Investigating Status Planning through Studying Language Attitudes

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Abstract. In the Arab countries, linguistic conflict can be seen not just between the study of the mother tong (Arabic) and foreign languages but within the mother tong itself. This research investigates status planning in Saudi community through examining participants' attitudes to standard Arabic (SA) and colloquial Arabic (CA). The paper also examines how the participants actually used these varieties. This study has assisted in identifying part of the linguistic situation in the Saudi context. In regard to actual use, the findings showed that SA was 'rarely' used in comparison to CA which was found 'always' to be used, particularly in social interactions. Although the use of SA was rare, it used more in the media than in social interactions and in education. A surprising finding was that CA used widely in informal written discourse. The participants believed that SA was superior to CA. Attitudes to SA were slightly more positive than they were to CA. The research showed that there were religious, linguistic, social and cultural factors behind the participants' positive attitude to SA.

Keywords: Language Planning, Status Planning, Language Attitudes, Sociolinguistics.

1. Introduction

Language is a highly complex phenomenon. One aspect of this complexity can be seen through the position of language in a society and its relation to other language varieties. Identifying the spheres where language is used clarifies its position, as Gadelii (1999, p. 5) indicated, "The larger the number of domains in which a language is recognized, the higher its status: government; assembly/parliament; courts; administration; education; business; media". This research presents discussion about status planning in the Saudi community especially; the linguistics situation in Saudi Arabia has not received the attention that it deserves from researchers (Izza, 2009). There is a lack of scientific studies examining the linguistic situation in the Saudi setting. The situation of both national and foreign languages needs more exploration as little research has been conducted on this matter in the Saudi context. As the United Nations' (2003) Arab Human Development Report points out, the absence of a linguistic planning and policy is the prime cause of the linguistic crisis in the Arab world. Such a planning and policy cannot be effective without a systematic language planning that is based on deep understanding of the linguistic situation. The report states, "there is a marked absence of linguistic policy at the national level, which diminishes the authority of language centres, limits their resources, and eventually results in poor co-ordination among them" (United Nations, 2003, p. 122). As a result of the above considerations, the current study aims to make a contribution that may assist language planners in Saudi Arabia by investigating how the two main varieties of Arabic SA and CA are actually used and what people's attitudes to these language varieties are, using direct method. To understand the status of a language in a specific context there is a need not only to study how the language is used but also to gather information on language attitudes in such contexts (Kristiansen, 2010).

2. Definition of Terms

Attitudes: In this research, the term 'attitudes' refers to individuals' feelings about a language which may be based on their values and beliefs and may possibly be reflected in their behaviour.

Status planning: the term 'status planning' refers to broad activities which include changes to the systems of language, changes in language functions, use of language, the language choice, implementing and changing the official language, shifting from the use of one language to another and the organisation of a community's language resources (Cooper, 1989; Coperahewa, 2009; Gadelii, 1999).

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Standard Arabic: The Arabic language has various levels that overlap. In this study, the term 'standard Arabic' (SA) refers to what some other researchers define as 'modern standard Arabic' (MSA). It is a modern literary language that has been modified and simplified from classical Arabic. This form of Arabic "is found in contemporary books, newspapers, and magazines, and it is used orally in formal speeches and in learned debates in newscasts on the radio and on television" (Suleiman, 1985, p. 7).

Colloquial Arabic: In this study the term 'colloquial Arabic' (CA) means 'educated colloquial Arabic'. This level of CA is used widely among educated persons in the affairs of everyday life. It sits between local colloquial and modern standard Arabic.

3. Research Questions

The research questions reflected the objectives of the research. The research seeking to answer these questions:

- What is Saudi university students' actual use the two main varieties of Arabic (standard and colloquial) based on their self-evaluation?
- What are Saudi university students' attitudes toward the use of standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic as revealed by the use of direct methods to investigate attitudes?

4. Participants

The participants in this study were a sample of Saudi male undergraduate students from King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The University has more than 50,000 students in 20 colleges which offer various specialities. The research was based on a random cluster sample of Saudi male undergraduate students. King Saud University colleges are divided into three main faculties, namely Medicine, Sciences and Human Sciences. The total number of participants in the questionnaire was 260 students from the three different main faculties (96 students from Human Sciences, 93 from Medicine and 71 from Sciences).

5. Instruments

The current research used a questionnaire to investigate the participants' attitudes directly. The questionnaire helped the researcher to obtain information about the actual use of and attitudes to the use of the two main varieties of Arabic (standard and colloquial). In order to design the research questionnaire, a review of the literature was conducted. There were three main sections in the questionnaire. The first section focused on the students' actual use of the two varieties of Arabic (SA and CA). It aimed to shed some light on the participants' actual use of the two varieties of Arabic based on their self-evaluation. This section was divided into three general categories: social interaction, education and media. Each category had several items. In the design of the first section, the research benefited from the work of Baker (2001), Murad (2007), Pütz (1995) and Marley (2004). The last draft of the first section had 17 items, with 8 items about social interaction, 4 about education, and 5 about the media. The second section of the questionnaire explored attitudes to the use of SA and CA. This section included several statements arranged on the Likert scale in order to measure the participants' attitudes directly. The items were divided into three major groups that represented the use of the language, namely social interaction, education and media. The final draft of the questionnaire consisted of 69 items divided into three main sections (social interaction (33 items), education (21 items) and media (15 items). In the designing of the questionnaire, the current study benefited from several attitude questionnaires including 20 language attitude questionnaires that investigated attitudes towards several languages in different contexts

6. Research Finding and Discussion

In regards to the language use, the findings indicated that the participants' use of CA (M=3.16) was high while overall the use of SA (M=2.17) was rare. The high amount of use of CA in comparison to SA was the result of its position as a mother dialect of the participants. That is, CA is considered as a mother dialect for Arabs which they acquired before learning SA, which mainly occurs during formal education (Dakwar, 2005; Maamouri, 1998; Owens, 2006; Saidat, 2010).

To give a wider picture of the participants' actual use of SA and CA the next figure provides a comparison of the use of the two Arabic varieties investigated in various circumstances.
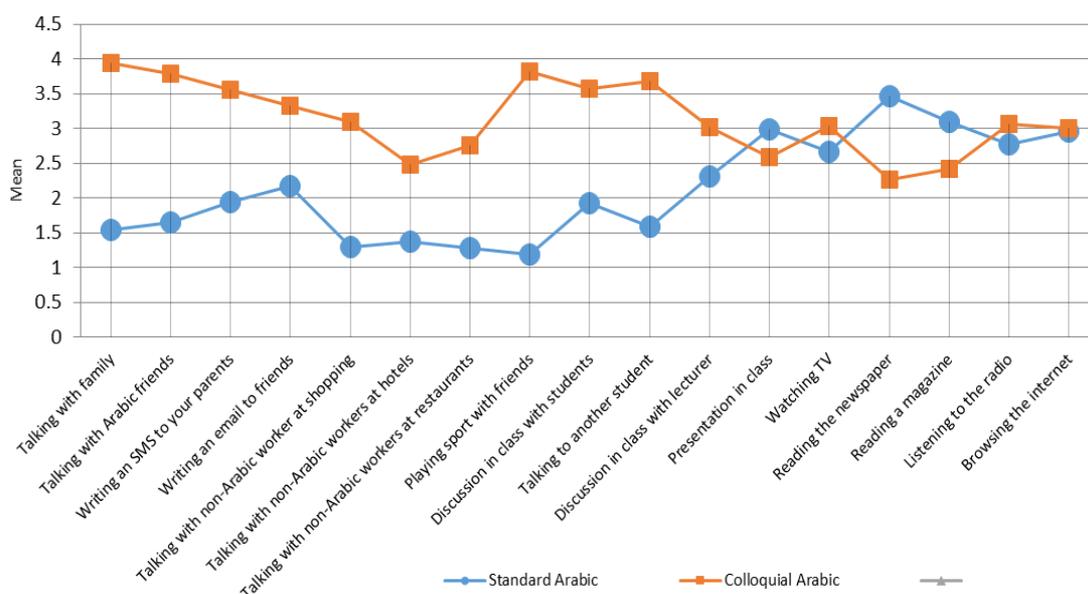

Fig. 1: Participants' actual use of standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic

As can be seen in the Figure 1, SA was clearly used less than CA in most situations. SA was used more than CA in only three situations, reading newspapers, reading magazines (which are both passive use) and presentations in class. This may be because all the newspapers in Saudi are written in SA and only very few articles in some newspapers are written in CA. Some writers sometimes insert a few sentences in CA into their articles, and poems are sometimes written in the local vernacular (namely local vernacular poetry). In addition, most magazines use SA. CA is commonly used in magazines that publish poems in the local vernacular. The readers of these kinds of media are usually not university students. In regard to class presentations, the explanation for the highest number of students using SA refers to its position as an H variety that is used in formal settings such as when presenting in class. There was generally an inverse relationship between the use of the two varieties of Arabic. An increase in the use of CA resulted in a decrease in the use of SA and vice versa as the Figure shows. The inverse relationship that was observed might be explained thus: SA and CA are two varieties of the same language representing two different levels of the language which are used extensively; hence, more use of one variety results in less use of the other which is common in diglossia situations. The overall findings indicated that SA was rarely used in social interactions and in the education setting. CA use was very high, and there was a large gap between the use of CA and the use of SA , especially in social interactions and in education. The extensive use of CA in social interactions is understandable due to its position as the mother dialect. However, it was somewhat surprising to find a high amount of CA used in informal written forms, such as writing to friends (M=3.33) or parents (M=3.56), although the participants were more likely to be neutral in their response to the questionnaire statement about their use of CA when writing to friends (Item 61). However, their self-evaluation of their actual use showed extensive use of CA in informal written forms. The findings indicate a kind of conflict between the participants' cognitive and conative responses. The high use of CA in unofficial written forms was also found in the study by Warschauer, Said, and Zohry (2002) in the Egyptian context, where it was found that the majority of the research population used local CA in informal emails and when chatting on the Internet. Also, Esseili (2011) reached a similar conclusion in Lebanon. CA has been referred to by several researchers as 'spoken Arabic' (Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004; Hussein, 1980; Palmer, 2008) due to its position as a verbal dialect. Moreover, some researchers refer to colloquial Arabic as 'non-written' vernacular (Ryding, 1991). The findings of the current research as well as the findings of some previous research indicate that definition of the terms 'spoken Arabic' and 'non-written' vernacular should be reconsidered. Such concepts do not reflect the current status of colloquial Arabic.

The conscious methods of investigation used in the current research revealed that the prevalent attitude of the participants towards SA was positive (M=3.22). The attitudes of the participants were positively influenced by religious, linguistic, social and cultural factors, as indicated by the qualitative data. The participants strongly believe that the importance of the use of SA lay in its being the language of the Qur'an. The mean for this statement was the highest of the entire questionnaire. This opinion seems to be shared among Muslims in several contexts. The study by Saad (1992) in Algeria, that by Saidat (2010) in Jordan and that of Ennaji (1991) in the Maghreb came to the same conclusion. This opinion was also confirmed by the participants in the focus group discussions. They stated that religious factors were a significant influence on the positive attitude towards SA.

The position of SA was superior to CA as reported by the participants. Several religious, linguistic, social and cultural factors lay behind this belief, as the participants indicated. Direct evaluation of attitudes showed that SA was perceived commonly as the mark of an educated person. This result was consistent with the findings of Saidat (2010) and was also found in the implicit evaluation of attitudes. This is understandable due to the position of SA as an H variety in the speech used among educated people.

The student participants tended to accept that using SA on a regular basis was an interesting skill, and this was also shown in the research of Alammar (2009). However, most of the participants agreed that people had negative feelings about them when they used SA in usual communication. This feeling was also noted by Saidat (2003) who suggested that there was widespread belief that people who speak SA are more likely to be subject to derision. On one hand, this may refer to the participants' lack of ability and limited competence in SA. As the participants indicated in the interview, difficulty using SA accurately can be seen as one of the linguistic factors behind negative attitudes towards SA. Hence, they might not have had enough competence and confidence to use SA. As a result, they were concerned about making a mistake in SA and worried about people's reaction to this. On the other hand, the participants seemed to have a perception that SA was not used in regular communication. There were specific contexts where using SA was considered appropriate. This view was expressed in other items of the questionnaire; that is, most of the participants expressed disagreement about using SA at social events with relatives. Also, the participants were undecided about the statement "In Saudi, people should use standard Arabic in communication with Saudis", which might show their opinion that using SA depends on the context, as they reported in the interviews.

The results showed that attitudes towards the use of SA in educational settings were generally divided. The participants acknowledged that they had a positive attitude to the use of SA in some situations but a negative attitude to its use in other situations. The findings indicated that the student participants were more likely to want SA to be used as the medium of instruction for the sciences. This finding is supported by other studies (Al-Haq & Samadi, 1996; Al-Jarallah & Al-Ansari, 1998). However, it seems to contradict what the participants stated about English. Less than half of the participants reported that English should be the medium of instruction in all scientific subjects and this result was also observed by AlJarf (2008). These two findings can be understood together through the participants' explanations in the interviews. The interviewees distinguished between situations where they would prefer to continue using English as a medium of instruction due to the lack of Arabic resources as well as the problem of translating concepts into Arabic. However, most of the interview participants were in favour of the Arabisation of scientific knowledge in the future when a solid base for the Arabisation is constructed. The participants were aware that the Arabisation process of science was not just translation of a few texts. It goes beyond that, to language planning with intensive and continuing efforts and collaboration of different parties to keep Arabisation updated with science knowledge outcomes. Therefore, on the other item, the majority of the participants agreed that science knowledge should be translated into Arabic, which is consistent with what Al-Haq and Samadi (1996) reported. This motivation to Arabise science knowledge resulted from several factors, one being the participants' belief that scientific subjects were easier to understand when taught in SA, as the questionnaire revealed. This belief was also found in the Algerian context (Saad, 1992) where the subjects indicated that scientific subjects were more comprehensible when taught in Arabic. Another factor motivating the Arabisation of science knowledge is identity. SA is recognised by the subjects as the real representative of their culture and identity. In regard to teachers' use of SA in class speech, the participants seem to agree that lecturers should use only SA. This result was also found in the Iraqi context (Murad, 2007)

and it was also confirmed by the participants' responses about their attitudes towards using CA in educational settings, which are reviewed later.

Two points reveal the negative attitudes of students toward SA in education. Although the participants expressed their support for the Arabisation of science, they clearly felt that SA was more the language of religion and literature than of science and technology. AlJarf (2008) reported a similar result in her research. The findings in this study revealed that, in regard to the present status, SA was currently believed to be more a language of religion and literature than of science and technology, but at the same time the findings supported the use of Arabic in science and technology in the future. The other point that revealed negative attitudes to SA in education was related to studying SA. Most of the respondents agreed that studying SA was not enjoyable. This finding was not consistent with the findings of Alammar (2009). This may be due to the difference in the educational level of the participants in the two studies. The participants in the current study were university undergraduates whereas the participants Alammar's (2009) study were public school students.

Attitudes towards SA in the media could be seen as positive. The participants tended to agree that they prefer to see SA rather than CA used in the media as it was a more beautiful form of the language. The relationship between SA and language beauty has also been found in other studies; for example, in the study in Algeria by Saad (1992), subjects agreed that SA was more beautiful than French. In the Iraqi context, Murad (2007) found that the beauty of the language was one of the reasons for the preference for SA over the local CA, especially among educated people. Findings from the analysis of the interview in the current study were in line with that finding.

Although the participants believed in the beauty of SA, their actual use of SA in the media as well as their overall use of SA was less than their use of CA, as the findings showed. On one hand, this showed that the participants' knowledge and their actions were not always in harmony; that is, the three components of attitude – action, knowledge and emotion – might not co-exist in agreement (Baker, 1992; Matsuda, 2000). On the other hand, SA is considered to be an H variety and there are specific situations in which it is used, and it is not appropriate to use it in every situation. There is associated prestige with using SA. Therefore, the respondents commonly agreed that respected TV channels used only SA. Interestingly, the findings demonstrated that although the participants' attitudes towards radio stations that used SA could be seen as positive, they were not in favour of watching films that used SA. These differences in attitude may reflect the nature of films that use SA. Often, SA is used exclusively in historical films whereas most drama and comedy movies use the local vernacular (Alshamrani, 2012). 1. In regards to the attitudes to CA, the overall results revealed by the direct methods of investigation indicated that the participants' attitudes towards CA tended to be positive (M=3.12). Positive attitudes to CA were motivated by several linguistic, social and cultural factors. With regard to social interaction, the findings showed that the participants agreed that it is easier to express feelings using CA. In addition, most thought that CA is easier to speak than SA. Similar results were reported by Murad (2007) who found that Iraqi people had a preference for using the local CA because it was easier. This linguistic simplicity was pointed out as one of the linguistic factors behind the favourable attitude to CA revealed in the interviews in the present study based on the point of view of the participants.

However, the opinion about linguistic simplicity, as stated by the subjects, may be explained by a difference in competence in the two main varieties of Arabic - CA and SA. The subjects chosen needed to have a high level of competence in CA while their competence in SA was expected to be limited. CA was considered by most of the participants to be representative of local identity. This sensitivity to the relationship between local CA and local identity has been found in other Arabic contexts such as in Morocco (Marley, 2004) and Iraq (Murad, 2007). However, the respondents were also conscious of the value assigned to SA as giving an Arab identity rather than a local one. Hence, they tended to acknowledge that the use of CA threatened Arab unity and they observed that the use of CA was clearly slowing the spread of SA. Overall, attitudes towards CA in education were equally divided between the positive and negative. On the positive side, about half of the participants agreed that if a teacher used CA in class it made it easier to understand the subject. Thus, they agreed that it was acceptable for lecturers to mix SA and CA when they are speaking in class. On the other hand, about half of the participants believed that using CA in the

classroom was not appropriate. It was perceived as an indicator of a serious cultural issue. CA was assumed to be an L variety that had limitations for becoming the language for knowledge. Therefore, most of the participants supported banning it from use in education contexts. Banning CA from use in education has been supported by numerous researchers (Aldannan, 1999; Tinbak, 2005) on the grounds that CA affects education in general and Arabic language education in particular (Abu-Rabia, 2000; Aldannan, 1999; Ayari, 1996; Maamouri, 1998). This inconsistent attitude towards CA among the participants shows how attitudes are a complex phenomenon that cannot simply be separated into positive or negative views without deep understanding. As was evident from the qualitative data, it seems that there were two views in regard to the CA situation in education. The first was focused more on the advantages of using CA in education settings because of its linguistic simplicity, whereas the other view was more concerned about the disadvantages of its cultural impact. The subjects obviously prefer CA as the medium of instruction because it makes learning easier, yet at the same time they recognise the importance of upholding the position of SA as perhaps the most important maker of ethnic, culture and religious identity.

In general, attitudes towards CA in the media were positive. Most of the participants liked to watch TV programs that used CA, as was also supported by the findings about their actual use. Moreover, they commonly agreed that radio programs that used CA were more understandable than those that used SA. The participants suggested that this was possibly linked to the simplicity of CA. With written media, about half of the participants enjoyed browsing websites that used CA, and they enjoyed reading magazines that used CA more than those that used SA. However, most of the participants stated that it was not acceptable to use CA in written media. They also believed that using CA in the media was resulting in the decline of SA. These findings together present a sort of conflict between the cognitive and affective components of attitudes. The respondents were more likely to support the position of SA because of their knowledge and perhaps due to its position as an H variety that had high prestige and was considered to superior and more logical and respected within the speech community, as Ferguson's (1959) theory of diglossia stated. However, emotionally they tended to favour CA as it was the mother dialect and people might have a stronger emotional attachment to their own dialect than to other dialects (Cook & Bassetti, 2010).

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study have assisted in identifying part of the linguistic situation in the Saudi context. In regard to language use, the study showed that the participants always used CA, with further use in social interactions. The use of SA was found rarely in both social interactions and education, and sometimes in the media. In addition, the research showed that CA was actually used more widely than had been thought. The common perception has been that CA is only a spoken variety of Arabic; however, the results showed that it was also used commonly in informal writing. Consciously, the participants believed that SA was superior to CA. Attitudes to SA were slightly more positive than they were to CA. The research showed that there were religious, linguistic, social and cultural factors behind the participants' positive attitude to SA. The participants felt strongly that SA was important because of its religious value. The findings indicated that the participants supported the position of SA and they supported Arabisation in education settings. Also, they had a positive attitude to the use of SA in the media. In the indirect investigation, although attitudes to SA with respect to social attractiveness were negative, SA was perceived positively in regard to competence and personal integrity. Attitudes towards CA were motivated by linguistic, social and cultural aspects. The linguistic simplicity of CA was mentioned in both the questionnaire and the interviews, and participants recognised that this was due to the position of SA as the mother dialect. This simplicity to some extent also supported the use of CA in educational settings. On the other hand, the participants mentioned that their negative attitude to CA in educational contexts was related to its negative cultural impact. Attitudes towards CA use in the media were, on the whole, positive. Nonetheless, interestingly the findings pointed out a sort of conflict between the cognitive and affective components of attitudes. That is, the participants enjoyed reading magazines and websites that used CA but at the same time they stated that it was not acceptable to use CA in written media. The emotional aspect of attitudes towards CA was perhaps supported by its position as the mother dialect, while the participants recognised it as an L variety. In the covert study of

attitudes towards CA it was found that participants had a positive view of CA in regard to both social attractiveness and personal integrity, but their attitude to CA was negative in relation to competence.

8. References

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