

The Connotations of Pet Expressions in Jordanian Spoken Arabic

Helen A. Al-Ghoweri

The World Islamic Science & Education University (WISE), Amman, Jordan

Ayman Yasin

Princess Sumayya University for Technology, Jordan

Jibrel Al-Saudi

The World Islamic Science & Education University (WISE), Amman, Jordan

Abstract—The primary objective of this study is to examine the connotation of pet expressions when used to describe people in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA), that is, the wide array of negative and positive associations that pet expressions bring with them. When defining animals, *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* define most of the animal expressions along with their connotations. The present study investigates the connotations of pets in Jordanian Spoken Arabic. To this end, the researchers distributed an open ended questionnaire to the subjects that could provide rich qualitative data. This, in turn, will give the researchers an opportunity to gain insight in the subjects' opinions on the connotation of pets in JSA. The questionnaire consisted of (11) Jordanian spoken Arabic sentences. Each sentence included a pet expression which is used in JSA. After collecting the questionnaire the researchers tested the connotations of pet expressions in JSA against the connotation of pet expression in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jam al-jami'*. The findings of the study suggest that in some cases the connotation changed from positive in the two lexicons to negative in JSA or vice versa. In others, the connotation remained the same but changed from a connotation to another.

Index Terms—pet expressions, Jordanian spoken Arabic (JSA), connotation

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the connotations of pets in Jordanian spoken Arabic (JSA). The positive as well as the negative connotations of pets reflect features, characteristics, and behaviors which are employed to convey certain meanings. Connotative meaning is concerned with the communicative value of lexemes and expressions rather than with the conceptual one (Leech, 1974). Connotations are relatively unstable; they differ considerably according to culture and the experience of the individual. Leech believes that all speakers of a particular language share the same denotative meaning just as they share the same syntax, phonology and morphology (P. 14).

Connotative meaning is not definitive as it includes the subjective and objective senses of the utterance. The denotative meaning of a word can be thought of in terms of a limited set of semantic representation as its rules are finite. Connotative meaning is may be different according to culture, languages and its speakers and their experiences. Non-propositional meaning can have expressive, presupposed, or evoked senses (Cruse, 1986). In this study, connotation, used in opposition with denotation and sense, refers to the expressive meaning which makes it useful for speakers to communicate their evaluations or attitudes. Dictionaries seek to define meaning. However, one of the problems of dictionaries is that they impose, by abstraction of one or more a rigidity of meaning that words do not often show in reality, once words are put into a context, their denotative meanings become more flexible. Moreover, not all dictionaries and lexicons include the connotations which words may carry (Kovecses, 2010).

Connotative meaning is the meaning given to the word over and above the denotative meaning which it has in that context by the fact that it brings to mind another meaning of the same word, and it differs from its sense, denotation and reference (Allan, 2007). Animal words are associated with cultural connotation. Therefore, their connotations vary across cultures and languages. For example, The word *hima:r* refers to the animal 'donkey', but to call someone *hima:r* in Jordanian Arabic means connotatively 'stupid'.

Animals have always been part of people's development. At least they have been considered as food for humans. Accordingly, animals play a significant role in the people's life. Newmark (1988) points out that animal expressions can be utilized to describe undesirable human attributes. Research on animal expressions has revealed the use of different categories related to animals. Animal names have been found in various metaphorical expressions that refer to people.

Peled-Shapira (2009) studied the metaphors which were derived from the animal world in the works of the exiled Iraqi Communist writer GhaibTu Ma Farmasi. The animal metaphors were used to depict the writer as leftist intellectual. They, further, involve transference of meanings depending on culture and context. The study found that animal metaphors contribute to aesthetics and poetic elegance of literary works.

Rodriguez (2009) studied animal metaphors for women in two languages: English and Spanish. “The study explored perceptions of womanhood through animal metaphors and figurative uses of animal names applied to females in both English and Spanish”. Animal metaphors were proven to reinforce the stereotypical image of women. Moreover, the study found that the names of certain pet animals have positive connotations, while wild animals express undesirable associations. Pet animals reflect the idea that women entertain men and provide food to men and beget children.

Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015) conducted a study within semantic – pragmatic framework. The researchers attempt to show some lingual misunderstandings in the usage of animal expressions animal expressions. The research studied the connotations between the English and Persian animal words. The study found that animal words have cultural connotations in each language. Most cultural connotations in Persian are different from the English ones. The researchers found out that differences in animal connotations between English and Persian are caused by religion, history, geographical environment and customs.

Al-Rawashdeh (2016) conducted a study on the connotations of animal names used in describing people in the city of Shoback-Jordan. The study also aimed at investigating whether the animal names are metaphorically to describe males and females. The researcher employs the semi-structured interview as a research method. 20 Shobackian people were interviewed. The researcher reported that people in the city of Shoback use animal names positively and negatively, but negative uses. However, the animal names used to describe both sexes outnumber the names of animals used to describe males only or females only.

Salman and Barjes (2019) examined dog proverbs with the aim of showing the way in which the English and the Iraqi Arabs interpret and use animal proverbs. The researchers analyzed the selected dog proverbs adopting Leech's (1981) connotations and Holmes' (2013) social factors. The research concluded that English and Iraqi Arabs have different attitudes towards their animal proverbs which give the proverbs different connotations, and in turn, influence the way they interact with social factors, this conclusion goes hand in hand with Abdullah (2011) who investigated Malay proverbs related to the dog. According to the researchers, both cultures associate the frequent use of dog proverbs with the lower prestigious occupations (e.g., farmers). Moreover, the English are more flexible in using animal proverbs with socially remote participants more than the Iraqi Arabs do. Finally, the only variable in the two cultures is the informality variables.

The present study tries to explore the connotation of pet expressions in Jordanian spoken Arabic. Animal expressions and particularly pet expressions are used to describe people, express words' meanings and have cultural associations (Lakoff and Turner, 1989). That is to say, they can be used either literally or connotatively to convey their associative meanings. The language user can appeal to his or her linguistic knowledge to support a belief. The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the positive and negative connotations of pet expressions in JSA?
2. Do the connotation of pets in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:t* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* agree on positive and negative connotations and associations of pets in JSA?

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Subjects

The sample of the study consisted of (20) BA native speakers of JSA enrolled in the English Language and literature Program at the World Islamic Science and Education University (WISE). There were 12 female students and 8 male students. The age range of the subjects was between 20 and 22. Both groups reported that they have studied English language for more than ten years. The subjects have taken at least fifteen courses in English Language and literature including a course in *linguistics* where they studied the terms ‘connotation’ vs. ‘denotation’.

B. Data Collection

The researchers distributed an open ended questionnaire to the subjects that could provide rich qualitative data. This, in turn, will give the researchers an opportunity to gain insight of the subjects' opinions on the connotation of pets in JSA. The researcher will analyze the data in light of the results obtained.

The questionnaire consisted of (11) Jordanian spoken Arabic sentences. Each sentence includes a pet expression which is used in JSA. The research used the following Pet expressions: *hima:r* 'a donkey', *asfu:ra-h* 'a bird', *arnab* 'a rabbit', *hamameih* 'a dove', *kharuf* 'a sheep', *battah* 'a duck' *kalb* 'a dog' *hisa:n* 'a horse' *bisah* 'a cat', *babaghah* 'a parrot' and *m'azeh* 'a goat'. The pet expressions used in the study have been collected by the researchers based on her own experience as native speakers of JSA. The researchers asked the subject to mention the connotation of the pet expressions used in the study and to indicate whether the pet expression in each sentence has a negative or a positive connotation. The subjects were given fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire. After collecting the questionnaire the researchers tested the connotations of pet expressions in JSA against the connotations of pet expression in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:t* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'*. These two lexicons arrange words in an alphabetical order with cross-references to their roots. The researchers chose these two lexicons list the meanings of words along with their connotations.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following table illustrates the findings of the present study:

Pet Expression	<i>al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt</i> and <i>al-mu'jam al-jami'</i>		JSA	
	Positive connotations	Negative connotations	Positive connotations	Negative connotations
<i>hima:r</i> 'a donkey'		✓	✓	✓
<i>asfu:ra-h</i> 'a bird'	✓		✓	
<i>arnab</i> 'a rabbit'	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>hamameih</i> 'a dove'	✓		✓	
<i>kharufa</i> 'a sheep'	-----	-----		
<i>battah</i> 'a duck'	✓		✓	✓
<i>kalb</i> 'a dog'	✓			✓
<i>hisa:n</i> 'a horse'	✓		✓	
<i>bisah</i> 'a cat'	-----	-----	✓	✓
<i>babaghah</i> 'a parrot'	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>m'azeh</i> 'a goat'	-----	-----		✓

Let's start with the first pet. The word *hima:r* 'a donkey' is defined in *al-mu'jamal-jami'* as "an animal related to horses ,but it is smaller than the horse since it has short hair in mane ,a tail and very large ears". It is used to carry things and move from one place to another. According to the same lexicon, the word *hima:r* 'a donkey' connotes loud voices. *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* states the same definition, but according to *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* the pet expression *hima:r* 'a donkey' connotes bad men with bad reputations.

1. *hima:r* u qajid *hima:r* (JSA)
donkey and leading a donkey
'A donkey leading a donkey'

The study shows that 85% of the subjects indicated that the word *hima:r* 'a donkey' is used in the above context to connote stupidity while 10% indicated that *hima:r* 'a donkey' connotes difficulty in changing opinions. 5% of the subjects, however, indicated that *hima:r* 'a donkey' connotes strength. The 95% subjects also indicated that *hima:r* 'a donkey' has a negative connotation, and 5% of the subjects indicated that it has a positive connotation. The connotations of *hima:r* 'a donkey' are negative in these two lexicons. Nonetheless, it seems that the connotations of *hima:r* 'a donkey' in JSA do not go along with the connotations mentioned in *al-mu'jamal-jami'*.

The second word '*asfu:ra-h* 'a sparrow'. '*asfu:ra-h* in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* connotes light things and melodious sounds.

2. *btokil* zai *il-asfu:ra-h* (JSA)
eat:3SF like the-bird-F
'(She) eats like a (female) bird'

The study reveals that 20% of the subjects indicated that '*asfu:ra-h* 'a bird' is used in the above context to describe a person who eats in a prestigious way. The other 80% of the subjects indicated that '*asfu:ra-h* 'a bird' is used in '*btokil zai ilasfu:ra-h* to connote a person who does not eat much or a person who eats light meals. This connotation goes hand in hand with the connotations in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* since both lexicons mention that '*asfu:ra-h* 'a bird' connotes light things. It is worth mentioning that '*asfu:ra-h* 'a bird' in JSA may connote a person who has a melodious voice .The subjects of the study identified that '*asfu:ra-h* 'a bird' has positive connotations in JSA. It seems that the connotations of '*asfu:ra-h* in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* are also positive.

Third, the word *arnab* 'a rabbit' in *al-mu'jamal-jami'* is a member of a family of long-eared ,short-tailed mammal with long hind legs. It connotes being humiliated, and it also connotes running from the predator.

3. *arnab* sa'i:d fi bait-uh (JSA)
rabbit happy in home -his
'Happy rabbit in his home'

The present study shows that 60% of the subjects manifested that *arnab* 'a rabbit' is used to describe a person who is under his wife's control, and 40% of the subjects indicated that *arnab* 'a rabbit' connotes a person who is fast in doing the housework. 60% of the subject stated that *arnab* 'a rabbit' has negative connotations. While 40% of the subjects indicated that *arnab* 'a rabbit' has a negative connotation. The connotations in JSA agree with the connotations mentioned in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* which can also be classified as positive when connotes a fast runner and negative when connotes being humiliated.

Moving to the word *hamameih* 'a dove', *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* lists this word as referring to any of numerous pigeons; especially a small wild pigeon, and it connotes a person who sends messages to others. In the past, people used to send messages to each other by doves which had the ability to get back to their place easily. In accordance with this line of thought, *hamameih* 'a dove' carries a positive connotation in these two lexicons.

4. Farah mithl *hamamit* is-sala:m (JSA)
Farah like dove the-peace
'Farah is like a peace dove'

The study indicates that 40% of the subjects showed that *hamameih* 'a dove' in JSA connotes a gentle woman.20% of the subjects indicated that *hamameih* connotes a gentle or a peaceful person.20 % of the subjects suggested that *hamameih* 'a dove' connotes freedom. Additionally,20% of the subjects posited that *hamameih* a person who carries

good news. Importantly, 100% of the subjects indicated that *hamameih* has positive connotations in JSA. The researcher states that the word *hamameih* 'a dove' has positive connotations in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jam Al-jami'*.

The word *kharuf* 'asheep' means *inal-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* any of various hollow-horned mammals related to the goats, but lacking a beard in the male. People make use of its flesh and wool, a timid defenseless creature one easily influenced or led.

5. hu zai ilkharuf (JSA)
he like sheep
'He is like a sheep'

Interestingly, 60% of the subjects stated that *kharuf* in JSA connotes a man who is governed by his wife. 10% of the subjects mentioned that *kharuf* connotes either a man who is governed by his wife, or it connotes a person with weak personality. 30% of the subjects mentioned the two connotations. 100% of the subjects indicated that *kharuf* has a negative connotation in JSA. The word *kharuf* is used to describe males rather than females in Jordan. The connotations of *kharuf* mentioned in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* agree with the connotations of *kharuf* in JSA since both connote weakness. Accordingly, *kharuf* 'asheep' carries negative connotation in JSA and in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'*.

The word *battah* 'duck' any of various swimming birds. *Al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* state that a duck with a broken leg connotes powerlessness. It has been found that the two lexicons mention nothing about the connotation of *battah* 'duck'.

6. Ahlam battah (JSA)
Ahlam duck
'Ahlam is a duck'

The study eliminates that 70% of the subjects of the study identified that *battah* 'duck' is used in JSA to connote either a beautiful female or a chubby female, 70% of the subjects also indicated that *battah* has a positive connotation. 30% of the subjects, however, were of the opinion that *battah* connotes a fat female and though it has a negative connotation. One may notice that the *battah* is used in JSA to connote females rather than males.

The word *kalb* 'the dog' is defined in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* as a wild and domesticated animal of many breeds, especially kept by people as a pet or to hunt or guard things, and it is known by its loyalty as well as its companionship with humans. However, in Jordanian Arabic, *kalb* 'the dog' has a negative connotation as many people use it as a curse. Consider the following example from JSA:

7. huwwe kalb (JSA)
he dog
'He is a dog'

Interestingly, 5% of the subjects maintained that the word *kalb* 'the dog' connotes dirt and impurity; 10% of subjects indicated that *kalb* 'the dog' connotes bad manners. Forty 5% of the subjects indicated that *alkalb* connotes a curse. 40% of the subjects indicated that *kalba* 'dog' connotes humiliation. 100% of subjects indicated that the word *kalb* has a negative connotation in JSA. On the other hand, the word *kalb* has a positive connotation in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* since it connotes loyalty.

The word *hisa:n* 'a horse' is defined in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* as a large herbivorous mammal that eats grass. It is a domesticated animal which is used as a beast of burden, a draft animal, or for riding an athlete whose performance is consistently strong and reliable. The word *hisa:n* 'a horse' in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* connotes fastness and politeness. Hence, it has a positive connotation in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'*. The following example from JSA is a case in point:

8. Omar qawi mithl l-hisa:n (JSA)
Omar strong like the-horse
'Omar is as strong as a horse'

Moreover, all the subjects indicated that the *hisa:n* has positive connotations. 60% of the subjects stated that *hisa:n* 'a horse' connotes strength. 20% of the subjects stated that *hisa:n* connotes strength and good health. 20% of the subjects stated that *hisa:n* is used to connote fastness. All the subjects reported that the word *hisa:n* has a positive connotation in JSA.

The word *qitt* 'a cat' is defined in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* as a domesticated mammal used for catching rats and mice. In *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* only the definition is mentioned without any connotations. The following example from JSA is in order here:

9. hi zai ilbisah ilmghamdah (JSA)
she like cat closing -eyes
'She is a closing -eyes cat'

The present study reveals that 30% of the subjects indicated that *bisah* 'a cat' connotes shyness. 20% of the subjects indicated that *bisah* connotes lack of understanding. 10% of the subjects indicated that *bisah* connotes being naïve, 30% of the subjects indicated that *bisah* connotes lack of experience, and 10% indicated that *bisah* is used to connote a poor female. 90% of the subjects indicated that *bisah* has a negative connotation, and 10% of the subjects indicated that *bisah* has a negative connotation.

The word *babaghah* 'a parrot' is defined in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* as a widely distributed tropical bird that is brightly colored, has a distinctive hooked bill. It is a bird which is distinguished by mimics. The word *babaghah* 'a parrot' is defined in *a-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* connotes a person who echoes another's. This goes along with the connotation of *babaghah* 'a parrot' in JSA. Consider the following example from JSA:

10. Ahmad babaghah (JSA)
ahmad parrot
'Ahmad is a parrot'

The researchers report that 60% of the subjects indicated that *babaghah* 'a parrot' connotes repeating the words of others. 20% indicated that *babaghah* connotes gossiping and talking too much. Intriguingly, 20% of the subjects indicated that *babaghah* connotes revealing secrets. The twenty subjects identified that *babaghah* has negative connotations in JSA. 40% of the subjects stated that *babaghah* has a neutral connotation. In other word, neither positive nor negative connotation. 60% indicated that *babaghah* 'a parrot' has a negative connotation in JSA. It seems that *babaghah* in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* has also a neutral connotation.

The word *m'azeh* 'a goat' is defined in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* as a hollow-horned strong mammal related to the sheep but of lighter build and with backwardly horns, a short tail, and usually straight hair, and it is domesticated for its milk, wool, and flesh. The words *m'azeh* 'a goat' is used to describe a person or a behavior in JSA.

11. ta:sarufat-uh zai ilm'azeh (JSA)
Behavior-his like goat
'He behaves like a goat'

The study clarifies that (50%) of the subjects indicated that *m'azeh* 'a goat' in JSA connotes stupidity. 10% of the subjects suggested that *m'azeh* connotes immaturity, 20% identified that *m'azeh* connotes mindlessness, and 20% stated that *m'azeh* connotes difficulty in grasping things. 100% of the subjects indicated that stated that *m'azeh* has a negative connotation in JSA

IV. CONCLUSION

At this point, it has become clear that most of the pet expressions reflect the way of thinking and the cultural background of the Jordanian society. Stated differently, pet expressions fulfill semantic and sociolinguistic functions in JSA. More importantly, in Jordan, pets may include the following animals: dogs, cats, horses, sheep, goats, donkeys, domesticated rabbits, parrots, domestic, chickens, and doves. The present study manifested that some of the connotations of pet expressions in JSA are similar to the connotations of pet expressions in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* such as *babaghah* 'a parrot' which connotes repeating the words of others. The word *asfu:ra-h* 'a bird' in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'* connotes light things and melodious sounds, and it has also the same connotations in JSA. On the other hand, the connotations of some pet expressions used in JSA differ from those in the *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* and *al-mu'jamal-jami'*. For example, the word *hima:r* 'a donkey' in *al-mu'jamal-wasi:tt* connotes men with bad reputations or loud voices. On the other hand, it seems that *hima:r* 'a donkey' is used in JSA to connote stupidity.

In sum, setting light on the meaning of the pet expressions in the two lexicons as well as in the way they are used in JSA has disclosed that they have both positive and negative connotations. In some cases, JSA has the same connotation as in the two lexicons. In others, the connotation remained the same, i.e. positive or negative, but the connotation has changed. For example, *hima:r* has negative connotation in the lexicon. JSA kept the negative connotation but changed it from 'loud voice' to 'dumb, stupid'.

APPENDIX A

Kindly fill in the accompanied Questionnaire. Answering the Questions also means giving informed consent about taking part in this study. Kindly do not write your name.

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Questionnaire

A. What are the connotations of the bold pet expressions in Jordanian Spoken Arabic?

1. **hima:r** u qajid **hima:r** (JSA)
donkey and leading a donkey
'A donkey leading a donkey'

2. **btokil** zai il-**asfu:ra-h** (JSA)
eat:3SF like the-bird-F
'(She) eats like a (female) bird'

3. **arnab** sa'i:d fi **bait-uh** (JSA)

rabbit happy in home -his
'Happy rabbit in his home'

4. Farah mithl hamamit is-sala:m (JSA)
Fara like dove the-peace
'Farah is like a peace dove'

5. hu zai ilkharuf (JSA)
he like sheep
'He is like a sheep'

6. Ahlam battah (JSA)
Ahlam duck
'Ahlam is a duck'

7. huwwe kalb
he dog
'He is a dog'

8. Omar qawi mithl l-hisa:n (JSA)
Omar strong like the-horse
'Omar is as strong as a horse'

9. hi zai ilbisah ilmghamdah (JSA)
she like cat closing -eyes
'She is a closing -eyes cat'

10. Ahmad babaghah (JSA)
ahmad parrot
'Ahmad is a parrot'

11. ta:ṣarufat-uh zai ilm'azeh (JSA)
Behavior-his like goat
'He behaves like a goat'

APPENDIX B

Transliteration symbols for Arabic vowels and consonants

Arabic alphabet	Symbol	Example	Meaning
ء	ʔ	ʔamal	hope
ث	th	thaʕlab	fox
ج	j	jamal	camel
ح	h	hub	love
خ	kh	khubz	bread
ذ	dh	dhahab	gold
ز	z	zi:t	oil
ش	sh	shams	sun
ص	s	sayf	summer
ض	d	dayf	guest
ط	t	ti:n	mud
ظ	TH	THuhr	noon
ع	c	cabd	slave
غ	gh	gharb	west
ق	q	qalam	pencil
و	w	ward	rose
ي	y	yawm	day

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Helen A. Al-Ghoweri is an Assistant professor of Linguistics at English Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Arts and Sciences at The World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE) in Jordan. She has got her Ph.D from the University of Jordan in 2018, and she has taught many courses in linguistics .Her research interests include Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, Syntax, Language Acquisition and Semantics.

Ayman Yasin is currently the head of the Coordination Unit for Service Courses at Princess Sumaya University for Technology in Jordan. He studied linguistics at Purdue University in Indiana, USA (2008-2012). He is interested in social sciences in general and in linguistics in particular. He has published ten papers in syntax, phonology, translation, and cinema. Dr. Yasin has also taught MA and PhD courses in linguistics and translation at the University of Jordan (part timer). He has experience in IELTS tests and he serves as a reviewer in several journals.

Jibrel Al-Saudi is an Assistant professor of Linguistics at English Language Department, Faculty of Arts and Sciences at The World Islamic Sciences & Education University (WISE) in Jordan. He is also the Director of Language Centre. His research interests include Semantics, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, Translation, Morphology, Syntax, Language Learning and Acquisition.