

Attitudes Toward the Saudi Southern Dialect: A Sociolinguistic Investigation

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Abstract: This study examined attitudes toward the Southern dialect among speakers from the southern region who live in or visit Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The study sample consists of 51 southerners participants, who were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their attitudes towards the Southern dialect. This study also investigated the use of the southern dialect among southerners who live in Jeddah or have contact with the Jeddah dialect (Hijazi). The findings showed that southerners hold significantly positive attitudes towards their Southern dialect and there was a significant positive correlation between attitudes towards the Southern dialect and its reported use.

Key words: Attitudes • Southern dialect • Saudi Arabia • Hijazi • Jeddah

INTRODUCTION

In situations of linguistic contact or cross-linguistic communication, the linguistic attitudes of the speakers are strong indicators of how they will proceed in that setting. Language attitudes have been a key factor determining the language/dialect presence or absent in one's linguistics repertoire which have been witnessed in several speech communities as well as in foreign language contexts [1- 3]. Regarding language/dialect attitudes studies among Saudi speech communities, there is a lack of research regarding members of southern speech communities who move from their hometowns to large cities. The purpose of this recent study is to address this gap, in investigating linguistic attitudes among southerners who come into contact with the Jeddah dialect (Hijazi). In order to do so, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- Are there positive attitudes towards the Southern dialect among southern speakers?
- Is there a correlation between the attitudes of southern speakers and the level of usage they report?
- Do speakers born in Jeddah report less favourable attitudes towards and less usage of, the Southern dialect?

Linguistics Attitudes: Many researchers have offered definitions of language attitudes. According to Ryan *et al.*[4] for instance, language attitudes can be defined as “any effective, cognitive, or behavioural index of evaluative reaction towards different language varieties and towards their speakers” (p. 7). Obviously, language attitudes differ from attitudes in general in that they are only concerned with languages or varieties of these languages. In a sense, language attitudes motivate individuals to behave in a certain way to promote linguistic diversity. Linguistic norms, varieties, styles and various facets of language—including grammar, dialects, accents, or lexical terms—could all spark the development of certain beliefs, values, or opinions about a speaker [5-6].

Scholars agree that sociolinguistic attitudes towards language are complex and multifaceted. According to Fasold [7], studies on language attitudes may look at attitudes towards whole languages, varieties of languages, or dialects. In these types of studies, participants rate whether they believe a given language is, for example, ‘rich’, ‘poor’, ‘beautiful’, or ‘ugly’,

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in order to uncover correlations between a dominant group's dialect and its solidarity and to show the existing attitudes and ideology in a society regarding varieties of languages, including how different dialects are classified by that society. Ryan *et al* [4], suggested that the dialect of the more powerful group would be considered the correct or prestigious form, whereas the minority dialect would be marked as less powerful and less prestigious.

Language Attitudes,accommodation and Dialect Shift: Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) implies that while interacting speakers adjust their own speech towards (convergence) or away (divergence) from their interlocutors' speech. [8-12]. In these situations, attitudes towards dialects play an important role in how speakers make these accommodations in their own speech. Many researchers have found that on processes of linguistic accommodation, attitudes influence speakers speech [13,14] In the Arabic-speaking world, research has shown that speakers with stigmatized dialects are more likely to shift their speech towards Modern Standard Arabic in accommodation settings [15]. Although the speakers in [16], study were converging towards the standard form of Arabic, not any other existing dialect, Holes' findings provide an example clarifying how speakers of a stigmatized or less prestigious dialect might opt to converge towards a more favourable variety.

On the other hand, dialect shift refers to the interaction of two or more dialects or languages within a speech community. More specifically, language contact usually involves the interaction of non-mutually intelligible languages; that is, languages with differences in phonology, syntax, or lexicon, such as Arabic and English [17]. Previous research has found that in language or dialect contact scenarios, the ways in which certain speakers value their native dialect or the stigmatization of regional varieties both have a major impact on their daily linguistic choices. [1,15,18]. In other words, how a variety is labelled by society might influence its perception among speakers, contributing to a shift caused by different social factors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants in the Study: The participants in this study were 51 male and female southern Saudi Arabians who were living in or visiting Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. (see table 1)The participants were approached using a 'friend of a friend' method of introduction [19],

Table 1: Southern participants divided by age and gender

Age	F	M	Total
18-29	11	12	23
30-39	8	8	16
40-49	4	4	8
50+	2	2	4
Total			51

Research Design: Due to limitations on time and resources, this study was conducted using a questionnaire The questionnaire is described in detail in the following sections.

Questionnaire Content: The questionnaire was issued together with a consent form and a covering letter explaining the purpose of the study, aim of the research and the security of the information collected in order to encourage a high rate of response. It was composed of three sections. Section 1 had 15 Likert scale items regarding attitudes towards the southern dialect. Section 2 of the questionnaire attempted to gather information about the subjects' usage of their original dialect. The final section, Section 3, served to collect demographic information on the subjects

Data Analysis Procedure: Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. First, for the items concerning attitudes, there were items with ‘-southern dialect’ tendencies, in which an agreement to those items show unfavourable attitude towards Southern dialect. Then, they were recorded in reverse order (1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) so that the higher the score, the more favourable the attitude indicated. Then, in order to establish whether there was a correlation between the attitudes of southerners and their reported usage of the Southern dialect, the Spearman correlation test was used. Lastly, because of the unequal sample sizes, Welch’s *t*-test was used instead of the Student *t*-test to establish whether respondents who were born in Jeddah expressed less positive attitudes and less usage of the Southern dialect.

RESULTS

Southerners’ Attitudes Towards the Southern Dialect

Items Analysis: As shown in Table 5 below, a one-sample *t*-test was used to determine respondents’ attitudes towards the Southern dialect. The test was used for each item and for the cumulative attitudes regarding the Southern dialect. Due to the chance of producing false scores by conducting many *t*-tests, the researcher focused on the aggregate *t*-test result for all items. Items with ‘-southern dialect’ tendencies were recoded so that higher scores would correspond to more favourable attitudes. The results of the test showed that items 1, 12, 6, 13, 5, 14, 15, 9 and 4 met significance level. Overall, the results for the cumulative attitudes suggest that there is a significantly positive attitude towards the Southern dialect among southerners, $t(51) = 4.813, p < .001$. This indicates that the southerners showed loyalty to their own original dialect, even in situations of contact with other dialects; they still had strong feelings of pride about their roots and background, which may be projected onto their preferences and daily linguistic practices.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for items concerning attitudes towards the southern dialect among southerners (Ranked from highest to lowest)

Rank	No.	Items	Mean	Standard deviation	t (51)	P
1	1	The Southern dialect is rich in vocabulary from Standard Arabic.	4.29	0.965	9.574	.000**
2	12	It is important to learn and speak my original dialect.	3.90	1.024	6.285	.000
3	6 ^a	When I’m in Jeddah, I change my dialect to white dialect.	3.74	1.163	4.573	.000**
4	13	I feel that most of my relatives use their original dialect.	3.67	1.104	4.438	.000**
5	5	Southern dialect is an attractive dialect.	3.65	1.180	3.915	.000**
6	14	I feel that most of my southern acquaintances use their original dialect.	3.60	1.133	3.832	.000**
7	15	My way of speaking is similar to how my parents and grandparents speak.	3.55	1.026	3.822	.000**
8	9	Southerners use their dialect in every region.	3.33	.909	2.618	.012*
9	11	Most southerners do not face difficulties in expressing themselves, when speaking in southern dialect with non-southerners.	3.12	1.143	.735	.466
10	3	It is easy to understand the southern dialect and its vocabulary.	3.09	1.118	.524	.534
11	2	I prefer using my dialect when speaking with non-southerners.	3.08	1.128	.496	.622
12	8	The southern dialect is the clearest dialect in Saudi Arabia.	3.00	1.039	.000	1.000
12	10	I do not face difficulties in expressing myself, when speaking in the southern dialect with non-southerners.	3.00	1.200	.000	1.000
14	7 ^a	I switch my southern vocabulary with the equivalent from any other dialect.	2.83	1.126	-1.119	.268
15	4 ^a	When I’m in Jeddah, I change my dialect to Hijazi.	2.63	1.112	-2.391	.021*
All items			3.36	0.541	4.813	.000**

^aRecoding applied.

* $p < 0.05$? ** $p < 0.0$

Linguistic Practices of the Southern Dialect Reported by Southern Respondents

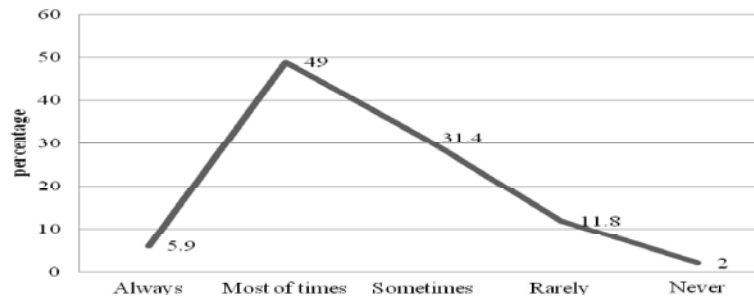


Fig. 2: The majority of participants reported using the southern dialect most of the times or sometimes

As shown in Figure 2, the southern participants reported neither categorical nor rare use of their southern dialect in general. This means that their overall reported usage is not clearly define here. The following sections provide a deeper examination of southerners’ reported usage patterns.

Dialect Usage Among Different Groups

Overall Results: As shown in Table 9, southern speakers reported that they mostly used their dialect with their parents, relatives, siblings, grandparents, spouses, friends and children, with mean scores ranging from 4.41 to 3.20. This suggests that southerners are more likely to use their original dialect with people with whom they share closer or more intimate relations. In contrast, respondents reported that they were less likely to use their dialect when communicating with strangers, female shopkeepers/cashiers, male shopkeepers/cashiers and colleagues, with mean scores ranging from 2.66 to 2.47. The following discussion investigates the link between attitudes towards the dialect and its usage.

Table 9: Results of reported usage of southern dialect with several people as reported by respondents ranking from highest to lowest

Rank	No.	Persons	Mean	Standard deviation
1	4	Grandparents	4.41	.81
2	1	Parents	4.27	.94
3	2	Spouse	4.18	0.94
4	5	Siblings	4.17	0.99
5	6	Relatives	3.96	1.058
6	3	Kids	3.20	1.15
7	7	Friends	3.07	1.030
8	11	Colleagues	2.66	1.31
9	9	Female shopkeepers/cashiers	2.63	1.35
9	8	Strangers	2.63	1.232
10	11	Male Shopkeepers/cashiers	2.47	1.41

Correlation Between Attitude Towards the Dialect and Usage: Table 10 shows the Spearman correlation figures between respondents’ reported attitudes to the Southern dialect and its reported usage. The findings of the test showed that a significantly positive correlation usage of it ($p < 0.05$). This means that how participants view their southern dialect has a major impact on their reported daily linguistic practices. In other words, the favourable attitudes of southerners towards the Southern dialect have resulted in an increased presence of the southern dialect as reported by the participants. Table 10 addresses whether the birthplace of respondents had a role in the attitudes towards and reported usage of, the Southern dialect.

Table 10: Correlation matrix between southerners' attitudes towards southern dialect and their reported usage of it

Attitudes of Southern Speakers	Statistic	Usage of the dialect
	Spearman rank correlation	0.509
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000 **
	N	51

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Differences in Attitudes and Reported Usage of the Southern Dialect by Respondents' Birth Place: Table 11 illustrates how the birthplace of participants affected their attitudes and reported usage of the dialect. Welch's *t*-test was used to see whether speakers who were born in Jeddah reported less favourable attitudes towards the Southern dialect and less frequent usage than those born in the southern region. The findings of the test show little difference in the mean scores regarding attitudes towards the southern dialect for both groups: means were 3.16 for those born in Jeddah and 3.43 for those born in the southern region, with no significant difference between the two groups, $t(51) = -1.551, p > .005$. From these figures it is not possible to say that those born in Jeddah have significantly less positive attitudes towards the Southern dialect. This indicates that both groups have a strong sense of identity and pride in their heritage dialect.

In terms of reported usage of the dialect, respondents who were born in Jeddah reported lower levels of usage of the southern dialect (mean = 2.36) than those born in the southern region (mean = 3.45). Based on the results, there was a significant difference in the reported usage of the Southern dialect between the two groups, $t(51) = -3.700, p < 0.05$. This reveals, based on the reported usage by southerners, that participants born in Jeddah are less likely to use their Southern dialect than those born in the southern region. Again, this is likely due to increased exposure to the host dialect (Hijazi dialect) and less contact with the original Southern dialect, resulting in lower reported levels of usage of the Southern dialect; for instance, it might only be used in communication with family members or close friends.

Table 11: Attitudes and reported usage of both groups born in Jeddah and in the southern region

	Birthplace	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	P
Favourable attitudes towards southern dialect	Jeddah	12	3.16	0.473	-1.551	0.127
	South	39	3.43	0.549		
Usage of southern dialect	Jeddah	12	2.36	0.832	-3.700	0.001*
	South	39	3.45	0.908		

* $p < 0.05$?

** $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Research Question 1: *Are there positive attitudes towards the southern dialect among southern speakers?*

The findings of this research indicate that southerners view their Southern dialect in a positive light. As shown by the results of the one-sample *t*-test, there was a highly significant finding of favourable attitudes towards the southern dialect among southerners ($p < .001$). The motives behind this outcome were discovered in examining the participants' responses on the open-ended questions. It was found that the southern dialect is a strong identity marker for southern speakers when they come into contact with the Hijazi dialect and this reinforces the findings of Dyers [20]. As an insider of the Southern community, it is worth to mention that the current situation of the Southern region speakers have changed from what it used to be in the past. Now we find them very proud of their background and dialect. This is all due to the spread of civilized life in the southern region. From these findings, we can generalize that southern speakers strongly value their heritage, including the dialect of their origin. It can also be noted that southern speakers are proud and linguistically secure about their dialect due to the fact that it is closer to Standard Arabic and has many lexical terms derived from Standard Arabic.

Research Question 3: *Is there a correlation between the attitudes of southern speakers and the level of usage they are reporting on?*

The results of the correlation test uncovered a highly significant positive correlation between overall attitudes towards the southern dialect and reported usage of it. In this sense, these findings demonstrate that attitudes guide southerners' linguistic behaviours and they are found to be strong predictors of southern speakers' reported usage of the southern dialect. It can be observed that the ways in which people view their way of speech and their feelings about it influence their linguistic choices, either in maintaining their speech or in shifting it towards other styles in the contact context. This duplicates the findings of Tawalbeh *et al.* [21], where there were found a link between the positive attitude towards Arabic and the usage of it.

In addition, the findings of the present study have uncovered usage patterns regarding the southern dialect, where a strong link was found between favourable attitudes and reported usage of the southern dialect. Similarly to the results of this study [13], found that the favourable attitudes of speakers from El Salvador and Honduras lead them to diverge in their interactions with other Spanish speakers. However, a deeper examination of the findings of the present study uncovers that the reported levels of usage of the southern dialect varied based on the type of relationship speakers had with their interlocutors. Here, it can be observed that although southerners reported more usage of their southern dialect in general, when it came to people with whom they had less intimate connections, they reported that they used the southern dialect less than they did with their close social networks, including their families and friends. This implies that, although southerners demonstrate positive attitudes towards their southern dialect and these correlate positively with their reported usage, yet, when they are communicating with those who are less familiar with the southern dialect and its linguistic features, southerners tend use the dialect less often. This may be due to a variety of factors; in particular, the need to avoid being misunderstood, or simply to deliver their message clearly without the need to repeat. In conclusion, if speakers have positive attitudes towards their heritage dialect, consequently they will exhibit a higher frequency of dialect features in their linguistic repertoires.

Research Question 4: *Do speakers born in Jeddah have less favourable attitudes towards and less usage of, the southern dialect?*

The results reveal no significant difference in attitude towards the southern dialect between southern participants born in Jeddah and the southern region. This can be attributed to the fact that the southern dialect is a strong identity marker for our respondents, even for Jeddah-born participants who show no less favourable attitudes than those who were born in the southern region. In terms of reported usage, there were striking differences between the two groups. The results show that the participants born in Jeddah reported less usage of the southern dialect than those born in the south. Because of this similarity with those born in the southern region regarding their view of their heritage dialect, it would normally be predicted that the participants born in Jeddah would behave similarly to the other group. This further highlights the impact of contact with speakers of the other dialect. It can be observed here how daily contact with the host dialect might influence the level of usage reported by southerners' participants.

In conclusion, this study is one of the few that has examined Saudi southern speakers' attitudes towards their heritage dialect and their reported usage of it when they come into contact with other dialects in the region—in this case, the Jeddah dialect. This study offers insight into the southern speech community in Jeddah. This examination has revealed that the southern dialect is an identity marker for southerners, a fact that is reflected in their positive attitudes towards and reported usage of the dialect.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research: Due to limitations on time and resources, the present research used only direct methods for measuring dialect attitudes. In order to produce comparable findings; future research should include indirect methods for capturing attitudes regarding the southern dialect, such as matched guise tests or observation. Another limitation this research faced is in its sample; it was difficult to find a representative number of informants,

especially in the older age groups. Recommendation for future studies is to observe participants daily usage of their dialect in everyday life situations. Despite these limitations, this present study provides valuable insights into the study of dialect attitudes in Saudi Arabia, specifically towards Southern dialect.

Most importantly, this research has raised several questions to be investigated in future research concerning the southern Saudi dialect. It will be interesting to examine the attitudes of other Saudi regions towards the southern dialect. One aspect that remains to be explored is how non-southerners view the speakers of the southern dialect. Finally, in the middle of conducting this research, a local sketch comedy show [22], has portrayed a southern speaker, specifically speaking an Asiri speaker. Afterwards, the hashtags *#سلفي* (# selfie) and *#البيجة_الجنوبية* (# southern_dialect) became the two top on Saudi trend on twitter. The responses vary; some thought the dialect of the actor was unauthentic presentation of the southern dialect, others were praising the southern dialect history and others were negatively harsh on the dialect and sometimes on the speakers themselves. It will be interesting for future research to analysis these feedbacks.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work could not come to light without the help and support of my passionate supervisor Dr. Vineeta Chand.

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