

THE LANGUAGE OF FEMALES IN THE CITY OF IRBID IN JORDAN

Dr. Majed Mohamed Hasan Drbseh

Faculty of arts and science in Almethnub-Qassim University in Saudi Arabia, Department of English language and Translation

ABSTRACT: *Studies in language and gender are barely known in Jordan and the Arab-Islamic world at large. This paper highlights the empowering use that Irbid females make of the languages available to them. The importance of this use is enhanced by the fact that Jordanian is a multilingual country where languages do not have the same social and political status and where the choice and use of a language is part and parcel of negotiating the power related to gender-making and gender-creating in Jordanian society. Mono- or bilingual women use oral genres to help themselves and literate (often multilingual) women use code-switching for the same goal.*

KEYWORDS: Sociolinguistics, code switching, L1

INTRODUCTION

A brief history about the city of Irbid; Irbid is a second largest and important city in Jordan, located in the north part of the country. The relatively recent upsurge of interest in the language of females at the international level females' level owes an important deal to sociolinguistics, conscious feminism and interesting awareness of civil rights. This interest is also marvelous enhanced by the quick social change in the dress, appearance, and behavior of both females and males. However, as in all domains of scientific research, mainstream women's sociolinguistics is a field of controversy. Writing from various perspectives, authors address the subject of ladies language with different goals in mind. For example, some of these authors (cf. Labov 1972; Ervin-Tripp 1978; Hymes 1974) have pointed the interdependence of patterns of speech variation and the gender of the speaker/ hearer. Moreover, other authors (Lakoff 1975; Zimmermann and West 1975) have assured that gender differences are basically attributed to the socialization factor, hence the relevance of other variables such as ethnic membership, age, and social class in the analysis of ladies language. On the other hand, other authors (Coates 1986; Bull and Swan 1992) believe gender differences as reflexes of some types of female's sociolinguistic "subculture."

In Jordan, no attention is being paid to the language of women in the burgeoning domains of Jordanian sociolinguistics beyond indications here and there that the variable of gender is significant in performance. This may be due to the fact that ladies in this country are still, to a large extent, culturally invisible. The matter fact, documentation on the language of ladies in the Arab world at large is very seldom. Jordan is a multilingual country where Jordanian Arabic, Caucasian, English and classical or standard Arabic are used with varying degrees of frequency in Jordan (cf. Enajji1991). In this research paper I will focus on two main themes: (1) the situations in which women use a particular language, as well as the constraints on this use, and (2) the social aspects of the image of women in Jordanian Arabic, the lingua franca for all women in Jordan except cases of Caucasian living in different areas in Jordan.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section, some preliminaries concerning the gender variable are

given. In the second, the methodology used in data collection is briefly described. Third one is an interpretation of the results of data analysis is presented. The last one is the language of and about women is correlated with their overall socio-economic status.

THE GENDER VARIABLE

In the linguistics sense, one cannot say that women have their own specific language because there is no difference between the Language of females and the language of men; both of them achieve the same kind of competence in a given language. However, as far as performance is concerned, there are instances where the same meaning rendered differently by females and males in terms of the linguistic expressions they use, that is, their speech. Throughout this paper the term language is used to refer to speech.

Within sociolinguistics, the term gender is to be differentiated from the term sex. The latter is usually used to designate both female and male participants in a speech activity, whereas the previous usually indicates to the notion of sex as a social variable. Gender is felt to be one of the most influential factors in language use.

An overview of the literature on the gender variable discovers that sex differences have been so far explained as reflexes of (1) social dominance, (2) social difference or more recently (3) asymmetrical discourse. The first view illustrates the idiosyncrasies of women speech as typical results of women dominated social status. The most famous example of this dominance approach is Lakoff (1975) who thinks that the bulk of gender differences in language to the phenomenon of socialization in a male dominated society. The process of socialization permits the internalization as well as the reinforcement of a strong sense of gender identity, which automatically results in a certain speech behavior. In other words, ladies speech is a subordinated form of linguistic behavior because females are socially subordinated to men.

Instances of this subordinated linguistic behavior are lack of assertion/authority, hesitation, politeness and a tendency to use standard forms of language. At the same time, these communicational behaviors, women search to compensate for their overall social insecurity. Lakoff's explanation of sex linked differences in terms of dominance were further developed by other sociolinguists. Hass (1975) for example, illustrated speech development in small children prior to the crucial age of five. His results reveal that distinct patterns are recognized in the way boys and girls use their languages. As for Zimmermann and West (1975) they illustrate the various linguistic characteristics of ladies language in terms of turn-taking roles in conversations. Ladies are not assertive in their speech because they are constantly subject to being interrupted by men in conversations. Fishman (1980), on the other hand, thinks that differences in females' and male's language to different ways of beginning and keeping conversations. Part of ladies role in mixed conversations is to support what Fishman (1980) points to as bad work that is verbal behavior whose major role is to keep the flow of conversation. The second approach to sex-linked differences is difference approach (Coates 1986, Maltz and Broker (1982). Studies within

this approach have gone beyond the impact of society in illustrating the language of females and males have confirmed that the two genders simply have different sociolinguistic subcultures. Differently, women speech is not because their social status is inferior to the males, but because they have different female subculture where values and norms simply happen to be different from the male values and norms.

This is the finding of the early social differentiation of the genders, which gives rise to the single gender per groups where each gender learns certain conversational strategies norms and values. Thirdly, approach to the role of sex in speech is a symmetrical approach, stated by Bull and Swan (1992). Both authors based their suggestions on the writings of the feminist theorist Mackinnon (1987). In the symmetrical approach, sex is not regarded as something fixed through cultures, but as something that changes both through time and even within the makeup of the same person. Gender differences, referring to the view, can be illustrated only by concentrating on the various differences that sex makes in various kinds of speak because various kinds of people.

A symmetrical discourse is based on analyses of situations where talk is highly institutionalized and where the participants are symmetrically related, as in court rooms, doctors examining rooms etc. where doctors and judges control speech as they have more power over defendants and patients. For example, in such situations, only the dominant parties use the dominant language, not because of their social power but because of the constructed privilege that such institutions give them. These situations sex does not have a significant effect in courtroom, women judges have the same privileges that men judges have.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of analysis used in this paper is based on three questionnaires, as well as several interviews and tapes recordings. Not all the ladies participating in the questionnaires, interviews, tape recordings were born in the city of Irbid where the data were collected geographically dialect differences are thus not excluded. The first questionnaire was submitted to a sample of 103 students, the second questionnaire was submitted to 25 university teachers, and the third questionnaire was submitted to a sample 51 women from different areas. In addition to the questionnaires, 26 women were interviewed, 8 from each group that filled out the questionnaires. During the interviews, women were asked questions meant to elaborate on one or more points in the questionnaires or were asked questions that would confirm or disconfirm the answers given the questionnaire forms. I also used tape recordings. The females who participated in the recordings did not know that they were being tape recorded. These ladies belong to different social classes and age groups. Some of them are academics, some are business female, shop keepers, doctors, and others house wives. Moreover, both formal and informal situations were used. I used homes, university, and the sport center as the main places for recordings. The choice of these places simply coincident with places I usually prefer.

ANALYSIS OF DATA:

The data obtained from the questionnaires may be categorized into two main themes: 1. The way Jordanian women use the three languages are available to them: Jordanian Arabic (JA), Caucasian (C), and English (E), and the way Jordanian women perceive language use. Table 1 is related to the first theme.

INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA:

In my interpretation of the data obtained from the questionnaires, I will whenever appropriate correlate the findings of the questionnaires with following Table below it.

Table 1 Frequency of language choice among Jordanian women (%)

Questions	working females'	Non-working wife
Which language do you use at home?		
JA: 64	JA: 75	
C : 18	C: 19	
E: 19	E: 7	
Is this choice motivated by habit?	Yes: 77	Yes 83
Is this choice motivated by the need to impress others?	Yes: 8	Yes: 24
Is this choice motivated by the need To feel relaxed?	Yes: 34	Yes 1
Which language do you speak to your Children?	J A: 58	J A: 80
	C : 9	C: 11
	E : 34	E: 10
Which language do you use with your Friends?	J A: 53	J A: 72
	C: 16	C: 14
	E: 32	E: 15
Which language do you use in mixed Groups?	J A: 30	J A: 85
	C: 16	C: 5
	E: 55	E : 11

Those of the tape recordings, I will begin by interpreting the percentages obtained from table 1. According to question 1, Jordanian Arabic appears to be the language predominately used at home in Jordan. This correlates with Ennaji; s (1990) says that Moroccan Arabic is the lingua franca par excellence in Morocco. This similarly happened in Jordan. The fact that working women use more English at home is obviously due to their social status as women with jobs and hence to their relatively high level of education. However, a point of caution needs to be evoked here: in 1950s. 1960s and 1970s Jordanian housewives were in the majority of cases nonworking and hence generally no educated, but situation has dramatically changed in the early 1980sand especially in the early 1990s: more and more housewives are educated women who either could not find a job or choose to stay at home. This situation is obviously linked to overall economic situation of Jordanians.

Further conclusion that may be drawn from the answers to question 1 is that Caucasian is not much use at home: only 7 percent of working women and 19 of housewives use Caucasian at home. Caucasian is used more among adults than with children. Note that the percentage of ladies who speak Caucasian at home is higher nationalist people. It is also to noted that Moroccan ladies make abundant use of code mixing and switching stated by (Lahllou 1990). Similarly has happened to Jordanian women.

As for English only 7 percent of housewives use it at home, whereas 20 percent of working females do. This of course correlates with females' job requirements. The answer to question 2 shows that the use of Jordanian Arabic at home is mainly due to habit. This again reflects the strong acceptance of Jordanian Arabic as a mother tongue and a lingua franca. The percentages corresponding to question 3 show that women may use J A in order to impress others. These are usually Caucasian phones who regard J A as more prestigious than Caucasian given the diglossic relationship of the previous to standard Arabic, and hence to religion. Just for information, that Caucasian language is mostly spoken language, and fewer who able to speak, write and read the language, especially the adults and particular the nationalist people. Caucasian people came to Jordan after the world war one; they fled their home land seeking for safer place in Jordan and other places cross the world.

Never the less, 7 percent of working women share this opinion. An interesting conclusion from the answer to the question 4 is that only working females appear to be conscious that the choice of a particular language is dictated by a need to feel relaxed. Question 4 is significant given that the choice of the language that ladies use with their children is extremely revealing.

In a multilingual country like Jordan, some of the people prefer to speak with their children in a language that they think will be useful for their future careers even if there are other languages that their parents hold in esteem. Here again, the unique place of J A as a mother tongue and a lingua franca is clear. However, the social status of women is also crucial here. Generally, housewives use Jordanian Arabic 80%, whereas working women tend to use it less (only 58%). On the other side, an important percentage of working women 34% use frequently English with their children, whereas only 10% of housewives do. Caucasian is less and less used 9% by working women and 11% by housewives.

The answers to question 6 show that the language that women use with their friends is predominately Jordanian Arabic (72% of housewives and 53% of working women). More working women usually use English in such situations (32%), whereas 14% of house wives do. Caucasian is more used among friends and nationalist than with children (16% by working women and 15% by housewives). This fact shows that when women speak to their children, they are more concerned with future use of the language and its practical utility than with anything else. The percentages corresponding to the last question in Table 1 show that in mixed groups, there is a sharp difference

between working and nonworking females. In previous group, only 30% percent of females use Jordanian Arabic, whereas 85% use the same language in the same circumstances. Similarly, no less than 55% of working women use English in such groups, whereas 11% of non-working females do. As for Caucasian it is frequently more used by working females in mixed groups than by housewives in similar situations. In fact, only 6% of non-working females use Caucasian language in mixed groups. One illustration for this is that nonworking females, more than working females, need to assert themselves given their social status, and hence tend to use a language that they think is more prestigious. Although 86% percent of Jordanian nonworking females use Jordanian Arabic in mixed groups, the majority of these ladies mix this language with English in order to sound educated.

The main reason for this is that Jordanian females are more consciously aware than Jordanian males of the social importance of English as a prestigious language because they are more in need of this prestige than males. It is also to be noted that working ladies tend to use English –Jordanian Arabic code-switching and mixing more than non-working females. Furthermore, females generally avoid the use of words and expressions belonging nonstandard language. It is perceived as “rough,” “uncivilized” and “uneducated” as opposed to standard language, which is generally viewed as “intelligent,” “independent,” and “sophisticated”. Ladies need to have an effect on the audience more than men. In conversations, ladies are more anxious to have an effect on males than conversely. One possible reason for this is that ladies are more evaluated on what they say than males.

One general conclusion to be taken from the percentages given in Table 1 is that the status of women as working or nonworking has a direct effect on their use of language inside and outside the home. In wider perspective, the answers obtained from Table 1 show that the less social status a lady has, the more standard she uses.

As for Table 2, the answers to question 1 reveal that Jordanian females

Table2 elicitation of Jordanian females' perception of language use

Questions	working females	non-working wife
What are the topics that you would like to Discuss with females?	personal: 92	personal: 98
Do you believe that there are words or Expressions that only men use?	Yes: 84	yes: 101
Do you believe that there are words or Expressions that only females use?	Yes 97	Yes: 101
Do you feel embarrassed in a mix groups?	Yes: 28	Yes: 87
Do you believe there is a language of females In Jordan?	Yes: 72	Yes: 95
If your answer to the previous, how would You Qualify this language :inferior, typical, Superior?	inferior: 12 typical: 64 Superior: 27	inferior: 48 typical: 40 superior: 15

(working or non-working wives) prefer to discuss personal matters with other females than with males. This correlates nicely with the findings of the tape recordings, where the topics of conversations in all women groups centered almost exclusively on children, personal relations, family, jobs, and husbands. However, I should add her that 72% of working women prefer to discuss matters related to their jobs in mixed groups. Another correlation between the questionnaires and the tape recordings is that the later that topic shifts in all women groups conversations were rather abrupt, a fact which reveals that in all women groups conversations appear to be more relaxed and conversation situations are created more easily.

As for answers to question 2 they reveal that Jordanian ladies (working or non-working women) are conscious of the fact that there are words and expressions that are used only by males. Most ladies gave examples like kallili ‘my pal’ or taboo words like wali ‘go to hell’ According to the answer obtained, men also trend to use more slang and violent speech than women.

Similarly, answers to question 3 shows that women assume that there are words and expressions that are typically used by women. According to the examples that were given, I can cite yaa (interjection of surprise), youwarjiny youm fik! ‘Drop dead’, ahij (interjection). These samples correlate with the results of the tape recordings: it looks that the majority of the vocabulary items that occur in the recorded speech of women are related to child rearing, cooking, fashion, hair-styling and home decorating. Ladies also make a great use of intensifiers such as iktheer ‘a lot’ shwija ‘a little’ iawah ‘not a bit’ etc., which show their emotions. Further, women tend to use diminutives are noticed like ‘shwi ‘little’ ‘biggest’ etc. Diminutives are noticed in the speech of women even in questions: qdish? ‘How big?’ Women also prefer euphemistic expressions and polite forms. Another correlation between the questionnaires and the interviews is that when asked to relate the most important event in their lives, most ladies revealed a lot of emotion.

According to the answers to question 4, more housewives 86% than working women 28% feel embarrassed in mixed groups. Most of the reasons given are “I cannot follow men’s lines of argumentation,” what men say is boring” “I am afraid of being misinterpreted,” etc. It is also to be noted that in mixed groups women talk far less than males. Ladies are more easily interrupted than males, a fact which mentions Zimmermann and West’s (1975) tells that in mixed groups males trend to interrupt females as a result of which the later often resort to silence. The percentages corresponding to question 5 are very revealing. A good percentage of females 72% of working women and 95% of housewives believe that there is a language of ladies in Jordan. These results correlate with findings of questions 3 and 4 Table 2.

The last question in Table 2 reveals that more non-working women 49% than working women 11% qualify the language of ladies as inferior, whereas more working ladies 64% than housewives 40% qualify it as typical of women. Interestingly, enough, only 15% of non-working women and 27% of working women believe that their language is superior. Generally, the conclusion is to be drawn from the answers to the questions that they speak differently from males. The answers also show a prevailing sense of solidarity and sharing among ladies.

FEMALES LANGUAGE: A REFLECTION OF THEIR SOCIAL STATUS

In Jordanian society, as in any other society, females and males hold different positions and perform different functions. Naturally, different values are attached to these functions, very often to the detriment of women. In Jordan, many actions, practices, rules, and customs, as well as application of the law, contribute directly to limiting ladies role. Socially, Jordanian women are relegated to second position in key areas like the family, public circles and law courts. The social status and identity of Jordanian females largely depends on whether or not they are married,

whether or not they have children and whether or not they have a job.

Overall, public recognition is often given to males, not women. Legally, unmarried women and widows always depend on their fathers or even sons; they are never recognized as responsible before the law, even in cases where they have some economic independence. To have a pass port a Jordanian lady needs the permission of her husband, her father, son or two men relative as witnesses. Further, ladies do not act as witnesses in court of law to certain degree. When married a female like a child is usually referred to in relation to property.

There is a relationship of “owner-owned” in males-females interaction in Jordan. For instances, like mra ‘unqu women in his possession’ is accepted, but zalameh unqha man in her possession is not. A popular saying in Jordanian Arabic is ja flan la taqarrab la melk flan u la taqrrab la mart flan ‘do not touch another man’s property and don not touch another male’s wife’. In Jordan, the level of education is still highly correlated with the possibility of having a job. One thing to be noted in relation to Jordanian ladies education is that it is very rare for women to be better educated than their husbands. A consequence of this is that, on the one hand, females earn less, and on the other side, they tend to have little opportunity for promotion. In fact, ladies tend to think more of their husbands’ promotions than of their own promotions even if both partners hold the same position in the same institution.

A natural result of this state of affairs is that Jordanian females tend to look assertiveness. This is reflected in speech, mainly in the excessive use of more polite forms of speech and euphemisms. (see the answers to questions 3, 5, and 6 in Table 2. Note here that politeness is a concept that can be judged only in relation to a speech social context. For instance, men’s politeness is to be perceived as different forms of females’ because only the latter stems from lack of assertion.

Jordanian females’ speech is polite because in Jordanian society females are brought up to talk in a “ladylike” way and are expected to act and to talk accordingly. Expressions like bent bethum ‘daughter of their house’ (a girl of good upbringing), bent nas ‘daughter of people’ (a girl of a good back family ground’ are highly sought after even by ladies themselves.

Moreover, females are differential in the use of forms of address. They use more terms like sidi not only as a form of respect but also as an attempt to keep distance. Females also like to prefix names of males with the titles like Y duktor ‘Doctor’. This correlates with females’ general tendency to use compliments more frequently than males viewed by (Herbert 1990). Further, in both all women and mixed groups, Jordanian ladies make extensive use of the expressions aiwah ‘all right’ mish haik ‘isn’t it?’ Such expressions are much more elliptical than the English tag questions, but they share with these tags the context of use. It is true that Jordanian males also use such expressions but not as frequently as females and also seldom in unmarked situations where the social power of men is not jeopardized. Socially, these expressions have a function and a meaning; they show the typical communication strategies that women use: hesitation, lack of assertion, and the seeking of approval forms the participants in conversations. All this largely reflects women’s lack of assertiveness and their constant feeling of insecurity in cross gender conversations (see the percentages to questions 4 in Table 2. The Jordanian socio-cultural background does not develop in females a feeling of self-dependence and initiative.

In Jordanian society, the way ladies are talked about, even by women themselves, is a very good case of persistent stereotyping. Stereotypes reflect shared expectations that members of a specific society have as to what ladies and men are like and what is expected of them. Stereotypes are, thus, social reflexes of social divisions and social attitudes, which in turn are directly reflected in language use. This is an area where language and society interact

significantly. Stereotypes stem from social norms and behaviors and it is very difficult for a stereotype to die a natural death. Jordanian society is positively biased toward men and negatively biased toward women. Men have power over women at the level of political leadership and legal rights and even in streets. Generally, speaking the attributes and values associated with women are more negative than the one associated with males.

It is true that, unlike English and French where man and homme ‘man’ refer to both men and women. However, Jordanian Arabic is full of expressions that reflect stereotypes relating to women. These stereotypes vary greatly from rural, bedouin, to urban areas, as well as across the class categories of females. For instance, although there is no generic usage of masculine terms to the extent it exists in other languages, the following expressions are attributed to females and do not have equivalents that allude to males

Hadik mra!

‘That’s only woman!’ Hadk Zalameh!

That’s only man!

Suq I’linisa! ‘the market of women’ Suq IZlaam!

‘the market of male!’

Hadak mra mish, Zalameh

a. That’s female not a male

b. Negative connotation an insult! b.Hada Zalameh

That’s a man not a female’: positive connotation; an attribute

In Jordanian context, one of the most widespread stereotypes is that women talk more than males. This is so much believed to be truth that any devalued or uninteresting talk is qualified as hadik mra Cf. {1} above. Although the literal meaning of this expression is ‘women’s talk’ it is used to refer to anything ‘unimportant’ or uninteresting’. However, they have been extensively studied by many researchers (e.g. Hilpert et al 1975; Strodebeck 1951; Argyle et al. 1986; Swacker 1975) have shown that men talk far more than women. The expression hadak mra. Mish Zalameh (c.f.{5} above told to a man is very strong; it denotes the fact that women are associated with anything unworthy. The meanings attributed to words and expressions and the way these words and expressions are used create a powerful ideology that is difficult to eradicate or even change. In Jordanian society, this ideology creates a world view where males have physical and moral power over females.

Other similar examples are given below it.

Iwa bes helwah

‘At least she is beautiful’

Iwa bes maah filus ‘At least he is rich’ Anna bes Zalameh ‘I’ am just a man’

Anna bes mra ‘I’m just woman

Iftah itariq (said only by males

‘let females hide themselves so that males can enter the house’ (lit make the way free)

Referring to Lakoff (1975), gender language is language that is derogatory to women as a group. The expressions 6-8 above are not sexist in their literal meaning, but their use certainly is. On the other side the terms sibian ‘boys’ and iwlaad ‘boys’ refer to both boys and girls, whereas The terms bannat ‘girls’ sabiyaat ‘girls’ refer only to girls and hence marked. Such terms denote a sexist attitude.

Many masculine words and expressions are used in a generic sense. For instance, Zalameh ttalim ‘men of education,’ although the majority of teachers in Jordanian primary and secondary schools are composed of females. There is also geel ilmustakbel ‘the future generation’ or males of the future which excludes women at the level of linguistic expressions. Further, many expressions associated with women, but not men, with children: nasa wa iwladha ‘women with her children’. In every day speech, Jordanian women are often defined in relation to their fathers or husbands, whereas men are defined in terms of the jobs they hold in society. In addition, the use of title aniseh ‘unmarried girl’ and lady ‘saideh’ ‘married woman’ is discriminatory in the absence of equivalent terms distinguishing unmarried from married men. One implication of this is that females need to be identified at first sight, as married or unmarried whereas; men are not subject to this. In fact, this clearly implies that the material status of Jordanian females is crucial to their public social identity, whereas the material status of men is not.

Stereotypes relating to how Jordanian females are perceived and talked about are dangerously reinforced in children’s textbook. Females (both girls and women) are always revealed performing domestic duties like cleaning the floor and washing up the dishes, whereas males (both boys and men) are shown piloting an airplane, playing violent games, reflect this attitude and so on. Words and expressions that are little boys utter like banaat fashlat ‘girls are weak’ and so on. There is a marked continuity between the speech of girls and those women as well as between the speech of boys and that of men. The early differences between the behaviors of girls and boys are only naturally carried over by females and males, a fact that explains miscommunication that often characterizes cross-sex interaction.

The image of Jordanian females in the national media is in line with the widespread stereotypes. The media related industries are over whelming males dominated. For instance, most commentators of commercials are men. Ladies are represented as ‘petty’ users of products or as commercial accessories accompanying a car or well coming important looking business men. Jordanian females have an ambiguous status vis-à-vis authority they have authority over children and maids; they are responsible for house maintenance, hence the expressions malek addar ‘home owner’ in this capacity only. However, politically females are largely invisible. It was only in the early 1990s that a tiny percentage of females were elected directly by people and few others were getting help by the state. Up to now few of females have managed to secure a seat in parliament.

At the social level, the status of females in Jordan is also ambiguous ;this is appropriately reflected in the popular saying mra kwiseh u mra laa ‘a female is good and a woman is bad’. This gives women an uncertain social status, similar to their uncertain political status. Further, a married females’ identify depends on crucially on her relationship with her husband’s: anna mrat zalameh ‘I am a male’s wife’, said in contexts where a woman needs to state that she has social status, shows the females subordination to men.

Note for instance, the ridiculous connotation of zalameh mra ‘I am a female’s husband’. Overall, there is a great uncertainty as to Jordanian women’s sociolinguistic place and status. This situation is maybe wanted. It is a situation that is very much reminiscent of what Jaworski (1992: 36) demands: “should women be talked about, or discussed in any meaningful, relevant terms, they would have to be unambiguously identified as women, and this would pose a threat to the identity and coherence of the male status-quo world”.

In Jordan, as in all societies, the usual reaction to the ambiguous is taboo, unspeakable, and silence. To large extent, Jordanian ladies are seen not heard especially in the public areas involving ritual speech. The religious factor affects Jordanian ladies speech in a very apparent way. Their attachment to the Muslim religion is reflected in the religious terms used and a tendency to defend a specific point. Generally, females’ speech greatly varies according to whether those ladies are visible religiously committed or not that is, whether or not they wear the veil.

SUMMARY

The language of females in the city of Irbid offers a very good case study in sociolinguistics. The urban area of Irbid is to a large extent representative of Jordanian urban areas. On a great scale, differences in the speech of Jordanian females cannot be attributable solely to biological differences: it is very difficult to illustrate the linguistic behavior of Jordanian females without describing the socio-economic setting that dictates this behavior. In fact, gender-role behaviors and attitudes are socio-culturally defined, and the socio-cultural status of ladies in Jordan is largely showed in their speech.

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AUTHORS

First Author – Majed Mohamed Hasan Drbseh, PhD. Research scholar at Aligarh Muslim University,
Emailmajeddarabseh1@yahoo.com