

Emphasis of the labio-velar /w/ in Jordanian Arabic: Preliminary results

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The study of emphasis in Arabic has nearly been limited to the investigation of primary emphasis, i.e., the occurrence of phonemic contrast between emphatic and non-emphatic segments (Davis 1995; Watson, 1999; Al-Masri & Jongman, 2004; Khattab et al., 2006; Abudalbh, 2011; Al-Deaibes, 2016, inter alia.). Secondary emphasis, though significant, has nevertheless, been overlooked in the related literature. This study is primarily concerned with the variant (emphatic) pronunciations of the labio-velar /w/ in two subdialects of Jordanian Arabic, namely Urban Jordanian Arabic (UJA) and Rural Jordanian Arabic (RJA). It also investigates the effect of gender on the production of this segment. This study is based on wordlist data comprising 15 trisyllabic words uttered by 24 native male and female speakers of Jordanian Arabic, 12 (6 males and 6 females) UJA speakers and 12 (6 males and 6 females) RJA speakers for a total of 360 tokens. These tokens were recorded and acoustically analyzed in Praat (Version 6.1.04). Duration as well as F1, F2, and F3 of target vowels were measured. Each vowel was also coded for two independent variables, i.e., gender and dialect. Preliminary results reveal that the acoustic correlates of the secondarily emphatic segments are similar to those of primarily emphatic segments, including raised F1 and F3 and lowered F2 of the vowels that appear in the emphatic context. On the other hand, the results show that there is a discrepancy regarding the degree of emphasis between males and females, on the one hand, and RJA and UJA speakers on the other. Female speakers tend to produce weaker emphatic segments as compared with male speakers. Similarly, UJA speakers (both males and females) tend to produce weak emphatic consonants than RJA speakers do. Finally, RJA speakers (males and females) produced longer emphatic vowel duration across the board, which is an indication that vowel duration is a robust acoustic correlate of secondary emphasis as opposed to primary emphasis. Furthermore, the study shows that emphasis spread directionality is symmetrical and can range from short to long-distance.

References

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