

Good Arabic: Ability and Ideology in the Egyptian Arabic Speech Community

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This paper reports on the results of research conducted in Cairo, Egypt, on the abilities of native speakers of Arabic with their standard language. While it is assumed that most speakers control their own colloquial dialect perfectly, the results of a grammar test administered to more than 150 subjects of various ages, both sexes, and various levels of education indicate that while there are some aspects of the grammar that are apparently learned well by all, there are many common difficult constructions that are controlled by only a small minority. Subjects also consistently scored better on the multiple choice items than on corresponding items in a production test. Reading, writing, listening and speaking tests (all based on the proficiency testing model) were also administered to these same subjects. Results indicate that average educated subjects are proficient readers and listeners (the receptive skills), but are deficient speakers and writers (the productive skills). A discussion of an appropriate model for analyzing the social position of Standard Arabic ensues, and the results of a set of surveys are presented that throw light on how Egyptians view this language. The paper concludes that Egyptians have not yet made up their minds to agree on exactly what "good" Arabic is, and suggests that what "good" Arabic ultimately comes to be for these people will be a result of the clash of the incompatible views of it which they currently hold.

Introduction¹

For the last two decades, variationists and sociolinguists have been describing the variation of linguistic production over time, geographic space, and over social space, styles and registers. In this paper, I am going to look at a kind of language variability that is closely related to these, but which is not so commonly studied by linguists, and which at first glance many lin-

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guists would simply reject as worthy of study at all. I refer to variability in language ability. Users of language, people, do vary considerably in their control of particular language forms. Despite theoretical and methodological problems, most would agree that some use language better, or more effectively, or more elegantly or appealingly than others. One of the most intractable problems of second language acquisition research is explaining why language learners are so different from each other, why it is so difficult to guarantee the outcome of any particular approach or method for any particular student (see Spolsky, 1989). From an educator's point of view, the same can be said for first language acquisition.

The problem some linguists might have with this, in relation to a speaker's native language, is that it doesn't seem to square with one of the basic assumptions of modern linguistics, which is that all native speakers of a language know it perfectly, by definition. I do not propose to confront this assumption head on, although I do think it presents a number of problems and that speakers do vary somewhat in their ability even with their informal daily language, but it is necessary to point out that this assumption could only refer to the informal end of an educated speaker's linguistic repertoire. In any language situation with a relatively codified, formal, probably mainly written end of the linguistic spectrum, one is likely to find extreme variability among speakers or users both in their knowledge of the formal variety and their ability to use it effectively. Educators know this intuitively, of course, and have even come up with relatively circular explanatory constructs, equivalent to IQ, to deal with it. These are known as language ability, verbal ability, language learning ability, etc., as well as their opposites, language disability, etc. One problem that has only recently begun to be faced in this regard is that it is often almost impossible to distinguish between lack of ability and a purposeful "aiming lower" for social or stylistic purposes. In other words, when a speaker uses non-standard forms, we usually cannot tell whether this was the only thing available in his repertoire, or whether more standard forms were in fact available and the speaker chose to avoid them, or possibly a combination of both.

It is in the context of this variability, and our current inability to explain it adequately, that I ask the main question of this paper: Why is it most Arabs do not speak/write their own standard language well? Before beginning to answer this question, I would like to make it clear that this is not

really my question. If it were, it would be of little interest, and would imply an Orientalist “condescension” not worthy of credible scholarship. As one scholar wrote to me: it would seem that I am holding Arabs to a standard of how I think they should talk. In fact, the only reason the question is of interest is because Arabs in general, and Egyptian Arabs in particular, ask it of themselves constantly. Many, if not most, educated Egyptians believe firmly that their actual performance of their own language falls short of a perceived goal or target. A large majority, when asked on a survey if they believed they should try to speak better Arabic in their daily lives strongly agreed, and an even larger majority were willing to criticize, on the same survey, the oral use of Arabic by radio and television announcers and other public persons. One of the most common topics for Mubarak jokes these days concerns his inability with Arabic. Theorists and other writers on Arab Nationalist topics constantly point out the importance of “good” Arabic for holding the Arab Nation together, and it is almost impossible to have a conversation with an Egyptian Muslim fundamentalist these days without being informed of a western plot to undermine the Arabic language, and therefore Islam, by encouraging the use of regional and dialectal forms.

As a western educated linguist, of course, it is impossible for me to believe that one form of Arabic is intrinsically better than another, although I readily recognize that some forms have carved out communicative niches for themselves and therefore have become more adapted to their particular social space than others currently would be. As a sociolinguist, however, I am extremely interested in why it is that Arabs find their own performance defective, and why with such seemingly strongly held beliefs they still have not found a way to train their children to talk the way they think they should talk. Why don't there seem to be many native users or even near-native users of what Egyptians themselves define as “good” Arabic? What, in fact, is “good” Arabic for Egyptians?

These questions were the impetus for a research project conducted in Cairo in 1989–90 under the auspices of a Fulbright grant. Several methods were used to try to answer them, from participant observation, to matched guise experiments, to survey data, to actually testing native speakers on their language proficiency.

Grammar Test

One possible reason why Egyptians don't use "good" Arabic very often or very well, is that they may simply be unable to. In other words, despite the best efforts of the education establishment, they have not learned or acquired it very well. In order to test this possibility, I designed a grammar test which covers many of the "difficult" aspects of "good" Arabic grammar, as well as some of the more basic aspects of it. This test consisted of three parts: 1) 80 multiple choice items, 2) eight written questions in which subjects had to respond in "good" Arabic, most of them involving changing a clearly colloquial sentence to "good" Arabic, and 3) a written text with some words underlined and for which the subjects had to provide the grammatical marking.

Before presenting the results of this test, it is necessary to give some background to understand a little of how Arabic grammar works and how it is different from the colloquial versions of Arabic that speakers learn at home as children. Classical Arabic grammar was codified in the 9th century, and has been one of the major fields of study of Muslim scholars since that time. One of the most striking features of the grammar is the use of what I will here call vowel endings, grammatical markers on the ends of all nouns, adjectives, verbs and other categories of words. These markers mark case and definiteness on nouns and adjectives, and mood on verbs. Although the basic grammatical system is rather simple, consisting of only three cases traditionally labeled nominative, accusative and genitive, combined with a marker of definiteness, the marking system itself is enormously complex, with various subclasses of words bearing different markings for the same case, and with a variable system of suppressing the vowel markers in certain circumstances, referred to as pause form. Further, Arabic is written with script that leaves out the short vowels. Although these vowels may be indicated by small marks placed above and below the letters, they rarely are, in practice, included. Thus, the grammatical markers included on every noun, adjective and verb are not usually written, and the reader must supply them as he reads along from his own knowledge of the grammar. Classical Arabic is basically a VSO language, although considerable variation of word order is allowed for pragmatic purposes.

The colloquial variety of Arabic is actually a number of varieties. These

are the local dialects, which vary from place to place. For the purpose of this presentation, we will restrict our attention to Cairene Arabic, the dialect spoken in Cairo, Egypt and its environs. Although comparing the difficulty of two languages is a risky business, since a simplification in one part of the language often is accompanied by a complication elsewhere, still most would agree that Cairene Arabic is “easier” than Classical Arabic, both for native speakers and for learners. The most obvious difference is that the vowel endings are almost entirely missing, except for a few frozen forms. Word order is basically SVO and is more strictly adhered to than in Classical Arabic, although some variation is still allowed.

Both Classical Arabic and Cairene Arabic are varieties of Arabic, and thus share much in common, not the least of which is the basic tri-consonantal pattern of most roots, the basic root and pattern system of deriving related words, the basic verb system, the basic phonological system, and many lexical items. They differ in the details. Classical Arabic has only three vowels, while Cairene Arabic has five; Classical Arabic has several interdental consonants which don't exist in Cairene; Classical Arabic has a fully functional dual in verbs, adjectives, pronouns, demonstratives and nouns, while Cairene Arabic has only dual nouns, and even these are somewhat restricted; Classical Arabic maintains a gender distinction in the plural of pronouns, nouns, adjectives and verbs, while colloquial Arabic has no gender distinctions in the plural. Some of the most common constructions are the most different, and these have thus become markers of the difference between the two varieties. These would include verb negation, the forms for “there is” and for “to have”, the verbs “to want,” “to see,” “to go,” etc., the demonstrative constructions and the use of numbers with nouns. Since short vowels are not written in Arabic script, it is possible to construct a paragraph on paper that could be read as either Classical Arabic or Cairene Arabic, but this could not last for more than one or two sentences before something gave away which variety was being used. When spoken aloud, of course, the distinction would be immediately obvious, since the Classical Arabic performance would include the vowel endings, and the Cairene performance would not, not to mention the other phonological differences. We can therefore quite confidently state that users of these forms would not normally confuse the two.

In order to better understand the relationship between the two forms, I

have constructed two pairs of sentences. In each case, the first sentence is in Classical Arabic, and the second is the equivalent sentence in Cairene Arabic.

1. a. *manah-a r-ragul-u kitaab-a-n 'ilaa 'ustaaθ-i-hi.*
 granted-3ms the-man-nom book-acc-indef to professor-gen-his.

fully vowelled script version *مَنَحَ الرَّجُلُ كِتَابًا إِلَى أُسْتَاذِهِ.*

unvowelled script version *منح الرجل كتابا إلى أستاذة.*

1. b. *ir-raagil manah kitaab li-'ustaaθ-u.*
 the-man granted book to-professor-his.

'The man granted a book to his professor.' *الراجل منح كتاب لأستاذة.*

2. a. *'u-riid-u 'an 'u-saahid-a haaθaa l-film.*
 I_s-want-indicative that I_s-see-subjunctive this the-film.

fully vowelled script version *أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَشَاهِدَ هَذَا الْفِلمَ.*

unvowelled script version *أريد أن أشاهد هذا الفلم.*

2. b. *'aawiz 'a-suuf il-film da.*
 want I_s-see the-film this.

'I want to see this film.' *عاوز أشوف الفلم ده.*

The first pair demonstrates that much of the basic lexicon and morphology is similar between the two languages. Word order is different, but each main lexical item has a cognate in the other form. Differences include some internal vowels (*rajul/raagil*), the change of the interdental to a palatal (*'ustaaθ/'ustaaz*), a reduced form of the preposition 'to', and most noticeably, the lack of the verbal and nominal endings in the Cairene sentence. When written without vowels, as it usually is, the sentences in Classical and Cairene also look more or less alike. One of the most noticeable differences in the script itself is the accusative indefinite ending /-an/on '*kitaab*' in Classical which does not appear in the colloquial. Although most of the grammar vowels are not written in the script but are supplied by the reader, the /-an/ is written even when other vowel endings are not.

The second pair demonstrates the situation where many of the most common words and constructions are different. Here, for example, we notice differences in the word for “want”, the word for “to see”, and the demonstrative construction, where the demonstrative comes before the noun in Classical and after it in Cairene.

With that background, we will now return to discussing the grammar test. It was given to about 150 Egyptian subjects from different ages, sexes, and levels of education. The results were analyzed by dividing the subjects into groups based on two ages (young and old, the dividing line being 42 years of age), on the two sexes, and on four levels of education, those with less than a high school education, those with at least a high school education, those with a college education, and those with a college education and a specialty in the Arabic language. The latter group would include those trained as Arabic language teachers, journalists, writers, religious leaders, and others for whom “good” Arabic is part of their job description. Table 1 summarizes the not terribly surprising overall results.

Table 1. Results of Grammar Test by Level of Education (% correct)

HiAr	73%
Hi	61%
Mid	48%
Lo	21%

To briefly characterize these scores, they indicate that Arabic specialists got about three fourths of the questions correct, college educated subjects about two thirds, high school educated subjects less than half, and subjects with less than a high school education less than a fourth correct (worse than random guessing). To better understand these results, we need to examine a few representative items individually.

The first example question tests subjects knowledge of the genitive sound masculine plural when it is the first term of a genitive construct. The sound masculine plural is an /-uuna/ ending in the nominative and /-iina/ in the accusative and genitive, but drops the /na/ when it is the first term of a genitive construct. The four answers give the word as /-uuna/, /iina/, /-uu/, and /-ii/, the latter being the correct answer. The Cairene version of this construction is universally /-iin/ with the /n/ never dropping. The second answer would thus be closest to the colloquial. The results are quite informative.

They indicate, first, that subjects with specialized Arabic education have acquired this rule relatively completely, 90% showing correct responses. College and high school educated subjects, however, show much less familiarity with the rule, and further show little difference from each other, indicating that nothing happens in college to increase overall ability with this rule. A look at the incorrect responses is also interesting. Only 6% of the subjects overall choose response “a” or “b”. This is somewhat surprising, since both are closer to colloquial than either “c” or “d”. In other words, subjects clearly have no problem with the rule that the final *nuun* is to be dropped when the sound masculine plural is the first term of the genitive construct. (They are getting something out of their schooling.) What they do have a lot of trouble with is choosing the correct overt case marking. Note that this is not a vowelizing problem since the case marker actually appears in an unvoveled text for sound masculine plurals. Note also that the correct answer, “d”, is closer to the colloquial than “c”, which was by far the most common incorrect response, indicating that subjects who weren’t sure of the rule (almost half of the Mid subjects and over a third of the Hi subjects) chose the form that was most clearly not colloquial, a strategy that appears to be rather common.

Example 1. (Genitive Sound Masculine plural noun as first term of *idaafa*)

Overall	58%
Hi Ar	90%
Hi	59%
Mid	51%
Lo	7%

قابل رئيس الجمهورية عددا من الأساتذة و _____ النقابات.

- ا - ممثلون
 ب - ممثلين
 ج - ممثلر
 د - مثلي

qaabal-a ra'iis-u l-jumhuuriyyat-i 'adad-a-n mina
 met-3ms president-nom the-republic-gen number-acc-indef of
 l-'asaatiḍat-i wa-_____ n-naqaabaat-i.
 the-professors-gen and-_____ the-unions-gen.

‘The president of the republic met a number of the professors and _____ of the unions.’ (the blank is to be filled with a form of the word for “representatives”)

(Note that I have marked all short vowels in the transliteration, which must therefore be supplied by the reader, as bold. The correct answer must be genitive—with an /-iina/ rather than an /-uuna/ ending—and reflect the fact that it is the first term of a possessive construct—by having

dropped the /-na/ from the ending. The corresponding colloquial form is *mumassiliin*, closest to answer ‘b’.)

- a. *mumaththiluuna* (Wrong: it is nominative, and the /-na/ has not been dropped)
- b. *mumaththiliina* (Wrong: it is genitive, but the /-na/ has not been dropped)
- c. *mumaththiluu* (Wrong: it is nominative)
- d. *mumaththilii* (Right: it is genitive and the /-na/ has been dropped)

I do not believe it would be fair to claim that the rule in question here is a rare or esoteric rule. Such structures are very commonly encountered in the press and elsewhere. Note that lack of knowledge of this rule would probably not affect a person’s reading ability, and so may not be very serious for many, but it would clearly affect one’s writing ability.

We find throughout the test that most of the straightforward case marking questions yield results similar to these.

The second example involves a much more difficult vowel- ing question, the agreement of a feminine singular adjective with a feminine sound plural noun, since the marking system requires that they be marked differently in order to agree. In other words, the head noun is marked with /i/ for accusative, while the adjective must be marked with /a/. The third choice, “c”, is the correct answer. Clearly, there is almost no control over this aspect of vowel- ing, with the overall score being equivalent to the random guessing score. Even for the Arabic specialists, less than half scored correctly, and the Hi and Mid are again indistinguishable, but this time at less than random level. And interestingly, although “a”, the trick answer, was the most common answer overall, all of the wrong possibilities were chosen very frequently, with each scoring at least 18% of all responses, again indicating a certain randomness, and absolute lack of even a very strong idea of the correct answer. Both of these results make us wonder what it means for “good” Arabic as an active form, that many of its users appear not to control the basic rules.

Example 2. (accusative /a/ agreement of feminine singular adjective with sound feminine plural accusative /i/)

ban-at *al-hukumat-u* *haaḏihi* *l-mataaraat-i* _____ .
 built-fs the-government-nom. these the-airports-acc _____ .

'The government built these big airports.'

Overall	23 %
Hi Ar	43 %
Hi	21 %
Mid	23 %
Lo	10 %

بنت الحكومة هذه المطارات _____

ا - الكبيرة
 ب - الكبيرة
 ج - الكبيرة
 د - الكبيرة

(The answer is a form of the adjective *kabiira* 'big'. Although the head noun "airports" is accusative, it is marked /-i/ since that is the [exceptional] accusative marker for sound feminine plurals [/-/i/ otherwise normally marks genitive]. To agree with it, *kabiira* 'big' must be marked /-a/. Thus, 'c' is the correct answer. Note that although short vowels are normally not marked, the question supplies the /-i/ on *l-mataaraat-i* in order to prime the subjects.)

- al-kabiirat-i (Wrong, this is genitive)
- al-kabiirat-u (Wrong, this is nominative)
- al-kabiirat-a (Correct, this is accusative)
- al-kabiirat- ϕ (Wrong, this is a written attempt at pause form which can occur only orally, not on paper)

Other questions tested knowledge of internal vowels in words which are cognate with colloquial words but which differ in vowels. We find that at least 30% of even Mid and Hi subjects do not know the correct forms. Again, is Arabic that is perfectly fine as written on the page still "good Arabic" when it is read aloud or silently with incorrect vowels?

Our third example comes from the portion of the test where subjects were required to vowel the endings of words in context. Actually producing a vowel is clearly more difficult than choosing one from a list. This question is, however, about as basic as one can get in vowing, involving the marking of the subject as *nominative*. Arabic specialists do quite well here, but less than half of college and high school graduates were able to vowel the subject correctly, and again their scores are similar to each others. The Lo score higher than might be expected, about one third getting it right, but this must be tempered by the understanding that we are only counting answers that were actually attempted, and more than half of the Lo subjects simply refused to do the vowing section of the test.

Example 3. (voweling of definite subject of sentence—production test in which subjects were asked to vowel the ending of the underlined word)

Overall	50%
Hi Ar	80%
Hi	45%
Mid	41%
Lo	31%

لام يكن هذا الأسلوب مجرد شعار جديد .

wa-lam ya-kun haaðaa l-'usluub-? mujarrad-a sa'aar-i-n
 and-not 3ms-was this the-style just-acc slogan-gen-indef
 jadiid-i-n.
 new-gen-indef.

'This style was not just a new slogan.'

(Subjects were required to supply the vowel on *l-'usluub* 'style' which is clearly the definite subject of the sentence, therefore to be marked nominative /-u/. Note that since the passage is written unvoweled, as is normal, the other vowel markers are not actually written, but are presumed to be supplied by the reader. I have marked these as bold in the transliteration of this question.)

The fourth example involves the same adjective problem as the second, but this time the subjects had to produce the vowel themselves. Interestingly, subjects, nearly two thirds of whom could choose the correct vowel for a direct object right after a verb, apparently had absolutely no idea how to vowel this adjective. No group, not even the Arabic specialists, could handle it, with not even one fourth of any group answering correctly. The results, further, were very mixed up, with Hi scoring higher than Hi Arabic Related, and Lo scoring higher than Mid, indicating a diversity of guessing strategies.

Example 4. (voweling of indefinite accusative adjective agreeing with sound feminine plural—production test in which subjects were asked to vowel the ending of the underlined word; compare # 2 above)

Overall	16%
Hi Ar	20%
Hi	23%
Mid	4%
Lo	17%

وسوف يتناول الأسلوب الجديد للتعليم توجهات جذرية جديدة
لأهم المواد بالمدارس.

wa - sawfa ya - tanaawal - u l - 'usluub - u l - jadiid - u
and - future 3ms - deal - with - indicative the - style - nom the - new - nom
li - t - ta'lim - i tawjiihaat - i - n juḍriyyat - a - n jadiidat - ?
of - the - education - gen directions - acc - indef basic - acc - indef new - ?
li - 'ahamm - i l - mawaadd - i bi - l - madaaris - i.
for - most - important - gen the - subjects - gen in - the - schools - gen

'The new style of education will deal with new basic directions for the most important subjects in the schools.'

(This time without priming, the subjects needed to recognize that the underlined word is an adjective modifying the object of the verb: an indefinite sound feminine plural accusative marked /-in/, and that the adjective therefore required the marking /-an/.)

Questions from the second part of the test, in which subjects had to actually produce Arabic sentences from Colloquial prompts, are also revealing. For example, one question included an indefinite masculine object, which would require the addition of an *alif* to mark grammar even in an unvoiced text. The results are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Adding Accusative marker to *rajul*

HIAR	62.9	O	75.0
		Y	60.1
HI	46.1	O	58.8
		Y	40.0
MID	31.3	O	58.8
		Y	16.1
LO	20.0	O	18.2
		Y	21.4

It is interesting to note that subjects generally scored less well on this production test than on equivalent items in the multiple choice section. On

the multiple choice equivalent questions, Hi and Mid subjects scored about two-thirds correct responses, while here they scored less than half. The pattern of Old and Young responses is also interesting; the old subjects scored uniformly higher than their young counterparts at each level of education other than Lo, and shockingly better at the Mid level. This tends to confirm what many Egyptians claim: The old education system before the revolution produced better results when it comes to Arabic grammatical proficiency than the modern system does.

To summarize the results, it appears that there are some very basic items, mostly those which are similar to colloquial, but also some others, which everyone with at least a high school education appears to have acquired. There are then a large number of grammar points which Arabic specialists have acquired well but which only a half to two thirds of those with at least a high school education appear to have acquired. Finally, there are many "difficult" points which few if any acquire, including the Arabic specialists. We further have detected a strategy in which subjects who are not sure of the correct answer tend to choose a form that is most distant from the colloquial form they know, and we have also seen that subjects score quite a bit worse in actual production than in multiple choice situations dealing with the same grammatical construction. In short, it does appear that many Egyptian Arabs do not produce "good" Arabic because they do not know how to. Focusing on the Mid and Hi categories, which represent the huge numerical majority of users of the form, we find that one half to one third of them cannot answer straightforward grammatical questions when presented to them directly in multiple choice format, and that over one half to two thirds cannot consistently produce grammatically correct sentences with the straightforward constructions. With the difficult constructions, we find that over three fourths of our users have no understanding of the constructions, and no ability to use them correctly. We can thus assume a large degree of failure in the attempts of the Egyptian education system to teach "good" Arabic to its students.

Knowledge Of and Knowledge To

There is, however, something wrong with this answer to our original question. Theorists have long recognized two ways of knowing things which I will characterize as knowing about something and knowing how to do something. These two kinds of knowledge can coincide but do not neces-

srily. For example, a person may know everything there is to know about riding a bike, being loaded with information about gear ratios, peddle straps, the mechanics of balance, etc., but he may or may not be able to actually ride a bike. And while such a knowledgeable person may find his knowledge somewhat useful once he actually does start learning to ride, he will almost certainly be surprised how much more it takes than just knowledge to actually be able to do it. Language appears to be the same kind of activity. One can learn everything about a language, memorize lists of words, understand grammatical rules, etc. (even get a Ph. D. in the language) and for some people this knowledge is helpful in actually using the language. However, the actual processes or skills of reading, writing, speaking and understanding oral speech turn out to depend on much more than just knowledge of the language. There is abundant evidence that being able to perform in actual communicative situations is a separate skill.

In asking how well Egyptians know "good" Arabic, therefore, we need to know not only something about their overt knowledge of the rules of Arabic grammar, but also about how well they actually deal with it in situations where it is required. It makes little difference for most of these people whether they are able to accurately identify some grammatical structure (an example of knowledge of), but it makes an immense difference to them whether or not they can read the newspaper easily enough to do it consistently, or whether they can write competently enough to get a certain administrative job (examples of knowledge to). This point was brought graphically home to me when I tried to test a young man with only two years of elementary education. He didn't seem to be doing anything with the first test, a reading test, so I sat by him and asked him to read me the first sentence. He looked for a long time at the first word, which was *yasilu*, and finally said *fii*. I responded: "I thought you told me you knew how to read!" He replied: "I can read some of the letters, just not all of them. Do you think you could come and teach me the rest of the letters so I can read the signs above the shops so I can know what kind of a shop it is?" Besides bringing tears to my eyes, I believe this experience beautifully illustrates the point that even minor increases in actual proficiency can have a major impact on the communicative lives of individuals. I thus decided to try to determine how well Egyptians knew Arabic by testing their proficiency in actually using it in the four modalities of reading, writing, speaking

and listening. I wanted to test all four skills, since it is possible for a person to be an extremely proficient reader, but a terrible writer, etc. For a form that is experienced by most of its users much more often in the receptive rather than productive mode, I assumed that I might find such a pattern.

I do not have time here to discuss the development of the notion of proficiency testing in the second language teaching field. I will simply state that proficiency tests are criteria referenced rather than norm referenced, and that they try to test language ability in its natural setting and in a wholistic rather than piecemeal manner. The 0–5 scale adopted for many proficiency tests has achieved wide acceptance in professional and academic circles, not so much because people believe that it is the only way to divide up the proficiency continuum, but simply because it is widely understood, and is thus maximally useful for comparative purposes.

It is understood that testing the proficiency of speakers of a foreign language is not exactly the same as testing native speaker's proficiency in their own formal language. Descriptors had to be modified somewhat to match the situation, and colloquial communication had to be discounted. However, it is clear that there are many similarities in the situations. "Good" Arabic is not learned at home as a native language, but rather in school and other educational settings. And users vary dramatically in their abilities with it, which is not true of their vernacular where variation in ability is more subtle and hard to define. The task here was to develop a series of tests which as closely as possible reflected the actual communicative tasks for which native speakers have to use their formal language in the course of their daily lives. For the two receptive skills, listening and reading, this meant finding authentic spoken and written texts which could be graded on a proficiency scale, but which were not overly technical or specialized or intended for a specific audience. For the simpler texts I choose news items and simple news analysis. For the more complicated texts, I choose editorials, and articles from magazines and books which could be considered part of the "National Dialogue." For the two production skills, speaking and writing, I needed to find a set of relatively authentic production tasks to ask each subject to perform. In writing, they were asked to describe a series of pictures, tell a story, write an essay about a given topic, pretend to be the secretary of a company and respond to a letter received, and to turn the text of a colloquial news interview into an article in gram-

matical Arabic. In the speaking test, each subject was told that they were to pretend to be in a country where only “good” Arabic was spoken. The native speaker tester then responded to any colloquial forms produced with “I don’t understand that. Could you say it in “good” Arabic?” Other techniques such as role play were also used in the oral interview to push the subjects to give as much formal, grammatical Arabic as they could.

In Table 3, I have listed the proficiency correlates of the average scores of each education group in my sample. In parentheses, after each average rating, I have included the actual range of ratings obtained by subjects in that group.

Table 3. Proficiency Correlates of Basic Skills’ Scores

	Lo	Mid	Hi	HiAr
Reading	1 (0-2+)	2 (1-3)	3 (1-4)	3 (1-4)
Listening	1 (0-2+)	2 (1-3)	3 (2-4)	2+ (1-3+)
Writing	1 (0-2+)	2 (0-3+)	2+ (1+-4)	3 (1+-4)
Speaking	0+ (0-2)	2 (0-4)	2+ (1-4+)	3 (0-4+)

Subjects in the Lo education category achieved a mean score of 1 in Reading, Listening and Writing, but only a 0+ in Speaking. A 1 indicates that the subject is operating in that skill at the single sentence level, able to slowly understand, or produce short simple independent sentences, but unable to deal with longer texts. A 0+ indicates someone who is dealing with a few words and phrases of memorized material.

Subjects in the Mid education category, high school graduates, scored, on average, at the 2 level in all four skill tests. A 2 is remarkably fluent in both reception and production, having no problems with longer texts of straightforward narrative and description. He breaks down, however, when confronted with more complicated or analytical texts, has trouble drawing inferences, and produces texts that while understandable are so full of grammatical and other errors that they may not be accepted by others as examples of “good” Arabic.

Subjects in the Hi category, college graduates, averaged a score of 3 in the receptive skills, Reading and Listening, but only 2+ in the productive skills, Writing and Speaking. In receptive skills, a 3 means the subject is good at making inferences, and can handle most analytical and hypothetical

texts, although he may still break down with the most complex philosophical texts and with very classicized texts. A 3 in the productive skills no longer makes consistent grammatical errors, and produces text that would be taken by most to be examples of “good” Arabic, although usually without significant vowelings. The average 2+ in the productive skills earned by Hi subjects indicates that while they approach the skills of a 3, they still cannot produce texts free of patterned errors.

Subjects in the Hi Arabic Related category, college graduates with Arabic language specialties, scored 3 on reading, just like those in the Hi category. They scored lower than the Hi subjects, however, on the Listening test (a 2+), and higher than the Hi subjects on the Writing and Speaking tests (3’s).

Although on average no group approached a 4 or 5 score, some individuals in the Hi and Hi Arabic Related categories did achieve 4’s. Subjects who scored 4 on the reading test had no trouble understanding complicated philosophical prose. Subjects in the 3 range, who are otherwise good readers, simply break down when they reach a passage by Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, for example, even if it is intended for a general audience. More than one 3 informed me that they simply would not even try to read those passages because they always engendered headaches. A 4 plows right ahead and makes sense of it. A 5 is not only as adept as a 4 in reading complicated prose, but is also steeped in the traditions of classical Arabic literature, so that *recherché* texts, which although modern breathe a classical spirit and which use much unfamiliar vocabulary and an archaic and convoluted style, present no problems for him. Further, he knows so well the traditional genres and the great texts of the tradition that he instantly recognizes literary allusions to these texts, and examples of these genres with all that this recognition implies in terms of increased understanding of the text. For the writing test, a 4 indicates that the subject not only can write competently and express himself on a wide range of subjects, but can also do it with such a fine style that educated readers would recognize it as “good” Arabic, not just correct Arabic. This is writing that is convincing, and fine enough to appear in a newspaper or magazine, i. e. it may be termed good journalistic Arabic. A 5 not only writes well, but with an awareness of classical norms, vocabulary and styles. For Speaking, a 4 indicates not just an ability to express oneself, but further the ability to do it in an attractive

and convincing manner. Although ending vowels need not be used consistently, they would be used frequently and always correctly. A 5 in Speaking would speak with classical pronunciation, with full vowels, with elegant, redundant and convoluted expression, in a way that is clearly accepted as *fusha*, beautiful Arabic.

It is interesting, in looking at these proficiency scores, to look at the subjects in each category who scored particularly high on a particular test. There were often personal reasons why a subject became good at a particular skill. Some Mid male subjects, for example, give the Friday religious sermons in local mosques. These subjects scored comparatively very high on speaking, even though this extra ability did not translate into higher scores on the other tests. Very high scores in reading were obtained by self-described passionate readers. In short, it appears that people get good at what they get a lot of practice in doing.

To come back, therefore, to the original question, what do these scores tell us about Egyptians' ability? It seems clear that although high school educated persons can read straightforward material fluently, and while college educated persons read even better than that, productive skills clearly lag behind, with even the average college educated subjects unable to produce a convincing performance (either written or spoken) of "good" Arabic. In other words, although there are many exceptions, the huge majority of educated Egyptians don't speak and write "good" Arabic very much not just because they choose not to, but because they can't. And one can only assume that parents and teachers who themselves are not proficient users of the form would have trouble teaching it adequately to the next generation, thus perpetuating the situation. Why, then, can't the Arabs teach their children how to speak? Simply, because they themselves both do not and cannot speak that way, and there is thus no effective mechanism for engendering that ability in the next generation.

Diglossia

At this point, I am going to be forced to admit that I have been cheating. I have been referring to "good" Arabic as if it were a well defined and agreed upon thing. The actual situation is somewhat more complex as I will now explain. Ferguson (1959) chose Arabic as one of the defining cases of

what he called diglossia. This is a language situation in which distinct Hi and Lo varieties of a language co-exist in a single speech community, and indeed within individual speakers. Although both varieties may be used in written or oral forms, the Hi variety tends to be a literary language with a long classical tradition, while the Lo variety tends to be mainly a spoken language, used for everyday communication. Unlike the situation where there exists a Standard dialect in an urban center, and a regional dialect in an outlying area, diglossia refers to a situation where the two languages are used throughout the speech community, each with a clearly defined social role. Specifically, the high variety is designated as a “very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature of an earlier period, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.”

Figure 1. Diglossia Model.

LO	HI
Colloquial Arabic (Cairene)	Classical Arabic

For Arabic, the Hi variety is Classical Arabic. Native Speakers refer to this variety as *fusha*, ‘the most beautiful.’ This language overflows with religious and cultural significance. It is the language of the Qur’an, all early religious literature and commentary, of Islamic Philosophy, of Arabic Poetry, and of early and medieval prose literature. It is a very poetic, “arty” language, even in prose styles, with much attention paid to form and expression. Multileveled parallelism, alliteration, internal rhyming, strict monorhyming, closely packed similes and metaphors, and many other rhetorical figures were given much importance. Even prose was typically rhymed. A language that clearly values virtuosity, Classical Arabic has an enormous vocabulary with a multitude of synonyms, and highly obscure and difficult passages are valued. The Qur’an itself is taken to be a model of good Arabic style. Much of it is rhymed, all is rhythmic, and it is full of impressive but obscure images and all kinds of rhetorical figures.

The Lo variety is the dialect, for our purposes, Cairene Colloquial, which we have already discussed.

Modern Standard Arabic: Fusha or Not?

Although Ferguson's concept of diglossia must be considered of seminal importance to the field of sociolinguistics, and is a true and insightful analysis from one point of view, a more fine-grained analysis of the language situation in Egypt turns up certain problems in applying it across the board. The first problem centrally concerns whose definition of Classical Arabic we are willing to use in our analysis, the researcher's or the native speaker's. If we decide to go with the native speaker's definition, what do we do if we find that significant numbers of native speakers disagree with each other about what Classical Arabic is? This is not a trivial problem, particularly for those native theoreticians whose central concern is authenticity.

To put the problem in straightforward terms, is Classical Arabic, *fusha*, simply the vocabulary and grammatical rules of the Classical Arabic of the literary tradition, or does it also include the "convoluted" classicizing stylistic features which accompanied that vocabulary and grammar? Further, how much development and modernization can Classical Arabic undergo and still be considered Classical Arabic. This is a problem for modern Arabs, Egyptians in particular, specifically because they are **modern** Arabs. They live in the same twentieth century we do, they have schools with a similar curriculum, they are taught the scientific method and skepticism, they dabble in modern philosophy, they are deeply involved in world politics, and their lives, frankly, have little in common with their ancestors who produced Classical Arabic literature. If Classical Arabic is kept pure, with no borrowings from European languages, no neologisms to express modern concepts, and with traditional rhetorical style, there is no question that it would not be a very adaptable tool for expressing twentieth century meanings. The Arabic Language Academy in Cairo was established in the early part of this century precisely because of this perceived deficiency, and members of the Academy have taken it as their goal to update the language, providing it with the vocabulary necessary for the modern world.

The work of the Academy, however, has been somewhat overtaken by events. In the early days, when large numbers of people still went to traditional schools, and were only slightly "westernized" or "modernized" if at all, the Academy might have hoped to keep ahead of natural developments. In the last 50 or so years, however, with the spread of literacy, the rise in

importance of newspapers, and the rapid and pervasive modernization of society and education, speakers have fended for themselves, so to speak. Modern Arabs don't feel the deficiency that their grandfathers did because there no longer is one: through borrowings from Western languages, neologisms, and other sources, the formal Arabic used in newspapers, school books, modern literature, news broadcasts, and most written and formal spoken settings has become a fully modern language, with words and expressions available for almost all conceivable modern concepts. Further, the old, convoluted rhetorical styles have quickly faded away, so that the language of the modern press, for example, is as straightforward as that of any European language. Western scholars have begun to refer to modernized Classical Arabic as Modern Standard Arabic, assuming that for most purposes, it is the version that must be considered the Hi of the diglossia situation rather than more old fashioned Classical Arabic.

Figure 2. Triglossia Model.

LO	HI	SUPER HI
Colloquial (Cairene)	Modern Standard	Classical

Educated Egyptians are still exposed to “pure” Classical Arabic, particularly in school, where they memorize large amounts of medieval poetry, and in religious settings, where they hear and read the Qur’an and listen to religious sermons, some of which, at least, strive to maintain the old forms, rhetorical styles and all. The huge majority of modern writing, however, and almost all formal speaking, is done in Modern Standard Arabic.

The question, therefore, is whether this modernized, straightforward form, which maintains much Classical Arabic vocabulary, and most Classical Arabic grammatical rules, although in somewhat simplified form, but which has done away with most of the stylistic rules, and has supplemented the vocabulary from a variety of sources, is still considered by Egyptians themselves to be Classical Arabic. Is Modern Standard Arabic *fusha* or not? This is a question on which native speakers have not yet agreed to agree. Some believe strongly that newspapers Arabic is not *fusha*, that it is oversimplified, influenced by colloquial and by foreign languages, and that it does not have the stylistic or grammatical breadth to qualify as *fusha*. Others, particularly those who work for newspapers, believe that newspa-

per Arabic is a worthy descendent of old *fusha*, and that it clearly deserves that designation itself, despite its adaptations to the modern age. For example, when I informed a dean at Al-Azhar University that I would be testing Egyptians on their ability with *fusha*, she informed me that they had no ability whatsoever. I countered that many could at least read the newspaper fluently, and she replied that there was no *fusha* in the newspaper. When I mentioned this and other anecdotes at a presentation in Cairo, however, I found that the newspapers the next day printed stories informing the public that newspaper Arabic was *fusha* after all. Many Egyptian scholars accept as a matter of ideological principle that modern *fusha* and medieval *fusha* are one and the same, leading to such anomalies as a dictionary published by the Arabic Language Academy in which modern and archaic usages are listed one after the other with absolutely no indication as to which is which. Ideological and religious factors are playing an important role here. Many believe that the point of preserving the Arabic of the heritage is specifically to unite the Arab Nation which historical accident has separated into different countries with different dialects, while others support a strong educational program in Classical *fusha* to keep children in touch with their great literary heritage. Others, of course, are more interested in the religious aspects of that heritage. The education system does appear to emphasize Classical as opposed to Modern Standard Arabic both in its curriculum and its exams, with questions testing obscure and archaic vocabulary and structures, and with an emphasis on reading and memorizing old poetry and other texts. There is not really an accepted term for Modern Standard Arabic other than *fusha*, however, so the line between the two forms is somewhat blurred. One subject, after reading the instructions to the writing test which asked her to write her responses in *fusha*, looked up and asked: "Should I write this in *fusha*, or *fusha fusha*?" implying something like "grammatically correct Modern Arabic" versus "Classical, convoluted, fancy Arabic."

The proficiency and grammar tests which I gave in Egypt dealt with the range of forms that could be called Modern Standard Arabic, not with real Classical Arabic, which everyone agrees is beyond the ability of almost all Egyptians, educated or not. However, it should be clear from the above that part of some Egyptians' perception that they don't know Arabic well stems from their understanding of "good" Arabic as representing archaic, diffi-

cult style or an attempt to impose aspects of archaic Arabic on modern usage.

We thus find that there are not only two versions of Arabic available in the speech community, but rather three, a truly classical Hi variety used mainly in religious and memorized settings, a modernized Hi variety used for most modern writing and formal speaking and the vernacular, used for daily life communication. It should be noted that while Egyptians are quite emotionally attached to Classical *fusha*, believing it to be truly beautiful and powerful, they are not necessarily so attached to Modern Standard Arabic, toward which they have a more ambivalent attitude.

The Continuum: Particle or Wave?

It would be nice if that was all there was to it. Unfortunately, an even more fine-grained analysis shows that even this model is rather over-simplified. It has often been noted that educated Egyptians speak a colloquial dialect that is influenced by Modern Standard Arabic. Most of the influence involves lexical borrowings, but even some grammatical and phonological features show up as well. It is thus quite easy to distinguish the speech of an illiterate from that of an educated person on formal grounds. It is further noted that topic and formality have an effect on this educated colloquial, such that the more erudite the topic, and the more formal the setting, the more Standard Arabic features are likely to appear, and vice versa. There are also a number of written varieties that can be distinguished. One involves the normal informal writing of most Egyptians of medium education. They write a form that has been termed by one scholar "Substandard Written Arabic." (Meiseles, 1980) He uses this term because although lexically one finds a lack of colloquial forms, and it is clear that the writers intended the result to be taken as Standard Arabic, there is an inattention to the grammatical details of "true" Standard Arabic, particularly those forms like in example 1. a. above which require a marker in script even when the vowels are not written (involving such items as indefinite accusative nouns, sound masculine plurals in the nominative, the correct form of the numbers before nouns, etc.). We find, in other words, a continuum of forms or styles which go "up" from colloquial and "down" from Standard Arabic in a way that makes it difficult to mark off one section of the continuum as consti-

tuting a distinct and recognized style or form. There is even, of course, a continuum on the higher level between very informal Standard Arabic and a more classicized and elegant form or style.

Bedawi (1973) proposes a five part model to deal with this more fluid situation. Illiterate colloquial is “pure” colloquial, uninfluenced by the Hi in any way. Educated colloquial is the speech of educated people in their daily lives, while Enlightened colloquial represents the speech of those same individuals when they are consciously raising their style toward Standard for some stylistic purpose. Modern *fusha* would then represent the language of the press and modern literature, while “Heritage” *fusha* would represent Classical Arabic and classicizing modern Arabic.

Figure 3. Bedawi’s Five Part Model.

Illiterate Colloquial	Educated Colloquial	Enlightened Colloquial	Modern <i>fusha</i>	“Heritage” <i>fusha</i>
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Bedawi admits, of course, that the choice of how many varieties to label, and where to draw the lines, is somewhat arbitrary. We are faced with the classical particle vs. wave problem. When you look at almost any distinguishing linguistic variable, you find a relatively sharp break somewhere on the continuum or at least a limited range in which the two competing forms vary. At one precise point on the way up the continuum, in other words, people stop using a particular colloquial phoneme and replace it with the Standard version, they change abruptly from the colloquial to the Standard demonstrative construction, they start adding the vowel endings, etc. The problem is that none of these markers co-vary to any great degree, and the relationship between them is extremely tangled; when taken as a whole, the picture looks much more like a gradually varying continuum without any sharp breaks at all.

If, for example, we focus solely on that part of the continuum labelled Modern Standard Arabic, or Modern *fusha* as Bedawi has called it, ignoring versions of colloquial that are elevated and highly influenced by Modern *fusha* (and thus ignoring versions with clear grammatical errors from the point of view of prescriptive Standard Arabic), we might decide that this language includes only what the professional newspaper correctors will accept as “good” Arabic. This still leaves us with a large variable field. Oral

performances of newspaper texts for example, routinely use a whole range of phonological variables, from Classical to intermediate to colloquial forms. Variation is most obvious, however, in the use of the short vowel endings. Since these are not normally written, they have to be supplied by the reader, and most people are not very good at supplying them correctly. News readers on television and radio often perform with full vowels and correct pause form, although some “modernize” the rules a bit. Other speakers on the media, however, may put in just some of the vowel endings, for example, just on imperfect verbs and before pronoun suffixes, while others omit even these. Furthermore, some do this systematically and others quite haphazardly without much regard for pause form rules. Most Egyptians who read texts silently read every word in pause form, thus saving themselves the effort of supplying the difficult, and redundant, vowel endings. Is *fusha* without vowel endings *fusha*? Even if it is written and corrected as *fusha* at the newspaper office, does it stay *fusha* when it enters a reader’s head in a simplified or colloquialized form?

Going beyond the rather simplistic prescriptivist conception I have been using up till now, then, we are forced to ask not only whether Egyptians can speak “good” Arabic, but what “good” Arabic is for them. What do they accept as examples of modern *fusha*, what do they do when they think they are performing modern *fusha*? (For example, some people who scored fairly low on the speaking and writing tests may have a broader conception of what *fusha* means, and would have scored higher if that section of the continuum were considered *fusha* by the native speaker graders.) Prescriptivist norms will interplay with the actually emerging standards of use in various situationally determined styles or levels, but they should not be taken for those standards, since the interplay will involve conflict as much as it will involve agreement. Egyptian’s attitudes toward and beliefs about *fusha* are clearly relevant here. *Fusha* is not just what the experts, or even the newspaper correctors, say it is, although these experts do have enormous influence on what appears in print, the surviving “record” of modern *fusha*. It must be partially also what its normal users think it is, and what they do when they think they are using it. In other words, some of my tests of Egyptians’ abilities with Modern Standard Arabic only make sense to the extent that there is a social consensus behind the prescriptivist norms enforced by the newspaper correctors and there is at least some evidence that this con-

sensus is weakening.

To investigate these native attitudes towards *fusha*, I devised three experiments of the matched guise variety, in which subjects either read or listened to various styles of a single text that was manipulated with phonological and other stylistic variables to elicit particular reactions. The disagreement about *fusha* mentioned above showed up clearly in the ratings. Some were willing to rate almost any grammatically correct text as *fusha*, while others rated informal texts such as sports articles as examples of colloquial. Oral performances of a *fusha* text were rated higher when classical phonological variables were used and when some vowelizing was added to the performance. However, when full vowelizing was used, the ratings went down again, indicating that subjects recognize use of vowel endings as a stylistic marker, but react to "overuse" as arrogant or vain. There is other similar evidence for a partially conscious aiming for a middle ground, one which is mostly *fusha* but which doesn't "overdo" it in regard to particularly difficult or arcane constructions. Very classicized performances by male speakers were labeled as very religious by informants, while similar performances by females were not, reflecting a different religious role for males and females in society generally. From the open ended comments on the forms, subjects could generally be classed into one of three groups: 1) those who felt that any version of grammatical Arabic deserved the term *fusha*, and who saw newspaper Arabic as good and useful; 2) those who believed that *fusha* referred only to Classical Arabic, and who saw newspaper Arabic as a kind of degeneration or relaxation of standards, and longed for the return of real Arabic; and 3) those who agreed that the term *fusha* referred only to Classical Arabic, but who found Classical Arabic to be too difficult and convoluted and preferred the straightforward style of the newspapers, while admitting that this straightforward style was simpler and less elegant than 'real' *fusha*.

Conclusion

It is clear both from observation and experiment that Egyptian native speakers of Arabic are not of one mind when it comes to their formal language. They disagree about what to call the form, about what varieties should constitute the form in particular settings or uses, and even about

how a single text should be performed. Their experts and academics take the ideological position that medieval and modern varieties should be one, and then proceed, as a matter of policy, to confound the two forms in a way that ignores the actual modern “standards” of usage that are normally adhered to by professional writers and users of the form. Most informal users, on the other hand, in their attempts to use *fusḥḥa*, end up producing mixed forms with various amounts of colloquial influence, partly because of simple inability to use the prescriptive form, and partly because they react negatively to totally correct forms. Despite these disagreements, however, modern “standards” do appear to exist and to exert a strong if not irresistible pull on all users of the form, both away from classical norms, and away from colloquial influences. Modern *fusḥḥa* is really there; it is a named form which at least some people think they use on a daily basis. Many of our problems in describing it stem from the fact that it forms a relatively broad but indeterminate section of a much larger continuum, and while there is general agreement about the continuum, there is little agreement about where the natural breaks in that continuum lie.

We have discovered some patterns in these disagreements. We have noted the existence of three main groups in regard to attitudes towards *fusḥḥa*, those who restrict the term narrowly to classical varieties of Arabic and feel that modern usage is lacking in comparison, those who also narrowly restrict the term, but who prefer modern usage, feeling that classical style is too difficult and convoluted, and those who apply the term broadly to include all grammatically correct usage, including simplified, modern styles.

We have found that some subjects are influenced by topic and formality of style as well as word choice and grammar in their acceptance of a text as *fusḥḥa*, and in rating a text as more or less *fusḥḥa*.

We have found, finally, that there is a wide range of acceptable oral performance styles for a text whose written form would be accepted as *fusḥḥa*, and that while increasing “authenticity” or “classicization” of phonological variables increases acceptance of the text, completely full vowelizing and proper observation of pause form, and the like, can actually decrease it, making a “middle” solution, with partial vowelizing but correct (Egyptian) phonology, a clear preference over other varieties. This indicates that the grammar vowels are probably not being used much to disambiguate texts, but rather to mark them stylistically. It also emphasizes, in general, the sali-

ence of phonological as opposed to grammatical markers in the context of acceptability ratings. I am quite uncomfortable with the notion that Modern Standard Arabic is really nothing more than an abstraction, although that is certainly true from the prescriptive point of view. This discomfort stems from the fact that educated Egyptians come into contact with real (not abstract) texts that are fully grammatically acceptable Modern Standard Arabic in large quantities on a daily basis. They read them in books and newspapers, and they hear them on news broadcasts, in political and scholarly speeches and elsewhere. How to characterize the variable nature of the linguistic form is a problem, but it is not one that should be dismissed as uninteresting simply because it falls in the high range of the linguistic continuum. From any point of view, it must be admitted that modern *fusha* is an important part of the communicative lives of all educated Egyptians. Although their actual performance may often fall short of the rules enforced, for example, by the newspaper correctors, still they think they are performing *fusha* and would not admit to performing a separate variety. In some cases it might cogently be argued that their "deficiencies" are the result of "aiming lower" to purposely create a more informal style (as is implied by naming the results of their efforts Informal Written Arabic or substandard Oral Literary Arabic, for example, and implying that the writer/speaker could have done better if he or she wanted to); although it is also likely that many of them are simply mistakes, the result of learning deficiencies that would have been corrected even in this style if the writer/speaker were more proficient or simply knew Arabic better. The point is that educated Egyptians use modern *fusha* in one or another of its guises constantly and consistently. On the other hand, modern *fusha* is clearly a form with a particular social place. Speakers simply do not use it (at least in unmixed varieties) for "daily life" kinds of communication. Even passionate supporters of *fusha* react negatively when they hear people using it to small children, for example. In the end, therefore, it must be concluded that Egyptians themselves have not yet come to a consensus about their formal language and what it should become. What *fusha* becomes will be influenced not just by its exposure to modern life, but also by the dialectic of these competing views of itself.

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