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A History of the Arabic Language and the origin of non-dominant varieties of Arabic

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Abstract

To comprehend how Arabic became a pluricentric language, we need to navigate through its rich history. In this paper, I focus on three stages in the development of Arabic: Classical Arabic, Middle Arabic and Modern Arabic. I explain how the fate of Arabic was permanently sealed in the Classical period with the emergence of Islam and the subsequent Islamic conquests. At the peak of the Islamic empire, the codification of Arabic preserved it as a dominant written language. However, the indigenous languages which Arabic had displaced in new regions gave way to non-dominant regional varieties. These varieties continued to diverge from the codified variety during the Middle period, giving rise to diglossia in Arabic. I conclude with a review of the modern period and the Arabic revival efforts which marked the creation of Modern Standard Arabic while the colonially influenced non-dominant varieties drifted further still.

1. Introduction

This paper serves as an introduction to other papers on the Arabic language in this volume. The collective aim of these papers is to situate Arabic within the field of the pluricentric languages and non-dominant varieties. The specific aim of this paper is to answer the following closely related questions: How did Arabic become a pluricentric language? What is the origin of non-dominant varieties of Arabic? To answer these questions, I will be navigating through the rich history of Arabic, with a particular focus on the social, religious and political events which have shaped the language.

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2. Overview

Arabic is a Semitic language; this refers to a group of languages which belong to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages (cf. Ryding 2005; Versteegh 2001). The Semitic group was originally the most Easterly based group in the Afro-Asiatic family: covering the Levant, the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula. The languages of the Semitic subfamily, include extinct members such as Phoenician, endangered languages such Aramaic, and survivors such as Hebrew and Arabic. Of these, Arabic is the language in widest use today serving as "the native language of over 200 million people in twenty different countries as well as the liturgical language for over a billion Muslims throughout the world" (Ryding 2005: 1).

The development of the Arabic language may be divided into five stages: Old Arabic (or Proto-Arabic), Early Arabic, Classical Arabic, Middle Arabic and Modern Arabic (Ryding, 2005). The evidence which survives from the first period (approximately 7th Century bc to 3rd Century ad) is very scarce, and carries little information about the structure of the language. Speculations have been made about the presence of an early form of Arabic in inscriptions which were found in Central Arabia and date as far back as the 6th century bc (Versteegh 2001), but the earliest evidence of the existence of Arabic as a distinct language seems to lie in an inscription which has been dated back to the first century ad (Holes 2004). The second stage spans a period of about three centuries, during which Arabic underwent some transitional changes through contact with the surrounding cultures and evolved into a closer semblance of Classical Arabic (Ryding 2005; Versteegh 2001). This paper will focus on the latter three periods in the development of Arabic: Classical Arabic, Middle Arabic and Modern Arabic.

3. Classical Arabic

It is perhaps the Classical period which was the most crucial to the development of Arabic. The earliest evidence from this period survives in pre-Islamic poetry from the 6th century AD which was preserved through an active tradition of oral transmission until it was finally recorded in writing in the 8th century AD (Holes 2004). During this period, reciting poetry was a highly refined and much admired formal art and tribal custom. Even at this early stage, there is general agreement among Arab and Western linguists that some regional variation had precipitated in dialectal varieties of Arabic, although it is maintained that such variation would have consisted mostly of minor lexical and phonetic

differences which did not interfere with mutual intelligibility (Altoma 1969; Badawi 1973; Holes 2004; Versteegh 1996; Zakariyya 1964). It is speculated that the literary *koine* of poetic production, though not far removed from the native varieties, would have been used *alongside* them (Ferguson 1959a).

Badawi (1973) subscribes to this theory. He acknowledges the claim made by medieval Muslim grammarians to linguistic purity during the pre-Islamic period, stating that the Bedouins of the time spoke 'perfect' or 'sound' Arabic innately[1] (this is commonly referred to as the theory of linguistic purity). However, Badawi tells us that linguistic evidence and accounts presented by some of the very same grammarians suggests a contradicting reality. The grammarians had set up a dialectal hierarchy in which the Arabic of the tribe of Quraysh constituted the most perfect variety (Holes 2004; Versteegh 1996), inevitably implying some degree of linguistic variation among the tribes and regions of Arabia (Versteegh 2001). Strictly speaking, such a situation corresponds to what Ferguson (1991) would call a case of "standard-with-dialects" where the standard variety is the mother tongue for a group of people who use it for everyday conversation. However, Badawi goes even further to speculate that the Bedouin tribes had two levels of speech: the varying native vernaculars which were used for everyday communication within the tribes, and a somewhat uniform literary variety for poetic production and formal cross-tribal communication (Badawi 1973: 19-22). It is the latter, Badawi states "which was the seed of a common language, or 'Arabic' [*al-ʿarabiyya*] as it later came to be known" (p. 20). Badawi describes this situation as 'linguistic duality' (*izdiwājiyyat al-luġa*), which corresponds to what is known in Western linguistics as *diglossia*.

The view that the origins of diglossia stem from pre-Islamic Arabia is supported by Elgibali (1996) and Anis (2003 [1973]). According to Elgibali (1996: 8-9), "to presume that Classical Arabic was the native language of any speaker either immediately before or at the time of the inception of Islam is, a gross misrepresentation. The texts transmitted to us belong to a literary genre, which was not identifiable with any one native tongue". Anis argues that this literary language, which drew many of its features from the dialect of Quraysh, was in fact an amalgamation of other Arabic dialects as well: it was a sophisticated poetic *koine* recognised by the Arab tribes of the region and used in oratory competitions, but not itself the native tongue of any one tribe. This elevated

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[1] The Arabic expression they used was *bi-l-salīqa*, literally meaning innately or by nature.

variety was hence a learned variety, one which was manipulated by tribal elites who would compete in the mastery of its intricacies. As Elgibali (1996: 10) observes, "one can easily imagine the importance of such mastery in a society dominated by oral tradition". He adds that the "history of Arabic abounds with anecdotal evidence of how learning the Classical language has always been a noble yet unattainable goal" (Elgibali, 1996: 12).

The central event which would shape the fate of Arabic did not occur until the 7th Century AD with the emergence of Islam. Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in the year 570 AD in Mecca. From 610 AD and until he died in 632 (22 years), Muhammad preached Islam. At the core of his message was a divine revelation, the *Qurʾān*, a text which was not only considered the literal word of God, but is considered by multitudes today to constitute Arabic in its purest form; Arabic was "permanently sacralised" (Ryding 2005: 3). Though differing in stylistic and general textual structure, the Quran is thought to be formulated in the poetic variety of pre-Islamic Arabia (Badawi 1973; Holes 2004; Versteegh 1996). Muhammad was himself from *Quraysh*, an important tribe in Ḥijāz, the eastern part of the peninsula. It is therefore little wonder that later Muslim grammarians would rank the dialect of *Ḥijāz* highest among the pre-Islamic dialects of the Arabian Peninsula (Holes 2004; Versteegh 1996).

Soon after Muhammad's death, his followers recognised the need to preserve the Quran as many of the reciters of the Quran were dying and the increasing number of followers from outside the Peninsula was resulting in deviant readings of the text (Versteegh 2001). The codification process was a long and thorough one overseen by an appointed committee of text editors who had to make many decisions at the linguistic-level. The first unified text of the Quran, *al-muṣḥaf*, was completed during the time of the third Caliph, ʿuṯmān bin ʿaffān (r. 644-656) and was sent to the corners of the fast-growing Islamic empire to displace all deviant texts. *Al-muṣḥaf* is believed to be the product of the first effort to standardise the Arabic orthography which included the adoption of diacritic dots to distinguish between similar letters, a convention which was already in use by some Arabic scribes and which is thought to have been borrowed from Syriac (ibid.).

Within a century of Muhammad's death, his followers had formed an empire that stretched from Persia to Spain, and wherever Islam went, Arabic did too. In fact, Dallal (1999: 158) states that "the first main cultural transformation that occurred after the establishment of the Islamic empire had more to do with

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language than with religion". While Muslims remained a minority for several centuries in many parts of the empire, Arabic, the official language of the empire, was gaining rapidly. In the eighth century, Arabic began to replace Greek to the West and Persian to the East as the language of administration (Versteegh 2001), but recognising the prominence of the Greek and Persian cultures, translations from these languages would later abound, introducing many Greek and Persian loanwords which survive in Arabic to this day (Holes 2004). In these early centuries following Islam, Classical Arabic was not only used as a written language, but also served as "the spoken language of the élite in formal situations" (Versteegh, 1996: 17). Between the eighth and the twelfth centuries, Arabic became the language of a great body of cultural and scientific production which thrived under the Islamic empire. Indeed, Dallal (1999) argues that what is often dubbed "Islamic sciences" should be more accurately designated "Arabic sciences" because of the central role that the Arabic language played in the development of these sciences. Many of the scholars who wrote in Arabic were not Arab, and some were not even Muslim.

One particular science was quick to flourish; that of Quranic exegesis. The close analysis of the Quran often entailed a linguistic analysis of the text, and soon enough, some scholars began to focus primarily on the language of the text itself rather than its contents (Versteegh 1997). This was coupled with a growing concern for the Arabic language; medieval grammarians believed that the rapid acquisition of the Arabic language by non-native speakers of Arabic in the wake of the Islamic conquests had resulted in the 'corruption of speech' (*fasād al-kalām*) (Badawi 1973; Versteegh 1996; Versteegh 1997). Grammatical mistakes in assigning the wrong case endings to words were often reported and bitterly criticised by grammarians who took measures to preserve the unity of the language. In the eighth century, the first text to comprehensively compile and describe the rules of Arabic grammar was written by Sībawayh (c.a. 752- c.a. 796), a Persian scholar who studied Arabic in Iraq (Carter 2004). *Kitāb Sībawayh* (Sībawayh's book), so called because its author died without giving it a name, is still considered by many today as the ultimate reference on Arabic grammar.

Notwithstanding contemporary views concerning the pre-Islamic origins of diglossia, it is worth noting that, to the Arabic Grammarians, there was only one Arabic language; it was used in everyday communication by the tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia, and it is the same language in which the Quran was revealed (Versteegh 1996). While the Grammarians acknowledged regional linguistic

variation among the tribes of Arabia, this was regarded as "equivalent expressions with approximately the same status" (Versteegh, 1996: 16). For centuries after Islam, noblemen would send their children to live with Bedouin tribes so that they may learn to fight and speak 'proper Arabic'. It was also common for the Arab grammarians of the time to consult Bedouins in arbitrating linguistic questions, suggesting that Classical Arabic (as defined by the grammarians) survived for some time as a living language which was natively spoken by at least some tribal groups. However, Versteegh (1996: 18) notes that, over time, the forms put forth by grammarians as supposedly spoken by a group of people through expressions like "the Arabs say", "lost [their] connotation of actual intercourse with living speakers of the Classical language who could be consulted in case of doubt, and it came to denote a methodological fiction". The work of the early grammarians was essentially prescriptive; indicating how people *should* speak (Versteegh, 1996). That the grammarians had to go to such lengths to prescribe how Arabic ought to be spoken is itself proof that whatever core of native speakers the Arabic language had, this was rapidly diminishing.

4. Middle Arabic

By the 13th century the Arabic Islamic empire was past its prime. Already weakened by the emergence of independent dynasties and the Crusaders' inroads, it suffered additional blows from the Mongol invasions in the 13th century (Smith 1999). This weakened state culminated in the fall of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold in Spain in 1491 and the subsequent expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. What happened to Arabic under the disintegrating empire was perhaps the early Arabic grammarians' worst nightmare. For one thing, this disintegration symbolised the declining prestige of Arabic. With the loss of Andalucía in Spain, the Islamic world had lost an important centre of cultural exchange for which Arabic was the main vehicle of expression (ibid.). Under the independent dynasties in the East, Farsi (a new form of Persian heavily influenced by Arabic) was already replacing Arabic as the language of the court from the 9th century and became the main language of culture in the 10th century. The fall of Baghdad, another Islamic cultural centre, to the Mongols in 1258 undermined the status of Arabic and contributed indirectly to the newfound prestige of Farsi in the entire Islamic East (Lapidus 1999; Versteegh 2001). Arabic continued to be revered as the language of Islam, but even as Islam spread further into central

and South East Asia, it did so through Farsi (Lapidus 1999).

Simultaneously, a new force began to emerge from the 14th century onwards: that of the Ottomans. The Ottomans expanded in every direction, annexing to the Islamic empire new territories in Eastern Europe. In its geographical scope; the Ottoman Empire was the greatest of Islamic Empires, reaching the height of its expansion in the 17th century (Lapidus 1999). The Ottomans were Turkish-speakers and enforced Turkish as the language of government and administration throughout the empire. As in Persia and further to the East, Arabic continued to function as the language of religion. It was also the language of most cultural production, and crucially, it continued to be the language of the populace in the Arab provinces where less than one percent of the population spoke Turkish (Versteegh 2001).

These changes fall within the timeframe of what is sometimes known as the stage of Middle Arabic. However, definitions of the time span of 'Middle Arabic' vary widely; it extends from (as early as) the 8th century to the end of the 18th century according to some linguists (cf. Versteegh 2001), while other linguists delimit it to the period from the 13th to the 18th centuries (Ryding 2005). Holes (2004: 37) does not rule out the possibility of tracing "the developments in Middle Arabic through time", while Versteegh (2001: 114) argues that "it would … be a mistake to assign any chronological connotation to the term 'Middle Arabic'". He uses it as a "collective name for all texts with deviations from Classical grammar". In light of this ambiguity, Middle Arabic is perhaps more usefully treated as a developmental phase rather than a time period. However, it is useful to draw parallels between Middle Arabic and what Chejne (1969) terms "the period of decline" of Arabic: from 1258 to 1800[2]. Studies of Middle Arabic usually focus on examining the influence of colloquial Arabic in written texts, though this is not always easy since many texts will have possibly undergone various degrees of editing and 'correction' over time, and because the written texts available for study are not proportionately available from all regions of the empire (Holes 2004; Versteegh 2001). The general assumption about this stage, however, is that while the literary standard codified by the Classical grammarians remained morphologically and lexically intact save for borrowings from the substrate languages, the vernacular non-dominant varieties experienced morphological simplifications most visible in the loss of inflections and

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[2] Chejne (1969) divides the history of Arabic under the Islamic empire into three periods: development (661-750), growth (750-1258) and decline (1258-1800).

grammatical distinctions.

The 14th century Tunisian scholar, Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) testifies to this in his *Muqadimma* (1377), observing that the language of his time is different from that which was codified by the early grammarians (Ibn Khaldun 1967 [1377]). Ibn Khaldūn is clearly a proponent of the theory of the pre-Islamic purity of Arabic, and attributes any deviation from Classical Arabic to contact with the non-Arabs. He believed that the Arabs had lost their innate ability to speak their language properly when they left Arabia and settled among the non-Arabs; the more contact they had with the non-Arabs the more 'corrupt' their language became. Crucially, Ibn Khaldūn notes that the Arabic spoken in his time has lost many of its grammatical inflections and that it has been phonologically influenced by contact with non-Arabs. He also notes regional variation in Arabic, observing that the Arabic spoken by the people of the East (who have been influenced by Persian and Turkish) is different from that which is spoken by the people of the West (who have been influenced by Berber). All the same, Ibn Khaldūn remarks that the Arabic language is just as eloquent in his time as when it was codified by the Classical grammarians (in a clear reference to the literary variety which had retained its Classical features). We may infer from this that Middle Arabic reflects a stage during which the Arabic vernaculars shifted further from the literary standard and grew further apart from one another; a period where distinct regional non-dominant varieties began to emerge and diglossia became more pronounced.

Although the traditional theory of the purity of pre-Islamic Arabic was, according to Elgibali (1996: 4) "dogmatic in its view of Arabic as a static language", "not surprisingly, the language itself – unheeded by theoretical prescriptiveness or squabbles – has ceaselessly continued its own journey of change into a multitude of often interrelated and overlapping regional, ethnic, religious, and social varieties". What the well-meaning classical grammarians had effectively done, according to Badawi (1973: 38-41), was "freeze" Arabic in its 7th century form; but the grammarians could not possibly freeze the Arab civilisation even if they had tried. Badawi posits that, by defining sound Arabic so precisely and distinctively, the early grammarians had unintentionally defined two languages instead of one: one which falls within the prescribed boundaries of the language, and one which falls outside them; i.e. eloquent Arabic (*fuṣḥā*), and the Arabic of the populace (*ʿāmmiyya*).

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5. Modern Arabic

However, literary Arabic has not remained completely unchanged since its codification as the above analogy might suggest. The literary Arabic of the modern period, which begins approximately from the end of the 18th century, differs markedly from Classical Arabic.

For all that Arabic may have suffered at the hands of the Ottomans it experienced a brief revival under Ottoman rule in the 19th century. In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte led a French expedition against Egypt. The expedition itself was very short-lived and proved too adventurous to sustain; the French were driven out of Egypt in 1801 but the legacy they left would impact the position of Arabic for the rest of the century (Chejne 1969; Holes 2004; Versteegh 2001). In many ways, the expedition marked the beginning of a period of cultural influence from Europe.

Europe had already gone through the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution which had given birth to many technologies and intellectual ideals. These were eagerly taken up by Muhammad Ali, a Turkic-Albanian Ottoman whose lineage ruled Egypt from 1805 to 1952, and who had a great zeal for European learning and culture (Brugman 1984). Muhammad Ali's most significant tribute to Arabic was perhaps in replacing Turkish with Arabic as the official language of administration in Egypt and reinstating it as the vehicle of cultural production. His reign saw the beginning of the Arabic *nahḍa* or Renaissance (Chejne 1969).

This intellectual revival made the Arabic scholars and writers aware that Arabic was at a disadvantage in expressing technological terms and modern social and cultural ideas, a problem which was usually resolved by reviving equivalent concepts from the Classical literature, coining new Arabic terms (sometimes under the influence of Turkish usage), or less commonly by borrowing the European terms into Arabic directly (Versteegh 2001). Ferguson calls this revival that Arabic experienced nothing short of a 'miracle' which is often underestimated or forgotten about. He states that "in the sense of having a literary language that is part and parcel of the life involvement of people; there really was a renaissance, a revival of the language, a renewal of a language that was in a sense not fully alive" (Ferguson 1997 [1990]: 264).

The call for Arabic gained momentum in the 1930s and 1940s, coinciding with and contributing to fervent moves to reform and modernise the Arabic

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language. These moves were mobilised by the inception of the Arab League in 1945, and the establishment of Arabic Language Academies in Syria (1918-1919), Egypt (1932) and Iraq (1947). The primary objective of the academies was "the preservation and renovation of Classical Arabic as an effective and unified language for all Arabic speaking people" (Altoma, 1974: 302). Their goals also included the "preservation of the purity of the language; making Arabic self-sufficient so as to meet the requirements of the arts and sciences; and rendering Arabic a suitable instrument of communication in the modern world" (ibid.). The Arabic language academies generally reflect a purist attitude which can be summarised as: insisting on the need to preserve standard Arabic; undermining colloquial Arabic, and believing that mass education and universal literacy would spread the use of standard Arabic to all functions in society (Maamouri, 1998: 24).

The result of these modernisation efforts was Modern Standard Arabic, which can be described as a simplified form of Classical Arabic; a form which "is readable and comprehensible by any literate Arab" (Zughoul 1980: 206). Ryding (2005: 4) attributes the emergence of MSA to "the spread of literacy, the concept of universal education, the inception of journalism, and exposure to Western writing practices and styles". Crucially, Mitchell (1982: 124) notes that "MSA is not a *spoken* language; it is nobody's mother tongue, and the man who wants to talk at all times like a book or newspaper is a decided oddity". It is worth noting that MSA is uniform across the Arab World; despite some minor differences in lexicon, the structure remains remarkably constant (McCarus 2008).

The cultural changes to which the difference between CA and MSA can be attributed were largely a by-product of the European colonisation which swept through the Islamic world in the 19th century, bringing the waning Ottoman Empire to an end and thereby concluding this chapter in the common history of the Arabic-speaking world.

Arabic suffered considerable setbacks under European colonisation, but was afforded a fresh relevance as a tool for political and ideological resistance. One clear influence of Western ideas during the Arabic *nahḍa* was in the rise of intellectual nationalism. This took different forms in the Arab World: ranging from Islamic nationalism and pan-Arab nationalism to territorial nationalism. Versteegh notes however that "although the Arabic thinkers often disagreed among themselves about the future form which their nation should take, they all agreed on its being an Arabic-speaking nation" (2001: 177).

It was not until the end of World War II that the region became completely

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independent of European colonisation, although the colonisers maintained a cultural hold on their former colonies (Nasr 1999). The extent and nature of the cultural influence of colonisation was not uniform across the Arabic speaking world, but a shared feature is the plethora of foreign borrowings into the Arabic non-dominant varieties from the respective languages of the colonisers (examples include the influence of Italian on Libyan, French on Moroccan and Lebanese, and English on Gulf Arabic) (cf. Holes, 2004). However, the most lasting legacy of the colonial era has perhaps been the division of the Islamic and Arab World into territorial nation-states. Hence, as the newly-founded states walked down separate paths of history, they continued to diverge politically and culturally as well as linguistically. When the newly independent Arab states declared 'Arabic' their official language – this 'Arabic' referred to the modernised, standardised variety. On the other hand, the regional non-dominant varieties, which were regarded as inadequate renditions of the standard, were completely overlooked. These varieties continued to develop – as they always had – unfettered by purist ideologies and unchecked by standardisation policies.

6. The present situation

When Charles Ferguson published his landmark article *Diglossia* in 1959, he used Arabic as one of three textbook examples (Ferguson, 1959b). He described a situation where two or more varieties of the same language serve different functions in society, co-existing in a relatively stable manner. Over half a century later, Arabic linguists still use Ferguson's idea of H and L, but maintain that they are two poles on a continuum rather than a dichotomy. However, this period has seen many social, political and technological developments in the Arabic-speaking world, not least the spread of literacy and the onset of the digital age. While we might still say that Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabics enjoy some degree of functional distinction with the more formal functions reserved for SA and the informal functions for colloquial Arabic, the distribution of functions outlined by Ferguson has changed somewhat: new fucnitons have appeared and overlap in functions is not at all uncommon. In particular, with the spread of computer-mediated communication and the decentralisation of publishing, written functions are no longer seen as the exclusive domain of SA.

Today, regional non-dominant varieties of Arabic are widely reffered to as ‚dialects' (*lahajāt*). Native speakers of Arabic are aware that Standard Arabic is

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quite different from the Arabic they speak, but to them they are both ‚Arabic'. That is, Arabic speakers feel „that both varieties are part of one language; they do not consider the two varieties to be separate languages. In other words, both standard and colloquial Arabic are 'Arabic' in one system" (Hary, 1996: 78-79). Arabic speakers are also aware that the Arabic they speak is different from other varieties which are spoken in other regions in the Arab world. Traditionally, the dialects of the Arab East or *Mashriq* (from Egypt East-wards) have enjoyed more prestige and exposure. This is not surprising given that this region has historically been a locus of political and cultural influence. Egyptian colloquial, which is based on the dialect of Cairo, has particularly enjoyed great supra-local prestige due to Egypt's cultural legacy and media influence. This has been used to explain the special attitude, and even pride, with which Egyptians regard their spoken variety. The Arab Maghreb on the other hand has been less fortunate: traditionally seen as lying on the periphery of the Arab world, the North African countries of the Arab West have enjoyed little influence in the region. This is reflected in attitudes towards the Maghrebi dialects which are often stigmatised by Arabic speakers outside the region and considered very difficult – if not impossible – to understand. We may therefore say that there is a hierarchy of non-dominant Arabic varieties in the Arab world. However, the situation is not static: the spread of satellite channels in the last decades has meant more exposure for the less dominant varieties, and geopolitical power shifts have translated into competition for higher positions in the hierarchy.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, to understand the position of Arabic as a pluricentric language, it is necessary to examine its history, particularly the three main stages in its development: Classical Arabic, Middle Arabic and Modern Arabic. These stages correspond respectively to periods of rise, decline and revival of the Arabic language. The origins of non-dominant varieties of Arabic lie in the Classical period. Indeed, if we subscribe to the theory of early diglossia in Arabic, then they may be traced back all the way to pre-Islamic Arabia. What is uncontested is that distinct non-dominant varieties were recognised during the Middle period. These increased and became even more distinct in the Modern period where Arabic revival efforts followed in the steps of the medieval Arabic grammarians, overlooking all that which did not fall within the prescribed boundaries of

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Standard Arabic. These revival efforts asserted the position of Arabic as a pluricentric language which was declared the official language of the newly independent Arab states after WWII. Today, the attitudes of Arabic speakers place the non-dominant varieties in a regional hierarchy, with the dialects of most influential countries enjoying greater prestige. As non-dominant varieties of Arabic continue to evolve, shaped by changes in the social lives of their speakers, they also continue to offer much to study for researchers in the field.

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