

## **Variation In Arabic and identity**

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This paper examines different ideological and identity construction functions of linguistic variation in Arabic through a detailed analysis of the existing literature on language politics and national identity, arguing that linguistic variation may be used for constructing/reconstructing, locating/ relocating and/or shifting/losing identity, and divided/split identity. In the “Diglossic” pattern, each of the two polar varieties stands for different sets of values: H variety serves as a neutral, corrective /reference and pan-Arab unifying model aiming to transcend the boundaries of individual nation-states, and also stands for conflicting drives : Religious, political, national, ethnic, which determine the direction of change, patterns of variation and/or conflict. The L varieties, on the other hand, stand for local, regional, bloc, and state values and identities.

Within each state, variation may reflect sociopolitical, ETHNIC, Sectarian, and Religious grouping/ divisions. In such contexts, language serves as a marker of identity and as a “boundary-setter between groups” where linguistic boundaries correspond to political divisions. Accordingly, with any political tension or conflict, each group resorts to its identity markers, including language, where in some cases language variation can save or cost life. Ultimately, political changes lead to changing of identities and loyalties...

Religiously, different religious groups may use language variation as a way to relocate identity. For instance, younger women and some Christian men in Bethlehem tend to adopt the urban pronunciation of nearby East Jerusalem and abandon the common rural Palestinian variety of their town; While, at the same time the speech of younger educated Muslims is showing the growing influence of the standard variety of Arabic. Here linguistic variation seems to have produced new distinctions. A case of a town in transition, being transformed from its previous status as a Christian Arab town into an important Palestinian and dominantly Muslim city.

Linguistic variation may also reflect political and economic dislocation and divided loyalties: A sociolinguistic study of a divided Palestinian Village presents evidence of a “growing double identity” reflected linguistically within the same politically and economically divided village.. Yet, A further complication of the picture is added with the recent calls to maintain “ a Pure Jewish State”, based on the “exclusion” of Native Palestinian Arabs, which will ultimately lead them to start reconstructing their new political identities.

Finally I will present the case of “The Returning –Immigrants variation”. Many Arab Omani families immigrated to Zanzibar where established themselves as the ruling and upper group. Then in the 60s of last Century they were forced to leave the country where the majority went to Oman. However, many of these still face what may be seen as “identity conflict” or “divided loyalty”: do they see themselves as Omanis returning home or Zanzibari Omanis immigrating to hosting Oman? This identity conflict is reflected in another pattern of linguistic variation ( Swahili, Arabic , English)