

*PRAGMATICS AND CULTURAL INTERPRETATION
IN SPOKEN ARABIC:
FEEDBACK AS A DISCOURSE PHENOMENON*

البراغماتية والتفسيرات الثقافية في العربية المنطوقة: الإستجابة
كظاهرة تحليلية

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TO THE

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER AS A DOCTORAL DEGREE OF
PHILOSOPHY IN,
SOCIOLINGUISTICS & SPOKEN ARABIC LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

'In the Name of God, Most Gracious Most Merciful'

«يا أيها الذين آمنوا إنا خلقناكم من ذكر وإنثى وجعلناكم شعوبا وقبائل لتعارفوا»
الحجرات

صدق الله العظيم

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Submitted by: ABDULLA^h Y. SAMARA^h

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Abstract

This study deals with linguistic feedback (see Wiener/48, Fries/52 and Allwood/93) which falls within the domain of *cultural description*. Feedback can informally be described like this: when a *speaker* performs a linguistic action which requires a linguistic response from a *receiver*, the given response has an important function for the speaker. In the ideal case, the listener's response gives information to the speaker that the listener has perceived and understood the communicated content. However, the receiver can also signal that he/she has failed to hear or understand what has been said. As well as that, the receiver can ignore the speaker's action and initiate other actions or get involved in a different conversation. It has been noted, in particular, that if a speaker performs an action that requires a response, it is less certain whether both the speaker's performance and the receiver's responses will succeed. When a receiver does not give a coherent or clear response, then the sender sees that the receiver is experiencing some problem(s) that deserves to be dealt with. For this reason, there might be several alternatives which the sender can initiate, e.g., to abandon the attempt to get the listener's feedback, to misinterpret the answer, or to take the listener's response into account.

By increasing awareness of the significance of feedback, we may hope to understand better problems in communication between cultures. The present study focuses on verbal feedback actions and discusses briefly non-verbal feedback actions.

The following aspects are central in the study:

I) Feedback expressions in spoken Arabic:

- Feedback turns and non-feedback turns. This subsection will include the following items: feedback consisting of a one-word utterance, complex feedback consisting of an utterance of more than one word, eliciting feedback, giving and eliciting feedback, self-feedback and non-feedback turns

II) The semantic and pragmatic analysis of feedback actions:

- Criteria for deciding the function of feedback

III) Studies of six kinds of conversation and one form of communication, which give examples of feedback in spoken Arabic.

This thesis deals also with sociolinguistic feedback and sociolinguistic variations will be described for each individual in conversation. These variations will be described with the help of tables and several selected examples from the data. These examples have to be connected with the main topic (feedback) and related to each social variant.

A number of theoretical assumptions about FB and related studies which fall under the same linguistic phenomenon i.e., human response, and possibly have universal relevance, are presented. The need for further empirical research is expressed. The present work is divided into six chapters and based on live conversations recorded in Jeddah (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

Preface

I would like to express my great appreciation to Exeter University that gave me the opportunity to go on with my higher education after finishing my M.Phil degree in Sweden in June 2002.

First of all I wish to thank Professor Adrian J. Gully, my main guide and supervisor, whose knowledge of linguistics has been a constant source of inspiration for me. I am grateful for his patience and understanding since our first contact some years ago, as well as for his patience in reading the whole thesis. His instructions taught me several necessary things, for example, the necessity of maintaining a sceptical attitude when undertaking scientific research.

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- I) English proofreader/s
- II) Data participants and external examiner
- III) Family and friends
- IV) Financial supporters, and
- V) My previous institute and teachers in Sweden

- John Stewart and Rebecca Masterton. John is my friend and colleague, who undertook all the initial proof-readings and the correction of my English and suggested some improvements of the text. I also have to admit that without Rebecca's help, positive support and suggestions, in different degrees, my thesis would never have been finished.

- Data, Participants, and Opponent. I am also much obliged to Allwood, Nivre and Ahlsén, Lyons, Schiffrin and Levinson, among others, whose data has been helpful in the present task; and to the participants who have played an important part in the empirical research.

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Transcription, Transliteration and Translation

The recorded conversations have been transcribed, transliterated, and (partly) translated into English in order to facilitate the analysis and presentation of data. All feedback actions throughout this thesis, in the (Latin) transcription and its English translation, appear in bold face. In subsection 3.1.3, two selected examples from the data conversations are demonstrated to show how these main steps have been followed.

Transcription

The recorded conversations were first of all transcribed into written Arabic, following the main rules of transcription described by Nivre (1995), and Sofkova and Larsson (1995). Apart from a header giving background information about the recording, a transcription consists of two types of lines:

Speech lines: Speech lines begin with '\$' followed by one or more capital letters identifying the speaker.

Comment lines: Comment lines start with the symbol '@' and contain comments enclosed in angle brackets <>.

In speech lines, the speech of a participant is transcribed using modified standard orthography. In addition, the following symbols are used:

CAPITALS Used for emphatic or contrastive stress.

: Used to mark lengthening of continuants.

(speech) Uncertain speech is enclosed in parentheses.

(...) Unintelligible speech is transcribed as three dots in parentheses.

/ Short pause= 1 second

// Long pause= 2 seconds

/// Longer pause= 3 or more seconds

0.4 The longest pause= 4 or more seconds

[speech] Overlap; speech enclosed in indexed brackets is simultaneous with everything else enclosed in brackets with the same index.

[phonetic speech] All the Arabic examples when transliterated are represented phonetically between these brackets

+ Interruption, used to indicate a partly pronounced word, or when a speaker pauses, etc. within a word.

/ High intonation
\ Fall or low intonation

Additional List of the Important Symbols and Abbreviations:

A.D.= Anno Domini (according to the Christian calendar)
A.H.= After Hijra ('immigration') (according to the Islamic calendar)
C.A.= Classical Arabic
S.A.= Spoken Arabic
FB = Feedback
F (p) = Following page
P: (x) = Page (x)
[] = Half square parentheses enclose the phonetic reading.
' ' = Word translated into English
< > = Interrupted action during the conversation.
The codes used are: affir= affirmative, conf= confirmation, repet= repetition, accep= acceptance, rejec= rejection, agree= agreement, corr= correction, under= understanding, perc= perception, inter= interrogative, laugh= laughter, domin= dominance, repro= reproaching, eval= evaluative, boul= boulemaic, - = negative, + = positive.

Transliteration

In order to make the transcriptions readable for those not familiar with Arabic writing, they have been transliterated into Latin script. The table below shows the correspondences between the Arabic phonemes and the Latin characters used in the transliteration. For the sake of comparison, the standard transliteration symbols (*International system for the transliteration of Arabic characters* 1961) are given in the third column.

Key to Symbols of Transcription and Transliteration:

Arabic Alphabets, the Standard Way and the Phonetical System of Writing Arabic Articulation

Table 1.1: Symbols for Arabic in Phonetic, Latin and Standard Script

<u>Phonetical Rep</u>	<u>Latin Character</u>	<u>Standard Symbols</u>
[a]	a	a-initially/ a'-a elsewhere
[ay] [ee]	a	the character ay
[ʔ]	a	the character ʔ
[aʔ]	a	the character aʔ
[b]	b	the character b
[t]	t	the character t
[θ]	t	the character θ
[dʒ]	j	the character ǧ
[ħ]	h	the character ħ
[χ]	kh	the character χ
[d]	d	the character d
[ð]	th	the character ð
[r]	r	the character r
[z]	z	the character z
[s]	s	the character s
[ʃ]	sh	the character š
[ʒ]	s	the character ʒ
[ɗ]	d	the character ɗ
[ɟ]	t	the character ɟ
[ʒ]	z	the character ʒ

[ʕ]		the character ʕ
[ʁ]	g ^h	the character ġ
[f]	f	the character f
[q]	q	the character q
[k]	k	the character k
[l]	l	the character l
[m]	m	the character m
[n]	n	the character n
[h ^h]	h	the character h
[w]	w	the character w
[y]	i/y	the character y
[ee]	ee	long vowel e
[dd]	dd	geminate consonant d

In addition to the above phonemes, there are three main types of vowels or vocalization in Arabic language:

1. which is represented in the transcription as= **a**
2. which is represented in the transcription as= **u**
3. which is represented in the transcription as= **i**

Translation

For purposes of presentation, parts of the conversations have been translated into English. The translations given are idiomatic, not literal glosses.

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3. Abbreviations

AD	Arabic Dialect
CA	Classical Arabic
EA	Egyptian Arabic
ESA	Educated Spoken Arabic
FBG	Feedback Giving
FBE	Feedback Eliciting
IPA	International Phonetic Association
IWA	Informal Written Arabic
MA	Modern Arabic
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
MLA	Modern Literary Arabic
OLA	Oral Literary Arabic
PA	Palestinian Arabic
SMSA	Spoken Modern Standard Arabic

SA	Spoken Arabic
St A	Standard Arabic
SAL	Standard way of Arabic Letters
WMSA	Written Modern Standard Arabic
SMSA	Spoken Modern Standard Arabic
GPTL	Gothenburg Papers in Theoretical Linguistics

4. Table Abbreviations

Contin	Continuous
Red	Reduplication
FBSWMF/ FBSW	FB single word main functions
CONV	Conversation
Non-U	Non-understanding
Hes	Hesitation
Fric	Fricative
Glott	Glottal
FB	Feedback
FBW	Feedback single word
FBU	Feedback in an utterance
CFBU	Complex feedback
MFF	Main feedback functions
- Acceptance	Negative acceptance
+ Acceptance	Positive acceptance, etc.
Affir	Affirmative
Conf	Confirmation
Rep	Repetition
Accep	Acceptance
Rejec	Rejection
Agree	Agreement
Corr	Correction
Under	Understanding
Perc	Perception
Inter	Interrogative
Laugh	Laughter
Domin	Dominance
Repro	Reproaching
Eval	Evaluative
Boul	Boulemaic
S	is the participant's code in conversations.
Single	is feedback by itself
Initial	is feedback at the beginning of a sentence, or phrase.
Medial	is feedback in the middle of a sentence, or phrase.
Final	is feedback at the end of a sentence, or phrase.
RSFBU	Reduplication of simple feedback unit

DAL	Deictic or anaphoric linking
R	Repetition of simple feedback unit
IP	Idiomatic phrase
MP	Modal phrase
SW or P	Single word or phrase
SFB + MP	Simple feedback unit + modal phrase
SFB + SFB	Simple feedback unit + simple feedback unit
SFB + RedFBU	Simple feedback unit + reduplication simple feedback unit
SFB + DAL	Simple feedback unit + deictic or anaphoric linking
SFB + IP	Simple feedback unit + idiomatic phrase
SFB + SW or P	Simple feedback unit + single word or phrase
SFB + RepFBU	Simple feedback unit + repetition of simple feedback unit
TTL C	Types of talk and topics throughout the length of conversation
L O C	Length of conversation
T O T	Type of talk
B	Beginning of conversation
M	Middle of conversation
E	End of conversation
+	Exists in the conversation
-	Does not exist in the conversation

5. Abbreviations in the Gloss Lines

FBW	Feedback words
FBC	Feedback copula
INTER	Interjection
N	Noun
ADJ	Adjective
V	Verb
P	Preposition
ADV	Adverb
PN	Proper name
PRON	Pronoun
CONJ	Conjunction
COMP	Complementiser
DET	Determiner
AUX	Auxiliary.
ADV	Adverb
P	Phrase
S	Sentence
VP	Verb phrase
Conj	Conjunction
NP	Noun phrase
Rep/Red	Repetition or Reduplication
Det	Determiner

Comp	Complementiser
V	Verb
Pron	Pronoun
N	Noun
PP	Preposition phrase