

DIALECTS AND IDENTITIES IN CASABLANCA, MOROCCO: THE CASE OF FESSI MIGRANTS

In Morocco today two competing local urban models co-exist. On one hand, there are the Old urban dialects of the historical cities, which have defined urban and prestigious linguistic practice in Morocco for centuries. These dialects have acted as badges of a well-established urban and bourgeois identity. On the other hand, there are the newly formed koinés that have emerged as a result of massive internal migration to large urban centres in the 20th century. These koinés are establishing themselves as new urban dialects and are shaping a new brand of urban identity. The best representatives of these types of dialects and identities in contemporary Morocco are, without doubt, Fessi (from the city of Fez) and Casablančan (from the city of Casablanca), respectively.

This paper examines the social and linguistic outcomes of the Fessi-Casablančan contact, considering in particular how Fessi women construct linguistic and social identity in Casablanca. Data come from in-depth ethnographic interviews that I have carried out with migrant (first generation) and Casablanca-born (second and third generation) Fessis during a 14-month period of fieldwork in 1999-2000 in Casablanca. Three linguistic variables are examined in order to assess Fessi women's leveling or maintenance of Fessi forms: two phonological variables; the alveolar trill variable (r) and the uvular stop variable (q), and one morphosyntactic variable; the second person singular feminine clitic (-i).

Drawing on the latest research on language and identity which emphasizes the agency of speakers in constructing their own identities (e.g., Eckert 2000; Gubbins and Holt 2002), the paper first identifies the categories that have emerged as a result of the Fessi-Casablančan contact such as *Fessa-d-Fes* 'pure Fessis', *Fessa-d-Casa* 'Fessi-Casablančans' and *Bidawa* 'Casablančans'. The paper, then goes beyond identifying categories to looking at the social practices that shape and give them meaning. In other words, the paper explores what it means to be *pure Fessi* and what it means to become *Fessi-Casablančan* or *Casablančan* and shows the linguistic and non-linguistic practices that are used as resources in the construction of these identities. Findings show that being *shaḡbi* 'one of the folks, not snob' and sounding *ḡadi* 'normal', i.e., levelling out stereotypical regional traits; e.g., leaving behind [ʃ] or [q] for Casablančan [g] and adopting Casablančan trilled [r] instead of non-trilled Fessi [ʃ], are important components in thinning out *pure Fessi* identity. These practices may also be considered rite of passage to becoming *Fessi-Casablančan* or *Casablančan*.

References

- Eckert, Penelope. (2000). *Language as Social Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Gubbins, Paul and Mike Holt, eds. (2002). *Beyond Boundaries: Language and Identity in Contemporary Europe*. Multilingual Matters 122.