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Variation as Christian identity marker in Egypt: A sociolinguistic study

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Abstract
This study explores how variation marks the religious identity of the Egyptian Christians and helps in describing the present sociolinguistic landscape in Egypt. Data for this study has been collected from Christian friends, students, and neighbors as well as Christian T.V. programs and videos. Data has shown significant lexical and phonological differences in expressing common religious concepts, ritual expressions, and names. These differences, which depend mainly on synonyms, paraphrasing, loanwords, and pronunciation, constitute a shibboleth in Egypt. The study has revealed that not only is variation regional or social, but religious as well. Moreover, the colloquial lexis and non-standard speech forms that Christians use contradict Ferguson's claim that the highly codified variety of diglossic languages is always used in giving sermons. Although the variation is not that substantiative and does not impede understanding, the study has pointed out that there is a religious-based dialect differentiation in Egypt and the Egyptian Christians could be classified as bidialectal to some extent. The ultimate goal of this variation is to mark themselves as a different religious group in an Islamic society. The plethora of the Arabic lexis and expressions and the diglossic nature of Arabic enabled the Egyptian Christians to easily communicate with Muslims and simultaneously preserve their socio-religious identity.

Keywords: Egyptian Christians, religious identity, variation

Public Interest Statement

This study attempts to foreground the role of lexical variation in marking the socioreligious identity of a given speech community and prove that the low variety of a diglossic language can be used in giving homilies. The study has shown that although lexis of both Classical and Egyptian Arabic are rich enough to mark the socioreligious identity of the Egyptian Christian, they used to borrow from other languages.

1. Introduction

Language is an integral part of the identity of its speakers; it preserves and mirrors their national, cultural, and religious heritage. Linguistic variation highlights social variables such as gender, occupation, religious affiliation, and place of residence simply because speakers use that variation to express their belonging to or exclusion from various social groups. This study focuses on language as a socioreligious marker of a certain religious community, *viz*, the Egyptian Christians. It would be perplexing that although Arabic is strongly related to Islam and although the Egyptian Christians speak the same language, Egyptian Christians managed to partially maintain their socioreligious identity via language. This paradoxical situation is subtly resolved by manipulating variation, which creates and maintains a slight socioreligious boundary between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. In this respect, variation is used by the Egyptian Christians to disentangle their code from the dominant Islamic hue. In a similar linguistic situation, García-Arenal (2009) claims that "many new Christians of Muslim origin (Moriscos) tried to break the religious identity of the Arabic language in an effort to salvage part of their culture, and specially the language, by separating it from Islam" (p.40).

Detaching the Islamic identity of Arabic to accommodate a different religion and assist its followers in not fully assimilating into the Muslim majority has been accomplished via using less frequent synonyms of some Islamic words, paraphrasing, the low variety of Arabic, calque, transliteration, and borrowing from Hebrew and Coptic languages. The outcome of this process is what may be called religion-based variation.

Religion-based variation means that the expression contains a religious subject matter which, according to Scott (2017) "could encompass a variety of agents, states of affairs or properties—such as God, deities, angels, miracles, redemption, grace, holiness, sinfulness." However, most of the religious expressions in daily use act as interjections and/or routine replies, whether the speakers mean their religious content or not. In other words, religious expressions have acquired new social functions. Scott (2017) claims that "religious language may be meaningful even if it does not express religious propositions. Various options have been proposed: it may express non-cognitive states, have a practical value in modifying the thought and action of speakers, or represent non-religious facts."

Since the Islamic conquest of Egypt circa 641AD, Egyptian Muslims and Christians, sometimes called Copts, have communally intermixed and constituted a one-fabric society. Socio-politically speaking, they are not deemed an ethnic group. Rather, they are a minor religious group that forms an integral part of the Egyptian community. They share the same customs and traditions, wear the same dress, and speak the same regional and/or social dialects according to the various social factors that govern the use of language in a specific speech community. Moreover, the anthropometric measurements show no significant differences; Keita & Boyce (2005) and Brace, L., Tracer, D., Yaroch L., et al. (1993) claim that eighty percent of today's Egyptians, regardless of their religion, share the genetic properties of the ancient Egyptians. In other words, the physical traits of eighty percent of the Egyptian population have a similar body size, height, shape, and color complexion.

However, the Christian discourse, both religiously and socially, seems to be different from the Muslims'; there are some lexical features that mark the Christian discourse in Egypt. These features are variants of what the majority use.

As for the number of Christians in Egypt, it is controversial. McCallum (2008) claims that "according to government census figures, there are five to six million Copts, around 8% of the population. However, church sources tend to cite 10%, expatriates 15-20% and academic research suggests 5-6%" (p.1).

1.1 Scope of the study

This study is sociolinguistic in the first place. It tackles the function of the words and expressions that have the same sense in the two religions from a sociolinguistic perspective. These words are either liturgically used inside the church to highlight the Islam-Christianity distinction or socially utilized outside the church to mark Muslims-Christians' identities. However, the lexical items that refer to the peculiarities of each religion such as the creed words and oath words fall outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, discussing the etymology of the religious expressions is not intended in this study. This study is not intended to be lexicostatistical, but the words and expressions introduced in it are just examples used to support its hypothesis.

Although many studies have been carried out on lexical variation, the current study, one claims, explores new horizons of the social functions of lexical variation, viz., the preservation of the religious identity of speakers in a given speech community.

1.2 Research questions

This study addresses the following questions.

1. Is there religion-based variation in Egypt? If there is any,
2. What is the function beyond it?
3. Is it used by the clerics for liturgical purposes only, or by the laics in their daily communication as well?
4. Does it form a religiolect?
5. Is it used in Christian-Christian communications only or in Christian-Muslim communications as well?

1.3 Literature Review

It seems that the relationship between religions and Arabic, particularly Baghdadi Arabic, has inspired several sociolinguists. In 2020, Baarda narrowed the spectrum and focused on the Christian Arabic of one sect in Iraq, i.e., the Assyrians. Baarda investigated when and why Arabic was used by the Assyrians. Baarda claims that "if they employed Arabic at all it was because of the dominance of this language in the new state of Iraq, not because they were so keen on using it" (p.143).

In 2017, Bassiouney carried out a study, via discourse analysis, on religion and identity in modern Egyptian public discourse. She collected the data for the study from online articles, patriotic songs, and films. According to Bassiouney, the language used in public discourse unified the Egyptian identity and tackled the religious differences by minimizing them and foregrounding the common religious values that united Egyptians. She claims that "religious differences between Christians and Muslims in Egypt are backgrounded as trivial and not determinant in identity formation" (p.3).

She argues that "both religious groups share the same linguistic practices. These practices are the product of location, class, education, and other social variables that do not include religion" (p.3). On the face of it, Bassiouney's (2017) findings contradict the hypothesis of this study. However, after a moment of thought, one finds out that the findings of each study have been reached according to the starting point and hypothesis of each study. Bassiouney's study tackles the public discourse of the Egyptian nation, and she concluded that there is no impact of any Christian or Muslim expressions on that discourse. One agrees

with Bassiouney that song lyrics writers and movie script writers don't often tackle the creeds or religious thorny issues. They usually use utterances with shared values. However, the wording of such utterances is obviously Islamic, whereas the proposition is common. It is a well-known fact that the public discourse of any nation is often given through the linguistic code of the majority. In other words, ethnicity, religious affiliation, languages of the minor groups, and color take a back seat. For instance, daily expressions such as *In the Name of God The All Merciful The Ever-Merciful*, *God is Greater*, *God willing*, *God forbid*, *Praise be to God*, *God bless you*...etc. as well as reciting some verses of the Glorious Qurʔân in the condolence shots are Islamic par excellence. Furthermore, the official speeches always start with *In the Name of God, The All Merciful The Ever-Merciful. Praise be to God. Peace and blessings of God be on the messenger of God, his close family, and his companions,* and end *with Peace be upon you.* Nevertheless, the present study is on the other side of the fence; it attempts to scrutinize the use of Christian wording that expresses those shared values to realize the social and religious privacy of that group. Whatever the case is, one may well ask: Does the national identity eliminate the religious identity? In fact, marking religious identity and endorsing nationalism are two different concepts that require different linguistic practices. Muslim minorities in Western countries, for instance, use Arabic calques and loan words for the same purpose, i.e., the preservation of their religious identity.

In 2014, Miller and Germanos conducted a study about the relationship between religious affiliation and variation in the Arab world. They presented a panoramic view of the religion-based variation in North Africa and the Middle East. They chiefly relied in their study on the data collected by other researchers. Not only did they tackle the dialectal differences of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim speakers but they also treated the different linguistic practices of the speakers of different sects of one religion; they analyzed the linguistic differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Bahrain.

In 1996, Abu Haider carried out a study on the linguistic differences between Sunnis and Shiites in Baghdad. In 1991, she did a study on the Christian Arabic of Baghdad. She collected the data for her study in 1987 via making recordings of eleven Christian Baghdadi Arabic speakers living in England and by requesting from her friends in Baghdad "to make recordings of the speech of fellow Christians" (p.5). Like Blanc, Abu Haider tackled the phonological, morphological, and syntactic features of the Christian Baghdadi Arabic. She concluded that "CB speakers are generally bidialectal, speaking CB with fellow Iraqi Christians only, and MB [Muslim Baghdadi] with those from other communities" (p.6).

In 1988, Abboud did a brief study on how to identify Egyptian Christians through verbal performance. He stated that the names of the members of each religious group as well as the titles of the clerics of each group adequately identify Christians in Egypt. In fact, names cannot always be a valid parameter by which one can identify the religious affiliation of people simply because some people of the two religious groups are named after the Arabic variants of some prophets' names such as Ibrahîm lit. *Abraham*, Yusuf lit. *Joseph*, Mûsa lit. *Moses*, Yaçcûb lit. *Jacob*, Ayyûb lit. *Job*, Isḥâq lit. *Isaac*, Harûn lit. *Aaron*, Dawûd lit. *David*, Eliâs lit. *Eliot*, and Zakariyya lit. *Zacharias*. Moreover, some non-religious names are used by the two groups such as Hânî, Riâḍ, Sâmî, Sâmeḥ…etc. As for the clerics of each group, they can be simply identified via the visual context, viz., by their special costumes.

In 1964, Blanc found a "sharply delineated dialectal cleavage that divides these populations into three non-regional dialect groups, corresponding to the three major religious communities, namely the Muslims, the Jews, and the Christians" (p.3). In his monograph, Blanc studied the phonological, morphological, and syntactic features of the dialect of each religious group. He gathered data from Baghdadi informants who belonged to the three religions. He concluded that "the Muslims, Jews, and Christians speak three different dialects, each fully correlated with community affiliation" (p.160).

All the reviewed studies, except Abboud's, focused on the description of the syntactic, morphological,

phonological, and grammatical features of the dialect of each religious group. However, none of them explained the motives beyond that difference. After reviewing these studies, one can conclude that the main difference between religion-based variation in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world is that variation in Egypt is mainly based on words, expressions, and slightly on phonology. i.e., no morphological, syntactic, grammatical, or semantic differences observed. Moreover, the religion-based variation in Egypt is regionally and socially specific. The Levantine Christians, for instance, use the diction and pronunciation of the Muslim majority in their daily communication. Theodosius Atallah Hanna (2016), the Archbishop of the Sebastia for the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, states "I am a Palestinian Christian. We also say: "Allahu Akabar" which normally hear from a Muslim, as well as: "Inshaa Allah", "Ma Shaa Allah", and "Alhamdulillah." This is simply because Arabic is our language, and Arabic for "God" is "Allah" whether you are a Christian or a Muslim." Egyptian Christians, one argues, got double benefit from variation; they could staunchly mark their religious identity in the Egyptian Muslim community and simultaneously mark their national identity in the Arab Christian community. In other words, they are Christian in the sight of the Egyptian Muslims and Egyptians in the sight of the Arab Christians.

1.4 Methods and data collection

The data for this study has been collected via close observations, Christian neighbors, Christian T.V. channels, Christian books, and direct contact with Christian students and friends. Although this study is not a comparative study between the Christian and Muslim codes in Egypt, the Muslim variants are used as a reference to demonstrate how the Christian code is different.

2. Data Analysis

In this section, the different parts of speech are analyzed and discussed to show that variation has led to conceptualizing the linguistic code adopted by the Egyptian Christians as an essential part of their religious heritage.

2.1 Ritual expressions

One may claim that religious affiliation in Egypt determines the phrasing of ritual expressions such as addressing clerics, offering and accepting thanking, apologizing, and requesting. Historically speaking, many titles of respect that precede the names of the top officials and people who occupy religious positions are borrowed from Turkish despite their Arab origin. Words such as *ṣâḥib assaçâdah*, lit. the owner of happiness, *ṣâḥib Ad-Dawlah*, lit. the owner of the state, and *ṣâḥib Al-çizzah*, lit. the owner of dignity are Arabic words that have been reutilized in Turkish in new contexts. Following the Turkish style of addressing, the names of the Christian clerics are usually preceded by *qadâsat*, lit. holiness, *ghibṯat*, lit. blessedness, *niyâfat*, lit. his eminence to show reverence, whereas Muslim clerics' names are preceded by *ṣâḥib al-faḍîlah,* lit. the owner of virtue. However, the word *sayyidna*, lit. our lord is used before the names of the clerics of the two religions.

In condolence, Muslims and Christians use different wording to express the same semantic content; in Muslim-Muslim situations, they use *ra*bbinah yir*ḥamu,* whereas Egyptian Christians use *rabinah yinaiyḥ rûḥuh*, both mean "may God have mercy on his soul". Moreover, *Irrabb yiçazzîkum,* lit. May The Lord condole you is a Christian variant of the Muslims' *ra*bbina yiṣubbarkum*, lit. May our Lord grant you patience.

Egyptian Muslims and Christians used to show sympathy by praying for those who experienced hard times. The semantic content of the prayers is almost the same. For instance, *May the Lord assist you* is expressed by Muslims as *ra*bbinah yiçînak* and expressed by Christians as *rabinah yisnidak*.

When visiting sick people, both Muslims and Christians pray for them saying, "May The Lord cure you!". However, each religious group uses a different expression; the former usually say *shafâka Allahu wa çâfâk* and the latter often say **rabinah yimmid îduh*. However, in Christian-Muslim situations, Egyptian Christians usually adopt the variant used by Muslims. When Egyptians see or hear about someone who suffers from an incurable disease, the members of each religious group supplicate to Allah not to test them using their code; Muslims often say *ra*bbinah ma yibtalînâsh,* whereas Christians usually say **rabinah ma yidkhilnâsh fî tagrubah*. Although the two expressions have the same semantic meaning, i.e., *O' God! Do not try us,* they have two different socioreligious meanings.

Alḥamdu lillâh lit. Praise be to Allah and *nushkur *rabina* lit. We thank our Lord are a routine reply for *how-are-you question* that have the same proposition. However, the first is used by Muslims and the latter is used by Christians. Asking for a favor always takes two religion-based forms; Muslims usually say *maçalihsh hatçibak maçâya,* whereas Christians always say *mumkin taçab maḥabbah?* The thank-you word after the favor is different as well; Muslims usually say *ra*bbinah yigazîk khîr,* whereas Christians often express the same meaning as **rabinah yiçawwaḍ taçabak* to mean *May The Lord reward you the best. God bless you, as an expression of gratitude,* is said in two different variants; *bâraka Allâhu fîk* is used by Muslims, and *bârakaka arrabb* is used by Christians.

2.2 Nouns

In this section, one can evidently notice the variation in nouns; every noun used by Muslims is replaced by a synonym even if it is not Arabic because the main aim is markedness. Words such as *al-mutniyyiḥ,* lit. the deceased, *ûrshalîm*, lit. Jerusalem, *Tuqs,* lit. rite, and *kirâza,* lit. preaching the Christian teachings are not Arabic words. The table below shows how Christians managed to *Christianize* some nouns that mark their socioreligious identity.

Table 1. Nouns variation

Christian code	**Muslim code**	**Translation**
At-Talamîz	*Al-Ḥawâriyûn*	Disciples
Qallâyah	*Khalwah/ Khanqâh (old use)*	Cell/solitude
Yûm Ed-Daynûna	*Yâwmu Al-Ḥisâb*	The Day of Judgment
Khâṭî	*Âthem*	Sinner
çithah	*Khuṭbah/dars*	Sermon
Mubash-shir	*Dâçiyah*	Christian missionary, lit. carrier of glad tidings/ preacher
Al-Masîḥiyyah	*An-Naṣrâniyyah*	Christianity
Al-Maskûna	*Al-Maçmûra*	The inhabitant, a figurative variant of "Earth"
Al-mutniyyiḥ	*Al-Marḥûm*	The deceased
Ḥabr	*çâlim*	Scholar
Maḥfal	*Jamç/Ḥafl*	Assembly

ûrshalîm	*Al-quds*	Jerusalem
Mazâmîr	*Zabûr*	Psalms
Malakût/ Mamlakah	*Mulk*	Dominion /realm/ sovereignty
Al-Ḥayâh Al- ʔabadiyyah	*Al-Ḥayâtu Al- Âkhirah/ Al-Khuld*	Eternal life
Al-Firdwas	*Al-Jannah*	Paradise
Kirâza	*Dâçwah*	Preaching the Christian teachings
Burjj	*Miʔthanah/manârah*	Steeple/ Minaret
Khidmah	*çîbâdah*	Worship/ service
Tuqs	*Shaçîrah*	Rite

2.2.1 Proper nouns

Although Arabic provides variants for all the Aramaic and Syriac names of prophets, religious characters, and angels that were introduced in the Old and New Testaments, Egyptian Christians adopt arbitrary transliterations for these proper nouns. For instance, they transliterate the names of Enoch, John, Jonah, Ezekiel, Ezra, Elisha, and Michael, whereas they adopt the Arabic variants of Moses, Job, Aaron, Abraham, Adam, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Lot. Angel Gabriel has two variants in Arabic, i.e., *Jibrîl* and *Jubraʔîl* but Egyptian Christians use the latter and sometimes they pronounce it as *ghubriâl*. Angel Michael is pronounced in Arabic as *Mikâl* or *Mikaʔîl* and as *Mîkhaʔîl* in Hebrew. Egyptian Christians use the Hebrew variant for the same reason, i.e., to mark their religious identity. As for Jesus Christ, Muslims call him *çîssa* and *Al-Masîḥ* whereas the Egyptian Christians call him *Yasûç* or *Al-Masîḥ*.

2.3 Verbs

Many verbs that are used by Egyptian Christians are synonyms to the verbs used by Muslims. However, Egyptian Christians ignore the synonym used by Muslims and massively use the other variant even though the ignored one is the most accurate. For instance, *yurattil* and *yatlu* are synonyms that mean *to read* and after the emergence of Islam, the meaning was specialized to refer to '*reciting verses from the Glorious Qurʔân*'. Muslims use the two verbs interchangeably, whereas Christians specialize *yurattil* meaning *to read psalms, and verses or say prayers*. Although the two synonyms of the verb *to pray* are *yuṣallî* and *yadçu* lit. to supplicate to Allah and to say prayers, Egyptian Christians adopt *yuṣallî* for both meanings. In the table below, there are some verbs that Egyptian Christians use with some nouns to constitute what might be called *Christian* collocations.

Table 2. Verb variation

English	Muslims' use	Christians' use
commit a sin	*Yaqtarif/yartakib/ yafçal maçṣiya/thanmb/ʔithm/khaṭîʔah*	*Yaçmal /yafçal khaṭiyyah/ Ash-Shar*
Preach	*Yakhṭub/ yadçu*	*Yubash-shir/yaçith*
Perform /establish (prayers)	*Yuqîm/yuʔaddî (Aṣ-Ṣalâh)*	*Yurattil (Aṣ-Ṣalwât)*

Test\try	*Yabtalî*	*Yakhtabir/yudkhil fî tajribah*
Lead (the prayer) Lead (the mass)	*Yaʔum (Al-Muṣallîn)*	*Yarʔas (Al-Quddâs)*
Die	*Yutawaffâ ʔlâ raḥmat Illâh*	*Yarqud çalâ rajâʔ Al-Qiyâmah*

2.4 Common words

Although this variation is based on religion, no significant variation is observed in some religious nouns and proper nouns. This supports the claim that Egyptian Christians often use variation abruptly. Below are some examples.

Table 3. common words used by the followers of the two religions.

Job	Ayyûb
David	Dawûd
Isaac	Isḥâq
Joseph	Yûsuf
Jacob	Yaçcûb
Moses	Mûsa
Abraham	Ibrahîm
Holy	Muqaddas
The Book	Al-Kitâb
Eden	çadan
Fasting	Aṣ-Ṣiyâm
Blessedness	ṭûbâ
Devil	Ash-Shayṭân
Paradise	Firdaws

2.5 Phonological differences

Although the phonological differences are the least in number, they are the most remarkable in the Christian discourse. In Arabic, the pronunciation of the first sound in "Allâh" is determined by the last sound of the word that precedes it. Simply, if the last sound of the word that precedes "Allâh" is /ɪ/, it is pronounced as "ʔɪllâh." with clear /l/. However, Egyptian Christians, particularly the clerics, pronounce /Aɬlâh/ in all cases, regardless of the sound that precedes it. Moreover, Egyptian Christians used to replace the glottal stop /ʔ/*hamzat qatç* with /j/ or /ɪ/ as in *khaṯiyyah*, lit. sin, *khâṯî*, lit. he is a sinner, *khâṯyah*, lit. she is a sinner. Moreover, they always replace /d/ sound with its emphatic /ḍ/ *in al çaḍrah* lit. The Virgin Mary instead of the popular pronunciation *al çadrah*.

2.5.1 Stress

Stress in /ˈrabɪna/ lit. our Lord is usually placed on the first syllable, irrespective of the regional or social dialect of the speakers.

2.5.2 Nasalization

During leading masses and singing a cappella, the vicars of the Egyptian Church often nasalize sounds that are not originally nasals.

2.5.3 Lengthening

***Âb*, lit. father:** Although the pronunciation of this word is incorrect according to the pronunciation rules of classical Arabic, Egyptian Christians adopt it and restrict it to refer to one of the three hypostases that constitute the Christian dogma, i.e., Father.

2.5.4 Two-pronunciation nouns

The word angel in classical Arabic has two different pronunciations: *malak* and *malâk*. Muslims adopt the former, whereas Egyptian Christians prefer the latter. Similarly, *mawlid* and *milâd,* both meaning birth, are used by Egyptian Muslims and Christians differently; Muslims narrowed the former to refer to the birth of Prophet Mohammad, whereas Christians restricted the latter to refer to the birth of Christ. In the same vein, *glad tidings* can be expressed in two classical Arabic forms, namely, *bushra* and *bishâra*; Muslims always use the former, but Christians frequently use the latter.

2.6 Colloquial versus Classical

The only motive, one claims, beyond resorting to colloquial Arabic when classical Arabic synonyms cannot mark their identities or vice versa is marking the religious identity. A word like *Al-çaḍrah,* lit., the Virgin, which is the colloquial variant of the classical *Al-çathrâʔ*, is used by Egyptian Christians because Muslims usually use the classical pronunciation. Moreover, Christians use the classical word *tabût,* because the colloquial word *Al-khashabah* lit. piece of wood is used by Muslims when they refer to coffins. One might argue that the diglossic nature of Arabic helped the Egyptian Christians to detach their religious code from the Islamic one; the heavy use of the low variety of Arabic in preaching and giving sermons constituted a different religious code. According to Ferguson's (1959) classification, this use contradicts the classical function of the high variety of the diglossic languages, i.e., delivering sermons. Although using the wrong variety in the wrong situation is considered unacceptable, the frequent use mitigated the inappropriateness of the wrong use of the low variety. One might claim that Egyptian Christians partially invalidated the functions of the high variety of the diglossic languages.

2.7 Paraphrase

According to Hurford, Heasley and Smith (2007), "a sentence which expresses the same proposition as another sentence is a paraphrase of that sentence" (p.108). One might claim that paraphrasing is *the photo collage* in which the other variation tools function as *ingredients*. The outcome of such a paraphrase is a Christian religious text par excellence because the religious identity has been fully represented. Below are some examples of each variant being transliterated and followed by a translation and the main differences are written in bold.

Christian: Fî **çi<u>th</u>at** il ʔaḥad illi **fât** il **kâhin âl irrabb** biyaʔmurna ʔann nakûn ṣâdiqîn wa muḥbîn **lilkhîr** wa **multazimîn bitaçâlîmuh** çalashân **naḥṣul** çala il-ḥayâh il-ʔabadiyyah. Widah bikûn **bitartîl iṣ-ṣalawât** wa **shukr irrabb** wa **ḥuḍûr il çi<u>th</u>ât**. Bârakakum irrabb.

Trans: In last Sunday's **sermon,** the **vicar** said, "**The Lord** commands us to be honest and philanthropists and **stick to His teachings** to **gain eternal life.** This can only be attained by **saying prayers, thanking the Lord,** and **attending the sermons**. May The Lord bless you!"

Islamic: Fî **khuṭbat** al gumçah **al mâḍiyah qâl al-Imâm ʔinna Allah** yaʔmuruna bi aṣ-ṣidqi wa **al-**

ʔiḥsâni wa ʔann **naʔtamira biʔawâmirihi** ḥatta **nadkhula al Jannah wa thâlika lâ yak**ûnu illâ bil **muḥâfatha** çala aṣ-Ṣalâh wa al **ʔiltizâm bi sharçih** Baârâka **Allâhu** fîkum.

Trans: In last Friday's **khutbah, the Imam said, "Allah commands us to be honest and benevolent and abide by His commands to bring us into paradise.** May Allah bless you."

Christian: Il kâhin âl ʔn lamma il ḥût balaç innabî Yûnân ibn Amittai ṣallâ lirrab wa istagâb irrab li ṣalâtu.

Trans: The vicar said, "When the whale swallowed Prophet Jonah, Son of Amittai**, he prayed to The Lord** in the belly of the whale **and The Lord** responded to **his prayers."**

Islamic: Ish-Shîkh qâla ʔnnahu çindama ibtalaça al ḥûtu Yûnusa ibn Matta daça Allah fa istajâba Allâhu li duçâʔih."

Trans: The Sheikh said, "When the whale swallowed Prophet of Allah, Jonah, Son of Amittai**, he prayed to Allah** in the belly of the whale **and Allah** responded to **his prayers."**

Christian: Tursil al-kanîsa **al mubash-shrîn** wa **rijâl iddîn** likul ʔrjâʔ **al masqûna littabshîr** bilmasîḥiyya.

Trans: The Church sends off **missionaries** and **clergymen** around all the inhabited parts of the globe to **evangelize**.

Islamic: Yursilu Al-Azharu **adduçâta** wa **çulamâʔa iddîni** likuli ʔrjâʔ **al maçmûrati linashri risâlata** al Islam.

Trans: Al-Azhar sends off **preachers** and **scholars** around all the inhabited parts of the globe to **convey the message** of Islam.

Christian: Fî âkhir il **çithah il kâhin ṣallâ lirrab liyubârikna** wa **ma yidkhilnâsh fî tajribah wa yidkhilna Il-Malakût.**

Trans: At the end of the **sermon, the vicar prayed to The Lord** to bless us and to not try us, and to bring us into **the Kingdom of Heaven.**

Islamic: Fî **nihâyat al-khuṭbbah, daçâ al-imâm Allaha** ʔann **yubârika fîna** wa ʔallâ **yabtaliyanâ** wa ʔann **yukhilana al Jannah.**

Trans: At the end of the **khutbah, the Imam supplicated to Allah** to bless us and not test us and bring us into **Paradise.**

3. Conclusion

Egyptian Christians leveraged the richness of Arabic lexis and could detach themselves from the code of the majority by creating a slightly different linguistic code that evidently marked their religious identity. The study has shown significant differences in their approach to Arabic to represent their religious identity. One claims that this code is justified and natural; Egyptian Christians, as a different religious group, may not desire to wholly assimilate themselves into the Islamic heritage and culture of the Muslim majority.

Although the lexical variation is evident in the Christian discourse and marks their religious identity, Muslims and Christians speak one general code. That is, neither does the religious-based variation inhibit intergroup communication nor fuel sectarian strife. Moreover, it does not stir up religious hatred because Christians, in the Christian-Muslim discourse, usually avert using words that refer to thorny issues that contradict the Muslim creed such as the trinity and crucifixion.

The gap between the Christian code and written-and-spoken classical Arabic is relatively wide. The deliberate avoidance of Classical or/and Modern Arabic in sermon giving, Christian T.V. shows, and daily communication of the educated people, one might claim, is due to the strong bond between Classical Arabic and Islam. Thus, the strategy of not adopting classical Arabic is symbolic and works as a touchstone for exclusion. Furthermore, this variation is arbitrary and marks a positive religious identity, namely, it is done with free will. That is to say, the Muslim majority does not impose this variation on Egyptian Christians for religious discrimination purposes.

The Christian code is often a paraphrase of the Muslim one, whether the expressions are religious or

non-religious. This supports the hypothesis that there is a difference between the Christian diction and the Muslim one in Egypt. In other words, this variation can never be attributed to any social factor save religion. Such expressions are used by Christians everywhere nationwide regardless of the socioeconomic status of the speakers to mark their religious identity. Liturgically speaking, one might claim that there are "Muslim Arabic" and "Christian Arabic" in Egypt.

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