

Gendered Identities and Practices in the Jordanian-Turkish Community in Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide a sociolinguistic investigation of gendered identities and practices among some third-generation Jordanian Turks. It researches into language proficiency, use, and identity of Jordanian Turks of both sexes. A mixed methods approach was chosen, drawing upon a combination of quantitative and qualitative data captured through two methods: sociolinguistic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The data analysed in this study provide evidence that the female members of the Jordanian-Turkish community, whose linguistic repertoires are comparatively more bilingual than male counterparts, are undergoing a language shift in progress, and the male members, on the whole, are monolingual language users and have therefore shifted their language practices and only sustained ritualised cultural practices.

Keywords: gendered identity, language proficiency, language shift, and linguistic repertoires

1. Introduction

The outburst of scholarship in the field of sociolinguistics that is largely conceptualised as the research into association between language use/shift and social contexts, could be tracked back to Labov's (1963) seminal study on social factors that unswervingly influence language change and linguistic processes. An important thread of social inquiry which has since been investigated is language performance within ethnolinguistic minorities that helps identify how language constructs identity and is constructed by contextual factors. Gender has always been a significant variable in language maintenance and shift (henceforth LMS) research, yet its exigent role in LMS has been problematised by recent scholarship that is inconsistent with findings in previous studies which have come up with the conclusion that females take up stronger alignment to ethnic language and identity and are more actively responsible for maintaining the heritage language's linguistic and cultural purity and uniqueness. This is in part associated with subjective understandings, regardless of gender, through which people (re)conceptualise and (re)assess their personal relationships to values and identities that are tied up with and negotiated by the languages of their society. It is a matter of individual practice and agency rather than a defined social phenomenon (Garrett, 2005, p. 63). Concepts of change and mobility are being reconsidered responding to a new strand of research informed and defined by expanding globalised sociocultural practices and adaption of multimodal practices brought about by technological advancements. Consequently, people are more easily communicating with others in today's mobile, hybridised, and decontextualised life, which patently change the dynamic aspects of language practices and attitudes in contextual settings, problematising the traditional conventions of concurrent change in the habitual use of a heritage language. Jordanian-Turkish community is small and hitherto remains largely underexplored not only from a sociolinguistic point of view but also more generally in scholarly literature. This study investigates the mechanisms of some Jordanian Turks (henceforth JTs) JTs' socialising and linguistic behaviours and practices of both sexes and figure out if established linguistic and cultural practices are being reinterpreted and reproduced by them. It delves into a glut of internal, external, and contextual variables that have contributed to Turkish LMS. The study also explores the identity practices of JTs, how they negotiate and construct their ethnic identity, and how the negotiation of their ethnic identities is shaped and mapped by the power relations embedded in social contexts.

1.2 Research Objectives

LMS is manipulated by the intermingling of macro- and micro-level factors. The language education policy context in Jordan, given the socio-political context in which it operates, is cardinally dominated by monolingualism (Al Suod, 2022). The family language policy is mapped and constructed by the subjective experiences of parents and how they mediate objective prevalent discourses in the dominant society (Savikj, 2017). The sociolinguistic standing of ethnic language and identity in many settings and contexts has long been probed and considered by numerous sociolinguists (Giles et al., 1977; 1981; Le Wei, 1994; Holmes, 2013; Netto et al., 219; Kinsella, 2020).

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because a sociolinguistic investigation of gendered practices and identities in the Jordanian-Turkish community has not been carried out before. Therefore, it fills a gap in ethnic literature. Moreover, this research provides a creditable account of some JTs' language proficiency, use, and identity which, in turn, makes a substantial contribution to the field of sociolinguistics and paves the way for further studies on this ethnolinguistic community.

2. Literature Review

An interdisciplinary array of societal and individual variables encroaching on LMS have been realised and identified in the existing body of scholarship on heritage language and identity. When languages of power and dependency get into close contact, they carve into a matrix of volatility and asymmetry or equilibrium – essentially feeding into each other and making sizeable mutual accommodation, or vice versa (Al Suod, 2022). Fishman (1971) lays down three vital subdivisions for the study of language maintenance and shift: (i) habitual language use at more than one point in time or space; (ii) antecedent, concurrent or consequent psychological, social, and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use; and (iii) behaviour toward language in the contact setting, including directed language maintenance or shift efforts. Fishman's (1971) theory of LMLS lends itself very well with this study. Addressing the nuanced linkage between LMS and ethnicity, Fishman (1972; 1989; 1991) offers insights into the perceived and preconceived conceptualisation of ethnicity in terms of modelling LM among ethnolinguistic groups inexorably having a go at sustaining and maintaining their languages to ethnically sensitive and acceptable limits of adherence and loyalty. The instrumentalist theory of ethnicity states that ethnicity is a means employed by individuals to mobilize, unify, and forge communities so that they can attain larger-scale gains and advantages. This sort of ethnicity is socio-economically and politically mobilized and constructed. Identity is a multidimensional concept that has been at the core of LMS, on which a good deal of research has been carried out to investigate the role of ethnic identity in LMS. Identity is a multifaceted concept which is forged within religious, personal, cultural, traditional, and social practices and behaviours (Westen et al., 2010; Hyde & DeLamater, 2010; Baker, 2011; Weaver, 2011; Hatoss, 2013; Epstein & Heizler, 2015). Social identity theory was developed by Tajfel (1974, 1978, 1982) and Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) which profoundly acted on and overlapped with subjective ethnolinguistic vitality. It is induced by an array of sociopsychological processes. Giles and Johnson's (1987) theory of ethnolinguistic identity that provides better understanding of the processes and variables involved in the preservation of an ethnic language. It was proposed to take up the issue of the language strategy an ethnolinguistic community member needs to utilize in interethnic encounters. It draws deeply on and is conceptually derived from by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, from which ethnolinguistic identity theory borrows four key concepts: (1) *social categorisation*, (2) *social identity*, (3) *social comparison*, and (4) *psychological distinctiveness*.

3. Methodology

The study design used in this study is both qualitative and quantitative. It is recognised that there has been considerable scholarship, early and recent, that advocate the mixed methods pragmatic stance. Mixed methods approach has been supported and markedly utilised across a wide variety of disciplines, such as social work (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, 2003; Creswell & Clark 2011, 2017; Garrett et al., 2010; Andrew & Halcomb, 2009; Angouri, 2010; Cameron, 2009; O’Cathain, 2009; Dornyei, 2007; Ivankova et al., 2006; Morgan, 1998; Greene et al., 1989). The study is primarily based on Fishman’s theories of LMLS and on his theories of what should be investigated to come to conclusion about LMLS among JTs. The theoretical underpinnings of this study emanate from a synthesis of Fishman’s works. In *Reversing Language Shift*, Fishman argues that the following should be analysed in order to assess LS: (i) a framework for specifying the social location of language shift; (ii) data of language shift; and (iii) causes of language shift (1991, p. 45). As expounded in the literature review, Fishman (1971) posits three main subdivisions for studying LMLS. In this study, the researcher attempts to make use of the two typologies combining them into an integrated model.

3.1 Questionnaire Design

An integrated model based on Fishman’s theories is used as a basis for designing the questionnaire and setting the interview questions. Therefore, the questionnaire was carefully developed to meet the needs of this study. However, the questionnaire was slightly modified and customised to fit the ethnic group under investigation. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information about:

1. respondent's childhood language use.
2. respondent’s present language use.
3. respondent’s identification of himself or herself.
5. respondent’s level of language competence.

In addition, a qualitative approach (semi-structured interviews) was also applied to this study in order to investigate the challenges and perspectives of Jordan Turks towards maintaining their Turkish ethnic language. The questions of the interviews also benefited from several models and theories of LMLS (Kloss, 1966; Giles et al., 1977; Smolicz, 1988; and Conklin et al., 1983). The interview questions enabled the researcher to ask questions not included in the sociolinguistic questionnaire in order not to make it long and complicated. Moreover, most of the interviews were set up by a letter to the volunteers who had already indicated their willingness to be interviewed once they were done with the questionnaire. A phone call followed the letter in order to arrange a suitable time for the interview. During the interview the researcher recorded the interviews.

3.2 The Sample and its Limitations

A random sample of about 50 JTs were asked to respond to a sociolinguistic questionnaire. Based on these interviews, complete details of language use, competence, and identification patterns were identified. Since the identities of the participants in the study should be anonymous, the participants will be coded as below:

Participant Code	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The researcher asked for permission from the manager of the Turkish Charity Association that has been established to teach Turkish. The researcher was also aware of the ethical issues that must be considered when conducting every phase of this study. The following ethical pillars were considered:

1. Informed Consent
2. Freedom to Withdraw
3. Confidentiality and Protection of Anonymity

3.3.1 Informed Consent

According to Johnson & Christensen (2012), informed consent is “agreeing to participate in a study after being informed of its purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, alternative procedures”. As a result, the researcher had informed the participants everything about the study before they chose to participate. The interview questions, questionnaire, and the participant information sheet were translated and attached together to the consent form in order to enable the participants to read and understand the study. The participants were given enough time to read the consent form before they signed it.

3.3.2 Freedom to Withdraw

The participants were informed verbally and in writing that they should feel free to withdraw at any time during the study. This piece of information was also included in the consent form.

3.3.3 Confidentiality and Protection of Anonymity

The participants’ identity and confidentiality were protected by being coded as mentioned above. They were assured and promised that their responses to the questionnaire and interview questions would be confidential and anonymous.

4. Results and Discussion

This section provides an in-depth discussion of the findings of the data collected using sociolinguistic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Since the study is theoretically

fused into the pragmatic paradigm that problematises the obdurate opposition and bridges the gap between the constructivist and positivist ontologies, it goes beyond mere descriptive analysis, having provided a deep critical analysis of the outcomes. As the study is more quantitatively driven, the questionnaire results principally systematise the discussion, and the interpretative data (interviews) are also probed into to add thorough information and look more into the sociolinguistic questionnaire responses, because they virtually inquire into the experiences lived by the informants involved.

4.1 Demographic Data

Demographic information of a total of 50 JTs was collected. This sample of the study corresponds numerically with the larger population of JTs who would have undergone analogous nurturing and mentorship, which would substantiate it as a typical sample of the larger population of the Jordanian-Turkish community in Jordan. In the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide information on the following: gender, age, education level, and identity, to be more conscious of their background.

4.1.1 Gender

50% of the respondents are males and 50% females. Over a month of severe fatigue, the researcher took pains to glom onto this equal proportion of gender among the informants in spite of all social and cultural hurdles and predicaments he came down with.

TABLE 1
NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS' GENDER

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	25	50%
Female	25	50%

4.1.2 Age

The age groups of the study are as follows:

TABLE 2
Age Groups of the Participants

Age Group	Num. of Respondents	Percent
12-19	8	16%
20 -29	27	54%
30 -39	15	30%

The age between 13 and 39 makes up the third generation of the Jordanian-Turkish community. For this study and based on the socio-historical and political data since the establishment of Jordan in 1946, the researcher defines the third generation as those who were born to at least one second-generation Jordanian-Turkish parent (Al Suod, 2022, p. 140). The age variable is of predominant position in LMS in an ethnolinguistic context, for generation is a critical construct in LMS research despite all hardships in categorising generations for investigative objectives (David, 2002).

4.1.3 Level of Education

82% of the respondents have a university degree.

TABLE 3

Participants' Level of Education

Level of Education	Number	Percent
Elementary School	4	8%
High School	5	10%
Diploma	3	6%
Bachelor	35	70%
None	0	0%
Master	3	6%
PhD	0	0%

As shown in table 3, the majority of the participants are highly educated, which can be intertwined, being both negative and positive at the same time in terms of LMS. The status of official literacy being only in Arabic and English in Jordan counts out the capacity for amounting to the age-proper phases of bilingual/multilingual development in Turkish among JTs. Conversely, given this elevated degree of education, JTs may be able to redouble and reconsider their efforts and capacity to revitalise and pick up the formal registers, vocabulary, and structures conforming to Turkish.

4.1.4 Identity

32% of the participants self-identify themselves as 'Jordanian Turk', identifying with two identities and setting down their identity to be lying on a continuum between Jordanian and Turkish. This Jordanian-Turkish identity is perceived as accessible, evolving, fluid, up for negotiation, and permeable, for it is socially constituted (see Hall 1992, 2012; Chambers, 1994; Hargreaves, 1995; Akerlof & Kranton (2000); Omoniyi & White, 2006; Epstein & Heizler, 2015). 12% of them identify with a Turkish identity and conceive of it as immutable and rigid, reflecting strong affiliation to their ethnolinguistic identity and a lacking degree of blending into the Jordanian society of power.

TABLE 4

Participants' Identification of Themselves

Identity	Number	Percent
Jordanian	28	56%
Jordanian Turk	16	32%
Turkish	6	12%

Because all of the participants were born in Jordan, it is plausible to rationalise why only 56% of them declare that they are purely Jordanian, with 32% and 12% proclaiming that they are Jordanian Turks and Jordanians, respectively. These figures are indicative of wider identification patterns since they are considered to conduce among other factors to LMLS intergenerationally.

TABLE 5

Identity by JTs' Gender

		Gender		
		Males	Females	Total
How do you identify yourself?	Jordanian	17	11	28
	Jordanian Turk	6	10	16
	Turk			
	Turkish	2	4	6
Total		25	25	50

It is argued that female members of an ethnolinguistic group, serving catalysts for *LM*, are more disposed to linguistic and cultural preservation than male ones (Hill & Hill, 1986; Hill, 1987; Pauwels, 2015). Table 5 illustrates that the female JTs (20%) identify more with their ethnic identity than the male JTs (12%). The third-generation JTs accommodate and attend to social identification and coerced linguistic practices, having essentially socialised into the language and culture of power (see McCall & Simmons, 1978; 1986; Stoessel, 2002). JTs have embraced an exclusive identity (56%) to which higher affiliation and greater dominance have been made, after they have negotiated it with the Jordanian society which has endorsed it (see Stoessel, 2002).

It is crucial to note that the process of constructing ethnic identity unfolds through the mobilisation of mutually interwoven ethnic bases and resources, which would emerge insofar as ethnic upbringing is reflective of race and history. Ethnic identity enshrines positive perceptions into its subscribers and serves as a frame of reference for them and as a system of inter-ethnic relations within the inter- and intra-domain interactions. It also channels possible courses of action for advocating heritage language which embodies corresponding culture and its ethos, incorporating a pragmatic framework for heritage language owing to its distinctive construction and interpretation of reality (Al Suod, 2022, p. 158).

JT1, (32-year-old woman), articulates her thoughts on her identity¹:

I consider myself a Jordanian-Turkish woman because my mother is Turkish, and I speak Turkish reasonably well. I also speak Turkish with my mother most of the time, but I speak Arabic with my father because he does not speak Turkish well, not to mention that he is a Jordanian Arab man. Being both Jordanian and Turkish is something that cannot be controlled or denied.

JT1 tries to rationalise her hybrid pattern of identification by claiming that she acquired Turkish firsthand as a native language. The expressive phrase ‘*being both Jordanian and Turkish is something that cannot be controlled or denied*’ reveals a sentiment trapped within the dynamic and evolving boundaries of ethnic affiliation that reflects a hybridised pattern of ethnic identification.

JT3's narrative is an illustrative instance of a situated identity JT3, (26-year-old man), has constructed and developed within the Jordanian context:

I consider myself a Jordanian-Turkish man because I was born in Jordan to a Jordanian mother. I speak Turkish and Arabic fluently, but I use the Turkish language only with my father and some relatives and via the Internet with friends and relatives in Turkey. I am forced to speak Arabic outside the house and in situations that require Arabic so as not to be dismissed from the Jordanian society that considers the Arabic language as the main marker of it.

JT3's narrative uncovers that he has negotiated his identity by forming and cultivating a transnational hybrid identity as he latches onto both the Jordanian and Turkish sides of identification. Because he is traversing rather different sociocultural spheres and contexts, this sort of identity is believed to nurture a form of sociopsychological functioning that normalises his behaviours and attitudes, allowing him to get off being classified as ‘alien’ by the subscribers of the Jordanian culture (*so as not to be dismissed from the Jordanian society*). JT2 occupies a ‘third space’ that empowers him to pick up new but overpowering paths of knowledge and understanding of his identity performance in the Jordanian context (see Al Soud, 2015). JT3's manifold challenging loyalty has reformed and mobilised his own perception of the meaning of home; he has problematized the essentialised norms of his identity and reconstructed it into hybridised, transnational, and cross-linguistic sites of identity that is bound by vitalising negotiations and contestations (see Al Suod, 2022).

4.2 Self-Reported Proficiency in Turkish

16% of the participants perceive their proficiency in Turkish oral skills as ‘fluent’, which is higher than that of their literacy ones, because 12% of the respondents claim that they can read and write in Turkish easily. Tables 6 & 7 shows the respondents’ proficiency in the oral and literacy skills in Turkish.

¹ All interviews conducted were in Arabic yet were translated into English by the researcher. The translations are deliberately streamlined in grammar and style to allow for more comprehensibility.

TABLE 6

Participants' Proficiency in Turkish Oral Skills

		Neither Able to Speak nor Understand it		Unable to Speak but I Understand it		Not Very Fluent		Fairly Fluent		Fluent	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Turkish Speaking Skills		23	46%	5	10%	3	6%	11	22%	8	16%
Gender	Males	15	30%	2	4%	1	2%	4	8%	3	6%
	Females	8	16%	3	6%	2	4%	7	14%	5	10%

TABLE 7

Participants' Proficiency in Turkish Literacy Skills

		I Can Neither Read nor Write		I Can Read but I Can't Write		I Can Read and Write with Difficulty		I Can Read and Write Somewhat Easily		I Can Read and Write Easily	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Turkish Reading and Writing Skills		27	54%	2	4%	6	12%	9	18%	6	12%
Gender	Males	19	38%	0	0%	2	4%	2	4%	2	4%
	Females	8	16%	2	4%	4	8%	7	14%	4	8%

It is obvious, as the output shown above in tables 6 and 7, that there is a significant difference between the female and male members of the JT community, with the female JTs having a higher level of proficiency in Turkish. The overall reported low proficiency in Turkish lays out how ideological constructs act on destabilizing prevailing linguistic diversity by infusing the differing divisions of the Jordanian society into a single linguistic code and identity intent on generating a looked-for degree of linguistic and ideological unity. The low proficiency in Turkish is also accounted for by the fact that despite Turkish assumes an instrumental role for some inner social gains for some JTs, it casts no regulative function in Jordanians' everyday lives.

JT2 (28-year-old man) explains why he does not speak Turkish, reflecting on the power dynamics of monolingual language ideology implemented in Jordan:

The Turkish language is part of the past, linked only to our Turkish ancestors and has no effect at the present time. I tried to learn to speak Turkish but I couldn't. Arabic is the only language spoken by all members of the Jordanian community, but English is taught in primary and secondary schools and is spoken by very few members of the community. Other languages, such as Turkish, are of no value in Jordan.

Despite overt public endorsements supporting multilingual policies and practices, policy makers and practitioners still brace up monolingual or bilingual (Arabic and English) education provided that one linguistic code (Arabic) is more dominant than the other, an avowal largely made for an assortment of local and international interests. , JT2's words '*the Turkish language is part of the part ... has no effect at the present time*' are reflective of the ideology that underlies his monolingual practices which renders him submissive, passive, and deprived of agency.

5. Conclusion

LMS is a matter of individual practice and agency rather than a defined social phenomenon (Garrett, 2005, p. 63). Nevertheless, this argument is not largely borne out by this research, even though it cannot be generalised because of the somewhat small number of JT participants, and, methodologically, the respondents' reported data on language use, proficiency, and identity can be contested and questioned. In this study, the female JTs reported higher heritage language proficiency and ethnic identity commitment than male counterparts. Some third-generation JTs associated the perceived unfeasibility of the present and future challenges for heritage language identity maintenance to their gone past that is addressed to contextualise their destabilized collective subjectivity, without any contingent reconceptualization of it being proposed.

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