

## **Children's deviation in the acquisition of variable linguistic gender patterns**

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This study compares the use of the variables (o), (o:), (e), and (e:) in the speech of parents and their children in the village of Oyoum Al-Wadi, Syria. These variables are realized respectively as the rural forms [o], [o:], [e], [e:] or the urban forms [a], [a:], [a], [a:]. A previous study comparing the same parents' and children's use of the variable (q) (realized as the rural form [q] or urban form [ʔ]) showed that although children do not acquire the frequencies that exist in their immediate environment, they acquire the linguistic gender differences in their community; boys, like men, use the rural form [q] much more than girls. Gender emerged as statistically significant regarding (q) for both parents and children. In the current study, while fathers appear to use the rural forms of the vowels more than mothers, gender does not emerge as statistically significant regarding parents' use of these vowels. In contrast, gender emerges as statistically significant regarding the children's use of these vowels, indicating that boys use much more rural forms of the vowels than girls. It is, thus, hypothesized that children in this community not only do not acquire the frequencies that exist in their immediate environment, but also do not acquire the same degree of linguistic gender differences. They exhibit stronger linguistic gender division than their parents regarding the vowels, creating a parallel situation to their strong linguistic gender division regarding (q).

The naturally occurring speech of 22 parents is compared to that of their 21 children who are divided into four age groups (6-8, 9-11, 12-14, and 15-18). The gender and origin of parents emerged as statistically insignificant like the age of children. However, the gender of children emerged as statistically significant.

The Paired-Samples T-Tests showed no correlation in the use of all variables between parents and their children; fathers and their children; mothers and their children; fathers and boys; fathers and girls; mothers and boys; or mothers and girls. These results strongly suggest that children do not acquire the frequencies of their parents or of their caregiver.

These findings indicate that boys and girls observe the strong gender differences in the community along other differences such as the strong distinction between rural and urban identities which are associated with the rural and urban forms respectively. They try to implement, as in the situation of (q), a strong linguistic gender division regarding the vowels, which is not as strong among parents. They also try to maintain a strong distinction between rural and urban identities; girls use much lower percentages of the rural forms than their caregivers and boys use higher percentages of the rural forms than girls. Consequently, children seem to have very strong awareness of the different variations in their environment and the significance of certain sounds to projecting specific gender and spatial identities and are able to manipulate these variations accordingly, indicating the influence of socio-psychological factors in their observed inter- and intra-speaker variation and the immense development of their sociolinguistic competence.