with her model, she concentrates her presentation on code-switching with examples where one part is Arabic and the other some other language, as English. I will not comment further on this article except for the following note: Myers-Scotton does suggest a possible increase of code-switching between colloquial variants and MSA in the electronic media, to be followed by printed media. Well, as pointed out by Ibrahim in his article, this prediction is already happening. Certainly, apart from his observations, non-MSA elements in Arab blogs seem to be considerable. Interesting also, is that the term code-switching used originally for oral language, by Myers-Scotton is used with reference also to written language.

Reem Bassiouney examines gender differences related to code-switching in five different Egyptian talk-shows. She distinguishes between an Egyptian colloquial Arabic (ECA) and the MSA where the former is represented by a prestige version of colloquial, mostly Cairene. The article gives quite a thorough presentation of both identity and gender issues connected to Arabic. Further, the results are illuminating even if the categorization leaves a few question marks unanswered, such as, what is the difference between a category “MSA” and another “Basically MSA”? Or, for that matter, why not mention also “MSA with insertions of ECA”. Suffice to say, that this kind of classification does not meet the Classical (Aristotle’s) stipulations. What, precisely, defines belonging and not belonging to a category, and, what to another? This obstacle is further aggravated by the fact, as Bassiouney also mentions, that MSA and ECA often use

the same terminology. The informed reader will anyway get a lot of interesting information when reading this article, with several informative examples, but it is most unfortunate with the chosen categorisation, as it really does not help our understanding of the subject.

Madiha Doss connects in her article a bit to a previous subject, on news in colloquial. Here, of course, we focus on oral language as it is presented by the private channel OTV, in its programme of 'State of the World'. She begins with a very informative presentation of previous studies on the field of oral news in colloquial Arabic, followed by an analysis of Egyptian TV resources and then an introduction to the language used in the program. Consequently, the article deals with the language, including its morpho-syntax, phonetics and lexica. Of special interest, I find, the analysis of how borrowed words are pronounced, as well as the choice of what MSA vocabulary that are to be included in the transmission, and what, by contrast, that are not. This problem is interesting, since the colloquial simply is insufficient to cover every part of the MSA lexica.

The heterogeneity of media language is further emphasised by the following article devoted to the rhetoric (as well as to the non linguistic issue of his mediated charisma) of Nasrallah, spiritual leader of the *Hizbollah*. While Dina Matar writes a very interesting article on this personality and his ideology, and, even as, she makes interesting suggestion to the socio-political function, "the political frame", of terminology like *jihad* within a Lebanese, or even a larger pan-Arab, media culture, I still feel that this article does not belong with most of the others. Still, and again, in its own right the article is both informative and well written.

Also of weak connection to the main trend in the book is the following article by Munira al-Azraqi. It deals with, what is referred to as, Gulf Asian Pidgin (GAP). This is then a language spoken by Asian immigrants with a "mostly Gulf Arabic (GA) lexicon". Al-Azraqi examines a data collected from TV-series, yet another possible subject of Media Arabic. The linguistic analysis is quite interesting, not least the parts on predication structures and on the particle/preposition *fī*. Still, what differs, only, between the recording of informants in research on dialectology and the material of this article is that this comes from a TV-serie.

Nadav Samin's article on Internet bulletins in Saudi Arabia focus both on the function and the content of these bulletins. They are a means for the Saudi authorities to absorb new information technologies under controlled forms. The article is illuminating both regarding basic information about Internet in the Saudi Kingdom as well as on how sensitive issues are being contained and, to some extent, guided to, for e.g. the clergy, acceptable directions.

Soha Abboud-Haggag continues the book with her article on Arabic novels. Although, this is, arguably, also media, the present collection is no place for it. That having been said, Abboud-Haggag still makes some intriguing suggestions in the article. One of these is the need for modern writers to level colloquial differences in order to reach a wider audience. The examples on colloquial mixed with MSA feel, on the other hand, a bit like slamming in open doors, even if this practice is until today not entirely acceptable.

I have been tutoring Media Arabic, defined as political Arabic of news and news analysis, as a special variant of Arabic in periods since 1998. Part of the task has of course been trying different books suitable for students. For that reason, the following section lies close to my heart. I agree, firstly, with Karin Christina Ryding in her article on Media Arabic, that is the following article, on, that the functional importance of Media Arabic is through process. The same goes when it comes to teaching it. We are not dealing with any kind of completed, static, end result. As a tutor of this form of language, I welcome the brief and concise presentation she makes of the most well known material we have today on the market, from Monteil (1960) to Elgibali (2007). A somewhat wider description of each of these, as well as advantages and disadvantages related to teaching them would have been even more appreciated.

With clear reference to the previous, Raghda el-Essawy writes on another highly important issue in tutoring Media Arabic, that is the difficulties for student in learning vocabulary. Much of the content in the article is, nevertheless, I must say, of the more obvious kind. On the other hand, such a theoretical approach to pedagogy should not be entirely underestimated, as a suggestion of this kind actually may lead to a practical process of trial and error and, consequently, to real improvement of the tutoring. Every teacher has to find his or her own way and suggestions are always appreciated.

Mahmoud Abdallah returns in the following article to previous issues in relating the language of mass media to the real language situation in the Arab societies. He presents examples from newspaper texts and relates them to local situations. Abdallah, furthermore, makes some important pieces of advice for students of Arabic, and teachers, on how to use Media Arabic in a situation of tutoring and learning, stressing its importance also in a wider acquiring of Arabic.

To sum up, I find the various contributions to be very interesting, everyone in it's own right. But, as stated previously, they are too divergent to fit all in one volume, and, the present, and still very much worthwhile reading, work, would have benefited from a division into several volumes where each would enter deeper into one specified area.

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