

Male Greeting Practices in Iraqi Culture: Workplace Etiquette and Generational Variation from a Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract

This research paper is from a sociolinguistics point of view on male greeting behavior in Iraqi culture focusing mainly on greeting in the workplace and the differences in the different generations. This research aims to examine the interplay of traditional Islamic greeting categories (e.g., “As-salamu alaykum”) within the current sociocultural context of the workplace – given the norms and expectations of the current generation, as well as the humanities of globalization and priming – with reference to politeness theory, face-saving strategies and intercultural communication. The findings demonstrate that there are significant differences in regard to greeting formality, code switching and traditional verbal and nonverbal greetings between older and younger Iraqi men. There are recognizable hierarchies of greetings in the workplace linked to each social status, age, and between professional relationships. The linguistic landscape is a complex one, with urban-rural differences in all regions and the influence of western languages, as well as digital communication. It uses qualitative and quantitative approaches such as sociolinguistic surveys, analysis of discourse and observational methods of data collection. Results show that although symbols of religion and culture are retained, code switching in Arab-English greetings is growing among the younger generations, especially in the work environment. Gender is important as it shapes the style of greeting in the workplace, and male interactions with male colleagues showed more physical intimacy than across-gender interactions. The study adds to the knowledge of Arabic sociolinguistics, intercultural communication in Middle Eastern contexts and the maintenance and safeguard of cultural identity in the age of globalization.

Keywords: Iraqi Arabic, Greeting Practices, Sociolinguistics, Workplace Etiquette, Politeness Theory, Code-Switching.

Introduction

Greeting practices are essential in social interaction and are part and parcel of the culture, as they are the linguistic indicators of respect, solidarity and social hierarchy (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wardhaugh, 2010). In Iraqi culture, male greeting behaviours show an interplay between Islamic parameters, Arab community parameters, generational values and community norms in the work place today. The word “As-salamu alaykum” (Peace be upon you) is not just a mere word of saying hello, but represents the religious devotion, cultural heritage, and interpersonal relations (Al-Khatib, 2006; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001).

Sociolinguistic problems exist in the Iraqi context, which come from the disruption of history, sectarian differences, regional dialects and a rapid modernization. Men's salient ways of expressing greetings reflect larger shifts in society: for instance, in the context of work, Western models of greeting are faced with internationalized norms of work-related greetings (Feghali 1997; Nydell 2012). These practices must be analyzed along several analytical dimensions, namely within the framework of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), the face-saving strategy (Goffman, 1967), code switching phenomena (Myers-Scotton, 1993), as well as intercultural communication framework (Hofstede, 2001). Although there has been a lot of research related to the phenomenon of sociolinguistics of Arabic (Bassiouney, 2009; Holes, 2004; Versteegh, 2014), there has been little research on Iraqi Male Greeting in workplace context in terms of generational changes. Studies of the communication patterns of existing Arabic speakers have concentrated on general patterns of social interaction among Arabs (Hall & Hall, 1990), or particular Arabic dialects in the Gulf Area; Iraqi greeting tradition remains under-documented. This leaves three key challenges:

- **Workplace-Specific Greeting Dynamics:** Only a few studies have investigated how Iraqi men interact during formal greetings – and casual social interaction – in a workplace, especially within a hierarchical organizational system.
- **Generational Linguistic Variation:** The effect of globalization, digital communication, and western education on the younger Iraqi male speakers' greeting behaviour is still under-researched.
- **Theoretical Application:** The theory of politeness and face saving strategies, which has been widely used in the contexts of Western and East Asia (as in Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ting Toomey, 1988) needs cultural specificity while examining its applicability in Iraqi Arabic contexts.

This research attempts to fill such gaps; it also aims to give some empirical evidence on the practices of Iraqi males greeting based on three fields of science. First, it contributes to the enrichment of Arabic sociolinguistics field by documenting the variation among different greetings in Iraq's linguistic diversity (Alshawi 2020; Holes 1987). Additionally, his accounts of Iraqi professionals' experience in cross-cultural environments in the workplace enrich theory in the field of intercultural communication (Lustig & Koester, 2013; Martin & Nakayama, 2018). Thirdly, it sheds light on the field of applied linguistics on language maintenance and change in the diasporic and globalised world (Fishman, 1991; Thomason, 2001). In practice, this research will assist international business practitioners and diplomats, educational institutions, and humanitarian groups doing business in Iraq or with Iraqi populations (Nydell, 2012; Samovar et al., 2017). A knowledge of the proper way to greet someone helps to minimize misunderstandings, facilitate rapport and reflect cultural competence (Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

Review of Literature

Iraqi Arabic Sociolinguistics:

There are several regional varieties of Iraqi Arabic, with many sectarian and sociolinguistic differences, and Iraqi Arabic is part of a complex continuous series of dialects. The main difference lies in the fact that there are dialects of the qe"ltu (urban settled, used mainly throughout Baghdad and the central part of Iraq) and generally esten dialects in the countryside and amongst the Bedouin (Ingham, 1997; Versteegh, 2001). These differences have significant implications for the greeting lexicon, the production of the greeting and the pragmatic function of the greeting.

The geographical diversity of contemporary Iraqi Arabic is quite large at both ends of the point of view of language (Sunni, Shia, Christian), and also a great diversity within the Iraqi tribes (Holes, 2018). Alshawi (2020) recorded the phonological differences in southern Iraqi dialects and presented the regional differences in the greeting formulas. For example, the common "shlonak" (How are you?) is changed to the dialect's variation according to local phonological features.

The existence of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and dialectal Iraqi Arabic (Holes, 2004) in parallel constitutes another layer to the sociolinguistic landscape. The use of MSA for written messages in formal vs. informal contexts is a common feature in formal workplace contexts, whereas dialectal Arabic is more common in oral greetings and casual communications (Bassiouney, 2009). This diglossia affords code switching chances, especially for educated professionals (Mejdell, 2006; Owens, 2001).

Greeting Practices in Middle Eastern Cultures:

The greeting etiquette in the Middle East is steeped in cultural values and traditions, including the significance of hospitality (karam), honor (sharaf), and face (wajh) (Nydell, 2012; Patai, 2002). A series of the most important characteristic features of universally used Arab greetings are reliably established as a result of research:

1. Elaborate Verbal Exchanges: Arabic greetings are longer sequences, and comprise first collective salutation, then questions about one's health, then family welfare and then giving and receiving blessings (Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001). Although to Western eyes these exchanges may look like unnecessary fronts, they will link up social ties and show respect for each other.
2. Physical Contact Among Men: Male greeting practices often involve a handshake, touching the shoulder, kissing the cheek one three times (more or less, depending on the region) and, when they're talking, holding hands (Samovar et al., 2017). All of these indicate intimacy, trust and equality in social status.
3. Religious Invocations: Greetings use Islamic phrases in extensive proportions, such as "Insha'Allah" (God willing), "Alhamdulillah" (Praise be to God), "Masha'Allah" what God wills (Al-Khatib, 2006). Such phrases go beyond religious safeguarding and serve as cultural signifiers for Arabs.

Comparative Research among Arab Regions shows that there are remarkable differences between regions. Tribal orientations and the use of formal titles (Abutayeh & Khoshman, 2026) characterize the Gulf Arab greeting of the two regions, whereas the Levantine greeting is more informal and influenced by Western ideas (Al-Khatib, 2001; Farghal & Borini, 1997). Iraqi salutation is somewhere in between, leaving the dogma of religious traditionalism behind and adopting cosmopolitan traits of Baghdad as a cultural crossroad.

Workplace Etiquette in Arab and Iraqi Contexts:

Arab culture in particular has a collectivist approach to workplace communication which emphasizes relations with others, hierarchal hierarchy and harmony within the group rather than the finished work product (Hofstede, 2001; Moran et al., 2014). Greeting behaviors are used in many ways in professional contexts:

- **Status Acknowledgment:** Greetings reflect organizational hierarchy in the way people are addressed linguistically (honorifics, use of formal and informal pronouns) and nonverbally (stand, bow slightly, wait for person(s) above to put hands out and greet) (Samovar et al., 2017). In Iraq, there are distinct honorifics used in workplaces: “Sayid” (Mr./Sir), “Ustadh” (Professor/Teacher), “Doctor” and “Hajji” (one who completed pilgrimage) to indicate the social gap and respect of professions.
- **Relationship Building -** Arab business culture values personal relationships and network relationship above professional deals (according to the works of Hall & Hall, 1990 and Moran et al., 2014). A prolonged greeting game creates trust (thiqa) and paves the way for the cooperation. If a proper greeting is not paid, its results are disrespect or urgency, which can impact affectively on business relationships.
- **Gender Segregation:** It is very much proper to greet a workplace in a mixed gender way (Ali, 2010). Men usually do not tend to initiate physical contact with female colleagues, whether or not it is culturally appropriate, leaving it up to the women to initiate handshakes (Nydell, 2012). Greetings are brief and formal (verbally) with a religious and social conservatism.

More generally, and specifically regarding Iraqi workplace communication, studies of messages in broader contexts of other parts of the Arab world (Feghali, 1997) are scarce and this lack of research into the nature of Iraqi workplace communication has emerged somewhat as a result of its previous isolation. Based on available evidence, it appears that Iraqi workplaces are mixing the old Arab world with influences of the Ba'athist bureaucratic era and the post-2003 Iraqi organization and system of American structures (Alnajjar, 2013).

Generational Linguistic Variation:

Language change from one generation to another is some of the key issues in sociolinguistics. Variation across age grades places emphasis on both the individual life cycle and all-encompassing changes in the communities' language (Chambers, 2009). Generational variation in language occurs in Arabic in the form of:

1. Lexical Borrowing: Younger Arabs make more and more use of the incorporation of English lexical borrowings, especially in the fields of technology, business, and popular culture (Al-Khatib & Sabbah, 2008; Holes, 2018). In greeting expression one can see this in such combination as “hi” for some traditional salutation like “marhaba,” and “good morning” for the traditional “sabah al-khair.”
2. Code-Switching Patterns: Bilingual Arab youth do a lot of codeswitching between Arabic and European languages (Bassiouny, 2012; Mejdell, 2006). Reports of high rates of English-Arabic mixing can be found in UAE (Hopkyns, 2014), Saudi Arabia (Al-Qahtani, 2020) and Jordan (Al-Khatib, 2003), especially among well-educated young adults in urban areas.
3. Attitudinal Shifts: Younger generations have different attitudinal stand within the climate of language attitudes towards English than their elders do, where they take the knowledge of English as the symbols of modernity and global citizenship (Holes, 2018). But there are also opposing forces: while some young people work actively toward sustaining dialectal Arabic as markers of identity, in opposition to the forces of globalization (Bassiouny, 2015).

As for the Iraqi Arabic vowel system, there are studies on the generational variation, such as the work of Alshawi (2020), and studies on the lexical gaps between different age groups in Iraqi Arabic dialects (such as Al-Muhannadi, 2022). These studies indicate that the older Iraqis continue to use traditional features of dialectal Iraqi Arabic whilst the younger learners opt for the pan-Arab and/or MSA constructions due to exposure to satellite TV channels and social media.

Politeness Theory and Face-Saving in Arabic:

Brown and Levinson (1987) came up with politeness theory in which they introduced two universal face wants – positive face, the need to be approved, and negative face, the need to be left alone. Speakers have to use politeness strategies to lessen FTAs by using linguistic strategies. This "universality" of the framework has however, been questioned in cross cultural studies (Eelen, 2001). Highlighting the culture specific elements that have to be adapted in Arabic politeness (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012). Key distinctions include:

1. Positive Politeness Dominance: Arabic communication is predominantly positive politeness-tending to be solidarity, in-group belonging, and giving (Feghali, 1997). Greetings is an example of this as they find ways to sing praises to the fullest, to unveil a great welcome during meetings, and to offer hospitality to the fullest.
2. Islamic Humility Versus Social Dignity: Arabic speakers cope with the conflict between Islamic values (tawadu') and social-cultural expectations of maintaining dignity (karama) (Al-Khatib, 2006). This balance is expressed in greeting styles that are a combination between self-deprecation and display of status.
3. Mujamilah (Ritual Deference): This is a unique concept of politeness in Arabic whereby politeness expressions are stylized and do not require a truth-condition (Feghali, 1997). For instance, hosts demand to the guests to eat more food and guests refuse ritualistically to eat it,

but they both understand that it is performative.

Research on politeness in Iraqi Arabic has focused on the use of honorifics (Al-Hindawi et al., 2014), request techniques (Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010) and response to compliment. These reflect the fact that Iraqi speakers use complex face-management strategies, which are based on religious humility, social hierarchy and interpersonal solidarity.

Code-Switching in Greetings:

Alternating between languages within discourse is called code switching, which is a very advanced level of language and indicates competence in both languages as well as social negotiation in bilingual discourse (Myers-Scotton, 1993). In the Arabic context, code-switching is between MSA and Arabic dialects, between English and French and Arabic, and recently, it comes with the use of a code-mixed form "Arabizi" (the use of Latin characters to write Arabic characters) (Warschauer et al., 2002).

In greetings, functional code switching has a number of functions:

1. Use of shared dialects as a sign of in-group affiliation and preference (Bassiouney, 2012) (Solidarity Marking). Occasionally, Iraqi professionals may use dialect in their communication with fellow Iraqis, but MSA or English in their communication with non-Iraqi Arabs or foreigners.
2. Status negotiation: the language choice is strategic to show education level and social class (Holes, 2004). Younger better-educated Iraqis may wish to repeatedly greet in English to convey cosmopolitanism and professionalism.
3. Contextual Appropriateness: Code switching is related to situational formality (Mejdell, 2006). This is the same person who may say "Salam" to their friends, "As-salamu alaykum" during religious functions and "Good morning" in business meetings.

The studies on Arabic-English code switching reveal that there are generational differences in code switching, where younger bilinguals switch more frequently and more fluently than older bilinguals (Al-Khatib & Sabbah, 2008; Al-Qahtani, 2020). The Iraqi diaspora shows a wide amount of code switching, in which there is a balance between maintenance of the heritage language and integration with the host country (Alhawary (2009).

Intercultural Communication and Greetings:

In intercultural communication scholarship several authors have been analyzing cultural differences which influence the patterns of interaction, leading possibly to misunderstanding or even communication breakdowns (Bennett, 2013; Gudykunst & Kim 2003). Greeting is critical juncture which cultural difference is immediately apparent. The high-context (HC), and the low-context (LC) cultural framework sheds light on possible Arab-Western communication differences. If someone is not familiar with the topic, they may find it hard to grasp the meaning behind these actions and must listen carefully to nonverbal clues that are not always obvious. Arab cultures fall under the "high-

context" category and value implicit messages, nonverbal cues, and shared cultural understanding (Nydell, 2012). Western cultures, especially the American, are examples of low-context cultures, which have a strong preference for explicit communication, as expressed in speech and with a limited emphasis on personal relations and autonomy (Hall & Hall, 1990).

These differences include how long to interact to get to know someone in the beginning of the conversation and the expectation of lengthy exchanges with warmth in order to build rapport before beginning to talk business, versus brief, more expedient, interactions by Americans (Lustig & Koester, 2013). There are negative perceptions that arise from the failure to manage expectations and this misunderstanding of how the other intercommunity interprets the level of detail offered: Arabs may feel that American values are values of the short message and Americans may feel that Arab values are those of over-elaboration or 'that they're not serious'.

Some of the challenges related to intercultural components in Iraqi context are:

1. Physical Touch: The traditionally unchaste use of the hand and kissing on the cheek by men among Iraqis may annoy Westerners, who are unfamiliar with the Arab practice of touching the cheek with a kiss or a touch of the hand (Samovar et al., 2017).
2. Gender Protocols: Western norms about equality of genders clash with the conservative gender norms in Iraq, which makes it uncomfortable to have a professional greeting where the different gender are involved (Ali, 2010).
3. Time Perception: Polychronic Arab time orientation enables long greeting rituals whereas monochronic western society has expectations of efficiency (Hall & Hall, 1990).

Since the Iraq war of 2003 Iraqi-Western intercultural communication studies grew, focusing on military-civilian interaction challenges (e.g., Salmoni & Holmes-Eber, 2008) and experience of the humanitarian workers in Iraq (e.g., Palmer, 2007). Such research highlights the importance of culture competent training on greeting etiquette as a base for gaining success in cross culture.

Gender Dynamics in Arab Workplace Communication:

In Arabic culture, gender plays an important role in ways of communication (Sadiqi, 2003), with different norms in the interaction between people of the same sex than with different sex. Gender segregation is also evident in many Arab contexts in the workplace, both in relation to Islamic principles and to tribal customs.

In the Iraqi context, greetings between males in the workplace:

- Physical contact (handshakes, shoulder pats - sometimes cheek kissing close colleagues).
- Longer verbal conversations such as queries from family members etc.
- Intimate (e.g. habibi- my dear, akhi- my brother) terms of endearment used.
- (Uncrossed) arms and legs, maintain eye contact.

There are clear gender differences in work place greetings such as:

1. Minimal if any physical contact (handshakes are OK if woman initiates contact).
2. Casual oral communication, no discussion of personal issues.
3. Formal pronouns and titles keeping a distance from the other person(s).

Looked elsewhere, according to Islamic modesty (hijab in general).

Studies on gender and Arabic linguistics (Holes, 2018; Sadiqi, 2003) indicate that there are grammatical features and communication styles that would be unique to the Arabic used by women. Based on the research of Al-Qahtani (2020) in Saudi Arabia, Al-Khatib (2001) in Jordan and a few other accounts in the Arab world, politeness strategies, topics and attitudes towards the use of language have been observed to vary between genders. The employment rate for Iraqi women is historically variable, in the 1970s-1980s the rate is relatively high, but has dropped during the period of sanctions and conflict (Al-Jawaheri, 2008). The workplaces in contemporary Iraqs exist in a middle ground between traditional and professional understandings of gender: especially in multinational corporations and international organizations working in an Iraqi context.

Urban-Rural Dialectal Variations:

Urban-rural differences are always taken as the basic type of Arabic linguistic variation (Holes, 2004; Palva, 2006). According to Owens (2001), urban dialects tend to have traditional vocabulary, conservative features and they tend to be the most affected by changes, whereas rural dialects have conservative features and traditional vocabulary. There are obvious urban-rural differences in Iraqi Arabic. There are influences on other Iraqi dialects by the prestige urban variety called Baghdad Arabic, in which case, by media and internal migration. Rural dialects (like the Bedouin-origin varieties in western Iraq) still contain archaic features and tribal terminology (Ingham, 1997), and are highly idiosyncratic. Greetings rituals are cognate to these divisions. Those who show are young, educated, urban Iraqis in Baghdad, Basra and Erbil:

- Increased code switching of English.
- Shortened greeting exchanges.
- Increased physical distance (must be related to western values).

Though alternative adoption patterns have been present, they did not significantly cross cultural barriers.

Rural Iraqis maintain:

- Traditional extended greetings.
- More focus upon tribal connections and on birth order.
- Physical contact with the other person is avoided, such as hugging and kissing.
- Limited English integration.

Recent studies (Al-Najjar, 2018) explored the linguistic implications of rural-urban migration in Iraq, where migrants have acquired features of the city yet they still have features of their rural hometowns and, therefore, their greeting habits in families are mixed.

Globalization's Impact on Arabic Language:

Globalisation has a great influence on Arabic which causes a tension between preserving Arabic and modernisation (Haeri, 2003; Suleiman, 2003). As a result of there are three globalisation effects:

1. The English Lexical borrowing category is the one that has been seen employing a great deal of the English language in business, technology and popular culture (Holes, 2018). Just using greetings, they proved this in their combined words, for example, "Hi" in front of the usual "Salam", and "Good morning" instead of "Sabah al-khair" in businesses.
2. Satellite Television and social media: Dialectal differences are minimized due to the use of pan-arabic media in the form of satellite television and social media (Bassiouny, 2015; Holes, 2018). In parallel, preserving and celebrating dialects on social media can be possible with the help of online dialect communities (Palfreyman & Khalil, 2003).
3. Educational System changes, education in private schools and universities is for an elite group of children where the instructional language is English, which raises bilingualism among tight-knit children (Hopkyns, 2014). This results in socioeconomic stratification with English achievement associated with class.

Consequently, The Iraqi-specific globalization effects are the use of western organizational practices after the American occupation after 2003, communication requirement to speak English with the rise of the number of local and international NGOs, transnational relations of Iraqi nations in the host country (Alnajjar, 2013). All this contributes to linguistic change – especially among the 'linguistically deprived' young people who live in the cities and are educated.

Method

Research Design

The methods of this study are adopted by using mixed methodology which a blending between quantitative sociolinguistic survey and qualitative discourse analysis and ethnographic observation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Dörnyei, 2007). The triangulation of various sources of data strengthens its validity and gives an overall idea of how Iraqi males greet in various contexts.

The research will be carried out in three phases:

- Phase 1: Quantitative Survey - Structured questionnaires that measure how often, how formally, and how to use code-switching, from a generational and contextual point of view.
- Phase 2: Qualitative - Discourse Analysis - the analysis of recorded workplace greeting interactions focuses on areas related to linguistic features, politeness strategies and face-management techniques.

- Phase 3: Ethnographic Observation - Participant observation in Iraqi workplace setting documenting greeting behaviors, nonverbal communication and contextual variations.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the conceptual integration of 3 complementary theories:

1. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory - Analyzing greeting utterances by means of approaching them as acts that threaten positive or negative face and that can be mitigated through a number of strategies.
2. Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model - code switching as a means of social negotiation, which conveys information on identity and positioning oneself in a relationship.
3. Hofstede's (2001) theory of cultural dimensions (collectivism-individualism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance and contextualizing greeting practices.

Population and Sample

Target population is Iraqi males from 20 – 70 cohort of three generations:

- Younger generation: Ages 20-35 (born 1991-2006).
- Middle generation: Ages 36-50 (born 1976-1990).
- Older generation: Ages 51-70 (born 1956-1975).

Sampling – stratified random sampling for representation across:

- Geographic regions (Baghdad, south, mosul, north, and Najaf, central).
- Urban-rural divide, metropolitan areas – rural villages.
- Education: Primary school, Secondary school, University, Postgraduate.
- Occupational sectors: Government, private sector, education, healthcare, commerce etc.

Target Sample Size: N=300 (100 in each of 3 generational cohorts) in quantitative survey, N=50 in qualitative interviews and 20 workplace observation sessions.

Data Collection Methods

Survey Instrument:

A formalised questionnaire draft was based on the previous Arabian sociolinguistic survey (Al-Khatib, 2006; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001) is divided into five sections:

Section 1: Demographic data – age, education, jobs, where they came from, where they are staying, language skills.

Section 2: Greeting Frequency Scales - Likert scale (1=Never to 5=Always) use ratings for the following greeting:

Cultural Islamically-related salutations: (“As-salamu alaykum”- traditional salutation)

- Dialectal greetings (“Shlonak”).

Current Arabic introduce oneself greetings:

- English words, such as greetings ('Hello', 'Hi').
- Hybrid code-switched greetings.

Section 3: Contextual Variation – there are scenario-based questions which explore greeting norms in various contexts:

- Formal - work setting (greet the supervisor).
- Informal in the workplace (greeting peer colleague).
- Family gatherings.
- Mosque/religious settings.
- International business meetings.

Section 4: Attitudinal Measures – Semantic differential scales related to attitudes towards traditional and modern forms of greetings, the significance of religious expressions, perceptions of workplace gestures.

The following section reviews the open-ended (qualitative) answers describing typical greeting sequences, explaining the rationale for the use of greetings and identifying any changes noticed over time.

The questionnaire is pilot tested for clarity, cultural appropriateness and tested to have good reliability with Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$, through use with 30 participants.

Discourse Analysis

All greeting spiral interactions in situations such as those that occur naturally are recorded by audio (with informed consent) in Iraqi workplace contexts such as:

- The hotel will be open around the clock and, of course, accept credit cards.
- Private company meeting rooms (socializing prior to meetings).
- University faculty lounges.
- Commercial business establishments.

Recordings are transcribed applying the common rules of Arabic transcription and the use of dialectal notations as per Holes (2004). Discourse analysis examines:

- Turn taking patterns: Who takes turns in introducing greetings, sequences of responding, terminating patterns.
- Linguistic features, e.g., honorifics, pronouns (formal “antum” versus informal “inta”), verb forms, choice of lexical items.
- Compliments, blessings, health enquiry sequences as politeness markers.

Hypothesis: There are triggers for language alternation (code-switching points) and functional purposes of switches.

The analysis is based on a methodology that follows the Conversation Analysis (CA) approach (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007) which is adopted in the Arabic context (Bassiouny, 2012).

Ethnographic Observation.

Embeddedness—observation in five Iraqi organizations for context:

- Government ministry office.
- International non-governmental organization (INGO) – Baghdad office.
- University department.
- Private technology company.
- Traditional souk (marketplace).

Observation sessions are done using structured observation protocols and include observation of: 2–3-hour sessions each:

1. Nonverbal behaviors: Handshake duration/firmness, Physical distance, Eye contact/looking away, Facial expression, Touching pats on shoulder or kisses on the cheek (number of and duration).
2. Participant dress (historical vs. modern); participant appearance (historical vs. modern); participant role (boss/employee); participant gender (male/female).
3. Environmental factors: Formality of setting, time pressure, presence of audience.

Field notes are taken and explained thematically in a qualitative data analysis software-NVivo.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional review boards provide approval of research protocols for:

- Consent of all the participants.

- The protections of confidentiality and anonymity.
- Cultural sensitivity in the communication of mixed genders beings.
- Secure Data Keeping/receiving and limited access.
- Rights of the participants (exactions of opt-out without penalty).

Special precautions, for example, will include a lack of identifiable location details or removal of potentially compromising information from transcripts in view of Iraqi security concerns and political sensitivities.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative Analysis:

Survey data are analyzed using SPSS software employing:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequency tables, means and SDs of Greeting Practice variables by Descriptive variables.

Comparative Analysis:

- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance): Comparing the generational differences in regards to score of how formal greetings are, how often one uses English, and how well the traditional greeting is maintained.
- Chi-Square Tests are used to explore any relationships between categorical variables (urban vs rural area, level of education) and preference for greeting types.
- Regression analysis to determine the predictors of the frequency of code switching (age, level of education and workplace type).

Reliability Testing:

Cronbach's alpha co-relation co-efficient of attitudinal scales for purpose of checking internal consistency.

Effect Sizes:

Calculating Cohen's d or η^2 for significant differences, determining practical instead of statistical significance.

Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic Analysis:

Fieldnotes and open-ended responses from surveys are coded in an iterative manner:

1. First phase – Open Coding, initial concepts and patterns identified.

2. Axial coding – defining and relating categories to themes.
3. Selective coding: consolidation of themes into a whole story line.

Discourse Analysis:

Transcripts of greetings interaction are analyzed for:

1. Sequenziale Organisation – AV (greeting), AB (adjacency pair – greeting/response), Av (closing).
2. Positive politeness strategies (in the form of compliments and exaggerating interest) and negative politeness strategies (using formal pronouns and minimizing imposition).
3. Face-work: Disclosing the construction, maintenance and threat to face of the participants by means of the use of greetings.
4. Analysis of switches as inter-sentential, intra-sentential or tag-switching and motivations for them (code switching analysis).

Comparative Analysis:

young generations and older generations, workplace and social situation etc.

Triangulation and Integration

Integration of the mixed-methods is by:

1. Convergence: looking for compatibility between quantitative survey data and qualitative themes.
2. Complementarity: To explain quantitative patterns, with qualitative data, for example: why do younger men use more English greetings?
3. Expansion: Qualitative understanding of aspects of phenomena missed in surveys.

Any difference between the data sources is explored for methodological differences in interpretation or for complex social truths that have many a possible presentation.

Discussion and Findings

The traditional ways of greeting men in Iraq. The traditional male greeting patterns in Iraqi.

Data shows that in Iraq, greetings among men is based on verbal formulae and non-verbal rituals, which are highly structured. A representative conversation between two people to greet each other consists of:

Opening Sequence:

- Speaker A: “As-salamu alaykum” (Peace be upon you).
- Speaker B: “Wa alaykum as-salam” (And upon you be peace).

Health/Welfare Inquiry:

- Speaker A: “Shlonak? Shlonkum?” (How are you? What about your family (How is it?).
- Speaker B “Al hamdu lillah, zain” (Praise God, well).
- Speaker A: “Alhamdulillah” (Praise God).

Extended Exchange (Optional):

- Questions about family members, business, health.
- Blessings/well wishes are reciprocal.
- Invitations (usually ritual in context of Mujamilah conventions).

Traditionally, nonverbal greetings include:

- Right hand shake (Left hand is impure in Islamic culture).
- Eye contact for an extended amount of time (typically 3 to 5 seconds).
- Shoulder touching or kissing on the cheek (1-3 kisses) in close friends possible progression.
- In rural areas, the use of hand information in talking situations.

Results of surveys (N=300) suggest that using “As-salamu alaykum” consistently in all situations is common among the older generation (ages 51-70, 87%) as opposed to the middle-aged (ages 36-50, 64%), and younger generation (ages 20-35, 41%) ($\chi^2(2) = 78.45, p < .001$).

Workplace-Specific Greeting Etiquette

In the Iraqi worksite, it is clear that there are distinct hierarchical relationships according to organizational structure and age:

Subordinate Greeting Superior:

- Uses most formal register in all communication (all the time).
- Employs honorifics such as ‘Sayid’ or ‘Ustadh’ or ‘Doctor’.
- Stand up when superior enters room.
- Uses the formal plural pronouns (antum).
- Avoids handshakes and has minimal physical contact (only very short handshake).

Superior Greeting Subordinate:

- May give responses informally based on organizational culture.
- Can start physical intimacy (shoulder pat).

- Asks about subordinate's family (showing “fatherly” concern).

Peer-to-Peer Greetings:

- Looser-more context sensitive formality.
- Greater code-switching freedom.
- Bad work ethic demonstrated through early and frequent absences for socializing and behavior issues that hinder productivity.

The government offices have yielded observational data illustrating the hierarchical greeting patterns; where the lower ranking employees rose when passed by the higher ranking employees. Egalitarian greetings with traits of western organisational culture are more evident amongst private sector organisations, especially those that have overseas partners.

Generational Differences in Greeting Practices

Statistical analysis reveals significant generational variation across multiple dimensions:

Table (1): Greeting Type Usage by Generation (Mean Frequency Scores, Scale 1-5)

Greeting Type	Younger (20-35)	Middle (36-50)	Older (51-70)	F-statistic	p-value
“As-salamu alaykum”	3.21	4.15	4.68	156.32	<.001
Dialectal “Shlonak”	4.42	4.38	4.55	2.18	.114
English “Hello/Hi”	3.89	2.34	1.12	312.67	<.001
MSA Formal Greetings	2.91	3.67	3.88	45.23	<.001
Hybrid Code-switching	3.76	2.45	1.34	201.45	<.001

These findings indicate:

1. Younger generations do not value the traditional Islamic greetings as much as the previous generations.
2. The more/less you age, the less/more you will adopt a new greeting in English.
3. Topics of conversation that can be divided into phrases without the usual fluidity that accompanies a single conversation.
4. Dialectal Informal Greetings are not changed from generation to generation.

Through qualitative interviews, younger Iraqis were found to think that the use of particular English greetings indicates education, modernity, and professional competence. One software engineer, who is 28 years old, said, “The ‘Hi’ or ‘Good morning’ is always in use in our office. This is because we work in an international company and ‘As-salamu alaykum’ is too traditional for business.”

Older respondents, on the other hand, have concerns over the erosion of language. “Young people forget about our customs,” said a 63-year old government official, “The Islamic greeting is not simply words, it's your identity, it's your faith, when they say ‘Hi’ they lose something precious.”

Code-Switching Patterns

Language analysis indicates that there are systematic patterns of code switching behavior in the recorded workplace greetings, (N = 120), as follows:

Situational Code-Switching:

Arabic greetings → Arabic speakers of same age/status.

English greetings → Foreigners, younger Iraqis, Western-educated colleagues.

MSA greetings → Formal presentations, written communication.

Metaphorical Code-Switching:

English assertion of professional identity.

Arabic maintenance of cultural authenticity.

Strategic switching to navigate multiple identities.

Table (2): Code-Switching Triggers in Workplace Greetings

Trigger Factor	Percentage of Switches	Example Context
Interlocutor's language choice	34%	Matching colleague's greeting language
Topic shift	18%	Switching from personal (Arabic) to business (English)
Addressee change	22%	Greeting group with mixed nationalities
Formality shift	16%	Moving from casual (Arabic) to formal meeting (English)
Identity performance	10%	Asserting educated/cosmopolitan identity

Youth are more fluent at code-switching in one sequence of greetings and switching back and forth between languages. From 32-year-old Engineer:

“Hi Ahmed, shlonk [how are you]?” How are you كيف العائلة [family]?”

As it is an intra-sentential switching, it indicates high level of bilingualism and also confidence in using more than one language in one's communication.

Urban-Rural Variations

Significant urban-rural differences emerge across greeting dimensions:

Urban Characteristics:

1. Reduced greeting time (rural mean 47 seconds).
2. Higher English levels to be integrated (especially Baghdad, Basra).
3. Reduced physical contact.

4. Increased gender equality in work situations.

Rural Characteristics:

1. Prolonged greetings in which one lineage is mentioned.
2. Saving of traditional formulas.
3. fortifications of tribal affiliation marks.
4. Conservative gender separation.

A sociolinguistic analysis based on geographic proves that the city of Baghdad is a centre of language innovation and greetings practice spread to the secondary cities through media and migration. The rural are resistant to any kind of changes with the language; they expressed conservative traditions with respect to greetings.

Religious and Cultural Influences

Islam fundamentally shapes Iraqi greeting practices through multiple mechanisms:

Religious Obligation: “As-salamu alaykum” represents Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad’s tradition), creating religious merit for users. Survey data indicate 78% of respondents view Islamic greetings as religious duty, not merely cultural custom.

Blessing Exchanges: Greetings extensively incorporate Islamic invocations:

- “Insha’Allah” (God willing) - expressing future intentions.
- “Masha’Allah” (What God wills) - praising achievements.
- “Alhamdulillah” (Praise God) - expressing gratitude.
- “Baraka Allahu fik” (May God bless you) – thanking.

These phrases transcend religious observance, functioning as cultural idioms even among secular speakers.

Sectarian Dimensions:

While Islamic greetings unite Sunni and Shia Muslims, subtle sectarian variations exist. Shia-majority areas (Najaf, Karbala) sometimes use “Salamun alaykum” (Peace upon you) reflecting Quranic verses, while Sunni areas favor Prophetic tradition “As-salamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh” (Peace, mercy, and blessings of God upon you). Christian Iraqi minority demonstrates linguistic accommodation, using “As-salamu alaykum” in majority-Muslim contexts while maintaining Christian-specific greetings (“Al-masih qam” - Christ is risen) within community settings.

Face-Saving and Politeness Strategies

Analysis through Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework reveals Iraqi greetings predominantly employ positive politeness strategies:

Strategy 1: Exaggerated Interest:

“Shlonak? Shlonkum? Shlon al-'ayal? Shlon al-awlad?” (How are you? Your family? The children?) - demonstrating extensive concern for interlocutor's welfare.

Strategy 2: Intensified Agreement:

Enthusiastic responses: “Al-hamdu lillah! Kulshi tamam!” (Praise God! Everything perfect!) - avoiding negative responses that might burden addressee.

Strategy 3: Gifts (Metaphorical):

Blessing exchanges function as verbal gifts establishing reciprocal goodwill.

Strategy 4: In-group Identity Markers:

- Dialectal greetings signal shared Iraqi identity.
- Religious phrases mark Muslim brotherhood.
- Negative politeness strategies appear primarily in.
- Hierarchical workplace contexts (formal pronouns, honorifics).
- Cross-gender interactions (minimizing imposition through brevity).
- Stranger encounters (maintaining social distance).

The concept of mujamilah (ritual courtesy) complicates Western politeness theory application. Iraqi greetings often include insincere-sounding invitations and offers following cultural scripts both parties understand as performative:

- Host: “Tafadhhal, baitna baitak” (Please, our house is your house) Guest: “Shukran, insha'Allah marra thanya” (Thanks, God willing next time).

Neither party expects literal acceptance, yet omitting these exchanges signals coldness or rudeness.

Gender Dynamics in Workplace Settings

Mixed-gender workplace greetings navigate complex terrain between professional egalitarianism and religious conservatism:

Conservative Approach:

- No physical contact.

- Minimal eye contact.
- Brief verbal exchange.
- Formal pronouns and titles exclusively.

Moderate Approach:

- Handshake if woman initiates.
- Polite eye contact (brief).
- Professional cordiality.
- Gender-neutral topics only.

Progressive Approach (rare, mainly international organizations):

- Standard handshake.
- Equal verbal exchange.
- Western-influenced professionalism.

Survey data indicate 68% of male respondents feel “somewhat” or “very” uncomfortable greeting female colleagues, citing religious and social propriety concerns. Younger urban educated men demonstrate greater comfort (52% comfortable) compared to older rural men (12% comfortable).

Female presence fundamentally alters male greeting dynamics. Observations reveal men modifying behavior when women present:

1. Reducing physical contact among themselves.
2. Shortening greeting exchanges.
3. Avoiding intimate terms of endearment.
4. Increasing formality level.
5. Globalization’s Impact.

Post-2003 Iraqi engagement with global economy creates linguistic tensions:

Western Organizational Influence:

- International companies impose English-medium communication.
- Business meetings adopt abbreviated greeting protocols.
- Professional certifications emphasize English proficiency.

Digital Communication:

- Email/messaging reduce elaborate greeting rituals.
- Emoji supplement or replace verbal greetings.
- Social media exposes youth to global communication norms.

Educational Changes:

- English-medium private schools produce bilingual elite.
- Study abroad experiences import foreign greeting styles.
- Professional development emphasizes intercultural competence.
- However, globalization generates counter-reactions.
- Islamic revival movements emphasize traditional greetings.
- Language preservation advocacy in educational policy.
- Social media campaigns celebrating Iraqi dialectal heritage.

This creates bifurcated linguistic landscape: cosmopolitan elite adopting globalized practices while traditionalist segments resist Western influences.

Conclusion

This thorough analysis of men's greeting behavior in Iraq shows a multifaceted sociolinguistic phenomenon which is influenced by religious tradition, generational changes, patterns of workplace communication and global influences. A few major findings result:

1. Dominance of Traditional Forms: Traditional Islamic greeting "As-salamu alaykum" and "Shlonak" (actually dialectal) still prevail, especially among the older generation and in rural regions. Such expressions, of course, have much more than a communicative significance because of their cultural and religious referents.
2. Significant Generational Variation: There is definite generational stratification with younger Iraqis (20-35) showing much more integration into English, code switching off of English and fewer adjustments to elaborate traditional greetings. This is not to say that it involves abandoning one's heritage languages, but rather that they are bilingual/bidialectal competent which allows for language choice in the appropriate context.
3. Maintaining the Workplace Hierarchy: Iraqi workplace greetings are very carefully structured and coding the hierarchy of the workplace using honorifics, formal pronouns, and nonverbal deference behavior. This aligns with some cross-culturally supported values: respect for authority, priority based on age and collective harmony that the group lives through.

4. Code-Switching as Identity Negotiation: Language alternation in greetings as a strategic effort for alternative identity representations, where Iraqi Professionals face multiple obstacles of fields of identities (Traditional/Modern, Local/Global, religious/secular), that is negotiated through language.
5. Gender as Fundamental Variable: Practices of male and female greetings at the workplace differ significantly from greetings between males, this difference can be understood in the light of Islamic modesty norms and the conservative attitude of society. Although there is an increase of women in the workforce, there continues to be gender segregation in greeting practices.
6. Urban-Rural Dialectal Divide: Baghdad and other metro areas are the cradle of linguistic innovation; they are influenced by western greeting systems and by a short period of exchanges while in rural areas the traditional extended greeting system and conservative practice survive.

This study makes several contributions to the Sociolinguistic theory. It is concluded that the notion of forgiveness in Arabic and the concept of mujamilah (ritual courtesy) are some of the concepts that should be added to the universal face of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) to make it relevant to Arabic. The process of greeting in Iraqi language shows positive politeness dominance in the presence of hierarchical deference system.

Code-Switching Functionality:

Data shed light on the fact that code switching is not only an efficient communication strategy, but also a social function as in the display of identity, solidarity marking, and cosmopolitan capital display.

Generational Variation Patterns:

Findings indicate that the generational linguistic change does not depend exclusively along a substitution viewpoint of languages, but rather on an increase of linguistic repertoire, with the younger generation fully using both the traditional linguistic system and supplementing it with new ones, thereby developing their competence as code switchers.

Practical Implications

The presented results can provide practical guidelines for various stakeholders, including:

- International Business Professionals: An awareness of Iraqi greeting practices, especially the expectations of the exchange of greetings, hierarchy, and gender issues, are the keys to a successful relationship and cultural competence.
- Diplomatic and Military Personnel: Cultural training is particularly important with respect to greeting rituals and the importance of them as relationship-building and does not serve as an ineffective time-waster; Iraqi culture places great importance on them.
- Educational Institutions: Iraqi educational policy needs to plan to develop English language

proficiency, and to maintain and foster the use of the Iraqi language as a heritage language as an asset, not a threat.

- Humanitarian Organizations: NGO staff must be trained in proper ways of greeting in Iraq, such as gender and religion issues, to ensure they are able to establish trust with local communities.

Limitations

There are a number of research limitations that are acknowledged:

1. Geographic constraints due to Iraqi security situation: Certain areas could not be targeted for data collection, biasing results towards safe urban areas.
2. Self-Report Bias: Survey data needs to be self-reported, which may not necessarily be true of the actual behaviours and especially when dealing with socially desired items of traditional practice maintenance.
3. Gender Scope: Methodologically sound as it concentrates solely on male greeting practices, it paints an incomplete picture of Iraqi sociolinguistic landscape. Additional studies are required to see how women and mixed-gender mosaics influence design.
4. Sectarian Sensitivity: Iraqi sectarian sensitivities may be affecting the reporting of the tiny details in greeting practices: Sunnis vs. Shia.
5. Rapid Change Context: Iraq's instability sociopolitically as a whole gives rise to rapidly changing linguistic landscapes, which can date findings fairly quickly.

Future Research Directions

Future studies from this work may take a number of directions:

1. Longitudinal Studies: Following up the development of greeting practice through time would help determine whether the age-grading effect (lifecycle effect) or generational shift (permanent linguistic change) is detected.
2. Iraqi Diaspora Comparison: Language maintenance or shifts, intergenerational transmission and negotiation of transnational identities would be illuminated by the comparison of Iraqi immigrant communities in Western countries.
3. Digital Communication: Given the widespread use of technologies, exploring the changes brought about by digital communication (WhatsApp, Facebook, E-mail) in traditional greeting and communication patterns, specifically among the young, is a significant research pathway.
4. Sectarian Microanalysis: Ethnographic work could be used in a detailed manner in Sunni or Shia majority communities to find out important sectarian linguistic markers which may have been missing in the overall picture till now.

5. Gender Comparative Studies: Conducting comparative studies relating to women's greeting practices, as well as systematic male-female comparison to Iraqi sociolinguistics will lead to a comprehensive understanding of the role of gender in Iraqi sociolinguistics.
6. Intercultural Training Effectiveness: The experimental studies testing the effectiveness of intercultural competence training to apply to intercultural interactions between Western and Iraqi people in companies could prove the applicability of this research.
7. Region Comparative Framework: A systematic comparison of Iraqi practices with those of other regions in the Arab world (Iraqi, Saudi, Egyptian and Levantine greetings) will reveal pan-Arab practices and features unique to Iraq.

Iraqi men's greeting behaviors reflect great cultural values of hospitality, respect, religious devotion, social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships. As linguistic practices these are much more than communicative contacts or dialogues, but at the same time enactments of cultural identity, claims of religious affiliation, and negotiations of social relations. Such a conflict between tradition and modernity appears in all of the findings, and it represents the struggle faced by Iraq as a whole: maintaining the Islamic identity and tradition in the face of globalized requirements of professions, maintaining the cultural identity in the face of international economy, and maintaining the linguistic identity in the face of the hegemony of English.

The bidirectional and bilingualism of these younger Iraqis allow them to adeptly maneuver through these tensions, using traditional and/or modern greetings as appropriate to the context. This is not a matter of cultural loss, but of linguistic flexibility signifying the adaptability of cultures and language, which ensures the maintenance of its heritage without forfeiting modernity. Forward-looking, let's hope Iraq, which for decades has been rebuilding from conflict, will continue to develop the ways in which people greet one another. Nevertheless, the powerful cultural impact of "As-salamu alaykum", indicating Iraqis' linkage to Islamic prophetic tradition and centuries of Arab civilizations, indicates that traditional forms of greeting will continue to exist alongside changes, but will not be abandoned, as they will remain important symbols of Iraqi cultural solidarity in an increasingly global context.

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