

The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World

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The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World

Writing Change

Edited by

Jacob Høigilt
Gunvor Mejdell



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Preface

This volume comes out of a four year research project (The sociology and ideology of language change in the Arab world) based in Oslo, but involving scholars from – besides Norway – Egypt and Morocco, France and Britain, the US and Canada. Thanks to a generous research grant from the Research Council of Norway, we have been able to meet in three workshops – in Cairo, Oslo and Rabat – in order to arrive at a conceptual and empirical framework for the project and to discuss preliminary versions of the contributions to this volume. We also designed the issues and questions for two large-scale surveys on attitudes and practices concerning written Arabic, carried out in Cairo and Rabat. The results of these surveys have already been made publicly available in two tabulation reports published by the Norwegian research institute Fafo: *Language and Change in Egypt: Social and Cultural Indicators Survey* and *Language and Social Survey in Morocco*.

The editors, dr. Jacob Høigilt (senior researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo) and professor Gunvor Mejdell (University of Oslo), have thoroughly enjoyed the company of and scholarly discussions with our colleagues. We believe our cooperative efforts have resulted in an interesting, highly relevant and valuable volume on writing Arabic, its politics and practices.

Several institutions deserve thanks for their support and facilitation throughout the project. First, we would like to thank the Research Council of Norway for a grant that has financed this four-year, international research project on Arabic sociolinguistics (RCN project no. 213473). The grant has also made it possible for us to publish this book under Brill's Open Access program, which we think is particularly important to facilitate scholarly contact between Arab, European and American academia. In Egypt, the always friendly staff at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC) kindly offered to host us during our first workshop. The Institute provided a perfect venue for three days of intense deliberations, and a tranquil haven in the centre of Cairo; we are grateful to everybody there, in particular the director, Rudolf de Jong, and the office manager, Tilly Mulder. In Morocco, we would like to thank the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Muhammad v University, Rabat and its dean Abdelhanine Belhaj for their generosity in connection with our third workshop in Rabat. In addition to contributing to the workshop in Rabat, Ahmed Ech-Charfi at Muhammad v University took care of all the organizing and liaison with the University; his kind assistance and good spirits were highly appreciated by all. In Norway, we would like to thank the research institute Fafo for hosting the project in the initial stages and for its valuable work in relation to the surveys in

Cairo and Rabat. The Department for Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo kindly hosted the second workshop as well as the PhD fellowship included in the project. The Peace Research Institute Oslo has been the main host institution for the project. Its magnificent administrative staff has provided indispensable support throughout, always with a smile; Jacob is eternally grateful to Pål Torjus Halsne, Lars Even Andersen and Lorna Quilario Sandberg for their help and advice. Finally, we would like to thank Maarten Frieswijk at Brill for his interest in the book and all his help and support during the publication process.

Jacob Høigilt and Gunvor Mejdell
Oslo, 9 February 2017

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