Language Change in Makkan Society:

A Study of Change in the Makkan Lexicon

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction. Language change is a natural phenomenon that takes place even in isolated communities, for language is innovative in nature and slight synchronic variations might set the stage for a diachronic change that becomes observable only over leaps of time as language change is slow and gradual in nature. Moreover, language change is a normal outcome of the interaction among a number of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. Such a phenomenon has its effect over the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic domains. One can think of the course of language change in terms of a continuum. Whenever researchers study a change over a particular domain they are actually doing so in relation to a specific point on the language-change continuum. Thus, the study of language change is relative, for language is never fixed. That is, it is subject to a continuous change. Furthermore, as language is a unique repertoire of the human creature that can never be extricated from variation, language change remains a corollary of the interaction between language and society.

Any study of language change should take into account the context of the change and determine the extra-linguistic factors that contribute to it. As a phenomenon, language change is not bound to a particular community. In the same time, it is a unique phenomenon, the results of which can never be predicted, for it is the consequence of the interaction among several aspects of the society. After all, language change is a slow but continuous, unobservable, unless over leaps of time, relative, circular, and, above all, an inevitable phenomenon.
The focus of the current paper is language change over the semantic domain and its locus is a community to the West of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Makkan society.

1.1. The Makkan Society. The Makkan society is a mixture of people, of different Arabic and non-Arabic origins, who have chosen Makkah as their home. The status of Makkah as a sacred city for Muslims all over the world and its importance as a trade center, especially during Hajj, has made it an open society that accommodates people from all over the world, for many people have left their original countries and settled in Makkah for religious and/or economic reasons. As an open society, Makkah is willing to take in strangers regardless of their color, their race, their nationality, and their language (Al-Kurdi, 1965). This has made the Makkan society a mixture of several cultures, which have formed a unique society. This uniqueness has extended to several aspects of the Makkan life e.g. to the Makkan customs, food, costumes, and most significantly to the spoken lexemes. Thus, an observer to the Makkan streets will see a mixture of people of every nationality and color. These people have completely been incorporated into the Makkan society and affected by it. They, nonetheless, have retained some of their native customs, which they have gradually transmitted to the rest of the Makkan society (Bafaqeh, 2005).

Although this society descended from several branches, most of which have come from outside the peninsula, it still represents the character of people of the western part of the peninsula (Horgronje, 1888/1999). The diversity of people who dwell in Makkah has resulted in a similar diversity in their food that includes kinds from several cultures e.g. laddo, an Indian sweet made of chickpea; šurek, Turkmanistanian bread; and sagudana, a dessert of South Asian origin(Natto,1997). It is, nonetheless, worth mentioning that Makkan food in general is the customary food
of the near East and the Middle Eastern areas (Rafeç, 1981). Makkan costume is another clear reflection of the multi-cultural characteristic of this society. It is a mixture of The Indian ʿomamah, Egyptian qeṭṭan, Syrian jobbah, and Turkish minṭaqah (Bafaqeeh, 2005). Nowadays, although migration to Makkah is considerably limited in comparison to the past, the city is still a place of aggregation for Muslims from all over the world. This panoramic presentation of life in Makkah shows that the city is a real representative of a society in which many cultures have been melted, which justifies its status as a cosmopolitan city.

1.2. The Makkan Dialect. First of all it is worth mentioning that MAKKAN DIALECT is used here to refer to the dialect spoken by the sedentary dwellers of the city, for the dialects spoken by the Makkan tribes are different. The Makkan dialect is generally the dialect spoken in the western part of the peninsula. However, the Makkan dialect was heavily affected by the unique incorporation of several international groups into the Makkan society, which has resulted in a similar incorporation of words from different Arabic dialects, and even from non-Arabic languages, into the Makkan dialect (See appendix I). An important feature of this dialect is the absence of the coronal fricatives [th], [d] and [Dh], (Rafeç, 1981), which might be replaced by [s] or [t], [d] or [z] and Z, respectively (Al- Jehani, 1985). The coronal fricative [Dh] might also be replaced by [D] in Makkan dialect. Moreover, the uvular stop [q] of standard Arabic is replaced by the velar stop [g] in the Makkan dialect.

1.3. The Problem. An observer to Makkan society can detect an ongoing change in the Makkan lexicon. As is the case with the phenomenon of language change in general, it is not easy to decide the starting point of such a change, neither is it easy to
determine its direction. After all, change is there and its outcomes can be observed along leaps of time, for linguistic change, as Gal (1978a:227) states:

is neither so fast nor so slow as to be unobservable; new lexemes which eventually replace older lexemes can first be located in synchronic variants in the speech of subgroups within the community; and changes observed over time are the result of the redistribution of synchronic variants to different linguistic environments, to different social situations, and to different speakers.

Many lexemes have been discarded from the Makkan lexicon, others have been replaced by synonyms from other Hijazi dialects, and still others are used only in certain contexts or by people of a particular age or socio-economic background. Furthermore, a group of new lexemes has been launched and gradually incorporated into the dialect as an outcome of a number of interrelated factors, among which are:

1.3.1. Change in lifestyle. The lifestyle of the Makkans has undergone a great change during the last few decades. The expansion of the Holy Mosque has played a major role in such a change. To expand the Holy Mosque, many houses and shops around it, that have been included in the expansion projects, have been taken from their owners, who in turn have received generous compensation from the government. This was the starting point for a new stage in the life of many Makkan families who started building their own new houses in new areas of the city, drifting away from the traditional lifestyle and the center area around the Holy Mosque.

In their traditional habitation, Makkans used to put all the kitchen utensils in one box located in a particular side of the room, and whenever they want to cook, they had to prepare the layout they have, thus the name [mirakkab], literally ‘composite’, for the kitchen. However, as the lifestyle has developed in Makkah, Makkans started
including a particular place in their houses devoted for cooking only, ordinary kitchens, called [maṭbax], literally ‘a place for cooking’. Consequently the lexeme [mirakkab] has gradually been replaced by [maṭbax], yet such a replacement did not take place all over the city, for some Makkans are still using the lexeme [mirakkab] for the kitchen. Another example of the effect of life development on the lexicon is the lexeme [kabri:ta], foldable piece of furniture made of fronds and used as a curtain. As fabric has become available [kabri:ta] has been replaced by [sita:ra], an ordinary curtain made of fabric. Therefore, the lexeme [kabri:ta] has been discarded from the Makkan lexicon. Such a lexeme might sound strange to the new generation of Makkans who have not coexisted with such an item. Examples of such lexemes are numerous in the Makkan dialect and they all reflect the influence of the change in the lifestyle on the Makkan dialect.

1.3.2. Expansion of the city. This factor is related to the previous one. As mentioned before, the expansion of the Holy Mosque resulted in a parallel expansion of the city as a whole. Furthermore, the increasing number of population has contributed to such an expansion. After being centered in the areas surrounding the Holy Mosque, people started to transfer to new, quieter, and further areas, some of which are outside the actual boundaries of the sacred area. As a result, new small communities have been formed in different areas of the city. Such communities still have contact, to different degrees, with the focal area. The further the area the less it is influenced by the focal area. Such an expansion has its effect along several dimensions. First, it loosened the relationship between the Makkans who used to be as one family. On the other hand, it resulted in the existence of small isolated communities in different parts of the city, some of which has retained the characteristics of the original community in the focal area surrounding the Holy
Mosque while others have drifted away and almost lost clear characteristics of the original community. Each community has established its own characteristics that keep along with that of the original community or drift away from it.

1.3.3. Education. Education is an important factor that had its direct effects on the structure of the whole society of Makkah. As they started being enrolled in different organizations of formal education, Makkans started having more exposure to standard Arabic as all the curricula are written in standard Arabic. In turn, incorporation of vocabulary from the standard variety into their speech has become a sign of belonging to a community of a higher status, the educated community. Moreover, education has opened gates for Makkans to get official jobs and to have contact with a wider sample of the society after many Makkans used to run their own business and to be strongly involved within their own local networks. Consequently, as 'contact breeds imitation' (Weinreich, 1953; viii) and as dealing with representatives of different varieties triggers accommodation (Giles, 1994), education has directly and indirectly affected the status of the Makkan dialect and encouraged the emergence of a lexical change.

1.3.4. Effects of media. As mentioned before, Makkan society is an open society. However, the expansion of the city has loosened contact among Makkans on the one hand and between Makkans and visitors to the city on the other hand. Such a decrease in personal contact with other nations was accompanied with an increase of exposure to different dialects through the media. The effect of media is a prominent one. Media are considered the main gate that gives way to globalization. Nowadays, mass media are directing the world. The acceleration of language change has increased in the last decade because of the satellites. The recent revolution in the fields of telecommunication and media, specially the internet, popularly called the
information “super highway” according to Romaine (2000: 135), has resulted in what can be viewed as tele-acculturation. The whole world has become like a small village. Differences among the world’s nations and cultures have started to decrease. Such a revolution has been accompanied by an overwhelming permeation of a special type, a linguistic permeation. Such permeation has a notable effect on the linguistic identity of any society, and Makkan society is no exception. The role of media in language change is well known in literature. Romaine (2000) has cited the lexeme nerd as an example of the effect of the media on the lexicon. According to Romaine (2000), the lexeme nerd has crossed the Atlantic to Sweden and been incorporated into the Swedish lexicon as nörd after the American movie REVENGE OF THE NERDS was translated into Swedish. The same lexeme has recently started being noticed among the Danish, too (Romaine, 2000).

These factors have affected Makkan society and consequently the Makkan dialect. The focus of this study is to determine lexical changes in the Makkan dialect and to shed light on the social and socio economic factors that have been contributing to it.
REFERENCES


