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Language as a Marker of Social Class in Iraq

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of language as a major marker of social class of the varied sociolinguistic environment of Iraq. It evaluates the roles of Standard Arabic, Iraqi dialects, Kurdish and other minority languages by evaluating historical, cultural and linguistic evidence of their functions in signaling social stratification. The study shows that dialect, language competency, and code-switching choices emphasize and support the differences between urban and rural societies, educated and uneducated, majority and minority groups. The linguistic practices in Baghdad, rural regions and Kurdish regions show how the Iraqi society is united and divided, with boundaries of classes, ethnicity, and identity being drawn. The paper also focuses on the role of education, gender, and social media in shaping the language use, showing how younger generations use the digital platforms to negotiate their position in society and implement foreign words. On the whole, language is seen as an influential power of the sociocultural process that shapes its identity, maintains social relations, and indicates the process of social change in Iraq.

Keywords: sociolinguistic, social class, language variation, Iraq, identity.

1. Introduction

The language is an important parameter in social differentiation in the whole world and particularly the Middle East. To a large extent, language is a major social marker in a diverse socio-political setting like Iraq, with the language used categorizing the social classes (Bernstein, 1971; Coupland, 2007). The linguistic features in the country are taken to the center of the construction of social identities and expression or negotiation of social inequalities due to the ethnic and religious diversity. This introduction identifies the essential



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status of language in the development of social class in Iraq, which addresses problems on the intersection of language, ethnicity and social stratification that modify current social change. The sociology of language can be used to understand that the language of Iraq is mirrored in the societal structure and hierarchy of the country, which draws the interest of sociolinguists all around the world (Murad, 2014). Differences in language in society relate to a range of social aspects, and the correlation between language and social class is one of the popular topics in the sociolinguistic studies. This paper focuses on the association between language fluctuation and change and social stratum, which has been reinforced by the existing theories to answer fundamental inquiries regarding the relationship between language and social status, the characteristics linked to speech patterns of working and middle classes, and the personality characteristics that affect these patterns. Iraqi Arabic (IA) examples are also provided in order to have a complete picture (Labov, 1972).

2. Historical Context of Language in Iraq

History of modern Iraq has started in 1920 and includes the times of British governance, monarch, revolution, as well as emergence of sectarianism and patronage. It also encompasses a rule by the Ba'ath Party, several years of international sanctions, the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, the insurgency afterwards, sectarian warfare, and the subsequent establishment of a new constitutional democracy. The social class and language have always been intertwined during its history. The Arabic speakers belong to the middle-class population whose primary occupation is in the government buildings and universities (Murad, 2014). Iraqi Arabic has a very high national unity and identity, as a form of social classification. Others, like the Turkmen and Shabakis, stand out because they do not speak Iraqi Arabic they carry on with their tribal structures with their unique dialects (Owens, 2001; Albirini, 2016).

2.1 The Role of Arabic Dialects

It is necessary to discuss language variation and its connection to ethnicity before considering the topic of the Arabic dialects and the social class. In Iraq, the ethnic groups tend to manifest themselves by the language in which each one of them adheres to its own linguistic standards (Ferguson, 1959; Albirini, 2016). The Arab speakers normally speak the Iraqi Arabic or the Standard Arabic, the Kurds speak the Kurdish, the Assyrians speak the Neo-Aramaic and the Turkmen speak the Turkmen (Archanjo & Arpacik, 2016; Yilmaz, 2018). Social class is also reflected in the language as Arabic dialects are one of the primary indicators of social status because they have particular grammatical characteristics. They are primarily of two forms, namely Standard Arabic, which is the official and written language, and a variety of regional dialects spoken in the region (Murad, 2014).



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2.2 Standard Arabic vs. Dialectal Arabic

Iraq has Arabic as the official language where most of the people speak it as their language. Kurdish is also another official language and it is spoken by approximately one-fifth of Iraqis. Such minority languages are Turkoman and Aramaic. Although the majority of the Arabic speakers speak the local dialect in their day-to-day life, they acquire Standard Arabic in school (Bernstein, 1971; Milroy and Milroy, 1992). The Standard Arabic is mainly used in written and formal contexts, and people who have received higher education are more proficient in it. It is regional and the dialects of northwestern and northern Iraq vary greatly compared to those of the south (Murad, 2014).

2.3 Regional Variations in Dialects

Geographic location of the language has a strong effect on the structure of the Iraqi Arabic, which leads to the dialectal differences in the regions, and it is of value to the dialectologists. Dialects spoken by the Iraqis are broadly categorized into three major groups, namely, (1) Baghdad and other Sunni dialects, (2) the dialects of the south, primarily the Najaf, Karbala and Basra dialects, and (3) the dialects of the north, the Shiite areas of Hillah, Babel and Dhi Qar. The dialects usually have their differences due to their place of origin and the influence of close Bedouin tribes (Murad, 2014). As an example, the dialect of the Hadithah is used in the western bank of the Euphrates, such as Anbar and some part of Ramadi. The Centre superimposes the southern dialect, primarily in Abu Ghraib and Mada'in. Dialects near Baghdad have characteristics not identical to the Iraqi Supra dialect. The dialect of Hillah flows northwards of eastern Baghdad as opposed to Mid Euphrates dialect. Kirkuk has a dialect that is categorized into a dialect of a northern Iraqi, which is influenced by the Turkish language, as well as Khuzestani language. The people of Iraq who speak Arabic language are faced with a lot of different dialects in their daily lives and they can sometimes identify the origin of a person by their speech (Murad, 2014). The social stratification determines the sustainability of Standard Arabic and other forms of Iraqi Arabic: urban forms have a better social status than rural forms. Moreover, Standard Arabic is more prestigious than any of the spoken Iraqi Arabic and is more widely used. Supradialects are more prestigious than the ones in the Centre-group. Dialects used in southern Iraq are classified within Supradialects, whereas that used by the elite of Baghdad is evidently within the Centre. The urban and Bedouin Arabic non-elite varieties of the language are culturally low-status and are commonly referred to as vulgar or corrupt (Haeri, 2000).

2.4 Influence of Kurdish Language

The Arabic language is predominant among the Arab people in Iraq. Kurdish is also the second popular language after the Arabic language because the second largest ethnic group,



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the Kurds are found in the neighboring nations. Kurdish language is strongly associated with the social level, ethnicity, and language identity. It is a special language branch that lies in the boundary of Northwestern and Southeastern Iranian language groups (Archanjo and Arpacik, 2016). There are both urban and rural varieties of the two major dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani with numerous sub-dialects. Also, other forms of the languages include Southern Kurdish (Pehlewani) and Gurani (Hawrami), which are also present in Iraq.

2.4.1. Kurdish Identity and Language

The language is considered to be among the most important cultural symbols of unity and identity since many Kurdish residents think that their language, rather than Arabic, makes them individuals, citizens in Iraq and Syria (Archanjo & Arpacik, 2016). Kurdish is a language of two official languages of Iraq, the other being Arabic. The other regional Kurdish dialects include Laki and Shabaki in central and northeast Iraq, but the main dialects are Sorani and Kurmanji.

2.4.2. Status and Dialects of the Kurds.

Most Kurmanci, Sorani and a little Kelhuri dialects are spoken by the Kurds. This prestige is different in each of the Kurdish dialects, as it is in most of the national languages. The most respected one is Sorani, but other dialects, including Kelhûrî are also the Kurdish identity forms (Archanjo & Arpacik, 2016). Change of identity or assimilation may be indicated by non-Kurdish dialects.

3. Language and Class Distinctions

The social classes and norms have been the traditional features of the Iraqi society that influence the use of language. Compared to the other regions that are adjacent to Iraq, the country has had a long history of civilization and other forms of using different languages among its people. The social stratification is based on tribal and religious affiliations, where the higher classes tend to adopt certain forms of language that implies and supports their status. The language is therefore a means of allocating social groups and social order (Bernstein, 1971; Milroy and Milroy, 1992). According to the sociological point of view, people sharing the same social status belong to social classes, and their lifestyle and behaviors are oriented to their statuses. Social psychology lays emphasis on the impact of social class on group organization and interaction (Murad, 2014). The differences between educated and uneducated population were especially clear in the Kingdom as well as the People Republic. The education level also had common social classes characteristics and language proved to be a crucial factor towards social identity and role in society.

3.1. Language Use in Urban vs. Rural Areas Learning the social characteristics of Iraq and their dispersion in the areas is crucial to federal, regional administrations, and citizens. These



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characteristics affect the culture and their expressions within the form of behaviors, language, and discourse thereby affecting the social identity. Language is connected to the social class and it establishes geographical and linguistic boundaries. English is widely spoken in urban areas as well as such minority languages as Armenian, Turkmen, or Circassian languages. English which is associated with the British colonization days is a symbol of power and prestige which is commonly used in business and government. Fulfilling the identity and social stability also contributes to minority languages, which determine the language boundaries (Haeri, 2000).

In Iraq, there is a difference in the use of language; there is the difference between the city and the rural areas and the various classes of the society. Given that factors like birth place, social status of parent, upbringing, and place of residence impact language preferences, the frequency of use of various languages or dialects, the language or dialect spoken and the attitude towards language and dialect spoken are influenced. There is a common knowledge that the speech patterns are affected by the social class. In Iraq, language is a significant social distance and inequality indicator, which can hinder a complete society integration, determined by the language or dialect a certain individual speaks (Murad, 2014).

3.2 Education and Language Proficiency

Language proficiency has obvious relations with the social class and educational background (Murad, 2014). Usually, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) skills increase with the duration of time spent in primary and secondary school. People who have more Quranic educational qualifications are more likely to have the best understanding of classic and formal Arabic. On the other hand, monolingual Iraqi Arabic speakers who are less educated generally have poor knowledge of literary Arabic. Also, fluency in English or French despite its connection with strong levels of MSA is rather a factor of the level of education of mothers and grandmothers than fathers (Bourdieu, 1991; Coupland, 2007).

3.3 Language and Ethnic Identity

The language situation in Iraq facilitates the existence of a society that is split in two major factions: the minority who lack Arabic language and are not Arab, and the Arabic speaking majority who do not speak other language. Another category of classifying people in every group is through the language they speak and their level of fluency. These language differences are acutely captured as linguistic difference where distinct dialects may demand an outsider to acquire new languages and social cues and negotiate social hierarchy since neighboring dialects may not necessarily have overlapping semantic contexts. Consequently, linguistic segregations contribute to maintaining ethnic and social separations, thus maintaining the differences between classes (Jaber, 2022; IOSR, 2018).



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3.3.1 Arabic Speakers vs. Minority Languages

Minority and ethnic groups, social classes and Arabic language. In Iraq, Arabic is the common language, and it is used to separate the people speaking the Arabic language and those speaking minor languages. Among Arabic speakers, three kinds of Arabic can be observed: Classical Arabic, or the Quranic language; Standard Arabic (SA), the one that is used in the media and in schools; and another variant of the Arabic language that is spoken by people and is called colloquial Iraqi Arabic (IA). In specific, IA shows significant variations in dialect that also reveals ethnicity and social status (Albirini, 2016).

The Iraqi Arabic (IA) language has three major dialects, including the urban and rural sedentary varieties, the Bedouin desert variety and the mountain variety of the language found in isolated communities in the north. There is an elite variant of the Mesopotamian IA, which is primarily socially-based. The fourth also exists in Haqqani dialect, which in turn has both rural and urban dialect, since Baghdad is the capital and largest city of Iraq. Both of these dialects are further subordinated by geographical area or social status. There is also a central Iraqi dialect which serves as a triglossic language between Standard Arabic (SA) and IA, primarily in the mass media (Dhyaa, S. M., 2020).

This has caused a lot of diglossia due to the many dialects. The written word is typically composed of Classical or Standard Arabic, but the verbal language is typically the Iraqi dialect or Kurdish amongst Kurds. The Iraqi Arabic does not have much prestige, much like other Arabic speaking countries, the local dialect is not highly valued as compared to Standard Arabic. As a result, Iraqi Arabic speakers tend to go to extremes to prevent the occurrence of the impression that they only speak their native dialect (Murad, 2014).

3.2.2 Case Studies of Ethnic Communities

Reduced number of upper-class families in Baghdad still have traditional language characteristics of the socio-economic elite, which means that they are not likely to survive the 1990s. The recent historical trends have made the rural people prefer local centers as opposed to the capital city in terms of social mobility. The Sulaimania dialect is the most prestigious among the Kurdish minority, and speakers of the Erbil and Duhok dialects are viewed as less successful (Edam, 2025; Hama Gharib, 2023).

3.2.3 Language in Professional Settings

Standard Arabic is used in speaking and writing in professional environment, in business and government offices (Murad, 2014). It also speaks English and French, and these are very common especially in the banking and private company where speaking these languages is a condition to be employed. Multilingualism increases the probability of social mobility and career growth. Both native and foreign language proficiency is an indicator of an educated



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background, contributes to the attainment of a higher social position as well as access to special positions, benefits, and privileges. Conversely, the use of regional dialects tends to confine people to low-status, mundane work and hold them in low social positions (Dhyaa, S. M. 2020).

3.2.4 Language of Business and Commerce

The most common languages in business in Iraq are Arabic, Kurmanji and in some cases English. The information provided by other respondents gives light into the utilization of language within the business world. A majority of the local and international deals are made in either Arabic or English, although Kurdish is widely used in the areas where it is common. The Kurdish speakers in business usually remain in the domestic markets that cater to the domestic markets. In case of international or national transactions, Arabic or English will be used. This format is also applicable to communication with the Iraqi or foreign nationals in the Kurdish region: multilingual Kurds, who work in foreign organisations, make business in Kurdish with the colleagues in the region, whereas with the representatives of Iraq or the foreign nations, they speak Arabic or English.

3.2.5 Language in Government and Administration

Government and administration spheres are mostly Arabic speaking, and a refined version of this language is used by the high classes of Iraqi society. This form also known as official Arabic has very little in common with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) but they are both very similar (Murad, 2014). Because of the frequent protest and unrest directed at the government institutions, the affiliation with the government has occasionally enabled this variety of language to become imagery of oppression in the mass mind.

The official Arabic is the main language used in the executive, the legislative and the judicial branch and in communication and in the internal documentation within the government ministries and other associated organizations. The honor given to the language is extended to both spoken and written forms and politicians and civil servants tend to prefer a formal style that at times involves the use of long-winded grammar and oratory. As an example, Iranians tend to speak to the Iraqi officials in Arabic at the times when there are no interpreters. Arabic is also common in diverse business areas of imports, exports, investments, and services in oil, electricity, communications, and telecommunications. Kurdish is also used in government buildings and businesses in the three northern provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya where it has been a language of administration since 2005. It is much more common in these areas and other parts of the territory controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) that governs these provinces with high autonomy of the federal authority. Both languages are common in the government offices.



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4. Social Media and Language Use

Social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and Tik Tok are all used by the majority of young Iraqis nowadays. They employ such websites to disseminate information, seek help, talk about politics and social problems, integrate regulatory and non regulatory themes, exchange personal ideas, talk to friends and family, express shock and argue about religious things. Their activity is based on the access to the Internet and electricity. They may post pictures and videos, express their own ideas, repost material, create own networks or comment on past events or facts. The social media assists them to establish their identities and social statuses, as well as a language variation and change tool. These sites have young people in Iraq who speak Arabic, English, Persian, and Kurdish (Murad, 2014).

4.1. Impact of social media on Language Variation

Social media has contributed to the adoption of new linguistic tendencies by the Iraqi youth who has developed a more adaptable linguistic environment (Murad, 2014). Given that every age group is involved in the process of messaging, commenting, and creating friend groups, all of which possess their own distinct linguistic features, some language characteristics have become trendy among an age group.

4.2. Youth Language Trends in Iraq

The official language in Iraq is Arabic though English is also spoken especially in government and business. The Arabic language uses its script and a large number of the Iraqi learn English in schools or during immersion. The variant of Arabic which is taught in schools, employed in the printed media and TV, and only used in formal occasions is the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Although MSA is considered to be harmonized among the Arab countries, the Arabic language of Iraqi is more preferable in daily communication (Al-Titinchy, N. A. I., 2025).

The Iraqi Arabic is a dialect continuum that still retains the aspects of the different times in history. Its dialects have numerous distinctive features which distinguish them among the adjacent Arabic dialects in the aspects of phonology, syntax, morphology and vocabulary. Such differences are usually based on the geographical position of the speaker and, in other situations, his or her social group. Migration of the Iraqis has turned the Arab societies in other nations into solidarity groups that have strong linguistic connections to Iraq and the returning population. Arabic is a vital bonding to the origins of the community like ethnicity or religion (Murad, 2014).

4.3. Language and Gender Dynamics

Gender plays a big role in speech production and variation of language, which closely regards the social status of the woman in the Iraqi society. The use of language changes based on social forces which influence speakers to conform to societal rules and conventions. The



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social identity, sex and gender influence the way people give names to themselves and other people with the names given reflecting cultural ideas regarding the appropriate social group. Language identifies people with certain social groups and communities, some communities are confined within gender boundaries whereas some are not. Women tend to use more inventive forms of language and use standard variants more frequently than men do. This gender variation shows the community understanding of the position of the male and female, with the females having a superior status and the symbolic norm. Men, on the contrary, tend to be linked to underprivileged status and non-standard language (Murad, 2014).

4.3.1 Gender Differences in Language Use

Gender differences also manifest in language variation currently in Iraq. As an example, women do not use some words and phrases, but their speech is a close one to those of men (Murad, 2014). Such language distinctions are linked with the low position of women. Both sexes concur that women ought to be cautious in their speech and not use words that are normally used by the male. Nevertheless, the female world in Iraq is mostly exclusive to that of Iraqi men with some few exceptions.

4.3.2 Language and Women's Social Status

The language choices of women are based on their social class, which is determined by their social status. The latter become less likely to embrace a prestigious dialect, which is usually caused by little educational opportunities and limited engagement in business activities, governmental, and social contexts that require the use of the formal language (Al-Titinchy, N. A. I., 2025).

5. Case Studies of Language and Class

In Iraq, linguistic use is a social marker, and in most cases, the difference is mixed up with ethnicity and socio-economic status. As an example, the term fluent Standard Arabic usually refers to people with privileged urban cultural backgrounds (Yilmaz and Yilmaz, 2018). These disparities are very high as in the stratified society of Iraq. A language attitudes study has shown that the Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkmen varieties have a ranking with the Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkmen being ranked higher based on social prestige (Murad, 2014). The vernacular is the Iraqi Arabic (referred to as the Mesopotamian Arabic), and the Kurdish (spoken by about 15-20 percent of the local population) is the much-respected minority language. Arabic is also the government language and it determines social mobility. Language can represent membership and identification because in this multi-ethnic environment, speakers can distinguish social and ethnic groups with certain linguistics. Such attitudes to specific language varieties are the reflections of the social position of their respective groups in the community network.



5.1. Case Study 1: Baghdad's Elite

The elites of Iraq also scored low on the language scale of Kiwi and coworkers. This population mainly includes people of upper-middle-class people, who address a mixed dialect of Baghdad Arabic, with a strong influence of Standard Arabia and Iraqi Arabic. Big cities like Baghdad, Basra and Mosul are likely to be well-educated and well-paid. The problem of diverse linguistic obstacles of the Iraqi population depending on the ethnicity, social status, religion, and language is the key focus of the work (Murad, 2014).

In the middle-class neighbourhoods of Iraq, ethnicity and language has significant role and creates a sense of identity. Such regions have high social indicators including group allegiance, gender, birth order, ethnicity, and religion like Baghdad. Many times, ethnic and linguistic boundaries coincide. Arabic, Kurdish and sometimes English are spoken in the workplace, where Arabic is more prevalent in professional settings. It is difficult to decipher Arabic when the speakers alternate between Arabic and Kurdish. The most important social division among the Iraqis is founded on social class that is closely related to education and economic status. Various social groups have their own particular ways of languages, which accentuate their cultural differences. Teams tend to have barriers to maintain their identity. In the case of Kurds, language and ethnicity are interconnected with the social classes: a semi-standard dialect of Kurdish spoken by the more prominent social groups is viewed as having a higher status, and tribal and rural languages are viewed as having a lower status (Archanjo and Arpacik, 2016).

5.2. Case Study 2: Rural Communities

The social class still is embedded in the difference in the Iraqi Arabic dialect itself, in rural areas of Iraq. The choice of features, the category of membership, and the manifestation of the attitudes related to these processes become pivotal social processes revealing how the social-class role of the Iraqi Arabic localizes under the socio-economic transition of Iraq since 2003. The variety and quantity of options offered by the Iraqi Arabic repertoire, which consists of localist, regionalist, and globalist ideologies, illustrate how the social class can be indicated by the language choice in the new spaces established by linguistic mobility (Archanjo and Arpacik, 2016).

5.3. Case Study 3: Kurdish Areas

The Iraqi languages are strongly related to social identities of the speakers and many times, are used as a representation of social class. By the time modern Iraqi state was created in 1921, the language of the overwhelming majority of people in the country was Arabic and it is so today. It is, however, a multilingual nation where the Arabic language serves as lingua franca, which is spoken by people of other languages, like Kurdish, Turkoman, Syriac, and



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Mandean (Archanjo & Arpacik, 2016). It is typical to place aside early-isolate assumptions, and to embark on an effective interlevel analysis of a multiplicity of interacting constraints, which then permits one to explore the appearance and co-existence of varied conservation laws within a single complex network. Even the two primary Kurdish dialects, Sorani and Kurmanji, are tightly connected with class divisions in Iraq: Kurds of Sorani dialect, which are concentrated in the southern and eastern regions of the Iraqi Kurdistan, are associated with the rural poor, whereas Kurmanji is the language of the urban middle classes of northern Iraqi Kurdistan, and a great part of the Kurdish diaspora (Archanjo & Arpacik, 2016). Kurdish of north Iraq is also an idioma di ofusione or prestige language as compared to Sorani dialect (Ahmad, 2025).

6. Language Policy and Planning in Iraq

This is because the presence of some conflicting interests has not facilitated the development of a consensus over the language policy of Iraq and therefore, unifying the national language plan is a long term objective. The goal of language planning in a multilingual society is to ensure that the common functions are fostered and minority languages are preserved so that conflicts associated with the perceived threat can be prevented. At the moment, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar differences are evident and it is easy to tell whether the person has educational and socio-economic background or not. Most jobs are usually based on the ability to speak either Standard Arabic or Kurdish. Social context also another factor that determines the degree of dialect acceptance or repression simply because it is strongly associated with the assimilation expectations (Murad, 2014).

6.1. Government Language Policies

Though the impact of language policies on social strata may not be as evident, the government regulations on the usage of language have an influence on social differences, which consequently influence attitudes to some languages and social hierarchy. The policies of Iraq define the Arabic and Kurdish languages as the official languages: Arabic is the national language and Kurdish is the language of the Iraqi Kurdistan (Ahmad, 2025). Although both are official, the population does not have equal access and command over these languages. They are targeting the creation of formal Arabic and Kurdish, yet the application of these policies is done in a framework of unequal access to language (Archanjo & Arpacik, 2016).

6.2. Impact of Language Policies on Social Class

The Iraqi language policies are officially Arabic, which is the national language in the country, and no Kurdish language should be used in any official or other public place. These laws have a considerable influence on the Iraqi society, which makes even the socio-linguistic divisions more established all over the country. As the language of power, Arabic takes



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control over all spheres of political and cultural life; speaking this language is thus a precondition of getting to the upper ranks of the Iraqi society. In particular, Standard Arabic is especially prestigious and is primarily utilized in academic, formal and literary usage. On the other hand, the Kurdish people still focus on language planning and the quest to gain official status, and oppose the action of the state to enforce Arabic policies and restrict the access of the Kurdish people to the public sphere. In order to preserve national cohesion and counter ethnic separatism, the state recognizes that Kurdish is used only in the Kurdistan provinces with a limited cultural and linguistic reach (Jaber, 2022).

6.3 Language and National Identity: Cultural Identity and Language

Language is used in dual way in the life of Iraqi nation both as a symbol of a common identity and as an object of social division and a basis of political confrontation. It is a very important identifying feature of class, ethnicity, and national identity among other demographic and sociolinguistic variables.

In the heterogeneous majority of Arabs, social classes are obviously defined by language. The difference is mostly between Standard Arabic (SA) that is linked with high culture, literature, religion, formal speeches and media and the everyday dialects spoken by communities. The urbanized Arabic (IA) is the prestige of the dialects that separates the elite and the low-end working groups. There are also socio-economic differences in the major IA varieties of Iraq, Baghdad, Mosul and Basra (Murad, 2014). Urban dialects are important social markers. Although the Aramaic language is treasured among the Assyrians, to the rest of the world, the Aramaic language is not spoken with the same honor. When dialects such as Moslawi are applied in an Aramaic context, their social status changes. Kurdish on the other hand is placed in another category: it forms one of the major languages of Iraq, along with Arabic, and Kurdish nationals in Iraq are mainly upper-class landlords or Béja. Kurmanji (in the north) and Sorani (in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil) are broadly considered to belong to the higher social classes of Iraq, whereas Kurds who speak Kirmanji and Laki (south) are mainly of the working class. The country is also characterized by the language that reflects its key ethnic groups with the Kurdish and Turkmen minorities that put another twist in the linguistic picture. The Kurdish, Turkish and other Arabic dialects are associated with a certain ethnic identity, which serves as a centrifugal force. These identities create cohesion in the community. Dialects are ethnicity and religion indicators. Language patterns are also very much representative of social inequalities with a close reference to the northsouth disparities and urban rural variations. They operate in an intricate network of cultural and ethnic appeals which create prestige and respect regimes within the Iraqi communities (Archanjo and Arpacik, 2016).



Language is considered one of the strongest indicators of social status and culture all over the world, and in Iraq, it is no exception. Various profiles and social economic backgrounds in this nation dictate different cultural identities resulting in this cultural identity shaping linguistic behaviors, practices, and norms. The role of languages, dialect, and registers in identity formation is complicated due to the work of structure and agency, and the complex interdependence between language and social stratification needs to be emphasized (Murad, 2014).

There are many types of language in Iraq, and they are various dialects, accents. Most of the people speak the Iraqi dialect, which is also called the Iraqi Arabic, which is used in most of the daily conversations. There is a clear divergence between the variations of languages with a high occurrence of code-switching in Standard Arabic and Iraqi Arabic. The Iraqi dialect is in general informal and Formal Standard Arabic is more common in official use. The culture identity is also the mandatory of the Iraqi dialect, as it affects the level of Standard Arabic and application of English words and phrases (Archanjo and Arpacik, 2016).

1. Upper/middle-class youth:

Such examples are widespread with professors, professionals, and elites of universities in Baghdad, as well as other large cities. They speak Standard Arabic, English borrowings and address forms often.

اني راح اسوي انترفيو (Ānī rāh asawī interview) - *I am going to do an interview.*

قلبي وياك (my heart is with you)

"lecture?" قصير بعد ال meeting أستاذ، ممكن تعمل لنا"
Professor, could we have a brief meeting after the lecture?

→ Formal tone, English insertions, used by educated urban speakers.

"الدولي الأسبوع الجاي؟" conference حضرتك موجود في ال"
Will you attend the international conference next week?

→ Politeness strategies + English term "conference" = academic upper-class context.

"دكتور شفقت ال deadline قبل ال presentation"
Doctor, have you reviewed the presentation before the deadline?

- Indicates higher education and English borrowing.

2. Middle-Class / Semi-Urban Examples

Used by government employees, shop owners, and university students. Shows Baghdadi features and moderate English mixing.

"لو بعد؟" website نزل عال exams أستاذ، الجدول الجديد لل"

Professor, has the new exam schedule been uploaded to the website yet?

→ Middle-class, educated, with light English integration.



"هواي تعبانين من هذي الأسعار، بس ماكو غير نتحمل"

We are really suffering from these prices, but we have no choice but to bear it.

→ Expresses middle-class frustration in economic contexts.

"إذا تشتري من عندنا بالجملة نحسبك السعر أرخص"

If you purchase from us in bulk, we offer a discount.

→ Typical middle-class business context.

(صباح الخير أستاذ فارس) *Good morning, Professor Fares.*

3. Working-Class / Rural Examples

Common among rural populations, traditional communities, and lower-income groups.

Characterized by phonological shifts and the absence of English terms.

"أنت وين كنت البارحة؟"

Where were you yesterday?

→ /k/ → [ʃ] "چ" is a strong southern/rural marker.

"أبو حسين، اليوم نروح للحقل نشغل من الفجر"

Abu Hussein, today we will go to the field and work from dawn.

→ Nicknaming system (Abu Hussein) = rural kinship-based identity.

"حجي، هاي البضاعة رخيصة، ترى ماكو أرخص من هيجي"

Hajji, this item is cheap; you will not find a better price.

→ Marketplace speech, typical of working-class urban or rural sellers.

"تره إحنا ما عدنا كهرباء من يومين"

We have not had electricity for two days.

→ Working-class frustration; direct, colloquial structure.

(صباح الخير حجي) *Good morning, Hajji.*

Working class greetings.

4. Social Class Markers in Address Forms

No.	Arabic Example	English Meaning	Social Class Indicator
1	"دكتور علي"	Dr. Ali	Upper-class, educated
2	"أستاذ محمد"	Professor Mohammed	Upper-class/academic
3	"حجي أبو أحمد"	Hajji Abu Ahmed	Working-class, traditional
4	"أبو مصطفى"	Father of Mustafa	Rural, kinship-based

5. Social Media Examples (Youth Speech)

One of the few words that are predominantly used by Tik Tok and Instagram influencers among younger Iraqis, particularly Baghdad, are English words as the means to express prestige and modernity.



" عن يومي بالجامعة vlog سويتاكم
I made a vlog about my day at the university.

→ Youth, middle/upper-class, digitally influenced.

" كلش غالية، مو أي واحد يلبسها brand تره هاي الـ
This brand is very expensive; not everyone can afford it.

→ Highlights fashion-based class distinction.

6.4. Language as a Unifying Factor

Language plays a very important role in the Iraqi society. It is one of the major indicators of social class and is used through individual sophistication. The chosen forms of language and its varieties provide information about the belonging of a person to the stratified social hierarchy in the city. Various types of speech are related to different social classes and ethnic groups. The official language in Iraq is the Standard Arabic (SA), and the only major spoken dialects are the Iraqi Arabic (IA) and the Kurdish. There are also several native minority languages that can be found throughout the country. In urban centers and the southern part in particular, Arabic is the most popular lingua franca. The largest ethnic minority is Kurds who speak their language in the North such as Sinjar, Erbil or even in Mosul (Murad, 2014). The Arabic dialects of Iraq are typically divided into larger groups of colloquial Arabic dialects of the Near East and the Arabian Peninsula, and have four major regional dialects: Mosul, Baghdad, Basra and the South. The boundary of this division is approximately the boundaries of the old Ottoman provinces of Iraq before the World War I (Jaber, R.S., 2022).

6.5 Language Conflicts and Social Division

The book *Life in Iraq* by Denham and Lobeck depicts how the language disparity in Iraq is used to show the social class. The language they use has also created barriers between speakers of the Standard Arabic and those speaking of colloquial forms of the Arabic language as well as between Kurdish speakers who speak Sorani and Kurmanji. Normally, it is only the educated Iraqis who understand both Standard Arabic and a vernacular. These dialects are also regionally different such that the northern cities such as Mosul, have a different sub-dialect than the southern cities such as Basra. Moreover, the members of the tribe cannot understand an urban form of Arabic, which is a different dialect. As the sub-dialectal differences have strong connection with the geographical origin, the language differences are used as the markers of the social and regional origin (Coupland, 2007).

Understandably, language reflects social divisions in the country. The studies on contemporary Arab women by Koji Watanabe reveal that the level of formality or informality in use of language is associated with the status of a woman in the society. Hassan Abdollah Kaseb examines the role of the differences in social classes in language variation in Najaf.



Abdulkareem Abubakir investigates the relationship between social identity and the language styles on the social media platform the facebook in Iraq (Yilmaz, B. 2018).

Conclusion

Language has also had a significant impact on the society of Iraq with the leaders, poets and citizens of the nation articulating social and political identities using language. The standard arabic and local dialects bring out dissimilarity between the urban, rural and social groups. Arabic came to be associated with Arab nationalism and identity of Iraq as the power of Ottoman Turkish and British faded. In Iraq, language is not just a form of communication, it is a way of expressing social status and culture. Differences between Standard Arabic, Iraqi dialects, Kurdish and the minority languages relate linguistic activities to education, ethnicity, urban-rural boundaries and socio-economic backgrounds. Standard Arabic means prestige, local Arabic dialects mean local identity, and minority languages mean ethnicity. Multilingualism signifies the upward mobility and entry into the elites. The paper also shows the role that gender and social media have played in transforming the way people speak with women and youths taking up new types of speech that are transforming the social hierarchies. Although diverse, language reveals inequalities and division of classes but, at the same time, is a national glue. The identification of these trends underscores the relevance of the language policy, education, and culture to foster social cohesion in Iraq.

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