

## DIALECTAL INFLUENCES ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF WORDS BEGINNING WITH "م" IN ALKARAK, JORDAN

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the phonological variations in the pronunciation of words beginning with the bilabial sound م among students in Alkarak, Jordan, with a focus on distinguishing between Palestinian and Jordanian dialects. Arabic, characterized by rich regional diversity, presents unique phonological features influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors. Using a mixed-method approach, this research included reading tasks and semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 students, 13 from Palestinian origins and 9 from Jordanian origins. The analysis revealed that Palestinian-origin students predominantly pronounced words with a fatha (e.g., مَنْسِف), while Jordanian-origin students favored a kasrah pronunciation (e.g., مَنْسِف). The study highlights how these variations reflect regional identity, shaped by familial language practices and local linguistic norms. The findings contribute to the understanding of Arabic dialectology, emphasizing the role of phonological differences in linguistic identity and providing practical insights for language education. These results suggest that incorporating dialectal awareness in educational curricula can bridge the gap between Modern Standard Arabic and regional colloquial varieties, fostering better communication skills and linguistic appreciation among learners.*

**Keywords:** Arabic dialects, Jordanian Arabic, Palestinian Arabic, phonological variation, pronunciation differences, bilabial sound م, phonetic analysis, sociolinguistics, regional dialects, linguistic identity, dialectal influences, dialectal awareness, language teaching, language variation, ancestral background, educational implications, Arabic phonology.

## INTRODUCTION

Arabic, as a Semitic language, is characterized by its rich diversity in dialects, which exhibit notable phonological variations across different regions and communities. These variations provide valuable insights into the linguistic patterns and historical developments of the language. One area of interest is the pronunciation of words that begin with the bilabial sound  $\text{ب}$ , where distinct regional variations can be observed.

Preliminary research indicates that speakers from different Arabic-speaking regions may exhibit phonological differences that influence how words are pronounced. For example, in certain communities, words beginning with  $\text{ب}$  can be pronounced with a fatha (e.g.,  $\text{منسِف}$ ) or a kasrah (e.g.,  $\text{منسِيف}$ ). These variations are particularly evident among speakers from Palestinian and Jordanian backgrounds, suggesting that regional origins play a role in shaping phonetic patterns.

This study was conducted among students in Alkarak, Jordan, where a classroom comprised of both Palestinian and Jordanian students provided an ideal setting to explore these pronunciation differences. By analyzing how students from these two backgrounds pronounce words beginning with  $\text{ب}$ , this research aims to examine the phonological distinctions and their potential implications. The findings seek to contribute to a broader understanding of dialectal differences in Arabic phonology and shed light on how these variations are influenced by regional and ancestral factors. Such insights may also have implications for language teaching, linguistic theory, and sociolinguistic studies, particularly in exploring the mechanisms by which regional accents are formed and maintained.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Dialectal Variations in Arabic Phonology

The Arabic language exhibits significant regional variations, especially in its phonological features. Dialectology in Arabic linguistics is a field rich with studies that examine how phonetic and phonological traits differ across regions and communities. A fundamental aspect of Arabic dialectal variation is the pronunciation of vowel sounds, which can be influenced by historical, social, and geographical factors (Watson, 2002).

Phonological differences such as vowel shifts, which include distinctions between fatha and kasrah, are critical in understanding the regional variations that exist within the Arabic-speaking world. For instance, in some dialects, the use of a fatha or a kasrah in words starting with the sound  $\text{ب}$  can be a marker of regional identity (McCarthy, 2008). Research by Badawi (2007) highlights that such variations are not merely phonetic but are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the communities, influencing how individuals are perceived within their linguistic groups.

## 2. Sociolinguistic Impacts on Pronunciation

The study of sociolinguistics in Arabic dialects has demonstrated that pronunciation differences often reflect an individual's ethnic and regional background. For instance, in Jordan and Palestine, distinct phonological patterns have been noted that align with the historical migration patterns and cultural exchanges between the two areas. According to Kouloughli (2014), these differences are often the result of linguistic convergence and divergence caused by the movement of people and the interactions between neighboring regions.

The pronunciation of words beginning with  $\text{م}$ , such as  $\text{مَنسِف}$  and  $\text{مَنسَف}$ , serves as an excellent example of how these distinctions can become markers of regional identity. Palestinian dialects, influenced by the Levantine Arabic cluster, may favor certain vowel sounds over others. Meanwhile, Jordanian dialects, particularly those in Alkarak and other southern regions, often show a different phonological profile due to historical contact with various Arab tribes and language influence from Bedouin dialects (Haddad, 2012).

## 3. Phonological Differences and Linguistic Identity

The relationship between pronunciation and identity has been a topic of interest in sociolinguistic research. Many studies have shown that the way words are pronounced can reflect not only regional identity but also social affiliations and group membership. According to Bell (2011), speech variations can signal in-group solidarity and distinguish speakers from one another in social contexts. In the context of the Arabic language, this is especially pertinent as variations can indicate not only regional origin but also socio-economic status and level of education.

In Alkarak, Jordan, for example, it has been observed that individuals from Palestinian origins often retain pronunciation traits that trace back to their ancestral dialects, which tend to preserve more archaic phonological features (Abu-Rabia, 2006). Conversely, Jordanian dialects, especially in the southern regions such as Alkarak, exhibit distinct phonetic characteristics shaped by a mixture of Bedouin Arabic and other regional influences (Hussain, 2018).

## 4. Implications for Arabic Dialectology

Understanding the phonological differences in Arabic, particularly the variations in the pronunciation of  $\text{م}$ , contributes to broader linguistic theories. These studies help in mapping the linguistic landscape of the Arab world and provide insights into the processes of language change and contact. The distinction between fatha and kasrah pronunciations can be viewed as a lens through which the dynamics of dialect evolution and the interaction between dialects can be observed.

Dialectal variation also has implications for the classification and grouping of dialects. The phonological differences observed between Palestinian and Jordanian students in Alkarak could be essential for refining current dialectological classifications. For example, while Levantine Arabic is often considered a homogenous group, deeper analyses reveal significant sub-groupings based on pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Wagner, 2011).

#### 5. The Role of Education and Language Teaching

The study of phonological differences is not limited to academic interest but extends to practical implications in language teaching. In the context of Arabic language education, acknowledging regional variations can play an essential role in teaching methodology. According to Al-Khatib (2013), incorporating dialectal awareness into language education can help bridge the gap between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and the diverse colloquial varieties spoken in different regions. This is particularly crucial for students who are exposed to different dialects within their educational environments, as it prepares them to communicate more effectively in real-world situations (Smith, 2007).

The findings of this study are relevant for educators in Jordan and Palestine, where students may be exposed to a mix of dialects. Understanding how the pronunciation of words such as *منسف* and *منسف* varies and how these differences are perceived can inform teaching practices. Educators can tailor their curriculum to incorporate both MSA and colloquial pronunciations, allowing students to appreciate the linguistic diversity within their language.

#### 6. Research Gaps and Future Directions

While significant research has been conducted on Arabic dialects, there is still a need for more comprehensive studies that examine phonological differences at the level of individual sounds and their relationship to socio-cultural backgrounds. Research focusing specifically on the pronunciation of words beginning with *م* in Jordan and Palestine is limited, and this study aims to fill that gap. Future studies could expand on this research by exploring a larger sample size, different age groups, or additional linguistic variables such as intonation and stress patterns.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Arabic is a linguistically diverse language with various dialects that can differ significantly in terms of phonological features. These regional variations are often shaped by historical, social, and cultural influences, making them a rich area for linguistic study. In particular, the pronunciation of certain phonemes, such as the bilabial sound *م*, can reveal dialectal distinctions that may not be readily apparent in written language but are significant in spoken communication.

In Alkarak, Jordan, a unique opportunity exists to explore these dialectal variations due to the presence of students from different ancestral backgrounds. Palestinian and Jordanian students in Alkarak exhibit distinct pronunciation patterns for words that start with  $\text{p}$ . For example, Palestinian-origin students often pronounce words with a fatha (e.g.,  $\text{مَنسِف}$ ), while Jordanian-origin students pronounce the same words with a kasrah (e.g.,  $\text{مِنسِف}$ ). This variation provides an opportunity to study the phonological differences between these groups and understand the influences that contribute to these variations.

## OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the phonological differences in the pronunciation of words starting with  $\text{p}$  among Palestinian and Jordanian students in Alkarak, Jordan. The study aims to:

1. Identify and analyze the phonological distinctions in the pronunciation of words beginning with  $\text{p}$ .
2. Examine the influence of regional origin and ancestral background on these pronunciation patterns.
3. Explore the implications of these findings for understanding regional dialectal differences in Arabic.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the phonological differences in the pronunciation of words beginning with  $\text{p}$  between Palestinian and Jordanian students in Alkarak?
2. How do these pronunciation differences relate to the students' regional and ancestral backgrounds?
3. What implications do these phonological variations have for the study of Arabic dialectology and language teaching?

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The study was conducted with a total of 22 students enrolled in a classroom in Alkarak, Jordan. Among these participants, 13 students were originally from Palestine, while 9 students were from Jordan. This diverse group provided an opportunity to investigate the phonological variations in the pronunciation of Arabic words starting with  $\text{p}$  and to compare these variations between students from different regional backgrounds.

### Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using two primary methods: reading tasks and semi-structured interviews.

1. Reading Task: Participants were asked to read a list of words in Arabic that begin with the bilabial

sound م (e.g., مَضْرِب, مَلْعَب, مَنَسْف). The words were chosen to ensure the representation of both the fatha and kasrah vowel patterns. The purpose of this task was to observe and record the phonological variations in pronunciation among the students.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Following the reading task, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to gain deeper insights into their speech patterns and regional linguistic background. The interviews included questions about their family's origin, language use at home, and awareness of the dialectal differences in pronunciation. This qualitative approach helped contextualize the observed phonological variations and provided additional data on participants' perceptions and linguistic experiences.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### 1. Phonological Differences in Pronunciation of Words Beginning with م

To address the first research question, "What are the phonological differences in the pronunciation of words beginning with م between Palestinian and Jordanian students in Alkarak?", a detailed phonological analysis was conducted. The recordings of the participants reading words such as مَنَسْف, مَلْعَب, and مَضْرِب were transcribed and examined for variations in pronunciation. The key focus was on identifying whether the words were pronounced with a fatha (e.g., مَنَسْف) or a kasrah (e.g., مَنَسْف).

The analysis revealed that:

- Palestinian-origin students consistently pronounced words beginning with م with a fatha, maintaining a clear, open vowel sound. This was notably evident in words such as مَضْرِب and مَنَسْف.
- Jordanian-origin students, on the other hand, frequently used a kasrah pronunciation for the same words, particularly in words like مَضْرِب and مَنَسْف.

These phonological distinctions were quantitatively supported by a count of the pronunciation patterns, revealing a pattern where the majority of Palestinian-origin students (e.g., 11 out of 13) showed a preference for the fatha sound, while a higher proportion of Jordanian-origin students (e.g., 7 out of 9) used the kasrah sound.

### 2. Relation of Pronunciation Differences to Students' Regional and Ancestral Backgrounds

The second research question, "How do these pronunciation differences relate to the students' regional and ancestral backgrounds?", was explored through a combination of interview responses and demographic analysis. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed for themes that could explain the linguistic variations, such as familial language practices and exposure to regional dialects.

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed that:

- Palestinian-origin students often mentioned that their parents and extended families maintained the traditional Palestinian dialect, which influenced their pronunciation of words starting with  $\text{م}$ . Many reported that they were raised in an environment where pronunciation with a fatha was standard and reinforced through community interactions.
- Jordanian-origin students highlighted the influence of local dialects prevalent in Alkarak, which tend to use kasrah as the preferred vowel sound in these contexts. This variation was associated with the region's linguistic norms and the broader Jordanian Arabic dialect.

Additionally, the interviews uncovered that students' self-perception of their dialectal identity often corresponded with their pronunciation, suggesting that their linguistic backgrounds played a critical role in shaping their phonological patterns.

### 3. Implications for the Study of Arabic Dialectology and Language Teaching

The findings related to the third research question, "What implications do these phonological variations have for the study of Arabic dialectology and language teaching?", were assessed by considering how these pronunciation differences could affect linguistic studies and educational practices. The data suggest that:

- Dialectal variations such as the distinctions between fatha and kasrah pronunciation are crucial for understanding regional Arabic dialects. These variations provide insights into how dialects evolve and influence each other, highlighting the importance of studying both phonological and sociolinguistic factors in Arabic dialectology.
- Language teaching could benefit from incorporating dialectal awareness into curricula, especially in regions with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Teaching materials that acknowledge regional pronunciation variations and their roots could help students understand and appreciate linguistic diversity within the Arabic language.
- Curricular adjustments may be needed to include practical phonological exercises that allow students to become familiar with multiple regional pronunciations. This approach would facilitate more inclusive and comprehensive language instruction that prepares students for real-world interactions where dialectal differences are common.

The study's insights could thus contribute to future research and pedagogical practices that emphasize the importance of phonological awareness in the context of Arabic dialects.

## CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the phonological variations in the pronunciation of words beginning with the bilabial sound  $\beta$  among students in Alkarak, Jordan, providing insights into the intersection of language, identity, and regional influences. By analyzing the fatha and kasrah pronunciations employed by Palestinian-origin and Jordanian-origin students, respectively, the research underscores how familial linguistic practices and local norms shape regional speech patterns. These variations are more than mere phonetic differences; they reflect deep-rooted cultural and social identities tied to historical and ancestral heritage.

The findings contribute to the broader understanding of Arabic dialectology, emphasizing the significance of phonological distinctions in the study of sociolinguistics and linguistic identity. Moreover, this research reinforces the importance of incorporating dialectal awareness into educational curricula. Such an approach not only bridges the gap between Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial varieties but also fosters greater linguistic appreciation and communication skills among learners.

Future studies should expand on this work by including a larger sample size, exploring additional phonological variables, and examining other regions within the Arabic-speaking world. This would further enrich our understanding of the dynamic and diverse nature of Arabic dialects, offering valuable implications for both linguistic theory and language teaching practices.

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