Marginal Linguistic Systems (Calls to Animals, Child-Directed Language) and Political Folklore in Lebanon

Two Case Studies

Arkadiusz Płonka

Abstract

This paper takes a sociolinguistic approach to the analysis of the informal usage of two words common in modern Lebanese political discourse; ħarf at-tanbīh (the warning interjection) "hā," used in Arabic inter alia in calls to animals, and the hypocoristic forename "Roro," borrowed from the French. The paper also demonstrates how these lexical characteristics of the Lebanese dialect reveal similarities to what Ferguson termed marginal systems within languages. The paper is supplemented by graphical representations and other extra-linguistic data.

1. Methodological Perspective[1]

This paper employs a sociolinguistic approach to the analysis of data from Lebanese oral and written—mostly, but not exclusively unofficial—political discourse, showing similarities to what Charles Ferguson termed "marginal systems within languages" and "animal calls […] or child-directed speech."[2]

2. Marginal Linguistic Systems

Like Ferguson, Yurij Uspienski analyses marginal linguistic systems and defines them as a

> *separated lexical enclave which is characterized by phonetics differing from the norm, and also specific grammatical properties which seem abnormal in the background of a given language; one counts among them, for example, onomatopoeias, different forms of expressive lexis, so called "child words" (nursery-words), forms of calling to and fighting off animals, et cetera*.[3]

Uspienski also claims that

> *words of this type—due to usage and form—can ultimately be molded into new proper names: for example, in Russian, "child lexis" takes its shape on the pattern of hypocoristic proper names (kisa, biaka, wowa as a designation of wolf [wołk], pietia -*

[1] The data and photos in this article were collected in Beirut, Beit Meri, Bsharri, and Mar Shaʿya during my Agence universitaire de la Francophonie post-doctoral fellowship at the Institut français du Proche Orient (IFPO, Beirut, 2008-2009.) Part of the material was presented in an unpublished lecture titled "Anti-Arabism Among Lebanese-Christian Militias in Contemporary Propaganda Materials (1975-1990) in Standard and Dialectal Arabic; A Sociolinguistic Approach" (London, UK: London School of Economics, Anthropology Department, February 4, 2010,) and (Washington DC: USA, Third Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA), November 6, 2010.)

[2] Charles A. Ferguson, "Baby Talk in Six Languages," in *Language Structure and Language Use: Essays by Charles A. Ferguson*. Selected and Introduced by Anwar S. Dil (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 113.

[3] Boris Uspienski, Historia i semiotyka (History and semiotics). Polish translation: Bogusław Żyłko (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1998), 68 (English translation A.P.).

cock [pietuch] et cetera), in fact, forms of calling animals (cyp-cyp, kis-kis, mas'-mas' et cetera) occur as vocative forms (derived from cypa, kisa, masia et cetera). No less significant, and seen in this process, is the relationship with the child language which is explained by this particular role, played by proper names in the child's world (in which, in general, all the words can potentially take the status of the proper names.)[4]

Dialectal Arabic animal calls and baby talk[5] frequently have also the form of repetition/reduplication, that is, inter alia, *CvCv* and $C_1vC_2\,C_1vC_2(v)$[6]. We quote here for example[7]:

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[4] Uspienski, 68, (translation - AP).

[5] I use the term "baby talk" as a synonym of the term "child-directed speech", this is in Ferguson's meaning "any special form of a language which is regarded by a speech community as being primarily appropriate for talking to young children and which is generally regarded as not the normal adult use of language.", Ferguson, "Baby Talk in Six Languages", 103. In 1952 Marcel Cohen considered as "the most important" for Arabic "child language", the chapter "Kindersprache" in: Carl Reinhardt, Ein arabischer Dialekt gesprochen im Omān und Zanzibar (Stuttgart-Berlin, 1894): 185; Marcel Cohen, "Sur l'étude du langage enfantin," Enfance 5, no 3 (1952): 181-249; http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/enfan_0013-7545_1952_num_5_3_1243 (accessed January 15, 2012). In reference to the subject of the paper, it is noteworthy that Anis Frayħa emphasizes the homogeneity of *luġat aṭ-ṭifl* (baby talk) in Lebanon: *li-ṭ-ṭifli luġa ḫāṣṣa*, [...] *muštaraka bayna kaṯīr mina l-qurā l-mutabā'ida fī Lubnān* (The child has a special language [...] shared among many distant villages in Lebanon), Frayħa, 33; for the use of baby talk in political dialectal production in Lebanon, see Arkadiusz Płonka *L'idée de langue libanaise d'après Sa'id 'Aql* (Paris: LIbrairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 2004), 128.

[6] In more general context, Henri Fleisch, writing about the repetition of a bilateral element in Classical Arabic, stresses that: "Elle [this repetition - AP] donne du vocabulaire expressif, figurant ou évoquant des mouvements, des sons, des bruits particuliers ou caractéristiques, des phénomènes de lumière, des impressions particulières des sons et d'une manière générale toute action qui a retenu, nourri ou amusé l'attention", Henri Fleisch, L'arabe classique. Esquisse d'une structure linguistique (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1956), 102. We give here some verbs of the type $(ta\text{-})C_1aC_2C_1aC_2a$ with their chosen meanings: بربر *barbara* (to babble noisily, to jabber); بصبص *baṣbaṣa* (to wag بذنبه *bi-ḏanabihī* its tail); بطبط *baṭbaṭa* (to quack [duck]); هدهد *hadhada* [to rock, to dandle (a child)]; لألأ *la'la'a* and تلألأ *tala'la'a* (to shine, to sparkle); خلخل *ḫalḫala* (to shake, to convulse) and تخلخل *taḫalḫala* (to be shaken, to be rocked); خنخن *ḫanḫana* (to nasalize, to twang); خشخش *ḫašḫaša* (to clank, to clatter, to rettle); دلدل *daldala* (to dangle) and تدلدل *tadaldala* (to hang loosely, to dangle); ذبذب *ḏabḏaba* (to swing, to dangle); رحرح *raħraħa* (بالكلام *bi-l-kalām*) (to equivocate, to speak ambiguously); عطعط *'aṭ'aṭa* (to clamor, to yell); تمرمر *tamarmara* (to murmur, to grumble); مصمص *maṣmaṣa* (to suck, to sip and turn around in the mouth); نزنز *naznaza* [to rock, to dandle (a baby)]; نشنش *našnaša* (to bubble); غرغر *ġarġara* (to gargle); شعشع *ša'ša'a* (to shine); تكتك *taktaka* (to bubble); تعتع *ta'ta'a* (to stammer, to shake); طنطن *ṭanṭana* (to ring [bell], to hum [insect], to clang); ولول *walwala* (to cry "woe"); زلزل *zalzala* (to shake) and تزلزل *tazalzala* (to quake [earth]); all examples and their meanings from Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. J Milton Cowan (New York: Spoken Language Services, 1976).

[7] we note vowels as they are in their original texts.

1. *calls to animals: sa'sa' "arrêter un âne en criant sa' sa'" (to stop a donkey by shouting sa' sa')[8]; ğa'ğa'a "appeler (les chameaux) à l'eau en disant ği'ği'" [to call (camels) to the water by saying ği'ği'][9]; qasqasa and qaşqaşa (to call a dog)[10];*
2. *animal calls: ħafħafa (maşdar, the sound of hyena); also verbs like hawhaw (to bark, for example in Egypt) or nawnaw (to mew)[11];*
3. *baby talk: wawa (hurt)[12]; qūqū and kūkū (sleep)[13]; kūku (fowl, pigeon)[14]; nūnu (small)[15]; 'aw'aw and ba'ba' (to frighten)[16].*

In this context, we will now describe:

(a) the repeated monosyllabic interjection *hā* (here: call to an animal) used in Lebanese political folklore as a pejorative re-interpretation of part of an adversary's honorific nickname (Ar. *laqab*);

(b) the hipocoristic forename *Roro* used as a Christian identity tag.
It is worth noting here that native speakers of Arabic dialects outside Lebanon (and even some Lebanese people) often have no pragmatic competence in inferring the political connotations of the examples quoted below.

2.1. Repeated interjection *hā* and hypocoristic forename *Roro*: political aspect

2.1.1. *ħarf at-tanbīh*: *hā*

Figure 1. *Hā hā hā hā kīm*, Beit Meri, April 4, 2009

William Wright remarks that "The particle هَا [*hā* - A.P.] (which has the same demonstrative force as the Latin

[8] Fleisch, *L'arabe classique*,102.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] Albert Kazimirski de Biberstein, Dictionnaire arabe-français contenant toutes les racines de l[illegible]aire que dans l'idiome littéral, ainsi que les dialectes d'Alger et de Maroc, vol. 2 (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1860), 737 and 755.
[11] Animal calls quoted from *EALL*, s.v. "Sound Symbolism"; see also *nawnaw* (cat), Ferguson, "Baby Talk in Six Languages", 108. Versteegh also gives onomatopoeic names of animals like *laqlaq* (stork) or *žudžud* (cricket), *EALL*, s.v. "Sound Symbolism"; see other onomatopoeias in Arabic, for example: *'u' 'u'* or *hu' hu'* (to vomit), William Wright, A Grammar of the Arabic Language translated from the German of Caspari, and edited with numerous additions and corrections by William Wright (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1981), 295.
[12] *EALL*, s.v. "Reduplication" and Frayħa, *The Village*, 33.
[13] Frayħa, 33.
[14] Adrian Barthélemy, Dictionnaire arabe-français (Dialectes de Syrie, Alep, Damas, Liban, Jérusalem) (Paris: Geuthner, 1935-1969), 732.
[15] *Nūnu* ""petit", dans le langage des mères et des nourrices. *bebbo nūnu* "petit bébé"", Barthélemy, 857; see for cats *sūsu* and *lūlu*; Jean Lecerf, "Littérature dialectale et renaissance arabe moderne," Bulletin d'études orientales, no. 3 (1933): 84, note 5.
[16] Frayħa, 33.

ce in *hicce*) is called by the Arabs حَرْفُ ٱلتَّنْبِيهِ [*ħarfu t-tanbīhi* - A.P.], *the particle that excites attention."*

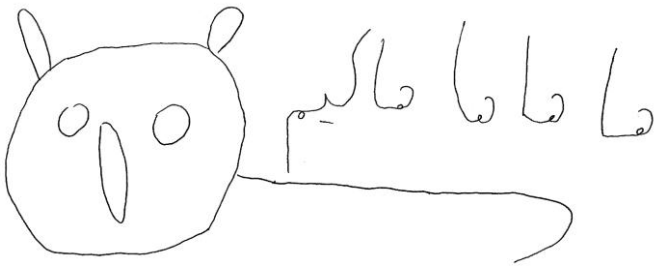

Figure 2. *Hā hā hā hā kīm*

Figure 3. Bsharri, March 6, 2009

Figure 1 above, and its Figure 2 sketch, represent the repeated warning interjection *hā* ending with the syllable *kīm* (here: donkey), written above an animal drawing[17]. This expression in Lebanese political folklore has a direct link to Samir Geagea, leader of *al-Quwwāt al-lubnāniyya* (the Lebanese Forces, LF) Christian militias, now a political party. The intention of the quoted slogan appears to have been a reinterpretation of Geagea's *laqab* (sobriquet): *(a)l-ħakīm* (the Doctor/the Wise Man as in Figure 3: الحكيم).[18] This derogatory expression is used, in both oral and written forms, by the adversaries of the LF. I noticed this, for instance, among followers of *at-Tayyār al- waṭanī l-ħurr* (the Free Patriotic Movement), Michel 'Awn's partisans in Beit Meri. This reinterpretation of the *laqab* enters into a wider group of anti-Geagea political slogans, such as:

> *Ya ħmār! Ya bhīm! nšalla m'abbad ya ħakīm!*[19]
> [You jackass! You idiot! Let's hope you're in for life, Doctor!][20]

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[17] Wright, 268; for Arabic dialects of *Bilād aš-Šām*, see for example: *hā* "attention, prenez garde à ce que vous dites!", *Lā tansa kalāmi, hā* "N'oublie pas mes recommandations surtout", Barthélemy, 861; see also, dialectal text from Qnat (Lebanon), Fleisch, *Études d'arabe dialectal*, 362; *hā* as a call for camels, see Kazimirski de Biberstein, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, s.v. *hā*.

[18] On the Figure 3: *As-sūrī 'aduwwu-ka. Al-qā'id. Al-ħakīm. 'Imbaraṭūr aš-Šarqiyya* (The Syrian is your enemy. The Chief. The Doctor [Samir Geagea] is an emperor of East [that is to say Christian] Beirut,) initials LF, three signs of delta in the circle [here: symbol of the LF], forename *Roy* and the swastika.

[19] Samir Geagea stayed at prison from 1994 to 2005, condemned for his activity as LF leader.

[20] See other Samir Geagea's pejorative nickname *Ṣāħib al-'aqdām at-tahğīriyya* (the one who provoked the expulsions) in his false obituary, analyzed in Płonka: "Fonction idéologique du vocabulaire de parenté dans la fausse nécrologie de Samīr Ğa'ğa'" in Leaders et partisans au Liban, edited by Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin, (Paris: Karthala, 2012), 314.

2.1.2. Hypocoristic forename *Roro*

Figure 4. *Sako, Pipo, Karen, Roro*. ʿAyn ar-Rimmané, January 6, 2009

Roro is an abbreviation of the forename *Robert*, used in Lebanon as a diminutive equivalent to France's *Bébert*. In Lebanon *Roro* is also a hypocoristic form of *Roger* and other common first-names. This form is marked emotionally. It has a hypocoristic tender function, but can also have a pejorative *fils à papa* (daddy's boy) connotation. Thanks to the reduplication of the syllable, it also has a mnemonic function: it is easy to remember. In Lebanese, *Roro* does not exist in the plural form.[21]

Similar hypocoristic forms are numerous in the case of Arabic and foreign forenames.[22] To wit, there is *Koko* for *Carlos*, *Christian*, *Claude*, *Claudia* or *Colette*, but also for Armenian first-names such as *Kevork* or *Krekor*. *Riri* is also used for *Rīma*, *Zuzu* for *Joseph*, and *Toto* for *Antoine*. More rare are *Jiji* for *Jihād*[23] and *Nunu* and *Tutu*—used ordinarily for cats and dogs—and *fufu* (pl. *fufuwēt*), used pejoratively in reference to homosexual or effeminate men.[24] We also find the repetition of the syllable in hypocoristic forenames in other Arabic dialects like, for example, *Fīfī* for *Faṭma* or *Zīzī* and *Zūzū* for *Zēnab* in Egypt.[25]

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[21] Ferguson remarks that "Of all the noun- or adjective-like words on the list [in Arabic baby talk - A.P.] only three have feminines: *bubbu*, *kuuku*; and *nuunu*; none has a plural", Charles A. Ferguson, "Arabic Baby Talk," in Structuralist Studies in Arabic Linguistics, Charles A. Ferguson's Papers, 1954-1994, ed. Niloofar Haeri, and R. Kirk Belnap (Leiden-New York-Köln: Brill, 1997), 185; but see in this section plural *fufuwēt* pejoratively about homosexual or effeminate men. Ferguson mentions also "two formations applied to words of normal Arabic which result in nicknames or pet names much used in baby talk. One is the hypocoristic *-o* of Syrian Arabic, the other the reduplicative patterns CuuCu, CiiCi applied to proper names.", Ferguson, *Ibidem*, 187.

[22] Outside of the Arab World, see for example in Turkish hypocoristic forms *Memo* and *Memi* from *Meḥmed*, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. CD-rom Edition, s.v. "Ism". These forms, written by Fleisch with long vowels /*ē*/ and /*ī*/, are also observed in Lebanon, see for Baʿabdat: *Mēmo*, *Memī* (little Mary), Henri Fleisch, Études d'arabe dialectal (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1986), 165; in more general context, see hypocoristic forenames with reduplication: *Lulu* from *Louise* or *Žožo* from *Joseph* and *Josephine*, *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, s.v. "Nicknames".

[23] See other hypocoristic forms as *Lello* and *Lilo* from *'Ilyās*; *Ṭanṭun* and *Ṭansa* from *Ṭanyūs*; *Žado* and *Žad* from *Žihād*; *Nažnaž*, *Nažo* and *Naždžūta* from *Nažāh*; *Sako* from *Sarkīs*; *Pipo* from *Pierre*, and also from relatively rare use in Lebanese first names (forms unused by broader group of native speakers): *Dandan* and *Dano* from *Adon*, and *Karo* or *Melk* from *Melkar*.

[24] *Cf*. also a hypocoristic form *fūfu* from *Fu'ād*, Ferguson, *Arabic Baby Talk*, 187.

[25] *EALL*, s.v. "Reduplication".

As Figure 4 shows, *Roro, Sako* or *Pipo* carry meanings of the hypocoristic first name of a young boy. In other words, it is not unusual for someone named *Robert*, *Roger* or *Roy* to write graffiti with his hypocoristic forename. However, my interlocutors, former Christian LF militiamen confirm that in the case of *Roro* there can also be reference to the common Lebanese nickname *roro*.[26]

Figure 5. Furn ash-Shubbak, October 10, 2008

Figure 6. *Roro* in an abandoned monastery. Mar Shaʿya, November 16, 2008

I also noticed *Roro* written on the walls in the East Beirut district Furn ash-Shubbak and in an abandoned monastery in Mar Shaʿya above the monastery of the Antonine Maronite Order of Saint Isaiah. This desolate place was turned into an unofficial prison in the 1990s.

In order to correctly decode all the meanings of hypocoristic forms in the Lebanese political praxis, one must keep in mind their historical context and remember, for example, that, in 1975, Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt was accused by Lebanese Christians to have spoken with contempt about *toto* (< Antoine) and *zuzu* (< Joseph); that is to say, effeminate Christians pervaded with Western culture, who wouldn't have a fighting chance in a showdown with Lebanese Muslims and Palestinian adversaries (presumed more Arabized, and therefore more virile.)[27]

[26] In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace & Conflict* [further: *EVPC*] Sanja Magdalenić, writing about the relationship between folklore and war, remarks: "The existence of particular projective folk characters was indicated in the lyrics of marching chants during the Vietnam War: "Jody," a reference to a trainee's nonprofessional life, the trainee's car, his girl, or his sister; "Charlie," a personification of the military/civilian enemy, "Slippery Sam," a marine soldier who fights against "Charlie," and "Mama," a character who is addressed to approve the use of violence", [*EVPC*], ed. Lester R. Kurtz and Jennifer E. Turpin (San Diego: Elsevier. Academic Press, 1999), s.v. "Folklore".

[27] Fadia Nassif Tar-Kovacs, Les rumeurs dans la guerre du Liban: les mots de la violence (Paris: CNRS, 1998), 207, see also Płonka: 2004, 128.

With the passing of time also *Roro* gained a new connotation, mostly as a graphical representation of an identity tag used by Christian militias.[28] *Roro* became their *ħarake* (sobriquet). It is synonymous with a Christian defender of Lebanon. *Roro* is supposed to instill fear,[29] in the manner of other terms such as *as-Ṣalībiyyūn* (The Crusaders,) which acquired related quotations and cultural meanings.[30] In post-war Lebanon these graffiti would often disappear, presumably erased by law enforcement agents, only to reappear overnight.

Figure 7. Furn ash-Shubbak, October 7, 2008 *as-Ṣalībiyyūn* (The Crusaders)

Figure 8. The same place, October 10, 2008

[28] *Roro* and also *Roy* (see Figure 3) are written as graffiti in the Latin alphabet, even if they are accompanied by slogans in Arabic script; see also the slogans like "Arab=Animal" written in Latin alphabet, collected in Eastern "Christian" district in Lebanon by Maria Chakhtoura between 1975 and 1977. Chaktoura emphasizes that using of the Latin alphabet by Christians, in this case, was a refusal of Arabic script (more generally Arab culture), Maria Chakhtoura, ħarb aš-ši'ārāt. Lubnān 1975-1977. La guerre des graffiti. Liban 1975-1977 (Beirut: Dār an-nahār li-n-Našr, 2005), 76-77. Non-linguistic elements such as swastika, *as-Ṣalīb al-mašṭūb*, this is LF cut cross, associated with *Roro* and *Roy*, are decisive factors in interpretation of these forenames. Swastika seems to be used as an identity tag referring, inter alia, to the pejorative slogan *Falanžiyye-fāšiyye* (Phalangists-Fascists), in Lebanon a dysphemism for members and partisans of *al-Katā'ib al-lubnāniyya* (The Lebanese Phalanges). As Nassif Tar-Kovacs remarks "il y a eu effectivement une période, courte il est vrai, vers la fin de 1975, où la croix gammée était badigeonnée partout sur les murs des régions chrétiennes et où, tout d'un coup, Hitler et Mussolini faisaient figure de héros, de modèles à suivre", Nassif Tar-Kovacs, 76-77.

[29] Gilsenan, analyzing the meaning of masculinity in Lebanon and the term "young men" (lib. *š-šebēb*), in the chapter *Joking, Play and Pressure*, describes the young men's attitude: "'We know how to be shebab, how to abuse and fight (*sabb wa qatl*)' was the often-used formula which expresses the cultural archetype of how to exert pressure on others.", Michael Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches. Violence & Narrative in an Arab Society* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996), 207.

[30] For the use of this term during the two years' war in Lebanon (1975-77) see Nassif Tar-Kovacs, 62-63.

The decoding of the meanings of these political graffiti requires context into which their specific connotations must be placed. In that sense, this sort of political language remains fluid and divergent in modern-day Lebanon. This instability brings new qualities to Lebanon's spoken political jargon, as this study has shown, frequently leaves some perishable traces in the language[31].

[31] I thank Ken Lovatt for very useful remarks concerning the English version and Hanna Siemaszko for translating fragments of the text.

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