| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Sociolinguistics of Iraqi Women: A New Perspective

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| ABSTRACT

The influence of gender on language preferences has been a major subject of investigation in modern sociolinguistic research. Previous studies show that social norms, level of education, economic status, and social classifications of gender roles have been identified as some of the key factors influencing different linguistic choices between female and male Iraqi Arabic speakers. The findings of previous studies indicated that Iraq is a male-dominated society. And the women are denied most socio-economic privileges accessible to men, which has significantly influenced their linguistic choices. This investigation, therefore, evaluates to what extent males/females' speech has different linguistic choices in Nasiriya City, south of Iraq. It aims to present sociolinguistic characteristics of Iraqi women based on 16 hours of voice recorded speech divided into three group situations. A random sampling procedure is applied in this study, where 235 speakers from the University of Thi Qar are involved. The findings collected from 134 female speakers and 101 male speakers indicate that young female speakers aged between 18 to 30-year-old are leading patterns of variation and change towards the prestigious dialect in their choice of some Baghdadi variants. In addition, Nasiriya males are conservatives keeping the use of local Nasiriya variants with a slight approach to Baghdadi variants when the spontaneous speech emerges in talks with females in a mixed group. The findings indicated that even though female speakers currently have equal access to all regional, prestige and standard varieties of the Iraqi Arabic language, both genders differ significantly in terms of their linguistic choices, and their individual choices reflect their social status. Most men are more inclined to use Nasiriya Dialect than Baghdadi Dialect for reasons attributed to strength, toughness and masculinity, while women use the language for prestige and to maintain high social status. Finally, it sounds that sociolinguistic behaviors and patterns of Iraqi Arabic female speakers in the Nasiriya Speech Community are similar to those discovered in Basra and other Arabic-speaking nations and societies.

| KEYWORDS

Nasiriya Speech Community, Iraqi Arabic Dialect, Gender Pattern, Arabic Sociolinguistics.

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1. Introduction

According to findings presented by Bakir (1989), Baghdadi Arabic is the most used and commonly considered prestigious dialect among Basra female speakers. In Baghdad, however, Standard Arabic is considered the prestigious variety among female speakers. From a personal point of view, however, these findings are not sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of sociolinguistic patterns and behaviors of Iraqi women for the following reasons:

Studies conducted by Abu-Haidar (1989), Bakir (1986) and Jaber (2016) do not use sufficient population size to provide more inclusive observations and which can significantly help in drawing a generalized conclusion. Based on the population data presented on World Population Review (2021), Iraqi is ranked 37th among the most populated nations in the world, with a total population totalling more than 37 million. Despite Basra and Baghdad being ranked as the most populated regions in Iraq with populations of 7.5 million and 2.6 million, respectively, these are not the only regions hosting over 1 million residences. Such regions include Al Mawsil al Jadidah, Al Basrah al Qadimah, and Mosul (World Population Review, 2021).

According to Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010), researchers in the early 19th century surveyed the entire population. Even though this approach was quite costly and tedious, the results gathered through such investigation are highly inclusive, less biased, and accurate. In the 21st century, investigators only work with a small proportion of the targeted population, currently referred to as population sample; and draw inferences related to the whole populations from the drawn sample (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). Even though this method is considered highly cost-effective, the generalized conclusion based on the selected samples is full of pitfalls. This is one of the leading drawbacks of empirical or inductive studies. According to Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010), inferences from a sample only reflect characteristics of the defined population when such a sample was properly selected. For instance, if we sample truck drivers from New York and discover that about 5% drive under the influence of drugs and substances, will it be accurate to conclude that 5% of all truck drivers are drug and substance-dependent?

Findings presented from previous investigations on sociolinguistic behaviors and patterns of Iraqi women are quite questionable. For instance, Abu-Haidar (1989), in the investigation on sex differentiation in Baghdad Arabic, concludes that Baghdad women are the frequent speakers of a prestigious variety of spoken Arabic, and with both sexes given the same social privileges, women tend to be more prestige conscious than men. The problem is that these conclusions were made based on data drawn from a sample population of 25 Baghdadi men and 25 Baghdad women aged between 26 to 41 years. Therefore, neglecting those below 25 and above 41 years renders them ungeneralizable. Given such, there is a significant research gap on the impact of gender on language preferences among Iraqi Arabic speakers across both genders. The selected samples are small, and a significant number of the most populated regions in the country remain uninvestigated. Therefore, to identify sociolinguistic characteristics of Iraqi women, further studies need to be conducted in other highly populated regions and cities, including Nasiriya City.

Apart from the Iraqi Arabic-speaking population being underrepresented in previous sociolinguistic investigations, there is a significant research gap in how language usage patterns across various religions, races, and ethnic groups have been investigated. Iraq society is divided into three regions: Muslims, Mandeans, Christians, and Yazidis, with Muslims being the most dominating religion accounting for about 97% of the population. As per data recorded by the Australian Census in 2011, most Iraqi-born individuals residing in Australia, about 35.7%, identify themselves as Catholic Christians. Only 32% and 11.9% identify as Muslims and Assyrian Apostolic Christians, respectively (Cultural Atlas, 2014). Islam is the official religion in Iraqi, and standard Arabic is the language of official communications. According to an investigation conducted by Ding and Goh (2020) on "*The impacts of religion on language maintenance and shift*" among Hakka communities in Malaysia, findings indicated that even though the role of religious institutions in influencing heritage of language and maintenance were unclear; differences in language use across various religious groups were identified.

2. Iraqi Women: Statistics

Iraq has been considered one of the countries with the highest proportion of the population are youth, accounting for about 58.71% of 39 million, and Iraqi women account for about 50% of the people, according to Vilardo and Bittar (2018). As per the country's demographic data, about 11,736,897 males and 11,217,392 females aged under 24 years old. The Iraqi population is comprised of numerous ethnic and religious minority groups. For years, Iraqi women have been victims of the country's conservative cultural, religious, societal beliefs and practices. These practices and belief systems deny women access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities and promote gender-based violence and inequality.

Iraqi women experience several challenges that have been identified in the previous scholarly investigations. Among these challenges are primarily attributed to knowledge gaps that exist in Iraq society. According to Dietrich, Skakun, Khaleel, and Peute (2021), Iraq community members are not committed to pushing social boundaries and challenging the adoption of social norms, beliefs, and stereotypes that discourage women and girls' participation in decision-making, peacekeeping, and policy development processes. Dietrich, et al. (2021) present several findings regarding factors contributing to the increase in inequality in Iraqi society. These include the belief that only men should make decisions and hold leadership positions at community and household levels, which has continued to promote male entitlement and privileges.

Gender inequality is also manifested in how the Iraqi society perceives gender roles. As per society, women are expected to be good and dedicated wives. To be respectable, they must be loyal and dedicated to their husbands and maintain a good social reputation. A woman's reputation is damaged if she fails to live up to her family's expectations and the existing society's norms of femininity (Dietrich et al., 2021).

A significant proportion of Iraqi women are denied their right to education. As per UNESCO, about 26.4% of Iraqi women are illiterate, and this percentage is believed to reach as high as 50% in rural regions (U.N. Women, 2019). As a result, this is the reason the Baghdad Women Association, in collaboration with United Nations Women, has dedicated resources to help Iraqi girls and women to recover years of education they have lost by offering classes at Duhok (U.N. Women, 2019). According to the official report issued by the World Bank in September 2020, Iraq has about a 13% illiteracy level across men and women, which is equivalent to 3.7 million individuals. According to the "Breaking Out of Fragility" report, Iraqi women and men account for 24%

and 11% of the illiterate population, respectively (World Bank Group, 2020). As per the UNICEF's Multiple Cluster Survey in 2020, the women's completion rates for primary, preparatory and high school education in Iraq were about 73%, 47%, and 43%, respectively (J.H.R, 2021).

Apart from the literacy levels, a close examination of the role of Iraqi women in life and society is essential in understanding their social and linguistic behaviors. Iraq has been experiencing internal conflicts since the beginning of the Gulf War in 1991 until the invasion of the United States forces in 2003 following the continued expansion of terror group ISIS, and this has significantly reshaped the role of women in life and their participation in social development programs (Priyanka Boghani, 2019). Based on findings from an investigation conducted by B.B.C. in collaboration with Frontline, Iraqi women and girls continue being subjected to poverty due to the adoption of weak and failing state institutions that amplify their vulnerability to various forms of exploitation (Priyanka Boghani, 2019). The finding indicated that about 85% of Iraqi women population aged 15 years and above do not participate in the country's labor force, which increases the risk of them falling into poverty. As far as the findings gathered during a survey conducted by Oxfam in 2012, among the women population interviewed, about 35% of unemployed women showed a strong determination to work if employment opportunities came along (Priyanka Boghani, 2019). Findings from another investigation conducted by United Nations Development Program in Iraq indicated that about 20% of women population in every 10-household investigated were widowed and, as a result, their sole breadwinners for their families (Human Rights Watch, 2018). The combination of high illiteracy and a high number of single parenting women confirms that Iraqi women are significantly economically and socially vulnerable. Thus, this study evaluates the sociolinguistics of Iraqi women based on findings gathered from males and females in Nasiriya City, south of Iraq.

3. Gender Roles and Equality

Iraq was ranked 123rd out of 188 nations in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (G.I.I.) of 2015. The G.I.I. measures gender inequality based on three aspects of human development: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status (Vilardo & Bittar 2018). The UNDP Human Development Report issued in 2015 refers to the fact that Iraq needs to improve its efforts towards meeting the national gender equality target (United Nations Development Program, 2015).

Iraq has been for years experienced political repression and a series of wars that have negatively impacted women, families, and the country's overall gender equality. Most families have suffered significant losses of loved ones (Koolaee, 2014). The adoption of conservative social norms promoting gender discrimination has triggered several social problems. These include a decline in participation of women in the Iraqi labor force; limited access to education, healthcare, and other essential social services are some of the negative implications that resulted from the Iran-Iraq wars (Al-Ali, 2008). The position of women changed for the worst during the 1980 to 1988 Iran- Iraq war. Women were pushed back to their homes as housewives as the unemployment rate increased and essential public infrastructures collapsed (Koolaee, 2014). As the number of deaths of husbands and sons during the war skyrocketed, women's roles changed to family breadwinners and producers of future soldiers. In 1982, the Revolutionary Command Council (R.C.C.) enacted several policies that limited women's marital and reproductive rights (Al-Ali, 2008; Koolaee, 2014). These historical events have played a role in reshaping the mannerism of Iraqi women, including how they express their opinions on different matters of social well-being. A recent study by Jaber (2022, p. 27) on the perception of gender equity in Iraq states that:

> "Nevertheless, the current study denotes that reports in the west are far much exaggerated as the gap in gender equity is shrinking. The current study revealed that the prospect of career progression was higher in men than women, and although students did not demonstrate gender stereotypes and preferences both on online learning platforms and in the traditional learning context, women's dwarfed progression in academia stems from the limited inclusion in departmental decision making, household duties, and the low respect received from the dean".

A lot of research is required to stand on solid ground and undercover the truth behind the gender equity of Iraqi women. Generally speaking, much information is hidden and what is said so far reveals a small space in a big country like Iraq.

4. Arabic Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics refers to the study of sociological aspects of language. Therefore, sociological studies investigate the role of language in fostering gender roles in society (Wolfram, 2021). Some of the critical areas of focus in sociolinguistics include age, education, gender, race, peer-group identification, and occupation. Sociolinguists, therefore, try to establish the relationship between society's perceptions of gender and the choice of various elements of language such as vocabulary, sounds, and grammar. As far as language is one of the key influencing factors of social behavior, people can know a lot of information about individuals based on the language they speak. For instance, our language tells who we are, where we are from, and the people we associate with (Wolfram, 2021). Given the pivotal role that language plays in reshaping social behaviors and interactions, sociolinguistics has become an important and popular area of study over the years. This increase in popularity is influenced by the fact that due to the continued adoption of globalization, different cultures around the globe have been forced to expand their intergroup and interpersonal relationships, and language plays a central role in establishing such relationships (Wolfram, 2021).

Sociolinguistics provides a way of studying linguistics based on the existing theories of language such as the Deficit Theory, the Dominance Theory, the Radical Theory, Reformist Theory, and the Difference Theory (Rahmi, 2015; Al-Wer & Horesh, 2019). The gender in language use consists of several terminologies used to represent men and women in a language. Such terminologies include lexical gender, referential gender, grammatical gender, and social gender (Rahmi, 2015). The term gender is frequently used interchangeably with "sex." According to Rahmi (2015), gender is not the same as sex. Sex is the classification of individuals based on their respective reproductive attributes. Gender is the classification of individuals in a society based on predefined social and psychological perspectives, which significantly influences interactions in families, education, and other social settings (Rahmi, 2015). Gender is, therefore, not something individuals are born with but a collection of beliefs and practices that dictate how they should live and their respective position in society.

Arabic sociolinguistic has been one of the thriving fields of research investigation. The first study on Arabic sociolinguistic variation is the relationship between spoken Arabic and various social factors was conducted in the 1970s (Al-Wer & Horesh, 2019). The first two studies were carried out in the United States by Richard Schmidt and Hassan Abdel-Jawad in 1974 and 1981. The third study was conducted in Britain in 1987 by Clive Holes. The development of Arabic sociolinguistics differs significantly between the two schools, the United States and Europe, respectively. In Europe, the development of Arabic sociolinguistics was primarily influenced by Arabic dialectology. In the United States, the earliest studies on the Arabic language were disconnected from Arabic dialectology (Al-Wer & Horesh, 2019).

The Arabic language is comprised of different varieties, dialects, and styles. According to Horesh and Cotter (2016), studies on Arabic variations indicate that more than 300 million people speak Arabic from Northwest Africa to the Arabic Gulf. As per available evidence, studies on Arabic sociolinguistics remain lagging compared to those conducted on English and other western languages (Horesh and Cotter, 2016). Despite being underexplored, Arabic sociolinguistics remains among the fast-growing research fields. The critical Arabic sociolinguistics include prominent scholars such as Niloofar Haeri, Hassan Abdel Jawad, Al-Wer, Gillian Sankoff, and Peter Trudgill (Horesh and Cotter, 2016). The recent studies challenge the belief that prestige and standards for Arabic dialects are the same. Researchers have identified some variants of the Arabic language that are not similar to standard Arabic being used across different Islamic communities (Abu-Haidar, 1989).

5. Gender, Variation and Prestige
Gender and language refer to the relationships between the language of males and females (Gu, 2013). Gender difference is, therefore, a reflection of the difference between men and females in terms of speeches, lifestyles, and attitudes. Several studies have been conducted in the recent past to investigate the differences between languages used by men and women. Findings gathered from these studies indicate both differences and similarities between the two. For example, men are more concerned with expressing power and being recognized as leaders.

On the other hand, women are satisfied with their subordinate roles; men speak directly and prioritize more on transferring information, while women talk indirectly and prioritize more on expressing feelings (Gu, 2013). Lakoff, Key, and Thorne have also explored differences between the languages of men and women from different psychological points of view. Lakoff's deficit theory views female language as inferior to male language while according to Thorne's dominance theory, female language is superior while male language is deficient. Cameron adds that women are better at listening and sharing emotions than men (Gu, 2013).

Robin Lakoff highlights several differences between phrases and vocabularies commonly used by women and men in his book "*Language and Woman's Place,*" published in 1973. According to Lakoff, women frequently use concrete color words such as yellow, lavender, and azure. They also prefer using words that have a close relationship with life. Women speak in a milder tone while men, on the other hand, speak in a firm tone. For instance, a man may use the phrase "*shit or damn it*" to express disappointment, while a woman would use words like "go to hell" to express the same feelings. According to Gu (2013), anthropologists perceive language as part of the social behavior of a particular community. Therefore, it changes per changes in the involved society's norms and belief system.

As far as Arabic is concerned, there are two primary varieties of the Arabic language that are commonly used on different occasions. The first variety is Classic Arabic, which is used in formal occasions and religious functions. The second is the Low variety used in casual conversions among peers and family members. The Low Arabic varieties are evenly adopted across all the 21 Arabic nations. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is one of the six official languages adopted by the United Nations and is currently used in various printed media, including books, official documents, magazines, and newspapers. The MSA variety is also the official language used in All Arabic nations and the only variety taught across Muslim schools (Jaradat & Al-Khawaldeh, 2015).

Extensive research investigations conducted in the recent past have concentrated on MSA and vernacular, also referred to as the low Arabic, to evaluate which is the prestigious variety (Bakir, 1986; Abu-Haidar, 1989; Albirini, 2016). These studies have one thing in common; they apply western theories and research methodologies that are not applicable in Arabic. Firstly, the prestigious

dialect is not the same as the standard Arabic variety, which reverses syllable structures, sound systems, and stress patterns of western languages (Eiman Mustafawi, 2019). As per Ello (2021), the terms "prestige" and "standard" mean the same thing. A standard variety of a language enjoys the highest prestige and status in a speech community. A "prestigious" variety is the one that is broadly accepted and most recognized in particular speech societies. This has been another area of inefficiency in the previous sociolinguistic studies. They treat MSA as the only prestigious Arabic variety across all settings (Abd-El-Jawad, 1987). The term "prestige" cannot be used interchangeably with "standard" when referencing a language because language varieties that are socially accepted in one geographical setting may not necessarily be equally accepted in another (Jaber, 2016). In other words, words that are considered prestigious in one region may be stigmatized in another.

Western sociolinguistic studies indicate the adoption of different linguistic patterns across genders and sexes. As per studies conducted by Trudgill (1974), Wolfram (1969), and Tagliamonte (2006), women of the same social classes living in urban regions tend to use more standard varieties of a language than men. On the other hand, men tend to associate with working-class life to be perceived as tough and protect their masculinity (Trudgill, 1974). Sociolinguistic studies on linguistic patterns in Arabic nations like Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and Kuwait prove that men from these countries speak the standard Arabic variants as opposed to women. Findings from another study conducted by Bakir (1986) in Basra on the preference of the [q] variant between men and women indicated that even though women used less standard Arabic variants, they associated themselves more with the prestigious Arabic dialect as Baghdadi Arabic in Iraq. According to Bakir, "in the formal domain of women, the prestigious linguistic form would certainly not be a form associated with formality, i.e., Standard Arabic, it is the variety of Colloquial Iraqi Arabic used in Baghdad" (1986 p.7). This is the opposite of the gender patterns that Ibrahim (1986) discovered across Western societies indicating that standard Arabic is not as popular among Arabic-speaking females as among Arabic-speaking males.

Abu-Haider's (1989) findings in Baghdad indicated that women used a higher percentage of standard Arabic than men. These findings disapproved those gathered from other Arabic studies positioning men as frequent speakers of Standard Arabic than women. Abu-Haider explained this contradiction stating, "In Iraqi society, today, where sex roles are not so clear-cut, and both sexes enjoy similar social privileges, women are more prestige conscious than men since it is mostly women who opt for the prestigious speech varieties" (1989 p. 479). Another study conducted by Alaa Al -Riyahi and Abdul-Sattar (2019) on the gender variation registered across Iraqi Arabic speakers, they are the women who tend to speak in rising tones compared to the men, and when it comes to dissyllabic tone variations, the pitch range among women is higher than men.

Jaber and Krishnasamy's (2012) study indicated that female prestige is directly correlated with the standard Arabic variety. For women, the acceptance of a word is what makes it prestigious, and if a word is stigmatized, it is stigmatized regardless of whether it is a Standard Arabic word. According to their study, males perceive female opinions on political and religious matters as weak. This attitude confirms the impact of political and social factors on the linguistic behaviors of both men and women.

In research on gender and language, most scholars overemphasize the role of gender and fail to consider variations and other factors. They focus their explorations on differences and ignore similarities. Such scholars, therefore, fail to understand that to establish the relationship between males and females in terms of linguistic adaptations, identifying similarities between both genders should be as paramount as differences as both plays critical roles in influencing language patterns in both genders (Gu, 2013). Scholars such as Maltz, Borker and Tannen have tried to explain the reasons for language disparities between males and females from cultural, social, and psychological perspectives (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1993). In their propositions, Borker and Tannen hold that males and females come from different cultural backgrounds, contributing to differences witnessed in their language and behavioral characteristics (Gu, 2013). In other words, cultural, social, and psychological differences and similarities between males and females account for the different language and behavioral patterns that can be identified between both genders.

Abu-Haider's (1989) findings from her investigation on language variations between men and women in Baghdad indicate the contribution of such social and psychological factors in dialectal differences between both genders. As per this study, women Arabic speakers used the Standard (prestigious variants) more than men. Even though female speakers chose standard items more than their male counterparts, there was a significant decline in the choice of standard variants in speeches of men from one age group to another. The findings indicated a decrease in the selection of the standard variants and borrowed English words. This is because, unlike female speakers who associate their dialectal choices with social status or prestige, males' dialectal choices are determined by expectations of their masculinity, especially in environments of violence. Men feel confident when speaking Arabic variants that adhere to Iraqi societal norms. Kiesling (1998) offers a conclusive explanation for this, stating that "men strive for (and hold) powerful alignment roles because of the societal ideology of hegemonic masculinity" (p.3). according to Kiesling, masculinity pushes men to adapt lexical variants associated with power and violence to reinforce their social dominance.

As mentioned earlier, MSA is the official language of most Arabic-speaking nations in the Middle East, northern and horn of Africa. Therefore, its usage is significantly influenced by individual speakers' level of education. Murad's (2007) study on the "Language attitudes of Iraqi native speakers of Arabic: A sociolinguistic investigation" indicates a strong relationship between language

attitude and the speaker's level of education. As per this study, speakers with high education levels, regardless of gender, are more inclined to speak MSA over Iraqi Arabic (IA). On the other hand, speakers with low education levels are less likely to speak in MSA than IA. Based on survey data collected during Murad's (2007) study, about half of non-students argued that simplicity was the leading factor that influenced their choice of IA over MSA.

Similarly, Haeri (1997) indicated that the reason for "participants' choice of Egyptian Arabic is because they were afraid of marking mistakes in S.A." (p.211). in addition to this, "Egyptians articulate positive attitudes towards Egyptian Arabic and describe it as "easy" and "full of life" whereas they perceive MSA as "powerful" and "heavy" and avoid using it in face-to-face communication" (Murad, 2007, p.110). Murad's (2007) study findings also indicated that most non-students perceive IA as a symbol of national identity and culture even though they believed that Standard Arabic would remain the official language of Iraq. These findings disapprove those presented by previous scholars such as Abu-Haidar (1989) that Iraqi females prefer using standard Arabic forms than Iraqi males and Bakir (1986) that Iraqi females view Standard Arabic as a masculine language and avoid using it. Murad (2007), however explain the reason for these differences arguing that Abu-Haidar and Bakir used different methodologies and which could be the reason for these variations. Abu-Haidar and Bakir interviewed participants and recorded speech patterns, while Murad (2007) used a self-reported survey.

The relationship between prestige and education on the adaption of the Standard Arabic and Iraqi Arabic between female and male speakers has also been investigated by Al-Wer (1997). According to Al-Wer's (1997) findings, men in Jordan commonly use stigmatized local and order features of Standard Arabic while women tend to use regional features irrespective of whether they are from standard Arabic or not. In Baghdad, however, these patterns differ as only young and old females were inclined to standard form instead of local forms. This is attributed to the assumption that in Baghdad, women's choice of Standard Arabic is due to their strong association of values, principles, concepts, and new forms of words. On the contrary, Jaber (2022, p. 91), in her study on language and identity in Iraqi Arabic in Nasiriya Speech Community, concluded that:

> "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".

6. Methodology

This section is devoted to explaining the procedures of obtaining data and the steps followed in choosing the sample of the study. The study and analysis of a language variety used naturally require solid data, which could be in the form of spontaneous and unmonitored speech in as a natural situation as possible. Therefore, this study is based on participant observation technique where a voice-recorded speech is elicited from three group situations as below:

1. Group 1: It includes voice recordings of a number of male and female speakers.
2. Group 2: It includes voice recordings of a number of female speakers.
3. Group 3: It includes voice recordings of a number of male speakers.

Each group of speakers is divided into subgroups so that the researcher is able to elicit the required data. The role of the researcher was marginal to the group. The researcher was a participant-observer rather than an interviewer. This technique is used to lessen the effect of the 'outsider' and to encourage the role of the 'insider' within the primary group. The result is 16 recording hours for the three group sessions. The data presented in this study is drawn from 235 speakers divided into 134 female speakers and 101 male speakers in Nasiriya City, south of Iraq. The target sample was students from the University of Thi Qar of the ages 18 to 30 years old.

Nasiriya Dialect has been recently investigated by Jaber (2022) in her study "Language and identity in Iraqi Arabic: A Gender-based study", who explained that:

> ".... women have equal access to the standard varieties as men. Because the sample chosen implied only educated informants who tend to speak and write in MSA more proficiently than less educated, then it is expected from both genders to avoid or use a few stigmatized words. However, the results prove the opposite. They are the females who use the most stigmatized word, that is, *cha* word" (p. 89).

In Nasiriya, data was collected over a period of three months in 2021. The speakers were basically chosen according to their gender as males and females. Group 1 is devoted to encouraging the emergence of a variety of speech through the presence of the opposite sex. And to diminish the effect of conscious attention to the speech, the recording sessions include the speakers being

present with their friends, relatives, members of family, colleagues and others. Most of the recordings include talks about social costumes, habits, news of celebrities, politics, fashion and makeup, sports, economics and up to date Iraqi issues. However, the whole group may move smoothly from one topic to another. Generally speaking, the atmosphere of recordings was sufficiently informal and friendly-like.

A random sampling procedure was applied in this study for two reasons. First, it was not difficult to get a list of names of students at the university; and second, in an academic atmosphere, no social constraints were imposed on the students' linguistic behaviour.

After data was collected, ten variants made clear cut differences between males and females within the three groups. These variants are:

1. The Baghdadi short vowel /e/ and its Nasiriya counterpart /aː/.
   Example: /menriːd/ منريد and /maːnriːd/ مانريد , meaning "we don't want".
2. The Baghdadi short vowel /o/ and its Nasiriya counterpart /i/.
   Example: /okul/ and /ikil/, meaning "eat".
3. The Baghdadi lexical item /aːni/ آني and its Nasiriya counterpart /aːnə/ آنه , meaning "I am".
4. The Baghdadi prefix /da/ and its Nasiriya counterpart /dʒai/ جاي.
   Example: /dajilʼəb/ ديلعب and / dʒaijilʼəb/ جاي يلعب , meaning "he is playing".
5. The Baghdadi lexical item /laʼad/ لعد and its Nasiriya counterpart /tʃa/ جا , meaning "so, why, how, then".

7. Results and Discussions
The analysis of data in the Nasiriya Speech Community shows a gender pattern differentiation. There is a tendency for females to use Baghdadi dialect as far as they are more prestige conscious than males. The data analysed (see Table 1) indicates that speakers behave differently according to their gender. In Group 1, 54 females used the Baghdadi short vowel /e/ 186 times in their speech with the percentage of 59.61%, which is higher than their use of the vowel /aː/ with the percentage 40.38%. In addition, the frequency of the variant /e/ for females in Group 2 is 298, which equals 65.06%. The slight difference of percentage for females in Group 1 and Group 2 in their use of the Baghdadi short vowel /e/ indicates that Nasiriya females follow a steady pattern in adopting the prestigious Baghdadi variant regardless of the presence of the other gender in Group 1. On the other hand, Nasiriya males prefer the Nasiriya short vowel /aː/ in Group 1 and Group 3 with the percentage of 94.11% and 98.75%, respectively. Similarly, they follow a steady pattern in their choice of this variant with slightly higher use of Baghdadi variant with the percentage 5.88% when females are present in the recording session than the percentage of 1.25 in Group 3 where only males are talking (see Table 1).

Table 1: Females and Males' Percentage of the Variants /e/ and /aː/

Group No.	Gender	No. of Speakers	Total Number of Occurrences	Frequency of the Variant /e/	Percentage	Frequency of the Variant /aː/	Percentage
Group 1	Female	54	312	186	59.61	126	40.38
	Male	34	204	12	5.88	192	94.11
Group 2	Female	80	458	298	65.06	160	34.93
Group 3	Male	67	160	2	1.25	158	98.75

As far as the use of the variants /o/ and /i/ is concerned, Nasiriya females in Group 1 and Group 2 prefer the Baghdadi short vowel /o/ with the percentage 61.25% and 53.68%, respectively; whereas Nasiriya males in Group 1 and Group 3 keep using the Nasiriya variant /i/ with the percentage 93.49% and 94.17% respectively. Both genders show a high percentage of use for Baghdadi variant in Group 1 where both genders are talking to each other with the percentage 61.25% for females and 6.50% for males. See Table (2) below.

Table 2: Females and Males' Percentage of the Variants /o/ and /i/.

Group No.	Gender	No. of Speakers	Total Number of Occurrences	Frequency of the Variant /o/	Percentage	Frequency of the Variant /i/	Percentage
Group 1	Female	54	81	49	61.25	32	39.50
	Male	34	123	8	6.50	115	93.49
Group 2	Female	80	244	131	53.68	113	46.31
Group 3	Male	67	189	11	5.82	178	94.17

These two variants appear very clearly in most widely used words by youth; they are "kollish" /kolliʃ/, meaning "very" and sodog /sodog/, meaning "true."

The next two lexical items,/aːni/ and /aːnə/ show a decreased use of the Baghdadi variant for Nasiriya males, which equals 0% in Group 3. However, this percentage increases in Group 1 when females are present to reach 7.69%, with only one frequency out of 13 times the two variants are used. Nasiriya females, on the other hand, are leading the language variation and change in their use of the Baghdadi variant. Females still keep the high percentage of their use of Baghdadi variants. See Table (3) below.

Table 3: Females and Males' Percentage of the Variants /aːni/ and /aːnə/

Group No.	Gender	No. of Speakers	Total Number of Occurrences	Frequency of the Variant /aːni/	Percentage	Frequency of the Variant /aːnə/	Percentage
Group 1	Female	54	20	12	60	8	40
	Male	34	13	1	7.69	12	92.30
Group 2	Female	80	22	14	63.63	8	36.36
Group 3	Male	67	16	0	0	16	100

The next two variants are the Baghdadi /da/ and the Nasiriya /dʒai/, which are both prefixes that precede verbs to confirm the continuity of action. It is very clear in Table (4) that Nasiriya males in Groups 1 and 3 never use the Baghdadi variant /da/ with 100% use of Nasiriya /dʒai/. For Nasiriya females in Groups 1 and 2, there is slight progress towards the Baghdadi prefix with 20% and 7.69%, respectively. See Table (4) below.

Table 4: Females and Males' Percentage of the Variants /da/ and /dʒai/

Group No.	Gender	No. of Speakers	Total Number of Occurrences	Frequency of the Variant /da/	Percentage	Frequency of the Variant /dʒai/	Percentage
Group 1	Female	54	10	2	20	8	80
	Male	34	12	0	0	12	100
Group 2	Female	80	26	2	7.69	24	92.30
Group 3	Male	67	19	0	0	19	100

The final two lexical variants are the Baghdadi /laˈad/ and the Nasiriya most stigmatized word *cha* /tʃa/ (for more information about *cha* see Jaber's 2022 study about language and identity in Nasiriya Speech Community). For both genders, there is a tendency for the Nasiriya variant despite the fact that *cha* is a stigmatized word. Nasiriya males in their groups use *cha* 100%; while Nasiriya females reach the same percentage except in Group 1 where there is /laˈad/ spoken one time out of 13 times usage. However, the frequency of occurrences for females is higher than those for males, which indicates that *cha* is females' preference. See Table (5).

Table 5: Females and Males' Percentage of the Variants /laˈad/ and /tʃa/

Group No.	Gender	No. of Speakers	Total Number of Occurrences	Frequency of the Variant /laˈad/	Percentage	Frequency of the Variant /tʃa/	Percentage
Group 1	Female	54	13	1	7.69	12	92.30
	Male	34	8	0	0	8	100
Group 2	Female	80	22	0	0	22	100
Group 3	Male	67	6	0	0	6	100

8. Conclusion, Recommendations and Limitations
8.1 Conclusion
In Nasiriya Speech Community, gender is among the leading social factors influencing the usage of a particular variant. Generally speaking, women use Baghdadi prestigious variants to signify social status. On the other hand, men use Nasiriya variants to symbolize toughness and power, attributes commonly associated with masculinity. These findings are also those uncovered in other Arabic and Western studies on the choice of prestigious variants among women and younger generations. According to Suleiman, social status significantly influences how most Arabic women speak as they are "inherently more sensitive to social prestige and social class division than men" (1985, p.45).

Previous studies on Iraqi Arabic conclude that various social and psychological factors influence the usage of different variants of IA between male and female genders. Indeed, men and women adopt different Arabic variants from one region to another. In some studies, most men are more inclined to use Standard Arabic than Iraqi Arabic for official communications, while women use the language for prestige and to maintain high social status. In Baghdad, women strongly prefer Standard Arabic as it is regarded as the prestigious Arabic variant. In Basra, women often use Baghdadi Arabic, which is considered prestigious in Iraq, which coincides with the results of this research. One of the key differences between the choice of Standard, local dialect and prestigious variants of the Arabic language is that women are more concerned about preserving their social status, which influences their choice of words. As long as a word is socially acceptable, women can use it regardless of which variant it belongs to. On the other hand, men are more inclined to use Standard Arabic, which influences their choice of words to power and social dominance. In Nasiriya, males prefer the local dialect in Nasiriya to confirm toughness, power and masculinity. Males in Nasiriya avoid using Baghdadi Dialect, neither do they like to use the standard variety. The findings in this study about males' variety of language do not coincide with findings from previous studies. However, males' preference for local variety is similar to males' worldly usage, where concepts of toughness and masculine hegemony prevail. As far as linguistic patterns are concerned, Iraq has mixed patterns as far as Standard Arabic, Baghdadi prestige variety, and other local variants are adapted across males and females.

The findings indicate that even though Iraqi Arabic female speakers in Nasiriya currently have equal access to all regional, prestige and standard varieties of the Arabic language, however, their individual choices of prestige variants reflect their high social status as educated university students. The only exception is the females' choice of Nasiriya "cha" rather than Baghdadi "laˈad". This can be explained by a recent study conducted by Jaber (2022). She (p.91) made it clear that:

> "It is common for educated women in NSC [Nasiriya Speech Community] to use *cha* in their speech. *Cha* is connected deeply to females who consider it as a reflection of their identity. ..*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."

Despite the fact that percentages for all three groups are approximately similar; however, it seems that genders behave differently in situations where both males and females have talks with each other. There is slight progress towards prestigious variants more

than in groups where only one gender is present. This can be explained that both genders are sensitive and caring to the presence of the opposite sex.

8.2 Recommendation and Future Studies

1. The Iraqi population is subdivided into different regions and different ethnic groups. According to United Nations (2022), Iraqi society is subdivided into three major ethnic groups: Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, and Kurds. There are also minority groups such as Shabak, Chaldeans, Turkmen, black Iraqis, Roma, Armenians, and Yezidis (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). However, the relationship between language and ethnicity and how ethnicity influences language choice among Iraqi Arabic female speakers is under-investigated. According to Fought (2006), language preference is highly influenced by the ethnic background of speakers. To provide a more inclusive conclusion on sociolinguistic patterns and characteristics of Iraqi Arabic female speakers, future studies must examine populations from both majority and minority ethnic groups in correlation with the gender of the speaker.

2. According to the World Bank's demographic data, the Iraqi population living in urban and rural regions accounted for 70.89% and 29.11% in 2020. Due to variations in the level of education, social status, and gender compositions, studies identify a significant variation between the use of Modern Standard Arabic and mixed dialects between these two demographics. According to Miller (2004), Iraqi urban and rural demographics' linguistic characteristics differ significantly as these regions have responded differently to recent political, economic, and demographic changes. Therefore, Iraqi cities have been major destinations for rural, provincial, and international immigrations, influencing shifts in pre-existing urban dialects. Given the continued changes in Iraqi urban demographic characteristics relating to new generations of dwellers, the old urban Arabic dialects are no longer prestigious (Miller, 2004). Leitner (2021) cites the continued stigmatization associated with various features of rural dialects as the key contributing factors influencing variations between rural and urban Arabic linguistic varieties. From a personal point of view, it is crucial to examine linguistic patterns and factors influencing their distribution between male and female speakers to identify Arabic language varieties adopted by Iraqi women in Baghdad and other regions of Iraq.

8.3 Limitations

The core limitation of this study is the choice of the sample. The sample is limited to young males and females from the University of Thi Qar. Although this has been justified that educated speakers have access to all varieties, including the standard and prestigious varieties; however, excluding the data of non-educated might hinder verifying the accuracy and reliability of these findings.

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