

Retention and Maintenance of Palestinian Dialect of Almafraaq in Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Study

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Abstract

Palestinian has been one of the Jordanian dialects, came into existence after the Arab-Israeli wars when a great number of Palestinian refugees came into Jordan. This paper particularly focuses on the Palestinian dialect of Almafraaq which is a minority Jordanian community, and their language maintenance is an interesting example for any sociolinguistic study. This article is based on the findings of an academic research among the Palestinian living in Almafraaq and surrounding areas. This article is a case study of the Jordanian-Palestinians' retention and maintenance of Palestinian dialect.

Keywords: Jordan, Palestinian Dialect, Language Contact, Sociolinguistics, Language Attitude.

1. Introduction

Arabic is considered as the most widely spoken, out of the living Semitic languages, belonging to the Afroasiatic family (Watson, 2002). Arabic can be broadly categorized into two standard varieties: Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. Classical Arabic, also known as *Fuṣḥa*, is the standard language used in the pre-Islamic period among the Quraish tribe. Modern Standard Arabic, also referred to as contemporary *Faṣiḥ*, is the form of language used in formal domains, such as academics, media, religious discourse, and conferences. Additionally, Arabic contains a large number of dialects spoken in around 60 countries that differ from one another in different linguistics levels. These dialects may not be mutually intelligible to speakers from other regions (Huneety, 2015; Mashaqba et al., 2020; Watson, 2002).

Recent studies on the sociolinguistics of Arabic dialects have demonstrated that in addition to the Standard Arabic that holds prestige and power across the Arab World, there exists, in all Arabic-speaking countries, at least one additional supra-local or regional variety, generally spoken, that holds considerable prestige for ordinary Arabic speakers (see e.g., Abd-El-Jawad, 1987; Abu-Haidar, 1989; Al-Amadidhi, 1985; Al-Rojaie, 2013; Bassiouney, 2017; Holes, 1995). These studies have shown that speakers speaking local varieties tend to shift to the non-standard supra-

local variety, be it the dialect of Amman, Almafraaq, Baghdad, Cairo, or Manama, perhaps because it is more accessible to speakers than the Standard Arabic.

Palestinian dialect of Almafraaq in Jordan presents a particularly interesting case for the study of language and identity construction for several reasons:

1. They were the ethnic majority in Jordan and thus found themselves in a demographic context that is extremely rare for migrant communities but holds minority status in Almafraaq.
2. The host community is very small and relatively homogeneous, making for greater visibility in the new Palestinian refugees' context than is again typical of migration situations in highly multi-cultural contexts.
3. Palestinian-Jordanians living in Almafraaq still maintain their native dialect in several domains. On the other hand, we notice their tendency to use the local Bedouin dialect in some other domains.

The linguistic situation in Jordan is more complex for many reasons. Jordan hosts a large number of skilled Palestinian workers (Plascov, 1981), and many merchants and academicians came from neighbouring states in the 1920s and 1930s (Aruri, 1972). More significantly, the annexation of the West Bank into Jordan in the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War led to a growth in the proportion of the urban variety and a decrease in the migratory patterns (Aruri, 1972); for more details of the linguistic situation in Jordan, see Mashaqba (2015). However, there has not been much research surveying language use and attitude in Jordan. This study fills this gap by investigating language ideology and attitude in the context of 21st-century Jordan, which is experiencing extraordinary social changes, including opportunities for language contact between Palestinian and Bedouins.

The findings are based on an examination of recorded sociolinguistic interviews and questionnaires designed to elicit speakers' language use and attitude.

2. Palestinian Dialect of Jordan

A dialectal contact situation between Jordanian and Palestinian varieties came into existence as a result of the influx of a significant number of Palestinian refugees into Jordan after the Arab-Israeli wars, which caused a large expansion of Jordanian urban centres at the expense of rural and Bedouin areas (Al-Wer, 2002). Before this change, the Bedouin dialect was the dominant variety in the country. The presence of both the rural and urban varieties in Jordan is directly related to how the Palestinian political problem unfolded over the past six decades. This explains why these two dialects are referred to as alien by Jordanian nationalists as opposed to the indigenous BV (Suleiman, 2004). This was a turning point in the dialectal context, which brought

about a competition between the Jordanian and Palestinian dialects. This is most obviously reflected in their emblematic variants; the use of [g], for example, symbolizes the local and Jordanian identity, while [ʔ] symbolizes the Palestinian originality (Al-Wer, 2002). The appeal to attitudes in discussing the competing varieties stems from three considerations: (1) the attitudes reflect the Jordanians' linguistic beliefs about dialects in the speech communities; (2) the significance of attitudes extends to other domains such as linking language to intergroup relations and politics; and (3) the concept of attitude helps us interpret what attitudes people declare to have toward a certain dialect and how they act toward it in empirical situations, such as being reluctant to code-switch between dialects because of issues related to pride (Suleiman, 2004). Overall, the complex language situation in Jordan is viewed differently by linguists, who mostly disagreed on the sociolinguistic ranking of the competing varieties, as we will see below.

Table 1

The most common phonological Palestinian features

Linguistic Variables	Standard Variety	Palestinian Variety	Example (Standard forms given first)
(Q)	[q]	[ʔ]	/qalb/(heart) /ʔalb/
(D)	[d ^s]	[d ^s], [z ^s] or [d]	/d ^s aabit ^s / (officer)- /d ^s aabit ^s / or z ^s aabit ^s /. Mutad ^s aajiq/ (upset)/middajiʔ/
(Ð)	[ð ^s]	[d ^s] or [z ^s]	/ð ^s ufr/ (nail)/d ^s ufr/. /ð ^s il/(shadow)/z ^s il/
(Θ)	[ə]	[t] or [s]	/əalaaə/ (three)/talaat/. /taəbiit/ (strengthening) /tasbiit/
(dʒ)	[dʒ]	[ʒ]	/dʒabal/(mountain) /ʒabal/
(k)	[k]	[k]	/kalb/ (dog)

3. The Bedouin Jordanian Dialect

People usually consider this dialect as being traditionalist and closer to the dialect of Arabia. It gains its high prestige because it is “considered quite conservative and hence similar to the Qur'an” Cadora (1970:12). This closeness to the Holy Qur'an is traced in the /fas'aaha! (eloquence) of its speakers. Thus, Rabin (1951:18) assumes that this dialect is “to some extent justified by the rich speech of the Bedouin and his natural rhetorical ability, and by the fact that a tradition of Classical Arabic poetry still continued among the tribes for some centuries.” I am

partly convinced with this statement that “it is part of the mythology of Arabic...that Classical Arabic...is still spoken by the Bedouin. Such statements are part of a general fact about human knowledge, which is that the further away and less accessible an area is, the more fantastic things seem to be known about it” Ingham (1994:5).

The most common phonological features (table 2) of this Bedouin variety, which is spoken in Almafraq of Jordan, are:

Table 2

The most common phonological Bedouin Jordanian features

Linguistic Variables	Standard Variety	Bedouin Variety	Example (Standard forms given first)
(Q)	[q]	[g]	/qalb/(heart) /galb/
(D)	[d ^ʕ]	[ð ^ʕ]	/d ^ʕ aabit ^ʕ / (officer)- /ð ^ʕ aabit ^ʕ /
(Ḍ)	[ð ^ʕ]	[ð ^ʕ]	/ð ^ʕ ufr/ (nail)
(Ḫ)	[ħ]	[ħ]	/ħalaaħ/ (three)
(dʒ)	[dʒ]	[dʒ]	/dʒabal/ (mountain)
(k)	[k]	[tʃ]	/kalb/ (dog) /tʃalb/

4. Methods and Data Collection

The sample selected for this study was limited to the families belonging to Palestinian tribes who were permanent residents in Almafraq. The respondents were selected partly on the basis of their accessibility to the researcher and mostly their willingness to respond. As the present study aims at investigating language use and attitude among Palestinian dialect users who are a minority in a host Bedouin majority, this region is considered as a representative example of such a sociolinguistic situation. The researcher had a total of 150 informants for the study by using the Social Network method. 50 informants were directly interviewed, and 100 informants of this sample filled a questionnaire. The sample covers different age groups, gender, educational background, place of birth, nature of work, etc. It is divided into three age groups, following the studies done by Dweik (2000), Al-Khatib (2001), and Al-Khatib & Al -Ali (2010) as the following table shows:

Table 3*Distribution of the sample by age and gender*

Age	No.	Sex	
		Male	Female
Young 15-29	38	20	18
Middle 30-44	29	14	15
Old 45+	33	17	16
Total	100	51	49

The questionnaires were randomly distributed to 51 male and 49 female participants whose ages ranged between 15 and 50 (Table 1).

The questionnaire in this study has three sections. The first section has five questions used to extract their perceived association of Bedouin and Palestinian dialects with four social features, namely age, gender, occupation, level of education, as shown in Appendix A. They also had the option of choosing ‘No Response’, which a few participants chose. As the researcher conducted the survey, the entire sample was simultaneously observed by the researcher himself. The interviewers used their own dialects during the interviews to maintain a natural environment. The researcher starts each interview by providing a summary of the objectives of the study. Extra questions could be asked when necessary.

5. Ideologies, Identity, and Language Maintenance

Language ideology refers to common-sense ideas that speakers have about the structure and use of their language. Silverstein (1979) more specifically refers to it “as a set of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (p.193). Language ideology is considered as a mediating link between linguistic forms and social structure. Language ideologies are often the driving force behind language maintenance and shift (Kulick, 1992). In this section, we discuss speakers’ ideologies about the social meanings of speaking the two varieties (Palestinian and Bedouin) as evidenced in the sociolinguistic interviews and the survey in order to understand the social factors that may contribute to the dialect shift. Fasold (1984) defines ‘language shift’ simply as ‘the process of a community giving up a language. He further states that ‘when the shift occurs, the community has collectively chosen a new language where an old one was used before’. He further states that language shift and language maintenance are two sides of the same coin and are both ‘really the long-term, collective results of language choice’ of a group of people (Fasold, 1984). At the end of the interview’s participants were asked questions that were intended to elicit their ideologies about the dialects.

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While discussing the shift, the younger Palestinian participants acknowledged the phenomenon and mentioned that they are ‘affected by’ the Bedouin dialect and their language is ‘mixed with Bedouin words. They generally attributed this to two major factors: the environment and socialization. Others said that persons who use Bedouin outside of their area are merely trying to impress other people, i.e., the Bedouins, with their knowledge of the dialect and gain social acceptability from them.

For the older generations (45+), the ideologies regarding language and language shift were similar for both men and women. In response to a general question about the value of preserving dialects, they responded by saying that people should preserve their own dialects. They however do not think that adopting the Palestinian dialect affects their broader Jordanian identity, because they claim that both dialects represent the Jordanian identity equally.

Although they claimed the Jordanian identity, the data collected during the study indicates that the Palestinians of Almafraq still retain their attachment with their national history and origins. During the researcher's visits to some of their houses, he could observe that photographs of Palestinian historical and religious places were still on display in their rooms and hallways. Furthermore, a young Palestinian man living in the area of Almafraq, states that “many of us still inherit the keys of our houses that our grandfathers were forced to leave behind”.

6. Dialect Attitudes

Data on language attitudes is difficult to acquire and difficult to quantify and requires at least a two-step analysis that must first consider whether the data collected is actually reflective of language attitudes (the validity problem (Fasold, 1984)), and second, whether language attitudes are predictive of language behaviour. Yet in cases of language contact, attitudes toward language varieties are likely to be one of the most illuminating social factors, particularly with respect to the question of whether speakers are likely to maintain a language in cases of contact.

The age of the participants plays an important role in the realization of the dialects used among the participants. Younger generation participants whose age ranges from 15-29 years, find Palestinian dialect as more useful in comparison to Middle and Older Generation. The following chart shows the distribution of the sample by dialects and age. The green bars represent older generation, red bars represent middle generation, and the blue bars represent the younger generation.

It is clear from Figure 1.1 that there are differences in the values of different age groups’ rating about their own dialect. Most Palestinian participants recognized their own Palestinian dialect as more useful than any other and this rating is particularly higher among younger

generation which is really unique. Despite this evidence, the researcher has observed many Palestinian children speak Bedouin fluently at school while engaging with their Bedouin peers. The combined data clearly shows that Palestinian across the age groups are strongly associated with the Palestinian dialect. The ideologies regarding the Palestinian dialect among Younger, Middle and Older generation are however clearer. Figure 1.1 shows that all participants view the Palestinian dialect in a positive light.

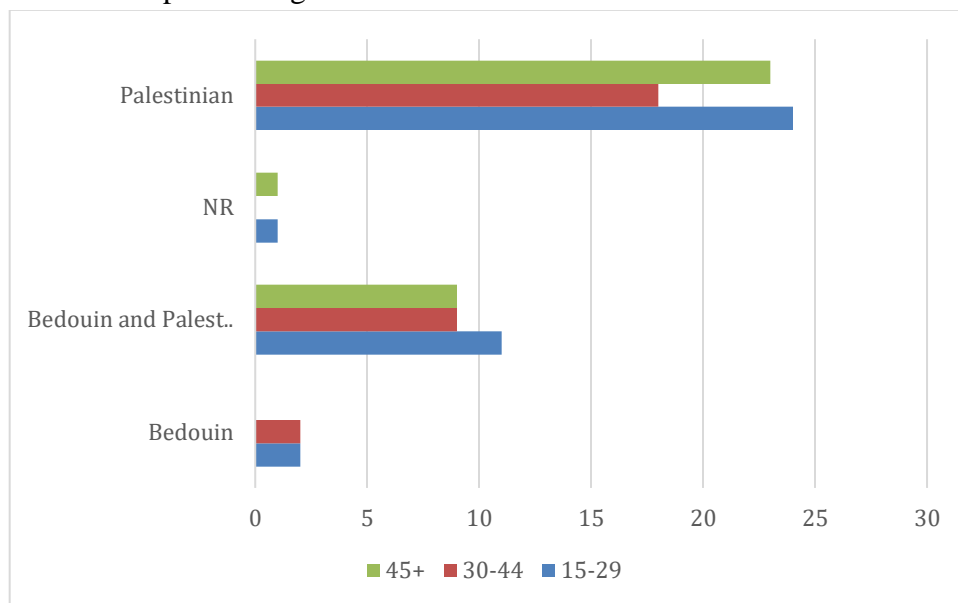


Figure 1.1. Participants' rating about the different dialects

What is striking in the survey is the asymmetric pattern that emerges from their answers to some questions. On the one hand, 96% of Palestinian participants said they spoke both dialects outside the home, and only 6% said they spoke only Bedouin. This clearly suggests that bi-dialectalism is prevalent among Palestinians, who, in addition to their own dialect, also speak Bedouin. These answers confirm that the dialect maintenance of Palestinians in Almafraq is a ground reality.

Table 4

Response Percentages: Dialect Attitude

Question	Bedouin	Palestinian	Both	Yes	No	NR	Sum%
1. What dialect is more beautiful?	3	70	25			2	100
2. What dialect is more useful to you?	4	65	29			2	100
3. In what dialect can you express yourself better?	1	69	28			2	100

4. Is it important for you to speak Bedouin?	67	33	0	100
5. Is it important for you to speak Palestinian?	87	11	2	
6. Is Palestinian dying or might die in your home?	2	97	1	100
7. Is Palestinian dying or might die in your local community?	6	92	2	100

Even though the data in Table 4 are readily comprehensible and interpretation is primarily a question of perspective, there are a few basic observations that may be stated. The findings of this study reveal the cultural perceptions of the Palestinians of Almafraaq in Jordan. Concerning their own dialect, data clearly indicate that Jordanian Palestinians have positive attitudes toward their own dialect and culture. Most participants (65%) considered that Palestinian is more useful to them than Bedouin (question 2), and that it is a more valuable mode of communication (questions 1, 3, and 5). The majority of them (67 percent) are conscious that using Bedouin is valuable to them, according to their responses to question 4. On the other hand, 87% of them consider that speaking Palestinian is also significant to them. The overwhelming majority of the respondents have claimed that Palestinian is not dying at home or in the community of the present study in questions 6 and 7. As a result, many of the responders present two contradictory attitudes. The interviewees' holistic attitude is that they value their dialect and culture, and that they would like to preserve it alive within their own families.

7. Limitation of the Study

The findings of the existing study on attitudes of Palestinians towards both the dialects, inform us little about how these attitudes have been formed. Apart from how the languages are perceived at the macro level, we know little about how the attitudes held by an individual are influenced by and interact with other factors that are pertinent to the individual's life trajectory. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of attitudes towards Palestinian and Bedouin, to make better sense of the current mixed views, we need to be able to pinpoint the factors that contribute to the formation of different kinds of attitudes and how they do so.

8. Conclusion

The findings from the questionnaire confirmed that the Palestinians of Almafraaq are involved in the process of language and cultural maintenance. On the other hand, the data from the sociolinguistic interviews prove that this process results from various socio-political and socio-cultural factors. This study also uncovered that at least two significant factors influenced the Palestinian community's type and amount of maintenance:

1. The political and ideological atmosphere of the Palestinian community, including the positive attitudes, showed by the Palestinians toward their national background.
2. The remote setting with limited access to Jordan's larger communities.

These two factors seem to encourage the retention of the identity of Jordanian Palestinians, and they lead this Palestinian minority through a process of dialect and cultural maintenance. On the other hand, a variety of other sociodemographic factors must also be considered.

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Appendix A

Dialect Use in Different Domains

Questions	B++	B+	B&P	P+	P++	NR
1. What dialect do you use when you speak with your Palestinian neighbors?						
2. What dialect do you use when you speak with your Bedouin neighbors?						
3. What dialect do you use with your parents?						
4. What dialect do you use with your brothers and sisters?						
5. What dialect do you use with your relatives?						
6. What dialect do you use with your friends in school?						
7. What dialect do you use when you are very angry						

8. What dialect do you use when you are very excited?

9. What dialect do you prefer to use when you are outside home?

10. What dialect do you prefer to use in your home?

11. What dialect do you prefer to use in the workplace?

12. In what dialect do you dream?

Abbreviations:

B++: Bedouin only, B+: Bedouin mostly, B&P: Bedouin and Palestinian, P+: Palestinian mostly, P++: Palestinian only, NR: No Response.

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