

Exploring Vehicle Slogans in Al-Mukalla: An Interactional Sociological Analysis



Rasha Saeed Badurais

English Department, College of Arts, Hadhramout University, Al-Mukalla, Hadramout, Yemen

ABSTRACT: This paper is an attempt to investigate the sociolinguistic features of these slogans using Hymes' SPEAKING model and to highlight how they reflect some aspects of the Hadrami identity. In the academic field, the linguistic analysis of slogans has been explored. However, and to the best of my knowledge, no previous study tackles the vehicle slogans using a sociolinguistic framework. This paper is limited to about thirty chosen slogans which were noticed written on the back glasses of different kinds of vehicles in the streets of Al-Mukalla, the capital city of the coastal part of Hadhramout governorate, Yemen. These slogans were collected by the author and some colleagues during the period from 2016-2018. Within Hymes' model, the variables (S), (P), (E), and (I) were redundant, so they were excluded from the analysis. The other variables; (A)ct sequences, (K)ey words, (N)orms, and (G)enres were the ones considered in the analysis. The analysed slogans show that the Hadramis are generally sarcastic considering their everyday life issues and attempt to express their opinions in an indirect way as a strategy of soothing their disappointments and managing to overcome them or at least reduce their negative influence on them.

KEYWORDS-Al-Mukalla, Hadrami identity, Hymes' SPEAKING model, Vehicle slogans

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the main means for communication. Through its oral and written means people can share all kinds of information including news, cultural and traditional experiences, and emotional states. Currently, and with the rise of social media, the pendulum strikes towards a new mixed mood of language, i.e., using the spoken language/ dialect written to communicate. Such an approach might be somehow dangerous to the basics of any language; however, it depends on the well-delved down roots of the language under question to keep its system as firm and consistent as possible without denying the fact that languages are species and they should be flexible enough to digest the new currents resulted from the rapid technological development.

This mood spreads widely in social media communication like Facebook, Twitter, and Whats App. It is shifted to be used even outside the boundaries of the virtual world; people, especially vehicle drivers, use some intently selected expressive sayings used in these cyber worlds to reflect one idea or another they think crucial/influential in their lives.

A. The Phenomenon of Street Slogans in Al-Mukalla

It becomes noticeable throughout a couple of years that a new phenomenon appears in the streets of Al-Mukalla. The drivers of buses, cars, vans and lorries write some comments or phrases on the back glasses of their vehicles to reflect a certain idea or message. Actually, it has started before especially on the big vehicles that move on long-distance roads with mainly verses from the Holy Quran, parts of Hadiths, lines of poetry or common sayings and almost all are about supplications to protect the driver and the vehicle in their journey. Recently, it spreads and becomes more like a vogue. Almost all write one saying or another, even on the motorcycles. Furthermore, the chosen sayings become more variable including – in addition to the previous kinds- colloquial sayings that might be even written literally as they are spoken. To the best of my knowledge, this trend does not start in Al-Mukalla. Its beginning might have been in Egypt and then it spread to other countries like Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. It appears that those nations share some common features; the most important one is the suffering of the class of the drivers – as a part of the middle to lower classes- due to the deteriorating situations in all aspects of life.

B. Transportation in Al-Mukalla

Al-Mukalla is the capital city of Hadramout governorate in Yemen. It is undeniable that the economic situation in the country is getting worse principally due to internal and external political conflicts. Moreover, the problem of unemployment is affecting people's lives deeply. Al-Mukalla as being the capital city of Hadramout is not far away from these circumstances. A large number of men, especially those who cannot get a stable governmental job with a steady salary, work as bus drivers or vehicle drivers so

Exploring Vehicle Slogans in Al-Mukalla: An Interactional Sociological Analysis

as to afford themselves and their families. This leads to a kind of boom in the public transportation inside the city. Furthermore, more young people buy themselves motorcycles as being a –somehow- cheap and personal vehicle.

Under the aforementioned circumstances, and due to the overall atmosphere not only in the country but also in the whole Arab world and the general sense of frustration and inability to express one's opinions freely, these drivers attempt to reveal their attitudes through the slogans or the sayings written on the back glasses of their vehicles.

In academia, generally few studies tackle the linguistic analysis of several kinds of slogans. The only academic study I found about vehicles' slogans was conducted by Lawuyi (1980) focusing on the social, economic, religious and cultural (not linguistic) indications of the Nigerian society. Dada (2010) studies the sociolinguistic and communicative aspects of language use in the Nigerian GSM adverts revealing that this use has been governed by variables such as the demographic and the attitudinal. Althyabat (2012) employs Jackobson's language functions to sociolinguistically analyse a selected number of Jordanian sports slogans to find out that these expressions use certain phonological, syntactic, and lexical features to highlight their meanings and implications. Al-Azzam, et al. (2014) explore the problems in translating Jordanian political street slogans. Al-Azzawi (2017) conducts a similar study to Al-Azzam et al. He studies the sociolinguistic features of Iraqi political slogans; this is employed as a sociopolitical means to influence the Iraqi voters. Therefore, in the academic field, the linguistic analysis of slogans has been explored. However, and to the best of my knowledge, no previous study tackles the vehicle slogans using a sociolinguistic framework. So, this paper is an attempt to investigate the sociolinguistic features of these slogans using Hymes' SPEAKING model and to highlight how they reflect some aspects of the Hadrami identity. This paper is limited to some chosen slogans which were noticed written on the back glasses of different kinds of vehicles in the streets of Al-Mukalla, the capital city of the coastal part of Hadramout governorate, Yemen. These slogans were collected by the author and some colleagues during the period from 2016-2018.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Interactional Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics as an interesting field of linguistics is concerned with the studies that link language to the society. That is

Interactional sociolinguistics (IS) studies the language use of people in face-to-face interaction. It is a theoretical and methodological perspective on language use with eclectic roots in a wide variety of disciplines such as dialectology, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, microethnography and sociology. (Jaspers, 2011)

Contemporary research on conversational discourse owes much to Goffman's theorizing about social interaction. Although Goffman did not analyse the specific details of language, his work spans a range of topics central to the analysis of interactions, including the presentation of self (*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959) and management of identity (*Stigma*, 1963), participant involvement (*Behavior in Public Places*, 1963), the ritualized nature of social interaction (*Interaction Ritual*, 1967), the production of talk and the structure of interaction (*Forms of Talk*, 1981). This body of research contributes to the understanding of individuals as agents not only in their production of talk, but also in their presentation of self.

According to Rampton (2017), the focal point of Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), a field further investigated by John Gumperz's endeavour, is the direct interactions between the addressers and the addressees with major differences between the participants in terms of language, social or/ and institutional level. With the interest in natural discourses, the methodology of IS has a broad base, including ethnography, dialectology, pragmatics (Rampton, 2017)

The collaboration between Dell Hymes and Gumperz, leads to developing IS theoretically and empirically between "small-scale interactions" and "large-scale sociological effects" (Jacquement 2011, 475), providing a "dynamic view of social environments where history, economic forces and interactive processes... combine to create or to eliminate social distinctions" (Rampton, 2021).

B. Dell Hymes' SPEAKING Model

According to Trudy Milburn (2012), Hymes (1974) has proposed an ethnographic framework which takes into account the various factors that are involved in speaking. An *ethnography* of a communicative event is a description of all the factors that are relevant in understanding how that particular communicative event achieves its objectives. For convenience, Hymes uses the word SPEAKING as an acronym for the various factors he deems to be relevant. We will now consider these factors one by one (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 247).

While conversation analysts tend to have a strict understanding of context as limited to discourse context, authors utilizing the ethnography of communication consider much wider definitions of context to include information captured in Hymes' SPEAKING framework. SPEAKING (an acronym) is a useful heuristic and encourages analysts to pay attention to the setting and scene of the interaction (S), the participants involved (P), the interactional ends (E), act sequences (A), the key or tone (K), instrumentalities (or forms and channels of communication; I), norms of interpretation (N), and genres (G).

Exploring Vehicle Slogans in Al-Mukalla: An Interactional Sociological Analysis

III. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study using conversational analysis (CA) method. The method applied here is Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model. All vehicles in Al-Mukalla were the target of the author. The sample had been randomly selected with the help of some colleagues. Data was collected in Al-Mukalla in the period from 2016-2018 at different times. Whenever the author or the colleagues noticed a written comment on any vehicle, they wrote it down and kept it. Then about 32 slogans were collected and the author started applying the analysis model.

The author followed the following steps to analyse the data collected:

- II. Each slogan was translated into English
- III. Each slogan (the Arabic one) was analysed in the light of Hymes' model.
- IV. After the analyses, the redundant data were collected together.
- V. The distinctive features of the slogans were categorised.

The (S)etting is the vehicles of Al-Mukalla, the (P)articipants are the drivers who selected and inscribed these slogans on their vehicles, the (E)nds are the meanings implied in these slogans as to be explored in the analyses, and the (I)nstruments are all the written means on the back mirror of the vehicles. The other variables; (A)ct sequences, (K)eys, (N)orms, and (G)enres were the ones considered in the analysis.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

A. Act sequences

The main macro-classes of act sequences in the selected slogans are principally representative, expressive and directive. Of course, deciding the kind of act sequence is somehow tricky for each slogan might imply more than one act. However, and generally, the chosen ones reveal one main point about the addressers – who in their turn represent a sample of Hadrami society – that their slogans carry emotionally-loaded messages of the addressers and to the addressees. Here are some examples:

In the slogan, “Those people want to live in a western-like luxury and to die as pure as the Prophet's companions (Al-Sahabah!)” the illocutionary act here is representative; the addresser states what he believes to be the case.

In “Cure your hearts by mentioning Allah” the illocutionary force here is advising in a directive manner

And in the slogan, “I forgot you... Manage it yourself!” the illocutionary force here is expressive. The driver announces his departure from -maybe-a lover, a friend..etc.

B. Key

The focal tones in these slogans vary between pessimism, as in “Loss is your fate who resist the sea!” “Smile... you will not lose anything,” and “Trust is the grave of the loyal!” optimism, as in “It's true that bee sting is painful, but the honey is so sweet!”, and dark humour as in “You, ignorant of the true meaning of love: Love means "my mother," . They show how Hadramis tend more to pessimism and frustration of their circumstances. There are some optimistic modes in these slogans. The other main point here is the remarkable spread of dark humour which reveals another attribute of the Hadramis that they attempt to defeat their troubles by laughing at them.

C. Norms

The norm is the deepest factor here. It reveals a lot about Hadrami society. There are four main constructs: social, religious, economic, and political. Socially, envy is one of the Hadramis' vices as in the slogan, “I was attacked/ influenced by the evil-eye, but the God of the throne saved me.”. Also they consider love as taboo but it is a funny, romantic and hopeful issue, for example, “In Arabic: "Uhebbuk"... In English: "I love you"... In Hadrami: "Nhebbak.. lbook erra'ah!" (I love you, damn you!)”. From a religious point of view, Hadramis are strongly religious and they adhere to the principles of Islam and through their slogans they either ask Allah's protection and support or advise themselves and others and remind them of some religious principles such as in “Cure your hearts by mentioning Allah,” and “Move... under the protection of Allah.” From an economic perspective, poverty is the main problem indicated in the selected slogans. For example, “Livelihood/ bread as the rain divided among people; some are drowned and others are waiting for the rain,” and “D**** Poverty!”. As for the political indications, Hadramis are usually cowards in this regard. It is noticeable that there are almost no slogans referring to any aspect of the political life. However, there is one indication in the chosen slogans which is “I –myself- a nation”. Honestly speaking, Hadramis discuss all current political issues in their cafes, on social media, or in any gathering or meeting. These discussions are oral. The slogans studied in this paper are written which might be more durable and it might cause the vehicle's owner many troubles.

D. Genre

The selected slogans are of great diversity spread throughout the scale from formal to colloquial. Moreover, these sayings are marked by the frequent use of figurative language as metaphors, symbols, and puns. Another noticeable point here is the

Exploring Vehicle Slogans in Al-Mukalla: An Interactional Sociological Analysis

employment of almost all kinds of sentences (affirmative, interrogative, imperative, conditional, simple, compound, complex, aphoristic) and the variety of adverbs, idioms, lines of songs, and common sayings. Here are some examples:

“For how much have you sold your friend?” with the interrogative rhetoric genre,

“Crush me with your love... and I'll maintain the damages” with the metaphoric genre,

“Loss is your fate who resist the sea!” with the symbolic genre,

“In Arabic: "Uhebbuk"... In English: "I love you"... In Hadrami: "Nhebbak.. lbook erra'ah!" (I love you, damn you!!)” here Hadrami dialect, Arabic standard, and English languages are used,

“He who has once committed a mistake, Give him another chance/ hope” which is a line of a famous local song.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explores a novel perspective of the sociolinguistic implications of the noticeable phenomenon of vehicle slogans. These implications reveal a lot about the Hadramis' identity and their worries and interests. The employment of Hymes' model utilises a multidimensional investigation of this phenomenon and its indications about the Hadramis. These slogans show that the Hadramis are generally sarcastic considering their everyday life issues and attempt to express their opinions in an indirect way as a strategy of soothing their disappointments and managing to overcome them or at least reduce their negative influence on them. In all, I recommend exploring similar peculiar linguistic phenomena in the Hadrami context and other contexts to find out their major implications of the people's identities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank all who helped me to collect the data for this article, especially my friend, Sofia Awad Almuhamdi, and 2014 BA batches of English departments in College of Women and College of Arts, Hadramout University.

REFERENCES

- 1) Al-Azzam, B., Al-Azzam, A. A., Khalil, R., & Taiseer, R. 2014. Electoral Slogans in Jordan: A Translational and Political Analysis. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 4(3). February 2014. pp.275-287. Center for Promoting Ideas, USA www.ijhssnet.com.
- 2) AL-Azzawi, Q. O. 2017. A Sociolinguistic Study of Iraqi Parliamentary Electoral Campaign Slogans. *Linguistics and Translation* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331314553_A_Sociolinguistic_Study_of_Iraqi_Parliamentary_Electoral_Campaign_Slogans
- 3) Althyabat, S. M. 2012. A Sociolinguistic Study of Sports Slogans Used in Jordanian Playgrounds. Master of Arts in Linguistics. Department of English Language and Literature, Yarmouk University.
- 4) Dada, S. A. 2010. Language Use and Communication Artifacts in GSM Adverts in Nigeria. *Linguistik online* 43, 3/10. ISSN 1615-3014. pp.19-30. DOI:[10.13092/lo.42.418](https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.42.418)
- 5) Jacquemet, M. 2011. Crosstalk 2.0: Asylum and Communicative Breakdowns. *Text & Talk- An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language Discourse Communication Studies*, 31(4), pp. 475-497. DOI:10.1515/text.2011.023
- 6) Jaspers, J. 2011. Interactional sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. In J. P. Gee, & M. Hanford (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203809068.ch10>
- 7) Lawuyi, O. B. 1980. The World of the Yoruba Taxi Driver: An Interpretive Approach to Vehicle Slogans. *Africa*, 58(1). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250225738_The_World_of_the_Yoruba_Taxi_Driver_An_Interpretive_Approach_to_Vehicle_Slogans
- 8) Milburn, T. (2012). Ethnography of communication. <https://www.cios.org/encyclopedia/ethnography/index.htm>
- 9) Rampton, B. 2017. Interactional Sociolinguistics. *Tilburg papers in Culture Studies*, paper 175. Tilburg University. https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/sites/default/files/download/TPCS_175_Rampton_2.pdf
- 10) Rampton, B. 2021. 1. Introduction: Linguistic Practice in Changing Conditions. In *Linguistic Practice in Changing Conditions*, pp. 1-8. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.21832/9781800410008-003/html?lang=en>
- 11) Wardhaugh, R. 2006. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. 5th edn. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.

Appendix

الصحابة ماتل يموت والأورود بين ماتل يعيش بغى شعب

Those people want to live in a western-like luxury and to die as pure as the Prophet's companions (Al-Sahabah)!

Exploring Vehicle Slogans in Al-Mukalla: An Interactional Sociological Analysis

الله بذكر ف لو ب كم داوا

Cure your hearts by mentioning Allah.

ن فسك دب ر أذت و ن س د ي ت ك أنا

I forgot you... Manage it yourself!

دولة و حدي أنا

I –myself- a nation.

المطر ي ش تهي حد و غارق حد مة ق سوم ال بشر ب ين ال غي ب ك ما ال رزق

Livelihood/ bread as the rain divided among people; some are drowned and others are waiting for the rain.

ب حر معاند ي ا خسران

Loss is your fate who resist the sea!

ت خسره ما هناك ل يس اب تسم

Smile... you will not lose anything.

الأوف ياء مة برة ال ثقة

Trust is the grave of the loyal!

المد بة جاهل ين ي ا أمي ال حب

You, ignorant of the true meaning of love: Love means "my mother".

حالي ال عسل ل كن موجع ال نحل ل سع إن ي ح صح

It's true that bee sting is painful, but the honey is so sweet!

ط بعهم ال غدرو و ب الوفاء أو هوني

They made me think they were loyal while actually they are treacheries.

مكاني اعرف و قوي ساسي... ال شواني هرج هني ما

Care not for what the envious say... Firm is my base and I know well my

ب ال فقر مات ب ال دي لة عاش من

Those who depend on deceiving others to sustain will die poor.

أمل عادك عطه... مرة غلط من كل

He who has once committed a mistake, Give him another chance/ hope.

!الراعة ل بوك ن د ب ك ب ال ح ضر مي... ي و ل و ف اي ب ال إن ج ل ي ز ي... أ د ب ك ب ل ع ر ب ي ب ا

In Arabic: "Uhebbuk"... In English: "I love you"... In Hadrami: "Nhebbak.. lbook erra'ah!" (I love you, damn you!!).

أمرك غريب

How strange!

ت كوي نار ات كن ف لا... ي روي ماء ت كن ل م إن

If you won't be cool water... don't be enflaming fire.

ت رعاك الله عين و سر

Move... under the protection of Allah.

ال ن بي على صل و نظرة لك خذ

Have a look... then praise the Prophet.

Exploring Vehicle Slogans in Al-Mukalla: An Interactional Sociological Analysis

غم و فرحه كذا طبعه الزمن

Joy with agony are the basic nature of time!

قهر وجودي من يشد بع وي عيش... طويل ره عم عسى يكرهني من

O! wishing long age for those who hate me... so as to live and be vexed more by me!

تسدل طلع حياتي هف

The goal of my life turns to be infiltration!

علي الصيانة و بد بك صدمني

Crush me with your love... and I'll maintain the damages.

X غياب سجلهم الشدايد وقت

In the hard times... mark them absent X.

صاح بك؟ بعنت بك كم

For how much have you sold your friend?

لي ي تمنون ما اضعاف اعطهم الهم

Oh Allah... Grant them doubles of what they wish for me.

نجاندي العرش رب و صاب تني العين

I was attacked/ influenced by the evil-eye, but the God of the throne saved me.

مجرم اني ال تاريخ في لا يشهد... جريمة ال جمال حب كان اذا

If love of beauty is a crime... Oh History! Bear witness that I am a criminal!

روي شان؟ بعقع و بك برمتي

When shall I grow up and became a Rwaishan?

!!آخرة لا و دذ يا لامسك بين!! ال يمن في عايش و تصدلي ما

Poor you! You don't pray and live in Yemen! Neither life nor hereafter!

ال فقر أبوهن.....

D**** Poverty!

الطيران وضع

Airplane Mode

فيها من اذ فظوا احميها الهم

Oh Allah, protect it and those riding it!



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.