Females' and Males' Identity as revealed in Phonology and Grammar: a case study of Mostaganem Spoken Arabic

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Résumé : *Cet article traite d'un aspect intéressant de l'identité, à savoir celui de l'identité des femmes et des hommes à travers la phonologie et la grammaire. L'utilisation d'un style spécifique au sexe reflète son image sociale. Cela signifie que le style spécifique au genre est limité par les normes sociales. Il peut être utilisé comme une stratégie pour atteindre certains objectifs. D'une autre manière, on peut dire que le style spécifique au genre signale une identité sociale. Pour signaler leur identité sociale, les hommes et les femmes sont susceptibles de se référer à des formules de style spécifiques afin d'expliciter leurs actes de langage. Il est indéniable que le discours des femmes dénote une infériorité, moins de confiance et d'insécurité. Les femmes sont enclines à utiliser tout ce qui est dans la communication verbale et non verbale, elles sont assez « sélectives » quant à leur style de langage car elles ont tendance à être prestigieuses. Leurs modèles de discours apparemment très prudents par rapport aux modèles des hommes. Cela dit que le sexe du locuteur le contraint à utiliser un style définissant le sexe. Ainsi, le choix d'un style spécifique est progressivement limité par un certain nombre de contraintes qui régissent le comportement des hommes comme des femmes.*

Mots clés : *Patterns phonologiques liés au genre, identité, identité féminine, construction identitaire.*

Abstract: *This paper deals with an interesting aspect of identity, namely that of males' and males' identity through phonology and grammar. It is stated that the use of a sex-specific style reflects one's social image. This means that Gender specific style is bound by social norms. It can be used as a strategy to fulfill certain objectives. In another way, one can say that gender-specific style signals a social identity. To signal their social identity, men and woman are likely to refer to specific style formulae in order to make their speech acts explicit. It is undeniably true that females' speech denotes inferiority, less confidence, and insecurity. Women are prone to the use of all that is in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Females are quite "choosy" about their language style since they tend to be prestigious. Their speech patterns apparently very careful compared to males' patterns. This leads to say that the sex of the speaker confines him/her to use a sex-defining style. Accordingly, the choice of a specific style is progressively restricted by a number of constraints that govern both males' and females' behavior.*

Keywords: *Gender-related phonological patterns, identity, females' identity, identity construction.*

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1. Introduction

The criterion upon which language is to be categorized as male or female proper has been controversial for many years. So far, the role of socio-cultural factors that determine the nature of this criterion has been the concern for a great number of sociolinguists.

Seminal taxonomic studies and many other sociolinguists revealed that male/female distinction in language is multi folded. They shed the light on phonological, phonetic and grammatical differences. The conclusion reached so far is that males and females do use a gender related language, which set them as two disparate speech communities.

2. Gender Related Phonological Patterns

Trudgill (1972) confirms that females use fewer stigmatised speech forms, give greater importance to prestige patterns, and are more sensitive to correct language. He attempted to draw a correlation between sex and context as social phenomena and the realization of some phonetic and phonological variables in the urban dialect of the city of Norwich.

Among the variables studied by Trudgill is the pronunciation of the suffix (ing) in words like walking, laughing, going and so forth. It is to be remembered that this variable has two different pronunciations. The first one is /Iŋ/. It is formal and occurs in accents described as prestigious, i.e. RP.

In this case, we have /w :kiŋ - lΛfiŋ - g∂uiŋ/. The second pronunciation (ing) is /∂n~n/. This pronunciation is neither formal nor prestigious. This variable has been tested in four contextual styles: word list style, Reading Passage style, Formal Speech and Casual Speech. The results obtained in this survey show very clearly that the variables [∂n~n] is typical to working class males.

Working class females however, more frequently use /Iŋ/ a pattern assigned more prestige. This fact, Trudgill speculates, is related to women's awareness of social status and therefore they are more attentive to the value and significance of language variations and language use. Given their relegation to inferior social ranking and their evaluation according to how they appear, female speakers are more anxious, less secure about their social position. They, therefore, find it necessary "to signal their social status linguistically" (Ibid.p,182).

Men's value, on the other hand is associated with how much successful they are. In other words, men are valued according to what they achieve in terms of their profession and their power. This is the reason why they attribute less importance to their linguistic behaviour and allow themselves to use less standard varieties.

Likewise, the western culture sees that Working Class speech connotes masculine characteristics as toughness and roughness. Supposedly, these features are positive when they are male referential, yet negative when they are female referential.

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Although it would be premature and well-nigh wrong to suggest that there is a great amount of stylistic differences in speech patterns used by females and males in MSA (Given that no such study has been done up to now), amateur observation forces us to notice linguistic correlates of such variations. In their everyday interactions, females use phonetic variables, which are, seemingly, more refined, sophisticated and female referential. Therefore, while MSA female speakers more frequently realize the phoneme /q/ as [q], male speakers generally realize it as [g]. The following table encloses some examples about the realization of /**q**/ as [**q**] or [**g**] depending on the sex of the speaker.

Table 1: Examples of females'/males' realization of the phoneme /q/ in MSA

Female pronunciation	Male pronunciation	English Translation
sbaq	sb∂g	He overtook
jʕanaq	jʕan∂g	To take someone in one's arms
ʕunqi	ʕungi	My neck
m∂rqa	m∂rga	Broth
jsaqi	js∂gi	To put broth on cooked food
laqa:t	l∂ga:t	Tweezers
jqaʕad	jgaʕ∂d	To seat somebody
qutra	gutra	drop
quffa	guffa	Shopping basket
qs∂m	gs∂m	He divided
qaj∂s	g∂j∂s	He tried something on
tbaq	tbag	Bread basket
wqaf	wg∂f	He stood up

Similarly, MSA female speech contains fewer diphthongs than MSA male speech. MSA female speakers, in general, tend to favor the use of long vowels, unlike males who prefer diphthongs. Thus, gender of the speaker determines the use of a long vowel or a diphthong.

Table 2: Examples of females and males' pronunciation of the same words using either a long vowel or a diphthong

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Females' pronunciation	Males' pronunciation	English translation
ħi:t	ħaIt	Wall
xi:t	xaIt	Thread
di:f	daIf	Guest
si:f	saIf	Summer
bi:d	baId	Eggs
lmi:da	lmeIda	Table
∂ro:z	∂rauz	Rice
∂do:	∂dau	Light

That diphthongs and the realization of /**q**/ as [**g**] are less frequent in females' speech is socially very significant and confirms the finding of Trudgill (1972). Females do avoid speech patterns that open them to stigmatisation because according to the general belief in MSA speech community, the use of diphthongs and the use of [**g**] in place of [**q**] typify the rural varieties most of the time lacking refinement and sophistication that distinguish the urban varieties.

Being vulnerable to criticism, female speakers make every endeavour to signal their status. Females, in fact, are careful about their pronunciation. Male speakers, in MSA, tend to sound less refined, less sophisticated in their pronunciation. It seems that this is deliberately done. Because it is not the criterion used for their evaluation, MSA male speakers do not care about their speech. In many cases, MSA speakers tend to describe males whose speech is sophisticated as lacking masculinity.

3. Gender Related Grammatical Patterns

The intersection of sex and social role is also present in the syntactic components used by males and females. Sociologists who have done work of comparative character have found out that some grammatical structures have a role in rendering social meaning. In that, they divulge speakers' identity in terms of sex, status and role. Taking stock of the way grammatical structures are handled, we are likely to see that these structures are informative of role assigning and role fulfilling. At some stage, it is necessary to examine the relation between the use of these grammatical structures, the identity of the speaker and his role.

The motives behind the choice between different grammatical processes and participant types are socially oriented and socially significant. To explore this further, we need to look at an aspect of the grammar used by females and males.

Polite forms and formality appear to be more frequent in females' speech than in males' speech (Lakoff 1973). The reason is that women in general have the real status of non-participant in serious matters, and her role is stereotypically to serve as a decoration for her man.

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One who plays such a role is an outsider, and an outsider, must be more polite than an active participant must and is therefore confident about the obedience of the addressee. Very formal polite forms like "I wonder if you could help me; would you mind shutting/opening the door, please? May I ask you a question? "Will you help me with these groceries, please?" instead of "come help me", "the door" (to ask someone to close/open the door and so forth are common place occurrences in females' language, Lakoff (1973). The same sentences are formulated differently and may be uttered with less formality and "less politeness" (we do not believe males to be impolite, but to get things done; they do not need the same formality as females. It is in fact easier for a man to get things done).

By analogy to English female speakers MSA female speakers, (amateur observation), use polite forms that are not or are very rarely used by males, **/ðłah ðjxali:k -smaħli xuja, - nðndzðn nsaqsi:k/** (may God protect you, excuse me, I wonder if I could ask you a question). Males would rather use the following polite forms, **/ðłah jaħafdak, ðłah erade ʕli:k ðlwældi:n,- ðłah jarħam ðl wældi:n/** (May God protect you, may God make your parents grant blessing to you, may God bless you dead parents).

In many societies, formality (Fairclough, 1989) is a feature that specifies practices of higher social prestige. It restricts access and set distances between participants. It is a means by which respect is generated. However its use by females is, in many cases, to neither signal distance nor higher ranking. In these terms, female formality is in fact a strong tendency towards politeness. Politeness in females' language is correlated to giving good impression and avoiding social stigmatisation. In MSA, a woman who displays a kind of "linguistic looseness" is described, as [**mætaħʃðmʃ**] (not decent), /**mætðswæʃ**/ (valueless vulgar). A too polite man, who speaks with an extra structuring of his speech, is likely to negatively affect the way the other members of society perceive him. In one word, over-politeness might be inimical to his masculinity; he will be rated as weak and lacking firmness, two characteristics that socially impinge males' image.

For the same reason, females shrink from using swear words or blasphemies. As males, females know that part of language described as vulgar, coarse and improper. However, there seems to be a universal tendency if not a deep-rooted "social instinct", (one that has been acquired at a very early stage of socialization) which drives females to not use curse-words. The sociolinguistic axiom «don't say» means «don't do» is very significant. The reason is that to be forbidden a word means to be forbidden an action.

Compared to females, males are not very reluctant as to allow themselves to blaspheme or use swear words. Society exerts less control and meets with less severe judgements such behaviour when man generated. What a man is allowed is forbidden for a woman. In our culture, nothing can affect the masculinity and the value of a man unless he is incapable of earning money. The popular saying **/ðrad al ʕaIbah fi: d i:bah**/ confirms that males' value resides in how much they earn

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and not in how they speak. Never does the sentence **/lmra ʕaIbha fi: d i:bha/** occur.

It is needless to recall that our culture does not grant any importance to a financially independent woman. The sentence **/lmra mra/** (a female is a female) is full an emblem of females' triviality. The use of the word **/mra/** two times has nothing to do with synonymy. The first one means the female sex. The second implies inferiority.

Passive and active forms would be sensitive grammatical areas where both disparities and roles differentiating the two sexes are prominently displayed. A deep examination of how passive/active forms operate in males and females' language could prove very useful for providing subtle information about the way society has been structured in the course of time.

Granted, females' confinement to a passive and subordinate role in the social network, their use of the passive form is apparent in their speech. Dekkak (1979) contends that these patterns are pervasive in Tlemcen Arabic **/talaqnI-xtabnI-zw∂d nI/** (he divorced me-he asked me for marriage-he married me) are female exclusive sentences. As Tlemcen Arabic, MSA witnesses the same type of behaviour. **/jaxd∂m ʕlIja- xar∂d nI m∂n darI- ħar∂mnI /** (He is responsible for me, he excluded me from my house-he repudiated me) are female exclusive patterns. These are examples, which bear out passivity and subordination of females because active speakership involves an active social role. Therefore, mentioned communication units are interpreted as socially nonsensical if said by male speakers. Because "*men like to make themselves the active doers,*" (Flexner in Henley & Thorne, 1975, p.53) they use active forms more usually. They dominate the world and it is up to the dominant to initiate action. Males would say, **/talaqtha-xtatbtha- naxd∂m ʕli:ha- ħar∂mtha/** (I divorced her-I asked her for marriage-I am responsible for her-I repudiated her).

Men's power and women's triviality is present in the way males structure some of their utterances. The fact that names of some professions have no feminine gender, as **/doktœr/** (doctor)/**profesœr/** (professor/teacher), /**medsɛ** /(doctor), /**provIsœr/** (headmaster), is an emblem of social inequality. Granted, the problem of grammatical gender is not eminently posed in Arabic but a political position marked by its newness in the Algerian society seems to not have the feminine. It is the position of female Member of Parliament who according to the media, is referred to as **/næ?Ib/** though **/næ?Iba/** would not violate the rules that govern the Arabic language.

The image of females as immature is well mirrored in the language we use. Consider if you please the following examples. The first one is extracted from MSA male ordinary speech dealing with the choice of would be future wife. The second example is an excerpt from a discussion between a young businesswoman (**Cl**) who

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wants to move to a new job because she was subjected to her boss's hassle, and an employment counsellor **(c)** (Fairclough, 1989, p.226).

> **1-/nɔdi:ha ʃi:ra sγi:ra wɔ nrabi:ha ʕla jɔdi:/**
> (I will marry a young girl so that I could train/tame her to do what I want).
> **2-Cl:** *the other thing that's difficult is if I don't succeed in getting this job I think the real difficulty will actually be at staying where I am. I mean if I don't get it I'm almost tempted to resign, become unemployed.*
> **C**: *well there's e-have you talked to your husband about this?*
> **Cl:** *e:m, in passing yes. I've threatened it on more than one occasion, we could afford it.*
> **C:** *Well then, that's your call. It would be said because it is much easier to get a job (cl:mhm) from a job. So, if you grit your teeth then that would be very good and have you considered that by handling the emotional stress and the hassle from ignoring and almost being crucified by the other people that you actually grow and mature as a person.*

Both examples have a considerable expressive value, in that their authenticity shows that females never grow mature enough and have to be supported by males. Example 1 is very striking since it immediately suggests that females have to be "domesticated" by males. Furthermore, turn 2 in the second example calls to mind that husbands do control their wives' important actions.

Additionally, the stereotyped immaturity of females is over emphasized in turn 4 where the counsellor overtly says to the woman this experience would help her "*grow and mature as a person*" (Fairclough, 1989, p.227). Such a statement presupposes that harassing is legitimate and a sine qua non condition for females' maturation (Ibid, p.228).

Hastily, one can say that the use of a sex specific style is no more than the manifestation of one's social image. The motives behind the existence of a sex specific style are not arbitrary. Gender specific style is dictated by social criteria. It can be seen as a strategy that serves the interest of the speaker and his objectives. To signal their social identity, men and woman are likely to need specific style formulae to make their acts explicit.

It is undeniably true that females' speech denotes inferiority, less confidence and insecurity. Women are reluctant to the use of all what is not refined be it in the verbal or non-verbal behaviour. Being more sensitive to prestige, females are quite "choosy" about their language styles. Their speech patterns apparently very careful, lucidly demonstrate that they are vulnerable to severe social judgement. However, the same reluctance is noticed in males' behaviour towards all what is refined and delicate.

This leads to say that the sex of the speaker limits his freedom and confines him/her to use sex-defining style. Consequently, the possibility to choose a specific

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style is progressively restricted by a number of constraints that exclude certain other possibilities.

4. Conclusion

To detain power, to maintain it and to be submitted to power urge the speaker to make use of linguistic as well as non-linguistic data to interact in society. This is the reason why, to state the social meaning of utterances, one should look for basic parameters of speech production and determine their social correlates, their social significance and their distinctive function at the level of communication.

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