
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language and Identity in Iraqi Arabic: A Gender-Based Study

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ABSTRACT

Languages are more than a tool for communication; they carry the histories, cultures, traditions, and experiences of people who speak them. They represent collections of shared cultural values and customs that uniquely identify speakers in a social setting and, as a result, make it for them to be recognized hence giving them a sense of belonging; that is, identity. Although numerous studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between language and social identities, a few of them have explored how Iraqi Arabic has been chosen as a significant identity marker across genders. The study is an attempt to answer the question of how language choice serves as an identity marker for male and female speakers of Iraqi Arabic. It evaluates the relationship between language choice and identity from a philosophical perspective. Hence, it investigates language choice and identity at AL-Nasiriya Speech Community in relation to the use of the word *cha*. The study is based on the assumption that both genders, with a high level of education, have access to the Modern Standard Arabic, which is expected to be their educated variety of language. Therefore, 240 male and female university lecturers are randomly selected from the University of Thi Qar to participate in this study. Following Labov's empirical work (1966), the rapid, anonymous observation technique is used for collecting data. The results of the study identified a strong correlation between language choice, identity and gender. They are the educated women in Nasiriya who use more of the stigmatized word *cha* in their speech than men do. The study concludes that female speakers have a strong connection with identity more than that of being prestigious or of high social status since *cha* serves as an identity marker.

KEYWORDS

Language, identity, gender, Iraqi Arabic, Arabic Sociolinguistics, Nasiriya Dialect.

ARTICLE DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.2.11

1. Introduction

Language and identity are not new concepts in sociolinguistic studies. Over the years, numerous studies have been conducted to establish the relationship between language use and identity. Based on findings gathered by previous sociolinguistic studies conducted by Robin Lakoff, Murtadha Bakir, and Deborah Cameron, language serves as an identity marker that helps audiences identify regions and societies where speakers come from. According to Jaber and Krishnasamy (2012), when concepts and values of people change, it necessitates the innovation of new lexical items; that is, new variants of language to satisfy that change. In other words, languages change as societies that speak them change. Evaluating arguments made in various sociolinguistic theories is critical to understanding the correlation between language and identity. They provide the knowledge foundation needed to establish the relationship between language and identity and assess how social factors impact language use across different language segments.

Numerous events, values, principles, concepts, and innovations have significantly changed how people view things in the past two decades. For instance, the world has witnessed significant technological advancement over the past 20 years, which as a result, improved our lives. Other noticeable changes include formations of various regional and international trade agreements that have lifted economic and socio-economic barriers that previously limited social interactions, significantly changing native languages and the social behaviours of their respective speakers (Fairclough, 2009).

Arabic cultural beliefs, similarly, influence differences in language use in relation to social variables. These beliefs are equally embraced across all Islamic nations, and Iraq is one of them; its sociolinguistic characteristics are not that different. According to Sadiqi (2006), men and women occupy different social and economic positions in Islamic culture, influencing their linguistic differences. In the traditional Arabic-Muslim societies and culture, the males have a more considerable social status than females. In other words, the females are socially viewed as smaller, marked, and degenerate versions of the males.

Regarding language use, these beliefs and hypotheses were advanced because they served sociocultural purposes and had a social meaning that reinforced the general Arabic-Arabic patriarchy that females were subordinate to males. This was consequently reflected in language usage. For instance, the term "*?imra?ah*," meaning "woman" in Arabic, is believed to be derived from "*mar?*" meaning "person" (Sadiqi, 2006). However, only "*mar?*" is used generically as it is grammatically masculine. Similarly, terms such as *al-?aamil* "worker," *allmuwaaTin* "citizen," and *al-?ustaad* "teacher" is used to refer to men even though there are as many female workers, citizens, and teachers as males (Sadiqi, 2006).

The portrayal of women in various forms of literature gives a clear understanding of gender equality. Gender equality is a prevalent social problem across Islamic societies, and the continued negative presentations of women in literature widen the gap between men and women in these societies. According to Izzuddin, Dalimunthe and Susilo (2021), the representation of women in different forms of Arabic literature and research studies is quite contradictory. Some present a fair and constructive image of women in Arabic society by positioning them at par with men. Others give stereotyped and gender-biased pictures of women and confirm that gender inequality is still a primary social concern in Arabic society (Izzuddin, Dalimunthe & Susilo, 2021).

In simpler words, male superiority is significantly prevalent in different forms of literature and which, from a personal point of view, is equally evidenced in language use across Arabic culture. Similar to gender inequality, negative sociolinguistic changes are also stimulated through literature, according to Izzuddin, Dalimunthe and Susilo (2021).

Therefore, this investigation raises the question of how language and identity affect the adoption of words in the Nasiriya Speech Community (NSC). It also identifies philosophical debates surrounding the use of Iraqi Arabic (IA) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) varieties by Iraqi genders.

2. Language and Identity

There is a close relationship between language and identity. Languages symbolize the identities of people that speak them. Through language, one can also categorize people into different social groups and, by doing so, create different social identities. For instance, people who speak German are identified as Germans, making it easy to recognize them in any part of the globe. Other groups of people have their language, and some languages have varieties of dialects depending on the geographical setting where they are used. For instance, supporters of a football club use particular jargon, which gives them a sense of belonging. According to Byram (2006), languages or varieties of a language enable people to express themselves and make it for their social identities to be recognized. Social identities are expressions of identification and are different from personal identities.

Languages can be acquired naturally or taught in school, and according to Byram (2006), both natural acquisition and formal teaching can create, foster, or weaken links between social identities and languages. National languages represent national identities, and the connection between national languages and national identities can be created, strengthened, or destroyed through formal teaching in school, especially in the event where language is taught as a subject (Byram, 2006). Individuals communicate with one another using languages shared within their respective social groups. A social group, in this case, can be as small as a family, a couple, mother and daughter, and twins. Closely related individuals may also communicate in private language as long as all parties understand the meaning of words used in private conversation.

Languages carry the history, culture, tradition, and experiences of people who speak (Humana, 2008). For instance, you meet a new person who may ask your name. Your name, in this case, becomes your first identity. Another way of identifying yourself is by giving them your national origin and citizenship. According to Humana (2008), people sometimes have fixed stereotypes about others. These stereotypes may be inaccurate, but they significantly influence how they perceive and interact with others. For instance, people's beliefs about people from a particular race will determine if they will embrace or ignore them (Humana, 2008). Language, therefore, gives us identity. Identity refers to individuality; in other words, the condition of being a particular person (Humana, 2008). Social sciences define identity as how individuals label or associate themselves with members of a specific group. In psychology, identity refers to a person's self-image or self-esteem.

Zalmay (2017) describes the relationship between language and identity using a quote from Nelson Mandela, which states, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his mother language, that goes to his heart." This is one of the fundamental roles of a language; to facilitate communication and foster understanding and, by doing so, strengthen the interpersonal relationship.

Therefore, language is a powerful tool that connects people with their families, identities, beliefs, music, and wisdom. Consequently, language preserves a particular social group's history, customs, and traditions and thorough communication; they are passed from one generation to another. Without languages, all forms of identity, including gender, nationality, religion, and culture, are lost (Zalmay, 2017). In addition to this, language plays a leading role in shaping a person's personality and psychological development and how they communicate their thoughts and emotions. Scholars have proposed several models and mechanisms of investigating the relationship between language and social identity. Examples of such models include sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and social construction theories (Mahmoodi-Shahreabaki, 2018).

Sociolinguistics and sociocultural theories are concerned with the impacts of societal factors on linguistic behaviours. One of the critical areas of focus on sociolinguistic investigation is the impact of social norms on linguistic identity (Mahmoodi-Shahreabaki, 2018). Sociolinguists explore the relationship between language and identity by evaluating the interactions between the identity of a speaker and the social context within which the speaking happens. On the other hand, William Labov (1972) conducted several research investigations on the influence of American vernacular on social identity and discovered that language use reflects social identities that people adopt to associate themselves with different social groups. These groups are characterized by ethnicity, social class, gender, or race (Labov, 1972).

According to Mahmoodi-Shahreabaki (2018), how people use a variety of languages becomes their identification. For instance, people may request differently, greet differently, or speak in different intonations depending on linguistic characteristics of their origins. As a result, this defines their social identity. He also noted that individuals express their positions with others using a given linguistic variety that conveys more than what is said. Linguistic variation did not necessarily originate from different geographical regions, and people can use a variety of languages to express their multiple social identities.

As per social construction theory, the relationship between human behaviour and social factors is mutually constructive. Based majorly on philosophical works of Vygotsky (1967), social constructivism theory argues that:

"Although the social world appears to human beings as an objective reality, it is constituted through human action and interaction and is not independent of it. From this perspective, people continuously create and recreate social reality and are shaped by it in a dialectical process. Thus, identity is not seen as a concept that resides in the mind of the individual self, but rather as a process of construction, that has its locus in social interaction" (Fina, 2012. p. 1).

Social constructivism theory rejects the belief that social identity is a cognitive representation of individuals' self-existence. According to Mahmoodi-Shahreabaki (2018), social constructivists maintain that social identity is created as a response necessitated by social norms the nature of social interactions. However, these perspectives differ from those offered by sociolinguistics and sociocultural theory that societies decide their linguistic identities. However, social constructivism theories acknowledge the role of memory and cognition in identity development. Riley (2007) confirms the position of cognition and memory, stating that from a social constructivist's point of view;

"...cognition is seen as a socially mediated activity since it provides a bridge between interpersonal and intrapersonal, showing that 'social' and 'individual' aspects of cognition and the identity formation processes, far from being unrelated or even contradictory, are the distal and proximal motions of one and the same mechanism." (p. 83).

In simpler terms, social constructivism, sociolinguistic theories, and sociocultural theories of language establish an intimate relationship between language and identity.

3. Arabic and its Varieties

The Arabic language is the backbone of Islamic culture and civilization. Following its rapid adoption in Islamic religious, cultural, and scholarly practices, the Arabic language has become a critical social identifier of the Arabic way of life. This has rendered preserving the Arabic language by incorporating it in today's scientific, economic, technical, and social levels a fundamental way of protecting the Arabic identity and cultural heritage. The Arabic language is currently facing several challenges. Some of these problems include the continued adoption of the slang of classical Arabic in various fields, colloquial languages, and changes in Arabic language variations used in today's newspapers and books. Another problem facing the Arabic language is the introduction of various types of education that incorporate the Arabic language and other foreign languages (Elkalliny, 2017). Students and higher learning institutions have lost focus on preserving the classical Arabic language with such a divided focus. In addition to this, integrating classical Arabic language studies with other foreign languages reduces the uniqueness of the Arabic language, negatively affecting the Arabic identity (Elkalliny, 2017).

The Arabic language is a universal language considering that it is now the sixth language to be adopted by the United Nations Organization as the official language of communication in Islamic nations. Arabic language is used in most of today's Arabic literature and confirms its close association with Arabic identity. In a study conducted by Bassiouney (2015) to examine how the

Arabic language is used in modern Egypt relates to Egyptian social identity, findings indicated that the Arabic language is commonly used in Enewspapers, blogs, patriotic songs, school textbooks, poetry, and films. These are vital markers of the Egyptian identity. But how does it relate to Arabic identity? Feeley and Rubin (2009) define identity as the marker that facilitates recognizing a group of people in a social environment. As a result, it is essential not only for Egypt as a nation but also at the individual level of Egyptian nationalities (Bassionney, 2015).

MSA, most frequently referred to as Al-Arabiya Al-Fusha or Literary Arabic, is the modern version of Classical Arabic. The Classical is the language used in the Holy Quran and other forms of early Islamic literature. However, MSA is currently the official language used in the Arabic world and serves as a *lingua franca* for speakers of different dialects. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of MSA speakers for several reasons. Firstly, MSA is learned as a second language in schools through magazines, newspapers, and religious functions. As a result, tracking the exact number of people who have learned MSA is challenging. Secondly, the level of MSA speaking fluency differs significantly across different levels of education. Therefore, educated people tend to speak and write in MSA more proficiently than less educated. MSA is used for formal situations such as lectures, public speeches, sermons, news broadcasts, and all formal writing, including literature, newspapers, and official correspondence.

In a study conducted by Zaidan and Callison-Burch (2014) on Arabic dialect identification, several facts about MSA were identified. As per the findings, MSA differs significantly from different dialects of spoken Arabic. However, despite these differences, MSA features and content are prevalent across all forms of Arabic literature (Zaidan & Callison-Burch, 2014). As far as adoption patterns are concerned, MSA is the only Arabic language standardized, regulated, taught in schools, and used for communication in official environments. Regardless of being used for official functions in more than 21 nations and spoken by more than 250 million people, varieties of the Arabic language spoken across these nations differ significantly. All these varieties differ from MSA in linguistic dichotomy. Regional Arabic Dialects (RADs), on the other hand, do not have any explicit written grammar rules or are regulated by any central authority like MSA. Even though RADs have the concept of grammatic and ungrammatical structures and most frequently apply the same spelling rules used in MSA, not of these varieties is used for official communication (Zaidan & Callison-Burch, 2014).

As far as colloquial varieties of Arabic languages are concerned, Zaidan & Callison-Burch's (2014) study revealed that the Egyptian variety of Arabic is the most understood dialect following its usage in television and movie industries. It has played a pivotal role in Egypt's civilization. The dialects spoken in Levantine differ from MSA in pronunciation and intonation, and the written texts are relatively similar to Aramaic. On the other hand, Gulf Dialects are very close to MSA, which can be linked to the fact that MSA evolved from an Arabic variety that originated from this region. In addition to this, the Gulf Regional Arabic variety preserves more of MSA's verbs than any other regional variety (Versteegh, 2001). French and Barber languages largely influence the Maghrebi variety, and the western varieties can be challenging to understand for speakers from the Middle East, especially in written text (Zaidan & Callison-Burch, 2014). The Maghreb region has more Arabic language variations than other areas like the Gulf and Levant (Tilmatine, 1999). Finally, the Iraqi variety is closely related to Gulf Dialects, even though it differs from MSA in verb conjugation, prepositions, and pronunciation (Mitchell, 1990).

4. Iraqi Arabic Dialect

Iraq is vastly diversified in terms of religion and ethnicity. Regarding religion, a higher proportion of the Iraqi population is Muslims, while the rest are divided into three minority religions: Yazidis, Mandaism, and Christians (Al-Bazzaz & Ali, 2020). Iraq accommodates several ethnic groups, including Kurd, Turkmen, and Arabic. In addition, the religious and ethnic diversifications are responsible for using different dialects of the Arabic language spoken across different parts of Iraq. From a general point of view, the Iraqi Arabic dialects use some words borrowed from the Turkish and Persian languages as Turkey and Iran are close neighbours, and people from the three nations frequently interact through trade (Al-Bazzaz & Ali 2020). That's why Iraqi Arabic Dialect (IAD) comprises numerous variants.

The MSA variant has a unique position in Iraqi sociolinguistics as it is the only variant used in the country's official communication, news broadcasting, art, music, education, and literature. According to Albuarabi (2018), the MSA variant is used in Iraq in media programs, meetings, and institutions of higher learning. In a study to investigate the linguistic history of IAD, Albuarabi (2018) discovered that IAD differs significantly from the MSA and most of the differences result from a series of changes that IAD has undergone over the years. As per the findings, IAD has more constants than the MSA and a few additional long vowels. Consequently, many sounds of the MSA have been replaced, and words in IAD do not end with vowels (Albuarabi, 2018) which is one of Iraqi Arabic's key distinguishing features. IAD also differs from MSA in terms of tenses. In IAD, tenses are formed by adding a prefix to the conjugated stem of a verb and a practice not allowed in MSA (Albuarabi, 2018).

The IAD also differs from the MSA in that it does not include overt case marking. Secondly, IAD does not always obey verbs established grammatical structure as in MSA. Another difference is that Iraqi entails head movement, a feature not found in MSA (Albuarabi, 2018). Differences identified in Albuarabi's study and other sociolinguistic investigations position IAD as unique.

Different dialects of the Arabic language are adopted in other parts of Iraq. The Baghdadi dialect is one of the most popular dialects, and its origin is believed to be in Baghdad city, the capital city of Iraq. According to Murad (2007), the Baghdadi dialect is spoken in Karikh and Risafa. The dialect emerged in the early 1930 and is commonly used by middle-class individuals. The Baghdadi dialect contains *da* and *la'ad*, which distinguishes it from other dialects. Blanc (1964) conducted a study on Communal Dialects in Baghdad and, using socio-religious traits, classified Iraqi Arabic varieties based on resultant ethnic and religious differences. As per Blanc's classification, Baghdad had three major communal varieties; Christian, Jewish and Muslim Arabic. On the other hand, the area of Mesopotamia had *gələt* variety, which was majorly used by Muslims, and *qəltu* variety, which was commonly used by non-Muslims (Blanc, 1964). Jabbari (2013) investigated MSA and Iraqi Colloquial Arabic and discovered lexical and grammatical differences. Ferguson (1959), on the other hand, pointed out that Muslim Baghdad Arabic is a standard dialect in Baghdad, especially among Jewish and Christian residents. Most frequently, it is considered *lingua franca* for all Iraqi nationalities. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021), in the book "*An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*" describe how various varieties of the Arabic language are represented in Baghdad, stating:

"In a city like Baghdad, the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim inhabitants speak different varieties of Arabic. In this case, the first two groups use their variety solely within the group, but the Muslim variety serves as a *lingua franca*, or common language, among the groups. Consequently, Christians and Jews who deal with Muslims must use their own at home and the Muslim variety for trade and inter-group relationships." (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021.p50).

According to Al-Bazzaz and Ali (2020), the Mousli dialect is the original and one of Mosul's main dialects, a region in the northern part of Iraq. The Mousli dialect substitutes heavy sounds with sounds that can be easily pronounced. With other factors held constant, the Mousli dialect is similar to Classical Arabic in pronunciation. Nasiriya is the third dialect spoken in Iraq and is popular in the Al-Nasiriya region, and it is similar to Basra in pronunciation.

In an investigation conducted by Murad (2007) to evaluate the language attitudes of Iraqi native speakers of Arabic in relation to two other Arabic varieties, the MSA and IAD, several differences and features were noted. The study used students and non-students as the population sample. As per the findings, about 70.04% and 26.40% of the student and non-student respondents indicate a positive attitude towards MSA, respectively (Murad, 2007). As far as IAD is concerned, about 73.60% and 29.96% of non-student and student respondents strongly prefer Iraqi Arabic, respectively. These findings confirmed the influence of educational level on the preference of MSA and Iraqi Arabic variety.

In terms of language use, about 57.17% and 85.58% of student and non-student respondents claimed to use IAD regularly, respectively (Murad, 2007). In other words, education plays a significant role in influencing language choice. People of lower education tend to use IAD, while those who attained higher education, including University students, use IAD and MSA depending on the surroundings. According to Murad's (2007) findings, students had a higher command of both MSA and IAD varieties than non-students. Unlike educational level, gender differences have no impact on language preferences between males and females as only 71.39% and 68.98% females and males indicated strong preference of MSA among student respondents while 28.61% and 31.02% of student females and males indicating a solid preference for IAD respectively (Murad, 2007).

Regarding the impact of gender on language preference among the non-student respondents, about 25.24% and 27.16% of females and males indicated a solid preference for MSA while approximately 74.76% and 72.84% of the same population indicating a higher preference for Iraqi Arabic (Murad, 2007). Based on these statistics, the impact of gender on the preference of MSA and Iraqi Arabic is minimal, as indicated by the slight differences between females and males in both student and non-student respondents.

5. Gender and Language

Over the decades, several philosophical debates have been raised regarding the adaption of different languages varieties and speech preferences between men and women. The feminist philosophy of languages is an example of sociolinguistic arguments that remain relevant today, and most of the concerns it addresses remain visible in today's society. According to Saul and Diaz-Leon (2004), subjects of false gender-neutrality; the invisibility of women; predominance of social norms that promote maleness dominance; and the use of sex marking language to differentiate between men and women are some of the concerns addressed by philosophers such as Marilyn Frye, Janice Moulton, Laurence Horn, and Steven R. Kleinedler.

Robin Lakoff proposed the deficit theory of language and gender in her book entitled "*Language and Women's Place*." This theory highlights several linguistic differences between men and women. Firstly, Lakoff argues that women's language is very general and inferior to men's. The women's language also contributes to women's lower social status in today's society. On the other hand, the language of men is linked to power, social class, and social status (Lakoff, 1973). According to Rahmi (2015), the deficit theory believes that women's languages are not as good as the language of men as it is considered a copy of men's language; and men are therefore positioned as the creators of the language. These linguistic differences between men and women reflect gender inequalities that exist according to De Beauvoir (1949) and Jespersen (1922). Findings presented by these scholars show that

gender inequality occurs when women express their language as a reflection of their marginalized position in society. Lakoff (1973) confirms this, arguing that women tend to speak in a manner that reflects their social status and is frequently lower than men's.

Proposed initially by Deborah Tannen and later advanced in philosophical works of Dale Spender, Don Zimmerman, Pamela Fishman, and Candace West, the dominance theory explains how language is developed and used between men and women in society (Tannen, 1991 and Betti, nd). According to this theory, women are perceived as a subordinate group in society, and linguistic differences between females and males result from patriarchy and male supremacy. Therefore, women's language is derived from men's language contributes to differences witnessed in both languages (Betti, nd). The language used between men and women reflects differences between both genders in terms of power, according to Cameron (2012). In the investigation entitled "*The Myth of Mars and Venus*," which investigates the language and speaking differences between men and women, Deborah Cameron also notes that social differences between roles of men and women in the society are not depicted in language use (Grujicic-Alatriste, 2015).

Rahmi (2015) supports propositions of the dominance theory, arguing that differences in language use between men and women reflect the inequality of power between both genders. His point of view is that men dominated the language because they had more power than women, both in cultural and political dimensions (2015). Due to their dominance in power, men control critical aspects of life and language. However, findings presented in works of Zimmerman and West (1975), O'Barr and Atkins (1980), Hultz (1990), Swacker (1975), and Spender (1980) disapproves assertions of the Dominance theory. The findings gathered by these scholars show that the concept of power is highly exaggerated (Rahmi, 2015). In communication, the sex of communicants is less critical. In other words, women can express themselves better than men if they have a higher social status.

The radical feminist theory is based on radical feminism, a branch of feminism that aims to dismantle gender roles established by the patriarchal system. This was when women were first allowed to participate in democratic processes such as voting and publicly expressing themselves. Radical feminism, therefore, is the first champion of women's freedom, equality and political participation, economic independence, and sexual expression. Radical feminism was founded on the belief that enforced societal gender roles and institutional norms that promote male supremacy were the leading causes of women's oppression, and dismantling gender-related barriers and patriarchy can make a better society in general. There was a need to equalize the distribution of power. From a feminist's perspective, abolishing patriarchy by questioning the existing societal and institutional normal will liberate women from an unjust society.

The radical feminism theory highlights social genders roles and the prevalence of male supremacy as the fundamental causes of women's oppression. From a sociolinguistic perspective, examining the role of these two factors on language use between men and females is of great importance. Arguments made by the radical feminist theory align with the conclusion made by Robin Lakoff that women's language use reflects their subordinate position in society. The society of the ages has positioned women as inferior to men. The traditional culture believed that women should only concentrate on taking care of family and should neither participate in political affairs economic activities nor decide their personal or social well-being. According to Bennett and Bennett (1992), the traditional society believed that women focus on taking care of children leaving politics to men. Apart from the unjust classification of gender roles, the traditional society judged women harshly compared to men. How women were perceived not only by society but their husbands, family members, and friends was of great importance, and this influenced many aspects of their independence and social lives. For instance, traditional society believed women should respect men, talk politely, and avoid disagreements with their husbands.

Sociolinguistic features of women's language are mainly presented through tone, pitch, and pronunciation. Women are generally polite, abundant, and euphemistic in vocabulary choices than men. Women's English language is also characterized by exaggerated adjectives, nicknames, colour words, and intensifiers (Bi, 2010). As per findings Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2021) gathered in an investigation on linguistic features of women in the 1990s as portrayed in female Disney films, the results indicated that women's language is characterized by hypercorrect grammar use of super polite lexical forms. The findings also showed that these films reflect the sexist stereotypes of women's language being polite, slag-free (formal), and dominant of empty words indicating uncertainty (Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah, 2021). These findings match those gathered by Jaber and Krishnasamy (2012) in their investigation on political and social impacts on the linguistic behaviour of Iraqis. As per this study's findings, about 65% of the interviewed women avoided using stigmatized and tough forms of the Arabic language.

Yonata and Majiyanto (2017) conducted a study to evaluate the portrayal of women in Indonesian textbooks and discovered biased depictions of female gender that are aligned with developing stereotypes within the Indonesian society. As per Yonata and Majiyanto's (2017) findings, these textbooks depict male characters as individuals with high social status as they are the most educated and hold high leadership positions. Male characters also have more social freedom as they can conduct activities outside

their homes and are more respectable than their female counterparts. In Japanese English textbooks, Lee (2014) similarly discovered unfair and inaccurate portrayal of women's social roles and cultural insensitivity.

6. The Sociolinguistic Patterns of Iraqi Women

Abu-Haidar's (1989) studied the impacts of gender differences on sociolinguistic behaviours of Iraqi male and female Arabic speakers in Baghdad. As per the findings, women are linguistically more prestige conscious than men. The Iraqi population uses the standard and the local commonly referred to as regional varieties of the Arabic language. According to the findings, Abu-Haidar (1989) gathered in this investigation, the standard Arabic is considered the prestigious variety across Baghdadi males and females. Results concluded in previous investigations indicate men, both in Iraq and other Arabic-speaking nations such as Egypt, Cairo, Hama, and Damascus as the famous speakers of prestigious varieties of the Arabic language. According to Abu-Haidar (2013), social factors such as education and social status are vital influencers in adopting prestigious varieties. According to her, however, with the current increase in access to education, employment, and the continued promotion of gender equality across nations, women have equal access to the standard varieties as men. In other words, Baghdadi women and men have equal access to the standard variety of Arabic language. Still, as per the study findings, women tend to use this variety more than men.

Sociolinguistic differences between male and female Arabic speakers in Baghdad are witnessed in prestigious and less prestigious varieties and individual varieties. This includes preferences in the usage of different words. In the book "*Christian Arabic of Baghdad*"; Abu-Haidar (2013) argues that female Arabic nouns in Baghdad are characterized by feminine markers such as "*i*," "*-i*," and "*-a*." These markers are suffixed to "*ms*" substantives and adjectives to "*fs*" nouns. Examples of such nouns include *xabbàz* (*ms*) and *xabbàza* (*fs*), *xayyàta* (*ms*) and *xayyàta* (*fs*), *basít* (*ms*) and *basíta* (*fs*) (Abu-Haidar, 2013).

According to Bakir (1986), women and girls were traditionally expected to behave in feminist ways and be accommodating, polite, and nurturing. On the other hand, men were expected to be aggressive, strong, and bold. All these beliefs were remarkably shaped women's identity through language use.

Findings from a study conducted by Ahmed (2017) on the pragmatics of apology speech act behaviour in Iraqi Arabic showed that the selection of apology strategies is highly influenced by the nature of Iraqi culture and socio-religious conceptualization of apology. This aligned with views made by Hofstede in the cultural theory arguing that norms adopted by a particular society greatly influence values and social behaviours that individuals living in such a society adapt and how they can establish effective cross-cultural communications (Ahmed, 2017). According to Murad (2007), Iraqi females use MSA more than men. However, findings gathered in another study conducted by Bakir (1986) disproved indicating that Iraqi women who associate MSA with masculinity tend to avoid using it.

Iraqi men and women use different dialects, and therefore these dialects mark their social identities. According to a study conducted by Albanon (2017) on gender and tag questions usage in the Iraqi Arabic dialect, the collected findings indicated that men use tag questions more than women. The conclusion arrived at this study was supported by data from Dubois and Crouch from professional meetings regarding the usage of questions tags between Iraqi males and females. However, these findings contradicted those presented by Robin Lakoff that the use of questions tags is a common attribute of women's language. According to Albanon (2017), men tend to use aggressive tags to indicate power, authority, or dominance. Lakoff (1973), however, argues that tag-questions are signs of unassertiveness. From her point of view, tag-questions can be legitimate and illegitimate. The legitimate question tags are used when a speaker needs confirmation from the addressee. The illegitimate tag-questions are used when the speaker knows the answer but needs to gather more information from the addressee or wants to start small talks (Lakoff, 1973).

Previous studies have found the impact of gender on language use in Arabic sociolinguistics to be contradictory. The leading cause of this is the lack of a clear definition of "prestigious language." This has rendered identifying the influence of gender on the use of MSA in Arab societies. Jaber (2013) conducted a quantitative investigation on the effects of gender and age on lexical choice in Baghdadi Arabic speakers and identified unique language usage patterns between men and women. As per the findings, gender was one of the critical social factors influencing lexical variations. According to Jaber (2013), Baghdadi women identified Standard Arabic as a prestigious variety of languages. As per the findings, only prestigious women such as teachers and those with higher social status than men used Standard Arabic.

In another study conducted in 2012 to establish the impacts of society and politics on linguistic behaviour of Iraqi men and women, Jaber and Krishnasamy (2012) discovered these social and political factors to be some of the significant influencers of linguistic choice between men and women. As per this study, different words have a different sociolinguistic value that reflected Iraqi political and social orientation of gender. In other words, men and women use various linguistic features to express their personal views, beliefs, and feelings, such as protest, anger, satisfaction, irony, and other attitudes. Males perceive female opinions on political and religious matters as weak. This attitude confirms the impact of political and social factors on the linguistic behaviours of both men and women. The study explored different words such as *hashash*, *tahshish*, *mu'mmam*, *kiki*, and *mawlai* between men and women.

The term *tahshish* is used by men to create an atmosphere of laughter and friendship but not women. Men also use *Mawlai and mu'mman* to express anger towards the interference of politics and religion. (Jaber and Krishnasamy, 2012).

On the other hand, 90% of the interviewed male respondents indicated strong convictions that vocabulary choices between genders reflect the values of Iraqi society. According to Jaber and, Krishnasamy (2012), Iraqi society forbids the usage of stigmatized words by women in public speeches. In other words, traditional communities expected women to be polite, caring, kind, and obedient. These values still reflected their sociolinguistic behaviours not only in Iraq but also in other cultures.

7. Methodology

The appropriate choice of informants as well as the ways in which data collected and analyzed shape the findings reached in this study. This study is devoted to finding out the relationship between gender and language use in the Nasiriya Speech Community and how that pattern shapes gender identity. It requires adequate data, which could be in the form of spontaneous and unmonitored speech in as a natural situation as possible. Thus, more than one method of data elicitation is employed in accordance with the objective of the study. The traditional method of an interview proves to be not useful in gaining access to the vernacular. The interview "is in itself a recognizable speech event" (Milroy and Milroy, 1985, p.126). The interview situation fundamentally invokes the effect of the observer's paradox. For this reason, this study is based on Labov's empirical work in New York City (1966); that is, the *rapid, anonymous observation technique*. The qualitative method is also chosen to enable the researcher to gather descriptive and experiential interpretations of the relationship between language use and gender identity.

Since gender is the social variable under investigation, it is important to explore the status of women and the language variants used by them to provide a better understanding of gender identity. Hence, 240 informants aged between 35 to 55, divided into 127 females and 113 males, were randomly chosen from the University of Thi Qar. The informants are all of higher education holding Masters and PhDs in different specializations. Therefore, both genders have access to the MSA, which is expected to be their educated variety of languages. Those informants are considered friends, close friends and colleagues to the researcher; therefore, no obstacles would hinder data collection.

Nasiriya is chosen as the location of study. Nasiriya is the capital of Thi Qar Governorate (sometimes written as Dhi Qar). It is a city in the southern part of Iraq that is situated along the banks of the Euphrates River. It is considered the cradle of civilization where Sumerians invented the cuneiform to write the first forms of letters in history. Nasiriya also has the ruins of the ancient city of Ur and the home of Abraham, the patriarch of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. For its spiritual importance, Nasiriya had been visited by Francis, the Pope of the Vatican, who delivered a speech there. In general, Thi Qar's population in 2019 is 2.132.000 million people, and the city of Nasiriya is 560,000, making it the fourth largest city in Iraq. Slightly more than 49% of the population was female (Central Organization of Statistics and Information Technology, 2019). It is considered a broken society as many other Iraqi cities due to forty years of wars, economic sanctions, deprivation and terrorism. Moreover, there are fixed insulting stereotypes about Nasiriya during history as represented in media, jokes and the other's attitude towards people.

In this study, the word *cha*, meaning *why* and *how* (in spoken and written language *cha* accompanies both of *why* and *how* despite the fact it holds the same meanings) is chosen and investigated as the only linguistic variable for its extreme value in representing a full image of the speech variety in Nasiriya speech community. On other linguistic occasions, *cha* means *so that's why* and *for this reason*. *Cha* is a linguistic variable that has no equivalent in MSA, and it is peculiar to a few southern cities of Iraq, such as Nasiriya, Omara, and Basra. The history of this word is unrevealed; however, the majority of people in Nasiriya believe that it is dated back to Sumerians. For tens of years, the variety of languages spoken in Nasiriya has been stigmatized for political, cultural and social reasons, and *cha* is one of the most stigmatized features (unfortunately, very rare research is devoted to exploring and investigating this variety of language). In a study conducted by Al-Bazzaz & Ali (2020) on three selected Iraqi-Arabic Dialects (Baghdadi, Mousli and Nasiriya) with reference to the implicit effect of TV Series on shaping a particular image, they concluded that:

"Overall, Iraqi males and females and their ages relate the positive semantic qualities to Baghdadi and Mousli dialects while negative qualities are associated with Nasiriya dialect. These learners have illustrated that dialect is a matter of style and it represents their social Classes." Al-Bazzaz & Ali (2020, p. 81).

Thus, it is very clear how media affected people's attitude towards the Nasiriya dialect, which is associated with negative semantic qualities. Also, the study points out the fact that the dialect's negative qualities are also accompanied by negative style and low social class.

The third female informant explains that “the word *cha* is what left to me from this civilization. I am proud”, which confirms the deep connection between the use of the word and being proud that it belongs to the ancestors.

Another young female informant is strongly questioning by saying, “who said *cha* is a bad word? Why do they judge a whole community in this way? On the contrary, it is a beautiful word”. It is the question to deny the stereotypes in which a whole community is being judged according to a linguistic variable.

“*Cha* means Nasiriya, and I love Nasiriya” is another remarkable answer by a female who spent most of the years doing research on physics.

The last short final comment comes from a female professor of Arabic who says, “*Cha* means I”, which concludes the whole study. It is the word that marks the identity of that speaker.

On the contrary, male informants do not show the same attitude towards the *cha* word. Moreover, they do not feel identity is reflected by that use. The female informants believe that identity is shown through hospitality, courage, gallantry, honour, promise, and other concepts. Some male speakers declare the following:

- “*Cha* emerges spontaneously in my speech. I don’t mean to use it”.
- “My wife utters *cha* most of the times... ..I don’t know why”.
- “I think it is a feminine word. It is not suitable for men”.
- “I reflect my identity to other people, especially those from other governorates through hospitality”.
- “It is true that Nasiriya inhabitants are known for their use of *cha*; however, it does not reflect identity... maybe partially”.
- “*Cha*?? You mean it reflects identity? So what about courage, gallantry?”.
- “Yes, in a casual speech, I use *cha*”.
- “I use it because it fits the dialogue with workers in this college. They understand me better”.
- “I think it is not suitable to me, but I use it sometimes”.

As the results in (Table 2) indicate, the informants from both genders, on average, use Educated Iraqi Arabic, which is a mixture of MSA, IAD and NSC. The table lists a sample of their sentences during the rapid, anonymous observation technique. The variety of language is unique, especially when informants mix some words from their specialization to that variety. Some of the words that have no equivalent in English, especially the vernacular, are left empty on the table without translation.

Table 2: List of Sentences in Nasiriya Speech Community Spoken by Educated Informants

No.	Gender	Sentence in Arabic	Variety	Translation
1	Female	الحكمة تقتضي ماتتخذين هذا القرار	MSA	It would be prudent that you don't make this choice
2	Female	ليش استعجلتي؟ هذا قرار صعب. shock انت انطيتيني	IAD, MSA and English	Why the rush? It is a difficult choice. Now you give me a shock
3	Male	يمعودة صدك تحجين؟ ليش هيجي سويتني؟	IAD	Is it true what you say? Why did you do that?
4	Male	اعتقد هذا تصرف مو صحيح. يفترض تتصرفين يهدوء بعيد عن كل الضغوط	MSA	I think it is not a correct attitude. You are supposed to behave calmly away from all pressures.
5	Male	هو الواحد بهذا البلد مو بس يستقيل ولكن يهرب افضل	MSA and IAD	One not only resigns in this country but also flees
6	Male	الاستقالة مو حل. ابدأ ماكانت افضل الحلول	MSA	Resignation is not a solution. Never was it the best solution
7	Female	من ينتهي الامل عند الانسان راح يتخذ اصعب القرارات	MSA	When hope ends in a human being, they will make the difficult decisions
8	Female	صدك جذب .. ناس شباب ومجلية بالدوام والراتب .. ليش؟	NSC	
9	Male	مو على اساس كنت تردين تقاعد؟ طيب ليش قدمتي استقالة؟	MSA and IAD	Did you Basically want to retire? So why you submitted a resignation?
10	Male	اكيد تعامل الجامعة كان صعب و قاسي لدرجة تاخذين مثل هذا القرار	IAD	For sure the behaviour of the university was tough and difficult to

				the degree you make such a decision
11	Female	ممکن اعرف الاسباب؟ انت انسانة قوية، مانوقعت فد يوم تنكسرین	MSA and IAD	May I know the reasons? You are a strong person. I never imagined one day you would be broken
12	Female	جا وين الصبر، وين القدرة على التحمل؟ وين الشعارات الي رافعتها ... لا للأنكسار معرف ايش!!!؟؟	NSC, MSA and IAD	<i>Cha</i> where is patience? Where is endurance? What about the slogans you raise... something like: No to refraction!!!??

9. Conclusion, Recommendations and Limitations

9.1 Conclusion

Language plays an essential role in our being. It is the tool that enables us to express our ideas and feelings so that we can be understood. Indeed, there is a strong relationship between language and identity; languages can create, foster, or weaken the identities of the respective speakers.

Gender, on the other hand, is one of the critical social factors influencing language use. However, the impact of gender on language use in Arabic sociolinguistics is contradictory. The study finds out that it is difficult to distinguish which Arabic language should be considered prestigious between the standard Arabic and native regional varieties. The leading cause of this is the lack of a clear definition of "prestigious language." This has rendered identifying the influence of gender on the use of Modern Standard Arabic in Arab societies. MSA is the standardized variety that is commonly used by individuals with higher education and social status. In Iraq, the standard Arabic is not only used by men but also by women. However, women in Iraq do not follow one pattern and each region, whether Baghdad, Mousl, Basra or Nasiriya, is unique in its usage. Therefore, generalization is not acceptable in this case. Even though, women tend to prefer using from a bunch of varieties, including native Arabic. Educated and prestigious women such as teachers and those with high social status prefer to use the educated variety, which is a mixture of MSA and IAD in addition to the native variety of the local language with fewer stigmatized words.

The study shows a unique language usage pattern between educated men and women in Nasiriya Speech Community. It is common for educated women in NSC to use *cha* in their speech. *Cha* is connected deeply to females who consider it as a reflection of their identity. To conclude, we can say that *cha* is a women phenomenon. It is not only a word that is specific to females more than males but also a symbol of geographical identity that is associated with the city they live in.

Gender pattern differentiation, identity, educated speech and Nasiriya are parameters that need further research and investigation so that we will be able to delve into a deeper understanding of linguistic variation and change. It is not the appropriate time to opt into generalizations and conclusions unless more data is collected. Whatever the conclusion is to be, Nasiriya is an interesting geographical location to be linguistically studied.

9.2 Recommendations and Future Studies

The current study recommends that a significant degree of linguistic variables that shape gender pattern differentiation in the Nasiriya Speech Community need to be studied and analyzed.

Future studies on the subject should adopt a mixed research method and focus exclusively on data that works as a bridge between identity and gender. Such a study would ensure that Nasiriya Dialect is better revealed and understood.

9.3 Limitations

This study is based exclusively on one stigmatized word; that is the word *cha* which is considered the core limitation of this study. Also, data were collected during the partial lockdown of Covid-19, which limited the number of informants suggested to participate in the study.

Funding: No funding, grants, or other support was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: I have no competing interests to declare relevant to this manuscript's content.

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