Referring to Jordanian Female Relatives in Public

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Abstract : Referring to female relatives by male Jordanian speakers in public is governed by various linguistic and social constraints. Although Jordanian society is less conservative than it was a few decades ago, women are still considered the weaker link in society and men still believe that they need to protect them. Conservative Jordanians often avoid referring to their female relatives overtly, i.e., using their real names. Instead, they use covert names, such as pseudonyms, nicknames, pet names, etc. The reason behind such language use has to do with how Arab men, in general, see women as part of their honor. This study intends to investigate to what extent Jordanian males hide their female relatives' names in public domains. The data was collected from spontaneous informal voice-recorded interviews carried out in the village of Saham in the far north of Jordan. Saham's dialect is part of a larger Horani dialect used by speakers along a wide area that stretches from Salt in the south to the Syrian borders in the north of Jordan. The voice-recorded interviews were originally carried out as an audio record of some customs and traditions in the village of Saham in 2013. During most of these interviews, the researchers observed how the male participants indirectly referred to their female relatives. Instead of using real names, the male speakers used broad terms to refer to their female relatives, such al-Beit 'the home,' al-ciyaal 'the kids', um-x 'the mother of x,' etc. All tokens related to the issue in question were collected, analyzed and quantified about three age cohorts: young, middle-aged and old speakers. The results show that young speakers are more direct in referring to their female relatives than the other two age groups. This can point to a possible change in progress in the speech community of Saham. It is argued that due to contact with other urban speech communities, the young speakers in Saham do not feel the need to hide the real names of their female relatives as they consider them as equals. Indeed, the young generation is more open to the idea of women's rights and call for expanding Jordanian women's roles in Jordanian society.
Keywords : gender differences, Horan, proper names, social constraints
Conference Title : ICLLL 2020 : International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics
Conference Location : Rome, Italy
Conference Dates : April 08-09, 2020