

## Speech Accommodation in Inter-Dialectal Conversations: Exploiting Linguistic Repertoire and Weighing Sociolinguistic Options

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### ABSTRACT

Conversations of eight USA-based native speakers of Arabic, four Jordanians and four Egyptians, were recorded during several casual conversations. Contrary to the prevailing assumption about Arabic inter-dialectal communication, the participants maintained their speech and rarely switched to their interlocutors' dialect of Arabic. Moreover, while only few instances of switching to Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA) were observed, several instances of switching to English were documented. In this regard, this study invalidates the once-prevailing assumption about the role of ESA as an extensive accommodation strategy for Arabic inter-dialectal interactions and reveals the role of English as a converging strategy in these interactions.

**Keywords:** Speech Accommodation; SAT, Code-switching, Sociolinguistics, Arabic Language, English Language.

### 1. Introduction and Literature Review:

When conversing with other interlocutors, speakers usually alter their speech in terms of style, tone, speech rate, lexical choices, and dialect among other linguistic features (Giles and Powesland, 1975). This speech altering is structurally governed and is usually triggered by factors such as the setting and the topic of the conversation and/or by factors related to the other interlocutors in the conversation such as their age, status, and spoken dialect(s). These changes in speech are often accounted for in terms of two interconnected models, namely speech accommodation and code-switching.

The Speech (Communication) Accommodation Theory (*henceforth* SAT) was first proposed by Giles (1973) and has been extensively revised, reformulated, tested, and expanded through the work of Giles, his colleagues, and other scholars (e.g., Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977; Giles and Smith, 1979; Beebe and Giles, 1984; Gallois *et al.*, 1992; S'hiri, 2002; Giles and Gasiorek, 2013). SAT was developed to explain when, where, how, and why speakers adjust their speech when engaged in conversations with other speakers (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977; Beebe and Giles, 1984; Dragojevic, Gasiorek, and Giles, 2015). Therefore, central to the goals of SAT is the attempt to account for the motivations that trigger shifts towards (i.e., convergence) or away from (i.e., divergence) the linguistic features of other speakers' speech, as well as to make predictions about the social consequences of those linguistic shifts, including how speech shifts are perceived, evaluated, and responded to by recipients and other observers (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977; Beebe and Giles, 1984; Gallois *et al.*, 1992; Dragojevic, Gasiorek, and Giles, 2015).

SAT proposes that speakers are motivated to accommodate or adjust their speech patterns in order to communicate attitudes, values, and intentions (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977). In this regard, Beebe and Giles (1984) elaborate by arguing that speakers are motivated during social interactions to accommodate (or modify) their speech to accomplish at least one of the following objectives: to be socially approved and positively evaluated by other interlocutors, to be communicatively efficient in their linguistic encounter with other speakers, and to sustain positive social identities

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during their social encounters.

There are two sides of the accommodation model that represent the opposite directions of linguistic shifts: convergence (i.e., assimilation) and divergence (i.e., dissimilation). It is worth mentioning that in some formulations of the accommodation model, maintenance is considered a third aspect of the model. For example, Coupland and Giles (1988) describe three 'approximation' strategies or orientations under the notion of accommodation, namely convergence (positive approximation), maintenance (zero approximation), and divergence (negative approximation).

According to Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) and Beebe and Giles (1984), convergence is a linguistic strategy that individuals employ mutually (symmetrically) or unilaterally (asymmetrically) to assimilate their speech to that of their interlocutors – or to minimize the linguistic dissimilarities between themselves and other speakers – utilizing a variety of linguistic means including, but not limited to, speech rate, utterance length, and pronunciation. In doing so, these speakers seek the social approval from – and the integration with – other people (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor, 1977). Following a review of the related research, Beebe and Giles (1984) summarized the motivations that could trigger the convergence of speakers' speech styles to those of their interlocutors as follows:

People will attempt to converge linguistically toward the speech patterns believed to be characteristic of their recipients when they (a) desire their social approval and the perceived costs of so acting are proportionally lower than the rewards anticipated; and/or (b) desire a high level of communication efficiency, and (c) social norms are not perceived to dictate alternative speech strategies. (8)

According to Giles and Smith (1979), linguistic convergence is positively perceived by the interlocutors if understood as integrative (i.e., psychologically positive) and seen "to be at an optimal sociolinguistic distance from them" (8) and/or attributed to a positive intent on the part of the speaker(s). However, Burt (1994) warns that exaggerated convergence may be negatively perceived as a threat by interlocutors whose linguistic style the speaker assimilates.

The other side of the accommodation model is divergence, whereby speakers mutually or unilaterally opt to distant themselves linguistically from their interlocutors for one reason or another. According to Coupland and Giles (1988), divergence is a linguistic strategy through which speakers emphasize speech differences between themselves and other speakers. To this end, a speaker may maintain his/her speech styles that are already different from those of his/her conversation partners or even depart linguistically from features that are present in his/her speech partners (Giles, Taylor, and Bourhis, 1973). Speakers may linguistically diverge from their conversation partners based on their definition of social relations within and between individuals and groups interacting in a conversation. Beebe and Giles (1984) report that speakers may opt to maintain their speech styles and features or even diverge away from the linguistic features of their interlocutors' speech if they define the encounters in intergroup terms, thus, desire to establish a positive in-group identity, if they desire to dissociate themselves personally from other interlocutors, or if they decide to elevate an interactant's speech behavior to an acceptable level from their point of view.

Speech accommodation is inevitable in human communication. Giles and Coupland (1991) argue that "each one of us will have experienced 'accommodating' verbally and non-verbally to others, in the general sense of adjusting our communication actions relative to those of our conversation partners." (60) Speech accommodation takes place in a variety of domains that utilize different means and strategies, including, but are not limited to, diglossic, bilingual, and multilingual code-switching (S'hiri, 2002). Code-switching is "the alternating use of different languages within a given situation" (Sankoff and Poplack, 1981, p.3) or, in other words, "the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode." (Heller, 1988:1) Such linguistic alternation violates the once-prevailing assumption that only one language (or language variety) is used in a given context or setting and is, therefore, worth explanation (Heller, 1988).

Generally speaking, the bulk of research on code-switching has been concerned in the very first place with the structural (syntactic or morpho-syntactic) constraints on this linguistic alternation as well as with the social factors and meanings associated with those switches (Poplack, 1981; Niley, 2006). As for the structural aspect, two interacting – or

simultaneously operating in Poplack's (1981) view – models were proposed to account for the linguistic constraints on code-switching, namely the free morpheme constraint and the equivalence constraint. While the free morpheme constraint prohibits switches between a bound morpheme and a lexical stem unless the stem is phonologically incorporated into the language system of the bound morpheme, the equivalence constraint draws on the speaker's bilingual proficiency demanding that the constituents in the vicinity of the switch site have the same order in both languages (Poplack, 1981).

Subsequently, more focus shifted towards the study of why code-switching occurs and what social implications are involved in the process. Emphasizing the sociocultural nature of this linguistic practice, Nilep (2006) defines code-switching as the practice of using or modifying linguistic forms in order to contextualize speech in interaction in a manner that responds to social knowledge and diverse identities. In Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, there are four possible sources of motivation behind code-switching. These are: code-switching in response to changes in situation factors (e.g., setting or topic), code-switching as a double identity marker, code-switching to renegotiate social distance with other interlocutors, code-switching when uncertain about the most appropriate language to use.

In her study of code-switching practices in one of the Puerto Rican communities in USA, Poplack (1981) observed that the language which the residents use (Spanish, English, or both) serves as a defining criterion of their network membership within their speech community. According to Poplack (1981), the occurrence and magnitude of code-switching depend, among other factors, on situational norms, the perceived bilingualism of the interlocutors, and the ethnic and group affiliation of the interlocutors. Her results revealed an interaction between what is universal (structural constraints) and what is community specific (i.e., the socio-pragmatic factors) in terms of code-switching patterns.

Reporting data from a series of ethnographic studies that examined the use of French and English in Canada over 12 years in the period between 1978 and 1990, Heller (1992) discusses the various patterns of linguistic choices (or code-switching patterns) of Canada's two major ethnic groups: Anglophones and Francophones. According to Heller (1992), two linguistic practices were observed: no code-switching and English-French code-switching. As for the former practice, the absence of code-switching was attributed either to the lack of bilingualism on the part of the individual or to a speaker's desire to maintain own identity and ethnic group membership. As for the latter practice, Heller (1992) observed frequent switches (mainly to French by Anglophones), which she explained in terms of speakers' interest in exploiting their bilingual linguistic repertoire "in order to cross the boundary, level it, or neutralize the tension across it." (130) Heller (1992) proposes that linguistic choices represent political strategies to accomplish various social goals. Among these strategies, Heller (1992) discusses code-switching as an agent of ethnic mobilization that involves "realignment of the relations of power between ethnic groups." (138) Under this view, languages are seen as symbolic resources (or capital) in the marketplace competition and struggle over valued economic and political resources such as jobs and goods.

In the context of Arabic, the predictions of the SAT model and the code-switching practices were examined in terms of the potential interplay between three varieties of Arabic: Modern Standard Arabic, Educated Standard Arabic, and the vernaculars. Educated Spoken Arabic (henceforth ESA) is a common koineized conversational variety of Arabic (Mitchell, 1978; El-Hassan, 1978). Weighing different defining terms of ESA, El-Hassan (1978) finds 'social dialect' the most linguistically appealing and correct term. In his attempt to distinguish ESA from Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA) and Colloquial Arabic, El-Hassan (1978) describes ESA as "some form of Arabic representing the spontaneous, unscripted speech patterns of educated Arabs in a variety of social contexts." (48) According to Mitchell (1986), ESA is

[a] vernacular type characterized by the aspiration of its speakers to get rid of local features through a process of koineization and/or borrowings from literary Arabic [cf. Blanc]. It is the current informal language used among educated Arabs, fulfilling their daily language needs, also the main means of inter-regional communication. The variety is marked by a liberal introduction of leveling and classicizing devices to basic vernacular structure. (12)

The above quotation reveals the strong association ESA has both with Standard Arabic (i.e., literary Arabic) and with the vernacular Arabic varieties as well as the mediating role of ESA in the relationship between MSA and the vernaculars. Indeed, ESA lies on a continuum between MSA and the vernaculars (Mitchell, 1986; El-Hassan, 1978), and thus ESA is not devoid of the effects of both. Rather, it is “created and maintained by the constant interplay of written and vernacular Arabic” (Mitchell, 1986: 13) suggesting a fluid and dynamic nature that makes ESA “subject to considerable fluctuation not only in its forms of pronunciation, morphological alternations and lexical selections but also in regularities of a grammatical kind.” (Mitchell, 1978: 229) As a result, the defining boundaries of ESA cannot be easily identified (El-Hassan, 1978) with ESA featuring some similarities and exhibiting some differences with both MSA and the vernaculars.

As expected, ESA resembles MSA in several linguistic aspects. El-Hassan (1978) cites a number of features that both ESA and MSA have in common. Among these are basic word order, verb-particle combinations, the use of the passive pattern /yufaʕʕal/, the use of the demonstrative form /haaða/ for masculine singular near referents, extensive lexical similarity (e.g., /tullaab/ ‘students’), and the use of the voiceless uvular plosive /q/ when appropriate instead of the other localized variants (i.e., /g/ or /k/).

There is a fundamental difference between MSA and ESA in terms of mode or channel of communication (i.e., written vs. oral) as well as codification. While MSA is a highly codified written variety, ESA is a barely codified spoken variety (El-Hassan, 1978). This fundamental difference results in phonological, morphological, and syntactic differences between the two varieties. Generally speaking, ESA, unlike MSA, escapes some of the prescriptive pressure and tolerates some violations in terms of the case and mood markers. In this regard, El-Hassan (1978) cites a number of linguistic aspects in which ESA differs from MSA. These include: the lack of case endings in ESA, phonological and morphophonemic deviations from the corresponding standard representations in MSA (e.g., the use of the conjunction /ʔu/ for /wa/ ‘and’; the use of the complementizer /ʔinnu/ for /ʔinna/ ‘that’), the use of non-MSA, hence non-standard, linguistic items such as the existential formative /fii/ ‘there is/are’, the preservation of the agentive phrase in passive constructions, and the use of verbal nouns from outside the MSA lexicon (e.g., /ħaki/ instead of /kalaam/ ‘talk’)

Like Colloquial Arabic, ESA is a spoken variety with little, if any, codification. El-Hassan (1978) cites some structural similarities between ESA and Colloquial Arabic. Among these are an overall similarity in terms of word order and the use of passive constructions although the latter is often characterized by the use of non-standard patterns in Colloquial Arabic (e.g., /yitfaʕʕal/ rather than /yufaʕʕal/). However, ESA and Colloquial Arabic differ in many linguistic aspects. One contrasting aspect of special importance is the manner in which each of these two varieties is acquired or learned. While Colloquial Arabic is acquired at home by children (hence serves as a first language), ESA is learned “under certain conditions of education and acculturation.” (El-Hassan, 1978: 67) El-Hassan (1978) reports a number of differences between ESA and Colloquial Arabic. Among these are lexical differences, different surface realizations of particles (e.g., the preposition /li-/ vs. /la-/ in ESA and Colloquial Arabic, respectively), the use of prestige and/or education markers (e.g., the prepositions /fi/ and /li/ as well as the demonstrative /haatha/) in ESA as opposed to the corresponding stigmatized (i.e., local) forms in Colloquial Arabic (i.e., the prepositions /bi/ and /la/ and the demonstrative forms /haadha/ or /haada/), the permissibility of double negation (e.g., /maa fiish/ in Colloquial Arabic but not in ESA, the use of the agentive phrase with passive constructions in ESA but not in Colloquial Arabic, and the use of the voiceless uvular plosive in ESA but not in the colloquial.

In Abu-Melhim (1991, 1992), the conversations of one educated Cairene Egyptian Arabic-speaking couple and one educated urban Jordanian Arabic-speaking couple were tape recorded. The participants used neither CA nor MSA as the primary means of communication when conversing with each other. Instead, they made use of several accommodation and code-switching strategies that included switching from Jordanian Arabic to the widely recognized Egyptian Arabic, switching from Arabic to English, switching to MSA, or sticking to their own dialect of Arabic. According to Abu-Melhim, each one of these strategies was used for a specific purpose and carried a specific social meaning.

Using different group designs, Abu-Melhim (2014) investigated the diglossic code-switching behavior and the accommodation strategies of Arabic-speaking interlocutors from five Arab countries. Except for a limited use of MSA for the sake of clarity, comprehension, quotation, and emphasis, neither classical Arabic (CA) nor MSA was used by the interlocutors for actual conversational purposes. Instead, the interlocutors resorted to ESA, switched between ESA and the vernaculars, and switched between the vernaculars themselves. The linguistic switches were attested at various levels: intra-word (stem-affix), word, phrase, clause, and sentence. Contrary to Mitchell (1978, 1986) and El-Hassan (1978), Abu-Melhim's (2014) results provided evidence against the claim that inter-regional Arabic communication is dominated by the use of ESA. Rather, the results revealed that inter-Arabic interlocutors employ a variety of linguistic resources including ESA, their own vernaculars, and the vernaculars of their interlocutors. Abu-Melhim (2014) attributed the interlocutors' heavy use of the vernaculars to the fact that those local dialects were mutually intelligible. He claimed that in the absence of functional necessities (i.e., the need to maintain comprehension), other factors take over and determine the interlocutors' linguistic choice. According to Abu-Melhim (2014), these factors include the need to maintain one's personal identity and the drive to gain power and control, especially when the interlocutor is faced with a prevailing sense of linguistic inadequacy or inequality towards his own dialect.

S'hiri (2002) investigated the accommodative practices of speakers of Tunisian Arabic and speakers of Middle Eastern Arabic when conversing together in the job context as work partners in London. Her study predicted that only Tunisian Arabic speakers will unilaterally converge towards the features of their interlocutors' speech (i.e., towards Middle Eastern Arabic or 'Sharqi Arabic') of their work partners. According to S'hiri (2002), such accommodation tendency was predicted in light of two prevailing assumptions. First, Tunisians consider 'Sharqi Arabic' as being lighter and more beautiful than Tunisian Arabic. Second, Tunisians, as other Arabs, are more familiar with the 'Sharqi Arabic', due to its popularity in media, than their Middle Eastern partners are with 'Maghrebi Arabic' (i.e., North African Arabic). The results of S'hiri study showed that Tunisian Arabic speakers converged linguistically to accommodate their speech to their Sharqi partners. S'hiri demonstrated that her Tunisian subjects converged to their Middle Eastern partners by utilizing MSA (*al-fusha*), 'Sharqi Arabic', as well as some English. S'hiri's findings invalidated the common misconception that speakers of different dialects of Arabic would solely switch to MSA when conversing with each other. S'hiri argued that the motivation of this unilateral accommodation on the part of Tunisians is not simply to achieve comprehensibility but rather to achieve communicative efficiency in their workplace, to reflect their openness to other cultures, and to seek their interlocutors' social approval.

The goal of the present study is to investigate the linguistic behavior and attitudes of native speakers of different dialects of Arabic, namely Jordanian Arabic and Egyptian Arabic, while engaging in casual conversations with the goal of testing the accommodative paths predicted by SAT: convergence, divergence, and maintenance.

### **1.1 Definitions:**

For the purpose of the present study, the following definitions were developed:

- i. Convergence: The shift into Jordanian Arabic by the Egyptian Arabic speakers, the shift into Egyptian Arabic by the Jordanian Arabic speakers, or the use of Standard Arabic by any participant in the conversation.
- ii. Divergence: The use of English language by any Arabic speaker.
- iii. Maintenance: The practice in which a participant preserves his own local dialect of Arabic.

Each participant's attitude towards the linguistic practices of his partners is defined in terms of his evaluation of those contributions. Following S'hiri (2002), these evaluations are defined as: *high accommodation*, *low accommodation*, or *no accommodation*.

### **1.2 Questions of the Study:**

More precisely, the questions of this study are:

1. Are the speakers going to stick to their own dialects, or are they going to accommodate their speech to their interlocutors?
2. If any accommodation/code-switching occurs, when, why, and in what direction does this accommodation occur? Is a speaker going to alter his/her speech to the other interlocutors' dialect or to MSA?
3. Are the speakers of the Middle-Eastern (Jordanian in this case) Arabic more willing to alter their dialect than the Egyptian speakers due to the popularity of the latter in mass media?
4. What role is English language going to play in this linguistic interaction?
5. What are the sociolinguistic correlates and implications of such speech accommodation/code-switching, if any? What are the motivations behind accommodation/code-switching? Finally, what are its social consequences?

### 1.3 Hypotheses:

The hypotheses of this study can be summarized in the following points.

- i. There will be very few cases of communication breakdown as the satellite television has increased the awareness of different dialects of Arabic language all over the Arab World especially for the Egyptian Arabic, and has introduced a hybrid variety of Arabic that Arabs would shift to when conversing with speakers of other dialects of Arabic.
- ii. The speakers of Jordanian Arabic will converge partially to Egyptian Arabic as Egyptian Arabic is more popular across the Arab World. The speakers of the Egyptian Arabic will not converge to Jordanian Arabic.
- iii. Both the speakers of the Jordanian Arabic and the speakers of the Egyptian Arabic will shift to a more standard variety of Arabic whenever communication breaks down or when the topic of the discussion is formal or intellectual.
- iv. There will be cases where speakers from both groups will switch to English language either to seek prestige and/or claim education OR to accommodate to their interlocutors and the setting.

This study is an attempt to further investigate aspects investigated by S'hiri (2002) but with different dialect groups where the communication failure is not predicted to be an issue. Results will be discussed in light of SAT and sociopolitical factors including social integration, separation, and power.

## 2. Data Collection:

### 2.1. Setting:

The recording took place in the campus of the University of Kansas in USA. The campus enjoys a multi-national nature with many international students. Basically, the medium language of communication is English across the campus. Following S'hiri's (2002) proposal, this setting was chosen to ensure a neutral context that does not give an advantage for one group over the other.

### 2.2. Participants:

Eight male native speakers of Arabic participated in this study. The group of participants was evenly divided: four native speakers of (Cairene) Egyptian Arabic and four native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. Their ages ranged between 29 and 37. Equal number of speakers of each dialect was intentionally considered to ensure the balance between the two groups. By the time the study was conducted, the participants had stayed in USA for 2-3 years. None of the subjects had any hearing or speech disorder as self-reported. Prior to the recording, an information sheet was distributed to the subjects eliciting information about age, education, first and second languages as well as the period since their arrival to USA. The Jordanian participants were already acquainted with all of the Egyptian participants. The Jordanian participants knew each other in advance; the same was true for the Egyptian subjects. This ensured in-group relations for the Jordanian group as well as the Egyptian group.

### 2.3. Procedures:

The participants were divided into two conversation groups. Each group included two Jordanians and two Egyptians. They met twice in two separate days. Each session lasted for one hour. In each session, the participants were seated in a quiet room in Watson Library at the University of Kansas. The recorder was placed on an equal distance of the subjects. No instructions were given in advance as to what topics the participants should choose. Each one of the four conversations was recorded in full from the moment the participants met. The topics addressed in the conversation were of both formal and informal nature. The researcher did not participate in, interfere with, or interrupt any of the conversations.

Subsequently, the participants were immediately interviewed separately to review and discuss their contributions (linguistic choices) to the conversation. The tape was replayed, and the participants were asked to rate certain elements of their speech during the conversation as: *high accommodation*, *low accommodation*, or *no accommodation*. Moreover, the participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire about their attitudes towards Egyptian and Jordanian Arabic (see Appendix I). The results of this questionnaire revealed that both speaker groups agreed that Egyptian Arabic is more romantic, poetic and popular than Jordanian Arabic. However, they disagreed on which dialect is closer to Standard Arabic with each group favoring their own dialect. Later on, the participants' names were coded and the conversation was transcribed using the regular Arabic transcription symbols in sociolinguistic research.

### 3. Data Analysis:

#### 3.1 Sample Conversations and Follow-up Interviews

In the following transcribed conversation samples, the subjects are coded as E1-E4 (Egyptian subjects) and J1-J4 (Jordanian subjects). In these samples, the transcribed transliterated data (the first line) are followed by the English translation (the second line). The non-Egyptian Arabic elements (Jordanian Arabic elements or MSA elements) in the Egyptian participants' speech and the non-Jordanian Arabic elements (Egyptian Arabic elements or MSA elements) in the Jordanian participants' speech are typed in bold. In the transliteration, the Arabic symbols (letters/sounds) that do not have corresponding English symbols are transcribed following the transcription convention in Appendix II. Finally, instances of switching into English are typed in small caps.

#### Excerpt (1)

**Topic: socializing (greeting and small talk)**

**J1:** ?assalaamu 'alaykum

"Peace be upon you!"

**E1:** wa 'alaykum ?assalaam wa raḥmatu allaah wa barakaatuh...**yaa halaa**

"Peace, mercy, and blessings (of God) be upon you! Welcome"

**E2:** 'alaykum ?assalaam wa raḥmatu allah

"May peace and mercy of Allah be upon you!"

**J2:** ahlan. wa 'alaykum ?assalaam

"Welcome. And may peace be upon you!"

**J1:** shuu axbaarak

"How are you?"

**E2:** keef il-ḥaal

"How are you?"

**J1:** keef il-?umuur

"How are you doing?"

**E1:** el-ḥamdu li-l-laah

"Thank God."

In this early part of the conversation, there were two instances of convergence into the Jordanian Arabic dialect by the Egyptian speakers (E1 and E2). These instances were *yaa halaa* and *keefil haal* to roughly mean ‘Welcome!’ and ‘How are you?’, respectively. In the follow-up interviews with the participants, the Egyptian informants said that they would have said *ahlan* (Welcome!) and *izzayyak* (How are you?) if they were to use the Egyptian dialect, and they ranked these instances as ‘high accommodation’. Similarly, the Jordanian informants (J1 and J2) rated these instances as ‘high accommodation’.

It seems that the Egyptian participants wished to establish solidarity and an in-group relation with the Jordanian participants by accommodating their greeting phrases into the Jordanian Arabic dialect. It should be mentioned here that these two Egyptian participants already had contact with some Jordanian friends and colleagues, and they are somehow, as self-reported, familiar with some basic phrases from Jordanian Arabic. The Jordanian participants, on the other hand, maintained their local speech norms as evident in their use of the local question operators *shuu* (rather than the standard form *maaḍa*) and *keef* (rather than *kayf*). It seems that the supposed familiarity with Egyptian Arabic did not motivate the Jordanian participants to converge to Egyptian Arabic at this very early stage of the conversation. A possible explanation could be that with the Egyptian participants converging linguistically to Jordanian Arabic, the Jordanian participants, having the impression that the Egyptian participants are familiar with their dialect, decided to stick to their own dialect. In the follow-up interviews, neither of the Jordanian subjects was able to explain this linguistic behavior, and they described their linguistic contribution to this part as ‘no accommodation’.

Following the argument of S’hiri (2002), instances of *ḥassalaamu ‘alaykum* (May peace be upon you!) though phonologically sound standard, were not considered cases where the participants converged to MSA or ESA as this greeting is a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic greeting. This claim was confirmed by the participants in the follow-up interviews as they explained that they use these expressions in the same way in their daily interactions with family and peers when speaking their own dialect. Obviously, there were no shifts, either phonological or lexical, to MSA or ESA by any participant in either group at this stage of the conversation. The absence of English from this early portion of the conversations may be explained in terms of the Arab participants’ desire to establish common ground (pan Arab nationalism) with each other refraining from the use of any non-Arabic linguistic codes sounding foreign. In this sense, the dominance of Arabic and the lack of English in the conversation may serve as an ethnic identity marker just as in Poplack (1981).

### Excerpt (2)

#### Topic: travel and conference

**J1:** kaayen ib-conference wallaa enta kunt bi-tupiikaa gallii Majdi

“You were in a conference, or were you in Topeka? Majdi told me something like that.”

**E1:** aah, kunt f-tupiikaa awwil imbaarih

“Yeah, I was in Topeka the day before yesterday.”

**J1:** ayyaam el-tornado

“Uh, when there was a tornado in the area.”

### Excerpt (3)

#### Topic: travel and conference

**J1:** kaan bi-kanzas walla barrah

“Was it in Kansas or outside?”

**E1:** laa, laa, kaan bi-denver

“no, no, it was in Denver.”

**J1:** aaah, cool. did you enjoy it

“Oh, cool. Did you enjoy it?”



E1: huwwa kan conference ya'ni academic in nature mosh fusha

"It was a conference – academic in nature – not a vacation."

The sample conversations in excerpts (2) and (3) show that none of the participants accommodated to their interlocutors' dialects. Moreover, there were no instances of convergence to a more standard variety of Arabic, whether MSA or ESA, as evident in the use of the local variant /g/ rather than the standard voiceless uvular plosive /q/ in *gallii* 'he told me' and the use of prefixed colloquial prepositions (ib-/bi- and f- instead of the stand-alone standard preposition *fii*) and the local negation particle *mosh* to replace the standard (MSA/ESA) form *laysa*. However, there were several instances of intra-sentential switching into English using single words like conference, tornado, and cool and one instance of inter-sentential switching using the sentence *Did you enjoy it?* by the Jordanian participants J1 as well as intra-sentential English switches using *conference* and the phrase *academic in nature* by one Egyptian Participant (E1).

In the follow-up interviews, the Jordanian participant claimed that he had not used these English switches to seek prestige or demonstrate high education. He insisted that he believed that two of the concepts he was trying to express (conference, tornado) would be better understood in English than if he used Standard Arabic or Jordanian Arabic. In Myers-Scotton's (1993) model, this behavior qualify as the fourth motivation for code-switching, namely switching when uncertain about –or not knowing what – the most appropriate linguistic form to use. On the other hand, J1 described his use of the English word cool as unconscious calling it an overword (a much-repeated word). He ranked his related contributions as 'high accommodation'. His contribution was ranked as 'high accommodation' by the other Jordanian participant and by one of the Egyptian participants. The other Egyptian participant was not sure how to rank the related contribution of the Jordanian participant.

#### **Excerpt (4)**

**Topic: travel and weather**

J1: lissah fii thalj 'al-jbaal

"Was there still snow on the mountains?"

E1: aslan ana ?a'adt bi-denver, ?aalulii shayif illi hnaak xaaliş dah... ?aaluli huwwa da(h) il-mountain

"Actually, I stayed in Denver. They told me: 'Do you see that very far thing? That is the mountain' [joking]."

#### **Excerpt (5)**

**Topic: travel**

E1: ?intuu daxaltuu Denver

"Did you enter Denver city itself?"

J2: daxalnaa Denver aah, abadan, waşţ il- downtown

"We did, yeah; we even went to the downtown."

#### **Excerpt (6)**

**Topic: travel**

J2: ... lamma tinzal 'al- downtown, inta yuftarađ ?innak bil-karak... inta already bil-karak...

"... when you go to the downtown, you are in Karak city... you're already in Karak."

Clearly, there was no switching to MSA in Excerpts (4), (5) and (6) as evident in the lack of case endings and the absence of the uvular plosive in good candidate words. However, there were few ESA aspects in the conversation such as the use of the existential formative /fii/ 'there is/are' and the use of the non-standard stem *shaaf* following an MSA pattern in *shayif*. Despite these limited ESA aspects, which also overlap with the vernacular norms, the conversation

was mainly carried in the vernaculars as evident in the extensive phonological and morphophonemic deviations from the corresponding standard representations such as the use of localized prepositions (e.g., *bi-*) and the use of the local forms *lissah* (still), *ʔa<sup>c</sup>adt* ('I stayed': notice the replacement of /q/), and *xaaliṣ* (completely), and *dah* (for the standard demonstrative *haaḍa* 'this').

In spite of the lack of inter-Arabic switching, the Egyptian participant (E1) switched to English using the word *mountain* and the Jordanian participant (J2) used the English word *downtown*. The Egyptian participant (E1) explained that he used the word in the context of narrating, or liberally quoting, what English-speaking people told him when he was in Denver. He admitted that he could have used the equivalent Arabic word without impeding the communication process. However, he ranked his contribution as 'high accommodation' and so did the other participants. As for the Jordanian subject (J2), he claimed that the word *downtown* is more common even in Jordanian Arabic than the equivalent Arabic word *waṣṭ il-balad*. He denied that he used this English word as a more prestigious variant of the Arabic word. All of the participants, including J2, ranked the related contribution as 'high accommodation'.

#### Excerpt (7)

##### Topic: general

J4: ʔihnaa min ilurdun mish min suuryaa

"We are from Jordan, not from Syria."

E3: Uh, confused

"Oh, I got confused."

#### Excerpt (8)

##### Topic: society and culture

E3: huwwa mush related bil-noobah aktar ma huwwa related bi-ssqaafah il-adiimah illi huwwa il<sup>c</sup>abd bitaa<sup>c</sup> zamaan

"It's not as much related to the Nuba (region in Egypt) as much as it is related to the ancient culture where he was the slave in the past."

#### Excerpt (9)

##### Topic: cultural differences

E3: da(h) mawguud hina, ana ma<sup>c</sup>aaya fi-shuyl naas kidah. ya<sup>c</sup>ni waaḥid ma<sup>c</sup>aaya mitgawwiz wi <sup>c</sup>indu talaat banaat wi waḥdah fi-shuyl ma<sup>c</sup>ana il-girlfriend bita<sup>c</sup>tuh

"This happens here. I have colleagues like this. One of my colleagues at work is married and has 3 daughters. However, one of our female colleagues is his girlfriend"

J3: yaa salaam

"How strange!"

The above excerpts indicate that the participating speakers did not switch to ESA as exemplified with the use of localized prepositions (e.g., *bi-*), the use of the localized negative particles *mish* and *mush*, the inclusion of morphophonologically modified pronominals *ʔihnaa* (we) and *huwwa* (he), and the extensive occurrence of local Egyptian forms such as *bitaa<sup>c</sup>bita<sup>c</sup>tuh* (possessive marker) and *kidah* (this way). One more example of the extensive colloquial use comes from the /j/-/g/ and /q/-/ʔ/ substitutions in words such as *mawguud* (present) and *adiimah* (ancient). Moreover, the speakers did not converge to their interlocutors' dialect.

However, one of the Egyptian speakers (E3) switched frequently to English using words like *confused*, *related*, and *girlfriend*. In the follow-up interviews, he explained that he used these words unconsciously with no intention to claim higher status than his interlocutors. Rather, this speaker claimed that the topic of that part of the conversation prompted him to use the English words *confused* and *related*. As for *girlfriend*, E3 explained that he believed it was better to use

the English word rather than the literal translation *ṣaahibtuḥ*, which he described as improper, impolite and confusing. This specific switch reflects, I argue, Myers-Scotton's (1993) fourth motivation for code-switching, namely switching when uncertain about the most appropriate choice to use. All of the participants ranked E3's contribution as 'high accommodation'.

**Excerpt (10)**

**Topic: cultural differences**

**J4:** bizzabṭ taraa **qadiyyit** il-jealous, ?innak tkuun jealous ʿala **zooztak** aw tkuun zooztak jealous ʿalake han ʿindhūm eh.. (interrupted)

"Exactly! By the way, being jealous, I mean being a jealous husband or a jealous wife is for them..."

**E4:** yaʿnii eah jealous?

"What does 'jealous' mean?"

**J4:** il.. eh, **alyiira**. ʿindhūm offensive...

"eh.. (explains the word in Arabic) it is considered offensive by them"

In this excerpt, there were cases where one of the Jordanian speakers (J4) switched to ESA phonologically and lexically. Those were cases like *qadiyyit*, which is often pronounced as *gadhhyyit* (issue) in Jordanian Arabic, the case of *zooztak* (your wife) which is *maratak* in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic, and the case of *alyiira* (jealousy) which is phonologically more similar to the standard Arabic than to the dialect where it is pronounced as *ilyiiri*. Although two of these words were not pronounced exactly as they 'should be' in MSA or ESA, I consider all of them instances of switching to ESA due to their phonological divergence from the local Jordanian dialect. Participant (J4) confirmed these observations and explained that he unconsciously switched to Standard Arabic for the purpose of the topic, which he considered as formal, educated, and heavily cultural. In Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, this switching behavior represents the first motivation scenario, namely switching in response to the requirements of the topic of the conversation. Participant J4 ranked his contribution as 'high accommodation', and so did the rest of the participants.

In addition, the same subject (J4) switched to English in words like jealous and offensive. This speaker described these words as common words that 'most educated Arabs know or use' and ranked his own contribution as 'high accommodation' and so did J3 and E4. However, Participant E3 ranked the contribution of J4 as 'low accommodation', questioning the reason for his use of the word jealous.

**Excerpt (11)**

**Topic: society and cultural differences**

**J2:** izziy muxtalif, ṭariiqit il-libis muxtalifih. ?ihna iṭṭallaʿ ʿaleyna bi-shaariʿ bi-ssoog nafs il-design nafs in-nidhaam nafs il-ʿaqliyyih ḥatta baʿd ilmarrat il-libis nafs in-nidhaam wi iḍa btinzal moʿta bitlaagii kull-innaas libsoo zayha... yaʿnii bitlaagii il-mujtamaʿ solid kulluh kutlih waaḥdeh

"Costumes/clothes are different. The way they dress up is different. If you watch our people in the streets and in the marketplace, you see the same style, the same pattern, and the same mentality and manners. Sometimes, the way people dress up is even the same, and if a new fashion appears, all people will follow it... In other words, the community is solid, people are homogeneous."

**J1:** ma btigdar tguul ?inna ihna il-perfect aw hummu il-perfect

"You cannot say that we are the ones who are perfect or say that they are the perfect (ideal) ones"

Once again, this conversation was dominated by the use of Colloquial Arabic as evident in the repeated use of the

vernacular preposition *bi-*, the inclusion of localized forms such as *ʔihna* (we) and *zayha* (like it), the use of the vernacular conjunction *wi* (instead of *wa*), and the /q/-/g/ substitution in *soog* (marketplace) and *bi-tlaagii* (you find). However, there were instances where Participant J2 switched to ESA in words like *ʔariiqit* ('manner', which is *ʔariigit* in JA) and *il-<sup>c</sup>aqliyyih* ('mentality', which is *il-<sup>c</sup>aglyyyih* in JA). Participant J2 explained that these are different from how he would say them in Jordanian Arabic and attributed the switch to the formality of the topic. He ranked his own contribution as 'high accommodation'. The other participants also ranked these contributions as 'high accommodation'.

Moreover, in this part of the conversation, there were several cases of shifts into English by both J1 and J2. These are cases like design, solid and perfect. Participant J2 pointed out that he could not think of an Arabic equivalent of the word 'design' that is better than the English word. However, he admitted that there is a good Arabic equivalent to the English word 'solid'. For both of these words, he described his linguistic behavior as unconscious and as being between 'high accommodation' and 'low accommodation'. The other participants (J1, E1, and E2) ranked the related contributions of J2 as 'high accommodation'. On the other hand, Participant J1 described his use of the word 'perfect' as spontaneous and ranked his relevant contribution as 'high accommodation', and so did the rest of the participants.

### Excerpt (12)

#### Topic: Academic and intellectual

**J1:** kul ma titla<sup>c</sup> nadhariyyih b-tinbahir ʔinnaas fiiha la-darajit ʔinhum b-inbahruu quote to quote. ba<sup>c</sup>d ʔashhur...sanawaat *tasqut* in-nadhariyyah wi b-titla<sup>c</sup> nadhariyyih jadiidih

"When any new theory appears, people get fascinated with it quote to quote. Ten years later, that theory fades, and a new theory appears"

**E2:** ya<sup>c</sup>nii isluub ilihṣa illi bi-ta<sup>c</sup>miluh bi-tshuuf nataʔig muṣayirah tamamen.. eh hiyyah il<sup>c</sup>ayyina... (interrupted)  
"I mean, you may see variable and completely different results depending on the test you use. This depends on the nature of the sample..."

**J1:** wallah yimkin bas inta law wṣilt la-haay in-nuṣṣa, liliḥṣaa? ma<sup>c</sup>naahaa you have achieved something gutillak fii abstractness, ya<sup>c</sup>nii taṭwiir il-TEST biḥad ḍaatuh mushkilih

"That is possible. However, if you reach this point in statistics, this means that you have achieved something. As I have told you, there is some sort of abstractness. I mean, developing the test is a problem in its own."

The speakers relied mainly on Colloquial Arabic in this part of the conversation. Aspects of colloquialism in this portion include the use of localized and/or stigmatized variants such as *ʔinhum* 'that they' (*ʔannahum* in ESA), *jadiidih* 'new-feminine' (*jadiidah* in ESA), the preposition *la-* 'to' (*li-* in ESA), *haay* 'this-feminine' (*haaḍihi* in ESA), *illi* 'that-relative pronoun' (*allaḍi* in ESA), and *bas* 'but' (*faqat* in ESA) as well as the use of the vernacular aspectual (habitual) verbal prefix *b(i)-* in *b-tinbahir*, *b-inbahruu*, *bi-ta<sup>c</sup>miluh*, and *bi-tshuuf*. Another aspect of colloquialism comes from the /q/-/g/ substitution in *gutillak* and the /j/-/g/ substitution in *nataʔig*.

Excerpt (12) shows a few instances of convergence and shifts to ESA as well as shifts into English. Participant (J1) shifted to ESA in *tasqut* (*tusgut* in JA) and *innuṣṣah* (*innuṣṣah* in JA) as well as the phrase *biḥad ḍaatuh* 'per se', which is lexically more standard. This last switch may qualify as an example of what El-Hassan (1978) calls an educated Arab's frequent usage of certain phrases that do not have a true match in MSA. The same subject switched to English repeatedly using English words, phrases and sentences: 'quote to quote', 'you have achieved something', 'test', and 'abstractness'. Participant J1 attributed these linguistic behaviors to the formality of the topic as well as what he called as "the supposed/assumed familiarity of the other participants with these English words, phrases and sentences." He described his linguistic behavior as 'high accommodation', and so did the rest of the participants. There was another instance of switching to ESA by E2 as clear from his use of the phrase *muṣayirah tamamen* (*completely*

*different*), the second part of which reflects the due standard case marker. Participant E2 stated that this expression is more formal than what he would say in his own dialect and in his day-to-day interaction. He attributed his use of this phrase to the formality of the topic and evaluated his contribution as 'high accommodation'. The Jordanian participants evaluated his contribution as 'low accommodation', whereas E1 evaluated E2's contribution as 'no accommodation', revealing that they did not recognize his switch as a true one but as a normal occurrence in that context.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In a total of four hours of conversations between eight Arabic speakers, the prevailing linguistic behavior was speech maintenance, whereby the participating speakers maintained their own dialects of Arabic (Jordanian Arabic for Jordanians and Egyptian Arabic for Egyptians). Contrary to the initial prediction and the reported findings in the field (e.g., Abu-Melhim 1991, 1992 & 2014; S'hiri, 2002), the results indicated very few instances of switching to the opposite interlocutors' dialects – apart from the few cases where some participants switched briefly into their interlocutors' dialect of Arabic early in the conversations to project pan Arab nationalism and achieve solidarity. In other words, these inter-dialectal shifts conveyed affective rather than referential functions.

This speech maintenance and the lack of extensive convergence into the opposite dialects are in line with Beebe and Giles' (1984) argument about the role of communicative efficiency in motivating speech altering. In other words, the fact that there was no communication breakdown suggests that the two dialects were mutually intelligible; hence, communicative efficiency was not an issue. The Egyptian dialect is very popular all over the Arab world due to its wide spread in the Arab media. This argument follows the argument of Boussofara-Omar (2004) who argued that the satellite TV increased the awareness of differences and similarities between Arabic dialects and developed a dynamic 'loci' for interaction. Although the Jordanian participants viewed Egyptian Arabic as more romantic, poetic and popular than Jordanian Arabic, they never switched to Egyptian Arabic. Contrary to the speech groups in Heller (1992), the relationships between the Jordanian group and the Egyptian group cannot be defined in terms of dominant/subordinate groups. These two groups are clearly in no conflict or struggle over resources or power, at least in the context of the present conversations making the dialect choice less symbolic economically and politically.

There were few instances where the participants switched to ESA especially when discussing formal or intellectual issues. These shifts were phonological and lexical in nature and were necessitated by the formality of the topic. However, these instances were limited in number and scope. This finding lends support for the findings of Abu-Melhim (1991, 1992, and 2014) and S'hiri (2002) against the once-prevailing belief and the claims of Mitchell (1978, 1986) and El-Hassan (1978) that speakers of different varieties of Arabic switch solely, or almost exclusively, to fusha (or MSA) or rely heavily on ESA when conversing with each other as a means of accommodating their speech to their interlocutors.

Moreover, all of the participants switched occasionally to English in their conversations. These shifts were lexical, phrasal and sentential. None of the subjects stated that such linguistic behavior on their side was to claim prestige, high status or fine education – all of these being values associated with the use of English in the Arab World. However, contrary to the speculation of this study, the use of English was not seen as a diverging strategy, at least in the context and setting in which the participating speakers conversed – i.e., an English-speaking community – as evident in the ratings the participants gave to those English contributions. It seems that switching to English is another strategy that speakers employ to accommodate to their interlocutors when they feel that there is a lexical gap (e.g., girlfriend) or when they feel that the English equivalent better convey the intended meaning (e.g., solid). This argument is in line with that of S'hiri (2002), who considered bilingual code-switching as an accommodation strategy. In this sense, the use of English seems to serve the function of speech contextualization (Nilep, 2006) in order to establish a common ground into which the Arabic speakers converge to create a situated world of shared knowledge and expectations that help speakers relate to the topic discussed. However, in the absence of communicative necessities, speakers tended to favor the use of Arabic to English, hence signaling their ethnic and (sub)group affiliation (Poplack, 1981; Heller, 1992).

The fact that the participants in the follow-up interviews almost always ranked their own contributions and their partners' (from both groups) as 'high accommodation' reveals two important points. First, there were no communication breakdowns. Second, that the participants interpreted those linguistic behaviors positively as accommodation-driven practices on their own sides and on the side of their partners. According to Beebe and Giles (1984), recipients may negatively evaluate speech maintenance or divergence if they view such linguistic behaviors as psychologically dissociative (i.e., psychologically diverging). However, the same linguistic behavior (speech maintenance or divergence) will be positively perceived and responded to by the observers of the verbal interaction who define the interaction in intergroup terms "and who share a common, positively valued group membership with the speaker." (9)

Apart from instances of shifts to ESA or switches to English, the results of the present study show that the Jordanian and Egyptian speakers mostly maintained their speech during the conversation. To put Heller's (1992) terminology in use, these practices reflect leveling the boundary within speakers' linguistic repertoire (in the case of ESA switches), crossing the boundary within the speaker's repertoire (in the case of English switches), or emphasizing those boundaries when maintaining own dialect, which was the most prevailing practice. I believe that factors such as the fact that there was always an 'in-group' partner who speaks the same dialect, that the conversation took place in an English-speaking setting, and that there was no communication breakdown had much to do with such tendency (i.e., speech maintenance). In other words, the participants weighed in-group membership more than inter-group membership, maintaining their positive group identity.

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## التكيف اللغوي في المحادثات بين أصحاب اللهجات المختلفة: استثمار المخزون اللغوي والموازنة بين الخيارات اللغوية الاجتماعية المتاحة

مجدي عبدالله\*

### ملخص

قامت هذه الدراسة بتحليل محادثات ثمانية ناطقين باللغة العربية، أربعة منهم أردنيون وأربعة منهم مصريون، من المقيمين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. وقد أظهرت هذه الدراسة، خلافاً للاعتقاد السائد، أن المتحدثين احتفظوا بلهجتهم عموماً ونادراً ما تحولوا إلى استخدام لهجة نظرائهم أو إلى لغة (لهجة) المتقنين المتعلمين المحكية (ESA)، إلا أن الدراسة أظهرت تحول المتحاورين إلى اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل متكرر. وتظهر هذه النتائج بطلان الافتراض الذي كان سائداً حول دور لهجة المتقنين كاستراتيجية تكيف لغوي واسعة الانتشار في المحادثات بين أصحاب اللهجات العربية المختلفة، كما تظهر دور اللغة الإنجليزية كاستراتيجية تقارب لغوي في ذلك السياق الأجنبي. **كلمات الدالة:** نظرية التكيف اللغوي، التناوب اللغوي، اللغويات الاجتماعية، اللغة العربية، اللغة الإنجليزية.

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