

University of Bucharest

Center for Arab Studies

مركز الدراسات العربية



ROMANO - ARABICA

XVI

2016

Modalities in Arabic



editura universității din bucurești®

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
CENTER FOR ARAB STUDIES

ROMANO-ARABICA
XVI

Modalities in Arabic



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2016

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Cover Design: Gabriel Bițună

Published by:

© **Center for Arab Studies**

7-13, Pitar Moș Street, District 1, 010451, Bucharest, Romania Website: <http://araba.lils.unibuc.ro>

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Șos. Panduri nr. 90-92, 050663 București, ROMÂNIA. Tel./Fax: +40214102384 E-mail: editura.unibuc@gmail.com Web: <http://editura-unibuc.ro>;

Centru de vânzare: Bd. Regina Elisabeta nr. 4-12, 030018 București, ROMÂNIA Tel. +40213053703;

Tipografia EUB: Bd. Iuliu Maniu nr. 1-3 061071 București, ROMÂNIA Tel./Fax: +40213152510.

ISSN 1582-6953

Contents

I. Modalities

Nadia Anghelescu . <i>Modalities and Modalization as Seen by the Arab Grammarians</i>	9
Daniela Chiru . <i>Renditions of the Arabic Modality kāda in Morisco Translations of the Qur'an...</i>	15
Luca D'Anna . <i>Agent and Speaker-oriented Modality in the Arabic Dialect of Benghazi (Libya)..</i>	25
Qasim Hassan . <i>The Grammaticalization of the Modal Particles in South Iraqi Arabic.....</i>	45
Andriy Matskevych . <i>The Notion of Modality in Arabic Linguistics: the Origin and Development</i>	55
Ovidiu Pietrăreanu . <i>Modalities in Contemporary Media Arabic Between the Grammaticalized and the Lexical Classes</i>	65
Catherine Pinon . <i>Quelques remarques autour de l'expression de la modalité « pouvoir » en arabe contemporain.....</i>	83
Manuel Sartori . <i>lā budda : description systématique et critères syntaxiques de détermination des valeurs de modalité du devoir en arabe écrit contemporain.....</i>	93
Apollon Silagadze ; Nino Ejibadze . <i>Some Set Expressions Rendering a Speaker's Attitude to the Utterance in the Egyptian Arabic Dialect.....</i>	125
David William Wilmsen . <i>The Dehortative in the Spoken Arabics of the Eastern Mediterranean..</i>	133

II. Studia Varia

Abir Husein Abid . <i>عبيير حسين عبد الرمز اللغوي حسب نظرية الصورة الإجمالية للإشارة اللغوية.....</i>	153
Montasir Fayez Faris Al-Hamad . <i>A New Model for Learning Arabic Script.....</i>	167
Marina Apaydin . <i>The Sogdian Horseman: Visual Representation of a Hunting Scene in Pre-Modern Central Asia and Iran.....</i>	179
Ward Aqil . <i>Ṣaḥūri wala tbūri. Elative Structures in Colloquial Palestinian Arabic Proverbs.....</i>	193
Almog Kasher . <i>Iconicity in Arabic Grammatical Tradition: Al-Suhaylī on the Correspondence Between Form and Meaning.....</i>	201
Cristina La Rosa . <i>L'arabe de Sicile et l'arabe andalou dans le contexte maghrébin : une approche phonologique.....</i>	225

Alexander Magidow . <i>A Digital Philological Investigation of the History of hā hunā Constructions</i>	239
Judith Rosenhouse . <i>An Acoustic-Phonetic Analysis of Vowels in Levant Arabic: Similarities and Differences</i>	257
Ivan Sivkov . <i>Etymology Of Arabic Terms Denoting Internal Body Parts</i>	269

III. Book Reviews

George Grigore & Gabriel Biṭună (eds.). 2016. <i>Arabic Varieties: Far and Wide. Proceedings of the 11th International Conference of AIDA, Bucharest, 2015</i> . Bucharest: Editura Universității din București. (Andrei A. Avram).....	283
Jairo Guerrero Parrado . 2015. <i>El dialecto árabe hablado en la ciudad marroquí de Larache</i> . Zaragoza : Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza. (Gabriel Biṭună).....	287
Noureddine Guella . 2015. <i>Essays in Arabic Dialectology</i> . Bern/Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang (Giuliano Mion).....	289
Alina-Georgiana Focșineanu . 2015. <i>Kalīla wa Dimna și Istoria ieroglifică. O posibilă filiație</i> . Iași: Ars Longa. (Christian Tămaș).....	293

Noureddine Guella. 2015. *Essays in Arabic Dialectology*. Bern/Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. pp. 114. ISBN 9783631660027

Reviewed by Giuliano Mion

The book under review is written by Noureddine Guella who, after many years spent at the University of Oran, is currently a professor of Linguistics at King Saud University in Riyadh. It is a short collection of articles on various subjects of general Arabic linguistics, as well as on some Arabic dialects belonging to both the Eastern and North African regions.

Each chapter of the book represents slightly revised versions of articles previously published in different journals, either in English or French. In this final revision, the original language of each article has been maintained; the book's introduction is in English and is entitled "Preface and Acknowledgments" (9-11). Most of the chapters are preceded by an abstract.

The book is divided into two parts that reflect the theoretical and methodological orientation of the works. The first is called "Part One: Dialectology", while the second is "Part Two: Linguistic Processes and Social Interactions". As the Author prudently declares in his preface, these republished articles «reflect on the whole a middle-of-the-road-approach [in linguistic analysis], avoiding speculations and controversial issues or proposals» (p. 9).

The so-called "Part One" of the book consists of four chapters.

The first chapter is *On relative clause-formation in Arabic dialects of the Maghreb* (p. 15-27). By starting with a quick comparison of the Classical Arabic structures and a short survey of the existing literature on this subject, the Author deals with the strategies involved in the formation of relative clause structures in some North African dialects. His analysis is mainly based on data collected in Algeria, and in particular the urban dialect of Nédroma.

The second chapter is *Possessive constructions in Arabic: a cross-dialectal study* (p. 29-42). The Author focuses on an intriguing issue of Arabic dialectology, i.e. the

structure of the traditionally so-called “construct state” and its substitution by genitival prepositions in modern Arabic dialects. The Author stresses the shift from a ‘synthetic’ construction, typically that of Classical Arabic, to a more ‘analytic’ one, that of the dialects. A comparison is made between the dialects of Eastern Arabia and those of North Africa in order to highlight differences and analogies. In this analysis, the treatment in both the Arabian dialects and Algerian ones of terms like **abū* ‘father’ and **umm* ‘mother’ is particularly interesting, because of their use in composite nouns expressing characteristics of people, animals and things. As for this latter issue, maybe a comparison with the data recently gathered by V. Ritt-Benmimoun¹ could have been useful. As for the general overview on the reflexes of the “construct state” in the Arabic dialects, in the bibliographical references of this chapter one cannot find, for example, a work like that of K. Eksell².

The third chapter is *On syllabication, stress and intonation in an urban Arabic dialect* (p. 43-55). As is apparent from the title, this work deals with the suprasegmental features of the urban Algerian dialect of Nédroma. It gives a short typological survey of the possible syllabic structures of this variety, exemplifying at the level of lexical words; no examples of syllabication at a sentential level are given. Aside from syllables, the work describes the general rules that govern the principal stress patterns. Intonation is treated by drawing the principal intonation contours, after the interpretative model of K.L. Pike³, of statements (including “commands”) and questions (“yes/no questions” and “information questions”).

The fourth chapter is *Emprunts lexicaux dans des dialectes arabes algériens* (p. 57-66). The article is an analysis of the foreign lexical elements entered in urban Algerian Arabic by the interference with the languages in contact, i.e. Berber, Turkish, Spanish, Italian and French. For each of the source languages, the Author gives an interesting list of lexical items and tries to trace the origins and socio-historical context of some of them.

The so-called “Part Two” of the book consists of three chapters.

The fifth chapter is *La suppléance linguistique en arabe dialectal: reflet d'une dynamique conversationnelle* (p. 69-85). This article deals with the interesting processes of voluntary and involuntary substitution of terms in daily conversations. The Author describes the dynamics through which individuals and communities use particular strategies in order to avoid some words and substitute them with euphemisms, metaphors,

¹ «A Lexical Study on Composite Nouns with *bū* and *umm* in Tunisian Bedouin Dialects», in S. Procházka, V. Ritt-Benmimoun (eds.), *Between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Studies on Contemporary Arabic Dialects*, Wien, 363-381.

² *The Analytic Genitive in the Modern Arabic Dialects*, Göteborg, 1980.

³ *The Intonation of American English*, Ann Arbor, 1945.

and so on. Several cases of “suppléance” are described: euphemisms/metonymy (like the use of *mūl ad-dār* ‘the master of the home’ instead of *rāǧāl* ‘man, husband’ by Algerian women), antiphrasis (like *bṣīr* ‘clairvoyant’ with the significance of ‘blind’ in Tunisia) and “suppléance par ignorance” (like the locution *asm-bbah* ‘his father’s name’ with the sense of ‘that thing’). But the investigation covers also phenomena issued by linguistic contact, as in the case of borrowings (like particular uses of French *ça va* and *normal* in Algeria) and code-switching. Lexical creation is another interesting case, if one considers for example the Algerian word *ṭaywān* whose origin is ‘Taiwan’ and that refers to counterfeit goods, or the Saudi Arabian term *dabbūs* (literally ‘pin’) that is a metaphor for ‘handcuffs’.

The sixth chapter is *Linguistic substitution as verbal dynamism* (p. 87-99). In the Author’s words «substitution is a process whereby a contextualized element or expression is replaced or substituted» (p. 89), and it occurs in particular with terms considered taboo or ignored/unknown by the speaker. After a short review of the scientific literature, the Author offers a list of examples classified under the categories of euphemism/metonymy, antiphrasis, borrowing and lexical creation.

The seventh chapter is *Enigmes en contexte algérien: un cas de dynamique sociolinguistique* (p. 101- 114). By means of the analysis of some riddles collected in Western Algeria, this study intends to show how some physical and animal environments are reflected in the linguistic and lexical structures of a community. The riddles studied are classified after the word of their resolution, i.e. *fākrūn* ‘turtle’, *nmāl* ‘ant’, *ṣarḃū* ‘jerboa’, *baṣla* ‘onion’, *ṣnāza* ‘funeral’ (and it should be observed that the grapheme <ṣ> is that used in the work, although coastal Algeria knows affricated ṣ above all).

Overall, some concluding remarks on this book can be made, as follows.

The *fil rouge* that links all the different studies representing the single chapters is undoubtedly the source of the linguistic issues, i.e. on the one hand, Algerian Arabic dialects, on the other, Gulf dialects. As for the latter dialects, in some research they appear for practical reasons, and this is because the Author works in Saudi Arabia and can easily have access to data from that region. As for the Algerian Arabic dialects, their presence in the research is the result of linguistic investigations carried out in the pre-colonial urban town of Nédroma (58 km far from Tlemcen) and its surroundings. The choice of this town is motivated by the fact that, in the past, the Author dedicated to its Arabic dialect his PhD thesis in Linguistics at the University of Manchester.

Although the previously published papers have been completely reformatted to become individual chapters of the same book, perhaps some purely formal and typographical aspects could have received better care, like for example references in the

final bibliographies. Transcriptions do not always follow the same criteria for all the chapters. For example, in the third chapter, unlike the others, *shwa* is registered by the symbol « ^ »; there is a slight alternation between ğ and ž, even when different works have used data belonging to the same Arabic variety; the phonetic symbol «æ» sometimes appears instead of the phonemic *a* (or *ā*) within examples written in phonemic transcription; long vowels are generally written as «*ā/ī/ū*», but there are also a few cases of «*a:/i:/u:*» and «*aa/ii/uu*».

Beyond these merely formal aspects, we can conclude that the subjects the book deals with are undoubtedly of great interest for those who study Arabic dialectology from a comparative perspective as well as a pragmalinguistic point of view.