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Language and Religion in Jordan

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Abstract
This paper tries primarily to show how religion influences some aspects of Jordanian Arabic, specifically its impact on some daily speech acts, such as naming practices, greetings, farewells, taking oaths, offering condolences, etc. We argue that although all Jordanians speak Arabic and identify themselves as Jordanians (with the exception of few ethnic groups) regardless of their faiths, there are some linguistic clues that can help them identify the religious affiliations of their interlocutors. The data for this study were collected based on both authors' personal observations in their daily-life conversations. In addition, data were collected through informal interviews in which the interviewees were asked about how they often identify the religious affiliations of other Jordanians. Moreover, data were collected from the Jordanian TV and other media; public speeches and university lectures. Our findings show that Jordanians rely on both linguistic and non-linguistic cues in order to identify the religious affiliations of others. They also admitted that sometimes not knowing the religious affiliations of others might result in the inappropriate use of language in some situations, such as offering condolences, giving advice, etc.
Keywords: Jordanian Arabic, religion, linguistic cues, speech acts, politeness

1. Introduction

Multifaith speech communities often follow certain linguistic and non-linguistic cues in order to identify the speakers' or addressees' religious affiliations. This is often important for the success of the communication process, especially in delivering some speech acts, such as offering condolences, taking oaths, giving advice, etc. A polite competent speaker should always do his/her best in order to use appropriate language and try his/her best in order not to hurt others' feelings or threaten their face (see Brown & Levinson, 1987). As religion influences language choices (Spolsky, 2006), the main focus of this study is to investigate the linguistic clues in the Jordanian dialect that indicate the religious affiliations of the speakers. Although all Jordanians speak Arabic and identify themselves as Jordanians regardless of their faiths, their faiths have influenced their linguistic choices in certain areas that need to be investigated. Indeed, as a deposit of thought, language influences societies and cultures, which in turn have crucial impact on language choice (see Darwish, 2012). The influence of society on language can be manifested in many daily aspects of language, such as saying greetings, farewells, blessings, etc. In this study, we will try to show how religion influences some aspects of Jordanian Arabic, specifically its impact on some daily speech acts.

Perhaps due to the potential incendiary nature of the subject matter, the relationship between language and religion in Arabic has received little attention. Blanc (1964) illuminated the existence of religious Arabic dialects in Baghdad: Muslim, Christian and Jewish. He divided these three dialects into two groups according to the pronunciation of the first person singular perfect of the verb gaal 'to say': gələt dialect refers to that of Muslims while qəltu dialect refers to that of Christians and Jews. Abu-Haidar (1987) investigated the reflexes of /q/ and /k/ in the Muslim dialect of Baghdad. She (1988) also studied speech variation (urban vs. rural) in the Muslim dialect of Baghdad. Moreover, she (1990) studied the Christian dialect of Baghdad in terms of dialectal maintenance and/or shift. Finally, She (1991) described the phonology, morphology and syntax of Christian Arabic of Baghdad. Abdel-Jawad (1986) studied personal names in Jordan linguistically and socioculturally. He detected various nomenclatural patterns in a pool exceeding 13,000 names. Examples of the dominant patterns or values are: beauty, blessing, generosity, glory, religiosity, happiness, honesty, piety, honour, justice and gratitude to God. What concern us more here are the religious patterns or values reflected in the names chosen by Jordanian parents to their sons and daughters. Indeed naming practices are not arbitrary; they can reflect people's beliefs and attitudes in times of war and peace (see Darwish, 2010). They can also be signs of how people view themselves and others within a speech community. Salih and Bader (1999) conducted a similar study on a pool of 2,550 female and male personal names in Jordan. What differentiates this study from Abdel-Jawad's is its concentration on the Jordanian Arabic Christian names. The researchers found that: 1) the names fall into patterns similar to those mentioned in Abdel-Jawad's study, 2) Christian Jordanians evidently avoid the Muslim male name Mohammed except in rare situations concerning pledges by childless couples (such Christian couples often make pledges that if they were bestowed a male child, they would name him Mohammed), 3) except for some biblical Christian and foreign names, Muslim and Christian personal names cannot be differentiated. They concluded: "In sum, it can be said that the widespread use of Arabic names by Jordanian Christians is meant to preserve their Arab identity and ethnicity, to demonstrate loyalty and attachment to the Arab country of Jordan,

and to show their solidarity with their Muslim compatriots" (pp. 41-42).

2. The Locale

Jordan, officially the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is an Arab country in the Middle East. It shares borders with Syria to the north, Saudi Arabia to the south and southeast, Iraq to the east and Israel/Palestine to the west. Historically, its location to the east of River Jordan has made it subjected to several occupiers, such as the Israelites, Nabateans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. Moreover, it was an important passage to Jerusalem for the crusaders and the battlefield for numerous encounters between them and Muslims (Vatikiotis, 1967). After the Battle of Yarmouk in 636 AD between the Muslim and the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) armies which ended with the former's victory, the Jordan area fell under the Muslim rule (Nafziger & Walton, 2003). In spite of the Muslim conquest, Christianity was not eradicated among the Arabs of the region (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009, cited in Abu Ain, Forthcoming). After the end of the Ottoman rule, Jordan fell under the British mandate. Modern-day Jordan gained its independence in 1946.

The official religion in modern-day Jordan is Islam. However, Christianity and other religions, such as Baha'ism and Druzism do exist and are practised freely and protected by the Jordanian constitution. Some Muslims, though, consider Baha'ism and Druzism as two Islamic sects rather than two separate religions as their adherents read the Holly Quran. Moreover, their numbers are very small compared to Christians who constitute around 6% of the whole population (Bin Talal, 1995). For these reasons, this study will focus only on Islam and Christianity.

With the exception of some ethnic groups (see Suleiman, 2011), both Muslims and Christians in Jordan view and identify themselves as Jordanian Arabs and speak Arabic in its both forms: the Standard and the Colloquial. Although Standard Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran, Christian Arabs value it very highly as it is also attached to Arab Nationalism. In fact, Christians have contributed to the Arab Renaissance, Arab Nationalist Movement and the maintenance of Standard Arabic (Bin Talal, 1995). Generally speaking, Muslim and Christian Jordanians live in harmony and mix with each other at schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, etc. As any other diglossic speech communities, they communicate with each other in Standard Arabic (H variety) in most formal situations and in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic (L variety) in everyday situations (for a discussion on Diglossia see Ferguson, 1959 and Fishman, 1972). In addition, they both write in Standard Arabic.

3. Objectives and Procedures

As stated earlier, indigenous Muslim and Christian Jordanians speak the same language and dialects and identify themselves as Jordanian Arabs. However, in certain circumstances, knowing the religious affiliation of the addressee is important for any polite competent speaker. This is often important for the success of the communication process, especially in delivering some speech acts, such as offering condolences, taking oaths, giving advice, etc. This study aims at investigating the linguistic and non-linguistic cues Jordanian speakers rely on in order to identify the religious affiliations of their interlocutors.

The data for this study were collected based on both authors' personal observations in their daily-life conversations. The fact that the first author is a Muslim and the second a Christian made it even easier. In addition, data were collected through informal interviews in which the interviewees were asked about how they often identify the religious affiliations of other Jordanians. Moreover, data were collected from the Jordanian TV and other media; public speeches; university lectures; and our own speeches. As this study is qualitative, no percentages were counted and no statistical analyses were used although it would be recommended for future research on the subject. Only ways of identifying religious affiliations were listed, classified and discussed.

4. Findings and Discussion

Our findings show that Jordanians rely on both linguistic and non-linguistic cues in order to identify the religious affiliations of other Jordanians. They also admitted that sometimes not knowing the religious affiliations of others might result in the inappropriate use of language in some situations, such as offering condolences and giving advice. To illustrate, one of the Christian interviewees reported the following incident between him and one of the secretaries where he works.

Secretary: Shiklak mish maliih elyoom. fii eshi?
You don't look well today. Is there anything wrong?

Interviewee: mish ʕaarif bas ṣaarli yomeen mnakkad.
I don't know but I've been feeling miserable for the last two days.

Secretary: rawwiḥ w ṣalliilak rakiʕteen lillah w raḥ tufraj
Go home and perform two units of the Islamic Prayer, then everything will be OK.

The secretary's advice is both inappropriate and funny. Not knowing that the addressee is a Christian, she is advising him to perform an Islamic prayer to make his mood better. We argue that the secretary is an ignorant interlocutor as she did not make use of many linguistic and non-linguistic cues under her disposal to infer that

her colleague was a Christian. Although our interviewee has taken it lightly, others might have been really offended by such inappropriate choice of advice. We will start with the non-linguistic cues.

4.1. Non-linguistic Cues

Upon the first encounter, Christians and Muslims can be identified through some of their dress codes. For example, if a female is wearing a Hijab, then she is easily identified as a Muslim. The reverse is not true though, i.e., if the female is not wearing a Hijab then that does not necessarily mean that she is a Christians as many female Muslims do not wear it. Similarly, wearing a cross chain necklace signals Christians, but those necklaces are not always visible and not all Jordanian Christians wear them. Finally, some committed Muslim males express their religious devotion by growing considerably long beards and wearing short *thobes* 'garments'.

Jordanians often keep certain pieces of furniture or ornaments in their houses or offices that signal their faith. For example, when visiting Muslims' houses, one is likely to see some Islamic antiques and wall art work, such as pictures of Al-Kabah and some verses from the Holy Quran written in beautiful Arabic calligraphy. You might also see copies of the Holy Quran and some prayer rugs. By the same token, when visiting Christians' houses, one might see sculptures and/or pictures of Jesus, Mary and other saints. Crosses of different sizes might be found as well as a Christmas tree around December. Moreover, manifestations of religious feasts and holidays can differentiate Muslims from Christians in Jordan. To illustrate, Christians celebrate Christmas, Easter, Palm Sunday and Feast of the Cross, while Muslims celebrate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. The New Year is celebrated by almost all Jordanians.

4.2. Linguistic Clues

There are a number of linguistic clues that might help listeners identify the religious affiliations of the Jordanian speakers. The first is the naming practices in Jordan. Muslims often like to give their male offspring religious names, such as *Mohammad*, *Ahmad*, *Mahmuud*, *Muṣṭafa*, and many names starting with the prefix *ʕabdul*, such as *ʕabdul Raḥmaan*, *ʕabdul Raḥiim*, *ʕabdul Waduud*, etc. Muslim female names have more variation and the frequency of the religious names is not as high as in males' names. Such names include, *Aysha*, *Maryam*, *Faaṭima*, *Khadiija*, *Asma*, *Ayaat*, etc. In contrast, Christians often avoid the Muslim name *Mohammad* (except in rare situations concerning pledges by childish Christian couples) and any names starting with the prefix *ʕabdul*; they frequently use male Christian names and foreign names, such as *Milaad*, *Paulus*, *Boutros*, *Elyaas* and *Eyaas*. Like Muslims, Christian female names have more variation and the frequency of the religious names is not quite as high as in males' names. Female names include Christian and foreign names, such as *Mary*, *Maryam*, *Razaan*, *Jorgiina, Saliina, Sada*, *Riima*, etc. With regard to the surnames, they are less conclusive indicators of the religious affiliations of the bearers. Very few surnames are Christian only, such as *Ṭaashmaan*, *Badir*, *Riḥaani*, etc. Others are both Christian and Muslim surnames, such as *Ḥaddaad*, *Najjaar*, *Bduur*, etc. The final category is Muslim only surnames, such as *Ṭawaalbih*, *Al-Quḍaah*, *Al-Khatiib*, *Rababʕah*, *Ghawaanmih*, etc.

Greetings in Jordanian Arabic can be used as indicators of the religious affiliation of the speaker. For example, *Assalaamu ʕalaykum* 'peace be upon you' is a Muslim greeting that is used mostly by Muslims and in rare occasions by Christians who want to show respect and solidarity with other Muslim Jordanians. Other greetings are used by both Muslims and Christians, such as *marḥaba* 'Hello, Hi', *ṣabaaḥ el-Kheer* 'Good Morning' and *Masa al-Kheer* 'Good Evening'.

Some feast greetings are shared by both Muslim and Christian Jordanians. For exmple, *kul ʕaam wintu bkheer* (another form is *kul sanih wintu saalmiin*) 'May you be well every year' is used to greet people by all Jordanians on the Muslim Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as well as on the Christian Christmas, Cross Celebration, and Palm Sunday. On Easter, Christian Jordanians greet each other with *el-Masiiḥ qaam* 'Christ is risen' for which the addressees reply with *ḥaqqan qaam* 'Is risen indeed'. In addition to *kul ʕaam wintu bkheer and kul sanih wintu saalmiin*, Muslims use Eid Mubaarak and Christians, especially during formal celebrations, greet with *Milaad Majiid* 'Merry Christmas' and *wulid al-Masiiḥ hallelujah* 'Christ was born hallelujah' on Christmas Day; and *shaʕnuuna mubaaraka* 'blessed palm' on Palm Sunday.

Farewells can also indicate whether the speaker is a Christian or a Muslim. Farewells like *Allah maʕak* 'May Allah be with you', *Allah winnabi maʕak* 'May Allah and the Prophet be with you', and *fi amaan Ellah* 'Allah Bless' are mainly Muslim phrases, while farewells like *elʕadhra tiḥmiik* 'May The Virgin protect you', *thoub elʕadhra yiḍal maʕak w nawwir ṭariigak* 'May The Virgin's dress be with you and light your way' (taken from the biblical phrase; Numbers 6:24-26: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace"), el *ʕadhra Maryam tuḥursak* 'May Virgin Mary protect you' and *el Rab Yasuuʕ yikuun maʕak* 'May Jesus Christ be with you' are mainly Christian phrases. Although the phrase *Allah maʕak* 'May Allah be with you', is mainly a Muslim farewell and *el Rab maʕak* 'May God be with you' is mainly a Christian one, in many areas in Jordan they are both used by Muslims and Christians.

Although committed Christians and Muslims rarely swear or take oaths, less committed people do perform such speech acts. Muslims swear by Allah, Allah's life, Mohammad, Mohammad's life, the Prophets, the Propthets' lives, etc., while Christians swear by God (al-Rab), God's life, Jesus, Jesus's life, Virgin Mary, Virgin

Mary's life, etc. However, some Christians might swear by *Allah* and some Muslims by al-*Rab* but with less frequency. Generally speaking Christians use al-Rab more than Allah and Muslims use Allah more than al-Rab although historically "for more than five hundred years before Muhammad, the vast majority of Jews and Christians in Arabia called God by the name Allah" (Accad, 1997, p. 22).

Offering condolences in Jordan can also include linguistic clues identifying the speakers' or addressees' religious affiliations. It is generally noticed that Muslims would more often refer to Allah's willing and what they call *alqadar* 'fate' in death events more than Christians would do. Muslims would very often say *La ḥawla wala quwwata illa billah* 'There is no strength or power save Allah'. In addition to that, Muslims usually use certain phrases in offering their condolences to each other like *ʕaḏḏama Allahu ajrakum 'May Allah reward you greatly'* which would be answered to by *shakara Allahu saʕyakum* 'May Allah accept your effort!' Christians more often use *ilʕumur ilkum* 'May God extend your lifespans', *elrab fagado braḥmitu* 'God has graced him/her with His mercy', *elbagiyyah bḥayaataku* "May God extend your lifespans', *ṭuulit eʕmaarku* '"May God extend your lifespans' and *man khallaf ma maat* 'He who has left offspring did not really die'. Nevertheless, almost all of the expressions of condolences used by Christians are not confined to Christian Jordanians. Muslims might use any of them but with less frequency than *ʕaḏḏama Allahu ajrakum* 'May Allah reward you greatly'.

Moreover, it is important to mention the differences in the written condolences between Muslims and Christians in the Jordanian newspapers. From the very first look at the obituary page in any Jordanian newspaper, the Arab reader would be able to identify the religious background of each case of death. For example, Muslims often start these announcements by Quranic verses or phrases like *Innaa lillaahi wa innaa ilayhi raajiʕuun* (Al-Baqara, verse 156) 'To Allah we belong and to Him is our return', *Kullu nafsin dha?iqat ulmawt* (Al-Imran, verse 185) 'Every soul shall taste of death', and *ya ayyatuha innafs ulmuṭma?inah irjiʕii ila rabbiki raaḏiyatan marḏiyyah fadkhulii fii ʕibaadii wa dkhulii jannati* (Al-Fajr, verses: 27-30) 'O soul, in complete rest and satisfaction come back to thy Lord,- well pleased and well-pleasing unto Him, enter among my devotees my Heaven'. Christian written condolences, on the other hand, are characterized be biblical phrases like *ʕaziizun fi ʕaynayy irrabb mawtu atqiyaa?uhu* 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful servants', *ana huwa elqiyaamah w alḥayaah man aamana bii wa in maata fa sayaḥyaa*, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying' and *arraubbu aʕta w arrabbu akhadh, falyakun esmu errabbi mubarakan.* 'The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'.

5. Conclusion

As stated above, this is a qualitative study of the linguistic and non-linguistic cues that Jordanians rely on in identifying the religious affiliations of other Jordanian speakers. The data for this study were collected from various resources, such as the authors' personal observations, informal interviews, Jordanian media, public speeches and university lectures. The fact that the first author is a Muslim and the second a Christian made the task of identifying and analysing the data even easier. The authors classified the data into linguistic and non-linguistic cues and provided sufficient examples and explanations.

The findings of this study show that Jordanians make use of both linguistic and non-linguistic cues in order to identify the religious affiliations of other Jordanians. They do not do that to judge or segregate others. In fact, they do so in order to be polite and to protect their face, because ignoring the religious affiliations of others in a conversation can sometimes threaten the addressees' and/or the speakers' face (for the notion of 'face' in conversation, see Brown & Levinson, 1987). We argue that all polite competent Jordanian speakers should try their best in order not to hurt others' feelings or threaten their face via ignoring their religious affiliations. The findings also confirm that language influences societies and cultures, which in turn have crucial impact on language choices. The influence of society on language has been manifested in many daily aspects of language, such as saying greetings, farewells, blessings, etc. This study has been an illustration of how religion influences some aspects of Jordanian Arabic, specifically its impact on some daily speech acts. As this study is qualitative in nature, we recommend that future research be conducted on the same subject quantitatively.

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