

The Socio-cultural Factors Involved in Sounds Shifting in Local Jordanian Dialects

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Abstract

Change in all aspects is evitable in any society as a result of many factors mainly the social and cultural factors. This research looks at Jordan which is experiencing an ongoing dialect change specifically sounds shifting. Undoubtly, there are many factors that accelerate this change. Studying this ongoing phenomenon as well as the factors that could play a great role on it is essential. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, 100 participants were interviewed and asked to respond to a questionnaire. The collected data were statistically analyzed. Data analysis highlights the effective role of socio-cultural factors (Urbanization, social media, immigration, social class, ethnic background,..etc) on replacing (shifting) original Jordanian variants with other variants. Although this process (sounds shifting) is partially intentional nowadays, overtime it could be unconsciously adapted. This could lead to the disappearance of many prominent sounds of Local Jordanian dialect in favor of other dialects. Consequently, it is a loss of an essential part of our cultural heritage.

Key words: dialect change, sounds shifting, urbanization.

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics is a science which studies the relationship between language and society. It examines the impact of language in society and society on language. Therefore, language and socio-cultural factors are interrelated and effect each other tremendously. Consequently, they cannot operate independently. As Christopher Spackman stated “Culture is to humans what water is to fish – that which surrounds us and that we are only aware of when it is gone. Culture as a process undermines the idea that culture can be learned through superficial aspects like food, custom holidays. It is experienced through language because language is inseparable from culture.” (2008, p.3-4)

It is already known that to get effective communication, the cultural context must be taken into consideration because it gives the words broader meanings. Moreover, cultural competency (a kind of knowledge of all systems of ideas and beliefs that shared by members of a community) is transmitted through language. Each culture has its unique rules about how language must be used. Consequently, how individuals use their language is a reflection of their socio-cultural knowledge(which is transferred by our usage style of language).

Linguists such as William Labov are interested in examining how certain socio-cultural factors may affect language, and how speakers of languages impose those factors in society. This mutual effect creates variation in language (how languages vary between ethnic groups, social institutions, specific locations, gender ,class ..etc). Part of the language variation is to speak differently since there are many ways of speaking, and each way of speaking is generally influenced by certain socio-cultural factors. There are many theories that are interested in describing how individuals’ behaviors are largely affected by their social and cultural factors. One of these theories is the socio-cultural perspective which is used in the field of psychology.

Most societies are changing gradually in their languages, dialects and even cultures. Studying the effect of socio-cultural factors upon language shift and maintenance is one of the core interests of many sociolinguists such as Clyne (1982), Ferguson et al (1981), and Fishman(1989). They reveal that both language and culture are experiencing a kind of shift and continuous changes as a result of many factors. Fishman (1966) points out that language shift is an important issue in analyzing the change and stability in habitual language use or cultural processes.

Since language is an entirely natural process, language change is something automatic and therefore could not be observed or controlled by the speakers of the language. According to Labov’s theory of language change, humans are social creatures so they do things based on social reasons. This view supports that language production is culturally learned behaviors; our cultural norms, beliefs, and values affect one’s use of language.

No society can remain isolated from other societies so cultural contact between them is something enviable. One culture influences other which will create many linguistic changes and variation. Each culture is like a colorful umbrella which reflects certain ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize certain group of people in a specific period of time. Condon (1973, p.4) defined culture as “a system of integrated patterns, most of which remain below threshold of consciousness, yet all of which govern human behavior just as surely as the manipulated strings of a puppet controls its motion. “

In Jordan, there are three dialects (Urban, Rural & Bedouin). Each dialect has its own unique distinctive features. However, like other dialects around the world, they are experiencing ongoing change as a result of many factors. One of those changes has to do with shifting (replacing) certain sounds with another. This change is really visible since it takes place among a large group of young Jordanians. Accent change is part of dialectal change which is comparable to language change. Since it becomes visible, many researches shall be conducted in this regard to examine the factors that encourage such change. Those changes could be the birth of a new dialect! They could lead to the loss of certain prominent linguistic features of Local Jordanian Arabic. Therefore, in this paper I tried to highlight how many speakers replace certain sounds with another with taking into account the effect of certain socio-cultural factors.

2. Literature Review

Labov (1960) developed the theory of social bending which proved that the pronunciation of certain sounds reflect social class. He noticed that many people tried to imitate the British pronunciation of the sound /r/ to show that they come from high class unlike those who pronounced /r / as in the American pronunciation come from a different social class. Labov (1972) also noticed in his study “Martha’s Vineyard”, an island with primarily fishermen as inhabitants, that locals deviated certain diphthongs from their original American pronunciation. This deviation has to do with the attitudes of the speakers to distinguish themselves from others, mainly those visiting the island in the summer. Overtime, the fishermen’s pronunciation became the dialect of the island. This demonstrates that how dialects are largely associated with the speakers’ ethnic identity and a marker of specific cultural domains.

Kerswill (1996) & Britain (2010) focused on the influence of gender, age, and level of education on leveling mainly in communities that have witnessed significant Urbanization and modernization. They are predicted to boast the fluidity of dialect contact, migration and social mobility within a country. Sociolinguistic factors effectively create linguistic change and variation. Dialects keep changing over generations. The new generations create a linguistic change which could be different from the heritage language of their parents as a result of many factors. Parents transmit their native dialect to their children , but certain linguistic features are changed leading to the creation of new linguistic features. (Al-Wer, 2007)

Rau, D (2002) investigated how social factors are related to phonological variation and sound change in the Squid variety of Atayal spoken in the Mstbon community. He identified three phonological variables there [p], [m], and [l] after comparing phonological data from 14 Atayalic dialects. He explored how social factors (age, gender, social class and social network) are related to the use of these three variables in the Mstbon community. His study revealed that phonological variation in [m] and [l] is correlated with age whereas the word final [-p] has almost completed its change to [-k] . Also, a new variant [-t] is emerging by the highest social class.

Anderson (2002) conducted a study to present evidence that Detroit African American participating in sound change (/aɪ / monophthongization) which is typically associated with

some White, but not African American, varieties in south America. Both Southern White and African American speakers monophthongize / aɪ / in prevoiced phonetic contexts, but the spread of the monophthong variant to pre-voiceless environments is a salient characteristic of some subregions of the Southern US. Such leveling has been connected with a particular social configuration relevant to the inter-ethnic dialect contact both in the South and in Detroit.

In Jordan, male and female speakers mostly have different attitudes towards certain features in Jordanian dialects. Females tend to use the dialect which has a prestigious status. Habib (2005) states that females tend to use the glottal stop [ʔ] in their speech instead of the original variant [g] since [ʔ] has more social prestige and high status than the voiced velar stop sound [g]. Gal (1979) asserts that language shift is progressing faster among females as a result of social prestigious reasons.

According to Kerswill et al (2007) and Kerswill (2013), the Multicultural London English appeared in the late 20th century and it is the dialect spoken by the working class in London. Overtime, it has been imitated by a wide range of people and it had put other dialects. Ethnicity also plays a role in language change. According to Kerswill et al (2007), ethnic minority plays a role in driving linguistic innovation in London on the levels of phonetics, grammar and discourse features. Some young Londoners' speech contains the very heavy use of [f] for 'th' in words like 'thin' for example. They pronounce the vowels of words like 'face', 'goat' and 'mouth' like Northern English. This indicates that there is ongoing shift between Londoners and London periphery residents. This stresses the role of ethnic minorities in driving forward linguistic changes.

Choosing one dialect or accent over others could have to do with power and prestige. Igondin (2011) conducted a case study on three young Asian girls who merged African American English Vernacular (AAEV) within their daily speech. Her study revealed that these girls believed that AAEV had benefits related to popularity and cross-cultural socialization. In such cases, using certain code is associated with gaining the sub-cultural capital and access the desired personal and prestige among others.

Geenberg (2012) conducted a study to explore the modern day meanings of Cairene Arabic strong palatalization. Palatalization has two kinds; strong and weak. 'Strong' palatalization is the use of [tʃ] for /t, t^{s/} and [dʒ] for /d, d^{s/}. 'Weak' palatalization refers to the use of [tʲ] for /t, t^{s/} / and [dʲ] for /d, d^{s/}. The sample of the study included 8 speakers with different gender and age. Their speech has been recorded and analyzed. The result shows that the voiceless postalveolar [tʃ] variant of /k/ in Cairene Arabic is considered by both men and women as a highly stigmatized variant. It is associated with poorer and less educated speakers.

Kerswill (2014) highlighted the effect of the medialization on language variety. He focused on the role of media as a tool that has the capacity to shape language variation by presenting new concepts and sounds.

Yaseen (2015) examined the variety of Arabic spoken in Mosul, Iraq. He examined two variables: /q/ and /ɔ:/ . The study revealed that these two variables might be related to the non-linguistic parameters intended for the study; age, gender and social class which affect upon the phonological behavior of Maslawi accent. [g] occurred in Maslawi accent but most

of its speakers nowadays tend to modify it in a way to project a correct or prestigious image of it . Moreover, it was found that /ɔ:/ is an age-based pattern (generally used by old speakers) whereas young and middle age groups use a greater proportion of the standard [u:] variant.

Saidat (2018) studied language change and development in Jordan. He examined why many Jordanians start imitating other dialects such as Syrians and Lebanese. This change is so obvious among a large group of young people. He interviewed the participants of the study and asked them to respond to a questionnaire. The findings were that social bending, identity, self-image and network ties are the major reasons for imitating and adapting certain regional dialects ; Lebanese and Syrian. Moreover, the role of media appeared great.

D’Onofrio and Van Hofwegen (2019) investigated vowel shift in communities of a cross California’s Central Valley. They analyzed 72 Californians’ vowel spaces. The result of their study found that contemporaneous movements of vowels work against the phonological tendency of maximal dispersion typically involved in describing chain shift. This indicates that the shift was driven by articulatory and social factors rather than purely phonological factors.

3. Methodology of the Study

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, I developed an interview schedule which has been followed by a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants directly after the interviews were completed to ensure that all the questions were answered under the same conditions. The interviews stated with open-ended answer questions that require detailed answers from the participants. They were given the chance to speak freely. There were certain reasonably reliable data that of course I want to obtain from the participants. The questions of the interviews consist of different elements such as demographic data, socializing, lifestyle, educational backgrounds, occupation and communication and cultural aspects. I asked some of my friends to help me collecting these data and to choose participants from different regions as well as different social backgrounds. Variations in gender, occupation, educational backgrounds and age were also taken into consideration. 50 males and females were interviewed and were asked to respond for a questionnaire. The following table (table 1) shows the distribution of the participants’ age and gender.

Table (1): The distribution of the participants’ age and gender

	Age group (1) 23-45	Age group (2) 45-75
Males	7	9
Females	16	18

The questionnaire was a mixed one’ it consisted of one open-ended question that gave the respondents the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions and feelings as well as it contained closed-ended questions following the Likert Scale. The open ended question was : It has been noticed recently that many speakers in Jordan shift/ replace certain prominent

sounds in Local Jordanian Arabic dialects with other sounds. If you have noticed this, please indicate whether you do that (or other do) and what are the reasons that encourage you to fall within this category.

The data were gathered and entered into SPSS to measure statistical significance. Moreover, the respondents were tested against some theories of language change and variation to understand the nature of this phenomenon.

Results and Findings:

The findings of the study have shown that there is a significant shift towards certain sounds. The [tʃ] variant which is originally spread in rural Jordanian dialect is considered by (73%) of the participants as a marker of being uneducated and less civilized. They instead prefer to use the variant [k] instead as in “kθi:r” (a lot of) instead of “tʃi:r”. Some of the participants admitted that they use the variant [tʃ] while speaking with their families or neighbors, but they feel shy to use it while speaking with their friends, colleagues, peers..etc. High level educated participants as well as the first age group participants intentionally use [k] instead of [tʃ] variant even they are natively rural speakers. Moreover, all female respondents tried to avoid using [tʃ] to be far away from being stigmatized and to be more prestigious. However, the second age group as well as uneducated respondents are still using the [tʃ] variant. (27%) of the respondents reject the use of [k] variant to keep their real identities. They believe that such shifting to [k] is part of the rapid decay of the rural Jordanian dialect. Some added that this change is a result of positive attitudes that motivate speakers (mainly young people and females) to imitate Syrians. As it is known that a large number of Syrian refugees come from Syria escaping from the war. As Muysken (2010) stated that “Migration of large groups of speakers to another country, or to metropolitan regions in their own country where a different language is dominant, have produced notable change in the behavior of these speakers.” (p.7)

One of the distinguished features of Classical Jordanian Arabic is the “Qaf” – “q” realization. This realization is also experiencing more than one change. Many speakers replaced it with either /ʔ/ or /q/. There is a favorable attitude among the respondents (53%) to use /ʔ/ or /q/ instead of “Qaf” or /q/ for many reasons. They (mainly females) believe that this variant is more prestigious, indicate high class and wealth, beautiful and easy going. However, some male respondents believe that this variant is not suitable for them since masculinity shall indicate toughness and harshness! Others admit that they tried to use this variant (/ʔ/ or /q/) to imitate Syrians (who came recently as refugees to Jordan). They felt that this variant makes their speech more attractive, nice and modern. This variant is widely used among the first age group and females whereas among the second age group the two varieties [g] and [k] are used. [k] is widely used by Palestinians who settled in Jordan (A large number of Palestinians immigrated to Jordan after 1948). The diversity of inhabitants in Jordan plays an obvious role in sounds shifting. Old age Jordanians respondents (18%) use the [g] variant in their formal speech and “Qaf” in their casual speech. Abd-el-Jawwad (1986) has conducted a study in this regard, and he found that respondents who use and adopt the [g] variant feel of their local identities, pride of origin and have high degree of solidarity. Moreover, the role of the social media shall not be ignored because it indirectly encourages

young Jordanians to adopt Syrians and Palestinian variants. Generally, most Jordanian TV representers use those variants. It becomes obvious that the /ʔ / ‘?’ has got a positive evaluation and attitude specially among females in Jordan because it has been considered as a sign of modernization, prestige and civilization. Moreover, it is generally linked with upper class, rich and wealth people. Others adopt this variant since they believe that it is “ simple” ; they felt that this variant is easier to pronounce than others, so it will be a natural tendency to modify the hard variant in order to say it easier .

One of the most visible sounds shifting among respondents is the pronunciation of the interdental fricatives / θ / and / ð/ and the interdental emphatic fricative /ð^ʕ / . Although these sounds are prominent and essential sounds whether in Standard Arabic or in Local Jordanian Arabic, they have been affected with modernity (the process of Urbanization which rises from the language contact with other dialects as well as industrialization). The sounds / θ/, / ð/ and / ð^ʕ/ are realized respectively as [θ], [ð] and [ð^ʕ] among indigenous rural Jordanian speakers from the second age group (21%) . The variants [t], [d] and [d^ʕ] are used widely among respondents who live in cities and largely affected by Syrian and Palestinian immigrants. It is also preferable among females of the first age group (56%). The variants [s], [z^ʔ] and [z^ʕ] are used widely among educated high class urban respondents (23%). Some females stated that they use these variants to get a good job and to be more feminine!

Another observable and tested sound is /ɟ/. Most respondents (81%) replaced this Standard sound in Arabic with /ʒ/ unconsciously. Unfortunately, some of them even read words containing / ɟ/ as /ʒ / . This could be considered as a cultural invasion it forms a threat to identify Standard Arabic and to read the Holy Qur’an correctly. It is already known that this variant [ʒ] is used among Lebanese. As a result of the high contact by social media , many Jordanians (specially females) adapt it . Using [ʒ] is considered as a shift towards Urbanization because most speakers (mainly young and females) tend to use it for prestige. Also, the death of the old people who used the Standard variant [ɟ] , the effect of immigration and the effect of social media would have given the priority to this variant to be superior over the other standard variant !

Concerning cultural associations, Jordan is a tribal country. Each individual has to belong strongly with the members of his tribe and to keep their cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the interviews and the questionnaire assure that the family and tribal association do not help so much in keeping the cultural heritage (mainly our dialects). Contacting with people whether in schools, universities, work, immigrants or even in public places give the chance to shift either consciously or unconsciously towards (as many speakers believe) the more prestigious dialect !

Conclusion

The analysis of the results of the interviews and the questionnaires show that the local dialects in Jordan are experiencing a gradual shift towards other dialects. There are many sounds that many Jordanians (special females and young) do not use them at all although they are part of their cultural heritage. Many participants in the interviews assure that such shifting has many advantages for them. Furthermore, the age factor plays a great role in the shifting process. They are carrying the imitation process to speak like Syrians, Palestinians and

Lebanese. If they do not imitate(shift), they could face many criticism among their peers and they will be considered less civilized. Others (mainly old age male respondents) reject such shifting and they assure that they are proud of their dialects .

What is investigated here is part of sounds shifting in Jordan. More researches shall be conducted in this field to highlight other socio-cultural or even linguistic factors that encourage the shifting process.

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