As an Arab American and a linguist, I have been interested in the spoken language used by Arab Americans in Detroit for some time. Detroit is a unique laboratory for the study of Arabic as an ethnic minority language because the Detroit metropolitan area has the largest concentration of Arabs outside the Arab world. Their number has been estimated at between 260,000 to 350,000 in the southeastern part of Michigan, which consists of Wayne, Macomb, and Oakland counties.

The sociolinguistic approach of this paper examines the ways in which language contact and conflict situations explain changes that have occurred in the Arabic spoken by first-, second-, and third-generation Arab Americans.

Arab immigration to the US and to Michigan specifically, began in the nineteenth century. The majority of immigrants came from what was then called Greater Syria. They were mostly unskilled males and, for the most part, Christians. The second wave of immigration occurred after World War II. Among these new immigrants were Muslims from Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, as well as Christian Iraqis, mostly Chaldeans (Abraham & Abraham 1981:18).

In the 1950s and ’60s, a third wave of Arab immigration landed in the US; many of these new residents were students and professionals. They were Egyptians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians (Elkholy 1966). A fourth wave of immigrants consisting mostly of Lebanese and Palestinians occurred in the 1970s and ‘80s, owing to the war in Lebanon, and the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Finally, in the 1990s, a fifth wave came to the US consisting of Palestinians, Lebanese, Egyptians, and Iraqi Muslims. According to the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), from 1988 to 1990, approximately 60,000 Arabs took up residence in the Detroit area.

At first, the early comers came into the Dearborn area, which is located southwest of Detroit. Like any group of immigrants who first come to the US, Arab Americans upon their arrival congregated in a neighborhood where they
could mix with other Arab Americans. They lived in this first community among people who tried to maintain psychological, social, cultural, and linguistic support with their original homeland.

Some Arab immigrants have remained within these early established communities. Others, upon improving their economic situation, established themselves in different parts of the Detroit metro area. But, whenever possible, Arabs still congregate and establish specific speech communities whose members share common linguistic, social and cultural features. For example, there is a Palestinian community in Livonia, on the west side of Detroit; an Egyptian group in Troy, on the east side; and a large Iraqi community on Seven Mile Road, outside of Detroit. A second Iraqi community was established in West Bloomfield, which is one of the most affluent suburbs in the Detroit metro area; and there are two Yemeni communities, one in Hamtramck (northeast of Detroit) and a larger one in the Dearborn area. There are also Arab American professionals that are scattered in the various suburbs around Detroit.

The Arab Americans who have lived for years in the Dearborn area have recently been coming into contact with a steady flow of new Arab immigrants from the Arab world. After the Gulf War in 1990–1, many Iraqi Shi’a (about 40,000) were given refuge in the US, most of them coming to Michigan. This group consists largely of people who opposed the Iraqi regime and defected, first going to Saudi Arabia. But since the Saudis refused to give them permanent residence, they were allowed into the US. Another 15,000 to 20,000 Iraqis working for the CIA were also given refuge in the US. The majority of this group settled in the Dearborn area. Actually, these refugees were first settled by the US government in different parts of the country; however many decided to move to Michigan because of the large number of Arab Americans already established in the area. This recently arrived group consists of Shi’a as well as Sunni Kurds, all of whom speak Arabic. Their children, who spoke only Arabic on arrival in the US, are presently attending American public schools. Taking into account these new arrivals and the older members of the Arab community, 70 percent of the students in the Dearborn school system are of Arab American background. Thus, all members of the well-established Arab-American community in Michigan are coming into daily contact with the newly arrived Arabic-speaking immigrants.

It is common place to refer to “Arab Americans” as an entity. It should be noted, however, that the Arab-American community is a microcosm of the Arab world with all its varieties and divisions: politically, economically, religiously, and of course, linguistically. Thus, in the Detroit metro area there is an interesting double language-contact situation. In the first contact situation, different Arabic dialects come into contact; in the second situation, different languages come into contact: Arabic, a minority language, is in contact with the dominant language, English.

The question then, is: What will the future of Arabic as an ethnic language in the Detroit metro area be? Or: How generally representative is language contact within the Arab-American community in Michigan? Furthermore, one may ask whether Arabic in its American Diaspora follows the linguistic paths which
other languages-in-contact, such as Moroccan Arabic in Holland or Algerian Arabic in France, have taken. With regard to any such question the diglossic nature of Arabic is a factor that must be taken into consideration.

Most of the data presented in this paper were obtained from specific neighborhoods in Detroit: from my interviews during visits to schools; during family gatherings such as weddings and other celebrations; and from a set of tape-recorded interviews conducted by my colleague, May Seikaly, for her research on an oral history of Palestinian Americans. Seikaly's interviews were not intended to examine the language situation of the speakers; however, they have been an interesting source of information for my research. These taped interviews consist of natural conversations between Seikaly and the mostly elderly participants. In these interviews, I was able to observe the phenomena of codeswitching and borrowing under very natural conditions. In Labov's terms, it was an observation of the vernacular: "the style that is most regular in its structure and its relation to the evolution of language . . . , in which minimum attention is paid to monitoring speech" (Labov 1972a:112).

I have categorized the speakers in my data on the basis of their competence and performance in whatever languages they speak. At one extreme, there are those who speak only Arabic. They live in neighborhoods inhabited mostly by newly arrived Arab immigrants, so they rarely need English. People in this category have developed a pidginized variety of English, which they use in their limited dealings with monolingual English speakers. They are, for example storekeepers, garage mechanics, or small grocers, and they use this pidginized variety mostly for business transactions. However, this form of pidginized speech is not acquired by the speakers' children, who learn standard English at school for informal interactions with peers. Hence, this pidginized form evolved only for temporary use and has not creolized.

At the other extreme are those Arab Americans who only use English. These monolingual English speakers have a very limited Arabic vocabulary, which consists mainly of lexical items related to food, or curse words. For example, one of the women Seikaly interviewed spoke English fluently and no Arabic whatsoever; however, she used a specific insult she remembered her father having used to refer to a woman of ill repute (sharmuta "slut").

In between the two extremes there are those speakers who use English for as many functions as they do Arabic. These communicative bilingual speakers are categorized here according to their degree of bilingualism, based on the author's judgement of their competence and performance in Arabic and English. They are well-educated newcomers, or Arab Americans married to Americans, or first-generation immigrants who have kept in touch with their parents' original homelands.

As mentioned previously, Detroit's Arab Americans have immigrated from different parts of the Arab world; hence, they speak different dialects of Arabic. They constitute a diverse linguistic community that incorporates many different subcommunities. Gumperz (cited in Hudson 1985:26) defined speech community as "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by
means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language use.”

As a sociolinguist I am interested in examining the “body of verbal signs” within different speech communities to determine the choice of language made by the speakers. In doing so, I will be looking into both the “social restraints” as well as the “grammatical restraints” (Gumperz 1964:138) that result from the language or dialect contact situations.

Whenever languages are in contact with one another three linguistic phenomena occur: codeswitching, borrowing and interference.

Codeswitching occurs in the speech of competent bilingual speakers when both speaker and listener know the two languages involved well enough to differentiate items from either language at any moment during their speech. The speakers, when codeswitching, alternate their use of the two languages within a single sentence or more. Linguistically speaking, as Michael Clyne stated, “it [CS] often occurs within structural constraints which may be language-specific or even universal” (cited in Coulmas 1997:313). Sociolinguistically, Carol Myers-Scotton defined codeswitching as “… an in-group mode of communication, rather than one used with strangers” (cited in Coulmas 1997:232). In other words, codeswitching occurs when the speakers share the same channels of communication and feel at ease with the two languages. The definition of codeswitching I find clear and indicative is that of Einar Haugen, who defined codeswitching as “the alternate use of two languages including everything from the introduction of a single, unassimilated word up to a complete sentence or more in the context of another language” (1973:521).

Borrowing, on the other hand, involves the transfer of lexical items from one language to another, not the alternating use of two languages. The borrowed items are either unchanged or inflected like words of the same grammatical category in the borrowing language. The speaker is not necessarily a competent bilingual. He/she borrows from the socially dominant language and not from the language he/she knows best. Interference occurs when grammatical rules of the dominant language affect grammatical rules of the subordinate, or borrowing, language. Myers-Scotton defines convergence as a “rearrangement of how grammatical frames are projected in one language under the influence of another language” (cited in Coulmas 1997:229). Borrowing and interference are closely related. When borrowing occurs without interference, it is usually considered a codeswitch.

There are different points of view on borrowing and interference in the literature. Weinreich (1963) stresses the fact that differences in linguistic structures play a major role in the quantitative and qualitative aspects of borrowing and interference. Bickerton (1981:50) states that “languages … are systems, systems have structures, and things incompatible with those structures cannot be borrowed.” Myers-Scotton and Okeju emphasize the importance of the “sociocultural context” in borrowing. They maintain that the sociocultural context, not the structures involved, seems to be more important. In their study of Ateso (spoken in Uganda and Kenya), they found that “the languages from
which Ateso has borrowed so heavily all have very alien structures” (1973:889). This same idea is expounded by Thomason and Kaufman who observed that “it is the social context, not the structure of the languages involved, that determines the direction and the degree of interference” (1988:19).

I am of the opinion that both the linguistic systems of the languages involved and their social context determine the amount and the types of borrowing and interference that occur when languages are in contact. For example, if we consider the structure of Arabic (a Semitic or Afroasiatic language) and that of English (an Indoeuropean language), such incompatible systems should not allow any borrowing, according to Bickerton. This statement can be refuted by the research on the Arabic–English contact situation. Borrowing occurs easily on all linguistic levels in spite of the incompatibility between the structures of Arabic and English.

In examining the processes of borrowing in the speech of Arab Americans, I tried to answer the following questions: what can be borrowed, why is it borrowed, and how does interference at the different linguistic levels occur?

It was apparent in my data that borrowing occurs in both directions, from English to Arabic, and from Arabic to English. The process follows the pattern that has been observed in other borrowing situations. For instance, the largest number of borrowings, from English into Arabic, occurred in the category of nouns (Rouchdy 1992:39). They are nouns borrowed for items that are new to the speakers or nouns that already exist in Arabic but for which the existing word does not convey the same idea as the English noun: for example, (1) \textit{is-sitizen, il livin ruum} “the citizen” “the living room.” Other borrowed nouns are considered unnecessary borrowing such as: (2) \textit{ikkaar “the car,” iddoor “the door,” ikkoot “the coat,” ishshooz “the shoes,”} where the definite article \textit{al/il} is usually attached to the borrowed noun and the process of assimilation is applied. Thus, the Arabic phonological rules are applied to the borrowed English lexical items.

There are differences in the patterns of borrowing between the educated and semi-educated or less-educated speakers. For instance, a semi-educated person would say:

(3) \textit{tabax ʿala-l-stuuv} \hspace{1cm} he cooked on the stove
(4) \textit{tarakitha bi-k-kaar} \hspace{1cm} she left her in the car

An educated speaker would be more likely to convey the same meaning by saying:

(5) \textit{tabax on the stove} \hspace{1cm} he cooked on the stove
(6) \textit{tarakitha in the car} \hspace{1cm} she left it in the car

In (3) and (4), the prepositional phrase consists of an Arabic preposition and English derived noun. This is an example of borrowing. In (5) and (6), an English preposition is used with the English noun. This is a codeswitch.

An additional difference between the linguistic performance of educated and semi-educated bilinguals is the pronunciation of borrowed English lexical items.

© Rouchdy, Aleya, May 13, 2013, Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic

Taylor and Francis, Hoboken, ISBN: 9781136122187
The semi-educated person pronounces English lexical items as closely as possible to how he hears them. For example: "dirty" is given as (7) dary "water" as warer, whereas "[I]ntellectuals tend to borrow foreign words through their eyes" (Higa 1979:284), i.e., by a "spelling pronunciation."

Myers-Scotton and Okeju have observed that "borrowed verbs are relatively few; in general they stand for new concepts" (1973:887). In my data, this did not prove to be the case: verbs constituted the second largest category of borrowing. For example:

(8) fakkasna assayyaara
   Fixed-we-the-car
   "We fixed the car"

(9) kalniit il-beet
   cleaned-I-the-house
   "I cleaned the house"

(10) kolmi bukre
   "Call me tomorrow"

These concepts are not new to the speakers. These items are "unnecessary" borrowings resulting from the strong contact between Arabic and English among these speakers.

Nicholas Sobin, in his study "Texas Spanish and Lexical Borrowing," described borrowed lexical items in terms of "semantic/syntactic features," meaning "features of lexical items which play a role in syntactic (transformational) behavior of sentences containing these items" (1982:167). He found a restriction in the English verbs borrowed into Texas Spanish. Such verbs can be "freely replaced by a form of do so ... and only Vs replaceable by ... do so in English ... have been borrowed" (1982:168–9).

In the case of Detroit Arabic, speakers borrow both types of verbs, the do so and the non-do so verbs. However, there are restrictions that shape the borrowing process with each type; some of these restrictions are morpho-phonologically, others syntactico-semantically determined. For instance, the do so verbs in the following example take an object that can be replaced by a pronoun; that pronoun is never borrowed. The Arabic object pronoun is always suffixed to the borrowed English verbs:

(11) kalneet id-daar
   Cleaned-I-the-house
   "I cleaned the house"

(12) baraknaa-ha
   Parked-we-it
   "We parked it"
It would be ungrammatical to say:

(13) *barakna-it

"We parked it"

Here the English verbs are adapted to the phonological patterns, but most importantly, the morphological patterns of Arabic grammar are also adapted.

The non-*do so* verbs follow a different pattern. For example:

(14) I see inti sayra muthaqqafa

"I see you became educated"

(15) I swear inti majnuuna

"I swear you [are] crazy"

(16) I know inti ju'cana

"I know you [are] hungry"

The verbs "see," "swear," and "know" are not adapted to the Arabic morphological pattern. The restriction results from the syntactic characteristics of the verbs; the non-*do so* verbs in the above examples have complement clause boundaries rather than the strict noun phrase boundaries of the *do so* verb sentences. In the case of non-*do so* verbs, the speakers transferred the English verb and pronoun into the Arabic structure without modification; these are instances of codeswitching.

In addition to this syntactic restriction on the process of verb borrowing, there is a semantic restriction. The non-*do so* verbs used in the speech of Arab Americans expressed a state of mind; this was not characteristic of *do so* verbs (typical examples are "see," "believe," "swear," "understand," etc.). Furthermore, these verbs in context are not easy to translate into Arabic. A literal translation does not convey the exact meaning. For example:

(17) I swear inti majnuuna

"I swear you [are] crazy"

The phrase "I swear" would be translated literally into Arabic as *ahlif*. However, the statement (17) *ahlif inti majnuuna* is unacceptable. The correct translation would be

(18) wallahi inti majnuuna!

"By God, you [are] crazy!"

Where the underlying structure is

"I swear by God that you are crazy!"

Thus, when borrowing, the bilingual speaker automatically conducts a linguistic analysis: verbs with a literal equivalent in Arabic are easily borrowed. For example:
The verb "to clean" has the Arabic equivalent 

The verb "to clean" has the Arabic equivalent *nazaf* with similar semantic features. The sentence *kalneet id-daar*, "I cleaned the house," is semantically acceptable in the speech of Arab Americans. This is a simple verb with no restrictions on its selection. But verbs with complex restrictions are codeswitched. Cases where Arab-American speakers use unacceptable structures such as (17) *ahlif inti majnuuna!* to translate the English "I swear you [are] crazy" reflect, in Nancy Dorian's words, "asymmetry" (1981:155). Asymmetry occurs when the linguistic skills of a speaker are unbalanced; such a speaker is a non-competent bilingual, or "semi-speaker," whose linguistic production is similar to other reduced language systems, such as the language of children or pidgin language.

Adjectives are usually not easily borrowed but codeswitched. Sobin found only one adjective borrowed from English into Texas Spanish (*tofudo* for "tough"). According to Sobin, the Texas Spanish speaker did not consider it an adjective and added the "adjectivalizing suffix -udo" (1982:169). In another study on Australian English and German, Clyne noted that "transferred adjectives are almost invariably left uninflected" (1967:35–6). Many recent studies on codeswitching mention that attributive adjectives rarely occur as embedded forms (see Boumans in this volume).

My interpretations on the Arabic spoken by Arab Americans support those above in the mentioned studies (Rouchdy 1992). Arab-American speakers use borrowed English adjectives without inflecting them, unlike Arabic adjectives, which must agree with the noun they modify in gender, number, and definiteness. For example:

"you (fem) [are] lucky" would be given as

(19) *inti laki

(20) *inta leezi* for "you (mas) [are] lazy"

It would be ungrammatical to use Arabic morphology and say:

(21) *inti lakiyy-a

(22) *hiyya beautiful-a "she (is) beautiful"

Why are adjectives switched rather than borrowed? Do adjectives and verbs share similar semantic features in this regard? This point has been discussed by Lakoff (1966), and Sobin (1982).

Adjectives such as "beautiful," "cheap," "lazy," and so on, denote a state of mind; they are restricted like non-do so verbs and cannot be borrowed: they are switched. During my observations, one of the speakers made the following statement:
(23) *nayyselluh*

Nice-you (mas)-to-him

“Say something nice to him”

In this case he makes a verb out of the adjective “nice.” The hypothetical sentence “John *nayyselluh* and Bill did so, too” would be accepted by the speaker involved. Thus, the verb created from the adjective “nice” is a *do so* verb, which can be borrowed and adapted to the Arabic grammatical pattern. Additional research on the borrowing of adjectives in other situations of language contact will contribute greatly to the analysis of restrictions on borrowing.

**SOCIOCULTURAL ISSUES**

Most studies of minority languages or ethnic languages are consistent in their conclusions that the use of ethnic language gradually decreases with successive generations due to a process of assimilation. There are certain events, however, that might lead to an ethnic revival. In an article entitled “The Third Generation in America,” Marcus L. Hansen (1952:496) points out that ethnic identity takes place over the course of three generations, and that there is a return to ethnicity in the third generation. Nahirny and Fishman, on the other hand, maintain that “the ethnic heritage, including the ethnic mother tongue, usually ceases to play any viable role in the life of the third generation” (1965:311). In general, both views are correct. In order for third-generation Americans to return to their ancestral ethnicity, there are certain social events that must take place. Subsequently, this rise in ethnicity might lead to the learning of the ethnic language.

Fishman (1985:114) wrote about the attrition of ethnic languages in the United States, such as French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, and Yiddish, based on 1960 and 1970 census data, and stated that most who claim non-English mother tongues no longer use them. Except for Spanish, the attrition rate of the other languages is 36 percent, while for Spanish it is 19 percent. This is, of course, due to the large number of those who claim Spanish as mother tongue, and due also to the continuous waves of new immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries.

Arabic speakers in the Detroit metro area share with Spanish speakers two situations: First, there is continuous arrival of new immigrants in their neighborhoods. Second, a large number of Arab-American speakers maintain that Arabic is their mother tongue.

How and why do Arab Americans become so inclined toward their heritage language, especially since this has not been always the case? Early in this century, the idea of maintaining minority languages or enhancing “cultural pluralism was not favored by politicians, academicians, or the public in general.” Gleason stated that the fear that immigration in the US could affect “national culture” led to the “espousal of the idea of assimilation and amalgamation. Assimilation was then used interchangeably with Americanization” (1984:222).

The earliest groups of Arab Americans, those who immigrated after World War II, tried to disassociate themselves from their ethnic heritage, especially its
language, because of how they were viewed by others. Actually, as a reaction to the prevailing anti-ethnic feeling and the pressure for conformity and assimilation, some Arab Americans went so far as to Anglicize their names to escape discrimination at work or when applying for a jobs, such as: Mohamad became Mike, Saleh became Sally, Bushra became Bouchard, and 9asham became Ashman.

A quotation from Gregory Orfalea’s book Before the Flames: A Quest for the History of Arab-Americans, reflects the attitude of Arab Americans towards their ancestral language or heritage language in the early part of this century.

“It was for this generation ... the most Americanized of all, that Arabic was a tongue whispered in warmth or shouted when a glass was broken at the dinner table. It was not the language that made friends or secured work, and it certainly was not useful in assembling a field rifle in the army.” (1988:107).

This quotation vividly reflects Arab American attitudes, at that time, towards the use of Arabic. Where was Arabic used? It was used secretly within one’s home. It was used to express one’s emotions, “a warm whisper of love,” or a shout to reprimand a loved one. But it was not considered an appropriate language to be used outside the sanctity of one’s home. It was not the “language that made friends.” If used it would isolate and alienate its speakers who would never be accepted in American society at large, nor make friends, nor become good patriots, since “it certainly was not useful in assembling a field rifle in the army.”

Later there were, however, some social factors that had an impact on the use of Arabic in the American Diaspora, and altered the feeling of paranoia that prevailed among Arab Americans. These factors affected the maintenance of the language, and led to its transmission to subsequent generations.

Since the mid 1960s there has been a shift toward an acceptance of ethnicity, although somewhat hypocritical. This shift is due to three major social changes, both in the US and the Arab world. These social changes have had an impact on the use of minority languages in general, and led to the revival or rebirth of ethnic pride and identity.

First, the civil rights movement in the US during the latter part of the 1950s and in the ‘60s encouraged the assertion of racial and ethnic identity and the rejection of the traditional concept of the melting pot. This led to the promulgation of legislation prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender.

Second, the convoluted political realities widespread in the Arab world continue to provide strong reasons for immigration from Arabic-speaking countries. Hence, the number of fluent speakers – many of whom are well educated – is increasing in the US and there is a larger social context within which it is appropriate to speak Arabic.

Third, the revival of Muslim identity in the Arab world and among Arab-American Muslims, has created a need for the language with which they can fulfill their religious duties and take pride in their identity as Muslims. In other
words, this revival of Muslim identity has created a special function for Arabic—a religious function—because only Arabic can be used to fulfill the obligation of the most important pillars of Islam, the prayer.

This revival of Muslim identity is apparent on Fridays in Dearborn, where mosques are full at the time of the noon prayer and where many women walk to the mosques wearing Islamic attire. In fact, the wearing of Islamic attire by Muslim women in the Dearborn area has been on the increase. It is noticeable in the streets and in some schools.

In an article entitled "Divided Loyalties: Language and Ethnic Identity in the Arab World," Holt stated, "[g]iven that language is probably the most powerful symbol of ethnicity, it therefore forms a basis of identity for millions who are politically separated" (cited in Suleiman 1994:11). In other words language distinguishes one person from another and one group from another. This is quite true, but Holt's remark was in connection with ethnic languages in the Arab world where minority languages are indigenous to the area—languages such as Kurdish, Berber, or Nubian. These are indigenous minority languages that are in contact with a dominant language, Arabic. In these situations of language contact, the ethnic minority language might erode, and such erosion might lead to language death.

Arabic, on the other hand, as an ethnic language in the Diaspora, faces a totally different fate. It might be affected linguistically by English to the point where it ceases to be used among some Arab Americans, but it will never die. Hence, the difference between these two cases of language contact and conflict is that, in the first case the ethnic language might be totally eroded, but in the second case the language merely suffers attrition and can be retrieved and learned at any time.

In reference to ethnic languages Narroll, in "Ethnic Unit Classification" (1964:283), stated that there is a "mouth to mouth" and "mind to mind" transmission between different generations of both ethnic groups and speech communities. This statement expresses well the situation of Arabic in the Diaspora. "Mouth to mouth" refers to the transmission of the dialect spoken at home, while "mind to mind" refers to the transmission of ideas. The idea of an ideal language is always there, hanging permanently on the horizon. This ideal of the Arabic language is what we refer to as the standard or classical Arabic language. It is this aspect of Arabic that acts as a unifying force among all speakers of the language. It is a common denominator that is bringing Arab speakers together, whether in the Arab world or among ethnic groups in the Diaspora. It is an expression of identity. One might use here the defunct term of "pan-Arab" identity.

Thus, the classical/standard form of Arabic creates a sense of ethnic identity among Arab Americans who belong to different speech communities. Suzanne Romaine, when referring to the sociolinguistic variation in speech communities, said the "individuals [in a community as a whole] may share the same Sprachbund without necessarily sharing the same Sprechbund." (1982:24). Classical Arabic is the Sprachbund that acts as a symbol that differentiates or
identifies not only those who use it but also those who understand it, as being different from others, the non-Arabic speakers. It is a language from which members of the different speech communities draw support and upon which they build their Arab American ethos in the Diaspora. Hence, it creates a bond of solidarity and an ethnic identity that raises a feeling of “us versus them.”

There is another factor that comes into the picture where the “us versus them” feeling is expressed, and that is the diversity of dialects. Using Romaine’s terminology, Arab Americans do not share the same Sprechbund, since they came from different parts of the Arab world. They have different dialects which they use in their daily contact with each other. This situation also erects a barrier between “us” and “them,” them being those from other dialect areas. Hence, this multiple dichotomy between Arabs and non-Arabs and between Arab speakers of different Arabic dialects shapes the expression of the Arab-American identity. It is a dichotomy that has both a negative and a positive linguistic impact. It is negative in the sense that the language can go through a process of attrition and a positive impact in the sense that a new linguistic form can develop that is understood by members of the different Arabic speech communities.

In *The Arabic Language in America* (Rouchdy 1992), there are reports of three studies in which the fate of Arabic in the Diaspora is viewed differently. First, Badr Dweik, in his study “Lebanese Christians in Buffalo: Language Maintenance and Language Shift,” concludes by saying that “Arabic was abandoned because it had no religious or nationalistic value to these Lebanese” (117). On the other hand, Linda Walbridge in her study “Arabic in the Dearborn Mosque,” discusses the relationship between Islam and the retention of Arabic in Dearborn. As she points out, the long-term future of Arabic depends on its survival as a medium of religious ritual. Third, Sawaie, in his article entitled “Arabic in the Melting Pot: Will it Survive?” states that the large number of Arab immigrants who came to the US from 1900 to 1910 were determined to protect the mother tongue” (94). Arabic seemed to be the social glue that bonded the community together at that time, reinforced by its use in some churches, mosques, and community newspapers. However, with the change in the political climate and the incessant attacks on Arabs in the West, the second generation of Arab Americans gave up their loyalty to their heritage language, standard or dialect. Sawaie predicts that the language of the Arabic-speaking immigrants who have recently arrived in the US will erode. I disagree with Sawaie’s prediction and with Dweik’s assessment, especially in a city such as Detroit, for the following reasons.

Recently, in Detroit, there has been a revival in the use of Arabic among Arab Americans. This revival is reflected in the increasing number of Arabic television programs, newspapers, and cable networks that transmit directly from the Arab world. Furthermore, national religious academies have been established; private schools, where Arabic and Islamic studies are taught, have been opened. Arabic as a foreign language is taught in some public schools. Moreover, there is a definite increase in enrollment in Arabic classes in universities in Michigan. It has also been pointed out that in New York
York Times Sunday, 8 November 1998), there are thirteen Arabic schools with an enrollment of 2,400 and in New Jersey there are at least ten private Islamic schools.

I recently conducted a survey of seventy-nine Arab-American students studying Standard Arabic as a foreign language at Wayne State University. Seventy-seven out of the seventy-nine respondents stated that Arabic is very important to them. The subjects gave the following reasons for their interest:

- 38% ethnic identity
- 34% religious affiliation
- 33% fulfilling a language requirement
- 24% importance of Arabic from a global perspective
- 5% influence of parental advice

The students who responded to the questionnaire belonged to different speech communities: that is, they have different dialect backgrounds. They are studying Standard Arabic as a foreign language. Thus, it is Standard Arabic that binds these students together. Furthermore, it is Standard Arabic that also binds nonstudent Arab Americans in the different speech communities to form one large linguistic community referred to by everyone as the Arab-American community in Detroit.

The diglossic nature of the Arabic language itself creates a strong relationship between the learning of Standard Arabic as a foreign language and the maintenance of the different dialects. This association is what differentiates Arabic from other ethnic nondiglossic languages in the Diaspora. The question to ask here would be: Does the learning of standard/classical Arabic as a foreign language help maintain the spoken language that is used at home among Arab Americans?

Indeed, the formal learning of Standard Arabic might revive the student’s ethnic identity and spiritual motivation, which could lead to a retrieval of the spoken language. However, the learning of Standard Arabic will not prevent the changes that occur whenever the different dialects or languages come into contact.

As a result, of this language contact situation, an ethnic language develops, a language that is used among speakers in the Diaspora. It does not correspond to any specific dialect variety nor does it correspond to Standard Arabic. It is a situation of language shift that creates an ethnic language, or a lingua franca, understood only by members within this specific linguistic community and that has a specific functional use.

This lingua franca is not understood by Arab immigrants outside the US, as in France, Holland or Germany. Comparative research on the use of Arabic in different parts of the Diaspora will be of great value to the field of sociolinguistics. For instance, how does Arabic, a language in contact with other languages in the US, differ linguistically and sociolinguistically from Arabic in other non-Muslim Western countries, on the one hand, and in Muslim non-Western countries, on the other?
To sum up these thoughts about Arabic as an ethnic language in the Diaspora and to its future, I would like to stress two points. First, there will always be skill attrition in the Arabic spoken in the Diaspora because of constant contact with a dominant language. However, when skill attrition occurs, it is only in the immigrants’ linguistic repertoire and such attrition can easily be reversed for the language to be learned. Usually, it is the standard Arabic language that is formally learned. Such learning of the standard, in many cases, leads to the acquisition of a specific dialect.

Second, the changes that occur in the ethnic language because of contact with the dominant language, should not be considered an erosion of the speaker’s competence in Arabic, but rather as an accomplishment of performance resulting in an ethnic language, or a lingua franca, that acts as a bond among Arab Americans, and which might also help toward the learning or maintenance of one’s ancestral language.

NOTE
1 This article was first presented at the Symposium on “Language, Creativity and Identity in Diaspora Communities,” Center for Advanced Study, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 20–22 November 1998.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


