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STANDARD LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY AND PRESCRIPTIVISM IN THE ARABIC-SPEAKING WORLD

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1. Introduction

Arabic is a macro-language (Eberhard et al., 2020), which encompasses a large number of uncodified varieties of colloquial Arabic (CA, Ar. *ʿāmmiyya/dārija/lahja*) used alongside Standard Arabic (SA, Ar. *fuṣḥā*), albeit in different contexts. SA is used primarily for written purposes and is not spoken natively by any segment of the population, making Arabic the epitome of a diglossic language (Ferguson, 1959, 1996). SA, which was codified between the eighth and eleventh centuries, is broadly associated with Islam, Arab nationalism, and a large body of classical and contemporary literature. In this chapter I provide a description of the dominant language ideology in the Arabic-speaking world and its manifestation in prescriptive practices. Language ideology is here understood as "the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them" (Irvine & Gal, 2001, p. 402). I draw on four types of sources for this description of Arabic prescriptivism: reports and proceedings from the *International Conference of the Arabic Language*, prescriptive style guides, televized discussion programs, and Arabic teaching materials. The first two represent the views of language specialists, and the latter two illustrate how these views are disseminated to the public.

In her recent book *Fixing English*, Curzan (2014, pp. 24–39) usefully divides prescriptivism into four strands: (a) *standardizing prescriptivism*, attempts to suppress non-standard forms; (b) *stylistic prescriptivism*, concerned with variant forms within the standard variety; (c) *restorative prescriptivism*, attempts to revive historical forms that have fallen out of use; and (d) *politically responsive prescriptivism*, prescription of "inclusive, nondiscriminatory, politically correct" usage (p. 24). Although Curzan's book deals specifically with English, this division of forms of prescriptivism is also applicable to other prescriptive traditions. I argue that the first two are particularly useful for describing prescriptivism in the Arabic-speaking world, as they represent its two main strands.[1] Arabic standardizing prescriptivism targets the Arabic-speaking population

at large to regulate the status of standard and non-standard varieties of Arabic. It assumes that forms can be trivially dividable into CA and SA variants. Operating on the level of linguistic varieties, it can be seen as a form of status planning (Kloss, 1969), which is less concerned with detailed prescriptions of specific forms. Since SA is portrayed as inescapably and essentially tied to religious and ethnic or nationalist identities, any threat to SA is interpreted as a threat to them as well, making the rhetorical tone of this strand highly moralistic and alarmist.

Arabic stylistic prescriptivism, on the other hand, specifically targets users of SA, such as writers and journalists, and not the community at large. It is concerned with detailed judgments on the correctness of specific forms, and can thus be seen as a form of corpus planning (Kloss, 1969). The tone here is elitist, rather than alarmist, as the focus is on features that represent, as Curzan (2014) puts it, "a nicety of usage, a nicety that distinguishes those who 'know better' from those who don't' (p. 33). To the extent that this strand promotes historical, obsolete forms, it also includes traits of restorative prescriptivism. The main characteristics of these two strands, further described below, are summarized in Table 17.1. The fourth of Curzan's strands, politically responsive prescriptivism, plays little role in the dominant, conservative discourse described in this chapter.

This chapter describes only the dominant Arabic language ideology. Other competing Arabic language ideologies include movements to establish local forms of CA as languages of learning or literary expression, for example in magazines and some literary genres (Håland, 2017; Høigilt, 2017) and in the Egyptian Arabic *Wikipedia*,[2] and the trend in Arabic departments in the West to regard CA as a legitimate and necessary part of formal language instruction (Al-Batal, 2018; Wahba et al., 2006). In Arab academia, linguistic research on Arabic is conducted within two distinct traditions. One strand of research is published in Arabic and conducted in *šarīʿa* or Arabic departments, which operate under a traditionalist, prescriptive paradigm. The other strand, often carried out by researchers educated at Western universities, is published in English, and conducted in other, often English departments, which operate under the paradigms and ideologies of modern linguistics (Miller & Caubet, 2010). This chapter focuses only on the former, traditionalist strand of linguistic research in Arab academia, which is the one represented in public discourse, reflected in pedagogical practices, and involved in shaping the public's views on language.

The rest of the chapter is divided into four sections. In the Section 2, Arabic is described as a case of standard language ideology, but one with its own characteristics resulting from diglossia and its early codification. The Section 3 describes Arabic standardizing prescriptivism, which deals with CA either with direct confrontation and condemnation or by rendering it invisible. In the Section 4, Arabic stylistic prescriptivism is described with examples from style guides. The section also includes a discussion of the prominent and complex role of case and mood inflection in Arabic notions of linguistic correctness. The final section of the chapter presents a brief summary and concluding remarks. Translations from Arabic are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Table 17.1 Features of Arabic standardizing and stylistic prescriptivism

	Standardizing prescriptivism	*Stylistic prescriptivism*
Target	the language community	writers, journalists, translators
Type of language planning	status planning	corpus planning
Historical origin	the *nahḍa* (19th cent.)	early codification (8th cent.)
Rhetoric	alarmist	elitist

2. Arabic standard language ideology

Arabic prescriptivism can largely be understood in relation to standard language ideology, that is, the belief that some variant forms represent the proper manifestations of the language and are inherently more correct than others (Milroy, 2007; Ricento, 2006). Milroy and Milroy (1991) poignantly characterized this ideology as "intolerance of optional variability in language" (p. 26). Such ideas are probably a feature of language standardization in general and exist to some degree in all modern standard languages. There are, however, two notable differences between the standard language ideology of Arabic and that of the Western language communities for which this concept was originally developed. The first relates to the lack of native speakers of SA (or of anything resembling it), and the second relates to the status of the codification and the historical distance from its formation. These are discussed in turn below.

In many languages, the standard variety is based on, or associated with, the speech of socio-economically privileged groups (Haugen, 1966; Milroy, 2007). From this association the standard variety derives its status and its association with social mobility. This is seen, for example, in the reflection of social stratification of variation in individuals' style shifts, so that when an individual pays more attention to their speech, it more closely resembles the speech of the upper classes (Labov, 1972). In these languages, prescriptive acts retrieve much of their authority from the covert social order of class and ethnic relations. The "correct" language these acts promote is by the language community at large associated with social and economic success and therefore requires no explicit justification (Lippi-Green, 1997; Trudgill, 1979).

SA, on the other hand, is not associated with social class; no group in society natively speaks a variety resembling SA, and it is therefore not associated with socio-economic prestige, socially driven style shifts, or linguistic change. Rather, socially driven change in the Arabic-speaking world is typically towards the CA of urban centers, irrespective of their similarities with SA (Al-Wer, 2013; Ibrahim, 1986). Prescriptivism, efforts to steer language use towards the standard variety, can therefore not tap into class-based systems of status and prestige in the Arabic-speaking world. Instead, Arabic prescriptivism claims authority by overtly referring to religious and nationalist ideals and ideologies. These represent the two major political forces in the region, and, while often in conflict, they converge in emphasizing SA as a crucial and essential component of identity and unity.

According to Islamic theology, Arabic was chosen by God as the language of revelation and as the vehicle to express religious truths. The Qur'an, the holy text embodying this revelation, is held by Muslims to be the direct word of God, as revealed to the Prophet Mohammad, and is upheld as the ultimate ideal of the Arabic language. Its exact linguistic form is seen as being a significant part of the message, and therefore it cannot be translated. It is a collective duty of all Muslims to learn and preserve the language of the Qur'an as an unadulterated connection to Islam and its message (Haeri, 2003; Suleiman, 2003). Notably, the obligatory prayers must be carried out in Arabic. The colloquial varieties deviate considerably from the language of the source texts, and their widespread use is seen as disconnecting speakers from the source texts and the truths they convey.

Secular nationalists have emphasized the role of SA since the nineteenth century *nahḍa*-movement of Arab-intellectual revival and the rise of pan-Arab nationalism. Inspired by German nationalist thought, the Arabic language came to be viewed as the single most important and defining factor of Arab ethnicity and identity (Gully, 1997; Suleiman, 2003). During the twentieth century, it became a cornerstone in the nation-building of the newly independent Arab nation states. Only SA, shared by all Arabic-speaking peoples, could fill this function, while CA, which differed in each region, came to be perceived as a threat to Arab unity.

Explicit reference to these religious or nationalist ideals is routine in virtually all materials reviewed in the research for this chapter. Indeed, the tendency in Arabic prescriptivism to overtly and forcefully justify itself with reference to Islam and Arab nationalist unity is a distinguishing feature of this tradition.

The second difference between the Arabic standard language ideology and that of many European languages relates to the status of the codification of Arabic and the historical distance since this took place. A prescriptivist tradition requires a body of authoritative texts or a consensus on what is to be considered correct language. English, for example, saw an explosion of grammar writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, formulating rules that came to represent a canon of grammatical correctness (Bailey, 1991; Curzan, 2014). The Arabic canonical grammar hearkens back much further. Arab grammatical and linguistic thought grew out of studies of the Qur'an and poetry in the eighth century, developed into an advanced theoretical science, and reached its final fixed and canonical form around the eleventh century, characterized by "its extreme coherence and systematicity" (Bohas et al., 1990, p. 16).[3] One of the main concerns for the early grammarians was that, in their view, the urban life-style of the new empire and the influx of non-Arabic speakers had corrupted the language and removed it from its Arabian, Bedouin, desert-dwelling roots (Versteegh, 1983). For this reason, linguistic sources from after around 750 CE (200 AH) were deemed to be at risk of contamination and corruption and were excluded for purposes of codification as a matter of principle. The material collected before then, consisting of the Qur'an, poetry, known sayings, documented Bedouin speech, and, to a lesser extent, *ḥadīṯ*, in effect came to form a closed corpus used for the purposes of codification. Subsequently, the period from the twelfth century onward saw development primarily in forms of presentation (Bohas et al., 1990; Carter, 2006). Works from this period, such as Ibn Yaʿīš's (d. 1245) *Šarḥ al-mufaṣṣal* and Ibn Hišāms's (d. 1359) *Muġnī l-labīb* and *Qaṭr an-nadā wa-ball aṣ-ṣadā* are to this day used as standard references in university-level Arabic courses. Modern grammars follow the terminology, modes of analysis, and forms of presentations established in these classical works. Accordingly, the grammatical descriptions used as references for linguistic correctness, and the system that is the foundation for contemporary language pedagogy, goes back roughly a millennium. This description is, in turn, based on a variety dating back a couple of centuries earlier, in what Hallberg (2016, p. 50) describes as a "doubly archaic" codification.

The association of the standard variety with a social group in many other languages gives the standard variety a measure of malleability, in that changes in the language of this group may provide legitimacy for new forms to be taken up in the codification (Curzan, 2014, Chapter 5; Havránek, 1982). In the diglossic context of Arabic, however, there is no group associated with the standard variety in this way, making the received grammatical description the only reference for correctness. This makes for a strictly synchronous view of language in which any deviation from the language as described in the classical grammars is interpreted as an error and not as linguistic change. Terms such as *Classical Arabic* and *Modern Standard Arabic*, often used in Western academia to designate historical and contemporary forms of SA and implying historical change, have accordingly gained little traction in the Arabic-speaking world. Reform of the grammatical description is in this context a sensitive issue; the grammatical description is the one fixture of SA, and any tampering with it is felt to be tampering with the language itself (Suleiman, 1996). Proposals for reform to the system of grammatical description have thus been consistently resisted (Diem, 1974; Suleiman, 1996).

This backwards-looking approach towards the past ideal of linguistic correctness is reflected in a lack of a sense of ownership of the language described by Haeri (2003) as many Arabic speakers seeing themselves as *custodians* of the language, who serve and preserve it, rather than

as *owners* free to use it as they see fit for their own purposes. Similarly, in classical works, Arabic is never referred to as "our" language, but rather as "their" language, the language of the *ʿarab*, the Bedouins of eighth century Arabia (Ayoub, 2006).

This attitude is prevalent in the literature reviewed for this chapter. Jawwād (2001), for example, in the introduction to his style guide, rebukes authors and translators who commit mistakes, writing that "the language is not the heritage of them alone for them to carelessly do with it what they please" (p. 10).[4] The same attitude is found in the *Waṯīqat Bayrūt* report (2013), produced by the Arabic Language Council and further discussed below. Its repeated calls for individuals and institutions to act in the service (*xidmat*) of the Arabic language (pp. 8, 16, 19, 30), and its subtitle (*The Arabic language is in danger—all are responsible for protecting it*[5]), clearly signal the obligations of the speakers towards a language that exists independently of them and that they must serve, maintain, and protect.[6]

3. Standardizing prescriptivism

The dominant Arabic language ideology is strongly negative towards all forms of CA, regarding it as a corrupt and distorted form of SA and as a sign and/or cause of cultural and intellectual decline. Since CA varieties are not regarded as proper languages, they are not seen as being able to function as vehicles of intellectual thought, education, or expressions of identity and culture. This is manifested in standardizing prescriptivism, defined by Curzan (2014) as "rules/judgments that aim to promote and enforce standardization and 'standard' usage" (p. 24). In the Arabic context, this strand of prescriptivism must be understood in the context of diglossia.

Ferguson (1959), basing his discussion on Arabic-speaking countries, Haiti, Greece, and Switzerland, famously defines diglossia as a situation where, alongside the natively spoken variety, there is a

> very divergent […] superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.
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> *Ferguson, 1959, p. 336*

He labels the native variety the "Low" variety and the superposed variety the "High" variety, and lists a number of spoken and written contexts, specifying which variety is used in each. For example, the High variety is used in newspapers and news broadcasts, speeches, and lectures, whereas the Low variety is used in conversation with family and friends and in folk literature (Ferguson, 1959, p. 329). In a later publication (Ferguson, 1996), he clarified that he intended for diglossia only to include situations where the High and Low varieties are genealogically related.

Ferguson's largely binary conception of diglossia has been criticized by Arabists for being overly simplified and for disregarding complications in observed usage, especially in speech. Several alternative models have been proposed, describing Arabic diglossia as a standard-colloquial continuum, possibly with distinguishable intermediate varieties (Badawī, 1973; Blanc, 1964; Meiseles, 1980). Nevertheless, on the ideological level and in public discourse, which is the subject of this chapter, a binary view of Arabic as either standard (*fuṣḥā*) or vernacular (*lahja/ʿāmmiyya/dārija*) is dominant (Brustad, 2017; Suleiman & Abdelhay, 2020), and therefore useful for understanding prescriptivism.

In the dominant language ideology, standardizing prescriptivism is expressed either by portraying CA as posing a direct threat to the language to be actively combated, or by rendering it invisible.

3.1. Combating colloquial Arabic

Since SA is perceived as inescapably tied to national and religious identities, any perceived threat to SA is also a threat to these identities, paving the way for alarmist and aggressively moralist rhetoric in its defense. Such alarmist and moralist discourse in the protection of the standard variety has also been documented for other languages (e.g., Bailey, 1991). The situation differs in Arabic, however, in that this is the dominant view propagated by academia and mainstream media.

The alarmist and moralistic discourse of conflict around SA in Arab academia is evident in reports and proceedings from the annual *International Conference of the Arabic Language*,[7] a major conference gathering linguists and policy makers in the region. It is organized by the International Council of the Arabic Language, an independent international organization supported by, among others, ministries of culture and education, language academies, universities in the region, and UNESCO.[8] The inaugural conference was held in Beirut 2012 and the main issues discussed at the conference were summarized in a report entitled *Waṯīqat Bayrūt* [The Beirut document] (2013). The document is prominently featured on the Council's website and is often referred to in later reports from the conference (e.g., *at-Taqrīr al-xitāmī*, 2018; *Qānūn al-luġa l-ʿarabiyya*, 2013).

The report paints a bleak picture of the status of Arabic. The subtitle, *the Arabic language is in danger—all are responsible for protecting it*, clearly sets the tone. The introduction warns that "this crisis, if it continues to be ignored, will lead to a language catastrophe threatening independence, self-determination and cultural, national, and individual identity" (p. 3).[9] The main concern is that SA, referred to as *al-luġa s-salīma* (the sound language), is being marginalized by foreign languages and CA (*al-lahjāt al-ʿāmmiyya*), the latter being likened to cancer (p. 26) and pollution (p. 27). The spread of CA is portrayed as rampant in all sectors of society, including education, media, and culture. Drastic measures are suggested to curb the spread of CA, including authorities shutting down media outlets that do not follow linguistic standards and fining or otherwise punishing private actors for using incorrect language on shop signs and in advertisements (pp. 25–26). Primary education is presented as the key defense against CA. However, most teachers are said to have insufficient skills in SA (p. 9) and it is recommended that efforts be made to train teachers in SA "in order to protect students from instruction in the dialect and to protect communities from the continued spread of the vernacular and foreign languages at the expense of the national Arabic language" (p. 21).[10]

This message has been reiterated in later installments of the conference. After the second conference in 2013, the Council published the report *Qānūn al-luġa l-ʿarabiyya* [The Arabic language law] (2013), supported by the Arab Lawyers' Union, which more directly addresses governments and policy makers. It suggests introducing laws regulating language use, including the complete Arabization of all levels of education (p. 12); legal repercussions for institutions that use incorrect language (p. 22); and banning the use of CA and foreign languages in all public and private institutions, companies, and public spaces (p. 21). It also suggests that state actors initiate "comprehensive and sustained campaigns to raise linguistic awareness among the citizens, informing them of the dangers posed by the vernaculars to the sound Arabic language, national unity, economic growth, and equal opportunity" (p. 25).[11] The later installments of the conference regularly featured contributions criticizing the use of CA, especially in education. Aḥmad (2015), for example, criticizes the teaching of CA in Western as well as some Arab

institutions, on the basis that "the dialect (*ʿāmmiyya*) does not have case and mood inflection[12] and is not governed by principles, grammar, lexicon, or linguistic forms that elevate it to a language of education or identity" (p. 162).[13] Zarmān and Ḍayf (2015) criticize recent calls for the use of CA as a medium of education in Algeria as serving colonial interests and as "having the effect of eradicating all cultural components of the nation, of which the most important by far is the elimination of Islam" (p. 186).[14]

These views are echoed in public discourse and the mainstream media. On June 28, 2013, the pan-Arabic Al Arabiya news network aired a panel discussion on the report *Waṯīqat bayrūt* referenced above, featuring the vice president of the Syrian Language Academy and ministers of education and culture, who reaffirmed that CA does indeed form a serious historical threat to the Arabic language.[15] Suleiman and Lucas (2012) analysed eight debate and interview programs dealing specifically with the Arabic language, broadcast on Al Jazeera, another major pan-Arabic news channel, from 1996 to 2010. They found that a main recurring theme in these programs was the question of whether Arabic is an endangered language (!), and, if so, what to do about it. While some opposing views were expressed, the main message in these programs was that the language is indeed endangered, and that efforts need to be intensified to protect and revitalize it. This tradition has continued on Al Jazeera after the period covered by Suleiman and Lucas (2012). In the documentary *Lisān aḍ-ḍād yajmaʿunā* [The language of *ḍād* unites us], aired on Al Jazeera on December 4, 2013,[16] statistics on the widespread use of non-standard Arabic or foreign languages in university teaching, on shop signs, and on websites is presented in the introduction, whereafter academics and opinion makers voice concerns about the grave danger this poses to the Arabic language and to Arabic identity, all accompanied by dramatically sad and somber background music. An episode of the discussion program *Fī l-ʿumq* [In depth], aired on November 17, 2014,[17] featured a discussion about the state of the Arabic language with two linguists: ʿAbd as-Salām al-Msaddī and ʿAzz ad-Dīn al-Būšīxī. In the program, the use of CA in domains traditionally reserved to SA was repeatedly described as a "catastrophe" (*kāriṯa*). Al-Msaddī stated that the historic threat now facing the Arabic language is not primarily from foreign languages and globalization, but "the real enemy of the Arabic language in use is the vernaculars" (12:30);[18] if no political action was taken, ʿAbd al-Msaddī claimed, it would face the fate of Latin, which was divided into the modern Roman languages (8:10).

3.2. *Rendering colloquial Arabic invisible*

The second expression of Arabic standardizing prescriptivism, apart from the alarmist rhetoric of conflict and confrontation describe above, is *erasure*, defined by Irvine and Gal (2001) as a process whereby "ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible" (p. 403). In many contexts where CA may be expected to have a central role as the *de facto* mother tongue of Arabic speakers and the dominant form of the language in people's lives, it is often erased, not mentioned at all, as if it did not exist.

The erasure of CA is to a large extent achieved by the ambiguous use of the phrase *al-luġa al-ʿarabiyya* 'the Arabic language' (or either of these words used separately) to refer either to Arabic in a wide sense, including the colloquial varieties, or in a narrow sense, to refer specifically to SA. This ambiguity makes it possible to speak of the 'Arabic language' both as "our" language, the native tongue of Arabic speakers used for all purposes of interaction and self-expression, and as a language threatened by the encroaching CA. Often, one and the same speaker or author switches between these uses for different rhetorical purposes. For example, to stress the importance of sound Arabic education, *Waṯīqat Bayrūt* (2013) states that "the national

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language (*al-luġa*) is the foundation on which the individual builds their personality, culture, capacities, and abilities, in order to comprehend and understand, and to be able to think, create, work, produce, innovate, and develop their abilities and knowledge" (p. 9).[19] Clearly, in the context of Arabic diglossia, these functions (working, learning, developing personality) are primarily conducted in CA. At the same time, as shown above, it is clear from the other parts of the report that CA is not to be developed, but rather shunned, in language instruction. This ambiguous use of *al-luġa al-ʿarabiyya* is also what allows ʿAzz ad-Dīn al-Būšīxī, in the program *Fī l-ʿumq* referenced above, to stress the strength and importance of the Arabic language (*al-luġa al-ʿarabiyya*) as the language speakers learn in childhood and through which they develop intellectually and form their identity (22:03), only to state, later in the same program, that the Arabic language is threatened by the vernaculars (28:10). In both examples, the fact that CA is the variety that speakers learn first, through which they develop intellectually and socially, and which they use predominantly throughout their lives, is erased and not taken into account.

The erasure of CA is especially noticeable in Arabic teaching materials. In the Arabic diglossic situation, learning to read and write is very much a process of learning to read and write in a second language (Ibrahim, 1983; Saiegh-Haddad, 2003; Saiegh-Haddad & Spolsky, 2014). Comparisons with CA would thus be pedagogically useful when teaching SA (Maamouri, 1998; Myhill, 2014; Saiegh-Haddad & Everatt, 2017). However, in reviewing the national curricula for primary and secondary education in several Arabic-speaking countries,[20] not a single reference to CA forms, or even to the existence of a colloquial variety, was found. SA is, in effect, presented as if it were the pupil's native variety. This is explicitly stated in the introductions to some books, to various degrees. In the previous edition of the Syrian seventh-grade curriculum, the language in the book was described as "the individual's vehicle for thought and for fully expressing their needs and beliefs, in speech and in writing" (al-Xayr & Muḥammad, 2011).[21] With this complete erasure of CA, Arabic schoolbooks present a fictitious world where SA is the sole medium of expression, which clashes with the world experienced by the student.

Even where educators would prefer to use some measure of comparison with the local CA or to introduce some colloquial forms in the teaching materials to make them more accessible to students, this may not be politically possible. Suleiman and Abdelhay (2020) report a recent rare example of how eight words from the local CA were introduced into an Arabic schoolbook in Morocco. This was met with strong reactions from the public, who accused the authors of betrayal of the nation and of Islam. According to Shaaban (2006), "Arab teachers avoid using foreign-language methodology in order not to be accused of treating the 'native tongue' as a foreign language" (p. 701). Thus, even where there are strong arguments for addressing diglossia in language instruction, if only to improve the acquisition of SA, the strong standardizing prescriptivism is such that this is not feasible.

4. Stylistic prescriptivism and the Arabic grammatical tradition

This section focuses on stylistic prescriptivism, that is, efforts to regulate variant forms within the standard variety. Issues raised in prescriptive language guides are described; thereafter, case and mood inflection, as a central topic in Arabic stylistic prescriptivism, is discussed.

4.1. Style guides

Arabic has a long tradition of prescriptive language guides, going back to the early formation of the grammatical tradition, in a genre known as *laḥn al-ʿāmma* (Solecism of the common people) or *laḥn* literature (Ayoub, 2006), the earliest example of which is *Mā talḥanu fīhi l-ʿawāmm* by

al-Kasāʾī (d. 799). This genre takes the form of lists of what are considered incorrect usages and contrasts them with their proposed correct forms. The lists are generally unorganized; "errors" are considered in isolation, as unrelated phenomena, with no attempts to carry out structural analysis. This is because, as Stetkevych (2006) poignantly describes it, "the author's purpose is to purge rather than to record" (p. 97).

The genre is still popular today, and the discussion below draws on three recent examples:

- *Qul wa-lā taqul* [Say, and do not say] (Jawwād, 2001), a two-volume work listing a total of 224 errors with extensive discussions for each, in no apparent order.
- *Muʿjam al-ʾaġlāṭ al-luġawiyya al-muʿāṣira* [A dictionary of common mistakes in modern written Arabic[22]] (al-ʿAdnānī, 1999), which lists 2135 errors ordered alphabetically with a brief discussion on each.
- *Axṭāʾ luġawiyya šāʾiʿa* [Widespread linguistic errors] (al-ʿIbrī, 2006), which lists 79 errors with extensive discussion under the headings of syntax (*naḥw*), morphology (*ṣarf*), plural forms, and orthography, in addition to a chapter on words that are often erroneously thought to be incorrect.

These works draw exclusively on the classical tradition to make judgments on correctness. Al-ʿAdnānī (1999, pp. ii–iii), for example, lists the following sources as the basis for his judgments: the Qurʾan, *ḥadīṯ*, classical dictionaries, pre-Islamic poetry, coinages approved by the language academies, and classical grammars. Among the latter he mentions authors from the early stages of the tradition, such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) and al-Mubarrad (d. 898) to those of the later classical period, such as Ibn Hišām (d. 1359) and as-Suyūṭī (d. 1505). All three authors of style guides painstakingly provide references to the classical authors and examples from the Qurʾan, classical poetry, or *ḥadīṯ*, to support their arguments. Contemporary usage, on the other hand, has little bearing on judgments of correctness in these guides. Indeed, many of the errors listed in these books and mentioned below are firmly established in current usage and appear, for example, in lexicons produced using modern corpus-linguistic methods (e.g., Arts, 2014; Buckwalter & Parkinson, 2011).

Providing an overview of the issues raised by these authors proves to be somewhat difficult due to the disorganized list structure of the genre. However, four types of errors stand out for the frequency with which they are mentioned. The first are errors relating to the use of prepositions, primarily related to transitive prepositional verbs. These prepositions carry minimal semantic content, typically only introducing the object, and may therefore be prone to variation among L2 speakers (which all speakers of SA are). Some examples are *ixtalafa fī* 'disagree in' for *ixtalafa ʿalā* 'disagree on' (al-ʿAdnānī, 1999, p. 202; al-ʿIbrī, 2006, p. 18) and *taʾakkada* 'confirm' (without a preposition) for *taʾakkada ʿalā* 'confirm on' (Jawwād, 2001, , vol. 1, p. 35). The second major category of errors concerns semantic shifts in derivational forms. Arabic has a rich root-and-pattern-based derivational morphology in which a sequence of typically three consonants carry a basic semantic concept, which is altered or extended through various patterns (Saiegh-Haddad & Henkin-Roitfarb, 2014). Certain patterns are related to specific semantic functions, and semantic shifts away from these functions are deemed incorrect. For example, the verb form $taR_1āR_2aR_3a$ (form VI) is typically used for reciprocity, requiring at least two subjects. Some of these words have lost their reciprocity and are often used in the singular, such as *taʾāmara* 'conspire' (Jawwād, 2001, vol. 1, p. 22) or *tarāwaḥa* 'fluctuate' (al-ʿAdnānī, 1999, p. 275), which is said to be incorrect. The third major group of errors relates to plural forms. Most Arabic nouns form so-called "broken plurals", in which the root consonants are placed in a different pattern from the singular. The plural *buʾasāʾ* (wretched), for example, a

Table 17.2 Incorrect vowel patterns according to al-ʿAdnānī (1999)

Incorrect	Correct		
xaffāš	*xuffāš*	bat	(p. 196)
šaqqa	*šiqqa*	apartment	(p. 350)
ġuzlān	*ġizlān*	gazelles	(p. 485)
fuṭr	*fuṭr/fuṭur*	mushroom	(p. 517)
qifl	*qufl*	lock	(p. 555)
tikrīt	*takrīt*	Tikrit (city)	(p. 574)
ṭāla maṭāl	*ṭāla muṭāl*	drag on	(p. 633)
malḥ	*milḥ*	salt	(p. 637)
manṭiqa	*minṭaqa*	area	(p. 669)

form popularized by the Arabic translation of *Les Misérables*, is considered incorrect, with the correct form being *bāʾisūn* or *buʾas* (al-ʾIbrī, 2006, p. 77; Jawwād, 2001, vol. 2, p. 78). Al-ʾIbrī (2006, pp. 75–87), in his chapter on this topic, lists an additional nine incorrect plurals, including *šabība* as the plural for *šābb* 'young man' and *wurūd* as the plural for *warda* 'rose'. The last major category of errors is related to the fact that the Arabic script is phonemically underspecified, with letters indicating only consonants and long vowels. Other phonemic features, most prominently short vowels and geminate consonants, are optionally represented with diacritics (*taškīl*). Although extensively used in children's literature and religious source texts, diacritics in other forms of texts are used only very sparingly, if at all. The name *Muḥammad*, for example, is typically written without diacritics, as محمد ⟨mḥmd⟩, but may also be written with diacritics, as مُحَمَّد ⟨mᵘḥᵃmᵐᵃd⟩. This lack of representation of vowels in the written word has allowed for variant, prescriptively incorrect pronunciations to proliferate. Some examples from al-ʿAdnānī (1999) are listed in Table 17.2.

Syntactic errors take up relatively little space in these books. The list structure of the genre makes it such that any single syntactic error, however structurally significant, takes up only one item and is swamped by the many lexically conditioned errors. The syntactic errors one does find are structures that, although common in modern SA, do not align with some principles in the Arabic grammatical tradition. One such example concerns words traditionally referred to as *tawkīd* (emphasis). According to the grammatical tradition, words filling this function, most commonly *nafs* and *ʿayn* (same), and *kull* (all), must follow the emphasized head noun and be accompanied by an enclitic pronoun referring back to it (al-ʾIbrī, 2006, p. 37). Examples such as (1) are therefore said to be incorrect, the correct form being (2). Al-ʿAdnānī (1999, p. 675), while noting that this is indeed the majority view among the grammarians, argues that the usage in (1) is in fact correct since it is attested in *al-Kitāb* by Sibawayhi (d. 798), the founder of the grammatical sciences.

(1) مقارنة بالرجال من نفس العمر
muqāranatan bi-rijāl min nafs al-ʿumr[23]
compared with-DEF-men of same DEF-age
'compared with men of the same age'

(2) مقارنة بالرجال من العمر نفسه
muqāranatan bi-rijāl min al-ʿumr nafsi-hi
compared with-DEF-men of DEF-age₁ same-its₁
'compared with men of the same age'

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In summary, these guides present contemporary Arabic as a variety fully governed by rules deduced from the classical medieval sources. Any deviations from these rules are listed as errors to be avoided, irrespective of contemporary usage.

4.2.   Case and mood inflection

Case and mood inflection holds a central position in Arabic notions of linguistic correctness that are maintained through grammar writing and educational practices. This position is undermined by linguistic practices, however.

Arabic has three cases and three moods which are marked with suffixes. Table 17.3 shows the case and mood inflections in the most frequent nominal and verbal inflectional paradigms. The Arabic system of case and mood inflection is syntactically simple compared with the systems in many other languages, but morphologically complex, with various patterns of syncretism in different inflectional paradigms (Hallberg, 2016, pp. 63–5, 127). As seen in Table 17.3, the inflectional suffixes are generally indicated in writing with diacritics and are therefore absent in most forms of writing. In traditional Arabic grammar, case and mood are, for theoretical reasons as well as for their morphological similarity, regarded as one and the same grammatical system, called *iʿrāb*. Nominative nominals and indicative verbs, both marked with the suffix -*u*, are for example regarded as having the same inflectional form (*marfūʿ*) and as occupying the same syntactic position (*rafʿ*).

Since none of the colloquial varieties has a similar system of inflection, case and mood inflection has always been regarded as a mark of demarcation between SA and CA and as constituting the core feature of Arabic grammar (Versteegh, 1983). The explication of these suffixes is seen as the sole purpose of *naḥw,* roughly 'syntax', one of the two main branches of the Arabic grammatical tradition (the other being *ṣarf,* roughly 'morphology'). In the classical *laḥn* literature, "the symbolic value of the syntactic endings is clearly seen in the forceful rejection of these errors" (Ayoub, 2006, p. 629).[24] It is widely believed that case and mood inflection is unique to Arabic (e.g., as–Saʿdī, 2012), cementing the view of these suffixes as "the most precious endowment of the language" (Chejne, 1969, p. 50). Case also serves as a basic organizing principle in Arabic grammars, with material organized into chapters depending on which case it relates to.

This focus on case and mood inflection in the grammatical tradition is reflected in pedagogical practices across the Arabic-speaking world in being the main focus of instruction (Haeri, 2003; Ibrahim, 1983). Furthermore, the system is taught with methods that rely heavily on memorization of formulaic explanations, where for each word in a given sentence, the word class, syntactic position, and the inflectional form is mentioned. Students are taught to reproduce the correct formulas verbatim (Hallberg, 2016, pp. 67–71; Uhlmann, 2012). (3) shows an example sentence and how this is analysed in the ninth–grade Syrian curriculum. For more advanced examples, the formulas are often complex, even convoluted, as they are based on theoretical rather than pedagogical considerations (Baalbaki, 1994; Younes, 2007). For example,

Table 17.3 Case and mood inflection in Standard Arabic

a. Case ('the book')			b. Mood ('he writes')		
Nominative	*al-kitaab-u*	الكتابُ	Indicative	*yaktub-u*	يكتبُ
Accusative	*al-kitaab-a*	الكتابَ	Subjunctive	*yaktub-a*	يكتبَ
Genitive	*al-kitaab-i*	الكتابِ	Jussive	*yaktub-ø*	يكتبْ

explanations often operate with assumed underlying (*muqaddar*) suffixes or whole words that are not present in the sentence but that are required to make the analysis comply with syntactic theory. The description of suffixes as "manifest" (*ẓāhir*) in (3) clarifies precisely that the ending is written out and does not have the status of being "assumed".

(3) *nassaqa   l-bustāniyy-u   l-ḥadīqat-a   ašjār-a-hā*
arranged DEF-gardener-NOM   DEF– garden-ACC   trees–ACC–its
'The gardener arranged the trees of the garden.'

نسّقَ: فعلٌ ماضٍ مبنيّ على الفتحة الظاهرةِ على آخره. •
البستانيُّ: فاعلٌ مرفوعٌ وعَلامةُ رفعه الضمّة الظاهرةُ على آخره. •
الحديقةَ: مفعولٌ به منصوبٌ وعامة نصبِهِ الفتحة الظاهرة على آخره. •
،أشجارَها: بدلُ بعضٍ من كلّ منصوبٌ وعلامة نصبه الفتحة الظاهرة على آخره •
و(هاً) ضميرٌ متَّصلٌ مبنيّ على السكون في محلّ جرّ بالإضافة.

- **arranged:** a past tense verb with an uninflected manifest final *a*.
- **the gardener:** a nominative subject; its nominative marker is the manifest final *u*.
- **the garden:** an accusative direct object; its accusative marker is the manifest final *a*.
- **its trees:** an accusative partial substitution; its accusative marker is the manifest final *a*, and 'its' [*hā*] is an enclitic pronoun with an uninflected final lack of vowel in a genitive position as annexation.

aṣ-Ṣāliḥ, 2019, 236

Producing this formulaic analysis is one of the primary ways in which mastery of the Arabic language is demonstrated in exams, and failure to produce it correctly is, accordingly, seen as a deficient linguistic proficiency (Baalbaki, 1994; Uhlmann, 2012; Younes, 2007). In this way, case and mood inflection is constructed as constituting the core of good Arabic in education, to the degree that, for many Arabic speakers, "grammar" has simply come to mean "case and mood inflection", or *iʿrāb* (Haeri, 2003; Ibrahim, 1983).

This central role ascribed to case and mood inflection stands in stark contrast to its marginal role in language use. Except for a few inflectional classes, case and mood suffixes in writing are indicated with diacritics, which are absent in most text types. This rarely leads to ambiguity, since these affixes are almost completely syntactically superfluous due to the fixed word order (Holes, 2004) and, in silent reading, the suffixes are generally assumed not to be phonologically encoded (Bateson, 1967; Saiegh-Haddad & Schiff, 2016). Hallberg and Niehorster (2021) have recently shown that, even when case inflection does appear in the text, it is often not parsed as encoding grammatical case. When reading aloud, case and mood inflections are generally omitted, except in the most formal situations, such as in news broadcasts or political speeches (Badawi, et al., 2004; Maamouri, 1998; Parkinson, 1991). In news interviews, panel discussions, and the like, where SA is used for unscripted speech, the suffixes appear only sporadically and are consistently absent in some grammatical contexts where prescriptive grammar requires them (Hallberg, 2016).

Because of the marginal role of case and mood inflection in language use, and the cumbersome methods with which it is taught, proficiency in the case and mood systems is generally very low, and it is often striking how even highly educated speakers struggle to add the correct suffix in simple sentences. This was clearly demonstrated by Parkinson (1993), who administered multiple-choice grammar tests to 170 Egyptians of various educational backgrounds. He showed that even for very simple structures, only around half to two-thirds of

participants with secondary or tertiary education were able to choose the correct suffix, with numbers dropping radically with more complex structures that included anything beyond the most frequent inflectional paradigm.

The contradictions between the perceived centrality of case and mood inflection and its limited practical role comes to the fore in the practice of adding all diacritics in teaching materials and children's literature to facilitate reading. Diacritics probably do have a facilitating effect for developing readers in representing lexical stems in a transparent "shallow" orthography where all phonemes are represented (Saiegh-Haddad & Henkin-Roitfarb, 2014). However, in addition to this, diacritics marking case and mood suffixes are also added, giving a level of morphological complexity that is absent in undiacritized text. This is illustrated in (4), an example taken from the second year Kuwaiti Arabic curriculum (al-ʿĀzimī et al., 2018). Note how case and mood inflection in this example is consistently indicated, whereas in the same undiacritized sentence in (5), as it would appear in a text for proficient readers, these inflectional suffixes are absent.

(4) أَحْمَدُ تَلْميذٌ مُجْتَهِدٌ وَمَوْهوبٌ، يُحِبُّ كُرَةَ الْقَدَمِ كَثيرًا

    aḥmad-u   talmid̲-un   mujtahid-un   wa-mawhūb-un   yuḥibb-u   kurat-a

    Aḥmad-NOM pupil-NOM   diligent-NOM and-gifted-NOM   likes-IND ball-ACK

    l-qadam-i   kat̲iran

    DEF-foot-GEN a.lot

    Aḥmad is a diligent and gifted pupil. He likes football a lot.

<div align="right">al-ʿĀzimī et al., 2018, p. 33</div>

(5) أحمد تلميذ مجتهد وموهوب، يحب كرة القدم كثيرا

    aḥmad   talmid̲ mujtahid wa-mawhūb yuḥibb kurat l-qadam   kat̲iran

    Aḥmad pupil diligent and-gifted likes ball DEF-foot   a.lot

    Aḥmad is a diligent and gifted pupil. He likes football a lot.

There is little technical hindrance to employing diacritics only on word stems and not to indicate inflection, but this is quite rare (Hallberg, 2022). On the contrary, teaching materials for upper primary and secondary education typically feature partial diacritics to mark case and mood inflection, while diacritics on word stems are omitted. This is the case in (3) above, where most diacritics appear in word-final position (to the left of words) to indicate inflection. The intention to expose children to the most correct form of the language thus leads to texts with significantly more complex morphology than is the case in texts for adults; nouns, adjectives, and verbs in texts for children are supplied with inflectional suffixes according to a system that few proficient readers master and with which they do not engage when reading.

These circumstances of case and mood inflection make for a complex and contradictory situation. Case and mood inflection is presented in the grammatical and pedagogical traditions as a central and ever-present part of the language, but it is generally not represented in writing and it is not mastered by speakers of the language. Covert norms have developed whereby omission of these suffixes is implicitly accepted in most situations, even expected. Adapting the grammatical description and pedagogy to these linguistic practices would, however, amount to a radical break with a deeply entrenched aspect of Arabic stylistic prescriptivism and a departure from the canonical codification, as well as an admission of linguistic change. Such a reform would therefore require a major shift in the dominant language ideology and prescriptive attitudes.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a description of the dominant Arabic language ideology and how it is expressed in prescriptivism in Arab academia, televized discussion programs, prescriptive language guides, and teaching materials. Arabic is associated with an aggressive standard language ideology supported by both religious and nationalist discourses and a long tradition of prescriptivist literature. The ideology is conditioned by the situation of diglossia, in which there is no reference group of speakers of the standard variety. Judgments of correctness are therefore based on the classical codification as formulated around the eleventh century. Arabic prescriptivism can usefully be divided into the two strands of standardizing and stylistic prescriptivism, which differ in scope, target group, and rhetoric.

Prescriptivism largely resides in the realm of ideology and discourse, often with limited effect on actual language use. Indeed, many of the prescriptive aims discussed in this chapter seem somewhat detached from reality and unlikely ever to be achieved. This includes calls for limiting the use of CA for cultural expression, for consistent inflection of words for case and mood, and for changing established usages of specific words or phrases. It, however, has other practical effects. This chapter has argued that the strongly conservative Arabic prescriptivism has considerable effects on people's sense of ownership of their language, on academic research, and, most importantly, on Arabic language instruction, where prescriptivist considerations often take precedence over pedagogical development.

Notes

1 See Gully (1997) for a similar observation about Arabic language debates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

2 https://arz.wikipedia.org/wiki/

3 For overviews of the canonical Arabic grammatical theory, see Bohas et al. (1990, Chapter 4) and Owens (2000).

4 فليست اللغة ميراثًا لهم وحدهم فيعملوا بها ما يشاؤون ، من عبث وعيث.

5 اللغة العربية في خطر - الجميع شركاء في حمايتها

6 See Suleiman (2014) for further discussion of this report as an example of *language anxiety*.

7 https://alarabiahconference.org/

8 https://alarabiahcouncil.org/النشأة

9 هذه الأزمة التي إن استمر التهاون فيها فسوف تؤدي إلى كارثة لغوية تهدد السيادة والاستقلال والهوية الثقافية والوطنية والشخصية.

10 حماية للطلاب والطالبات من تدريسهم باللهجة العامية ، وحماية للمجتمعات من استمرار انتشار اللهجات العامية واللغات الأجنبية على حساب اللغة العربية الوطنية.

11 نشر الوعي اللغوي بين المواطنين وفق خطة شاملة ومتواصلة تعرف بخطورة اللهجات العامية على اللغة العربية السليمة وعلى الوحدة الوطنية والتقدم والتطور والتنمية الإنتاجية وتكافؤ الفرص.

12 This is only partly correct, since many varieties of colloquial Arabic inflect verbs for mood, but by a system that differs from SA. The word used for case and mood inflection in the original Arabic (*muʿrab*), however, typically refers only to SA forms of inflection. See below for the symbolic significance of case and mood inflection.

13 العامية غير المعرب وليس له ضوابط وقواعد ومعاجم وقوالب لغوية ترتقي الى أن تكون لغة التدريس أو لغة الهوية.

14 وهي ذات تأثير مميت على جميع المقومات الحضارية للأمة وأهمها على الإطلاق: القضاء على الإسلم

15 www.alarabiya.net/ar/programs/arab-conversation/2013/06/28/ حوار-العرب-اللغة-العربية-في-خطر.html

16 www.aljazeera.net/programs/infocus/2013/12/4/ لسان-الضاد-يجمعنا

17 www.aljazeera.net/programs/in-depth/2014/11/18/ اللغة-العربية-وتحديات-النهوض

18 العدو الحقيقي للغة العربية في الاستعمال هو العاميات

19 إن اللغة الوطنية هي الأساس الذي تبنى عليه شخصية الفرد وثقافته وقدرته وإمكانيته ليتمكن من الاستيعاب والفهم وتستطيع التفكير والإبداع والعمل والإنتاج والابتكار والتطوير لقدراته ومعارفه.

20 This includes school books published online by the ministries of education in Libya (http://moe.gov.ly/), Syria (http://moed.gov.sy/), and Kuwait (https://www.moe.edu.kw/), as well as the curricula from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

21 أداةُ تفكيرِ الفردِ وتعبيرِهِ عنْ حاجاتِهِ وقناعاتِهِ تعبيراً كامِلًا باللّسان والقلم.

22 English title in original.

23 www.bbc.com/arabic/world-56514511

24 In the modern examples of this genre discussed above, errors in case and mood inflection are equally forcefully rejected in the introductions (e.g., Jawwād, 2001, p. 9), but rarely appear in the lists of errors, possibly for being regarded as too basic for the target audience.

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