



University of Bucharest
Center for Arab Studies

ROMANO-ARABICA XX

Trends and Developments
in Today's Arabic

2020


*editura universității din bucurești**

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
CENTER FOR ARAB STUDIES

ROMANO-ARABICA

XX

Trends and Developments in Today's Arabic



editura universității din bucurești®

2020

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Published by:

© **Center for Arab Studies**

7-13, Pitar Moș Street, District 1, 010451, Bucharest, Romania Website: <http://araba.lils.unibuc.ro>

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Telefon: (004) 021.305.46.74; (004) 0726.390.815

E-mail: editura.unibuc@gmail.com; editura@g.unibuc.ro, <http://librarie-unibuc.ro>

Librăria EUB: Bd. Regina Elisabeta, nr. 4-12, București, Tel. (004) 021.305.37.03

Tipografia EUB: Bd. Iuliu Maniu nr. 1-3 061071 București, ROMÂNIA Tel. +40213152510.

The official website of Romano-Arabica

<https://romanoarabica.academy>

ISSN 1582-6953



Romano-Arabica is an **A-class Academic Journal**, according to the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes – Anvur, Italia:
<http://www.anvur.it/en/homepage/>



Romano-Arabica is a **Category A Academic Journal**, according to the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research – CNCS,
Romania: <http://www.cncs-nrc.ro/publicatii-stiintifice/>

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'INN-/AN(N-) CLAUSES: STYLISTIC AND SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN MOROCCAN DIGITAL PRESS

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Abstract. The written production in the Arab world is usually characterized by an extensive use of Standard Arabic. It is, however, possible to state that written practices reflect a significant variability, both historically and sociolinguistically, in the past and in the more recent developments of the digital revolution.

The aim of this study is to show how the Arabic written practices of online newspapers are characterized by a great syntactic flexibility.

In particular, this study analyzes to what extent internal linguistic processes and the influence of vernacular languages affect written practices in the Moroccan digital reality. The study has been carried out on a corpus of articles and readers' comments of three online newspapers (*Hespress*, *Goud* and *Alakhbar*).

The comparative analysis between two different thematic columns, sports and opinion articles, focused on the construction of 'in(n-)/an(n) clauses, reveals that at the morphological and syntactic level, a contrasting stylistic variation emerges from the syntactic choices of authors, both in formal practices (articles), and in informal practices (readers' comments). This analysis will make it possible to reflect on whether the emergence of mixed Arabic forms in written production tends to constitute new form(s) of conventionalized normalization.

Keywords: *written language – linguistic variation – mixed Arabic – online communication – language ideologies.*

Introduction

The recent report of FAFO's survey on language practices in Morocco (Kebede & Kindt, 2016), showed that young people use written *darija*¹, Moroccan Arabic, i.e., vehicular language in Morocco, in their online daily life. This survey interestingly showed that, even if *darija* is not considered the most suitable variety for formal written productions (64% of the people surveyed think *fushā* is the proper language in writing, see Kebede & Kindt 2016:84-86), most people (75%) think that texts written in *darija* are easier to understand (Kebede & Kindt 2016:87-88). Moreover, it highlighted how different written practices affect also journalistic productions: while *darija* is not considered a suitable language for newspapers columns (81%, see Kebede & Kindt 2016:94), users of electronic newspapers seem to think that this variety is suitable for writing their comments (27%, see Kebede & Kindt 2016:78). This seemingly paradoxical attitude, common to other linguistic

¹ Young people (18-34) use daily *darija* (65%) and *fushā* (32%), old people (50-64) use *darija* (13%) and *fushā* (39%), see Kebede & Kindt (2016:73-74).

communities, reflects the implications of language ideologies², i.e., the belief that the Arabic language, *fuṣḥā*, is the proper variety for formal and written production, whereas *darija* is only considered suitable for oral communication. Nevertheless, usages and practices show that new written trends are emerging in Morocco, especially among young people on the web. Mixed forms of Arabic language are emerging also in spaces traditionally dominated by the standard language, such as newspapers. This does not mean that Modern Standard Arabic is completely changing, nor that *darija* is becoming predominant. It is possible, however, to observe that lexical *darija* items are used also in formal written productions and that syntactical simplifications are preferred by some journalists and readers. In light of all this, this investigation aims at showing, through the analysis of the syntactical construction of declarative clauses, how the written production is influenced by "middle" "mixed" spoken varieties.

This study is based on a corpus of 216 articles (Opinions and Sport columns) and more than 1000 comments by readers of three Moroccan online newspapers. It analyzes the realization of declarative clauses using a quantitative methodology and in from a comparative perspective.

Starting from the assumption that newspapers represent a formal communication context, in which the language traditionally used is Standard Arabic (also called in this context *Media Arabic*), the aim of the present study is therefore to show how linguistic variation emerges from the writing practices of the aforementioned publications.

I will try to observe to what extent the syntactical variation in the use of the complementizers *بأن/أن* and *إن* in declarative clauses and the asyndetic constructions might reveal new trends in the written production of contemporary Arabic in Morocco. The first part will be devoted to the theoretical framework about Middle/Mixed varieties and features of Media Arabic in relation to declarative clauses; the second section will describe the corpus and the methodology used. Finally, the third part will include the interpretation of the results, and a conclusion.

Theoretical framework

According to Lentin (2008), Middle Arabic is “the language of numerous Arabic texts, distinguished by its linguistically (and therefore stylistically) mixed nature, as it combines standard and colloquial features with others of a third type, neither standard nor colloquial” (Lentin 2008: 216). “Mixed Arabic” can be considered a proper label as well, thanks to the sociolinguistic dimension associated to it. Through a diachronic perspective, Middle Arabic is traditionally considered as the mixed variety of Arabic used, for example, in several medieval literary texts; while from a sociolinguistic point of view, Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic (i.e., the mixed variety of Arabic used in modern and contemporary sources) both represent the same linguistic dimension, namely as it can be defined as “an intermediate, multiform variety, product of the interference of the two polar varieties on the continuum they bound, a variety that, for this very reason, has its own distinctive characteristics” (Lentin 2008:216). Furthermore, Lentin also affirms that a non-

² For an extensive study on ideologies and written practices in Morocco, see Miller C., 2017.

institutionalized and non-recognized norm emerges from the common features attested in the written Middle Arabic texts, in their orthography, phonetics, morphology and syntax. With regard to the object of this study – declarative clauses – it is interesting to note that, in Middle Arabic, the fall of the *hamza* is a recurrent orthographic phenomenon, as observed also by Doss (2008) in modern sources, and that syntactically “syndetic as well as asyndetic constructions abound. The latter are particularly frequent after modal verbs or pseudo verbs [...]. The difference between *'an*, *'anna*, and *'inna* is blurred, *'an* (written <'n>) is the predominant subordination tool. Many verbs (not only ‘declarative’ ones) govern *bi-'an*.” (Lentin 2008:221). In the third part of this study it is possible to observe how those orthographic and syntactical features emerge in my corpus-based analysis.

A second point concerns the features of Media Arabic, i.e., the modern standard Arabic used in the journalistic prose which is characterized by variation and padding (Ashtiany 1993:28). Modern Standard Arabic used in newspapers tends to simplify syntactic structures, and to use collocations, and lexical borrowing from foreign languages, as described by Ashtiany (1993), Effat & Versteegh (2008), and Elgibali & Sullivan (2014). Furthermore, focusing on the declarative clauses, it is interesting to note that complementizers introducing subordinate clauses present variable constructions. In his analysis of variation of Modern Written Arabic, Gully (1993) observes, for example, that in the journalistic prose the complementizer introducing declarative clauses is used with or without a dummy pronoun in the same syntactical environment, as in the examples below:

(1) (*wa qāla li l-jaridati inna l-dustūra wa l-qānūna yu'akkidāni*) **annahu** *lā ḥaṣānata li a'māli l-majlis.*

And he told the newspaper that the constitution and the law ensure that there is no immunity for the council's actions. (Gully 1993:38)

(2) (*khuṣūṣan*) **anna** *lā ḥalla li mashākili l-tasalluḥi illa bi hadhihi l-ṭarīqa.*

Especially as this is the only way to solve the problem of arms. (Gully 1993:38)

These examples show that Media Arabic tends to deviate from traditional norms; for example, as Gully (1993) showed, dummy pronoun is used indistinctly in Media Arabic, in the same syntactical environment (see for instance the construction “particle +/- dummy pronoun + *lā* of absolute negation + noun” (Gully 1993:37) in example 1 and 2), even when it is not grammatically or syntactically necessary.

A third point which needs mentioning is the concept of Mixed Styles analyzed by Mejdell (2006). In her analysis of academic speech in Egypt, she states that, in a more or less spontaneous and formal communicative situation, speakers tend to use the standard variety, to which, however, elements and syntactic constructions deriving from colloquial varieties are introduced. Mejdell affirms in fact that “Arabic and similar diglossic speech communities have at their disposal alternative sets of most morphological features of the language, represented by the H and L varieties” (Mejdell 2006:74). This means that the emergence of mixed styles is characterized by the mixing of standard forms and colloquialisms in a register which tends to be formal due to the communicative context. Furthermore, with regards to declarative clauses, Mejdell states that in Egyptian Arabic the “obligatory vs. optional use” of complementizers, i.e., syndetic and asyndetic

constructions, involves not only syntactic and semantic features of the sentences, but also stylistic choices which depend on the individual preferences of the speakers (Mejdell 2006:100-101). In fact, her results show the variable use of the standard and the Egyptian complementizer, but also an important variation in the use of syndetic and asyndetic constructions among her speakers' samples (Mejdell 2006:375). If this is true above all in oral performances, the same model is potentially applicable also to other circumstances in the written production.

Finally, it is important to underline how declarative clauses are constructed in *darija*. According to Caubet's description (Caubet 1993), declarative clauses follow mainly asyndetic constructions, in which it is still possible to find also syndetic structures. However, *bəlli* is the *darija* particle which corresponds to the standard *'inna*, but unlike *'inna*, it can be used – even though it is not compulsory – after the verb *qāla* 'to say', but also after other verbs, as shown by the following examples:

(3) *gāl l-i bəlli gādi yzi.*

Il m'a dit qu'il viendrait. (Caubet 1993, I:237)

(4) *ma təmšīw š hətta ngūl l-kum āzīw εand-i !*

Ne partez pas avant **que je vous dise** de venir chez moi ! (Caubet 1993, II :92).

(5) *tyiqqənt bəlli ma yənza hš, u nzaḥ.*

J'étais convaincu qu'il ne réussirait pas, et il a réussi. (Caubet 1993, II :105).

Briefly, in *darija*, asyndetic constructions are more frequently used among speakers. Nevertheless, considering the assumption of Youssi concerning his theory of triglossia (Youssi 1992), some final remarks about the '*Arabe Moderne Marocain* (AMM)', i.e., the variety spoken in formal situations by educated Moroccans, must be added. He states that in AMM, declarative sentences follow a structure with *ənna* particle (Youssi 1992: 279), as in the following example:

(6) *ana ka-n-çtaqed ?enna l-muneDDama dyal-na lem t-sme ḥ bi-dalik*

Personnellement je reste convaincu que notre Organisation ne permettra jamais cela. (Youssi 1992:279).

In other words, Youssi affirms that *bəlli* is the declarative particle which marks the style of Moroccan Arabic (Youssi, 1992: 279), while *ənna* marks the formal style of Modern (educated) Moroccan Arabic. These findings will be taken into consideration when interpreting our data in order to understand whether a similar type of stylistic variation (formal/less formal, educated/less educated) exists in the variety of Mixed Arabic emerging from online Moroccan newspapers.

Methodology

Corpus

The present study was conducted on a corpus consisting of 216 articles from three newspapers, *Goud*, *Hespress*, and *Alakhbar*, and more than 1000 comments from *Goud* and *Hespress*. Three articles per month were collected from the opinions and sport columns throughout the year 2016. All three newspapers share a generalist editorial line, covering a wide range of topics, and their editorial staff belongs to the same demographics (25-40 years). Concerning their relation to language choices, only *Goud*³ openly declares to promote *darija*. In fact, the name of the newspaper, *گود* *gūd*, derives from the name of the Moroccan weekly magazine *نيشان* *nīšān*; both names are synonymous and mean ‘straight’ in Moroccan Arabic. In particular, the weekly *Nichane* represented a Moroccan editorial experience, which had a brief life but an important impact on public opinion and an impressive reception in terms of sales and distributions (Miller 2010). Its success was due to the combination of sensitive topics and the direct and ironic language used, in which *darija* emerged, mainly in headlines (Hoogland 2018). Ahmed Najim, *Goud*’s editorial director, worked for *Nichane* and, after its final closure in 2010, decided to continue that experience by founding *Goud* in 2011⁴.

Instead, *Hespress* and *Alakhbar* prefer to publish in Standard Arabic, even though in *Alakhbar* some *darija* expressions emerge in articles by the director Rachid Nini, in his editorial column named “shouf tshouf”. This column was one of the early instances of *darija* in newspapers, first published in the historical newspaper *Almassae*, of which Nini was the editorial director before founding *Alakhbar* in 2012. According to Nini, the column “shouf tshouf” has an excellent public reception because *darija* “gave the signal to people that the column addresses them in a non-transcendental language that they understand⁵”. The most visited newspaper website in Morocco is *Hespress*⁶. Founded in 2007 by the brothers Hassan and Amine Guennouni, *Hespress* has had a great success from the beginning, thanks to the possibility for readers to publish their articles and comments. As a matter of fact, “Minbar Hespress”, one of the two opinions columns of *Hespress*, which was analyzed in this study, represents the first online public space dedicated to readers⁷.

³ Goud is at the 29th rank among the websites visited daily by Moroccans, according to the statistics of ALEXA, https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/goud.ma?toggle=true&utm_expid=.NFDkwnQTSf2ZNn_fyyCLoQ.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alexa.com%2Ftopsites%2Fcountries%2FMA, last visited on 25/04/2019.

⁴ Information provided during an interview held in Casablanca on 30/03/2018.

⁵ From an interview held on 27/05/2018.

⁶ <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/hespress.com>, 25/04/2019.

⁷ It is however important to bear in mind that *Hespress* set out guidelines and rules that users must accept and respect. One of these rules concerns the variety of language, i.e. they only accept articles written in “proper Arabic”, see <https://www.hespress.com/publier.html>, last visited on 25/04/2019.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis was carried out on the total number of occurrences of the complementizers إن/أن (and يلي, in *darija*), introducing declarative sentences. The tool used was the software for text analysis Lexico 3.6: it allowed me to find all the attested forms, including the complementizers with prefixed particles (such as بأن/بان) and suffixed pronouns (such as إنه أنه وأنها).

The first search for concordances was launched in order to observe the syntactical context on the right and on the left of the particles. These results were therefore analyzed separately to identify only actual declarative sentences, and to eliminate clauses introduced by إن as emphatic particle or introducing conditional sentences. Therefore, I first classified the occurrences according to their different orthographic realizations (with or without *hamza*) and then according to the grammatical-syntactical categories preceding and succeeding the complementizers.

The sorting before was characterized by the following categories: suffixal verbs (perfect), prefixal verbs (imperfect) collocations (mostly compound temporal prepositions such as أن قبل and بعد أن but also lexical collocations such as لا بد and لا شك or simple prepositions such as على), simple nouns (such as ممكن or other participles such as ملاحظ) and phraseology, i.e., simple sentences composed by prepositions and nouns, for example لا يدع مجالاً للشك or more complex sentences such as لا بدع مجالاً للشك.

The sorting after was characterized by the complementizer with/without suffix pronouns and suffixal or prefixal verbs (perfect and imperfect), or SV sentences, or simple nouns, or nominal sentences.

Then, I searched for occurrences of asyndetic constructions according to the declarative verbs which had the higher frequency in the previous search. In particular, I found concordances with the declarative verb قال 'to say', the modal verbs يمكن 'to be able to, to can', يجب 'to have to' (and the *darija* pseudo verb خاص with the same meaning) and the verb أراد 'to want' (and its correspondent in *darija* بغى).

The aim of this second concordance search was to test whether from a quantitative point of view the frequency of the asyndetic constructions was relevant in order to interpret the syntactical variation in comparison with the three newspapers, but also to observe possible specificities of syntactic and stylistic choices.

Results

1- Orthographic distribution of the complementizer

The complementizer أن has a higher frequency throughout articles in all newspapers and in all columns. In opinions' column, on 1214 total occurrences, 1106 concern أن (503 in *Alakhbar*, 433 in *Hespress* and 170 in *Goud*) and only 57 ان (only 1 in *Alakhbar*, 14 in *Hespress* and 42 in *Goud*). The complementizer يلي occurs only in *Goud* (14 occurrences) and إن occurs more in *Alakhbar* (28 occurrences), lesser in *Hespress* (9 occurrences) and never in *Goud*. In sports column there are fewer occurrences (272 total amount), of which أن 86 in *Alakhbar*, 109 in *Hespress* and 59 in *Goud*; ان has a very low frequency, only 3 occurrences in *Hespress* and 9 in *Goud*, such as ان, only 1 occurrence in *Goud* and 5 in *Hespress*.

The most relevant remarks concern the higher occurrence of أن especially in *Alakhbar*, where moreover إن is more frequent than in the other newspapers. This is not the case in *Goud*, in which إن never occurs but where the *darija* بلي is used, even if in sporadic occurrences.

Concerning comments, it is possible to observe a similar situation. Nevertheless, the difference in percentage between the occurrences of the complementizer with/without *hamza* is smaller with respect to the articles' section. The comments section is marked by the occurrence of بلي in *Goud* and the higher frequency of ان in *Hespress*⁸, in contrast with the articles' sections⁹.

In conclusion, even though ان is globally quite used, it seems that journalists prefer the canonical orthography, unlike readers. An interesting remark, however, is that the orthographical representation of the complementizer with *hamza* also occurs in sentences in which elements of the *darija* are simultaneously used, as shown by the following examples:

(1) ولكن داكشي ماشي الأصح أن الدولة لي كان خاصها توفروا (1)
But this is not the best (thing) that it's the state who had to economize.
(Goud, Mohamed Socrate, Opinion, 19/04/2016)

(2) وممكن للصحافة ديال بصح أن تشمها عبر القارات (2)
It is possible for the good press to be proud across continents.
(Goud, Omar Ouchoun, Opinion, 02/08/2016)

2- Variation in the use of إن

According to Badawi *et al.* (2004), إنْ “has long been the compulsory particle after *qāla* قال ‘to say’ to introduce indirect speech”, (Badawi *et al.* 2004:711). Nevertheless, in the corpus the distribution of إن after the verb قال shows an important variation throughout the three newspapers, as shown in the following tables:

| | Occ. | ASY | إن | أن | بأن | ان | بلي | Dr.Sp. |
|----------|------|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|--------|
| Goud | 54 | 19 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 20 |
| Hespress | 52 | 10 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 31 |
| Alakhbar | 45 | 3 | 18 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| Tot. | 151 | 32 | 19 | 10 | 11 | 2 | 5 | 72 |

Table 1 Concordances of *qāla* in opinions column - articles section

⁸ In this section there are 2 occurrences (1 in *Goud* and 1 in *Alakhbar*) of انو i.e. the complementizer ان with the *darija* suffix pronoun m.s. -و .

⁹ In the comments sections of opinions columns: أن 90 in *Goud* and 75 in *Hespress*, ان 59 in *Goud* and 65 in *Hespress*; بلي 5 only in *Goud*, and إن only once in *Hespress*; Instead in sport column: أن 3 in *Goud* and 55 in *Hespress*, ان 7 in *Goud* and 116 in *Hespress*, بلي once in *Goud* and إن never.

| | Occ. | ASY | إن | أن | بأن | ان | بلي | Dr.Sp. |
|----------|------|-----|----|----|-----|----|-----|--------|
| Goud | 16 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 |
| Hespress | 16 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Alakhbar | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tot. | 32 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 19 |

Table 2 Concordances of *qāla* in sports column - articles section

Therefore, it is possible to observe that in the opinion columns, the particle *إن* never occurs in *Goud*, whereas in *Alakhbar* its frequency is higher and more constant. It means that, in *Goud*'s opinion column, declarative syndetic sentences after the verb *qāla* are introduced exclusively by means of the particles *أن/ان*, *بأن*, and *بلي*. Although Badawi *et al.* (2004) already stated that in Written Modern Arabic it is possible to find the idiomatic expression “*qāla bi-*” and the particle *أن* introducing indirect speech, it seems that in the corpus such constructions have different functions. While Badawi *et al.* (2004) stated that the ‘idiomatic *qāla bi-*’ construction occurs when “speaker makes an assertion in which the exact spoken words are not the issue” (Badawi *et al.*, 2004:712), in the opinion columns the authors use this construction in order to underline the topic of the issue they are reporting, such as in the following examples:

- (1) [...] الذي قال عن تنازلات هؤلاء البرلمانيين بأنها مزایدات شعبية [...] [...]
Who said about the concessions of these parliamentarians that [these] are populist overbids. (Alakhbar, Rachid Nini, Opinion Column 01/03/2016)
- (2) أما الكاتب يحيى حقي فيقول عن الفن بأنه تنقيف الذهن والروح وخلق مزاج سليم [...] [...]
The writer Yahya Hakki says of art that it educates the mind and spirit and creates a healthy mood [...] (Hespress, Hicham Hamadi, Minbar Hespress, 07/05/2016)
- (3) [...] وأبصم على ما تقول بأننا نستحق أن ندفن [...] [...]
[...] And I mark on what you say, that is that we deserve to be buried [...] (Goud, Hamid Zid, Opinion Column, 22/05/2016)

Therefore, in (1) and (2) the topic introduced by *عن* is reported in the declarative clause introduced by *بأن* whose function is to focus on the exact words explaining the topic message.

Concerning the use of *أن* introducing indirect speech, Badawi *et al.* (2004) stated that this construction “is usually a variant of the normal subordination of verbs of commanding, requesting” (Badawi *et al.*, 2004:712), in which the verb *قال* means ‘to tell’. Nevertheless, the use of the particle *أن* introducing an indirect speech (or quotation) in *Goud* indeed reflects the characteristics of AMM assumed by Youssi (1992), where *أن* corresponds to the

anna particle used in oral modern (educated) Moroccan Arabic. In fact, when authors utilize syndetic constructions in indirect reported speech, the particle أن is preferred to بأن and إن, and the verb قال maintains the meaning of ‘to say’, as shown by the following examples:

(4) الشهرة لفقيه آخر يقول أن الأرض لا تدور.

The fame belongs to another jurist, who says that the earth does not spin.

(Goud, Omar Ouchoun, Opinion Column, 15/02/2016)

(5) خرج داك البيان ديال وزارة الداخلية و لي كايقول أنه أي واحد فرح لمقتل السفير الروسي فتركيا [...] .

This statement from the Ministry of the Interior has been released and it says that any one was pleased by the killing of the Russian ambassador in Turkey [...].

(Goud, Siham Elbaroudi, Opinion Column, 30/12/2016)

In (4) and (5) the particle أن is used instead of إن and بأن in order to introduce the declarative clause. Moreover, in the latter example, it is interesting to observe that the particle أن (with non-necessary dummy pronoun) represents the focus point of a codeswitching. In fact, the main sentence is in *darija* (see the relative pronoun لي, the demonstrative adjective داك, and the particle ديال for analytic annexation) and قال is in prefixal conjugation with the preverbal كا. This is an example among others in which morphosyntactic items of *darija* combine with the standard language. Nevertheless, in this latter example the choice of the particle أن shows a case of mixed style, not only because of its combination with standard and *darija* items, but also because in this syntactical context أن was preferred to بلي (plain *darija*) and to إن (plain *fushā*). It belongs to linguistic items from AMM, as assumed by Youssi (1992). In fact, a common trend in *Goud* is that أن embeds standard syntactical constructions, whereas بلي only occurs in plain *darija* sentences, as in the following examples:

(6) قاليا بلي مزيان نساfer و نشوف ناس اخرين و بلادات

He told me that it is good that I travel and see other people and countries.

(Goud, Nada Eljebli, Opinion Column, 04/10/2016)

(7) حتى فتقرير الامين العام بان كي مون اللي كيكون باللي¹⁰ مزوار دار خطأ

Even in the report of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who says that Mezouar made a mistake.

(Goud, Adil Elmaknasi and Hanna Abu Ali, 30/04/2016)

Therefore, in (6) and (7) it is possible to observe that full sentences in *darija* occur in *Goud* not only in opinion articles belonging to narration¹¹ (6), but also in articles relating to international politics (7), in other words, in domains and topics usually expressed only in *fushā*.

¹⁰ *Darija* has an inconsistent orthography; the same author often writes the same words in different ways. For more details on the use of *darija* in written productions see Caubet (2012, 2017 and 2018).

¹¹ In the opinion column in *Goud* serial novels are published, such as مذكرات محمد سقراط فالسجن as an autobiographical novel, or such as in the case of this example مذكرات ملكة سانك ايطوال; see Caubet (2018).

3- Asyndetic vs Syndetic constructions

Concerning the distribution of Asyndetic (Asy) and Syndetic (Syn) constructions, it is possible to observe quite a variation throughout the articles' section of newspapers with the constructions following *يجب* , *يمكن* , *يريد* , and *خاص* (in *darija*), as shown in the following tables:

| يجب | Occ | Asy | Syn | يمكن | Occ | Asy | Syn | يريد | occ | Asy | Syn | بغى Asy | خاص Asy |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------------|------------|
| G | 1 | 0 | 1 | G | 24 | 14 | 10 | G | 4 | 1 | 3 | 25 | 23 |
| H | 24 | 12 | 12 | H | 34 | 14 | 20 | H | 20 | 10 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| A | 23 | 9 | 14 | A | 19 | 7 | 12 | A | 17 | 11 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Tot | 48 | 21 | 27 | Tot | 77 | 35 | 42 | Tot | 41 | 22 | 19 | 25 | 23 |

Table 3 Opinion columns, articles, distribution of Asyndetic vs. Syndetic constructions

| يجب | Occ | Asy | Syn | يمكن | Occ | Asy | Syn | يريد | occ | Asy | Syn | بغى Asy | خاص Asy |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|------------|------------|
| G | 1 | 0 | 1 | G | 1 | 0 | 1 | G | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| H | 1 | 1 | 0 | H | 2 | 2 | 0 | H | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| A | 1 | 1 | 0 | A | 1 | 1 | 0 | A | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tot | 3 | 2 | 1 | tot | 4 | 3 | 1 | tot | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 3 |

Table 4 Sport columns, articles, distribution of Asyndetic vs. Syndetic constructions

In articles of opinion columns, occurrences of syndetic constructions are more frequent than asyndetic structures. The contrary is true concerning the comments' section, where the frequency of asyndetic constructions' occurrences is higher (18/33 asyndetic occurrences of *يجب* and 15 of *خاص* – 1 in *Hespress* and 14 in *Goud* - , 10/19 occurrences of *يمكن* , 7/13 occurrences of *يريد* and 17 occurrences of *بغى* in *Goud*). Nevertheless, in *Goud* modal verbs and the verb 'to want' are more used in *darija*, as the following examples show:

وزير الداخلية ماشي غير هو اللي خاصو يتحاكم. (1)

The interior minister is not the only one who should be prosecuted.

(Goud, Hanna Abu Ali, Opinion column, 19/09/2016)

ويُزاف منهم بالنسبة ليه الريف أرض مغربية وهاذوك غي أوباش بغاو يزرعوا الفتنة فالبلاد ويقسموها (2)

For many of them, according to him, the Rif is a Moroccan land, and those are just rabbles who want to cultivate *Fitna* in the country and divide it.

(Goud, Mohamed Socrate, Opinion Column, 14/12/2016)

As shown in these examples, *darija* syntax prefers asyndetic constructions, and it is also interesting to observe in (2) that the verb *بغاو* in *darija* is followed by the standard verb *يزرعوا* which follows the standard conjugation in Arabic. This sort of mixing between morphosyntax structures and lexical choices from *darija* and *fuṣḥā* is a main feature in most opinion articles in *Goud*. These writing practices just show that mixed varieties of Arabic, usually widespread in oral communication, can also be used in formal written productions, and the variability of styles depends on the authors' choices and the communication purposes they have.

Conclusions

The three newspapers analyzed show variable writing practices and attitudes. *Alakhbar* and *Hespress* maintain a formal journalistic style and a language more adherent to the standard variety (also thanks to the correctors who work in their editorial staff), both at the level of orthography, as shown by the higher distribution of *أن*, as well as in the more extensive use of traditional syntactic structures, as it is the case with the syndetic construction with modal verbs and the use of the complementizer *إن* following *قال*.

Goud, on the contrary, seems to prefer a style more adherent to orality. The stylistic variation which emerges shows a mixed style characterized by the alternation of elements in plain *darija* and other middle items, e.g., the alternation between *أن* and *بلي* followed by the verb *قال*, which marks a *darija* style (with *بلي*) and a middle/mixed style (with *أن*). Another characteristic of the mixed style in *Goud* is the preference of asyndetic structures with *darija* modal verbs in combination with morphosyntactic structures in *fuṣḥā*.

Due to the lack of extensive quantitative studies on syntactical variation on written contemporary Arabic in Morocco, it is still difficult to state whether these linguistic practices represent a common trend in journalistic production. It would seem rather an individual linguistic and ideological choice, but which nevertheless represents a writing trend which continues to spread through digital platforms and whose developments will be interesting to observe.

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