GENDER AND LANGUAGE BOUNDARIES IN THE ARAB WORLD.
CURRENT ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

GÉNERO Y FRONTERAS LINGÜÍSTICAS EN EL MUNDO ÁRABE.
ESTADO DE LA CUESTIÓN Y PERSPECTIVAS

Ángeles Vicente[*]

Abstract
This article makes a modest contribution to the knowledge of the role played by gender in linguistic variation in Arabic-speaking societies regarding linguistic and literary aspects. It tries also to reflect the current state of the matter and to highlight the relevance of taking into consideration both the form and the content of female discourse.

Resumen
En este artículo se realiza una modesta aportación al conocimiento del papel que desempeña la variable de género en la variación lingüística en las sociedades arabó-fonas, aludiendo a dos facetas diferentes: la lingüística y la literaria. Para ello, hemos llevado a cabo un estado de la cuestión y hemos puesto de relieve la importancia de tener en cuenta tanto la forma como el contenido del habla femenina.

Keywords: gender, linguistic shift, oral literature, vernacular Arabic.

Palabras clave: género, cambio lingüístico, literatura oral, árabe vernáculo.

1. Women's words, women's world: female life as reflected in Arabic dialects

This special edition of *EDNA* bears the same title as the trilateral project of investigation formed by three teams from Austria (Universität Wien, Institut für Orientalistik), France (IREMAM, Aix en Provence) and Spain (Universidad de Zaragoza-IEIOP). The work published here was carried out within this framework[1].

[*] **Ángeles Vicente: Universidad de Zaragoza-IEIOP**
E-mail: mavicen@unizar.es

Our starting premise consisted of considering the existence of some general cultural principles in Arabic-speaking societies. These principles, despite numerous and at times not so small differences between the aforementioned societies, are the source of some common elements and similar strategies of communication between women of this vast geographical area regardless of their urban or rural origin, age or level of education, all of which contributes to differentiate female from male discourse[2]. Using a sociolinguistic approach, we tried to analyze a situation of great diversity which has at times been ignored due to stereotypes which blur facts and tend to generalize. We avoided at all times to consider women as a homogeneous group, so we took into account differences resulting from age, education level, social background, habitat, religion and even internal hierarchy within their status, because not all of them have the same position within their communities[3].

Our aim was to investigate linguistic gender-based differences and their impact on linguistic change and on oral female literature in several Arabic-speaking countries. We did not attempt to be exhaustive due to the exiguity of the team which made it impossible to span all the existing Arabic-speaking societies. We are also aware of the existing gaps and of the work that remains to be done.

In order to achieve our goal we used two different approaches: the first is a gender-oriented approach in the sense that we look into gender differentiation at the linguistic and literary levels. To this end, we made a comparative analysis of the female and male linguistic practices. The second is a women-oriented approach because we focused on female speech, on some woman-associated genres of oral literature and on the interdialectal study of some semantic fields exclusively related to the world of women.

This latter approach to women's words is probably our most original contribution to the studies on the relationship between gender and language in the Arab world (see in this volume pp. 31-92), because despite the fact that they consist of everyday topics in the life of women, they have usually been overlooked and do not usually take part in linguistic descriptions or gender studies.

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[2] Some authors have already alluded to these common cultural principles, for instance Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji claim: "Although it is culturally diverse, this region shares many commonalities with relation to women that are strong, deep, and pervasive: a space-based patriarchy, a culturally strong sense of religion, a smooth co-existence of tradition and modernity, a transitional stage in development, and multilingualism/multiculturalism", cf. Sadiqi / Ennaji 2010. According to Aziza Boucherit and Jerôme Lentin Arabic-speaking women present common linguistic innovations due to the same 'living conditions', such as lower exposure to the norm or the standard (cf. Boucherit/Lentin 1989: 25).

[3] Some works on this question have also considered the social class as a variable. This may lead to distorted conclusions because the term is vague since in some societies the idea of social class does not exist (cf. Bassiouney 2003: 381).

2. Studies on language and gender in Arabic-speaking societies

As Fatima Sadiqi claims: "the study of Arabic from a gender perspective is still at its beginnings in spite of the fact that Arabic sociolinguistics has attracted the attention of scholars worldwide", cf. Sadiqi 2007: 642.

Many works have dealt with women and gender in Arab societies but only a few of them were carried out from a sociolinguistic perspective. The general trend has always been based on a historical, socio-cultural, political, legal or economic approach, one of the most recurrent topics in the last few years being the use of the Islamic veil[4].

As a result, the study of gender-based linguistic variation in the Arabic-speaking world started, with some delay in comparison to western countries[5], in the 1980's[6], although some data had been provided before by some work on Arabic dialectology, such as Bauer's on women in Palestine (cf. Bauer 1926) and the work of Arsène Roux on women in Meknes in Morocco[7].

Most early studies of this discipline in the Arab world were conducted on oriental dialects (cf. Abdel Jawad 1981, Royal 1985, Haeri 1991, Al-Muhannadi 1991, Al Wer 1991), although there was also some investigation on western or Maghribian Arabic (cf. for instance Dekkak 1979 and Jabeur 1987). Since then, many works have been published due to the development of the sociolinguistic studies of different vernacular variations of Arabic.

At present, the situation has improved although there are still many gaps and aspects which remain unanalyzed, especially in comparison with the same speciality in other families of languages, such as Indo-European.

The sources available to study the relationship between the social category of gender and linguistic change in Arabic-speaking societies are of a different kind, ranging from data compiled through field work conducted by linguists, to compositions of oral poetry complied by anthropologists or sociologists. As regards

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[4] See for instance: Ahmed 1992, Badran 1995, Khoury / Moghadam 1995 and Heath 2008.

[5] This is at times attributed to the higher number of men studying dialectology in the early stages of this discipline. Due to this, most of their sources were also male because the world of women was inaccessible to them. This is the reason why data on most female sociolects in the early stages of Arabic dialectology remained on the sidelines until women started to take part in this field of investigation.

[6] This discipline had evolved in western societies, in particular in Anglo-Saxon countries, some years earlier. There were already some works by the first half of the twentieth century, such as those by Sapir (1929) and Haas (1944), although the peak was reached in the 1970's with the work of sociolinguists such as Labov and Lakoff amongst others. This could be linked to the beginning of the feminist movements and of the awareness in the western linguistic schools of the connotations of femininity.

[7] Arsène Roux worked in the Moroccan city of Meknes and compiled a corpus for the doctoral thesis he presented in 1925 titled *Le parler arabe des musulmanes de Meknès (Maroc)*. This author presented in a later work some phonetic phenomenon which differentiated the female from the male sociolect regarding the consonant phonemes /s/, /z/ and /r/ (cf. Roux 1952: 377). This corpus has been the subject of two later works conducted by Harry Stroomer, consisting of the publication of the texts of Roux's thesis (cf. Roux 2008), and an article by Stroomer (cf. Stroomer 2004).

linguistic data, information on this question can be found in two types of publications: those which describe directly certain features of some female sociolect and those which provide scattered data mixed with other types of information and are therefore not always easy to find[8].

Some compilations and classifications of available information have already been completed. The first study was provided by the work of Aziza Boucherit y Jerôme Lentin (cf. 1989), with an inventory of the features considered female in publications made to date, alluding to female speech strategies and finally making reference to the possible difference between stigmatized female features and others more prestigious (cf. Boucherit / Lentin 1989: 28 who claim "on passe d'une marque 'féminin' à une marque 'raffiné'"). Almost a decade later, Judith Rosenhouse (cf. 1998) made an excellent synthesis of the progress made within this discipline. In her work we find a summary of the results reached by some previous studies analyzing gender-based linguistic variation in Arabic-speaking societies. On the other hand, as well as classifying the linguistic features considered female, she also analyzed information from other fields such as female literary production.

More recently, we find other types of works. Some study a particular case, such as the book by Niloofar Haeri (cf. 1996) on linguistic change based on gender in the city of Cairo; some have different approaches, such as the work by Fatima Sadiqi (cf. 2003), who studies the diverse forms in which men and women use their linguistic potentiality to create their own identities built in accordance with the social concept of gender in Moroccan society.

Finally, we shall refer to the chapter devoted by Reem Bassiouney to gender differences in her work on Arabic sociolinguistics (cf. 2009: 128-197), with a summary of the debate regarding the advisability of applying the methods of western sociolinguists and their results to Arabic-speaking societies. The author also presents some linguistic features and analyzes linguistic variation based on two concepts of anthropology in Arab societies (cf. *infra*).

3. Gender as grammar category in Arabic (*muḏakkar versus muʔannaṯ*)

Some of the studies on the relationship between gender and language in the Arabic-speaking world made reference to the grammatical use of gender. Bearing in mind that Arabic is considered a gender language[9], the approach used when studying differences between masculine and feminine forms in the various morphosyntactic categories has also been considered as the subject of analysis on the linguistic representation of men and women in society, as Fatima Sadiqi did (cf. 2007). Thus, Sadiqi considers that some grammar treatises are androcentric because they reflect the sexist ideology of the societies where they were produced. According to the same author, the symbolic and social power of masculinity has been passed on to the

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[8] This is the case of many descriptions of Arab dialects where interesting facts are included occasionally regarding female sociolects; an example of this could be the book by Simon Lévy (2009) on Judeo-Arabic dialects of Morocco.

[9] It means that Arabic belongs to this type of noun class languages based on grammatical considerations, cf. Hellinger/Bußmann 2001-2003: 5.

world of grammar by establishing some hierarchies between words which reflect the same situation as society.

Nonetheless, some scholars do not believe this to be the case. They rather consider that some sexist connotations have been attached afterwards to the grammatical classification, for instance Ibrahim considers that "grammatical gender is merely a means for classifying nouns according to their suffixes without in the beginning any allusion to sex; the sex reference of gender was always posterior to the emergence of grammatical gender" (mentioned in Hachimi 2007:156).

Atiqa Hachimi also analyzed the question of grammar gender in the Arabic language (cf. 2001, 2007). An interesting question she refers to is that the feminine form is a 'marked' form[10], thus: "only feminine words are morphologically marked for gender, as most, but not all of these, carry the feminine suffix *-a*. Masculine words, on the other hand, carry a zero suffix, they are thus unmarked for gender".

As a result, when feminine forms are not morphologically marked, they either undergo a lexical change and become masculine (for instance *ʔarnab*) or a hyper-correction is made and a feminine suffix *–at* is added to an already feminine word (for instance *ʕarūsah*)[11]. Amalia Sa'ar considers this normative classification of masculine as unmarked and feminine as marked as an objectification of male hegemony[12].

Another aspect pointed out in this sense is that in Arabic, as in most gender languages, masculine is used as the generic grammatical and lexical form, that is, the masculine forms are used to allude to persons whose gender is unspecified. Male as norm is a highly prevalent phenomenon across languages. Similarly, generic masculine forms are documented in the cases of gender languages such as Serbian, Polish, French, German, Greek, Russian, Czech, and Romanian, as well as in languages with no gender noun class, such as English or Danish, and in languages that show no gender distinctions in the pronominal system, such as Orya[13].

According to Sadiqi (cf. 2003: 122) this is due to extra-linguistic reasons, it is not inherent in languages but it is gradually built up due to daily use in androcentric societies. This theory is also supported by Z. Abu Risha (cf. 2002) and is widespread in feminist literature. The fact that a genderless language, such as Turkish, is not egalitarian or semantically neutral either, as demonstrated by Braun, confirms this premise (cf. Braun 1999).

Interesting as this viewpoint of the relationship between gender and language may be, our perspective is quite different. We focused on considering gender as a

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[10] In Hellinger/Bußmann 2001-2003: 9-10, reference is made to the possible relationship between the use of the feminine form as unmarked gender in some aboriginal languages in Australia and to the possibility of expressing by means of feminine pronouns gender–indefinite references in Iroquoian languages, with the existence of matriarchal social structures.

[11] These changes have been attributed to a tendency to simplify the linguistic system, cf. Procházka 2004.

[12] Cf. Sa'ar 2007: 408.

[13] Hellinger/Bußmann 2001-2003: 5.

sociolinguistic category, not grammatical, and used it as the criterion to analyze the use of language made by men and women.

There is, nevertheless, some similarity between both approaches, because in some sociolinguistic studies male speech was taken as reference for the analysis, that is, as the 'unmarked' variety. The words of Joseph Chetrit (cf. 1986: 2) when talking about the female sociolect of Judeo-Arab women in Morocco illustrate this: "la parole des hommes sera donc considérée ici arbitrairement, comme non-marquée par rapport à celle de femmes, dans les mêmes contextes d'énonciation dont nous aurons à traiter dans notre analyse".

4. The role of Arabic-speaking women in gender-based linguistic variation

It is a well known fact that Arab sociolinguistics has evolved by applying the theoretical approach of western countries in this discipline to Arabic-speaking societies. Consequently, following the theoretical context provided by variationist linguistics, it has been demonstrated that in some contexts gender is a basic element to linguistic change[14].

A large number of studies conducted especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, consist of quantitative sociolinguistic research where linguistic variation is analyzed by means of statistics which reflect the relationship between the gender variable and other independent variables within a given community such as age, education, ethnic group or even the religion of the speakers[15].

Nonetheless, taking into consideration the fact that in these countries and in the Arab world there are neither the same level nor the same type of differences based on gender[16], or a similar linguistic situation, to which important socio-cultural differences must also be added, this method of work was questioned in the beginning.

The theses of sociolinguists such as W. Labov and R. Lakoff, produced in the 1970's, exerted great influence in the early stages of Arabic sociolinguistics. This is the case of one of Labov's most renowned theories regarding the impact of gender in linguistic change in western societies. According to him, lower-middle class women are more sensitive to prestigious forms and they therefore follow the standard rule as a way to compensate for their social insecurity[17]. Labov qualified this theory in later studies, so Principle II of his work *Principles of Linguistc Change* establishes that women use a lower number of stigmatized variations and a higher number of

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[14] This approach has been criticized, for instance, by Sa'ar (cf. 2007: 405), and Gordon / Heath (cf. 1998: 421). Reem Bassiouney claims also that quantitative sociolinguistic studies have some limitations (cf. 2009: 161-162).

[15] It is important to bear in mind that the relevance of these variations is not comparable to that of the same variations in Arabic-speaking societies, the clearest example being the difference between rural and urban backgrounds in both cultures.

[16] As S. Safiyiddeen demonstrated the discourses produced in the two different languages display differences in how these languages construct gender, cf. Safiyiddeen (cf. 2008).

[17] According to Labov, the reason for this situation is that men can show their social position by other means, such as their profession. The standard form of the language is therefore considered by women as a symbolic mark of the power of the ruling groups, cf. Moreau 1997: 260.

prestigious variations than men (cf. Labov 2001: 266). Besides, he adds that for this principle to be viable women must have access to prestigious forms and they must be aware of the social meaning linked to the use of any given variation (cf. ibid: 270). This last comment was criticized by N. Haeri (cf. 1996: 176), who believes that linguistic behaviour not only depends on access to the standard rule of the language but on many other social factors, for example, the type of occupation speakers have[18].

Thus, in the wake of the works of Labov and other investigators who reached similar conclusions (for instance, Trudgill 1974), most of the first sociolinguistic studies conducted in the Arabic-speaking context tried to elucidate whether gender differences existed in the use of the rules of modern standard Arabic (hereinafter MSA) since it was considered the standard norm. In the first studies carried out in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq differences in the use of MSA forms between men and women were described, cf. for instance Kojak 1983 (for Damascus and Hama), Abdel Jawad 1981 and 1983 (for Amman), Bakir 1986 (for Basrah), and Schmidt 1974 (for Cairo).

Nonetheless, some authors demonstrated that even though the cultural and religious prestige of classical Arabic may not be denied due to the role it plays in Muslim societies, this variety is neither the norm which triggers linguistic change in these societies nor the prestigious form associated with urbanity and modernity (see Ibrahim 1986, Haeri 1987: 180 and Haeri 2000: 68-69)[19]. These and other authors pointed out then the difficulty in applying the results reached by them in non-diglossic societies, which is the case of most western societies, to diglossic contexts such as Arabic-speaking linguistic communities[20].

In this sense, it should be recalled that in Arabic-speaking societies and precisely due to diglossia, linguistic variation depends more on interdialectal levelling than on the superstratum influence of classical Arabic (or MSA). Numerous works on Arabic dialectology have demonstrated the formation of a different prestigious variation in each linguistic community often coinciding with an urban dialect which has become or is in the process of becoming a koiné at a regional or even national level[21]. This koiné is, therefore, the result of the competition between several

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[18] N. Haeri (cf. 1996) alludes to the relevance of the occupation because it conditions linguistic behaviour; hence, women whose job implies contact with MSA will have the same predisposition as men with similar jobs to introduce elements of the classical-standard rule, for instance the variation /q/. However, amongst women and men with a similar level of education but with jobs which do not involve contact with the written form (MSA), women use fewer features of MSA than men. Nonetheless, opinions are not unanimous regarding this, Mejdell (2006) considers that this may not be generalized, and Abu Haidar (cf. 1989: 479) affirms that when this variety is accessible to both sexes, it is generally women who tend toward it.

[19] That is, a situation which is due to ideological rather than linguistic reasons.

[20] To find out about the debate of the 1980's on the suitability of applying western theories to an Arabic-speaking context, see for instance Walters 1991: 199-204, Hachimi 2001: 29-30 and Bassiouney 2009: 155-158.

[21] Nonetheless, the prestigious variation is not always an urban dialect and there are several cases where the drive for linguistic change is a Bedouin type dialect, as in the case of

regional varieties, but never against the classical variety (or its modern version, the MSA) which is more used in writing and in formal contexts but does not take part in processes of linguistic variation. Very often this prestigious national variety consists of the dialect used in the capital city, as in the case of Egypt, but not always.

As many works have demonstrated, if we equal this vernacular variety operating as the prestige norm in Arabic-speaking societies to the variety considered as standard in western communities, then we can find some similarities between Labov's conclusions and those drawn by Arabic sociolinguistics, in particular regarding the question of women being more sensitive to the prestigious forms of the language than men[22].

Concerning Arabic-speaking women and their role in linguistic change in a diglossic society, there are two clearly different situations. On the one hand, the innovative role of female discourse in urban contexts has been demonstrated. Under certain circumstances women adapt faster than men to linguistic change in process (see for instance, the works of Ibrahim 1986 and Abu Haidar 1988) and it is even women who start that change, as in the case of mid-higher class women from Cairo, demonstrated by N. Haeri (cf. 1996). Hence, it is contended that women, in a situation of 'stable variation'[23], use prestigious forms more frequently than men, whereas in cases of 'changes in progress'[24] women tend to use the new forms more often than men and are consequently more innovative and promote linguistic change[25].

On the other hand, in other circumstances, in rural contexts, women preserve more local productions and keep away from prestigious and generalized forms at a national level, which are then linked to the male world. Their linguistic practices are considered then conservative[26].

Baghdad. Many elements must be taken into account in order to explain the evolution of each linguistic community. These include, for instance, the effect of population movements on languages, since, as Miller states: "Not all urban vernaculars have expanded or are expanding and some old-city vernaculars have been declining in the face of news koinés brought by migrants" (cf. Miller 2003a: 252).

[22] This was already pointed out by some authors such as Farida Abu-Haidar and Reem Bassiouney, cf. Abu-Haidar 1988: 160 y Bassiouney 2009: 157.

[23] "When competing forms have been in use for a long time and neither is replacing the other", cf. Haeri 1996: 10.

[24] When "newer and more recent forms emerge as variants of older forms", cf. *ibid*.

[25] In western societies when women use standard or prestigious forms in stable variation are considered conservative, but in Arabic-speaking societies it is not always considered like that since a linguistic prestigious form can be also an innovation for a specific linguistic community.

[26] However, C. Miller, cf. 2003b: 493, admits that she finds it difficult to establish whether the linguistic differences she found between men and women in a community of the district of Balyāna (Upper Egypt) have existed for some time or whether the female sociolect represents an earlier stage of the language where these differences did not exist and has been preserved amongst women but disappeared amongst men, who have more interdialectal contact. This could probably apply to other linguistic communities.

Both situations are intertwined with many other social factors such as age, education and rural/urban context, which play a more important role than in western societies (cf. the case of Oran in Algeria described by Benrabah 1999: 26). Thus, although we may not generalize, it has been established that young, educated and urban women take a more active part in linguistic change and collaborate in the spread of new variations more often than men of any age[27], while older and illiterate or semi-illiterate women from rural areas preserve the most ancient features which in many cases are actually in danger of becoming extinct and are usually avoided by the rest of the language community because they are stigmatized. It is, therefore, the sociolect of a socially segregated group, with lower access to interdialectal levelling and, due to this, less permeable to innovations (see, for instance, Abu Haidar 1988[28] and Walters 1991[29], and Vicente 2002). In these cases, femininity has been identified with linguistic conservatism and also with illiteracy or semi-illiteracy[30].

The situation of this latter group led A. Boucherit and J. Lentin to identify female sociolects as minority Arabic dialects. According to these authors the variations found amongst some women often corresponded to those of a close minority group, as is the case of the production of diphthongs in Tunisia, typical of Jewish people and Muslim women (cf. Boucherit/Lentin 1989: 23)[31].

As regards expatriate women, the dichotomy young women-innovative / older women-conservative has also spread to some Arabic-speaking communities overseas, where according to Abu Haidar the sociolinguistic patterns of the society where they come from are reproduced to a certain extent. She demonstrates this with the example of Iraqi women settled in Britain (cf. Abu-Haidar 1991).

According to Haeri (cf. 1987: 177), the linguistic behaviour of men and women is the result of their different responses to processes of modernization and deve-

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[27] For instance, it has been observed that women from Cairo produce a form of palatalization of the dental occlusive phonemes (cf. Haeri 1992: 176-177) or that Muslim women from Baghdad use the prefix *da-* + the 1st person of some verbs to express a future action , cf. Abu-Haidar 1988: 159. Madiha Doss also claims that it is women from Cairo who innovate by spreading the use of the negative particle *miš* in cases where it was not formerly used (cf. Doss 2008: 90-91). In other words, in these cases women are in the vanguard of linguistic change.

[28] This author, who studied society in Baghdad, claims that women have less mobility and stay within private spheres and due to this, older women have preserved the old dialect. These women are very conservative from a linguistic point of view, even in a situation of interdialectal communication. However, amongst the younger population there are fewer differences between men and women (cf. Abu-Haidar 1988: 160).

[29] Walters states that young women and men prefer the less stigmatized and more prestigious variations while older people use the stigmatized ones. Amongst the former there is greater dialectal levelling which is clearly connected with the level of education. In this case, we can see that the situation is due to a variation based on age and on gender (cf. Walters 1991).

[30] Regarding some derogative connotations of femininity due in Moroccan society see Sadiqi 2003.

[31] As well as the three main features which A. Roux considered as female amongst women from Meknes, that is, /š/ >[ṣ], /ž/ > [ẓ] and the uvular pronunciation of /r/, are similar to those used by the Jewish community of Meknes, cf. Roux 1952: 377.

lopment. Women are having a more favourable reaction towards them than men. This is particularly true for young educated women. Thus, women are more innovative in some cases (cf. Haeri 1996: 172), and closer to the local prestige norms in others (cf. Daher 1999: 203). These prestige norms are usually linked to urban dialects, but not always. Bakir, for instance, stated that women of Basrah use more the variation [č] of the variable /k/ to emulate the socially prestigious norm of Baghdad, although this is not an urban but a Bedouin feature.

Nonetheless, it seems obvious that the linguistic practices in the group of elder women, usually illiterate or semi-illiterate, are generally more homogeneous than those of younger women, where more factors enter the equation such as different education levels or unequal access to modernization (cf. Walters 1991: 213).

Yet, as Enam Al-Wer recommends, we must avoid polarizing the linguistic behaviour of the speakers merely based on their gender. There are often other factors at play. According to this author, there is another element that ought to be considered amongst Jordanians as regards linguistic changes in the community which cancels gender differences. This element is adherence to local identity. Regarding the variable /q/, most of her sources, both men and women, show a higher frequency of the local variation of rural origin [g], than urban [ʔ] (cf. Al-Wer 1999). These new data seem to contradict some earlier observations, because women from Jordan were usually closer to urban phonetic characteristics from Palestine [ʔ], more prestigious at a pan-regional level, whereas men were closer to rural Jordanian features [g][32], although it is rather a linguistic situation which evolves along with socio-political circumstances in the country[33].

A similar instance is the case studied by Catherine Miller with regards to a rural society in Upper Egypt, where she also observed that the variable /q/ is not produced differently by men or women because they all produce the local variation [g], and not the prestigious form [ʔ] from Cairo (cf. Miller 2003b: 484)[34]. Thus, once again linguistic variation is affected by a question of local identity rather than by a question of different gender, because even young and semi-educated women also maintain the local pronunciation stigmatized in other Egyptian regions[35].

Both authors have highlighted the relevance of the level of awareness of the speakers regarding the meaning of the variables (cf. Al-Wer 1999: 54 y Miller 2003: 484).

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[32] Abdel Jawad demonstrates the same for Amman, that is, men produce [g] and women [ʔ] (cf. Abdel Jawad 1981: 264-266).

[33] For this reason, E. Al-Wer believes that these circumstances are causing the creation of a new dialect in Jordan (cf. Al-Wer 2007).

[34] They do not produce the variation [g] or variable /ǧ/ either, which is the prestigious form at a national level because it is from Cairo. Women alternate [ǧ] and [ž], the latter being a typical feature of female speech in this dialect (cf. Miller 2003b: 486).

[35] Her sources were young women, most of them without education, but even those with higher education levels produced the local pronunciation [g]. This situation of preference for pan-regional features instead of those from the capital is reproduced with other features of the dialect. Due to this, the author considers the possibility of the emergence of a koiné at a regional level different from that from Cairo (cf. Miller 2003: 494).

We can also find examples of the opposite. Women who, given their circumstances, ought to be linguistically conservative and alien to the prestigious variation, present the opposite situation. This is the case of the Najdi community of the city of Jeddah, where the Hijazi urban variation is the prestigious form. Amongst the Nadji community settled here interaction between women and men outside family networks is not permitted. Strict rules apply to marriages, which can only take place exclusively between members of the community. In this context, the female sociolect unexpectedly reflects greater levelling towards the prestigious Hijazi urban variation, thanks to linguistic exchange between women of both origins. According to the same author, they, even in a very conservative society, not only produce the prestigious forms but they are also more innovative because they contribute to the diffusion of new variations (cf. Al-Essa 2009: 218-219).

5. Grammatical variables

Many works have undertaken the study of the different linguistic behaviour between men and women in connection with grammatical variables. Some of them describe female variations compared to the local male variety as an 'unmarked' variety. Others compare female data to the prestigious variation within their environment. Some collate the productions of women from different contexts, for instance, between rural and Bedouin women. Some describe a dialect using exclusively female sources.

Some variations which are considered female can be found in several communities of the Arabic-speaking world, although they do not have the same meaning in all of them. Others are mere regional or local productions.

These variations may be phonetic, grammatical, lexical or even purely stylistic. Thus, some phonetic elements whose production varies from men to women are[36]:

- Weak pharyngealization is female, a phenomenon demonstrated in different vernacular varieties. Thus, strong pharyngealization is linked to masculinity "to sound tough and manly" (cf. Kahn 1975: 42, Royal 1985, Abu Haidar 1988: 156, Haeri 1996: 103-158). Weak pharyngealization is considered a female but also a refined or middle-upper class feature (cf. Royal 1985).

- Palatalization, a phenomenon studied by Haeri in Egyptian Arabic. She establishes that women from all age groups in Cairo produce strong palatalization more often than men. However, since this is linked to the lower-middle classes, women from the upper-middle classes try to avoid it (cf. Haeri 1992:177).

- One of the most prevalent features consists of the different productions of /q/. In most Arab countries the production of this variable has strong connotations of community or regional identification, something which speakers are very aware of. According to Daher, in Damascus the production [q] is introduced in vernacular Arabic through education and for this reason men produce it more often because, according to this author, they have more access to it (cf. Daher 1999: 203). Even educated women produce the glottal variation [ʔ], because it is linked to

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[36] Some scholars think that there is not always a sociolinguistic reason for different variables in linguistic shift. For instance, M. Gordon and J. Heath consider that the reasons for women universally lead sound change in the direction of the high front vowel /i/ while men lead change towards back vowels are biologically determined (cf. Gordon / Heath 1998: 423).

modernization and development and do not produce [q] to mark a difference from the male world but, above all, because of the rural connotation this variation also has for them. We can see, then, that the same variable can have different meaning depending on gender. In Damascus, when a man pronounces [q] it is due to his education and classical training, whereas when a woman does it, it is because of her origin from rural areas. In Nazareth, the rural variation, which is used by men, is [k], while women pronounce [ʔ] (cf. Havelova 2000). The same has been described by Shorrab (cf. 1986) for Palestinian women living in New York. In Arabic from Cairo, this question has been studied by Schmidt (cf. 1974) and Haeri (cf. 1996), amongst others, and in Upper Egypt by Miller (cf. 2003b). In Jordan, for instance, by Abdel Jawad (cf. 1981), Al-Khateeb (cf. 1988) and Al-Wer (cf. 1999), Jabeur (cf. 1987) on Tunisia and Al-Muhannadi (cf. 1991) on Qatar.

In this case we can see that a typically female form of production does not exist. Yet, we can assert as a premise that women generally produce the variation which is considered more prestigious within their community. This prestige may derive from an association to modernity or to the claim of local identity, as we have seen above. Nonetheless it is not always like this. In Chaouen, Morocco, F. Moscoso found [ʔ] as female form and [q] as male form, and glottal pronunciation is the stigmatized form in the area (cf. Moscoso 2003: 216).

- *Imāla*, studied by Walters (cf. 1991) in a small town in Tunisia called Korba, where she claims it is typical of elder or uneducated people and women. According to Miller (cf. 2003b: 487), pausal *imāla* is more systematically produced in female speech than in male speech in the dialect of Balyāna (Upper Egypt).

- Diphthongs, as typical features of female discourse, have been studied by Trabelsi (cf. 1991: 88-89) in Tunisia. According to Miller (cf. 2003b: 486), the palatalization of diphthongs may be considered a female feature in Balyāna, that is, the production of *beyət* instead of *beit* "house".

As regards prosody, some works have also pointed out differences in intonation, such as Hurreiz (cf. 1978) in Khartoum, El Kareh/Abdel Alim (cf. 1988) in Alexandria and Rosenhouse (cf. 1994) in Galilee.

Concerning the morphosyntactic level of the language, studies have been carried out on the differences in the agreement of words between female and male discourse in Arabic from Jordan (cf. Owens y Bani Yasin 1987), the use of the plural forms amongst women in Iraq (cf. Abu Haidar 1988: 158), the use of deictics with the suffix –*ti* in Upper Egypt (cf. Miller 2003: 489), in the collocation of interrogative particles, as shown in the study conducted by Abu Haidar amongst elder Iraqi women living in Britain (cf. Abu Haidar 1991), or the use of a varied prefix in imperfective by women of Chaouen instead of the fixed prefix used by men (cf. Moscoso 2003: 218).

With reference to lexicon, it has been established that in female speech the vocabulary is more descriptive for some semantic fields, for instance, regarding colours in Iraqi Arabic (cf. Abu Haidar 1988:158). The use of different expressions between men and women in formal and informal situations in Arabic in Khartoum (cf. Hurreiz 1978), has also been observed, as well as the use of interjections in Rades, Tunisia (cf. Jabeur 1987) and of diminutives in Tunis (cf. Trabelsi 1991:89-90).

As we can see, there are differences at all levels of the language but the phonetic level presents the greatest divergences, perhaps because here the variation depending on gender is more obvious. We could claim that, in general, certain phonetic variations are common to several vernacular varieties of the Arabic-speaking world, while morpho-syntactic variations are limited to local contexts.

Finally, it must be added that at times some of the features considered typical of female sociolects are avoided by men because their use could question their virility (cf. Dendane 1998: 30). It is even considered effeminate to use the prestigious variety when it does not coincide with the local variety. Once again, prestigious language is linked to female sociolect. This is the case in Upper Egypt, where according to C. Miller, speaking between *ṣaʕīdi-s* using features of the Cairo variety is not only considered ridiculous or snobbish, but also effeminate (cf. Miller 2003b: 484). This was already affirmed by A. Borg on Malta in 1970s where girls use English much more frequently that boys and men associated this practice with a female way of behavior even snobbishness (cf. Borg 1977: 41).

The opposite phenomenon also exists, it means some phonetic phenomenon are considered more masculine. For instance the pronunciation [g] of the variable /q/ is considered a sign of virility amongst Tunisian men (cf. Trabelsi 1988: 141), just as a strong pharyngealization is associated to masculinity amongst Iraqi men (cf. Abu Haidar 1988: 156).

As regards women's use of typically masculine forms, we can also find some instances with the consequent ingredient of transgression involved. This is the case of the work presented by Barontini/Ziamari in this volume (see 153-172). They describe the use of male discourse by women as a form of rebelling and taboo-breaking in Moroccan society. The purpose of this linguistic strategy is to detach themselves from submissiveness, although this is a stigmatized practice which can only be used in family circles. Other study on this topic claims that some women from Korba (Tunisia), usually young and educated in the city of Tunis, prefer to produce the stigmatized variation [z] instead of /ṣ/, for their own purposes, because this is traditionally typical of male speech, thus giving it a new meaning, according to the author: "the use of [z] marks education and regional loyalty in a subversive way", (cf. Walters 1991: 218).

More recent is Judith Rosenhouse and Nisreen Dbayyat's work (cf. 2006) who studied the use of masculine instead of feminine forms in women's speech in the towns of Tire and Nazareth. Also Amalia Sa'ar's work (cf. Sa'ar 2007) studies the case of women (Israeli-Hebrew or Palestinian-Arabic speakers) who make routine use of masculine grammatical forms. This phenomenon cuts across age, class, and ethnic group. The author says: "While it may be interpreted as active participation in women's own subordination or even silencing, it also can be seen as a form of appropriating the language of domination, hence facilitating participation rather than producing exclusion"[37].

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[37] Cf. Sa'ar 2007: 408-409.

6. Discourse strategies

Several studies have demonstrated that female and male sociolects are not solely differentiated by the production of some linguistic features but also by the use of certain discourse strategies.

Many interconnected factors intervene in the behaviour of men and women in different contexts, such as power relationships and different status within their group. According to R. Bassiouney (cf. Bassiouney 2009: 137), there are two main concepts which determine linguistic practices in Arabic-speaking societies: honour and modesty. These two terms, linked to the world of anthropology, help to explain why Arab women behave differently from western women. This is not exclusive to them and also applies to men. According to Bassiouney, a good understanding of how honour and modesty operate in an Arabic-speaking society helps to recognize the linguistic choice available to women and their behaviour in this sense.

As F. Sadiqi (cf. 2007) demonstrated, female linguistic uses and practices are a reflection of the different status women have in society from the viewpoint of economy, law, education, etc. This author also considers that female discourse strategies are an answer to widespread androcentrism in Moroccan society. This could also apply, with some differences, to most societies of the Arabic-speaking context, for instance Trabelsi (cf. 1991) described a similar situation for women in Tunisia.

Amongst these strategies of female discourse, the following have been mentioned: use of indirect speech, abundant use of diminutives[38], euphemisms, curses or repetition to give emphasis (cf. Abu-Haidar 1991: 33-34, Chetrit 1986[39], Trabelsi 1991: 94). Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that generalization and stereotypes have often been applied. This has already been criticized in some works such as in Boucherit/Lentin (cf. 1989: 26-27) and Hachimi (cf. 2001).

It has also been established that gender differences have an impact on the different perceptions of languages. For instance, F. Sadiqi establishes that women in Morocco do not have the same opportunities as men of free access to languages due to social differences between genders. The public sphere is masculine, while the private sphere is feminine, and this circumstance is not only spatial but symbolic and linguistic[40].

She claims that due to this, for extra-linguistic reasons, there are some languages which are considered feminine, those spoken in private, for instance in Morocco Moroccan Arabic and Berber, and others which are masculine and are used in a

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[38] A feature studied, for instance, in the urban dialect of Rades, in Tunisia, (cf. Jabeur 1987), or amongst Judeo-Arabic women in Morocco (cf. Chetrit 1986).

[39]According to J. Chetrit, the two strategies which differentiate the female from the masculine speech are: substitution and amplification. The former refers to substituting the literal meaning of a proverb by a metaphoric meaning. The latter consists of multiplying statements of similar meaning (cf. Chetrit 1986).

[40] According to Sadiqi, this situation created a paradox in these societies: women are considered conservative in the sense that they preserve the oral culture and transmit oral languages and cultural values. At the same time, however, they are not conservative because they do not use Arabic [that is, MSA], the most conservative form of public expression, (cf. Sadiqi 2007).

public environment, such as MSA[41]. Hence, denying access to MSA means denying access to public sphere and to power. Also, female discourse is considered an instrument which controls the moral system, and this control is also a form of competing to gain respect within the community[42].

In this sense, French or English are also female languages because when women use them they do not invade men's territory and their relationship with MSA. Consequently, women's interest in learning foreign languages (see below) is not prejudicial to the *status quo.*

All this causes women who seek social repute to try to demonstrate their proficiency in MSA by speaking this language in public. This is the case of some feminists in Morocco who speak MSA when accused of being too westernized; this fact has also been noted by R. Bassiouney amongst Egyptian women, who use MSA in certain contexts "for a discourse function and to project a specific identity on themselves" (cf. Bassiouney 2009).

A similar situation has been demonstrated for male discourse. El-Essawi (1999), analyzed the frequency of phonemes alien to Arabic such as /p/ and /v/ amongst Egyptian men and women. She noted that these variations are considered prestigious because they are linked to foreign languages. She also observed that in her interviews they are more frequent in male discourse, which is paradoxical because they are usually more typical of women. Finally, she verified that this situation, due to the fact that the interviewer was a woman, was a discourse function, and corroborates the influence exerted by the prestige consciousness on language behavior.

Another aspect related to gender, language and the identity of women is the forms of address, because they usually reflect women's lower social status. Nonetheless, not all authors agree on this. According to Parkinson there are no differences between men and women in the use of these formulae and social class, age and occupation are more relevant (cf. Parkinson 1995). Other authors who have alluded to forms of address are Eid (cf. 1994), regarding Egyptian Arabic through the obituaries section of the newspaper *Al-Ahram*, Herrero (cf. 2008) regarding Moroccan Arabic, H. Abdel Jawad (cf. 1989) and Al-Ali (cf. 2005) on Jordanian Arabic and Jabra on Lebanese Arabic (cf. 1980: 462-469). They do believe that the forms of addressing and naming people reflect differences in gender in Arabic-speaking societies because they reproduce underlying cultural and social attitudes. Thus, Abdel Jawad provides a series of terms to refer to Jordanian women and comments on the fact that most are derogatory (cf. Abdel Jawad 1989: 312). A. Hachimi (cf. 2001) also agrees with this and claims: "It is imperative to consider also the socio-religious setting that contributes to the construction of the identities of men and women in Islamic societies, in order to understand the fundamental asymmetries between the way they are addressed and talked about (based in their socio-political and sexual status)".

This relationship between gender and different status, also connected with linguistic practices, is further reflected by proverbs and sayings. There are also

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[41] About this topic, cf. Sadiqi 2003 and de Ruiter 1998.
[42] About this cf. Rosander 2004: 40.

different idioms, phrases, expressions or formulae which apply to each sex. They are known by all but are only used by the socially appropriate sex. They transmit existing stereotypes about women and their image in society. It has been stated that these traditions not only reflect the asymmetrical relationship between men and women but they contribute to maintaining it. In this sense, A. Hachimi claims: "We can examine religious sayings as a very powerful strategy used to maintain the status quo of gender relations in theses societies, for example, sometimes they are used in order to defend the social, political and economic segregation of women and men", (cf. Hachimi 2001)[43].

These stereotypes can be seen in one of the examples given by Sadiqi (cf. 2003), thus: *kəlma d-ər-ržāl* "word of men", means a promise kept, as opposed to *kəlma d-əl-ʕyālāt* "word of women", which is the opposite, something that you cannot trust[44]. However, the status of women changes with age because each period of their life is reflected in idioms and in the form of addressing them.

The use of one type of linguistic strategy or another to fight attitudes of male dominance varies depending on several factors: socioeconomic situation, access to education, type of habitat (rural /urban), ethnicity and religion. According to Sadiqi, regarding Moroccan women although it may apply to other areas in the Arabic-speaking world, women use above all their linguistic potentiality to perpetuate and subvert the roles attributed to them as a result of the perception of gender within these societies. Hence, women who have some education and have access to other languages use codeswitching, in this particular case Moroccan-French, while illiterate women use the genres of oral literature (cf. Sadiqi 2006: 289-297).

7. Women and codeswitching

It has been established that women are generally more attached to languages with higher social prestige, not only to the most powerful vernacular variety, as we have already stated above, but in some contexts, also to French or English. This is due to when people use a foreign language, they may develop different views and perspectives in their understanding of gender. It means the use of another language like a euphemistic recourse (cf. Trabelsi 1991: 92, who claims "cela est dû au fait que la culture que véhicule le français ne comprend pas ces tabous, ou, du mois, ne les interdit pas aussi sévérement").

Nonetheless, it must also be pointed out that this applies only to a specific group of women, usually within the following profile: young, educated and from an urban environment.

Thus, F. Abu Haidar, in the case of the Arabic-speaking diaspora, claims that it is young women who use more the prestigious language, in this case English, and use codeswitching as a common practice. On the other hand, older women seldom use loan words from English, usually phonetically adapted to Iraqi Arabic and men from

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[43] Cf . also Ennaji 2008.

[44] The lack of credibility of women in Muslim societies has a religious origin, because one male testimony is compared with two female testimonies.

different age groups present intermediate situations between these two groups, (cf. Abu Haidar 1991: 35-36)[45].

Other studies linking gender to differences in the use of the codeswitching are: Trabelsi (cf. 1991: 94), Walters (cf. 1996) and Lawson-Sako / Sachdev (cf. 2000) on Tunisia and Sadiqi (cf. 2003, 2007) on Morocco. She claims that men usually adapt loans to Moroccan Arabic phonetics while women reproduce French phonetics. This skill differentiates them not only from men but also from uneducated women from rural areas.

8. Women and oral literature: *When men go away, women play*

Oral artistic expression produced by women in the Arab world in the form of poems, music or stories, provides interesting anthropological information regarding socio-cultural rules as well as linguistic testimony to the practices and use of language made by women. We deal with another branch of studies, typically ethnographic, regards gender as a cultural construction where language reflects the roles women have played, and still play, as guardians of the oral tradition.

The Arabic-speaking region is characterized by the existence of a rich diversity of oral traditions closely linked to the role played by women narrating tales, religious or autobiographical stories and reciting or singing poems. All of this takes place on several informal occasions and in reunions for family celebrations, in sanctuaries or during pilgrimages, usually in private spaces and only for other women. Perhaps this is the reason why they are underrated and are not considered cultural practices, although there are some exceptions. This restriction in reciting poems only in female circles, where the presence of men is not allowed, was already demonstrated by L. Abu Lughod (cf. Abu Lughod 1986). Nonetheless, there are different situations because it is precisely through oratory how some Moroccan women create a new female space in the public sphere (cf. Sadiqi 2007).

On some occasions it has been considered that the purpose of this activity is to show their presence in the community and even at times, to subvert the role given to them. But it is not always a subversive activity because many of these stories reinforce social boundaries and preserve standards of behaviour (cf. Yaqub 2003: 127).

This activity is usually linked to older women and, in Morocco, always according to Sadiqi (cf. Sadiqi 2007), to poor and illiterate women. This situation can not be claimed to be the same in the rest of the Arab world. Yet, it constitutes a huge treasure regarding the female world and the expression of female feelings in this culture. D. Kapchan claims that poetic compositions in Algeria always cling to female sentiment and "although the men are often the star singers, in the public imagination Algerian women are the acknowledged authors of traditions", (cf. Kapchan 2003: 236).

The most important genres of female oral literature are gossip folktales, songs and riddles. Sadiqi (cf. 2007) adds the *ḥalqa* (marketplace oratory) in Morocco. There

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[45] Abu Haidar (cf. 1991: 36) admits, nonetheless, that these differences in the use of other languages sometimes go from "sex-related differences to a speaker's bilingual ability", especially amongst the youngest.

seems to be a tendency in the last few years to transform fiction into auto-
biographical stories.

We have some instances of these female compositions, although precisely because
of their nature as an oral tradition many of them have never been written down and
have become lost or are about to disappear. The most renowned work is the
aforementioned by L. Abu Lughod. Through the study of poetic compositions of Be-
douins from Awlād ʕAlī in Egypt, she examined the different symbolic natures of
language in male and female speech and its socio-linguistic function. Other works
compiling these female productions of oral literature are: the female tales from the
region of Upper Jezira in Syria published by Lidia Bettini (cf. 2006) and the stories
compiled by Judith Rosenhouse from Bedouin women from Israel (cf. 2001)[46]. In
the Maghreb, we have the verses compiled by Stillman and Stillman in the Jewish
community of Sefrou from a singer-songwriter of *mawwāl* (cf. 1978).

In these compositions, women appear as guardians and transmitters of tales and
traditional songs. This is not exclusive to Arabic-speaking women, because female
Berber songs also contribute to maintaining tradition and identity especially in
situations of high masculine migration.

Despite the fact that Arabic-speaking women are usually associated with oral
folklore and tradition, their activities are not limited to these spheres. There are also
novels, poetry books, memoirs, newspaper articles and forums on the Internet. In
classical literature (written in MSA) women have also broken the mould and caused
some level of controversy by breaking with tradition and, by invading a territory that
was virtually reserved for men, violating the principle of the silence of women. The
pioneering actions along this trend took place in the mid-twentieth century. These
women smoothed the way for the ensuing generations[47]. Some combine writing
poems in MSA with writing prose and poems in vernacular Arabic.

9. Conclusion

The use of the gender as a sociolinguistic category and its application to the study
of vernacular Arabic has taken many directions, since gender is expressed in various
different manners in the various Arabic dialects.

The changes which have taken place and which continue to take place in Arabic-
speaking societies are bringing about the disappearance of some stereotypical roles
operating in very traditional communities. This also has an effect on linguistic
practices and variations.

The social status of Arabic-speaking women has changed or is in the process of
changing, especially in urban environments where former illiterate housewives have
been replaced by young women with certain levels of independence and studies. As
N. Haeri (cf. 1996: 179) claims: "there are probably some women who spend most
of their lives in the "private" domain, but we cannot use their case to provide a *ge-
neral* explanation for the linguistic behavior of all women in Arabic-speaking

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[46] In this case stories from masculine sources are also compiled.

[47] The possible influence of western literary tradition on the poetic language used by these
Arab women has brought about some criticism, cf. Burt 2003.

speech communities". These women have proved to lead linguistic change and are more prone to use prestigious forms than men.

Nonetheless, we must not generalize because in another context, in the rural environment, this change is slower or practically inexistent. In this case, sexual segregation typical of these societies accounts for the linguistic behaviour of women due to their limited social contacts. Because of the few opportunities women have to leave the closely-knit family entourage, their linguistic practices are characterized by conservatism. They use ancient and usually stigmatized features and their speech is different from men's, who are more exposed to dialectal levelling. Yet, these women do not always ignore prestigious forms or may even be innovative, as in the case of the Najdi women in Jeddah.

Whenever sexual segregation disappears or becomes less severe, as in the case of some Arabic-speaking diaspora communities, differences between men and women are not so strong phonologically or morphologically[48].

We can thus see that gender-based linguistic variation is context-sensitive, because the context where linguistic practices take place is extremely important. It is also interconnected with numerous variables, age and education level having the highest impact.

We cannot anticipate how female sociolects will evolve in the context of widespread changes and vast migrations from rural areas to cities which is taking place in the Arab world. As we have already noted through the work of Enam Al-Wer, the appearance of new data gathered after social, economic or political changes occurring in Arab countries may contradict some of the commonly accepted premises.

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[48] See Abu Haidar 1991, and Boucherit 1998 for another study about the gender differences in a diaspora context.

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