Gendered Metaphors and Idioms in Lebanese Arabic: Shaping Social Perceptions

Sleiman, Tamara[1] & Chaya, Ranim[2]
[1]*American University of Beirut, Lebanon* [2]*Studyportals, The Netherlands*
ts65@aub.edu.lb, ranimchaya@hotmail.com,

Metaphors and idioms are more than just figures of speech; they serve as cognitive and discursive tools that shape and reinforce social ideologies. In Lebanese Arabic, many of these expressions are inherently gendered, reflecting and perpetuating cultural norms regarding masculinity and femininity. This study investigates how gendered metaphors and idioms in Lebanese Arabic contribute to the construction of social identities, reinforce gender hierarchies, and influence perceptions of power, agency, and emotional expression.

Theoretically, this research is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), examining how language encodes and transmits gendered ideologies. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the study also draws on Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (2003) work on language and gender**,** highlighting how idiomatic expressions serve as sites of meaning negotiation and social positioning. Additionally, language attitude research (Garrett et al., 2003) informs the analysis of speaker perceptions.

Methodologically, this study employs a questionnaire-based approach, incorporating a Likert-scale survey, semantic differential scales, and scenario-based questions to assess attitudes toward gendered metaphors and idioms. The questionnaire is distributed to a diverse sample of Lebanese Arabic speakers across different age groups, genders, and social backgrounds. Participants evaluate the perceived meanings, emotional connotations, and social implications of common gendered idioms, such as "eben ebnak elak; eben bentak la" (Your son's son is yours; Your daughter's son is not) and "tarsha 'al beb btetnassat" (Even if she's deaf, she can eavesdrop behind the door). Scenario-based questions further explore how these idioms influence social interactions and expectations.

Preliminary findings suggest that while many traditional idioms reinforce patriarchal norms, recent linguistic shifts, particularly among younger speakers, challenge these associations. The study also examines whether participants perceive these expressions as outdated, neutral, or still socially influential and whether language reform efforts, such as avoiding gendered idioms, are widely accepted. By analyzing how gendered metaphors and idioms shape thought and interaction, this research contributes to broader discussions on language, gender, and social change in Arabic sociolinguistics**.** The findings have implications for gender representation in everyday discourse, media, and education, offering insights into the evolving role of colloquial Arabic in shaping gendered social perceptions.

References

Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge University Press.
Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
Garrett, P., Coupland, N., & Williams, A. (2003). *Investigating language attitudes: Social meanings of dialect, ethnicity, and performance*. University of Wales Press.
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.