

The Variant of “Ech” to “Ek” among Residents of Irbid Governorate in Light of Gender and Age

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to examine the variant of the sound (ech) to (ek) among residents of Irbid governorate in light of both gender and age. Sample of the study consisted of nine participants (5 females and 4 males) selected using purposeful sampling from the families residing in Irbid governorate. The sample was from different age groups. The researcher used a qualitative interview to collect data. Results of the study indicated that “ech” variant to “ek” was more apparent among youth participants. It was found that this age group used more “ek” compared to “ech” as they were in more contact with people who do not use “ech” in their speech. It was also found that female participants use more “ek” sound variation compared to males among youth and middle age participants, but not among elderly. The study concluded with some recommendations.

Keywords: variant, Irbid governorate, language change, Jordan residents' dialect, sociolinguistic phenomenon

1. Introduction

The concept of sociolinguistic style refers to clusters of linguistic resources that combine to form a recognized whole, belonging to a social context, including extralinguistic resources like clothing, bodily hexes as well as times, places, and physical and personal characteristics. Sociolinguistic styles often require multiple resources to be recognized and detached from their original style and deployed in a new context, thus; incorporating social aspects of the original style into the performance (Coupland, 2007).

Language change has been described as an unintended elect of language in use. From this standpoint, change results from the way individuals use their language; the challenge is thus to explain change and its properties in terms of factors affecting individuals as well as population dynamics. An intriguing example of such a phenomenon is the finding that language change shows some highly regular tendencies (Keller, 1994).

Croft (2000) gives a conceptual model of language change as cultural evolution. He stated that actual utterances are the units of cultural transmission, a view that we adopt in this article. He also differentiates between linguistic factors and social factors. Linguistic or cognitive factors give rise to new variants that come into existence by both intentional and unintentional mechanisms such as reanalysis, creativity and economy. Whether these mutations spread through a population depends on social factors, such as the structure of the population and the prestige of speakers.

Our language changes—there's no doubt about that—and generally the reasons for this change has been fairly clear: new technologies emerge and need names (Clayton, 2010). Such inventions without doubt need names that are more far away from the traditional slang or dialect. Clayton (2010) further adds that new generations need to quit their fathers' dialect to conform with social changes. In the past, people did not have many opportunities for communication with each other. But with the huge advancements in communication and information technologies, people, especially youth, contact more with other people. Such contact sometimes needs to abandon the regional dialect.

The sound “ech” is one of the most important sounds used in the northern region dialect, especially in Irbid governorate and even extends to the southern regions of Syria. It is one of the most distinguishing sounds

differentiating residents of northern Jordan. The main concern of this study is to clarify that the sound “ech” is one of the main characteristics of the dialect used in the northern region of Jordan. In doing so, the study is attempting to clarify how such sound transformed from “ech” to “ek”, especially by youth. It is also a fact that even the seven original families who lived in the city of Irbid used this sound in their spoken dialect. Therefore, it is important to identify this sound variant; knowing that it is used by residents in four major governorates (Irbid, Jarash, Ajloun, & Mafrqa) in the northern part of Jordan.

2. Problem of the Study

The sound “ech” is prevalent in the northern Jordan residents’ dialect. It is taken for granted that people in this region use this sound in most of their spoken language. Nonetheless, it was evident in the last few years that major social factors have combined to affect the use of this sound by people in the northern region of Jordan. This sociolinguistic phenomenon is most clear among youth.

The variation of “ech” to “ek” is important to be examined as a sociolinguistic phenomenon among people in the northern region of Jordan. As indicated before, this sound is a major key to distinguish residents of the north region of Jordan. Yet, such a phenomenon was not fully addressed by sociolinguistic researchers. This study is mainly concerned with identifying one of the most important factors affecting the variation of “ech” to “ek” as well as identifying the generational gap in using this sound. It is vital to detect such factors to be in better position to understand this sociolinguistic phenomenon.

3. Significance of the Study

Sound variation is an important sociolinguistic phenomenon. Al Salman (2009) argued in his study that several factors combine to result in sound variations. Identifying the causes of such variation is so important in the sociolinguistics field, as it may help researchers better understand the factors behind the disappearance of certain sounds from the spoken dialect. As known, change is a stage in the evolution of languages, but the disappearance of certain sounds in a given dialect may be a sign of the disappearance of a distinguishing dialectal sound. Sociolinguistic researchers have to work on identifying factors leading to such a result.

Therefore, the significance of the current study stems from the topic it addresses; that is the variation in the sound “ech” to “ek” in the dialect used in Irbid governorate. The study is mainly concerned with this sound variation in three generations, youths, middle age, and elders.

4. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to investigate variation in “ech” to “ek” in light of gender among three age groups “youth, middle age and elder”. The study also seeks to identify the most important factors resulting in this variation.

5. Literature Review

Unfortunately, there is a paucity in the previous literature addressing sounds variation, especially in “ech” to “ek”. To the best of our knowledge, there are few studies examining the variation of some linguistic sounds in the northern region of Jordan.

Abdel Jawwad (1986, cited in Al Salman, 2009) in one of the early studies examining the variation in dialectal sounds, investigated the variation in some sounds (q, d, & k) among some families selected from Amman and Irbid. It was found in this study that Amman families have more tendencies to use sound variations in their original dialects. It was also evident that Irbid families do not favor sound variation in their spoken language compared to Amman families as they have more rural traditions compared to Amman families, thus they were not affected by the urban life style.

Russ (1996) argued that early explanations of sound change were often sought in extralinguistic factors such as climate or the speakers’ physiology. More recently, scholars have been reluctant to explain changes in this way, but the most widely accepted extralinguistic explanation is the substratum theory. Other linguists, notably the Prague group, looked at the linguistic system itself for causes of sound change. Skepticism at ever finding explanations was expressed by generative grammarians. A landmark in this discussion came when R. Lass (1980, cited in Russ, 1996) suggested that to explain change was to predict it, which is impossible. Subsequently, an approach that looks at both internal and external factors has gained favor. Four uses of the term “explanation” exist: a general historical one; an approach suggesting the universal nature of sound change; explanation having predictive power; and, most commonly, explanation of specific changes. The fact that language is subject to variation does not explain sound change, but does point to its possible origin. Variants may be idiosyncratic and not spread, or may find their way into the linguistic system. Language-specific explanations entail other issues.

Explanations of sound change can be given as long as it is realized that they merely connect phenomena to their effects.

In his study, Al Salman (2009) addressed the variation of “q” to “Q” among Tirawis living in Irbid. He used a group of informants as a source of his information. These informants were selected using purposeful sampling from some Tirawis families living in Irbid. Results of the study indicated that variants in the sound “q” to “Q” more apparent among younger age groups. It was found in the study that elders were more concerned with preserving their original dialects.

Hammer, Lawrence, Rodriguez, Davison and Dunn (2011) examined in their study changes in language usage of Puerto Rican mothers and their children. This longitudinal study investigated changes in reported language usage between Puerto Rican mothers and their preschoolers over a 4 year period. It also examined whether differences in language usage occurred depending on the timing of children’s exposure to English and children’s gender. Seventy-six mothers reported the languages they and their children used when talking to each other during 2 years in Head Start, kindergarten, and first grade. Mothers of children who were exposed to Spanish and English prior to preschool entry reported using more English to their children than mothers of children who were not exposed to English until after preschool entry. The language usage of the children followed the same patterns as their mothers. The difference between the groups was maintained over the 4 years, although both groups increased their English usage. A gender effect was observed. Mothers of girls were five times more likely to use “More or All Spanish” than mothers of sons. In addition, girls who were exposed to Spanish only prior to preschool entry were six times more likely to speak to their mothers in “More or All Spanish” than other participating children.

Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia (2011) published in its website that sociolinguistics, the study of language as it affects and is affected by social relations. Sociolinguistics encompasses a broad range of concerns, including bilingualism, pidgin languages, and other ways that language use is influenced by contact among people of different language communities (e.g., speakers of German, French, Italian, & Romansh in Switzerland). Sociolinguists also examine different dialects, accents, and levels of diction in light of social distinctions among people. Although accent refers strictly to pronunciation, in practice a dialect can usually be identified by the accent of its speakers as well as by distinctive words, usages, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical features. Dialects reflect and may reinforce class, ethnic, or regional differences among speakers of the same language, in some cases difference of dialect shades into difference of language. Where the line between them is not clear, groups that are linguistically distinct are considered to speak different dialects of the same language if they can generally understand each other, although what constitutes this mutual intelligibility is itself not always clear. For example, someone speaking Mandarin may not be able to understand the spoken form of another Chinese dialect but can read it, since the written form of all Chinese dialects is universal; Serbs and Croats, on the other hand, speak essentially the same language but use different alphabets to write it. Individuals sometimes deliberately change their dialect as a means of improving their social status. Speakers of any dialect or any language may modulate their vocabulary and level of diction according to social context, speaking differently in church, for example, than on the playground; social activities that tend to shape the language of those engaging in it are sometimes called registers.

6. Methodology

6.1 Design of the Study

The current study used the qualitative approach. To gather data, the researcher used a semi structured interview with informants selected using a purposeful sampling.

6.2 Participants

To collect data, the researcher used a sample of nine participants (5 females and 4 males) selected using purposeful sampling from the families residing in Irbid governorate. The three families were families the researcher is familiar with “relatives and friends of the researcher”. The researcher selected one participant from three age groups and from both genders. The participants were fully informed about the objectives of the study and also assured that the information gathered in the study will be only used for research purposes. The first participants group was from Irbid, the capital city of Irbid Government. It was selected from a family called Abandah. This family is one of the original families in Irbid city “one of the main seven families in Irbid city”. The second family was from Al Ramtha city, a city near the Syrian borders. Al Zubi family was used for this group of participants. Families in this city were not affected by the “ech” variation to Eck as the variation seen inside Irbid city. The third family was Obidat family, one of the well known families in Bani Kenanh Province. Since 50 years, this family had been known that it prefers contacting with other families in Irbid city, or even

with other cultures. This procedure was selected to ensure easy access to the participants and to ensure that the both genders and three age groups are represented.

6.3 Instrument

To collect data from the informants, the researcher developed an interview containing open-ended questions. The researcher used open question with no specific answers. The researcher's intent was to obtain natural data elicited from the informants in natural settings, their homes in particular so that no external variables may intervene in their natural talk. The researcher video-taped the interview using his mobile.

6.4 Data Analysis

As the researcher selected a three families, and selected three members of each family, interview transcriptions was used and frequencies and percentages of variation in the sound "ech" to "ek" were obtained from the informants.

7. Results

The current study was conducted in natural settings "homes of the three families", so no intervening factors were present at the time of conducting interviews. It was found that "ech" variant to "ek" was more apparent among youth participants. It was found that this age group used more "ek" compared to "ch" as they were in more contact with people who do not use "ech" in their speech as they come from sociolinguistic backgrounds. More than 80% of the youth participating in the current study reported that they use "ek" instead of "ech" when speaking with their friends. The researcher was male and from middle age, so this may be the reason for the sound variation. For example, when one of the participants one male youth participant—an undergraduate—to describe his daily dialogue with his male and female friends, this is an excerpt of what he said:

R: Hello. How are you?

P: Good. Thanks.

R: How do you go to university?

P: I take the bus "Arkab"—note here that there was a variation in Ech sound as people in the northern regions of Jordan use "Archab".

R: When you meet one of your female colleagues, how do you begin a conversation with her?

P: I begin by saying: "Marhaba, Keif Halek"—Hello- how are you? here, here is an obvious variation in the sound Ech to Eck in the following words: Keif Halek.

We must note here that the participant is a male undergraduate, and that much of the variation in the Ech to Eck is seen mainly when interacting with the opposite sex. The male undergraduate wants to leave an impression on his female colleague that he is cool.

The same questions were posed to an old man from another family. The following excerpt is part of the interview conducted by the researcher with this participant:

R: Hello. How are you?

P: Thank God.

R: How do you go to the market?

P: I take the bus "Archab El Bas" —"Archab" is the word used in this context to indicate "take the bus" and here was no variation in the use of the sound Ech.

R: How are your daughters, are they married?

P: All are married, their husbands and sons are well and I hope that I can see them married.

"Kulhen Mejawzat, Endeheh Azwaj Mlah." It must be noted here that his participant's use of natural language was evident, and he did not try to change any sound he uses

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of the study was to investigate variation in "ech" to "ek" in light of gender among three age groups "youth, middle age and elder". The study also seeks to identify the most important factors resulting in this variation.

It was found that this age group used more "ek" compared to "ch" as they were in more contact with people who do not use "ech" in their speech. This result is consistent with the results reported in Al Salman study (2009)

who indicated that youth use more “q” than “Q” in his study of the variation of this linguistic sound among Tirawis. It was also found that female participants use more “ek” sound variation compared to males among youth and middle age participants, but not among elderly.

It was also found that girls reported more tendencies in sound variation. More than 72% of the female participants in the current study used “ek” instead of “ech” during their interaction with the researcher. This result may be explained in the fact that girls have more tendencies to use “ek” sound variation compared to boys during their interactions with others, especially when interacting with the opposite gender. In his study, (Abdel Jawad, 1986) reported similar results as they indicated that female participants are more prone to show sound variations in their speech as this is an indication of modernization and being “cool”. This result is consistent with the fact that girls prefer to hide their rural origins when they interact with their friends and colleagues.

It was interesting to investigate the variation in the “ech” and the use of “ek”. It was evident from the results reported in this study that a high percentage of youth prefer using the sound “ek” instead of “ech” in their interactions. The present research was conducted in the homes of the participants, so the variations were evident and no intervening variables were present during the collection of information from them. Nonetheless, during the interaction with the researcher, some of the participants were careful in using some sound variations “ech” to “ek”, so it may be one of the most significant limitations of the current study. It is better to study this sociolinguistic phenomenon in more than one setting “not at home only”. Future research may focus more on the interactions than unstructured settings.

In conclusion, the study of sound variation is an interesting topic to investigate. It is hoped that sound variation may be examined in other populations such as Beduins living in Jordan.

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