

A Sociolinguistic Study of Terms of Oaths in Jordanian Arabic

Husein Almutlaq

Al-Balqa' Applied University
Huson University College
Jordan

Abstract

Oaths are strongly used in Jordan Arabic where various forms and types of oaths have been used all over the country. Besides, oaths are formed in different ways where a number of social factors affect the forming and using of such them.

Key Words: oaths, religious duties, honor, formation of oath

Introduction

Swearing is one of the well-known social customs in any society . People would use different expressions and terms in order to express this social custom . In Jordan , people use different terms and expressions in everyday Arabic to confirm their promises , speeches ,ideas and attitudes. This paper aims at investigating the different forms , terms and expressions of swearing in colloquial Arabic of Jordan . In Islam it is not accepted to swear with any thing except the name of Allah (God).In spite of this fact , a large number of swearing terms are within the spoken Arabic in Jordan.

Review of related literature

Swears can be categorized under social politeness. Brown (1976) defined politeness as "a special way of treating people , saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account other people's feelings ". Social politeness includes different social customs such as greetings, partings, invitations, thanks, swearing, condolences, congratulations... etc. Sachiko (1980) said that politeness has become a concept , which covers the constraints of human interaction according to the traditions and behaviors of people without friction. To congratulate someone on different occasions, certain expressions are used.

For Ardent and Janny (1985) politeness is the knowledge of how to express positive and negative feelings without threatening one's partner emotionally. Hazaymeh (2001) studied the standard expressions of swears in Jordan. He pointed out that many expressions were used formally.

Types of terms of swearing

A numerous number of swearing terms are used in spoken Arabic in Jordan . They are used by all Jordanians no matter of their social backgrounds. The following is an analysis of such terms . Religious words . A number of words with religious background are used in order to form the terms of swearing in vernacular Arabic in Jordan. The most prominent religious word that composes an essential part in many of swearing is the attribute of God (i.e. the word Allah). Terms as (Wallah , by God) , (Wallah il a'theem ,bilahi ila'theem , by His Almighty God) , (qasaman billah , I swear by God) , (wehyat allah by the soul of God) , (allah ilwakeel , I swear by God whom I depend on) , (allah wakeelak , by God whom you depend on) are widely used in Jordan . Other religious word is (rab, lord). It is coined with many expressions to form a colloquial swear. For example, the terms (werabi, by my Lord) , (berabbak, by your Lord) , (werab ilbeat, by the Lord of the house " the Ka'ba ") , (werab ilka'ba , by the Lord of the Ka'ba) , (werab ila'zah , bythe Lord of Power) , (werab ilkon , by the Lord of the universe) have astrong presence as terms of swearing in Jordanian Arabic . Besides these words, people adopt the word (nabi, prophet) , (rasool, messenger) and his name (Mohammad) to form different terms of swearing as (welnabi, by the prophet), (wea Mohammad, by Mohammad) , (wehyat innabi , by the life of the prophet) , (wehyat irrasool, by the life of the messenger) , (wehyat Mohammad , by the life of Mohammad) , (bisalat Mohammad a'leak , by the prayer of Mohammad upon you) .

In addition to these terms, colloquial Arabic of Jordan utilizes other words of religious sense to have similar terms of swearing. The word (quran) which is the name of the holy book of Muslims (the holy quran) is used to form swearings as (wil quran , by the Quran), (wihyat ilquran , by the life of the Quran). The word (Mushaf) which refers to the holy Quran is also used to make a swearing term as (wilmushaf , by the mushaf), (wilmushaf ilshareef, by the honorable Mushaf). The word (ka'ba , the holy shrine for Muslims in mecca, Saudi Arabia) is among the religious words that are used to have swearing in vernacular Arabic of Jordan as (welka'ba , by the Ka'ba), (wehyat ilka'ba, by the life of the ka'ba).

Religious duties

Since the great majority of people of Jordan are Muslims, they have to perform religious duties such as Salat (prayer), Haj (pilgrimage), Zakat (paying money), Syam (fasting) and Umra (small pilgrimage). People would use these words to form swearing in their spoken Arabic in order to give firmity and assurance to what they say or intend to do. Terms as (bisalatak , by your prayer), (bisyamak, by your fasting), (bihajjak , by your pilgrimage), (bizakatak , by your paying money), (biu'mrtak , by your small pilgrimage) are commonly used in Jordan. Those religious duties are also used in other forms for the same reason such as (a'syami , by my fasting), (a'salati , by my prayer), (bisyami , by my fasting), (bisalati, by my prayer).

In addition to these terms, a large group of people would use the word (deen, religion) to have other forms of swearing. The following examples will illustrate this. (wideeni, by my religion), (wideen illah, by the religion of God), (wideen ilislam , by the religion of Islam), (bideeni, with my religion), (bideenak , with your religion), (bideenku , with your " all of your " religion). Life, relatives, and parts of the body. In addition to the previous terms, Jordanian Arabic includes other terms of swearing. The most noticeable word is (hayat, life). It is widely used with different names such as (wihyat Allah , by the life of God), (wihyat alnabi , by the life of the prophet), (wihyat irrasool , by the life of the messenger) (the words prophet and messenger refer to prophet Mohammad). Other similar terms are (wihyat ilquran , by the life of the quran), (wihyat ilka'ba, by the life of the Ka'ba), (wihyat ilmushaf , by the life of the Mushaf), (wihyat halne'meh , by the life of this grace), (wihyat rabbak , by the life of your Lord), (wihyat rabbi, by the life of my Lord). The word (hayat, life) is also used with family relatives in order to have terms of swearing. The family expressions father, mother, parents, and children as used with the word (hayat , life) to compose swearing terms as (wihyat abuui, by the life of my father), (wihyat abuuk, by the life of your father), (bihyat waldak , by the life of your parent), (bihyat waldeak , by the life of your parents), (wihyat ummak , by the life of your mother), (wihyat ummi, by the life of my mother), (bihyat awladak , by the life of your children). Also the word (hayat, life) is used with the word (u'mr, age) as (bihyat u'mrak , by the life of your age), (wihyat u'mri, by the life of my age).

Also the word (u'mr) is used in terms as (weu'mr awladi , by the age of my children), (biu'mr awladi, by the age of my children), (biu'mr awladak , by the age of your children), (biu'mri, by my age), (biu'mrak , by your age), (biu'mr abuuk, by the age of your father), (biu'mr ummak , by the age of your mother), (biu'mr waldeak , by the age of your parents). The word (ruuh, soul) is present in the terms of swearing such as (biruuh aboi , by the soul of my father), (biruuh ummak, by the soul of your mother), (biruuh abuuk , by the soul of your father), (biruuh waldak , by the soul of your parent), (biruuh waldeak , by the soul of your parents). The word (ruuh, soul) is used here if a parent or two of them are dead. The word (hayat, life) is also used with certain parts of the body in order to have terms of swearing. These parts include the eyes, head, beard, and mustache. For eyes and head they are very important parts of the body and thus they require a high caring. The words beard and mustache have a very important social value because they are considered as symbols of manhood. People would swear by using these parts as the following. (bihyat lihetak, by the life of your beard), (wihyat shawarbak, by the life of your mustache), (wihyat rasak, by the life of your head), (wihyat o'uunak, by the life of your eyes), (wehyat hal o'uun, by the life of these eyes). Other similar terms are (weras abui , by the head of my father). Similar terms are (min hal shwareb , of these mustaches), (min hal lehya, of this beard), (min hal thiqn , of this chin). The using of these three terms of swearing indicates that the swearer is very serious in what he says and that it is impossible for others to convince him of doing what they want. Because of the high value of parents and children, the swearer uses them in order to assure and affirm what he says and to make others accept his speech and do what he wants or what he needs them to do for him.

1.4.Honor

One of the most important social norms and values in the Jordanian society is honor. It is considered as a taboo that causing any harm to it will lead to unpleasant results for all members of the community. As a result of that, people would use the words (sharaf, e'rdh, both mean honors) to have different terms of swearing. It will be noted that the word (honor) is strongly linked with female expressions such as mother sister and daughters because the represent the honor of males. The following terms represent this method of swearing . (besharaf ukhtak , by the honor of your sister) , (bie'rdh ukhtak , by the honor of your sister) , (besharaf ummak , by the honor of your mother) , (bie'rdh ummak, by the honor of your mother) , (besharaf khawati, by the honor of my sisters) , (bie'rdh khawati, by the honor of my sisters) . Other terms are (wesharaf ukhti, by the honor of my sister) , (wie'rdh ukhti, by the honor of my sister) , (wie'rdh ummi, by the honor of my mother) , (besharafak, by your honor) , (wesharafi, by my honor) , (wie'rdhi, by my honor) , (bie'rdhak by your honor) , (bilshraf , by the honor) , (beshrafi, by my honor) , (weshrafi, by my honor) , (wie'rdh banati by the honor of my daughters) . In addition to these terms of swearing , people use the word (sharaf) with the name of Allah as (wesharaf allah , by the honor of God) , (bisharaf allah , by the honor of God) .

1.5.Hallaf " adjure, to swear in " .

The word (halaf, swear in) is also used in colloquial Arabic of Jordan to have terms of swearing . It is used in expressions as (ihlef , swear) , (ihlef billah , swear by God) , (hallaftak billah, " I asked you" to swear by God) , (hallaftak bilrasuul, I swear to you by the messenger) , (hallaftak , I adjure you to swear) . Other terms are (hallaftak biu'mrak , I swear to you by your age) , (hallaftak biwladak, I swear to you by your children) , (hallaftak biu'mr awladak , I swear to you by the age of your children) , (hallaftak bilghali, I swear to you by the dear one. The expression (dear one) refers to a dead relative such father, mother or a child .

1.6. Miscellaneous

Besides the above terms of swearing , people of Jordan use other ones such as (willi khalqak, by the one who created you) , (willijama'na bidoon ea'ad, by the one who gathered us without appointment) , (wila'theem , by the Almighty) . In these terms of swearing the name of God is not mentioned but people already know that the swearer swears with the name of God which is here is Allah. The word (uqsem , I swear) is also used to make swears as (uqsem billah , I swear by god) , (qasaman billah , swearing by God) , (qasaman a'thaman , swearing and glorifying of God) , (qasaman bia'yat illah , I swear by the verses of God) . Other forms of swearing are (yameen billah, an oath by God) , (biridhai a'leak, by my approving on you) which is usually used by parents particularly the mother who would use such swear to convince their child to do a good thing that they want him to do or to ask him to stop doing bad thing . Also Jordanian colloquial Arabic has swearings as (saiq a'leak allah , I ask you by the name of God) , (saiq a'leak alnabi, I ask you by the prophet) , (jahet allaha'leak, I request and ask you by God) , (jerat allah a'leak, I call you by the name of God) , (allah wea Muhammad rasuul allah, "I swear by Allah and Muhammad the messenger of Allah) , this term of swearing is elicited from the statement of witnessing in Islam(I witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah) . Other terms are (mashan allah, for the sake of God) , (minshan allah , for the sake of God) , (mashanilnabi , for the sake of the prophet) , (minshan alnabi, for the sake of the prophet) , (mashan irrasuul , for the sake of the messenger) , (minshan irrasuul , for the sake of the messenger) , (mashan abuuk , for the sake of your father) , (mashani , for my sake) .

Also people say (wehaq allah , for the rightness of God) , (haq allah , for the rightness of God) , (wallah wilnabi , by God and the prophet) , (wallah wirrasuul , by God and the messenger) , (wallah wea mohammad , by God and Muhammad) , (wea Muhammad , by Muhammad) . Another way of expressing swear in spoken Arabic in Jordan is the using of the word (a'layya, on me) with a certain expression after it . When a person uses the word (a'layya , on me) it indicates that a certain word has been missed or not used and this word is (yameen , swear) . People will quickly understand that the expression which is used by the swearer is considered as a swear. Swears with the word (a'layya , on me) can be as follows : (a'layya iljiira , by the protection is on me) meaning that a swear or an oath on me to protect you because providing protection to someone is of high admiration in an Arab culture . Other similar terms of swearing with the word (a'layya , on me) are : (a'layya iltalaq , the divorce is on me) which means I swear to get my wife divorced if I do not do so and so . The swearer uses such term because getting divorced is not an easy thing and the results of such action are not socially good , so when the swearer uses this term he shows a great determination to do what he uses this swear for , (a'layya wimin deeni, I swear by my religion) .

By using this term, the swearer means that he would abandon his religion if he does not do the thing that he uses this swear for. Abandon one's religion is not accepted and is considered as an awful matter, so the swearer would use this term to give high importance for his oath. People also use terms as (a'layya wimin hal shawareb, I swear by my mustache), (a'layya wimin hal lehya, I swear by my beard). The swearer would make a swear by using (mustache and beard) because they represent a very important social value as symbols of manhood and such terms are of course used by men only. When the swearer uses these terms he means that he would shave his beard and mustache if he does not do what he uses these swears for and shaving beard and mustache is considered a social taboo. In addition to these terms, colloquial Arabic of Jordan includes other terms such as (bilharam, I swear with what is prohibited), the word (bilharam, prohibited means getting divorced which is a great social problem when it occurs so when the swearer uses this term it indicates that the swearer would commit this horrible social matter if he does not do what he uses this swear for. Few sarcastic terms of swearing are used as (a'layya ittarbuush, the fez is on me), (wihyat u'kash, by the life of Okash" nonsense name "), (a'la raqbat jaheshna, by the neck of our donkey).

2.0. Formation of terms of swear

From the above data, certain notes can be said concerning the vocabulary that are used in the terms of swear and the formation of such terms in colloquial Arabic of Jordan. First, many religious words have been used in forming the swears as (Allah Mohammad, prophet, ka'ba, and rab). Second, different social terms are also used as (hayat'life', honor, and relative expressions). For the formation of the terms of swear, certain notices can also be said. 1. Many terms consist of one word preceded by the prepositions (wa, bi both mean by) as (wallah, by God), (birabbak, by your Lord) 2. Certain swears are composed of two words preceded by the prepositions (wa, bi) as (wahyat allah, by the life of God), (bihyat abuuk, by the life of your father).

3. Few swears are formed of two words without a preposition as (gasaman a'thaman, swearing and gloring), (allah ilwakeel, I swear by God whom I depend on). 4. A number of swears are composed of three words such as (saiq a'leak allah, I ask you by the name of God. 5. Few terms compromise of an imperative verb with a noun such as (ihlef billah, swear by God).

3.0. Factors affecting using swears in colloquial Arabic of Jordan

A number of social factors play an important role in using such swears in spoken Arabic in Jordan. The most prominent factor is the religious commitment. People who follow the instructions of Allah are strongly aware of the fact that they should not use any term of swear except the one which includes the word (Allah) because in Islam it is not accepted to swear by the name of any creature. Those who are less committed to the religion would use different terms of swear in their daily speech besides the swears that are provided by the religion.

The second factor which also has an effect on choosing the suitable term of swearing is education. The well-educated people try not to use vulgar expressions as (wesharaf ummi, by the honor of my mother). Another factor is setting where people try to avoid using certain terms of swearing particularly the most common ones. When people sit in a mosque or in a respected place or that they sit or speak with a person of high social position, they would shift to certain swears such as (wallah, by God).

4.0. Conclusion

Swears have a prominent presence in the vernacular Arabic in Jordan and various forms and types of swears and oaths have been used all over the country. In addition to that, the terms of swearing are formed in different ways and a number of social factors affect the using and forming of such swears. It is hoped that this paper will be the start for other.

References

- Ardent, H and et al (1985). "Politeness revisited: Cross-modal supportive strategies." IRAL, vol.23, pp.281-300.
- Brown, P. (1976), " Women and Politeness: A New Perspective on Language and Society "Anthropology, vol.3, pp.240-249.
- Hazaymeh, Omar.(2001). Standard Patterns of Swears in Jordan. Atlas Journal. Vol.3. Jordan.
- Ide, Sachiko. (1980). "Japanese Sociolinguistics: Politeness and Women's Speech." Lingua, vol.57, pp.357-385.