

Towards a sociolinguistics of Arabic in Africa

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Sociolinguistics can be understood in a narrow and a broad sense. In a narrow sense Sociolinguistics is defined by goals, theories, and methodologies which developed in the wake of a Labovian perspective on language. In a broader sense, Sociolinguistics deals with all social conditions which impinge on an understanding of language. In both perspectives, the goal of Sociolinguistics is an understanding and analysis of the totality of factors which determine an individual's use of language.

In practice, Sociolinguistics in the broad sense breaks down into a number of scholarly sub-disciplines, including, but not limited to, Sociolinguistics in the narrow sense. While an atomistic approach to language study is methodologically necessary, there is a constant danger in academia of what can be termed the "metonymic fallacy", the danger of taking one part, one sub-discipline, one sub-arena of study, and allowing it to speak for the whole.

To guard against the metonymic fallacy it is not enough simply to produce compendia of various sorts (Encyclopedias and Handbooks have been very much in vogue over the past 15 years) which gather diverse information within a single, voluminous publication. Rather, a concerted effort is needed to integrate various subfields into larger conceptual wholes via taxonomies and the critical examination of key sociolinguistic and linguistic concepts as they impinge on one's larger domain of interest.

In this spirit, as time allows, I will first of all offer a general typology of Arabic in Africa embedded in a broad Sociolinguistic perspective. A provisional outline, subject to amendment, is given at the end of this abstract. Secondly I will examine two of the better studied sub-domains of inquiry, linguistic variation and codeswitching, with a view towards defining general parameters by which the attested phenomena can be integrated into a larger domain of Sociolinguistics.

Arabic Sociolinguistics in Africa: a Broad Perspective

1. Social and cultural background

Language policy and attitudes

Education

Politics of language

Official and national languages

Attitudes

Sociological approaches

Anthropological approaches

The media and culture: What is propagated, why

Television, media

Popular culture

Demography

Urban migration

Extra-Arab migration

2. Language

Core domains (socio-dialectal-multism)

Dialectology

Variationist studies

Multilingualism

Codeswitching

L2 Arabic, including Classical Arabic in non-Arab Africa

Anthropological approaches

Youth/Secret languages

3. History cross-cuts all of these perspectives: the history of X (language attitudes, variation, origin and spread of variants etc.)

Additionally:

Language contact between Arabic and African languages

Written Arabic and its influence on African languages

The rise of Sudanic Arabic creoles in 19th century