

Mecca: Sociocultural Change and Elaborate Courtesy in the Speech of Females

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Abstract. In the last thirty years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in general, and the Meccan community in particular, have undergone some drastic socioeconomic changes. These changes have affected the culture of the Meccan community. As culture provides the underlying pattern for communicative behavior, cultural change has had its impact on the communication patterns of Meccans. Examining elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females we found that there is a change in progress in this pattern of communication, with the young generation being much less elaborate than the elderly.

Introduction

In the last thirty years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has changed drastically. Utilizing its huge oil revenues, the Kingdom has moved rapidly towards modernization and advancement from a relatively underdeveloped country to a rapidly developing one.

The process of modernization of Saudi Arabia has had its consequences for the social life of Saudi Arabians. People's life style has changed; and most of the social aspects of life that represent today's norm are completely different from the norm that prevailed thirty years ago.

The holy city of Mecca, one of the major cities in Saudi Arabia, has been very much affected by the modernization process, like every other city in the Kingdom. As a result of this modernization, the social life of Meccans has changed too. The social life of the Meccan community today is completely different from that of the six-

ties and before. However, as their habits, customs, traditions, views, status, relations, roles, and responsibilities, to mention but a few, have drastically changed, it is the females of this community who have been particularly affected by social change.

Social change normally results in a linguistic change,⁽¹⁾ and the change Mecca, and Meccan females in particular, have undergone, is believed to have affected the communicative behavior of these females. Discussing elaborate courtesy in West Arabia, the region where Mecca is located, Al-Jehani noted "Our observation and data indicate that the pattern of verbal expression of courtesy in West Arabia is changing. We noticed systematic variation between old and young generations; with the old being much more elaborate in their expression of courtesy than the young."⁽²⁾

Whether or not Al-Jehani's observation is true is what we need to establish here. Our purpose in this research is to find out empirically if the socioeconomic changes that have taken place in Mecca in the last thirty years have or have not affected the communicative pattern of elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females. If we find that there is a change in the pattern of communication under consideration, we find it imperative to provide a plausible explanation for this change. But first we need some background information on the socioeconomic change in Mecca and its effect on the life of Meccan females.

Socioeconomic Change in Mecca and Its Effects on the Life of Meccan Females

According to Maghrabi, the size of the city of Mecca in the fifties was less than one-fifth its recent size.⁽³⁾ The economic situation was extremely difficult; public services were very minor; and education was close to nil. People lived very close to each other in overcrowded neighborhoods, with very few, extremely narrow alleys.

The economic situation and customs and traditions brought people very close to each other. They were extremely interdependent, relying heavily on each other for

(1) See John Baugh and Joel Sherzer, eds. *Language in Use: Readings in Sociolinguistics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984); John Edwards, *Language, Society and Identity* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Ralph Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985); *idem.*, *The Sociolinguistics of Language* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1990); John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, eds. *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

(2) Nasir Al-Jehani, "Elaborate Courtesy in West Arabia," to appear in *King Abdulaziz University Journal 2, Arts and Humanities*.

(3) Mohammed Maghrabi, *Aspects of the Social Life in Hijaz in the Fourteenth Century of Hijra* (Jeddah: Tihama, 1982).

their needs and for missing public services. They also intermingled a lot, spending hours and hours with each other everyday. And in some occasions, like weddings, neighbors spent days together giving a hand to the family concerned. Also, in the vast majority of cases, big families lived together in one house, with one single room being the sole domain of each married couple in the family.

Being uneducated and not allowed to work, the only role Meccan females played before the sixties was to take care of the house and to satisfy the needs of their husbands and children. Their free time was spent in extensive social gatherings with female relatives and neighbors.

Girls did nothing at home except to help their mothers in the house work. A girl was taught from an early age how to be skillful in house work; and was trained from an early age how to practice absolute obedience to her future husband. In addition, the minute she reached puberty, her parents began to consider getting her married.

This lifestyle forced Meccan females to be extremely family-conscious. For a wife, the norm was absolute obedience to her husband; and respect and coherence between her family members were among her ultimate concerns.

Meccan females were forced to be group-conscious to a great extent as well. A woman's second circle of involvement after her family was her neighbors, with whom she spent most of her free time. Because of social interdependence, and as she needed them economically as well, a woman had to be on good terms with her neighbors. Consideration of the dependence of a woman on her relatives and neighbors at the time of giving birth, in the absence of hospital care, makes clear the extent to which that woman had to be on good terms with relatives and neighbors, and consequently, highlights the importance of her social relationships.

In the late sixties things started to change in Mecca as well as in the rest of Saudi Arabia. The rocketing of oil prices at that period accompanied by huge oil production created a boom in the Kingdom. This enormous wealth was utilized in the modernization of the country via a large number of developmental projects, transforming it from a relatively underdeveloped country to a rapidly developing one. Drastic changes took place in the areas of health, education, urban planning, road construction, housing, information, communications, electricity, transportation, and many others.

The city of Mecca today is almost no different from any other modern city in the world. Modern, spacious residential areas have replaced the old ones; almost all public services are provided to the residents; and education of all types and levels is provided.

The socioeconomic situation in Mecca, as in the rest of Saudi Arabia, has also changed. People are able to afford modern homes, a very good life for themselves and for their children; education not only in Mecca or in Saudi Arabia but, for some, even in the best schools abroad, the purchase of the most sophisticated items needed, and travel.

So many things have changed including customs, habits, and even views. Eating and drinking, sleeping, dressing, shopping, socializing, pastimes, time spending, home furnishing and decorating, vacationing, and travelling, among others have all changed. People's views on priorities, education, work, medical care, sports, females, the work of women, and child-rearing, among others, have all changed too.

Due to television, travelling, and the importation of labor, Meccans have come in touch with other cultures, been affected by some of them and acquired some of their norms, especially Western culture, that of the advanced world. People's customs, habits, and views changed towards those of Western culture.

However, not all Meccans changed to the same extent. It is basically the new generation that has changed. The elderly have kept some of the customs, habits, and views that prevailed in their days, those of the fifties and before.

Females in particular have been affected by the change. Today, the vast majority of Meccan female youth receive education. Volumes 5 and 26 of the *Statistical Year Book* show that the number of female students at all levels of education in Saudi Arabia increased from 11,753 in 1960 to 1,344,818 in 1990.⁽⁴⁾ Female graduates also hold jobs. Some Meccan females are working as teachers, physicians, administrators, nurses, specialists in different areas of science and technology, and even university professors. According to the *Handbook of the GCC Main Economic Indicators* 4.6% of the civil employees in the government sector only in Saudi Arabia are females.⁽⁵⁾ Volumes 5 and 26 of the *Statistical Year Book* show that the number of female Saudi professors in the different universities and colleges in the Kingdom increased from 4 in 1970 to 1356 in 1990.⁽⁶⁾

(4) Ministry of Finance and National Economy, Central Department of Statistics, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Statistical Year Book* 5 (Riyadh: Ministry of Finance and National Economy Press, 1969); *idem.*, *Statistical Year Book* 26 (Riyadh: Ministry of Finance and National Economy Press, 1990).

(5) King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Economic and Industrial Research Division, Research Institute, *Handbook of the GCC Main Economic Indicators* 6 (Dhahran: King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals Press, 1991).

(6) Ministry of Finance, *Statistical Year Book*, 5,26.

Consequently, the life style of women has changed. So too has the role they play in society. They have become a valued labor force, playing a major role in the development process. They no longer spend hours and hours chatting every day like their predecessors. Their views and way of life also changed so that they no longer appreciate killing time. They have come to realize a more important role for themselves and to appreciate responsibility not only towards their families, but also towards society and the country at large.

The character of the Meccan woman has changed as well. She has become gradually independent, consequently developing her own entity, identity, and personality. She no longer views herself only through her husband and children; rather, she has come to see herself through her education, job, and achievements.

Data and Findings

For the purpose of this research, we are going to adopt the approach developed by William Labov.⁽⁷⁾ According to this approach, while change in patterns of communication cannot be directly observed, i.e., in real time, it can be observed in apparent time, i.e., through comparison of the communication patterns of two generations. If systematic differences between the communication patterns of the two generations were observed, then we have a change in progress; if not, then no such change exists.

To find out whether or not there is a change in the pattern of elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females, eighteen female Meccan native speakers were selected. Each six of them fit in one of three predetermined age-groups: young (20-25), middle-aged (35-45), and old (55>). Each of the eighteen informants was asked to call a friend of a similar age, was informed that the call would be recorded, and was told to ask her friend about where she and her family would spend the summer vacation and why. The callers were informed that the purpose of the recording was to see people's views regarding their preferences of where to spend vacations and that the recording was important for that matter. They were also instructed to inform the other party on the line just before they finished the call that the call was recorded for the purpose that was explained to them, and to see that they did not have any objections. Luckily, the recording was taken lightly and approval of it was granted by all.

(7) William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

Eighteen telephone calls were recorded. The number of participants was, therefore, **thirty-six**. Each age group had an equal number of participants (12), and, consequently, an equal number of calls (6).

Elaboration in the verbal expression of courtesy was determined by the length of time of greeting between the participants in the opening of the conversation. Greeting time was identified as that part of the conversation opening in which the caller and receiver exchanged turns of greeting until one of them initiated a topic. Here is an example of the greeting in a call between two of our informants who belong to the middle-aged group. Greeting turns are indicated by capital As and Bs in this excerpt, which is, of course, a translation from Arabic.

- A. Hello.
- B. Yes.
- A. Good evening.
- B. Good evening.
- A. How are you?
- B. Welcome (name).
- A. How are you?
- B. Fine, Thank God.
- A. What is your news?
- B. Thank God. How are you?
- A. Thank God. Fine.
- B. How are things?
- A. Fine. Thank God. How are the father and the mother?
- B. Fine. God bless you.
- A. How is the family?
- B. Fine. Thank God.
- A. How are your kids?
- B. All of them are fine. God bless you. How are you?
- A. Thank God.
- B. Your family is fine?
- A. Fine. Thank God.
- B. How is (name of sister of A)?
- A. She is fine.
- B. (Name of other sister of A), what is her news?
- A. She is fine. God bless you. You are fine?
- B. Thank God.
- A. Where have you been? We missed you.
- B. God bless you. It is you who we missed.

- A. God bless you.
- B. Welcome
- A. Where have you been? I did not see you at (name of a friend of both's) wedding.

A stop watch was used to determine the amount of time utilized in greeting, with parts of a second rounded up to the next second. Analysis of our data revealed the results shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Amount of Time Utilized in Greeting in Telephone Conversation Openings between Female Meccan Native Speakers.

| Age Group | Y 20-25 | | M 35-45 | | O 55 > | |
|----------------------------|--------------|----|--------------|----|--------------|----|
| Telephone conversations | T.C.1 | 11 | T.C.7 | 29 | T.C.13 | 53 |
| | T.C.2 | 13 | T.C.8 | 38 | T.C.14 | 49 |
| | T.C.3 | 17 | T.C.9 | 46 | T.C.15 | 57 |
| | T.C.4 | 24 | T.C.10 | 30 | T.C.16 | 42 |
| | T.C.5 | 23 | T.C.11 | 21 | T.C.17 | 50 |
| | T.C.6 | 15 | T.C.12 | 27 | T.C.18 | 47 |
| Total: | 103 | | 191 | | 298 | |
| Average: | 17.17 | | 31.83 | | 49.67 | |

The results of our data show a systematic difference between the different age groups in the amount of time utilized in greeting. The young spend a much shorter time on greetings than the middle-aged (an average of 17.17 seconds compared to 31.83 seconds), who in turn spend a shorter greeting time than the elderly (an average of 31.83 seconds compared to 49.67 seconds). A pattern emerges then: the younger the speaker, the shorter the time spent on greetings. In other words, the younger a female Meccan native speaker is, the less elaborate she is in her verbal expression of courtesy.

This pattern is a strongly prevailing one. Examining Table 1 closely, we see that the pattern does not only hold for the groups, but also for almost every individual telephone conversation. Except for one conversation between two middle-aged speakers (T.C.11), the time spent on greeting in each and every one of the six telephone conversations between the young speakers is less than the greeting time of any of the conversations between the middle-aged speakers. Also, with the exception of T.C. 16, the greeting time of each and every conversation between the middle-aged speakers is less than the greeting time of any of the conversations between

the old speakers. This shows clearly that there is a linguistic change in progress in the speech of Meccan females. Not only that, but the results also show that this change is a prevailing and steady one: the pattern of progressive change in the elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females holds true for the majority of our participants. Only in two out of eighteen telephone conversations is there a deviation from the norm.

The results also show that the difference in the average greeting time between the young group and the middle-aged group is greater than the difference between the middle-aged group and the old group. While the average greeting time of the young group (17.17 sec.) is 53.94%, that of the middle-aged group (31.83 sec.), the greeting time average of the middle-aged group is 64.08%, that of the old group (49.67). This shows that, although the middle-aged are the leaders of the change, the young are contributing a great deal to this change. The average greeting time average of the young group is only 34.57% that of the old group. In other words deviation from the old pattern of elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females is getting stronger and much more drastic by the passage of time.

In conclusion, then, we can say that our findings do confirm Al-Jehani's observation.⁽⁸⁾ They indicate that there is a change in progress in the communication pattern of elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females. The change is prevailing. Also, it is a rapid and drastic change.

Discussion

Discussing elaboration in the verbal expression of courtesy in West Arabia, where Mecca is located, Al-Jehani identified three of the several dimensions of cultural variation that produce differences in a culture's communication patterns, and argued that they are responsible for the communication pattern of elaboration in the verbal expression of courtesy.⁽⁹⁾ These are the dimensions of collective vs. individualistic cultures, contact vs. low-contact cultures, and polychronic-time vs. monochronic time cultures. While in collective cultures people are interdependent, reliant on each other, and have a strong sense of the group, in individualistic cultures people are independent and self-reliant. Contact cultures are those in which people's

(8) Al-Jehani.

(9) Ibid., see also Peter Andersen, "Explaining Intercultural Differences in Nonverbal Communication," in *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, ed. Larry Samovar and Richard Porter (Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth, 1988).

behavior is characterized by immediacy behaviors like closeness, warmth, and availability for communication, while low-contact cultures are those in which people do not exemplify immediacy behaviors. Polychronic-time cultures are those in which people are less time-oriented and for whom the notion of being on time is comparatively loose, while in monochronic-time cultures people are very much time-oriented and respect being on time. People in polychronic-time cultures are people-oriented, while those in monochronic-time cultures are job-oriented.⁽¹⁰⁾ As the West Arabian culture, including Mecca, was identified as a collective, contact, and polychronic-time culture, Al-Jehani argued for these cultural characteristics to be responsible for the communication pattern of elaboration in the verbal expression of courtesy.⁽¹¹⁾ Al-Jehani states: "The culture of West Arabia being characterized as a collective, contact, and polychronic-time culture; placing an extensive value on people and their relationships was found to provide the underlying pattern for this communicative behavior."⁽¹²⁾

Now, the socioeconomic changes that took place in the last thirty years have had their effect on Meccan females and on their relationships. For one thing, they have come to be less interdependent. People have become better off economically; public services have provided people with what they used to rely on each other for; and people have come to live apart in new residential areas. Meccan females, therefore, have come to be more independent and less reliant on their families and neighbors.

The socioeconomic changes have also forced Meccan females to become more conscious of themselves and of their immediate families rather than of the extended family, and much less conscious of the neighborhood or community. Meccan females are now involved either in their own schooling, the schooling of their children, or in a job. Involvement with the immediate family in daily activities, shopping, pastimes, dining, ... etc., has left them without much spare time. Meccan females have also come to look for goals and objectives to achieve in their lives, goals and objectives that relate not only to husbands and children, but also to their own selves in terms of education or careers. These factors, along with the independence mentioned above, contributed to the reorientation of Meccan females towards self and immediate family. They no longer enjoy the physical and mental leisure they used to enjoy and afford to relatives and neighbors.

(10) See Edward Hall Andersen, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (New York: Anchor, 1984).

(11) Al-Jehani.

(12) Ibid, p. 1.

The socioeconomic changes, then, have affected the culture of the Meccan community itself. The rules, norms, and values of the culture are changing. "Mutual solidarity and harmony and cohesion between people," "closeness, approach, and availability to people," and "involvement and constant being with people" are cultural characteristics of the Meccan community that are passing through a stage of change. The emerging norm is for less interdependence and reliance on others, and less availability and involvement and constant being with others. Physical space between people has increased in new residential areas and due to the expansion of the city. The one-to-two-meter-wide alleys were replaced with twenty-to-eighty-meter-wide streets. Proximity, in short, changed. People are also becoming stricter about time. Being on time for the job or for an appointment with the doctor, for example, are forcing people to become time-oriented, i.e., less people-oriented. The culture of the Meccan community, then, is becoming less and less a collective, contact, and polychronic-time culture. It is moving towards the individualistic, low-contact, and monochronic-time ends of the three culture dimensions.

The culture, therefore, which is responsible for the pattern of elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females, as indicated by Al-Jehani, is changing.⁽¹³⁾ As such, the communication pattern itself is changing. Meccan females are becoming less elaborate in their verbal expression of courtesy because of the cultural change the Meccan community is undergoing.

Conclusion

The paper addresses the issue of socioeconomic changes in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and their effect on the pattern of elaboration in the verbal expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females. Applying the Labovian approach to the discovery of linguistic change, we found that there is a change in progress in the communication pattern under investigation. There is systematic variation between three different generations of Meccan females. Young speakers are much less elaborate in their verbal expression of courtesy than middle-aged speakers, who in turn are less elaborate than the elderly. Young speakers' elaboration in their verbal expression of courtesy is only a little more than thirty percent of that of the old speakers'.

The socioeconomic changes the Meccan female community in particular, and the Meccan community in general, have undergone have affected the life of these people drastically. People-interdependence and people-orientedness seem to be decreas-

(13) Ibid.

ing. The socioeconomic changes, therefore, have affected the wide context of the Meccan communities' culture. The culture characterized as a collective, contact, and polychronic-time culture, is changing. The socioeconomic changes have affected these cultural characteristics, placing the culture in different positions on the cultural dimensions of collective vs. individualistic cultures, contact vs. low-contact cultures, and polychronic-time vs. monochronic-time cultures. As these cultural characteristics provide the underlying pattern for the communication pattern of elaboration in the expression of courtesy in the speech of Meccan females and as these cultural characteristics themselves are changing, the communication pattern itself is changing.

مكة: التغير الاجتماعي الحضاري والمجاملة المسهبة في كلام الإناث

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المملكة العربية السعودية

ملخص البحث. إن التغيرات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية التي طرأت على المملكة العربية السعودية بصفة عامة، والمجتمع المكي بصفة خاصة، لا بد وأن تكون قد أثرت في أنماط تخاطب هذا المجتمع. بدراسة الإسهاب في المجاملة في كلام الإناث المكيات، وجدنا أن هذا النمط التخاطبي في طور التغير، حيث تبين أن جيل صغار السن أقل بكثير من جيل كبار السن في الإسهاب في المجاملة. إن إحداث التغيرات الاجتماعية الاقتصادية لتغير في نمط التخاطب هذا يُفسر بتأثير تلك التغيرات على حضارة المجتمع المكي ذاتها. فالتغير في الحضارة، وهي التي تكون الإطار الأساسي للتصرف التخاطبي، هو ما نعتقد بأنه قد أدى إلى تغير في هذا النمط التخاطبي للإناث المكيات.