

# Introduction

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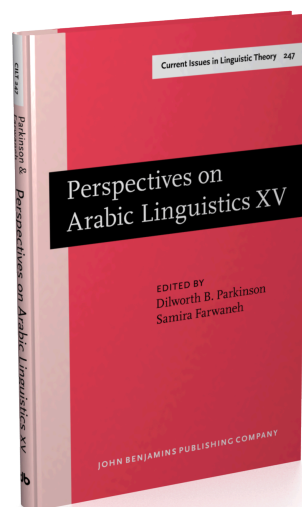
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## INTRODUCTION

Dilworth B. Parkinson

The papers in this volume deal with various topics in Arabic Linguistics, and focus on three specific areas: sociolinguistics, syntax, and corpus linguistics. The papers are data-oriented, and focus both on new theoretic insights and new techniques of data analysis.

Section I includes three papers in the area of sociolinguistics. Mughazy looks at a (less-typical) non-oath use of the oath phrase *wallaahi* in Egyptian Arabic. He demonstrates several differences between the oath and non-oath usages, and then shows how the non-oath usage functions as a mitigating politeness or face-saving device. Perhaps his most interesting result is that some of the usages that are thus mitigated are surprising from a western, or even a 'theoretical' point of view, and can only be understood in a local Egyptian context of what is and what is not face threatening and what needs to be mitigated.

Bassiouny's topic is diglossic code-switching. Using data from Egypt, she looks at various theories of code-switching, concentrating on the Matrix language model, and finds that her Egyptian data poses problems for all current proposals. She wonders if diglossic and bilingual code-switching are indeed examples of the same phenomenon, and gives suggestions for modifying the theory to account for her data.

Reinelt looks at 'speech act expressions,' words that refer to specific speech acts (like 'to say,' 'to declare'), in the Quran, and in German and English translations of the same to demonstrate some aspects of translation theory and efficacy. He finds a major difference between what might be termed 'academic' and 'informative' translation styles.

Section II contains two papers on syntax. Darrow looks at reconstruction problems in Syrian Arabic relative clauses, contrasting

semantic interpretation with a copy-theoretic approach. Syrian Arabic raises certain problems for any account, but ‘discomfort notwithstanding,’ he shows that a copy-theoretic approach provides a reasonable account of the data.

LeTourneau looks at what he calls ‘impoverished’ number agreement in Standard Arabic, specifically in relation to Form VI verbs, and tweaks a number of minimalist assumptions to account for the data.

Section III is a set of four papers dealing with the general area of corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics in general includes two main orientations: 1) scholars coming from the computer science area, interested in using corpora to test computational models of the language, and 2) scholars coming from a more traditional linguistics, using corpora to analyze particular characteristics they have identified as problems for whatever reason. The Taylor paper comes from the first category. The author describes his attempt to build a lexical analyzer for Arabic, which turns out to be several orders of magnitude more complex than a similar program for English would be. He then presents the results of a count of frequencies of various verbal forms, involving the categories of person, tense, gender and number.

The other three papers come from the second orientation. Al-Ansary uses a computational model in association with both a spoken and written corpus to compare NP structures in Spoken and Written Standard Arabic. There is a large body of interesting work comparing spoken and written English, but I believe that this is the first look at this topic for Arabic.

Van Mol utilizes a corpus of Spoken Standard Arabic from three Arabic countries to investigate to what extent the language is uniform on a syntactic level across the Arabic speaking world. Besides giving an excellent discussion of the problems and pitfalls of developing such a corpus, he arrives at some highly interesting results, showing that although most of the items investigated were identical in the various countries, there were differences.

Parkinson’s paper follows a similar tack, using a large corpus of newspapers from various countries to look at the variability in future particle use, both across countries and across genres.