

## Book Review

**Diglossia and language contact: Language variation and change in North Africa.**

**By Sayahi Lotfi (2014)**

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The question of language in the Maghreb has been the subject of heated debate for decades not only because of its implications for education and power, but also because it touches the very sensitive issue of identities in an ethnically diverse region. In his book, Sayahi gives a serene picture of the dynamics of language contact in the Maghreb, which is highly valuable for the debates of language and literacy in these countries. For this task, Sayahi uses two major concepts, bilingualism and diglossia, and he adopts the traditional definition of diglossia (as first defined by Ferguson), which, as he convincingly argues, is more adequate than the extended definition. His definition of The Maghreb is also restricted. In this book, the Maghreb refers to Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, which have similar sociolinguistic profiles and language policies.

The traditional definition of diglossia (Ferguson, 1959) refers to the coexistence of two varieties of the same language that are in complementary distribution: a low variety, the vernacular, that is used in everyday communication and high standard variety that is used in formal contexts, including education. Arabic, with its spoken dialects and the standard written variety, is a classical example of this traditional definition of diglossia. The extended definition of diglossia (Fishman, 1967) covers any two varieties that are functionally in

complementary distribution, which means that two genetically different languages like Arabic and French in Algeria are treated as a case of diglossia.

Sayahi argues that the classical definition is a more appropriate conceptual and research tool because it allows the study of the low and high varieties in a way that cannot be done in the contexts where the languages are genetically different. This is because of the difference in the distribution of the two varieties in each of the two mentioned contexts as well as the dynamics of language contact.

The book is made of eight chapters. The two first chapters are introductory. In the first chapter, the author introduces the concept of diglossia and in the second chapter, he introduces the linguistic varieties spoken in the Maghreb including varieties that are no longer spoken, but have left their relic. The main varieties are Standard Arabic, the Maghrebi Arabic varieties, French, Berber and Spanish.

The third chapter describes the manifestation of diglossia and bilingualism in the Maghreb and their interaction. Diglossia manifests itself in the coexistence of Standard Arabic and the local Arabic varieties. The author gives a detailed account of this situation using the example of Tunisia. Bilingualism is in two forms, societal bilingualism and educational bilingualism. Societal bilingualism refers to acquiring two languages in informal contexts or as a first language. This refers to Spanish and especially Berber, which is spoken by millions of people as a first language mainly in Morocco and Algeria. Educational bilingualism refers to the acquisition of a second language through education and this refers mainly to French.

In the fourth chapter, Sayahi examines code-switching, a dynamic aspect of language contact in the mentioned context of diglossia and bilingualism in the Maghreb and classifies it in this context into two categories, diglossic code-switching and bilingual code-switching.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters discuss aspects of language change that are a result of the language contact in diglossia and bilingualism. The fifth chapter deals with lexical borrowing, a result of language contact, where a distinction is

again drawn between diglossic borrowing and bilingual borrowing. In the sixth chapter, Sayahi examines other aspects of contact-induced structural changes, within diglossia, between the low and high varieties, namely convergence and structural borrowing (phonological and morphosyntactic). In the penultimate chapter, Sayahi addresses another aspect of contact-induced change under diglossia and bilingualism/multilingualism that leads to creation of new varieties, in the case of varieties such as Maltese Arabic.

In the last chapter, the author sums up the preceding chapters, with a particular focus on the factors that lead to language change and evolution in diglossic contexts.

Sayahi's use of the classical concept of diglossia in his analysis of the dynamics of language contact in the Maghreb is valuable first because of its potential theoretical value and second because of its practical implications especially in relation to educational policies and literacy. One limitation of the book is the lack of data on Berber and its contact with other languages, especially in relation to code-switching.

With a smooth logical flow of chapters written in an elegant style, free of unnecessary jargon and figures, the book is a pleasure to read. It should be accessible even to readers with very little background in (socio)linguistics.

## References

Ferguson, C. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15, 325-340.

Fishman, J. (1967). Bilingualism with and without diglossia; diglossia with and without bilingualism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 23(2), 29-38.