Language variation and change in Al-Karak Governorate (Jordan)

Tamadur Sulayman Al-Shamayleh[1]

Abstract:

This research explores language variation and change in the speech of nonstandard Arabic in Al-Karak Governorate (a city in the south region in Jordan). There are three phonological variables which are explored; /ʤ/, /q/, and the insertion of /i/.

These features are studied in relation to two social variables; age and gender. The sample consists of 40 inhabitants from this district (20 males and 20 females) from two age groups ; middle (18-45) and old (45+). The data were collected through sociolinguistic interviews and they have been analyzed within the frame work of the Variationist Paradigm.

The results reveal that there are considerable variation and changes regarding the selected linguistic variables. Moreover, the study reveals that age and gender play a great role in such variation. The young generation (mainly females) in Jordan is the leaders of this change.

Keywords: language variation, language change, Al-Karak Governorate.

I. Introduction:

This is a sociolinguistic study which is based on audio-recorded natural sociolinguistic interviews carried out in Al-Karak Governorate in the southern part of Jordan. It investigates the speech of both male and female informants distributed over two age groups.

Linguists such as William Labov are interested in examining how certain social 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 social factors. There are many theories that are interested in describing how individuals' behaviors are largely affected by their social factors. One of these theories is the socio-cultural perspective which is used in the field of psychology.

---

[1] University of Jordan/ Aqaba , tamadershamileh@yahoo.com .

Most societies are changing gradually in their languages , dialects and even cultures. Studying the effect of social factors upon language change and variation 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 society are experiencing a kind of shift and continuous changes as a result of many factors.

Since language is an entirely natural process, language change is something automatic ;therefore ,it 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. Labov states that " One can not understand the development of language change apart from the social life of the community in which it occurs " (1972, p.3)

Meillet says " From the fact that language is a social institution , it follows that linguistics is a social science , and the only variable to which we can turn to account for linguistic change is social of which linguistic variations are only consequences. " (Quoted from Al Jehani 1985, p.115) Thus, studying linguistics change and variation in Al-Karak highlights any social change takes place in this district . As Wolfram (1997, p.120) states " certain groups in society will be attached to the linguistic forms used by the members of these groups" .Also, he adds that " the use of a particular linguistic feature may be evaluated as socially prestigious or socially stigmatized depending on the group to which this feature or that belongs " (P.122). Furthermore, he adds " the social value associated to certain groups in society will be attached to the linguistic forms used by the members of these groups'' (p.120)

Hudson (1996) states that the speech in any community is governed and directed by the social rules of the society itself. According to Melliet , "We must determine which social structure corresponds to a given linguistic structure, and how in general changes in social structure are translated into changes in linguistic structure " (Melliet, 1926 cited and translated by Labov , 2001, p.23). Moreover, Blom and Gumperz state that " the fact that values attached to language usage vary with social background" (1972, p.421) .

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 these 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.

Al-Karak is a governorate in Jordan . It lies 140 kms to the south of Amman . It is situated on top of a small mountain in the center of the district. It lies east of the southern half of the Dead Sea in the East Bank of the Kingdom of Jordan (Gubser,1973).

In Jordan, the tribe is the most important social and political gathering (Gubser , 1973) . It might be considered as a corporate regional gathering . In any tribe, the basic source of power is its males members (not females). This makes Jordanian cities differ from Western societies . As Trudgill said " in Western societies where typically the population is heterogeneous , and both socially and geographically mobile…And the social structure is of a complexity….close individual knowledge of the area [is] impossible, and person to person contact as means of selecting informants [is] useless'' (Trudgill, 1974,p.4) . People in Al-Karak is so conservative and less complex.

This study reveals two main processes of linguistic change and variation taking place in Al-Karak; standardization and koinization (leveling) .

II.   Review of related literature

Labov (1966) 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.

Al-Khatib (1988) studied the relationship between one of the social factors (gender) and the use of SA (Standard Arabic) . He found significant gender differences in understanding the linguistic scene in Irbid (Jordan). He considered it as the " factor which seems to be invaluable in helping to reveal the origin and tendency of change ". He said " The breakdown of data by sex groups …indicates that men show significantly higher percentages of use of the SA variant [q] than women do " (Al-Khatib, 1988, p.126)

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 Squlid 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 monophthongnize / aɪ / in prevoiced phonetic contexts, but the spread of the monophthong variant to pre-voiceless environments is a salient characteristic of some subergions 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 Londeners 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, tˤ/] and [dʒ] for /d, dˤ/] . 'Weak' palatalization refers to the use of [tʲ] for /t, tˤ / and [dʲ] for/d, dˤ/ . The sample of the study included 8 speakers with different dender and age. Their speech has been recorded and analyzed . The result shows that the voiceless postalveolar [tʃ] variant of /k/ in Cairon 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.

III.   Methodology of the study:

This study is quantitative and empirical in nature. It is based in counting certain variants and comparing the frequency of these variants in terms of the two determined social factors; age and gender. As Labov argues that " instead of considering any variation and abandoning the field, we will pursue the matter further, using every considerable clue to discover the pattern which governs [such variation]" (Labov, 1972a, p.9). Of course, variation is not arbitrary or free bounded but is constrained and structured by many factors. As Trudgill (1974) states that variation is structured and socially determined in sociologically and linguistically interesting ways.

It is important in such studies to be empirical ; getting spontaneous and naturalistic speech from the informants. Thus, face to face interviews with 40 informants from Al-Karak Governorate (20 males and 20 females) were conducted with taking into consideration what is Labov called " the observer's paradox" . Many devices were applied in this regard to divert the participants' attention away from speech . The participants are divided into two age groups; middle (18-45) and old (45+). The data were collected through sociolinguistic interviews and they have been analyzed within the frame work of the Variationist Paradigm . 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) 24-45	Age group (2) 45+
Males	11	9
Females	10	10

IV.   Results and finding:

One of the distinguished features of Classical Jordanian Arabic is the "Qaf" – "q" realization. This realization is also experiencing more than one change. In Al-Karak, many speakers replaced it with either [ʔ] or [g] . There is a favorable attitude among the first age group respondents (mainly females) to use ['][ʔ] (about 43%) or [q] (about 34%) . They (mainly females) believe that the variant [ʔ] is more prestigious, indicate high class and wealth, beautiful and easy going . Many participants admit that they tried to use this variant (/' / 'ʔ') to imitate Syrians (who came recently as refugees to Jordan) . They felt that this variant make their speech more attractive, nice and modern. Such linguistic changes will create leveling . Moreover, the role of the social media shall not be ignored because it indirectly encourage 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. There is a tendency among young Jordanians to use urban variants to achieve certain goals; 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 . Women tend to prefer modern (urban) variants to be socially powerful . As abdal-Jawwad , 1981; Al-Khatib, 1988; Al-Wer , 1999; Walters, 1991; Daher , 1998 state that women have the tendency to be modern and soft. Other participants of the first age group (34%) use the variant [q] to be more standardized . As Labov states that " It is uncommon to speak of linguistic changes as a result of speakers' desires to assume a certain social identity " (2001, xv) .

Whereas the second age group(45+) (mainly males) use [g] instead of "Qaf" or [q] for many reasons. Some male respondents believe that the variant [ʔ] is not suitable for them since masculinity shall indicate toughness and harshness! The diversity of inhabitants (refugees from Syria and Palestine) in Al-Karak plays an obvious role in sounds variation. Old age Jordanians respondents (76%) use the [g] variant in their 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, Al-Wer (1991, p.91) notes that " generally , in Jordanian community , the pressure upon the old generation to conform to the traditional norms is

stronger than the pressure upon the younger generation" . Eckert (2000, p.342) also notes that " Community studies of variation frequently show that increasing age correlates with increasing conservatism in speech". However, many young Jordanians start to avoid the use of the variant [g] because it is started to be stigmatized . As Sindell (1999, p.377) states " in order for a variant to have distinct and analyzable indexical meanings (indicating class membership, region of origin , etc) users must be aware to some degree of the potential for variation within a particular category". Thus, the initiators of change among men are the younger age group.

Another observable and tested sound is /dʒ/ . Only females of the first age group (85%) replaced this Standard variation in Arabic with [ʒ] whether consciously or unconsciously. Unlike males of both age groups who use the Standard variant [dʒ]. The use of the variant [ʒ] could be considered as a cultural invasion because 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 females tend to use it for prestige. Also, the death of the old people who used the Standard variant [dʒ] , 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 ! Women in Al-Karak play a great role towards the use of the [ʒ] variants. This emphasizes the fact that since men and women are biologically and socially different, they are also linguistically different.

Another distinguishing feature in this district has to do with the distribution of /i/ . Unlike other governorates in Jordan ,inhabitants in Al-Karak are characterized with a special type of epenthesis in which the front high vowel /i/ is inserted in different contexts. For example , in Modern Standard Arabic (hereafter MSA) we use words like /galb/ "heart" , / xubz/ " bread'' and /ʃuɣl/ " work". All the participants of the second age group pronounce such words as /galib/ , /xubiz/ and / ʃuɣil/ with adding the front high vowel / i / to avoid consonant clusters .However, half of the participants of the first age group do not insert /i/ to be so similar to MSA.

As it can be noted that all the given words have the same surface structure form (CVCC) in Modern Standard Arabic (hereafter MSA) or " Fusˤħa" dialect. In Al-Karak, it becomes CVCiC . Moreover, words which follow the structure CVCCa in MSA are also pronounces differently in Al-Karak . As the following table (table 2) shows:

MSA	Al-Karak dialect
/ luʕbah/ " a toy"	liʕbiʰ
/zubdah/ " butter"	zibdiʰ

This is a another case which demonstrates that fronting the back vowels is commonly spread among old generation in Al-Karak whereas the young generation avoid such insertion . Thus, their speech is so close to MSD.

V.   Conclusion:

In this study, the "Variationist Paradigm" has been adopted as stated in Labov's trilogy (1994, 2001, 2010). The speech of 40 informants from Al-Karak district was recorded through face-to-face interviews. Rbrul software was applied for the quantitative analysis of the recorded interviews with taking into consideration the social and linguistic variables under investigation. The quantitative analysis shows that the new generation in Al-Karak (mainly females) are leading the process of linguistic variation which is directed either to urbanization or standardization.

The results of Rbrul runs with the two social variables reveal that age and sex are highly significant in the use of the urban variant [ʒ] instead of the Standard variant [ʤ] may be because the urban variant reflect " Prestige , consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurture, emotional expressiveness, connectedness, and sensitivity tp others" (Eckert & McConnel-Gient,1992, cited in Wodak & Benke, 1997, P.127).

Moreover, the two social variables (age and gender) are highly significant in the use of the Standard variant [q] and the urban variant [ʔ] instead of the traditional local variant [g] . Furthermore, they play a great role regarding avoiding the insertion of /i/ in many local structures to be similar to the MSD.

Thus , there is an obvious linguistic change and variation in Al-Karak district going away from the traditional variants led by young generation .

References:

1.   Abdel-Jawad, . (1986). The emergence of an urban dialect in the Jordanian urban centers. International Journal of the Society of Language, 61 :53-63.

2.   Abdel-Jawad, H.(1981). Lexical and phonological variation in spoken Arabic in Amman. University of Pennsylavania PhD dissertation.

3.   Al-Jehani, N. 91985). Sociostylistic stratification of Arabic in Makkah. PhD dissertation . The University of Michigan.

4.   Al-Khatib, M. (1988).Sociolinguistic change in an expanding urban context: a case study of Irbid city, Jordan. PhD thesis . University of Durham.

5.   Al-Wer, E. (1991). Phonological variation in the speech of women from three urban area in Jordan. University of Essex. PhD dissertation.

6.   Al-Wer, E. (1999). Why do different variables behave differently ? data from Arabic . In Y.Suleiman (ed.). Language and Society in the Middle East and North Africa. Studies in Variation and Identity. 38-57.

7.   Al-Wer, E. (2007). The formation of the dialect of Amman. Arabic in the city: Issues in dialect contact and language variation, 5 (55), 55-76.

8. Anderson, B. (2002). Dialect leveling and / aɪ / monophthongnization among African American Detroiters. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 86-98.

9. Britain, D. (2010). Super local regional dialect leveling. In L. Carmen, & D.Watt, Language and attitudes (p.193-294). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

10. Clyne, M. (1982). Multilingual Australia , Melbourne: River Seine.

11. D'Onofrio, A. , Pratt, T. & Van Hofwegen, J. (2019). Compression in the California's vowel shift : Tracking generational sound change in Californian's Central Valley. Language Variation and Change, 31(2), 193-217.

12. Daher, J. (1998). Gender in linguistic variation: the variable (Q) in Damascus Arabic.In E. Benmamoun , M. Eid and N.Haeri (ed), Perspectives on Arabic linguistics XI, 183-205. Amesterdam : Benjamins Publishing Company.

13. Eckert, P. (2000). Linguistic variation as social practice. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

14. Ferguson, C.et al (1981). Language in USA , New York: CUP.

15. Fishman, J.A . (1966). Language Loyalty in the United States. The Hague: Mouton.

16. Fishman, J.A. (1989). Language and ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective, England : Multilingual Matters LTD.

17. Gal, S. (1979) Language shift: Social Determinants of Linguistic Change in Bilingual Austria. New York: Academic Press.

18. Greenberg, K. (2012). The people who say "TSH TSH" : The Social Life of Cairene Arabic Palatalization. University of Pennsylvania : Working Papers in Linguistics, 18, 19-30.

19. Gubser, P. (1973). Politics and Change in Al-Karak, Jordan. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

20. Gumperz, J. (1964). Linguistic and social interaction in two communities, 66:137-153.

21. Habib , R. (2005) The Role of Factors, Lexical borrowing and speech accommodation in the variation of /g/ and /ʔ/ in the Colloquial Arabic of Rural Migrant families in Hims, Syria, Unpublished MA thesis. Sracuse University :USA.

22. Hudson, R. (1996). Sociolinguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

23. Igoudin, A.L. (2011). Asian American girls who speak African American English : A sub cultural language identity. In Du Bois, Inke, and Nicole Baumgarten (Eds.), Multilingual Identities: New Global Perspectives. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

24. Kerswill, P. (2013). Identity , ethnicity and place: the construction of youth language in London. In: Auer, Peter, Hilpert, Marten, Stukenbrock, Anja and Szmrecsanyi, Benedikt, (eds.). Space in language and linguistics. Linuae and litterae. Walter de Gruyter, p. 128-164.

25. Kerswill, P. (2014). The objectification of ' Jafaican' . The discoursal embedding of Multicultural London English in the British Media. In Androutsopoulous, Jennis (ed.) Mediatization and sociolinguistic change . Berlin :De Gruyter, p. 428-455.

26. Kerswill, P. , Cheshire, J. , Fox, S. , Khan, A. & Togerson, E. (2007). Multicultural London English : the emergence, acquisition and diffusion of a new variety . ESRC Research grant RES, 62 (23), 0814.

27. Labov, W. (1972). Sociolinguistic Patterns Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press.

28. Labov, W. (1972). The study of language in social context. In J.Pride And J.Holmes (eds). Sociolinguistics: selected reading, 1:180-201. Middlesex: Penguin.

29. Labov, W. (2001). Principles of linguistic change, vol.2.Oxford: Blackwell.

30. Labov, W.(1966). The social stratification of English in NewYork City. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

31. Rau, D. (2002). Phonological Variation and Second Language Change in Atayal. Oceanic linguistics, 39(1), 144-156.

32. Saidat , A. (2018). Jordanian Arabic : A study of the motivations for the intentionality in Dialect change. Theory and practice in language studies, 8 (6), p.580-587.

33. Trudgill, P.(1974). The Social differentiation of English in Norwich. Cambridge :Cambridge University Press.

34. Walters, K. (1991). Women, men and linguistic variation in the Arab World. In B.Comrie and M. Eid (eds.). Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics III, 197-229. Amsterdam :John Benjamins Publishing Company.

35. Wodak, R.& Benke, G. (1997). Age as a sociolinguistic variable. In F. Coulmas (ed.), The handbook of Socio-linguistics, 1:127-150. Oxford :Blackwell.

36. Wolfram, W. (1997). Dialect in society. In F.Coulmas (ed). The Handbook of Socio-Linguistics, 1: 107-126. Oxford :Blackwell.

37. Yaseen , A. (2015). Accent leveling and maintenance in Maslawi Arabic . Annual Review of Education , Communication & Language Sveience, 12, 1-23.