Diglossia and Multilingualism: A help or a Hindrance to Arabic Wikipedians?

Lessons from the Arabic “Students Write Wikipedia” program
Wikimedia Israel
- Hi! Ahlan wa Sahlan
My name is Bekriah
And my mother tongue is Palestinian Fallahi (rural) Arabic
What is DIGLOSSIA?

A stable linguistic situation where a language community simultaneously uses two variants: The HIGH variant (H) and the LOW variant

Examples:

- Fuṣḥa Arabic and vernacular Arabic العاميّة
- Chinese
- Swiss German
- Pakistan: Urdu (Persianized / Arabicized vs. colloquial Hindi)
- Tamil

And more.

وش بيدك؟
Shu Biddak?

ماذا تريد؟
Matha tu-reed?
MULTILINGUALISM?

The educational curriculum in Arabic-speaking schools in Israel includes three obligatory languages: Arabic, Hebrew, and English.
E. Said (2002) on the modernization of Arabic:

The modern classical is largely the result of a fascinating internal modernization of the language that began during the last decades of the nineteenth century—the period of the Nahda, or renaissance. This modernization was carried out mainly by a group of men in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt (a striking number of them Christian), who set themselves the collective task of bringing Arabic as a language into the modern world by modifying and somewhat simplifying its syntax, through the process of Arabizing (isti’rab) the seventh-century original. That meant introducing such words as “train” and “company” and “democracy” and “socialism” that couldn’t have existed during the classical period. It also meant excavating the language’s immense resources through the technical grammatical process of al-qiyas, or analogy. This is a subject brilliantly discussed by Stetkevych, who demonstrates in minute detail how Arabic’s grammatical laws of derivation were mobilized by the Nahda reformers to absorb new words and concepts into the system without in any way upsetting it.

Labaneh → (strained yogurt)

↑ Trilingual Street sign in Old city of Jerusalem / CC0 1.0

↓ Right to Food

Flag of Switzerland →
“Students Write Wikipedia”

How did we overcome challenging linguistic situation in class?

- Topic choice: individual vs. group theme (flags, human rights)
- Building a thematic lexicon for the task
- Topic choice: Let’s register names we use and provide etymological info on Wikipedia (food)
- One site, trilingual sign, three
- Translation tasks
A Hindrance or an Obstacle?

Multilingual educational environment assures inclusive information during the research and writing process, while diglossic situations challenges the process.

Extra: How can we reserve Vernacular Arabic on Wikipedia?
Thank you!
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