Spoken Arabic in Written Chats: four Arab girls talk about dinner time and venue

Letizia Lombezzi
Institution: Università di Bologna-DSPS   ✉ ⓘ

ᴱᴺᴳ **Abstract.** Chat texting shows the adoption of informal Arabic in writing, where the virtual participants accommodate each other and implement convergent strategies, at least for some key elements of the discourse. The selected texts reflect the linguistic behavior adopted in writing by the native Arab girls involved, interacting in a very natural and friendly way. They come from Morocco (1), Syria (1), Egypt (1), Gaza (1), are aged between 25-40, and live in Texas, where they work as Arabic instructors. Their behavior in chatting shows accommodation to a written language register comfortable for each one of them. This was possible by the adoption of precise lexical entries, verbs, and adverbs, coupled with specific morphological traits. The point of discussion here is the type and process of written accommodation, in particular for the decline of the exclusive Egyptian variety monopoly, compared to accommodative behaviors investigated in the past. content.
Keywords: Arabic chats, dialects, accommodation in writing, polyglossic behaviors.

ᴱˢ Árabe hablado en charlas escritas; cuatro chicas árabes hablan sobre la hora y lugar de la cena

Resumen. Los mensajes de texto en chats muestran la adopción del árabe informal en la escritura, donde los participantes virtuales se adaptan entre sí e implementan estrategias convergentes, al menos para algunos elementos clave del discurso. Los textos seleccionados reflejan el comportamiento lingüístico adoptado por escrito por las hablantes árabes nativas involucradas, interactuando de forma muy natural y amigable. Provienen de Marruecos (1), Siria (1), Egipto (1), Gaza (1), tienen entre 25 y 40 años y viven en Texas, donde enseñan árabe. Sus comportamientos en chats muestran una adaptación a un registro de lenguaje escrito cómodo para cada una de ellas. Esto fue posible gracias a la adopción de entradas léxicas, verbos y adverbios precisos, junto con rasgos morfológicos específicos. El punto de discusión aquí es el tipo y el proceso de adaptación escrita, en particular para el declive del monopolio exclusivo de la variedad egipcia, en comparación con los comportamientos acomodativos investigados en el pasado.
Palabras clave: Chats árabes, dialectos, acomodación en la escritura, comportamientos poliglósicos.

Summary: 1. Theoretical framework for accommodation. 2. The selection of chats and the participants. 3. Written chats: mini-corpus and translation. 4. The collected written chats: general characteristics and participants. 5. Accommodation revisited in written chats: real need or ideology? 6. Written chats and non-traditional media: the *coup de grâce* to the exclusive supremacy of the prestige variety? References.

1. Theoretical framework for accommodation

The collection and analysis of written chats offer useful insights for analyzing Arabic native speakers' linguistic behavior, which shows the features described by the *Speech Accommodation Theory* -SAT, originally drafted by Giles in 1987. It takes place during interaction, configuring itself as convergence or divergence, thus marking different attitudes of the speaker, like collaboration or rejection. The SAT later evolved into the *Communication Accommodation Theory*-CAT,[1] where additional factors, depending on the speaker's personal identity, are considered together with interpersonal issues and intergroup stakes. The theories of SAT and CAT, although originally conceived for speech acts, are here mentioned for framing the dynamics and mechanisms that take place during informal interaction and communication,

---

[1]   Giles, Howard and Ogay, Tania "Communication Accommodation Theory". In *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars,* (eds.) B.B. Whaley& W. Samter (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum: 2007), 293-310

Anaquel estud. árabes 37(1), 2026, 111-120

111

being written chats an example of both phenomena. Effectively, people bring their social identities to communication performance and enrich it thanks to different socio-historical backgrounds, motivations, expectations, emotions. CAT has also been explained as an "interdisciplinary model of relational and identity processes in communicative interaction".[2] In practice, groups of speakers may adapt their speech to their interlocutor, converging to a common style, sometimes intentionally and sometimes as the result of an ingroup feeling of self-worth.[3] It is also important to remember the definition of code-switching, for the case of Arabic renamed diglossic switching by Myers-Scotton.[4] It consists in a communicative competence, learned from the community, to interact more effectively with other members of the group. The researcher thus suggested a total naturalness of this linguistic and psychological process, remarking that it is not only intentional but partly automated. Accommodating one's linguistic performance in order to converge as much as possible toward the others would work for the effectiveness of communication, and for the atmosphere, hopefully friendly and collaborative enough to receive the interlocutor's approval. Concretely, those who accommodate try to use, in their speech, elements that pertain to the other's variety,[5] sometimes motivated by the need of identification with their conversation partner, if this may increase their own prestige.

2. The selection of chats and the participants

Written chats, the virtual space of informal communication, reflect the real linguistic behavior of native speakers. Their texting shows the adoption of informal Arabic elements and markers, together with accommodative behavior,[6] code-mixing and code-switching strategies.[7]

This paper theoretically frames and analyzes a selection of chat messages in which I participated (as fifth person, nonnative, and not appearing in the texts analyzed below), and by which a group of four Arab girls, as they named themselves in the chats, tried to set the date and venue of a dinner. Native informants come from Morocco (1), Syria (1), Egypt (1), Gaza (1) are aged between 25-40, and live in Texas. Interaction was totally natural and friendly, so ideally suitable for linguistic analysis. The protagonists represent a community of Arab women settled and well-integrated in a foreign capital city, where they work as Arabic language instructors. Their life reflects the process of migration-settlement-integration[8] that often gives rise to the birth of both professional and personal links, and friendship among Arabs of different origins, who cooperate to find a language variety comfortable for each one of them.

As highlighted by Bassiouney[9] this variety usually contains crucial markers, which work not only as indicators of linguistic functions, but also express discourse functions. For this twofold value they are much more eloquent than others in terms of identity, and sense of belonging. They hold a higher contrastive strength, are associated with specific functions, are more powerful and quite different from any viable alternative.

Taking into account the different origin of each participant, I present below the written chats I collected in March 2017 as a mini-corpus, which shows: (a) the degree and direction of informalization- here intended as the process that makes a language more informal compared to its high normative standard- along a path that mainly proceeds toward Levantine Arabic; (b) the linguistic traits subject to accommodation, which coincide with the so-called markers; (c) the residual space left to other phenomena like code-switching/code mixing, for example in keeping proper names of places in English, although transliterated (e.g. "Green Belt"), if translation couldn't work better.

In addition, the analysis demonstrates that informal Arabic is highly attested among various contexts of daily life in general, writing included, and not only in speaking.[10]

3. Written chats: mini-corpus and translation

The corpus here below presents the original messages in Arabic writing, as exchanged in chatting; the transliteration was possible after having asked the authors/participants to the chat, who then represent my informants, to read aloud

---

[2]   Nikolas Coupland, and Adam Jaworski."Relevance, Accommodation and Conversation: Modeling the Social Dimension of Communication," *Multilingua–Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 16/2-3 (1997): 241-242

[3]   Howard Giles and Tania Ogay. "Communication Accommodation Theory". In *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars,* B.B. Whaley& W. Samter (eds.) (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum 2007), 296

[4]   Carol Myers-Scotton. *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), 31

[5]   Sonia S'hiri. "Speak Arabic Please! Tunisian Arabic Speakers Linguistic Accommodation to Middle Easterners". In *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic Variations on a Sociolinguistic Theme*, Aleya Rouchdy (ed.) (New York: Routledge Curzon Press: 2002), 150

[6]   Howard, Giles, Anthony Mulac, James J. Bradac, and Patricia Johnson. "Speech Accommodation Theory: The First Decade and Beyond." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 10(1). 1987. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1987.11678638.

[7]   Carol Myers Scotton. "Precision Tuning of the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model of Codeswitching." *Sociolinguistica* 18 (1). 2004. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783484604650.106.

[8]   Catherine Miller. "Variation and change in Arabic urban vernaculars." *BRILL EBooks*, January. 2003. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402480_014.

[9]   Reem Bassiouney. *Arabic Sociolinguistics* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009), 64-68

[10]   On the impact of informal writing and chatting in Arabic see Dominique Caubet, "Morocco: An Informal Passage to Literacy in dārija (Moroccan Arabic)". In *The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World: Writing Change,* (eds) Høigilt Jacob & Gunvor Mejdell (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 119; on the system of writing adopted in Morocco see Montserrat Benítez Fernández, "Transcipción al árabe marroquí de mensajes de teléfono móvil", *Estudios de Dialectología Norteafricana y Andalusí* 7 (2003): 158-160; and Montserrat Benítez Fernández, "TelQuel: una fuente contemporánea para el estudio del árabe marroquí". In *De los manuscritos medievales a internet: la presencia del árabe vernáculo en las fuentes escritas,* eds*.* Mohamed Meouak, Pablo Sánchez, and Ángeles Vicente (Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2012), 403-417.

the messages. The informants are from Syria (Damascus), Palestine (Gaza), Morocco (Meknes), Egypt (Alexandria); they speak urban varieties and accommodate each other's speech, occasionally adopting features of others' dialect.

Chat n.1 *Ḥall-ū-na nəshar ˤa-l-yōm-l-aḫīr!*

SYR	مساء الخير يا حلوين *Masāʾ-l-ḫēr yā ḥelwīn* "Good evening dears"
	شو رايكم نجتمع في شارع غوادالوب؟ بيار فيه فرقه موسيقيه. العنوان هو Guadalupe St, Austin, TX *Šu rai-kom nəjtamiˤ fi šāriˤ Guadalupe? byār fihi firʾa musiʾiyya. l-ˤanwan huwe* Guadalupe street, Austin, TX "What do you think of meeting in Guadalupe Street? There are bars with music bands. The address is: 'Guadalupe St, Austin, TX'"
	نسهر شوي قبل ما يبلش الدوام. المحل اسمو Hole in the wall *Nəshar šwayy ʾabel ma yiballeš ad-dawām. El-maḥall ism-o* Hole in the wall "Let's enjoy an evening before work starts! The name of the place is 'Hole in the wall'"
MOR	حبيبتي فكرة حلوة ،شو مشان بكرة نروح؟ *ḥabibt-i, fikra ḥelwa, šu minšān bukra nrūḥ?* "Sweetie, good idea, what about going tomorrow?"
SYR	بكره الأحد! لازم نستعد للصفوف *Bukra l-aḥad!Lāzem nəstaˤədd li-ṣ-ṣufūf* "Tomorrow is Sunday! We have to get ready for the classes"
MOR	متى؟؟ *Matā??* "When?"
SYR	أنا هلا رح ألبس واطلع. بتلاقوني هناك *Ana hallā raḥ* ālbis *w ʾəṭlaˤ. Bətlaʾū-ni hunāk* "I dress up right now and go out. You will find me there"
MOR	انا هلا طلعت من شاور ولحالي مابعرف الطريق. *Ana hallā ṭaləˤt min šāwer w l-ḥal-i ma b-aˤref aṭ-ṭriq* "I have just come out from a shower and alone I don't know the way"
SYR	إذا طلعتي بشارع دين كيتن رح تلاقيه بوجهك في غوادالوب. تمام يا حلوه؟ *ʾiza ṭləˤti bi-šāriˤ* Dean Keaton *raḥ tlaʾi-h bi-wijh-ek fi* Guadalupe. *Tamām ya ḥelwa?* "If you arrive at Dean Keaton, you will find it in front of you in Guadalupe. Ok dear?"
	خبريني إذا ما عرفتي الطريق *ḫabbir-ī-ni ʾiza ma ˤarefti aṭ-ṭariʾ* "Tell me if you can't find the way"
	ياا امجااد يلا تعالي أنت ورضوى. خلونا نسهر ع اليوم الاخير! *Yaaa* Amjaaad *yalla taˤāl-ī enti w Raḍwa! ḥall-ū-na nashar ˤa-l-yōml-aḫīr!* "Hey Amjaaad, come on, come you and Raḍwa! Let's enjoy the evening for the last day!"
	عازمتكن ع مشروب *ˤāzimat-kon ˤa mašrūb* "I am inviting you for a drink"
PAL	انا هلا روحت ع البيت *Ana hallā rawweḥt ˤa-l-bēt* "I have just returned home"
	ورجلي مكسرين من المشي بحذاء غير مناسب. *W rijla-yya maksūrīn min-l-maši bi-ḥidā ġēr munāseb* "And my (two) feet are broken because of walking with uncomfortable shoes"
SYR	[during the evening, following the texting interrupted in the afternoon] لا تنسوا بطاقاتكن. أنا و ليتسيا وصلنا *Lā tansū biṭaʾāt-kon. Ana w Lītisīa wselna* "Do not forget your IDs. I and Letizia arrived"
EGY	أنا آسفة يا بنات أنا نزلت أجري على النهر على المغرب. *Ana* āsfe *ya banāt. Ana nizilt ajri ˤala* nnahr *ˤala* lmaġrib "I am sorry girls. I went out jogging on the river side at sunset"
	رجعت أخذت دش وأخذت قيلولة متأخرة ولسه صاحية هلق *rjiˤt ʾaḫazt duš w ʾaḫazt qaylula mitʾaḫḫira w lessa ṣaḥiya hallaʾ* "I came back, I took a shower and a nap late…and I am still snoozing now"
SYR	صح النوم. ياحلوه ولا يهمك حبيبتي... خيرها بغيرها! *ṣaḥḥ en-nōm. Ya ḥelwa w la yihemm-ek…ḫēr-a bi-ġēr-a!* "Bless the sleep! Dear, don't mind, we'll do it another time!"

Chat nr. 2 *Jalsat-əl-banāt*

SYR	هه ا حلوات فين راح نسهر اليوم؟ *Hey, a ḥelwāt fēn raḥ nəshar-l-yōm?* "Hey, dears, when are we going to celebrate today?"
	سلام ا حلوين. شورايكم نجتمع في وست بلدينغ عند موقف الباص اليوم الساعه7.30 ؟ *Salām ya ḥelwīn. Šu rai-kum nəjtamiˁ fī* West Building ˁind *mawˀif* əl-bāṣ əl-yōm əs-sēˁa *7.30?* "Hello dears. What do you think about meeting at the 'West Building' bus stop today at 7.30?"
MOR	خلونا نعمل اشي هادي نتعشى ونحكي *ḥallū-na nəˁməl iši hadi nitˀəšša w nəḥki* "Let's do something quiet, we dine and talk "
SYR	في شارع غوادالوب ومناخود الباص ع الداون تاون أو أي اشي بتقترحوه أنا جاهزه لأي اقتراحات [following her previous chatting] *fi šāriˁ* Guadalupe *w mnaḥod* əl-bāṣ ˁa-d-Downtown *aw ayy iši btəqtarḥ-ū. Ana jāhiza li-ayy iqtirāḥāt* "In Guadalupe Street and we take the bus to Downtown or anything you suggest, I am ready for any suggestion"
MOR	حدا بعرف مطعم صيني هناك ممكن نتعشى فيه مثلا؟ من موافق مع فكرة عشا اكتر من سهرة رقص؟ *ḥada bˀaref maṭˁam ṣīni hunāk mumkin nitˀəšša fīh maṭalan? Mīn muwāfiq maˁa fikrit ˁašā aktar min sahra raqṣ?* "Does anyone know a Chinese restaurant where we may dine in, for example? Who agrees with the idea of dining more than a dancing night?"
EGY	صح للجامعة معطلة . انا كمان جاهزة بس اذا راح نروح على الداون تون ممكن راح اقابلكم على هنيك منشان انا اقرب على الداون تون والأتوبيسات فيالسبرنج بريك ألغا. *ṣaḥḥ li-ljāmia muˁaṭṭale. Ana kamān jāhiza bass ˀiza raḥ nrūḥ ˁala ad-Downtown mumkin raḥ uqābilkum ˁala honīk minšān ana ˀaqrab ˁala ad Downtown wa lotobisāt fī-s* Spring Break ˀalǧā "True, because the University is closed. I am ready too but if we are going to Downtown, I am probably going to meet you there as I am closer to Downtown and the buses during Spring Break have been canceled"
PAL	بنات انا موافقة للعشاء وجلسة بنات *Banāt, ana muwafiˀa li-l-ˁašāˀ w jalsat banāt* "Girls, I agree with the dinner and a girls' night out"
EGY	ولبدكم تعملوه انا معكم بالنها يةٌ انا مع العشاء ولكن اذا الأغلبية مفضلة سهرة وكده انا معاكم برضه. *W l-beddkum taˁmlō[11] ana maˁakum bi-nnihāya. Ana maˁa l'ˁašāˀ wa lakin ˀiza laǧlabiyye mufaḍḍile sahra w keda ana maˁakum barḍo* "Well, if you want to do it, I am with you at the end, I agree with the dinner but if the majority prefers a night and so I am still with you"
MOR	صرنا تلاتة مع العشا.رضوى شو في اقتراحات لعشا. *ṣirna talate maˁa-l-ˁašā. Raḍwa, šu fi-iqtirāḥāt li-ˁašā?* "We became three with dinner. Raḍwa, what do you suggest for the dinner?"
EGY	شو بتحبو فيه مطعم تايلاندي كتير منيح بالداون تاون و اسمه*My Thai* *Šu betḥebbū? Fī maṭˁam tāilāndī ktīrə mnīḥ bi-d*Downtown *w ismo My Thai[12]* "What do you like? There is a very good Thai restaurant in downtown and its name is 'My Thai'"
MOR	اوك نجرب *Ok, njarrib* "Ok, let's try it"
PAL	كتير حلو وانا موافقة *Ktīr ḥelw w ana muwafiˀa* "Very good and I agree"
MOR	وهو مش بعيد بالباص عنا كمان لو بنقرر نتقابل هناك . *W huwe miš baˁīd bi-l-bāṣ ˁannā kamān lo binqarrər nitqābil honīk* "Moreover, it is not far from our place by bus. If you go for it, we meet there"
SYR	يا حلوين هي أرقام الجميع طبعا وانا محسوبتكم غدووش [providing a list of all the mobile numbers] *Ya ḥelwīn hay arqām al-jamīˁ ṭabˁan w ana maḥsubat-kum Ġaddūš* "Dears, these are the numbers of everyone. And me, of course, your 'obedient' Ġaddūš"
MOR	نتقابل في داون تاون الساعة 7ولا 730 *Nitqābil fī* Downtown əs-sāˁa7 *walla 7.30* "Shall we meet downtown at 7 or 7.30?"
EGY	ده المانيو والمكان منشان تشوفوا اذا راح يعجبكوا *Di lmenu wi lmakān minšān tšūfū ˀiza raḥ yuˀjibku* "This is the menu and the place too, so you can see if you like it"
PAL	انت قمر مش غدوش . *ənti qamar miš Ġaddūš* "You are a moon not Ġaddūš"
MOR	انا مابيفتح معي. *Ana ma biftaḥ maˁ-i* "I can't open it"

---

[11] *l-beddkum ta*ˁ*mlō*: the prefixes l- represents here the shortened form of the relative

[12] The texting of the Egyptian participants is extremely accommodating to the Levantine variety here.

EGY	عندو سي فود زاكي تحمست كتير ʕando sea food *zaki taḥammast* əktīr "It has delicious seafood. I am extremely eager for it"
SYR	مابيفتح شوعندن اكل. *Ma biftaḥ* šuʕand-on *akl.* "It doesn't open. What kind of food do they have at the restaurant?"
PAL	على فكره هالمطعم اكلو بيجنن كتيير طيب واسعاره مناسبه كتير. ʕala *fikra ha-l-maṭʕam akl-ō bijannin ktīīr tayyeb w asʕār-o munasibe ktīr* "By the way, the food of this restaurant is fantastic, and the prices are very convenient"
	اوك نروح ونجرب *Okay nrūḥ w njarrib* "Ok, we go and try"
SYR	يلااا نروح معناتو. *Yalla nrūḥ maʕnat-o* "Good! It means we go there!"
EGY	أوك جميل *Ok, jamīl* "Ok, great!"
	: نتقابل ٧:٣٠ هناك ولا ٨ عشان توصلوا بالباص : كيف ما بدكوا *Nətqābil 7.30 honīk willa 8?* ʕašān *tuṣilu b-əlbāṣ. Kīf ma beddku* "Do we meet there at 7.30 or 8? For you to arrive by bus. As you like it!"
MOR	امجاد وجيهان 8 *Amjād w Jihāne at 8* "Amjād and Jihāne at 8" *referring to the time of arrival for each person
SYR	بتوقع الساعه8 *Bətwaqqa* ʕ *as-sēʕa 8* "I think at 8"
	ممتاز : حلوو كتير معناها كلياتنا موافقين وطبعا ليتسيا معنا *Mumtāz ḥelw ktīr maʕna-ha kulliat-nā muwāfi'īn w ṭab'an Lītisīa maʕna* "Perfect! Very good, it means we all agree, and of course Letizia is with us"
MOR	جميل راح اشوفكم ياحلوات *Jamīl raḥ ašūf-kum ya ḥelwāt* "Good, I am going to see you dears"
SYR	بنشوفكم : يا ترى فيدا أنت عم توصلك المسجات *Bənšūf-kum: ya tara Fīdā* ənti ʕam *tuwsil-ek əl-mesajāt?* "See you…I wonder Fīdā are you receiving the messages?"
MOR	أنا كمان رح اقول لاستيف بعتقد بتحب تروح. *Ana kamān raḥ aqūl li -Estefi bə'teqid bəthebb trūḥ* "I am going to tell Estefi too. I think she'd like to come"
SYR	حلوو ستيفي أي أكيد خبريها بليز *ḥelwww Stefi ay akīd ḫabbirī-ha* please "Good, Stefi yes… sure, tell her please"
MOR	بعت لها رسالة. *Bʕet lā risāla.* "I have sent her a text"
SYR	العنوان هو San Jacinto Blvd Austin, تمام؟ əl-ʕan*wan huwe San Jacinto Blvd Austin, 78701tamām?* "The address is 'San Jacinto Blvd Austin', ok?"
MOR	اوك ممتاز ميرسي ياحلوة *Ok mumtāz merçi ya ḥelwa* "Ok, *merçi* dear"
	8 في باص من بيتنا لهناك فبنشوفكم هناك الساعة *Fi bāṣ min bēt-na la-honāk fa bənšuf-kum honāk əs-sāʕa 8* "There is a bus from our house to there, so see you there at 8"
SYR	اوك بشوفكم هنيكٌ بالمطعم. انا و ليتسيا بالباص شو وضعكم؟ *Ok bašūf-kum honīk b-əl-maṭʕam. Ana wa Lītisīa b-əl-bāṣ.* šu *waḍʕa-kum* "Ok, I see you there at the restaurant. Letizia and I are on the bus. What about you?"
MOR	احنا بنستنا بالباص رح يكون هون في دقيقة. *iḥna binstən-nā bəl-bāṣ raḥ ykūn hōn fi daqīqa* "We are waiting for the bus; it is going to arrive in a minute"
EGY	بالباص هلا *Bə-lbāṣ hallā* "On the bus right now"

PAL	انا فيالطريق مشي *Ana fi-ṭ-ṭrīʾ maši* "I am on the way walking"
SYR	حلو نحن صرنا في المطعمبانتظاركم. خدوا وقتكم يا جماعه بدنا تقريبا نصفساعه لناخود طاوله. *Ḥelw niḥna ṣir-nā f-əl-maṭʿam b-intizār-kum. ḥudū waʾt-kum ya jamāʿa bedd-nā taqriban niṣf sēʿa li-naḥod tawle* "Good, we have arrived at the restaurant, and we are waiting for you. People, take your time, it takes about half an hour to have a table"
MOR	اووووه لانو ما حجزنا نسينا. *Oooh lianno ma ḥajazna nsīna* "Oooh, because we did not book, we forgot"
EGY	كده شوفوا [web site] *Šūfu keda [web site]* "Look at this [web site]"
(After the dinner)	
SYR	جيهان وحفيظه هلا نحن بالباص راجعين عالبيت. شو وضعكن؟ *Jihāne w Ḥafīẓa hallā naḥnu bəl-bāṣ rājiʿīn ʿal-bēt . šu waḍʿa-kon?* "Jihāne w Ḥafīẓa, we are on the bus now, returning home, what about you?"
MOR	حبيبتي احنا وصلنا على البيت من شي نصف ساعة. بس توصل خبريني *ḥabibti ḥnā wṣelna min ši neṣf sāʿa bass tuwṣal ḥabbirī-nī* "Sweety, we have arrived about half an hour ago, but when you arrive, tell me"
EGY	يا بنات انا نسيت بطاقة الائتمان بتاعت الفيزا في محل ماي ثاي ...حد شافها *Ya banāt ana nsīt biṭaʾat liʾtimān bitāʾt lvisa fi maḥall My Thay ḥada šāfaha?* "Girls, I forgot the VISA credit card at the restaurant 'My Thay'. Has anyone seen it?"
	انا رضوى. اخذهاوانا ماشية. عشان انا دخلت الحمام وسبتها في البتاع اللي بيحطوا فيها لحساب ونسيت *Ana Raḍwa. ʾAḥazāh w ana māšya ʿašān ana daḥalt əlḥammām w sibtaha fəl-bitāʿ əlli biḥuṭṭū fi-ha lḥisāb w nsīt* "I am Raḍwa. They took it when I was leaving because I entered the restroom, and I left it inside the cover where they put the bill, and I forgot"
PAL	الله حبيبتي ما شفتها. لكان لازم تروح عندهم *Allāh ḥabībti ma šuft-āh. Lakin lāzim trūḥ ʿand-hum* "Goodness dear, I did not see it. But you must go there"
EGY	يا هيك يا اتسرقت مني وانا واقفة في الطابور. لأن هلاق ما لاقيةٌ كمان ال يوٌ تي اي دي : *Ya hēk ya itsaraqat min-ni w ana wāʾifa fi ṭṭābūr. liʾann hallaʾ ma lāqiya kamān əlUT ID* "It is so or they stole it from me while I was queuing. At the moment I don't find the UT ID* too" *it refers to the University of Texas identity card
EGY	[after having contacted the restaurant by phone] انا كلمتهم ...وردوا علي وقالوا عندهم *Ana kallamethum w raddū ʿalay w ʾālū ʿandhum* "I spoke with them, and they replied and told me it is at their place"
ALL	الحمدالله *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh* "Thanks God"

Chat nr. 3 *L-pizza miš ṭayyba ʾiza baradat*

SYR	شورايكم بكره بعد الجامعه كل واحد فينا يجيب اكله ونروح على الجزء من الغرين بيلت آللي بجانب بيتي ونتشارك القعدة والاستمتاع بالطقس الحلو. شو ريكم نجتمعمابين الساعه 5:30 5هل انتو موافقين؟ *Šu rai-kum bukra baʿd əj-jamiʿa kull wāḥid fī-na yijīb akl-o w nrūḥ ʿala-l-joz min-əl-Green Belt əlli bi-jānib bēt-i w nətšārək əl-ʾaʿda w-əl-istimtāʿ b-əṭ-ṭaʾs əl-ḥelw. Šu rai-kum nəjtamiʿ ma bēn-əs-sēʿa 5-5.30. Hal əntu muwafiʾīn?* "What do you think about meeting tomorrow after the University, each one of us brings his own food and we go to the area of the 'Green Belt' close to my house and we stay together, and we enjoy the good weather? What do you think about meeting at 5-5:30, do you agree?"
	عندي ساعه فراغ بدي اكول فيها فلافل مين بدو روح معي؟ *ʿand-i səʿat farāġ bədd-i akul fi-ha felāfel min bedd-o rūḥ maʿ-i?* "I have one hour of free time, and I wanna eat falafel. Who wants to come with me?"
MOR	انا عندي طالب بعد شويةٌ بعتزر *Ana ʿand-i ṭāleb baʿd šwiyya, bəʿtezir* "I have a student in a while, I am sorry"
PAL	حبيبتي عندي صف على مع أستاذة كريستن هلا صف راح يبلش. بعتذر كتير حبيبّتي *Ḥabībt-i ʿand-i ṣaffʿala-i maʿa ustaḍa Kristen, hallaʾ ṣaff rāḥ yiballeš. bəʿteḏir-ə-ktīr ḥabībt-i* "Dear, I have class with Prof. Kristen. Class is going to start now, I am very sorry, sweety"
SYR	ولا يهّمكم منلتقي بعدين *Wa lā yihemm-kum, mnəltaʾi baʿdēn* "Don't mind it! We meet later"
[The day after, on the same chat]	

MOR	اي ساعة نشوفك مشان نروح سوا اليوم
	Ayy sāʿa nšūf-ek minšān nrūḥ sawa-l-yōm? "What time do we see you, for going together today?"
SYR	إذا بدكن إلتقى جنب بيتي وبعدين منمشي سوا عالمطرح ع ال5 عنوان بيتي هو 2514 Pearlstreet #205
	ʾiza bedd-kon nəltaʾi janb bēt-i w baʿdēn mnəmši sawwa ʿa-l-maṭraḥ ʾa-l-5 ʿanwan bēt-i huwe xxx Pearlstreet "If you like, we meet next to my house and then we walk together to the place at 5. My house address is 'xxx Pearlstreet'"
[in reply to Letizia's question if they liked a pizza for the pic-nic]	
MOR	لا البيتزا مش طيبه إذا بردت!
	La, l-pizza miš ṭayyba ʾiza baradat! "No, the pizza is not good if it cools!"

4. The collected written chats: general characteristics and participants

The written chats presented above were adopted at an informal level of communication and reflect the linguistic behavior of the native speakers involved. From the very first glance, their texting shows the adoption of informal Arabic, with some common elements from the lexicon (حلوين /ḥelwīn; موقف الباص /mawʾif əl-bāṣ; كتير منيح /ktīr-ə-mnīḥ; بالطقس الحلو /əṭ-ṭaʿs əl-ḥelw), to the verbs (شاف/šāf, راح/rāḥ جاب/jāb) and adverbs (e.g.: *hallā or halla* "now", *barḍo, kamān* "also").

As expected, for what concerns morphology: *ʾiʿrāb* disappears in almost all parts of the speech; the endings of the dual and plural masculine are reduced to the genitive endings only, but they have now lost their original inflectional value; the feminine plural in the verb is replaced by the masculine, with loss of gender distinguished markers; the dual is replaced by the plural; for the imperfective, nunation is abolished at the second person, feminine singular and plural.[13]

In syntax, changes occur regarding:

- possession, *ʿand-* is attested to all the participants, as an accommodation result.
- negative forms, where *ma* prevails with verbs, both perfective and imperfective forms, and participles (SYR: ما عرفتي/*ma ʿarefti*; MAR, SYR: مابيفتح/ *ma biftaḥ*; EGY: ما لاقية/ *ma lāqiya*) and *miš* is coupled with adjectives (MAR: مش بعيد/ *miš baʿīd*; MAR: مش طيبه/miš ṭayyba), plus a residual number of cases with la (SYR: لا تنسوا /*lā tansū*; SYR: ولا يهمك/ *wa la yihemm-ek*).
- the relative clauses are almost avoided, and only a couple of times they are introduced by the invariable *əlli* (EGY: اللي بيحطوا فيها /*əlli biḥuṭṭū fi-ha*; SYR: اللي بجانب بيت / *əlli bi-jānib bēt-i*), included in its shortened form *l-* (EGY: ولبدكم تعملوه/ *w l-beddkum taʿmlō*).
- interrogatives generally confirm the spread of the most common ones (شو/*šu*, فين/*fēn*, مين/*mīn*).
- conditional clauses, with *ʾiza* coupled both with the perfective, the imperfective, and the future (SYR: إذا طلعتي / *ʾiza ṭləʿti bi-šāri*; MAR: إذا بردت/ *ʾiza baradat*; SYR: إذا ما عرفتي / *ʾiza ma ʿarefti*; EGY: اذا راح نروح / *ʾiza raḥ nrūḥ*; EGY: اذا راح يعجبكوا / *ʾiza raḥ yuʿjibku*).
- the passive voice is rendered by the augmented form (EGY: اتسرقت مني /*itsaraqat min-ni*).
- among the modals, *lāzem/ lāzim* is frequently attested (PAL: لازم تروح / *lāzim trūḥ*; SYR: لازم نستعد/ *lāzem nəstaʿədd*).

Verbs in general are juxtaposed in series, mainly using prepositions. Participants to the chat adopt informal Arabic, mostly found in spoken interaction, which usually contains some of the crucial markers highlighted by Bassiouney: markers of definiteness, of the dual, the masculine and feminine, the singular and plural; markers of possession or genitive constructions; question words, demonstratives negative markers, relatives, markers for the tense and mood of verbs; markers and structures for the conditional sentences. All these markers, as already mentioned, work as *indicators of linguistic functions* and are more eloquent than others. They hold a higher contrastive strength, are associated with specific functions, more powerful and quite different from any viable alternative. It emerges from the written chats I collected that informalization- here intended as the process that makes a language more informal compared to its high normative standard-takes place on the writing level too, and that tells that informal Arabic is prevailing in various contexts of daily life in general, and not only at the speech level.

For what concerns the participants of the chat, they were a group of four Arab girls who tried to set the date and venue of a dinner. They are native speakers from Morocco, Syria, Egypt, and Gaza, are aged between 25-40, and live in Texas. They represent a community of Arabs settled and well-integrated in a foreign capital city. Their life reflects the cited process of migration-settlement-integration that often gives rise to the birth of both professional and personal links and friendship among Arabs from different origins, who cooperate to find a language variety suitable and comfortable for each one of them. The variety they adopt is the consequence of the migration of people, later grouped around the same center that usually coincides with capital cities, like Austin in the cases here studied. This process is still in progress today in many areas, even on a bigger scale than a single city, and its effects are reflected in the Arabic language by the so-called linguistic globalization. Historically, the leveling of an informal spoken variety starts from many similar but still different sub-codes, cyclically repeats[14] and works in order to find a register that

---

[13] This means that, for instance, the feminine singular ending -īna is shortened into -ī, and the feminine plurals -na into -ū the latter then identical to the masculine.

[14] Miller, "Variation and change in arabic urban vernaculars"

allows the higher degree of mutual intelligibility. The real novelty of today's phenomenon is in the medium adopted, which is now the written chat by instant messaging: a fast, quite improvised, self-regulated and self-managed space.

5. Accommodation revisited in written chats: real need or ideology?

The language adopted and scripted in the selection of chats reveals that the Levantine variety prevails over the Moroccan, for example, and that the Egyptian native holds a stronger level of linguistic independence and sense of (linguistic) belong, although her variety doesn't prevail at all. Following the observations already mentioned in the above paragraphs, some general traits are summed up here again, which are shared by our chat participants.

The *qāf* is regularly written, although not always pronounced[15]: *firʔa musiʔiyya* is written فرقه موسيقيه (SYR); *biṭaʕāt-kon* is written بطاقاتكن (SYR); *wāʔifa* is written واقفة (EGY). Original *hamza* often disappears from its initial, medial, and final position too, albeit *l-ʕašā* is written both as العشا (MAR) and العشاء (EGY, PAL); instead, *šu rai-kum* is written شو رايكم (SYR). Differently, *hamza* appears in *əl-iʔtimān* written *as* الائتمان (EGY) or in hamzated verbs with hamza in first position.

The Moroccan girl accommodates more toward the Levantine, for example regularly adopting the future particle *rāḥ,* while we would expect *ġadi* from her.

The group of girls uses the unmarked plural in general, with the masculine ending -*īn. Miš* and *šu* appear widely texted. The suffixes for the possessive adjectives span from -*kon/-kum* for your, -*hum/-on* for their -*hu/-o* for his.

Possession and genitive construction are mostly expressed by the particle ʕ*and*. The adverb "now" is also rendered in its versions without *qaf* and at the end (or without *hamza*), so it is written هلا / *hallā*; "tomorrow" coincides always with بكرة /*bukra*, and "later" with بعدين /*baʕdēn*.

As for the interrogatives, فين /*fēn* or *fīn* emerge as an alternative to وين /*wēn*, present in all our participants chatting, and more familiar to the Egyptian and Moroccan girls.

The Egyptian significantly characterizes her chat by the utilization of كده /*keda*, ده /*di*, برضه /*barḍo*, as unmistakable Egyptian clues. Most of the participants substituted the interdentals with the dentals /t/ (e.g. MOR: تلاتة صرنا / *ṣirna talāte*), with again the Moroccan speaker being less firm in the choice (e.g. مثلا /*maṭalan* vs. اكتر /*aktar*). The realization of /ḏ/ varies between /d/ (e.g. SYR: مناخود /*mnaḥod*) and /z/, sometimes for the same entry (e.g. PAL: بعتذر /*baʕteḏir* or MOR: بعتزر /*baʕtezir*). The Palestinian seems to abide slightly more by the rules of written Arabic, texting /ḏ/. Conditional sentences do not take into account MSA grammar requirements but freely make use of the indicative mood or participles with present tense meaning. For example, in MOR: لو بنقرر /*lo binqərrər* or EGY: اذا الأغلبية مفضلة /ʔ*iza l-aġlabiyye mufaḍḍile sahra* or SYR: إذا بدكن نلتقى / ʔ*iza bedd-kon nəltaʕi* . The only passive form we find comes from the Egyptian woman and is rendered by the relevant augmented form: *itsaraqat min-ni* /اتسرقت مني. Frequently, we find the verb modifier ʕ*am (*SYR: عم توصلك المسجات /ʕ*am tuwṣil l-ek* əl-mesajāt) for an on-going action, the *lāzem/ lāzim* (SYR: / لازم نستعد /*lāzem nəstaʕədd*, PAL: لازم تروح / *lāzim trūḥ/*) for expressing necessity, and always *bedd-* (EGY: / كيف ما بدكوا *Kīf ma beddku;* SYR: مين بدو /*min bedd-o*) for will. Many words are borrowed from English (EGY: سي فود /"sea food"; SYR: بليز /"please"; all use اوك /"ok"; MOR: شاور /"shower") or even from French (MOR: ميرسي "merçi"*;* EGY:دش /*douche* "shower"). The use of the article in foreignisms is often misplaced and added to words that – in English-don't admit it like in SYR, EGY: *d-*Downtown*;* EGY: *s-*Spring Break; EGY: *l-*visa, this last required in Arabic by the *iḍāfa* construction *bitāʕt-l-*visa. This manifests the prevailing role played by Arabic over English, which confirms it as the matrix language in the couple Arabic-English for the choice of the article, when a foreignism is at stake. The only exception to this is offered by the Moroccan native, because she usually doesn't add the article to English words (نتقابل في داون تاون /*nitqābil fi* Downtown). The choices of the Moroccan participant recall what Chakrani observed: informants may shift to English for communicative efficiency and to level linguistic asymmetries. In addition to this, I know that the girl holds a specialization in teaching English as a second language, something that could have favored her self-monitoring and blocked the automatism of system matrices.

Reasoning on the relation among the different Arabics at stake, three main focuses emerge from the chat analysis:

1. the Levantine variety-and in particular the Syrian one- prevails over the others at play (Egyptian, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian); in parallel Egyptian markers prove to be strong enough and resistant to substitution, at least in the choices of the Egyptian native girl.
2. In the pair Spoken Arabic vs. MSA, the colloquial register emerges in writing too, although at informal writing level.
3. In the pair Arabic vs. other foreign languages, Arabic prevails and affects the foreign languages at system matrices level.

The four girls effectively made wide use of a number of Syrian markers, and the accommodation trend emerging from these chats is clearly toward the Syrian variety. Examples of this are: the interrogative شو /*šu* which replaces the Egyptian ʕ*ēh* and the Moroccan *ʔaš*; similarly, "now" is translated with *hallā* or *hallaʔ* by almost every participant, and it prevails over the Egyptian *dilwaʕtī*, and the Morrocan *dāba*; the same is true for *bedd-*, which wins over the Egyptian ʔ*ayz*; in addition, the Syrian *mnīḥ* is widely adopted by non-Syrians. The Moroccan girl, who's stance is minoritarian in this context, hardly uses any specific Moroccan features and lexicon. Effectively, she adopts the verbal particle *b-*, and the *n-* verb as plural form.

---

15   I verified this, by asking my informants to read aloud the texts in the chat, when we met the day after.

The texting proved to be efficient and well managed, for what concerns shifts and degree of engagement, as well as efficiency in communication and flow of information, but some questions emerge here: does accommodation respond to real need or is it just ideological? In other words, does the accommodation to the Syrian variety presuppose dependency, weaken independence and individuality in the free choice of the other participants to the chat? It seems that a heavy role is played by stereotypes, which lead not only to accommodation, but to overaccommodation, even in cases where it was not essential at all for effectiveness. A sense of power and legitimacy seems to exist behind the chatters: the Moroccan over accommodates, for example she often adopts non-Moroccan features (e.g., verbs starting with *b-*; šu*; hallā; raḥ*) even where the Moroccan ones won't have obstacle comprehension. More, she does not even attempt to impose her variety as if she wanted to abide by a common feeling and shared belief: Syrian Arabic here works definitely better for this sake. The Syrian, under accommodates, as she goes ahead with her dominant variety and-as opposed to her friend- really does not show much convergence toward the others. The Syrian attitude here seems to promote dependency, and the Moroccan one displays a learned (linguistic) dependency although not always motivated by the sake of enhancing comprehensibility.

Thinking ahead and beyond the specific cases here observed, it is evident that both under accommodation and overaccommodation are ideological behaviors, and do not work well for reinforcing individual skills, in case this is necessary. In conclusion, "while accommodation theory must continue to refine its potential to model talk in context, it should not neglect the metacommunicative dimension", for demonstrating to work most naturally and less ideologically.[16] It remains valid that written chats, although extremely ephemeral in their immediate effect, make it possible to identify in writing the basic features of the mentioned informal register, and help us in assessing the communication strength and expressive accuracy of spoken Arabic, which is not restricted to oral interactions, of course.

6. Written chats and non-traditional media: the *coup de grâce* to the exclusive supremacy of the prestige variety?

If written chats confirm the well-known features of accommodation on one hand, on the other they show that something is happening well beyond the expected phenomena. In fact, poli- multi- and trans-glossic behaviors seem to be at stake, so to deliver the *coup de grâce* to the variety of recognized high-prestige, which coincided for a long time with the Egyptian one. Today, informal settings like social platforms, soap operas, songs, and movies make use and include more *Arabics*, and not exclusively the Egyptian or Levantine ones. In this regard, Soliman in her PhD thesis brough evidence that in our age Arabs keep their own dialects in cross country communication, and they very seldom resort to MSA for intelligibility. She also noticed that today's listeners in most cases are already familiar with other dialects because they have already been exposed to them. Moreover, the context plays a fundamental role for helping to guess the exact meaning, in cases where listeners do not remember it for a specific term adopted by their interlocutor.

Such possible copresence of different varieties, and the familiarity of Arabs with different varieties depends on cultural centers being reconfiguring, because they do not coincide anymore with the ones recognized and affirmed in the past only. Pluri-Arabism as a phenomenon affects then both the cultural and the linguistic spheres. In practice, it emerges that-for example- the Egypt centric pan-Arabism is now being replaced by additional and more inclusive "-nesses": "Lebanese-ness, Syrian-ness or Algerian-ness",[17] for the specific case of singers. In addition, both traditional audiovisual media like TV settings,[18] and non-traditional media have recently experienced a boom in the Arab world, with impact on language attitudes. Kamal[19] also assigned a role to the Arab Spring, as a booster for change in the way nationalism was narrated, and he stated that: "the Arab nations and cultures are not only imagined and narrated but also Facebooked, Instagrammed, and tweeted by Arabic speakers who use all possible registers and languages to create, negotiate, and reinvent their own vision of their immediate society as well as of Arab identity in general.". This is why many languages and vernaculars gained the spotlight on particular occasions or coupled with specific tools, so to create a new polyglossic reality with new characteristics, geographically and linguistically. Geographically, the matter is neither internal nor restricted to one single country; linguistically, speakers or writers are exposed to more varieties than just one high and one low, and these multiple varieties arrive today from the audiovisual media too. In conclusion, there is no more one "single" national diglossia and the *coup de grâce* to the exclusive supremacy of the prestige variety appears completely delivered.

References

Atkinson, Karen, and Nikolas Coupland. 1988. "Accommodation as Ideology." *Language & Communication* 8 (3-4): 321–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/0271-5309(88)90025-0.

Attwa, Mona Farrag. 2019. "On the Way to Understand the Pan-Arab Voice." *Institut de Recherches et d'Études Sur Les Mondes Arabes et Musulmans EBooks*, January. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.iremam.4449

---

[16]   Atkinson, Karen, and Nikolas Coupland, "Accommodation as Ideology," *Language & Communication* 8/ 3-4 (1988): 325.

[17]   Haiem Richard Nedjat-, "The Dubai Effect: From Egyptocentrism to Gulf-Based Pan-Arabism in Arab Pop Songs," *Arabian Humanities*, 18 (2023).

[18]   Mona Farrag Attwa, "On the Way to Understand the Pan-Arab Voice." *Institut de Recherches et d'Études Sur Les Mondes Arabes et Musulmans EBooks*, (2019).

[19]   Amr Kamal, "The Return of the Diglossic Son: The Virtual Life of Translation, Subtitling, and Arabic Polyglossia," *Dibur Literary Journal,* 8 (2019): 84.

Reem Bassiouney. 2009. *Arabic Sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh University Press.

Benítez Fernández, Montserrat. 2003. "Transcripción al árabe marroquí de mensajes de teléfono móvil". *Estudios de Dialectología Norteafricana y Andalusí* 7: 153-163

Benítez Fernández, Montserrat. 2012. "TelQuel: una fuente contemporánea para el estudio del árabe marroquí". In *De los manuscritos medievales a internet: la presencia del árabe vernáculo en las fuentes escritas,* Mohamed Meouak, Pablo Sánchez, and Ángeles Vicente (eds), 403-417. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza

Caubet, Dominique. 2017. "Morocco: An Informal Passage to Literacy in dārija (Moroccan Arabic)". In *The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World: Writing Change,* Høigilt Jacob & Gunvor Mejdell (eds), 116-141*.* Leiden: Brill.

Chakrani, Brahim. 2015. "Arabic Interdialectal Encounters: Investigating the Influence of Attitudes on Language Accommodation." *Language & Communication* 41 (March): 17–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2014.10.006.

Coupland, Nikolas, and Adam Jaworski. 1997. "Relevance, Accommodation and Conversation: Modeling the Social Dimension of Communication." *Multilingua–Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 16 (2-3): 233–58. https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1997.16.2-3.233.

Giles, Howard, Anthony Mulac, James J. Bradac, and Patricia Johnson. 1987. "Speech Accommodation Theory: The First Decade and Beyond." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 10 (1): 13–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1987.11678638.

Giles, Howard and Ogay, Tania. 2007. "Communication Accommodation Theory". In *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars,* B.B. Whaley& W. Samter (eds.), 293-310. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Kamal, Amr. 2019. "The Return of the Diglossic Son: The Virtual Life of Translation, Subtitling, and Arabic Polyglossia". *Dibur Literary Journal* 8: 83-96

Miller, Catherine. 2003. "VARIATION and CHANGE in ARABIC URBAN VERNACULARS." *BRILL EBooks*, January, 177–206. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402480_014 .

Myers-Scotton, Carol. 1993. *Social Motivations for Codeswitching: Evidence from Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Myers Scotton, Carol. 2004. "Precision Tuning of the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model of Codeswitching." *Sociolinguistica* 18 (1). https://doi.org/10.1515/9783484604650.106.

Nedjat-Haiem, Richard. 2023. "The Dubai Effect: From Egyptocentricism to Gulf-Based Pan-Arabism in Arab Pop Songs." *Arabian Humanities*, 18 (December). https://doi.org/10.4000/cy.11395.

S'hiri, Sonia. 2002. "Speak Arabic Please! Tunisian Arabic Speakers Linguistic Accommodation to Middle Easterners." In Aleya Rouchdy (ed). *Language Contact and Language Conflict in Arabic Variations on a Sociolinguistic Theme*, 149-174. New York: Routledge Curzon Press.

Soliman, Rasha. 2014. Arabic Cross-dialectal Conversations with Implications for the Teaching of Arabic as a Second Language. PhD diss., University of Leeds.