GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SAUDI ARABIC QUESTION FORMATION ON

TWITTER

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores gender differences in forming a particular question in Aljouf Arabic asked by Aljouf University male and female students on Twitter. The question can be translated into English as ‘What do you think about professor X?’ The study examines the presence or absence of focus fronting and the presence or absence and position of vocatives. Consider the following examples:

1. (a) \[[\text{vocative marker} + \text{vocative NP}] + \text{main clause} + \text{dependent clause}\]
   
   \[
y\,\text{ʔulab} \,\text{ʔalhandasah, wi}\mathbf{ʃ} \,\text{wag} \,\text{ʔaduktor [masc. name]} \,\text{ʔili} \,\text{ʔiʃti} \,\text{ʔi dinamika?}
   
   O students engineering, how is professor [masc. name] who teaches Dynamics?
   
   ‘Engineering students, how is professor [masc. name] who teaches Dynamics?’

   (b) \[[\text{vocative marker} + \text{vocative NP}] + \text{Focus NP} + \text{dependent clause} + \text{main clause}\]
   
   \[
y\,\text{ʕyal, \text{ʔaduktor} [masc. name] illi} \,\text{ʔiʃti} \,\text{ʔahs} \,\text{ʔa, \text{ʔahad yiʃrif.ah?}}
   
   O guys, the professor [masc. name] who teaches statistics, anyone knows him?
   
   ‘Guys, does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches statistics?’

2. (a) \[[\text{Focus NP} + \text{dependent clause} + \text{main clause}\]
   
   \[
   \text{ʔaduktor [masc. name]} \,\text{ʔili ydaris \text{ʔilm \text{ʔaladwiyah, wiʃ rayikum}}}
   
   the professor [masc. name] who teaches pharmacology, what opinion your fih?
   
   about him?
   
   ‘What do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches pharmacology?’
(b) [main clause + dependent clause].

ʔahad yišrif ʔaduktor [masc. name] ʔili fi qisim. ʔalmuhasabah?

anyone knows the professor [masc. name] who in department accounting?

‘Does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who is in the department of accounting?’

In examples (1-a) and (2-b), we can see that there is no focus fronting in the statements.

However, in example (1-b), focus fronting occurs in the middle of the statement (i.e., ʔaduktor [masc. name] ‘prof. [masc. name]’) while in example (2-a) focus fronting occurs at the beginning of the of the statement (i.e., ʔaduktor [masc. name] ‘prof. [masc. name]’). In addition, we can also observe that in examples (1-a) and (1-b) the vocative marker and the vocative NP are used while in examples (2-a) and (2-b) are not. These two issues will be examined in more detail further below.

Before moving on, it is important to talk about vocatives in the Arabic language. The vocatives in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and in the Classical Arabic language (CAL) are more complicated than the one used in everyday language, as in Aljouf Arabic. In CAL, there are eight vocatives: ya, ʔa, ʔay, ʔayaa, hayaa, ʔaay, ʔaa and waa, while only three of those vocatives are used in MSA (i.e., ya, ʔa and ʔay) (Al-Bataineh 2019). But in Aljouf Arabic, the only vocative used is ‘ya.’ The traditional Arabic grammarians consider all these eight vocatives as case-marking. They also call the vocative in Arabic al-munadi “the caller.” However, I would call the vocative ya an ‘Attention Getting Marker’ since the case-markers are not realized phonologically in Aljouf Arabic or any other contemporary Saudi dialects.

The data for this study were collected from a Twitter account created by Aljouf University students (i.e., @Cjoufcom), so that the students can inquire about anything related to school. The professors’ names are not included in the data, for the sake of privacy. @Cjoufcom
has more than eighteen thousand followers among Aljouf University students. 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. A total of 168 tokens were collected from @Cjoufcom account and divided into six categories: (i) inquiries from male to male, (ii) inquiries from male to female, (iii) inquiries 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).

In many languages, much work has been done regarding the connection between language use and social variables, such as gender, age, and socio-economic status. However, there are no studies which examine gender differences in the use of syntactic structures in Aljouf Arabic. In particular, the formation of questions with and without focus fronting and vocative phrase have not been considered in relation to possible gender variation. In addition, to the best of my knowledge, there is no study that has focused on sociolinguistic variation in Aljouf Arabic, which differs in a number of respects phonologically, morphologically, syntactically and lexically from other regional varieties.

2. OBJECTIVES

The current study investigates how Aljouf University male and female students differ in their syntactic question formation. It is primarily designed to examine the syntactic structures used in a particular question asked by students of different addressees. In this paper, I will show that the gender of the addressor and of the addressee influences the frequency of the occurrence of focus fronting and the vocative phrase in the question form. Furthermore, the use and the
syntactic position of the vocative with the question is examined. Specifically, the paper addresses the following research questions:

1. Do Aljouf University males use different syntactic structures in forming question when addressing females, or do they use the same syntactic structures that they use with other males?

2. Do Aljouf University females use different syntactic structures in forming a question when addressing males, or do they use the same syntactic structures that they use with other females?

3. Do Aljouf University males use focus fronting more than females do?

4. Do Aljouf University females use focus fronting more than males do?

5. Do Aljouf University females use the vocative marker *ya* and a vocative NP more than Aljouf University males do?

6. Which syntactic structures are used the most in forming questions by each gender?

### 3. SIGNIFICANCE

This study adds new knowledge to the existing Saudi Arabic sociolinguistic literature on gender-based variation, which is extremely limited. Also significant is the fact that the study adds to knowledge of the Aljouf dialect of Saudi Arabic, a variety that has received very limited attention by linguists, other than a few studies on phonetics and phonology that have been done by (Al-Rubaat, 2017; Alenazi, 2016 & 2015; Alhuwaykim, 2013). Most studies on Saudi Arabic are on Najdi Arabic – mainly spoken in the Riyadh Province in the middle of Saudi Arabia— or Hijazi Arabic—mainly spoken in the Mecca Province in the western part of Saudi Arabia.
4. BACKGROUND

The Arabic language belongs to the Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages (Aoun, Benmamoun and Choueiri 2010). It is the official language of Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, there are several regional spoken Arabic varieties. In this paper, I investigate Aljouf Arabic, which Aljouf University students speak. Aljouf University is a public university located in Aljouf, Saudi Arabia. In every province in Saudi Arabia, there is a public university. There also are some small cities and villages have a university or a college. This is why Saudi students almost always prefer to study at the closest university to their hometown.

It is important to give a brief background on the interactions between males and females in Saudi Arabia. One essential point that should be addressed is how males and females interact with strangers based on their gender. In Saudi Arabia, the Islamic and traditional tribal rules are observed. Therefore, women normally do not converse directly with men, except with service providers, who are not their relatives, nor do they socialize with them and vice versa (Zuhur 2011). This social and religious policy plays a crucial role in the use of language when the different-gender people communicate. I have observed that when either males or females communicate in person or on the Internet with strangers of a different gender, the conversation is very limited, specific, and formal. On the other hand, communication between strangers of the same-gender can be informal and spontaneous. Although the influence of gender segregation on the style of language (i.e., formal or informal) is obvious, the linguistic differences in the use of language, at least for many people, are under the level of consciousness.

In Saudi education, gender segregation starts from the first grade and goes all the way through graduate school (Alhujaylan 2014). Thus, Aljouf University is a gender-segregated community, and is divided into two different campuses: one for males, and one for females.
However, this does not mean that males and females do not communicate at all at Aljouf University. They do so, but by Internet or telephone rather than in person, in order to teach and learn, inquire, inform, and even interview. Alsuwaida (2016) points out that most symposiums, conferences, and departmental faculty meetings take place on the dominant male campuses, and female faculty members have to attend by phone or via closed-circuit television.

At Aljouf University, the interactions between males and females are also affected by the individuals’ occupations and gender. In Saudi universities, when female professors are not available to teach particular courses, male professors who are specialized in those courses can teach female students via videoconference and can engage in more personal communication (Mill 2009). By using the distance education system, male professors teach female students via the Internet, which creates need for female students to communicate with male students to inquire about the male professors. However, female professors neither teach male students in person nor by using the distance education system. In spite of the fact that there is no interaction between female professors and male students, female professors often write the final exams instead of male professors. This leads some male students to contact female students by using the Internet in order to get some information about the female professors.

Before Dorsey and his partners developed Twitter in 2007, Aljouf University students founded a web-forum named Gathering Aljouf University Students. In 2013, they created a Twitter account as an additional place for their gatherings. The forum is designed for anything that is related to school and any interesting thing that someone likes while the Twitter account is designed for only the students’ inquiries and important news related to Aljouf university. A simple inspection of the forum and the @Cjouf.com’s account on Twitter makes it clear that participation in the Twitter account is more active than in the forum. This may be because Aljouf
University students cannot inquire or participate in the forum unless they have a forum account, while with the Twitter account, they can inquire or participate without even being one of the @Cjouf.com followers.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Aoun, Benmamoun, and Choueiri (2010) examine four different strategies in Arabic for forming questions, primarily in Standard Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, and Lebanese Arabic. They also include data from Egyptian Arabic, Palestinian Arabic, and some of Gulf varieties, but not Aljouf Arabic. Showing the different strategies for forming question, they present examples from Lebanese Arabic as an example of these strategies available in Arabic. See the following examples which are taken from their work (p.g. 128-129):

3. ?ayya mmasil ꞏift ꞏb.il.matˤʕam? (Gap Strategy)
   which actor saw.2ms in.the.restaurant?
   “Which actor did you see in the restaurant?”

4. ?ayya mmasil ꞏift.o ꞏb.il.matˤʕam? (Resumptive Strategy)
   which actor saw.2ms.him in.the.restaurant?
   “Which actor did you see in the restaurant?”

5. miin yalli ꞏift.o ꞏb.il.matˤʕam? (Class II Resumptive Strategy)
   who that saw.2ms.him in.the.restaurant?
   “Who is it that you saw in the restaurant?”

6. ꞏift ꞏʔayya mmasil ꞏb.il.matˤʕam? (In-situ Strategy)
   saw.2ms which actor in.the.restaurant?
   “Which actor did you see in the restaurant?”
Aoun, Benmamoun, and Choueiri (2010) claim that not all of the Arabic varieties use all the four strategies in question formation, but do not go onto any details. They say that Lebanese Arabic has all the four strategies for forming question while Modern Standard Arabic does not have the in-situ strategy, but it does have the other three strategies. One of the interesting things that they mention is that Egyptian Arabic use the in-situ strategy as a default strategy for forming questions. Aoun, Benmamoun, and Choueiri (2010), did not investigate gender differences on their work, which I did in this study. They also did not specify a particular language of a group of people, but they examined the Arabic language, which is all over the Arab world.

Mondorf (2002) investigated over 100 texts uttered by approximately 650 male and female educated native speakers of British English. In her data, she focuses on the use of finite adverbial clauses according to gender in the London- Lund Corpus (LLC). She divided them into four different types of clauses. They are: “Causal Clauses” which are introduced by conjunctions such as because, since, and for, “Conditional Clauses” which are introduced by if, when, as long as, and before, “Purpose Clauses” which are introduced by so, if, and for, and “Concessive Clauses” which are introduced by even if, although, while, and though. Mondorf (2002) found that gender plays a significant role in movement of clauses. Throughout the data and the four types of clauses, she found that females preferred to postpose clauses while males preferred to prepose.

Al-Harahsheh (2014) examines among Jordanian males and females’ conversational style and phonological variation. He collected twelve, 30 minutes dyadic conversations (mixed and same-gender) at Yarmouk University in Jordan. He found that the Jordanian females and males have different linguistic styles. He found that in the phonological variations, the Jordanian females were more conservative than males were. They tended to be more urbanized, prestigious
and educated with using urbanized pronunciations. He also found that females tended to express their feelings when interacting more often than males did. In mixed-gender conversations, females tended to communicate sympathetically with males when males are in troubles. Thus, they were more cooperative nature. They also showed more encouraging feedback to whom they would talk than males did. Thus, they were more cooperative conversationalists. Moreover, females tended to be more repetitive than males were in order to get others involved in the conversation. In mixed-gender conversations, females preferred to initiate more topics to keep the mainstream of the interaction and to break the silence.

6. METHODOLOGY

The following are the hypotheses of this study:

Hypothesis one: When males form a question addressed to males, they use the following syntactic structure:

[[vocative marker + vocative NP] + focus NP + main clause].

Hypothesis two: When males form a question addressed to unspecified gender, they use the following syntactic structure:

[main clause (includes object NP)] with no vocative expression is used.

Hypothesis three: Males don’t ask questions of females.

Hypothesis four: When females address a question to females, they use the following syntactic structure:

[vocative NP + main clause (includes object NP)] with no vocative marker is used.

Hypothesis five: When females form a question addressed to males, they use the following syntactic structure:

[main clause (includes object NP) [vocative marker + vocative NP]]
Hypothesis six: When females form a question addressed to unspecified gender, they use the following syntactic structure more than males:

[main clause (includes object NP)].

6.1. Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from the Twitter account @Cjoufcom, which has more than eighteen thousand male and female student followers at Aljouf University. 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 public and a wide range of students. Any student who has an answer or some information about the question may reply. A total of 168 tokens were collected from the @Cjoufcom account in 2018 between the Fall and Spring semesters. The 168 tokens were all the questions asked in that period of time. These tokens are divided into six categories: (i) inquiries from male to male, (ii) inquiries from male to female, (iii) inquiries 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).

6.2. Determining Age and Gender

A. Age Variable:

At Aljouf University, there is a condition related to age when students apply for an acceptance at the university. This is that the university will not accept any general certificate of secondary education issued more than 3 years ago. This makes the acceptance at Aljouf University restricted to a range of age that is from 18 to 21. Thus, I assume that the tweets are made by students who are 18-25 years old. For the attendance at Aljouf University variable, as briefly introduced earlier, this Twitter account was created by Aljouf University students,
primarily to provide a forum for inquiries. Thus, I am expecting all the students participating in this group were Aljouf University students.

B. Gender Variable:

There are several ways to identify this variable. However, if it was not possible to determine the gender of the addressors, the tweet was excluded.

(1) In Saudi Arabia, unisex names are not common. Therefore, identifying the gender of the addressors can also be by looking at their names.

(2) The gender may be indicated in the morphology of the messages. For example, ana talib-ah ‘I’m a student’ has the suffix ah which indicates the gender and the number of the subject.

(3) Some tweeters write a description of themselves in their profiles which indicate gender.

(4) Although tweeters can add their personal pictures to their accounts, it is not always a good way to identify the gender, especially if the tweeters are females. But it can be helpful for determining males.

(5) By looking at the addressors class schedules, we can figure out their gender when the tweets are sent by anonymous accounts. Since Aljouf university is a gender-segregated community, sometimes when the addressors provide their class schedules, where the name of the building is always included. This means that the gender can be determined from the location.
7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I will discuss the data in terms of the syntactic structure of question formation. As mentioned earlier, there are 168 tokens divided into six categories. Specifically, the following table shows the distribution of those tokens among gender-pairings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M-to-M</th>
<th>M-to-All</th>
<th>M-to-F</th>
<th>F-to-F</th>
<th>F-to-All</th>
<th>F-to-M</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The distribution of the tokens in gender-pairings

The first category represents tokens of males interacting with other males (hereafter M-to-M), and it has 21% of the total number of the tokens. The second category shows the number of tokens that are found of males addressing unspecified gender (hereafter M-to-All), and it has 19% of the total number of the tokens. The third category, which has no tokens throughout the data, represents males addressing females (hereafter M-to-F). The fourth category, which represents tokens of females addressing other females (hereafter F-to-F), has 19% of the total number of the tokens. The fifth category, which shows tokens of females addressing unspecified gender (hereafter F-to-All), has 17% of the total number of the tokens. The sixth and last category represents tokens of females addressing males (hereafter F-to-M), has 24% of the total number of the tokens. In each category there is more than one syntactic structure. These are given below with examples for each structure.

A. The first category is males’ tweets addressing other males (hereafter M-to-M). The following structures are the only ones found in this category.
Str.1 [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + Focus NP + dependent clause + main clause].

(7) ya $\text{ʕyal}$, ☐aduktor. [masc. name] illi yi$\text{ʕti}$ i $\text{ʔahs}^a$, ☐ahad yi$\text{ʕrif}$.ah?
   O guys, the.professor [masc. name] who teaches statistics, anyone knows.him?
   ‘Guys, does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches statistics?’

(8) ya $\text{ʃabab}$, ☐aduktor [masc. name] illi yi$\text{ʕti}$. ☐alhasib wa almud$\text{ʔtama}^c$, wi$\text{ʃ}`wag$ah?
   O guys, the.professor [masc. name] who teaches computer and community, how is.him?
   ‘Guys, does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches Computer and Community?’

Str.2 [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + main clause + dependent clause].

(9) ya $\text{ʕulab}$. ☐alhandasah, wi$\text{ʃ}`wag$ ☐aduktor [masc. name] ☐illi yi$\text{ʕti}$ dinamika?
   O students engineering, how is professor [masc. name] who teaches Dynamics?
   ‘Engineering students, how is professor [masc. name] who teaches Dynamics?’

(10) ya $\text{ʃabab}$, ☐ahad yi$\text{ʕrif}$ ☐aduktor [masc. name] ☐illi fi qisim ☐ariya$\text{ḍ}$iyat?
   O guys, anyone know the.professor [masc. name] who in department mathematics?
   ‘Guys, does anyone knows prof. [masc. name] who is in the Mathematics Dept.?’

B. The second category is males’ tweets addressing unspecified gender (hereafter M-to-All). The following structures are the only ones found in this category.

Str.3 [main clause + dependent clause].

(11) ☐ahad yi$\text{ʕrif}$ ☐aduktor [masc. name] ☐illi fi qisim ☐almu$\text{ʔhasabah}$?
   anyone knows the.professor [masc. name] who in department accounting?
   ‘Does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who is in the department of accounting?’

(12) wi$\text{ʃ}`wag$ ☐aduktor [masc. name] ☐illi yi$\text{ʕti}$. huquq insan?
   how is the.professor [masc. name] who teach right human?
   ‘Does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches Principles of Human Rights?’
Str.4 [Focus NP + dependent clause + main clause].

(13) ?aduktor. [masc. name] ?ili ydaris ʕilm ?aladwiya, wijd rayikum fi.h?

the.professor [masc. name] who teaches pharmacology, what opinion.your about.him?

‘What do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches pharmacology?’

(14) ?aduktor. [masc. name] ?ili fi qisim qaʃaydalaha, ?ahad yiʃrif.ah?

the.professor [masc. name] who in deparment pharmacy, anyone knows.him?

‘Does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who is in the Pharmacy Dept.?’

C. The third theoretical category is males’ tweets addressing females (hereafter M-to-F), but there are no tweets from males to females in the data.

D. The fourth category is females’ tweets addressing other females (hereafter F-to-F). The following structures are the only ones found in this category.

Str.5 [vocative NP + main clause + dependent clause].

(15) banat, wij rayik.um bi ʕalustaðah [fem. name] ?ali bi riyað.ʔalaʔfal?

girls, what opinion.your of the.professor [fem. name] who in Kindergarten?

‘Girls, what do you think about prof. [fem. name] who is in the Kindergarten Dept.?’

(16) banat, wij rayik.um bi ʔaduktorah [fem. name] ʔilli tiʃti nuðm ʔataʃyil?

girls, what opinion.your of the.professor [fem. name] who teach systems operating?

‘What do you think about prof. [fem. name] who teaches operating systems?’

Str.6 [vocative NP + Focus NP + dependent clause + main clause].

(17) banat alganun, ʔalustaðah [fem. name] ?ali tidaris ʔaljuʃbah 233, wij rayikum fi.ha?

girls law, the.professor [fem. name] who teaches group 233, what opinion.your about.her?

‘Law girls, what do you think about prof. [fem. name] who teaches group 233?’

‘Girls, what do you think about prof. [fem. name] who teaches Linear Algebra?’

Str.7 [main clause + dependent clause + [vocative marker + vocative NP]].


‘Girls, what do you think about prof. [fem. name] who teaches Qur'anic interpretation?’

(20) wij rayik um bi ?alustað [masc. name] ?illi fi qisim ?alhasib? what opinion your about the professor [masc. name] who in department computer?

‘What do you think about prof. [masc. name] who is in the Dept. of Computer Science?’

E. The fifth category is females’ tweets addressing unspecified people (hereafter F-to-All). The following structure is the only one found in this category.

Str.3 [main clause + dependent clause].

(21) tšruf.un ?alustað [masc. name] ?ali yidar is tعر tag radis? you know the professor [masc. name] who teaches teaching methods?

‘Do you know prof. [masc. name] who teaches teaching methods?’

(22) tšruf.un ?aduktor [masc. name] ?ali yišt'i ihšaa ?am? you know the professor [masc. name] who teaches statistics general?

‘Do you know prof. [masc. name] who teaches general statistics?’
F. The sixth category is females’ tweets addressing males (hereafter F-to-M). The following structures are the only ones found in this category.

Str.7 [main clause + dependent clause + [vocative marker + vocative NP]].

(23) "wiʃ  rayik.um  bi ʔalustað.  [masc. name] ʔali  bi ʔalahya, ya ʃabab?"

what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who in biology, O guys?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who is in the biology Dept.’

(24) "wiʃ  rayik.um  bi ʔaduktor  [masc. name] ʔali yiʃt'i  kimya  ʕamah 2, ya ʃabab?"

what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who teach chemistry general 2, O guys?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches general chemistry 2?’

Str.5 [vocative NP + main clause + dependent clause].

(25) "tˤulab ʔatarbiyah, wiʃ  rayik.um  bi ʔaduktor  [masc. name] ʔali yidaris ʔatarbiyah 

students education, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who teaches education

ʔalmugaranah? comparative?

‘Education students, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches comparative 
education?’

(26) "ʃabab, wiʃ  rayik.um  bi ʔaduktor  [masc. name] ʔilli fi qisim ʔalhasil? 

guys, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who in department computer?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who is in the Dept. of Computer Science?’
Str.2 [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + main clause + dependent clause].

(27) ya faabab, wij' rayik.um bi ḥaduktor. [masc. name] ?ali bi ?al'arabi?

O guys, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who in Arabic?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who is in the Arabic depart.?’

(28) ya ṭulab ?iilingilizi, wij' rayik.um bi ḥaduktor [masc. name] ?ali yidaris

O students English, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who teach qiraah 1?

‘English students, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches Reading 1?’

7.1. Tweets from Males to Males:

The following figure captures the distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by males addressing other males:

Str.1 [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + Focus NP + dependent clause + main clause]

Str.2 [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + main clause + dependent clause]

Figure 1. shows that while 14% of the questions under the Male to Male category are formed with structure Str.2, 86% are formed with structure Str.1.
Before comparing between these structures, see examples (29 and 30) which illustrate Str.1 and Str.2 respectively:

29 (a) ya ʕyal, ʔaduktor. [masc. name] illi yiʕtˤiʔaħsˤa, ʔaħad yiʕrif.ah?

O guys, the. professor [masc. name] who teaches statistics, anyone knows.him?

‘Guys, does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches statistics?’

(b) ya ʃabab, ʔaduktor [masc. name] illi yiʕtˤiʔaħasib wa almud ʒtamaʕah?

O guys, the. professor [masc. name] who teaches computer and community, how is.him?

‘Guys, does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches Computer and Community?’

30 (a) ya ʕulab. ʔalhandasah, wiʃ wagʕ ah? ʔaduktor [masc. name] ʔili yiʕtˤi dinamika?

O students engineering, how is professor [masc. name] who teaches Dynamics?

‘Engineering students, how is professor [masc. name] who teaches Dynamics?’
(b) ya ḡabab, ʔahad yiʕrif ʔaduktor [masc. name] ʔili fi qisim ʔariyadiyat?

   O guys, anyone know the professor [masc. name] who in department mathematics?

   ‘Guys, does anyone knows prof. [masc. name] who is in the Mathematics Dept.?’

In comparison, when males form questions addressed to males, focus fronting is used more than questions without focus fronting. In fact, structure Str.2 is very similar to the one that females use when they form questions addressed to other females (i.e., Str.5), except that structure Str.2 includes the vocative marker (i.e., ya) while structure Str.5 does not. In other words, females do not use the vocative marker “ya” as much as males do.

7.2. Tweets from Male to Unspecified People:

   The following figure shows the distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by males addressing unspecified people:

Str.3 [main clause + dependent clause].

Str.4 [Focus NP + dependent clause + main clause].

Figure 2. shows that 69% of the questions under the Male to All category are formed with structure Str.3 while 31% are formed with structure Str.4.
The structures are illustrated in examples (31 and 32), where example (31) illustrates structure Str.3 and example (32) illustrates structure Str.4.

31 (a) ʔaḥaḍ  yišrif ʔaduktor  [masc. name] ʔišli fi qisim ʔalmuḥasabah?
anyone knows the.professor [masc. name] who in department accounting?

‘Does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who is in the department of accounting?’

(b) wiʃ wagʃ ʔaduktor  [masc. name] ʔišli yišrifi ʔhuquq insan?
how is the.professor [masc. name] who teach right human?

‘Does anyone know prof. [masc. name] who teaches Principles of Human Rights?’

32 (a) ʔaduktor.  [masc. name] ʔišli ydaris ʔilm ʔaladwiyaḥ, wiʃ  rayikum fi.h?
the.professor [masc. name] who teaches pharmacology, what opinion.your about.him?

‘What do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches pharmacology?’
7.3. Tweets from Male to Female:

As stated above, there are no questions from males addressed to females. As mentioned in the introduction, male professors do not deal with female students directly. They teach females by using the distance education system. Although teaching through electronic means is common, the number of male students who deal with male professors is greater than the number of females. This is because male professors teach fewer courses to females than males even by the Internet. Thus males students are more likely to address those who have greater contact with male professors. This also applies to female students asking about female professors. They do not address the question to male students.

7.4. Tweets from Females to Females:

The following figure illustrates the distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by females addressing other females:

Str.5 [vocative NP + main clause + dependent clause]

Str.6 [vocative NP + Focus NP + dependent clause + main clause]
Str.7 [main clause + dependent clause + [vocative marker + vocative NP]]

Figure 3 shows that 88% of the questions under the Female to Female category are formed using structure Str.5, 8% with structure Str.7, and only 4% with structure Str.6.

Figure 3. The distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by F-to-F

The following examples (33, 34, and 35) illustrate structures (Str.5, Str.6 and Str.7) respectively:

33 (a) banat, wiʃ rayik.um bi ?alustaðah [fem. name] ?ali bi riyad.ʔalatˤfal?
    girls, what opinion.your of the.professor [fem. name] who in Kindergarten?
    ‘Girls, what do you think about prof. [fem. name] who in the Kindergarten Dept.?’

(b) banat, wiʃ rayik.um bi ?aduktorah [fem. name] ?illi tiʕtiʔ nuðm ?ataʕ∀il?
    girls, what opinion.your of the.professor [fem. name] who teach systems operating?
    ‘What do you think about prof. [fem. name] who teaches operating systems?’
In comparison, vocative phrases are used more frequently at the beginning of sentences than at the end when females address other females. For the focus construction, when females ask other females, the focus NP is less likely to be topicalized. The only focus NP that is topicalized found among all the structures is structure Str.4 which is in the (M-to-All) category. Moreover, we can notice that structure Str.7 has vocative marker and vocative NP at the end of the statement, and it
is the only structure found among the data that has the vocative marker and the vocative NP at the end of the question.

7.5. Tweets from Females to Males:

The following figure shows the distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by females addressing males:

Str.7 [main clause + dependent clause + [vocative marker + vocative NP]]

Str.5 [vocative NP + main clause + dependent clause]

Str.2 [[vocative marker + vocative NP] + main clause + dependent clause]

Figure 4 shows that 85% of the questions under the Female to Male category are formed with structure Str.7, 10% with structure Str.5, and only 5% with structure Str.2.
The structures are illustrated in examples (36, 37 and 38), which illustrate structures (Str.7, Str.5 and Str.2).

36 (a) wįʃ rayik.um bi ?alustað. [masc. name] ?ali bi ?alahya, ya ğabab?

what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who in biology, O guys?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who in biology Dept.?’

(b) wįʃ rayik.um bi ?aduktor [masc. name] ?ali yiśṭi kimya ʕamah 2, ya ğabab?

what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who teach chemistry general 2, O guys?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches general chemistry 2?’

37 (a) tˤulab ʔatarbiyah, wįʃ rayik.um bi ?aduktor [masc. name] ?ali yidarís

students education, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who teaches ʔatarbiyah ʔalmugaranah?

education comparative?

‘Education students, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches comparative education?’

(b) ġabab, wįʃ rayik.um bi ?aduktor [masc. name] ?illi fi qisim ʔalḥasib?

guys, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who in department computer?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who is in the Dept. of Computer Science?’

38 (a) ya ġabab, wįʃ rayik.um bi ?aduktor. [masc. name] ?ali bi ʔalʕarabī?

O guys, what opinion.your of the.professor [masc. name] who in Arabic?

‘Guys, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who is in the Arabic depart.?’
(b) ya tˤulab ʔilingilizi, wif rayik.um bi ʔaduktor [masc. name] ʔali yidaris

O students English, what opinion your of the professor [masc. name] who teach qiraah 1?

reading 1?

‘English students, what do you think about prof. [masc. name] who teaches Reading 1?’

Comparing the three structures, we can observe that females use the vocative phrases in all the structures when they address male students. However, structure Str.5 does not have a vocative marker, as in structures Str.7 and Str.2. In addition, when females form the question addressing males, they do not use focus NP, and structure Str.7 is more likely to be used.

7.6. Tweets from Females to Unspecified People:

The following figure illustrates the distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by females addressing unspecified people:

Str.3 [main clause + dependent clause]

Figure 5. shows that the only structure is used in this category is structure Str.3, which is the same structure that is used when males addressing unspecified people.
Figure 5. The distribution of the syntactic structures of the question formation used by F-to-All

This structure is illustrated in the following examples:

39 (a) ʕruf.un ‘alustað [masc. name]ʔ ali yidaris ʔurug ʔadris?

‘Do you know prof. [masc. name] who teaches teaching methods?

(b) ʕruf.un ‘aduktor [masc. name]ʔ ali yišt‘i ʔiḥṣaa ʔam?

‘Do you know prof. [masc. name] who teaches general statistics?

These examples show that when females addressing unspecified people, they do not use focus NP nor vocative phrases. Comparing the two categories (M-to-All) and (F-to-All), we can observe that males and females prefer to use simple structure to get information from each other. As mentioned earlier, they do not use focus NP and vocative phrases. Thus structure Str.3 is more preferable to be used when addressees are unspecified.
8. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

8.1. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are drawn from the analysis of question formation by Aljouf University students. The data was collected from the social media platform Twitter. A total of 168 questions were collected from the Twitter account @Cjoufcom in order to examine sociolinguistic gender differences in question formation of college students at Aljouf University. The results show that there is sociolinguistic variation in forming a question by Aljouf University students.

It was found that male students prefer to use focus NP more than female do. The use it at the beginning of the statement and in the middle, but never at the end of the question. Males also prefer to use vocative phrases. Unlike females, they always use a vocative marker when they use the vocative phrases. However, they always use the vocative phrases at the beginning of the question. Moreover, throughout the data there are no questions formed by male students addressing females. This goes back to the gender segregation in Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, it was found that female students are more flexible than males in using vocative phrases. They use the vocative phrases with and without a vocative marker. In addition, they use it at the beginning of the statement and at the end, but never in the middle of the question. For the focus NP, females do not prefer to use focus NP. In the (F-to-F) category, there was only 4% of that structure which has focus NP.

All in all, what is common between male students and female students is that both genders use the same syntactic structure when they address unspecified people, although male students use another structure, but the distribution of that structure was only 31%. The most common structure is the simplest syntactic structure in the data.
8.2. LIMITATIONS

This study covers only a variety of Arabic spoken in a small region of the Arab world, which can give an opportunity for comparing it with other Arabic variations. It focuses only on Aljouf University males and females who are 18-23 years old and does not include the older population. It also focuses on students who mostly have the same socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the form of language studied is casual written electronic communication. It is possible that the distribution of structures could be different in spoken language, or depend on the genre and/or level of formality in a given context.

8.3. FURTHER RESEARCH

The use of vocative markers and focus fronting in the Arabic language are phenomena that need more examination. In the linguistic literature on Arabic, there is no study that has focused on the use of vocatives and focus fronting in face-to-face communication. Since there differences between young and older adults’ language use can occur, examining the use of vocatives and/or focus fronting by other age groups is worthy of research. Finally, discourse conditions on the use of the structures examined here should be considered in future research.
9. References


11. Appendix

Transliteration System.

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## Characters

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## Vowels

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