

## Language Varieties & the Effect of Geography "Standard Arabic & Arabic Dialectal Languages as an example"

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### Abstract

This paper is built upon a sociolinguistics perspective, understanding the language variable in regard to geography or the place of living of human communities' impression on the language spoken (pronunciation & words) by people living in one country but in different regions. This issue affects Standard British English language learning in Libya as the students try to imitate Englishes they hear and receive from Cinemas, movies, TV shows and songs that defect the standard English we aim to teach our students.

Students or English learners do not know too much about English language differences between English speaking countries or the differences within the same English language in the same English speaking country, herein this paper is a try to talk about the effect of place or geography on language taking the classical Arabic and Libyan spoken language as example whenever needed.

### Introduction

As a teacher of the English language I have noticed that many of my students are trying to speak English with several different English dialectal languages or accents, with no regard to the words' origin, whether it is American, British, Australian, or South African and without knowledge of such accents original area. It's very noticeable for the hearer to find different English accents in one sentence which affects their smoothness in speaking. I encourage my students to try to speak the standard English received pronunciation as they have studied in their phonetics courses rather than imitating the language they hear in movies, TV shows and songs.

This problem encouraged me to investigate this issue from a sociolinguistic perspective. My aim is to explore more about the relationship between language and place of living and the influence of this issue on spoken language. I have found research studies and articles investigating the same issue, however, they focused more on the influence of Geography on language and when I applied those effects I found that they were also applicable to the Arabic language in general and in the local Libyan Arabic language in particular.

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## Language Varieties & the Effect of Geography

Language is fundamental and crucial for all social interaction. It helps individuals convey messages and deal with each other in every community. As the Danish linguist Otto Jespergon (1860-1943) ". <http://www.qotd.org/quotes/Noah.Webster> who also classified theories of language origins into five groups, noted:

1. "People imitate sounds from their environment.
2. People make instinctive sounds related to the emotions, body functions and pain.
3. People make oral gestures.
4. People work together and produce rhythmic sounds.
5. People make sounds associated with love, play and singing."

As an English language teacher in higher education, I have noticed that different students make efforts to speak English with different English varieties. They try to imitate what they hear from the media (T.Vs, radios, movies or series). This can be acceptable but they just imitate a variety of English language they do not know which English accent it comes from. To remedy this situation, I started two things with them, the first was to encourage them to speak only English language by applying all what they studied in phonetics to pronounce correct sounds, the second to leave the accent later until they have good command and control of their standard English language sounds by focusing more on the phonetics course they study.

This issue has lead me to look deeper into sociolinguistics where I found many research studies talking about the relationship between language and environment, language and place, also language and geography. This influence can be seen in the one language through the accents of the one language in a country. So what applies to English languages variation in the language spoken in U K or in the USA, between the regions of the same state like the differences between populations at shoreline cities and the inside or highlands people local languages and accents. Furthermore this applies the variation between the localities of the same city like the linguistics differences found in London or New York people's language. Hence, classical Arabic is the standard and the source language for all Arab spoken dialects that is nearly four hundred million (389,373,000) people. ([http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Arab\\_countries\\_by\\_population](http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Arab_countries_by_population)).

It has had the effect of geography and environment on spoken language in each individual Arab country (e.g. Lebanon, Egypt, Libya or Yemen) which are very clear in the differences of pronunciation or in differences found at lexical word meanings. Many studies have been conducted about the

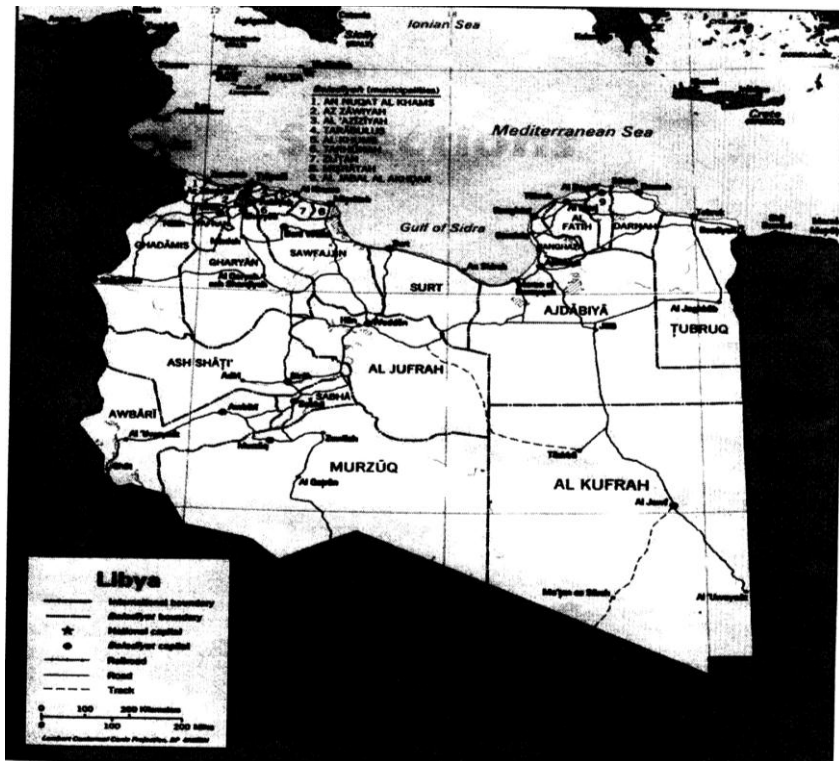
impact of place on language which explore the relationship between language and societies living in one place. In other words, the relationship between humans and the place of living. Noah Webster (1758-1843) the American lexicographer said that "language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affection and tastes of long generations of humanity and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground". Applying this to the Arabic language spoken in the Arab countries we can see that the differences between those vernaculars related to what indicated and mentioned by Webster.

However the standard classic Arabic language is well kept and preserved in the Holy Quran, the Arab states are speaking in different Arabic dialects because of geography, place or environment which affected that standard classic Arabic language used in the Quran. In other words the spoken Arabic dialectal in Saudi Arabia is more avid than the language spoken in Egypt, because Saudi Arabia geography is a desert and very big land while in Egypt the country is smaller and more crowded besides the availability of water made the Egyptian language more soft than Saudi language. On the same aspect, Lebanese and Syrian dialects, if compared with Saudi and Egyptian dialects we will find these two dialects to be softer and affected by the neighboring states like Turkey, Greece and Armenia. Those countries who have old and long living communities living in those Arab countries, still connected to their origins and affected by and from the language of the country they live in.

According to the universal grammar theory, all linguists agreed that language is a universal communication means ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_language)). As no human group at any time has been found, that they do not have a spoken language if not spoken and written language. As previously stated language is crucial and fundamental for our identity, taking classical Arabic language variety between Arab states as a base to all the dialectal Arabic languages spoken. From Morocco to the Arab gulf that are related to each other, as an example, any researcher can notice this variation between the Arabic dialectal languages, where you can see that Saudi language is more close to the neighboring states like Yemen, Oman, Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq and Jordan. On the same time we can notice the effect of each country's bordering cities where you can see that spoken languages at those territories are more closer than the other far cities. If we look at Libya, we can see the neighboring countries Egypt, Sudan, Niger,

Chad, Algeria and the Sahara tribes, living in the big Sahara, like Al-Tabo and Toureg. All this huge mixture affecting and affected by the geography of Libya and Libyan Arabic dialectal language is affecting and affected by standard classic Arabic language.

Focusing here on the Libyan Arabic variety as an example, the language varieties in pronunciation among Libyan cities in the east and the west many differences can be found in names or pronunciation, but still Libyan language e.g.: the word bokel /bu:kel/ in west is pronounced bekel /bikil/and in some Bedouin areas its pronounced Belkel /belkil/.



**(Dickinson, appendix: xiii)**

When going towards the cities at the Libyan borders similarities between the people of Amsa'ad (in Libya) and Salloum (in Egypt) in clothes, in habits and in language can be noticed. The same thing applies to the Sudan, Chad or Niger border cities in the south or if we go to the neighboring cities on the Algerian or Tunisian borders, same similarities in spoken language, cloths or

habits shall be very clear to the researchers and the effect of geography, environment and place shall be seen very clearly.

Conclusion:

The influence of geography is very clear and here if we generalize the influence of the standard classical Arabic reflected on the spoken languages of Arab countries and their geographic areas, we will prove that geography has a big influence on language and we should encourage our students to learn only standard English pronunciation and then they will be able to see the differences and similarities in language besides that English or American languages have their own community languages such as the African American or Latinos or emigrant languages, so for English language student we as teachers must focus on this aspect and encourage them to speak standard English and they should not just imitate only without looking up the correct pronunciation in their dictionaries especially that they are foreigners to the English language and have been taught by nonnative English speakers whom are affected by their own mother tongue.

After reading various articles, papers and books about this issue I tried to say something about it in this paper and let it clear for those teachers who are interested in teaching English language and I recommend here all teachers of English language to take this issue in consideration whenever they are teaching students and then the students will have the choice to follow the accent or dialect and even a language on the maps of the world countries.

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