

Lexical and spatial variation as perceived by young Tuat Arabic speakers

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In diglossic situations that prevail in the Arab world, lexical variation is a significant characteristic (Ferguson, 1959). It illustrates the split that exists between the High variety, Modern Standard Arabic, and the low vernaculars. The lexical level is characterized by the use of doublets and by the existence of different lexical forms with the same meanings. The discrepancy goes further to include a number of items found in L and not in the superposed H variety.

In the case of the Tuat, southern Algeria, the phenomenon is mainly due to the existence of a Tamazight substrate, namely Zenete (Taznatit) and Tamachek (or Tuareg). Moreover, the Tuat is also a "dialect mixture region" (Benson, 2003) where many dialects are in contact. Linguistic overlappings between the various vernaculars occur at all levels, and are perceptible in the lexicon. Furthermore, variation is not only with the standard language, but is in between the vernaculars too.

This paper applies the methods and techniques of 'Perceptual dialectology' (Preston 1986, 1989 and 1996; Garrett 2001, 'folk dialectology' (Benson 2003), or 'Folk Linguistics' (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) to an Arabic diglossic speech community, the Tuat. The focal point is the drawing of dialect isoglosses according to the informants' perceptions of the linguistic boundaries delimiting their idioms.

The sample of the study consists of twenty-five (n=25) male and female students from the department of English, university of Adrar. All of them use Tuat spoken Arabic (TSA). The analysis of the hand-drawn maps reveals the informants' subjective judgments as illustrated by the variable language boundaries and transition zones. It shows that socio-historical factors play a role in the respondent's representation of the geolinguistic boundaries.