An Overview of the Arab World and Arabic Language Use in Africa

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Arabic in Africa

• Arabic is largest language in Africa
• Probably most differentiated
  – Form
  – Functions in societies it is used in
## Arabic-speaking population in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>population</th>
<th>estimated % L1 Arabic</th>
<th>% Arabic-speaking (L1+ L2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>77,949,000</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>34,895,000</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>31,744,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>39,154,490</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>70%?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>10,432,500</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>6,420,000</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>11,274,106</td>
<td>10-20% (?)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>3,291,000</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>152,000,000</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>14,517,176</td>
<td>1-5%</td>
<td>1-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic conclusions:

Arabic is an important African language

• Estimated Arabic L1 and L2: 194,000,000
• Nearly 25% of all Africans speak Arabic fluently as L1 or L2
• More Arabic speakers in Africa than in Arabic-speaking Asia (115,000,000)
How did it get to Africa?

• 640-711: Arabic spread from Egypt to Morocco (and Spain) with the Islamic expansion
• Mainly a language of urban centers
• 1040: a second expansion to North Africa from Upper Egypt to Libya, Tunisia (Bani Hilal), 12th century + to Morocco
• 1300: emigration from Upper Egypt to the Sudan, Chad, Lake Chad
The harsh reality

• Arabic is multifaceted, differentiated, legitimized in different ways in different environments
Varieties of Arabic:

who speaks them,
what are they,
what status do they have?
Arabic Variety 1: Standard Arabic/Classical Arabic

• Not a spoken variety, but
• Language of formal education and therefore the language of literate Arabs and a good number of literate Africans
• Language of the Qur’an hence extremely important in Islamic education
Variety 2, 3, 4 ...: Arabic dialects

- Native language of Arabs, the language of everyday communication among them; 99% of all daily oral interactions are carried out in dialect
- the lingua-franca language in mixed ethnic societies, particularly Morocco, Algeria, Chad, Mauritania, Sudan (?)
- (approximately 3,888,000,000,000 words per day in Africa)
Standard Arabic and Dialects

• Do the dialects differ in a unified way from Standard Arabic? (diglossia)

• NO
I’ll go to the market by car

- Standard Arabic:
  - sa-‘a-dhab-u ilaa s-suuqi bi-s-sayyaara
  - FT-I-go to DEF-market by-DEF-car
- Cairene:
  - ḥ-a-ruuḥ li-s-suu’ bi-l-‘arabiyya
- Morocco:
  - ya-ni-mshi l-is-sug bi s-sayyaara
- Nigerian
  - b-a-mshi le s-suug be l-watiir
Arabic 3: Creole Arabic: Juba Arabic, Nubi

- Southern Sudan (Juba Arabic), small populations in Uganda, Kenya

- ana bi-ruwa fi su ma mota
## Structural elements comparing Arabic varieties in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Ar</th>
<th>sa-</th>
<th>‘a-</th>
<th>ḍhab-</th>
<th>u</th>
<th>‘ilaa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>ḫ-</td>
<td>a-</td>
<td>ruuḥ-</td>
<td></td>
<td>li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccan</td>
<td>γa-</td>
<td>ni-</td>
<td>mshi-</td>
<td></td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>future</td>
<td>person</td>
<td>Stem</td>
<td>mode</td>
<td>Preposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nubi/Juba Arabic</td>
<td>ana</td>
<td>bi-</td>
<td>ruwa</td>
<td>fi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>person</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>stem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Arabic language and African culture and politics

• Loanwords in African languages
• Up to 50% of Swahili vocabulary derives from Arabic
  – Asante “thank you”, tafadali “please”, ku-fikiri “think”
• Important domains of many African languages have significant Arabic-origin vocabulary
  – Kanuri: luwaram (< l-Qur’aan,), liitafi < al-kitaab
Ajami scripts

- Swahili
- Hausa
- Kanuri
Swahili, ca. 1900
Bemanihi taala.

Ila muhebbina ilakram innasih fulan bin fulan.
Arabic African literature

• Ibn Furtu, 16th century
Arabic and Islamic education

• Language of the *Qur’an* hence extremely important in Islamic education
  – Traditionally, *Qur’an* should be memorized, cf. the Kanuri Sangaya institution

• May be the language of “Islamiyya” schools in African Islamic societies
  – Kanuri think that Arabic should be obligatory subject in primary school
Language and politics

• In homogenous Arab societies (Egypt), or in African Islamic societies, Standard Arabic has a high social and cultural status

• In multiethnic, Arab-dominant societies, Standard Arabic associated politically with Arab hegemony;

• Dialectal Arabic has, roughly, the obverse status; main language of communication has a neutral status