7

GREETINGS IN BEIRUT
Social distribution and attitudes towards
different formulae

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7.1 Introduction
When various dialectal varieties and different languages meet in urban centers,
speakers—both migrants and city dwellers—have to accommodate the contact
of linguistic varieties. In multilingual situations, where there is no mutual
understanding between them, speakers tend to adopt a common lingua franca
in order to be able to communicate, whether it is the language of one of the
linguistic groups, or an external lingua franca. The urban lect not only has a
communication function, but also an identity one, in the sense that adopting
it may become the sign of integration into the city and its values.

In cases where various dialectal varieties meet, and mutual understanding
is possible between their speakers, the adoption of a common lingua franca
is not necessary for communicative purposes. There remains nevertheless,
the question of the linguistic integration of groups into the city, and the
directions of linguistic changes in urban areas. Urban sociolinguistics
proposes to approach urban places as a space that produces new variations.
Calvet (1994) thinks that urbanization can cause, along with the linguistic
integration to a common vernacular, the appearance of new linguistic forms
and languages that functionally replace the languages that disappeared.¹

In her remarks about Blom and Gumperz’s 1972 study of code-switching
in Norway, Lesley Milroy (1985) also points out that the reason why ver-
naculars resist pressure to the standard is that they have functions for the
groups that use them; and that they might be a sign of the group identity
and of the rejection of the “prestige” dialect:

Thus, instead of positing a sociolinguistic continuum with a local
vernacular at the bottom and a prestige dialect at the top, with
linguistic movement of individuals in a generally upward direction,
we may view the vernacular as a positive force: it may be in direct
conflict with standardized norms, utilized as a symbol by speakers to carry powerful social meanings and so resistant to external pressures.

(Milroy 1985: 19)

Both tendencies—linguistic integration and differentiation—are strongly linked to linguistic and extra-linguistic values. It is thus necessary, before presenting this study on linguistic variables for greetings in Beirut, to highlight some facts about the city itself, and about the demographic changes it has experienced so far.

7.2 Growth, division and reunification: a presentation of Beirut urban area

Beirut experienced a quick expansion in the twentieth century. Its population grew from 130,000 inhabitants in 1914 to 581,000 in 1988. The population of the whole Beirut urban area (including the suburbs) grew from 450,000 inhabitants in 1959 to 1,200,000 inhabitants in 1988 (Boudjikanian 1994). The conflicts it experienced later on disrupted its growth, and the number of inhabitants living inside the city’s administrative boundaries has not increased since the beginning of the civil war, mainly because of a steady emigration. In the meantime, the number of residents in the suburbs continued to increase.

Until 1975, we could distinguish three distinct areas inside and around Beirut: the city center was essentially commercial, while the city around it was a mixed residential area from the communal point of view—Hamra and Ras Beirut being more mixed and socially prestigious than other areas (Mouzoune 1999: 36). Hamra eventually became an economical center at least as important as the balad (downtown) itself (Bourgey 1979). The suburbs were poorer and more homogeneous regarding the geographical and communal origins of their inhabitants. Rural Shiite immigrants settled essentially in southern and eastern suburbs, and their Maronites counterparts settled in northern and eastern suburbs.

However, this setting changed after the outbreak of the civil war. The city was quickly divided in two separated areas: jarbiyye and varbiyye (East and West Beirut). Two concomitant facts accompanied this division: first, the appearance of a demarcation line later known as the “green line” that separated the two sectors and that could be crossed only in some locations, and second, population transfers that occurred inside the city—and across the entire country. During the first two years of the war, 110,000 Muslims left East Beirut and 75,000 Christians moved out of West Beirut; some 50,000 other Christians also left West Beirut after 1983 (Mouzoune 1999: 69). Both division and internal migrations led to a relative communal homogenization of each of the city sectors. This new human geographical
Map 7.1 Beirut
division was reinforced by the fact that refugees from other parts of the country usually settled in the area that was under the influence of their religious group.

The division of the city was also consolidated by the destruction of the city center during the early stages of the conflicts. Banks and shops were forced to move out of downtown Beirut. They opened branches in both sectors of the city whose inhabitants lost the shared public space they had represented (Davie 1993: 2).

Territorial, human and economical divisions put a stop to coexistence in the same quarters and suburbs of the capital between different communities, and political and social groups. Even after the end of the civil war, Michael Davie who worked on urban issues noticed in 1993 that the “frontier” was still very alive in the inhabitants’ minds.5

The unprecedented and tremendous growth of Beirut’s southern suburb is also to be partly regarded as a consequence of the war: thousands of Shiite refugees fled from southern Lebanon and the Beqaa valley to settle there, especially after Israel’s invasion of the country in 1982. This area now known as the Da’iyeh has grown enough to be considered as a settlement center at least as important as Beirut itself. In 1990 an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 persons lived in the southern suburbs which cover an area of 16 km² while Beirut had 510,000 inhabitants with an area of 17.9 km² (Harb el Kak 1996: 32). Besides, it is often considered as a particular space, relatively autonomous and self-sufficient, poor, and very homogeneous from the communal point of view.6

7.3 Greetings and sociolinguistic variation in Beirut

Two major sociolinguistic studies were conducted in the 1980s in two areas of Beirut. Through rigorous phonological description of various idiolects, Naïm-Sanbar (1985), and Srage (1997) respectively described the pattern of phonological variation in Ras-Beyrouth and Moussaytbeh. Other levels of linguistic analysis (morphological, syntactical or lexical) were nevertheless left apart in these studies and in the much earlier phonetic study of Mattisson (1910).

The aim of this chapter is to focus on another kind of linguistic variable, greetings formulae; and it will deal with both their distribution and with attitudes towards them. These formulae have not been studied yet in the case of Beirut. The three studies mentioned above focused on phonological and not on lexical variables. Recent works conducted by the GRIC (Université de Lyon 2) in an intercultural perspective in small shops in Lebanon (Beirut), Syria, Tunisia, France and Vietnam, have given a “script” of interactions occurring in such situations in these countries (Dimachki and Hmed 2002: 2). But these studies did not focus on the greeting formulae that were used, and did not study their variation.
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The choice of greetings as a variable imposed itself because of the existence of a variety of terms for the same act – greeting – in Beirut, and because of the interactional and social significance of the greetings in general. Srage referred to the existence of a choice between different formulae in a study dealing with school diglossia in Beirut:

Forms of greeting in Beirut illustrate well the great variety of social and linguistic levels. Thus, if I wanted to greet a Cheikh (religious notable) or a practicing Muslim, the best form would be the religious form: assalam alaykum “May my greeting be with you”. If I wanted to speak to a family member, colleagues, or my students, I use the form sabah-il-hayr. It means “good morning” and I find it more appropriate.6

(Srage 1987: 82)

The author insists on the importance of social factors over the choice of a precise greeting formula. The example he gives also outlines the religious dimension of this choice.

The formulae used to greet are usually interchangeable: they all occur at the same time in a conversation, function in adjacent pairs, and share other characteristics, such as conveying the same meaning (like the recognition of the other as a legitimate interlocutor, cf. Duranti (1997)). It could thus prove interesting to study the correlations between particular formulae and social variables, especially as the “access rituals” described by Goffman (1973) have mostly been studied essentially from an ethnological or an anthropological point of view.

7.4 Attitudes towards greeting formulae

In January 2003 we conducted interviews with 22 informants (see Appendix), during which the topic of greetings was brought up. Mainly five formulae were cited during these interviews: bonjour [bɔʒœ], marhaba, hi [hœy], sabah el-hayr and as-salâmu ‘alaykum. Those formulae can be classified into two categories: the ones that some informants called “neutral formulae” (mainly bonjour and marhaba), and the ones that were said to be used “depending on the situation”. The first are said to be used “normally” – when the situation does not require a particular formula – while the use of the latter depends on social elements such as his interlocutor’s profile (gender, age, religion, linguistic competence, etc.), the moment of the day, or the formality of the situation. The use of some formulae of this second category was sometimes rejected by informants: they would be able to explain when others use them – or who would use them – but they would totally reject their use for themselves.
marhaba was said to be a neutral greeting by eleven informants. One informant said he uses it “only” when he is not sure if his interlocutor speaks French or English. One informant said she would use it when “you have to greet in Arabic”. Four other informants linked its use to particular situations: they’d greet with a marhaba if their interlocutor is Muslim, or if they are engaged in an informal conversation, or if they are greeting a lower class interlocutor. Nine informants considered bonjour instead as a neutral formula. One of them insisted on making clear that the use of a French word was not wrong in an Arabic speaking country such as Lebanon:

The first thing I will think of (for greeting) is French. We got used to it so it is not wrong. This word, bonjour, is not wrong because we are used to it. I cannot say to someone ṣabāḥ ʾel-ḥeyr for example.

Other informants said they would only use it when addressing a person that knew French or a Christian person. Three informants said they never used it; they described its use as unusual or pretentious.

No one considered ṣabāḥ ʾel-ḥeyr as their normal greeting, although twelve informants said it was used frequently but depending on the situation. It was, to them, a term to be used in the morning (contrary to marhaba that can be used during the entire day), in formal situation, or when addressing an elderly person. Four other informants said it was not a frequent expression. They said it was not easy to utter (“too long and too heavy”) and specialized for “written Arabic” (“If somebody greeted me using ṣabāḥ ʾel-ḥeyr, I would feel he is very influenced by Arabic literature”).

All of the informants viewed ḥi as an informal formula. Its main advantage is its brevity according to a majority of informants. This term is said to be used amongst young people, Christians, students, or between friends.

When asked, only two informants said they would use as-salāmu ʿalaykum themselves. Christians consider it a “Muslim” greeting, or a “non Lebanese” greeting (used by “Arabs” from Gulf States); and Muslim informants added a nuance to that statement, saying it was used among practicing Muslims. as-salāmu ʿalaykum is also the expression to which the biggest number of informants reacted negatively, and sometimes with violence. A 23-year-old unemployed Shiite woman said:

Sometimes I say ṣabāḥ ʾel-ḥeyr and people answer me wa ʿalaykum as-salām as if they wanted to force me to say it. I hate this. I am Lebanese, after all, as-salāmu ʿalaykum I feel it is well it is a greeting after all. But I am Lebanese. ṣabāḥ ʾel-ḥeyr.

The most violent reaction against this formula occurred during an interview with a 29-year-old Maronite teacher:
RESEARCHER: Do you sometimes use as salāmu ‘alaykum?
INFORMANT: No way. There is no way. Over my dead body
R: Why?
I: I don’t like for example ḥukran or as-salāmu ‘alaykum. Why the hell am I going to say it? I have a hundred thousand other options. And why the hell should I say something that –
R: Something that?
I: You want me to be very honest
R: Yes
I: Well it is a Muslim word. I have nothing against Muslims but I’m proud to be Christian and that’s it.

These interviews allowed us to outline the existence of three types of greetings, according to the speaker’s attitude towards them. Some expressions are said to be “neutral”, others are said to be suitable to some kind of situations, and some can be totally rejected. The same formula can belong to each of these three categories, depending on the informant. Sometimes it can belong to the two last types for a single informant. This raises the point of the absence of consensus among all informants over one single greeting to be used in any situation, without it being the sign of a categorization of each interlocutor by the other.

7.5 The use of greetings in Beirut: a distribution according to social, communal, and territorial factors

7.5.1 Presentation of the data collection

In order to be able to determine the factors that would influence the choice of a certain greeting formula rather than another in Beirut, we carried out a field study of the greetings usage during January 2004. We had decided to select places where several encounters can happen in a row, to make it possible to have a significant amount of data involving greetings. We thus limited our observations to public places, such as shops (2 newspaper kiosks and 6 grocery stores), doctor’s offices (2), and fast-food outlets (4). We noted that 79.24 percent of the greetings were initiated by the person coming from the outside, and not by the owner of the place.

Initially, we had only chosen the kiosks, fast-food outlets, and medical centers, hoping to observe a diverse range of individuals as possible. One of the kiosks is situated in Concorde, a business area near Hamra. We went there on Monday morning (8.30 am to 11.30 am), when the employees, on their way to work, stopped there to buy their newspapers. The second kiosk is located in Sassine – a more residential area – and we went there on Sunday; it was then mostly frequented by people living in the immediate vicinity.
As for the fast-food outlets, two of them were actually two branches of the same brand; one is located in Sodeco, near Saint Joseph University (French curriculum), and the other one is opposite the gate of the American University of Beirut, on Bliss Street. Most of their customers are students, generally from middle or higher social classes. The prices of the other two outlets (in Hamra and Achrafieh) are more affordable, and their menu is also more "classical" and restricted, consisting of one or two types of sandwiches. They are frequented by the residents of the area and by low and middle class workers during the day.

Concerning the physician, it was in fact a hearing aid specialist who had two offices, one in Hamra and one in Jal el Dib (northeastern suburb). His patients were either elderly persons, or very young children accompanied by their parents. This allowed us to observe different age brackets and social levels.

After this first stage of field work, we noticed that we had not heard some of the expressions that were cited during the interviews (including as-salāmu 'alaykum that we had only encountered once). This formula had been considered as a "(practicing) Muslim" expression. But all of the areas where we had conducted our researches were central areas, with a certain level of communal and social mixing. Some other areas in Beirut and its suburbs being more marked, socially and communally, so we decided to extend our observations to such areas.

In order to be sure that a majority of the observed interlocutors would be inhabitants of the selected areas, we decided to restrict our observations to groceries. The grocer would be able to inform us whether every customer is a habitué – and thus lives in the neighborhood – or not. We selected six areas in this second step. The first grocery was in Borj Hammoud where the majority of the inhabitants are of Armenian origin (the grocer who received us was himself Armenian), the second one was in Haret Hreik, in the southern suburb (inhabited mostly by Shiites), the third one was in Sabra, with lower level social classes formed by Palestinian refugees, displaced Lebanese Shiites and Syrian workers, who clustered in the area according to their nationalities (in three separated sectors). Our grocery owner was Lebanese, with a majority of Lebanese clients. We also went to Nabaa (northern suburb) where there are groups of Armenians, displaced Lebanese Christians, Syrians and Kurdish workers; to Nweyri, close to Basta; and, to Karm el Zeytoun. This enabled us to gather two other formulae: as-salāmu 'alaykum and barew (Armenian).

We noted 480 interactions in all. Of these, 342 began with at least one person greeting the other while the remaining 138 encounters took place without any greeting. For each encounter, we wrote down the gender and approximate age of the interlocutor, whether he was a habitué or not, all of the routine formulae (thanks, greetings, good byes, and so on . . .), and, when necessary, the gestures and the possible relation of kinship between the interlocutors or any other possibly relevant remark.
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In the analysis of the data that follows, we only take into account the first part of the adjacent pair of the greetings, and only the interlocutor who greeted first, whatever his role was (client, doctor, patient...). When speaking of a percentage of use for each formula, or of the number of times it was used, we refer only to the first formula used by the first person to greet, and not to all the greetings exchanged. We do not take into account the answer to the first greetings or anything that follows it.

The fact is that the formula used by the first person directly influences the formula used in reply: in a majority of cases, the answer is either the “expected” semantic one (ex: bonjour/bonjour(eyn) or as-salāmu ʿalaykum/ wa ʿalaykum as-salām), or a “complementary” greeting (for example, the couple “how are you?/fine”, as defined by André-Larochebouvy 1984: 69). It was rare that an interlocutor who was greeted with a particular formula produced an unexpected answer (bonjour/masa el-ḥeyr). It sometimes happened that he did not answer at all.

7.5.2 Data analysis

The “first” formulae found in the collected data are (number within brackets refers to number of occurrences):

bonjour or bonsoir (118), marhaba (65), hi (40), as-salāmu ʿalaykum (28), kifak (23), ahl and its variants ahlān and ahlān (9), ʿabāḥ el-ḥeyr (9), la (6), yʿāṭīq el-ʿafye (5), hello (3), barew – pronounced as parev (8), barī ʿirkown – pronounced payergun (2), saʿide (1), salamdi (1), salām (1), hi bonsoir (6 occurrences, but with one single person).

The most frequent formulae are therefore bonjour, marhaba, hi and as-salāmu ʿalaykum. Different criteria favor the use of each one of them. The most important criteria are territorial, social, and religious. The other formulae were not frequent enough in the collected data, and it is therefore impossible to propose a relevant interpretation of their use. Nevertheless, we will also present a short analysis on the use of barew and barī ʿirkown, as they were only heard in the two areas where a majority of Lebanese from Armenian origin settled (Nabaa and Borj Hammoud).

7.5.2.1 bonjour

This is the most frequently used formula in the collected data: 118 persons used it, i.e. 34.50 percent of the “first greetings” observed. Its use does not vary significantly within different age brackets, but it is used by 46.15 percent of women and only by 28.44 percent of men. It also varies according to the type of place where the encounter takes place. It was more frequent in
the doctor’s office (58.02 percent of the “first greetings” in both offices), especially in Jal al Dib (69.39 percent of the “first greetings” are a bonjour). On the other hand, it was rather rare in the grocery stores (17.16 percent of first greetings).

The difference between Jal el Dib (69.39 percent of bonjour) and Hamra (40.625 percent) offices reflects the territorial distribution of the use of this formula. Bonjour is much more frequent in those areas that were part of East Beirut (and northern and eastern suburbs of the city; with Jal el Dib being part of these suburbs), than it is in areas anciently part of West Beirut (and southern suburbs). In West Beirut (i.e. Bliss, Concorde, Hamra, Haret Hreik, Nweyri, Sabra districts) 152 greetings were observed and 183 in East Beirut (i.e. Borj Hammoud, Jal el Dib, Karm el Zaytoun, Nabaa, Sassine and Sodeco districts).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.1 Percentage of bonjour in East and West Beirut</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East Beirut</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of bonjour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of greetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of bonjour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is another remark about each one of those two groups: bonjour is generally more used in areas inside Beirut’s administrative boundaries, generally mixed, with middle or upper class areas inhabitants or with business centers, than in those areas situated in the suburbs or in popular residential areas inside Beirut. In Borj Hammoud and Nabaa (northern suburbs), bonjour’s percentage is respectively 26.92 percent and 23.08 percent, while it is 51.52 percent in Sassine and 52.32 percent in Sodeco. Not one person used bonjour in Haret Hreik and Sabra (southern suburb). Only one person used it in Nweyri, while in Hamra, Concorde and Bliss, the percentage of bonjour is significant: respectively 34.04 percent, 29.63 percent and 33.33 percent.

It appears therefore that bonjour is more used in “Christian” areas, and less used in “Muslim” areas and is also less frequent in popular areas: it is almost never used in popular Muslim areas. Women also tend to use it more than men, and it might be used more frequently in formal situations (such as the doctor’s office), than in informal ones (such as in the grocery store).

7.5.2.2 marhaba

The marhaba greeting occurred 65 times – 19.05 percent of all first greetings observed. Its use varies with the age of the interlocutor, and the type of situation in which he is involved. Contrary to bonjour, marhaba is more
frequent among men (23.56 percent of them used it) than among women (10.26 percent). Also contrary to bonjour, it is more frequent in groceries (26.12 percent of greetings in groceries are a marhaba), and less frequent at the hearing aid specialist's office (6.17 percent of the greetings).

In the fast food outlets 10.67 percent of greetings were a marhaba, but this only occurred in the outlets located in Hamra and Achrafieh – the ones mostly attended by workers and area inhabitants. Only one person said marhaba in the two branches of the fast food outlets with a younger clientele formed by students marhaba is apparently more frequent in informal situations (groceries), among men, and in places frequented by workers. Furthermore, it was more frequently used by persons aged between 40/59.

Table 7.2 Percentage of marhaba by age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>-18</th>
<th>19/29</th>
<th>30/39</th>
<th>40/49</th>
<th>50/59</th>
<th>+60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of use of marhaba</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.04%</td>
<td>17.07%</td>
<td>27.40%</td>
<td>25.53%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.5.2.2 hi

The corpus contains 40 hi – as a first greeting – in other words 11.70 percent of all greetings. It is more frequent among women and younger interlocutors, and - not surprisingly - near the American University, in places attended by its students. 62.50 percent of its occurrences were by women – leaving only 37.50 percent by men – whereas the majority of the persons observed were actually men (225 men, and 117 women), i.e. 21.37 percent of the 117 women used it, and only 6.67 percent of the men.

Table 7.3 Percentage of hi by age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>-18</th>
<th>19/29</th>
<th>30/39</th>
<th>40/49</th>
<th>50/59</th>
<th>+60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of use of hi</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>6.85%</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only 8 persons were more than 60 years old.

One last and unsurprising remark: the formula was very frequent in the two fast food outlets frequented by young people and students (Bliss and Sodeco). In Bliss 37.50 percent of greetings were a hi while 19.05 percent of those in Sodeco were a hi. The difference between those two places is more than probably due to the proximity between the Bliss street snack bar and the American University of Beirut.
as-salāmu ālāykum is the fourth most frequent formula in our data: 8.19 percent of all first greetings (28 occurrences). Its distribution varies according to social and territorial factors. A majority (89.29 percent or 25 occurrences) of those using it are men. It is also more widely used in groceries (27 occurrences; the last occurrence happened in the kiosk in Concorde). But both these remarks are not relevant if not related with the territories of the usage of this formula. Contrary to the other formulae, there is a clear division between three areas (Nweyri, Sabra and Haret Hreik) where this formula is massively used, and all the other areas where it hardly ever occurs. It occurred only once in Concorde and once in Nabaa, but it was each time a Syrian supplier – not a client – who used it. We also noticed that two similar formulae salām and salāmat – were also used only by Syrians interlocutors.

Of people entering the grocery – and greeting – in Nweyri 25 percent used as-salāmu ālāykum, 42.11 percent did in Sabra, and 73.68 percent in Haret Hreik. This is probably why it had a higher rate of usage in groceries than in other situations (the three places visited in these areas were groceries).

This also can explain the difference of usage between men and women – only 11 women greeted in those 3 groceries. They greeted as follows:

Nweyri (5 women): 3 mārḥāba; 1 ḥi; 1 bonjour
Sabra (4 women entered, but only one greeted): 1 mārḥāba
Haret Hreik (5 women): 3 as-salāmu ālāykum; 2 mārḥāba

Not too many women greeted in those areas, but a majority of them preferred another formula (7 out of 11) than as-salāmu ālāykum. On the contrary, the majority of men in Nweyri, Sabra and Haret Hreik (23 out of 30 men who greeted) preferred as-salāmu ālāykum.

Territorial distribution is therefore very important to understand the usage of as-salāmu ālāykum. As the inhabitants of the three areas mentioned above are mostly Shiites, we are led to suppose that this formula has a similar function to that of Bavarian "Gruss Gott:" which Coulmas (1979: 252) refers to in his article about routine formulae: the recognition of group identity.

It was also interesting to notice that a rather new formula, salām al-masīh, has recently appeared on the Télé Lumière, a religious Christian TV channel, during Christian religious broadcasts, while it seems to be absent from daily life encounters. Its construction with salām reminds us of as-salāmu ālāykum, and it might possibly be a Christian religious "identity" response to this formula. When asked about it, informants conversant with salām al-masīh said it probably has its roots in the message and gesture exchanged in the church during the mass.
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7.5.2.5 barew and bari irikown

Although we heard barew 8 times and bari irikown only 2 times, both their territorial distribution and the remarks about their comparative meanings and uses given by two informants needs to be mentioned.

Exactly like as-salâmu 'alaykum, both formulae were heard in two areas only. Nabaa and Borj Hammoud are places where an important Armenian diaspora lives. One of the two groceries we visited in Nabaa was owned by an Armenian family: we heard 4 barew and 2 bari irokown, which represents 42.85 percent of the 14 greetings that we noted in this store. In Borj Hammoud, only 15.38 percent of the interlocutors used barew. Of course both formulae are very linked to Armenian identity, and they are therefore highly used in sectors where Armenian community lives in Beirut.

There is one last hypothesis regarding barew/bari irokown distribution among Armenian interlocutors: it might be possible that older people use bari irokown more frequently than barew – while younger people would prefer using barew. The two persons who used bari irokown in our corpus were over 50 years old, and all those who used barew were under 50. But we cannot of course generalize with such a small quantity of data.

We asked each of the grocers about the meaning of both terms. The first grocer was 18 years old. He answered that barew was like marhaba, and that bari irokown was more sustained, like masa el-heyr. He also said only “old people” use bari irokown. The second grocer was 35 years old. He gave a different explanation, arguing that barew can be used at any time of the day, while bari irokown was only to be used in the evening, and he compared it to bonsoir. It is likely that both sociolinguistic (older/younger usage) and semantic (evening usage) differences overlay.

7.5.3 Remarks concerning Nweyri, Sabra, and Haret Hreik

During our study we noticed that the use of as-salâmu 'alaykum was restricted to the areas of Nweyri, Sabra and Haret Hreik. On the other hand, bonjour and hi – two of the most frequently used greetings in other parts of the city – were almost never used in these three areas. They were not heard at all in Sabra and Haret Hreik. Each of them was used once in Nweyri: hi was used by a friend of the owner (a woman) who came to visit him, and bonjour was also used by a woman (a customer). To that customer, surprisingly – it rarely occurred in the rest of the corpus – the grocer answered using masa el-heyr.9

These three areas differed from the others at different linguistic levels – and not only greetings. It is therefore necessary to present them briefly. Both Sabra and Haret Hreik are in the suburbs, while Nweyri is an area of Beirut (located near Basta).
Sabra is located near the Chatila refugee camp. In the second half of the twentieth century and until 1985, the population living in the area was mostly Palestinian refugees. After the massacres of 1982 and after what was known as the “war of the camps”, Sabra was almost totally destroyed and its population fled and took refuge in the Chouf and in southern Lebanon. According to the UNRWA, an estimated 18,000 to 31,000 refugees left the refugee camps situated in Beirut in 1985. They could hardly return to their homes after the end of the war, mostly because of large-scale destruction of the housing (Doraï 2002). The area is therefore now inhabited by few Palestinian refugees, by a significant number of displaced Shiite Lebanese families and by many Syrian workers, who live there in very precarious conditions.

Until the middle of the century, Haret Hreik was still a village located close to Beirut and its population was then mostly Maronites. The number of its residents began to increase – as it did in the neighboring villages – after migrants came to settle there, mostly originating from Shiite villages (from the Baalbek region). In 1950, the Haret Hreik-Hadeth area was estimated to have 12 percent of Shiite inhabitants, and 55 percent of Maronites inhabitants (Nasr 1979). With the permanent settlement of migrants in it, and with the growth of the Beirut urban area, Haret Hreik soon became a suburb of the Lebanese capital. During the war, and particularly after 1983, the Maronites fled from Haret Hreik, while, in the meantime, an increasing number of Shiites displaced from southern Lebanon settled there and in the neighboring areas. The residents of Haret Hreik are now mainly Lebanese Shiites. The area hosts the headquarters of the Hezbollah political party.

Nweyri is located inside the administrative boundaries of Beirut, near Basta, and thus in what was once known as West Beirut. Its population is for the most part constituted of Lebanese Sunni and Shiites inhabitants. The owner of the grocery we stopped in was a Shiite.

The second linguistic observation we can make about them – though this has to be verified in a more systematic survey – is that inhabitants of these areas use less borrowings and code-switch less than inhabitants of the other selected areas (we had also noted the occurrence of code-switching and the different borrowings we have heard).

The last remark concerns other routine formulae: the ones used in Nweyri, Sabra and Haret Hreik are mainly Arabic, while in other areas of the study, they are French or English.

The formulae most frequently used to thank in Haret Hreik, Sabra and Nweyri are: yeslama (and sallamun, yeslama ha dayyêt etc.), jukran and kellak zo’. Merci was noticed twice in Nweyri, but never in Sabra and Haret Hreik. Thanks/thank you were never heard in these areas. In all other areas of the study, it is merci that is most frequently used – all other formulae including thanks and thank you are also used everywhere else, but merci is by far the most frequent formula, followed by yeslama.
GREETINGS IN BEIRUT

As for leave-taking, bye (and yalla bye) are the most frequent in all areas of the study, except Nwayri, Sabra and Haret Hreik once again. We only heard it once in Nwayri, and once in Sabra. Formulae used instead in these three areas (and that sometimes - but rarely - occur in other places) are: ma'es-salâme, ya'tik el-fâfyâ, alla ma'sak, alla ywâffâ.

7.6 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the use of greetings in Beirut is linked to social factors, such as the gender or age of the interlocutor. bonjour and hi can then be considered as more “feminine”, and hi as “younger”. Usage is also linked, to a lesser extent, to the formality of the situation – bonjour being more formal than marhaba. Last but not least, territorial factors can influence the usage of at least three greetings: bonjour, and, to a greater extent, as-salâmû 'alaykum and the pair barewâlhi irikoun. Those are greetings more frequently used in some areas, and can therefore be linked to a sectarian identity (Christian (bonjour), Shiite (as-salâmû 'alaykum), and Armenian (barewâlhi irikoun).

Thus greetings must be considered as sociolinguistic markers, sometimes referring to the identity of a group. Since informants are aware of the existence of such markers and tend to categorize them, they can also sometimes be considered as stereotypes (Labov 1973), especially in the case of as-salâmû 'alaykum. Some other words can also be treated as stereotypes as têene (my, mine) for example. Some informants mentioned it as the marker that allowed them to identify someone as “Shiite” – the non-marked variable being tabeene. It is therefore possible to confirm that some linguistic variables are identified with communal groups in the Beirut urban areas. This coincides with phonological remarks made by Naïm-Sanbar (1985) and Slarge (1997).

A certain number of phonological variables were identified by Naïm-Sanbar in her study in Ras-Beirut, most of them being relevant from the gender or from the communal point of views. Some of these variables were also outlined in the work of Slarge in Moussaytîb. The major variables identified by both researchers in the two areas are the extension of emphasis, the emphasis of /f/ and the following vowel and the distribution of /q/. The realization of emphasis was said to distinguish between the speakers of then East Beirut (de-emphasizing) and those of West Beirut (strong emphasis), the latter variety being thus considered as “heavy” and being identified as a masculine, popular, Muslim, and West Beirut variety opposed to a more “occidental-like”, feminine, East Beirut and de-emphasizing variety.

Nevertheless, in later remarks, both researchers refer to what can be considered as a certain kind of koineization in Beirut. In his introduction Slarge states:
The young Beiruti generation (Sunni and Orthodox Greek in general), uses *grosso modo* a Lebanese “constituted” urban dialect, distinct from the traditional dialect of Beirut, and from the “Maronite” and “Druze” dialects of the Mountain and of the Metn Caza. This urban dialect shares numerous features with the dialect used by the inhabitants of Achrafieh, a Beirut Christian area that groups together Orthodox Greeks and Maronites.\(^\text{11}\)

(Srage 1997: 30)

As for Naïm-Sanbar (1985: 217), in the later remarks of her work, she speaks of a “koinic zone”. In the Beirut divided by a demarcation line, these koinic zones had no geographical dimension; they could be found in an informant’s speech and were linked to the presence of a stranger or to the raising of some topics during the conversation for example. They could be defined as the disappearance of distinctive linguistic traits in order to produce a neutral variety.

To these koinic zones may correspond, on the other hand, identity zones, where the usage of a distinctive trait is not to be avoided, but might be, on the contrary, socially necessary for a speaker to be fully identified as a member of the group. Now that Beirut has been reunified and that the physical obstacle to the existence of a territorial geographic koinic zone has disappeared, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not a koine is emerging.

The idea of such a koine appears to be linked to the disappearance of both extra linguistic (Maronite, Druze, Mountain, Metn), and linguistic particularities (traditional dialect of Beirut), each one “trying to erase distinctive traits from his use, to let it become somehow neutral” (Naïm Sanbar 1985: 217).\(^\text{12}\) The hypothesis of the existence of a koine needs to be explored, with further identification of its linguistic features, if it exists, and with investigation of its relations to identity zones and distinctive traits.

**Appendix: profile of the 22 informants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age (approximate)</th>
<th>Rite</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Orthodox Greek</td>
<td>Student (American University of Beirut)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Student (Notre Dame University)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Small trader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>Tailor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Audio-Visual technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Catholic Greek</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>Maronite</th>
<th>Retired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Shiite</td>
<td>Student (American University of Beirut)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Small trader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Shiite</td>
<td>Student (American University of Beirut)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Student (University Saint Joseph)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Shiite</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Employee</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Employee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes

1 (Calvet 1994: 62): “La ville est en effet un crucible dans lequel viennent se fondre les différences — et, au plan linguistique, cette fusion est productrice de langues à fonction véhiculaire —, mais elle les accentue en même temps, comme une centrifuge qui sépare divers groupes, séparation qui, au plan linguistique, produit des formes grégaire.”


3 For a detailed study of the transformation of two villages (Ghobeira and Chiyah) of Beirut outskirts into suburbs, with a study of the social consequences of such a transformation, see Khuri (1975).

4 During field research for this study, in 2003 and 2004, we noticed that fariyye and yarbiyye were still being used by some informants. Furthermore, we heard three significant slips that could only be understood as a negation of the “Beirutness” of each of the two formerly separated areas (West and East Beirut). Once an informant said for example she was “going back to Beirut” while she was going from Mar Elias (area of war time West Beirut) to the Museum sector (close to the ancient “green line”; she was actually going to the eastern part of this sector).

5 Harbel Kak (1996: 14): “Au sein de Beyrouth, la banlieue sud représente plusieurs spécificités. D’abord, sur le plan socio-démographique, c’est un des plus grands bastions communautaires; sur le plan spatial, c’est une entité clairement délimitée par des axes routiers majeurs et caractérisée par des pôles urbains importants; ensuite, sur le plan économique, la banlieue sud regroupe des commerces, des banques et des petites industries qui lui permettent une certaine auto-suffisance; enfin, sur le plan politique, elle est gérée par des partis politiques fortement implantés qui ont longtemps échappé à l’autorité de l’État.”

6 Original text “Les formes de salut à Beyrouth illustrent bien la grande variété de strates sociales et linguistiques: assalam alaykum ‘Que mon salut soit avec vous’ qui est une forme religieuse. Pour m’adresser à ma famille, à mes collègues, ainsi qu’à mes étudiants, j’utilise la forme sabah il-hayr qui signifie ‘bonjour’, ce qui me paraît le mieux adapté” (Srage 1987: 82).
7 André-Larochebouvy (1984: 69): "Les salutations complémentaires sont une amorce à un développement du thème qui servira alors d'exorde avant d'aborder d'autres sujets moins anodins."

8 Coulines (1979: 252): "In short, the group identifying or group identity reinforcing effect is another important function of routine formulae (...) If a non-native of Bavarian German cannot bring himself to use this formula, he will always be identified as a foreigner upon the first word that he has a chance to utter, even if he has acquired a next to perfect Bavarian accent."

9 In the entire data, 97 interlocutors in all answered to the bonjour or bonsoir greeting. 70 of them answered using bonjour, bonsoir or bonjour Reyn, 13 said ahia (welcome), and 10 answered with a complementary greeting (kif ak or comment ça va?). Only a minority of 4 interlocutors answered with another formula: the grocer in Nweyr said massa el-heyr, and the 3 others said hil.


11 Original text: "La jeune génération beyrouthine (sunnite et grecque orthodoxe en général), utilise grosso modo un parler libanais citadin constitué, bien distinct du parler traditionnel de Beyrouth, et des parlers maronite et druze connus dans la Montagne et le caza du Metn. Ce parler citadin comporte de nombreux points et traits communs au parler utilisé par les habitants d’Achrafieh, quartier chrétien de Beyrouth regroupant des grecs orthodoxes en même temps que des maronites" (Srage 1997: 30).

12 Original text "Chacun essayant d'effacer de son usage les traits discriminants, de le rendre en quelque sorte neutre" (Naim-Sambar 1985: 217).

References


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