

MEN’S AND WOMEN’S LANGUAGE: INQUIRIES ABOUT HEALTH IN JORDANIAN ARABIC

Nibal Abd Alkareem Malkawi, PhD

Basic Science Department, AlBalqa Applied University, Jordan, Aqaba

Mahmoud Ali Rababa`h

Basic Science Department, AlBalqa Applied University, Jordan, Aqaba

Abstract

This paper investigates some of the strategies used by Jordanian men and women to ask about each others' health. Jordanian women usually inquire more than men about the hearer's health and about his children's and relatives' health simply to establish social contact and to show sincere concern for the well-being of the addressees' family. There are some situations on which the asker cannot talk about directly especially in mixed-dyads; therefore, he should use some euphemistic terms or use indirect expressions to avoid offence to the askee. For example, the fact that a male asking about a sick female's health improperly may be considered a social mistake because mentioning a female's name in front of foreign or marriageable people or mentioning the name of some diseases are taboo; this may cause embarrassment to the speaker and his addressee. Therefore, men tend to use more euphemistic terms due to their wider experience and other's sensitivity of men's speech upon using non-euphemistic terms

Inquiries about health normally encompass proper forms of address. Women tend to use more relational forms and less formal formulas due to their real sincerity to increase intimacy and rapport with their addressee. Jordanian women use inquiries accompanied with kin terms of address more frequently than men do. They use such terms to address foreign or acquainted people either to express solidarity with the well-acquainted or to increase solidarity with the

foreign addressees. Some forms of address are almost sex deictic and non- reciprocal. They are used by old Jordanian women to express intimacy even when the relationship is not intimate.

The recipient of the inquiry normally replies "ilHamdu lillaah" (Praise be to Allah) in bad or good conditions. Men don't usually give a detailed reply about their real conditions; they give a conventional response while women normally give a prolonged answer.

Keywords: health inquiry, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, ethnography of communication

Review of Related Literature

A lot of researches have investigated the importance of speech act of greeting and its rituals in different cultures. Goffman (1971: 79) stated that greeting exchanges consist of two types, passing greetings and engaging greetings. He stated greeting exchanges serve to reestablish social relations, acknowledge status, and guarantee for safe passage when performed between strangers. Firth (1973) stated that greetings are rituals which consist of verbal and nonverbal forms. Verbal forms may be one of three linguistic units: question (How do you do?), interjection (Hello) or affirmation (Good morning). Laver (1981) proposed that greeting exchanges have three components: formulaic phrases, address forms, and phatic communion. He views that greeting exchanges as a whole are routine rituals which serve to preserve face.

There are studies into greetings as a sociolinguistic element or as a speech act which concentrated on traditional forms as Fadipe (1970) and Akindele (1997) investigated Yoruba greetings, Ibrahim et al (1976) researched into greetings in northern African communities, Dzameshie (2002) studied Ewe greetings and pointed out three kinds of greetings: temporal greetings which he calls 'Time-of-day' greetings; the inquiries which he calls 'How-are-you greetings'; and the valedictory greetings which Akindele (2007) refers to 'Ways of Parting/ Leave-taking'. Akindele (2007) studied Sesotho greetings pointing out that greetings are "extremely important strategies for the negotiation and control of social identity and social relationships between participants in a conversation".

Emery (2000: 201) investigated the phenomenon of greeting, congratulating and commiserating in Omani Arabic. He viewed that greetings are used to establish identity and affirm solidarity. Greetings comprise an indispensable phase on the direction to interpersonal access where information can be sought and shared. Other researchers as Searle (1969), Kasper (1989), Wilkins (1976) looked

at greetings as semantically or propositionally empty, and frozen or formulaic routine items.

Many studies claim that the ‘How are you?’ sequence is an instance of phatic communion. Coupland, Coupland, & Robinson (1992) identified a set of strategies elderly people use to attain degrees of phaticity when they respond to ‘How are you?’ question. Sun (2004) discussed the inquiries about well-being, ‘How are you?’ between female participants in Chinese. He studied phatic talk in terms of deictic reference; Chinese speakers might replace the second person deictic pronoun ‘you’ with other terms such as ‘mother’ to display deference, attentiveness of social status especially when addressing seniors.

Inquiries about health among close relatives and friends in Arabic are typified by prolonged and redundant turns. Females tend to extend their inquiries about one’s children’s, and other immediate family members’ well being whereas males tend to ask questions which are not intended to elicit genuine responses.

Literature of women's language

Some social dialectologists suggested that women are more conscious in their speech than men and they usually tend to use more standard forms than men do. Other sociolinguists, such as Robin Lakoff, argued that women use a code of speech which is incomparable with men's which is more hesitant and less confident to reinforce their subordinate status in the American society. A lot of sociolinguists had focused their researches on the differences between men's and women's speech in the areas of morphology and pronunciation but Lakoff shifted the focus on gender differences to semantics, syntax and style. She identified some linguistic features which are used by women to express uncertainty and lack of confidence to reinforce their subordinate status. Lakoff claimed that such hedges or intensifiers are signals of lack of confidence or reflection for women's anticipation that their addressee needs extra reassurance and persuasion (cited in Holmes: 1992, 316). Therefore, both hedges and boosters reflect women's uncertainty and lack of confidence. Lakoff also claimed that women normally use tag questions which signal doubt about what they are asserting. They use tags as facilitative or positive politeness devices to give the addressee an entrée into conversation and encourage him to contribute.

Introduction

Women and men in the Jordanian villages don't speak exactly in the same way. There are some

linguistic features which occur particularly in the women's speech. There are some differences between the vocabulary items used by women and men. For example, there are some sex-exclusive forms of address used only by women. Women's and men's social roles don't often overlap so that this is reflected on their speech forms. Women tend to use the more vernacular forms while men tend to use the less vernacular forms more than women do. Men usually tend to use the overtly prestigious forms which are admired overtly by the society.

The language of young females, educated or working in big factories, is quite different from their mothers' language; it is more polite and more formal which can resemble middle and high class language. Young females pretend to speak more urbanized vernacular to signal their fake inclusion to the high class. They use some forms to claim more status than they are entitled to. For example, they mostly change their way of pronunciation and choice of certain vocabulary which are associated with high class. Their language at home, especially in front of their father or elder brothers, is extremely different from their language with newly-acquainted colleagues, especially males or city dweller girls, to gain those strange people's acceptance and acclaim prestige and to ensure that they are perceived as socially statusful. Glottalisation is particularly characteristic of the city dwellers' vernacular but rural girls shift the consonant /g/ into a glottal sound when they only interact with foreign or urban persons because if they did this in front of old friends or relatives, they would be despised or criticized. Jordanian Females accommodate to the speech of their addressee more than males do.

Jordanians expect better behavior from women than from men. Women are considered subordinate in the Jordanian society so that they should avoid offending men to protect their face. Women's usage of super polite forms refers to their own face protection needs while men's usage of the same forms refers to their seek for self-esteem or to gain others' respect. Men don't intend to use polite forms with their relatives, relative females or young males to signal for power and masculinity. Thus young males prefer using vernacular forms because they convey connotation of masculinity.

Jordanian men's speech normally starts with an affective utterance then turns quickly to be information-oriented whereas women normally prolong the affective functions till they reach their referential function indirectly. They focus on phatic communication to convey an affective message. They select some linguistic forms to express an appropriate degree of social intimacy while men would wait longer to encroach in deeper personal matter or sometimes can not entirely open familial matters because they are taboo. This paper intends to shed a light on some linguistic variation

between men's speech and women's speech upon inquiring about someone's health.

Methodology

The data on which the researcher bases his claims were collected from his own speech community. About one hundred spontaneous conversations during casual visits were collected from different rural areas in Irbid in Jordan. The data were collected from different naturally occurring conversational settings and the conversants were unaware that their conversation was monitored. The data were analyzed to identify the relevant strategies followed by Jordanian people upon inquiring about someone's health. This is an empirical study which is basically descriptive, but the inductive approach is indispensable for conversational analysis. My intuition as an Arabic native speaker helps me to analyze interlocutors' behavior.

Discussion

When the transaction of greeting finishes, the interlocutors start to ask about each other's health. In general, the older or the superior initiates the inquiries but if he forgets or delays, the younger or the subordinates will ask him. There are specific formulas which comprise inquiries about the health and well-being of the hearer and those close to him. These inquiries are mainly phatic communion because one may ask about others' health without intending really to know about their healthy conditions or to obtain a precise answer. The speaker may multiply his inquiries about the addressee's health in order to show respect; all inquiries may be similar in meaning and function but only differ syntactically.

Jordanian adult males usually give preference to formal, traditional forms of inquiries and avoid using very informal or untraditional forms unless they want to express intimate privacy such as inquiries between close friends of the same age and sex. Consider:

1-a- keefak ya baladiyyih

(How are you, o fellow countryman?)

b- Keefak ya abu shshabaab?

(Lit. How are you father of the youth?)

c- Keef ilHaal?

(Lit. How is the state/ situation i.e. how are you?)

d- Keef aHwaalak?

(How are your affairs?)

e- Shuu 9loomak?

(Lit. What are your news?)

Example (1a) is an informal sex-deictic form used mostly by young males especially those who are in the army and (1b) is also sex and age-deictic used mostly by young males. Although the content of this form seems nice, its over usage by the young males has given it a negative connotation. Example (c) and (d) are the most polite and common among adult males.

Strangers often pay much more attention to their speech. Strangers, especially educated young females, try to use the urban dialect, to be considered more prestigious, and try to use different forms of address than those usually used in normal everyday speech. Consider the following example:

2. (Context: An undergraduate female visited her neighbors and met accidentally her friend's husband there. She does not know her friend's husband very well).

V: keef Haalak u keef ilmadaam

(How are you and how is your wife?)

H: ?ilHamdu lillaah; ibkheer

(Thank God; alright).

After a few days the undergraduate female met the same person. She asked him:

3.V: cheef Haalak

(How are you?)

H: maliiH

(Fine)

V: wishloon umm ehmad

(Lit. And what is the color of the mother of Ahmad? I.e. how is um Ahmad?)

H: hayha daaHlih

(Lit. Here she is rolling i.e. She is fine.)

In example 2, the young girl uses a formal and polite question to ask about the hearer's health and his wife's health. In addition, she uses a borrowed form of address "madaam" (madam). In

example 3, the young girl switches to the stigmatized phonological variant /ch/ of /k/ i.e. "cheef" instead of "keef" which is socially less prestigious. The host also uses the colloquial and less polite style to respond to her inquiry e.g. "daaHlah" (Lit. She is rolling i.e. fine). The aforementioned examples show how the interlocutors switch from a formal style to a less formal, colloquial style after they become well-acquainted. Thus, the forms of the inquiries are subject to change as a result of everyday communication acts. The better interlocutors know each other, the more casual forms they will use.

Age and sex, among other things, are important markers which are reflected in social interaction. Age is often the criterion that determines superiority of the interlocutors. Among Jordanians, the older a person becomes, the more power he holds. So the inferior (i.e. younger person) ought to initiate inquiries concerning the superior's health and well-being to show respect to him. With an age difference between conversants of a generation, the elder is entitled to ask not only about the health of the hearer but also about his family or relatives. The younger usually asks only about the hearer's health. And superiors often ask more questions about the inferior's family than about the inferior himself. The reason may be that superiors want to show concern for the well-being of the inferior's family. Consider:

a. ishloon iwlaadik wishloon ilbanaat

(How are your sons and daughters?)

b. keef Haal ummak wishloon abuuk, ya 9ammah.

(How are your mother and father, o niece?)

Women are entitled to ask about the whole family members whether males or females while men find this very embarrassing so they restrict their inquiries to males' health.

Inquiries about health usually convey some information about the age of the speaker. Some old women tend to use certain expressions more frequently than others. Such expressions are acquired in the community and become associated mainly with a particular stage of life. And it is known that the elders can define situations as more or less formal, hence, they are more capable of using a proper code of inquiries to cope with different communication settings. Consider:

4. (Context: A surgical operation was made to BA (a boy aged 12) and many visitors came to congratulate his parents on the success of the operation).

a- ilHamdillaah 9asalaamtuh

(Congratulations on his being healthy)

b- inhanniik ibsalaamit iSSabi

(Congratulations on the boy's safety)

c- inshallah yguum bissalaamih

(God willing he will leave his bed in wholesomeness).

The first expression (4a) is normally used by all people. Whereas (4b) and (4c) are mostly used by the elders especially females.

Men and women often use the same forms of inquiries to ask about other people's health. Holmes (1992:167) states "Women and men do not use completely different forms. They use different quantities or frequencies of the same forms". Women tend to ask more questions and put more weight on familial questions which will maintain and increase solidarity. Women ask questions about the health of the addressee's family as a part of conversational maintenance, but men may ask just to get information. The asker may use remarks to describe his impression of the state of the addressee to consolidate solidarity between them. Consider:

5- a- La iSSiHah tamaam

(Oh! your health is good)

b- mashallah wijjhak imfattiH / innawwir ilyoom

(God bless you! Your face is radiant today.)

c- ?allah muSalli 9ala sayyidna muHammad mitnaSSiH

(God bless our prophet Muhammad. You have grown healthy)

On (5b) and (5c) the speaker uses religious expressions accompanying the remarks; therefore, they are more polite than (5a) which is devoid of any etiquette term. The above mentioned expressions "mashallah" (God bless you) and "?allah muSalli 9annabi"(God bless the Prophet) are not only etiquette terms, but they are also essential elements of such remarks lest they be considered acts of jealousy. Brown and Levinson (1978:252) note that "compliments may be very big FTAs" (Face-Threatening Acts) in societies where envy is very strong and where witchcraft exists as a sanction ... ". Women are more conscious of using such religious etiquette terms and they would ask those who don't mention such terms upon complimenting to do.

The common response to any inquiry about health is "ilHamdillaah/ ilHamdullaah/?al Hamdu lillaah" (Praise be to Allah). The variation in respect of "ilHamdillaah and ilHamdullaah" may not be

significant: both are nonstandard forms, whereas "ʔalHamdu lillaah" is the most formal and courteous among them. The recipient of the inquiry doesn't have to give a detailed answer about his real conditions, but he has to give what may be regarded a social response to the inquiry. Another common expression which usually accompanies the hearers' response is "inshallah" (God willing). It is used to show that only God knows about our future affairs and they (our affairs) are only decided by the will of God.

Employing Euphemisms to Ask about Each Other's Health

People sometimes avoid using some terms and if they were to use them, they would talk in an indirect way. Such terms are avoided because they may cause embarrassment to the speaker or to his addressees. Therefore, interlocutors will "resort to circumlocution and euphemisms in order to avoid direct mention of matters pertaining to parts of the body, bodily functions, etc" (Wardhaugh, 1992:234). Yankah (1991:45) says euphemism acts as a "rhetorical filter that aims at decorum and politeness". Asking about a sick female's health is necessary but it may threaten the conversants' face. Therefore, if someone asks improperly, he maybe considered communicatively and socially incompetent. The following excerpt shows how euphemism is exploited to ask about others without threatening their face:

11. (Context: A man and his wife visited their friend because his wife had a breast cancer operation. The host's wife was in a separate room from the speakers).

Visitor: keef SiHHt l9eelih.

(How is the family's health? i.e. How is your wife's health)

Host: ilHamdillaah; ibkheer.

(Praise to Allah; well)

Visitor's wife: ishloon juruHHa. inshallah itHassan

(How is her injury? I wish it got better.)

Host: baddu shwayyi 9ashaan waram iththadi...

(It takes a while because the breast tumor...)

In Arab culture mentioning female's name in front of foreign or marriageable people is taboo. Therefore, the visitor uses the polite term "9eelih" (family) to refer to the host's wife. The visitor's wife also uses a euphemistic term "juruH" (injury) to refer to the breast cancer

operation. Though "juruH" (injury) can be a euphemistic term for an operation in general, it is understood from the context that it refers to the breast cancer operation. The visitor's wife does not know the medical details of the disease. Therefore, the host uses the euphemistic term "waram iththadi" (breast tumor) to save her from falling in mistake; the host's goal of using

the polite expression is to tell the visitor's wife the euphemistic term and help her avoid a social mistake because she may use the dysphemistic term to make herself clear. Jordanian men are generally more careful in their choice of euphemistic terms due to their closer contact with the outside world and mass media contrary to women who normally keep close to home.

Using Terms of Address with the Inquiries

Terms of address are essential in every day speech. They can be omitted without affecting the referential content of utterances but "utterances never function on the overt content level alone" (Parkinson, 1985:36). Yankah (1991:41) notes that an utterance is considered to be polite if it is "suffused with terms of politeness or courteous addressives". He adds that a polite utterance is often suffused with terms of respect, greetings as well as appropriate address terms (ibid: 36). Forms of address accompanying inquiry about someone's health are either relational (depend on the relationship between the interlocutors such as "9ammuh" (uncle) or absolute (reserved for authorized recipients such as "ustaaD" (professor) (cf. Farghal and Shakir, 1994: 241). Arabs usually extend these social titles to display courtesy to the recipient. For example, ustaad (professor) is used to address any well dressed adult male even if he is illiterate. Parkinson (1985:128) comments "When used as a term of address, ustaaD (ustaad) no longer means professor".

Inquiries about health normally encompass proper forms of address. Some social titles such as "ustaad" (professor/ teacher) or "siidi" (sir) are used when the level of rapport and intimacy is relatively low. A speaker may use such terms not only to show respect to the hearer but also to show that he is a cultured and polite person. Other social titles such as "Hajji" (pilgrim) and "9ammooh" (nephew) are used as polite lubricants when the hearer is superior in terms of age even when the level of intimacy and rapport is high. Consider these examples:

12. a- keef Haalak siidi

(How are you sir?)

b- ishloonak ya istaad

(How are you teacher/ professor?)

c- ishloonak ya Hajji

(How are you, pilgrim)

In (12a) the speaker, an adult male, uses the form of address "siidi" (sir) - the colloquial version of standard Arabic "syyidi"- to make his inquiry more polite. This form of address signals formality and low intimacy between the conversants. It is a sex marker form of address which is only used among males to address each others and doesn't have a feministic equivalent. In (12b) the addresser uses the polite form of address "istaad" (teacher/ professor) which is also a sex deictic normally used among males and the feministic equivalent is not common. In (12c) the asker uses "hajji" (pilgrim) to show respect. This term is commonly used to address any old or middle aged people as an age deixis but sometimes it is not favored by young or middle aged females because of its negative impact.

Inquiries are also accompanied with inverse address terms (kinship terms) which are usually extended to involve non-kin addressees in order to show solidarity and respect. Consider these examples:

13. a- keef Haalak 9amtoo

(How are you, aunt?)

b- ishloonik ya 9ammeh

(How are you, aunt?)

c- 9asaaki bkheer yammah

(I hope you are fine, mother)

The above terms of address, which are part of the Arabic system of addressing, may cause difficulty to non-native speakers because, for example, a mother addresses her son and the son addresses his mother with the same term "yammah" (mother). It is worth noting that inverse address terms are originally directed from age juniors to seniors, but seniors use them to show closeness and solidarity with the juniors. To emphasize this, a young male can only, for example, address his uncle with "9ammooh" (uncle) but his uncle may address him with "ibn ?axuuy" (Lit. son of my brother) in addition to "9ammooh" (nephew). Women tend to

use kin terms more than men due to their real concern to increase solidarity with their addressees. In (13b), the inquirer uses a vocative particle which is often inserted between the inquiry and the term of address when the addressee is female, but it is often omitted when the addressee is male.

Non-verbal Etiquette Signs

The technical term "Idiomovements" (by analogy to idiolect) has been referred to the manners of an individual including all the varieties in different moods and situations (Ekman and Friesen, 1969:165). Each individual maintains an idiosyncratic use of paralinguistic and kinetic acts that make a friend, for example, imitate his friend's speech more than a foreign speech expert. Nevertheless, members of a society maintain a range of patterns that are known to each other. An inquiry about health is normally preceded by a handshake with the right palms of both speakers. Some people use both of their hands and shake for a while when they greet a superior person in terms of age or status to show respect to him. They also speak in a high-pitch tone and protract their inquiries to show concern for the superior's health. In addition, old males usually tighten on the greetee's hand and then tap on their chest in order to show deference. Many Jordanian females do not shake a marriageable male's hand. They tap on their chest and say "9aziiz" (dear), "9aziiz bala salaam" (dear without handshaking) or "9ala waDhuu" (I have done ablution). Old females, if they were to shake, cover their hands with their cuffs and say some expressions like "mithl ibni" (like my son).

Reading Conventions

Consonants

		ess glottal stop
		ess pharyngeal fricative
		ess dento-alveolar emphatic fricative
		l dent -alveolar emphatic stop
		ess dent –alveolar emphatic stop
		l interdental emphatic fricative
		d pharyngeal fricative

		d uvular fricative
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Conclusion

The paper has shown that Jordanians employ some polite strategies to keep the social channels open and to maintain rapport and solidarity among conversants. Furthermore, many Jordanians use etiquette terms, deferential titles, and polite formulas to mitigate an imposing or a face-threatening act. It has been shown that choosing an appropriate inquiry about health depends on the interlocutors' social status, age, sex and the level of closeness between the conversants. The addresser uses an appropriate form of inquiry which is consonant with the social situation and which reflects the social relationship between the interlocutors. In a male dominant society like the population of the study (i.e. Jordanian villages) the tendency is to use more polite terms to ask about males' health, whereas females may be addressed with less courteous ones. In addition, the age and the social status of the addressee affect the addresser's choice of using an appropriate term; inferiors may be offered a less courteous form than that offered to superiors.

It seems that males use more courteous inquiries than females. This is not in line with Lakoff's (1975) claim that females are more polite and more indirect than males. Also old people, males or females, use more courteous, longer terms than young people. This may be due to the fact that old people have more experience and broader communicative competence than young people. Women tend to use less formal formulas due to their real sincerity to increase intimacy and rapport with their addressee. They tend to minimize status differences and shift to a more informal style to increase solidarity. While men may take longer time till they are well-acquainted to move from negative politeness into positive politeness expressions

It has been revealed that the inquiries used to ask about other's health are relatively distinctive; they are either formal as "keef Haalak" (Lit. How are you?), or informal as "ishloonak" (Lit. How is your color? I.e. how are you?). The informal formula is limited to informal situations, whereas the formal one can be used in formal or informal situations. Furthermore, some informal inquiries are relatively restricted to young males, especially soldiers e.g. "keefak ya baladiyyih" (How are you, o fellow countryman?); others are restricted to old males e.g.

"keef limruwwah" (How is your strength/health?). Jordanian women use inquiries accompanied with kin terms of address more frequently than men do. They use such terms to address foreign or acquainted people either to express solidarity with the well-acquainted or to increase solidarity with the foreign addressees.

Responses to inquiries about health are quite limited in variation. Most people respond with the polite socio-religious term "alHamdullaah" or "?alhamid lillaah" (Praise be to Allah) or a discourteous term such as "daaHlah" (It is rolling i.e. not bad). The response is usually short and lacks details about one's real conditions. Men tend to give short answer while women usually protract in their answers and give very detailed explanations. Using the socio-religious response (and giving a short response) denotes that Jordanians tend to use etiquette terms which portray loyalty to the Islamic norms.

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