

Regional and Sociolinguistic Variation of Personal Pronouns in Dialects of Najdi Arabic

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Abstract—This study examines the regional and sociolinguistic variation in the paradigms of personal pronouns, independent and dependent, in Najdi dialects. The regional dialects are Central, Qassim, and Northern. The social dialects are sub-varieties of the Central dialect: Hamadan, Hawazin, and Sedentary. The data was collected using the sociolinguistic interview of 25 speakers. It was found that there were more variations in the personal pronoun forms than what have been reported in the literature. When comparing forms with Standard Arabic, the Central dialects are more conservative in the number of changes to the forms. However, Qassim and Northern have retained gender distinction in plural forms while Central dialects did not. This study introduced forms of personal pronouns that were never mentioned in the literature.

Index Terms—Hamadan, Hawazin, Najd, northern dialect, Qassim dialect

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Personal Pronouns in the Semitic Languages

The Semitic languages use five types of pronouns: personal pronouns, suffixed possessive pronouns, determinative-relative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and indefinite and interrogative pronouns (Lipinski, 2001). Personal pronouns are either independent (free) or dependent (suffixed). The independent pronouns, as the name suggests, are used separately, as in Indo-European languages. The dependent pronouns are suffixed to nouns, verbs, or even prepositions.

Personal pronouns in general, and in Semitic languages in particular, are susceptible to universal language changes, but their main forms remain intact. In Tables 1 and 2, it is obvious that the forms of personal pronouns, for example, in some of the Semitic Languages are mainly similar. However, an example of universal linguistic change is that the dual forms are partially lost in (Classical) Arabic and fully lost in other languages. The loss of the dual number in personal pronouns is due to the economy principle (Al-Sharkawi, 2017, p. 183). Although irrelevant to this study, it needs to be mentioned that the dual forms are preserved in Najdi dialects in nominal cases, unlike other Arabic dialects.

TABLE 1
INDEPENDENT PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN SOME OF THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Number	Person/ gender	*Proto- Semitic	Arabic	Aramaic	Hebrew	Ge'ez
Singular	1	?an-a	?ana:	?ana:	?ani:	?ana
	2M	?an-ta	?anta	?anta	?atta:	?anta
	2F	?an-ti	?anti	?anti	?att	?anti
	3M	?u-wa	huwa	hu:	hu:	wə?ətu
	3F	?i-ya	hiya	hi:	hi:	yə?əti
Dual	1	?an-ka:	--	--	--	--
	2	?an-tana:	?antuma:	--	--	--
	3	?u-na:	huma:	--	--	--
Plural	1	nih-nu	nahnu	?anaḥna:	nahnu:	nəḥna
	2M	?an-ta-nu	?antum	?antu:m	?attem	?antəmmu
	2F	?an-ti-na	?antunna	?anti:n	?atte:n	?antən
	3M	?u-nu	hum	himmo:	he:m	wə?ətomu
	3F	?i-na	hunna	hinni:n	he:n	yə?əton

TABLE 2
DEPENDENT PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN SOME OF THE SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Number	Person/ gender	*Proto- Semitic	Arabic	Hebrew	Aramaic	Ge'ez	
Singular	1	GEN	-iy	-i:	-i:	-i:	-ya
		ACC	-ni	-ni:	-ni:	-ni:	-ni
	2M	-ka	-ka	-ka:	-k	-ka	
	2F	-ki	-ki	-k	-ki:	-ki	
	3M	-fu	-hu	-hu:	-hi:	-hu	
Dual	3F	-fa	-ha:	-ha:	-ha:	-ha:	
	1	-nay	--	--	--	--	
	2	-kunaya	-kuma:	--	--	--	
Plural	3	-funaya	-huma:	--	--	--	
	1	-na	-na:	-nu:	-na:	-na	
	2M	-kun	-kum	-kem	-ko:n/m	-kəmmu	
	2F	-kin	-kunna	-ken	-ke:n	-kən	
	3M	-fun	-hum	-hem	-ho:n/m	-homu	
3F	-fin	-hunna	-hen	-he:n	-hon		

B. Personal Pronouns in Arabic and Modern Arabic Dialects

Personal pronouns in modern Arabic dialects have evolved rather differently, which has led some scholars (e.g., Al-Sharkawi, 2017; Ferguson, 1959; Versteegh, 1984) to introduce the *peninsular* versus *non-peninsular* dichotomy. According to Al-Sharkawi (2017, p. 183), non-peninsular contemporary Arabic dialects (i.e., spoken outside the Arabian Peninsula have evolved from the Arabic koine (see Ferguson, 1959) which has gone through decades of simplification and eventually koineization. This intrinsically indicates that contemporary dialects in the Arabian Peninsula (e.g., Najdi dialects) are radically more conservative given that they were not subjected to leveling and koineization as their non-peninsular counterparts.

The comparison between peninsular and non-peninsular dialects is beyond the scope of this study. However, in this section, some light will be shed on the general differences between personal pronouns paradigms in both dialect groups.

In discussion of Ferguson's theory of the Arabic koine, Cohen (1970, p. 109) points out that there are some common features shared by non-peninsular modern Arabic dialects that indicate such a systematic process of koineization. The features concerning personal pronouns are the partial/complete loss of /h/ in the 3rd person masculine suffixed pronouns and the loss of gender distinction in plural pronouns. The former feature, however, is retained in most peninsular dialects, and the latter is retained in several peninsular dialects, some of which are in Najd.

For a better understanding of this dichotomy, refer to Table 3 which contains references for the paradigms of personal pronouns in modern Arabic dialects arranged geographically.

TABLE 3
REFERENCES FOR PERSONAL PRONOUNS (INDEPENDENT AND SUFFIXED) IN MODERN ARABIC DIALECTS

Part of the Arab World	Dialect	Reference
West	Algiers	Boucherit (2006, p. 63)
	Tripoli	Pereira (2009, p. 551)
	Khartoum	Dickens (2007, p. 560)
	Cairo	Woidich (2006, p. 326)
	Morocco	Caubet (2008, p. 277)
	Tunis	Gibson (2009, p. 566)
Levant	Amman	Al-Wer (2007a, p. 510)
	Baghdad	Abu-Haidar (2006a, p. 226)
	Damascus	Lentin (2006, p. 548)
	Palestine	Shahin (2008, p. 531)
	Beirut	Na'in (2006, p. 279)
Arabian Peninsula	Oman	Edzard (2008, p. 483)
	Sana'a	Watson (2009, p. 110)
	Bahrain	Holes (2006, p. 247)
	Kuwait	Holes (2007, p. 613)

C. The Dialects Understudy

The dialects of Saudi Arabia have been categorized as a continuum of each of the countries bordering them (Ingham, 2009, p. 123). The dialects of the southern part of Saudi Arabia share features with those of Yemen. The eastern dialects share features with those of Bahrain and The United Arab Emirates (Holes, 1984, p. 30). The dialects of Hijaz (west) have been regarded as Egypto-Levantine because of several features they share with said Arabic varieties (Ingham, 1971, p. 277). As pointed out by Ingham (1994, p. 1), the dialects of Najd, however, have had less contact with other countries and therefore have been noted to be conservative in nature. According to Ingham (1994, p. 5), they can be subcategorized into Central Najdi (spoken in Riyadh Province), Northern (spoken in the northern parts of the Arabian

Peninsula, Hayil and Northern Borders Provinces), and finally mixed Northern-Central (spoken in Qassim Province). The geographical distribution of Najdi dialects is provided in Map 1.

The central Najd dialect is spoken in an approximate radius of 500 km and thus there are sub-dialects that exhibit differences in some linguistic features, some of which are personal pronouns. The sub-dialects are the dialect of the Sedentary population, the dialect of Bedouin tribes that are originally from the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula (descendants of the ancient tribe of Hamadan), and the dialect of the Bedouin tribes that are originally from the mid-western parts of the Arabian Peninsula (descendants of the ancient tribe of Hawazin). For further details on this sub-categorization of Central Najd dialects refer to Alajmi (2019).



Figure 1. Map Showing Administrative Provinces Covering Najd Area and Corresponding Najdi Dialects
Adapted From Alajmi (2019, p. 29)

D. The Study and Research Questions

Personal pronouns are one of the most intriguing paradigms in linguistics, especially from a comparative diachronic perspective. Although they show resistance to change and maintain to some extent similar basic forms, they tend to exhibit minor variations mostly at the morphophonemic level across languages/dialects descending from the same language family.

The personal pronouns of Saudi Arabian dialects have been examined by Prochazka (1988). There are valuable contributions by Prochazka, but the classification of dialects and sub-dialects is rather outdated and to some extent random. For instance, the dialects in one instance will be distinguished based on city (e.g., Riyadh), but based on lifestyle in another (e.g., Bedouin). Furthermore, in other instances, it is based on tribe (e.g., Qahtan). Ingham (1994, p. 193) provided several differences between Najdi dialects based on personal pronouns, but there is a lack of a deeper classification of the dialects, like the one which will be used here (provided by Alajmi, 2019).

The current study will provide the paradigms of personal pronouns of regional and social dialects of Najd. The dialects share a similar phonemic inventory and most grammatical features. However, there is a considerable number of morphophonemic differences, most of which are present in the paradigms of personal pronouns. These variations are preserved in each dialect because they are below the level of the speaker's consciousness, i.e., *indicators* or *markers* (as established in Alajmi & Alghannam, 2022). However, some forms of personal pronouns in some dialects have reached the level of *stereotype* and thus are mostly avoided by speakers. Such forms will be discussed below.

This study aims to answer the following question:

- What are the regional and sociolinguistic variations in the paradigms of personal pronouns in Najdi dialects?

To reiterate, the regional dialects examined here are Northern, Qassim, and Central. The social dialects are Hawazin Bedouin, Hamadan Bedouin, and Sedentary, which are sub-varieties of the Central dialect.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several linguistic studies on Najdi Arabic that have been carried out by non-native and native speakers (e.g., Abboud, 1979; Al-Sudais, 1976; Al-Sweel, 1987; Ingham, 1994, 2008; Johnstone, 1964). Following the traditional framework, these studies provided descriptions of the main linguistic features of the Najdi dialect and sub-dialects. The paradigms of personal pronouns (Independent and dependent) have been mentioned in most studies. However, only a few of them pointed out the regional and social variation of personal pronouns. Ingham (1994, p. 193), for example, was one of the first to point out the differences between the forms of 3SM and 3SF suffixed pronouns in Central as opposed to Qassim and Northern dialects. In the Central dialect, the forms are 3SM *-ih* and 3SF *-ha* (e.g., *kita:b-ih* 'his book' and *kita:b-ha* 'her book') while in the other two dialects it is 3SM *-uh* and 3SF *-ah* (e.g., *kita:b-uh* 'his book' and *kita:b-ah* 'her book'). What Ingham (1994) and others fail to mention is that *-ih* is not the only form of 3SM pronoun in the Central dialect. As will be discussed below, there are actually two forms for 3SM: *-ih* and *-ah*. The former is used by Bedouin tribes while the latter is used by Sedentary groups. Other recent sociolinguistic studies on Najd (e.g., Al-Essa, 2008) refer to personal pronoun forms, but compare one paradigm of Najdi personal pronouns with another Saudi dialect (e.g., Urban Hijazi). There are new studies in which some personal pronoun forms of Najdi dialects are mentioned, but to my knowledge, there is no thorough examination of personal pronoun paradigms in Najdi dialects (both regional and social). This study digs deeper into the awareness rank of some forms (stereotype, marker, and indicator) and whether they are abandoned or are still in use. This study will shed light on the loss of gender distinction in plural forms in some dialects and retention in others.

III. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The data in this study have been collected by the sociolinguistic interview. Participants were interviewed for an average of one hour. They were asked questions on a range of topics gauged to the interest of each participant. The structure of the interview is designed to elicit stretches of free speech in which the participant is relaxed and hence less attention is paid to speech (Labov, 1984, p. 32). In interviews with Arabic speakers, eliciting styles using reading tasks is not applicable because of the diglossic situation in the Arab world (Al-Wer, 2013, p. 245). In other words, when participants are given reading tasks, they will more likely switch to Standard Arabic. Therefore, free conversation is the targeted type of production data in this study and in most studies that investigate Arabic varieties.

The sample is comprised of 25 speakers, five speakers from each dialect and sub-dialect. The researcher reached out to participants via a friend of a friend technique. The age of participants ranges from 25 to 45. The level of education is roughly the same for all participants (i.e., have a college degree).

All forms of personal pronouns, independent and dependent, have been recorded and analyzed. A participant might use more than one form for a pronoun, one is the standard one and the other is a marked feature or stigmatized. Observations on such forms will be discussed below.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the interviews have been transcribed, and all forms for each dialect have been provided below. The independent personal pronouns are listed in Table 4 while dependent forms are listed in Table 5. Observations on each set of pronouns are given under the corresponding Table. The forms that are considered non-standard (i.e., marked) are written in bold in the tables. The discussion of forms will be based on pronouns rather than dialects. In other words, the forms will be discussed row by row.

TABLE 4
INDEPENDENT PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN REGIONAL AND SOCIAL DIALECTS OF NAJD

Person. Number. gender	SA	Hamadan	Hawazin	Sedentary	Qassim	Northern
1SC	<i>ʔana:</i>	<i>ʔana:</i>	<i>ʔana:</i>	<i>ʔana:</i>	<i>ʔana:</i>	<i>ʔana:</i>
1PC	<i>naħnu</i>	<i>ħinna</i>	<i>ħinna</i>	<i>inna</i>	<i>ħinna</i>	<i>ħinna</i>
2SM	<i>ʔanta</i>	<i>ʔant</i>	<i>ʔantah</i>	<i>ʔint</i>	<i>ʔant</i>	<i>ʔant</i>
2SF	<i>ʔanti</i>	<i>ʔanti</i>	<i>ʔanti</i>	<i>ʔinti / ʔintaj</i>	<i>ʔinti</i>	<i>ʔinti</i>
2DC	<i>ʔantuma:</i>	--	--	--	--	--
2PM	<i>ʔantum</i>					
2PF	<i>ʔantunna</i>	<i>ʔantu:</i>	<i>ʔantu:</i>	<i>ʔintaw</i>	<i>ʔantu:</i>	<i>ʔantu:</i>
3SM	<i>ħuwa</i>	<i>ħu:</i>	<i>ħu:/ħwah</i>	<i>ħu:</i>	<i>ħu:</i>	<i>ħu:</i>
3SF	<i>ħiya</i>	<i>ħi:</i>	<i>ħi:</i>	<i>ħi:</i>	<i>ħi:</i>	<i>ħi:</i>
3DC	<i>ħuma:</i>	--	--	--	--	--
3PM	<i>ħum</i>				<i>ħum</i>	<i>ħam</i>
3PF	<i>ħumma</i>	<i>ħum</i>	<i>ħum</i>	<i>ħum</i>	<i>ħin</i>	<i>ħin</i>

- 1SC: This form *ʔana:* is the most preserved form of all, not only across Najdi dialects but also across the Semitic languages (see Table 1)

- 1PC: The Sedentary form *inna* is the only different variant from all other dialects. It should be noted that when speakers of other dialects were asked about this form, they were not aware of this variation (i.e., it is a marker or indicator).
- 2SM: For this form, Najdi dialects have lost case marking, and therefore the last /a/ in *ʔanta* is lost. The Hawazin dialect has added /h/ to their form, as well as to 3SM *hwah*. In the Sedentary dialect, the stem *ʔant* has changed to *ʔint*, not only in this form but across the entire paradigm as well.
- 2SF: Hamadan and Hawazin have preserved this pronoun from Classical Arabic. The Sedentary dialect, as discussed above has undergone the change *ʔant* → *ʔint*. Qassim and Northern have undergone this change as well, but surprisingly it is restricted to this pronoun. 21% of the tokens in the Sedentary dialect were realized as *ʔintaj*. The addition of a glide at the end is also found in the Sedentary 2P *ʔintaw*.
- 2DC: The dual forms for all personal pronouns are lost in all modern Arabic dialects.
- 2PM, 2PF: The gender distinction has been lost in all Najdi dialects in these forms. It is *ʔantu*: for both masculine and feminine. The Sedentary form, however, contains a glide at the end as stated earlier.
- 3SM, 3SF: The 3S forms show no variation across all dialects, except Hawazin dialect 3SM. The frequency rate of usage for *hwah* in the data is 27%, as opposed to the other form *hu*: (73%).
- 3PM, 3PF: The gender distinction in these forms has been lost in Central dialects but preserved in the others. The Northern dialect has undergone the change /u/ → /a/ in the masculine form. This is not a sporadic change, however. Rather, it is consistent with other dependents forms, as shall be discussed below.

TABLE 5
DEPENDENT PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN REGIONAL AND SOCIAL DIALECTS OF NAJD

Person.Number. gender	SA		Hamadan	Hawazin	Sedentary	Qassim	Northern
	GEN	-i:/	-i:	-i:	-i:	-i:	-i:
1SC	ACC	-ni	-ni	-ni	-ni/-a:ni	-an	-an
1PC		-na	-na	-na	-na/-a:na	-na	-na
2SM		-ka	-ik	-ik	-ik/-k	-ik/-k	-ak
2SF		-ki	-ts/-f/-ik	-tʃ/-ik	-s/-ik	-ts/-ik	-ts/-ik
2DC		-kuma:	--	--	--	--	--
2PM		-kum				-kum	-kam
2PF		-kunna	-kum	-kum	-kum	-kin	-kin
3SM		-hu	-ih	-ih	-ah	-uh	-uh
3SF		-ha:	-ha:	-ha:	-ha:	-ah	-ah
3DC		-huma:	--	--	--	--	--
3PM		-hum				-hum	-ham
3PF		-hunna	-hum	-hum	-hum	-hin	-hin

- 1SC: In Arabic and modern Arabic dialects, the suffixed pronouns of accusative and genitive cases are different. For the other forms, they are the same. For the genitive case, all dialects of Najd have the same forms as Standard Arabic. As for the accusative case, the forms are different in Qassim and Northern dialects, as noted by Ingham (1994, p. 193). In addition, *-a:ni* is attested among Sedentary speakers who inhabit the towns north of Riyadh and south of Qassim. Two of the five speakers representing the Sedentary dialects have used this form 34% of the time. To elaborate, the total number of tokens for this pronoun in the speech of these two speakers was 41. The occurrences of *-ni* were 27 (66%) while the occurrences of *-a:ni* were 14 (34%).
- 1PC: This form is preserved in all Najdi dialects as *-na*. However, as is the case with the previous form, the Sedentary dialect has *-a:na*, and it is used by the same aforementioned speakers.
- 2SM: For this pronoun, the form is *-ik* for all dialects except for the Northern dialect which is *-ak*. In the Sedentary and Qassim dialects, sometimes the stem to which the suffixed pronoun is attached is re-syllabified resulting in loss of the epenthetic vowel /i/ in *-ik*. Therefore, the word *tʃlib-ik* ‘your order’ is realized as *tʃalab-k*.
- 2SF: The realizations of this pronoun are some of the most unique forms in the Arabic Language. They have been observed by early Arab grammarians, e.g., Sibawayh and Ibn-Jinni (Al-Azraqi, 2007, p. 230), and they are still studied by contemporary native and non-native linguists (e.g., Al-Azraqi, 2007; Al-Essa, 2009; Al-Rojaie, 2013; Johnstone, 1963). The standard form of this pronoun in Najdi dialects is *-ik*, which is identical to the Masculine form. The non-standard variants, however, are different across dialects. Under Haman for example the non-standard forms *-ts/ -f* were reported. The former is produced by the Dosari Tribe while the latter is produced by the Ajmi tribe, all of which descend from the Haman ancient tribe as stated earlier (see Alajmi, 2019). Hawazin dialect exhibited a rather unique form *-tʃ*, which is similar to that of Kuwaiti Arabic (Holes, 2007, p. 613). The Sedentary dialect uses *-s* while Qassim and Northern dialects use *-ts*, which is similar to that of the Dosari Tribe. It must be noted that the speakers’ awareness of some of these non-standard forms is rather high (i.e., stereotype). The frequency of some of the variants recorded was quite low due to this fact. The discussion of the sociolinguistic details of these forms is beyond the scope of this research.
- 2PM, 2PF: As is the case with independent pronouns, the gender distinction in Central dialects has been lost. In Qassim and Northern dialects, however, the gender distinction is retained. As noted across the masculine

- forms in the Northern dialect, there is a tendency to use /a/ instead of /u/ and /i/ (Northern *-kam* vs. other dialects *-kum*).
- 3SM: Ingham (1994, p. 193) noted the variation between the Central form *-ih* and Qassim/Northern *-uh*. However, the form used by the Sedentary dialect is *-ah*, not *-ih*. As for when this pronoun is suffixed to a stem ending in a vowel, the form is *-h* for all dialects (e.g., *ʕale:-h* ‘on him’ and *ʕasʕa:-h* ‘his stick’). In Qassim dialect, it was noted that if the ending vowel is /e/, it is changed to a glide /j/. Therefore, *ʕale:-h* ‘on him’ was used by some Qassimi speakers as *ʕalj-ah*.
 - 3SF: The variation in this pronoun between Central and Qassim/Northern dialects was also noted by Ingham (1994, p. 193). It must be noted that nowadays some speakers from Central Najd, especially Sedentary, face difficulties when communicating with speakers of Qassimi and Northern dialects because the masculine form in the Sedentary dialect is identical to the feminine form in the other two (*-ah*).
 - 3PM, 3PF: The observations on these forms will be redundant because the independent and dependent forms are identical in all dialects.

V. CONCLUSION

The regional and sociolinguistic variation of personal pronouns has not been addressed properly in the literature. It was found that there is a considerable variation in the paradigms of personal pronouns across Najdi dialects. Central dialects are more conservative than Qassim and Northern Dialects in terms of changes in the actual forms. Qassim and Northern, however, are more conservative than Central in the sense that they preserved gender distinction in 2nd and 3rd person plural forms. Personal pronouns are generally indicators or markers. This means that speakers of each dialect will continue to use their variant of the pronouns, and they will be less likely to converge to the standard form. Some pronouns, however, have achieved the level of a stereotype and thus are avoided. Consequently, the leveling in the relevant paradigm can be noticeable, e.g., 2SF.

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