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## LINGUISTIC GENDER-BASED VARIATIONS IN BANI BUHAIR DIALECT

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### Abstract

The current article examines the linguistic gender-based variations between male and female speakers in Bani Buhair Dialect (BBD), a dialect spoken in the southwestern region of Saudi Arabia. It records, transcribes and investigates two natural conversations of two groups (two females and three males), each of which is one-hour-long. It explores the uses and frequencies of hedges, boosters, profanity, humor, interruptions and questions (common distinctive factors in language and gender studies). The results show that female participants use more hedges than male participants who use more boosters in comparison. As for humor and profanity, it has been observed that males produce more offensive words and show more sense of humor than females. With respect to interruptions and questions, the article shows that male participants interrupt and raise more questions during their conversation than their female counterparts.

### Keywords

language, gender, Bani Buhair dialect

### VARIACIÓN LINGÜÍSTICA BASADA EN DIFERENCIAS DE GÉNERO EN EL DIALECTO DE BANI BUHAIR

### Resumen

Este artículo examina las variaciones lingüísticas basadas en el género entre los hablantes masculinos y femeninos en el dialecto de Bani Buhair (BBD), hablado en la región suroeste de Arabia Saudita. Se registran, transcriben e investigan dos conversaciones espontáneas de dos grupos (dos

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mujeres y tres hombres), cada una de las cuales tiene una hora de duración. Se exploran los usos y las frecuencias de los atenuantes, refuerzos, blasfemias, humor, interrupciones y preguntas (factores distintivos comunes en los estudios de lenguaje y género). Los resultados muestran que las participantes femeninas usan más atenuantes que los participantes masculinos, los cuales usan más refuerzos desde un punto de vista comparativo. En cuanto al humor y la blasfemia, se ha observado que los hombres pronuncian palabras más ofensivas y muestran más sentido del humor que las mujeres. Con respecto a las interrupciones y las preguntas, el artículo muestra que los participantes masculinos interrumpen y plantean más preguntas durante su conversación que sus contrapartidas femeninas.

### **Palabras clave**

lengua, género, dialecto Bani Buhair

## **1. Introduction**

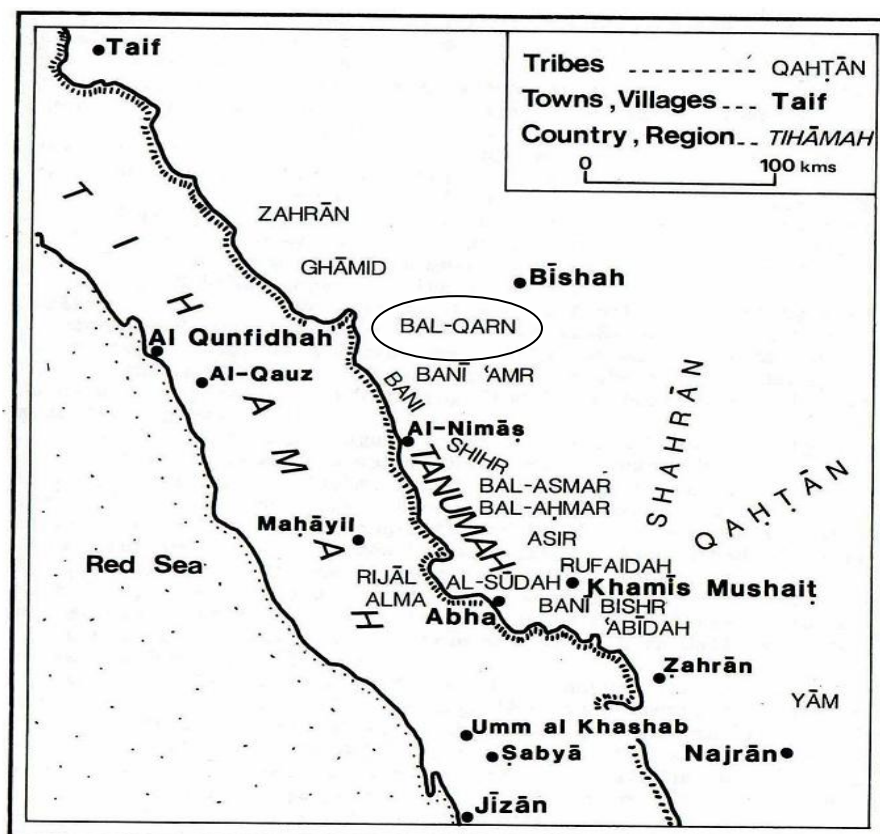
Although a considerable volume of literature has investigated the linguistic variations among speakers under gender influence (Coates 1993; Holmes 1995 on New Zealand; Brouwer 1989 on Dutch; Brown 1990 on Tenejapa; Byrnes 1986 on German), a little is known about the case of language and gender in Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> One of the factors that prevents the progress of research in such a domain is the dominant sex segregation in nearly all walks of Saudi life. Generally speaking, Saudi families live within an ultraconservative atmosphere. A woman is allowed to interact with her close immature relatives, yet she is prohibited from communicating with any would-be husbands. According to Sharia Law, women are supposed to stay in private spheres in households, workplace and single-sex schools, whereas men penetrate the public domain. Such Islamic rules, as well as sociocultural factors, impose difficulties — for particularly male researchers — to pursue their research in this burgeoning field.

Only two studies explored the linguistic gender-based differences among Saudi speakers. In one study, Ismail (2015) studied the frequency and types of code-switches from Arabic into English in young bilingual Saudis' casual conversations. She found that Saudi females code-switch more than males. Gomaa (2015) also investigated the use of

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slang among Saudi men and women. He found that Saudi males use more slang expressions than their female counterparts. The current study explores more features known to draw a linguistic distinction between male and female speakers cross-linguistically: hedges, boosters, expletives, humor, interruption and questions (see e.g. Brouwer 1989, Coates 1993, Holmes 1995, among others). Given that the earlier studies focus on the Riyadh dialect (the central region of Saudi Arabia), the current study examines the gender-based linguistic variations in Bani Buhair Dialect, a southern variety spoken in a mountainous area in the southwestern part of Saudi Arabia, i.e. Alooriyaat, which officially belong to Mecca Governance. Bani Buhair is a sub-tribe of Balqarn circled in Map 1 (cf. Prochazka 1988: 6). According to the Statistics of the Health Care Center in Alfaija (2016), the population of Bani Buhair speakers ranges from 8,000 to 8,600 Buhairis in an area of around 380 square kilometers.



Map 1. The Southern Hijaz and the Tihama.

The sample of the current study consists of 2 females (aged 25 and 26) and three males (aged 25, 26 and 21) from a village called “Alrayan” in Bani Buhair region. For research difficulties, the men-to-women ratio was slightly skewed towards the men side. Only two female relatives (i.e. sisters) in the whole village are willing to be recorded and analyzed. No other females agreed to join the female group conversation. The participants are given general topics to discuss in a natural setting. The topics include cooking, sports, school, childhood memories, etc. To reduce my influence as a researcher and to make the data as natural as possible, I was not present during the recordings. From each group, a one-hour-long natural conversation is elicited, transcribed and analyzed. Consider Table 1 and Table 2 that summarize the female and male participants’ information considering their age, gender, occupation, and education.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>Participant A</b>	25	Female	School student	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree of High school
<b>Participant B</b>	26	Female	School student	3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree of High School

Table 1. Female Participants.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>Participant A</b>	25	Male	College Student	Undergrad Student
<b>Participant B</b>	26	Male	College Student	Undergrad Student
<b>Participant C</b>	21	Male	School student	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade of Int. School

Table 2. Male Participants.

The remainder of the paper will be structured as follows. The use and frequency of hedges and boosters among the two groups will be discussed in section (2). Section (3) addresses the differences between male and female speakers in their expressions of profanity and humor, whereas section (4) explores the case of interruption and questions. Concluding remarks are given in section (5).

## 2. Hedges and Boosters in Bani Buhair Dialect (BBD)

Hedges and boosters play key roles in weakening or intensifying the utterances respectively. Robin Lakoff (1973; 1975) suggests that hedges and boosters are characteristics of women's language and such features help females in their social insecurity and tendency to be more polite. These remarks present hedges and boosters as forms of politeness (Shimanoff 1977; Brown & Levinson 1987). In the following sections, I will discuss the use and frequency of hedges by BBD male/female speakers in section § 2.1 and those of boosters in section § 2.2. Section § 2.3 will summarize the results.

### 2.1 Hedges in BBD

A hedge is a mitigating lexical item that reduces the force of an utterance, by making it gentler (Holmes 1995). Hedging can be viewed as a an aspect of politeness, wich "involves taking into account other people's feelings" (Holmes 1995: 74). It can be a word, sound, phrase that ensures politeness, softens the blow, and eschews bragging. Hedges may include phrases like the adverb *somewhat* as in *the party was somewhat spoiled*, or clauses such as *I am not an expert* as in *I am not an expert, but you might want to try restarting your computer*.

Hedges take different labels such as *down-graders* (House & Kasper 1981), *compromisers* (James 1983), *downtoners* (Quirk et al. 1985), *weakeners* (Brown & Levinson 1987) and *softeners* (Crystal & Davy 1975). BBD lexical hedges include *yaʕni* 'I mean', *yara* 'I think', *ay kalam* 'whatever' and *yemkin* 'perhaps' among others, whereas they use *saħ* 'right?' as a tag question. As syntactic devices, tag questions are also seen as hedges (Cheshire 1981, Brown & Levinson 1987, Coates 1989b, Holmes 1982, Blankenship & Craig 2007, among others). In Classical Arabic, there is a single fixed tag question *alays kathalik* 'is that correct? or is not it?'. Other Arabic varieties such as BBD have the most common phrase *saħ* 'right?'. The tag question *saħ* 'right?' is commonly used to invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse, and more commonly used as

a polite device. BBD-speaking female and male participants make use of hedges both lexically (i.e. words) and syntactically (i.e. tag questions).

In their conversations, female speakers used 10 hedges to reduce the strength of their claims or statements such as *yaʕni* ‘I mean’ which is the most widely used one, alongside *yemkin* ‘perhaps’ and other idioms such as *mush wala bud* ‘so and so’, and *mahu thak aldaraja* ‘not that (high) degree’ (for more examples of hedges used by BBD-speaking females see the appendix 1.1). In (1), for instance, participant B used four hedges sequentially when she speaks about the quality of her cooking such as *mush wala bud* ‘so and so’ and *mahu thak aldaraja* ‘not that (high) degree’ as well as a couple of *yaʕni* ‘I mean.’ All the BBD examples, throughout the paper, will be first transliterated and then translated into English as shown in (1) below.

(1) Female Participant B

*Ana saħ ini atbakh bas mush wala bud yaʕni mahu thak aldaraja, fushakhun yaʕni*

*Right, I can cook but so and so, I mean, not that (high) degree, bad I mean*

Female BBD speakers also used the tag questions *saħ* ‘right?’ three times. In (2), for example, participant B recalled a story in her childhood, when she used to take the yellow material from broken-down fridges and rub it on friends’ backs and make their skins itchy. Participant A completed the story, and she called that material an insulator and then used the tag question *saħ* ‘right’ to lesson her claim about the nature of the yellow material they used to use.

(2) Female Participants A/B

A: *aħwooooh wa*

B: *walla la khiraban abtalajat hagt zaman nikhraj fiha shayin asfar*

A: *nahbuh fi duhurna hhhhhhh hwa ʕazil saħ? oooooh*

B: *XXX hhhhhhhh hhhhhh*

A: *ouch and*

B: *or when fridge broke down we used to take out yellow stuff*

A we put it in our backs        hhhhh it is insulator right?        oooooh  
B:                                XXX hhhhhhhh                                hhhhhh

As for male BBD speakers, they used eight hedges in the whole conversation: the widely used hedge is *yaʕni* 'I mean' and others such as *yara* 'I guess' and *shwayya* 'a bit' (for more examples of hedges used by BBD-speaking males see the appendix 1.2). Male participants use hedges when they are uncertain about their statements, and therefore tend to shed less light on their utterances by phrases like *yaʕni* 'I mean' or *yara* 'I guess'. In (3), for instance, participant A claimed that Shuraza has made the tea given to them, but then lessened the strength of his claim by suggesting that he was not sure as Shuraza might be sleeping. He used the hedges *yara* 'I guess'.

(3) Male Participant A

*Shurazah thabatanhu, yara ragdah asaaʕ*

*Shuraza made it well; I guess she is asleep now*

The tag question *saħ* 'right?' has been recorded only once in the males' conversations. In (4), participant B asked participant A about his tests, and participant A responded the Saudi literature course is quite tough as he scored 30 out of 40. Participant B relatively knew the course and the lecturer in charge of it, namely Saeed Alhilali. He expected the assigned textbooks but did not confirm his expectation, saying 'you read the notebook, right?', and participant A responded with 'yeah'.

(4) Male Participants A/B

A:    *wallah saħlah inshallah bas ini ini*  
B: *tayb kaif alkhtbarat teeh saħla walla?*  
A: *adab sʕudi fihu shwayh*                                *min arbʕeen kitht min*  
B:                                *yani kam bitjib wa kam darajah?*  
A: *thalatheen*                                *alyum hara ʕali saeed alhilali*                                *eeh*  
B:                                *yas saeed alhilali*                                *thakart min amthakara saħ?*  
A:

- A: *By Allah, easy God willing but I I*
- B: *ok, how about these tests! are they easy or?*
- A: *Saudi literature is quite tough* *out of 40 I got*
- B: *what is your possible score?*
- A: *30* *Today Saeed Alilali curses me* *yea*
- B: *aha Saeed Alhilali* *you read the notebook, right?*

In the two whole conversations, the female speakers produced 13 hedges (three of which are tag questions) more than the male BBD speakers who used only nine hedges (one of which is a tag question). These results confirm the findings reached in most language and gender studies. In her book *Language and Women's place*, for instance, Lakoff (1975) argues that women use more hedges, tag questions, and other polite forms than men, and she interpreted such tendencies as results of uncertainty, social insecurity and lack of confidence. The current results are also consistent with the findings of Holmes (2008: 300) who claims that "some researchers reported that women use up to three times as many hedges as men, while others noted no gender differences". Based on an analysis of spoken discourse, as in this study, Preisler (1986) recorded conversations on controversial issues between men and women (aged from 20-50) from three occupational groups and corroborated the same findings that women significantly use more hedges than men. Interestingly enough, the only two females in this study were able to produce more hedges than the three males.

With regard to tag questions, they have been reported three times in females' speech in comparison to only one instance made by male BBD speakers. Although these findings are in contradiction with those of Talbot (2010: 41) who claims that "women do seem to use a lot of tag questions", they corroborated the findings reached by Fisherman (1980). Fisherman recorded 52-hour-long conversations between three American couples (aged from 25-23) and found that women use tag questions four times as frequently as men.



## 2.2 Boosters in BBD

A booster is a lexical device that makes statements stronger and increases the force of utterances; examples from English include *definitely/absolutely/completely* as in *it is definitely argued that this theory has some flaws*, and sometimes phrases like *I swear* as in *I swear that nobody will come*. Other labels for boosters are *intensifiers* (Quirk et al. 1985), *strengtheners* (Brown & Levinson 1987) and *up-graders* (House & Kasper 1981). In BBD, both females and males make use of boosters such as *wallah* 'By Allah' which is the most widely used one, alongside *saħ* 'real',<sup>2</sup> *marrah* 'really', *wala shay* 'nothing whatsoever' and others.

Female BBD speakers use 24 boosters such as the common one *wallah* 'By Allah', *oqsim ba ayaat illah* 'I swear by the verses of Allah', *marrah* 'really', *yijannin* 'so crazy', and other words related to 'the best/worst thing out of others' such as *atʕas shay* 'the worst thing' and *afdal shay* 'the best thing' (for more examples of boosters used by BBD-speaking female participants, see the appendix 2.1). In (5), for example, participant A was narrating her old memories about what used to happen after her visits to the hospital. She used the booster *wallah* 'by Allah' and then *atʕas shay* 'the worst thing'. She said that the worst thing about her visits to the hospital is the lentil soup they always bought from Hameed afterwards, and she then swore by Allah to confirm the negative feelings she had about the lentils.

(5) Female participant A

*wallah atʕs shay itha riħt almustashfa .. yijiibo ʕadas min ʕind hameed wallah ...*

*By Allah, the worst thing is when we go to the hospital...they bring lentils from Hameed by Allah...*

As for male BBD speakers, they also incorporated 27 boosters (most of them are religious vows) in their speech to add more force to their statements. They used words

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the word *saħ* is not always used in tag questions. It may also mean 'real' in other contexts.

such as *wallah* ‘by Allah’, *qasam bayaat illah* ‘I swear by Allah’s verses’, *yameen bayaat illah* ‘I swear by my right hand by Allah’s verses’, among other boosters such as *absdaag* ‘really’, *wala shay* ‘nothing whatsoever’, *ahm shay* ‘the most important thing’, and *bsaʿd Allah* ‘I really wish Allah that...’ (for more examples of boosters used by BBD-speaking male participants, see the appendix 2.2). In (6), for instance, participant A attempted to confirm his belief that school time has passed fast. He used various ways of boosting these utterances. So, he first used the phrase *wallah* ‘by Allah’ and then added *qasm bayat allah* ‘I swear by Allah’s verses’ and then *yameen bayat Allah* ‘I swear by my right hand by Allah’s verses’.

(6) Male Participant A

*wallah* *aldrasah* *qasm bayat Allah* *tugul aflhan fi isboof o isbofeen* *Yameen bayat Allah*

*By Allah* *school time,* *I swear by Allah’s verses,* *passed in around a week or two weeks,* *I swear by my right hand by Allah’s verses*

In the two entire conversations, it has been observed that males used 27 boosters, more than females, who employed 24 ones. These findings do not support the consensus reached by Holmes (2008: 300) who reports that most researchers “but not all, claimed women use more boosters or intensifiers than men”. The current findings do not support the conclusions of Stenström (1999) either, who examined data from corpora of spoken languages by teenagers in London and found out that teenage girls use more boosters than boys. If any reason was given for the mismatch in findings, it could be due to the number of female participants (only 2) in comparison to the three male participants. Although they are only two women, they produced 24 boosters, close enough to the 27 boosters generated by the males. This ratio suggests that BBD-speaking women may still produce more boosters than men as is the case in other studies; thus, future work is recommended in this regard.

### 2.3 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, female BBD speakers produced 13 hedges more than male BBD speakers who produced only nine hedges. However, male BBD speakers used more boosters (i.e. 27) than the female speakers who produced only 24 boosters. Consider Chart 1 that summarizes these findings.

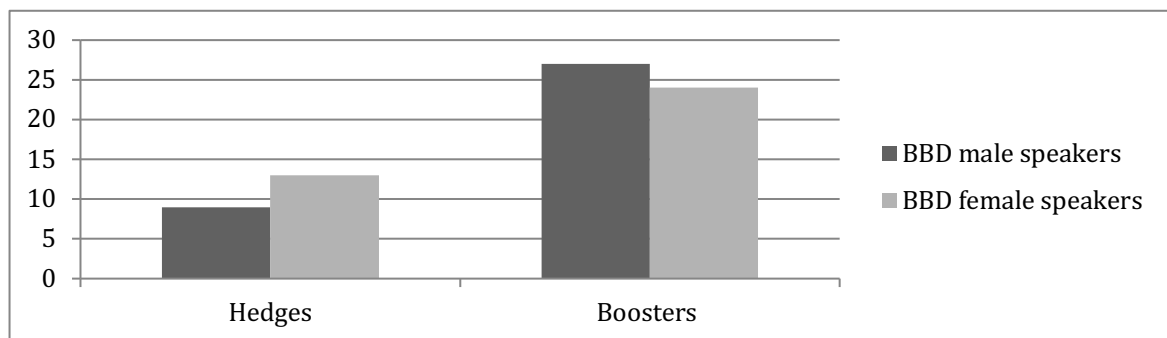


Chart 1. The frequency of hedges and boosters used by BBD speakers (males/females).

### 3. Profanity and Humor

In this section, I will discuss profanity and humor of BBD speakers. I put profanity and humor in one section as they are correlated. When there is a profane use of language, there is sometimes humor, but the opposite is not true. I will discuss profanity in section § 3.1 and humor in § 3.2. Concluding remarks will be laid out in section § 3.3.

#### 3.1 Profanity in BBD

Profanity is blasphemous or obscene language or a subset of a language's lexicon that is commonly considered to be strongly impolite, rude or offensive. This includes oaths, swearwords, expletives, cursing, insulting and name-calling. There are lexical items devices which are used as bad language in English such as *Shit*, *Fuck*, *Jesus!* etc., and they might be adjectives, nouns, adverbs, interjection and (rarely) verbs.

Profanity as a sociolinguistic phenomenon attracted a considerable amount of research from a gender-based perspective. Jespersen (1922), for example, found that women have an instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expressions and a tendency toward refined and indirect expressions. Wentworth & Flexner (1960: xii) claimed that “most American slang is created and used by males”. He found that men use stronger expletives, whereas women produce weaker and politer versions such as *damn* and *oh dear* (Lakoff 1975; Stenström 1991). Brown (1980) found that women are more polite than men, and thus use fewer vulgar words than men. All in all, the main findings in profanity-based studies demonstrate that men use a profane, vulgar and harsh language than women (see e.g. Hughes 1991; Timothy 1999; Broadbridge 2003, among many others). This is expected since “swearing, by its proactive nature, is considered as an act of power, and this may be why women have been denied it a long time” (Gauthier 2012).

BBD speakers also use offensive invocations. For example, they ask God to inflict harm on the prayed-upon object, be it human or non-human — *Allah yaghrik* ‘Allah subdues you’ is one example used by a female BBD speaker. Another phenomenon that can be subsumed under profanity in BBD is *ṣirah* ‘name-calling’. It is a common linguistic behavior in BBD, where almost every individual has their own bad names to be called by. Sometimes, people are called by animal-related names such as *bagaraan* ‘cowy’ and *dikaan* ‘cocky’ which are derived from cows and cocks respectively. In some cases, people are called by names of other socially outcasts or names of people who have some distinctive ‘funny’ features. For example, a male participant called one of the male speakers *Jabra*, a female name that has some connotation of an old woman that sells cheap products in the market.

In the male speakers’ conversation, the participants used 24 bad words in their speech, for example *Jabra* ‘a bad female name’, *Dulga* ‘a bad female name’, *Alqasha* ‘a bad male name’, *thirma* ‘toothless old woman’, *abghdra* ‘Blackness, a bad name for a black guy’, along with the offensive prayers and swearwords such as *atlaṣ tilṣan ruḥak* ‘Get out, May Allah get your soul out’, *Allah alyum yamhaghin bhaq* ‘May Allah wipe them out rightly’, and *Allah yaṣanuuh* ‘May Allah curse him’ (for more examples of bad words, see appendix 3.2). In (7), for instance, participant C mentioned that he failed in

the first and second grades of primary school because of the harsh teachers in one of the villages in BBD area. He interrupted his story with a swearword and a prayer against the teachers who failed him, saying *Allah alyum yamhaghin bhaq* 'May Allah today wipe them out rightly' .

(7) Male Participant C

*hafastibha ... foola marah wa thani martain allah alyum yamhaghin bhaq mdrseen  
alfurç*

*I failed ... once in first grade and twice in second grade, May Allah today wipe them out  
rightly, those teachers of Alfur'*

Example (8) also shows many bad names used by male participants. In (8), participant B blamefully asked participant A why he called him *dolga* 'a bad female name' during the recording process, and then scolded him saying *çaiib çlak* 'shame on you'. Participant A deliberately continued to call participant B with worse female names, using *Jabra* 'a female name', and *thirma* 'a toothless old woman'. Participant B laughed at participant A's unexpected reactions.

(8) Male Participants A/B

A: (eating) *yaha Jabra thirma*  
B: *matha looh tugu gubayla Dolqa ...çaiib çlak* hhhh hhhh

A: (eating) *Oh! Jabra thirma*  
B: *why did you say Dolqa ...shame on you* hhhh hhhh

As for female participants, they also used offensive words, but only twice in the whole conversation, e.g. *kathaba* 'you liar' and *Allah yagharik* 'May Allah subdue you!'. The two offensive words are used when both participants talked about the vegetables. In (9), participant B told her sister (participant A) to remember when they used to eat pomegranates in their childhood, and participant B interrupted with *kathaba* 'you liar' claiming that they did not use to know pomegranates at all.

## (9) Female Participants A/B

A: *kathaba abruman ma kin niʕrufuh zaman*

B: *abruman kina nuhbuh illa kan khali ...*

A: *You liar! we didn't know pomegranates before*

B: *we used to love pomegranates No my uncle...*

On the same topic, participant A talked about her love of lemons during her childhood as shown in (10). Participant B seemed to belie her again claiming that they did not use to know it either. Then, participant A protested and prayed *Allah yaghrik* 'May Allah subdue you!' claiming that they used to know lemons when they were kids.

## (10) Female Participants A/B

A: *ablyamun ma qid rayuh illa gareeb ma kina nishtrihu*

B: *Allah yaghrik alyamun maʕrufin*

A: *I've never seen lemons but recently we didn't use to buy it*

B: *May Allah subdue you, lemons are known*

In both conversations, male BBD speakers expressed 24 offensive words in comparison to two uses of offensive words recorded in female BBD speakers' speech. These findings confirm the earlier findings that men use more offensive and harsh expressions than women (see e.g. Hughes 1991; Timothy 1999; Broadbridge 2003; Gauthier 2012, among others).

### 3.2 Humor in BBD

Humor is a social phenomenon that has been an interesting area of exploration in language and gender studies. It has been argued that men tell more jokes than women; and women undervalue humor compared to men (McGhee 1979) perhaps because women cannot receive or tell jokes, and "have no sense of humor" (Lakoff 1975: 56). As

self-reported humor, men evaluated their sense of humor more positively than women, and both males and females always make jokes on males specifically (Crawford 1995). This is not, however, true with the rise of feminism movements since women started to tell jokes and laugh more than men in group conversations (Dovidio et al. 1988).

Hay (2001) studied the conversational humor in both same and mixed-gender groups in New Zealand and found that women share funny personal stories to create solidarity. In BBD, female speakers have shown a sense of humor, yet produced only two jokes in the whole conversation. In (11), for example, participant A narrates a joke about her brother Ali, confirming the findings in Crawford (1995) who claimed that men are always the butt of jokes in both men and women's speech. Participant A said that Ali rode her uncle's donkey with her elder brother who led the donkey and shook Ali off its back until he fell in the small river, where his skin felt itchy because of the worms at the river's bank. Participant B laughed in response, and then started a new joke about the yellow material that they used to take from broken fridges, and rubbed against others' skins so that they feel itchy. Participant A laughed in return.

(11) Female Participants A\B

A: *kan yarkab ʕla humart khali wa kan yiflt Ali bayn abshryah wa*

B:

A: *yuruh hhhhh nathalah yigʕid yiħrik abhimar hata Ali*

B: *hhhhhhh*

A: *yih taz yugiʕfi absharyah wa yrawih Ali hhhhhh*

B: *hhhhhhh*

A: *milħin XXXX haqiqah X*

B: *milħin absharyah tiflih walla la khiraban*

A: *aħwooooh wa nahbuh fi duhurna*

B: *abtalajat hagt zaman nikhraj fiha shayin asfar XXX hhhhhhhh*

A: *hhhhhhh hwa ʕazil saħ? oooooh*

B: *hhh hwa hneeh ʕind khali Muhammad alħeen*

A: *He used to ride my uncle's donkey and drop Ali off with worms and*

B:

- A: *left! Hhhh bad behavior! He shook the donkey so Ali*
- B: *hhhhhhhh*
- A: *fell between worms and then asked Ali to return hhhhh*
- B: *hhhh*
- A: *salt XXXX that's right XX*
- B: *salt! worms disappear or when fridge broke down*
- A: *ouch and we put it in our backs*
- B: *we used to take out yellow stuff XXX hhhhhhhh*
- A: *hhhhh it is insulator right? oooh*
- B: *hhhhh uncle Muhammad has some of it now*

In contrast, male BBD speakers show more sense of humor. The male participants laugh alongside their uses of offensive words, as is attested in the earlier example (8) repeated below in (12), when participant B used two bad names after participant B blamefully asked participant A to stop name-calling him *Dolga* 'a bad female name'. Participant A continued using *Jabra* 'a female name', and *thirma* 'a toothless old woman', and participant B responded with laughs.

(12) Male Participant A/B

- A: *(eating) yaha Jabra thirma*
- B: *matha looh tugu gubayla dolga ... Saib Ṣlak hhhh hhhh*
- A: *(eating) Oh! Jabra toothless woman*
- B: *why did you say dolga ...shame on you hhhh hhhh*

In most jokes told by male speakers, they use self-defeating humor. Self-defeating humor is when a joke-teller narrates a joke where he or she is the main character to be laughed at. Male BBD speakers narrated four self-defeating jokes that show themselves in embarrassing situations. For example, participant A shared a joke about himself that he argued with his teacher saying that he did well in the exam and deserved more grades, but the teacher turned angry and shouted with an offensive prayer *atlaṣ tilṣan ruḥak* 'Get out, May Allah get your soul out'







A: hhhhh  
B: *they say to you 200.000 or 150.000?* hhhhh  
C: *200.000 or 150.000? she can relax!*  
A: hhhhhhhhhhhh hhhhh  
B: hhhhhhhh hhh  
C: *we will take one soap for a Riyal* *hhh you only play Oud hhhh*

In the two conversations, female BBD speakers told two jokes, while male BBD speakers shared five self-defeating jokes, one of which is sexually oriented. Since a joke-teller's audience must be laughing and amused (Sacks 1974; Fine 1984), a joke-teller that does not get a laugh is rated more negatively and considered more aggressive (Derks et al. 1995). Thus, I counted the number of laughs (e.g. hhhh) in the transcriptions of both conversations to measure the sense of humor in both genders, and I found out that female BBD speakers laughed 22 times in the whole conversation in comparison to 55 times by the male speakers. These findings support the mainstream view that men show more sense of humor than females (see Lakoff 1975; McGhee 1979; Crawford 1995, among others).

### *3.3 Concluding remarks*

To sum up, the analysis shows that male BBD speakers uttered 24 offensive words in comparison to two bad words used by female BBD speakers. As for humor, male BBD speakers produced five jokes as compared to two jokes by female BBD speakers, who thus produced 22 bursts of laugh less than men who reacted with 55 laughs. These findings are summarized in Chart 2 below.



Chart 2. The frequency of offensive words, jokes and laughs produced by BBD speakers (males/females).

#### 4. Questions and Interruption

In this section, I will discuss interruptions (§ 4.1) and questions (§ 4.2). I grouped interruption and questions together as they are somehow related; in certain cases, interruption is motivated by many factors, one of which is question-raising.

##### 4.1 Interruption in BBD

Although interruption causes a breakdown in the natural turn-taking aspect of conversations (Sacks et al. 1974), it has been frequently attested in most interactions but unevenly distributed across interpersonal contexts (LaFrance 1992). On a gender-based comparison, West & Zimmerman (1977, 1983) observed that interruption occurs in mixed-sex more than same-sex interactions, and men are the most likely interrupters (see also similar findings in Natale et al. 1979; Willis & Williams 1976, among others). Since interruption has been related to dominance and power, it becomes a masculine property. Roger & Schumacher (1983) found that people who scored high in dominance scale interrupt more than men who scored low. Regardless of sex, Drass (1986) concluded that the more masculine a person's gender identity (male or female) is, the more they interrupt their interlocutors. In few studies, no significant conclusions have been made regarding interruption frequency from a gendered perspective (Dindia 1987; Smith-Lovin & Brody 1989).

Interruption can be collaborative and competitive (Tannen 1992). Collaborative interruption helps the speech flow as a sign of collaboration and support. It might be represented by supportive questions or minimal responses, either verbal responses like *hmm, aha, I see, right*, or non-verbal ones such as *smiling, nodding*, etc. In this study, no consideration is given to non-verbal interruptions as the data is based on voice recordings only. Competitive interruption, on the other hand, disrupts the flow of speech, either by posing challenging questions, changing topics, etc. In many studies, women appear to use more minimal responses than males, since women highly value listening (Zimmerman & West 1975; Carli 1990; Coates 1989a).

Overlapping speech is a common result of interruption, and it is difficult to define as it can be collaboratively or competitively evaluated. In this article, I use overlapping and interruption interchangeably. Overlapping speech can be positively viewed if all participants occupy the floor simultaneously. However, in a one-at-a-time floor, overlap is negatively construed as interruption as the next speakers seek to take the floor (Johnson 1997). Overlapping has been found in both male and female BBD speakers. The overlapping process consists of collaborative and competitive interruption. Sometimes, the occurrence of the interruption is quite clear. In (16), for example, the female participant A narrated the way she cooks her food so excellently. Since participant B (her sister) had known her way, she interrupted participant A to explain it on her behalf. Participant A strongly counter-interrupted participant B, saying that she is the one who should speak and explain her cooking style. Then, participant B continued to interrupt yet collaboratively with supportive questions and minimal responses.

(16) Female participants A/B

- A: *ana mahu ṡlashan midhin fi nafsi* *saḥ*  
B: *anti tuhiteenawh fi gidr abdaght wa tahbeen ṡlah...*  
A: *ish dakhlak anti ma tṡrfeen ana almfrud ahki ana bagool lik altariqa fi*  
B: *tayb maṡleesh*  
A: *altahtheer .. awal shay lazim almooya tkoon nathifa lazim, hatha wal shay*  
B: *minyan lana?*

## Translation

- A: *it is not a praise for myself* *right!*
- B: *you put it in the pressure pan* *and you put on it...*
- A: *it's not your business, you do not know, I'm supposed to tell* *I will tell ya the way*
- B: *Ok, sorry*
- A: *of cooking* *first, water must be very healthy* *it must be, this is first*
- B: *ahaa* *from where?*

As for male BBD speakers, they also interrupt, both collaboratively and competitively. In (17), for example, both types of interruption have been attested. Participant B narrated a car accident that happened to him and other friends. It is a familiar story known by all the three participants. During the narration, the other participants, A and C, sometimes support with questions, minimal pairs, laughter, and other times challenge the details of the story.

## (17) Male participants A/B/C

- A: *min foogha? jeeeh hhh* *hhhh girbak*
- B: *ingalabna min foog abʕabaara* *hhhhhh min foogha ya? Zanta ysal*
- C: *hhhhhhhhhhhh*
- A: *ygool bagi hayyn hhh?* *hhhhhhhh*
- B: *Deefallah, bagi hayyn* *ygool deefallah: eewah bagi hayyin! Ali Anashri ygol*
- C: *baagi hayyain hhhh* *hhh*
- A: *mskeen Ali anashri hhhh* *hhhhhhhhhh*
- B: *Ali Anashri ygol: khirshan bamoot, shaʕri ydammi* *hiya baratmh*
- C: *hhhhh*
- A: *lawah ygool how lawah akid galbi ba ydami alheen:* *hhhhhh*
- B: *tdami* *ygool: galbi ba ydami alheen*
- C: *hhh* *aho sadlooh sakʕa haalya*
- 
- A: *over it? God hhh* *hhhh it deserves it!*
- B: *the car overturned over the bridge* *hhhhhh over it ya? Zanta asked*

C: *hhhhhhhhhhhh*  
A: *he said: are you alive hhh?* *hhhhhhhhh*  
B: *Deefallah, are you alive?* *Deefallah said: yea I am alive! Ali Anashri said*  
C: *are you alive? hhhh* *hhh*  
A: *Poor Ali anashri hhhh* *hhhhhhhhhhh*  
B: *Ali Anashri said: Khirshan I'm dying, my hair's bleeding* *it's his lips*  
C: *hhhhh*  
A: *No he said: my heart must be bleeding inside* *hhhhh*  
B: *bleeding* *he said: my heart is bleeding inside*  
C: *hhhh* *he got a wonderful bang!*

In both conversations, the female group showed 103 occurrences of interruption (76 times [collaborative] whereas 27 times [competitive]) whereas the male group made 254 occurrences of interruption (155 times [collaborative] & 99 times [competitive]). These findings indicate that female BBD speakers tend to collaborate for 76% of the overlapping time, whereas they compete for only 26%. In contrast, male BBD speakers collaborate for 61% of the time, whereas they compete for 39%. The overall findings are demonstrated in Chart 3 below.

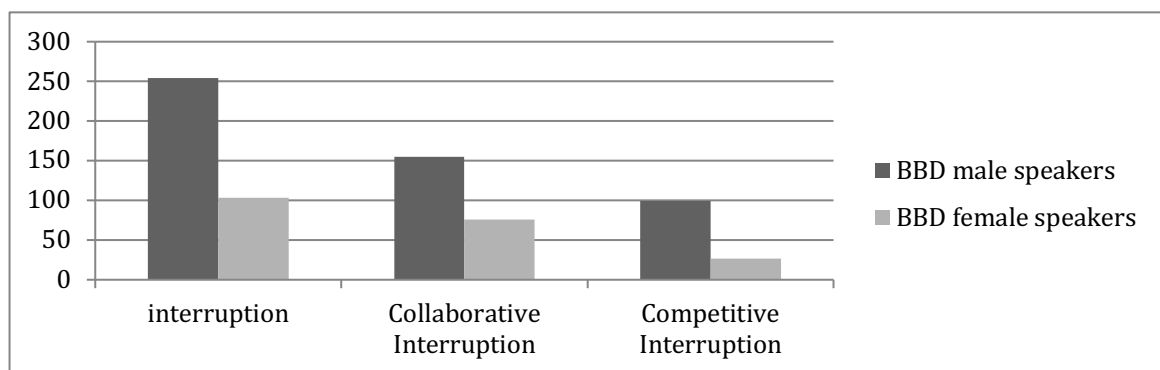


Chart 3. Occurrences of collaborative/competitive interruptions made by BBD speakers (males/females).

Both men and women collaborate than compete in their interruption. However, the results verify the findings that males tend to interrupt in their speech more than females (See e.g. West & Zimmerman 1977, 1983; Natale et al. 1979; Willis & Williams 1976; Drass 1986). The findings also confirm that females still collaborate in their

interruption more than males as they only compete for 26%, as opposed to 39% of the time, respectively, see also Tannen (1992) for the same results.

#### 4.2 Questions in BBD

A question is a linguistic expression used to elicit information. Men and women differ in their use of questions, and their goals thereof. Men's questions are genuine requests for information whereas women's questions in mixed-sex groups aim to encourage a partner's conversational contribution and receive attention from interlocutors (Barnes 1971). As for frequency, women use questions more than men (Todd 1983; Fitzpatrick et al. 1995). Other studies find no significant differences in terms of question-raising from a gendered perspective (Freed & Greenwood 1996).

In BBD, questions have been attested in the two conversations. Female BBD speakers raised 51 questions in different situations. In most cases, they posed questions to make the story flow. In (18), participant B talked about her friends' visit, and participant A kept asking her to elicit more details.

##### (18) Female participants A/B

A: *kina daykheen baʿd jayyathm Aliyyah and Saida, nswalf wa dikhin ams*

B: *ay banat? mata?*

A: *alfasr eeh, bas bin khatima ziʿi? yogool ma yagdroom*

B: *ʿind bay khalti Garsa? laish?*

A: *ina mashghoolin bithabayh? wa inkun mantin samaha*

B: *aha saadqin dalʿa*

##### Translation

A: *We were dizzy after their visit Aliyyah and Saida, we talked & laughed yesterday*

B: *which girls? when?*

A: *afternoon yes, but Bin Khatima got angry he said they don't consider*

B: *at aunt Gharsa's home? why?*

A: *we are busy, and you are not free now?*

B: *Aha, that's right! Spoiled!*





and he called him *Jabra* 'a bad female name', saying 'what's wrong with you'. Participant B raised all his questions and Participant A answered all the questions, with boredom in one answer.

(20) Male Participant A/B

A: *ha jabrah matha abħwij? Taybah*

B: *eewah turki kaif? hhh kaif alktbarat maṣak?*

A: *akhtbaart ya tweel alṣumar nagd aladab*

B: *bas madri wish akhtabarta?*

A: *alhadeeth tarbiyah khasa*

B: *ewah yaṣtaik yahu alṣameed naqad aladab*

A: *eewaah*

B: *alhadeeth?*

A: *ha Jabra what are the demands? good*

B: *yea Turki how? Hhhh how were your tests?*

A: *man, I took the criticism of the modern*

B: *but I do not know! What did you take?*

A: *literature special education*

B: *aha does the dean teach the criticism of the modern*

A: *yep!*

B: *literature?*

As is the case with females, male BBD speakers do not answer some questions either, despite the interruption. In (21), participant A received three questions from participant B, but, he ignored all the questions continuing his story. This differs from example (19) from the female group, where participant A responded to the question finally. In (21), however, male participant A talked about football saying that they did not have the chance to play because of the missing ball. Participant B asked him about his feet that looked somehow hurt, but participant A did not seem not to care about it as much as he cared about the story. He proceeded with the story without any answer, and participant B rather stopped the question, and started laughing at individuals who were not interested in football yet playing with him.

(21) Male participants A/B

- A: *hata alyum abkuwir ma haslnaha* *wallah*  
B: *tayb salamat wish brijlak?* *Billah* *wish*  
C:  
A: *baghayna nalʕab alyum bas ma haslnaha* *liʕib maʕna abrabiʕ*  
B: *brijlak ya mdees?* *Mdees wish brijlak?*  
C: *dayim kitha!*  
A: *wa liʕib maʕna wa mahmd thibʕan ʕad mhla arslna Bandar rikib absiyara*  
B: *hhhhhhh* *hhhhhhh*  
C: *hhhh* *hhhh*

*Translation*

- A: *even today we didn't find the ball* *By Allah*  
B: *ok get well, what about your feet?* *Really?* *what*  
C:  
A: *we were about to play but no balls* *Arrabiʕ played*  
B: *about your feet, mdees?* *Mdees, what about your feet?*  
C: *always like this!*  
A: *with us and Muhammad Dubʕan too. So we just sent Bandar he took the car*  
B: *hhhhhhhhh* *hhhhhhhhh*  
C: *hhhhh* *hhhhh*

In the two conversations, both female and male speakers raised questions. Not all questions were answered. However, a female speaker returned to the question and answered it even after ignorance, whereas a male speaker did not return to the question, caring more about the proceedings of the story. Generally speaking, female BBD speakers contributed with 51 questions in the whole conversation whereas male BBD speakers posed 63 questions. Consider Chart 4 that summarizes the findings related to questions in BBD speech.

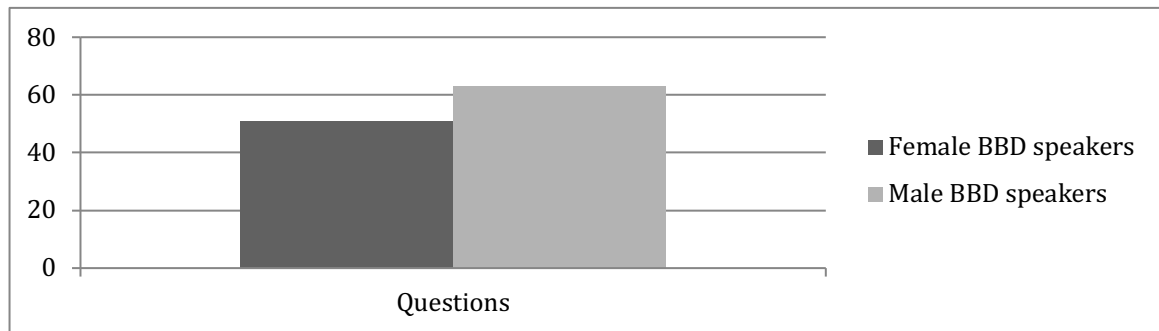


Chart 3. The frequency of questions raised by BBD speakers (males/females).

In both conversations, male BBD speakers employ more questions than their female counterparts, and this is at odds with the overall conclusions in most studies, where females raise questions more than men (Todd 1983; Fitzpatrick et al. 1995). The difference cannot be significant given the number of the speakers in the two groups (two females produced 51 questions vs. three males produced 63 questions), which means that the general view that women pose more questions can be still true. It appears that the question-raising in BBD speakers is more valued among females more than males, and this is an interesting avenue of exploration in the future research.

## 5. Conclusion

Put together, the study has demonstrated linguistic gender-based differences among BBD speakers. Analyzing two natural one-hour-long conversations recorded by two BBD-speaking groups (two females vs. three males), it has been observed that female speakers produced 13 hedges more than male speakers who produced nine hedges, supporting prior studies with similar findings (e.g. Lakoff 1975, Preisler 1986, Holmes 2008). On boosters, male speakers produced 27 boosters more than female speakers who used 24 boosters, and these results contradict earlier studies (e.g. Holmes 2008, Stenström 1999).

For profanity, male BBD speakers uttered 24 offensive words in contrast with only two uses of offensive words recorded in female BBD speakers' speech. These findings corroborate the results of earlier studies which indicated that men use more offensive

and harsh language than women (see e.g. Hughes 1991; Timothy 1999; Broadbridge 2003; Gauthier 2012, among others). As for humor, both genders have shown a sense of humor. Nonetheless, female BBD speakers told two jokes, while male BBD speakers shared five self-defeating jokes, one of which was sexually oriented. By and large, these findings support the mainstream view that men have more sense of humor and tell more jokes than females (see Lakoff 1975; McGhee 1979; Crawford 1995, among others).

The study also shows that both males and females collaborate more than they compete in their interruption, yet men interrupt more than females. These results confirm many earlier conclusions that males tend to interrupt in their speech more than females (see e.g. West & Zimmerman 1977, 1983; Natale et al. 1979; Willis & Williams 1976; Drass 1986). The findings also confirm that females still collaborate in their interruption more than males as they only compete for 26%, as opposed to 39% of the time, respectively (see also Tannen 1992 for the same results). Questions have been attested in both groups' speeches. In the two entire conversations, male speakers address more questions than females, and this is inconsistent with the overall conclusions in most studies, where females raise questions more than men (Todd 1983; Fitzpatrick et al. 1995). The difference cannot be significant given the number of the speakers in the two groups (two females produced 51 questions vs. three males that produced 63 questions).

The primary hindrance in this research is the number of female speakers (two females vs. three males), although the number of females supported earlier studies as is the case with the use of hedges, profanity, humor, and interruption. The findings regarding boosters and questions may rise significantly with any increase in the number of female speakers. Thus, it is highly recommended that future studies shed more light on these linguistic behaviors to advance the nascent field of language and gender in Saudi Arabia in general and in Bani Buhair tribe in particular.

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## Appendix

### 1. Hedges in BBD

#### 1.1 Hedges used by female BBD speakers in the conversation (10 times)

#	Hedges (Arabic)	Hedges (Translation)	Frequency
1	yaʕni	I mean	3
2	shwayya	A bit	2
3	yemkin	perhaps	1
4	Mush wala bud	So and so	1
5	mahu thak aldaraja	not that (high) degree	1
6	ihtimal	possible	1
7	Yimash alhaal	It is good enough	1

#### 1.2 Hedges used by male BBD speakers in the conversation (8 times)

#	Hedges (Arabic)	Hedges (Translations)	Frequency
1	yaʕni	I mean	3
2	yara	I guess	1
3	shwayya	A bit	1
4	matha ismooh	What is it called?	1
5	ʕadi	ok	1
6	Maho shidda	not so much	1

### 2. Boosters in BBD

#### 2.1 Boosters used by female BBD speakers in the conversation (24 times)

#	Hedges (Arabic)	Hedges (Translations)	Frequency
1	wallah	By Allah	6
2	Marrah	Really	3
3	Raiʕah	great	2
4	Aqsum bi ayat Allah	I swear by Allah's verses	2
5	Wallah alʕatheem	I swear by the great Allah	1
6	Atʕas shay	The worst thing	1
7	Akhas shay	The worst thing	1
8	Jeenin	Jee!	1

9	Yijannin	So crazy	1
10	Ahu bibti	It is too impossible	1
11	Saḥ	real	1
12	Maratain	Very really	1
13	Kulluuh	Whole	1
14	kulluhm	All of them	1
15	Helo	Cute	1

### 2.2 Boosters used by BBD male speakers in the conversation (27 times)

#	Boosters (Arabic)	Boosters (Translations)	Frequency
1	wallah	By Allah	11
2	absdaag	Really!	2
3	Yameen bi ayaat Allah	I swear by my right hand by Allah's verses	1
4	Yamen billah	I swear by my right hand by Allah	1
5	Billah	Really?	1
6	Ahm shay	The most important thing	1
7	Wala shay	Nothing whatsoever	1
8	Jeenin	Jee!	1
9	Bsaʿd Allah	I really wish	1
10	kulluhm	All of them	1
11	Lʿawn	So much	1
12	Bilmarrah	So much	1
13	Aḥlf	I swear (by Allah)	1
14	Haaliyah	So good	1
15	Mahkoorah	Well done	1
16	Bithabat	literally	1

### 3. Profanity

#### 3.1 Offensive words used by female BBD speakers in the conversation (2 times)

#	Offensive word (Arabic)	Offensive words (Translations)	Frequency
1	kathaba	You liar	1
2	Allah yagharik	May Allah subdue you	1

## 3.2 Offensive words used by male BBD speakers in the conversation (24 times).

#	Offensive word (Arabic)	Offensive words (Translations)	Frequency
1	atlaḥ tilḥan ruḥak,	Get out, May Allah get your soul out	1
2	Allah alyum yamhaghin bhaq	May Allah wipe them out rightly	1
3	Allah yaḥḥanuuh	May Allah curse him	1
4	Allah yakḥthak	May Allah take you	1
5	Allah yzilak	May Allah wipe you out	1
6	Allah yihjib ḥalahu	May Allah take care of him! (Sarcastic)	1
7	Allah la ybarik fik	May Allah not bless you	1
8	Laḥanak Allah	May Allah Curse you	1
9	Dakhalo fi rasak	May the Jinn enter your head	1
10	Hassawbak	May the jinn take you down in the earth	1
11	Jabra	A bad female name	1
12	Dulga	A bad female name	1
13	Alqasha	A bad male name	1
14	abghdra	Blackness, a bad name for a black guy	1
15	thirma	toothless old woman	1
16	Alrabiḥ	A bad male name	1
17	Diviz	A bad male name	1
18	Yiglib wjhooh	Get his face off	1
19	Sallimli	I really wish the opposite	1
20	Inḡlaḥ	Get lost	1
21	Winḥim	Good for him! (Sarcastic)	1
22	ḥaib ḥlak	Shame on you	1
23	Istaḥ	Be shy!	1
24	ḥar	Finger! (like fuck you)	1