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J.H. HOSPERS AND C.H.M. VERSTEEGH

XVIII

BEDOUIIN, VILLAGE, AND URBAN ARABIC



BEDOUIIN, VILLAGE AND URBAN ARABIC

AN ECOLINGUISTIC STUDY

BY

F.J. CADORA



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FOREWORD

BRIAN D. JOSEPH, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Arabic speech communities exist in several distinct social units, ranging from tribal and subtribal bedouin groups traditionally associated with desert life to urban families in various socioeconomic classes. Cutting across these differences of social organization are divisions based on physical environment and socio-cultural adaptation to it: sedentary versus nonsedentary (nomadic)—a factor first recognized by Anīs (1952) and later used by Al-Jundī (1965)—and rural versus urban. Together, these factors yield a three-way division of (sedentary) urban, sedentary rural, and (rural (nonsedentary)) nomadic bedouin groups. This tripartite distinction therefore comprises both social and cultural differences among the various groups of Arab speakers and so is not definable in purely social, cultural, or even geographic terms.

To characterize the relevance of these overall environmental factors for the linguistic developments in these speech communities, Frederic Cadora here introduces the notion of "ecolinguistics," i.e., the study of the linguistic correlates of developments related to the overall environmental differences among groups of speakers. Cadora's proposal to relate linguistic differences to factors that are "ecological," in a broad construal of the term, differs from various less compelling putatively explanatory uses to which physical environment has been put by other Arabists; Anīs (1952) and Al-Jundī (1965), for instance, attempted—unsuccessfully, as Cadora points out (p. 8)—to explain the apparent rapid tempo of bedouin speech and various truncating changes it seems to have occasioned by reference to the demands of the intense desert environment in which this group lived. By contrast, an "ecolinguistic" account, for Cadora, is a sober appeal to correlations between the complex of social, cultural, and geographic factors on the one hand and the linguistic usage of the groups influenced by these factors on the other.

Bedouin usage in general shows several innovations away from earlier Arabic patterns, among which are affrication of k to č, vowel elision (syncope), and glide deletion, to name just a few. Sedentary usage, on the other hand, did not share in many of these innovations and therefore in this regard is conservative. With the sedentarization and urbanization of certain bedouin groups, there has been contact between bedouin speakers and sedentary rural and urban speakers, a contact situation which has led to the incorporation of ruralite and urbanite factors into the newly sedentarized speakers' usage.

The mechanism which Cadora uses to describe and account for these features is that of adaptive rules, in the sense of Andersen 1973, which, given that they map between the dialects of the different ecolinguistically defined groups, Cadora refers to as "ecolinguistic rules." In this case, the ecolinguistic adaptive rules map from bedouin usage to sedentary usage and thus, inasmuch as bedouin speech is generally characterized by a number of innovations, the ecolinguistic rules are often the reverse of the historical changes which gave rise to the dialect differences in the first place. For example, Cadora posits an ecolinguistic rule of Deaffrication to map from bedouin č to urban k, whereby newly sedentarized bedouin speakers assimilate their speech patterns to those of urbanite speakers. Different rates of application for this and other ecolinguistic rules are found for different age groups, reflecting differing rates of assimilation of bedouin speech to urban patterns. Such ecolinguistic rules, therefore, demonstrate how different synchrony and diachrony can be—diachronically an affrication change created the bedouin č ~ urban k correspondence but synchronically a deaffrication rule now accounts for the correspondence, given the respective ecolinguistic niches occupied by bedouin and urban speakers.

Urbanization as a process, therefore, transforms originally geographic dialect differences into socially determined dialects, i.e., sociolects. In a sense, what is described here for the urbanization—and more generally, the sedentarization—of bedouin Arabs reflects a process that has been going on for a long time within the greater Arab community and elsewhere around the world. Even though large urban centers are more a construct of the modern world than of previous times, it is still possible to find examples from earlier periods of the effects of urbanization; for instance, the occurrence in ancient times within the city of Rome of various

putative "rural Latin" features such as the loss of word-final t or s and their apparent evaluation as nonstandard within Rome seems to have been the result of the urbanization of rural speakers of Latin (see Joseph and Wallace 1991 for references and some discussion). Presumably, wherever and whenever large commercial centers attracted inhabitants, urbanization could and did occur, with its attendant linguistic consequences.

One main contribution, therefore, of this examination of neo-sedentary Arabic usage lies in its being a study of language and dialect contact as a vehicle for linguistic change. Moreover, Labov's Uniformitarian Principle, which licenses the use of the principles and mechanisms of language change that emerge from the examination of on-going change in the present to explain and understand changes in the past, means that the glimpse of ecolinguistically-induced change in the modern Arab world afforded by this study provides a basis for understanding what the social and ecological situation confronting Arabic speakers must have been in earlier times.

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