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Perceiving East vs. West Beirut Arabic: Gender and Language Attitudes in a Matched-Guise Experiment

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Perception of East vs. West; Beiruti Arabic; Gender and Language Attitudes; Matched-Guise Experiment; Language and Identity; Cultural Stereotypes; Cross-Cultural Communication

Abstract

Lebanon's linguistic landscape is shaped by complex historical, social, and political dynamics that intersect with class, sectarian affiliation, and gender ideologies. While sociolinguistic research has historically emphasized gender as a critical factor influencing language variation and attitudes, there is a notable scarcity of empirical work examining whether gender maintains its traditional influence on evaluative perceptions within contemporary, post-conflict, multilingual urban settings like the capital city, Beirut. This study directly addresses this gap by investigating a core sociolinguistic question: Does a rater's gender influence attitudes toward the perceived East and West Beirut varieties of Lebanese Arabic? To provide an empirical answer, the research employed the rigorous matched-guise experiment methodology. The experimental stimuli involved eight speakers, carefully balanced across gender and the dialectal background (East vs. West Beirut). These speakers provided short audio recordings representing the target East and West Beirut speech varieties. The recordings were evaluated by a substantial sample of 200 participants, perfectly balanced by gender (100 men and 100 women) and evenly distributed across different age groups. Participants rated each recording on twelve evaluative traits using a four-point Likert-type scale. Quantitative data were analyzed using one-way ANOVA tests in SPSS to assess whether gender-based differences existed in evaluative judgments. The results reveal no statistically significant differences between male and female raters across all evaluative categories ($p > .05$). These findings indicate that, within this sample, gender does not significantly influence attitudes toward Beiruti dialects. Rather than suggesting complete attitudinal homogenization, the results point to a context-specific convergence in linguistic evaluations shaped by shared educational experiences, widespread multilingualism, and Beirut's urban cosmopolitan environment. The study challenges established sociolinguistic assumptions that position gender as a stable predictor of language attitudes and highlights the importance of situating linguistic evaluations within evolving social and historical contexts. By highlighting how post-conflict urban environments can foster more overlapping linguistic perceptions, the study contributes to broader discussions on language, gender, and identity in multilingual societies. Future research would benefit from integrating qualitative methods to uncover the ideological frameworks underlying quantitative evaluations and to examine how gendered expectations emerge in spontaneous language use.



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Mots clés**Résumé**

Perception de l'Est vs. l'Ouest ;
Arabe beiroutien ;
Attitudes de genre et langage ;
Expérience du masque linguistique ;
Langage et identité ;
Stéréotypes culturels ;
Communication interculturelle

Le paysage linguistique libanais est façonné par des dynamiques historiques, sociales et politiques complexes qui s'entrecroisent avec la classe sociale, l'appartenance confessionnelle et les idéologies de genre. Si la sociolinguistique a longtemps considéré le genre comme un facteur central dans la formation des attitudes linguistiques, peu d'études empiriques ont examiné son rôle dans des contextes urbains post-conflit et multilingues tels que Beyrouth. Cette étude examine l'influence du genre sur les attitudes envers les variétés de l'arabe libanais associées à Beyrouth-Est et Beyrouth-Ouest. L'analyse repose sur une expérience de matched-guise impliquant huit locuteurs et locutrices, équilibrés selon le genre et l'origine dialectale. De courts enregistrements audio représentant les deux variétés ont été évalués par 200 participants (100 hommes et 100 femmes), répartis équitablement par groupes d'âge. Chaque extrait a été évalué selon douze traits perceptifs à l'aide d'une échelle de type Likert à quatre points. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de tests ANOVA à un facteur sous SPSS afin d'identifier d'éventuelles différences liées au genre. Les résultats ne révèlent aucune différence statistiquement significative entre les évaluations produites par les participants masculins et féminins pour l'ensemble des traits considérés ($p > .05$). Ces résultats indiquent que, dans cet échantillon, le genre ne constitue pas un facteur déterminant des attitudes envers les dialectes beyrouthins. Plutôt que de refléter une homogénéisation totale des perceptions linguistiques, ils suggèrent une convergence contextuelle des évaluations, façonnée par des parcours éducatifs partagés, une forte exposition au multilinguisme et le caractère cosmopolite de l'environnement urbain beyrouthien. Cette étude remet en question les hypothèses sociolinguistiques traditionnelles associant le genre à des tendances évaluatives distinctes et souligne l'importance d'inscrire l'analyse des attitudes linguistiques dans des contextes sociaux et historiques en transformation. Elle met en évidence le rôle des environnements urbains post-conflit dans l'émergence de perceptions linguistiques plus fluides. Des recherches futures gagneraient à intégrer des approches qualitatives afin d'explorer les idéologies sous-jacentes aux évaluations quantitatives et d'examiner la manière dont les attentes genrées se manifestent dans l'usage spontané de la langue.

1. Introduction

Language in Lebanon is more than a communicative tool; it is a social resource that reflects and reproduces hierarchies of class, sect, and gender. Since the French Mandate (1920–1943), multilingualism, which included Arabic, French, and later English, has come to index different forms of cultural capital and identity (Makki, 2007; Ghaith & Shaaban, 1996). French remains tied to prestige and education, English to globalization and professional mobility, and Arabic to national belonging. In contemporary Beirut, early bilingual exposure also correlates with elegance judgments, suggesting shared urban repertoires across genders (Chehimi et al., 2024). Within this stratified system, dialect variation functions as a powerful social marker, particularly in



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Beirut, where speech styles often signal both social position and group affiliation (Bourdieu, 1991).

In urban Lebanon, and Beirut especially, gender intersects with linguistic behavior in ways that reveal competing social expectations. Women's speech is often judged through ideologies of refinement, politeness, and prestige (Rosenhouse, 1998; Al-Wer, 2014), while men's language tends to be linked with authenticity or solidarity (Trudgill, 1972; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Yet globalization, education, and mixed-gender professional environments are reshaping these boundaries, potentially reducing traditional gender asymmetries in linguistic evaluation (Bassiouny, 2009; Daher, 2017). Recent gender statistics further document these role shifts in education and work, aligning with more convergent evaluative norms (UN Women Lebanon, 2024). These dynamics suggest that gendered linguistic ideologies, which are beliefs about how men and women should sound, may no longer translate straightforwardly into gendered attitudes toward language.

The Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) further complicated the city's linguistic map. Dialects once associated loosely with geography became sectarian symbols; East Beirut speech linked to Christian communities, West Beirut to Muslim ones (Mady & Chettiparamb, 2017). These spatial-ideological divisions persist in everyday perception, mapping onto linguistic cues that listeners still recognize (Mady & Chettiparamb, 2017). While this study does not analyze the war itself, the East/West dialect contrast remains a salient axis of identity and social perception in post-conflict Beirut. Against this backdrop, language attitudes can reveal how social categories such as gender interact with historical divisions to shape perceptions of prestige, authenticity, and belonging.

Despite extensive research on language and gender in the Arab world, little empirical work has examined how gender mediates attitudes toward local dialects in a multilingual and post-conflict setting like Beirut. Previous studies have explored women's linguistic strategies or men's vernacular use, but not how listeners of different genders evaluate dialectal variation within the same community. Addressing this gap, the present study uses a matched-guise experiment to test whether male and female listeners differ in their evaluations of East and West Beirut Arabic. It draws on the theoretical frameworks of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; applied in Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) to conceptualize gender as one of several intersecting social dimensions, alongside class, age, and sect, that structure linguistic perception. Accordingly, this study asks:

- Do male and female listeners evaluate East and West Beirut dialects differently in terms of perceived elegance, intelligence, and trustworthiness?
- What do these evaluations reveal about shifting gender ideologies in Beirut's multilingual, post-conflict context?



By situating quantitative attitude data within Lebanon's broader sociolinguistic history, the article contributes to debates on how gendered ideologies evolve in urban, multilingual societies, and how linguistic variation continues to mediate identity and social power in contemporary Beirut.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Language Attitudes and Gender

Language attitudes, defined as socially shared beliefs, affective responses, and stereotypes toward linguistic forms, play a central role in the reproduction of social hierarchies and symbolic power (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). These attitudes are never neutral; rather, they are embedded in ideological systems that regulate legitimacy, prestige, and belonging. Gender, understood not as a biological variable but as a social and performative construct, both shapes and is shaped by linguistic practices and evaluations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). From this perspective, linguistic behavior becomes a site where gendered expectations are enacted, contested, and reconfigured.

Adopting an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1989; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), this study conceptualizes gender as one axis among class, sectarian affiliation, generation, and education that jointly inform linguistic evaluation. Research across Arabic-speaking contexts demonstrates that attitudes toward dialects often reflect layered social meanings rather than isolated demographic variables (Al-Rojaie, 2023; AlAlaslaa, 2024). In post-conflict or politically unstable societies, these ideological linkages intensify, as dialects become audible markers of political alignment, moral legitimacy, or resistance (Schmid, 2023). Language in such contexts materializes group boundaries in everyday interaction, rendering linguistic choices socially consequential.

Gendered evaluations are particularly salient in these settings. Women's speech is frequently moralized and evaluated in terms of refinement, modernity, or respectability, while men's speech is associated with authenticity, toughness, or local solidarity (Trudgill, 1974; Al-Wer, 2014). In Beirut, Rebeiz's (2022) analysis of Francophone women's narratives illustrates how hybrid linguistic repertoires function as tools for processing and articulating civil war trauma, revealing gendered metapragmatic awareness within a post-conflict ecology. These findings further highlight the need to examine whether such gendered expectations persist in contemporary urban evaluations.

2.2. Globalization and Diversity

Globalization has reconfigured linguistic hierarchies by producing what Blommaert (2010) terms *super-diversity*: dense and shifting intersections of language, migration, class, and identity. In multilingual cities such as Beirut, where Arabic,



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French, and English circulate across institutional, digital, and personal domains, language attitudes must be understood as responses to this fluid sociolinguistic environment.

Studies in sociolinguistic perception demonstrate that listeners evaluate speech not only through phonetic cues but also through socially indexed meanings such as education, cosmopolitanism, or mobility (Campbell-Kibler, 2010; Drummond, 2010). Gender intersects with these perceptual processes, but its effects are increasingly mediated by factors such as media exposure, schooling, and transnational mobility. Recent work supports this shift. Chehimi et al. (2024) show that early bilingual exposure among Lebanese university students predicts evaluations of elegance and competence regardless of gender, suggesting the emergence of a shared urban linguistic repertoire.

Comparable patterns appear beyond Lebanon. Abdelsayed and Bellinzona (2024) found that second-generation Arabic speakers in Italy evaluate dialectal and hybrid forms through transnational frames shaped by schooling and integration rather than gender alone. Similarly, Belahcen and Ouahmiche (2017) demonstrate that generational change, rather than gender, increasingly drives linguistic evaluation in multilingual settings. These findings collectively point to a decentering of gender as a primary explanatory variable in highly mobile urban contexts.

2.3. Gendered Ideologies and Linguistic Evaluation

Classic sociolinguistic models posited a gendered polarity in which women align more closely with overt prestige norms, while men favor vernacular authenticity (Labov, 1972; Trudgill, 1995; Milroy & Milroy, 1998). While influential, this binary has been increasingly problematized. Recent scholarship argues for grounding Arabic sociolinguistics in locally situated indexical regimes rather than inherited Western paradigms (Habib, 2025).

Empirical studies across the Arab world demonstrate that attitudes toward dialects fluctuate with education, media consumption, and mobility rather than gender alone (Kircher & Zipp, 2022; Askar, 2021; AlAlaslaa, 2024). In the Gulf, Askar (2021) observed women maintaining local dialects to assert cultural continuity, while men adopted supralocal forms for economic mobility. Ruthan (2024) similarly shows that attitudes toward Jazani Arabic are shaped by sociophonetic salience and stereotypes linked to region and modernization, with gender playing a secondary role.

Applied to Beirut, these findings suggest that traditional gendered roles, women as linguistic “refiners” and men as “authenticators”, may be weakening as both groups navigate comparable multilingual and cosmopolitan environments. This hypothesis motivates the present study’s empirical examination of whether gendered distinctions persist in evaluations of East and West Beirut speech.



2.4. Comparative Insights from Post-Conflict and Multilingual Cities

Comparative research from divided cities such as Sarajevo, Brussels, and Johannesburg reveals recurring gendered logics in language attitudes, though with context-specific outcomes (Bugarski, 2012; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Across these settings, language indexes power, reconciliation, and access to resources, with women often associated with cosmopolitan or prestige varieties (Javeau, 2015). However, Beirut differs in that its divisions are deeply sectarian and historically sedimented, making linguistic ideology, rather than language policy, the primary mechanism shaping evaluation.

Recent interdisciplinary work emphasizes the importance of digital and transnational spaces in reshaping linguistic perception (Hoyte-West, 2024). These spaces further destabilize fixed gender-dialect associations by exposing speakers to diverse norms and communicative styles. In sum, three interconnected insights emerge from the literature: (1) intersectionality explains how gender interacts with other social categories; (2) multilingual urban environments blur classical prestige hierarchies; and (3) post-conflict contexts produce shifting symbolic meanings for dialects. Together, these insights frame the present study's investigation of gender, ideology, and linguistic evaluation in Beirut.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study investigates the relationship between dialectal variation in Lebanese Arabic (East and West Beirut), language attitudes, and gender. It adopts a quantitative perceptual research design grounded in the matched-guise technique (MGT), a well-established experimental method for eliciting implicit language attitudes (Lambert et al., 1967). MGT is particularly suitable for contexts where dialects carry strong social and ideological meanings yet circulate within shared communicative spaces, as is the case in Beirut.

The research design comprises two sequential stages: (1) the collection of controlled speech samples representing the two dialects and speaker genders, and (2) the administration of a perceptual survey in which listeners evaluated these samples. While the study is primarily quantitative, its design is informed by sociolinguistic theory on ideology and indexicality, allowing for interpretation beyond surface-level statistical patterns.

3.2. Speaker and Stimuli Selection

Eight speakers were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (a) native use of the target dialect, (b) daily use of that dialect in Beirut, and (c) age range between 20 and 40 years, to limit age-related phonetic variation. Four speakers were from East Beirut (Ashrafieh area) and four from West Beirut (Mousaitbeh area), with an equal gender distribution across dialects (two men and two women per variety).



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To ensure dialectal authenticity, each speaker provided a short demographic statement confirming their area of residence, linguistic background, and daily dialect use. All speakers received identical instructions and produced their recordings independently in quiet environments using WhatsApp voice notes. This method ensured consistency while maintaining accessibility and naturalness.

Speakers were shown five neutral, everyday images (cushion, balcony, motorcycle, pan, and slipper) and asked to produce one spontaneous sentence per image in their habitual spoken dialect. These lexical items were selected because they contain phonological and lexical variables known to index dialectal differentiation in Beirut. Speakers were explicitly instructed not to read from prepared texts to enhance ecological validity and approximate everyday speech.

All recordings were reviewed for sound quality and comparability. The final stimuli were anonymized and coded systematically: MEB1–MEB2 (East Beirut men), WEB1–WEB2 (East Beirut women), MWB1–MWB2 (West Beirut men), and WWB1–WWB2 (West Beirut women). During survey deployment, the order of the recordings was randomized to minimize ordering and priming effects.

A pilot study with 10 participants was conducted before full data collection to test audio clarity, survey functionality, and scale comprehensibility. Minor technical adjustments were implemented based on participant feedback, including the addition of replay options for audio files.

3.3. Research Instruments

The primary research instrument was an online perceptual survey, available in both Arabic and English to accommodate participants' linguistic preferences. Participants were presented with the eight speaker recordings in randomized order and asked to evaluate each speaker across a set of perceptual dimensions.

The survey consisted of 96 items, organized into eight identical blocks (one per speaker). Each block included five lexical evaluations assessing the perceived elegance of each sentence (1 = very vulgar, 4 = very elegant) and seven personality trait evaluations measuring pleasantness, intelligence, friendliness, trustworthiness, peacefulness, respect, and cooperativeness. All ratings were collected using a four-point Likert-type scale to discourage neutral responses.

The evaluative dimensions were adapted from the original matched-guise framework (Lambert et al., 1967) and have been widely employed in sociolinguistic attitude research. Their relevance to the Lebanese context is supported by recent perception-based studies conducted locally (Sleiman, 2022). To reduce participant fatigue, given the length of the survey, progress indicators and brief instructional prompts were included between sections. Average completion time ranged between 15 and 18 minutes.



3.4. Participants

A total of 200 participants took part in the study. The sample was balanced by gender (100 men, 100 women) and age group (100 aged 18–25 and 100 aged 50 and above), allowing for examination of generational as well as gender-based variation in language attitudes. All participants were either originally from Beirut, currently living or working in Beirut, or both. Specifically, 62 participants were originally from Beirut but did not work there, 68 worked or studied in Beirut without being originally from the city, and 70 both lived and worked or studied there. Although the sample was not stratified by sectarian affiliation or educational level, efforts were made to ensure diversity in socioeconomic background and geographic origin. These variables are acknowledged as important and are proposed as focal points for future research using stratified sampling.

3.5. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was distributed through social media platforms and word-of-mouth, using voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained electronically before the start of the survey, and participants were informed about anonymity and their right to withdraw at any time. Ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee at Saint Joseph University of Beirut before data collection. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). A Missing Value Analysis was conducted to check for incomplete responses; no missing data were found. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize ratings across variables. One-way ANOVA tests examined the relationships between participant gender and age group and their evaluations of the two dialects. Reliability of the perceptual scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, confirming acceptable internal consistency.

4. Results and Discussion

In sociolinguistic research, the perception and evaluation of dialects often reveal subtle insights into underlying language attitudes and social dynamics. This study examined how gender influences perceptions of East and West Beirut dialects, using One-Way ANOVA tests in SPSS to analyze whether male and female raters evaluated the dialects or speakers differently.

4.1 Quantitative Results

Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics and ANOVA results comparing male and female raters' evaluations of the eight speaker recordings. Across all stimuli, no statistically significant gender differences were found in attitudes toward either the dialects or the speakers. All significance levels (p-values) exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating that gender did not have a measurable effect on participants' evaluations.



Table 1. Attitudes toward dialects across genders

Speaker	Male (M) Mean	St. Dev	Female (F) Mean	St. Dev	F	Sig. (p)
East Beirut Man 1	3.16	.57	3.20	.59	0.17	.68
East Beirut Woman 1	2.89	.49	2.91	.49	0.12	.73
West Beirut Woman 1	2.87	.53	2.85	.50	0.16	.69
East Beirut Woman 2	2.78	.53	2.77	.51	0.02	.88
West Beirut Man 1	2.00	.70	1.97	.70	0.08	.77
West Beirut Woman 2	2.29	.61	2.29	.61	0.00	.95
West Beirut Man 2	2.27	.48	2.36	.48	2.02	.16
East Beirut Man 2	3.24	.48	3.36	.48	2.75	.10

Table 2. Attitudes toward speakers across genders

Speaker	Male (M) Mean	St. Dev	Female (F) Mean	St. Dev	F	Sig. (p)
East Beirut Man 1	3.14	.62	3.29	.56	3.37	.07
East Beirut Woman 1	2.96	.51	3.03	.52	0.85	.36
West Beirut Woman 1	2.82	.53	2.91	.52	1.31	.25
East Beirut Woman 2	2.83	.59	2.82	.53	0.03	.86
West Beirut Man 1	2.15	.75	2.13	.85	0.04	.85
West Beirut Woman 2	2.33	.62	2.40	.63	0.54	.46
West Beirut Man 2	2.38	.56	2.42	.55	0.26	.61
East Beirut Man 2	3.36	.47	3.36	.45	0.00	.97

As shown, all F-values are low, and no effects approached statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). Effect sizes were negligible ($< .01$), confirming minimal variance explained by gender. A simple visualization could further illustrate the near-identical mean trends



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between male and female raters across all eight stimuli, reinforcing the quantitative outcome.

4.2. Interpretation and Theoretical Context

The results suggest that gender does not significantly influence language attitudes toward East or West Beirut dialects within this sample. While this finding initially appears to indicate a convergence of linguistic perceptions across genders, it should be interpreted cautiously.

Previous sociolinguistic research (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Labov, 2001) often identifies gender as a mediating factor in linguistic evaluation, reflecting broader social norms. However, the absence of gendered variation here may reflect Beirut's unique sociolinguistic ecology, rather than an outright "homogenization" of language attitudes. Beirut's urban, multilingual environment, where Arabic, French, and English intersect, creates fluid linguistic boundaries (Joseph, 2004). Shared schooling, media, and bilingual routines plausibly synchronize evaluative norms across genders (Chehimi et al., 2024), consistent with indexical fields where meanings cluster around mobility and cosmopolitanism rather than sex/gender category (Eckert, 2008).

Men and women alike navigate this complexity, often sharing similar repertoires and communicative goals in professional, educational, and social contexts. This pattern aligns with recent findings from other Arabic-speaking and diasporic contexts, where gender has been shown to play a diminishing role in dialect evaluation when speakers share comparable educational and multilingual trajectories (Abdelsayed & Bellinzona, 2024; AlAlaslaa, 2024). In these settings, attitudes are increasingly shaped by institutional affiliation, media exposure, and perceived mobility rather than by gendered linguistic expectations alone.

Moreover, globalization and media exposure have softened traditional gendered linguistic distinctions. Research by Chehimi et al. (2024) found that both male and female Lebanese speakers engage in extensive code-switching and cross-dialectal borrowing. This aligns with Bassiouney's (2009) argument that Arab urban centers exhibit increasing overlap in male and female linguistic behavior due to mobility, media, and modernity. These sociocultural shifts likely contribute to the alignment of evaluative norms found in the present study. However, the lack of significance should not be mistaken for absolute equality. Several methodological or contextual factors could have masked potential differences.

As Kircher and Zipp (2022) note, null effects in attitudinal research may reflect the dominance of other social variables rather than the disappearance of gendered ideology. Thus, rather than indicating an egalitarian linguistic landscape, these results may instead reflect the narrowing of overt gender-based distinctions in urban contexts where shared experiences dominate linguistic perception.



4.3 Contextualizing within Broader Literature

Similar findings have emerged in other urban multilingual settings where men and women share social and linguistic spaces. For example, Milroy (1987) observed that shared social networks can equalize language attitudes, while Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) emphasized that factors such as education and media exposure often outweigh gender in shaping linguistic perceptions. Likewise, Trudgill (1995) argued that when dialects are perceived as relatively neutral, gender differences tend to diminish. This may apply to Beirut, where exposure to multiple dialects reduces their social markedness and encourages more uniform evaluation patterns. Comparable conclusions have been reached in recent Arabic sociolinguistic studies, where gender-based differences in dialect evaluation were minimal or inconsistent in university and urban samples (AlAlaslaa, 2024; Ruthan, 2024). Ruthan's (2024) findings further indicate that sociophonetic salience and regional stereotypes often outweigh gender in shaping listener judgments, particularly in contexts marked by mobility and modernization.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research

The present study offers important insights into language attitudes in Beirut but is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the lack of stratification by key sociolinguistic variables such as sect, class, and education limits the representativeness of the sample and may conceal underlying patterns of variation. Recent research underscores that these variables often interact with gender in complex ways that attitudinal surveys alone may not capture (Al-Rojaie, 2023; Kircher & Zipp, 2022).

Second, the controlled nature of the audio stimuli, short WhatsApp voice notes, may not fully capture the richness of spontaneous speech, potentially affecting the ecological validity of the findings. Third, the survey's length (96 items) could have led to participant fatigue and reduced sensitivity to subtle differences in evaluation. Fourth, the absence of qualitative data, such as interviews or open-ended responses, restricts deeper exploration of the motivations behind participants' ratings.

Finally, while the statistical analysis was appropriate, the exclusive reliance on quantitative methods means that non-significant findings should be interpreted cautiously rather than as evidence of equality. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating stratified sampling, naturalistic speech data, and mixed-methods approaches to provide more understanding of language attitudes in Beirut.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between gender and language attitudes in modern-day Beirut, offering evidence that complicates traditional assumptions about gendered linguistic behavior. Contrary to classic sociolinguistic models predicting systematic gender differences in evaluative tendencies (Labov, 1990; Trudgill, 1974), the findings revealed no significant correlation between gender and attitudes toward East



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and West Beirut dialects. Instead, the results suggest a pattern of attitudinal convergence, where men and women exhibit similar orientations toward dialectal variation. This convergence reflects the influence of Beirut's multilingual, highly mobile, and media-saturated environment which includes conditions that weaken the boundaries once sustained by gendered norms of linguistic behavior.

Beirut's complex sociopolitical history that is marked by civil war, displacement, reconstruction, and globalization, has reshaped both linguistic hierarchies and social expectations. In this fluid urban ecology, gender emerges not as a fixed determinant of language attitudes but as a flexible position negotiated through intersecting structures of class, education, and sectarian affiliation. Such findings resonate with Eckert's (2008) conception of indexical fields, wherein linguistic forms accrue layered meanings that shift with context and speaker identity, and with Cameron's (2005) notion of gender as performance, emphasizing that gendered language practices are situationally enacted rather than biologically determined. In Beirut, the loss of rigid gendered norms in linguistic evaluation reflects wider social transformations, including women's expanding public presence and the normalization of mixed-gender, multilingual interaction in schools, workplaces, and digital media.

From a theoretical standpoint, these results invite a rethinking of indexicality in post-conflict societies. The diminished gender gap in dialect evaluation suggests that social meaning has migrated from gendered differentiation to broader markers of mobility, cosmopolitanism, and prestige, echoing Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic market framework, where linguistic capital is distributed according to shifting value systems rather than biological or social categories alone. Beirut's speakers, exposed to transnational media and fluid linguistic repertoires, participate in an ongoing process of reindexicalization (Silverstein, 2003) that aligns linguistic prestige less with gender and more with class, education, and urban sophistication.

Methodologically, this study's quantitative focus offers a clear picture of attitudinal tendencies but leaves room for deeper qualitative inquiry. The sample's urban concentration may not fully capture Beirut's internal diversity in sectarian, socioeconomic, or peripheral linguistic communities. Incorporating discourse-based or ethnographic methods in future research could uncover subtler forms of gendered meaning-making and linguistic self-presentation that remain invisible to attitudinal surveys alone.

Practically, these findings carry pedagogical and sociocultural implications. In educational contexts, they highlight the need to challenge implicit hierarchies of dialect prestige and to cultivate linguistic awareness that values variation rather than conformity. Public discourse and media can similarly play a role in reframing dialect diversity as a resource for social cohesion rather than a site of difference.

Ultimately, this study contributes to broader debates on language, gender, and social transformation by showing that post-conflict multilingual cities like Beirut function as laboratories for linguistic change. Here, language not only indexes identity



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but also mediates resilience, negotiation, and coexistence. The convergence of attitudes across gender lines signals an ongoing redefinition of linguistic and social capital, one that mirrors Beirut's larger struggle to reconcile diversity with unity in a post-war, globalized age.

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Authors' Contribution

Tamara Sleiman conceived and designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript. *Rosine Zgheib* and *Nadine Riachi Haddad* provided academic guidance, critical feedback, and editorial revisions throughout the research and writing process. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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