

The Effect of the Pronunciation of Emphatic Sounds on Perceived Masculinity/Femininity

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Abstract : Emphatic sounds in Arabic are /t^h/, /s^h/, /d^h/, and /ð^h/ . They involve a secondary articulation in the pharynx area as opposed to their counterparts: /t/, /s/, /d/ and /ð/. Although they are present in most Arabic dialects, some dialects have lost this class as a historical development, such as Maltese Arabic. It has been found that there is a difference in the pronunciation of these emphatic sounds between the two genders, arguing that males tend to produce more evident emphasis than females. This study builds on these studies by trying to investigate whether listeners perceive fully emphatic sounds as more masculine and less emphatic sounds as more feminine. Furthermore, the study aims to find out which is more important in this perception process: the emphatic consonant itself or the vowel following it. To test this, natural and manipulated tokens of two male and two female speakers were used. The natural tokens include words that have emphatic consonant and emphatic vowel and tokens that have plain consonant and plain vowel. The manipulated tokens include words that have emphatic consonant but central vowel and plain consonant followed by the same central vowel. These manipulated tokens allow us to see whether the consonant will still affect the perception even if the vowel is controlled. Another group of words that contained no emphatic sounds was used as a control group. The total number of tokens (natural, manipulated, and control) are 160 tokens. After that, 60 university students (30 males and 30 females) listened to these tokens and responded by choosing a specific character that they think is likely to produce each token. The characters' descriptions are carefully written with two degrees of femininity and two degrees of masculinity. The preliminary results for the femininity level showed that the highest degree of femininity was for tokens that contain a plain consonant and a plain vowel. The lowest level of femininity was given for tokens that have fully emphatic consonant and vowel. For the manipulated tokens that contained plain consonant and central vowel, the femininity degree was high which indicates that the consonant is more important than the vowel, while for the manipulated tokens that contain emphatic consonant and a central vowel, the femininity level was higher than that for the tokens that have emphatic consonant and emphatic vowel, which indicates that the vowel is more important for the perception of emphatic consonants. These results are interpreted in light of feminist linguistic theories, linguistic expectations, performed gender and linguistic change theories.

Keywords : Emphatic sounds, gender studies, perception, sociophonetics

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