Cairo: The linguistic dynamics of a mega-city

This study will concentrate on the central role of 'Standard Cairene Arabic' (SCA) in Egyptian public discourse, and the pressure to adhere to it that speakers of other local dialects are faced with. Although the city of Cairo is highly diverse with a substantial number of foreigners and non-Egyptian Arabs, as well as local migrants from other parts of Egypt, accommodating to SCA becomes a target for many local migrants as well as non-Egyptian Arabs. This study will concentrate on the metalinguistic discourse of Cairenes towards other local dialects, specifically the highly stigmatized dialects of the south (Sa'idi). During the last half of the 20th century there was a wave of immigration from the south, to Cairo. 'Saʿidi dialect' is a general phrase used by Egyptians to refer to a group of dialects that stretch from the south of Cairo to the border of Sudan. Of all the dialects throughout Egypt and the Arab world, Saʿidi Arabic is the most ridiculed, stigmatised and stereotyped in the media. Salient phonological and semantic features of Saʿidi are associated with ignorance, stupidity, a lack of sophistication. These negative indexes are usually emphasised by the media.

Data for this study cover the span of 50 years. It includes 40 soap-operas, 15 movies, 40 songs, 12 talk shows, and 15 post cards. This data deals with Sa'idis and is produced in Cairo. The purpose of this study is to describe the mechanism by which indexes of the Saidi dialects are established in Egyptian media by examining the metalinguistic discourse of Saidi dialects as well as the portrayal of Saidis who adhere to the dialects in Cairene media. I also highlight the most salient features of Saidi which help construct second order indexes of Saidi. These features are phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical.