THE LINGUISTIC STATUS OF THE MODERN JORDANIAN DIALECTS

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ABD-EL-JAWAD (1986: 55) claims that the urban Jordanian dialect is “prestigious” relative to both the rural and Bedouin dialects. Al-Sughayer (1990: 6), on the other hand, regards the rural Jordanian dialect as “fuḥāḥāʾ,” associating it with ‘clarity of articulation’.

Following Ferguson (1968: 75), this paper argues that these hypotheses are basically “myths” and that they are definitely implausible in considering that one dialect in Jordan has a greater “prestige” or “clarity of articulation” than do others.

1. Introduction

Ferguson (1968: 75) states that every speech community has attitudes and beliefs “about the language of the community as well as about other languages and language in general”. He labels these attitudes and beliefs “myths” and discusses “the set of myths about Arabic current in the Arabic speech community.” He discusses four “myths” about Arabic: the superiority of Arabic, the classical-colloquial diglossia, dialect rating, and the future of Arabic.

The basic idea of this paper is based on the third type of “myths.” That is, dialect rating. Ferguson (1968: 79) discusses this rating in terms...
of what a member of an Arabic speech community thinks of his dialect in relation to other dialects within the same community. This paper differs from Ferguson’s study in the sense that it discusses and evaluates dialect rating from a linguist’s perspective. I refer to this rating as linguistic status. I define the linguistic status of a dialect as the position or rank of a dialect in relation to other dialects, as well as its linguistic condition in the eyes of a linguist.1

2. Different hypotheses

Numerous hypotheses about the linguistic status of the modern Jordanian dialects have been made. For example, different studies, whether sociolinguistic or non-sociolinguistic, have used terms like “prestige”, “stigmatized”, and “most/least preferred” to describe certain dialects:

1. Ibrahim, M. (1986) claims that “a prestigious spoken variety of Arabic (urban Palestinian Arabic) exists independently of the prestige of Standard Arabic.”
2. Abd-el-Jawad, H. (1986) considers the urban Jordanian dialect as “prestigious”, labels the rural and Bedouin ones as “stigmatized”, and talks of “covert prestige” in relation to what he terms “Bedouin”.
3. Al-Sughayer (1990) makes another claim for “prestige”, this time for the rural Jordanian dialect.
4. Hussein and El-Ali (1989) consider the Bedouin variety as the “most preferred” variety and the urban as the “least preferred” among the colloquial varieties. They even suggest that the rural dialect speakers don’t view their dialect as less “prestigeful” than other urban varieties.

1 The dialects of Jordan can be classified into three types: urban (Abd-el-Jawad, 1981), rural (Al-Khatib, 1988; Al-Sughayer, 1990), and Bedouin. The Bedouin dialects include Bani Hasan (Irshied, 1984), Bani Sabah (Palva, 1980), the Bdul (Bani Yasin and Jonathan Owens, 1984), the Hewtat (Palva, 1986), Al-‘ajarna (Palva, 1976), ‘ashdy Arabic (Sakarna, 1999), and Al-Zawaida Arabic (Sakarna, 2002). See Cleveland (1963) for more information about the classification of the Bedouin Jordanian dialects, in particular, and the other Jordanian dialects, in general. See Rosenhouse (1984a) and (1984b) for details on the classification of the Bedouin dialects. See also Sakarna (1999) for more details about the types and features of the Jordanian dialects.