Topics in Arabic Sociolinguistics

About the project

Socio-linguistic studies in Arabic often have the concept of 'diglossia' as a point of departure, a situation in which a language community has two related, but very different, varieties, each with their own domains (for use). The standard language in diglossic language communities will have more limited functions than in the 'standard-with-dialects' kind of communities (Mejdell 2008). However, the domains are not necessarily clearly defined, and tensions regarding forms and varieties to be used in various contexts, e.g. for literary purposes, exist in most diglossic communities (Mejdell 2006).

The overlap of functions in new domains (eg. digital - and even audiovisual - media), combined with what can be considered a (possibly global) socio-cultural tendency towards less formality in social interaction - lead to interesting developments in language use, with changes of domains and more hybrid forms (as in Middle Arabic texts and modern mixed forms) along what may be called a diglossic continuum. These may also be considered from a code-switching perspective (Mejdell 2006: "Codeswitching", 2012).

More recently, I have been interested in metalinguistic concepts and how they reflect native speakers´ perception of the linguistic situation and the varieties of the language. And in the relation between norms and practices in contemporary written Arabic (Mejdell 2014, 2015 and forthcoming).