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SEMANTIC CHANGE AND OBSOLESCENCE IN IRAQI ARABIC DIALECTS

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التغيير الدلالي وتقدم المعنى في اللهجة العراقية العربية

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Abstract

Language change is considered as a universal phenomenon, and forms the base of historical linguistics. Semantic change refers to the changes of word meaning that replace the original meaning, and most of these changes are created according to the user's need. This study investigates the semantic change in Iraqi Arabic. It focuses on the semantic change (death meaning) in Iraqi Arabic. Ethnographic technique which is based on collection of spontaneous speech and words in neutral setting is adopted in the present study, and the authentic data was collected in *Salah Al-Din Governorate*, Iraq. This paper finds out that simple words meaning type is most type of meaning change in this region. Full change of meaning is found more than the partial one. Also, it refers that psychological factors besides socio-cultural factors affect semantic change in Iraqi Arabic dialects. The study concludes that there is no death of meaning in Arabic language but there are obsolete words may appear again.

Key words: Language change, Semantic change, Iraqi Arabic, Death meaning, Obsolete words.

المخلص

يعدّ التغيّر اللغوي ظاهرةً كونية تمثل الأساس في الدراسات اللسانية التاريخية. ويشير التغيّر الدلالي إلى التحولات التي تطرأ على معنى الكلمة لتحلّ محلّ معناها الأصلي، وغالباً ما تنشأ هذه التحولات استجابةً لحاجات المتحدثين. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل التغيّر الدلالي في العربية العراقية، مع تركيز خاص على ما يُعرف بموت المعنى. وقد تم اعتماد المنهج الإثنوغرافي القائم على جمع الكلام التلقائي والمفردات في سياقات طبيعية، حيث جُمعت البيانات من محافظة صلاح الدين في العراق. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الألفاظ البسيطة هي الأكثر عرضة للتغيّر الدلالي في هذه المنطقة، وأن التغيّر الكلي في المعنى أكثر شيوعاً من التغيّر الجزئي. كما تبين أن العوامل النفسية، إلى جانب العوامل الاجتماعية والثقافية، تسهم في تشكيل مسار التغيّر الدلالي في اللهجات العراقية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنه لا وجود لموت حقيقي للمعنى في اللغة العربية، بل إن بعض الألفاظ المهجورة قد تعود إلى التداول من جديد الكلمات المفتاحية: التغيير اللغوي، التغيير الدلالي، العربية العراقية، موت المعنى، تقدم الكلمات

1. Introduction

Language seems to be one of the most dynamic skills that humans have acquired through their evolution. It has constantly evolved to adapt the communication to new purposes and need (de Sá et al., 2024). One of the main important phenomenon of variation in language is language change. Some features of language such as phonology, morphology, semantics and other features are always change overtime. So, new meaning, grammatical forms or even new pronunciation can be occurred, also some meaning or old forms may be dropped out of use. According to Thomson (2010) language or linguistic change takes place when some new elements of linguistics are used by few speakers of specific community and adopted by others in the same community to be accepted as a norm.

It is found that people use languages (or new words) that they are easy for them to communicate. However, younger or new generations are not using the old words or their meanings and as a result these words are gradually die. Isa, Ahmed and Grema (2014) consider languages as dead/ extinct languages when they no longer spoken by anyone in the community. Crystal (2000) has another opinion, he states that Arabic, among other languages, has suppressed many languages because of cultural assimilation which is considered as a big threat, besides colonialism that spread a small number of dominate languages around the world.

The issue of word death or meaning obsolescence is discussed by Crystal (2000), who asserts that language loss often begins with lexical attrition. In Arabic, this process can be seen where rural terms become stigmatized or irrelevant due to modernization. Kadhim (2012) characterizes the loss of meaning as the most extreme outcome of semantic change. In contrast, Al-Asady (2015) challenges the notion of permanent word death, arguing that “resurrected” vocabulary may reappear under socio-political or cultural revival. Stokwell and Minkova (2001, cited in Yule, 2020), classify the semantic change into generalization, shift, and meaninglessness. Meaninglessness is the final semantic change step which means the death of word meaning. The obsolescence of certain lexical items contributes to intergenerational miscommunication and a diminished capacity for mutual understanding within the same speech community. As these words fall out of regular usage, younger generations often fail to recognize or comprehend their meanings. Consequently, a gradual semantic change occurs over time. Factors such as advance technology, wars and conflicts as well as shifting cultural norms tend to encourage the adoption of new vocabulary while accelerating the abandonment of traditional expression.

However, semantic change has been widely studied in different contexts and languages; limited research has focused on the death or obsolescence of word meanings in Iraqi context. The current study aims to fill this gap by exploring how words fall out of use or the death meaning of words in Iraqi Arabic language. Moreover, Stokwell and Minkova (2001, cited in Yule, 2020), classify the semantic change into generalization, shift, and meaninglessness. Meaninglessness is the final semantic change step which means the death of word meaning. Accordingly, this paper tries to investigate the meaninglessness or death meaning of words due to cultural, psychological factors in Iraqi, specifically in Salah Al-Din Governorate.

So, some questions need to be answered in this paper:

- 1- What is the kind of words meaning that change mostly?
- 2- Do Iraqi Arabic words meaning die over ages like English words meaning do?
- 3- What are the psycho-social factors which cause semantic change in Iraqi Arabic?

2. Understanding Semantic Change

Traditionally, semantic change has been defined as the process through which a lexical item acquires a new meaning or loss an existing one over time (Geeraerts, 2009). Words that originally meant one thing can change, become more specific, sometimes narrower, or even lose their meaning completely. This phenomenon reveals a lot about how people think, how societies function, and how communication adapts to changing cultural realities. It is not merely a peculiarity of language .

Early linguists such as Bloomfield (1933) treated semantic change as a natural process in language history. While recent scholars see meaning change as more than just categorizing types. Geeraerts (2009) stresses the importance of looking at real usage and the social context behind those shifts. His focus is on how people use words in daily life, more than the change itself .

Jennifer Coates points that semantic change is occurring in the context of linguistic heterogeneity. In her argument, she explains that linguistic change can be said to have taken place when a new linguistic form used by some sub-group within a speech community. Thus change is adopted by other members of that community and gradually becomes accepted as the norm. Taylor et al. (2001) sees lexical change relates the cognitive processes, which relates to a socio-cultural and historical context. Lakoff and Johnson (1980), referred to this opinion before, as they highlighted how abstract thinking shapes language.

Another idea of semantic change is the grammaticalization. Heine and Kuteva (2007) explain how words that once had full, clear meanings become part of the grammar of a language. They clarify that this shift as a gradual and often predictable process. Pragmatic angle is not ignored in semantic change. Scholars like Traugott and Dasher (2002) emphasize the role of inference. They assumed that people often understand more than what's said directly, gradually, the implied meanings can become part of a word's core meaning. This subtle process of reinterpretation in real communication is one of the main ways meanings evolve.

However, beyond how the brain and communication affect meaning, social, psychological and cultural change besides other perspectives play a huge role in change the meaning. Factors like age, gender, and region often determine how language is used differently across groups, and eventually, these differences can lead to lasting changes in meaning.

3. Related Studies

The change of words meaning that replaces the original meaning is called meaning change or semantic change. Overtimes, words in different languages always in change either getting new meaning or losing the meaning at all. According to Fromkin and Rodman (1983, cited in Tobing 2010) "semantic change is a change in one of the meanings of a word that may expand or replace the original meaning of the words".

Although the semantic change is one of the many domains discussed within the area of language change, the emphasis has been laid on semantic shift, change meaning, creating new words in different languages and cultures. Little serious attention has been paid to study the death meaning of words in semantic change domain of linguistics such as (Liao & cheng 2010, Wijaya & Yenterzi 2014, and Puncevic 2016).

A study by Boualem (2017) investigates semantic shift as a phenomenon of semantic change that exists in English and Arabic languages. Asmaa makes a comparison between the two languages, she found that there is a semantic change of words in English and Arabic and that change over time at the semantics level. Also, she noticed that the semantic shift of both languages is systematic since they share the same type of change. More close study has been done by Kadhim (2012) who discussed the semantic change of Arabic and English language. The study focused on similarities and differences in semantic change especially the old language of Arabic. Khadim called the words that have no meaning any more as meaninglessness and this point does not get much attention of the researchers.

Recent computational research (Wijaya & Yeniterzi, 2011; Eger & Mehler, 2016) demonstrates how semantic change can be tracked over time using large digital corpora, providing insight into lexical attrition patterns. Alasaady (2015), focusing on Iraqi Arabic, argues that so-called obsolete words may re-emerge, especially during periods of socio-political change.

Last but not least, Alrabial, Al-salman, Atwell and Alholewh (2014) refer to the change of meaning in Arabic words and synonyms in their study about Arabic linguistics. This study indicated that Arabic speakers no longer taste language and their linguistic background does not allow them to use synonyms properly

3. Methodology

The research was conducted in Salah Al-Din Governorate, especially in Baiji, Tikrit and Alam. These areas situated with along the Tigris River, and they are characterized by agricultural lifestyle and conservative cultural norms. These areas are experienced significant sociolinguistic shifts due to different reasons such war, migration and technological exposure. That is, a purposive sampling of 25 native Iraqi Arabic speakers aged 50 and above was selected to ensure familiarity with traditional vocabulary or meanings. Gender, socioeconomic statues, and urban-rural background were balanced to provide diverse linguistic input.

Ethnographic method was used to collect data from spontaneous conversation. The goal was to collect authentic spoken language in natural settings. This approach aligns with methods proposed by Hymes (1996) and Mones & Wolfson (1981). In the analysis process, the collected words were classified based on Stageberg's (1981) typology: simple, compound, and complex and change type (full, partial, obsolete). Moreover, quantitative analysis was conducted to determine the frequency and type of semantic change, using SPSS for statistical interpretation.

5. Findings

The next examples of words that analyzed in the current study have been collected by the researcher from authentic data. These words come from everyday conversation in the past 50 years as mentioned before.

Firstly, Stageberg (1981) classified words on the basis of the kind and combination of morphemes of which they are composed into three types: simple, compound and complex. simple words consist of a single free morpheme, and compound words usually have two free forms. The compound words resemble grammatical structure in that they imply, though they do not state, a grammatical relationship. While complex words contain either two bound morphemes or a bound and a free morpheme. The next table shows these kinds of research words.

Table 1. Kinds of Words

Simple words	Compound words	Complex words
Bartil	faku yakhata	Yaqus al hawayz

Badkir	bazat alshghl	mudawafuhuna aqshur
Yafashir	Faltihdhafa	adeah min earayij albayn
Baqija	matk alhusn	Khayt al shabram
Duk	duk 'iyah	
Aleawma	saradiq fasal	
Dabriji	dast kawaz	
Jarjur		
Hakla		
Almunjasa		
Barajud		
Qazuq		
Salbaja		

Table 1 shows kinds of words that lost their meaning or they are not used any more by people in *Salah Al-Din Governorate*. More examples like (labed) which means (quiet), (Jarkh), (wheel), (aqeud tarafay), (sitting beside me) and (adeah min earayij albayn), (hit him severely). However, according to the collected data, simple words were most susceptible to semantic change. This is likely due to their high frequency and broader usage contexts, which make them more vulnerable to replacement.

Table 2. Statics of Words Types

Word type	Number	Percentage
Simple	٩٥	79.1 %
Compound	١٥	12.5 %
Complex	١٠	8.3 %
Total	120	100 %

Table 2 explains statics of words types. Simple words were 95 representing the highest number at 79.1 % of the whole collected words while complex words were only 10 words as the lowest number at 8.3 % respectively.

Figure 1 Kinds of Words Meaning

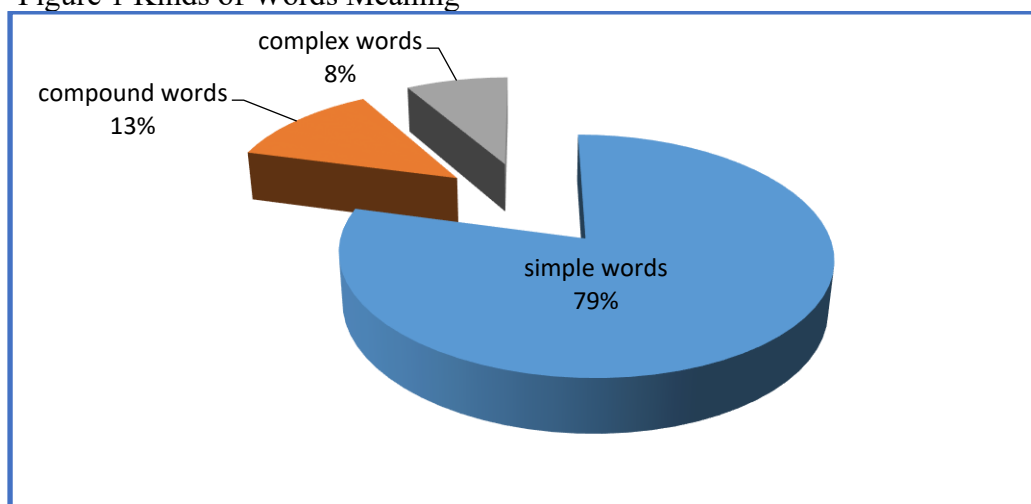


Figure 1 above shows clearly the percentage of kinds of words meaning.

Change of meaning is the next point that needs to explain in the present paper, some words are changed partially while others are forgotten and change totally. Table 3 below will explain this point.

Table 3. Type of Word Meaning Change

Word	Partial change	Word	Full change
faku yakhata	faku eaniy	Yafashir	yaghlit
bazat alshghla	kharabat alshghla	Salbaja	mughasila
duk 'iyah	eindak 'iyah	Lmba	Light
aqeud tarafay	Aqeud yumi	Qiryula	qunfa

The examples in table 3 show partial change in some words, though people in *Salah Al-Din Governorate* have made a full change to some words. They totally use different words. (faku yakhata) as an example of partial change moved to (Faku eaniy) that means (leave me), while (qiryula) which totally changed to (qunfa) (sofa).

Table .4 Statics of Word Meaning Change

Number of words = 120			
Full change	Percentage	Partial change	Percentage
105	87 %	١٥	13 %

As shown in table 4, the collected data state statically that the fully changed words are more than these words which are partially change. The full change words reached (105) words to represent 87 % of the data, while only (15) words are partially changed at 13 % only. Full semantic change was dominant, often replacing traditional words entirely with modern alternatives.

Figure 2 Types of Meaning Change

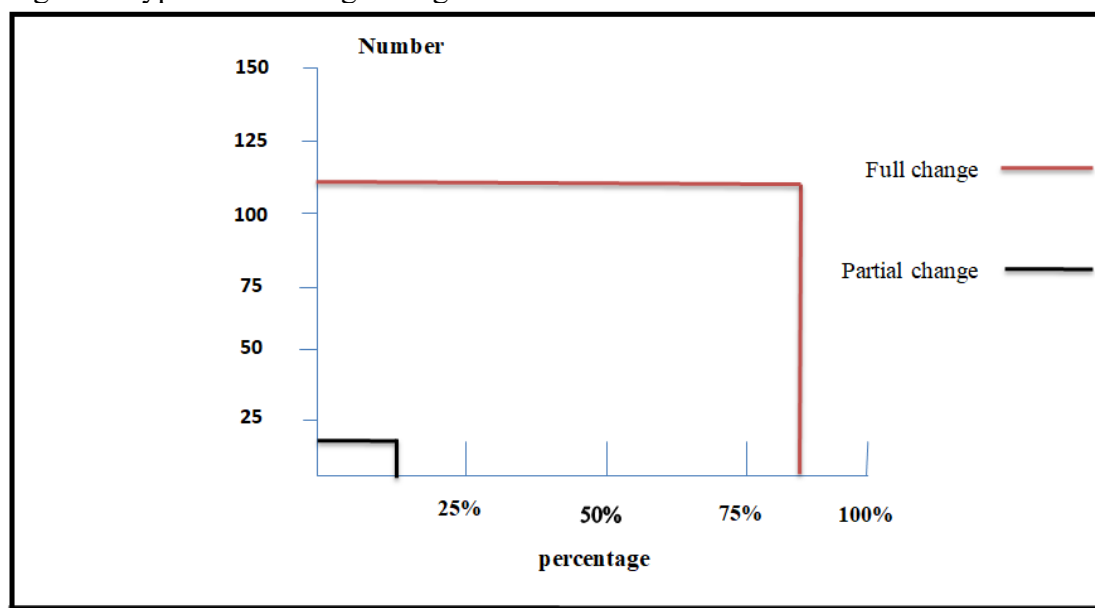


Figure 2 shows the number of words in the two types of meaning change, also it explains the percentage of these words according to the total number of data. Figure 2 actually explains table 2 of change meaning statistics. The final and the most important point in this study is the existence of an object that related to the words meaning. In some languages or cultures, when an object or a thing does not exist anymore, the word that refers to this thing is dead (death meaning), other languages may do not.

Table 5. The Existences

Still exist	Not exist
Dunadrima	Bustwka
Danbuk	Alnayr
Limba	Qawaniq
Qiryula	Madahana
Batia	Jarjur
Katala	Almunjasa
Mudama	Karij

Table 6. Statistics of Existences

Number of words = 120			
Exist	Percentage	Not exist	Percentage
30	25 %	90	75 %

However, regarding the factors or causes of semantic change, this study finds out and refers to two main important types of causes; firstly, psychological factors (internal causes) which deals with cognitive science and related to the speaker's mind and speaker's organs, such causes are (misunderstanding, influence from other dialects, desire for linguistic distinctiveness). The second type is social – cultural factors (external causes) such as Technological advancement, war and displacement, needs for change, new inventions, Influence from other cultures and dialects etc.).

5. Discussion

English and Arabic are considered as changeable languages for different reasons that belongs to the fact that language is not something stable, it is dynamic, and it changes over times.

Simple words type among the other kinds that classified by Stageberg (1981) as the most words meaning change in Iraq. Besides the full change meaning and the obsolete words or the words which do not exist type. This result would answer the first research question. People usually try to change compound or complex words with simple words in their everyday conversation and they do that gradually. But in *Salah Al-Din Governorate*, it seems that people make the change and focus on the old simple words as well as other words types. After the war in Iraq against ISIL and the technology, internet, and social media entered the country, a huge fast change happened in different points and the language was one of these points. According to Sheard (1966) (cited in Kadhim 2012) semantic change or meaning change is connected with the development of human mind as it would reality to confirm with its needs. Based on this, it can be said that languages are affected by cultural, social and technical besides other elements.

People in *Salah Al-Din* region choose the full change of meaning of some old words, they may consider these words meaning as an old fashion words in conversation, or the objects that represent these words do not exist anymore, usually they do not find it and that powerfully appears in the results which show that the words that do not exist are mostly changed more than the words which refer to object that are still exist and can be seen or touch. Another probably reason is that people may know these words are difficult to be understood or an acceptable by others from different regions since they can communicate with others out of their areas using the social media and the internet. So they try to avoid using these words till they forgotten, changed and died. The difficult question that always in consideration; Does language lose words and die? Which is not easy to be answered. Crystal(2000) states that language dies when nobody speaks it any more. According to Crystal (2000) "It is not usually possible to write a single cause on the death certificate for a language", referring to the death of language. Campbell (1994) defines language death as "the loss of a language due to gradual shift to the dominant language in language contact situations. Such situations involve an intermediate stage of bilingualism in which the subordinate language is employed by a decreasing number of speakers in an equally decreasing number of contexts, until it ultimately disappears altogether".

Hasan (2015) refers to meaning change overtime as cultural and historical shift, and he uses the term (expired) "when the word meaning comes to an end of period of validity , this just meant die". According to Hasan this is a historical process of meaning change which is intimately linked to synchronic process of meaning extension. Switching to new words excessively instead of the old or native equivalent words may cause many native term of language being discarded from usage and consequently, they may become partially or fully obsolete. According to Okere (2017) the obsolete words or terms are outdated or lost terms, they are dead in language.

Words which drop out of use may still be found in a fixed expression which is why these are useful tools in historical linguistics, reflected in the results (partial change). Even the words meaning that represent an exist objects, may appear again when people need it or the object appears again and that happened when there was a war in *Salah Al-Din*, people started re using such words like (limpa means light, chula means cooker). This point basically is essential in Arabic linguistics especially in semantic change, that means there is no death meaning in Arabic language. Alasaady (2015) supports this opinion and states that words may disappear but they may arise again, even after centuries, Alasaady's research proved that the Iraqis have vocabulary in their everyday conversation and these vocabulary are considered or seen dead by the scholars or linguists. He supports his point of view by mentioning that the Arabic scholar Sibawayh did not used the term death of words meaning but he used the phrase (the Arabs dispensed with these words). Based on these facts, it can be said that there is no death meaning in Arabic language.

Referring to the factors or causes of semantic change, it is clear that society has a great influence on language, any society has its own important elements of any culture such as identity, behaviour, traditions and attitudes.

Each culture can change over times for many reasons like new fashion, new conditions which obligate these cultures to change. Since language is one of the most essentials of any society identity, it is always in need to be changed to cover some new concepts, one of these concepts or change is the disappearance of some words. Through the wars against ISIL in *Salah Al-Din region*, most of people were displaced to other regions like Kirkuk, Baghdad or Kurdistan and that means new dialects, new cultures, new words or vocabulary were they clearly influenced by other people in these areas. Also, the development of peoples' minds in *Salah Al-Din* because of the development of the educational levels, affected by new technology and internet, besides contacting with other people from different areas and countries which requires the use new words and leaving old fashion words that they feel embrace when using them or they find them difficult to be understood by others.

Finally, it can be said that the new technology, internet and social media, wars, immigrate or moving to another areas, the development of educational levels and minds as well as other causes have a big influence on the Iraqi people and make semantic change (obsolescence words) in *Salah Al-Din region*.

Conclusion

The current study concluded with some facts related to change in *Salah Al-Din* area. Firstly, simple words froms are the most susceptible to semantic change in *Salah Al-Din*. People in *Salah Al-Din* tend to make changes with simple words, and they have made more full change meaning of words than partial change. In another way, full semantic changes are more prevalent than partial ones. That is, people in this community prefer to make complete change for simple meaning to make the conversation more understandable. Moreover, words representing obsolete objects are more likely to be lost. The words meaning that represent objects or things which do not exit are changed more than the words that may still exit in some areas in *Salah Al-Din*. Regarding the factores that have effects on change the meaning in this area, it is found that there are psychological factors and Social-cultural causes affect in change the meaning in *Salah Al-Din*. However, the idea of permanent lexical death in Arabic is contestable; words may re-emerge under new conditions.

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