

A Sociophonetic Study of Diphthongs and Triphthongs in Al-Karak Governorate in Jordan Compared to BE Diphthongs and Triphthongs

Tamadur Sulayman Al-Shamayleh¹

Abstract

This research provides a sociophonetic investigation of the existence of distinctive diphthongs and triphthongs in the speech of nonstandard Arabic in Al-Karak Governorate (a city in the south region in Jordan) . In order to achieve the aim of the study , the speech of 20 participants (10 males and 10 females) from the recommended district has been recorded and analyzed.

The results reveal that there are unique diphthongs and triphthongs which are used in this district which are not there in Standard Arabic (SA). Moreover, they are similar to certain BE diphthongs and triphthongs

Keywords: *diphthongs, triphthongs, Al-Karak Governorate.*

Introduction

Sociolinguistics is a science which studies the relationship between language and society. It examines the impact of language in society and society on language. Therefore, language and socio-regional factors are interrelated and effect each other tremendously. Consequently, they cannot operate independently. Linguists such as William Labov are interested in examining how certain social and regional factors may affect language (even dialects and accents) , and how speakers of languages impose those factors in society. This mutual effect creates variation in language (how languages vary between ethnic groups, social institutions, specific locations, gender ,class .etc). Part of the language variation is to speak differently since there are many ways of speaking, and each way of speaking is generally influenced by certain social and regional factors.

It is already known that to get effective communication, the regional context must be taken into consideration because it gives the words broader meanings. Therefore, each region or district might have unique sounds. Each region has its unique rules about how language must be used. Consequently, how individuals use their language (or even dialect) is a reflection of their socio-regional knowledge(which is transferred by our usage style of language).

The linguistic forms vary among different social and regional groups. This variation creates many stigmatized or prestigious linguistic features. The members of these groups use these linguistic features as a reflection of their regional and social background. Moreover, as Hudson (1996) states that the speech in any community is governed and directed by the social rules of the society itself.

Arabic is a Semitic language and one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is the language of the Holy Quran. Its importance also increased due to the

¹ University of Jordan, Aqaba, Jordan

prestigious position of the Arab countries in the world of international trade. (Fatihi,2001). It has its own unique consonants and its distinctive vocalic system . It, as other languages, has many dialects. Each dialect has its own phonetic peculiarities which could be associated with regional factors . Besides, regional variations could be assigned to geographical factors.

In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan , there are several researchers who are deeply interested in studying Jordanian dialects. Some are concerned with studying the presence or absence of specific phonological, lexical or grammatical features in certain dialects. Others are interested in describing varieties spoken in certain places. Still others make comparisons between certain dialects to show the role played by certain social, cultural and regional aspects. Of course, dialects keep changing over time. Consequently, many researchers are interested in studying dialect in contact , dialect change and code switching. However, researchers face many obstacles to do so. According to Versteegh (2001), “ It remains difficult in the Arab World to arouse an interest in the dialects as a serious object of study. Many speakers of Arabic still feel that the dialect is a variety of a language without grammar , a variety used by children and women, and even in universities there is a certain reluctance to accept dialect studies as a dissertation subject.”(p.132)

Standard Arabic in Jordan has got several varieties with particular speech communities which are known as dialects. However, people’s way of speaking the same variety differs from class to class and thus the term variation arise. There are many determining factors of language variation such as gender, social class, regional differences..etc. By observing their use of language, people can be easily categorized into their social classes or regions that they belong to.

Altoma (1969) discussed the use of both Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic. Accordingly, the use of Standard Arabic is considered more prestigious than Colloquial Arabic in which he states , “ In spite of its use as the dominant medium of the spoken word in conversation and various cultures or artistic contexts such as songs, stage and movies, the Colloquial lacks the prestige enjoyed by the Classical and is looked upon , often with a considerable degree of contempt , as a stigma of illiteracy and ignorance.” (p.3)

Abd-el-Jawwad(1986); Al-Khateeb (1988); Al-Sughyer (1990) and Sakarna (2005)state that Jordanian Arabic is a multidialectal variety since there are three local Jordanian varieties: rural (commonly used in villages and towns), urban (commonly used in major urban centers of the country, such as Amman and Irbid), and the Bedouin dialects (commonly used in the eastern and southern parts of the country). According to Miller (2007), “ linguistically , the categories of Bedouin , rural and urban dialects are still used by most linguists on the bases of the presence/ absence of a set of features rather than by reference to geographical region or lifestyle.” (p.9) As a result, these linguistic representations echo some of the local identity discourses. Referring to “ origin” or “ family” is important in self-affiliation discourse. رسالتي

Al-Karak is a governorate in Jordan . It lies 140 kms to the south of Amman . It is situated on top of a small mountain in the center of the district. It lies east of the southern half of the Dead Sea in the East Bank of the Kingdom of Jordan (Gubser,1973). As other district, it has its own distinctive phonetic and phonological aspects. Most previous studies focus on examining unique consonants and sounds' shifting in this district. This is the first study which examines unique diphthongs and triphthongs in this district.

Review of related Literature

Irshied (1984) examined a Bedouin Jordanian dialect (Bani Hassan Arabic; BHA). He explained the distribution of / u / and / i / in BHA. He found that BHA curtailed the

use of / u / (the short high back vowel) in comparison with classical Arabic . In BHA, / u / occurs in just CVCC nominal and followed by labial / m/ or / b/ as in *kumm* ‘sleeve’ and *hubb* ‘love’. However, BHA changes Classical Arabic CuCC nouns into CiCC when the vowel is not followed by a labial for example *kill* ‘all’ and *firb* ‘drinking’, from the Classical Arabic *kull* and *furb*.

Bani Salameh & Abu-Melhim (2014) conducted a research to explore the phonetic nature of vowels in Modern Standard Arabic. Data were gathered by analyzing the speech of nine informants who are native speakers of Arabic. The study reveals that the Arabic vocalic system mainly revolves around six vowels and two diphthongs. Moreover, the research shows that the vocalic system of Arabic is much simpler than that found in other Semitic languages.

Abu Ain (2016) conducted a study that examines variation in the use of two Horani traditional features in the dialect of Saḥam/Saḥam (a north most village in Jordan). The study’s variables are the alternation between /u / and /i / (/u / is the traditional local Horani realization while /i / is a characteristic of the koineised (creating a new dialect as a result of mobility and dialect contact) modern and urban Jordanian dialects and the use of dark /ɪ / which is a stereotypical feature of the traditional local dialect. These variables are studied in relation to three linguistic factors (position in syllable, preceding and following environments). The sample of the study consists of 30 males and 30 female speakers from three different age groups (young , middle and old). The data were gathered through sociolinguistic interviews then analyzed within the framework of the Variationist Paradigm using Rbrual statistical package (a specialized program for analyzing linguistic data). The result of the study shows considerable variation and change in progress in the use of both variables, constrained by linguistic and social factors. The innovative variant [i] was found to be favored in the environment whenever it is preceded or followed by coronal sounds . Moreover, the traditional variant /ɪ / (dark /ɪ /) was favored when preceded or followed by a back vowel. The result of this study highlights the changes that local community have experienced as a result of urbanization as well as the increasing access to the target features through contact with outside communities.

Mumani (2018) conducted a study to investigate vowel duration and formant frequencies in two dialects of colloquial Arabic spoken in Jordan; Al-Mazar Ash-Shamali and Ibeen dialects. All the vowels of the dialect were included in two linguistic contexts: plain and emphatic . 20 participants (10 males; 10 females) from each dialect were asked to read a list of minimal pairs in the plain and emphatic environments in a monosyllabic CVC structure twice. The results of the study revealed that there was a variation in vowel duration between the two dialects ; speakers of Al-Mazar produced longer vowel duration compared to Ibeen speakers in the following environments: plain long, emphatic long, plain diphthong, and emphatic diphthong. Moreover, female speakers of Al-Mazar produced longer vowel duration than the males of Al-Mazar.

Methodology of the study

It is important in such studies to be empirical; getting spontaneous and naturalistic speech from the informants. Thus, face to face interviews with 20 informants from Al-Karak Governorate (20 males and 20 females) were conducted with taking into consideration what is Labov called “ the observer’s paradox” . Many devices were applied in this regard to divert the participants’ attention away from formal and careful speech. Their speech is recorded and analyzed to examine the existence of certain diphthongs and triphthongs .

Results and findings

Differences between Standard Arabic (SA) and British English (BE) are not only restricted to consonants. However, there are obvious differences regarding vowels as will be explained here. Vowels differ from consonants in that they are produced with a relatively free flow of air. It is important to represent briefly vowels in British English and Standard Arabic before dealing with unique distinctive diphthongs and triphthongs in Al-Karak Governorate to highlight vowels' differences and similarities between BE and the examined Jordanian district (Al-Karak).

Vowels in English are classified into pure vowels, diphthongs, and triphthongs. Pure vowels are divided into two groups: short and long vowels. Short vowels include /ɪ, e, ʊ, ə, æ, ʌ, ɒ/. There are five long vowels in English: /i:/, u:/, /ɜ:/ or /ɜ: /, /ɔ:/ and /ɑ:/ .

Pronouncing a diphthong includes a quick glide from one vowel position to another within the same syllable. English diphthongs are generally divided into centering and closing diphthongs. Centering diphthongs end with a glide towards the central vowel /ə/ as in /ɪə/ (the glide begins with a tongue position that is taken for /ɪ/ and moves in the direction of /ə/ as in “ here “ /hɪə/, /ʊə/ (it glides from a tongue position that is used for /ʊ/ towards /ə/) as in “ pure” /pjʊə/, / eə/ (the glide begins in the half-open front position and moves in the direction of /ə/) as in “air” / eə/. Closing diphthongs end with a glide towards /i:/ or / ʊ/. They are: / eɪ/ (the glide starts at a point behind the front open position and glides to /ɪ/) as in “ say” /seɪ/ , /ɔɪ/ (the glide begins with the tongue position for /ɔ:/ and glides in the direction of /ɪ /) as in “ boy” /bɔɪ/ , /aɪ/ (the glide starts behind the front open position and glides to /ɪ/) as in “my” / maɪ/ , /əʊ/ (the glide begins at a central position of /ə/ and glides to /ʊ/ as in “ no” /nəʊ/ , /aʊ/ (the glide starts between the back and front open position and glides to /ʊ/) as in “ cow” /kaʊ/. In conclusion, there are eight main diphthongs in Standard British English.

According to Roach (2009) and O'Connor (1980), English vowels are not restricted only to pure vowels (short and long vowels) and diphthongs but there is also a third kind of vowels which are known as “ triphthongs”. A triphthong is a quick glide from one vowel position to a second position to a third within the same syllable. In Standard British English, there are five triphthongs; /aɪə/ as in “ higher” / haɪə/ , /aʊə/ as in “ our” / aʊə/ , /əʊə/ as in “ thrower” /θrəʊə/ , /eɪə/ as in “greyer” /greɪə/ , and /ɔɪə/ as in “ royal” /rɔɪə/. It could be easily noticed that all triphthongs consist of a diphthong followed with /ə/.

In Standard Arabic, vowels are only existed as pure vowels (short and long vowels) and as diphthongs. It is noteworthy that Arabic short vowels are presented by notations, not by letters, unlike English vowels. Kara (1976) states that short vowels are represented in Arabic as “ Harakat”; “ Kasra”, “ḍammah”, and “ fatha”. All short vowels in Standard Arabic are simple ones (they are made without any stoppage of the air in the mouth). They are represented as /ɪ/, /u/ and /a/. /ɪ/ or “ kasrah” appears under the alphabet and during its pronunciation, the tongue is in the half-close position and the lips are unrounded as in the word “ ملح ” salt”. This vowel refers to the genitive case. /u/ or “ḍammah” is produced when the tongue in the half-close position with rounded lips. In Arabic writing, it appears above the alphabet like small “w” as in the word “ قُمْ ” stand up!”. It represents the nominative case. /a/ or “fatha” is produced when the tongue is in the half-open position and the lips are neutral as in “ كَتَبَ ” he wrote”. It expresses the accusative case.

There are three long vowels in SA which are called “ huruufu al-mad al-Taweel” “ the letters of prolongation” (Hamed, 2003). They are /a:/ , /u:/ and /i:/. / a:/ is formed by the prolongation letter / a/ preceded by the notation fatha as in “ قال ” “he said” / qa:la/. / u:/ is formed by the prolongation letter /w/ preceded by the notation ḍammah as in “ فول ” “ beans” /fu:l/. / i:/ is the prolongation of /j/ preceded by kasrah as in “ فيل ” “ elephant” /fi:l/. To sum up, long vowels in Arabic are given alphabetical names, unlike the

corresponding short vowels which are given names that suggest distinctive phonetic features which are called case markers (Fagiihi, 2012).

According to Masloh (1980), there are only two diphthongs in SA with taking into consideration that a diphthong in SA is a combination of a vowel and a consonant. They are /aw/ "أُو" (the glide starts from the vowel /a/ to the consonant /w/ as in "صَوْم" "fasting"/ sʕawm/ and /ay/ "أَي" (the glide begins from the vowel /a/ to the consonant /j/ as in "بَيْت" "house" /bajt/. Regarding triphthongs, there are no triphthongs at all in SA. Thus, Arab learners face difficulties while pronouncing words that contain triphthongs in British English.

It is noticeable that there are words used in Al-Karak Governorate include diphthongs other than /aw/ and /aj/. These diphthongs involve a glide from one vowel position to another within the same syllable rather than a glide from a vowel to a consonant (they are so similar to English diphthongs). The first diphthong is /ē/ which is the same as /eɪ/ in BE; the glide begins behind the front open position and glides to /ɪ/ as in "لويه" "Why?" /lawēh/ and "بنكيت" "the bank of a street" /bankēt/. Other examples include "كيفك؟" "How do you do?" /kēfak/. Some speakers pronounce it as /ki:fak/. Also /ē/ is there in "لش؟" "Why?" /lēʃ/ and "استنتيك؟" "I waited you" /ɪstannētak/. The second diphthong is /aʊ/ (the glide begins between the back and front positions and ends in /ʊ/ as in "هوليه" "a term used to convey astonishment" /haulēh/ and in "معاوية" "a proper name" /moʕaʊja/. Another example of this diphthong's usage is the rapid pronunciation of "ما ودي" "I don't want" /maʊwidi/. Certain speakers pronounce it as /mæ-widi/ by separating the letters "ما" and "ودي" as two lexical words.

There is also another diphthong which is /aɪ/. It differs from the English diphthong /aɪ/ in that it appears to be pronounced as the consequence of a soft glide that begins in the low back area and glides to /ɪ/ as in "هاي" "this" /hai/ and "شاي" "tea" a kind of hot drink "and in "معاي" "with me" /maʕai/. It is necessary to focus on the point that the BE diphthong /aɪ/ is used with its quality in local Jordanian dialects only in words which are borrowed from English such as "واي فاي" "Wi-Fi" and "هاي" "hi".

It is remarkable to state that during analyzing the informants' speech, certain words include triphthongs! It is already known that SA has no triphthongs at all. Examples of these triphthongs are /aʊə/ and /aɪə/. Examples of words including /aʊə/ are "خاوه" "It is obligatory!" /xaʊəh/ (It's worth noting that "خاوه" could be pronounced differently by other speakers /xawəh/) and in "حلاوة" "a kind of sweet" /haləʊə/ and "علاوة" "getting a higher position" /ʕələʊə/. It has been noticed that this triphthong has the same quality of the BE triphthong /aʊə/.

Another triphthong is /aɪə/ as "عباية" "a kind of long dress" /abaɪə/, and in "رماية" "to shoot" /rɪmaɪə/. It has been noticed that the first part of this triphthong is pronounced softer in the speech of the informants than that in BE.

Conclusion

In this study, the speech of 20 informants from Al-Karak district has been analyzed to examine the existence of distinctive diphthongs and triphthongs. Moreover, a comparative analysis regarding the pronunciation of these sounds in Al-Karak directorate and BE has been conducted to state whether they are phonetically similar or not. It is already known that SA has only two diphthongs and no triphthongs. However, this study reveals the existence of many diphthongs and triphthongs which are used in colloquial speech in Al-Karak directorate. Some of them are so similar in their phonetic quality with BE sounds.

More studies in this respect have to be conducted to highlight other phonetic and phonological aspects.

References

- Abdel-Jawad, H. (1986). The Emergence of an Urban Dialect in the Jordanian Urban Centers. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 16, 53-63.
- Abu Ain, N. (2016). *A Sociolinguistic Study in Saḥam, Northern Jordan*. PhD Diss., University of Essex.
- Al-Khatib, M. (1988). *Sociolinguistic Change in an Expanding Urban Context : A Case Study of Irbid City*. PhD Diss., University of Durham.
- Al-Sughayer, K (1990). *Aspects of Comparative Jordanian and Modern Standard Arabic*. PhD Diss., Michigan State University.
- Altoma, S.J.(1969). *The problem of diglossia in Arabic*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press.
- Bani Salameh, M . & Abu-Melhim, A .(2014). *The Phonetic Nature of Vowels in Modern Standard Arabic*. *Australian International Academic Center, Australia*, 5 (4), 2203-4714.
- Fagihi, M. 2012. *Anti-Essay*. Uk.
- Fatihi, A.R. (2001). *Aspects of Arabic phonology*. New Delhi, India: Katinga Publishing.
- Gubser, Peter. 1973. *Politics and Change in al-Karak. Jordan*. London: Oxford University Press. Google Scholar
- Hamed, A. (2003). *Al-mumathalah walmuqabalah bayna ibn jeni walderasat alsawtia alhadithah*. Irbid: Moasasat Hamadah.
- Hudson, R.A. (1996). *Sociolinguistics*. 2nd edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Irshied, O. M. (1984). *The phonology of Arabic: Bani Hassan, a Bedouin Jordanian dialect*. PHD Diss., University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.
- Kara, R. 1976. *The problems encountered by English speakers in learning Arabic*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley. Press, Cambridge.
- Masloh, S. (1980). *Dirasat alsama` walkalam*. Cairo: Alam Al-kotob.
- Miller, C. (2007). *Arabic urban vernaculars: Development and changes*. *Arabic in the City*. Hal archives, Routledge/ Taylor, France.
- Mumani, D.T. (2018). *A Sociophonetic study of the vowels in Al Mazar Ash-Shammali Community in Jordan*. Master Thesis at Yarmouk University.
- O'Connor, J.D. (1980) *Better English Pronunciation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Roach, P. (2009) *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course*. 4th Edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sakarna, A.K. (2005). *The linguistic status of the Modern Jordanian Dialects*. *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 52 (4), 522-543.
- Versteegh, K. (2001). *The Arabic language*. New York: Columbia University Press.