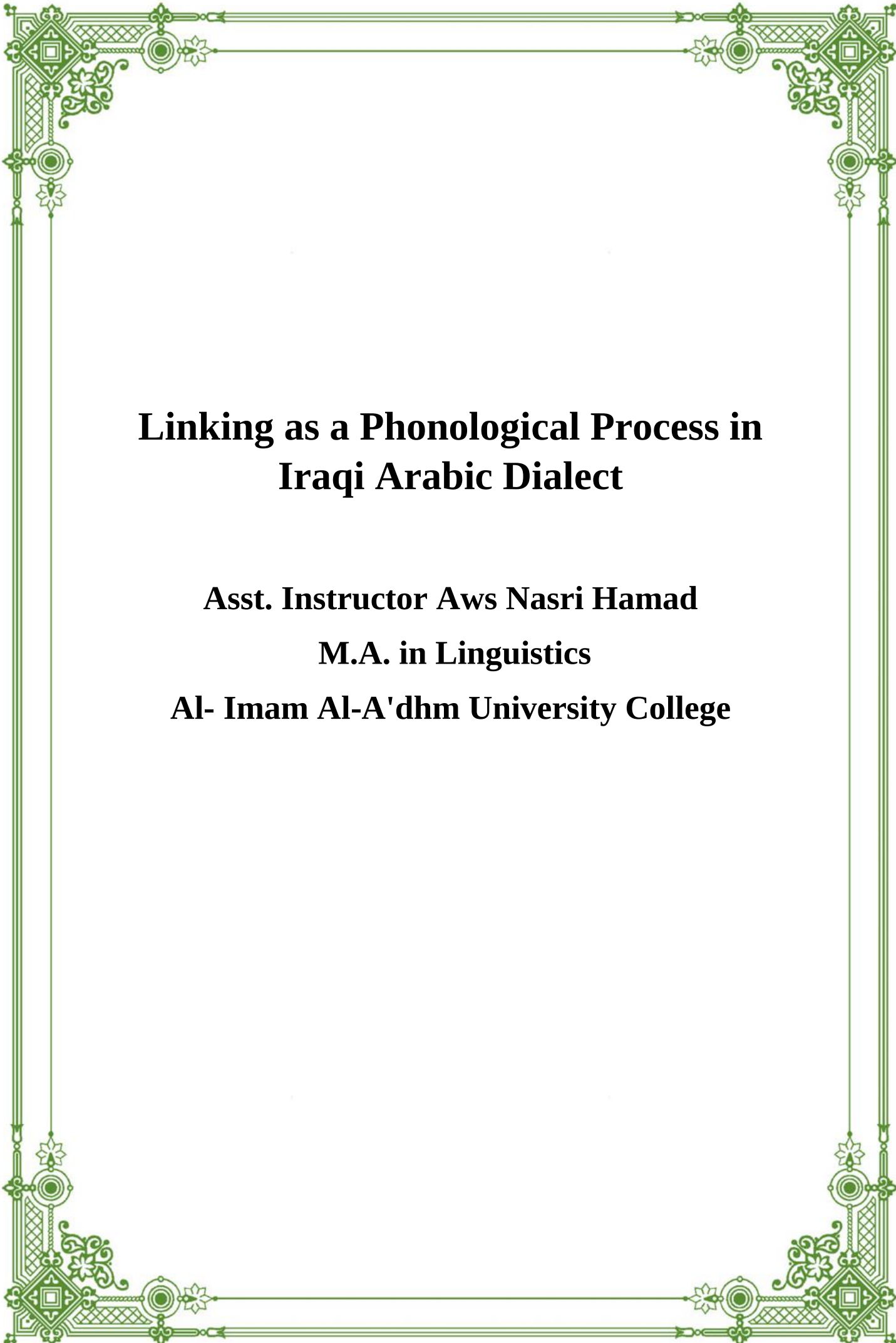




Linking as a Phonological Process in Iraqi Arabic Dialect

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Abstract

This paper investigates linking as one of the phonological process in English. Linking can be defined as a process of blending two words into one in connected speech. The aim of this paper is to identify the phonological phenomenon of linking in Iraqi Arabic Dialect (henceforth IAD). A data analysis is presented to show the validity of this phenomenon in the dialect under investigation. The results are presented to compare and show the similarities and differences between IAD to both Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA) and English in using linking in connected speech.

Keywords: Contrastive Phonology, linking, Iraqi Arabic Dialect, Modern Standard Arabic.

1. Introduction

The linguistic sounds suffer a great quantity of changes, valuable both in the normal flow of the language and in the course of the time, and such changes are known as Phonological Processes. Studying linking is a process by which "groups of words are connected together within the same phrase or sentence in connected speech". Kenworthy (1990: 9) states that people do not generally make pauses between words when they speak, but they move smoothly from one word to the next. Thus, the ability to speak smoothly and to utter connected words easily demands use of linking.

Studying connected speech is a matter of dealing with a very complex issue. In order to fully understand all the aspects of connected speech, a combination of various phenomena has to be taken into account. Single elements can be extracted and analyzed, but are also often influencing other elements of a different nature, yet fairly equal relevance to connected speech.

It is also important to say that every single speaker may pronounce every single word differently from what is basically considered a standard pronunciation even in connected speech. Various factors influence and affect the way how individual speakers express themselves, e.g. current mood, communicative situation, purpose of the communication, one's idiolect, education etc. Of course, all these possibilities are not the main subject of analysis in connected speech, but doubtlessly play a certain role in its final form. Gilbert (2008: 6) mentions that "Most English learners who suffer from inadequate training in listening comprehension complain that "native speakers talk too fast." What this often means is that learners are unable to process important grammatical signals, (e.g., past tense markers) or effectively process contracted speech." In fact, native speakers do not talk significantly faster, but they link, which creates an illusion of the speech flowing 'too fast' and causes that the speech becomes unintelligible for less experienced foreign users of English.

2. The System of Arabic Language

Arabic-speaking region has at least two distinct language systems in use (Ferguson, 1959). The first language system is the **MSA** which is the sole system for official communication in governments, news reporting and academic language and it is basically written. While MSA is used orally in speeches, broadcast news and formal settings, only a small minority of the population has facility in speaking it. For most users of MSA, it is like a second language, and its use consists mainly, if not exclusively, in reading and listening (Maamouri, 2005:1). The second language system is the spoken Arabic varieties, so called **Ammiyyah** (vernacular). It is the primary language varieties spoken in the different Arabic countries, but their usage is almost exclusively oral. Each Arab country has its own variety of spoken Arabic. It is possible to group these varieties of Arabic into Iraqi, Syrian, Algerian, Egyptian, etc (Jasim and Sharhan, 2013: 3).

Iraqi Arabic is spoken by about 28 million people in Iraq. Significant differences between the Arabian-like varieties of the south and the more conservative varieties of the north can be noticed (Ibid).

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Does Linking as a phonological process occur in Iraqi Arabic Dialect?
2. Does Linking behave in the same way as MSA ?

3. The Phonological System of Iraqi Arabic Dialect

Generally speaking, most Arabic dialects differ from MSA in the number of sound segments. That is, they have a reduced and restructured consonant system, but more complexity in the vowel system (Holes, 1995: 56). A closer look at the segmental system of Iraqi Arabic phonology is importantly needed to establish a "dialectal background" of this system. IAD has its own phonological system, that is, its phonological system consists of a number of consonants and vowels. As to the consonant sounds, there are thirty eight consonants in IAD, and these consonantal segments can be described according to the three parameters of voicing, place of articulation, and manner of articulation. There are more consonant sounds in IAD than in English. Some of these sounds are quite unlike anything in English, while others are in some respect, like certain English sounds (Wallace, 2004:3). As for the vowel sounds, the IAD vowel system is composed of five long vowels, four short vowels, and a number of vowel/semivowel combinations called diphthongs. All vowels in IAD have a much wider range of variation than vowels in English.

Table 1: The Consonant System of Iraqi Arabic Dialect
(After Wallace, 2004: 87)

	LABIAL	INTERDENTAL	DENTAL	PALATAL	VELAR	UVULAR	PHARYNGEAL	GLOTTAL
STOPS								
Voiceless	<i>p</i>		<i>t</i>		<i>k</i>	<i>q</i>		<i>ʔ</i>
Voiced	<i>b</i>		<i>d</i>		<i>g</i>			
SPIRANTS								
Voiceless	<i>f</i>	<i>θ</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>ʃ</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>ħ</i>	<i>h</i>
Voiced	<i>v</i>	<i>ð</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>ʒ</i>	<i>ġ</i>		<i>ʕ</i>	
AFFRICATES								
Voiceless				<i>tʃ</i>				
Voiced				<i>dʒ</i>				
NASALS	<i>m</i>		<i>n</i>					
LATERALS			<i>l</i>					
FLAP			<i>r</i>					
SEMIVOWELS	<i>w</i>			<i>y</i>				

Table 2: The Pure Vowel System of Iraqi Arabic Dialect
(After Wallace, 2004: 87 with some modifications)

Vowel	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>ii</i>		<i>uu</i>
	<i>i</i>		<i>u</i>
Mid	<i>ee</i>		<i>oo</i>
			<i>o</i>
Low		<i>aa</i>	
		<i>a</i>	

Table 3: The Diphthong System of Iraqi Arabic Dialect
(After Wallace, 2004: 87 with some modifications)

Vowel Height	With glide to y	With glide to w
High vowels		iw
Mid vowels	ooy	eew
Low vowels	aay ay	aaw aw

4. The Phonological process of Linking

The term linking is defined as a phenomenon happens at word boundaries where two sounds combine together while keeping their phonetic qualities (Alameen, 2007:1). Generally speaking, English speakers link words together to a void hiatus which is defined as "articulatory break, or gap, between two consecutive vowels belonging to different syllables or words linked through the insertion of an additional sound" (Burleigh, 2005: 157).

English speakers use linking to facilitate speech and avoid gapping to be more fluent. Nevertheless, the pronunciation of linking sounds is noticeable in all sorts of recorded material of the pronunciation of native speakers of English, and it has great value as a learning device to help learners of English to use smooth linking of words in continuous speech. (Ibid).

5. Types of Linking in English

According to the sounds that meet at word boundaries (i.e. consonants and vowels), linking can be categorized into three main types:

5.1 Consonant-to-vowel linking (C-V) takes place when the final consonant of a word is followed by a vowel in the same thought group. It is often pronounced as a medial consonant, i.e. a consonant occurring in the middle of a word, as in:

(1) **keep on** [ki:pon]

5.2 Vowel-to-vowel linking (V-V) occurs when a word that ends in a high and mid-tense vowel is followed by a word that begins with a vowel. Speakers, thereafter, insert a very short /j/ or /w/ sound to link the two vowels together and avoid a gap between the sounds. As in :

(2) **go out** [gəʊ^waut]

(3) **day out** [deɪ^jaut]

Linking with [j], Kelly (2000: 111) explains that when a word ends in [ɪ], [i:], or a diphthong which ends in [ɪ], speakers often produce a [j] to ease the transition to the following vowel sound. Justifying this type of linking, Underhill (2005:67) states that [j] is used because [ɪ] and [i:] form the starting point for the semi-vowel [j]. In this case, the linking glide is represented by [j], as in the following examples: *pay a lot* [peɪə^jlɒt] *my own* [maɪ^jəʊn] *see it* [si:^jɪt] *they always* [ðeɪ^jə^jlweɪz].

Linking [w] is added when a word ends in [u:], or a diphthong ends with [ʊ] (Kelly, 2000: 112). Underhill (2005: 67) justifies this use of linking [w] by explaining that [ʊ] and [u:] have lip rounding and form the starting point for the bilabial semi-vowel [w]. In this case, the linking glide is represented by the phonetic symbol [w], such as: *blue ink* [blu^wɪŋk] *now I* [naʊ^waɪ] *too easy* [tu:^wi:zi:] *go out* [gəʊ^waut]. It should be evident that using linking [w] and [j] is justified by the fact that sounds, which are linked by these semi vowels, have a very close mouth gesture when they are produced.

5.3 Consonant-to-consonant linking (C-C) can take place when two identical consonants meet at word boundaries and pronounced as one slightly prolonged sound. For example:

(4) **stop pushing** [stɒpʃɪŋ].

6. The Linking in Iraqi Arabic: Evidence and Discussion

The phenomenon of linking has been found in Modern Standard Arabic and is known as *Ittiqaa Alsakinyian*. An Arabic phonological rule states that if two quiescent sounds meet each other one occurs at the end of the word and the other occurs at the beginning of the next word, this occurrence will be avoided by omission or insertion (i.e., linking). Accordingly, as far as the present study is concerned, Iraqi Arabic words are compared with those of modern Standard Arabic to identify phonological linking that has occurred.

7. Methodology

The researcher listened and recorded conversations in different environments (i.e., casual conversations and institutional). Data has been collected by transcribing the records of normal everyday speech of Iraqi Arabic native speakers. Listening to different informants from different social backgrounds is followed by the researcher in order to get variable data. After transcribing, a number of linking processes have been noticed. Table (4) below shows the types of linking available in Iraqi Arabic Dialect.

Table 4: (The types of Linking in IAD words)

(IAD)	(IAD)	eration
ant to vowel		
o consonant		
تو		llh
		h
ant to consonant		

6. Results

1. In both languages, the phonological phenomenon of linking is used in rapid causal speech.
2. Speakers of both languages use linking to avoid hiatus to make their pronunciation fluent and natural. Thus, in both languages, there are certain sounds that are added to the pronunciation to facilitate producing an uninterrupted speech which is achieved via linking words together by using certain sounds. Besides adding sounds, In IAD certain sounds are deleted or omitted to facilitate speech.
3. The phonological phenomenon of linking, in both English and Arabic, is not phonemic because it does not change the meaning of the words to which the chosen sounds are added or deleted.
4. Linking in IAD is consonant to consonant and it is the same case in MSA and it appears to be applicable in both languages.
5. Vowel to vowel occurs frequently in English, this case turned to be available in IAD since (V-V) while in MSA it does not occur.
7. It is worth mentioning that the phonological linking in IAD is not just a matter of spoken form it is used also in writing such as casual conversations, texting, social media...etc.
8. Linking two subtypes facilitates connected speech of elision and assimilation.

Conclusion

This study presented a new contribution to the study of dialects. This phenomenon is used to make speech fluent and rapid in everyday speech. Just like other languages, Arab people resorts to elision and assimilation or linking in order to facilitate their speech. There are many features that turned to be in common between English and IAD. Thus, IAD followed the phonological rules of Standard Arabic of adding and deleting sounds to facilitate speech. Though the IAD shows a tremendous use of vowel –consonant linking which is considered to be the least use case in relation to standard Arabic. As in standard Arabic, it presented consonant to consonant linking as one of the main kinds. Talking about the use of consonant to vowel is considered to be the less prominent form in relation to IAD. Finally and most importantly, the use of linking in Iraqi Arabic Dialect (as in English) is used not only in speaking form of the language rather it also used in writing messages in social media and networking as an informal way of writing to facilitate the process of texting and communicating in everyday life.

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