

CHAPTER 3

THE LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE:

Sociolinguistic and Political Aspects

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1914 there were 600,000 Palestinians in Palestine and in 1947, towards the end of the British Mandate, the estimate was 1,294,00 (Gilbert, 1989: 3). The growth of the Palestinian population was accompanied by the impressive progress of their educational system. In the beginning of the 1920s, there were 30,681 Palestinian students in all stages of education. During the next 27 years their number increased by 500% and reached 150,000 students (Al-Haj, 1996). The drastic growth in the number of students in the Palestinian education system enhanced the status of Arabic among the Arabs, since the literate people in the language increased tremendously.

In 1922 the British Mandate recognized three official languages in Mandatory Palestine: English, Arabic and Hebrew in that order.

English was extensively taught in Palestinian schools and in colleges for teachers' training, and sometimes more hours were assigned to English than to Arabic. English served as the main means of communication between the local population and the officials of the British Mandate. Learning English sprang mainly from instrumental considerations. As to Hebrew, the Palestinians did not learn Hebrew during the British mandate, in contrast to Jews who studied some Arabic in their schools since the 19th century.

In addition to English (taught both in public and private schools), the private schools taught other European languages such as French, German, and Spanish.

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the linguistic repertoire of the Palestinian citizens of Israel became progressively more complex and diverse, and the status of the languages in it changed. Hebrew and Arabic

became the two official languages of the state, and English took on the status of a foreign language (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Hebrew, Arabic and English as reported by people over age 15. (Source: Resident Census 1983).

<i>Language</i>	<i>Mono-Linguals</i>	<i>First language</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Total</i>
Hebrew	945,450	931,445	312,080	2,188,975
Arabic	242,325	155,075	270,410	667,810
English	6,530	28,150	165,100	199,780

The last time that data were collected concerning language was in the Resident Census taken in 1983 (Central Office for Statistics, 1985). Despite the great changes which have occurred since then (over a million Russian and Ethiopian immigrants have entered) and the limitations of the census, it can be seen clearly that Hebrew is in first place, with Arabic in second place and English in third place.

Spolsky and Shohamy (1999b) estimate that two million people in Israel have functional competence in Arabic. Arabic is the mother tongue of a million Arabs in Israel and the mother tongue of tens of thousands of Mizrahi Jews who emigrated from Arab-speaking countries in the early years of the State. In addition, a number of Israeli Jews studied Arabic in formal frameworks (school or army) or picked it up at home.

From 1948, Palestinian Arab school pupils in Israel studied the Hebrew language as a required course, starting from third grade. Benor (1950), the first director of Arab education in the Ministry of Education, claimed that "Hebrew has been brought into the program of study not by an order from above but by the firm demand of the Arabs themselves." In fact, the teaching of Hebrew to Arab-speaking pupils was a decision of the committee that decided to maintain Arabic as language of instruction. It was a vital interest of the Israeli government that Arab students should learn Hebrew and that they should be exposed to the culture and heritage of the Jewish people in order that they might exercise the Israeli citizenship they had received (Al-Haj, 1996).

Arabic remained an official language of the State of Israel just as it had been an official language under the British Mandate. Koplewitz (1992: 32) points out that the State of Israel removed English from the list of official languages, but it did not change the status of Arabic. But the domains of official use are limited, just as they were limited in the original King's-Order-in-Council of the British Mandatory Government. Arabic is used in a number of official areas. Coins, paper money and postage stamps use both Hebrew and Arabic. It is possible to use Arabic in the courts, and the laws legislated by the Knesset are published in Hebrew, and later in Arabic. Arab members of the Knesset may speak in Arabic, provided they advise the Speaker in time to arrange for interpretation. All Arab

schools use Arabic as the language of instruction. In addition, the Israel Broadcasting Service maintains a radio program in Arabic in addition to Hebrew and other foreign languages throughout most of the day (Network D) and broadcasts one and a half hours (on the average) of television in Arabic every day.

In 1952, there was an attempt to make Hebrew the exclusive language of the state; but this proposal was rejected by a majority of the members of the Knesset (Koplewitz (1992). In the debate in the Knesset, the Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, said:

We negate the assumption that one must forbid the Arab citizens the use of the Arabic language if they wish to use it anywhere, including the Knesset. The clear policy of Israel is to teach and impart knowledge of Hebrew to all the inhabitants, including the Arab minority. The Arab children want to learn Hebrew, but we will not forbid them the use of their language in any way, even not in the Knesset..... Yet the State must see to it that Hebrew be not only an official language, but must provide the means for imparting the knowledge of Hebrew to immigrants and to all residents of Israel, without depriving the Arab minority of the right to its own language (Proceedings of the Knesset, 1952, vol. 12: 2550; quoted in Fisherman (1972: 9-10).

This was not the last attempt. A similar move in the Knesset in 1980 failed. The idea of making Hebrew the sole official language is put forward from time to time. In 1998 Knesset member Michael Kleiner (previously of the Geshar faction in the Likud, and today of the United National Party) brought up the idea in the media.

However, despite the fact that Arabic enjoys the status of an official language, Hebrew is clearly the preferred language in Israel. One can see this in two laws: The citizenship law of 1951 (Paragraph 5a) requires "some knowledge of the Hebrew language" as a condition for acquiring citizenship, while no such requirement is made for "some knowledge of Arabic." (Ben-Rafael, 1994; Hallel & Spolsky, 1993); The Chamber of Advocates Law of 1961 (Paragraph 26 [3]) requires "sufficient knowledge of Hebrew" in order to be registered as a law clerk (Ben-Rafael, 1994; Koplewitz, 1992). De facto, Hebrew is without doubt the dominant language in most public domains.

Thus, while Arabic is the medium of instruction in the Arab schools in Israel, other languages have important places. Arabic is the medium of instruction in all courses, the mother tongue of students and teachers alike, and the principal literacy and literary goal. Hebrew is studied as a second language from 3rd grade on, recognized as the language of the state (Winter, 1981), and studied for instrumental purposes. English, as a major international language, is taught as a foreign language from 4th grade on, and earlier where the school accedes to parental pressures. In addition, French is studied in a number of private religious schools as a second foreign language.

2. ARABIC

2.1 Arabic in the World

A review of the general status of the Arabic language will help understand the place of Arabic in Israel.

For the most part Arabic dialects are classified according to geographical area: North African countries, Egypt, Persian Gulf States and the Middle East countries (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine) (Ferguson, 1959). There is also a division according to demographic groups and settlement types – urban versus rural, sedentary versus nomads (Bedouins) (Al-Husri, 1976: 42f.). The various dialects used in Arab countries serve not only for communication, but carry a high degree of sociolinguistic weight, for the dialect characteristic of a specific population shares its social, political and economic status and emphasizes its uniqueness and emotional attachment.¹

The Arabs in Israel speak the Palestinian dialect — which has within it groups of sub-dialects (Galilee, Little Triangle and Negev). While related to the dialects of surrounding countries, it is different from them and even more different from the dialects of Egypt and North Africa.

In twenty-three countries of the Middle East (all except Turkey and Iran) and North Africa in the Arab league for whom Arabic is an official language (Suleiman, 1999). In four countries (Israel, Chad, Somalia, and Djibouti), Arabic is an official language alongside other languages. Beyond this, Arabic has a special status in Islamic countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia as the language of the Koran.

Arabic serves as a language of communication in a large number of Arab and Muslim countries, and it is also recognized as an official language in international organizations such as the Arab League, the African Unity Organization, the Islamic Congress, the Muslim Organization for Education, and Science and Culture (Hijazi, 1992: 102f.) In 1970 Arabic was recognized as an official language in UNESCO and afterwards in the United Nations, and in the International Food and Agriculture Organization. The penetration of Arabic into these organizations has contributed directly to the strengthening of its status as an important language in the international community alongside the European languages.

¹ The Egyptian and Syrian dialects, for example, enjoy prestige in the Arab world today, among other reasons because of the special political and historical backgrounds of the two countries.

2.2 Diglossia in Arabic

Arabic is considered an archetype of the linguistic situation known as diglossia (Ferguson, 1959). There exist simultaneously two linguistic systems, a written language and a spoken language (Brosh, 1996: 64) showing great differences both in form and symbolic values.² Understanding a piece of literature requires a large and different vocabulary from that of the spoken variety. It is common to define the Arabic language as two languages – literary and spoken, but a division into three is also sustainable³ (Blau, 1976; Brosh, 1996: 65):

1. *Standard Arabic*. This variety is used in formal settings, at school, on television, and for university lectures, to mention just a few examples. In terms of phonology, this variety should not, at least in principle, depart from Classical Arabic. However, since this variety is learned through schooling as a second language and not acquired naturally through use at home, traces of the mother dialect are discernible when it is spoken. In phonology, it is quite similar to Classical Arabic, except for the lack of inflectional systems in nouns and verbs, which makes a difference in pronouncing the end of words. In terms of syntax, there is no difference between Standard Arabic and Classical Arabic except the lack of an inflectional system. Its lexical items are drawn from Classical Arabic, but it attempts to avoid archaic forms and to use items which are shared by the Spoken Variety and Educated Spoken Arabic. The use of foreign items in this variety is rare; they are used only where there is no alternative. However, there is no use of expressions, sentences, or segments of foreign languages as is the case in the Spoken Variety and Educated Spoken Arabic.

² The spoken language and the written language are distinct in three main features: In dependence on context, in stability and in the degree of linguistic control (Schlesinger, 1996).

³ Meiseles (1975) suggested another division of Arabic into four linguistic variants:

- a. Standard Arabic, i.e., the classic literary language.
- b. Sub-standard Arabic – the linguistic type of contemporary Arabic which characterizes the ambition of speakers or writers in general to restore the literary language. However, for whatever reasons, mostly non-linguistic (such as spontaneous speaking or writing, lack of sufficient knowledge of the norms of literary Arabic, pressure from native dialects or foreign languages, speaking or writing in less formal situations, convenience or negligence, etc.) deviations from the norms of literary Arabic have appeared and a mixture of dialect bases to a great extent.
- c. The superior spoken Arabic – described by Cadore (Cadore, 1975: 134) as the semi-formal Arabic which is the common spoken language of the learned.
- d. The local Arabic dialects – a regional language, and every region develops local dialects of its own.

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