

Please cite this paper as follows:

Talib Mutashar, M., Hadian, B., Shakir AbdulHasan AlNawas, R., & Mirsaedi, A. S. (2024). Social Variation in the Dialects of Karbala and Baghdad: A Comparative Study of Urban and Rural Populations. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 12 (51), 95-105. <http://doi.org/10.30495/IJFL.2023.703378>

Research Paper

Social Variation in the Dialects of Karbala and Baghdad: A Comparative Study of Urban and Rural Populations

Mustafa Talib Mutashar¹, Bahram Hadian^{2*}, Raad Shakir AbdulHasan AlNawas³, AtefehSadate Mirsaedi⁴

¹Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
mt90iraq@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
bah.hadian@khuisf.ac.ir

³Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi Qar, Iraq
raad.abnawas@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of English, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
atefemirsaedi@gmail.com

Received: July 24, 2024

Accepted: October 28, 2024

Abstract

This paper explored how social variables such as gender, education, and age influence linguistic variation between the speech communities of Karbala and Baghdad. The study examined phonological, syntactic, and semantic variations within these communities, using a sociolinguistic lens. A total of 192 participants were selected, stratified by gender, age, education, and region, with data collected through sociolinguistic interviews. The results indicated that gender and education significantly impact the phonological features, while age influenced syntactic patterns. The study's findings provide valuable understanding about the complex dynamics of linguistic variation in Iraq, offering new perspectives on the role of social factors in shaping local dialects. These results are consistent with previous sociolinguistic studies, yet they offer distinct contributions to our understanding of Iraqi dialectology.

Keywords: Baghdad dialect; Dialect variation; Karbala dialect; Sociolinguistics; Social variables; Urban-rural linguistic differences

تنوع اجتماعی در گویش های کربلا و بغداد: بررسی تطبیقی جمعیت شهری و روستایی
این مقاله به بررسی چگونگی تأثیر متغیرهای اجتماعی مانند جنسیت، تحصیلات و سن بر تنوع زبانی بین جوامع گفتاری کربلا و بغداد پرداخته و تغییرات واج شناختی، نحوی و معنایی را در این جوامع با استفاده از یک لنز زبان‌شناختی اجتماعی بررسی می‌کند. برای این کار در مجموع 192 شرکت‌کننده انتخاب و براساس جنسیت، سن، تحصیلات و منطقه طبقه‌بندی شدند و داده‌ها از طریق مصاحبه‌های اجتماعی-زبانی جمع‌آوری شد. نتایج بررسی داده‌ها نشان داد که جنسیت و تحصیلات به شکل معنی‌داری بر ویژگی‌های واج‌شناختی تأثیر می‌گذارند، در حالی که سن بر الگوهای نحوی تأثیر می‌گذارد. یافته‌های این تحقیق درک ارزشمندی در مورد پویایی پیچیده تنوع زبانی در عراق ارائه می‌دهد و دیدگاه‌های جدیدی را در مورد نقش عوامل اجتماعی در شکل دادن به گویش‌های محلی ارائه می‌دهد. این یافته‌ها با مطالعات اجتماعی-زبانی قبلی سازگار است، با این حال کمک‌های متمایزی به درک ما از گویش‌شناسی عراق ارائه می‌دهد.
کلیدواژه‌ها: زبان‌شناسی اجتماعی، متغیرهای اجتماعی، تنوع گویش، گویش کربلا، گویش بغداد، تفاوت‌های زبانی شهری-روستایی

Introduction

The field of sociolinguistics explores how social factors such as gender, age, education, and social class influence language use. This intersection of social characteristics and linguistic behavior becomes particularly pronounced in societies with significant dialectal diversity. Iraq, with its rich geographical, social, and linguistic diversity, presents an ideal setting for investigating these dynamics. The country is home to numerous dialects that reflect the historical, social, and cultural experiences of its people. Among Iraq's cities, Baghdad and Karbala stand out as unique linguistic environments that offer valuable insights into the relationship between social factors and language variation.

Baghdad, the capital of Iraq and a historic cultural hub, has long been a center of linguistic innovation and prestige. Its dialect has evolved through centuries of interaction with speakers of various languages, including English, Turkish, and Persian. These external influences have contributed to the development of a distinctive urban dialect that reflects Baghdad's status as a cosmopolitan city. Karbala, by contrast, is a religious city known for its strong traditional social structures and conservative values. As a result, it offers a contrasting sociolinguistic environment where the preservation of dialectal forms and resistance to external influences might be expected. The city's strong association with religious identity makes it an ideal location for studying how traditional values intersect with language use.

Linguists have long recognized that regional dialects function as markers of identity at both the individual and group levels (Labov, 1972). Dialects serve not only as linguistic tools but also as social symbols that reflect speakers' affiliations with particular communities or social groups. According to Eckert (2000), these dialects are influenced by a wide range of factors, including social status, gender, education, and exposure to external influences. In this regard, the dialects of Baghdad and Karbala represent two distinct linguistic and cultural identities: Baghdad as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and modernization, and Karbala as a bastion of traditionalism and religious identity.

Despite the rich dialectal diversity in Iraq, the majority of sociolinguistic research in the Arab world has focused on other countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and the Gulf states. Although a growing body of research has explored Arabic dialects, relatively few studies have concentrated on the dialects of Iraq, especially those spoken in urban centers like Baghdad and Karbala. Even fewer have compared these dialects in terms of how socioeconomic factors influence linguistic variation. The existing research tends to focus on specific features of dialects in isolation, without examining how broader social dynamics such as gender, education, and age interact to shape language use.

The current study aims to address this gap by investigating the dialects spoken in Baghdad and Karbala, with a particular focus on the role of socioeconomic factors such as gender, education, and age. By examining how these variables influence phonological, syntactic, and semantic features in both cities, this research seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of sociolinguistic patterns in Iraq. Specifically, the study will explore whether younger speakers in Baghdad are adopting more standardized or urban linguistic features due to social and economic pressures, while Karbala's residents may exhibit greater linguistic conservatism due to the city's traditional and religious orientation. This comparison will shed light on the ways in which dialects serve as markers of social identity and how they are shaped by broader processes of social change and globalization in Iraq. In brief, by investigating the dialects of Baghdad and Karbala and their relationship to key social variables, this study will enhance our understanding of how language variation reflects and reinforces social structures in contemporary Iraqi society.



The Problem

Variation in language is a topic that has been extensively researched; nevertheless, the specific ways in which social factors shape dialects in Iraqi cities have not yet been thoroughly investigated. There is a distinct lack of study that focuses on Iraq, despite the fact that a large amount of work has been done on sociolinguistic variance in other Arabic-speaking nations, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco. There is a significant amount of dialectal diversity within Iraq, particularly between the two large cities of Baghdad and Karbala. Although this is the case, there have been very few studies that have conducted in-depth research on the sociolinguistic elements that contribute to the variances in dialects that exist between these cities. Furthermore, there have been no studies that have thoroughly investigated how social characteristics such as gender, age, and education influence these variations.

Previous studies (Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1974; Abu-Haidar, 1991) have demonstrated that social factors, such as gender, education level, and age, play a significant role in the variety of language in other locations. Still, there is a lack of comprehension regarding the manner in which these elements present themselves in the Arabic dialects spoken in Karbala and Baghdad. Urbanization, migration patterns, and educational opportunities are all factors that contribute to linguistic change. This is especially important in Iraq, where enormous social and political changes have occurred over the past few decades. These changes have influenced urbanization, migration patterns, and educational possibilities.

Furthermore, linguistic studies on Arabic dialects in Iraq have a tendency to concentrate on either formal linguistic structures or historical linguistic evolution, rather than the sociolinguistic dynamics that are occurring in the present day. Due to the cosmopolitan nature of Baghdad and the many other languages that are spoken there, the Baghdad dialect has been a subject of research throughout history. However, despite being a center of both religion and culture, Karbala has received a relatively small amount of research. Due to the lack of study that has been conducted, our comprehension of the exact ways in which social factors contribute to variances in phonological, syntactic, and semantic patterns in these cities is restricted. In light of the fact that language diversity is not only a worry in the academic world but also in the cultural world, it is imperative that this issue be addressed. The use of a particular dialect is an important indicator of identity, social mobility, and group identification. It is possible that efforts to conserve linguistic diversity and educational measures aiming at increasing linguistic awareness could be hampered if the mechanisms underpinning dialect variation and change in Iraq are not clearly understood. This research endeavors to address this deficiency by conducting an investigation into the influence of gender, education, and age on the dialects spoken in Karbala and Baghdad. The findings of this study will offer fresh perspectives on the sociolinguistic landscape of Iraq.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

To identify which social variables (gender, education, and age) influence regional dialect variation in Karbala and Baghdad.

To determine which linguistic features (phonological, syntactic, or semantic) are most influenced by these social variables in these Iraqi cities.

To compare and contrast the dialects of Karbala and Baghdad, particularly focusing on differences between urban and rural populations.

Novelty of the Study

This work therefore brings a great amount of novelty into the realm of sociolinguistics, especially Arabic dialectology, by taking into consideration social variables and their impact on dialects

such as Karbala and Baghdad dialects. Very little attention has been paid to dialects from Iraq, especially in the city of Karbala, despite the great amount of research that has been conducted on dialectal variation throughout the Arab world. This paper is a pioneering contribution in that it provides a close articulation of the interplay among social variables of gender, age, and education with the linguistic features of phonology, syntax, and semantics in these two cities. This is particularly novel on a number of grounds: first, a comparative focus on the dialects of Karbala and Baghdad;

There is abundant literature on the dialect of Baghdad; in comparison, however, Karbala, a cosmopolitan capital, lacks any major scientific research work. This research will be novel, therefore, as it touches on a direct comparison between Karbala and Baghdad dialects regarding the role of social factors in linguistic variation. While Baghdad is typical of linguistic innovation due to its metropolitan nature, Karbala represents a more conservative and traditional linguistic climate. A comparison between these two cities provides information about how urbanization, cultural identity, and regionalism shape language use. In fact, such a comparison can provide a better understanding of the way dialectal change may proceed—even within relatively close geographical regions—driven by social dynamics rather than mere geographical distance.

This research is also novel in taking a holistic approach toward linguistic features. It does not simply focus on either phonological or syntactic variation, as most previous studies have done; it investigates the features of phonological, syntactic, and semantic variation together. In this way, the research offers a more holistic understanding of how social factors influence different layers of linguistic structure.

For instance, phonological differences, such as /dʒ/ vs. /ʒ/ or /k/ vs. /tʃ/, are researched with syntactic changes, such as the use of modern structures over, say, /ma:/, or semantic changes indicating social affiliations. This multi-dimensional undertaking increases the contribution which otherwise, without this paper, would make one feel that the social variables influence only one aspect of language or the other.

The novelty of this work is in conducting a complete look at how the critical social variables of gender, age, and education affect usage. Most other works in Arabic dialectology mention these factors but often as separate entities rather than together as influencing linguistic behavior.

The present study reveals another important determinant of language use, which is education, especially in urban areas. It presents new information about the way formal education fosters the use of more standardized or prestigious dialectal varieties. In Iraq, where education is a critical determinant of social mobility, this study shows ways in which linguistic choices reflect broader social aspiration associated with educational success.

Urban vs. Rural Linguistic Dynamics is another new aspect of the research, which was directed at the urban-rural divide in linguistic variation, especially between Karbala and Baghdad.

Even as urbanization and migration have been key ingredients of research into language change in most parts of the world, this study represents a culturally and regionally specific exploration of how urban prestige forms are invading the speech communities in rural Iraq. This research underlines the dialect leveling caused by digital media, education, and migration: rural speakers are increasingly using urban features of speech. This process is more salient in the case of younger rural speakers who receive more exposure to urban norms from education and media. The study brings into focus a new look at the language use by the urban and rural populations differently in these cities, with modern influences such as technology and education that bring changes to these traditional linguistic communities. Such understanding gained in this manner are of immense value for understanding convergence or divergence of dialects in the times to come.



Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study stated above, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. What social variables affect regional dialect variation in Karbala and Baghdad?

RQ2. Which linguistic features (phonological, syntactic, or semantic) are most influenced by social variables in these two cities?

RQ3. How do linguistic variables differ between the dialects of Karbala and Baghdad, particularly in urban versus rural populations?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons, spanning academic, educational, and cultural contexts.

Academic Contribution

This research contributes to the field of sociolinguistics by providing empirical data on the dialects of Karbala and Baghdad, two cities that have not been extensively compared in the context of language variation. While earlier studies have focused on Baghdad's linguistic complexity, few have examined the interplay of social variables like gender, education, and age in shaping both Baghdad and Karbala's dialects. The findings of this study offer new perception of how these factors contribute to linguistic variation, thus enriching the body of knowledge on Arabic sociolinguistics. Moreover, the study tests sociolinguistic theories—such as Labov's (1972) variationist approach and Trudgill's (1974) model of dialect leveling—in a new context, applying these frameworks to Iraqi Arabic.

Sociocultural Implications

Understanding how social factors influence dialects has broader sociocultural implications. In Iraq, linguistic diversity reflects the country's rich cultural tapestry, and dialects serve as markers of social identity. This study sheds light on how different groups (e.g., urban vs. rural populations, younger vs. older speakers) use language to express identity and social affiliation. The analysis of gender as a factor in language use, particularly in a Middle Eastern context, offers important understanding of the role of women as linguistic innovators and the ways in which education and social mobility influence language behavior. By highlighting these dynamics, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of social identity in Iraq.

Educational Relevance

For language educators and curriculum developers, this study has practical implications. The findings on how education influences syntactic and phonological features can be used to inform teaching methods that are sensitive to regional linguistic diversity. As Iraq continues to modernize its education system, especially in teaching Arabic and foreign languages, understanding local dialects and how they vary can help educators tailor their approaches. This study encourages the inclusion of sociolinguistic awareness in the curriculum, which can help students appreciate the linguistic diversity within their country. Additionally, educators who understand the influence of social factors on language learning can better support students in acquiring both the local dialect and more formal varieties of Arabic.

Policy and Language Preservation

Language preservation efforts can also benefit from the findings of this study. As urbanization and globalization continue to influence Iraq, regional dialects face the risk of being eroded by

more standardized or "prestigious" forms of Arabic, especially in urban centers. The identification of specific linguistic features that are being lost or retained in urban vs. rural settings can inform efforts to document and preserve these dialects for future generations. Policymakers interested in cultural preservation and language policy can use the findings to design strategies that promote linguistic diversity while supporting the use of formal Arabic in public education and media.

Bridging the Digital Divide

The study also has relevance in the context of digital communication. With the increasing influence of social media and digital communication platforms, younger speakers in urban and rural areas are adopting new linguistic forms. This study offers awareness of how digital platforms may be accelerating dialect leveling and influencing the linguistic choices of younger generations. By exploring how media exposure contributes to the adoption of urban linguistic features, this research addresses a modern sociolinguistic phenomenon that has far-reaching implications for how languages evolve in the digital age.

In short, this study not only fills a critical research gap by exploring the sociolinguistic landscape of Karbala and Baghdad but also provides valuable understanding of linguists, educators, and policymakers. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how social factors shape language and identity in Iraq and offers practical applications for preserving linguistic diversity in an increasingly globalized world.

Review of Literature

Theoretical Background

The sociolinguistic analysis of language variation has deep roots in the work of seminal scholars like William Labov (1966), who laid the groundwork for understanding how language is influenced by social factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Labov's variationist approach has been crucial in demonstrating that linguistic variation is systematic and socially conditioned, rather than random. His research in New York City revealed how socio-economic class stratifies language, showcasing how individuals from different classes display different phonetic patterns. Labov's methodology involved sociolinguistic interviews that were meticulously designed to capture natural speech and to understand the variable patterns of language use among different social groups (Labov, 1966). His work has since become a cornerstone in sociolinguistics, establishing the concept that language is a social tool reflecting broader societal structures.

In the field of Arabic sociolinguistics, one of the key theoretical constructs is Ferguson's (1959) theory of diglossia, which introduced the concept of linguistic duality in languages like Arabic, where two varieties coexist within the same speech community: the "high" (formal) variety and the "low" (colloquial) variety. Ferguson's work delineated how these varieties serve different social functions, with the high variety used in formal, written, and official contexts, such as education and government, while the low variety is used in daily conversations and informal settings. This dichotomy has far-reaching implications for how identity, power, and social mobility are expressed linguistically in Arabic-speaking communities. Ferguson's concept of diglossia has become a lens through which many sociolinguistic studies on Arabic dialects are conducted, providing a framework to examine linguistic choices and their social meanings (Ferguson, 1959).

Blanc (1964) further contributed to the understanding of Arabic dialectology by focusing on the dialects of Baghdad. He explored how these dialects evolve under the influence of external factors such as migration, trade, and historical contact with other linguistic communities. His findings underscore the importance of understanding how non-linguistic factors like historical

events and economic changes impact language variation and shift. Blanc's work showed that the Arabic dialects are not static but dynamic, reflecting broader societal changes, particularly in urban areas that are sites of intense social interaction (Blanc, 1964).

Another important theoretical contribution comes from Trudgill (1974), who introduced the concept of "dialect leveling." This process refers to the reduction of distinct dialectal features as a result of increased social mobility, urbanization, and the movement of people between different regions. In this theory, Trudgill argued that when people from diverse dialectal backgrounds come into contact, the linguistic differences between them tend to diminish over time, leading to the adoption of more standardized or widespread forms of speech. This theory is particularly relevant when examining how younger speakers in urban areas such as Baghdad and Karbala may be influenced by more standardized forms of Arabic, often linked to socio-economic pressures and the demands of modern, urban life (Trudgill, 1974).

Empirical Background

Empirical studies on Arabic dialects have offered detailed insights into how social factors shape linguistic variation. Abu-Haidar's (1991) research on the dialect of Baghdad, for instance, examined how gender influences linguistic choices. Her work demonstrated that women in Baghdad tend to use more prestigious forms of speech than men, a phenomenon that has been observed in various sociolinguistic contexts across the Arab world. Abu-Haidar's findings align with broader sociolinguistic patterns where women often adopt more standard or prestige forms of language as a way to enhance their social status or signal upward mobility (Abu-Haidar, 1991). This gendered pattern of linguistic variation is key to understanding how dialectal features are maintained or altered within the community.

Similarly, Bakir's (1986) work on Basra's dialect highlights the role of education in linguistic variation. He found that more educated speakers tend to switch between formal Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and their local dialect, depending on the formality of the setting. In formal situations, such as in academic or official discourse, speakers were more likely to use features of MSA, while in casual conversations, they reverted to their local dialectal forms. This code-switching behavior reflects the diglossic nature of Arabic and illustrates how education facilitates linguistic flexibility (Bakir, 1986).

More recent studies have shifted their focus to the impact of digital communication and globalization on language. Albirini (2016) explored how social media and other forms of digital communication are accelerating the spread of urban linguistic features to rural areas. His research suggested that younger speakers, in particular, are influenced by the linguistic norms they encounter online, where urban dialects often dominate. This process of "linguistic globalization" has been instrumental in explaining the convergence of dialects, particularly in settings where rural speakers are adopting features traditionally associated with urban centers like Baghdad. Albirini's findings are critical to understanding how modern forms of communication are reshaping linguistic landscapes (Albirini, 2016).

Finally, Ingham's (1997) work on generational linguistic shifts provides an essential perspective on the sociolinguistic evolution of dialects. His research demonstrated that older speakers tend to maintain traditional linguistic forms, while younger generations are more likely to adopt new, often urbanized or globalized linguistic features. This pattern of generational change has been observed in many communities undergoing rapid urbanization and globalization. In the context of Baghdad and Karbala, this generational shift offers a framework for understanding how dialects may be evolving as younger speakers incorporate features that are influenced by urban life and digital communication (Ingham, 1997).

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods, non-experimental correlational design to explore relationships between social factors (gender, education, and age) and linguistic variables (phonological, syntactic, and semantic features). A correlational approach was used to observe naturally occurring linguistic patterns without manipulating variables (Labov, 1972).

Participants

The study sample consisted of 192 participants, equally divided between Karbala and Baghdad, with further stratification by gender, education, and age groups. Half the participants were from rural areas, and the other half from urban centers. Sociolinguistic interviews were conducted, with questions tailored to elicit natural speech.

Model of the Study

Labov's variationist sociolinguistic model was applied, focusing on correlations between social factors and linguistic variables. This model allows for a systematic examination of how social attributes affect language variation.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through interviews in participants' homes and public spaces to ensure a natural conversational setting. Conversations focused on personal experiences, allowing for the analysis of authentic dialectal features.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tests (e.g., Chi-Square, ANOVA) to examine correlations between social variables and linguistic features. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed to identify patterns in phonological, syntactic, and semantic variation.

Results

Results for the First Research Question

What social variables affect regional dialect variation in Karbala and Baghdad?

Table 1

Gender and Phonological Features

Variable	Urban/Standard Form (%)	Rural/Localized Form (%)	Gender (Male) (%)	Gender (Female) (%)
/dʒ/ vs. /z/	60% Urban	85% Rural	70%	50%
/k/ vs. /tʃ/	75% Urban	90% Rural	80%	65%

The table shows that urban speakers and females are more likely to use the prestigious forms of /dʒ/ and /k/, which are seen as markers of urban identity. In contrast, rural males use more localized forms.

Results for the Second Research Question

Which linguistic features (phonological, syntactic, or semantic) are most influenced by social variables in Karbala and Baghdad?

Table 2

Education, Age, and Syntactic Features

Feature	Educated (%)	Uneducated (%)	Younger (%)	Speakers	Older (%)	Speakers
/ma:/ vs. /mei/	80% Educated	60% Uneducated	85% Younger		65% Older	
/ʔibui/ vs. /abuiya/	70% Educated	50% Uneducated	75% Younger		55% Older	

Educated and younger speakers tend to use the modern syntactic features, such as /mei/ and /ʔibui/, indicating that education and age strongly influence the use of more standardized syntactic structures.

Discussion

Discussion Related to the First Research Question

The results demonstrate that gender is a critical factor influencing phonological variation in both Karbala and Baghdad. Female speakers, particularly those in urban areas, are more likely to use prestigious or standardized forms, such as /dʒ/ instead of /z/ and /k/ instead of /tʃ/. These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as Abu-Haidar's (1991) research on Baghdad's dialect, where women adopted more urban, prestigious forms as a way of signaling social mobility and education.

The findings also align with Labov's (1972) theory that women are often linguistic innovators, adopting new linguistic forms earlier than men. In the context of Karbala and Baghdad, this innovation is reflected in the phonological features used by female speakers in both cities. This pattern is likely due to greater access to education and increased exposure to media in urban settings, where women may feel more pressure to conform to linguistic norms that signal modernity and progress.

Discussion Related to the Second Research Question

The influence of education on syntactic variation is particularly evident in the use of modern structures, such as the preference for /mei/ over /ma:/ among younger and educated speakers. This finding supports Bakir's (1986) assertion that education promotes the adoption of standardized forms of Arabic. Educated speakers in Baghdad and Karbala are more likely to align their speech with formal structures, even in informal contexts, suggesting that education is a driving force in the spread of these features.

The impact of age on linguistic variation is also significant, particularly in the retention of traditional forms by older speakers. This generational divide mirrors findings from studies on dialect change in other Arabic-speaking regions, such as those by Ingham (1997) in the Gulf. The older speakers' adherence to traditional forms indicates a resistance to linguistic change, possibly driven by cultural values that prioritize the preservation of local identity.

Discussion Related to the Third Research Question

Phonological and syntactic differences between urban and rural populations are particularly striking. Rural speakers, especially in Karbala, tend to retain localized forms such as /z/ and /g/, while urban speakers in both cities adopt more standardized features. This urban-rural divide

reflects Trudgill's (1974) theory of dialect leveling, where urbanization leads to the spread of standardized forms at the expense of regional variations.

The findings also suggest that younger rural speakers are increasingly adopting urban features, likely due to exposure to digital media and migration patterns. This is consistent with Albirini's (2016) research on the influence of social media on dialect variation, where younger generations in rural areas are more likely to incorporate urban linguistic features into their speech.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of how social variables such as gender, education, and age shape dialect variation in Karbala and Baghdad. The findings reveal that gender significantly influences phonological features, with women adopting more prestigious forms, while education and age impact syntactic variation, particularly in the use of modern versus traditional structures.

The study's results align with previous research on sociolinguistic variation in the Arab world but also offer new knowledge of the specific dynamics of dialectal change in Iraq. The influence of urbanization, education, and media exposure suggests that the dialects of Karbala and Baghdad are undergoing a process of leveling, where local features are gradually being replaced by standardized forms.

Future research should explore the impact of digital media and globalization on dialect variation in Iraq, particularly in younger generations. Additionally, expanding the study to include other Iraqi cities and rural areas would provide a more complete understanding of the sociolinguistic landscape of the country.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have practical implications for linguists, educators, and policymakers. Understanding how social variables shape language use can help inform language preservation efforts, particularly in regions where local dialects are at risk of being lost due to urbanization and globalization. Additionally, educators can use these perceptions to develop language teaching strategies that respect and incorporate regional linguistic diversity.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation is the focus on two specific cities, which may not fully capture the linguistic diversity of Iraq. Future research could expand to other regions or adopt a longitudinal approach to track changes over time.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further research could explore the influence of migration on dialect variation in Iraq, particularly in cities that have experienced significant population shifts. Additionally, studies could examine the role of digital media in spreading urban linguistic features across rural communities.

References

- Abu-Haidar, F. (1991). *Christian Arabic of Baghdad*. Otto Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Al-Ani, S. H. (1978). *Linguistic variation in Baghdad*. Mouton Publishers.
- Albirini, A. (2016). *Modern Arabic Sociolinguistics: Diglossia, Variation, Codeswitching, Attitudes, and Identity*. Routledge.
- Bakir, M. (1986). "Sex differences in the approximation to Standard Arabic: A case study." *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28(1), 3-9.

- Bakir, M. (1986). "The use of language in Basrah: A study in variation." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1986(61), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.1986.61.33>
- Blanc, H. (1964). *Communal Dialects in Baghdad*. Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs (10). Harvard University Press
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge.
- Eckert, P. (2000). *Linguistic variation as social practice: The linguistic construction of identity in Belten High*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). "Diglossia." *Word*, 15(2), 325–340.
- Ingham, B. (1997). *Arabic Sociolinguistics and Dialectology*. *Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement*.
- Ingham, B. (1997). "The dialects of the southern Iraqi fens." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 60(1), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00030133>
- Labov, W. (1966). *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict." In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Trudgill, P. (1974). *The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge University Press.
- Trudgill, P. (1974). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society*. Penguin Books.
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society* (4th ed.). Penguin Books.

Biodata

Mustafa Talib Mutashar, is a Ph.D. student at the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.

Email: mt90iraq@gmail.com

Bahram Hadian, is an assistant professor of Linguistics in the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. His main research areas of interest are general and applied linguistics as well as comparative linguistics. Bahram Hadian has published a number of articles on linguistics and language teaching.

Email: bah.hadian@khuif.ac.ir

Raad Shakir AbdulHasan AlNawas is an assistant professor at the Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Thi Qar, Iraq.

Email: raad.alnawas@gmail.com

AtefeSadat Mirsaedi is an assistant professor of General Linguistics in the English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran. She received her B.A. in English Literature from University of Isfahan (2003), and earned her M.A. (2006) and Ph.D. (2011) in General Linguistics from University of Isfahan. Her main research areas of interest are Issues in General Linguistics including Phonetics and Phonology, Acoustic Phonetics, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Ecolinguistics, Forensic Linguistics and Cognitive Linguistics. AtefeSadat Mirsaedi has been teaching General Linguistics for the last 20 years. She has published several articles and books on General Linguistics and has presented papers in international conferences.

Email: Atefemirsaedi@gmail.com



© 2024 by the authors. Licensee International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research, Najafabad Iran, Iran. This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY NC 4.0 license). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).