

# Diglossia

## A language ideological approach

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Diglossia is, as far as the Arabic language is concerned, a concept that has been taken for granted, as much as it has been criticized. First, based on Ferguson's article on diglossia and subsequent interpretations and ramifications of the concept and with a special focus on how language variability is discursively deployed and how it is perceived in the Arab speech community, I will argue that diglossia does not so much describe actual language use, but rather how language variability is 'read' in the Arab world. In the second part of the article, an analysis of labeling in a 19th century debate will show how the dichotomy between *fushā* and non-*fushā* varieties (*'āmmīya*),<sup>1</sup> which is the basis of diglossia, was already taken for granted long before the concept and the term existed, and even before *fushā* and *'āmmīya* were used as independent lexical items. The analysis in both parts of the article shows how much diglossia is taken for granted by most native speakers of Arabic, even if it defies linguistic descriptions of actual language use. It is exactly this 'common-sense-ness' that suggests that diglossia is a useful tool to describe language ideological attitudes.

**Keywords:** diglossia, Arabic, language ideology, language debates, labeling

### 1. Introduction

Many linguistic studies of Arabic open with an introduction to the 'Arabic language situation' in which reference is made to the diglossic nature of Arabic. It is Ferguson's article "Diglossia" (1959) that set the stage for this approach and for students and scholars of Arabic, using it has become almost a rite de passage.<sup>2</sup> Even if many aspects of the article received a lot of criticism, diglossia is still often taken for granted when

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1. The transliteration of Arabic terms follows Hans Wehr's system.

2. Before the term "*la diglossie arabe*" was used by Marçais (1930) and "*al-izdiwāḡīya*" by Frayḡa (1938).

Arabic is concerned. Moreover, the criticisms hardly ever approach the concept as a language ideological one, namely one that is *informed*, *shaped* and *constructed* by linguistic attitudes that were and are prevalent in the Arabic speech community.

If we follow Joseph's claim (2004, 30–40) that linguistic analysis should not exclusively focus on language production, but that interpretation is at least as important as (if not more than) representation and communication, then diglossia can be a useful concept not to describe the productive aspects of language use (for which it has proven to be invalid), but rather its interpretative aspects. In other words, diglossia can be used to describe the ways in which linguistic variability is 'read' in the Arabic linguistic community. This way of reading in itself, however, influences linguistic norms and actual language use, be it in highly complex ways. This is probably the reason why diglossia is so easily misunderstood as a model for actual language use.

An analysis of labeling can offer fruitful insights into how linguistic variability is interpreted, as labeling linguistic varieties is never an exercise in terminology alone and not a matter of merely 'representing a linguistic reality'. Labeling also implies categorization, drawing boundaries, chopping up the essentially continuous reality of linguistic variation into discontinuous blocks, into 'categories of communication', such as 'language', 'dialect', 'standard' etc. (Gal & Woolard 1995, 129) Thus, labeling is not merely giving a name to 'existing varieties and languages' but rather involves the construction of linguistic varieties and languages and the ways in which they relate to each other. However, we must admit that if and when the linguistic labels are accepted and become common use, they actually do influence and shape linguistic reality and language use. (see also Joseph 2004)

In the present article, the process of labeling will be analyzed by focusing on a sub-debate of the highly polemical debates concerning *'ammīya* and *fushḥā* that were conducted since the end of the 19th century. A close reading of the 19th century sub-debate can offer us insight into how variability in Arabic was perceived by 19th-century intellectuals. Even if intellectuals were only a small minority, the debates offer us an entry into the linguistic attitudes of at least one segment of the Arabic-speaking population at the time. The debates are interesting not only because of the explicit and implicit argumentation patterns of those in favor or against the standardization of other varieties than *fushḥā*, but also because a close analysis of the processes of labeling different varieties can offer us deeper insight into how diglossia was constructed as a language ideological concept, even if the term (*al-izdiwāḡīya* in Arabic) as such was not yet used to describe Arabic.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Basing herself on the work of Mackey (1993), Haeri (2000, 64–5) claims that the term diglossia was first used to describe the Greek language situation in the 1880s. It is interesting to note that this coincides with the early beginnings of the *fushḥā*–*'ammīya* debate in Al-Muqtaṭaf (1881–1882).

A close reading of the linguistic labels used in debates demonstrates that, despite the variability that is covered by the term ‘*āmmīya*, the term is used as a collective term for all varieties other than *fuṣḥā* and as such the wide variety of linguistic characteristics that is covered by the term is overruled by their shared non-*fuṣḥā*-ness. Thus, the debaters construct a diglossic division,<sup>4</sup> long before the term was actually coined and started to be used to describe Arabic or the ‘Arabic language situation’. Moreover, the debaters create a contrast that is not symmetrical, as one side (*fuṣḥā*) is used as the standard of the comparison by which the other side (*‘āmmīya*) is measured.

I will first start with a discussion of the most fundamental points of criticism on Ferguson’s article and the ways in which it was interpreted in subsequent research, as well as some of the remedies that have been presented. Subsequently, I will proceed with a close analysis of labeling in a selection of 19th century sub-debates of the *fuṣḥā*-*‘āmmīya* debate.

## 2. Diglossia: A critical approach

### 2.1 A strict functional division between *fuṣḥā* and ‘*āmmīya*? The language continuum, intermediate varieties and code-switching

One of the main points of criticism that were formulated against Ferguson’s argument was that the actual language use of native speakers challenges the strict functional division that Ferguson suggested in his article:

One of the most important features of diglossia is *the specialization of function* for H [*fuṣḥā*] and L [non-*fuṣḥā*]. In one set of situations only H is *appropriate* and in another only L, with the two sets overlapping only slightly.

(Ferguson 1959, 328, emphasis mine,<sup>5</sup> see also discussion below)

H would then be used for a sermon in church or mosque; a personal letter; a speech in parliament; a political speech; a university lecture; a news broadcast; a newspaper editorial; a news story or the caption on a picture and poetry. L would be used

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4. Or maybe rather re-construct and reconfirm it, as the early Arab grammarians and philologists are said to have been dealing with this topic from as early the ninth century. (El-Hassan 1977, 113)

5. Note the tension between “the specialization of function” which suggests a strict functional distribution of H and L (and which has been taken for granted in much of the literature on diglossia) on the one hand, and the reference to the settings in which H and L are “appropriate” on the other hand. The latter refers to the communicative norms related to the settings rather than to the actual language use in these settings. Moreover, the suggestion of a functional division of language use is confirmed by the examples that Ferguson gives.

for instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks; a conversation with family members, friends, colleagues; radio soap opera; the caption on a political cartoon and folk literature (Ferguson 1959, 329). Analyses of fragments of a sermon in a mosque in Upper Egypt (El-Hassan 1977), a university lecture (El-Hassan 1977), speeches in parliament (El-Hassan 1977), political speeches (Holes 1993; Mazraani 1997) challenge this claim. Counterexamples can also be given for personal letters, news broadcasts,<sup>6</sup> etc. On the other hand, in conversations with family members, friends, etc., captions on political cartoons, or radio soap operas L is not invariably used either. Many more examples can be given. Therefore, “the language situations Ferguson has cited as the exclusive domains of each variety are not as hermetically separated as he had thought” (Mahmoud 1986, 239, op cit. Boussofara-Omar 2011). Just like speakers of other languages, arabophones, more often than not, do not strictly adhere to one language/variety or another within a certain context, but consciously and unconsciously code-switch and style-shift depending on highly variable factors. As in other speech communities, linguistic interaction is a highly dynamic process defying essentialist views of a one-to-one relationship between language and context.

### 2.1.1 *The linguistic continuum and intermediate varieties*

The idea that H and L are actually functionally not as separate as is suggested in Ferguson’s article has led to the assertion that there is a continuum of which H and L are the poles.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently several attempts have been made to divide the continuum in three (triglossia), four (quadriglossia), five or more intermediate varieties. Blanc (1960) makes a distinction between five intermediate varieties: plain colloquial, koineized colloquial, semi-literary or elevated colloquial, modified classical and standard classical (Blanc 1960, 85). Badawi (1973) also distinguishes between five levels for Arabic in Egypt: *fushhā al-turāt* (*fushhā* of the literary heritage), *fushhā al-‘āṣr* (contemporary *fushhā*), *‘ammīyat al-mutaqqafīn* (the colloquial of intellectuals), *‘ammīyat al-mutanawwirīn* (the colloquial of educated people) and *‘ammīyat al-ummīyīn* (the colloquial of illiterates) (Badawi 1973, 89–92). In these labels and their description context, modus (written versus oral) and class are blurred.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Meiseles (1980) divides the continuum into: literary Arabic or standard Arabic, oral literary Arabic or Sub-standard Arabic, Educated Spoken Arabic and plain vernacular.

6. For example, the South-Lebanese radio *Ṣawt al-ḡanūb* broadcasted news bulletins in both *fushhā* and Lebanese Arabic.

7. Ferguson himself was much aware of this: “A kind of spoken Arabic much used in certain semi-formal or cross-dialectal situations has a highly classical vocabulary with few or no inflectional endings, with certain features of classical syntax, but with a fundamentally colloquial base in morphology and syntax, and a generous admixture of colloquial vocabulary.” (Ferguson 1959, 332)

8. See also Bassiouney (2009, 14–16).

However useful the idea of the continuum is (see later), this approach shows various flaws. First of all, all attempts to define intermediate varieties have led to infinite and void discussions about how many varieties could be distinguished and on what basis this could be done. Not only are intermediate varieties vaguely defined, the continuum can be endlessly further divided into yet more varieties. In other words, “the result was the emergence of a constellation of labels to categorize a tentative taxonomy of ‘ill-defined’ middle varieties of Arabic, and hence, a failure to articulate their description in a coherent manner or to relate these sets of practices to a theoretical linguistic model that can account for them” (Boussofara-Omar 2011). Moreover, Meiseles (1980, 121) himself concluded that “outlining borders to the different Arabic varieties is not only a very difficult task, but one that seems, *prima facie*, unnecessary and superfluous.”

Furthermore, these attempts to divide the continuum between shades of so-called “colloquialized *fushā*” and “standardized ‘*āmmīya*” are too one-dimensional, as they, at least implicitly, suggest that the mixing occurs between *fushā* and only one non-*fushā* variety. But in reality mixing between Arabic and other languages on the one hand, and different non-*fushā* varieties of Arabic, on the other, also occur. The definition of Educated Spoken Arabic was an attempt to counter this criticism.

### 2.1.2 *Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA)*

Mitchell and his colleagues who worked on the Leeds corpus (Mitchell 1978, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1994; Mitchell & al-Hassan 1984; El-Hassan 1977, 1978; Sallam 1979, 1980) argue that the so-called vernacular or colloquial is never pure or unmixed, but always shows some degree of influence by *fushā*. They call this variety Educated Spoken Arabic and argue that it is not a static variety but, on the contrary, a highly dynamic one that is defined by the constant interplay between *fushā* and the spoken varieties. Moreover, by focusing on cross-dialectal conversations in interactions between speakers of different parts of the Arab world the Leeds corpus also accounts for switches between *fushā* and several non-*fushā* varieties (not only one) with special attention to these linguistic elements that all non-*fushā* varieties have in common. They attempt to describe the general rules of ESA that is the result of this interplay by means of variation grammar.

One may wonder, however, whether it is useful to consider ESA in the way it is defined by Mitchell and his colleagues as yet another variety of Arabic. First of all, more research on cross-dialectal communication is needed. Otherwise, ESA risks remaining as ill-defined as any one of the other intermediate varieties that have been described above. Or as Parkinson states: “Everyone claims to believe that Educated Spoken Arabic is rule-governed, but none seems to be able to come up with the rules. Part of the reason for this may be, of course, that Educated Spoken Arabic may not actually *be* anything” (Parkinson 2003, 29, op cit. Boussofara-Omar

2011, emphasis original). Furthermore, describing language use in terms of code-switching allows us better to stress the highly dynamic character of language use, while describing it as a variety implicitly suggests some static stability.

### 2.1.3 *Code-switching*

Probably, a description in terms of code-switching is then the most suitable and subtle approach to describe language use among arabophones, since it can interpret inter- and intra segmental switches (e.g. switches between and within sentences or words) on all linguistic levels between Arabic and other languages and between different varieties of *fuṣṣḥā* and non-*fuṣṣḥā* Arabic in one stretch of discourse. Nevertheless, we must add that even the more nuanced approaches that are critical towards the diglossic approach still depart from a basic dichotomy between *fuṣṣḥā* and *‘ammīya* that is taken for granted, hence the term “diglossic switching” (Boussophara 2011) and consistent reference to the “two varieties” of Arabic, e.i. *fuṣṣḥā* and *‘ammīya* (or written and spoken Arabic), as is illustrated by the following paragraph:

It is true that the linguistic situation in the Arab world is no longer (if it ever was) characterized by Classical Arabic/Modern Standard Arabic, on the one hand, and the various regional dialects, on the other. Ferguson’s impressionistic and perhaps idealized characterization of the two varieties as being in complementary distribution functionally is removed from the reality of Arabic-speaking communities. It is idealized in the sense that it does not reflect the constant flux and ever-increasing leakage between *the two varieties*. Nor does it reflect the dramatic social changes that have taken place in the Arab world. “One may ask whether the seal between *the two varieties* had ever been hermetic”, as Walters (1996a) rightly puts it. The linguistic situation in the Arab world has always been permeated by a state of linguistic flux due to the prolonged contact between *the two varieties*, on the one hand, and between Arabic and a foreign language (typically a former colonial language, e.g. French or English), on the other. The advocacy of universal education and the accessibility and knowledge of *fuṣṣḥā* have increased over the years. *Fuṣṣḥā* has increasingly ceased to be used restrictively by a privileged literate elite or to be known passively by a handful of illiterate people. Besides, social changes and growing literacy rates have called for new domains of use of *both varieties*, resulting in an increasing overlap between *the two varieties* of Arabic (and hence a significant leakage), and have induced changes in attitude toward *the use of either variety in both the written* (Daher 1999; Belnap and Bishop 2003) *and the spoken mode* (Parkinson 1996, 2003; Walters 1996, 2003; Boussofara-Omar 1999, *forthcoming*).

(Boussofara-Omar 2011, emphasis mine)

This rather lengthy quote suggests that Boussofara-Omar seems to consider switches between only two different codes, rather than more codes, either languages other than Arabic or different varieties of Arabic.

However, a few qualifying remarks must be made. In order to be able to analyze discourse with code-switching as an analytical tool, one has to be able to distinguish at least two codes.<sup>9</sup> This is not always as straightforward as it might seem at first sight. Even when the two codes are different languages, one might have to deal, for instance, with lexical borrowing and the use of loan words. Needless to say that the relation between borrowing and code-switching is a complex one. This issue becomes even more complex when the codes belong to the same linguistic system, as is the case in code-switching between different varieties of the same language. One has to consider not only borrowings and loan words, but also shared and mixed forms. In his analysis of switching between Black English Vernacular and Standard English Labov (1971, 462) concluded that it is difficult to identify switching sites since both codes have a lot of shared items. The same difficulty was encountered by Gumperz (1982, 85) when analyzing switches between Panjabi and Hindi: The two codes shared so many phonological, lexical and syntactical items that they were indistinguishable in many cases. The same observation has been made by researchers dealing with diglossic code-switching in Arabic (e.g. switching between *fushā* and a non-*fushā* variety). Bassiouney (2009) refers to the difficulty to decide whether a linguistic item belongs to the Egyptian variety or *fushā*. She refers, among other things to the definite article (p. 49), prepositions (p. 55), morphemes in general (p. 55) and concludes that “ECA [Egyptian Colloquial Arabic] and MSA [Modern Standard Arabic] are different codes but with a lot of shared [...] morphemes, and it is almost impossible at times to say whether a certain morpheme belongs to ECA or MSA.” (Bassiouney 2009, 55) This conclusion can be expanded to code-switching between *fushā* and non-*fushā* varieties other than Egyptian Arabic. Shared items can be found on all linguistic levels, but one has to keep in mind that concrete examples will differ depending on which non-*fushā* variety is taken into account. Shared forms can be the result of the fact that both codes simply belong to the same linguistic system. For instance, the phoneme /q/ is phonologically shared by *fushā* and several non-*fushā* varieties, such as most urban varieties in the Maghreb, but also several rural varieties in Syria etc. Other examples can be situated on the morphological (e.g. the definite article *l-*) and lexical levels.

However, shared forms can also be the result of mutual borrowing. Lexical borrowing (with or without phonetic adaptations) is the most obvious example, but

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9. A similar remark has been made by Bassiouney concerning the attempts at defining intermediate levels: “[...] these intermediate levels cannot be understood unless one presupposes the existence of two ‘poles’, H and L. It may be that ‘pure H’ or ‘pure L’ does not occur very often, and that there are usually elements of both varieties in any stretch of normal speech, but still one has to consider a hypothetical pure H or L in order to presuppose that there are elements that occur from one or the other in a stretch of discourse.” (Bassiouney 2009, 13)



borrowing can also take place on all other linguistic levels. In their discussion of general problems of Arabic dialectology, Schippers en Versteegh (1987) refer to the impossibility to describe “pure dialects” because of the continuous influence of *fuṣṣḥā* (“Classical Arabic”) on the spoken varieties (“dialects”). They mention, for instance, that most descriptive studies of modern dialects refer to the use of both the analytical possessive construction (with an analytical possessive component) and the *fuṣṣḥā* genitive construction (without such an analytical component),<sup>10</sup> with the remark that this makes it impossible to know whether both constructions belong to spontaneous language use (by which they mean the non-*fuṣṣḥā* variety) or whether the latter is borrowed from *fuṣṣḥā* (Schippers & Versteegh 1987, 109).<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of analysis in terms of code-switching, the point is not so much whether the construction without the analytical component is original to non-*fuṣṣḥā* varieties or borrowed from *fuṣṣḥā*, because we can argue that even in the second case it is a fully integrated borrowing and as such part and parcel of the non-*fuṣṣḥā* variety as well. As a result, we cannot but consider it a shared grammatical form and therefore it is – without phonological, morphological or discursive clues – impossible to decide to which code this grammatical construction belongs (and hence whether or not its use is to be considered a code-switch).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, linguistic items can be considered to be phonologically, grammatically or lexically shared (e.g. the grammatical or lexical item occurs in both codes having the same semantic load), but can be realized differently on the morphophonological level (with different combinations of morphophonological elements of both the involved codes).<sup>13</sup> However, so-called

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10. Note that in *fuṣṣḥā* the possessive relation between the possessor and the possessed is expressed by means of flexion (e.g. the genitive for the possessor, which is the second part of the construction, hence the term ‘genitive construction’). In non-*fuṣṣḥā* varieties the construction is used without flexion.

11. Versteegh (2001) dismisses the idea of diglossic code-switching altogether arguing that the language choices take place on a continuum and therefore “these changes do not take the form of code-switching from one variety to another, but manifest themselves in a larger percentage of features from the opposite variety.” (Versteegh 1997, 194) Note, however, that this approach suffers of what I called one-dimensionality. Hence, “the mixtures of variants” in the quote “[s]ince the colloquial and the standard language are not discrete varieties, but only abstract constructs at the extremes of a continuum, linguistic choice does not a two-way selection, but rather a *mixture of variants*.” (Versteegh 1997, 195, emphasis mine) should also be interpreted only in terms of *fuṣṣḥā* and one non-*fuṣṣḥā* variety.

12. One could possibly argue that the use of the form with flexion is indication of its *fuṣṣḥā*-ness, but in the case of the opposite, the designation is harder because the pausal forms are also used in *fuṣṣḥā*.

13. See Mazraani (1997, 33–38) and Bassiouney (2009, 43, 46–7) for a more detailed discussion with examples.



mixed or hybrid forms do not pose analytically the same problem as completely shared forms, since they can be considered in terms of intra-sentential or intra-word code-switching.

What can be concluded is then that, even when one has to deal only with switches between one non-*fuṣḥā* variety and *fuṣḥā*, defining the codes is not as clear cut as it might seem at first sight. The case becomes even more complex if switches between more than one non-*fuṣḥā* variety involved need to be considered. Only when highly salient markers occur, it is easy to distinguish between codes and hence identify code-switches, but when shared forms are used, discursive and metapragmatic clues including the perception of the interlocutors, rather than linguistic form alone, has to be taken into account as well.<sup>14</sup>

#### 2.1.4 *Diglossia, intermediate varieties and the native speaker*

The previous point, namely that not only linguistic form but also the perception of native speakers needs to be taken into account, brings us to another criticism on the attempts to divide the continuum between H and L in distinct varieties. Haeri (2000, 66) questions the usefulness of the coining of labels for one of more intermediate varieties without considering their meaningfulness in the Arabic speech community: “One of the reasons for the unending disputes about whether there is di-, tri-, or quadriglossia (Meiseles 1980) is that in practice, stylistic levels are defined purely on the basis of linguistic data. Whether such levels are in fact perceived by and *are meaningful to members of the community, or even a part of it*, is a question that has not been pursued” (emphasis mine). Or as Josph (2004) suggests: the speakers have been left out. This criticism is very fundamental for our purposes, as the main argument of this article is that the concept of diglossia is counterfeited by actual language use (e.g. the linguistic data, linguistic production), but still very persuasive as far as linguistic variability in Arabic is conceived by native speakers (e.g. perception, (meta-)linguistic interpretation).

#### 2.1.5 *Diglossia as a set of metapragmatic norms*

The discussion about the functional division between H and L (that was at least suggested by Ferguson) and the subsequent solutions that have been proposed can maybe be closed by concluding that diglossia is not so much a model for actual language use, but that it should actually be seen as a model of metapragmatic norms (Caton 1991, 145, in Haeri 2000, 66):

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14. One seems not to be able to escape completely from Bassiouney’s (2009, 13) observation that at some point “hypothetical pure codes” need to be distinguished in order to proceed with analysis.

Caton (1991, 145) responded to the enduring dispute about the perceived inadequacy of Ferguson's model by pointing out that it was not one of "actual language use" but rather of the *metapragmatic norms* that prevailed in the speech community (see Ferguson 1991). That is, Ferguson did not offer rules that would account for when and under what conditions one or another of the languages would be chosen by speakers. What he offered was a model of *what the community perceives as appropriate usage* based on historically and institutionally inculcated *norms*.  
(emphasis mine)

However, the confusion between diglossia as a model for norms or as a model for actual language use was caused by Ferguson's ambiguous formulation, as is obvious from the quote above.

### 2.1.6 First set of conclusions

The conclusion is then that diglossia is invalid as a model for actual language use, but it still remains an interesting model to understand the *overt/explicit* norms for language use or the *metapragmatic* norms in the Arabic linguistic community (see Caton 1991; Haeri 1996, 2000). Most native speakers of Arabic would indeed agree that the norm for Ferguson's H situations is *fushā* while in the L situations it is the use of a non-*fushā* variety. We cannot stress enough that these norms are often breached in practice, as is demonstrated in the vast and still growing literature on code-switching in Arabic. However, it is just because of this set of overt metapragmatic norms (which suggest a clear functional distribution of *fushā* and *'ammīya*) that the code-switches in actual language use gain their meaning. For instance, it is exactly because the use of *fushā* is the norm in political speeches that Nasser's switches to Egyptian Arabic are not random or just slips of the tongue, but highly meaningful on the pragmatic level (see Holes 1993; Mazraani 1997). This is also the case for other examples of so-called *diglossic switching*. And maybe this is exactly why the term diglossic switching remains interesting, not so much because the switching only occurs between H and L, but rather because it is informed by a sense of dichotomy between H and L that is perceived as very real by most native speakers of Arabic (see also below and Suleiman 2008, 28, Suleiman 2011, 29–31; Eid 2002, 204).

## 2.2 Diglossia and linguistic prestige: Standard versus prestige

Another aspect of Ferguson's article that has led to a lot of misinterpretation and that needs to be clarified is the presupposition that only H (the standard language, *fushā*) is prestigious and that all other varieties, namely the L varieties, don't have any prestige whatsoever.

In all the defining languages the speakers regard H as superior to L in a number of respects. Sometimes the feeling is so strong that H alone is regarded as real and L is reported 'not to exist.' Speakers of Arabic, for example, may say (in L) that so-and-so doesn't know Arabic. This normally means that he doesn't know H, although he may be a fluent, effective speaker of L. (Ferguson 1959, 329–30)

In the literature that was inspired by Ferguson's article, the prestige of the standard language H, in this case *fushhā*, is most often taken for granted. This is also suggested in Arabic language use by labeling all non-*fushhā* varieties invariably 'āmmīya, *lahajāt* or *dāriġa*. (see below)

However, even if *fushhā* is a very prestigious variety in the Arabic speech community, its prestige is blurred in various ways and for different reasons.

Although many if not most of the non-*fushhā* varieties can be rightly called 'dialects', 'colloquials' or 'vernaculars', other non-*fushhā* varieties actually do have a lot of (covert) prestige and are used in speech contexts that are much wider than the ones one might expect on a basis of the labels that are used to describe them. On a local or regional level, many (mostly urban) varieties function as local or regional prestige forms. In many Arab states, because of the political and cultural predominance of the capital, the variety spoken by the urban classes of the capital also functions as a national standard or prestige form.<sup>15</sup> This was also mentioned in Ferguson's article:

In speech communities which have no single most important center of communication a number of regional L's may arise. In the Arabic speech community, for example, there is no standard L corresponding to educated Athenian *dhimotiki*, but regional standards exist in various areas. The Arabic of Cairo, for example, serves as a standard L for Egypt, and educated individuals from Upper Egypt must learn not only H but also, for conversational purposes, an approximation to Cairo L.

(Ferguson 1959, 332)

Moreover, often the speech of educated classes in the capital is considered to represent the whole country. Not only do several non-*fushhā* varieties then actually function as local or regional standard varieties, many examples can be given of cases in which the overt prestige of *fushhā* is outdone by the covert prestige of these non-*fushhā* varieties. This is most clearly illustrated when a linguistic feature is shared between *fushhā* and the stigmatized non-*fushhā* variety, but deviates from the local prestigious non-*fushhā* variety. In such cases, the shared *fushhā*/stigmatized non-*fushhā* variant will be replaced by the prestigious non-*fushhā* variant, even if this means from a normative perspective that the 'correct' form will be replaced by an 'incorrect' one. For instance, Holes (1986, 1995) has demonstrated that in Bahrain there is a tendency

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15. The use of the term 'standard' should not be confused with 'standard language', mainly because of their lack of any official recognition whatsoever.

for Bahraini Shiite Muslims (*Baḥarna*) to adapt to linguistic features of the variety spoken by Sunni Muslims ('*Arab*'), which is considered to be the locally prestigious variety. One of the characteristics of the '*Arab*' variety is the realization of the alveolar affricate /ʃ/ as a palatal fricative [ç]. In the *Baḥarna* variety /ʃ/ is realized as [ç̣], just as in *fušḥā*. However, when interacting with '*Arab*', *Baḥarna* will often switch to [ç], even when it is in opposition with the *fušḥā* variant. Holes concludes that the educated variety of the '*Arab*' dialect has become a standard for Bahrain as a whole and that it is used in almost all attempts to represent 'typical' Bahraini speech. (Holes 1995, 276) The same goes for (mostly female) speakers of rural and Bedouin varieties of Jordanian Arabic, (for which the interdental realization of /d/ and /t/ as [d̪] and [t̪] is a characteristic shared with *fušḥā*) who tend to switch to the urban pronunciation (respectively [d] and [t] or [z] and [s]) when they have the impression that their own variety is inappropriate. Non-Muslims in Baghdad (e.g. speakers of a *qeltu*-dialect) tend to switch—among other features—from [q] (shared with *fušḥā*) to [g] in interactions with Muslims (speakers of a *gilit*-dialect). (Ferguson 1959, 325; Blanc 1964, 9; Abu-Haidar 1991, 6)<sup>16</sup>

These examples clearly illustrate that in certain contexts the overt prestige that is associated with *fušḥā* is overruled by the covert prestige of the local prestigious non-*fušḥā* varieties. This suggests that when a feature is shared by *fušḥā* and a non-prestigious (or stigmatized) variety, its association with the stigmatized variety seems to overrule its association with *fušḥā*.

### 2.2.1 Lēš tmaddanti?<sup>17</sup>

However, this does not have to lead us to the conclusion that the so-called stigmatized varieties are never valued by its speakers. They can serve as a strong marker for in-group identity and as such they can be considered to be prestigious within the in-group. This is exemplified by the softly reproachful expression '*lēš tmaddanti*' that is directed towards (mostly young female) speakers of rural Jordanian varieties when they insert phonological or lexical items that are associated with urban varieties, such as the glottal stop [ʔ] (urban variant) for /q/ instead of [g] (rural and Bedouin variant). This is also exemplified by Bassiouney reporting the following reaction of an Egyptian student coming originally from Upper Egypt when complimented about his fluency in Cairene Arabic: "I speak Cairene to you. I can never speak it to my mother. If I speak Cairene Arabic to my mother, she will call me a sissy and possibly kill me!" (Bassiouney 2009, 3)

16. Note that Abu-Haidar (1991), a speaker of Christian Baghdadi Arabic herself, refers to and quotes both Ferguson (1959) and Blanc (1964) to substantiate her claim (f.n. 9).

17. Why do you (fem. sing.) talk urban?

### 2.2.2 Foreign languages

Another aspect that must be taken into account is the role of languages other than Arabic, especially French and English, and to a lesser extent Italian and Spanish (the latter two will not be further discussed here).<sup>18</sup> Despite the fact that both languages are related to the colonial past of most of the Arab countries (French in the Maghreb, Syria and Lebanon and English in Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq and some of the countries of the Gulf) and despite the measures for the arabisation (*ta'rib*) in the fields of administration and education that were taken in almost all of these countries after independence, English and French continue to be important languages in terms of linguistic prestige. In most Arab countries education offered in primary and secondary public schools is mostly in Arabic. However, with the exception of Syria, in most Arab countries most courses on university level are, depending on the academic field, partly or completely offered in either French or English. Moreover, many private schools in the Arab world tend to offer education in French or English and teach Arabic as a foreign language. As a result, bilingualism in Arabic (mostly spoken varieties) and either English or French, has become a marker for the elite that can afford to send its children to private schools. Moreover, in many cases fluency in either English or French is much more an asset on the labor market than the knowledge of *fushā* is.

[...], the use of foreign languages, French and English specifically, is still prevalent in the Arab world, even more so than at the time of colonisation, for different reasons. Some of the reasons are related to economic needs and market forces, as is the case with countries that depend on tourism for their hard currency, such as Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, or countries that depend on France as their main trading market, such as Morocco. Although most of the reasons why parents in the Arab world are keen on teaching their children a foreign language, and learning one themselves, are to a great extent utilitarian (Shaaban 2006), there are still symbolic connotations of the use of French in North Africa, for example.

(Bassiouney 2009, 210–2)

Therefore, despite their association with the colonial past, English and French can compete in terms of prestige with *fushā* because of their association with modernity and the sciences and upward social mobility:

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18. The languages spoken by linguistic minorities will not be taken into account neither, since their prestige is most often limited to being a marker for in group identity of the linguistic minority in question and as such they do not compete for linguistic prestige for speakers who don't speak them natively.

[...], mastery of a Western language represents an important kind of embodied symbolic capital (Walters 1999b), a fact not lost on future elites across the Arab world. Knowledge of a Western language may be useful in getting a job or helping one's country modernize, but it also increases one's social status and may help women, in particular, in the marriage market. (Walters 2011)

From the above can be concluded that even if *fushā* actually does have a lot of overt prestige, this does not necessarily mean that this influences language use in a straight-forward way and that speakers will switch invariably to *fushā* in contexts in which their own variety is felt to be inappropriate. So, a distinction must be made between different forms of prestige or the symbolic meanings that are attached to different varieties of Arabic.

Furthermore, even the overt prestige of *fushā* cannot be fully taken for granted. Haeri (1996, 2000, 69) argues that in Cairo upper class men refer more often to the political importance of *fushā* as a marker of pan-Arab nationalism and cultural and political resistance against colonialism and imperialism than women do. Moreover, to corroborate the remark above, she observed that the overt importance they attached to *fushā* did not influence their language use in such a way that it led to an increased use of *fushā* forms:

although upper class men in Cairo spoke far more about the political importance of Classical Arabic in forging pan-Arab identity, in resisting colonial domination, and as a cultural and political weapon against more recent forms of foreign domination, their actual use of Classical Arabic forms did not match the overt importance they attached to this language. Such characterizations of Classical Arabic were not as readily present in interviews with women, and they also did not use such forms as often as men did. (Haeri 2000, 69)

This confirms, first of all, our argument that the overt prestige that is attached to *fushā* is not necessarily enacted in actual language use (see also above). Furthermore, this means that not all individuals or groups of individuals are in the same ways attached to *fushā*.

### 2.2.3 *Second set of conclusions*

The above discussion has illustrated that *fushā* indeed has a lot of overt prestige in the Arabic speech community. Speakers will very often explicitly refer to *fushā* as the language of the Koran and the Islamic heritage, the language of a rich literary heritage, and as a marker of pan-Arab identity. However, this prestige should not be taken for granted, as it is blurred in several ways.

First of all, in contrast to many Western standard languages, *fushā* is not the standardized version of the vernacular of a socially prestigious group. Its prestige

is not based on the social prestige that is derived from social, cultural, political or religious dominance. In this capacity, the prestige that is related to *fushā* is an abstract kind of prestige that is often overruled by the prestige of locally or regionally prestigious varieties in situated oral face-to-face interactions.

Second, *fushā* is not necessarily a language variety that is needed for upward social mobility. In many cases, the knowledge of French or English is far more important to find a job than the knowledge of *fushā* is.

Third, not all social groups are to the same degree attached to *fushā*, neither do they give the same symbolic meanings to it. Research has demonstrated that, for instance, in Egypt women express far less the importance of *fushā* as a marker of pan-Arab and religious identity (Haeri 2000). Neither are Arab Christians religiously attached to *fushā* in the same ways as Muslims are, even if they are highly respectful to the religious meanings that Muslims attach to *fushā*.

Fourth, the overtly voiced prestige that is attached to *fushā* is not necessarily enacted in actual language use. Upper class men in Egypt use *fushā* far less than their explicit statements about its religious, political and cultural importance would suggest (Haeri 2000).

Fifth, the above discussion has also demonstrated that all languages and linguistic varieties can carry prestige, depending on the speaker and the context, be it not always a prestige that is overtly expressed. Even the so-called stigmatized varieties are at least prestigious as markers of an in-group identity. In such contexts, the use of other (overtly more prestigious) varieties is not appreciated.

The discussion above is, as I have done myself, often framed in terms of competing linguistic prestige. Since none of the Arabic varieties seems to have unflawed prestige that is one-dimensionally enacted in linguistic practice, it is probably more fruitful to describe the different ways in which languages and linguistic varieties are overtly and covertly evaluated by speakers in terms of the symbolic meanings that are attached to the different varieties. As has been demonstrated above, these assessments are not necessarily the same for all speakers or categories of speakers, but they can highly differ depending on gender, social, religious, sectarian or national identity. Moreover, the same speaker can attach different meanings to different varieties, depending on the context (in its widest meaning). Therefore, the symbolic meanings of Arabic varieties can also be assessed as markers of identity.

The following table presents a rather generalizing overview of positive and negative symbolic meanings that can be attached to different languages and Arabic varieties in the Arabic speech community.



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<i>fuṣṣḥā</i> :	overt prestige +	negative assessment –
	– Islam	– ‘book language’ = ossified
	– classical heritage	– pedantic
	– pan-Arab nationalism	– islamism?
	– education	
A +	covert prestige +	–
(mostly urban varieties)	– associated with socio-economic or political dominance	– effeminate
A –	covert prestige +	–
(mostly rural varieties)	– ingroup (“ <i>lēš tmaddanti</i> ”)	– rural, lower classes, uneducated
foreign language (English, French)	overt prestige +	–
	– education, science, internationality	– foreign dominance (political = colonial and post-colonial political dominance and economic dominance)
	– upper class (access to (private) higher education, travel, etc.)	

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### 3. Analysis of the Muqtaṭaf debate

#### 3.1 Introduction

The main conclusion of the first part of this article is that diglossia cannot be used as a model for actual language use. Neither does it account straightforwardly for the different symbolic values that are attached to the different Arabic varieties. Nevertheless, the idea that there exists a dichotomy between *fuṣṣḥā* and non-*fuṣṣḥā* varieties, in which *fuṣṣḥā* is the prestigious variety and all the other varieties don't have any prestige whatsoever, in combination with a very clear sense of the domains in which either variety is respectively appropriate, is very real to most speakers of Arabic. In other words, we can say that “[diglossia] accords well with how the Arabs generally conceptualize their language situation” (Suleiman 2011, 29). In this sense, we can agree with Caton's (1991, 145) conclusion that diglossia can serve as a model for the metapragmatic norms in the Arabic speech community. These norms are based on language ideological attitudes, in which the dichotomy between *fuṣṣḥā* and non-*fuṣṣḥā* varieties is taken for granted. The above discussion has hopefully clearly demonstrated that the linguistic reality, as far as both actual language use and the distribution of prestige (e.g. the symbolic meanings that are given to different varieties) are concerned, is far more complex than is suggested by this basic dichotomy. Still, both language use and the distribution of prestige are influenced by it, be it in ways that are never straightforward.

“Folk-linguistics<sup>19</sup> nativist dualism”, (Suleiman 2011, 30) captures the language ideological aspects of these diglossic conceptualizations very well, referring at the same time to their shared or “common-sense nature”, meaning that they are taken for granted and as such hardly ever questioned by most speakers of Arabic (1),<sup>20</sup> together with the fact that they can be “highly immune to experience and observation” (2)<sup>21</sup> and that they are “community-based” (3)<sup>22</sup> (Verschueren 2012, 10–20; 200). Moreover, it is because, “[t]he products of common-sense reflections (mainly descriptive) are turned into norms (both in the sense of what is seen as normal, and in the regulative and prescriptive sense)” (Verschueren 2012, 8) that these conceptualizations have evolved into the highly persistent meta-pragmatic norms referred to above.

Furthermore, as Suleiman remarks and as can be concluded from the discussion above, this folk linguistics nativist dualism, or in other words, the language ideological dimension of diglossia, has been largely excluded from the literature in English on the concept. A detailed explanation of the reasons underlying this exclusion would lead us too far here, but we could suggest that the answer partly lies in the prevailing tendency in Arabic sociolinguistics of quantitative variationist and positivist approaches rather than qualitative analysis (Suleiman 2011, 8–29, 2013, 264–5). We could also suggest that this exclusion is also language ideologically driven, in the sense that the selection of topics and research methodologies suggests implicit frames and views of what (socio)linguistic research includes and what not, within what we might call a ‘community of researchers’ adhering to the quantitative variationist paradigm.<sup>23</sup> Because of the community-based character

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19. Suleiman (2013, 266), partly quoting himself, defines folk linguistics as “the range of views and attitudes people have about their language, including its origin and the myths surrounding it that “allow us to come closer to the overt or covert orientations, assumptions, and hidden ideologies of the community and how these relate to linguistic repertoire.” (Suleiman 2008, 28)”

20. “The common-sense (basic/normative) nature of ideological meaning is manifested in the fact that it is rarely questioned, in a given society or community, in discourse related to the ‘reality’ in question, possible across various discourse genres.” (Verschueren 2012, 12)

21. “Ideology, because of its normativity and common-sense nature, may be highly immune to experience and observation.” (Verschueren 2012, 14)

22. “Like paradigms, ideologies (if we can use the plural at all) are *community-based*. Their relevance, while going beyond the individual, does not extend beyond a given society or community [...]. (Verschueren 2012, 11)

23. This tendency can be partly explained by the fact that sociolinguistics had to struggle for its place in the linguistics curriculum. (See Joseph 2004, 60–1)

of ideology (see above), this language ideology obviously differs from the previous one, for one thing because they are prevalent in different communities, respectively a linguistic community and a community of linguists. Nevertheless, it is exactly because of the persistency of diglossia in its language ideological capacity, together with the fact that it does inform actual language use, that it is important to include it in sociolinguistic analysis.

Finally, the ‘diglossic language situation’ is not as stable as is suggested in Ferguson’s article and the subsequent literature:

It might be supposed that diglossia is highly unstable, tending to change into a more stable language situation. Diglossia typically persists at least several centuries, and evidence in some cases seems to show that it can last well over a thousand years.

(Ferguson 1959, 332)

For one, diglossia is implicitly challenged in actual language use. Moreover, Ferguson himself argues that, even if diglossia can be accepted by a community for an extensive period, it tends to become challenged when three trends appear, namely “more widespread literacy”, “broader communication among different regional and social segments of the community” and “desire for a full-fledged standard “national” language” (Ferguson 1959, 338).

This is exactly what happened in the Arab Middle East, where since the 19th century the diglossic metapragmatic norms have been explicitly challenged in highly polemic debates that were triggered by calls to modernize the Arabic language, be this by completely changing the norms for written and official language use, or just by simplifying grammatical rules or at least the teaching methods of grammar.<sup>24</sup> However, in most of the debates the dichotomy between *fushḥā* and non-*fushḥā* is not only kept intact, it is also taken for granted by all the debaters notwithstanding the position they take in the debate. It is exactly for this reason that it forms an interesting case for uncovering and analyzing language ideological attitudes, since ideology lies much more in the unsaid than in what is overtly voiced. (Verschuere 2012)

The remainder of this article is an attempt to uncover a part of what is taken for granted and is left unsaid, or only indirectly said, about *fushḥā* and ‘*āmmīya* and their mutual relation, or in other words to uncover diglossia or folk-linguistics nativist dualism as “*common sense with a history*, common sense that members of a wider community appeal to in order to be persuasive” (Verschuere 2012, 8, emphasis mine).

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24. See Ferguson: “[L]eaders in the community begin to call for unification of the language [...] and tend to support either the adoption of H or of one form of L as the standard, less often the adoption of a modified H or L, a “mixed” variety of some kind.” (Ferguson 1959, 338)

As will hopefully be demonstrated, labeling, especially when the process goes un(re)marked, when labels are accepted without further discussion and become common use (e.g. are repeated over and over again), proves to be a very fruitful domain to uncover language ideological attitudes.

The data that will be presented here are taken from a short but vivid debate that was conducted between November 1881 and July 1882 in *Al-Muqtaṭaf*,<sup>25</sup> a scientific and cultural journal that was widely read. The string of 11 articles of which the debate consists can be considered a debate in the formal sense of the word. The article opening the debate concludes with a request to “all the distinguished writers who vie for the welfare of the fatherland to present their opinions on this issue [of the dichotomy between the written and the spoken language] and to give it due attention.” (*Al-Muqtaṭaf* 1881, 354)<sup>26</sup> Subsequently ten articles appeared reacting upon the first article and previous reactions on it. The debate was also formally closed; the editors of the journal added a footnote to the 11th and last article in which they stated that “this is the end of the debate in this section, without rebuke, nor blame” (*Al-Muqtaṭaf* 1882, 110). Therefore, we can consider the string of articles as one unit, namely a debate. Besides, all but the first two articles were published in the section “Debate and correspondence” (*bāb al-munāzara wa al-murāsala*).

To my best knowledge, this debate was the first time (since the standardization and codification of Arabic) that the issue of linguistic variability in Arabic was explicitly debated on such a large scale. From that moment on, until the present, other, but in many ways very similar debates have continued to erupt in which the main arguments tended to be repeated over and over again.<sup>27</sup> As such, we can consider the *Muqtaṭaf*-debate and the other debates as sub-debates of a larger debate that has most often been called the *fušḥā-‘ammīya* debate. Moreover, “the continuous repetition of the main arguments in the different sub-debates in each generation and, in the same generation, in different locations, testifies to the perennial nature

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25. *Al-Muqtaṭaf* was published in Beirut from 1876 until 1884 and then in Cairo from 1884 until its last issue appeared in 1951/1952. Its main editors were Ya‘qūb Ṣarrūf (1852–1927) and Fāris Nimr (1856–1952), both prolific intellectuals of Christian descent.

26. All translations from Arabic are mine.

27. Other manifestations of the debate are the sub-debate in *Al-Muqtaṭaf* in 1887–1888 (see Diem 1974, 129–30, Daniëls 2002, 255–6), the publication of *The spoken language of Egypt* by Selden J. Wilmore in 1901 and the reactions and counter-reactions it triggered in *Al-Muqtaṭaf* and other prominent cultural journals such as *Al-Hilāl* and *Al-Manār* (see Diem 1974, 132–3, Daniëls 2002, 257–80, Suleiman 2004, 68–71), the articles that appeared in 1910 in *Al-Muqtabas*, yet another leading journal at the beginning of the 20th century, the linguistic proposals by Aḥmad Luṭfi al-Sayyid in the 1920s and 30s (see Daniëls 2002, 284–8) and by Anīs Frayḥa in 1938 and 1955 (see Daniëls 2002, 289–301, Suleiman 2004). Needless to say that this list is not exhaustive.

of the issues that animate them (Daniels 2002). Here, every act of textualization becomes one of retextualization in which society and culture share the right of authorship” (Suleiman 2004, 94).

However, the analysis in this part will focus only on the Muqtaṭāf sub-debate. But exactly because of the repetitive character of the arguments, the main findings can be extrapolated to other sub-debates and the larger *fuṣṣḩā-‘āmmīya* debate as a whole and to meta-linguistic language use in general. Even if the debate is in a variety of ways interesting as a locus for language ideology, I will limit myself for the purposes of this article to a micro-analysis of the linguistic labels and the ways in which they are used in the debate.

### 3.1.1 *Why the 19th century?*

In general, the 19th century can be described as a period during which Arab societies were in flux. The important social, political, cultural and religious changes that took place in that era were also felt in the linguistic domain. During the 19th century, the modernization of Arabic was not only debated, it was also actually taking place, as Arabic underwent some drastic changes, mainly under the influence of the development of the printing press, translation from European languages and the modernization of education in several parts of the Arab world, especially Egypt and Lebanon. These linguistic changes were most dramatically felt at the lexical level. For concepts (of all kinds, not only linguistic ones) previously unknown to the Arab world loan words from European languages entered the Arabic language (with or without being adapted to Arabic phonological and morphological rules), new lexical items were created and already existing words were given a new semantic load.<sup>28</sup> One of the implications of re-semanticization is that words tend to have, at least for a certain period of time, a very ambiguous meaning. Semantic ambiguity is of course always to a certain extent a characteristic of language, but when important social, political or other changes take place—as is the case for the 19th century—this characteristic becomes more salient. The inverse is also the case, when language becomes subject to debate, this means that other important changes are taking place in society. The fact that this observation certainly applies to this debate and to the larger *fuṣṣḩā-‘āmmīya* debate in general cannot be dealt with in detail here, but we cannot stress enough that the debate was not only deeply anchored in the social, political and cultural changes that were taking place at the time, it was also one of the factors contributing to the shaping of these changes. Returning to the linguistic changes themselves, it is exactly because of its position between classical

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28. For a more elaborate discussion, see Ayalon (1987), Versteegh & Schippers (1987, 146–6), Versteegh (2001, 173–88).

and modern language use that 19th century language use proves to be a highly interesting domain for uncovering language ideological attitudes.

Since this is, as far as the modern period is concerned, most probably the first time that the issue of linguistic variability in Arabic was debated on such a large scale, it seems obvious that the debaters, in order to express their ideas, also needed to create new linguistic terms or re-semanticize already existing ones. This process in itself, then, seriously influenced their and later generations' thinking about language and linguistic variation. An interesting case is, as will be demonstrated below, the term *'āmmīya* itself.

In the analysis special attention will be given to synonymy, as it is yet another interesting aspect of labeling and constitutes an entry into the implicit language attitudes of the debaters. After establishing *fuṣḥā* and *'āmmīya* as not only different and separate, but also *unequal* varieties, a wide variety of synonyms is used to refer to either *fuṣḥā* or *'āmmīya*. Nevertheless, these synonyms carry with them very different connotations and associations by which the inequality is further confirmed. The use of these synonyms is not challenged and goes even un(re)marked. And as such, synonymy is again a strong indicator of the language ideological attitudes of the debaters (Verschueren 2012).

### 3.2 The basic dichotomy: *Fuṣḥā* and *'āmmīya*

One of the first striking elements that comes, not surprisingly, to the forefront is the fact that the debaters divide Arabic variability into two main categories, which are generally labeled respectively *al-luġa al-faṣīha/al-luġa al-fuṣḥā* and *luġat al-'amma/al-luġa al-'āmmīya*. Whereas there are several attempts to define *fuṣḥā*, either directly or by defining words that are derived from the same tri-radical root *f-ṣ-h*, such as *faṣīh*, *fuṣaḥā'*, *faṣāḥa*, no attempts are made to define explicitly what *'āmmīya* means. As a result, *'āmmīya* is defined implicitly and by default as everything that is not *fuṣḥā*,<sup>29</sup> (hence my own choice to refer to the *'āmmīya* varieties as non-*fuṣḥā* varieties, see also above). As the discussion of the functional division and the distribution of linguistic prestige has shown, this has serious and far stretching implications for the ways in which non-*fuṣḥā* varieties are perceived and evaluated. Turning the point upside-down, we can also argue that this implicit default definition is exactly the result of the ways in which non-*fuṣḥā* varieties are perceived in the Arabic linguistic community.

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29. However, Şarrūf and Nimr refer also to the fact that the science books are written in “a language different from the language we speak” (*luġa ġayr al-luġa allatī nataḥallamuhā*) (Al-Muqtaṭaf 1881, 353)

Apart from the fact that this terminology overrules the internal variability that is covered by both terms, not only in the obvious case of ‘*āmmīya*, but also that of *fuṣḥā* (which is maybe less obvious), the terminology veils the fact that both *fuṣḥā* and the varieties covered by the term ‘*āmmīya* actually do have a lot of linguistic features in common on all linguistic levels. As mentioned above, this is one of the main difficulties of an analysis of code-switching and as the discussion has illustrated, it depends on a highly complex set of factors (related to both the context in its broadest sense and the identity of the speakers) whether such a shared feature is then considered to be a marker for *fuṣḥā* or ‘*āmmīya*.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3 Clusters of associations *Al-fuṣḥā* and *Al-‘āmmīya*: Synonyms and their connotations

Those who read the biography of George Stephenson which appeared in this issue have seen that this man studied mathematics and other sciences while he was a mere stoker of a steam engine who only had a simple knowledge of reading. Those who succeed best in their efforts can be found among the Westerners who studied the higher sciences, such as algebra, engineering, natural philosophy and mechanics, while they exercise the basest work and have scientific knowledge [based on] simple reading [skills]. This is because the *book language* (*luġat al-kutub*) of the Westerners does not differ a lot from *the language they speak* (*al-luġa allatī yatakallamūna bi-hā*). So, a *commoner* among them (*al-‘āmmī minhum*) understands a philosophy book just [in the same way] as a *commoner* among us (*al-‘āmmī minnā*) understands the story of Banī Hilāl. Their *common people* (*‘āmmatuhum*) avail themselves of books [in the same way] as their *elite* (*hāṣṣatuhum*) does. Therefore, you can see that the ways to success are open in the same way for their elite as for their commoners and that the qualities of science are widespread among them. (Al-Muqtaṭaf 1881, 352–3, emphasis mine)

With this paragraph, Ya‘qūb Ṣarrūf and Fāris Nimr, the editors of Al-Muqtaṭaf open a prolific debate that will continue for decades. They claim that the main reason that triggered them to write this article, *The Arabic language and success* (*Al-luġa al-‘arabiya wa-al-naġāh*), is the observation that Western societies are more successful in pursuing their scientific aims than the Arab world. In their opinion, the main reason is that in the West, all layers of society have access to scientific books because the language of books does not differ from the spoken language (Al-Muqtaṭaf 1881, 353). However important the argumentation concerning success and its relation to science is, with all its social Darwinist implications, we will focus here only on the lexical labels that are used.

30. See Parkinson (1991) for an interesting discussion of variability within *fuṣḥā* and how *fuṣḥā* means different things for different native speakers of Arabic in Egypt.



As can be seen, two basic interrelated oppositions, a linguistic one and a social one, are referred to in this opening paragraph: “the book language” (*luġat al-kutub*) versus “the language they speak” (*al-luġa allatī yatakallamūna bi-hā*); and “the elite” (*al-hāṣṣa*) versus “the common people” (*al-‘amma*). In the remainder of the article and the ten reactions it triggered, in other words the debate as a whole, these social and linguistic oppositions will be repeated over and over again. The debaters implicitly and explicitly establish connections between the social and the linguistic oppositions, which are further solidified by the continuous repetition. Moreover, the linguistic opposition is not only repeated, but also rephrased by using synonyms for both the “book language” (written language) and the “spoken language”. These synonyms, however, have very different connotations, but by using them interchangeably, the connotations of one label are (implicitly) transferred to the other. Let us first look at the different ways in which synonymy is established.

### 3.3.1 *The process of labeling and synonymy: Indirect equation*

One of the ways in which the debaters establish synonymy consists of direct or indirect equation. A few examples that are taken from the debate will do to illustrate this process. As the process is repeated over and over again, we will by no means try to be exhaustive.

When Ṣarrūf and Nimr opened the debate on linguistic variability in Arabic, they presented the linguistic problem basically as the existence of a large difference between the written and the spoken language, to which they referred respectively as the “book language” (*luġat al-kutub*) or the “language we write” (*al-luġa allatī naktub bi-hā*) and the “language of speech” (*luġat al-takallum*) and “the language they/we speak” (*al-luġa allatī yatakallamūna/natakallam bi-hā*). This difference is subsequently compared to the difference between respectively Latin and Italian, and Classical and Modern Greek:

[...] Modern Greek (*al-rūmīya*) which is related to Classical Greek (*al-yūnāniya*) in the same way as the Arabic we speak is related to the Arabic we write.

(Al-Muqtaṭaf 1881, 353)

Without mentioning it explicitly, written Arabic is then associated with the ancient or the classical form of the language, while the spoken language is associated with the modern form. It follows that implicitly a historical/diachronic dimension is given to the opposition between the written and the spoken language, even if ‘spoken’ and ‘written’ refer to how the language is used or its medium, whereas ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ refer to the historical phases in the development of a language. Moreover, these adjectives suggest that the written language is historically older than the spoken language, and the idea that the latter is derived from the first.<sup>31</sup>

31. This can be related to the Arab views on the development of the post-Islamic Arabic dialects

Another interesting implicit equation that appears later in the article, is that of the written language with correct Arabic.

Or, we [have] to teach our children to speak correct Arabic (*al-‘arabiya al-ṣaḥīḥa*), so that a natural [linguistic] disposition (*malaka*)<sup>32</sup> comes in them and that they speak the same as they write. (Al-Muqtaṭaf 1881, 353)

Equating written Arabic in this way with correct Arabic also indicates indirectly that spoken Arabic is incorrect.

On the other hand, the spoken language is associated with general and common language use. When discussing the third solution, namely “to write books in the language we speak” (*an naktuba kutubanā bi-al-luḡa allatī nataḥallamu bi-hā*), the authors refer to the fact that other peoples/nations replaced “their ancient languages” (*luḡātuhum al-qaḍīma*) with “the commonly used languages” (*al-luḡāt al-šā’i’a*). The authors apply this equation also on the case of Arabic, by arguing that nothing hinders them to standardize “the spoken language that is commonly spoken in the Arabic countries” (*luḡat al-takallum al-šā’i’a fī al-buldān al-‘arabiya*).

### 3.3.2 *The process of labeling and synonymy: Direct equation*

It is striking that in the article that can be considered to be the opening of the modern debate concerning variability in Arabic, which is most often referred to as the *fuṣṣḥā-‘āmmīya* debate, no reference at all is made to these two linguistic labels. It is only in the first reaction that appeared to the opening article that this happens. This article was written by Ḥalīl al-Yāziḡī and introduces us to another way of establishing synonymy. The debaters have the habit of briefly summarizing the arguments that were previously mentioned, before adding their own arguments. The reformulation is done by means of direct quotes, to which very often new terms are added, or by rephrasing the previous argument(s) and using other linguistic key words that are considered to have the same meaning. In the following example we find examples of both methods. Al-Yāziḡī rephrases Ṣarrūf’s and Nimr’s solutions as follows:

One of them is the replacement of our language with another language. The second is the replacement of the writing language with the language of speech, meaning the folk language (*istibdāl luḡat al-kitāba bi-luḡat al-takallum ayy luḡat al-‘amma*). The third is the replacement of the folk language in speech with *al-faṣīḥa* (*istibdāl luḡat al-‘amma fī al-takallum bi-al-luḡa al-faṣīḥa*). (Al-Yāziḡī 1881, 404)

In this quote, the spoken language (*luḡat al-takallum*) is directly equated with the folk language (*luḡat al-‘amma*) by means of the particle *ayy* (meaning), whereas the written language (*luḡat al-kitāba*) is indirectly equated with *al-faṣīḥa* by replacing

32. For a discussion of the ideological implications of the concept of natural linguistic dispositions or “pristine linguistic intuitions” (*fiṭra luḡawiya* or *salīqa luḡawiya*), see Suleiman (2013, 53–4).

“the written language” with this term in the rephrasing of Şarrūf’s and Nimr’s third solution. As already mentioned, because of the repetitive and unchallenged character of this process clusters of associations and meanings arise.

In the Muqtaṭaf debate as a whole, the writing language (*luġat al-kitāba*) is directly or indirectly equated with the book language (*luġat al-kutub*), the written language (*al-luġa al-maktūba*), the Arabic we write (*al-‘arabīya allatī naktubuhā*), *al-luġa al-faṣīḥa* or *al-luġa al-fuṣṣhā*, and their elliptic forms *al-faṣīḥa* and *al-fuṣṣhā*. These labels are associated or equated with the ancient/classical language (*al-luġa al-qadīma*), correct (Arabic) language (*al-luġa (al-‘arabīya) al-ṣaḥīḥa*) or correct Arabic (*al-‘arabīya al-ṣaḥīḥa*), the original/authentic language (*al-luġa al-aṣliya*) and the language of the Muḍar tribe (*luġat muḍar*).

The writing language is thus associated with eloquence, but also with an ancient history, correctness, originality and authenticity and the language of the tribal confederation to which also the Prophet’s tribe the Qurayṣ belonged.

In the same way, the spoken language (*luġat al-takallum*) or the language they/we speak (*al-luġa allatī yatakallamūna/natakallam bi-hā*) and the Arabic we speak (*al-‘arabīya allatī natakallam bi-hā*) is equated with the language of the common folk (*luġat al-‘amma* or *al-luġa al-‘ammīya*), the common language (*al-luġa al-‘amma*), the current language (*al-luġa al-šā’i’a*) or the current spoken language (*luġat al-takallum al-šā’i’a*) and the Arabic that we suckled with the mother milk (*al-‘arabīya allatī narḍa’uhā ma’a al-laban*). By doing so, the spoken language is associated with the lower (uneducated) social classes, but also with currency (in the sense of being widespread) and naturalness (in the sense of being naturally and effortlessly acquired as opposed to via formal education).

### 3.3.3 *The terms and their connotations: al-luġa ‘ammīya–luġat al-‘amma*

Above, reference was already made to the fact that in the first article of the Muqtaṭaf sub-debate the key terms *fuṣṣhā* and *‘ammīya* are not used at all. As the debate further burgeons both terms are gradually introduced and, through the processes of direct and indirect equation, they are established as the basic terms to refer to the poles of the perceived linguistic dichotomy. Another striking element is that the terms *faṣīḥa/fuṣṣhā* and *‘ammīya* are not yet used as independent nouns, but rather as adjectives.

This can be explained by the fact that in the 19th century Arabic language use itself was changing. This change can be traced in the Muqtaṭaf sub-debate as well and, as already mentioned, an analysis of the evolution of the use of the linguistic labels constitutes an interesting locus for tracing how the thinking about language and language variability evolved with the evolution of the debate itself. We also mentioned already that 19th century language use can be positioned between Classical and Modern Arabic. An analysis of the term *‘ammīya* and its cognates is an interesting case to illustrate the hinge position between classical and modern language use of 19th century Arabic.

The two terms that are most currently used in the debate in order to refer to *al-‘āmmīya*/non-*fuṣḥā* are *luġat al-‘āmma* and *al-luġa al-‘āmmīya*. Rabin (1960) mentions that the first one was current in medieval times, whereas the latter, together with *al-dāriġa* and *al-laḥāġāt*,<sup>33</sup> is used in modern times.<sup>34</sup> The observation that *‘āmmīya* is only used as an adjective, and not as noun, suggests that at the end of the 19th century *‘āmmīya* was not yet considered to be a distinct linguistic concept. This is further supported by the fact that the authoritative dictionary *Muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ*, which was published by Buṭrus al-Bustānī in 1870 and which is considered to be one of the first modern Arabic dictionaries, does not refer to the linguistic connotations of *‘āmmī* and *‘āmmīya*. Nor does *‘āmmīya* occur as a separate lemma (Al-Bustānī 1998 (1870), 634). This is also the case for Kazimirski’s translating dictionary (Arabic-French), which is contemporary to Al-Bustānī’s (Kazimirski 1860, 358–9). Together with the ways in which the terms are used in the debate, this suggests that before the 20th century, the terms could only be used in order to refer to language and language use in combination with *luġa* (language), e.g. *luġat al-‘āmma* (the language of the common people) or *al-luġa al-‘āmmīya* (the folk language).

As the larger debate further develops, these lexical items develop, or rather are developed, into independent linguistic concepts, which are mostly used in contrast with (*al-luġa*) *al-faṣīḥa* or (*al-luġa*) *al-fuṣḥā* and therefore are defined by non-*fuṣḥā*-ness. Gradually the term *‘āmmīya* then obtains the meaning of colloquial, vernacular or dialect. This is corroborated by a quick glance in monolingual and bilingual Arabic dictionaries. The explaining Arabic dictionary *Al-mu‘ġam al-asāsī* (2003, 869) explains *‘āmmīya* as follows: “the opposite of the official language or the literary language or

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33. It is important to note that the term *‘lahġa* (pl. *laḥāġāt*)’ in the sense of ‘dialect’ or ‘variety’ is also used in the Muqataf debate, however only in order to refer to specific dialects, e.g. “the dialects of the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Iraqi’s and the Maghribians (*laḥāġāt al-sūriyīn wa al-‘irāqīyīn wa al-miṣriyīn wa al-maġribīyīn*)” (Al-Mumkin 1882a, 494), “the dialect of which province [...], city, [...] village, [...] neighborhood” (*laḥġat ayyati muqāta’a [...], madīna [...], qariya [...], ḥāra*.” (Dāġir 1882, 557). Sometimes the term is also used in the sense of ‘way of speaking’ or ‘pronunciation’.

34. Interestingly enough, Rabin uses the term post-Islamic dialects in reference to what I call the *‘āmmīya* or non-*fuṣḥā* varieties. This can be related to the fact that traditionally pre-Islamic and post-Islamic language variability has been perceived differently. This is mainly related to the fact that, basically, pre-Islamic variants (*luġāt*) were considered to remain within the realm of correctness, even when deviating from the norm (*naḥw*), whereas deviations from the norm related to post-Islamic varieties were considered to be mistakes (*laḥn*). This can be derived to the ways in which the terms *luġa*, *naḥw* and *laḥn* diachronologically evolved. This process of semantic shifts is intrinsically related to the evolution of the concept of *faṣāḥa*. For a more elaborate discussion see Ayyoub (2011).

*al-fuṣṣḥā*.”<sup>35</sup> And *kalām ‘āmmī* and *lahǧa ‘āmmīya* as “the usual speech of the people, the opposite of *al-luǧa al-fuṣṣḥā* or the literary language.”<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to notice that both entries are explained by referring to their contrast with *fuṣṣḥā*, which is in itself related to official and literary language use (respectively *luǧa rasmiya* and *luǧa adabiya*). This way of explaining in itself keeps the binary between *fuṣṣḥā* and *‘āmmīya* neatly intact. In the same way, the explaining Arabic dictionary *Al-mu‘ǧam al-wasīf* (1980, 629) *al-‘āmmīya* as “*luǧat al-‘amma*, and this is the opposite of *al-fuṣṣḥā*”<sup>37</sup> and *kalām ‘āmmī* as “what the common people (*‘amma*) utter, differing from the habits of Arabic speech.”<sup>38</sup> The definition of the latter strongly solidifies the relation between the notions of *fuṣṣḥā* and the idea that only *fuṣṣḥā* is correct and ‘real’ Arabic. These two dictionaries are very popular and widely used in the Arab world. Finally, Hans Wehr (1994 (1979), 751), one of the most widely used translating dictionaries, translates *al-‘āmmīya* as “popular language, colloquial language.”

This brief exercise shows that the use of the term *‘āmmīya* underwent some important changes, of which the beginnings already appeared in the Muqtaṭaf sub-debate. We can assume that the term *al-luǧa al-‘āmmīya* gradually became more frequently used than *luǧat al-‘amma*, ultimately replacing it. As the use of *al-luǧa al-‘āmmīya* became more current, its elliptic form *al-‘āmmīya* developed into an independent noun. The second step in this development (e.g. the independent use of *al-‘āmmīya*) can be observed already in the Muqtaṭaf debate, be it only in the 11th and last article by Mitri Qandalaf.<sup>39</sup> However, in the same article, Qandalaf also uses frequently the pre-modern label *luǧat al-‘amma*.

In conclusion, we must add that the shift in the use of the labels (*luǧat al-‘amma* → *al-luǧa al-‘āmmīya* → *al-‘āmmīya*) was accompanied by an important semantic shift from the social connotations of the label, namely *luǧat al-‘amma*, and already to a lesser degree *al-luǧa al-‘āmmīya* (as the language spoken by the common folk) to its linguistic connotations, namely a linguistic variety that is basically defined in contrast with *al-fuṣṣḥā*.<sup>40</sup> However, even if the linguistic connotations of

35. In Arabic: “*hilāf al-luǧa al-rasmiya aw al-adabiya aw al-fuṣṣḥā*”

36. In Arabic: “*kalām al-nās al-‘ādī, hilāl [sic] al-luǧa al-fuṣṣḥā aw al-luǧa al-adabiya*”

37. In Arabic: “*luǧat al-‘amma wa hiya hilāf al-fuṣṣḥā*”

38. In Arabic: “*mā naṭaqa bi-hi al-‘amma alā ġayr sunan al-kalām al-‘arabi*”

39. *Naǧāḥ al-umma al-‘arabiya fi luǧatihā al-aṣliya* (Qandalaf 1882, 107–110).

40. Only a couple of times *faṣiḥā* is defined by contrasting it with *‘āmmīya*. Ṣarrūf and Nimr refer also to the fact that the science books are written in “a language different from the language we speak” (*luǧat ġayr al-luǧa allatī nataḥallamuhā*) (Al-Muqtaṭaf 1881, 353) and al-Yāziǧi refers to *faṣiḥa* and explains “in the sense that it is not part of the folk language” (*bi-ma‘nā annahā laysat min luǧat al-‘amma*). (Al-Yāziǧi 1881, 305)

the label became more dominant, its social connotations never disappeared completely. Because *fuṣḥā* is associated with education, literature and official language use, and because *‘āmmīya* is defined as its opposite, *‘āmmīya* is, by default, associated to the lack of education.

#### 4. Conclusion

After a careful and detailed analysis of the concept diglossia and its functional and symbolic implications, it was concluded that diglossia suits as a description of meta-linguistic norms and language attitudes in the Arabic linguistic community rather than as one of actual language use. In the second part of the article, I described how the dichotomy between *fuṣḥā* and non-*fuṣḥā* varieties, that lies at the basis of diglossia, was constructed by 19th-century intellectuals who participated in a short but vivid debate concerning *‘āmmīya* and *fuṣḥā* in Al-Muqtaṭaf. By means of a lexical and semantic analysis of patterns of labeling, direct and indirect equation and the connotations of the terms, I demonstrated how the diglossic dichotomy was constructed and taken for granted long before the term ‘diglossia’ was used. Moreover, even the terms *‘āmmīya* and *fuṣḥā* were not yet used as independent nouns in the ways they are used now. As such, the analysis sustains the argument that diglossia is a useful concept to describe language ideological attitudes concerning linguistic variability in the Arab world and the symbolic values attached to it, rather than actual language use.

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