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IS IT GOING TO BE A MASCULINE LANGUAGE?

***EXPLORING THE LANGUAGE-GENDER RELATIONSHIP IN REFERRING
TO THE OTHER SEX IN ARABIC SOCIETIES.***

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Abstract

Investigating the language-gender relationship is said to show fascinating results. The idea of how women and men use certain linguistic features has been stimulating researchers to examine different languages from several points of view. This study explores language differences in referring to the other sex and tries to investigate the underlying reasons which cause this particular language. It uses empirical data to examine the Arabic situation of referring to the other sex. Several Saudi and Emirati magazines were used as evidence to reflect the language that men use in referring to women and vice versa. The exploration has been done in three categories: generalisation, work positions and social roles. The study has found that referring to males is continuously respectful, polite and matching their gender. Referring to women, in contrast, is rarely mentioned in generalisation, sometimes matching in workplaces and most of the time is polite in the social context.

Keywords: Gender - Arabic Language – Women – Men - Linguistic features

Introduction

The relationship between language and gender has been a growing field in linguistic studies. This sort of investigation was influenced in the late 1960s by the expansion of linguistic pragmatics and sociolinguistics, which had been following the growth of 'mentalist argumentation' when syntax enriched linguistic researches (Lakoff 2005). Since then, a huge amount of exploration has been produced in order to investigate this relationship at various levels which embody the effects of gender on particular language features and, vice versa, to investigate the use of language against gender differences. These gender-language researches have resulted in fascinating outcomes which have encouraged further investigation almost after each study. Romaine (2001: p.156) states that the world reflects male values which have become "normal" where 'ideas about what is "normal" are deeply embedded in linguistic practices'.

Based on linguistic practice in what might be called women's language and men's language, this paper aims to discover gender effects on language while referring to the other. In other words, it explores language differences in describing the opposite sex and tries to investigate the underlying reasons which cause this particular language. The article consists of three sections: firstly, a quick look at the literature will be taken as a preface to the study. Secondly, the methodology used in the study to collect and analyse the data will be explained. Thirdly and lastly, a discussion will be expanded to investigate the outcomes of the study, supported by examples, before the conclusion, which sums up the study's purposes and methodology as well as all the results obtained.

1. Gender differences in linguistics and sexist language

Gender as a linguistic concept, does not only refer to the binary gender difference, although the greater part of this notion has been concerned with this diversity (Cameron 2005). Inevitably, it covers the characteristic differences of each sex's way of using language. The concept, however, is wider than this, as it embodies many complicated ideas concerning the relationship between language and sex. Likewise,

sexist language in linguistics is a term that refers to the use of language based on the nature of the speaker/writer, whether it is a he or she.

Indeed, there has been an explosion of interest in this field in the last thirty years, as Ann Weatherall (2002) remarks. However, she affirms, as does Keating (1998), that in the huge quantity of research which covers almost every single aspect of this subject, no language feature has been found that is related to only one of the two sexes. Nonetheless, the question of whether women and men talk differently has remained and probably will remain the theme of all past and prospective researches.

On the same lines as Lakoff (1973), many linguists relate language forms which carry an attribute of specific gender to social practice or cultural status. In fact, some of them have associated particular forms such as certain polite and hesitant forms with a specific sex (i.e. female), even though this differs from place to place and from one culture to another (Keating 1998). In terms of politeness, for example, a notable study in the US has found that 'females are more geared toward maintaining positive politeness, whereas males are more attuned to the adversarial or anarchistic nature of the medium' (Hongladarom and Hongladarom 2005: p.148). This is to say that social pressure is a powerful tool in tuning language, as reflected in what the Chinese have done to legitimize their idea of 'socialism' alongside their new attitude to neoliberalism (Yang 2007). So if this is an acceptable analysis of national attitudes towards language, it may be yet more convincing in the link between language and gender.

This part of the essay, which negotiates language and gender, comprises four sections. It tries firstly to define gender as a linguistic term and to discuss its implications. A historical view of the link between the binary items will be briefly taken second. It also investigates gender-language research topically to expand the view of this relationship. Fourthly, the fundamental aspect of this essay, which is exploring the status of referring to one sex and the other in a specific culture, will be produced as a direct foreword to the study.

1.1 What gender means

Generally speaking, gender is simply sex which differentiates between males and females. However, gender in specific definition is slightly different. Three issues will be considered here: gender and sex, gender definition and gender stereotypes.

1.1.1 Gender and sex

Linguists have used either word to describe the relationship between sex and language features. However, they have ultimately nearly reached an agreement to use the first rather than the second for one reason or another. Coates (2007) points out that in 1970 researchers did not distinguish between the two words as they signify the same meaning of sex differentiation in both the biological and cultural position. By the end of twentieth century, researchers revised the inaccurate linking ‘of biological sex and social behaviour’ (Coates 2007). This is the key difference between the two words, but some researchers still do not completely agree with this division. Yet they still practise it, going with the linguistic wave of separation, as in the note by Wardhaugh (2010) at the beginning of his chapter on gender.

Although gender, as said before, is another meaning of sex, it is more practicable compared to sex, which is something that a child is born with (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). In other words, sex biologically defines the type of a human being as either male or female at birth, whereas gender considers human beings’ behaviour to classify them in the same two categories.

1.1.2 Gender definition

Given the above distinction between gender and sex, gender refers to the social, cultural and psychological characteristics of a human being. In a clearer statement by McElhinny (2003: p.22), ‘[G]ender designates a set of categories to which we can give the same label crosslinguistically or crossculturally because they have some

connection to sex differences'. When sociolinguists attempt to investigate these differences in a language product (i.e., speech or writing), gender becomes the theme of this investigation. This definition and maybe others, in fact, have been illuminated by the famous saying of West and Zimmerman (1987, cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003), which has had a powerful effect on language and gender researches, that gender is something people do, not something they are born with (Bucholtz 2003).

Regardless of the variety of definitions, Joan Scott (1986) sees that any one of them ought to acknowledge two elements: a fundamental factor of social relationships in which sex differences are perceived, and a chief approach to representing power interaction (Scott 1986, cited by McElhinny 2007). In addition, and as this study is about gender linked to language, the language element has to reflect these sex differences along with the apparent power marks of their relationship in order to be a proper study of gender and language.

Gender as described can be an embedded element of a language where there are noticeable sex signs in the language construction. For example, many Semitic and Indo-European languages embrace these signs to differentiate between the sexes. Languages such as Arabic, French, Greek and Russian characterise gender differences. However, other languages cannot be described as 'gender languages' due to the absence of gender differentiation. Chinese, for instance, is an ideographical language and it lacks the grammatical gender to determine whether words are masculine, feminine or neutral (Hellinger & Bussmann 2002). However, even this is not an absolute fact, as Xiaoping (2008) has revised this claim in the study entitled 'Gender-specific Asymmetries in Chinese Language'.

1.1.3 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes entail a set of actions, and a language performance in linguistics, which probably identify the type of sex. Hesitation and certainty, solidarity and dispute, and politeness and impoliteness are some of the attributes that work in people's minds to form that set of actions and make the association with its supposedly applicable sex. The same particular idea forms numerous expectations of sex differences, some of which Lakoff (1973) has shown to really exist. The powerful

influence of gender stereotypes on language has been documented by many studies which found that speakers' perceptions are affected and shaped by these stereotypes (Aries 1996). As a result of these effects, gender stereotypes leave their mark on language, which probably creates the so-called sexism in language. Weatherall (2002) argues that sexist language consists of linguistic forms that tend to control the other sex, mostly women, and spread a specific social action about them.

In addition, the culture approach provided by Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker (1982, cited in Aries 1996) may provide more explanation. According to them, men and women grow up separately in different subcultures that afford them different rules of language use. Once the stereotypes are built, their language (or languages) is shaped accordingly, which might eventually cause sexist language (Tannen 1994).

1.2 Historical view

Gender as an area of language studies was first recognised around the beginning of the last century. Since then, linguists started writing about the realisation that, while women and men probably use the same language in discourse, they speak it and receive it differently (Lakoff and Ide 2005). One of these early studies was conducted in 1922 by the linguist Otto Jespersen, who discussed the different language, or to be more accurate, the different forms of language based on sex (Speer 2005). An earlier study was noted as early as approximately 1887. Inoue (2007) explains that in the Japanese print media, intellectual males at that time noticed a strange sound that schoolgirls make at the end of their utterances, such as the verbs *noyo* and *tey*. Given that males had described this sound, '[t]hey called such speech forms 'schoolgirl speech' (Inoue 2007:175), which may be considered the first spark of gender-language observation. However, the boom in gender and language studies developed some time later.

Lakoff's initiative in 1970 and her later works, in particular, opened a wide door into sociolinguistic research for women by highlighting the gender differences in language use. She started the argument about male power and male language which, according to her, dominated the female world (Coates 2007). From that early point, much work

has been done to clarify the notion of the gender effect on language and to revise the remarkable work of Lakoff.

Lakoff (1970) started her gender-language study with empirical data, whereas Fishman (1978), for instance, found that males use 'minimal responses' such as "yeah" and "huh" differently to their use by females. Tannen (1990) later worked towards proving the idea of using the same but different language in her bestselling book: *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, along with many others who have been developing the investigation of gender linguistically. Nonetheless, the study of this field would not be flourishing as it is today if women of the feminist movement had not supported it and pushed it, in opposition to men's dominance, in works such as those by Lakoff and her sisters (Lakoff and Ide 2005).

Although the study of gender has been widely well-established amongst several languages, the 'study of Arabic from a gender perspective is still at its beginnings in spite of the fact that Arabic sociolinguistics has attracted the attention of scholars worldwide' (Sadiqi 2006, p1).

1.3 Topics of gender-linguistic studies

The relation between gender and language entails a wide range of different subjects which have been dynamically developed over a long time since the point when gender-linguistics sparked into life. As gender researches have expanded over that time, the field currently satisfies the interests of various academic topics. For example, 'the topics of gender and voice, verbal ability and brain specialisation for language have primarily interested psychologists, with differences in language development being examined in both educational and psychological research' (Weatherall 2002: p.33). Furthermore, the study of sex differences at different levels of language, such as semantic, syntactic and phonological levels, has been linguistically appreciated (Weatherall 2002). Also, subjects such as sexism, men's dominance, women's weaknesses and racism have also been discussed in the area of gender and language researches. This is to open the eye on a chain of topics concerning this field before entering into the detailed discussion of the topic of this study.

1.4 Referring and addressing in gender, how and why?

From this variety of topics, the fundamental aspect of this study should be addressed as a preface to analysing and investigating the empirical data which will be explained in the next part of the study. Referring to the other sex is one of the interesting topics of gender and language studies. It shows how women refer to men among women or in a mixed society and vice versa. This section involves two sub-sections which are: classification based on gender and the kind of language used to refer to or address the other sex.

1.4.1 Gendered Classification:

In almost all communities, classification has been used to identify people. One person can have many classifications as a result of being present in different levels of society, ranging from her or his family to the local or even global community. For example, someone could be 'African-American', 'high-class', 'neighbour', and 'teacher' and so on. These classifications could be applied to men or women, which suggests the need for gendered classification like a 'woman' or a 'man', or whatever the classification might be, in which the gender would be recognisable, such as 'single mother' or simply 'mother'.

The gendered classifications, labels or attributes, as seen, simply refer to the specific related sex. However, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) assert that culturally they do not simply 'interpret' the supposed meaning or the targeted gender. In fact, gendered classifications have created problematic labels such as doctor, nurse, chairman, etc., which has initiated the argument about women in work positions. This has triggered the question that if men have the right to be referred to as writers or doctors, then what about women's jobs? Do they have to acquire other titles such as 'lady/woman doctor' or 'female/woman writer'? This, as Romaine (2001) thinks, expresses the idea of a real thing which does not have to be explained as opposed to the other thing which has to be articulated.

1.4.2 What kind of language to address the other gender?

Addressing others is what people do all the time, and this is probably what makes this topic so fascinating in sociolinguistics. Schneider and Hacker (1973) direct attention to the unavoidability of gendered referring, compared to the situation with race and nationality. According to them, the use of *he* in English, for example, refers to males and unknown gender. In contrast, ‘the Chinese referrers “他” (ta), meaning “he” and “她” (ta), meaning “she” are pronounced exactly the same so there is no need in oral Chinese to distinguish a male from a female when referring to a third person singular’ (Xiaoping 2008: p.32).

Furthermore, while English manages to make a clear distinction between some gender-based words, such as actor/actress and woman/man, it can also reshape other words to create the other gender, as in chairman/chairwoman. However, some word pairs, as Wardhaugh (2010) indicates, probably do not signify the same intended meaning, as in master/mistress, for instance. Likewise, some female terms have lost or changed their meaning to point, perhaps, to completely the opposite. For example, madam, mistress, lady and courtesan have lost their positive meanings, while the subdivision words still have their original ones: sir, master and lord (Romaine 2001). In addition, it may be taken as insulting if the addition of ‘lady/woman’ to the word/position is consistently needed when the position is considered as high-class (Lakoff 1973).

As an attempt to escape this gender dilemma, Besnier (2007) draws attention to an articulation which demonstrates that gendered linguistic practices are both *indexical* and *indirect*. This is to empty language features of their gendered identities, and to lose the problematic relation between language and gender (Besnier 2007). However, this does not seem to solve the whole problem or to defeat the feminist theories. Conversely, Arabic seems to linguistically show no gender dilemma. While it does not morphologically encode the neuter, it generally exhibits two types of gender markers: masculine and feminine for almost every word in its linguistic structure (Sadiqi 2006).

2. Methodology

The study uses empirical data to examine the situation of referring to the other sex in Saudi Arabia along with other Arab countries. This part discusses the aims and the research question, the study method, the nature of the empirical data and how it has been collected.

2.1 Aims and research question

As mentioned earlier, Arabic language context has not gained as much research attention as other language contexts have. The literature still lacks the intensity and reliability which unbiased non-oriented studies could investigate. This literature gap coincides the fact that Arabic has shown a clear contrast on the two levels: the formal (grammatical) level and the sociolinguistic (relational) level (Sadiqi 2006). This study tries to investigate the language on the sociolinguistic level compared to the language on its grammatical/morphological level.

Taking into account Arabic local societies, this study examines any significant differences between men and women in referring to the other sex. It aims to explore the communication status among the society to study the linguistic-gender relationship. This study is mainly explorative and hence it is intended to show what the linguistic practice is like in terms of referring to the other sex. It also endeavours to discover the relationship between the Arabic language, Arabic people and the Arabic culture in sense of referring-to-males-and-females language.

Based on the cited literature and the data that the study uses, the questions are as follows: a) what kind of language do both genders use in order to refer to the other sex in Arabic countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Arabic Gulf and Syria)? b) are there any differences? and c) what sort of reasons underlie this particular use (if it does exist) of language? To answer these questions, the study will examine empirical data as a source to reflect the actual use of language within the community.

2.2 Study method

Because the data, as will be explained later, is a set of texts which were collected from magazines, websites and blogs, this study uses a qualitative approach. In qualitative studies, the task is to sort the quantity of data into patterns or categories and then to investigate them. The increasing interest in the analysis of text is quite understandable, considering that the majority of recoverable information about human social life and thoughts in their complicated society can be found in their published texts, such as newspapers, magazines and books (Bernard 2006).

In addition, the study will use the qualitative approach in dealing with words to capture patterns and try to offer explanations, as this is the value of such an approach (Cohen et al. 2000).

2.3 Data collection and data analysis

The data for this study is drawn from several Saudi and Emirati magazines, some of which are aimed at women and the others are oriented towards men. The magazines are: Zahrat Alkhaleej, Banat, Laha, Noon, Shabab and Arrajol. Other data is taken from different on-line bulletin, twitter and blogs. The idea is to find out how women and men are represented either among mixed audience or in same-sex groups. Several men-only as well as women-only zones (e.g. magazines and websites etc.) were examined to fulfil the goals of the study. Although there are some English data, the collected sample is exclusively in Arabic, which allows us explore the language-gender relationship in the real situation. Arabic is authentically the language formally and informally of all the targeted society. This raises the research validity as the picture reflected here, using this sort of data, is more accurate.

To analyse the collected data, which is in written form, the investigation involves reading through the text to identify any patterns. This is an inductive procedure which meets the requirements of this type of data (Seliger and Shohamy 1989; Thomas 2003). It normally reflects reported patterns which build a model that results a number of main categories (Thomas 2003). Three themes were developed by studying the

transcripts repeatedly and thoroughly. The coding process entails labelling the sorts of language used to address the other sex to gradually building a theme of its own which may embody related meanings and similar labels. The potential patterns may then show and explain any significant differences in the ways in which women and men address each other.

3. Results and discussion

After an inclusive survey of different women's and men's magazines and websites, patterns have emerged. Although some of them are pretty distinct, they are not always totally clear. Feasibly, we are going to see the findings in three categories: generalisation; workplaces; and social roles, in which the identified patterns of referring to the other sex have been classified and will be discussed.

3.1 Gender generalisation

Calling things by their names is not the case here. The use of 'women' and 'men' and such binaries is the normal language used to refer to women and men. In addition, it is understandable why men use male words to make generalisations, even if they mean both sexes. However, it is quite odd when women in their own magazines use male words to do so. For example, one reporter used both male words "الشباب" (young men) and "النشء" (immature males) to refer to all young people (Zahrat Alkhaleej 2010). Interestingly, the report was about an Emirate festival which has been established to honour a certain prominent Emirate lady. In the same magazine, a female journalist reported on the Sheikh Zaid Mosque and she employed the word "المشاهدون", meaning 'audience of males', many times. She did not even point out to females depending on that this word is making such a generalization in order to include all people, no matter what their sex is.

Another obvious example emerges from using the word "باحثون" (male researchers) right before mentioning a female researcher (Banat 2010). This implies that the term

‘male researchers’ is thought sufficient to include male as well as female researchers, although the intended researcher is herself female.

A statement by Ibn Jinni ¹(cited by Najjar 1975: p.2415), who is one of the foremost Arabic linguists, might be an explanation of this phenomenon in Arabic: ‘the masculinisation of the feminine is widespread as it is reverting to the origin’. Although this claim is not convincing and many contemporary linguists oppose it, it could be that it is the culture itself which converts this claim into reality through this kind of language.

Moreover, the Syrian First Lady, in honouring Syrian women on Mothers’ Day, used both female and male generalisation. For instance, in addressing Syrian women, she said "نساء سورية العاملات في الزراعة" (the Syrian women who work in agriculture). Yet, she added "وتأمين حياة أفضل لأبنائه" (to assure the sons of this country of the best life) (Laha 2010) ⁽²⁾. It is probably clear that the female words (Syrian women) are being used to refer to women specifically, and the male words (sons) are used to refer to both sexes generally. The male words in generalisation are used as gender-free words. Hence, this particular use is deeply implanted in the mind of the culture and it is possibly being used unconsciously. A notable example of this concept is given in a book by Nawal Assa’dawi, who is a major figure in Arabic feminism. While her book title is ‘Female is the Origin’ as if she is in confrontation with Ibn Jinni’s statement, she intensively used the male pronoun in general referring, (Alghathami 2006).

What is shocking nonetheless, is addressing females using male linguistic features which can be found in formal as well as informal interactions. Figure 3 and 4 show that the use of male language features has gone beyond making generalisation to address females themselves³. These are only few samples of numerous on the internet which may reflect the informal/individual use of language compared to what is found in published magazines. The ways of referring to mixed audience existed in both

¹ AbulFateh Othman Ibn Jinni, an early Arab linguist, born at Al-Mosul and died at Baghdad in 1002. He composed a number of instructive linguistic works on syntax, semantics and phonetics. Kitab al-Khasa’is (specifications) is one of his splendid works. (Ibn Khallikan 1972)

² Ironically, the reporter was a female reporting in a female magazine about honouring females on a female day, as carried out by a prominent female.

³ Personally, I asked women around me to consider this idea simply to determine the informal usage. They said that in such a speech they would use male-language words and signs such as pronouns (although Arabic affords them their own linguistic features). This is obviously not an accurate measurement, though it is probably an informal indicator.

types is simply identical in sense of making generalisation. It differs however, in terms of addressing females only between a nearly consistent use of male signs on the internet and a frequent use of female features in publication.

In contrast, none of the male-oriented magazines nor the websites which were covered by this study have used female words in referring to both women and men generally. However, they of course have exploited the male attributes in generalisation in conjunction with using equal status words to refer to women and men separately. This is more likely to match Spender's (1980) thinking, in which she uses the term 'he/man language' and explains it by revealing the inclusive use of male pronouns (he) and words (man) which fully hide females in this context.

3.2 Gendered work positions

In her celebrated work, Lakoff (1973) concludes that 'men are defined in terms of what they do in the world, women in terms of the men with whom they are associated' (Lakoff 1973: p.64). This may reveal the hidden insistence of some cultures on keeping women in the shadows: languages foster this interest by expressing the chief role of men and the subordinate role of women. Although Arabic makes a clear gender distinction between the work positions of men and women, as it has features that provide the ability to change language construction according to gender, the real situation sometimes differs.

References to work positions in the data examined revealed a sort of contradiction or hesitation in making a decision. For example, Sheikh Fatima, who is a member of the royal family and has more than one position, is described in a report in a women's magazine four times: twice as in female positions and twice more as in male's positions. According to the magazine *Zahrat Alkhaleej* (2010), she is "شيخة" (female Sheikh), "الرئيس الأعلى لمؤسسة التنمية الأسرية" (Chairman of the Family Development Foundation), "رئيسة الاتحاد النسائي" (female President, or Chairwoman of the Women's Union), and "الرئيس الأعلى لمجلس الأمومة" (Chairman of the Board of Motherhood) (see figure 2 for the whole report). However, referring to a man's positions does not include this uncertainty at all, as he is, for example, "أستاذ علم الاجتماع" (male

sociologist), "المحامي" (male lawyer), "الطالب" (male student) and "الباحث" (male researcher) (Laha 2010: Report 4).

Surprisingly, the men's magazines consistently refer to women's positions accurately by using the addition of female signs in accordance with Arabic grammar. Hence, woman is "ممثلة" (actress), "طالبة" (female student), "عارضة أزياء" (female model), "صائغة فضيات" (female goldsmith) and "ناقدة" (female critic) (Arrajol 2010), for instance. Similarly and naturally, men are described in their magazines without deviation.

Although some magazines make it unclear, there are other women's magazines that refer to women's positions properly most of the time, as in Laha (2010). So it might be the culture or language advisors which account for the vagueness found in referring to women's work positions. For example, although, as said before, Arabic grammar entitles the speaker to express gender in this context, the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo determines that describing woman in the workplace as male is linguistically acceptable (Allam 1977). As there is no gender dilemma in this context to escape from, there is no need to legitimate the presumably wrong linguistic behaviour. This decision from one of the highest authorities on Arabic suggests that there might be other reasons for legitimising references to women's workplaces as if they were men's, even while the language has features suitable for targeting gender systematically.

The linguistic behaviour in these examples reveals that language practices cannot be fully understood without taking into account other sociohistorical factors, both locally and globally. Or as Nguyen (2007: p.363) puts it, 'gendered linguistic patterns can be partly shaped by sociohistorical events in other places and times'. Nonetheless, neither in women's magazines nor in men's magazines the masculine work positions are ever described as female positions.

3.3 Social roles

This section discusses the descriptions of women and men in the social context based on the study's data. It seems that women tend to describe men in the best of terms,

such as father, young man, or man, and even within a dreadful story about a man beating his daughter he is still "الأب" (the father) (Banat 2010). Moreover, a man is sir, mister, son, groom, good man and in the family setting husband, brother, son and father (Zahrat Alkhaleej 2010). However, this seems too formal and polite compared with the normal/informal interaction.

In an Arabic TV show called 37.2 (2010) on the MBC1 channel, a female doctor started repeating a particular slang word, "ييو" *Yabu*, which means 'Hey, mate!', when she was calling her colleague. The man could not tolerate this and so he told her not to use the word as it is exclusively a man to man word. Then he and she went on to write down other unusable words for each sex when referring to each other.

Similarly, females are described in men's magazines as beautiful woman, little girl, girl, sensitive creature, housewife, young woman, wife and mother (Arrajol 2010). In addition, she is sister, "حبيبة" (sweetheart), wife, girl and bride (Noon 2010). Except for one case where a woman was described as "سانجة" (naive), the overall tone of socially referring to woman seems to be polite. It seems here that gender stereotypes positively play their roles to illustrate the overall relationships and descriptions to be supreme. The description of mother, particularly, is the most noticeable one, and brings to mind the traditional social role of woman as housewife, wife and mother (Marco 1997). Although the local social culture affords "mother" this high appreciation, the same culture takes away this appreciation from another angle when the same woman becomes the "mother in law" (Alghathami 2006). However, this was not shown in the data which was studied.

Conclusion and essential implications

Gender has been in the foreground recently, along with other similar topics in sociolinguistics, whereas class, for example, has returned to the background (McElhinny 2007). Using empirical data drawn from several magazines, blogs and websites, this essay has discussed the local situation of referring to the other sex in three categories: generalisation, work positions and social roles. The three categories have been examined by looking for patterns using a qualitative approach. It was found

that referring to males is continuously respectful, polite and matching their gender. Referring to women, in contrast, is rarely mentioned in generalisation, sometimes matching in workplaces and most of the time is polite in the social context. Interestingly and strangely at the same time there are countless evidences that indicate the accepted use of male linguistic signs in addressing females only which goes beyond making generalisations.

Given these results, the reasons of causing the gender differences in the language use such as women addressing women, making generalisation or the language use in work positions are not clear enough. What we can hypothesise however, based on the literature we reviewed, is that this kind of use has arisen from three main areas: over generalisation, gendered differences and Ibn Jinni's statement. Over generalisation can be one of the reasons in addressing mixed audience using a male-signs language which has been discussed thoroughly in this article. In accordance with over generalisation, the gendered differences, particularly the difference between the two sexes in status and connections, comes as another possible reason. Lakoff (1973) discussed and showed that females talk for solidarity and males talk for explanation or dispute, which might justify the leaning of females towards using masculine language in favour of unifying themselves with mixed audience. Ibn Jinni's statement which has been discussed earlier could shed light on the usage of male signs in women-to-women interaction as reverting to the origin which allows women to let go of their female linguistic identity even in their own conversations.

Whatever the reasons might be, there is a huge gap between the language potentials and the social attitudes. While, Arabic entitles the language user to differentiate genders, the social attitudes seek exits from no problem situations. It seems the language which is supposed to be the culture container, is detached from its people and their culture. However, the need for more investigation appears crucial to absolve this linguistic dilemma, probably with other methodological approaches such as the conversation analysis approach which could be of more useful to the 'real life' communications.

In addition, I think that the findings cannot be generalised as this study has its own limitations. For example, there are other social contexts that the magazines and websites do not cover, such as everyday life, actual interactions and differences in

social levels and backgrounds as well as other areas of the Arabic map. The magazines reflect the cultural layer of the middle class, and there is no reflection at all of practices above, or more importantly below, that class. It would perhaps be better if the empirical data was taken from another type of source, such as novels or TV shows, which represent a variety of classes, while also exploiting the local vernacular. As these limitations could prevent the findings from being generalised, they suggest that other studies could be undertaken to investigate these areas and contexts with different methodological approaches.

That said, we can anticipate that the politeness is one of the common elements which is most likely not going to fade. Generalisation on the other hand, would be persistent for the long run in favour of males as it always has been since Ibn Jinni's description of the gendered reference to feminine in making generalisation as 'reverting to the origin'. Due to the hesitation, we have seen, in referring to females only however, we cannot obviously say what the linguistic practice would be like many years to come as this has not settled yet. And until we figure out the actual and definite reasons of such an attitude, by further investigations, we are stuck in this dilemma.

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About the author

Hisham Alkadi is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at the School of Education, Communication, and Language Sciences (ECLS). Prior to this, he has completed an MA and BA in linguistics and Arabic. His areas of research interest include applied linguistics, Arabic linguistic and literature, and sociolinguistics.

Appendices

Figure 1, Taken from Laha (2010)



Figure 2, Taken from (Zahrat Alkhaleej (2010:p16)



Figure 3, Taken from hawaaworld.com (2012) and Swalif.com (2011).

بنات القنفذة وين تروحون؟ ترا مليت.
 03/01/2012 - منتديات عالم حواء

السلام عليكم كيفكم حبيباتي والله اني احسكم مثل اهلي وزوجي طفش مني كل ما اكلمه المنتدى والمنتدى المهم يا بنات القنفذة انا كنت عايشة بجده وجيت سكنت القنفذة عشان شغل زوجي المهم كل مانخرج مكان مافي الا البحر ومطعمين والله طفشنا منهم مافي شي ثاني لا اسواق كبيرة ولا مول ولا مطاعم زي جده ولا شي مع ات المدينة مرة كبيرة ماهي صغيرة ولا قرية بالعكس هي مدينة مرة حلوة... ياليت يسمعوني ويسولنا اي شي وسلامتكم مواضيع ذات صلة



مواضيع ذات صلة

بنات جده وين الاقيها يوجد صور ه
 03/06/2012 - منتديات عالم حواء

بنات جده وين الاقيها يوجد صور ه وين الاقي شنت سفري دلسي بيركارد بجده؟ والارخص من والا موقع امارون؟ وين الاقي شنت سفري دلسي بجده واللي جريت موقع امارون تقولي اذا كان سعرها مع الشحن ارخص والا لا احس هنا تصب مواضيع ذات صلة



بنات القنفذة ادخلوا
 04/03/2012 - منتديات عالم حواء

السلام عليكم يا بنات القنفذة بحكم يا حلوات بدي منكم تحطوا صور للقنفذة نفسي اشوف مسقط راسي يلا يلا وروني همتكم مواضيع ذات صلة



بنات الرياض وين تقضيتوا اغراض رمضان . في اي سوق ؟؟
 04/03/2012 - منتديات عالم حواء

بنات الرياض وين تقضيتوا اغراض رمضان . في اي سوق ؟؟ ودي اروح لسوق فيه كل شي التميمي اللي على طريق خالد بن الوليد او هايبر بنده اللي في خريص او وين ؟؟ .. مواضيع ذات صلة



Figure 4, Taken from Twitter, @BHT90 (2012)

1h **بدور التويجري @BHT90**

@ghathami

نخبة من المدربات السعوديات يطرحون دورات مجانية على هذا الحساب

.. ادعمهم بريتويت لاهنت **@NewSunrise2** ..

by عبدالله الغدامي via web

