

Syntax and Morphology in Egyptian dialect versus Modern Standard Arabic in Arabic speaking children

Essay

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا

لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ

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*To my lovely daughter **judi** .*

To the soul of my father.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SA	Standard Arabic
MSA	Modern standard Arabic
EA	Egyptian Arabic
ECA	Egyptian colloquial Arabic
IPA	International phonetics Alphabet
(-a)	Accusative marker of noun and verb
(-u)	Nominative marker of noun & Imperfect marker of verb
(-un)	Nunation suffix
-C-	Consonant
-V-	Vowel
-G-	Glide
P. L. S -4	Preschool Language Scale 4 th Edition
LAD	language acquisition device
F	Feminine
mpl	masculine plural
fpl	feminine plural
msg	Masculine singular
fsg	Feminine singular
Acc	accusative
Gen	Genitive
Nom	Nominative

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INTRODUCTION

Language is defined as an arbitrary symbolic system that pairs sounds to meaning. It is the way of normal communication in homo sapien sapien (*Kotby, 1980*).

The Arabic language is acquired by its native speakers both as a regional spoken Arabic dialect, acquired in early childhood as a first language, and as the more formal variety known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), typically acquired later in childhood by school entry (*Boudelaa, 2013*).

MSA is the official language of the Arab world. It is the primary language of the media and culture. MSA is syntactically, morphologically, lexically and phonologically based on Classical Arabic, the language of the Qura'an (Islam's Holy Book). However, it is much more modern. MSA is primarily written not spoken. The Arabic dialects, in contrast, are primarily spoken, not written. However, this is changing as more Arabs gain access to electronic media such as emails and newsgroups.

There are many different, regional colloquial dialects and they are sometimes mutually unintelligible (*Newman, 2002*).

Collin (2011) believes that many Arabic dialects lack mutual intelligibility and should more properly be considered separate cognate languages; he states that a Moroccan clerk and an Iraqi policeman need to know Standard Arabic to be able to talk to one another.

Arabic dialects vary on many dimensions – primarily, geography and social class. Geolinguistically, the Arab world can be divided in many different ways. The following is only one of many that covers the main Arabic dialects:

- ***Gulf Arabic*** (GLF) includes the dialects of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman.
- ***Iraqi Arabic*** (IRQ) is the dialect of Iraq. In some dialect classifications, Iraqi Arabic is considered a sub-dialect of Gulf Arabic.
- ***Levantine Arabic*** (LEV) includes the dialects of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine.
- ***Egyptian Arabic*** ((Henceforth, EA) is the dialect of Egypt.

- **Maghrebi Arabic** covers the dialects of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania. Libya is sometimes included (**Habash, 2006**).

Egyptian Arabic is the language spoken by contemporary Egyptians. It is more commonly known locally as the Egyptian colloquial language or Egyptian dialect (**Youssef, 2003**).

Although all the colloquial dialect of Arabic display fundamental similarities to MSA, there are a variety of critical changes and transformations that occur in EA (**Al-Tonsi, 2010**).

Phonologically, the profile of EA is quite similar to MSA, except for some important differences, for example, the MSA consonants /ð/θ/ are generally pronounced in EA as /z/s/ (**Holes, 2004**).

EA has five long vowels compared with MSA's three long vowels. Unlike MSA, long vowels in EA are predictably shortened under certain conditions (**Habash et al., 2012**).

In EA there is no greater a pause between words in continuous speech than there is between the syllables of a single word, the syllable boundaries are not necessarily coincident with the word. The syllable

patterns may change with the succession of another word, uttered in close association (*Al-Tonsi, 2010*).

Morphologically, the most important difference is in the use of clitics and affixes that do not exist in EA. Another important difference is the circumfix negation (ما+ +ش) *ma+ +š* which surrounds some verb forms (*Gadalla, 2000*).

Lexically, the MSA differs from EA in many of vocabulary and synonyms (*Habash et al., 2012*).

Still there are many other differences between EA and MSA that may represent golden differences and in the same time may represent a challenge for children acquiring MSA at early academic years.

Our concern in this essay is language form (syntax and morphology) which shows peculiar differences between EA and MSA. These differences are presented with several researchers; but still not available in details from the phoniatric point of view.

AIM OF THE WORK

The aim is to review literature related to normal development of syntax and morphology and to compare between Modern Standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect language in Arabic speaking children in order to help in designing therapy program for children in delayed language development and learning disabilities.

LANGUAGE PARAMETERS

Language comprises the following three major aspects: form (structure), content and function. Form includes syntax, morphology and phonology, content includes semantics, and lastly, function or use of language includes pragmatics that consists of the goals of language. Each of the above components is distinct but they are interrelated (*Lahey, 1988*).

Language parameters:

- **Semantics (The study of meaning)**

The study of linguistic meaning takes place within a subfield of linguistics called *semantics*. Semantics is concerned with the relationship between language form and cognition. Semantics helps language users to decide what is meaningful and what is nonsense (*Bates & Thal, 2003*).

At word level, it entails vocabulary and concepts. At sentence level it entails sentence formulation task i.e. how words are put together to give a meaningful sentence and how sentences are put to form a story (*Owens, 1988*).

- ***Form (structure)***

The study of grammar (sentence structure) is traditionally divided into two parts: *morphology* and *syntax*:

Morphology refers to the principles governing the construction of complex words, for lexical and/or grammatical purposes: so it is concerned with rules governing sequence of morphemes within a word. The smallest unit of syntax is the "morpheme" and the largest is the sentence. The morpheme can be defined as the smallest unit of grammatical structure that has a clear and constant meaning in all its uses; although we can find exceptions e.g. **pro** which has no constant, clear meaning in protest, profess, and process (*Levinson, 2000*).

Syntax is the rule of ordering words to construct phrases and sentences. So it is the rules governing sequence of words in a sentence (*Levinson, 2000*).

- ***Phonology (The study of speech sounds):***

Phoneme is the smallest linguistic unit of sound that can signal a difference in meaning. Phonological rules govern the distribution and sequencing of phonemes within a language.

The phonological structure is divided into 2 levels: the segmental and supra-segmental levels. The segmental level is related to language sounds which are either vowels or consonants. Each of them has its own characteristics. Consonants result from the formation of blocks or constrictions in the way of expired air in the supra-laryngeal compartments. They have lower intensity and higher pitch than vowels. Vowels are characterized by the presence of an open vocal tract. They are formed by changes in the form, width and tension of the walls of the supra-laryngeal compartments (pharynx, nose, sinuses and mouth cavity) (*Levinson, 2000*).

The supra-segmental level is the prosody of language. The prosody is formed mainly by combining syllables that are different in their intensity, length and stress. This results in a musical linguistic pattern that characterizes every language (*Watson, 2002*).

- ***Pragmatics (The study of language as a communicative system)***

The set of rules that govern the use of language in a certain context. These rules govern the manner in which one is able to state a thought, the way to enter and exit from a conversation, the adaptation of rules,