

# Linguistic Varieties and Social Radios in the Tunisian Sahel The Case of News Broadcasting

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**Abstract** The existing studies on language uses and practices in Arab digital media mainly focus on few Mashreq countries and, as far as the Maghreb is concerned, mostly on Morocco and Algeria, while very limited attention has been devoted to other countries of the Arab West such as Tunisia. This paper will analyse some passages of news broadcasting taken from four Tunisian social media radio broadcasters, uploaded as videos on the Facebook pages of the selected radio stations, based in the Tunisian Sahel, i.e. Mahdia, Msaken, and Sousse. The data presented and analysed are taken from different information programmes. The aim is to try to describe and analyse the linguistic choices of the speakers, influenced by personal and contextual elements, such as the editorial line of a radio, in order to verify whether there is a general tendency among the radio stations or if some peculiarities can be identified. In particular, the role of Tunisian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic will be highlighted, as well as that of any possible mixed varieties occurring in the examples offered.

**Keywords** Tunisian Arabic. Sahel. Radio. Social media. Mixed Arabic. Sociolinguistics. News broadcasting.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Radio Broadcasting in Tunisia. – 3 Varieties of Arabic in Radio Programmes: For a State of the Art. – 4 Corpus of Selected Radio Stations. – 5 Methodological Issues. – 6 Analysis. – 6.1 Radio Mahdia 1. – 6.2 Sports News Radio Mahdia 1. – 6.3 RMFM Msaken. – 6.4 RMFM Msaken sport. – 6.5 Menara Fm Programme Nhârkum zîn. – 6.6 Jawhara Fm. – 7 Concluding Remarks.



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## 1 Introduction

In the panorama of the studies on the varieties of Arabic used in digital media, very little space has been devoted to Tunisia. In fact, on the one hand, the majority of the existing contributions focus on the analysis of written varieties, on the other hand, papers concerning oral media, and particularly radio broadcasts, have focused mainly on the varieties of Egypt and Morocco.

In the Arab world, in recent years and especially after the 2011 revolutions, which, in addition to being political, civil and social, were also cultural revolutions, digital radio stations and radio programmes have multiplied and diversified. In fact, with the advent and spread of social media, online radio and television stations have expanded their audience by leaps and bounds, reaching audiences of all ages. The free use of the internet, gained also through smartphones, has made programmes broadcast via social media accessible to anyone, anywhere, and at any time.

As far as I know, Van Mol's *Variation in Modern Standard Arabic in Radio News Broadcasts*, published in 2003, is the only systematic study focused on the varieties used in radio broadcasting, especially news programmes. Van Mol focused on the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) used in Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia news broadcasting. In the last twenty years, several changes have affected the Arab society and its linguistic varieties. Therefore, when we refer to radio programmes we have to consider them quite differently from those considered by Van Mol, owing to the new characteristics of the medium itself, but also to the different recipients and contexts in which these radio programmes are conceived and received.

Moreover, regarding the language used in the media, Van Mol (2010, 63) stated:

So far, the term Media Arabic has not clearly been defined. [...] In some cases, newspapers Arabic is understood by the term [...]. Arabic Media language, however, comprises at least also its spoken counterpart that is used in radio and television programmes. Research on the 'oral' segment of Media Arabic, so far, has rath-

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er been limited to news broadcasts. Media Arabic, however, covers a much larger field than the two above-mentioned segments.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this observation, there is almost no systematic recent study on radio broadcasts after Van Mol's, and none of the available contributions are devoted to Tunisian Arabic. Even if many efforts have been made by some scholars regarding Moroccan linguistic practices in oral media, in my opinion, the linguistic and stylistic variation in Maghribi Media Arabic deserves more attention.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I will present some observations on the linguistic varieties used in some radio news programmes broadcast by radio broadcasters based in the Tunisian Sahel, in the cities of Mahdia, Sousse and Msaken.

## 2 Radio Broadcasting in Tunisia

Arab oral media, such as radio and television, emerged after the independence of the Arab countries, where they have been important means of communications for the Arab people.<sup>3</sup> Initially, in the Arab countries, radio stations were owned by the state since they constituted a very important means of diffusion of political ideas and propaganda, especially because all Arabs, including the illiterate, could access information through radio broadcasts. Since the 1950s, the use of Modern Standard Arabic in media broadcasting has been enhanced (Effat, Versteegh 2008, 199). Amin (2001) includes Tunisia in the group of countries in which the state has a strong control of radio broadcasting. In recent years, also private institutions have started to own their own radio stations and to broadcast programmes discussing many different topics more freely. In Tunisia, radio broadcasting started in 1935 for commercial purposes and despite the tight control on information, the state allowed some individuals as well as a French

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**1** For a definition of Media Arabic and for its main features see, among others, Effat, Versteegh 2008, and, for a synthesis of the state of the art on the subject, the recent unpublished thesis by Rosa Pennisi 2020, 15-25 and relative bibliography.

**2** See, among others, Miller 2010, 2012, and relative bibliographies for Morocco. Pennisi has an ongoing study regarding oral linguistic practices in some Moroccan talk shows, the first results of which were presented at the study day held in Aix-en-Provence. See also Morsly 1990 for Algeria.

**3** Lahlali (2011, 26-7) justifies this inclination towards oral media by stating that it is due to the fact that the Arab culture has long been an oral one. However, some studies, such as Schoeler's, proved that in the early Islamic society the oral and written transmission of information, from the masters to their disciples, were not opposed, but complementary. See for instance the first two chapters of Schoeler 2006 (ed. by J.E. Montgomery).

company to establish radio broadcasting in 1939 (Lahlali 2011, 27-9).<sup>4</sup>

The Tunisian audiovisual landscape, characterised by the state monopoly on radio and television, has been defined since the 1990s by some measures of emancipation leading to a partial relaxation of the monopolisation. In 1995, one year after the creation of *Canal 21*, *Radio Jeunes* was launched. Its programmes mainly fell into the categories of entertainment, amusement and public service. The Head of State also ordered the launch of *Radio Culturelle FM* on the occasion of National Culture Day on 27 May 2006. This Tunisian public radio station broadcast on medium wave (AM), on FM, and by satellite, covering 60% of the Tunisian population. The programmes cover all areas of culture (literature, theatre, cinema, plastic arts, music, science and technology, publishing).<sup>5</sup>

The privatisation of the radio sector started in 2003. In November 2003, *Radio Mosaique FM* was the first private radio station to be launched in Tunisia. Located in Tunis, it broadcasts to the Greater Tunis area, the northern suburbs and the Hammamet region, and its broadcasting is constantly expanding with the hope of covering the entire Tunisian territory. Still within the framework of the privatisation of the audiovisual sector, on 25 July 2005, a second radio station called *Jawhara FM* was created. It broadcasts from the city of Sousse in the Tunisian Sahel region. Its frequency covers the governorates of Sousse, Mahdia, Kairouan, Monastir, Nabeul and part of Sfax: major university centres are located in these areas, hosting about one hundred thousand students whom the radio aims to target, and it aims to meet their expectations.<sup>6</sup>

The opening towards privatisation has been an important step towards the expansion of the national media because it created a new space for competitiveness which improved the quality of productions in all sectors. However, in order to succeed in this mission, it has been important to regulate the conditions for the creation of private media according to a liberal legal framework. However, *Mosaique FM* and *Jawhara FM* were launched without clear specifications.

For this reason, the Association of Tunisian Journalists (AJT), in its fifth report on the reality of press freedom in Tunisia, insisted on the need to establish specifications in order to organise the private sector and ensure diversity and transparency in the allocation of licences and guarantee professional media with a well defined identi-

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<sup>4</sup> On the development of Arab media, see also Miller 2010, section 2, available at <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00578851>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

ty. In this new situation, many journalists from the AJT have called for the creation of a Tunisian union of private radio stations. The association also drew attention to the situation of journalists working for the private channel *Hannibal TV*, stating that they do not have legal employment contracts and that the employment relationship is not governed by any of the labour laws in Tunisia. The dismissals, that have become frequent, do not comply with legal regulation. Moreover, 56% of journalists who responded to the association's questionnaire expressed their dissatisfaction with their work situation.<sup>7</sup>

It was only in May 2004 that the profession created an autonomous union of 150 independent journalists to defend the freedom of the press, the working conditions and the professional ethics of journalism, but the union has not been recognised by the authorities. In 2008, a union called the National Union of Tunisian Journalists was created.

Before 2011, the Tunisian media sector was characterised by strong state control, and former President Ben Ali alone controlled the national public radio and its regional stations, and the local private radio stations. Independent associative media were almost non-existent, with a few rare exceptions. Among the latter, *Radio 6 Tunis*, a web radio launched by the Tunisian Union of Free Radios in 2007 that briefly went on air before being censored, and *Radio Kalima*, created in 2008, broadcasting its programmes from Italy and on the Internet.<sup>8</sup> After the 2011 Revolution Tunisian media underwent a certain liberalisation to the extent that radio stations created without authorisation multiplied. This was the case for *Radio Nefzawa* in Kibili and *Djerid FM* in Tozeur. Setting up a legal framework allowing the recognition of these associative media has therefore become an important issue. Several meetings including actors such as HAICA, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and the Tunisian Union of Free Radios (STRL7) took place between 2012 and 2014; these meetings led to the elaboration of specifications for associative radio and television stations, as required by law, which were made public on 5 March 2014 by HAICA, and which allowed broadcasting licences to be obtained.<sup>9</sup>

In 2019 there were ten associative radio stations, nine of which were active, holding a broadcasting licence from HAICA, as well as five local public radio stations and one radio station broadcasting the

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

programmes of local radio stations, around 16 private radio stations and numerous blogs, web radio stations and web televisions, most of them created after 2011. With the existence of public, private and associative radio stations, Tunisia presents a unique model in terms of pluralism in the region. These radio stations represent the largest audience in Tunisia, after television. Indeed, 67% of households own a radio and 27% of Tunisians listen to the radio on the Internet. Some 55% of listeners consider the information provided by radio station to be reliable; radio stations are therefore an important source of information and a vehicle for the participation of social actors in Tunisia.<sup>10</sup>

These new media also seek to represent under-represented groups, such as youth and women. For example, the *Tunisie Bondy Blog*, a web medium created in Gafsa, aims to provide young people with the opportunity to express themselves and discuss issues related to daily life in their region. *Radio 3R* aims to promote social integration and youth empowerment, and *Houna el Gasserine* was created by a group of young people. *Radio Amal* specialises in the needs of disabled people. The Association Femmes Média created *Radio Femmes Militantes*, a radio without HAICA authorisation that therefore does not broadcast on FM.<sup>11</sup> Regarding non-authorised radios, in 2014, there was a protest against the anarchic proliferation of unauthorised radio stations, of which there were 41, while three radio stations had been authorised but did not respect the broadcasting rules.<sup>12</sup>

Radio has had an important role in the whole Arab world as a means of resistance against colonialism and in the struggle for independence (Essoulami 2006; Lahlali 2011, 29).<sup>13</sup> With the development of private media based on the free market, the genres of programmes multiplied and sought to involve the audience more and more in order to gain their consensus. This generated some new language and communication practices with regard to the choice of the varieties used, the styles, the kind of programmes suited to the aim of getting closer to the public (Miller 2016).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/20678236-fr/index.html?itemId=/content/component/20678236-fr>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2014/02/19/tunisie-maintien-de-la-greve-generale-des-agents-de-lont/>.

<sup>13</sup> On the development of media in the Arab world, see Miller 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Miller states that the Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle (HACA) of Morocco provides some generic indications about the languages allowed in radio broadcasting. The HAICA, La Haute Autorité Indépendante de la Communication Audiovisuelle in Tunisia, instead, does not mention the issue. See <https://haica.tn/fr/>.

### 3 Varieties of Arabic in Radio Programmes: for a State of the Art

Regarding the use of varieties of Arabic in radio broadcasting, they have always been used as an important instrument of propaganda by the state and by some politicians specifically, such as Nasser. Modern Standard Arabic, in particular, has been employed to produce some intended reactions among the listeners as it was considered to be suited to radio broadcasts, designed to influence others' opinions. Dialects have also been used in Arab media, but their use has long been considered as a deviation from the Standard norm (Effat 2008, 194-6). Actually, as mentioned above, the Arabic used in the media has many specific features that distinguish it from Modern Standard Arabic, such as *qāma bi- + maṣḍar*, of the conjunction *wa-* preferred to *fa-*, the redundant expression *wa-ḡālika* 'and this', and the use of *min taraf* expressing the agent of a passive verb, the substitution of some particles with some others, such as in the cases of *fī* and *bi-* or of *ladā* and 'inda (Ashtiany 1993, 29-32; Effat, Versteegh 2008; Van Mol 2003, 66-7). This is not only due to the influence of Arabic dialects, but also to that of European Languages whose vocabulary and phraseology has deeply influenced journalistic style (Blau 1981, 60-141). Some other features do not belong to any of these varieties, but are peculiar to Media Arabic, such as those mentioned earlier.

After independence from the European countries, the media have been used as an education tool to spread Modern Standard Arabic among the illiterate people, even if all the radio stations have maintained some programmes in European languages or in Arabic dialects (Miller 2016). Miller underlines that during the 1950s-1980s, Arab media were a fundamental means of diffusion of the Pan-Arab ideology, whose main instruments were national radio and television stations mainly broadcasting in *fushḥā*, used above all in news programmes. There were also some programmes, mainly of cultural and popular genre, broadcast in more dialectal varieties as well as talk shows using forms of Educated Spoken Arabic (Mitchell 1979; 1986). Programmes broadcast in a foreign language or in a local language different from Arabic were absent. Therefore, in spite of the will of the Arab States, Educated Spoken Arabic, and therefore mixed varieties and styles, were gradually spreading among the population together with Modern Standard Arabic, perceived by the people as a rigid and artificial language. The 1990s-2000s have been characterised by the liberalisation and fostering of private and semi-private radio and TV stations, which were local, national and transnational too. Plurilingualism has then been enhanced as a symbol of openness and development of the Arab countries (Miller 2010).

However, oral media Arabic is considered to be as varied and heterogeneous as its speakers are:

In our definition oral media Arabic covers the whole spectrum of language, which is actually used within the context of oral media. Because of the fact that the object of investigation is the language use in oral media, we observe that people of all layers of society appear in these media to participate by means of oral expression, which reflects a wide variety of language capabilities and layers. Especially in this respect differs the language of the written media from the oral media. In written media, even when dialectal elements are used, in most cases we have to do with language producers with higher education. (Van Mol 2010, 67)

The Arabic language used in oral communication in the media reflects the varieties used by people belonging to some different social classes and having different cultural levels, such as in the case of the radio speakers, who generally use a higher register, and common people who almost always use their mother tongue. In fact, in radio broadcasts, all the nuanced varieties in the linguistic continuum can be used and not only what is known as Media Arabic.<sup>15</sup>

As Doss stated:

The distribution of language levels in radio and television is usually described as follows: *‘ammiyya*, the local dialect, is said to be used in serials and soap operas as well as in situations involving public participation: interviews, discussions, testimonies, etc., whereas standard Arabic - *fuṣṣḥā* - is reserved for more formal functions, and is usually utilized in programmes of a religious content: sermons, lectures, and short talks, as well as historical and period serials and soap operas with a historical religious content. It is a variety used in programmes which are based on the reading of a written text, such as the news bulletin for instance. Finally, a mixed variety,<sup>16</sup> which consists of blended features of *fuṣṣḥā* and *‘ammiyya* is used in interviews, discussions, talk shows, and various other programmes involving political, social, cultural, and technical topics. News bulletins have always been presented in the standard variety. (Doss 2010, 123)

Harrell's (1964) is among the first studies on Arabic radio broadcasting, focused on the analysis of Classical spoken Arabic used in Egyptian radio broadcasting. The scholar highlighted a series of dialectal

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<sup>15</sup> In this regard, see what Van Mol 2010, 68 maintains: "we prefer to describe the whole continuum which is presented as the Arabic language in the media, which we describe as the written or verbal language that is used not only by, but in mass communication means. Only in this definition do we take into account all possible kind of interlocutors and all possible varieties of language that occur in these media".

<sup>16</sup> For the idea of mixed variety and mixed style, see Mejdell 2006.



features characterising it.<sup>17</sup> Diem (1974, 63) highlighted the fact that in Egypt other varieties than Modern Standard Arabic were already allowed for monologues, genre in which news programmes are included. In 1976, Tapiéro pointed out that radio and television “sont de loin les deux moyens les plus répandus d’utilisation de la langue savante dans l’expression orale, car ce sont les deux instruments de la communication de masse ou ‘mass media’” (Tapiéro 1976, 83). According to Thiry (1985, 106), on radio and TV the programme presentations, news, time bulletins, cultural programmes and some debates were in Modern Standard Arabic, the other programmes were broadcast in dialect. Some interesting contributions about TV broadcasting have been made by Doss (1987; 2010), who studied the linguistic varieties used in Egyptian programmes focusing on a children’s programme and a cultural programme dealing with theatre. Doss analysed the mixed linguistic elements used in the programmes. Morsly, instead, conducted an investigation into the varieties of Arabic used in Algerian radio news broadcasting and, talking about the journalists, stated that although they have a “tension dominante envers l’AC”,

[ils] n’arrivent pas à tout à fait se détacher de leur langue quotidienne qui se glisse subrepticement. (Morsly 1990, 173)

Morsly also pointed out that Algerian Arabic traits were present in the language used by journalists in specific conditions and contexts, linked to the communicative aim of the speakers, their physical attitudes and the problem of censorship. Al-Batal’s (2002) study focused on the interaction between *fushḥā* and Lebanese Arabic in news broadcasting highlighting the conflict existing between the formal and the informal varieties. At the same time, the scholar describes the mixed language used in local news broadcasting as a sociolinguistic innovation. In his work, Van Mol (2003) analysed the use of complementary particles in Modern Standard Arabic in radio news broadcasting in Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and showed that, on some occasions, dialect was used in news programmes, especially in Algeria, both in reports and in interviews, but news information was only given in Modern Standard Arabic. Van Mol (2003, 126) included the news in the genre of monologues given in what he defines as Literary Arabic:

These monologues encompass the formal language which is used by journalists in the media to inform listeners on certain developments and ongoing facts in the world. [...] As far as news broadcasts are concerned, these are always considered to be Literary Arabic.

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<sup>17</sup> See also the master’s thesis *Egyptian Radio Arabic* (Skogset 2000).

According to Eid (2007, 404-5), broadcasting media is a hybrid context mixing formality and informality and therefore allowing the use of Arabic dialects and *fuṣṣḥā*. The varieties chosen in them reflect the intended audience. The scholar analyses the mixed or 'in-between' variety contained in some interviews, a genre aimed at informing and entertaining, broadcast on the Egyptian Satellite Channel. In 2010, Doss studied the news broadcasting in Arabic dialect on OTV, a private Egyptian channel founded in 2006. The dialectal and the 'mixed' variety identified and analysed by the scholar have been interpreted as a precise choice made by the channel to express Egyptian identity. Doss concluded her paper wondering about the possible standardisation of colloquial Arabic and its relationship with Modern Standard Arabic, which is still an important point today:

The question is not whether we are heading towards the adoption of *'āmmiyya* in place of *fuṣṣḥā*, but an attempt at questioning the role of writing colloquial Arabic in the process of its standardization. [...] It is an attempt at understanding what the future of spoken Arabic could be, and, in a structurally binary relation, how Standard Arabic could evolve within this setting. (Doss 2010, 140)<sup>18</sup>

Regarding Tunisia, Achour Kallel (2010-11; 2011) investigated the linguistic choices of *Radio Mosaïque FM*, the first private radio in Tunisia founded in 2003. She stated that the radio's linguistic choices were original in comparison with the other Tunisian radio stations since *Radio Mosaïque FM* used Tunisian Arabic and French, while the others preferred Modern Standard Arabic. As the scholar maintained, her paper comes within the field of anthropology of language.

Today, studying the varieties and linguistic uses of a social media radio station implies approaching an entirely different context from the one previously analysed, since the idea and the structure of 'radio' has also changed, compared to that described by Van Mol. Indeed, today's radio stations are digital and broadcast on social media, with live videos available that can be re-watched and shared at anytime and anywhere. The idea of web and social radio has developed alongside that of radio on demand.

The evolution of technology moves together with linguistic changes, as Miller (2010) stated:

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**18** See also Miller's (2016) observation: "L'évolution des pratiques langagières radio-phoniques amène à s'interroger in-fine sur le rôle de ce média comme acteur/transmetteur de changements sociolinguistiques plus généraux. Cette évolution ne prend tout son sens que si corrélée avec ce qui se passe dans d'autres domaines (presse écrite, internet, création artistique, etc.). Un point important étant le brouillage entre les différents domaines, toutes les radios ayant maintenant leur site web ou leur page sur facebook, par exemple mêlant données orales et écrites".

La tendance au mixte de langue et au plurilinguisme s'est considérablement renforcée dans les années 1990-2000 avec l'irruption des nouvelles technologies (TV satellitaires et internet) qui ont à la fois participé à l'élargissement considérable des audiences et donc à un rapprochement virtuel mais également au renforcement des expressions nationales/régionales dans un contexte de libéralisation économique et de désengagement des Etats. Tout ceci dans un contexte mondial où le droit aux langues est devenu un des nouveaux droits de l'homme soutenu par les Institutions internationales permettant aux « minorités » non-arabophones de revendiquer leurs droits linguistiques, de développer leurs médias, leurs programmes etc.

According to Van Mol (2003, 96), «radio plays a normatizing role», in other words, for this scholar, radio announcers are a category of speakers who set real linguistic trends and influence the audience's linguistic usages. It will be necessary to verify whether some of the data highlighted in previous studies can be confirmed despite these changes affecting radio stations and the programmes broadcast and what elements are possibly different in the main radio stations in the Sahel.

Van Mol (2003, 126) also adds that news language, is “an essential part of the spoken language” and that “it can even exert a certain influence on the spoken language” therefore, it can influence the listeners/audience's linguistic uses and

[a]lthough news readers on television simply read their texts before the camera they create the impression that they are good 'spontaneous' narrators. Moreover, news bulletins occupy a strategic position in language use and many people, also in the Arab world, listen to these news broadcasts every day. (Van Mol 2003, 126)

Bulletin news does not contain spontaneous speech in Arabic, but in Van Mol's opinion the *aḥbār* (news) are written very quickly, therefore its language is very unplanned and so reflects a relatively spontaneous context and

give a more accurate image of how people daily treat MSA in a more or less spontaneous way. [...] News broadcasts are, as a matter of fact, a reflection of current language use of the standard language in a certain area and in a certain manner. (Van Mol 2003, 127)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This literary review does not pretend to be exhaustive. See also the Van Mol 2003's bibliography.

These statements will be verified through the analysis of the sample taken from the selected Sahel radio stations, in which the news bulletins may be announced in a specific programme, entirely devoted to the subject, or they may be given during a wider information programme. This undoubtedly influences the register chosen by the announcer. Another element to take into account is the eventual editorial line of a radio.

#### 4 Corpus of Selected Radio Stations

The data analysed in this paper have been taken from videos uploaded on the Facebook pages of a selection of four digital radio stations. A recent study has shown that Facebook is among the favourite social media used by Arab journalists during the Covid 19 pandemic (Ziani et al. 2021).<sup>20</sup> It is clear that the adoption of social media has changed the way in which journalists gather and disseminate information since such media are an effective source of information, as well as «a news-reporting mechanism and a news-sharing system» (Ziani et al. 2021). Social media are a source for information material, they allow information to circulate and reach a wide audience faster.

In fact, during recent years, we have witnessed a shift from traditional radio, at first, to web radio and therefore to social media radio broadcasting, mainly in response to the changes in society towards a social media-oriented communication in which audio-visual codes are very important (Ferguson, Greer 2018, 127).

The four Sahel radio stations I have chosen are the following.

*Jawhara FM* (<https://www.jawharafm.net/fr>) is a private Tunisian radio station, based in Sousse, which started out in 2005 as a generalist radio station before choosing to be a commercial broadcaster. *Jawhara FM* covers 85% of the national territory, starting with the Sahel, the centre of Tunisia and covering Grand Tunis, reaching nearly 8 million inhabitants, and its listeners share is between 40% and 50%. The radio station has made its linguistic choices based on these characteristics. The majority of the programmes are in Tunisian Arabic, while the press review and the news are mainly in *fushā*. Among *Jawhara FM*'s programmes there are those on well-being, news, cooking, sports, motorbikes and cars, as well as talk radio, entertainment programmes, etc. On the presentation page of the website, the radio clearly states that it broadcasts in Tunisian Arabic.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Available at <https://search.bvsalud.org/global-literature-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/resource/en/covidwho-1342930>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.jawharafm.net/fr/rubrique/presentation/141>. At the same page, a presentation of the radio's mission, aims and contents is available.

*Radio RMFM* (<https://www.rm-fm.net/ar/>), based in Msaken since 2015, is a generalist radio station broadcasting in the Msaken and Sousse region. It broadcasts programmes in *derja*<sup>22</sup> online and on the frequency 99.8 fm, except for the morning and evening news which are read in *fuṣṣḥā* with reports and interviews in Tunisian dialect. Programmes: factual and information programmes, news, talk shows, entertainment, call-in programmes.

*Radio Mahdia 1* (<http://radiomahdia1.com>), based in Mahdia, has been broadcasting on 99.3 fm since 2012 and on the internet since 2020, and is the first cultural radio focused on cultural and society issues. It is an associative radio covering the Mahdia and Monastir regions. Among its cultural programmes, there is what they define as “programme culturel touristique” *Mahdiatu-na l-bāhya*, that is ‘Our beautiful Mahdia’, and *Consomag*, a programme realised in collaboration with the Union des consommateurs tunisienne, again broadcast in Tunisian dialect or in a dialect-based variety with few *fuṣṣḥā* elements. Some other examples of programmes broadcast on *Radio Mahdia 1* are morning wake-up shows, entertainment shows, talk shows, interviews in the street, all in Tunisian Arabic, but the news is offered in a standardised variety of Arabic and sports news in a mixed variety.

*Menara Fm* (<https://menarafm.net/>), based in Mahdia, is an independent generalist radio station aiming to transmit the values of freedom of thought and justice, and to spread ideas regardless of any political and thought currents. Founded in 2019, it can be listened to from anywhere in Tunisia through the website *Menarafm.net*. It offers several cultural programmes, such as *Rikāb Menara*, *Stade Menara*, and *Nhārkum zīn*, broadcast in *derja*. The news programmes or flash news within some of these programmes can be announced in *derja* or in a mixed variety, or can be read in *fuṣṣḥā*.

Following this short presentation of the radios selected for this study, it is clear that this group of radio stations devote very little space to *fuṣṣḥā* and no space at all to foreign languages. The linguistic choice of the radio station is sometimes clear from their slogans, such as in the case of *RMFM Msaken al-Rādyu əlli yisma’ək* ‘The radio that listens to you’, *Menara Fm*, whose slogan is *Šūt el-mūġa* ‘The voice of the wave’. The same cannot be said for *Jawhara FM*, whose slogan is *al-d.niyā w(a)-mā fī-ha* ‘The world and what it contains’, which may be read both in dialect and *fuṣṣḥā*, but since on the website of the radio station the preference for Tunisian dialect in programme broadcasting is declared, it is possible to state that the slogan is in Tunisian Arabic. The dialect in the Sahel radio stations is the main protagon-

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<sup>22</sup> This is the way in which the word *dāriġa*, defining an Arabic dialect, is pronounced in Tunisia.

nist in the absolute majority of programmes, even those concerning ‘high’ and important subjects. The varieties used in the radio programmes mainly depend on the genre of programme and on the role of those who intervene (speakers, hosts, interviewed people...), but do not seem to depend on the radio station itself as all of them prefer the use of Tunisian dialect, regardless of the programme.

For instance, official speeches of the political men and women are given in *derja*, as in the case of the speech of Mahdia’s *wālī* (governor) held during the first general lockdown of March 2020.<sup>23</sup>

On *Radio Mahdia 1*, there is a programme called *al-ḥayāt al-ṭayyiba* ‘Good life’ about the correct *taǧwīd* (reciting) of the Koran in which a master teaches some students how to read and recite the Holy Book with the correct *taškīl* (vocalisation) and *i’rāb* (declension). He reads the introduction in *fušḥā*, then reads and recites the Koran and finally he questions the students, asking them about some linguistic and pronunciation issues, corrects them, and explains some issues using his mother tongue, i.e., Tunisian Arabic.<sup>24</sup>

## 5 Methodological Issues

Before presenting the examples chosen for the analysis, I would like to make some methodological observations.

First of all, I would like to point out that it has not been possible to show the way in which the same news is treated and announced by the different radio stations because not all the videos concerning a precise piece of news on a given day are always available on Facebook. Therefore, I selected some passages of some news that I judged meaningful and useful for linguistic analysis.

Secondly, choosing whether to transliterate or transcribe Arabic in Latin script or not is always problematic. I have chosen to provide the examples transliterated in Latin script because this allows highlighting some phonological and phonetic features belonging to Modern Standard Arabic or to Tunisian Arabic that otherwise would not emerge.

Moreover, the texts offered below present elements from at least two different varieties, i.e. Modern Standard Arabic and Tunisian Arabic, as well as some other elements attested in the selected news that can be defined as ‘mixed’ or ‘hybrid’. It is not always easy to distinguish among

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<sup>23</sup> See for instance <https://www.facebook.com/AlmhdytRyfwlwsywnRevolucionMahdia/videos/242506457135392> taken from an information page, and not a radio station, called *Revolution Mahdia*. It is well known since Holes’ studies of 1993 that Arab politicians may prefer dialects of Arabic to give their official speeches in specific circumstances and for specific purposes and aims.

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/RadioMahdia1/videos/382037503516495> at the minutes 3’30”, 8’50”, 11’50”, 13’09”, 16’00”.

these varieties that are closely linked together, and to 'label' a linguistic feature as 'standard' or 'dialectal' *tout court*.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, my transliteration seeks to offer the pronunciation of the speakers in the most reliable way possible and non-standard elements will be written in bold to distinguish them from the standard ones.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the examples will be given in Latin script transliteration, reflecting some phonological phenomena, i.e. *imāla*, raising of /a/ and /ā/, abbreviation of long vowels, dropping of short vowels, absence of *hamza*, etc. Then, the English translation will be provided. Lastly, the main linguistic features of the passages selected will be presented and discussed.

## 6 Analysis<sup>27</sup>

### 6.1 Radio Mahdia 1

In the evening news programme on *Radio Mahdia 1* the variety used is *fushā* with very little phonological influence from the colloquial variety: After the opening, the speaker gives the news of the day:

Min **al-studio** Radio Mahdia 1, nuqaddimu la-kum mūḏiz al-aḥbār. Ahlan bi-kum ilā mūḏiz al-aḥbār bi-l-Mahdiyya bi-99.3 Fm. [...] Yadḥulu a'wān iṭārāt al-'adliyya al-yawm fī yawm ḡaḏab waṭaniyy fī iṭār al-i'tiṣām **al**-maftūḥ allaqī daḡalū fī-hi mundu yawm arb'a w-'iṣrīn **november** **al**-māḏī. Wa-tuṭālibu al-naḡāba **al**-waṭaniyya li-a'wān w-iṭārāt al-'adliyya bi-tanḡiri **ṣahāyid** a'wān wa-iṭārāt wazārati l-'adl wa-bi-minaḡ tata'allaḡ bi-l-**a'bā** al-tanfiḏiyya wa-l-istimrāriyya al-muta'alliḡa bi-l-'amal ḡilāl al-'uṭlat al-'usbū'yya.<sup>28</sup>

From the studio of *Radio Mahdia 1*, we present you the main news. Welcome to Mahdia on 99.3 fm, here is the main news. Today, judicial police officers announced a national day of protest as part of a general strike they have been on since 24 November. The Na-

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<sup>25</sup> On this subject, see for instance Bassiouney 2010, 100. Bassiouney's paper given at Aix study day was very interesting because the scholar suggested avoiding the binary approach standard/non-standard variety and to prefer the idea of translanguages, speaking about stylistic variation rather than of varieties. However, this approach also raises questions about how to analyse a text containing standard, non-standard and mixed elements.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Eid 2007.

<sup>27</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Nadia Tebbini (Université de Tunis El Manar, MAECI fellow at the University of Turin) for helping me understand some unclear passages of the selected texts offered in this paper. Any mistake is, of course, my responsibility. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

<sup>28</sup> News of 25 December 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/RadioMahdia1/videos/752409802355869>.

tional Union of Judicial Police Officers and Managers is demanding the homologation of the Ministry of Justice officers' and staff's titles as well as bonuses for managerial functions and work on weekly rest days.

There are a few phonological features, such as the raising of /a/, pronounced as [e] (i.e. *el-*), and of /ā/, realised as [e:] (i.e. *ḥilāl* 'during'), the realisation of the interdental voiced consonant /d/ as /d/ (*mundu* 'since'), and the absence of final *hamza* (*a'bā* 'bonuses'). At the morphological level, the speaker preferred a dialectal plural (*ṣahāyid* 'titles, certificates'). Regarding lexis, two French terms, belonging to Tunisian Arabic, are used: *studio* 'studio' and *nuvember* 'November'.<sup>29</sup> Even if the raising of /a/ and *imāla* of /ā/ are typical of Tunisian dialect as well as the realisation of interdentals as dentals are peculiar to Mahdia Arabic, the language of the speaker is characterised by the absence of these most common dialectal features which are, on the other hand, present in other genres of radio programmes (La Rosa 2021).

## 6.2 Sports News Radio Mahdia 1

The language used in the sports news of the same radio station, Radio Mahdia 1, is slightly different since it contains more dialectalisms and mixed elements:

Marḥaban bi-l-sādat al-mustami'in, marḥaban bi-awfiyā al-Radio Mahdia 1, idan **na'ūdu** min ḥadīd ilā liqā'at-na al-riyādiyya wa-'awda maymūna li-l-ḥamī' in **ṣā** Allāh, fī ḥaḍa al-mūsīm al-riyāḍī allaḍī narḥū an yakūna iżābī wa-mutamayyizān bi-kulli l-maqāyīs, 'awda maymūna li-l-mawṣīm al-riyāḍī **alfin wāḥid w-'iṣrīn/ alfin iṭnīn w-'iṣrīn** wa-in **ṣā** Allāh **nšūfu** ma' ba'ḍna mawṣūm riyāḍī mukallal fī l-naḥāḥ, **nšūfu fī** kurat qadam al-tawra, idan, qult **na'ūd** min ḥadīd ilā liqā'at-na al-riyādiyya wa-**na'ūd** ilā barnāmaḥ li-l-Stade Radio Mahdia 1 allaḍī nuḡaṭṭī min ḥilālī kull mubārayāt firāq al-Mahdiyya. In **ṣā** Allāh, **nabdāw** l-yūm bi-al-mustaqbal al-riyāḍī bə-Rəḥīš allaḍī yanzilu ḍayfan 'alā-l-nādī al-ifriqī fī mal'ab Ḥammādi Raḡīb bə-Rādis wa-sa-nutābə' fī mā ba'd iṭār al-muqābḥat kadālik. Sa-natawallī l-naql ba'd mubārayāt **əlli** l-nādī l-riyāḍī l-ṣābbī ayḍan, ṭumma mubārayāt Makārim al-Mahdiyya allaḍī ṣa'ada ḥadīṭan ilā l-rābṭa al-muḥtarfa al-**tāni**.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On the morphological features of Mahdia Arabic, see Yoda 2008; Attia 1969. For loanwords and code-switching in Tunisian Arabic, see Mzoughi 2015; Sayahi 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Sports news of 16 October 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/RadioMahdia1/video/555817355719684>.



Hello to the listeners of Radio Mahdia 1, hello to the faithful of Radio Mahdia 1, let's go back to our sports meetings and let's hope that it will be a happy return, in this sports season that, we hope, will be positive and characterised by all the measures. A happy return to the sports season 2021/2022 and, God willing, we will see a successful sports season, we will see revolutionary football. So, we said, let's go back to our sports meetings and let's go back to our programme Stade Radio Mahdia 1, which welcomes us during all the matches of the Mahdia club. God willing, let's start today with *Avenir sportif* in Rajiche, guest of al-Ifrīqī club at Hammadi Raghīb Stadium in Rades. We will follow the schedule of the matches like this: we will follow the transfer after the matches of the sports club of Chebba too, after that, there will be the matches of El Makarem of Mahdia which has gone up to the professional league.

In this case, there are more dialectal and mixed elements: the absence of *hamza*, especially in final position, a few other phonological features like *imāla*, qualitative changes of vowels which are, in some cases, those used in *derja*, such as in the case of *mawsum* 'season' (standard *mawsim*), and the monophthongization of /aw/, i.e. *mūsim*. At a morphological level, there is an oscillation in the conjugation of the verb *na'ūd/na'ūdu* for 'let's turn back' (1st p. p.), the dialectal conjugation of the verb 'to start' *nabdāw* 'we start'. Regarding nominal morphology, the form *fā'ila* is pronounced *fā'la*, i.e. *rābta* 'league'. Some hybrid structures are also present, such as *sa-nutābθ* 'we will follow', in which we have the future particle of Modern Standard Arabic *sa-*, but the verb has a dialectal pronunciation. As for syntax, the dialectal relative *əlli* is used, but it alternates with *allaqī*; the use of *fi* + direct object after a transitive verb, typical of Tunisian Arabic, is also attested, as well as a dialectal use of numerals (Van Mol 2003, 183-5). Regarding lexis, it is worth noticing the use of the verb *šāf* 'to see'. Some standard elements have been underlined, such as *hadītan* 'recently', *ayḍan* 'also', *tumma* 'then, after', *yanzilu ḍayfan* 'is guest of'.

### 6.3 RMFM Msaken

On RMFM Msaken, the flash news at 7 in the morning and 7 in the evening are read in *fushā* without any report, but the radio also gives the local news in another programme, called *Al-aḥbār*, with the same announcer, always in *fushā* with reports and interviews in *derja*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> News of 29 September 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/rmfm.net/videos/346287270515160>.

This is a short passage in which the variety used is once again quite standard:

Ilta'amat ams bi-maqarri baladiyyat Msākin žalsata 'amal ḥawla l-qubūl **al**-waqtī li-ašgāli mašrū' tanwīr al-ṭariq al-ḥizāmiyya bi-ḥayy al-nūr bi-taqniyat *led* bi-l-ṭāqat al-šamsiyya bi-tamwīl sab'in bi-l-mi'a min al-šurakā' wa-ṭalāṭin bi-l-mi'a tamwīla baladiyya. Wa-**dālika** bi-ḥudūr mumaṭṭilin 'ani l-žāmi'āt al-waṭaniyya al-baladiyyāt wa-munaḍḍamat taḥāluf al-mudun (UNESCO). Wa-fī ḥāḍa al-siyāq, 'alā ra'is al-baladiyya **mtā'** Msākin Muḥammad 'Alāya fī taṣliḥ fī RMFM.

A general assembly was held yesterday at the headquarters of the municipality of Msaken for the provisional approval of the works of the illumination project for the ring road in the district of Cité Ennour with the help of solar energy LED technology with a financing of 70% by the participants and 30% by the municipality. This was done in the presence of representatives of the National League of Municipalities and UNESCO. In this regard, here is the comment of the Mayor of Msaken Muhammad Alaya for FMRM [...].

The language used by the speaker is very standardised with a few phonological phenomena, mainly related to the raising of the vowel /a/ and /ā/, the rhotacism of /r/,<sup>32</sup> that I also noticed in the speech of another girl in Msaken, but not in the nearby towns, and the affrication of the dental /d/ realised as /dʒ/.<sup>33</sup> At the syntactic level, it is possible to notice the choice to use the genitival particle *mtā'* instead of the standard *iḍāfa*. The expression *wa-dālika* 'and this' is considered to be a redundant expression typical of Media Arabic by Ashtiany (1993, 32) and Effat and Versteegh (2008, 201), but it is also considered to be a connective having the function to join small sentences to compose a longer one in order to give cohesion to texts (Dickins, Hervey, Higgins 2017, 175-6).

In the interview about the project, the Mayor of Msaken speaks in dialect. In the interviews and reports recorded and broadcast the speakers use their own mother tongue in which some features typical of the town variety of Arabic may occur, such as in the case of the 'villageois' relative pronoun *ella*:<sup>34</sup>

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**32** Actually /r/ is pronounced as an English /r/. This feature has to be verified and investigated, since I found only a few examples in the language of young girls of Msaken.

**33** For the phenomenon in Moroccan Arabic, see Layla Ben Salah 2017. An interesting study on the affrication of the dental /t/ in Nabeul Arabic is Dallaji 2017. My impression is that the attention of some scholars has been devoted to the affrication of /t/ in Arabic dialects, i.e. Moroccan, rather than to the affrication of /d/, which characterises all the varieties of Tunisian Arabic and would deserve a systematic study.

**34** See Marçais 1950, 211, and for Chebba, D'Anna 2020, 90.

Akīd, muhimm al-mašrū‘ ḥāṭir imiss al-muwāṭin mubāšaratan, imiss al-buniyya taḥtiyya **alla** hiya waffar ‘iš karīm bi-l-muwāṭin, al-tanwīr al-‘umūmī kīma l-kayās, kīma al-manṭqa al-ḥaḍrā, kīma raf‘ al-faḍḍalāt, [...] w-imiss mubāšaratan al-msāknī fī dār-u.

Of course, the project is important because it concerns the citizen directly; it concerns the underlying structure that has guaranteed the citizen a dignified life. Public lighting is like roads, like green spaces, like rubbish collection [...], and it concerns the citizen of Msaken directly in his home.

At the end of the interview, the speaker continues reading the other news in very standardised variety.

#### 6.4 RMFM Msaken Sport

Also on RMFM Msaken Sport, sports news is given in a mixed style and reports are in Tunisian Arabic. The element worth noticing is that the speaker starts in a more or less standardised variety and as the reporting continues he uses more and more Tunisian dialect. In 2003, Van Mol noticed that in Algeria sports news was always announced in dialect, while in Egypt the main variety used at the time was Modern Standard Arabic:

In contrast with Diem (1974, 64), we found that the news commentaries in Egypt are almost completely free of dialectal influence. We observe in the reportages of Algeria a larger increase of dialectal forms, but the nominal value is too small to draw conclusions. On the other hand, in the Algerian sports news dialectal forms are used almost exclusively, in contrast with the general news broadcasts. (Van Mol 2003, 185)

The next example is taken from *RMFM Msaken*:

Ahlan wa-sahlan bi-kum fī ṭāliṭ mū‘id-na fī RM sport al-muntaḥab l-waṭan **tūnsī wašl fī** taḥdīrāt-**u** ista‘dādan li-mubāratay Mūrītania **nhār 7 october** fī mal‘ab Ḥammādī l-‘Aqrabī bi-Rādis **w-nhār 10 october** fī Nuwākšūṭ fī iṭār al-żawla al-**ṭālṭa** wa-l-**rāb’a** fī tašfiyat **mondial** Qaṭar **2022**. Ḥissat tamārīn **al-bāriḥ ‘ar-fat** iltiḥāq [many names of soccer players] **w-bqāw** fī maqarr al-iqāma **w-qāmū bi-iḥsās al-tadlik w-l-yūm** in **šā** Allāh **yaḥtim al-nisāb bi-ltiḥāq kull mla‘biyya** ma‘ ḡiyāb Sayf al-Dīn Ḥawī bi-

**sbāb** iṣāba wa-kaḍālik Farḏānī Sāsī bi-**sbāb** ‘uqūbat l-inḍarāt.’<sup>35</sup>

Welcome to our third appointment with RM sport, it is the turn of Tunisia to prepare for the two matches with Mauritania on 7 October at the Hammadi Aghrebi stadium in Rades and 10 October in Nouakchott in the third and fourth round of qualifying for the 2022 Qatar World Cup. Yesterday’s training saw the participation of [several names of players] who remained in their places of residence for a massage session and today, God willing, will end the suffering of participation of all the players in spite of the absence of Saif Eddine Khaoui, because of an accident, and also Ferjani Sassi because of a disqualification.

In this passage, there are several dialectal or non-standard elements. Regarding phonology, we find once again the absence of *hamza*, the raising of the vowels /a/ and /ā/, the monophthongization of /aw/, the vowel syncope, i.e. *tūnsī* ‘Tunisian’, *waṣl* ‘(it) arrived’, *nhār* ‘day’. Regarding morphology, *mla’biyya* was preferred to the plural *mal’ab* ‘players’, the pattern *fā’ila* is pronounced *fā’la* in *tēlṭa* ‘third’ and *rāb’a* ‘fourth’. Numerals have a dialectal pronunciation as do the verbs that have a dialectal conjugation, i.e. *waṣl*, ‘*arfet* lit. ‘knew’ (3 f.p.s.)’, *bqāw* ‘they stayed’ exhibiting a sedentary conjugation.<sup>36</sup> The pronoun for the masculine singular third person pronoun suffix is *-u* in *tahdīrāt-u* ‘his preparation’ because the word ends in a consonant (Marçais 1977, 191). Regarding syntax, it is worth noticing that the verb *waṣl* is followed by the particle *fī* and not *ilā* or *li*.<sup>37</sup> As for lexis, we have the dialectal terms *nhār*, *al-bāriḥ*, a borrowing from French, i.e. *mondial* ‘World’. *Bi-sbāb* can be considered as a ‘hybrid structure’ since its pronunciation is dialectal.<sup>38</sup> There are some formal/standard expressions, such as the preference of the verb *qāma bi-* for ‘to do’, considered typical of Media Arabic (Ashtiany 1993, 29), and the adverb *ista’dādan li-* ‘in preparation for/preparing for’.

The speaker gives the floor to the interviewee, and after the interview, despite the fact that he continues to read the news, he uses a more dialectal register. This never happens during non-sports news.

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<sup>35</sup> Sports news of 5 October 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/rmf.net/video/891584848409102>.

<sup>36</sup> For the idea of ‘sedentary’ conjugation, see Mion 2015, 272-3, and La Rosa 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Ashtiany 1993, 32, notices the use of the verb *waṣala* with or without *ilā*.

<sup>38</sup> On the notion of hybridity, see Van Mol 2003, 89 and Eid 2007.

## 6.5 Menara Fm Programme *Nhārkum zīn*

On Menara Fm, news may be listened to also in the context of the programme called *Nhārkum zīn* (Have a nice day). It is a 20/30-minute morning wake up show in which the public can listen to and watch the daily news, weather forecasts, and a short talk between the speaker(s) and the guest(s) about a topic which changes everyday.

The announcer starts with a formal greeting, which is very common in the opening of all radio programmes, but she switches immediately into Tunisian Arabic:

Ṣabāḥ al-ḥayr wa-l-surūr, ṣabāḥ al-nūr li-l-nās al-kull ***ǎlli tasma‘ fi-na al-yūm*** [...]

Good morning, good morning to all those who are listening to us today.

Then, she continues in Tunisian Arabic:

**donc, awwal ḥāža kīma ‘awwadnā-kum, nat‘addāw aḥwāl** al-ṭaqṣ. ‘So, first of all, as we are used to, we are going to give you the weather forecasts’.

She reads the news in a standardised variety:

Tawaqqū‘āt **al-météo** al-yūm l-ḥad ṭlāta **octobre alfīn w-waḥd w-‘iṣrīn**, wifqan l-al-ma‘had al-waṭānī l-rasd al-ḥawwī **sa-yakūn** al-ṭaqṣ mulabbad bi-l-uḡuyūn ḡuz‘iyyan fī-l-wasaṭ **wa-l-ḡanūb** ma‘ huṭul **amṭārī** fī l-ṣabāḥ. Ariyāḥ ḡanūbiyya ‘alā l-ṣamāl **w-‘al-wasaṭ** wa-l-ṣarḡiyya ‘alā l-ḡanūb qawwiyya nisbiyan bi-l-qurb min al-sawāḥil al-ṣamāliyya wa-ḡa‘īfa ilā mu‘tadila fī amākin uḥrā. Tartafa‘ daraḡāt **al-ḡarāra** qalīlan ma **bayn ṭlāṭīn w-ḡamsa w-ṭlāṭīn** daraḡa fī-l-ṣamāl **w-ḡḡanūb, w-bīn arb‘a w-tis‘a w-l-‘iṣrīn** f-l-wasaṭ. **W-yumkin an taṣila** ilā **sab‘a w-ṭlāṭīn** darḡa fī ḡanūb al-ḡarbī.

Wa-kān... **nkūnu kammal-na ma‘ l-météo, nata‘addāw w-nṣūfu** aḡbār al-ṣuḡuf aham al-‘anāwīn al-rasmiyya [she switches to *fushā* once again].<sup>39</sup>

The weather forecast for today, Sunday, 3 October 2021, according to the National Institute of Meteorology: the weather will be partly cloudy in the centre and south with showers in the morn-

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**39** News of 3 October 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/menarafm.net/videos/226136826161123>.

ing. Relatively strong winds from south to north and from centre-east to south near the northern coasts and light and moderate in other places. Temperatures will rise to between 30 and 35 degrees in the north and south and between 24 and 27 degrees in the centre and may reach 37 degrees in the southwest. We have finished with the weather; now let's move on to the news in the main dailies and headlines.

The variety used by the speaker is more influenced by *derja* than that used in the examples offered above. At the phonological level, there are a few phonological phenomena such as the realisation of the central vowel /a/ and /ā/ as [e] and [e:], /u/ pronounced as [o] in *uḥrā* 'other(s)', some cases of vowel syncope, i.e. *darža* 'degree', *tūnsiyya* 'Tunisian', and apocope, i.e. *f-* 'in', *'al* lit. 'on/above', the monophthongization of the diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/, the assimilation of the /l/ of the article to the palatal /ž/ in the word *w-žžanūb* 'and the South'. Regarding syntax, the relative pronoun *əlli* is used, as well as the structure transitive verb + *fī* + object. There are also a few mixed structures such as *sa-yakūn* '(it) will be', *yumkin an tašila*, syndetic structure in which the verb has a dialectal pronunciation and the /š/ of *tašila* is pronounced without much emphasis. However, the non-emphatic or very low-emphatic realisation of consonants is not uncommon in Tunisian speakers (La Rosa 2021, 10-11). Some other mixed structures are the dialectal conjugations of the verbs *nata'addāw* 'let's pass', which very frequently alternates with *\*net'addēw*, and *'awwadnā-kum* 'we have accustomed you'. Dialectal numerals are used once again. It should be noted that the use of *fušḥā* seems to limit the use of French, which is more likely to be present, especially at the lexical level, when the variety used is news broadcast *derja* and this concerns especially connectors. Here, the French words *octobre* 'October' and *donc* 'so' are used, as well as the dialectal words *hāža* preferred to the standard *šay* 'thing', *ḥad* 'Sunday', *kīma* 'as', *wifqan* 'according to', *amṭārī* 'rains', *šāf* 'to see' and the dialectal conjugation *w-* 'and'.

If we analyse *Nhārkum zīn* further, we notice that other speakers, on other days of the week, may make different linguistic choices, as in the case of a man who gives the weather forecast entirely in dialect and only reads the press review in *fušḥā*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/menarafm.net/videos/607450030501224>.

## 6.6 Jawhara Fm

Regarding *Jawhara Fm*, the news at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. is read in *fushā*, while the press review is in Tunisian Arabic with the titles of the newspapers in Modern Standard Arabic. The business news is also read in *fushā*.

As last example, I prefer to analyse *Jawhara Fm* sports news on the programme *Jawhara Fm sport*, in which the speaker, ‘Ali al-Khlouli, introduces the news in *fushā* while the reports are in Tunisian. Once again, as shown in previous examples, after the first sports report, the announcer introduces the second one using a more colloquial register. It seems to me, therefore, that *fushā* has the function of officially opening the programme and the register tends to become more dialectal immediately after, as the programme continues. Let’s see an example of the variety he uses.<sup>41</sup>

After greeting the public by saying “Masā’ al-nūr, ahla w-sahla bikum fī Jawhara sport” (Good evening, welcome to *Jawhara sport*), the announcer starts reading the news:

Wazārat al-dāḥiliyya **akkadat zāda fī** balāḡ ṣādir ‘alā l-ṣafḥat al-rasmiyya **mtāḥḥa** l-Facebook **innu l-abḥāt** qā’dat **tətamma bi-**‘idn min niyābat al-‘umūmiyya wa-**annu** l-qānūn fawqa l-ḡamī’.

Balaḡat **al-yūm** al-‘āsiya **barša** wa-l-ḡam‘a **tūnsiyya** li-kurat qadam **azdarat** (aṣdarat) balāḡ **tastankar bi-h** bi-šidda l-i’tidā **əlli** ta‘araḍ **l-u** l-ra’is al-Naḡma l-Sāḥli Māhir **al-Karuwī**, fī mubārat **al-Naḡma** al-ḡayš l-ruwāndī, min ṭaraf ba’d al-quwwāt al-amniyya **əlli** kānat quddāma l-mal‘ab; al-ḡam‘a **‘abrat** ‘alā taḡāmun al-kāmil ma’ ra’is al-Étoile **w-wṣfat** l-i’tidā bi-l-ḡarīb **w-ḡayr** al-ma’qūl **tamāman** w-da‘at al-ḡihāt al-mas’ūla ‘alā l-tadaḥḥul min aḡli ttiḥād **al-qarārāt** wa-l-iḡrā’āt al-**munāsba** ma’ ḡarūrat radd al-**a’tibār** li-ra’is al-Naḡm w-l-**āyla** l-muwassa’ l-Étoile **w**-li-kurat **al-qadam** al-tunisiyya.

The Ministry of the Interior also issued a statement on its official Facebook page, maintaining that investigations are ongoing with the authorisation of the public prosecutor and that the law is above everyone. Tonight, many communications have arrived and the Tunisian Football Federation sent a statement in which it strongly condemned the attack suffered by the president of *Nejma Maher el-Karoui*, in the match of *Nejma* with the Rwandan Patriotic Army, from some security forces who were in front of the Communal Stadium, and expressed its complete solidarity with the president

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<sup>41</sup> News of 23 October 2021: [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=424885375831337](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=424885375831337).

of Étoile. Moreover, it described the aggression as completely absurd and inconceivable, and called on the parties responsible for the aggression [to take] adequate decisions and measures with the need to reinstate the president of Nejma, a member of the extended family of Étoile and of Tunisian football.

The variety of Arabic used by the speaker has some dialectalisms at all levels of analysis. At a phonological level, to the phenomena already mentioned in the previous examples, it is possible to add a case of assimilation *mtāḥḥa* 'hers' derived from the assimilation of the /ʔ/ of the genitive particle *mtā*' and the /h/ of the feminine third person suffix pronoun *-ha*, a case of de-emphasis of /s/ that possibly lead to its sonorization  $\text{ṣ} > \text{s} > \text{z}$  with implications for the adjacent vowels: *aṣḍarat* > *asḍarat* > *\*azderet* 'she/it (f.) promulgated'. Once again, the masculine singular third person suffix pronoun is *-u* or *-h* in *l-u* 'to him' and *bi-h* lit. 'in it/it' and the noun pattern *fā'ila* is *fa'la*, i.e. *žam'a* 'federation'. Also in this example, we notice some dialectal pronunciation of the verbs, i.e. 'abrat 'she/it (f.) expressed', *wuṣfat* 'she/it (f.) described', and *tətamma* in the expression *qā'dat tətamma* 'are ongoing'. Regarding syntax, the speaker uses the relative pronoun *əlli*, the genitive particle *mtā*' and the complementisers *innu/annu* (Mejdell 2006, 90).<sup>42</sup> The latter generally follow verbs of opinion, expressing emotions and feelings, desire and volition and possibility (Pennisi 2020, 127). Here the use of this particle does not reflect the Modern Standard Arabic norm since the pronoun *-hu* is a 'dummy pronoun',<sup>43</sup> which has no grammatical function. According to Pennisi:

Dans la production contemporaine [...], le pronom de rappel est utilisé assez fréquemment pour introduire des propositions nominales sans verbes, [...] mais aussi comme 'dummy pronoun' sans fonction grammaticale. À ce propos, Gully (1993) ajoute que lorsqu'il est utilisé, le pronom de rappel s'accorde rarement au féminin singulier en arabe moderne [...]. Il faut insister sur le fait que la présence et/ou absence du pronom de rappel, qui peut présenter des anomalies par rapport aux normes grammaticales traditionnelles, dépend des choix stylistiques de ses utilisateurs.<sup>44</sup>

According to Youssi (1992, 279), there is an invariable particle *ennu*, used in Arabe Moderne Marocain. Also Mejdell (2006, 90-109) de-

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<sup>42</sup> See also Pennisi 2020, 125-7 who calls them "particules complétives pour indiquer les marqueurs syntaxiques qui introduisent les subordonnées complétives syndétiques".

<sup>43</sup> See also Peled 2006.

<sup>44</sup> See Pennisi 2020, 125-50 and particularly 134.



voted a study to the invariable complementiser *ənnu* in Egyptian Arabic that has not been in my corpus, at the moment.<sup>45</sup>

Another syntactic feature attested in the passage analysed here is the lack of the article *al-* in the attribute referring to the substantive in *wa-l-žem'a tūnsiyya* 'the Tunisian Federation'.<sup>46</sup> The verb *qa'.d* + imperfect is used to indicate an ongoing action, i.e. *qā'dat tətamma* 'investigations are ongoing'.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the subject + verb + object order is preferred, i.e. *Wazārat al-dāḥiliyya akkadat zāda fī balāğ* 'the Ministry of the Interior also issued', whereas in other passages it was the verb + subject + object order to be chosen. The latter is however present in this passage.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the expression *min ʔaraf*, translating the agent of an action, is a typical feature of Media Arabic (Holes 1995, 259-60, Effat, Versteegh 2008, 202).

Regarding lexis, some dialectal terms are used, i.e. *barša* 'much, many', and *zāda* 'also, too'. A hybrid element is the adverb *tamāman* 'completely', whose pronunciation is dialectal with raising of /a/ and /ā/.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

From this overview of the varieties of Arabic used in news broadcasts by some Tunisian Sahel radio stations, there emerges a substantial uniformity of linguistic usages among them. In fact, for the local or national news, announced in a specific programme devoted to flash news or information, the variety used is always *fušḥā*, which is very little influenced by *derja*, especially at the phonological level. If the news is given within information programmes containing diverse kind of news and topics, as in the case of *Nhārkum zīn*, then there is openness towards the use of a mixed or a dialectal variety. Regarding sports news, it is usually announced in a mixed standard-based language more characterised by dialectalisms at all levels.

Some phenomena attested in the texts are typical of the so-called Media Arabic, i.e. the use of *qāma bi-* + *mašdar*, of the conjunction

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<sup>45</sup> Jairo Guerrero, in his paper given at the Study Day held in Aix-en-Provence on 9 November 2021, assumed that the particle *ənnu* in Maghribi Arabic may be a loanword from Mashriqi Arabic.

<sup>46</sup> The latter is an old syntactic feature already attested in Middle Arabic texts and still present in contemporary dialects. For Sicilian Arabic, which was a maghribi dialect sharing many features with Tunisian Arabic, see La Rosa 2019, 200.

<sup>47</sup> For the constructions used in Arabic dialects to express the notion of event in progress, and particularly for the use of *qā'id*, lit. 'sit', see Sellami 2020, available at [https://voices.uchicago.edu/sellamize/files/2020/10/Handout\\_Arabic\\_Typ.pdf](https://voices.uchicago.edu/sellamize/files/2020/10/Handout_Arabic_Typ.pdf), and its bibliography.

<sup>48</sup> On this feature, see Pennisi 2020, 20-2 and its bibliography, and Effat, Versteegh 2008, 202.

*wa-* preferred to *fa-*, the redundant expression *wa-ǧālika* ‘and this’ (Ashtiany 1993, 29-32), and the use of *min ʔaraf* expressing the agent of a passive verb (Effat, Versteegh 2008, 202).

However, when the dialect ‘penetrates’ the radio programmes, it is strongly standardised towards the Arabic of the capital, Tunis, and no specific local features are attested in the speakers’ Arabic.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, some studies by Gibson (2002) and Mion (2018) on Tunisian Arabic, and La Rosa (2021) on the Arabic of Mahdia, have shown that there is an ongoing process of linguistic levelling and standardisation in Tunisia because of the influence of Tunis Arabic and the Arabic of the main coastal cities of Sahel, i.e. Sousse.

Some traits highlighted in the news presented are peculiar to Tunisian or Maghribi Arabic, i.e. the genitive particle *mtāʔ*, the *-āw* conjugation (i.e. *nabdāw/bqāw*, etc...), or the use of some terms such as *zāda* ‘too’ or *barša* ‘much/many’ and the loanwords from French, some others can also be attested in other Arab dialects, such as the cases of assimilation and de-emphasisation of some consonants or the relative *əlli* and many others.

The situation described here seems to be slightly different from that presented in Miller (2010) according to whom:

Dans les médias audio-visuels, le mixed-style ESA/vernaculaire dans ses variantes de plus en plus « nationales » semble avoir de beaux jours devant lui. De même que le MSA seul ne s’est jamais totalement imposé, il apparaît que l’usage du vernaculaire n’est jamais exclusif, y compris dans les radios ou TV qui en ont fait leur image de marque et y compris dans les pratiques plurilingues. Cette fluidité pose la question toujours non résolue, puisqu’aucune codification officielle n’a eu lieu dans aucun pays arabe, des frontières éventuelles entre « vernaculaire » et MSA. De fait, dans les pratiques quotidiennes des médias ce sont bien des quasi-langues nationales/régionales qui sont en train d’émerger.

In contemporary social, live, audio-visual radio, speakers know that they are watched and listened to on social media and that videos remain available in the ether. All these elements influence their linguistic choices. The internet and social media allow, to some extent, to combine the characteristics of radio with those of television and at the same time to go beyond the limits of ‘traditional’ media as they allow continuous and instantaneous interaction with the listeners also through the comments.

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<sup>49</sup> Many other studies have been devoted to the different varieties of Tunisian Arabic that cannot be mentioned here. See, among others, Saada 1984; Gibson 2009; Bouhlel 2009; Ritt-Benmimoun 2014a; 2014b.

Despite the fact that the contemporary radio broadcasting has changed, and that dialects have gained more and more space on the media, news is still considered as a formal issue to be announced in Modern Standard Arabic. Also Eid (2007, 405) in 2007 classified news as ‘formal’:

The media, particularly the broadcasting media, has a unique role to play in negotiating the relationship between the two varieties. Because of its dual role, to inform and entertain, the media serves as a bridge between the public and the private, the local and the global. It represents different forms of discourse: formal (speeches, lectures, news broadcasts) and informal (conversations, storytelling, joking) and creates in-between spaces that serve as excellent sites for the negotiation of identities.

As shown above, Van Mol (2003, 128) stated that news language represents the language used by a category of people, the radio speakers, in a certain historical and geographical context. Of course, in Tunisia too, different speakers may use Standard Arabic in different ways, such as in the case of *Nhārkum zīn*. According to Van Mol (2003, 128), the language of news would be similar to that of spoken *fushā*, in a semi-spontaneous context, but in the examples offered above, and especially those regarding sports news, it seems that the variety used by the speakers seeks to reproduce the formality of the written level, but is influenced, at the phonological level and sometimes at other levels, by the speakers’ oral language. Instead, a similar element to that highlighted by Van Mol (2003, 92) is that the ‘pure’ dialect, in Sahel radios, is only used by the public interviewed, while Modern Standard Arabic is the main variety used for announcing news.

Tarrier’s (1991, 11) statement seems to be valid for news languages presented in the sample of this paper, except for sports news:

Or, les communiqués d’informations sont préparés et rédigés à l’avance en arabe classique, ce qui a pour effet de fausser au départ l’analyse : le speaker ne fera que lire un texte, n’introduisant que ça et là au cours de sa lecture quelques réalisations phonétique de son dialecte et, donc, son intervention ne sera pas vraiment représentative d’un arabe parlé.

The journalists, in fact, use what Eid (2007, 411) calls a ‘reading style’, since they usually read news previously written in *fushā* and probably revised by more than one person, and which does not really leave room for the use of dialects or mixed varieties. As already mentioned, the use of dialects may also depend on the editorial line of the radio station or the structure of the news programmes. *Nhārkum zīn* is indeed the only case in which the choice of the variety to use is left to

the speaker and in fact four or five different speakers may use four or five different linguistic varieties in the course of the programme.

The mixed and/or standardising varieties that characterise the news are very different from the varieties used in other genre of radio programmes. In fact, the latter show many local dialectal features, such as the loss of interdentalals in Mahdia Arabic together with many other features, present at all levels of analysis that do not appear in news language (La Rosa 2021). In fact, all the radio programmes contained in the Sahel radio stations selected for this study, i.e. talk-shows, documentaries, interviews, entertainment programmes, etc., are all in a more or less 'educated' *derja*, according to the speaker's level of education, the subject, the listeners and the occasion and the context in which the interview is held. Thus, although nowadays *derja* is also used in some semi-official and official situations, it is less common for flash news and news reports, except for sports. It is evident, therefore, that bulletin news is the only domain in which Standard Arabic is still the protagonist, although it often contains mixed elements, whereas sports news is the only space devoted to news where mixed varieties and, seldom, dialects are considered more appropriate.

In sports news, it seems that *fushā* is used to open the programme to give it an aura of officiality, as if it were part of the formal opening style, but *fushā* immediately gives way to the everyday language of Tunisians, despite the speakers' intention to use *fushā*. When non-sporting news is read, instead, speakers almost always manage to maintain the use of *fushā* until the end of the bulletin. This linguistic attitude is mitigated in programmes discussing various topics or where the interaction between the speaker and the guest(s) generally leads them to the use of *derja*.

To conclude, the data collected in this paper suggest that, in an ideal continuum of varieties between Dialects and Standard Arabic, the varieties used in Sahel news broadcasting can be synthesised as follows:



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