Comparing Language Attitudes Toward Arabic in New York City With Those In Egypt
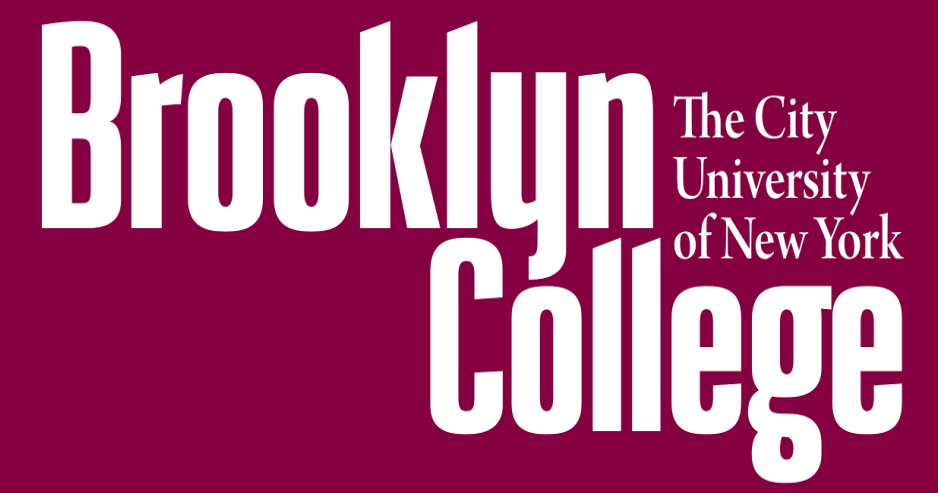
NSF REU SITE: Intersection of Linguistics, Language, and Culture

Marwa Elraey, CUNY Brooklyn College

INTRODUCTION

Accent	A distinctive way of pronunciation due to difference in social class, cultural/ethnic group, and/or place of growing up.
Dialect	A different variety of a language with differences in grammar, vocabulary, and/or pronunciation.
Diglossia	Refers to cases where two language varieties are spoken within the same speech community but in different domains (settings/situations).

e.g.
- High and Swiss German
- Standard and Cypriot Greek
- French and Haitian Creole
- Arabic dialects and Standard Arabic (SA)

PREVIOUS STUDY

Husein (2017) study investigated the attitudes Egyptian college students have toward SA ➜ Egyptian students' attitudes toward SA

3 Domains tested

Affective Domain
Reflects feelings, preferences, likes.

Behavioral Domain
Reflects intentions and plans.

Cognitive Domain
Reflects beliefs and opinions.

Results
- Positive Cognitive and Behavioral attitudes toward SA
- Negative Affective attitudes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What do Arabic speakers think about the two varieties/diglossia?
2. Would we expect similar results among Arabic speakers in NYC?

PRESENT STUDY

Methodology

- Setting: Mosque in NYC; majority of attendees are Arabs, especially Egyptians.
- Questionnaire was filled out both online and on paper.
- Dörnyei (2010): questionnaires are versatile.
- ~21 Demographic questions (e.g. dialect(s) spoken, age, educational level, etc.).
- 29 Questions about the participants' attitude toward both varieties..
- 6 questions asking respondents to self-evaluate their proficiency of SA and that of their dialect.
- 1 Question asking about the situations where they would use SA.

29 language-attitude-related questions:
- ~10 affective questions
- ~15 behavioral questions
- ~9 cognitive questions
- Overlap; not clear-cut

Participants
- Study in progress: so far 37 respondents, expecting more
- Most respondents regularly interact with one or more person who speaks another dialect
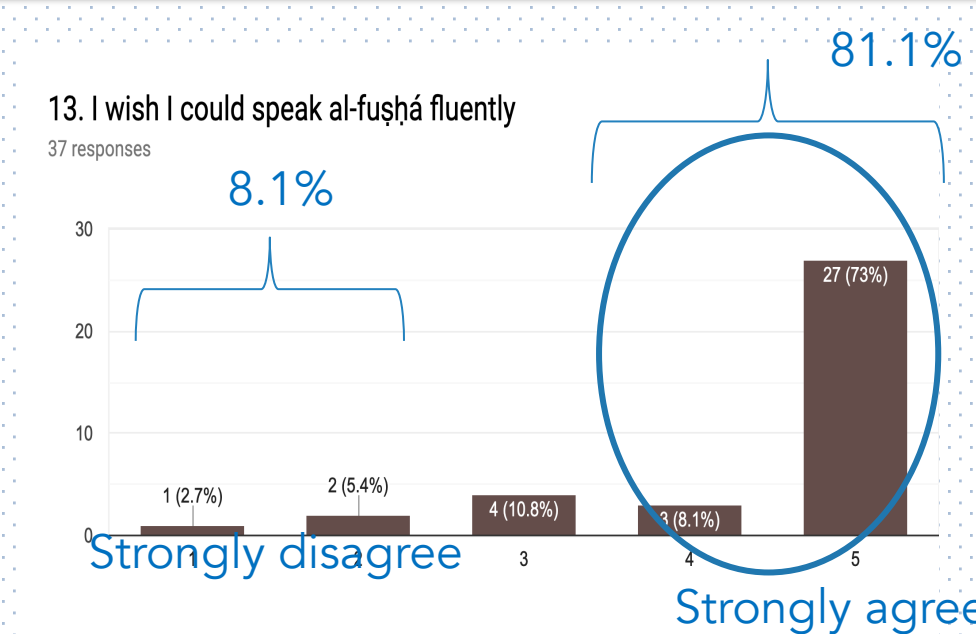- 81.6% females; 18.4% males

RESULTS

1. I wish I could speak [SA] fluently (Behavioral Domain)

Q4. I wish I could speak fuṣḥā perfectly

	Freq.	%	Cumul.
Strongly Disagree	1	2.0	2.0
Disagree	7	14.0	16.0
Don't Know	3	6.0	22.0
Agree	23	46.0	68.0
Strongly Agree	16	32.0	100.0
Total	50	100	

16%
78%

(Husein, 2017)

13. I wish I could speak al-fuṣḥā fluently
8.1%
81.1%
Strongly disagree
Strongly agree
Present Study

SIGNIFICANCE

- More need to study differences between Arabic dialects on one hand and differences between Arabic dialects and Standard Arabic (SA) on the other.
- Low motivation to learn the standard variety as it is significantly different from the spoken dialects. Some linguists attribute this oral-literacy gap to Diglossia (Abu-Rabia, 2000) (Ayari, 1996).
- Another possible consequence is poor reading and writing skills which may transfer to L2 causing poor attainment.

2. I enjoy watching TV shows and movies in [SA] (Affective Domain)

Q11. I enjoy watching TV programmes (like talk shows, soap operas, etc.) in fuṣḥā

	Freq.	%	Cumul. %
Strongly Disagree	11	22.0	22.0
Disagree	18	36.0	58.0
Don't Know	4	8.0	66.0
Agree	16	32.0	98.0
Strongly Agree	1	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

58%
34%
(Husein, 2017)
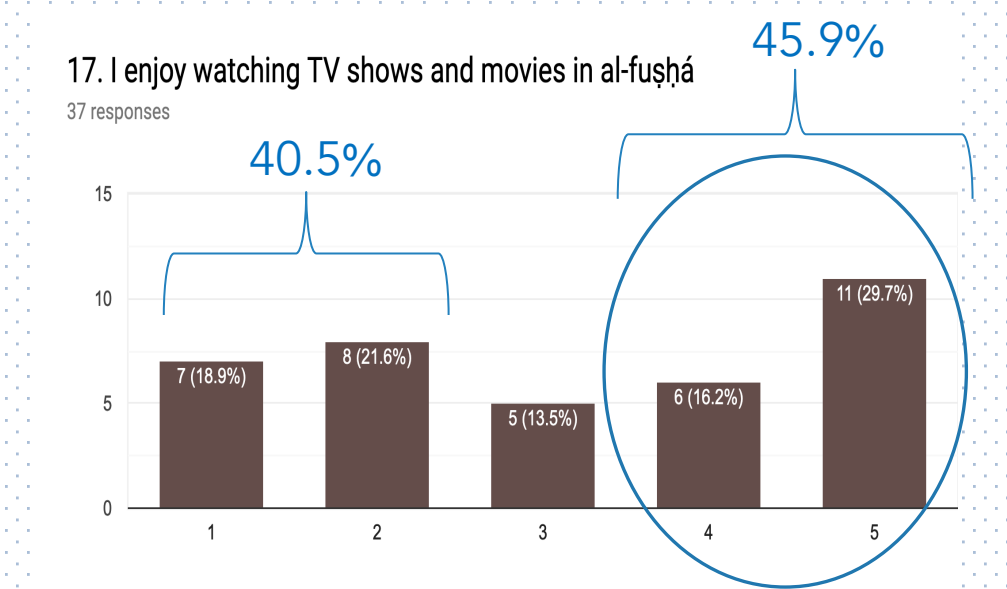
17. I enjoy watching TV shows and movies in al-fuṣḥā
40.5%   45.9%
Present Study

3. It is easy to learn SA (Cognitive Domain)

Q3. It is easy to learn fuṣḥā

	Frequency	%
Strongly Disagree	7	14.0
Disagree	19	38.0
Don't Know	4	8.0
Agree	18	36.0
Strongly Agree	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

52%
40%
(Husein, 2017)

3. For me, SA is harder than the vernacular (Cognitive Domain)
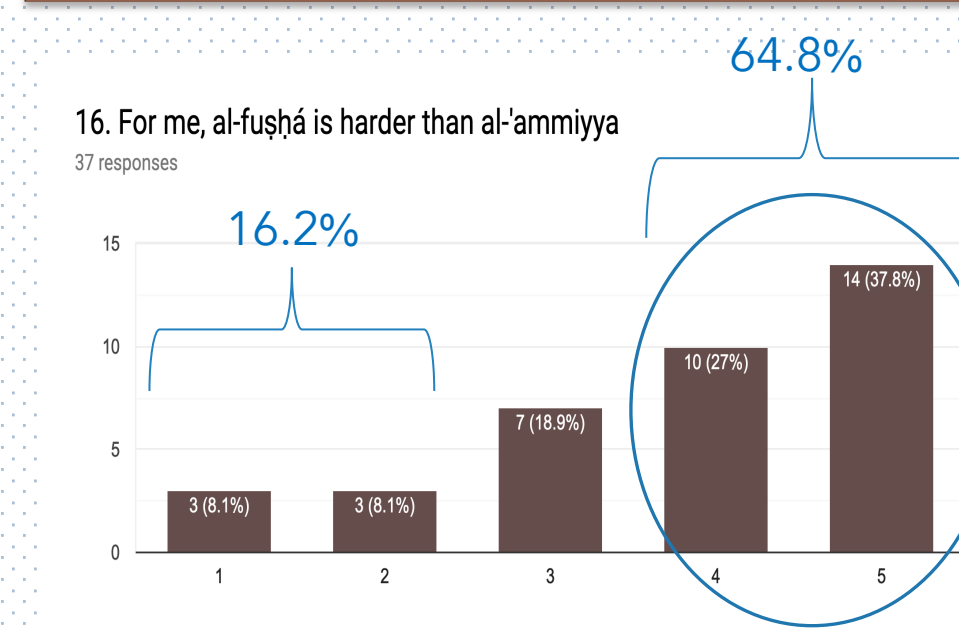
16. For me, al-fuṣḥā is harder than al-'ammiyya
16.2%   64.8%
Present Study

CONCLUSIONS AND lIMITATIONS

Results
- Similarities of (behavioral and cognitive) attitudes toward diglossia among Arabic speakers in the Arab world and heritage speakers in NYC.
- Different attitudes in the affective domain.

limitations
- Investigating the reasons for Husein's negative affective attitude and for our study's positive affective attitude.
- Too many variables. Focus on one non-linguistic variable (e.g. educational level, gender, etc.).
- More participants, especially male participants.
- More questions concerning the cognitive and the affective domains.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Rabia, S. (2000). Effects of exposure to Literary Arabic on reading comprehension in a diglossic situation. Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 13, 147–157.
- Ayari, S. (1996). Diglossia and illiteracy in the Arab world. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 9 (3), 243-253.
- Husein, A. A. (2017). Students' attitude towards Arabic language varieties: The Case of the Fuṣḥā Arabic. Practice and Theory in Systems of Education, 12(2), 86-98.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS