THE LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF ‘BENI-SNOUS’ DIALECTS: ASPECTS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION IN THE COMMUNITY OF ‘KHEMIS’

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ABSTRACT

This thesis revolves around investigating the linguistic development of ‘Beni Snous’ dialects from their ancient Berber variety to today’s Arabic dialects, through fundamentally studying some particularities of sociolinguistic variation in the variety spoken by the members of ‘Khemis’ speech community in ‘Beni Snous’. It also tries to shed light on some aspects of language maintenance and language shift in this area, with a particular focus on the ‘Endangered Berber Variety’ in the village of ‘Beni Zidaz’, as the sole region where its Berber variety could persist. This research is basically founded on a corpus that is gathered by many research instruments and procedures such as: directed assisted surveys, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, note-taking and tape-recordings. Based on qualitative and quantitative approaches, the data obtained have been analyzed, and then interpreted following both ethnographic perspectives and sociolinguistic models of language maintenance and shift. This study has proved that ‘Beni Zidaz’ Berber is an Endangered Zenati Variety that is only used by few members of the grandparental generation and up in restricted settings among themselves. In ‘Khemis’, language use correlates with age and its individuals’ educational level more than gender as social variables. Old informants, particularly women, show a trait of conservatism and solidarity towards the use of their linguistic characteristics. Some youngsters, however, are somehow inclined to shift to other varieties in constrained settings, mainly outside ‘Beni Snous’, but are more conservative when interacting with individuals speaking the other varieties surrounding ‘Khemis’ Arabic.
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