

Speech Accommodation in Inter-Dialectal Conversations: Exploiting Linguistic Repertoire and Weighing Sociolinguistic Options

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ABSTRACT

Eight male native speakers of Arabic, four Jordanians and four Egyptians, were recorded during several casual one-hour conversations about a variety of topics. The setting for the conversations was the University of Kansas in USA. The linguistic repertoire for each participant consisted of his own dialect of Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and English language as a second language. The conversations were observed for instances of speech accommodation and code-switching. Contrary to the prevailing assumption about Arabic inter-dialectal communication, the results showed that the participants maintained their speech and rarely switched to their interlocutors' dialect of Arabic – favoring in-group membership to inter-group membership. However, instances of switching to a more standard (educated) variety of Arabic as well as instances of switching to English were observed. In this regard, the current study invalidates the once-prevailing assumption about the role of Standard Arabic as an extensive accommodation strategy and reveals the role of English as a converging strategy. The results are discussed in light of the Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) and in terms of sociolinguistic factors such as setting, identity, social integration and separation, and social group membership.

Keywords: Speech accommodation, SAT, code-switching, sociolinguistics, Arabic