Abstract

RESEARCH PAPER: Gender Differences in Saudi Arabic Question Formation on Twitter.

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This work examines gender differences in Aljouf University students’ use of focus fronting in questions based on data from tweets from @Cjoufcom, a Twitter account established by Aljouf University students themselves for inquiries about anything related to school. It focuses on a particular question that is often asked by Aljouf University students on Twitter, which can be translated into English as ‘What do you think about professor X?’ The hypothesis is that the way male and female students form this question syntactically is based on the addressee and addressor’s gender. Specifically, I hypothesized that (1) male students would form the question addressed to male students as [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + focus NP + main clause], (2) male students would form the question addressed to unspecified people as [main clause (includes object NP)] with no vocative expression, (3) female students would form the question addressed to female students as [vocative NP + main clause (includes object NP)] with no vocative marker, (4) female students would form the question addressed to male students as [main clause (includes object NP) [vocative marker + vocative NP]] and (5) female students would form the question addressed to unspecified people as [main clause (includes object NP)]. In addition, I hypothesized that (6) male students would not address their particular questions to female students.

A total of 168 tokens were collected from the Twitter account @Cjoufcom. The way that the participation works is that the students send their questions to this account, then @Cjoufcom retweets the students’ questions in order to disseminate their inquiries to the students. Any student who has an answer or some information about the question may reply. Since the hypotheses are based on the gender of the addressee and the addressor, six groups of tweets were examined: (i) inquiries from male to male, (ii) inquiries from male to female, (iii)
inquiring from male to all (or unspecified people), (iv) inquiries from female to female, (v) inquiries from female to male, and (vi) inquiries from male to all (or unspecified people).

The results were that there is sociolinguistic variation in Arabic question formation by Aljouf University students. They also showed that the use of the vocative marker and the vocative NPs differ from Aljouf University males to Aljouf University females. Besides, Aljouf University females use the focus NPs differently from Aljouf University males.