The Language Used in five-Star Hotels

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to investigate the language used by the receptionists and the guests of three five- star hotels in Amman (Jordan). It has been observed that they use both English and Urban Arabic regardless of their social backgrounds in their speech, while the guests display a readiness to use English regardless of their level of proficiency of the language. English and the Arabic dialect which is considered the supra dialectal low of the speaking Arabic world are used as tools to exhibit levels of prestige in these luxurious hotels. Code-switching quite evident in the language of the employees even when the interlocutors (i.e. the guests) show readiness to use English. Ninety percent of the employees exhibit a readiness to code-switch and sometimes even to code-mix. It is very clear that English is found to be the preferred language once the guests began using it. That is to say, the language used by the receptionists is launched and determined from the beginning by the language used by the guests. Linguistic accommodation and cost and reward principle are to be considered. The guests' perceptions of the quality of service are obviously affected by the language used in the hotels. Eighty-two percent of the guests believe that the use of English in the hotels reflects the fact that they are in a prestigious five-star hotel.*

Key words: *linguistic accommodation, code-switching.*

اللغة المستخدمة في فنادق الخمس نجوم

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الملخص: تهدفُ هذه الدراسةُ إلى معرفةِ اللغة المستعملة في فنادقٍ الـ (خمس نجوم)، وقد أُقيمتْ هذه الدراسةُ على فنادق تُصنَّفُ على أنها (خمس نجوم) في الأردن، وركَّزتْ على موظفي الاستقبالِ والزبائنِ. الخلفية الاجتماعية للزبائن والموظفين قد درست لتحديد العلاقة الممكنة مع النمط اللغوي المستخدم من قِبلهم. أظهرت الدراسة ان ٩٠ بالمائة من الزبائن على استعداد للانتقال اللغوي والانتقال بين لهجة للهجة او من لغة للغة.٨٢ بالمائة من الزبائن يعتقدون أن استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية يعكس كينونتهم في مكان راق. وجدَتْ الدراسة أنّ الزبائنَ وموظفي الاستقبال يميلون إلى استعمال اللغة الإنجليزية، أو اللهجة العربية المدنية في معظم الوقت. ومن أهم الأسباب لهذا التغير اللغوي وتفضيل اللغة الإنجليزية في مثل هذه الأماكن التي تُصنَّف على أنها راقية وعالية المستوى، الاعتقادُ النفسي اللغوي بأنّ اللغة الانجليزية ترفع مكانة المتكلم الرسمية، فالمكان يخلق الميل لاستعمال اللغة الإنجليزية، مما يُشعر المتحدث بأنّه الشخص المؤهّل اجتماعياً الذي يستحقُّ أن يكونَ في هذا المكان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغير اللغوي، الانتقال اللغوي.

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Introduction

In this section we provide background to this sociolinguistic study. Labov states that "one cannot understand the development of a language change apart from the social life of the community in which it occurs (Labov, 1972b: 3)."

Amman, the capital of Jordan and in which this study is carried out, is the commercial, industrial, and administrative center of the country. The city has an estimated population of about 2.5 million. Due to the city's modern-day prosperity and temperate climate, almost half of Jordan's population is concentrated in the Amman area (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010). The residential suburbs consist of mainly tree-lined streets and avenues flanked by elegant, almost uniformly white houses in accordance with a municipal law, which states that all buildings must be faced with local stone. The people of Amman are multi-cultural, multi-denominational, well-educated and extremely hospitable. They welcome visitors and take pride in showing them around their fascinating and vibrant city (Jordan Tourism Board, 2010).

Although Jordan's tourism sector has grown steadily in the past, the sector has had to overcome a number of challenges. Following the 2005 hotel attacks, the sector proved to be resilient with its rapid recovery in terms of tourist arrivals and hotel occupancy levels (Rosenberg and Choufany 2009).

Methodology

This study has been conducted in light of the Labovian Paradigm (Labov, 1972a). In order to provide a full account, some of the informants will be discussed as individual cases first and then as a group because "even though most choices reflect some societal pattern, speakers make linguistic choices as individuals. That is, choices ultimately lie with the individual and are rationally based (Myers-Scotton and Bolonyal, 2001: 1)."

In order to collect data for the purpose of this research, we visited five-stars hotels in Amman during the summer of 2013. The language used by the Arab guests and the receptionists while talking to each other is the target of this study. Our hypothesis is that the norms of speech for this setting would be reflected in the language and code-switch that is used there. Should special sociolinguistic characteristics emerge in the typical speech of the persons within this setting, we will attempt to interpret both these and the reasons for them.

If we can determine and shed light on the reasons for shifting from one's own language to another language in such social contexts and under the influence of the location, we can imagine the reasons for the shifts which might lead to change in similar places or phases in the past. Our method was to, sometimes, pretend that we were guests. On other occasions, we used the time in queuing up to book by listening to the discussions between the receptionists and other guests. In order not to forget the crucial words or important code-switches that took place, we would sit in the hotel lounges before leaving and write our notes. Deep linguistic data analyses would occur after returning home.

The Sample

Our study includes forty-eight informants as we did our best to listen to this number of formants at these hotels. Twenty-four of the informants are females, and twenty-four are males. This size of sample is acceptable and similar to the number of informants in many similar studies. For example, the number of informants in Trudgill's 1974 study was sixty in a city (Norwich) with a population of 118,610, and the number of informants in Daher's 1998 study, conducted in Damascus, was forty-six. Labov also notes that "the structured nature of social and stylistic variation of language can be studied through samples considerably smaller than those required for the study of other forms of social behavior (Labov, 1966: 638)."

The social network framework of Milroy (Milroy and Milroy 1978) has been followed as individuals whom we know work at some of these hotels played crucial roles in facilitating our task. It was difficult sometimes to be allowed to listen to the conversations between the receptionists and the guests. Many thanks to those friends who helped us overcome these obstacles. They helped us to carry out many successful interviews. Sometimes we failed to make the some interviews when we did not have a personal relation and contact with one of the employees at these hotels. The basic justification was that any conversation between employees and guests, especially regarding the booking of the room, is considered part of their privacy; thus, the hotel administration felt compelled to respect this. In other words, the task to approach the speech of our target (i.e. the guests and the receptionists) was not easy at all. It is worth mentioning that in the hotel business, the term "guests" is used instead of "customers" as this helps to create the intimacy needed in order to help the customer feel that he/she is at home rather than a hotel.

Findings and Discussion

Table (1)
Distribution of informants by gender and age (young 18-49, old 50+).

Age	Male	Female	Total
Young	12	12	24
Old	12	12	24
Total	24	24	48

Table (2)
shows the use of the different varieties (U,E and LJ) by age and gender.

Sex	M				F			
Age	[U]%	[E]%	[LJ]%	N	[U]%	[E]%	[LJ]%	N
Young	20	77	3	189	26	73	1	240
Old	22	75	3	210	21	78	1	200

Note: U=urban dialect, E= English language, LJ=local Jordanian dialect.

It is found that, to a great extent, the receptionists accommodate their dialect and the language they use to that which is used by the guests. The guests in general tend to use English the majority of the time as table 2 shows, and if Arabic language is used, the Urban Arabic Dialect (UAD) dominates. 77%% of young male guests and 75% of old male guests showed readiness to shift to English in their speech. While 73% of young female guests and 78% of old females showed this readiness. SPSS analysis

shows that sex, by contrast, has a very low significance in the use of the [E] variant. (P<.05 while P<.278 for sex in the use of the [E] variant). In general sex is a significant factor in making the speech of males and females differ as females prefer to use the variety that reflects softness and urbanization, features which are regarded as suiting the nature of women in some parts of the Arab world (Al-Wer, 1999: 41; Amara, 1999: 70), while Young males stereotypically used the local varieties that "carries the social meaning of locality (Al-Wer, 1991: 75)".

It seems that financial reasons are not sufficient to give a guest the sense that he/she is prestigious and deserves to be at such fine hotels. This impression was confirmed by discussions which we had with my informants after the informal interviews.

Shifting into English by the guests was not an aimless task. The use of it helps one to attach to a level of prestige to him-/herself. According to Myers- Scotton (1995), "a major motivation for using one variety rather than another as a medium of an interaction is the extent to which this choice minimizes costs and minimizes rewards for the speaker (Myers-Scotton, 1995: 100)." The cost and reward principle goes beyond assessing things materially to assessing them psychologically. Nor it is an aimless task by the receptionists either. This impression was also confirmed by discussions which we had with the receptionists after the informal interviews. Their use of English helps reinforce this idea for the guests. It is as though the receptionists' use of English with the guests is a kind of confirmation that they are in a luxurious place. Simply put, it is a role that is mutual; the guests use English to create a sense of prestige, and the receptionists use it to reinforce this idea for the guests by creating the atmosphere of a prestigious place. The place itself (being a luxurious place) stresses the use of English, and, therefore, the use of English by many guests enhances the impression that the place is prestigious. The linguistic behavior of all the informants become almost similar in these luxurious place, as if the place unifies the code used. In most of the studied (see, Abdel Jawad, 1981, Al Khatib, 1988, El Salman 2003) linguistically males and females behaved differently. In our study they behave similarly. Even the old and the young linguistically behave similarly in that the old and the young used English and the (UAD) in almost similar percentage, 77% young males used English and 20% of them used the (UAD) and 75% of the old males used English and 22% of them used the (UAD).Young females and old females also linguistically behave similarly as table 2 shows. SPSS analysis shows that age, has a very low significance in the use of [E] or (UAD). (P<.05 while P<.300 for age in the use of (E)).

Thus, the use of any code in this social context was not free. It was, to a great extent, governed by this social context. These three elements (i.e. the place, the guests, and the receptionists) play equal roles in creating this linguistic context where, decidedly, the English language became dominant. According to Gee (2011), language has a magical property: when we speak we craft what we have to say to fit the situation or context in which we are communicating. But, at the same time, how we speak creates that very situation or context (Gee, 2011). Our study shows that patronizing a five-star hotel presupposes a minimal ability of the English language to manage to fit the place to the guests. This was crystallized by the insistence on the use of English by some guests who did not show mastery in it. Second, in face-to-face interviews with some guests, 86% of them acknowledged that they use English in such places because English is more suitable. So, the place creates a willingness and tendency to use English.

The cost and reward principle (Scotton, 1995) seems to work clearly, as we stated, in this context. In using English, the guests' gain a reward in displaying their ability to use a prestigious language (English). The reward gained by the receptionists is the use of the language which the guests show readiness and desire to use even if they do not adequately master. In other words, the ability to accommodate linguistically to the guests (customers) exhibits efficiency in carrying out one's job. The principle that the customer is always right and we, the service-providers, have to adjust our habits to theirs is crucial among the reasons which dictate language use. Many linguists discovered that the speech of the interviewers (Trudgill, 1986:) mirrored that of their informants and the speech of the employees mirrored that of the customers (see Labov, department store study 1974). In our study, the language of the receptionists mirrored the mixture of dialects or languages that the guests might use. If Arabic is used by the guests, the receptionists shifts to Arabic, and if the guests code-switch into English, then the receptionists respond by code-switching to English.

Nonetheless, the nature of the Arab societies is also reflected in some behaviors of the guests and the receptionists. In other words, although we conducted our study in very prestigious and luxurious hotels, the nature of the local society is still easily noticeable in these places and is obviously mirrored within. It was apparent that the relation between some of the guests and the receptionists was intimate to the degree that terms reflecting this intimacy and friendship were dominant in their speech. The following dialogue exhibits this:

G (a guest): okay Marwan nazil assoq tabi shai? "Marwan,
I'm going to the marketplace do you need anything?"
R (a receptionist): la shokran Zahir haini bigoli 3agli arawih ba3d shwai laani ta3ban.
No thanks Zahir. It comes to my mind to go home as I'm a little bit tired.

This dialogue shows that the relation between the two became very close. Notice the use of the first name (Marwan) without any title; this reflects a reciprocal informal relation between the two (see also Brown and Gilman, 1960). In addition, the use of the local dialect by the guest which indicates that he is from a Gulf country. It should also be noted that the receptionist uses neither the urban nor the English language in his speech. He uses the local Jordanian dialect distinguished by the use of its key feature, the /g/ variant, in the words /bigoli 3agli/ "it comes to my mind." It should be noted that the receptionist uses his local dialect with the guest once he talked to the guest as a friend but not as a customer. In other words, the style is casual and the topic they talk about has nothing to do with a hotel business.

Another dialogue sample:

R: "tfadli madam kiif ba? dar akhdimik"
"Welcome, Madame. How can I help you?"
She then directed her speech to her husband,
Golo bidna lyltiin"
"Tell him that we want to stay two nights."
R: "tfathal sho bto? mor?"
"What do you want?"
G" Bidana ni7jiz l liltiin
"We want to book for two nights"

It is noticed here that the receptionist used the urban dialect when he directed his speech to the female guest. Then it is noticed that the dialect of the woman is not urban when she talked to her husband. This means that the receptionist automatically expects that the urban dialect is used by a female and as a result he used the urban code with a female guest as females prefer the urban dialect (Al-Wer, 1991) as it is "strongly associated with the forces of urbanization, modernization … . (Daher, 1998, 189)."

Females also appeared to use English more than males. Eighty percent of the female informants tried to use English and code-switched to it frequently. This is expected as females are known to show a tendency to use the language or the dialect which is considered prestigious. Thus in such luxurious places, females are expected to be more likely to use the prestigious code (in this case, English or the urban dialect). It was also noted that the receptionists reacted positively to this tendency in females by complying in all instances to the code used by females (see below). If the urban dialect were used by females, the receptionists would also use it, regardless of their origin. For example, some of the receptionists' original dialects were discovered in the interviews that they are not urban dialects at all and that the [g] variant, which is the key feature of the local Jordanian dialect, is dominant in their speech. The example below shows this:

F1: kolna talat wma ba?dar astka ida samahit.
' we are all three and I could not wait, if you please.
R: okay, hala? Barod ashoof ilkom athalath, tikrami madam.
'Receptionist: 'I will try to check again for the three of you, okay.'

In an interview with the receptionist, we learned that his original dialect is not the urban dialect of this study. Nevertheless, his use of the urban variant /?/ in hala?displays a switch in his speech in order to accommodate the speech of the guest. Indeed, it is however noted that he does not pronounce the word /thalath/ (three) using the correct urban dialect pronunciation regarding the variant /t/. This indicates that he does not fully master the urban dialect. But as Mesthrie et al put it, speakers do not necessarily accommodate to how their interlocutor actually speaks. Rather, they may not be able to do so. Speakers converge towards how they expect their interlocutor to speak, rather than towards their actual speech (Mesthrie et al, 2000).

Language varieties are meaningful: they are indexical of a speaker's origin or of aspects of their social identity (for instance, their social class or ethnic group) (see, Abdel Jawad, 1981, Kanakrih, 1988, Al Khatib 1988, Mesthrei, El Salman, 2007, abdel-Jawad and Abu Radwan, 2013). It can be added here that language varieties are also indexical of a speaker's desire to associate him- or herself with a given group once a linguistic shift is witnessed in his or her speech. A natural tendency to show worthiness to be in a place is to show the ability to use the favorite dominating language. As such, our study could be considered a social and psychological study that has attempted to shed light on the meanings that may be attributed to the different language varieties that the speakers try to use in our studied contexts.

The pressure of the place and the general social atmosphere played a crucial role in determining the language used. In other words, using English was to a great extent justified.

This language study has shown that no single language is used. The informants we succeeded to document exhibited features of code-switching. The highest percentage of code-switching was from Arabic into English.

Conclusion

Our study was conducted in 5-star hotels which are places that are considered luxurious and prestigious. Our hypothesis was that such places have a linguistically strong impact on the guests as well as the receptionists in that the language they use, or even the dialect, is, to a great extent, governed by the place and is not free. In other words, linguistic variation in the place was not free at all. Most of the guests tend to draw on two varieties, English or the urban Arabic dialect. Language varieties constitute a resource that may be drawn on in interaction with others (Mesthrei, 2000). Nonetheless, the choice of any of these varieties that people master depends solely on the avoidance of the use of any marked code that might be unsuitable to the social context (see also Ferguson, 1959, Scotton, 1995). The cost and reward principle (Scotton, 1995) works clearly in this context. In our case, the place appears to be the determinant to the code used.

The unmarked codes clearly appear to be the English language or the urban Arabic dialect; each of which aided psychologically in creating the sense that one belongs to the place and he or she has a legitimate right to be there. That is to say, the English language and one of the most prestigious Arabic dialects, the UAD, were used to enhance the sense that our existence in such a prestigious place is legitimate. In other words, linguistic tools were used to justify social matters. The need to communicate did not appear to be the reason for any choice. In most of the cases, the shift to English was between two informants who master Arabic language fully. In other cases the shift to the urban dialect was to accommodate the interlocutors but not to increase communication efficiency. Once one finds him- or herself in such a luxurious place, English and the urban dialect appear to be the codes preferred to display one's legitimacy to be at such a prestigious place. In other words, the place creates the language used and we are speaking and acting in this governed way because we are in such places.

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