CHAPTER SIX

FOREIGNER TALK IN ARABIC

Input in circumstances such as those illustrated in chapter four took place by means of modifying the target language (i.e. tendencies of Foreigner Talk). Because Arabs, as the native speakers of the target language, were the majority group in the loci of early communication, they themselves were able to undertake the initiative of modifying their native language, especially when the majority of them were monolinguals. Although heavy restructuring and loaning from a foreign language have permanently affected the formation of varieties of Arabic elsewhere in East Africa and Asia, the type of input and the non-linguistic ecological conditions that facilitated it in the now-Arab world inhibited this process in the case of the dialects. It is unlikely, according to the conclusion of the previous chapter, that native speakers undertake a heavy restructuring of their language, even if the purpose is educational. If heavy restructuring is attempted by native speakers it takes place in highly marked situations. When restructuring occurs, however, the upgrading nature of FT does not allow a permanent mark on the output of the non-native speaker.

Generally speaking, if FT should be grammatical, and if the conclusions concerning the socio-demographics of Arabicization have any historical truth, then it must be responsible for the differences between Classical Arabic (as the nearest variety to pre-Islamic Arabic) and the Modern Arabic dialects. These differences are less than the differences between Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic on the one hand and the Arabic-based pidgins and creoles on the other, but are in many respects the result of internal processes, such as generalization and reduction. It is not an overstatement to say that FT might very well be responsible for the relative similarities between the modernized sedentary dialects of Arabic and the peninsular dialects in general, as respective representatives of their ancestors. Gulf Arabic dialects share with the sedentary ancestors of New Arabic some of their most particular features. The Sunni Kuwaiti dialect, for instance, shares with the sedentary dialects the use of a genitive exponent, ٌٌْ. In addition, many Gulf Arabic dialects share with Moroccan Arabic
the use of an analytical dual, which is formed by means of a plural noun followed by the number two (Holes 1990: 149). This form of the dual has exactly the same function as the standard Arabic dual suffix. In addition, Kuwaiti Arabic shares with the modern sedentary dialects a system of modal and aspectual prefixes, albeit less complex than the Syrian system, for example.

Although the study of FT in Arabic is limited, the available data indicates that simplification is the purpose of native interlocutors (Tweissi 1990: 296–326). This is suggested by the fact that FT register is used only when non-native interlocutors indicate to the native speakers a difficulty in understanding. From Tweissi (1990), it is clearly noticeable that native speakers of Jordanian Arabic who took part in his study do not use an FT register as soon as they realize that they are talking to non-native speakers, but rather when these non-native speakers signal that a difficulty in comprehension occurred. To cite but one example in Tweissi (1990: 313), the non-native speaker pretends that he has problems comprehending the word samak ‘fish’. Here, the native speaker elaborates to facilitate the meaning of the word as follows:

**NNS**

afwan ++ is-samak šū?

’Sorry’ ‘fish’ ‘what’

’Sorry, what is fish?’

**NS**

is-samak illi binlāʾī fil-bahhīr bništī țāzij

‘The fish’ ‘which we find’ ‘in the sea’ ‘we buy it fresh’

‘We buy the fish that we find in the sea fresh.’

The rest of this chapter will introduce the tendencies of simplification and modification used by native speakers of modern Arabic dialects with non-native speakers. It will also introduce some of the strategies of simplification and modification. The purpose of the strategies listed is to clarify how modification and simplification work on the different levels of linguistic analysis. To attain this goal, data from Tweissi (1990: 296–320) from urban Jordanian Arabic, as well as data I collected from native-speakers of Egyptian Arabic will be discussed. What follows is a comparison of sedentary Modern Arabic dialects to other varieties of Arabic in order to show that the difference between the two varieties of Arabic is the result of the tendencies of Arabic FT.

The reader should expect tendencies of modification and simplification to have existed in the FT situation in the first century of the Islamic era as part of a universal phenomenon. One should not imag-