

The realization of (s) as [s^ʕ] in Kuwaiti Arabic Hanan Taqi, Newcastle University

This study aims at investigating linguistic and social factors influencing the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] in Kuwaiti Arabic (KA). The investigation is unusual in that the variant in question is different from the pharyngealised /s^ʕ/, which is a part of the sound inventory of many Arabic dialects. While no studies have been implemented on the sociolinguistic variation of emphatic [s^ʕ] as a reflex of (s), this variable has been found productive in the speech of two Kuwaiti communities from different ethnic backgrounds: Najdi (originally from Saudi Arabia) and Ajami (originally from Iran). The aim is to analyse the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] 1) in the context of general Arabic emphatic spread (primary emphatic), where it would be expected to occur and 2) as a factor of ethnicity, age and gender in KA (secondary emphatic).

Data were collected from 48 Kuwaiti speakers representing two ethnicities (Najdi and Ajami), three ages groups (chosen according to relevant milestones in the history of Kuwait), and from a balanced number of males and females. Several techniques were implemented to collect data in this study. Spontaneous data were collected through interviews (this data will be referred to as ‘interview data’), while picture elicitations and a map task were used to provide controlled data which could easily be compared between ethnic groups and generations (this will be referred to as ‘controlled data’). The total number of tokens represented from the controlled data was 1200 (25 tokens per speaker), and the total number of tokens collected from the interview data with target /s/ was 1621 (an average of 34 tokens per speaker). Acoustic analysis was found impossible because of the background air-conditioning noise in all Kuwaiti homes; thus auditory analysis was used solely in this study.

The only realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] by the Najdi group was in contexts where there was a primary emphatic (/ð^ʕ/, /t^ʕ/, and /d^ʕ/) in the word (e.g. /mist^ʕara/ (ruler) realised by both groups as [mas^ʕt^ʕara]). This realisation was found in the data of all speakers and is not unusual as it occurs in all Arabic dialects. [s^ʕ] realisation was also found in the neighbourhood of a voiced alveolar trill [r] or a voiced velar plosive [g] in the speech of Ajamis (e.g. /masrah/ (theatre) realised by Ajamis as [mas^ʕrah]). These will be called secondary emphatics as they only occur in Ajami speech, and a few Arabic dialects. The emphasis effect of /r/ and /g/ (as a reflex of /q/) were the subject of many studies (Davis 1995; Broselow, 1976; Younes 1993, 1994 among others) which showed that /r/ and /g/ could sometimes behave as emphatics depending on neighbouring sounds and lexical factors. But what was interesting here is that the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] in these contexts was only found in the speech of Ajamis (fig. 1) e.g. /aqi:s/ (to try on) realised as [agi:s^ʕ]. This realisation also showed interactions between age and gender (fig.2).

Age played a significant role in the realization of (s) as [s^ʕ], whereby old Ajamis used [s^ʕ] more than middle aged and young Ajami informants (two way ANOVA Ajamis by age results show $F(2,23)= 39.645$, $p<0.001$ for the controlled data, and $F(2,23)= 36.418$, $p<0.001$ for the interview data). Gender was also shown to be an influential factor, as female speakers on the whole exhibited fewer emphatic [s^ʕ] realisations than male speakers ($F(2,47)= 104.4$, $p<0.001$ in the controlled data, and $F(2,47)= 13038.9$, $p<0.001$ in the interview data), and the interaction between gender and ethnicity showed in the lower use of [s^ʕ] by female Ajami speakers compared with the males. Significant results obtained from a two-way ANOVA age by ethnicity calculated on the mean realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] values shows $F(3,47)= 4.952$, $p= 0.011$ for the controlled data, and $F(3,47)= 6.260$, $p=0.004$ for the interview data; whereas for gender, a two-way ANOVA by gender by ethnicity calculated on the mean realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] values results show that $F(3,47)= 1.866$, $p= 0.179$ in the controlled data, and $F(3,47)= 2.362$, $p= 0.131$ in the interview data which is not significant at the $p=0.05$ level.

The fact that Arabic emphatics are realised as their de-emphasised cognates in Farsi could controversially be the reason behind the realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ]. It could be that when the first generation of Ajamis attempted to speak Arabic, they were not sure whether certain Arabic words had a phonological /s/ or /s^ʕ/, and in order to avoid realising sounds in accordance to the Farsi sound system, they were affected by hyper-articulation, which is the process by which instead of realising /s^ʕ/ as [s] as a Farsi speaker might do, a Kuwaiti Ajami would realise KA /s/ as [s^ʕ].

In the analysis of the social attitudes towards the realization of (s) as [s^ʕ], it was found that Najdis believed that the realization of (s) as [s^ʕ] out of the context of primary emphasis spread is ‘not Kuwaiti’. Young Ajamis exhibited the lowest use of [s^ʕ] and also believed that this feature reflected ethnic backgrounds. Social contacts and identity was reflected in the attitude of Najdis and young Ajamis. Young Ajamis believed that their parents’ use of [s^ʕ] was ‘embarrassing’. They also expressed their belief that the use of [s^ʕ] is not Arabic, thus not Kuwaiti and should therefore be ‘corrected’. The Old Ajamis, on the other hand, believed that their use of [s^ʕ] was a reflection of co-articulation. Since the use of [s^ʕ] for plain /s/ is less frequent in the speech of young Ajamis, it is believed that this feature is going to disappear from the Kuwaiti dialect when not occurring as a result of emphasis spread.

Figure 1: Realisation of (s) by ethnic groups

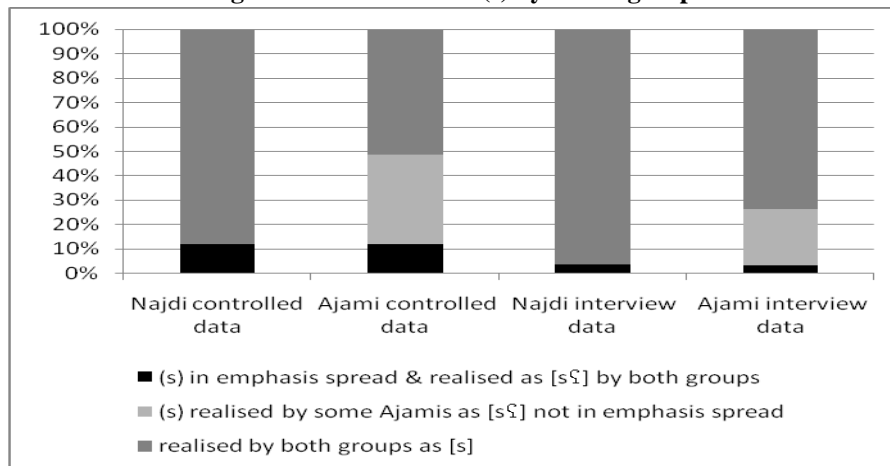
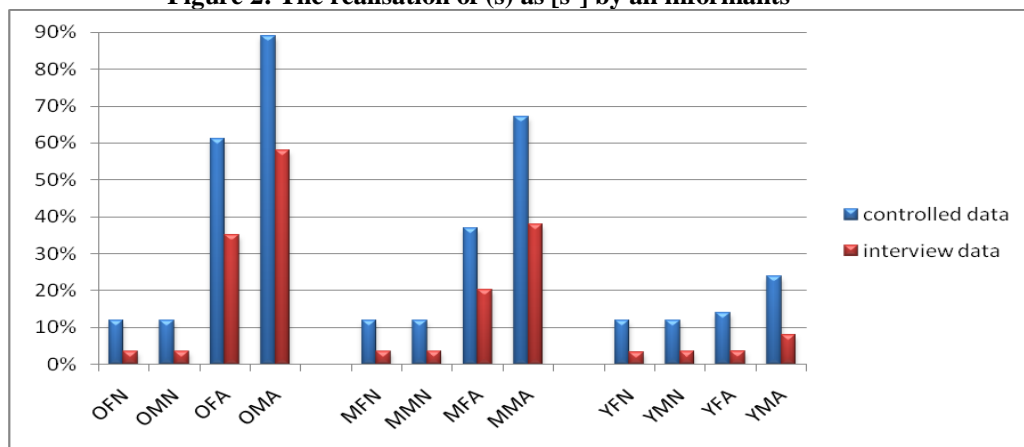


Figure 2: The realisation of (s) as [s^ʕ] by all informants*



* O = old; M = middle-aged; Y = young; N = Najdi; A= Ajami; F = female; M = male

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