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"The dialect is provocative, how can they not put it in Egyptian?": Metalinguistic comments about the voice assistant Alexa on YouTube

Commercial voice assistants are programmed using standardized, normed, and mostly European languages, reflecting a monolingual bias. The heterogeneity of communicative Arabic practices is viewed as an "issue" for computational processing (Fuad and Al-Yahya 2022:23855). Therefore, major commercial companies opt for the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a predominantly written language, resulting in less natural/human-like interactions, as Arabic speakers use non-standardized vernaculars in daily communication.

In early 2022, Amazon launched Alexa with the "Khaleeji (Gulf) dialect" in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, leading numerous Arabic-speaking YouTubers to produce videos testing and engaging with the device. Our project analyzes one of these videos, created by an Egyptian YouTuber, and focuses on the comment section to investigate contested language ideologies related to Arabic in the context of voice assistant technologies.

Using the analytical lens of stance (Du Bois 2007) and drawing on computer-mediated discourse analysis literature (e.g., Hachimi 2013; Herring 2004), we will examine how Arabic speakers from different Asian and African countries position themselves regarding companies' strategies concerning Arabic and engage in metalinguistic discussions on the hierarchies of language varieties related to national, regional, pan-Arabic, or religious beliefs in a process of "context collapse" comprising people from different regions and linguistic repertoires (Androutsopoulos 2014). Our aim is to provide insights into user perspectives and develop a critical perspective on simplistic and typically Western monolingual language ideologies that permeate technology design.

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