Today's agenda

- Introductions.
- Overview of linguistics.
- Roadmap, syllabus, and other administrivia.
- Overview of sociolinguistics and discussion of some example issues from English and Arabic.

So, what’s linguistics?

- Linguistics is defined as the study of human language.
- Linguists are interested in studying language as an internal system, and also in the way in which this system interacts with other external systems.
- That’s why we have multiple subfields within linguistics, each responsible for the study of a particular aspect of language.

Subfields of linguistics

- **Phonetics**: The study of the articulation and perception of speech sounds.
- **Phonology**: The study of the sound system in a language.
- **Morphology**: The study of word structure.
- **Syntax**: The study of sentence structure.
- **Semantics**: The study of meaning of words and sentences.

Subfields of linguistics

- How language is acquired by children is the domain of first language acquisition.
- The study of how and why language changes over time is the domain of historical linguistics.
- Linguists also raise questions for how we use language in social contexts and how people's speech is influenced by sociological factors. This is the domain of sociolinguistics. More on this later.

Other subfields within linguistics

- **Psycholinguistics**, on the other hand, studies the cognitive processes that we engage in in the production and perception of language.
- **Neurolinguistics** deals with how language is physiologically represented in the brain.
- **Computational linguistics** is concerned with ways to model natural languages so they can be used by machines.
Course focus

• In this class, we will be primarily concerned with the study of issues of sociolinguistics as they apply to Arabic-speaking communities.
• But to understand many of these issues, we will also have to talk about some historical (e.g., where Arabic dialects came from) and linguistic aspects of the language (e.g., pronunciation, verb conjugation, word order, negation, etc.).

Beyond learning about Arabic sociolinguistics

• That said, this class is about more than just Arabic sociolinguistics. Studying linguistics in general helps improve certain skills that you will need in several other domains of study or work.

Beyond learning about Arabic sociolinguistics

• Problem-solving skills:
  - How to uncover regular patterns in speakers’ linguistic behavior.
  - How to formulate a generalization to explain that linguistic behavior, and how to revise that generalization once presented with further facts that challenge your initial generalization.

Beyond learning about Arabic sociolinguistics

• Argumentation skills:
  - How to formulate arguments for and against a certain view based on objective evidence.
  - How to question certain claims or beliefs (no matter how popular they are) based on objective evidence.

Beyond learning about Arabic sociolinguistics

• Presentation skills:
  - How to read a chapter section or an article, present it to an audience, and lead the discussion with that audience.
• Research skills:
  - How to conduct some basic sociolinguistic data collection.
  - How to research a topic of your interest, and write your findings in a paper.

Syllabus and Administrivia

• Course requirements.
• Honor Code.
Class website

- [http://blogs.middlebury.edu/arabicsociolinguistics/](http://blogs.middlebury.edu/arabicsociolinguistics/)

- Please make sure you refer to the website for the most updated syllabus prior to every class. [http://blogs.middlebury.edu/arabicsociolinguistics/syllabus/](http://blogs.middlebury.edu/arabicsociolinguistics/syllabus/)

- I will also post any electronic files for readings, homework assignments, and exams there.

Sociolinguistics: General Introduction

- Sociolinguists study the interrelationships between language and society with particular focus on two main questions:
  1. How do speakers of a language vary in their linguistic behavior?
  2. Why does such variation exist?

Arabic sociolinguistic issues

- Whether you are a beginning learner of Arabic, an advanced learner, or a native speaker of some Arabic dialect, what are some things about Arabic that you think sociolinguists study in Arabic-speaking communities?

Arabic sociolinguistic issues

- [العاميّة والفصحيّة](al_gamayyaa_wa_l_fashahiyya)
  1. How and why speakers switch between العاميّة الفصحيّة (al_gamayyaa_wa_l_fashahiyya)
  2. Regional dialectal variation: How do dialects differ?
  3. Sociological factors that affect variation, e.g., urbanization, ethnicity, gender, religion, and politics.

Arabic sociolinguistic issues

- Inter-dialectal communication, e.g., how do Egyptians and Moroccans get a conversation going?
- What is exactly the status of Modern Standard Arabic?
- Effects of immigration on Arabic. Diaspora speakers.
- Impact of colonialist languages on Arabic.
- Language contact effects on Arabic.

Bill Labov’s study of variation in pronunciation on Martha’s Vineyard
Bill Labov’s study of Martha’s Vineyard

• Some speakers on the island had a distinctive pronunciation of the two vowels, /ɔɪ/ and /ɔʊ/ (phonetically called diphthongs), in words such as “like, while, might” and “house, out, trout.”
• This linguistic feature was characteristic of people living on the island (as opposed to summer tourists), hence it was a **regional** feature.
• But within the island population, some residents had it in their speech, while others didn’t.

Labov’s study of Martha’s Vineyard

• People who lived Up-Island (strictly rural) had the feature more than those who lived Down-Island.
• The feature also increased with age, peaking between 31 and 45 years.
• Students going to college with the intention of returning to the island had the pronunciation more than those who didn’t plan to go back.
• Ethnic minority groups such as Portuguese and Native Americans also had the pronunciation more than other groups.

Centralization and attitude towards Martha’s Vineyard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>/ɔɪ/</th>
<th>/ɔʊ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 (Positive)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 (Neutral)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (Negative)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upper Egyptian speech

• Egyptian Arabic has several dialects.
• Most notable is the speech of upper Egyptians, who live in the south.
• What happens to the speech of some speakers from the south when they move to Cairo?
• What happens when they return home?

Next class agenda

• Readings (available as .pdf on class website, and the book is on reserve at DF library):
  - History of Arabic: Holes’ *Chapter 1*, pp. 9-18.
• Also don’t forget to fill in the questionnaire.