Syntactic Variation in Khasibi Iraqi Arabic:
A Sociolinguistic study

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Abstract

This study investigates the correlation of a syntactic pattern of variation in the Khasibi Iraqi Arabic (henceforth KIA) with the social variable of contact with the urban centre of Basra. The study has carried out a quantitative analysis to a corpus of data comprising tape-recorded speech of 60 informants representative of the users of the variety of spoken Arabic under investigation. This analysis has made it possible to conclude that KIA users who maintain contact with Basra centre adopt the urban linguistic form under question much more than their peers who do not have such contact. The study has also offered a sociolinguistic interpretation to this pattern.

1. Introduction

Recently, one of the rural varieties of spoken Iraqi Arabic, locally known as Khasibi Iraqi Arabic (KIA), has been the pursuit of two previous sociolinguistic studies (Daffar, 1990 & 2006).The present research has also been on the same track. It is a stage further in studying the sociolinguistic variation in the speech of KIA users. It deals with another linguistic variable different from the variables tackled formerly in the sense that it is syntactic whereas the previous ones are all of a phonological level (cf. ibid). However, the syntactic variable under discussion in this study is similarly supposed to be correlated with the social variable of contact with Basra city, the vicinal urban centre of the southernmost governorate in Iraq. On the other hand, this linguistic variable can be described as being a negation particle having two principal alternative forms, /mu:/ and /ma:/, the first of which is socially distributed as being urban because it characteristically occurs in the speech of the urbanites living in BC whereas the other is considered rural since it is a characteristic linguistic feature of KIA. Moreover, while the urban one appears to be prestigious, that which is rural is looked at down and seems to induce ridicule.

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Linguistically viewed, this urban form of the negation particle has in its turn two different morphophonemic alternatives. They are /ma:/ and /mu:/. The former is used on condition that the following word is either a verb or an adjective having a verbal force. The following examples illustrate the two usages respectively:

1) /ma: yri:d/[1]
   Neg   V
   not   want   (3rd p, sing., m)
2) /ma: da:li:n/
   Neg Adj [+vf]
   not   staying   (3rd p, pl)[2]

The other variant is restricted to a position followed by an adjective which does not imply a verbal force. Example 3 below illustrates this restriction;

3) /mu: ba:rid/
   Neg Adj[-vf]
   not   cold   (3rd p, sing., m)

On the other hand, the rural form of this particle also appear to have two different alternatives. One of which is restricted to a pre-adjective position and the slot of the adjective that follows has no specific lexical restriction. On the other hand, this alternative varies in terms of person, number and gender in accordance with the following adjective. It may take one of the variants shown below:

/ma:ni:/	1st p, sing., m & f
/mahna/	1st p, pl., m & f
/manta/	2nd p, sing., m
/manti/	2nd p, sing., f
/mantu:/	2nd p, pl., m & f
/mantan/	2nd p, pl., f[3]
/mahaw/	3rd p, sing., m
/mahay/	3rd p, sing., f
/mahum/	3rd p, pl., m & f
/mahan/	3rd p, pl., f[4]

The second alternative of the rural form of the negation particle under discussion looks almost the same as the first alternative of the urban form, i.e. /ma:/ except that the vowel it has is pronounced with more fronting. It is also worth noting here that this rural alternative is structurally distributed in a different way. It occurs in a local linguistic pattern different from the one related to the urban /ma:/ alternative. In the local linguistic pattern the usage of /ma:/ is

confined to a syntactic position never followed by an adjective implying a verbal force (vf). The local Khasibi /ma:/ can commonly be found in a structure like /ma: ḥilu:/ (not sweet) and /ma: ze:n/ (not good).

The syntactic variation referred to in the present study occurs only where KIA speakers vary in their use of the urban /mu:/ variant and the rural /ma:/ variant. Therefore, the two other urban and rural alternatives, i.e. the urban /ma:/ alternative and the rural /ma:ni:/ variant and its other inflectional forms have been excluded. In other words, the /ma:/ variant occurring in this sociolinguistic pattern of variation is the rural one rather than the urban. The urban variant which has been taken into consideration is the /mu:/ variant.

By general observation, the two principal alternative forms of this negation particle, i.e the rural /ma:/ and urban /mu:/ variants are found to be used interchangeably by KIA speakers.[5]

The present research assumes that their variable use is governed by a number of independent variables,[6] one of which is the speaker's contact with the urban centre of Basra (henceforth BC). The use of the syntactic variable under reference seems to be correlated with those independent variables specially the variable of contact with BC. KIA users vary in their use of these alternative forms of negation according to whether or not they maintain contact with BC. Speakers who keep contact with BC tend to adopt the urban variant much more than those who do not maintain such contact.

2. Methodology

The linguistic material upon which this study is based consists of a corpus of the speech of 60 KIA users. It has been collected in separate recording sessions each of which lasts thirty minutes. The sessions have been conducted in such a way that made it possible to elicit casual spontaneous conversations that constitute the language material of this study[7]. The material under reference has then been quantitatively analysed. In this regard, the informants are distributed into two main sets according to whether or not they maintain contact with BC. And for the purpose of defining those two sets of informants, the study has followed Milroy's model (1980 & 1987). In this respect it has applied the notions of density and multiplexity of one's social network to determine how he or she is affiliated with a particular social community.

On the other hand, two statistical techniques have been employed for verifying the results. They are the paired t test and the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The first has been used to check the significance of the pattern of

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differences between the two main sets of speakers: those who maintain close contact with BC and those who do not have such contact, as regards the use of the variable under study in their speech. The second technique, the (ANOVA), has been applied here to check the validity of the cross-section of various influential independent variables, when operating simultaneously, on the occurrence of the variable under reference.

3. The Analysis of the Results

For the purpose of analysing the data, all the tokens in which the linguistic variable under study occurs have been extracted from the recorded speech of the informants individually. Those tokens are, then, classified according to whether the variable takes the form of its rural or urban variant. The next step was the calculation of the occurrence of each type of the two variants. However, the scores of the urban variant have been given more consideration in the analysis. The numerals are reduced to percentages and they are set in two main groups in accordance with the presumable sociolinguistic pattern of KIA users maintaining contact with BC vs KIA users having no such contact.

By tabulating the results, it was possible to obtain clear indicators of the range and direction of variation in the speech of the two sets of the informants as regards the use of this linguistic variable.

Tables 1 & 2 contain percentages reduced from the mean scores of various groups from the two main sets of the informants as regards the occurrence of /mu:/ and /ma:/, the urban variants of the variable under discussion. The results in these two tables disclose a consistent pattern of sociolinguistic variation in which KIA speakers having contact with BC tend to use these urban variants in their speech more than their peers who do not have such contact do. This pattern conforms to what is hypothesized in this study. And by the application of the t test, the differences in each of the tables aforementioned have been found to be significant. In other words, the P value is less than 0.05 (see tables 1 & 2).

However, it is worth noting that in table 1 & 2 there appear three remarkable cases. Two of them are in table 1, the first of which concerns the opposite groups 3 and 9, and the second relates to the scores of groups 5 and 11 (see table 1). In both of these cases there appears no great difference between the scores of the two main sets of the informants: those who have and those who do not have contact with BC. As regards the third case which exists in table 2 (see groups 5

and 11 in table 2), this difference becomes nil. The interpretation of these cases with reference to the effect of contact with BC or that of the speaker's state of

Table 1. The effect of contact with BC on the choice of /mu:/ by various age groups of male informants

Age	State of Literacy	Cont⁺		Cont⁻	
		GN	Group Mean	GN	Group Mean
60⁺	+	1	89	7	52.8
	-	2	37.8	8	14.3
40-59	+	3	89.4	9	84.5
	-	4	81.7	10	68.8
20-39	+	5	98.5	11	90.5
	-	6	80.9	12	55.1
$P = 0.013$			($P < 0.05$)		

Note: Cont⁺ = having contact with BC
      Cont⁻ = having no contact with BC
      GN   = Group Number

Table 2. The effect of contact with BC on the choice of /mu:/ by various age groups of female informants

Age	State of Literacy	Cont⁺		Cont⁻	
		GN	Group Mean	GN	Group Mean
60⁺	+	1	100	7	81.8
	-	2	74.6	8	40.4
40-59	+	3	100	9	85.2
	-	4	87.5	10	61.8
20-39	+	5	100	11	100
	-	6	76.4	12	69.1
$P = 0.021$			($P < 0.05$)		

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literacy seems to be disputable. But if it is argued here that contact with BC has no influence on the use of /mu:/ by the informants of these groups, why is it then quite clear in all the cases of the illiterate informants? However, these exceptional cases in the opposite groups abovementioned can be expounded only by the fact that the choice of a certain linguistic variable by the speaker can never be attributed to only one single factor. This implies that the impact on linguistic variation is so intricate and unlimited that it is mostly due to a multiple source of various factors which operate together simultaneously (Le Page, 1975a cited in Milroy, 1980: 115).

Tables 1 and 2 above also cast light on the intricacy of the factors affecting the variable use in the speech of KIA users as regards the negation particle under investigation. It is obvious that a number (possibly not only those investigated here) of social variables interact in such a way that the occurrence of the linguistic variable appears to be correlated to them all. By the application of the (ANOVA), this interaction has been found to be more than the F table. For instance, in the case of the interaction of sex and literacy with the social variable of contact with BC the F ratio has been found to be 3.64 whereas the F table is no more than 0.025. This indicates the validity of the interaction as regards these three variables (see tables 1 & 2).

4. Discussion

The pattern of sociolinguistic variation referred to in 3 above reveals that KIA users who maintain contact with BC have the lead in a process of speech approximation towards the urban linguistic forms of the spoken variety of Iraqi Arabic used in the centre of Basra city. This process indicates an aspect of urbanization taking place in the social behaviour of the natives of this district. This inference conforms to what Labov (1972: 299) states in this connection. It is also implied in Trudgill (1983: 191) where stating that the process of urbanization is one of the factors that affect rural dialects to decline.

As much as Arabic speaking communities are concerned, two studies have been conducted in this regard. The first has noticed that Jordanian ruralites have a similar tendency in their linguistic behaviour to approximate towards the urban dialects of the urban centres to which they shift when they change their residence (Abdel-Jawad, 1986a: 53 & 61). In the second study, Bakir (1986) has found that the linguistic behaviour of a number of female informants from Basra, which is considered comparatively less urbanized, approximate to the

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spoken dialect of Iraqi Arabic employed by the natives of Baghdad, the metropolis of the country, which is regarded as a much more urbanized centre.

This shift in the linguistic behaviour of ruralites is sometimes ascribed to the speaker's intention to shun derision (Labov, 1972: 299). But it can also be interpreted as an indicator of individual's ambition for social promotion (Abdel-Jawad, 1986b: 27). Mostly, such ambition is strengthened when the individual has weak social ties with his local community, and is inspired by the urban pattern of life he becomes in contact with. His aspiration to be identified as an urbanite operates as a strong motive for this change in his linguistic behaviour (cf. Milroy, 1980: 160).

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the data presented in the current study made it possible to arrive at a sociolinguistic pattern of variation in which KIA users who maintain contact with BC appear to adopt /mu:/, the urban variant of the negation particle under investigation, much more than their peers who do not have such contact. The present study has also offered an interpretation to this pattern as being an aspect of urbanization in the behaviour of KIA users who maintain contact with BC. This process of urbanization taking place on the linguistic level is clear in the approximation of the speech of ruralites towards the linguistic variety predominant in the neighbouring urban centre of Basra when they come to be in contact with it.

Notes

1. Two notes concerning some of the vowels used in KIA are important here. First, the vowels used in the speech of KIA are, in comparison with their urban counterparts, less emphatic and pronounced shorter. Secondly, the vowel /a:/, which commonly described as being long, open and unrounded, has in particular, two realizations, one pronounced with some fronting, and typical of the speech of the ruralites living in the countryside of Basra; the other pronounced with less fronting, usually centralized and typical of the speech of the urbanites living in BC.

2. Unlike Standard Arabic, no specific linguistic form is commonly used in spoken Iraqi Arabic to express duality.

3.It is worth noting that this form is very rarely found nowadays. Instead, /mantu:/, the second-person plural male form, is more often employed to indicate second-person plural feminine form as well.

4. Similar to /mantan/, this form is also very rarely used by KIA speakers at present. /mahum/ is more often employed instead.

5. A rather similar pattern of sociolinguistic variation in the use of this negation particle has also been found to exist in a neighbouring dialect of spoken Arabic (see Omar, 1975: 41).

6. For the definition of the technical term (independent variables), the reader is referred to Milroy (1980 & 1987).

7. For this purpose, some speech elicitation techniques have been used such as the choice of the topics on the spot, the attendance of some of the speaker's relations and friends during the session, the placement of the recorder in between the interviewer and the speaker who was seated very close to his side.

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تنّوع نحوي في لهجة أبي الخصيب العربية العراقية

خلاصة

تبحث هذه الدراسة العلاقة المتبادلة بين نمط من التنوع النحوي في اللهجة العربية العراقية المحكيّة في أبي الخصيب والمتغير الاجتماعي للاتصال بمركز مدينة البصرة. طبّقت الدراسة منهج التحليل الكمّي على مجموعة من البيانات تتضمن كلاماً مسجلاً بجهاز تسجيل صوتي لستين شخصاً ممّن يمثلون مستخدمي هذه اللهجة العربية المحكيّة التي هي مجال البحث،فأصبح من الممكن بهذا التحليل التوصّل إلى استنتاج مفاده أن مستخدمي هذه اللهجة العربية العراقية المستخدمة في أبي الخصيب الذين يديمون التواصل مع مركز مدينة البصرة يعتمدون الصيغة اللغوية المدنية التي هي مدار البحث أكثر وإلى حد بعيد من أقرانهم الذين ليس لهم مثل هذا الاتصال. كما قدّمت الدراسة تفسيراً لغوياً اجتماعياً لهذا النمط.