Workshop proposal

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Topic: Language indexing by gender forms in the Arab world
Arabic sociolinguistics has followed and applied the main theoretical trends of Western sociolinguistics. Therefore, variation and language use in Arabic speaking countries have been correlated with a number of social factors like sex, age, social class, neighborhoods, context, interaction, etc. However, these sociolinguistic categories have been mostly established by linguists working on western societies. They are not always very relevant for the understanding of Arab societies and for the evaluation of change in progress. To quote only one example, socio-professional categorizations and economic levels are often of little explanatory value for the linguistic dynamics of spoken Arabic. The cultural construction of gender differences does not escape this trend. According to Labov (1990) reviewing 30 years of variationist sociolinguistics, the most consistent universal sociolinguistic pattern concerns the linguistic differentiation of women and men. But do we find the same degree and same type of linguistic gender differentiation in western and Arab countries, i.e. in countries where the gender differentiation might not have the same social values? In Arabic-speaking countries, gender differentiation manifests itself through phonological, morphological and syntactic variables as well as through various stylistic and discourse devices. However there are considerable discrepancies from one Arab country to another. Some variables can be found throughout the Arabic-speaking world, other variables are localized, while in a third category of possibilities, the same variable can have different social meanings and connotations in different localities. New urban trends seem to disrupt the traditional gender categorizations and illustrate the need to think in terms of practices rather than in term of fixed gender categories.

Aims:
The workshop intends to gather a number of participants (linguists, sociolinguists and specialists of oral literature) in order to assess the dominant sociolinguistic trends in the field of gender differentiation in Arabic-speaking countries. It will include presentations based on first hand case studies as well as more theoretical and analytical reviews of the field. Among the issues to be investigated: is gender differentiation one of the main consistent patterns of variation in the Arabic speaking world? Is gender differentiation more prominent in some contexts than others (cf. oral literature versus daily speech for instance)? Are there some phonological or morphological variables which tend to be more systematically associated with female or male speech and why (such as palatalization, front vowel raising, use of diminutive patterns, etc.)? How far do migration and urbanization impact on gender differentiation, keeping in mind that in a number of Arab countries some old-urban features are often associated with female speech? What is the interplay between language use, gender and power in the Arab world, particularly regarding the use and attitudes towards the vernaculars, Classical Arabic and the former colonial languages such as English and French?
Behind the obvious heterogeneity of the Arabic speaking world, the workshop will try to point to some explanatory models and to assess the universal versus the local.

**Organisation of the session:**
Workshop: number of papers 11, number of discussants 3. The workshop includes senior as well as junior researchers. Case studies will cover phonetics, phonology, syntax, stylistic variation, oral literature.

**A Few key references**