Social Attitudes Towards Bedouin and Sedentary Dialects in Central Najd

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Abstract

This study examines whether Bedouins in Najd are converging on the sedentary dialect due to social attitudes towards these two dialects. It is hypothesized that the social attitudes towards the sedentary dialect will be positive, as opposed to those of the bedouin dialect. The social attitudes towards the dialects will be measured using indirect approach, via the *verbal-guise test*. In this test, the implicit attitudes of individuals towards a language/dialect are measured. Participants are presented with stimuli (short speech excerpts) from both dialects and asked to rate each speaker on a list of selected status and solidarity traits. The results show that the sedentary dialect ranked higher than bedouin dialect in civilization, education, open-mindedness, and expressing emotions. The bedouin dialect, however, ranked higher only in self-confidence. Thus, it is stated that the bedouins are converging on the sedentary dialect because of Najdis' social attitudes towards the sedentary dialect.

Keywords: Bedouin, converging, implicit, Najd, sedentary, social attitudes, social traits, verbal-guise test

1. Introduction

Based on lifestyle, Arabic dialects in the Arab world can be classified into bedouin (henceforth B), urban, or rural (Palva, 2006:604). In some parts of the Arab world, the dialect contrast can be urban/rural; while in others it is B/urban, e.g., most parts of the Arabian Peninsula (Holes, 2016; Ingham, 2009). In some areas of the Arab world, e.g., Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt (Al-Wer, 2007; Shahin, 2008; Wilmsen & Woidich, 2007), all dialect groups are attested, i.e., urban/rural/B.

According to Ingham (1994:4), the dialects in Najd, the central region of the Arabian Peninsula, can be classified into B and Sedentary, henceforth S. Unlike other parts of the Arab world in which dialects can be further classified based on religion, ethnicity, and/or lifestyle (Bassiouney, 2009), in Najd the only dialect distinction is drawn from speakers' lifestyle. All inhabitants of Najd descend from Arab tribes which have inhabited the Arabian Peninsula since the pre-Islamic era, and they are all Sunni Muslims. Therefore, lifestyle, whether B or S, is pivotal in Najd.

Who Are the Bs and Who Are the S Groups?

According to Alajmi (2019), the Bs are the tribes that have adopted/used to adopt nomadic lifestyle in the Arabian Peninsula since the pre-Islamic era. Their lifestyle can be described as primal. The vast majority of them own a livestock and constantly roam the desert seeking water and wild pasture lands. They live in tents and travel in small groups. S groups, on the other hand, live/lived in small villages which was scattered across the region, and they were mainly farmers.

As mentioned in Alajmi (2019), both groups have continued to adopt their lifestyle for hundreds of years until the oil boom in the 1970s, which has led to massive urbanization in the region (see figure 1). Although moving to the city appealed to both groups, it was a big step up for the Bs. Although they resisted moving to the city at first, despite all efforts by King Abdulaziz, they were eventually swayed by the stable income and abundance of resources, especially water. After Bs and S groups were in almost complete separation of one another in the past, they live now sided by side in the city and occupy the same type of jobs.
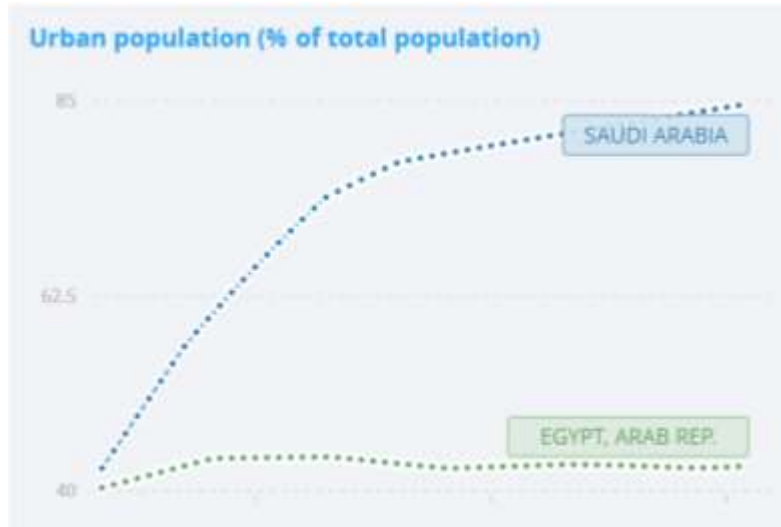
Figure 1. Percentage of urban population in Saudi Arabia and Egypt

Source: United Nations (2018).

The Dialects Understudy and the Linguistic Variables

The B dialects in the Arab world are characterized as conservative in general (Rosenhouse, 2006). The B dialect of central Najd is claimed to be the most conservative of all, i.e., the most conservative contemporary spoken Arabic dialect (Ingham, 1994:5; Versteegh, 2001:193). This claim is based on the preservation of archaic linguistic features that are attested only in Najdi B dialect, e.g., the indefinite marker *tanween* and the internal passive formation. It should be noted that the Najdi S dialect, on the other hand, is not innovative but rather quite conservative compared to other urban dialects across the Arab world. In fact, it was found in Alajmi (2019) that tanween is not only used by Najdi Bs, but also by Najdi S speakers as well.

The differences between the B and S dialects in Najd have been mentioned by Ingham (1994). Ingham, however, covered a wide range of dialects which he classified all as Najdi. The geographical borders of Najd, according to him, stretched from Najran city in the south up to the Syrian desert in the north. Nowadays, 'Najd' is used to refer to Riyadh province, which encompasses a radius of roughly 500 km in in the center of the Arabian Peninsula. The dialects spoken in this area, according to Alajmi (2019) is the B and S dialects. To my knowledge, the differences between the two dialects have never been explored in the literature, except few features mention in Ingham (1994:193). In Alajmi (2019), however, the linguistic differences between the two dialects have been examined thoroughly. The linguistic features of both dialects shall be listed below as they will constitutes the stimuli upon which the social attitudes towards both dialects will be measured.

- *The merger /ʊ/, /ɪ/ > /ɪ/*

In most modern Arabic dialects (see Alajmi, 2019:121) a reduction in the short vowel system has been attested. This is resulted from a merger between two vowels, and the distinction between the two vowels can be partially or fully lost. In Saudi Arabian dialects, Prochazka (1988) reported a merger of /ʊ/ and /ɪ/ to /ɪ/, yet the distinction is preserved in others. Ingham (1994:14) reported an overlap between /ʊ/ and /ɪ/ in Najdi Arabic (e.g., *kʊll/kɪll* 'all'), but he classified such variation as non-distinctive. However, this variation is sociolinguistically conditioned. That is, Bs have retained the distinction between /ʊ/ and /ɪ/ while S dialect has undergone the merger /ʊ/, /ɪ/ > /ɪ/. Therefore, the B forms *kʊll* 'all' and *gʊl* 'say-imperative' are realized as *kɪll* and *gɪl* in the S dialect. More examples are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Example of the merger /ʊ/, /ɪ/ > /ɪ/

B dialect	S dialect	Gloss
ygʊsˤsˤ	*ygɪsˤsˤ*	'He cuts'
xʊð	*xɪð*	'Take-Imperative'
kʊrsɪ	*kɪrsɪ*	'Chair'

- *The 3ʳᵈ Single Masculine objective/possessive suffixed pronoun (-ıh / -ah)*

Another variation between B and S dialects of Najd is the realization of the classical Arabic 3ʳᵈ single masculine

objective/possessive suffixed pronoun *-ʊh*, as in *kɪta:b-ʊh* 'his book'. This pronoun is realized as *-ɪh* in Najdi B (e.g., *kɪta:b-ɪh*) and as *-ah* in S dialect (e.g., *kɪta:b-ah*).

Table 2. Examples of the suffixed 3SM objective/possessive pronoun in Najdi dialects

B dialect	S dialect	Gloss
ʕallam-t-ih	*ʕallam-t-ah*	'I told him'
sayya:rt-ih	*sayya:rt-ah*	'his car'
minn-ih	*minn-ah*	'from him'

- ***The imperfect prefixes (ya-/yɪ-, ta-/tɪ-, na-/nɪ-)***

Across modern Arabic dialects (see Alajmi 2019:143), there is an alternation between /a/ and /ɪ/ in the imperfect prefixes. The alternation had been documented by ancient Arab grammarians, which they referred to as *talatalah* (Rabin, 1951:61). Ingham (1994:194) also reported the alternation in Najdi Arabic and attributed it to the B/S dialect split. In B dialect, /a/ is used in all imperfect prefixes (e.g., *ya-ksɪr* 'he breaks', *ta-ksɪr* 'she breaks' and *na-ksɪr* 'we break') while in S dialect /ɪ/ is used (e.g., *yɪ-ksɪr*, *tɪ-ksɪr* and *nɪ-ksɪr*. An exception is the 1st person singular prefix, which is always *ʔa-* in both dialects.

The Current Study

The analysis of production data in Alajmi (2019) shows that Bs are converging on the S dialect. One of the possible explanations why Bs are switching to the S dialect and not the other way around is that because S dialect is associated with civilization, education, prestige, etc. This has not only been mentioned by (Al-Sowayan, 2010:345) but is also intuitive given the B basic lifestyle. The current study aims to answer whether social attitudes towards B dialect is associated with the ongoing by eliciting implicit social attitudes towards both dialects. The social attitudes, elicited using the verbal-guise test (to be discussed below), will help answer the following research questions:

1. What are the social attitudes towards the Najdi B dialect?
2. What are the social attitudes towards the Najdi S dialect?
3. Do Bs converge on the S dialect because of the social attitudes towards the dialects?

2. Literature Review

Before we attempt to examine the language attitudes toward B and S dialects, it is essential to answer the question: What is a language attitude? Ferguson (1972) defines them as "elicitable shoulds on who speaks what, when, and how", in Cooper & Fishman (1974:6). Another definition by Cooper and Fishman (1974) is based on the consequences of language attitudes, i.e., language behavior and behavior toward language. Cooper and Fishman (1974:6) define language attitude in terms of referent, in which the referent includes "attitudes toward a language (e.g., Hebrew) or towards a feature of a language (e.g., a given phonological variant) or towards language use (e.g., the use of Hebrew for secular purposes) or towards language as a group marker (e.g., Hebrew as a language of Jews)". Since *language attitude* is treated here as attitudes toward dialects (not languages), the referent will be limited to attitudes toward B and S dialects as a group marker.

The significance of language attitudes in sociolinguistics emerged in the foundational work of Labov (1963). According to Cooper and Fishman (1974:5) language attitude can be a cause for a sound change as in Labov (1963), a defining feature of a particular speech community (Labov, 1966), a measure of achievement in second language (Anisfeld, et al. 1962; Lambert, 1967), or a determining factor of teachers' perceptions of their students' linguistic ability (Seligman, et al., 1972). In the field of sociolinguistics, social attitudes towards a dialect explains how a behavioral input (e.g., stereotypes) could possibly lead to a behavioral output like language/dialect change (Garrett, 2010).

Studies on language attitudes have been conducted in communities in which more than two languages are spoken. Such studies aim to explore speakers' attitudes towards each language and what are the social traits and preferred uses of each language. Some of these studies are Bentahila (1983), Chakrani (2011) and González-Rivera (2021), to name a few. Other studies have been conducted to explore language attitudes towards a standard (high) variety and a colloquial (low) one in diglossic communities. Some of these studies are Al-Haq (1998), Brown, et al., (1985), Cremona & Bates (1977), Dweik (1997), Hussein & El-Ali (1989), and Murad (2007). In almost all studies that examine language attitudes towards a standard and non-standard variety, the standard variety is rated higher in term of positive attitudes and regarded as more prestigious.

However, in studies which examine social attitudes towards dialects, all of which are ranked at the same level of

standard/colloquial (i.e., all are classified as low varieties), it is difficult to predict what are the social attitudes towards each one. The results from such studies were sometimes unexpected and counterintuitive. For example, Al-Raba'a (2016) examined the attitudes towards the rural and urban dialects in Jordan. It was found that elder rural respondents ranked their variety higher in pleasantness and correctness but not in the social status. The younger generation of rural respondents favored the urban variety over their own. However, the urban younger respondents exhibited a bias towards their variety and a negative attitude towards the rural variety. In Hussein & El-Ali (1989), the social attitudes towards Standard Arabic, as well as B, rural and urban dialects were measured in Jordan. As stated earlier, a high variety was often regarded as more prestigious. However, we are interested here in what respondents thought of the colloquial varieties, given that they hold the same status. The results show that B dialect was the most preferred while urban was the least preferred because of several intertwined geopolitical factors. Also, it was found that urban and B respondents were loyal to their varieties, unlike rural respondents. Aldosaree (2016) explored social attitudes towards regional dialects in Saudi Arabia (Central Najd, West Hijaz and Southern). It was found that: Najdi speakers are thought of as friendly, kind, humble, and religious; Sothern speakers are regarded as brave, kind, humble, religious and respectful; and Hijazi speakers are regarded as creative, kind, neat, and respectful. There are other studies exploring social attitudes towards particular dialects in Saudi Arabia, such as Alhazmi & Alfalig (2021) and Alabdali (2017). However, to my knowledge, there is no study exploring social attitude towards B and S dialects in Najd or even in Saudi Arabia, especially given the fact that this dichotomy is evident in most parts of the kingdom.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

Direct vs Indirect Approach

The measurement of language attitudes can be conducted using direct or indirect methods. In direct methods, such as questionnaires, interviews and scaling techniques, the respondents are asked directly about their feelings towards a language, which can be viewed as racist, classist or other prejudicial attitudes (Preston, 2013). Such attitudes are likely to be disguised and therefore the results will be inaccurate. Another problem with direct methods is that "the great majority of respondents show no conscious awareness of the variables we have been studying." (Labov, 1966:266). Therefore, as early as 1960, a psychologist and his associates (Lambert et al.1960) have devised the *Matched-Guised Technique* (MGT) to elicit attitudes indirectly. In the MGT, a group of listeners will judge speakers of two or more languages in term of status and solidarity traits not knowing that the guises are recorded by bilingual speakers of the target languages. A listener, for instance, will judge a French speaker and then an English speaker without knowing that s/he is evaluating the same speaker.

Verbal Guise Technique

An adjustment to the MGT have been proposed when it is difficult to employ speakers who can produce native-like stimuli in both languages/dialects. Thus, each stimulus is produced by a native speaker of the varieties examined. Such adaptation by Cooper (1975) is referred to as *verbal-guise technique* (VGT). The stimuli in VGT are authentic, on one hand, but introduce the effect of speakers' vocal quality on the listeners' judgment on the other. In other words, a speaker with deep voice might score higher on some traits than the others.

In this study, the VGT will be implemented for the following reasons. First, we are examining the social attitudes towards a dialect, not a language. The differences between the two dialects are subtle; thus, it is extremely difficult to find a speaker who can imitate the other dialect. Secondly, the speakers producing the stimuli are chosen carefully so that there are no noticeable differences in vocal qualities.

The respondents were asked to rate the speakers on a list of personal traits using Likert scale. The adjectives have been adopted from studies on language attitudes in the Arab world (e.g., Bentahila, 1983; Hussein & El-Ali, 1989). The group of adjectives used in language attitude studies are usually categorized into *status* and *solidarity* traits. Since the two social groups understudy have relatively the same social status, only three status adjectives will be included: civilized, educated and open-minded. Solidarity traits, on the other hand are believed to be more relevant and thus four adjectives will be included: confident, modest, sociable and emotional.

Data Collection

In another project in which Najdi speakers are interviewed, speakers were asked about their memories of their first day at school. Their answers are generally similar, but some answers are radically unique. The answers of two speakers, one B and one S, which were very similar have been chosen as the stimuli in the VGT. All efforts have been made to make sure: (a) the answers are similar, (b) the vocal qualities of the speakers are not drastically different, and (c) the stimuli include all of the linguistic variable discussed above.

The sample of respondents have been chosen from Al-Kharj city for various reasons. The most relevant reason is that Al-Kharj is one the few cities in central Najd in which the B/S dichotomy is dominant. Although official census does not show demographic distribution based on lifestyle (B or S), it can be estimated that Al-Kharj is roughly 40% Bs, 40% Ss, and 20% others.

The sample is comprised of 50 university students: 25 Bs and 25 Ss. For the criteria of classifying someone as B or S, we rely on the last name of participants, which corresponds to the tribe's name. The tribe's name is a solid indication of whether the ancestors of this individual have led a B or S lifestyle. The list of personal traits is handed out to the participants (as in Table 3) and the stimuli is played to them at the same time to remove any variation in the sound quality. The respondents are asked to judge the speakers on a Likert scale for each personal trait.

Table 3. List of personal traits

	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Civilized	1	2	3	4	5
educated	1	2	3	4	5
open-minded	1	2	3	4	5
confident	1	2	3	4	5
modest	1	2	3	4	5
sociable	1	2	3	4	5
emotional	1	2	3	4	5

The respondents are reminded not to take long time to record their responses as their first (subconscious) impressions are the target.

The use of distractors (i.e., speakers of other dialect) is not recommended here as it might affect the results, especially according to the order in which they are presented to the participants. Therefore, only two stimuli, B and S were used. The ordering of the two stimuli is actually taken into consideration as it was expected to skew the results, and as a matter of fact it did. The participants were divided into two groups (28 and 22 respondents), both of which are divided evenly into B and S. For the first group, the B stimulus was played first; while for the second one, the S one was played first.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

The results of each of group of participants, based on the order of stimuli presentation, were analyzed separately as there was a considerable difference in the responses. As for the respondents' lifestyle (B or S), it was found that members of each group have strikingly similar social attitudes towards the dialects understudy. That is, B and S respondents have rated both dialects similarly in most traits. Therefore, the data will be presented according to the grouping of respondents by stimuli order. The group of respondents for which the B stimulus were presented first is *group 1*; while the group for which the S stimulus were presented first is *group 2*. The ratings of each participant were recorded and the average (of 5) for each trait is provided. In Table 4 and 5, the results for group 1 and 2 are provided, respectively.

Table 4. Mean of social traits rating for B and S dialects: Group 1 (B stimulus first).

Status and solidarity traits	S		B		Difference
	mean	Percentage	mean	Percentage	
Civilized	**4.77**	95.4%	2.98	59.6%	**1.79**
educated	**4.46**	89.2%	2.05	41%	**2.41**
open-minded	**4.27**	85.4%	2.23	44.6%	**2.04**
confident	2.85	57%	**4.65**	93%	**-1.8**
modest	4.10	86.6%	3.56	59.8%	0.54
sociable	3.89	77.8%	4.17	83.4%	-0.28
emotional	**4.73**	94.6%	2.78	55.6%	**1.95**

Table 5. Mean of social traits rating for B and S dialects: Group 2 (S stimulus first)

Status and solidarity traits	S		B		Difference
	mean	percentage	mean	percentage	
Civilized	**3.79**	75.8%	1.12	22.4%	**2.67**
educated	**3.64**	72.8%	1.31	26.2%	**2.33**
open-minded	**4.16**	83.2%	0.78	15.6%	**3.38**
confident	2.53	50.6%	**4.21**	84.2%	**-1.68**
modest	3.22	64.4%	2.1	42%	1.12
sociable	3.17	63.4%	3.25	65%	-0.08
emotional	**4.24**	84.8%	1.87	37.4%	**2.37**

after running T-test for each group separately given the differences in both mean and standard deviation, it was found that the personal and solidarity traits that exhibited a mean difference of 1.5 and above are statistically significant. This is not only based on the difference in values of mean, but the standard deviation is also considered. The traits which showed less than 1.5 in the difference of mean exhibited considerably higher values of standard deviation. The status and solidarity traits which are statistically significant are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Status and solidarity traits associated with B and S dialects

Trait	**S**	**B**
Civilized	Higher	Lower
educated	Higher	Lower
open-minded	Higher	Lower
confident	Lower	Higher
emotional	Higher	Lower

Discussion

First, it is essential to shed some light on the obvious reason why the ordering of stimuli yielded different results yet with similar patterns and degree of variation. The respondents tend to rate the social traits of the speakers towards moderate values (yet showing tendency towards the expected values) until they listen to the other speaker. In other words, group 1 rated the B speaker 2.05 in education (moderate with slight tendency to low education). However, when they listened to the S speaker, they realized that he is more educated. Hence, the S speaker is rated 4.46, with 48.2% difference. When we reverse the order of stimuli, the same pattern occurs. When group 2 listens to the S speaker, they rate him 3.64 in the same trait. But when they listen to the B speaker, they rank him lower than group 1 (1.31, with 46.6% difference). This pattern is evident in almost all social traits as seen in Table 4 and 5.

Now we turn to the end results of this study, as exhibited in Table 6. The data statistically proves that S speakers are ranked higher in civilization, education, open-mindedness, and expressing emotions; while Bs are ranked higher in term of self-confidence.

For the first two traits, it is not surprising that the B lifestyle is not associated with civilization and education (Al-Sowayan, 2010). As the name suggests, *badawi* 'bedouin', *badaawah* 'bedouinism' and *badiah* 'the temporary place where Bs live' are all derived from the Arabic root *bada* 'started', and from which the adjective *bidaaʾi* 'primal' is derived. B lifestyle is characterized as being simple and primal, hence not civilized. As for education, since the pre-Islamic era Bs were known for speaking the purist form of Arabic, and kids form the villages were sent to the Bs to learn from them. In the past hundreds of years, however, Bs used to roam the desert and education was not a priority. Until the oil boom in Saudi Arabia, Bs had not had access to education. After the oil boom, the first generation of Bs moved to the cities and worked in government jobs that required low level of education or even none. The second generation of Bs had access to education and the majority of them now hold a college degree, which is quite the contrast. As for S groups, the first generation, who lived in villages and had basic education (*kuttab*), was able to pursue their education when they moved to the city. The second generation of S groups had access to education as well and obviously most of them hold a college degree. Given this history, it is not surprising that the B lifestyle is not associated with civilization and education.

For the traits of open-mindedness and expressing emotions, Bs are ranked low for several reasons. first, these two traits seem to be intuitively associated with education. The more educated one is, the more open-minded and expressive of emotions s/he will be. Second, the Bs strict social norms and customs prohibit them from accepting new ideas and concepts. Third, the B harsh climate and living circumstances is not a fertile environment for emotions. Further investigation of social and psychological inter-relationship between these traits may be needed; but it is beyond the scope this study.

The last trait, self-confidence, exhibited a rather intriguing pattern. However, it can be easily justified by an insider who is familiar with the B culture. In the Najdi B community, individuals are expected to show several personal

qualities, all of which can reflect courage and hospitality. To some degree, it became a disgrace that someone's kid does not show these qualities. As a consequence, parents realized that these qualities must be taught at an early age and taught their kids to invite a crowd to a feast, speak in front of older people, ride horses, hunt, etc. All of these qualities can definingly boost self-confidence of Bs at an early age. It must be stressed that S groups also exhibit these qualities, but the Bs' obsession with these traits to avoid shame is the reason Bs are perceived as more self-confident.

It is therefore clear that since most of the genuinely good traits are associated with the S dialect, it is not surprising why the Bs are shifting to the S dialect, as proved by the production data in Alajmi (2019). In his thesis, Alajmi found that the Bs are converging their dialects towards the S dialect by examining data elicited form sociolinguistic interviews. In sociolinguistic variationists studies, it is preferred to employ a triangulation of examining the production, perception and social attitudes of a dialect group to better understand the sociolinguistic situation. To my knowledge, the current study is the first sociolinguistic study that examines the social attitudes towards B and S dialects in Central Najd.

5. Conclusion

Central Najd is one of the understudied areas sociolinguistically. The dialects in this area can be classified as B or S. These dialects have come into contact with one another since the 1970s. In Alajmi (2019), after examining production data form both dialects, it was found that the Bs are shifting towards the S dialect. However, the social attitudinal data were unknown. The current study explores the social attitudes of B and S Najdi speakers towards their dialects. By employing the VGT, it was found that the S dialect is associated with civilization, education, open-mindedness and expressing emotions while the B dialect were ranked statistically significantly lower in all of these traits. Therefore, it is obvious why shifting is B-to-S, rather than vice versa. Both S and B individuals have positive attitudes towards the S dialect and negative social attitudes towards the B. It must be noted that Bs take pride in bedouinism, although they do not pursue a nomadic lifestyle anymore. However, this shift towards the S dialect is happening at a subconscious level. It is considered a natural evolution when compared to the evolution of Bs educational, social and financial status.

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