

The Use of the Low Variety of Arabic in Email Communications among Saudi Youth

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Abstract

This study examines the use of the Low variety of Arabic, commonly known as colloquial or spoken Arabic, in email communications among Saudi university youth, specifically in their correspondence with academic affairs unit. Drawing on sociolinguistic frameworks of diglossia, this project investigates the extent to which colloquial Arabic is employed and the underlying factors influencing this usage. Through a quantitative analysis of 100 email samples and qualitative analysis of 4 focus group discussions with Arabic language instructors, the findings of this study indicated a noticeable shift toward the incorporation of colloquial Arabic in academic email communication among youth, signaling broader transformations in linguistic norms influenced by technological advancements, generational attitudes and educational factors. This phenomenon underscores the need to adapt language education, institutional guidelines, and cultural expectations to align with these changes, ensuring a balance between linguistic evolution and the preservation of traditional standards.

Keywords

Diglossia, Email Communication, High Variety, Low Variety

1. Introduction

In recent years, the landscape of communication has undergone significant changes, particularly with the rise of digital platforms that facilitate instant and informal interactions. Among these platforms, email remains a crucial tool for both professional and personal communication. However, the linguistic choices made by youth in email correspondence often reflect a shift towards the use of low varieties of Arabic, a manifestation of diglossia. Diglossia, a term popularized by Charles A. Ferguson in 1959, refers to a sociolinguistic situation in which two varieties of a language coexist within a community, serving different social functions (Ferguson,

1959). Typically, this involves a “high” variety (H), used in formal settings, such as literature and formal education, and a “low” variety (L), used in everyday conversation. This phenomenon is not limited to any single language; it can be observed in various linguistic contexts around the world, including Swiss German, Haitian Creole, and Arabic (Holmes, 2013). This phenomenon raises important questions about the factors influencing this trend, especially in contexts traditionally dominated by Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Understanding these factors is essential for comprehending the broader implications of linguistic variation in Arabic, particularly in the context of globalization and the digital age.

This study aims to explore the multifaceted influences driving the emergence of low varieties of Arabic in email communications among youth. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this project seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on language use in the digital era and its implications for the Arabic language and its speakers.

2. Literature Review

Ferguson (1959), an American linguist, described diglossia as the practice of an individual employing two distinct varieties of the same language, each appropriate to different socially-defined contexts. He further defined diglossia as the coexistence of two functionally and structurally distinct varieties of the same language: a highly codified, standardized, and socially prestigious form referred to as the High (H) variety, and the commonly spoken regional dialects, collectively known as the Low (L) variety. These two varieties are distinct yet closely related. The H variety is typically learned through formal education and used for most written and formal spoken contexts, but is not used by any segment of the community for everyday conversational purposes. In contrast, the L variety serves as the medium for informal, day-to-day communication. This leads to a linguistic hierarchy that influences language acquisition, social mobility, and identity within the community (Simanjuntak et al., 2019). To other sociologists, the term “varieties” refers not only to different forms of language, but also to two distinct languages, such as Spanish and Guarani in Paraguay. Haeri (2000) characterized the H variety as the language used in writing, education, and administrative functions, while the L variety is associated with oral communication, non-print media, poetry, and theatrical performances.

Arabic exhibits a well-documented high-low dichotomy, with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) serving as the H variety and various regional dialects, often referred to collectively as colloquial Arabic, acting as the L varieties. The roots of diglossia in Arabic can be traced back to the linguistic history of the region. Classical Arabic, the language of the Quran, set the standard for MSA, while colloquial dialects evolved in parallel, influenced by local languages and cultures. This historical divergence has led to significant variations in phonology, syntax, and vocabulary across different Arabic-speaking regions (Daniëls, 2018).

MSA is used in formal contexts, including media, education, and literature,

whereas colloquial dialects are employed in everyday conversation (Daniëls, 2018). Arabs typically use MSA in formal settings, while informal contexts often involve colloquial forms such as Spoken Jordanian Arabic, with the choice influenced by factors such as the subject matter, audience, and environment. The H variety is regarded as more prestigious than the L variety, and is characterized by greater complexity, beauty, logic, and expressiveness (Alshamrani, 2012). However, the use of the H variety is unsuitable in situations such as conversations with family or close friends, and the L variety is associated more with the spoken form of the language, specifically in everyday conversations.

Qudah (2017) points out that the two varieties are learned through different processes. Children naturally acquire the L variety at home through unconscious exposure, while the H variety is formally taught in schools using grammar lessons, dictionaries, and textbooks. A key distinction between Modern Standard Arabic (H variety) and colloquial Arabic (L variety) lies in the exposure children receive to each. Arab children grow up hearing colloquial Arabic at home, as Standard Arabic is not used in domestic settings. They are only introduced to Standard Arabic upon entering school and formal education, with the exception of exposure through cartoons and children's educational programs that are presented in MSA. He adds that educated individuals can easily comprehend MSA, and, to some extent, so can those without formal education. However, understanding MSA does not guarantee the ability to produce it. For example, many uneducated individuals can understand the language used in Friday sermons but are unable to deliver such speeches themselves, which suggests that mastering literary Arabic requires formal education.

Social media networking sites are vibrant linguistic environments. A distinct functional separation is evident in language use among Arab youth on social media. Recent scholarships have begun to explore the dynamic interplay between diglossia and language change on digital platforms. For instance, studies have shown that younger generations are increasingly mixing MSA with colloquial forms, resulting in a "hybrid" language that reflects both modern influences and traditional roots (Al-Saleem, 2011). This phenomenon challenges the traditional boundaries of diglossia and suggests a shift towards greater linguistic flexibility among younger speakers. Bassiouney (2020) indicated that the rise of digital communication platforms has facilitated the use of colloquial Arabic, allowing for greater expression of local identity and fostering a sense of community among speakers of various dialects. This trend highlights the potential for colloquial varieties to gain visibility, potentially reshaping the diglossic landscape of Arabic in the future. Qudah (2017) offers insights into diglossic practices within Arabic-speaking communities, by analyzing the diverse linguistic behaviors exhibited by users on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Qudah's findings indicate that the H variety of Arabic is predominantly employed in discussions centered on politics, news, and religion, whereas the L variety is more commonly used in conversations related to fashion, sports, music, and personal topics. Al-Saleem's (2011) study examines the impact of Social Networking Sites (SNS), with a particular focus on

Facebook, on the language use and identities of Jordanian youth, investigating the influence of online written languages on language and identity. The study uncovered several notable insights into Arab youth's online language use. First, local Arabic was identified as the predominant language, frequently blended with MSA and foreign languages due to its practicality, habitual use, and ability to effectively convey ideas. Second, private school graduates often favor foreign languages, mixed languages, or Arabizi, reflecting a novel form of diglossia that merges English with colloquial Arabic. Furthermore, the results show a clear link between language preferences and the perception of being a new generation seeking modern communication styles. In addition, many Arab youths believe that social contexts demand the adoption of innovative communicative languages, contributing to a decline in the use of MSA.

This study investigates the use of the L variety of Arabic in emails produced by youth in their correspondence with university academic affairs units. Email is the most useful communication method for many people and the most common medium of communication in professional settings, including educational institutions and different business organizations, characterized by specific linguistic features that differentiate it from informal or casual communication. The key linguistic attributes of formal email focus on tone, structure, lexical choices, politeness strategies, and the role of context, as explained in the following points:

2.1. Tone and Register

The tone of formal emails is typically characterized by a high level of professionalism and respect. As *Chejnová (2014)* notes, formal emails often use a more elevated register and tend to avoid colloquialisms and slang. This formality is essential in establishing authority and credibility, especially in business contexts. She further emphasizes that the choice of words in formal emails reflects a deliberate effort to convey seriousness and professionalism, which is crucial for effective communication in a workplace environment.

2.2. Structure and Organization

Formal emails usually adhere to a clear structure that enhances readability and comprehension. *Domonkosi and Ludányi (2019)* identify the common components of formal emails as a salutation, a well-organized body, and a closing statement. Each of these components serves a distinct purpose. The structured format not only aids clarity but also reflects the writer's organizational skills, which can impact the recipient's perception of the sender (*Domonkosi & Ludányi, 2019*).

2.3. Lexical Choices and Complexity

The lexical choices in formal emails tend to be more sophisticated and precise than those in informal communication. *Chejnová (2014)* points out that formal emails often use specialized vocabulary that is relevant to the subject matter, which can enhance the credibility of the communication.

2.4. Politeness Strategies

Politeness is a fundamental aspect of formal email communication. [Chejnová \(2014\)](#) argues that formal emails often use various strategies to maintain politeness, such as indirect requests and hedging. These strategies serve to mitigate potential face-threatening acts and foster a collaborative atmosphere. Chejnová adds that the choice of expressions, such as “I would appreciate your assistance” instead of “Help me,” reflects an effort to maintain respect and professionalism.

2.5. Context and Audience Awareness

Understanding the context and audience of one’s message is crucial in formal email communication. According to [Domonkosi and Ludányi \(2019\)](#), the effectiveness of formal emails often depends on the writer’s ability to adapt their language to suit the specific audience and context. Such adaptability includes recognizing hierarchical relationships and the degree of familiarity between the sender and recipient, which can influence the tone and level of formality employed in the email.

Recent developments in digital communication have significantly altered traditional written interactions within higher education, particularly among younger individuals, as seen in various studies. [Domonkosi and Ludányi \(2019\)](#) conducted an analysis of emails and chat logs exchanged between students and faculty in a higher education setting, focusing on the initiation and closing of messages, as well as the conventions used for addressing recipients. Their findings reveal that electronic communication has reshaped conventional practices, introducing novel linguistic features and, at times, resulting in communicative challenges. The study further underscores generational differences in communication expectations and highlights the importance of fostering awareness of these dynamics to facilitate effective interactions in academic contexts. [Chejnová’s \(2014\)](#) study, *Expressing Politeness in the Institutional E-mail Communications of University Students in the Czech Republic*, investigated the strategies that Czech university students used to convey politeness in emails directed toward faculty members. The study examined various linguistic features, including forms of address, opening and closing formulas, degrees of directness, and the use of modification strategies, and its findings indicated that students used both direct and conventionally indirect approaches, frequently incorporating syntactic and external modifications. Notably, more than half of the students avoided using deferential forms of address, and instead opted for greetings that appeared to diminish the hierarchical power imbalance between themselves and their instructors.

Several scholars have explored the linguistic characteristics of emails, particularly among non-native English speakers, within educational institutions. [Biesenbach-Lucas \(2007\)](#) observed that native speakers of American English demonstrate a broader repertoire of strategies for composing polite email messages to their professors than their non-native counterparts. Similarly, [Economidou-Kogetsidis \(2011\)](#) analyzed emails written by Greek Cypriot university students who were non-native speakers of English, addressed to faculty members at an English-

language university in Cyprus. The study revealed that these emails were marked by a pronounced level of directness, minimal use of lexical and phrasal downgraders, frequent omissions of greetings and closings, and notable inconsistencies in the forms of address employed. Faculty members' negative evaluations of these emails highlighted the extent to which inappropriate language strategies can result in pragmatic failure. *Chen's (2006)* longitudinal case study demonstrated that even non-native speakers can adapt to the target culture and develop pragmalinguistic competence. The study followed a graduate student from the Taiwan region of China and her email communication in English during her time at a U.S. university. Initially, as a master's student, she employed discourse features such as lengthy emails, inductive structures, "want" statements, and self-humbling expressions as a deliberate strategy to project an identity of being needy, helpless, and humble. Over time, as her pragmalinguistic competence improved, she shifted her communication style to reflect the identity of an independent and capable doctoral student.

The subsequent section outlines the methodology used in this study, followed by an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to derive conclusions that are relevant to the topic under investigation.

3. Methodology

This study seeks to investigate the prevalence of L variety of Arabic in email communication among youth in their correspondence with the academic affairs unit of an academic institution in Saudi Arabia. It aims to uncover how these linguistic practices mirror shifting perspectives on language, identity, and formality by addressing the following study questions:

- 1) To what extent does Saudi youth email communication use the L variety of Arabic?
- 2) What are the main factors that influence the use of the L variety of Arabic in email communications among Saudi youth?

To address the first research question, this study uses a quantitative analysis to assess the extent of the use of the L variety of Arabic in 100 emails written by youth to the academic affairs unit. This analysis involves systematic coding and statistical evaluation of linguistic features indicative of varying levels of formality. The process is structured as follows:

3.1. Data Collection

The sample consists of 100 emails written in Arabic between September and December 2024 by individuals aged 18 - 22 in their personal correspondence with the academic affairs unit in an academic institution. Institutional consent was obtained to ensure that the data would be used exclusively for research purposes. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were also strictly maintained. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, all participants are identified by their initials in the analysis section.

3.2. Data Organization

The data were organized on an SPSS spreadsheet to systematically record the following for each email: emails' word count, L variety word count, H variety word count, shared word count (shared words between H variety and L variety in Arabic), and presence and type of greeting and closing.

3.3. Statistical Measures

- A Paired-Samples T-Test is used to indicate the correlation between the two variables (L variety word count and H variety word count) by comparing the means of these two variables to show whether the difference is statistically significant.
- Descriptive Statistics are used to show frequencies of different variables to provide a clear, data-driven understanding of how youth adopt language formality in email communication.

A qualitative analysis was also conducted to explore the factors that influence the use of the L variety of Arabic in formal email compositions. The data were collected through four focus group discussions with Arabic language instructors, each consisting of five participants. *Dornyei (2007)* indicates that the focus group format is designed to leverage the collective experience of group brainstorming, wherein participants engage in collaborative thinking, inspire and challenge one another, and respond to emerging topics and issues. He adds that such within-group interaction fosters a synergistic environment that can potentially generate high-quality data through profound and insightful discussions.

4. Data Analysis

This section is organized into two components: Quantitative Analysis and Qualitative Analysis. The Quantitative Analysis focuses on statistical results and measurable outcomes, providing objective insights into the study's findings. On the other hand, the Qualitative Analysis explores interpretations derived from participants' perspectives, offering a deeper understanding of the subject of the study.

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

To address the first research question, this study uses a quantitative analysis to assess the extent of the use of the L variety of Arabic in 100 emails written by youth. This analysis involves systematic coding and statistical evaluation of linguistic features indicative of varying levels of formality. The process is structured as follows:

4.1.1. Lexical Choices

Table 1 presents the mean word counts of the L variety and H variety of Arabic, enabling a comparison of these two variables across 100 emails composed by youth.

Table 1. Paired samples t-test.

Word Count	Mean	N	Percentage	Sig (2-tailed)
low variety word count	11.76	100	45.1%	0.0000
high variety word count	3.70	100	15.87%	

Table 1 shows that the mean of the usage of the L variety in the email sample is 11.7 words, while the mean of the usage of the H variety in the same sample is 3.70 words, corresponding to proportions of 45.10% and 15.87%, respectively. This reflects a statistically significant difference, as evidenced by a p-value = 0.000. Shared lexical items between colloquial and standard Arabic account for approximately 39%; however, in most of the emails, these words are predominantly employed in a colloquial manner.

The first column of **Table 2** shows the most frequently used colloquial lexical items in the emails. The second column provides the equivalent terms in the H variety of Arabic, while the third column contains their English translations.

Table 2. Study data (lexical items).

Low Variety Expressions		High Variety Expressions		English Translation
Arabic	Transcription	Arabic	Transcription	
ايش	/ʔaiš/	ماذا	/ma:ða:/	what
اللي	/ʔilli/	التي	/ʔallati:/	that
الترم	/ʔatairm/	الفصل الدراسي	/ʔalfaSl ʔaddirassi:/	semester
السمنتر	/ʔassimistir/	الفصل الدراسي	/ʔalfaSl ʔaddirassi:/	semester
ابغى	/ʔabGa/	أريد	/ʔuri:du/	I want
بعدين	/bacdain/	بعد ذلك	/bacda ð:lika/	after that
ليش للحين	/laiš lilHi:n/	لماذا إلى الآن	/limaða: ʔila ʔalʔa:n/	why until now
بس	/bas/	لكن	/la:kin/	but
ايش أسوي	/ʔaiš ʔasawi:/	ماذا أفعل	/maða: ʔafcal/	what should I do
شلون كذا صار	/šlu:n kiða Sa:r/	كيف حدث ذلك	/kaifa Hadaða ða:lik/	how this happened
متى يتحط لي	/mita: yitHaTali:/	متى يظهر لي	/mata: yaðhar li:/	when does it show
تغفل	/tigafil/	تغلق	/tuGlaq/	closed
أبا	/ʔaba/	أريد	/ʔuri:du:/	I want
عشان	/caša:n/	بسبب	/bisababi/	because
معليش	/maclaiš/	أعتذر	/ʔactaðiru/	I am sorry
ما تردين	/ma: trudi:n/	لا تردين	/la: tarudi:n/	you do not answer
راح	/ra:H/	سوف	/sawfa/	will

Continued

دورت	/dawwart/	بحثت	/baHaθtu/	searched for
ما لقيته	/ma: ligi:tuh/	لم أجده	/lam ?ajidahu/	I did not find it
أبغا	/?abGa:/	أريد	/?uri:du:/	I want
ضغط	/ḌaGT/	ضغط	/Dagt/	pressure
مامتي تعبانة مرة	/ma:mati tacba:na marra/	والدتي مريضة جدا	/walidati mari:Daton jidan/	my mother is so sick
اسويها سكان	/?asawi:laha ska:n/	أمسحها ضوئيا	/?amsaHha: Dawiyan/	to scan it
مو	/mu:/	لا	/la:/	not
السمستر اللي فات	/?assimistir ?illi fa:t/	الفصل الماضي	/?alfaSl ?almaDi/	last semester
الحين	/?alHi:n/	الان	/?al?a:n/	now
أسوي	/?asawi:/	أفعل	/?afcal/	do
النت	/?anit/	الشبكة	/?ašabakah/	The internet
بدري	/badri:/	مبكرا	/mubakkiran/	soon

Within the context of university correspondence, lexical choices are expected to be more refined and precise than those typically used in informal communication. Nonetheless, the data reveal that youth frequently opt for the L variety of the language, encompassing various regional dialects and colloquial expressions, to a significant degree. This behavior may suggest either a lack of awareness of the formality required in such contexts or a conscious effort to assert their identity. To account for potential regional variations within Saudi Arabia in the use of colloquial Arabic, it is important to clarify that the primary focus of this study is not to examine dialectal differences across regions. Instead, the study aims to highlight the presence and functional use of the low variety of Arabic—namely, colloquial or spoken Arabic—in formal email communications among Saudi youth. While regional variations in colloquial Arabic certainly exist, this research is concerned with demonstrating that, regardless of the specific dialect, the low variety is being integrated into a context typically reserved for the high variety (Modern Standard Arabic).

4.1.2. Sentence Structure

An analysis of the sentence structure in the emails reveals that 73 emails consist of a single sentence, some of which are lengthy and incorporate multiple clauses. Additionally, 23 emails contain two sentences, 1 email includes three sentences, and 3 emails consist of four sentences each. The mean word count across the sample is 25.96, reflecting a concise and succinct style of communication. Such brevity suggests a preference for efficiency, which aligns with an informal tone typical of youth communication. The frequent use of colloquial language, combined with short and straightforward sentence structures, is indicative of the informal communication style often observed among younger individuals. This tendency is

likely influenced by the students' regular use of digital platforms, in which brevity and informality are prioritized over adherence to formal linguistic norms.

An examination of punctuation usage reveals a clear tendency toward run-on sentences. In addition, none of the emails conclude with a full stop, which reflects a lack of adherence to conventional grammatical standards and suggests an informal approach to written communication. Internal punctuation marks are used to separate sentences in only 27 emails, indicating limited adherence to formal writing practices. Notably, question marks are prominently used in 23 emails, suggesting a conversational tone aimed at posing questions or making requests. This pattern highlights a dynamic and interactive communication style that often prioritizes engagement and immediacy over formal linguistic structures.

4.1.3. Linguistic Style

The majority of the emails addressed to the academic affairs unit primarily serve the purpose of making requests. All the emails examined involved formal requests related to academic matters, such as registration, dropping or adding courses, schedule issues, and summer courses. These requests are typically positioned directly before the closing sentence of the email. They are categorized, based on linguistic style, as formal style, characterized by the use of the H variety of Arabic, and informal style, marked by the use of the L variety of Arabic. Among the total emails analyzed, 20 contained requests composed in the H variety of Arabic, while 80 featured requests written in the L variety of Arabic. The notable disparity between these choices suggests a preference for informal communication in such contexts. This preference may reflect the correspondents' comfort level with less formal language, or a perception that the use of the L variety of Arabic is sufficient for effective communication in this setting.

Furthermore, 12 of the emails include emoji, such as hearts, broken hearts, and crying faces. These visual symbols, which have become integral to contemporary mobile email communication, serve as means of expressing emotions and adding personal touches to the students' messages. The use of emoji reflects an emerging trend in digital correspondence in which non-verbal cues are employed to complement written text and enhance emotional engagement. However, their presence in formal emails may undermine the perceived seriousness and professionalism of the message and can lead the recipient to view the sender as informal or lacking in communication etiquette.

4.1.4. Openings and Closing:

26 of the emails began with the phrase *السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته* /assalamu calaikum wa raHmatu allahi wa baraka:tuh/ (May the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you) (while 54 emails started with the shorter form *السلام عليكم* /assalamu calaikum/ (May the peace of God be upon you), and 20 emails included no opening salutation at all. In the context of formal email communication, the longer phrase is regarded as more formal and respectful than the abbreviated form. The extended version, which includes an invocation of peace, mercy, and blessings, demonstrates

a heightened level of courtesy and adherence to traditional linguistic norms, making it particularly suitable for professional, official, or hierarchical correspondence in which maintaining a tone of respect and politeness is paramount. Conversely, the shorter form, while still conveying politeness, is less formal and carries a more neutral tone than the longer version. It is often preferred in semi-formal or informal settings where a concise greeting is deemed sufficient, and is also used as a salutation in informal oral communication. The variation in the choice of opening phrases reflects differing levels of formality and situational appropriateness, with the extended version serving as the more suitable choice for upholding decorum in formal contexts. The absence of a salutation in formal communication may be perceived as a lack of attention to etiquette or an oversight, potentially signaling informality or even a degree of carelessness. It could also reflect unfamiliarity with formal email conventions. However, in professional and academic settings, failing to include a salutation may risk appearing abrupt or impolite, as it deviates from widely accepted norms of respect and courtesy.

The data also reveal that only a small proportion of the emails—28 of the total 100—used closing expressions such as “thank you,” while a significantly larger number, 72 of 100, omitted any form of closing. The use of “thank you” or similar expressions can indicate politeness, appreciation, or a formal tone, all of which are appropriate for academic settings. Conversely, the absence of any closing expression could reflect a lack of awareness about formal email etiquette. This absence could potentially be interpreted as abrupt or inattentive, especially in contexts that prioritize decorum and structure, such as academia. It may also reflect an evolving communication culture in which brevity and informality increasingly dominate digital interactions. However, in academic settings, maintaining formality in email communication remains essential to fostering clear, respectful, and professional exchanges.

The quantitative analysis demonstrates a significant prevalence of the L variety of Arabic in emails written by youth in their correspondence with the Academic Affairs unit. This finding raises critical questions regarding the underlying factors and potential implications of this phenomenon, particularly its impact on perceptions of professionalism and credibility in such contexts. These questions are addressed in the focus group discussions.

4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

To explore the underlying factors contributing to the use of the L variety of Arabic in student email communication with the university, four focus group discussions with Arabic language instructors were conducted. Each session consisted of 5 participants and was guided by semi-structured, open-ended questions aimed at eliciting participants’ experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of student email language.

Most of the participants associated students’ informal email writing styles with broader digital habits shaped by platforms such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Fa-

cebook. AA said, “The way students write emails is just an extension of how they talk on WhatsApp. There is no switch between casual and formal.” The blending of casual digital communication with academic correspondence was viewed as a natural consequence of daily technology use. This idea is also expressed by MA, who said, “They copy the same tone they use on social media—it’s quick, informal, and filled with expressions that are not appropriate in emails.” DA also agreed that “They are used to communicating on social media and instant messaging platforms, where the L variety of Arabic is the norm. That style carries over into email.” DK explained that “The traditional linguistic divide between the H and L varieties of Arabic has historically delineated formal and informal communication. However, the rise of digital communication has blurred these boundaries, with the L variety increasingly infiltrating formal domains.”

Another significant insight was the perception that students no longer view emails as formal correspondence. NR said that “They might be choosing the L variety because it’s quicker and easier for them to express their ideas without overthinking grammar or structure. For many of them, email doesn’t feel like a formal tool; it is just another app to send a message through.” This point was emphasized by FH, who noted that “The line between email and instant messaging is blurred for today’s youth. They write emails like they are sending a WhatsApp message, and they expect an immediate response.” The prevalence of informal language use in daily digital life affects formal communication habits due to students’ easy access to these applications on mobile devices. AA explained that easy access to email applications, particularly on mobile devices, has influenced the linguistic features of emails composed by youth. For example, their emails are often short, with reduced use of formal greetings and closings. They frequently employ casual language, abbreviations, and emoji, blurring the distinction between emails and informal messaging. There is also a tendency towards more direct communication, often bypassing traditional politeness strategies in favor of brevity and efficiency.

Most of the participants expressed concern that the use of the L variety of Arabic in academic emails can undermine perceptions of professionalism and respect. The informal tone may unintentionally create impressions of carelessness, disrespect, or immaturity. MH pointed out that “Sometimes I feel they don’t mean to be disrespectful, but the tone sounds like they are talking to a friend, not an academic.” Another participant, MS, commented that “It makes it hard to take the request seriously when the language is too casual. It affects how we respond.” This point highlights the broader implications for student-staff relationships, institutional communication culture, and the development of professional identity among youth. It also implies the need for educational intervention around digital etiquette. NA pointed out that “Most students lack the knowledge of how to make their request polite through using indirect approaches; for example, instead of using ‘I want,’ they should use expressions like ‘If you do not mind’ or ‘I would appreciate it’ approaches.” She added that “one of the drawbacks of colloquial lan-

guage is that it is based on abbreviations and spontaneity and may be incomprehensible when used in writing.”

The absence of institutional guidelines is also an important factor in the use of the L variety of Arabic in emails composed by youth. MA said that “the problem is that even at the institutional level, unfortunately, they sometimes use colloquial language in some advertisements to attract attention.” The absence of institutional policies or models leaves room for informality. NT mentioned that “There is no clear policy or consequence for writing informally, so students might not see the need to change their approach.” In this regard, AA suggested that “the institution might propose email templates, language guides, or orientation modules for new students.”

A recurring concern among participants was the absence of formal instruction in academic or professional email writing. Some participants, such as DA, MB, MD, and AF, observed that students often lacked exposure to the norms of writing in MSA and of appropriate email etiquette. This concern was expressed by DA, who said, “They were never taught how to write a formal message. They write like they are texting their classmates.” She added that “Even at the high school level, formal Arabic writing is limited to essays. Nobody teaches them how to write emails.” Such a lack of formal instruction appears to leave students unaware of the expectations in institutional communication, leading them to rely on colloquial forms. MB said, “Many students don’t seem to have been trained in writing formal Arabic. They might not know what is appropriate in academic or professional communication.” Another point was raised in this regard by MD, who pointed out that “Some students come from school systems where formal Arabic is not emphasized in writing. That might affect how they write now.”

Another key factor was students’ discomfort or insecurity in using the H variety of Arabic. Two participants, AA and AF, both suggested that some students deliberately avoid formal Arabic because they feel unprepared or fear making linguistic errors because they consider formal Arabic a separate language and find it complicates expressing their ideas. AA indicated that “Some of them are just scared of making grammar mistakes in the H variety, so they avoid it completely,” while AF said, “They feel safer using dialect because it is what they are fluent in—even if it is inappropriate in this context.” This low confidence was seen not only as a linguistic issue but also as a reflection of gaps in educational preparation. SA raised an important issue regarding the gap between Arabic education that prioritizes classical and literary forms, and the practical application of the H variety in contemporary academic and professional contexts. In email communication students often seek clarity, efficiency, and relatability, which leads them to favor simpler, more colloquial expressions. As a result, the highly structured and elevated form of MSA becomes impractical for these purposes, creating a gap between what is taught and what is actually used in digital communication. SA proposed a suggestion, which 4 of the participants praised, that “Necessitating adjustments to educational and linguistic frameworks are needed to accommodate these emerg-

ing patterns. This transformation highlights the need for adaptability of language to societal and technological changes while raising questions about the preservation of traditional linguistic norms through the use of grammatically correct but simplified language.”

The following section presents a comprehensive discussion of the study’s main findings in relation to the existing body of literature. By drawing connections between the observed patterns in language use and previously established findings in sociolinguistic scholarship, particularly those related to diglossia, language attitudes, and digital communication practices, this section elucidates the implications of the study’s outcomes.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Traditionally, oral and written language were distinctly separated by their linguistic characteristics, with the former often characterized by informal, conversational expressions and the latter adhering to formal, structured norms. However, this distinction has become increasingly less pronounced over time. In the context of Arabic, this shift is particularly evident as the L variety, historically reserved for informal and spoken interactions, has increasingly infiltrated formal domains such as email communication among youth within academic settings, as the results of this study’s quantitative analysis have demonstrated. As mentioned earlier, Qudah’s (2017) findings reveal the tendency to blend MSA with colloquial varieties, resulting in hybrid linguistic forms that embody both traditional and modern elements. However, in contrast to this study, Qudah’s investigations were conducted within the context of informal social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, rather than formal academic email communication. The emergence of the L variety of Arabic in formal communication among youth, particularly in academic and professional contexts, can be attributed to several factors, categorized into technological, generational attitude, and educational dimensions.

5.1. Technological Factors

The data analysis of this study suggests that the widespread prevalence of digital communication platforms, such as social media, instant messaging, and mobile applications, has significantly influenced linguistic practices by normalizing the use of informal language and abbreviations. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook promote brevity and the incorporation of colloquial expressions, which have increasingly extended into formal communication settings. Additionally, the use of emoji and other visual symbols that are integral to digital communication complements the L variety of Arabic, making messages more relatable and emotionally expressive. This trend not only shapes how youth structure their language but also reinforces the blending of formal and informal linguistic elements. In the case of Arabic, the use of the L variety among youth in academic email communication highlights how digital communication norms influence language practices, leading to a more hybridized linguistic landscape. In

addition, easy access to email on mobile phones has significantly influenced the use of the L variety of Arabic, such as colloquial dialects, in written communication. Mobile email applications promote quick and informal exchanges, which align with the characteristics of colloquial Arabic. As a result, users often default to their spoken dialects for convenience and ease of expression, rather than using the more formal Standard Arabic that is typical of traditional written contexts. This shift underscores the growing prevalence of the L variety in digital communication.

5.2. Generational Attitudes

Another finding reveals that generational attitudes further contribute to this shift, as younger individuals often perceive the H variety of Arabic as excessively formal or complicated and instead favor the L variety for its practicality and accessibility in fast-paced digital interactions. The shift to a hybridized form of Arabic that incorporates elements from both varieties reflects the changing needs and practices of modern communication. The integration of the L variety of Arabic and the use of emoji in formal communication have notable implications for identity and expression, particularly in fostering increased personalization. These elements enable individuals to convey emotions and establish rapport, adding a personal touch to traditional formal interactions. Additionally, the adoption of these practices reflects a generational shift in linguistic preferences, driven by younger generations who are accustomed to the norms of digital communication. This shift signals an evolution in language use, highlighting the influence of generational dynamics on shaping contemporary linguistic practices and expressions of identity. This finding ties neatly with [Basiouny's \(2020\)](#) and [Daniëls' \(2018\)](#) respective findings, which indicated that the expansion of digital communication platforms has promoted the widespread adoption of colloquial Arabic, especially among young generations, enhancing the articulation of their linguistic and cultural identities.

5.3. Educational Factors

The data analysis also indicates that educational factors significantly contribute to the increasing use of the L variety of Arabic in formal communication among youth. A key issue lies in gaps within formal language training, as Arabic education often prioritizes classical and literary forms and offers limited emphasis on the practical application of the H variety in contemporary academic and professional contexts. This disconnect leaves students inadequately prepared to employ the H variety effectively in real-world scenarios. Additionally, the lack of institutional enforcement regarding formal language standards further reinforces this trend, as academic settings often implicitly accept the use of the L variety in mediums such as email exchanges, since no action is being taken against this issue. On the other hand, the findings revealed that the use of inappropriate language strategies can contribute to faculty members' negative evaluations or misunder-

standing of these emails, a point that Economidou-Kogetsidis' (2011) analysis of emails written by Greek Cypriot university students to their English language university instructors has demonstrated.

The blending of H and L varieties calls for a reconsideration of Arabic curricula, particularly in the teaching of writing skills for formal communication, to better reflect the evolving linguistic landscape. Most of the participants in this study suggest that educators and institutions may also need to adjust their expectations for formal writing by explicitly teaching the contexts in which the H or L varieties are appropriate, ensuring students develop the ability to navigate diverse communicative settings effectively. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of the L variety poses a potential risk to proficiency in MSA, which remains essential for disciplines such as literature, law, and religious studies. This potential decline underscores the need for balanced educational strategies that preserve the integrity of MSA while accommodating the practical demands of digital communication. The findings recommend greater emphasis on teaching and promoting proper email etiquette, particularly among students and early-career professionals. By cultivating the habit of using appropriate language and structure, individuals can enhance the tone and effectiveness of their correspondence, ensuring alignment with academic and professional expectations.

In conclusion, the increasing use of the L variety of Arabic in formal communication, particularly among youth, reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of language in the digital age. This phenomenon has blurred the boundaries between formal and informal linguistic domains, driven by the influence of digital communication, generational attitudes and gaps in formal language education. While the L variety offers accessibility and relatability, its integration into formal contexts raises questions about professionalism and the potential erosion of traditional linguistic standards. Educational reforms are needed to bridge the gap between MSA proficiency and practical communication skills, ensuring that students are equipped to navigate diverse linguistic settings effectively.

As the low variety continues to gain prominence, further research is necessary to understand its long-term implications for Arabic language evolution and identity, while fostering a balanced approach that respects both linguistic innovation and cultural heritage.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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