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Modern Arabic Structures, Functions, and Varieties

REVISED EDITION

Clive Holes

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Introduction

0.1 Where is Arabic spoken?

Arabic is the sole or joint official language in twenty independent Middle Eastern and African states: Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. It is the native language of Israel's Arab citizens and of the Palestinians who live in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. Since the end of the nineteenth century, there have been large communities of Arabic speakers outside the Middle East, particularly in the United States, and more recently in Europe.[1] Arabic is also the language of Islam's holy book, the Koran, and as such is the religious and liturgical language of all Muslims, regardless of origin. On the contemporary international stage, Arabic has been an official language of the United Nations alongside English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese since 1 January 1971.

Recent estimates put the total number of native speakers of Arabic at about 250 million. In some of the countries listed above, however, Arabic is by no means the only, or even in some cases the first, language of some sections of the population. In the countries of North Africa—mainly Morocco and Algeria, and to a lesser extent Tunisia and Libya—there are scattered but large minorities, several million strong, whose mother tongue is one of a large

number of Berber dialects that are only distantly related to Arabic. Virtually all these Berber speakers, however, have at least a rudimentary knowledge of local spoken Arabic, and most are bilingual. As a result of more than a century of French colonization, some are trilingual in Arabic, Berber, and French. Further east, in the mountains of northern Iraq, there are several hundred thousand native speakers of Kurdish, an Indo-European language related to Persian. In southern Sudan, the southernmost country whose official language is Arabic, the indigenous population speaks a variety of mainly Bantu languages, quite unrelated to Arabic. In the "heartland" Arab areas of the Arabian Peninsula and the Near East, small pockets of speakers of other Semitic languages still exist here and there within the borders of the Arabic-speaking countries, although they have now all but disappeared: Aramaic in a few villages in Syria and northern Iraq, and a group of South Arabian languages (Mehrī, Ḥarsūsī, Jibālī) in the deserts and mountains of Oman. These linguistic minorities, large and small, are a vestige of the situation that existed in the Middle East and North Africa before the great expansion in the influence of Arabic, which began with the rise of Islam in the middle of the seventh century A.D.

In adjacent areas once but no longer under Arab hegemony, a linguistic flotsam was left by the receding imperial tide. Here, Arabic is still spoken as the first language by some of the population, although it has no official status. In Asia, the southern Iranian province of Khuzistan (or Arabistan) is demographically, and politically perhaps, the most important of these regions, but there are also Arabic-speaking minorities in Afghanistan (Balkh), parts of the former Soviet Union (Uzbekistan), northeastern Iran, and quite widely in southern Turkey. In Africa, there are mother-tongue speakers of Arabic on the fringes of the southern Sahara in northern Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Chad. In the Mediterranean, a recognizably Arabic-based vernacular was still spoken until 1974 alongside Greek in the village of Kormakiti in northern Cyprus, and Maltese is undoubtedly structurally an Arabic dialect, though it has been heavily influenced by centuries of contact with Romance languages and, more recently, English.

But what exactly do we mean when we say that the inhabitants of such geographically separated, ethnically diverse areas "speak Arabic"? In what sense does an Arabic-speaking villager from Uzbekistan speak the "same" language as a northern Nigerian townsman from Maiduguri, a Waheibi tribesman from the sands of southern Oman, or a professor of Islamic law at the al-Azhar University in Cairo? An objective comparison of the varieties of Arabic found at the edges of the Arabic-speaking area might well lead one to the conclusion that they were historically related, but synchronically distinct and mutually unintelligible languages like English and Dutch.[2] But it is unlikely that this view would

be shared by ordinary speakers of these different varieties of Arabic themselves. Each would certainly aver that he or she personally "spoke Arabic" and would probably agree that the others did so too even though their normal vernacular might be very difficult to understand. How can we explain this apparent paradox?

It is well known that speakers' perceptions of closeness or distance between languages and dialects sometimes have as much to do with attitudinal, historical, and even political factors as with objective linguistic differences or similarities. The standard varieties of Hindi and Urdu, for example, although written in different scripts and differing from each other in literary writing in the quantity of Sanskrit-derived forms employed in the former and of Persian-derived ones in the latter, differ objectively only slightly from each other in the grammar and vocabulary of their nonliterary spoken forms. A foreigner who learns to speak the standard variety of either one of them will get virtually 100 percent comprehension from speakers of the standard variety of the other. Nonetheless, it is sometimes claimed by native speakers of these languages, despite their obvious structural similarity, that they are different to the point of mutual unintelligibility. In the Arabic-speaking world, we have the opposite phenomenon: considerable objective linguistic diversity[3] that can on occasion definitely hamper effective communication, allied to the homespun view that *kulluh ʿarabiyy*—"It's all Arabic." As with the Hindi and Urdu speakers who claim they cannot understand each other when observation suggests they can, this is more of a political and cultural than a linguistic statement.

0.2 Varieties of Arabic

The spoken Arabic dialects are the varieties of the language that all native speakers learn as their mother tongue before they begin formal education. Geographically, these dialects may be thought of as being distributed along innumerable sets of intersecting continua, from Morocco in the west to Oman in the east, and from the borders of southern Turkey in the north to Sudan in the south.[4] Within this vast area, the inhabitants of any given village or town will experience no difficulty in understanding the ordinary vernacular speech of the inhabitants of the next village or town in any direction. The greater the distance between any two points of comparison, by and large, the greater will be the differences between the ordinary vernaculars spoken in them. It is not then surprising to find that the varieties of Arabic spoken at the extreme peripheries of the area differ from each other considerably, and certainly to the point of mutual unintelligibility if we were to compare what might be called the plain uneducated vernaculars—say, that of an Omani nomad with that of a Moroccan

townsman from Marrakesh.[5] In practice, in the modern world, a number of factors work to reduce the effect of such geographical differences.

For decades, although less so today, expatriate teachers, technicians, and professionals of all kinds from Egypt and the Levant formed the backbone of education and technical services in less developed areas within the region, such as the Gulf states. Conversely, students from all over the Arab world, but especially from those countries that until recently lacked a system of tertiary education, have long studied in the universities of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Mecca, as the epicenter of the Islamic world, has for thirteen centuries been the goal of Muslim pilgrims from all over the Arabic-speaking lands. So interdialectal contact between different Arab populations is not new. But with the massive increase in inter-Arab contact occasioned by recent economic developments in particular, the scale and variety of types of interdialectal contact has become much greater. Nowadays, dialect contact occurs not just at the level of the well-educated business executive, flitting from country to country, or the expatriate teacher or technician on long-term contract, or the scholarship student. In Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the modern city states of the Gulf that have developed in the last two decades, armies of semiliterate economic migrants—Egyptian, Sudanese, and Yemeni laborers, porters, doormen, and waiters, mostly from rural backgrounds and with modest educational attainments—have become a semipermanent, highly visible feature of the landscape. Perhaps it is still unlikely that our Omani nomad and Marrakeshi townsman would bump into each other in a Kuwaiti supermarket and still less need to discuss the spiraling price of rice. But this is no longer because the opportunity could never arise. Large numbers of very ordinary Arabs, expatriate and host, are indeed nowadays faced with having to cope with the speech of others from very different geographical and educational backgrounds. How do they do this? As we shall see, they have a number of linguistic resources and "coping" strategies at their disposal.

From an early age, Muslim Arabs (that is, more than 90 percent of all Arabs) have some degree of exposure to the language of the Islamic scriptures: that is, so-called Classical Arabic (CLA). As the language of revealed scripture—in Muslim eyes the literal words of God—the Classical Arabic of the Koran is viewed as an immutable linguistic phenomenon fixed for all time. For most Arab children, it is the first kind of Arabic different from their mother tongue dialect to which they are exposed, and it leaves an indelible impression, reinforced throughout later life in the constant ritual of prayers and attendance at the mosque. This early exposure consists of the rote learning of verses or even whole chapters of the Koran and the rituals of communal prayer, and is traditionally begun at the age of five or six in special Koranic schools. Until recently,

this was the only kind of education that many Muslims got; and while Classical Arabic is no more a functional linguistic idiom for Arabs than liturgical Latin is a living language for Roman Catholics, its rhythms and cadences are part of all Muslim Arab children's earliest conscious experience of language. Classical Arabic is revered by rich, poor, educated, and illiterate alike as the linguistic jewel in the Islamic cultural patrimony. It is regarded as the inimitable apogee of perfection, unsurpassable in beauty, an ethereal ideal of eloquence, perfect symmetry, and succinctness—however imperfectly, in practice, many Arabs understand it.[6] And although the syntax, vocabulary, and phraseology of Arabic have undergone considerable changes in the fourteen centuries since the Revelation, the common origins of Classical Arabic and all other contemporary varieties of the language are still plain for all to see. It is this fact, allied to the strong sense of shared cultural values that derives from the Islamic religion and its culture, that goes much of the way to explaining the claim made by speakers of apparently mutually unintelligible Arabic dialects that they all speak the same language.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), or Modern Literary Arabic (MLA), is the modern descendant of Classical Arabic, unchanged in the essentials of its syntax but very much changed, and still changing, in its vocabulary and phraseology. This unified, codified pan-Arab variety of Arabic is used for virtually all writing in the Arab world and nowadays, in its spoken form, also dominates the airwaves and the television channels of every Arab country. As the normal medium for formal discourse, it is used for all news broadcasts, political speeches, official announcements, and—most crucially—education in every Arab country. Ordinary Arabs themselves do not make a systematic terminological differentiation between CLA and MSA. Both are termed *ʔal'arabiːyatu lfuṣḥa:* "pure/eloquent Arabic" or simply *ʔal'arabiːya* or *ʔalfuṣḥa:* for short, in opposition to *ʔal'aːmmiːya* 'the vernacular', which exists in innumerable varieties and is popularly thought to be a grammarless corruption of "real" Arabic (*ʔalfuṣḥa*). Some purists maintain that the terms *ʿarabiːya* and *fuṣḥa:* should be reserved for the sixth- and seventh-century language of pre-Islamic poetry and the Koran—that is, the language as it was supposedly spoken in Arabia before the Islamic conquests brought the Arabs into contact with non-Arabs who eventually (or so it is believed) corrupted it. In practice, however, there is no chronological point at which CLA turned into MSA, still less any agreed set of linguistic criteria that could differentiate the two. MSA is merely a handy label used in western scholarship to denote the written language from about the middle of the nineteenth century, when concerted efforts began to modernize it lexically and phraseologically. Most western scholars refer to the formal written language before that

date, and par excellence before the eclipse of Arab political power in the fifteenth century, as "Classical Arabic."

In symbolic terms, MSA is the language of power and control, as opposed to the language of intimacy and domesticity (the dialect), and it impinges in multifarious and sometimes subliminal ways on the daily life of Arabs of all generations, backgrounds, and educational levels. Metaphorically, and often literally, given the amount of television viewing in the average household, MSA is the backdrop against which the business of everyday life—itself invariably in one form or other of the vernacular—is conducted. However imperfectly ordinary Arabs may have mastered its rules, and however out of place they may feel it sounds in nonformal, everyday, face-to-face conversational contexts, they know that MSA is always there as a kind of communally owned linguistic reservoir that they can dip into when they need to—a word here, a borrowed phrase there—in order to ensure that they make themselves understood to Arabs from distant countries or outsiders such as Arabic-speaking foreigners. In normal face-to-face conversation, as opposed to writing, however, a blanket switch from dialect to "pure" MSA is rare indeed, even if it were within the ability of most Arabic speakers, and is a strategy that is resorted to only when all else fails.

In practice, of course, it is rare for all else to fail. Some dialects—usually those of large metropolises such as Cairo or Damascus—are more widely understood than others and have acquired the status of "prestige" national or even international spoken standards that can be resorted to in cases of cross-dialectal conversation. When speakers from distant parts of the same country talk to each other—Egyptians from Lower and Upper Egypt, for instance—saliently "local' features not shared by the speakers may be neutralized in favor of "prestige dialect" features, in this case Cairene, that do not form part of the native dialect of either.[7] In cases of dialectal contact of speakers from more widely separated areas, the matter is a complex one but depends basically on what the participants perceive as the minimum degree of switching to "neutral" dialectal, MSA, or even "hybridized" forms, which is necessary to ensure smooth communication in an appropriate style. This is a question to which we will return in chapter 9.

0.3 Aims of this book

My first aim in writing this book is to give in outline a linguistic description of the structure of modern Arabic as it is used by Arabs today. It will be clear from what has been said already that this will involve describing two types of Arabic: Modern Standard Arabic—the language of writing and formal speak-

ing—and dialectal Arabic, the language of normal conversation. Because, as has been pointed out, the latter exists in inmumerable varieties, an attempt will be made to describe the structural characteristics that the majority of dialects share in general distinction to the structure of MSA. This book is not, therefore, a reference grammar of MSA or any dialect, still less a pedagogical manual, but rather a snapshot of a language undergoing rapid change.[8]

My second main aim is to illustrate, through the discussion of actual examples of language behavior, how these two types of Arabic are used by native speakers for different kinds of communicative purpose. In doing this, we will, I hope, be able to breathe life into the somewhat idealized and static picture of the language that will inevitably, and for the purposes of clear exposition quite properly, have appeared in our snapshot. What kinds of Arabic do Arabs choose to use on a range of social occasions, and why? How consistent is their behavior? Are MSA and dialectal Arabic really as self-contained and discrete entities as many available descriptions would lead us to believe? If they are not, and some kind of hybridization of the two types occurs, what is the nature of the mechanism that governs it? As well as describing the outline of language form, this book addresses the question of the complex and evolving relationship between structure and communicative function in the Arabic-speaking world of today (and tomorrow).

I hope that this book will prove to be of interest to two different types of reader: advanced students of Arabic who have a good practical knowledge of the standard language and perhaps one dialect, and who wish to gain a more principled understanding of the dynamics of the evolution of Arabic and the detail of its contemporary use; and general linguists who have little or no knowledge of it, but who are interested in how it compares structurally and sociolinguistically with other languages. The technique of statement throughout is therefore conservative, because my aim is not polemical but descriptive; the book aims not to support or refute claims advanced in favor of any particular linguistic theory, but rather to describe and explain the status quo, and how it came to be so, in what, it is hoped, is an insightful but as far as possible theoretically neutral manner. Whether the book succeeds in these aims is left to the reader to judge.

Notes

1. See the essays collected in Rouchdy 1992, 83–204, and Rouchdy 2002, 133–48, for data-based observations on the status and evolution of Arabic in the speech of immigrants to the United States. Between 1988 and 1990, some 60,000 Arab immigrants arrived in the

Detroit area alone, most of them seeking refuge from the Lebanese civil war (Rouchdy 1992, 173). Abu Haidar 2002 describes the types of interference from English on the Arabic of the large London-based community of expatriate Iraqis and the generational language shift that is taking place from Arabic to English. Boumans and de Ruiter 2002 give an overview of the language profile of the Moroccan Arabic-speaking diaspora in Western Europe, which began to arrive in the 1960s.

2. This is the position espoused in Kaye 1994.
3. According to Cadora (1979, 32), Syro-Lebanese and Casablancan Arabic share only 68 percent of their base vocabulary—less than the 70 percent that Swadesh's work indicates is roughly the point at which two dialects can be considered forms of the same language.
4. Fischer and Jastrow 1980 provide a useful overview of the modern-day Arabic dialects classified from a geographical perspective, with twenty sample texts, including one from Malta.
5. A particular and pervasive feature of the linguistic situation in the Arab world is that dialectal distinctions are by no means exclusively related to geography. Lifestyle—that is, whether a community was in its recent history nomadic, village based, or urban—and even religious or sectarian affiliation are additional important factors in the dialectal structure of many states in the region, and the linguistic fault lines that run between one region, community, or even neighborhood and another can be quite sharp. A good example is provided by Baghdad, where Muslim and Christian dialects of Arabic are still sharply differentiated. Until the early 1950s, and the mass emigration of Jews, there was a three-way dialectal split along confessional lines (see Blanc 1964).
6. The only indigenous attempt—and a schematic one at that—at simplifying the complex rules of CLA was Anis Furayḥa's *Naḥwa ʿArabīya Muyassara* [*Towards a Simplified Arabic*], published in 1955. There is a presumably apocryphal story that when some of Furayḥa's academic colleagues who earned their living teaching CLA saw the title of his book, they protested: *ya: ʔusta:ẓ, xalli:na: nʿi:š!* (liberally translated: "Oh, Professor, please don't take away our livelihood!").
7. Holes 1995b shows how, in Amman (Jordanian v. Palestinian), Baghdad (Muslim v. Christian v. Jewish) and Bahrain (Sunni v. Shi'i), dialects associated with different national, religious, and sectarian communities, and originally spoken side by side in the same city, have assumed a pecking order over the last few decades as a result of one of the dialects in each case assuming the status of a national "nonstandard standard": the East Bank Jordanian dialect in Amman, the Muslim dialect in Baghdad, the Sunni dialect in Bahrain. A major factor in this has been increasing urbanization and the consequently enhanced importance of the city in national and political life. This has led to the marginalization of the other dialects in public spaces and their relegation to a mode of in-group speech.
8. As this book was going to press, a new data-based reference grammar of modern written Arabic, *Modern Arabic: A Comprehensive Grammar*, by Elsaid Badawi, Michael Carter, and Adrian Gully appeared, unfortunately too late for me to be able to consult it thoroughly.

I

A Brief History of Arabic

Although the purpose of this book is to describe the structure and use of modern varieties of Arabic, there are good reasons for beginning with a historical sketch of the development and spread of the language. The purpose of this is to highlight those factors that in the course of its long history have had a profound effect on its development and that in some cases—religion chief among them—remain crucial to an understanding of speakers' use of, attitudes toward, and beliefs about it. It would not be an overstatement to say that the study of the history of Arabic may also suggest the direction of future developments.

We shall make no attempt in this chapter to describe the minutiae of the structural differences between the various historically attested varieties of Arabic, but rather outline the chronology and typology of development that occurred in terms of general linguistics in order to elucidate how the present-day linguistic situation, which is the main object of this book, emerged. Inevitably, therefore, much of the detail of the story, which is in any case still obscure and controversial, is omitted. What remains is, it is hoped, a balanced and judicious account of the main lines of the language's development. Where reference is made to historical events or linguistic terminology that are unlikely to be familiar to the reader without a specialist background, these are explained, glossed, or footnoted as appropriate.

1.1 Arabic as a Semitic language

Arabic is a member of the Semitic language family, a term that designates a group of languages, some long dead, some still living, and some today having a marginal status as liturgical languages, that all show a sufficient degree of similarity of structure in their phonology, morphology, and basic lexical stock for a common origin ("Proto-Semitic") to be supposed.[1] The exact geographical homeland of the putative Proto-Semitic "mother language" is disputed, but the earliest texts written in languages that are presumed to have developed from it were composed in the ancient Near East—Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia—and date from about 2500 B.C.

The Semitic languages are traditionally divided on grounds of both their structural properties and geographical provenance into three groups: northwestern, northeastern, and southwestern. These areas cover respectively what are now the Levant (modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, parts of Jordan), central-south Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula and Ethiopia. Arabic is a member of the southwestern group. The earliest definite textual evidence we have for the existence of a distinct language identifiable as Arabic is an inscription found at 'En Avdat in 1986. This has been dated to the first century A.D. —recent by the standards of Semitic languages. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that Arabic was a latecomer onto the linguistic scene, because a datable written text merely shows that the language in question could be written at the time of its composition: it tells us nothing about the antiquity (or even necessarily the structure) of the spoken language that must have coexisted with it.

1.2 Arabic at the dawn of Islam

Arabic does not emerge into the full light of history until the sixth or seventh century A.D. The nomadic tribes who lived in the Arabian peninsula and contiguous areas before and at the time of the Islamic Revelation had, it seems, a thriving oral poetic tradition, the products of which have come down to us in the form of a large body of poetry. As has been pointed out above, there is no reason to believe that the Arabic in which this oral poetry was originally composed (and the vernacular form of the language that must have coexisted with it) does not reach back further in time than the relatively late period for which we have textual evidence. Indeed, some linguists point to the structure of this so-called Classical Arabic (CLA) as evidence that it does. Compared with other Semitic languages that were living at the same time (such as Aramaic), the CLA of pre-Islamic poetry shows a high degree of elaboration in its inflectional system, a richness in its derivational morphology, and, crucially, a markedly "synthetic" character.[2] This typological evidence has suggested to some philologists an archaic origin within the chronology of development of other known Semitic languages, although this is disputed.[3] The question turns on whether the structural characteristics of the language of the early poetry and other forms of elevated diction can be taken as the same as those of the contemporary vernacular. We will briefly consider this question, because the answer has obvious implications for what we take as the language that the Arab tribes exported to the Near East and North Africa during the conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, which formed the basis for the development of the modern dialects.

1.2.1 Pre-Islamic poetry

The only direct evidence we have of the linguistic structure of Arabic before the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (570–632) is to be found in orally composed and transmitted poetry, the earliest specimens of which date from the early sixth century, but that began to be collected and committed to writing by the grammarians of Basra and Kufa (southern Iraq) only in the middle of the eighth century. The poems (Ar. *qaṣa:ʔid* 'odes') are generally short (rarely longer than 120 lines, and usually much shorter) and conform to strict prosodic rules of meter and rhyme. From the point of view of their type and purpose, several subvarieties can be distinguished: elegy, tribal or personal panegyric, and satire. The recurrent patterns of thematic structure, conventional imagery, and repeated linguistic oddities and archaisms found in this poetry point to an oral-formulaic origin of the type proposed for the Homeric poetic tradition of ancient Greece[4] and described in the modern period for certain tribal groups in southern India.[5]

As a source for the reconstruction of the contemporary nonpoetical language, spoken or written, this kind of material is problematical. In the first place, the fact that the poetry underwent a continual process of oral transmission by professional reciters, before commitment to writing, copying, recopying, and editing many years after the original composition must cast doubt on the reliability of the recensions we have as an accurate linguistic record. As Rabin comments:

> Both pre-Islamic and Islamic poems have been revised by editors, as can be seen not only from the extensive variants, but also from the not infrequent cases where verses are quoted by grammarians for some linguistic oddity, while on looking up the Dīwān [= "anthology"] we find the same line slightly reshaped so that the oddity is eliminated.[6]

These "oddities" may have reflected minor tribal dialectal differences in the speech of the poets that were ironed out at a later date in order to give the pre-Islamic poetry a consistency of grammatical structure and lexicon that it originally lacked. An even greater difficulty, however, even if we were to assume that the versions we have are exactly as they were when they left the poet's lips, lies in estimating the effects that the traditional mode of composition and the status of poetry in pre-Islamic society as "noncasual" communication had on the language used.[7]

There are two divergent views on the relationship between the language of oral poetry and the everyday speech of the poets themselves. The first, espoused by Fück[8] and, more recently, Versteegh,[9] sees the language of the oral poetry as being syntactically and morphologically identical with the Arabic vernaculars of the time. In this view, the pronouncing of case endings in nouns and mood markers in verbs (final short vowels), which is required for its scansion and, it is claimed, for its accurate construal, was a fully functional feature of nonpoetical written and spoken Arabic of the period. Although there is no body of written nonpoetic Arabic (and of course none of spoken) of a sufficiently early date, and sufficiently varied provenance, to allow this hypothesis to be tested, its proponents conclude that the linguistic situation must have been so from the fact that many grammarians of the ninth and later centuries were in the habit of resorting to unlettered Bedouin informants to settle disputed points of Arabic grammar, claiming that they alone still spoke the language in its pristine state. If the unlettered Bedouin of the ninth century were still speaking an Arabic with full case endings and mood markings, the argument goes, then the same must also have been true two centuries earlier. As Zwettler points out, however, this theory does not recognise "the possibility of a linguistic form separate from any spoken vernacular and peculiar to the non-casual verbal expressions of poetry,"[10] and further that:

> if the philologists still into the tenth century sought linguistic correctness and heard the case- and mood-endings among the Bedouin of their time, it must be recognized that what they were after was precisely the *'arabiːya* (= Classical Arabic) that they knew from the Classical poetry and that the Bedouins alone could provide—because . . . they alone maintained . . . a tradition of oral poetry out of which the *'arabiːya* had been generated and derived to begin with. And since it was the *'arabiːya* that the philologists went out into the desert to seek, it was the *'arabiːya* that they got. The products of formal elocution (poetry, oratory, etc.) were what interested them: so whether the colloquial speech of the Bedouin was identical with the *'arabiːya* or whether, as now seems more likely, it was substantially different in both morphology and syntax, we cannot definitely ascertain from the accounts and examples that have been recorded.[11]

If Zwettler's interpretation of the philologists' objectives and methods is correct, then one of the main planks on which the argument for the structural identity of poetical and nonpoetical Arabic at an early period rests is removed. Furthermore, a close study of the poetry, even in its later "polished" recensions, reveals diverse dialectal influences in some aspects of its morphology, occasional archaisms, and other forms that contravene what the later grammarians set up as normative CLA inflectional rules.[12] Far from representing a linguistic monolith, the language of the early poetry shows vestigial evidence of a heterogeneous origin. As a living, socially valued oral-formulaic art form that operated within strict prosodic rules and that was transmitted from one generation to the next, both its linguistic archaism and instability are readily understandable: these "retentions" and "borrowings" existed and were used in the poetic diction precisely because they adequately and quite satisfactorily functioned in specific prosodic contexts.[13]

The most plausible construction that can be put on the evidence we have is that the language in which the pre-Islamic poetry was composed represented an elevated "poetic style" that cannot be identified with any contemporary spoken dialect (of which in this alternative view there were a number) of pre–seventh-century Arabic. This poetic style is held to have had its origins in central and eastern Arabia and to be based on the dialect of this area, from which the dialects of the western part of peninsula, the Hejaz, differed slightly.[14] As a special register of Arabic, it may have gradually evolved in conditions, and then perhaps become fixed by constraints and conventions, that did not apply to everyday speech, although the question of the *extent* of the grammatical differences between the poetic idiom in its fully developed form and that used in the everyday spoken Arabic dialects of the seventh century is finally unresolvable given the nature and amount of the data available.[15] What cannot be in any doubt is that oral poetry, composed and recited by skilled poets, was an integral and important element in tribal life, fully comprehensible to the ordinary Bedouin of the time. The language in which this (and other elevated forms of diction) was composed, minus its lexical rarities and the grammatical frills required by its rules of prosody, cannot therefore have been very far removed from everyday speech. A parallel can still be observed in modern Arabia, where so-called Nabaṭī poetry is composed in a highly stylized, dialectally "Bedouin" form

of spoken Arabic quite different from the contemporary vernacular, but nonetheless fully comprehensible to speakers of it. It too is an integral part of the popular, nonliterate culture of its time.[16]

1.2.2 The Koran

Viewed as a purely linguistic artifact[17] from which we might make further deductions about the state of Arabic before it began to spread outside the peninsula, the Koran, the holy book of Islam, presents many of the same problems as the early poetry. Before considering these, let us first briefly review the historical record.

Muslim tradition states that the Koran (Ar. *qurʔaːn* 'reading, recitation') began to be revealed to Muḥammad, an apparently illiterate[18] Meccan of the locally important tribe of Quraysh, from approximately A.D. 610 when he was forty years old, and continued until his death in Medina in 632. Muḥammad professed to receive his divine messages from God through the Angel Gabriel, who commanded him, at the first revelation, to "Read!" (Ar. *ʔiqraʔ* (whence *qurʔaːn*)). According to tradition, Muḥammad's reply to this was *maː ʔanaː bi qaːriʔin* 'I cannot read'. The Angel insisted and Muḥammad once more refused, so the Angel spoke the *suːra* 'chapter', called the '*suːra* of the blood-clot', for him. Tradition has it that Muḥammad received this revelation in a state of ecstasy or in a dream.

After an interval, Muḥammad began to have further revelations, and these continued regularly for the next twenty-three years. The early *suːras*, revealed at Mecca at the beginning of his prophethood, are very different in character from the later ones revealed at Medina, after Muḥammad had made the so-called flight (Ar. *hijra*) from Mecca with a small band of followers in 622. These early Meccan *suːras*, written in rhyming prose, are short, ecstatic exhortations to his fellow citizens to abandon idolatry and believe in one God, and to accept Muḥammad as His Messenger. They describe vividly the bliss that awaits the pious and the everlasting torment that will be the fate of wrong-doers when all are resurrected and called to account on Judgment Day. The Medinan *suːras*, on the other hand, have a quite different style. They are much longer and prosaic (in the nontechnical sense), dealing largely with matters of legal, social, and political import, and promulgating the laws and ordinances by which the nascent Muslim community was to live. The content of these *suːras* is the fundament of present-day Islamic law.

The process of collecting the text of the Koran and putting it into a canonical form was not completed until some years after the Prophet's death. Tradition has it that so many of the Muslim reciters were killed in the "Wars of Apostasy" that plunged the embryonic Islamic community into crisis immediately following the Prophet's death that the early Caliphs entrusted with the leadership of the Muslim community feared that the Koran was in danger of being lost forever. After the Battle of Yamāma in 633, the collection began under Abū Bakr, the first caliph, or leader of the Muslim community. Collection from surviving Koran reciters continued during the next twenty years under Abū Bakr's successors, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. By 651, however, the political situation had been transformed: Syria, Iraq, Persia, and Egypt had all been conquered and the need to complete the establishment of a *textus receptus* had become more urgent. In different areas of the by now far-flung Islamic empire, variant Koranic readings were proliferating alarmingly, giving rise to fears that the substance of the scriptures would become a matter of dispute. A centrally "authorized version" was required to settle the matter once and for all. The collection of the Koran was finally completed in the middle decade of the seventh century under the third Caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, and disseminated to all parts of the empire with instructions that all Korans not conforming to it were to be burned. It is this 'Uthmanic recension of the Koran that has come down to us.

The Koran is the other main source of evidence, apart from the early poetry, for the state of Arabic during the premedieval period. We will now attempt to answer some questions bearing on both its formal linguistic aspects and the "textual status" it can be assumed to have had (or implicitly claimed) at the time of its revelation. Specifically, how similar to or different from the poetry that we discussed above is its language, particularly from the syntactic and morphological angles? Given that, like the poetry, its mode of transmission was oral, what relationship, similar or different, might its language have borne to the spoken Arabic of the time? Does it show any internal oddities or inconsistencies? And while, as prophetic utterance, it was *sui generis*, what genres of preexisting "oral text" might it have been akin to, stylistically speaking?

From the point of view of general textual structure, two sharp distinctions can be drawn between the Koran and the poetry. First, the Koran is written in rhyming prose and completely lacks "the isochronic metrical regularity that made up the fabric of Arabic verse rendition."[19] In other words, it is patently not the result of the careful crafting and fitting of words into preexisting structural schemata and would not therefore have been considered poetry in the sense that the poets themselves defined that term. Second, the rhyme schemes used at the end of the verse units that make up Koranic *suːras* depend on final pausal consonants rather than on final vowel cantillation, as is the case in most of the poetry. From these two formal points of view, then, the Koran is quite unlike the poetry. It did apparently bear some resemblance, however, in its use of rhyming prose to the utterances of the *kuhbaːn* ('soothsayers').

On the stylistic level, the sources and patterns of imagery of the Koran are far removed from those found in the poetry, in which a vividly physical, sensual, and profane world is evoked. More impressionistically, the packed, dense feel of the poetic line, with its flexible word order, dependence on inflection for correct construal, and frequently arcane vocabulary—summed up by Arberry[20] as "pregnant brevity and epigrammatic terseness"—contrast starkly with the simplicity of the Koranic *ʔaːya* ('verse'). It is small wonder that foreign learners of Arabic generally find the Koran easier to understand than the poetry: for all its sometimes ecstatic and exhortatory language, its directness and relative lack of syntactic and phraseological artifice are reminiscent of actual speech.

It can be argued, however, that there is an important functional parallel between the Koran and the poetry that has implications for any judgment of its narrowly linguistic aspects: both required the use of an "elevated diction," although for different reasons. The poetry as we see it in the seventh century is the end product of a fixed and fully elaborated tradition of ritual language use that we can only surmise must have evolved in peninsular Arabia over a long period.[21] The qualities required for language to be considered "poetic" inhered in its conforming to strict, learned conventions of prosody, skill in the use of which was acquired through practice and conferred on the user almost magical qualities.[22] But more significantly, as has already been suggested above, the traditions and physical circumstances of poetic composition had almost certainly resulted by the seventh century in a poetic language (*ʿarabiːya* = CLA) to some degree syntactically and morphologically archaic and not identifiable with any single contemporary vernacular. This conventionalized archaism must itself have been recognized by everyone as one of the defining characteristics that marked out poetic language as different from everyday usage. This probability—we cannot say "fact"—is of particular significance in assessing the language of the Koran. Muḥammad recited the Koran—a linguistic act—and thereby made his claim for the elevated, other-worldly status of Messenger of God: the only variety of Arabic appropriate for this in the sociolinguistic setup of Arabia at that time would have been the inflective *ʿarabiːya*.[23]

In its morphology, the language of the Koran shows almost complete conformity with the *ʿarabiːya* of the poets, although with sporadic examples of forms that we can recognize from the work of poets from the west of Arabia, the Hejaz, from where Muḥammad also came, as dialectal features not found in the east. In syntax, there is also some evidence of dialectal Hejazi influence in sentence construction.[24] The probability, then, is that Muḥammad chose an already existing type of Arabic suitable to the elevated diction required by his message that would have been familiar to his listeners but that was not his (or for that matter their) normal vernacular—hence the occasional deviations from established *ʿarabiːya* usages.

The role of inflection in Koranic Arabic, which we will briefly consider, has been a matter of considerable controversy. Proof of the inflective nature of Koranic Arabic[25] (challenged by Vollers[26]) is sometimes adduced on the basis of verses that might theoretically be misconstrued if they had been recited without the final short vowel desinential inflection (Ar. *ʔiʿraːb*).[27] But on its own, this argument is unconvincing. The number of cases where the inflection is meaning-bearing and in which there would be a real chance of, say, subject being confused with object, compared to those where it is not, is minuscule. Whatever the arguments may be in favor of the Koran having been recited by Muḥammad with full *ʔiʿraːb*, they are not ones that depend on its syntactic importance. And even in the few cases where inflection *does* seem to carry a functional load in the canonical written text, comprehension of the Prophet's message may not have depended on it. Recitation is a species of *oral* performance, and, like any other type, Muḥammad's would have been marked by the use of sentence stress, intonation, and possibly paralinguistic gestures in order to make his meaning clear. In other words, Koranic *ʔiʿraːb* may well have been an appropriate *stylistic* feature, but it was by no means an indispensable *syntactic* one, required for the unambiguous communication of meaning.

1.2.3 Evidence from the modern Bedouin dialects

In the light of the conclusions about the functional dichotomy of ordinary language and elevated diction, poetic or Koranic, the fact that traces of one of the main systems of desinential inflection in the elevated diction (the *ʿarabiːya*)—that used for marking indefiniteness in the noun (*tanwiːn*)—still survive in some modern Arabic dialects of the "Bedouin" type[28] needs to be explained. In assessment of the evidence, it can in general be said that (i) the modern dialects in which *tanwiːn* occurs are always "Bedouin," never "urban," in the sense that the users either still pursue, or until recently their forebears pursued, a nomadic or pastoral way of life; (ii) as far as can be judged, those dialects that show the highest degree of retention of it are in central and eastern Arabia; (iii) the incidence is higher in formulaic language (folk poetry and epic narrative, riddles, proverbs, etc.) than it is in nonformulaic or otherwise unprepared speech;[29] (iv) the casual, as opposed to formulaic, use of *tanwiːn* is always optional; (v) the syntactic environments of dialectal *tanwiːn*, wherever it occurs, are a restricted subset of those in which CLA *tanwiːn* occurs, although these environments seem to differ from dialect to dialect,[30] and in some cases dialectal *tanwiːn* occurs where it never could have in CLA;[31] and (vi) the phonetic substance of dialec-

tal *tanwi:n* is in some areas uniformally *–in* and in others *-an*, in contrast to the *-un, -an, -in* case-determined system of CLA.

These observations hardly support the implicit but never fully articulated claim of some linguists[32] that *tanwi:n* in the modern Bedouin dialects is the direct descendant of the fully inflective CLA system that is claimed to have been used in ordinary spoken Arabic at the time of the Islamic Revelation and for several centuries after. Taken together, they suggest rather that modern *tanwi:n* is the continuation in the most conservative modern varieties of Arabic of what was certainly by the tenth and probably already in the seventh century an optional, syntactically redundant feature of normal spoken Arabic but that was, and still largely is, associated with formulaic phraseology and other kinds of ready-made language. Certainly, no one would reconstruct a universal three-vowel inflection system for the ancient dialects on the basis of the modern evidence of its syntactic and geographical distribution, were they not already convinced that CLA had such a system.[33]

1.2.4 Summary

At the time of the Islamic Revelation, the linguistic situation in Arabia can be summed up as follows. There seems to have been some degree of dialectal variation, with the main cleavage between the tribal groups living in the west (the Hejaz) on the one hand and those living in the central and eastern area (Najd) on the other. In the southwest, the Arabic of Yemen formed a continuation of the Hejazi type of dialect.[34] The grammatical and morphological differences between the western and eastern Arabic dialects were probably relatively minor, although we have no direct contemporaneous reports of what the everyday spoken Arabic of the time was like. A highly inflective poetic Arabic, or perhaps more accurately a poetic register, based principally on the speech of Najd, but no longer morphologically or syntactically identical to it, was in use throughout the whole of the area for the composition and recitation of oral poetry and other forms of elevated diction.

1.3 The spread of Arabic

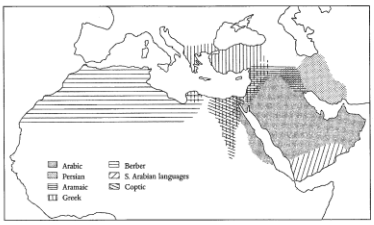
The second half of the seventh century saw the founding of an Islamic Arab empire that by the beginning of the eighth century stretched from Spain to Persia. The history of how this empire was established is of course not the concern of this book. Our interest is rather in the nature and type of the social contacts that its establishment entailed between the Arabs and the conquered peoples, and the long-term linguistic results of contact and assimilation, insofar as these can be gleaned from a study of the Arabic used in written materials of the period and inferred from a comparison of the present-day language with what is known about pre-Islamic Arabic. There will be no attempt here to present these changes in the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical substance of Arabic in any descriptive detail. The aim is rather on the one hand to outline the mechanisms by which Arabic began to replace the local languages in both speech and writing, ultimately completely supplanting them, and on the other to show in what ways the structure of Arabic evolved during this long process.

The first question to be addressed is what the linguistic situation was like in the conquered areas immediately before the conquests began. We are dealing here with the areas occupied today by the Levant states, Egypt, Iraq, and the coastal areas of North Africa as far as Gibraltar.

1.3.1 The language situation on the eve of the conquests

1.3.1.1 Syria

The ancient designation of Syria (Ar. *aš̆a:m*) covered the area now occupied by modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan. For many centuries until the Arab conquests, the whole of this area had been under the political control of the Byzantine emperors or their vassals. The degree of Hellenization at the grass-roots level, however, was slight: only in the cities do there appear to have been sizeable numbers of Greek-speaking government officials, merchants, and absentee landowners, whereas the vast majority of the indigenous population were peasants of Semitic stock who spoke various dialects of Aramaic.[35] For centuries, it appears that there had been some degree of contact between this sedentary, Monophysite Christian, Aramaic-speaking, and largely illiterate populace and the neighboring Arabic-speaking nomadic inhabitants of the Syrian steppe. Nomadic Arab tribes regularly summered in the vicinity of Syrian towns and settlements, and traded with local merchants. In some areas, however, there was a still more substantial Arab presence: notably in the Bekaa Valley and parts of what is now Israel, large groups of Arabs appear to have settled permanently and in such numbers that they may even have been in the majority in some areas by the sixth century. A Byzantine inscription in Greek, Syriac (the written language of the Eastern Church, in essence the same as Aramaic), and Arabic, found at Zabad, south of Aleppo, and dating to the early sixth century A.D., an era before Arabic had any known literature, shows that speakers of Arabic were frequent enough in this northerly location to warrant the effort that writing a hitherto unwritten language must have entailed.[36]



The language situation on the eve of the Islamic conquests

Thus on the eve of the Islamic conquests, there were three factors in the situation in Syria that would have helped the spread of Arabic as a spoken language: (i) there had been several centuries of trade-engendered contact between speakers of Aramaic and Arabic; (ii) some degree of permanent settlement by Christian Arabs had occurred, probably giving rise to mixed communities and some degree of bilingualism;[37] and (iii) whereas the "high" culture of Greece had failed to make much impact outside the cities and coastal ports, and had always been something imposed from outside, the common Semitic racial and linguistic roots of the Aramaic and Arab sections of the population were latent ancillary factors in the situation that might have predisposed the Aramaic speakers to accept Arabic as a language for communication with the conquerors and eventually, given favorable social conditions, as their first language.

1.3.1.2 Iraq

The linguistic situation in mid–seventh-century Iraq bore some similarities to that which we have sketched above for Syria. At that time, Mesopotamia, the fertile lowland plain of modern Iraq, formed the western border area of the Sasanian empire of the Persians, lying between the Zagros mountains to the east, a natural barrier that marked the beginning of Persia proper, and the deserts inhabited by Arab tribes to the west and southwest. Like Syria, Mesopotamia had long been something of a linguistic melting pot. The generality of the population was rural and sedentary, confessionally Nestorian Christian or Jewish, and

spoke Eastern Aramaic dialects, although there had always been sizable pockets of Zoroastrian Persian-speaking landowners and city dwellers throughout lowland Iraq, as well as Persian-speaking nomads in the foothills of the Zagros mountains. It seems also that by the mid-seventh century, the western edges of Mesopotamia had been settled by large groups of Arabic-speaking tribesmen who were in various stages of assimilation, social and probably linguistic, with the local Aramaic-speaking populace. Furthermore, there seems to have existed a loose economic relationship between the Aramaic and Arabic-speaking riverine sedentaries and the nomadic Arab tribes of inner Arabia that brought them into regular contact. The latter regularly visited the cultivated areas in order to obtain the agricultural produce and manufactured goods they could not obtain anywhere else. In Iraq as in Syria, then, an Aramaic-speaking peasantry formed the majority of the population, but with a significant admixture of Arabs of various provenances and in various stages of sedentarization. But unlike the situation in Syria, the number of speakers of the language of the imperial government—in this case Pahlavi (pre-Islamic Persian)—was probably large. It can reasonably be assumed that, as in Syria, some degree of Aramaic–Arabic bilingualism existed, although it would have been patchy owing to the nature of Arab settlement; in the cities, Persian and Aramaic would have dominated.[38]

1.3.1.3 Egypt

At this period in its history, Egypt was also polyglot, though here there seems to have been sharper ethnic and linguistic divisions than in either Syria or Mesopotamia. The population was made up of (i) the rural population of the Nile Valley and Delta, who formed the vast majority; (ii) the inhabitants of the towns and cities of the Delta and the Nile, with Alexandria as the capital; and (iii) the people who lived on the fringes of the cultivable areas to the east of the River Nile and Delta, in the deserts to the west of the Red Sea, and in Sinai. The densely populated Nile Valley and Delta were overwhelmingly Monophysite Christian and Coptic-speaking and pursued an agricultural way of life, under the nominal control of the Melkite Greek governor, army, administrators, clerks, and tax collectors. The latter lived in the cities, along with Greek traders and merchants and urban Copts. On the eastern periphery of the fertile valley and further into the deserts to the east and northeast, however, there had been a creeping process of arabization through the migration of disparate tribal elements from the peninsula, which had occurred over several centuries. By the time of the conquests, there were Arab communities already living in northwest Sinai, Sharqiya, Qena, in the towns and villages along the eastern edge of the Nile Delta, and along the Egyptian Red Sea coast down as far as Upper Egypt. Greek

historians state that some of these areas had been partially arabized by as early as 66 B.C. [39] Throughout Egypt, Coptic, as well as being the spoken language of the majority, was used in its written form as a liturgical and to some extent administrative language alongside Greek, up to and for a considerable time after the Islamic conquests.

1.3.1.4 North Africa

The linguistic, and indeed the political, situation in North Africa before the coming of the Arabs and Islam is known only in the sketchiest outline. At the time of the conquest, the North African littoral was, like Egypt and Syria, nominally under Byzantine control, imposed a century earlier in 531. Apart from in the cities, however, the Greeks had virtually no authority over, or contact with, the Berber tribes that inhabited this vast area. A narrow fertile coastal strip runs for virtually the whole length of the coastline, where the heaviest concentration of both urban and rural population has been since the earliest times. This is backed by an inhospitable hinterland that changes from steppe to mountain and then desert. These hinterland areas appear to have been wholly Berber-speaking at the time of the conquests, and, indeed, of all the earliest populations that were gradually arabicized and islamicized, the mountain Berbers have remained the most tenaciously conservative, culturally and linguistically speaking, up to the present day.

1.3.2 The early linguistic results of the conquests

By the early eighth century, the geographical boundaries of the Arab empire enclosed a vast and polyglot area stretching from Spain to Persia. Within these borders at that time, some ninety years after the initial conquest (of Syria), monoglot speakers of Arabic, whether of pure peninsula origin or mixed parentage, must still have been a small minority. It would take many centuries of gradual evolution—political, administrative, and sociocultural—before the central area was completely arabicized and islamicized, and in some of the peripheral areas neither or only the second of these processes was ever completed (and indeed, in some the first was later reversed).

In order to understand the spread of Arabic during the initial phase of the empire—a period for which we have little in the way of nonliterary linguistic evidence apart from a few chancery documents—we must turn to the historical record of the mode of colonization and the kinds of social relationship that the conquerors contracted with those they conquered. The details of this differ somewhat from one area to another, but we will try to highlight common factors and differences insofar as these may have had linguistic implications.

1.3.2.1 The pidginization hypothesis

In a controversial and thought-provoking polemic, Versteegh[40] recently put forward the theory that the Arabic that the tribesmen brought with them from Arabia (whatever kind that was—Versteegh assumes it was identical with the poetical *'arabi:ya*[41]) everywhere underwent a process of pidginization, creolization, and long-term decreolization during the first centuries of Islam. According to Versteegh's model, the conquered peoples would everywhere initially have communicated with the conquerors in a language that was neither Arabic nor their own native tongue, but a pidgin—a drastically reduced and simplified mixture of the two. In time this pidgin would have become a creole—that is, a natively spoken language—as the conquerors and their descendants began to intermarry with the women of the indigenous communities and raise children who would have acquired this creolized Arabic as their first language from their mothers. The greater the degree of mixing and intermarriage, the more rapidly would the Arabic creole thus formed have come to displace both the original languages and the Arabic of the conquerors. Decreolization, the reapproximation of the creole to the structure of the original "parent" language, in this case Arabic, would have eventually and gradually occurred through the dissemination of linguistic "models" of one kind or another—native speakers of "pure" Arabic, prescriptive school grammars and style manuals, the Koran, etc.

That a process of linguistic accommodation would have occurred in the initial phase of the conquests is indisputable. However, it is a huge leap from this to positing a full-blown "creolist" model of language acquisition. Neither the contemporaneous linguistic data, such as exists, nor retrospective extrapolation from later data support this hypothesis; and what we know of the stages and nature of the process of integration that the conquerors and conquered passed through also conjures up a social milieu different in character from those in which pidginization, creolization, and decreolization, in the generally accepted senses of these terms, typically occur.

There is no mention in the copious Arabic literature describing the social and political consequences of the conquests of the formation of any kind of Arabic that could be described as a pidgin. True, there are occasional references to linguistic errors committed by the non-Arab conquered peoples, and later there developed a separate genre within the indigenous lexicophilological tradition devoted to mistakes committed by educated Arabs in the use of the literary language (treatises on the so-called *laḥn al'a:mma* 'solecisms of the common people'). However, the examples of solecisms, culled from townsfolk's speech in the con-

quered territories, are given by writers who lived at least 100, and in most cases 200, years after the conquests and the first linguistic contacts. Where sentence examples are given,[42] they exhibit not the massively broken-down and remodeled morphology and syntax that typically result from the process Versteegh proposes, but rather the recognizable antecedents of today's modern dialects. The purpose of writing the treatises appears to have been purely prescriptive and educative: the mistakes are presented as illustrations of the extent to which certain of the norms of the *'arabi:ya*—whose rules were themselves elaborated only at the end of the eighth century—were no longer being observed in the towns and settled areas at that time. In terms of Versteegh's model, what they would exemplify is a relatively late stage in the process—an Arabic creole in the process of decreolization, not of course the original pidgin. As we shall argue below, however, neither this evidence, nor the now copious and direct testimony available from early papyri, support the creolist hypothesis.

The main source of *direct* evidence for the structure of nonliterary Arabic in the early centuries of Islam is to be found in a small number of chancery documents and a vast quantity of papyri and paper documents of a mundane and ephemeral nature (personal letters, inventories, petitions, contracts, bills, etc.) discovered during the last century. A large collection of these documents, mainly from Egypt and Syria, some of which have been reliably dated to as early as A.D. 800 (still of course more than 150 years after the first contacts), has recently been analyzed linguistically by Hopkins.[43] The value of this material, in particular the ephemera, as evidence of the state of Arabic at the time, lies in the following: (i) much of the material was written before any prescriptive, codified system of written Arabic grammar had been disseminated, and, unlike the poetry, it is inconceivable that such material would ever have been systematically tampered with or edited after it was written, precisely because of the banality of its content; (ii) as nonliterary material for personal and domestic consumption, it is unlikely to have been written in any form of "elevated diction," but rather reflected everyday usage; and (iii) it exists in quantity, is of varied provenance, and shows several subgenres. The drawbacks are the extreme difficulties posed by deciphering the sometimes abominable scrawl, and in the orthography, at that time lacking diacritical points to distinguish many of the letters (let alone any vowel marks whatsoever). On top of this, there is a good deal of variability in spelling conventions, some of which may be because of scribal lapses, which makes it difficult to get a clear grasp of how some aspects of the morphology and syntax worked. Finally, it cannot be assumed that written Arabic of this kind, albeit written at a time before the standardization and codification of the written *'arabi:ya* had taken hold, exactly mirrors the structure of

the spoken language of those who wrote it. Prima facie, it seems likely that the two would not have been very different, but a somewhat more formal style might have been used even in these kinds of ephemera.

Despite all these problems, Hopkins' cautious analysis leads him to one quite definite conclusion regarding the status of the language in which these documents are written, which is worth quoting at length:

> in almost every case in which the language of the Arabic papyri deviates from CLA, it deviates unmistakably in the direction of Middle Arabic, typologically akin to most of the modern colloquials. The language therefore, lies fully within the mainstream of Middle Arabic, of which it is the earliest representative. A large proportion of the features attested later in medieval Jewish, Christian, and to a lesser extent Muslim Middle Arabic, many of which are familiar today from the modern dialects, occur here for the first time. This fact speaks for a very impressive continuity in colloquial Arabic usage, and the roots of the modern vernaculars are seen to lie very deep.[44]

This conclusion, based on a large amount of datable and authentic evidence, is difficult to reconcile with the pidginization–creolization hypothesis. Even allowing for the reading difficulties and scribal inconsistencies mentioned above, the material examined by Hopkins is written in a language full of morphological and syntactic variation. Variation and instability on this level suggest a language in a transitional phase, and it is apparent that the transition is from a variety of Arabic that has many of the features that we now exclusively associate with Classical Arabic (codified and fixed *after* many of Hopkins' texts were written) to one containing many, but not yet all, of the features typical of later medieval and modern varieties of informal written and spoken Arabic. Thus, while we note the total absence of some features that we associate with that variety of Arabic later codified and reified as "Classical Arabic" and the categorical presence of the corresponding "colloquial" feature (e.g., the complete loss of case marking in the sound masculine plural of nouns), in other subsystems of the language we find variation between what we now think of as the "dialectal" and the "Classical" system (e.g., in the morphology of numbers), and in yet other cases the dominance of the "Classical" feature and absence of the equivalent "dialectal" feature is clear (e.g., in the means for marking mood and aspect in the verb).

These late eighth- and early ninth-century ephemera are the linguistic "missing link" between early (ca. 640–800) spoken and nonliterary written Arabic, of which we have no extant unadulterated examples, but that we would argue

must have been derived from a form of Arabic structurally akin to, though not identical with, what later became codified as "Classical Arabic," and the later, fully documented medieval varieties of Middle Arabic that in turn evolved into the modern urban dialects. At no point during these twelve centuries of evolution from about A.D. 800 does there seem to have been any violent dislocation or change, but rather a long and gradual evolution toward the present dialectal situation.[45] What does this mean for the pidginization-creolization model?

Pidginization always involves a drastic breaking down and simplification of the structure of the input language. A modern example of the kind of thing that happens can be observed in the southern Sudan, where an Arabic pidgin, based presumably on Egyptian colloquial Arabic and variously known as Mongallese, Juba Arabic, or Bimbashi Arabic, was formed as a result of Egyptian military campaigns in the nineteenth century. It was later exported as a creolized variety known as (Ki)Nubi.[46] Juba Arabic and (Ki)Nubi are virtually unrecognizable as varieties of any kind of Arabic, ancient or modern. There has been a remodeling of the input language such that, to give but a few examples, the phonology of the pidgin/creole has lost all of the postvelar consonants (/ǧ/, /x/, /ḥ/, and /ʿ/) so typical of all varieties of "heartland" Arabic in all periods, and, in the morphology of the verb, there has been a total loss of all inflection for tense and person and the collapse of all verb classes into a single paradigm[47]—again, completely unattested phenomena[48] for earlier periods of Arabic. The question then is this: if the Arabic of the conquering tribesmen in the middle of the seventh to the end of the eighth century was everywhere being pidginized and creolized, and presumably giving rise to drastically reduced varieties along the lines we today observe in Juba and some other parts of Africa, is it conceivable that, by the eighth/ninth century—the date of Hopkins' earliest ephemera—these pidginized/creolized Arabics could have been decreolized to the point where they have the morphological and syntactic structure Hopkins describes? Or, even if we assume that spoken and written Arabic were already different in the eighth/ninth century, is it conceivable that a creolized form of Arabic of the structural type exemplified by (Ki)Nubi could have coexisted as a spoken form alongside the very different variety of written Arabic that we see examples of in Hopkins' texts? The answer to both questions is almost certainly no. For the answer to be yes, a quite incredible series of coincidences would have had to occur in different parts of the new Arab empire, and a very different social setup from the one the historical sources describe would have had to exist.

Pidgins result from the need for communication, normally in a limited range of contexts between an indigenous people and outsiders. In this case, the indigenous people spoke a variety of languages—mainly Aramaic, Coptic, and Berber—with no close geneological relation to each other. In all cases, the incoming language was Arabic. In this situation, we should expect pidgins to be formed from a linguistic accommodation between Aramaic and Arabic, Coptic and Arabic, and Berber and Arabic. The resulting pidgins would all have been very different from each other: compare the differences, say, between a Chinese–English pidgin and New Guinea–English pidgin, both based on English but in which the other "parent" language is different. These pidgins would then in turn have given rise to a range of divergent creoles (compare, say the French-based creoles of West Africa with those of the West Indies), which would have been the earliest Arabic urban colloquials and all of which would later, following Versteegh, have been decreolized—that is, would have all moved in the direction of the imposed standard form of Arabic (in creolist terms, the "acrolectal standard"). The problem is that the linguistic facts as we know them do not support this scenario.

The earliest forms of urban non–Classical Arabic we know, of whatever provenance, from Hopkins' materials to those for the somewhat later period of Blau,[49] share a remarkably similar structure, and all differ in the same ways from CLA. These typological similarities have continued up to the present day, and far from being the result of creolization, the degree and pattern of similarity have led some linguists to propose an original non-Classical koinè as the most reasonable explanation.[50] Suffice it to say that all the early varieties, as well as their modern descendants, show a similar reduction of morphological distinctions and categories, the development of "analytic" features in syntax, a greater degree of symmetry in syntax, and (insofar as it is possible to judge from spelling) the loss of the same phonological distinctions. Given the different substrate languages in different parts of the empire, it is extremely difficult to explain these similarities in creolist terms. If there had been separate processes of pidginization in, let us say, Aramaic-speaking Syria and Coptic-speaking Egypt, the resultant creoles that we see a century and more down the line should (i) be much more different from each other than they actually are, (ii) show a much greater degree of local lexical and substrate syntactic influence, and (iii) show a much more reduced morphology and syntax, compared with CLA, than they actually do. Purely on the basis of a prima facie examination of the data, it seems very unlikely that the early non-Classical varieties could all be the result of the decreolising influence of CLA on disparate Arabic creoles with structures like that of (Ki)Nubi.

It is also unclear who or what would have been the purveyors of the model of "pure Arabic" to bring about this decreolization, and over what time scale.

For the first several centuries after the conquest, functional literacy in the *'arabi:ya* was exceedingly rare in the population at large (including the conquerors themselves). Effectively, it was necessary only for a tiny minority of officials involved in tax collection and other administrative matters.[51] Rudimentary Koranic schools (Ar. *kutta:b*) may have been gradually established from an early date for Muslim converts,[52] but with its complete reliance on rote learning and recitation of the scriptures, the seventh/eighth-century *kutta:b* could no more be said to have provided an "acrolectal model" (to use the creolist term) to be approximated to in nonfrozen contexts of speech than its equivalent does today. Perhaps, then, we could look to the "pure" spoken Arabic of the largely illiterate conquerors themselves, their descendants, and later groups of immigrants from the peninsula to provide the model for decreolization. This explanation has attractions, because the Arabic of the immigrant groups, untainted by substrate influences, would have provided regular and relatively homogeneous infusions of "pure" Arabic into the developing linguistic melting pot of the cities and their immediate hinterlands.[53] It has already been argued above, however, that whatever this "pure" spoken Arabic was, it was unlikely to have been identical in syntax or vocabulary with the poetical *'arabi:ya*, but was rather a group of mutually intelligible dialects with a high degree of structural similarity, in which some of the most characteristically "synthetic" features of the *'arabi:ya* had already disappeared or were in the process of disappearing. The "acrolectal" standard would not therefore have been provided by an imposed *'arabi:ya* but rather by the speech of "pure-blooded" Arabs—that is, various peninsula dialects. Only at a very much later date, when the *'arabi:ya* had begun to be disseminated as the vehicle of Islamic culture in a fully islamicized society, could *literate* norms as such have exercised any decreolizing effect on the population at large. But even then, access to these norms through education was always severely limited; indeed, there were still until very recently many parts of the Arab world where the level of functional literacy in the *'arabi:ya* (or, rather, Modern Standard Arabic [MSA], its modern equivalent) remained negligible. The pidginization model would thus work like this: (i) initial pidginization of the conquerors' dialect by the indigenous populace; (ii) long-term creolization of this pidgin as intermarriage and closer social contact between the two groups begins; (iii) decreolization through continuous contact with new immigrant populations from Arabia; and, very much later on (up to and including the modern era) (iv) the beginnings of the decreolizing effect of a prescriptive *'arabi:ya* as the codified language of Islamic culture. However, even if this model or something like it is accepted, the problem still remains of explaining the remarkable and detailed similarities that exist between the results of this process—the early non-Classical varieties (= 'creoles') and eventually the modern dialects—given the huge differences in the parent languages that were supposedly involved at the pidgin stage.

A more plausible explanation of the linguistic facts we have is simply to assume that the indigenous population learned Arabic from the conquerors *as a foreign language*, without the need to break down its structure. What we know about the immediate aftermath of the conquests is that the initial need was to set up an administrative and fiscal system in the abandoned towns, a task that the Arabs initially seem to have been content to leave to what remained of the local government after the Byzantines and Persians had left. This class of clerks was obviously literate and, in Egypt and Iraq, bilingual in the local language and either Greek or Persian; in Syria, Greek was the language of government. Such people, already accomplished language learners, were now facing a need to learn to communicate in speech (if not for some while yet in writing) with their Arab masters: why could they not have learned to do this directly, perhaps with the help of local bilinguals who knew Arabic? After all, as we have already noted, the circumstances were propitious: there had been contact with Arabic-speaking visitors and settlers for many centuries in all the conquered areas, although mainly outside the cities. It may well be that, immediately after the conquests, ephemeral forms of "kitchen" or "pidgin" Arabic arose as monolingual tradesmen and farmers struggled to do business with the new arrivals in the circumscribed contexts of buying, selling, and the daily round; but, in the towns at least, which is where the Arabs in Egypt and Syria were mainly concentrated and rapidly became settled in considerable numbers, there is every reason to suppose that, out of sheer self-interest if nothing else, the local townsmen would have set about learning to speak Arabic back to Arabs as it was spoken to them.[54]

1.3.2.2 The arabicization of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and North Africa

The arabicization and islamicization of the conquered territories were separate but overlapping, long drawn-out processes that passed through a number of distinct stages in all parts of the new empire, although the speed and mechanics of how this happened differed somewhat from area to area. In Egypt, the invaders at first confined themselves to the towns and left the countryside in the hands of the Copts. There was no encouragement to mass conversion to Islam during the early centuries because this would have eroded the taxation base created by the Byzantines and taken over by the Arabs. There appears to have been a period of decades of peaceful coexistence in which Coptic- and Greek-speaking Egyptians continued to hold high office under the new dispensation and during which Arabic was not even used in official government

documents.[55] From the early eighth century, however, Arabic begins to appear in written documents and gradually becomes dominant over Coptic and Greek. It can be surmised that the same shift from Coptic–Greek to Coptic–Greek–Arabic multilingualism to Arabic monolingualism must have been happening concurrently in urban public life generally. However, certainly during the first Islamic century, the total number of native Arabic speakers compared to Copts was tiny. At the turn of the eighth century, there were probably about eight million Copts and no more than 80,000 Arabs, concentrated in Fusṭāṭ, the old section of what was later to become Cairo, and Alexandria.[56]

The period from the ninth to the twelfth century witnessed a number of developments that all tended to favor the spread of Arabic: a continuous flow of immigration into Egypt from Arabia; the embracing of Islam by the Copts on a much larger scale than hitherto in order for them to escape payment of the *jizya* ('poll tax'); a tightening of the conditions for employment by the state, so that adherence to Islam became a requirement; and the disbanding of the Arab army in 833, leading to a greater degree of mixing between the Arabs and Copts in civilian and social life in urban areas. It is interesting to note that from the thirteenth century, grammars and dictionaries of Coptic begin appearing, probably a reflection of efforts to keep the language alive among educated Copts in the cities who were fast losing it. In the countryside, however, the processes of arabicization and islamicization appear to have been much slower. In 1673, the European traveler Vansleb reports meeting the last Coptic speaker, although as late as the present century, there are reports of whole villages in Upper Egypt still speaking Coptic.[57]

To sum up, the arabicization of Egypt was a long process that began in the cities, where Arabic was learned initially as a (sometimes second) foreign language by the Coptic intelligentsia and used during the first Islamic century only as a language of government and administration, and, for the few early converts, of Islam. Over the succeeding centuries, the practical attractions of Islam, which increased as the Arabs introduced a more restrictive employment regime within the administration, led to increased conversion and gradual arabicization. These processes were no doubt aided by the continuous inflow of Arabic-speaking migrants into both the towns and rural areas and by the resulting greater social contact and mixed marriages between Arabs and Coptic converts to Islam.

The arabicization of Syria is less fully documented than that of Egypt, but it is thought that there were some important differences in how it came about. There certainly seems to have been a mass flight of the Greek population (much greater, it seems, than in Egypt) from the cities—Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and Jerusalem—which were gradually filled by Arab settlers. As in Egypt, the number of Arab invaders was small in comparison with the indigenous population: probably no more than 40,000 men took part in the decisive Battle of Yarmouk in 636.[58] Unlike Egypt, however, in which the military cantonment of Fusṭāṭ later turned into a city in its own right, no new urban centers were created and the sources do not hint at the kind of early mass migrations in the centuries following the conquest that occurred into, and through, Egypt. After the end of the Umayyad dynasty in 750, tribal migration into Syria increased, but an educated guess would put the numbers of Arabs at the end of the eighth century (almost entirely confined to the cities) at between 200,000 and 400,000, as against 4 million non-Arabs.[59] The Syrian countryside, peopled at the time of the conquest by Aramaic-speaking villagers with little in the way of movable possessions to take with them—even if they had wanted to leave and had anywhere else to go—seems to have remained very much the same as it had been before the invasion, with little or no sequestration or settlement by the invaders.[60]

As in Egypt, the written language of administration remained at first Greek, with Arabic beginning to replace it from the beginning of the eighth century. As in Egypt too, mass conversions to Islam did not begin until the eighth and ninth centuries, and again the motives appear to have been at least as much ones of economic pragmatism—the desire to escape from the tax burdens of being a *ðimmi:* ('(Christian or Jewish) protected person')—as they were of religious conviction. Linguistically, the cities of Syria, because of the mass exodus of the Greeks and the inflow of Arabs, must have been polyglot from the earliest period of the conquest, with varieties of Arabic, Aramaic, and Greek all in use. We have already noted that there had been a considerable degree of contact with Arabic speakers from Christian Arab tribes in the centuries before the conquests, and parts of Syria–Palestine had been settled by Arabs from the fifth century, so some degree of familiarity with Arabic among the population can be assumed, at least among those sections in whose interest it would have been to know Arabic (e.g., traders and other providers of services). Not surprisingly, Arabic seems to have supplanted Aramaic in the cities relatively rapidly, where it is likely to have developed a role as a lingua franca between the various ethnic groups. In two to three centuries, its use had spread even to the extent of replacing Aramaic as a spoken and literary language (although written in the Hebrew script) among the Jewish population.[61] Similarly, a Psalm fragment of apparently Christian Syrian origin, written in Greek uncials but in which the language is (Middle) Arabic, and dated with reasonable certainty to A.D. 800, also bears witness to the use of Arabic among Christians, even in religious contexts.[62] The text appears to have been written for a readership (and perhaps by a scribe) who could understand Arabic but not read it, or perhaps for whom written Arabic in a religious context was associated with Islam and hence inappropriate. In passing, it is worth mentioning that the pidginization hypothesis appears even less plausible in Syria than elsewhere, because the close similarities in morphology, syntactic structure, and vocabulary between Arabic and Aramaic would arguably have made it unnecessary even if the social conditions for it had existed. This is not to say that Arabic did not change as a result of Aramaic influence, of course, but these changes are more plausibly explained as the outcome of a protracted period of language contact and communal bilingualism.[63]

Aramaic–Arabic bilingualism, we can be fairly certain, lasted for a very long time outside the cities. This has been strikingly demonstrated by Garbell in a study of the non-Bedouin Arabic dialects of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.[64] She shows that these dialects underwent three successive stages of Aramaic influence on their phonology lasting eight centuries in all. Such developments could not of course have occurred unless both languages had been in continuous concurrent use over this period. Although the use of Aramaic at home and with other Aramaic speakers, and that of Arabic for public and interethnic communication, probably lasted for centuries across the vast area of Syria–Palestine outside the cities, the increasing prestige and use of Arabic as the language of government and state religion, together with the growth of mixed marriages[65] and the bringing up of the resultant offspring as Arabic-speaking Muslims, were factors that must have accelerated the disappearance of Aramaic. It is important to emphasize that the importance of Arabic was as a *spoken* language among the population at large; outside the cities, knowledge of written Arabic was probably virtually nil among native speakers of Arabic and foreigners alike. Even today, rates of illiteracy among rural communities remain high in all parts of the Arab world. The Hellenistic school system that the Arabs inherited in Syria played no part in the spread of Arabic. To the extent that it survived at all, it seems to have furnished a means by which the Arabs acquired the rudiments of science and philosophy, rather than as a means of teaching Arabic to foreigners.[66] The Koran schools, which developed from the late seventh century, can in no sense be considered to have constituted a means of fostering functional literacy in the population at large.

In Iraq, a name that at the time of the conquests designated only modern central and lower Iraq, and not the mountainous north, the linguistic results of conquest were in the long term the same as in Syria: complete arabicization. As has already been mentioned, there had been a large population of semisettled, mainly Christian Arab tribesmen living on the western edge of the fertile Iraqi *sawa:d* ('alluvium') for decades, if not centuries, before the Arab conquest, although it is unlikely there was much penetration of Arabs into it before this time. The bulk of the ordinary population, rural and urban, were Aramaic-speaking Christians and Jews, no doubt the descendants of the ancient Semitic and non-Semitic populations of Iraq, with a sprinkling of Pahlavi-speaking land-owning Sasanian nobility in the countryside and a Pahlavi-speaking government administration in the towns. Again, as in Syria, arabicization must have been a long process, particularly in the countryside. There was no mass desertion of the land, and the conversion of Christians and Jews was not encouraged early on, in order to avoid erosion of the taxation base. However, in Iraq, in contrast to Syria, there were large migrations of Arabs from all parts of Arabia immediately after the conquest, and new, entirely Arab cities were founded on the base of the originally military cantonments at Kufa, in central Iraq, and on a smaller scale at Basra in the south.[67]

It is likely that Arabic would have become quickly dominant in the erstwhile Sasanian provincial capital of Iraq at Madā'in and in other central Iraqi cities as the language of government and administration, but, just as importantly, it would have served as the general lingua franca between Arabs, Aramaic speakers, and what remained of the Pahlavi-speaking population, which was augmented by mass desertions from the Sasanian armies to the Arabs after their defeat. In the succeeding centuries, the factors that ensured the disappearance of languages other than Arabic in the lowlands of central and southern Iraq were the continued massive flow of Arabic-speaking tribesmen into the towns and villages, mixed marriages and the consequent gradual linguistic assimilation of the indigenous communities over succeeding generations, and the eventual wholesale abandonment of other religions for Islam as this became economically attractive and politically encouraged. In the mountainous terrain of north and northeastern Iraq, however, Kurdish-speaking tribesmen accepted Islam but maintained their language intact. To this day, they constitute Iraq's largest linguistic minority.

The arabicization of North Africa proceeded at a much slower pace than anywhere else in the early centuries of the Islamic empire for a combination of demographic, political, and topographical reasons. The nature of the struggle was different in that the Arabs initially faced not only the Byzantines in their strongholds, dotted along the coast, but also fiercely independent Berber tribes, some partly Christianized, whom neither the Byzantines nor the Romans before them had ever subjugated. Only when the local Berber tribesmen in each area had been persuaded that it was in their interest to accept Islam and fight alongside the Arabs did the defeat of the Byzantines became a reality. This is of course a

simplification, and a full account of the vicissitudes of the historical record, in which the Arabs often found themselves facing mutinous Berber "allies" is well beyond the scope of this book; but it can be said in summary that there were several distinct stages in the early period of the arabicization and islamicization of the area that here, more than anywhere else except perhaps Persia, were separate processes.

Islam was initially accepted by the Berbers largely because enlistment in the Arab army guaranteed being put on the same footing as the Arab soldiers in the distribution of booty.[68] This was especially true of the conquest of Spain in the early eighth century. The earliest Berber converts were the lowland nomadic tribes of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, southern Tunisia, and Morocco, rather than the montagnards of the Aurès and Kabylia ranges (Algeria) and the high Atlas (Morocco). However, it appears that these early conversions were nominal, and only after some degree of political stability had been achieved (in about 717–720) was a systematic effort made to convert the Berber population throughout the Maghreb. The concomitant process of arabicization appears to have been very slow, given the vast size of the territory and the sparsely populated nature of much of it. As had been the case with the previous imperial power, the Arab–Islamic power base was in the towns, either taken over from the Byzantines or, like Qayrawān and Tunis, founded by them. Everywhere else, the non–Arabic-speaking but islamicized Berbers remained the dominant group as, in the mountainous areas, they still do to this day.

The major demographic change that altered this balance did not occur until the middle of the eleventh century, when the first of a series of massive migrations of Arabic speakers from the east occurred. An estimated 50,000 warriors of the Banī Hilāl and Banī Sulaim, in addition to their women and children, moved west from Egypt into Cyrenaica. Some settled here, but many continued into the fertile plains of Tunisia and what is now Algeria. Further westerly migrations followed, reaching Morocco in the twelfth century. These nomads did not settle in the towns, but rather began to occupy the plains. The linguistic effect was the spreading of knowledge of the Arabic language in the countryside instead of it remaining limited to the towns. Before this invasion, the Berber dialects had formed the means of communication in the Maghrebian (= North African) countryside, but as groups of these Arabic-speaking nomads came from Egypt, Arabic gradually replaced the Berber dialects.[69]

1.3.2.3 Summary

Several common strands can be identified in the process by which Arabic spread in the newly conquered areas:

(a) Preconquest contacts with Arabs

With the exception of North Africa, the evidence is that the peripheries of the conquered territories had had extensive contact with Arab tribes and that there had been some degree of migration to and settlement on the fringes of cultivable areas by Arabic speakers over several centuries (west-central Mesopotamia in Iraq, east of the Nile Delta and Upper Nile in Egypt, some river valleys in Syria–Palestine). It can safely be assumed at the very least from this that there was some preconquest familiarity with Arabic in these areas.

(b) Islam

Initially, this was the *least* important influence in the spread of Arabic, although it came to acquire a central educative and hence linguistic role later on. The contrasting linguistic effects of the conquests as diffusers of spoken Arabic and that of Islam as a second-wave normative influence have been succinctly put by Wansbrough:

> Symbolically the contrast would be one between natural, uninhibited diffusion and artificial, consciously directed restriction. Linguistically arabicization is characterized by a concept of language as the most convenient means for meeting the demands of normal communication (*Mitteilungsbedürfnis*), and islamization by a concept of language as an instrument of education (*Bildungsprinzip*). An example of the first was the introduction of Arabic as official language into the Umayyad chancery; the example of the second was, of course, the Koran.[70]

(c) Urbanization

Everywhere, the conquerors occupied or established towns and cities that became centers of local or regional power. For administrative and economic reasons, as well as for ease of communication, Arabic became the language of the people who lived or migrated to these often initially polyglot towns and cities, and of trade between them. The rural peasant communities, on the other hand, as well as being more slowly islamicized, were also much slower to give up their original languages. Communal bilingualism must have been normal in the rural areas of all parts of the empire for very many centuries.

(d) Migration and assimilation

The size of the conquering armies was small—tiny, even, compared to the sizes of the indigenous populations. A major factor over several centuries in the arabicization of both town and country in North Africa, Egypt, Iraq, and (somewhat later) Syria was the infusion of new Arab blood through large-scale tribal migration from Arabia and remigration from already heavily arabized to

less arabized areas. The increased pace of conversion to Islam among indigenous populations from the ninth century must also have indirectly speeded up the process of social integration and linguistic change through mixed marriages.

The third and fourth of these factors, taken together, were without doubt the real engines of arabicization during the first two to three Islamic centuries in the eastern Mediterranean and Fertile Crescent, and in large parts of North Africa until the sixth Islamic century (thirteenth century A.D.). Preconquest contacts with Arabic speakers may perhaps in some places have been a linguistically predisposing factor, although they were not a necessary one, as is shown in the case of North Africa, where no such contacts occurred. Nor was Islam, in the absence of large infusions of Arabic speakers, a force that by itself could bring about wholesale linguistic change. These points are illustrated by the negative example of the linguistic history of Persia and other islamicized regions of central Asia, which were never subject to mass migration from Arabia, although they were islamicized, and where consequently Arabic never took over from Persian or the other Indo-European and Turkic languages spoken in these vast areas as the language of daily life. Although it was for a long period the language of government, religion, culture, and polite society, thereby influencing the lexical stock of the languages of the subject peoples, Arabic never became a general vernacular language here precisely because the social factors that would have been required to make it one never came into existence. Today, throughout modern Iran and Muslim central Asia, Arabic has receded to the point of being a scriptural language only.[71] The same thing applied until recently to parts of the heartland areas of the present-day Arab world that for topographical reasons were less attractive to tribal migrants from Arabia and hence never became settled by them and arabicized: the mountainous areas of northern Iraq, still populated by Kurdish-speaking Muslims, and the mountain ranges of present-day Algeria and Morocco, the home of Berber speakers. Only relatively recently, with the establishment of modern nation states in which Arabic has been adopted as the official language and propagated through a centrally controlled education system has functional bilingualism become widespread among these unassimilated non-Arab populations.

1.4 Middle Arabic, the modern dialects, and the evolution of Modern Standard Arabic

Having surveyed the reasons for the spread of Arabic in the early Islamic period, we will now trace its general lines of development through the Middle Ages and into the modern era.

We distinguished earlier between the *'arabi:ya*, defined as that variety of Arabic used in pre-Islamic poetry, the Koran, and "elevated diction" in general, and the tribal dialects (which we will henceforth refer to generically as Old Arabic, or OA) used in everyday speech. The chief distinction between them was that the *'arabi:ya* retained certain morphosyntactic features—most notably the final short vowel endings indicating mood and case—that OA had probably begun to lose by the late seventh century. This trend toward the loss of inflection in spoken Arabic accelerated in the circumstances in which Arabic was learned in the towns and cities of the conquered lands and was part of a general restructuring of OA involving, over time, a reduction in distinctions/categories and greater paradigm symmetry in phonology, inflectional, and derivational morphology; a more analytic and periphrastic phrase structure in syntax; and lexical borrowing from the various substrate languages. The dialects of the Bedouin who remained in inner Arabia were not affected by these contact-induced changes and retained many features of OA that were quickly lost in the conquered territories. This linguistic purity, later to become a popular and romanticized *idée reçue*, in part accounts for the common practice of the medieval Arab grammarians (q.v.) up to about the eleventh century of resorting to unlettered Bedouin informants during their investigations into and codifications of the *'arabi:ya*.

It is possible to trace many of the developments in Middle Arabic through time by studying surviving written ephemera and other kinds of text not subject to the normative influence of the *'arabi:ya*,[72] although the establishment of a precise comparative chronology for developments in different areas of the conquered territories is likely to remain an impossibility. For one thing, there are lacunae in the geographical and chronological coverage of the surviving texts, so that, for example, we have little or no material for Iraq or North Africa of the requisite type and almost none for the first one and a half Islamic centuries. Second, the degree to which the morphological and syntactic norms of the *'arabi:ya* may have influenced "informal" writing in the later Middle Ages remains an uncertain factor. The degree of influence depends partly on who wrote the text—Christian, Jew, or Muslim—because from an early period the different religious communities developed different conventions for what purposes Arabic was to be used for: secular or religious literature, religious ritual, everyday intercourse within the group, intragroup contact, etc., and consequently divergent communal norms and styles.[73] However that may be, it is possible to discern a clear line of development from the earliest written Arabic ephemera (ca. A.D. 800) through medieval Middle Arabic texts to the modern urban colloquials, at least for Syria–Palestine and Egypt.

In contrast to the relative obscurity that cloaks how spoken Arabic and informal written Arabic developed, the elaboration of the *'arabi:ya* as the linguis-

tic vehicle par excellence of Islamic culture and ultimately of all kinds of written communication in Arabic unfolded in the full light of history. In 750, a century after the first wave of conquests in the Fertile Crescent, the Umayyad dynasty, which had sedulously promoted specifically Arab political and economic interests at the expense of the *muwalladu:n*, the non-Arab converts to Islam, was overthrown. The center of power shifted to Iraq, where the Abbasid dynasty represented the aspirations of the heterogeneous polity of the eastern regions of the Muslim empire. Arabic had by this time firmly established itself in Iraq, as elsewhere, as the language of government and of Islam, although almost certainly not yet as the language of everyday intercourse outside the arabized towns. In these towns, as we have already noted, it was rapidly changing on account of its use as a spoken lingua franca. Not long after the rise to power of the Abbasids, we see the beginnings of philological activity in the new Iraqi towns of Kufa and Basra, first established about a century before as military cantonments for the armies of conquest. The motives traditionally imputed to those who began the codification of "correct" Arabic usage are summed up in the following passage from the fourteenth-century writer Ibn Khaldūn's *Prolegomena*:

> When Islam came, the Arabs left the Hejaz to seek the royal authority that was in the hands of [foreign] nations and dynasties. They came into contact with non-Arabs. As a result, their linguistic habit changed under the influence of the solecisms they heard non-Arab speakers of Arabic make, and it is hearing that begets the linguistic habit. Thus, the [Arab linguistic habit began to] incline towards adopting forms of speech at variance with it, because the Arabs became used to hearing them spoken, and their linguistic habit became corrupted. Cultured people feared that the Arabic linguistic habit would become entirely corrupted and that if the [process] went on for a long time, the Qurʾan and the traditions would no longer be understood. Therefore, they derived certain norms for the Arabic linguistic habit from their way of speaking.[74]

The derivation of these "certain norms" and their codification can be seen as the second major step in the process of binding together and imposing order on the Muslim community, the first having been the fixing of a canonical version of the Koran about a century earlier. Both of these essentially "logocentric" events manifest the desire of the Arabs for Islam and the *ʿarabi:ya* in which it was made manifest to act as centripetal educative and political forces to counteract the centrifugal tendencies of arabicization, which, as we have seen, was creating communities in which uncontrolled linguistic innovation and dialectal diversity were bound to flourish. The grammatical tradition of the *ʿarabi:ya*, first elaborated in

the late eighth century by al-Khalīl and his Persian Muslim pupil Sībawayhi, had as its initial objective the extrapolation of the linguistic structure of the pure *ʿarabi:ya* from texts whose Arabian character was unimpeachable: the old poetry and the Koran, where necessary with contemporary supporting evidence from Bedouin informants. The need for such an enterprise was pressing: there is no reason to doubt Ibn Khaldūn's assertion that, from the earliest period of the empire, the *ʿarabi:ya* would have been, if not a foreign language, substantially different from the natively spoken Arabic of both pure Arabs and *muwalladu:n* living in the towns.

Over the succeeding seven centuries, the system of description devised by Sībawayhi was refined but never substantially changed.[75] It was puristic and prescriptive in attitude and taxonomic in approach, and sought to specify in the minutest detail what was and was not "correct."[76] Much of its early methodology and terminology appears to have been borrowed from the law,[77] and by the twelfth century there are treatises that directly equate the principles of grammatical reasoning with those of the law.[78] This nexus is not surprising, because the bases of law and government in Islam—the Koran and the recorded sayings of the Prophet—are linguistic events frozen for all time whose exegesis precisely requires grammatical and lexicographical skill. In public life in general, the ability to speak and write correct Arabic, to avoid *laḥn* ('solecism') as defined by the grammarians, was both the condition of entry to and the distinguishing mark of the elite.[79] In particular, up to the end of the early Abbasid period (ca. A.D. 850) "the correct use of *ʔiʿraːb* (= case and mood endings in nouns and verbs) apparently was a necessary condition for an intellectual career, just as bad manners were betrayed by a wrong use of the endings."[80] In some respects, the linguistic situation in this period was analagous to that in the late Roman empire, with the *ʿarabi:ya* functioning in a similar way to Classical Latin as a language of scholarship and public life, and Vulgar Latin (= the Middle Arabic vernaculars) as the language of everyday intercourse.

By the end of the Abbasid period in 1258, we witness a gradual diversification of style in written Arabic. On the one hand, the *ʿarabi:ya*, as defined by the philologists and jurisconsults, gradually became a rigid system of formalized rules, forms, and vocabulary that at least theoretically could not be improved on. It remained in use in its pure form as the vehicle of all religious and doctrinal writing, as well as of philology itself. But on the other hand, interest in Hellenistic culture resulted in the establishment of a translation school in the newly founded city of Baghdad, where not only Greek but also Syriac works were translated into Arabic. Much of the material translated was on scientific subjects for which Arabic lacked any terminology—philosophy and medicine, for ex-

ample—and the work was often carried out by literate Christians and others who were familiar with the source language of the text but were less than complete masters of the *ʿarabi:ya*. Many new scientific terms had to be coined, and the translators were faced with the task of developing an expository prose style for which there was no precedent in older Arabic literature and for which there were no available guides. At the same time as the translation movement was broadening the scope of subject matter that the written language had to cope with, there was increasing political fragmentation and regional autonomy throughout the empire, with the establishment of local dynasties that paid only lip service to central control. This political loosening up reflected itself linguistically in the proliferation of local substrate, dialectal, and nonstandard features in all kinds of writing except in the Islamic sciences proper and those traditional literary genres such as poetry that a few learned Arabs continued to cultivate. By about the end of the third Islamic century (= A.D. 912), however, the traditional *ʿarabi:ya* had ceased to be used in the conversation of good society and in the law courts and colleges, and had ossified into a purely "high literary" idiom. To stick to the rules of *ʔiʿraːb* in speech was considered a sign of pedantry and affectation. In 955, the geographer al-Muqaddasī lists a large number of differences—phonological, lexical, and grammatical—between the varieties of Arabic used in different parts of the empire even by educated people.[81]

The final result of the political decentralization and exposure to outside linguistic influences occasioned by both the translation movement and the absorption into the Muslim community of disparate non-Arab elements can be appreciated from an examination of the wide range of styles used in Arabic literature from the late eleventh to the mid-thirteenth century. At the most conservative end of the linguistic spectrum, we have, for example, the *maqaːmaːt* ('assemblies') of the Basran al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1122), a kind of witty literary tour de force in ornate rhymed prose containing many lexical rarities and deliberate archaisms intended to show the erudition of the writer, and understandable only by the literary connoisseurs of the time. Still within the traditionalist camp linguistically, but with a more conversational cadence, we have the poetry of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Zuhayr (d. 1253). Further down the scale of formality and adherence to the canons of the *ʿarabi:ya* come the anecdotal memoirs of ʾUsāma b. Munqidh (d. 1188), a Syrian "officer and gentleman" at the time of the Crusades, in which the tone is often frankly conversational and the language smacks of the Levantine dialect that the author must have spoken. But even in the work of serious geographical and scientific prose writers of the period, such as Yāqūt (d. 1229) and al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283), "offence against grammar (sc. of the *ʿarabi:ya*) is the rule rather than the exception."[82] At the bottom of the scale in observation of

the norms of the *ʿarabi:ya*, we have the popular epic romances of the Banī Hilāl and ʿAntar, written for the entertainment of the lower classes in a style that must have closely mirrored the urban vernaculars of the time.

Thus by the middle of the thirteenth century, the linguistic situation was one of considerable fragmentation and complexity. In the urban areas across the Muslim empire, spoken Arabic showed variation along both the horizontal (geographical) and vertical (social) axes. In the countryside, the substrate languages continued to survive, although by now challenged by Arabic following increasing islamicization and, in North Africa, large-scale Bedouin immigration. In contrast to the situation in the towns in the conquered territories, the spoken Arabic of inner Arabia remained structurally close to the original OA dialects of six centuries before, not having been subject to prolonged contact with other languages. As spoken Arabic had developed and become geographically diversified, it had become more and more different from the *ʿarabi:ya*. The point of contact between the two was in certain kinds of popular literature, written in a style that avoided gross solecism and observed the syntactic rules of the *ʿarabi:ya* insofar as this did not conflict with the need to communicate clearly with the intended (plebeian) audience. It is of course impossible to tell how far the linguistic forms used in this kind of writing were a conscious compromise between the norms of a superposed literary tradition and ordinary spoken usage. An answer to this question would require a detailed comparison of the language of this kind of literature with that of surviving nonliterary ephemera of the period that we can be sure would not have been subject to careful monitoring by the writer or later editing by someone else. For most ordinary inhabitants of the empire in the thirteenth century, the *ʿarabi:ya* in its pure form, canonized and reified on the basis of ancient usage by the grammarians, had come to be an exclusively written, almost foreign language, even though venerated by all as the language of revealed scripture. It was the preserve of that minuscule proportion of the population that was literate and that devoted itself to the expounding of religiolegal doctrine or to "high" literature in its various forms.

The sociolinguistic situation described in the previous paragraph remained in its essentials unchanged up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the point at which the Arabic-speaking world had its first close contacts with European civilization. The intervening period had been one of political, although not linguistic or cultural, subjugation to the Turks. Turkish had been the language of government throughout the Arabic-speaking areas of the Ottoman empire, but there was never any question of it replacing Arabic as the language of Islam, even for the Turks themselves, nor any attempt to Turkicize the ordinary people. Turkish linguistic influence on spoken Arabic was limited to lexical bor-

rowing, much of it in the military sphere, but also with sizable borrowings in the spoken terminology of agriculture, material culture, food, the household, and local administration.[83] There was no Turkish influence on the frozen norms of the *'arabi:ya*, which, by the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was used solely for increasingly sterile imitations of old literary genres.

The beginnings of a renaissance of literary Arabic in both Egypt and the Fertile Crescent came as a consequence of cultural contacts with the West. Despite the oppressive rule of the Ottomans, the Christians of Syria–Lebanon had had contacts with Europe since the seventeenth century, and these continued unbroken into the nineteenth because of the interests of the Papacy in extending its interests in the area. Originally for reasons of proselytization, Christian clerics and laymen established colleges and missions in the secluded mountain valleys of Lebanon and laid the foundation of the revival of literary Arabic as an instrument of general cultural transmission.[84] The most important single political event, however, was in Egypt. In 1798 Napoleon launched an expedition against Egypt and defeated the Mameluke Turks at Alexandria. The short occupation that followed—it lasted only two years until the French army was forced out in 1801—left a legacy of local unrest that led to momentous internal political changes. A young Albanian officer, Muḥammad 'Alī, who had been sent by the Turkish sultan at the head of an army to fight the French, was given the task of restoring law and order after their departure. He was successful and was confirmed as Pasha of Egypt by the sultan in 1807. He and his descendants ruled Egypt for the next 145 years until the military coup that brought General Muhammad Neguib to power on 23 July 1952.

Muḥammad 'Alī and his successors in government pursued a deliberate policy of cultural and educational rapprochement with Europe, one of the effects of which was to underline the degree to which Egypt had become technologically backward during the long period of Turkish domination. Missions were sent to France and elsewhere in Europe for training in modern administration, law, economics, medicine, science, diplomacy, etc. The training the members of these missions received using French, English, and German, and the difficulties they experienced on their return in attempting to apply what they had learned by means of a language that lacked both the necessary technical vocabulary and a living tradition of systematic word coinage impressed on the Egyptian administration the need for action. In the short term this meant that professional training inside Egypt would have to be done in foreign languages, but in the long term the Arabic language would itself have to be modernized to cope with the new demands that would be made on it. A School of Languages was established in Cairo in 1836 under the direction of Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī. The objectives of this institution, and other schools like it, were to prepare students for the professions and to train government officials and translators. A separate bureau of translation was added to the school in 1841 in which a great many works on geography, history, military matters, philosophy, and social issues were translated into Arabic, mainly from French.[85] Al-Ṭahṭāwī also became editor of the official Egyptian government gazette, *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīya*, which later developed into the first Egyptian national newspaper. The Arabic printing press had been introduced by the French some thirty years earlier, and the effect of this was to increase popular access to written material of all kinds. De facto, the written Arabic language gradually started to cease to be the exclusive preserve of the religiolegal establishment and literateurs and to be used for a wider variety of purposes, educational and everyday, although there was not yet any attempt to modernize it systematically.

As the nineteenth century wore on, Arabic came to occupy an ever more important place in the thinking of Islamic reformist and nationalist political movements in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent. Its symbolic importance as the factor par excellence that united all Arabs and Muslims was redoubled after the collapse of the Ottoman empire and its dismemberment after the First World War. The significance of Arabic as a unifying symbol is summed up in this passage from Rashīd Riḍa (1865–1935), writing in 1922:

> One of the religious and social reforms of Islam was to bring about linguistic unity, by making its common language that of all the peoples who adhered to it. The religion preserved the language and the language preserved the religion. But for Islam the Arabic language would have changed like others, and as it had itself changed previously. But for Arabic, the different interpretations of Islam would have grown apart from each other, and it would have split into a number of faiths. . . . Thus the Arabic language is not the private property of the descendants of Qaḥtan, it is the language of all Muslims.[86]

In 1863, Arabic had been declared the sole official language of government in Egypt (previously this position had been shared with Turkish). But the use of Arabic in many arenas of public life was the exception rather than the rule: English, French, German, Greek, and other languages continued to be used in all the professions. There was no possibility of Arabic-medium training in Egypt because of the complete lack of modern educational institutions and Arabic-speaking teachers, and the poverty of modern Arabic terminology in these subjects. After the British occupied Egypt in 1882, the cause of Arabic suffered another reverse, when English was declared the sole official language in 1898. But the pressure for the restitution of Arabic to public life continued unabated through the early part of the twentieth century.

One of the ways in which this pressure expressed itself in both Egypt and Syria was in attempts to establish an Arabic language academy to conduct research on linguistic problems and the development of technical terms. Starting in 1892, there had been a number of short-lived unsuccessful attempts in Egypt,[87] but in 1919 an academy was founded in Damascus, followed by another in Cairo in 1932. The Damascus Academy's stated principles are interesting in themselves, because they reflect the academicians' perceptions of where the roots of the problem lay: (i) the preservation of the purity of the language, (ii) making Arabic self-sufficient so as to meet the requirements of the arts and sciences, and (iii) rendering Arabic a suitable means of communication in the modern world.[88] The first principle is a defense against the encroachment of spoken Arabic on the one hand, and foreign languages on the other. It recognizes the *'arabi:ya* as the only "true" variety of Arabic and hence implicitly rejects the spoken dialects as corrupt. Nor should foreign elements be allowed to intrude into the regenerated *'arabi:ya*: the second principle enshrines the concept of self-sufficiency in generating new vocabulary. This meant that neologisms coined to fill terminological gaps had to conform in their morphology to roots and patterns already attested in the *'arabi:ya* through the application of the principle of *qiya:s* ('analogy'). Except in extreme circumstances, mere loan translation or, even worse, the transliteration of foreign terms into the Arabic script was to be rejected. The third principle hints at an admission that the *'arabi:ya* was not only deficient in terminology, but was also not a sufficiently flexible or widely understood medium to be usable for everyday purposes, but that somehow this needed to be remedied.

These desiderata strike one as at once prescriptive, grounded in conservative philological tradition, and based on an assumption that lack of technical terminology was the root of the problem. Indeed, much of the early work of the academies, and of others like them that sprang up later in Iraq and Jordan, was devoted to coining long lists of equivalents for words such as "microscope," "loudspeaker," "elevator," and "propeller."[89] Although some of these neologisms eventually came to be accepted, many did not, either because a transliterated foreign word had already gained such currency among concerned users that it could not be replaced or because the newly coined term, derived from an archaic meaning of an Arabic root, was simply semantically opaque to the intended users.[90] Worse, the proliferation of language academies, a consequence of political fragmentation, often led to the coining of several terms for the same referent, making communication in Arabic between specialists from different Arab states even more difficult.[91] Small wonder that many continued to use English or French.

The question of how the *'arabi:ya* could be modernized so that it could become a means of normal communication for ordinary people was an even thornier issue and has to be seen in the context of the prevailing social and political climate of the early decades of this century. The background to the debate was the very high rate of illiteracy throughout the Arabic-speaking world and the political subjugation of the Arabs to western powers. There were basically two positions advocated: reduction of morphological and syntactic complexity, so that the simplified *'arabi:ya* that resulted resembled more closely the natively spoken dialects;[92] and promotion of the use of dialect instead of the *'arabi:ya* in secular contexts.[93] Both of these proposals can be seen as motivated by the desire to create a greater degree of social cohesion within the then-future nation-states of the Arab world by increasing the participation of the population at large in national life, which depended in many fields on literacy in the *'arabi:ya*. But neither ever had very much of a chance of being accepted, even if they had ever developed beyond vague statements of intent,[94] because both went against the grain of cultural history. In a politically fragmented Arab world, in which the western concept of the nation-state had in any case always been regarded with ambivalence if not suspicion, the Arabic language, along with Islam, the religion that was revealed through it, was *the* politically and culturally cohesive force. From this perspective, "Arabic" could only mean that which was common to all Arabs wherever they lived—the *'arabi:ya*. Because the spoken Arabic dialects differ from one area of the Arab world to another, attempts to argue the advantages of elevating them to the status of written languages could be construed only as playing into the hands of those outsiders who sought to divide and rule the Arabs politically and would have the effect of alienating all of them from their common cultural and religious patrimony.[95] Simplifying the grammar of the *'arabi:ya* might be less politically damaging in a pan-Arab context but would have the same culturally alienating effect.

From a western perspective, these objections to language reform smack of elitism. After all, the vast majority (in places up to 90 percent) of the rural and lower-class urban population in all parts of the Arab world was illiterate until thirty or forty years ago, so it was in effect culturally disinherited anyway. Such people would have had nothing to lose from a thoroughgoing reform. This is not to say that the maintenance of the *'arabi:ya* as the sole acceptable and legitimate form of written Arabic was a deliberate ploy to exclude the popula-

tion at large from participation in political and cultural life. It was rather something that followed almost inevitably from a combination of factors—the irrelevance of reading and writing to the way many, or even most, Arabs lived until recently (on the land); the lack of a secular paradigm in which education in general, and language education and planning in particular, could have been elaborated; and the interests of the religious authorities in maintaining the hold of Islam, and its vehicle, the *'arabi:ya* over the population. Until well into this century, all of these factors conspired to produce a general inertia.

1.5 The contemporary linguistic situation

The "democratization" of Arabic did in fact happen during the second half of the twentieth century, although not in ways that the language academies or other concerned instruments of government planned. There has been a gradual but palpable narrowing of the gap between spoken Arabic and the *'arabi:ya* in its contemporary form, MSA. This has come about not through the imposition of an artificial norm from above, but rather through natural symbiosis: the lexis and phraseology of MSA penetrate spoken Arabic, and, in somewhat less obtrusive ways, syntactic structures common to most spoken dialects are recast into a superficially MSA form in written Arabic.[96] The cause of this has been massively increased education and literacy among all sections of the population, the political impetus for which was the strongly populist policies of the socialist regimes in Egypt and the Levant in the 1950s and 1960s and in postcolonial North Africa, underwritten by the improved economic situation in which almost all Arab countries have found themselves since the mid-1950s.

Other changes have been externally motivated. Much foreign lexical, phraseological, and even syntactic influence has been exerted on MSA in recent years as a result of loan translation from European languages.[97] More than anything, this is a consequence of the dominance of English, and to a lesser extent French, in the international media. Arabic newspapers in particular are full of rapidly, and often very literally, translated versions of press agency reports with what Joshua Blau calls "Standard Average European" phrase structure.[98] The ad hoc calques thus formed find their way into everyday use. A tremendous amount of MSA stock phraseology in economics, politics, and popular science and technology seems to have arisen in this way, for example, *al-'umla al-sa'ba* 'hard currency', *suyu:la naqdi:ya* 'cash flow', *ta'wi:m al-junayh* 'floating of the pound', *al-diblu:ma:si:ya al-maku:ki:ya* 'shuttle diplomacy', *al-'add al-tana:zuli:y* 'countdown', *'amali:yat zira:'at al-qalb* 'heart transplant operation', *buhayrat al-nifi al-zaliqa* 'oil-slick', as well as cliched, all-purpose metaphors, such as *hajar al-za:wiya* 'cornerstone', *qimmat jabal al-θalj* 'tip of the iceberg', *tajmi:d* 'freezing (e.g., of political relations, assets)', *al-mana:x al-'a:tifi:y* 'emotional climate', etc.

What of regional differences in MSA? Although, syntactically speaking, MSA is relatively homogeneous across the whole of the Arabic-speaking world, there are significant and systematic differences in vocabulary that differentiate the Maghreb countries—principally Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—from those of the Mashreq, or eastern Arab world. Some examples from Tunisian official signs and hoardings, which I noticed on a recent (2001) visit to that country, will illustrate the point. A modern European-style 'hotel' is typically *nazl*, rather than eastern Arabic *funduq*—in the west, this latter term is not used to refer to the modern hotel but variously designates certain premodern phenomena: a type of old-fashioned caravanserai, or an entrepot for the storage of goods, or a kind of guild house where artisans practicing a particular craft lived and worked. In Tunisia, a small 'shop' is *maǧa:za* (probably via a reborrowing of French *magasin*, itself originally a borrowing into French from Arabic), which has now developed a further Tunisian calque in *maǧa:za rafi:'a* 'supermarket' (lit. 'superior shop'). This is normally termed *su:barmarkit* in the Arab east. 'Car rental' in Tunisia is always *kira:? al-sayya:ra:t*, compared with *?i:ja:r al-sayya:ra:t* in Cairo or Damascus. Both words for 'rent' are equally acceptable as normative MSA and appear in modern dictionaries. Shop signs advertising the sale of fruit in Tunisia term it *ǧila:l*, whereas in the east the term is *fawa:kih*. There are hundreds of such differences in the terminology of written Arabic for everyday material artifacts, objects, and activities in which the western Arab world prefers one MSA synonym or near synonym and the eastern another. These often reflect underlying east–west dialect differences or, as in the case of *maǧa:za* versus *su:barmarkit*, the different foreign languages with which each area has historically had most contact. There are also differences in the "officialese" of government bureaucracy—for example, an administrative 'region' is *jiha* (adjective *jihawi:y*) in Tunisia, whereas in the east *jiha* is most commonly used in the more general sense of 'direction, perspective, point of view'; in the east, 'region' in an administrative sense is *mintaqa*. Potentially, and sometimes in practice, these differences can lead to misunderstandings. In Tunisia, at least, 'the (natural) environment' is termed *al-muhi:t*, a word that in the eastern Arab world is used only in the context of the natural world to mean 'ocean' (the semantic link between the two is that *al-muhi:t* literally means 'that which surrounds'); easterners use *al-bi:?a* to denote 'the environment'. The Maghrebi term *hari:f* 'guest', pl. *hurafa:?*, as in a notice to hotel guests who are addressed as *?ayyuha: l-hurafa:? al-kira:m*

'Dear guests . . . ' sounds to someone from the Mashreq like an archaic word meaning 'artisan'. And in a Maghrebi taxi, the sign that specifies the *'adad al-biqa:'*, that is, the 'number of seats', causes puzzlement to visitors from the east, who would expect *'adad al-rukba:b* 'number of passengers'—for them *biqa:'* principally means 'spots, blots, or patches' rather than being the normal word for 'place, seat'.

In the spoken domain, the results of the spread of education and the exposure of the population to the broadcasting media are varieties of Arabic intermediate between "pure" MSA and "pure" dialect, in which there can be a greater or lesser mixture of MSA and dialectal elements, depending on the speaker's (or writer's) perception of the formality of the context. At the formal end of the spectrum, speakers select a basically MSA morphosyntactic and lexical base but modify it morphophonologically in the direction of their dialect; at the informal end, a fundamentally dialectal base is "classicized" by the insertion of MSA phraseology, lexical items, and the associated "prestige" pronunciation. In some circumstances speakers switch between using a "colloquialized" MSA and a "standardized" colloquial as they perceive the demands of the speech context to change. There have been a number of attempts to describe the varieties of Arabic produced in terms of a spectrum from the purest MSA through intermediate varieties to uneducated plain colloquial,[99] generated by the complementary stylistic tendencies of "leveling" (the elimination of very localized dialectal features in favour of more regionally general ones) and "standardizing" (the replacement of dialectal features by standard ones beyond the level demanded by the need to ensure clear communication), although so far none has been based on a sufficiently large data base to enable a complete "grammar" of the permissible combinatorial possibilities of MSA and dialectal elements to be written.

The interpenetration of MSA and the dialects is the linguistic concomitant of the spread of secular government-sponsored education, reinforced by the output of the ubiquitous news and entertainment media. Education has meant that a large proportion of Arab children now have a long and formative exposure to MSA at school. All school materials in all subjects are written in MSA, and a large number of hours of the curriculum are specifically devoted to mastering its rules and to reading its literature and that of its forebear CLA.[100] The media also provide a constant diet of MSA to the population at large in news broadcasts, religious programs, documentaries, and historical dramas. Without the speakers being aware of it, MSA words and phrases and pronunciations seep into their speech and in the long term may even replace some dialectal equivalents completely. But language contact is a two-way street: the fact that education has made MSA the "property" of a much greater proportion of the population than was true even one generation ago means that MSA is itself now much more open to influence from the dialect than hitherto because of the more extensive concurrent use of the two varieties. This has already blurred, and will no doubt continue to blur, the distinctions between them.[101]

The contemporary sociolinguistic situation in the Arab world is thus a complex one, although perhaps no more complex than the situation at earlier but less well-documented periods of its history. The concept of Arabic as a "diglossic" language,[102] if it was ever accurate, is now an oversimplification: the behavior of most Arabic speakers, educated or not, is rather one of constant style shifting along a cline at opposite ends of which are "pure" MSA and the "pure" regional dialect, more accurately conceived of as idealized constructs than real entities. Most communication apart from the most "frozen," written as well as spoken, is conducted in a form of Arabic somewhere intermediate between these two ideals but is governed by rules nonetheless, even if we cannot yet capture the full complexity of the rules that control the combining and hybridizing of the two.[103] In many regions of the Arab world, the choice of what kind of Arabic to use on what kind of occasion is not confined to a one-dimensional cline. As a result of population movement, voluntary or forced, generational differences can develop within a community or even a single extended family. In Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, for example, there are many families who have recently migrated from rural areas. The older nonliterate generation tends to know and use only a "ruralite" dialect, whereas the younger generation not only acquires a knowledge of MSA at school, but also an awareness of the "urbanite" dialect, which has local prestige. "Ruralite" features tend to be used by these younger speakers to their family elders, while "urbanite" features are preferred in most informal public contexts in which "ruralite" features are likely to be stigmatized or at best regarded as quaint; in more formal contexts of speech, MSA features variably replace "urbanite" features.[104]

The overall picture is thus one of kaleidoscopic variation. Within each modern Arab nation-state, the dialect of the capital city will usually carry some prestige and act as a kind of local "dialect standard,"[105] at least in everyday but nondomestic contexts within the national domain—for example, peasant farmers visiting government offices to sort out some work-related problem. In more formal but still "national" contexts, the influence of MSA will make itself more or less felt, depending on what is being talked about, to whom, and in what circumstances, such as an unscripted television discussion on a housing crisis in which all the participants are of the same nationality. In a supranational speech context, national dialects may still be used, although with some "leveling" and "standardizing." This kind of variation occurs in such contexts as a pan-Arab discussion on educational

cooperation. Again, depending on contextual factors (including the subject itself, which may have more or less strong MSA associations), the "leveling" and "standardizing" processes may elevate the language level to the point where most local features are zeroed out and replaced by standard ones. Finally, in speech contexts that are seen as outside any purely national framework (e.g., news bulletins, religious programmes par excellence) only "spoken MSA" is appropriate.[106]

In writing Arabic, there is less room for variation: basic grammar, morphology, and lexis (with some geographical exceptions noted above) are in theory the same for all. However, in practice there *is* variation, both natural and contrived. In some forms of nonfolkloric narratives and especially in drama, a "written colloquial" may be put in the mouths of characters or actors where the creation of a naturalistic atmosphere is being aimed at; and in the evocation of particular social milieu, it may be impossible, even were it felt desirable, to avoid the use of nonstandard terms. These points apply particularly to certain erstwhile leftist Egyptian writers such as Yusuf Idris.[107] Other kinds of marginal writing in which the colloquial is normally rendered into script are children's comics and political cartoons. It can be inferred from this that "written colloquial Arabic" conventionally conveys multiple associations of the "domestic," "homely," "amusing," and "nonserious." The same associations attach to the "colloquialized written Arabic" that occurs in certain kinds of informal writing not for public consumption in which a nonstandard written Arabic is produced less consciously. Examples are handwritten personal letters to friends, draft typescripts, memoranda, and other kinds of informal documents and ephemera.[108] Here there may be much less care taken over excising the influence of the colloquial, or a "colloquialized standard" may even be deliberately aimed at for affective reasons, as in letters to friends. It will be remembered that it is precisely this kind of informal material from the early medieval period that has enabled us to infer what the structure of spoken Middle Arabic was like.

Notes

1. Moscati et al. 1964, 15–16.
2. The three key "synthetic" Proto-Semitic features that have reflexes in CLA are: (i) a set of final short vowel case inflections that are suffixed to the noun, e.g., *ʔal-malik-u* (nom.), *ʔal-malik-a* (acc.), *ʔal-malik-i* (gen.) 'the king'; (ii) the suffixation of *-n* (so-called nunation, in Arabic *tanwīn*) to designate indefiniteness in most types of noun, e.g., *malik-un* (nom.), *malik-an* (acc.), *malik-in* (gen.) '*a* king'; (iii) a set of short vowels suffixed to imperfect verbs to indicate mood, e.g., *yaktub-u* (indic.) 'he writes, is writing', *yaktub-a* (subj.) '(that) he may write', *yaktub* (juss.) 'let him write'. This marking of final short vowels to designate case in the noun and mood in the verb is called by the Arab grammarians *ʔiʿrāb*. Only in two of the most ancient Semitic languages, Akkadian and Ugaritic, is (i) attested in as complete a form as it is in CLA, whereas in no other do we find a system of equivalent completeness and consistency for (ii) and (iii). In the Semitic languages contemporaneous with sixth-/seventh-century CLA for which we have data, e.g. Aramaic, these features have all been lost.
3. For example, see Moscati et al. (1964, 94–96, 134–36) on the case and mood endings in CLA as evidence of its antiquity. For a contrary view, see Wansbrough 1977, 106ff.
4. See Zwettler 1978.
5. Emeneau 1964, 330–40.
6. Rabin 1955, 21.
7. Zwettler 1978, passim, but especially chapter 3.
8. Fück 1955, 3.
9. Versteegh 1984, 4–5.
10. Zwettler 1978, 132–33.
11. Ibid., 134.
12. Ibid., 110–11, 113, 115–16.
13. Ibid., 112.
14. Rabin 1951, 3–4.
15. Old Arabic dialect differences ascribed to various tribes, as they are reported in Arab grammarians' works beginning in the eighth/ninth centuries A.D., have been collected and classified in Kofler 1940–42. Zwettler (1978, 103–10) argues, via an analysis of irregularities in the patterns of vocalic assonance at rhyme ends and the skewed incidence of final consonant clusters in the same position, that, in all probability, the desinential inflection system in the noun was breaking down in the spoken dialects at the time of the composition of the poetry.
16. See Sowayan 1985, especially 147ff., in which it is argued that modern folkloric poetry in Arabia is the direct lineal descendant of the classical oral-formulaic tradition.
17. "Artifact" is not of course a description that would ever be applied to the Koran by an orthodox Muslim, to whom it is the literal word of God, revealed through his Messenger.
18. The epithet *ʔummiyy*, applied to Muḥammad in the Koran itself, in modern Arabic simply signifies the inability to read and write. Its original, and Koranic meaning, however (see Noeldeke 1909–19, 14) seems to have been "one unfamiliar with the ancient scriptures" (i.e., a Gentile) and only by extension one who could not read.
19. Zwettler 1978, 158.
20. Arberry 1957, 250.
21. According to tradition, the first Arabian ode was composed in about A.D. 500, but prototypes were certainly in existence well before this date (see Nicholson 1969, chapter III).
22. It was believed that poets were possessed by spirits (*jinn*) and had access to the occult. The word for 'poet' *šaʿir* means literally "knower."
23. Similarities between the language of the early Meccan *sūras* and that of the oracular utterances of soothsayers, and the compositions of the poets seem to have led Muḥammad's detractors to accuse him of being one of either or both, to judge by several denials in the Koran itself, such as Sura XXXVI, 69: "We have not taught him [i.e., Muḥammad] poetry; it is improper for him. It [i.e., the Koran] is only a reminder and a clear recitation." Given that the textual structure of the early *sūras* and the poetry are so different, one can only assume that these accusations were based on the fact that the *linguistic system* used in the poetry and the Koran was the same—the inflective '*arabiyya*—and different from that of everyday Arabic speech (see Zwettler 1978, 157–61).
24. Rabin 1951, 3–4.
25. See Fück 1955, 3.
26. Vollers 1906.
27. Short vowels, wherever they occur in an Arabic word, are not normally written, hence the difficulty in interpreting how a consonantal skeleton would have been pronounced in material that , unlike the poetry, is metrically irregular.
28. See, e.g., among many others, Johnstone 1961, 264–66, Matar 1981, 233–39, Holes 1983a, 27–28.
29. See, e.g., Johnstone's computations based on his Dōsiri data (1961, 264).
30. Contrast the data for Dōsiri Arabic given by Johnstone with that for nearby Bahraini Arabic given by Holes in the references cited in note 28.
31. Johnstone 1961, 264.
32. See, e.g., the lengthy discussion of *tanwīn* in the modern dialects in Blau 1981a, 167–222.
33. Cf. the comments of Corriente 1976, 87–91, Zwettler, 1978, 122.
34. In Yemen, another Semitic but non-Arabic language, Himyaritic, was still in use alongside Arabic. See Rabin 1951, 25ff.
35. Donner 1981, 92–94.
36. Versteegh 1997, 33.
37. See Versteegh 1984, 66–67.
38. See Donner 1981, 167–73 for more detail on the social composition of Iraq during this period.
39. ʿUmar 1970, 12–13.
40. Versteegh 1984. See the generally critical reviews by Holes in *BO* 43, no. 1/2 (1986): 218–22; Goodman in *JPCL* 1 no. 1 (1986): 165–70; Hopkins in *ZAL* 18 (1988): 98–99.
41. Versteegh 1984, 2.
42. A typical example is quoted in Fück 1955, 8.
43. Hopkins 1984.
44. Hopkins 1984, xlvi. Hopkins (personal communication) now feels that "Middle Arabic" as the term is being used here is confusing, because it fails to distinguish that mix of Classical, Neo-Arabic, and pseudocorrect elements typical of certain types of medieval written text, and the Neo-Arabic component of such texts.
45. Geoffrey Khan (personal communication) states that early dated Judeo-Arabic material from the Cairo Geniza written in voweled Hebrew script has allowed him to reconstruct a diachronic grammar of Cairene Arabic that traces its gradual evolution over several centuries. Publication of this grammar is forthcoming.
46. See Versteegh (1984, 117–19) for references on this and other modern Arabic pidgins and creoles in Africa.
47. Pasch and Thelwall 1986.
48. The only report of a medieval Arabic pidgin/creole was discovered in Egypt in 1982 in a manuscript written by the Hispano-Arab geographer al-Bakrī in the mid-eleventh century and relating to the speech of the black population in the town of Maridi in Mauritania, N.W. Africa (Thomason and Elgibali 1986, discussed by Holm 1988 [2:568–74]).
49. See Blau 1981a and 1988 passim.
50. Ferguson 1959.
51. In Egypt, for example, Coptic (and according to some, Greek ['Umar 1970: 30–31]) continued to be used as the sole written language of government and administration until A.D. 705, some sixty-five years after the conquest of Egypt was completed. It is only at this point that bilingual Coptic/Arabic records and protocols begin to appear alongside monolingual Coptic ones.
52. The islamicization of the conquered realms, especially the peasantry, was also a gradual process: for example, most of the Egyptian rural population remained non-Muslim (and almost certainly non-Arabic speaking) until at least the middle of the eighth century, some one hundred years after the conquests (see 'Umar 1970, 43).
53. For example, between about A.D. 760 and 870 there was a continuous flow of tribal migrations into Egypt from the peninsula for a variety of political and economic reasons. Migrations by communities from no less than thirty-three different tribes have been identified as occurring during this period ('Umar 1970, 40).
54. The details of what kind of Arabic was brought by the conquering tribesmen and the early history of its implantation in the conquered territories are controversial. See Miller 1986 for a summary of the arguments.
55. 'Umar 1970, 30–31.
56. Ibid., 33–34.
57. *EI* 5:92, article '*Kūfa*'.
58. Donner 1981, 221.
59. Versteegh 1984, 64.
60. Donner 1981, 245–50.
61. Blau 1981a, 21–22.
62. Violet 1901–2.
63. Blau 1988, 288–90 demonstrates Aramaic substrate influence on the morphology, syntax, and lexicon of south Palestinian Christian Arabic of the first millennium.
64. Garbell 1958.
65. Donner 1981, 222.
66. Versteegh 1984, 74–75.
67. Donner 1981, 229–45 passim.
68. Abun-Nasr 1975, 71ff.
69. Ibid., 85–86.
70. Wansbrough 1977, 89.
71. There are a few small Arabic-speaking *Sprachinseln* [speech islands] that are an exception to this: in Uzbekistan, described in Fischer 1961, and in Afghanistan, described in Sirat 1973.
72. See Hopkins 1984.
73. Literate medieval Muslims, in all but the most mundane types of writing, seem to have been more influenced than non-Muslims by the norms of the *ʿarabiyya* on account of its by then fully elaborated, disseminated, and specifically Muslim religiocultural signifi-

cance. See, for example, Blau 1981a, 19–50 on the significance and use of different "levels" of Judeo-Arabic (Arabic written in the Hebrew script) in the medieval period.

74. Ibn Khaldūn 1986, 3:321–22.
75. See Owens 1988 for a general overview.
76. The notions of "correctness" overlap with those of "eloquence" and "purity" in Arabic grammatical writing. Sībawayhi makes use interchangeably of a variety of positive ascriptions when approving of the sources of particular linguistic forms, e.g., *turḍa: 'arabi:yatuhum* '(those) whose Arabic is satisfactory', *al-'arab al-maw0uq bi 'arabi:yatihim* 'Bedouin whose Arabic can be relied on', and *fuṣaḥa:? al-'arab* 'the eloquent among the Bedouin'. See Fück 1955, 45.
77. Haarman 1974.
78. Carter 1983, especially 77ff.
79. Ibid., 71.
80. Versteegh 1983, 157.
81. Fück 1955, 163ff.
82. *EI* 1:571, article "*Arabīya*."
83. For example, see the comments in the introduction of Hinds and Badawi 1986 on the foreign elements in Egyptian Spoken Arabic. A comprehensive list of the specifically Ottoman Turkish lexemes in the same dialect can be consulted in Prokosch 1983.
84. Hourani 1967, 55–56; Suleiman 2003, 81–82.
85. Hourani 1967, 71.
86. Rashīd Riḍa *Al-Khilāfa* (*The Caliphate*) Cairo, 1341 A.H. (1922–23), quoted in Hourani 1967, 300.
87. Chejne 1969, 104.
88. Hamzaoui 1965, 9.
89. Stetkevych 1970, 17.
90. Ibid., 31–33.
91. See, for example, the inconsistencies in the Arabic geological terminology proposed by the language academies in Chalabi 1984, 287–88.
92. The proposals of Anis Furayḥa 1955, 183–96 for the adoption of a simplified written language based on the speech of the educated are the classic statement of this position. Furayḥa even goes as far as to propose the use of the Roman alphabet.
93. An Egyptian perspective on how the movement for the use of colloquial Arabic in Egypt was first promoted by the British and then taken up by a group of Egyptian reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century can be found in Sa'id 1964, 43–71 and 75–149. The attitude of the Arab language academies to the idea of adopting the colloquial has been universally hostile. Fairly typical is the comment of academician Muḥammad Riḍa al-Shabībī in an article titled "The chaos of the dialects" in the *Review of the Egyptian Language Academy* 12 (1966): 135: "This call [to adopt the colloquial] is basically a colonialist scheme (*dasi:sa isti'ma:ri:ya*) which has only been accepted by a few people terrified by the call of Islam." The identification of the Classical language with religion and of the colloquial with a divisiveness that can be exploited by outsiders has wide popular currency throughout the Arab world.
94. Stetkevych 1970, 83.

95. A typical example of views of this kind is that of the Lebanese leftist physician G. Hanna, cited in Chejne 1965, 465.
96. Blau 1973, 193–200 and 1976, 162–71.
97. Blau 1981b, 60–141 passim.
98. This term was originally applied in a Semitic context with reference to Israeli Hebrew. See Blanc 1957, 400.
99. Blanc 1960 proposes five quasidiscrete levels of Arabic on the basis of a short sample of interdialectal conversation; Badawi 1973, 89ff. also suggests five levels of Arabic within Cairo, basing his analysis on media output. See chapter 9 for a detailed discussion of the descriptive adequacy of such models.
100. Al-Toma 1974, 291–92. For the rather different situation and history of educational language use in Algeria, North Africa's most populous country, see Holt 1994; and Boucherit 2002.
101. Mitchell 1986, 20–27. In the written sphere, Rosenbaum 2000 describes the phenomenon of what he terms *faṣḥa:mmiyya*, a style found in modern Egyptian short stories, novels, and especially magazine articles, in which there is frequent and seemingly unpredictable switching back and forth between MSA and Cairene colloquial Arabic. See 9.5.3.
102. Ferguson 1971.
103. Mitchell 1986, 9–10. See chapter 9.
104. Cadora 1970. A similar "switching" phenomenon is reported in Grotzfeld 1983, 90–92 for rural Lebanon. Cross-dialectal switching in a sectarian milieu in Bahrain is discussed in Holes 1983b, 1987 passim.
105. See Holes 1995b for data on Jordan, Iraq, and Bahrain; Haeri 1996 for Egypt.
106. But see now Al-Batal 2002.
107. Vial 1983 provides a representative glossary of common "Egyptianisms" in contemporary Egyptian Arabic literature.
108. Meiseles 1979.