

## The Proverbial Questioning Expressions in Jordanian Spoken Arabic

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**Abstract:** Proverbs are an important element in society that reflects its culture, styles of thinking, and methods of dealing with life variables. The proverb is an important source for providing the language with many formulas and words where linguistic forms and social functions of them vary in order to serve the human being and to give him the ability to deal with things in an expressive linguistic style. The Jordanian society, like other societies, is characterized by the presence of different types of proverbs that people use in their daily lives, including the proverbial questioning expressions that the present research aims to investigate. The study data were collected from several sources and were subjected to in-depth analysis in order to clarify the linguistic components and social functions of these expressions where the findings showed the multiplicity and diversity.

**Keywords:** Jordan, linguistic folklore, intangible heritage, proverbs, questioning, social functions

### INTRODUCTION

The human being without language is a static one. Language is a crucial means of communication between people and a basis for civilized and human interaction through which a person can express his opinions, attitudes, and feelings towards others and the events that he sees, hears, and experiences in the course of his daily life. Within the language are the means and tools that the human being uses to explain his views of things, people, events, or circumstances. Such tools and means are riddles, tales, idiomatic expressions, sayings, poems, and proverbs. Proverbs are one of the most prolific linguistic sources expressing the culture and social life of the community. They are almost a law that regulates relations between people and controls individual and collective behaviors by encouraging positive values and

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criticizing negative ones. Proverbs are sincere and profound expressions of the life of society and are the product of an interaction between the human being and the surrounding social, political, economic, and religious environments that leave their prominent marks on the formulation of many of these proverbs. The linguistic forms of proverbs vary, as some of them are imperative, verbal, nominal sentences, or a question. Proverbs are generally characterized by limited words, depth of meaning, ease of memorization, rapid spread within the different groups of society, and are passed through generations. They sometimes differ in some of their vocabularies, but they agree with their social goals and functions. Like other Arab and international societies, Jordanian society is bulk with the intangible heritage, which is represented in multiple linguistic genres such as folk songs, tales, legends, rituals, riddles, wisdom, idioms, and proverbs. The present study aims to investigate the proverbs of questioning in Jordanian spoken Arabic to bring to light their linguistic structure and social functions.

#### DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

As a pragmatic study, the present article relies on the descriptive-analytical method in investigating the proverbs of questioning in Jordanian spoken Arabic. To achieve this goal, a number of these proverbs have been collected from various printed and online sources, in addition to benefiting from the national radio and television programs. In addition to that, the personal observation of people speaking spontaneously on different occasions and places where the researcher was present had a role in supporting the study with a number of these proverbs. Then, the proverbs were analyzed in-depth to explore their linguistic and social functions.

#### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Linguistic folklore is an important means of the formation and building of society and an expressive reflection of the various aspects that make up it and build relationships between its members. This folklore varies to include overlapping social and linguistic genres, including proverbs. The relation between folklore and sociolinguistics is symbiotic (McDowell 2018, 1). Proverbs are an important linguistic pattern that supports the speech of people and increases their ability to praise or criticize things. As a short phrase that encodes different norms in society (Alshorafat 2019, 235), the proverbs are a mirror to view

culture (Farghal 2021, 3). The proverbs tell the literal meanings of the words that are used in making them and the cultural background of the language they represent (Al-Harashseh & Al-Muheisen 2021, 270-271). The proverbs in Jordan are somehow unwritten authoritative words (Al-Azzam 2017, 57) that are stored and memorized in the nation's emotions (Al-Refa'1 & Al-Edl 2015, 68) to participate in regulating, shaping, and directing the relations between people. As a supportive means to help people in enhancing their speech, proverbs are punctuated in the speech of people in Jordan to drive the message that they want to deliver (Dawaghreh & Tengku-Sepora 2020, 281).

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The discourse of proverbs is characterized by its rapid spread among various social groups, for its simple expression, assimilation, structure, and expressive ability, which makes it reflect various patterns of human behavior that gives it the continuity of presence and transmission from one generation to another, in addition to its great metaphorical nature. In fact, this discourse expresses the human reality and stores different images. There are different linguistic forms of the folk proverbs in Jordanian spoken Arabic, including those in which the questioning word "shu" which means "what" is used. The following section reviews some of these proverbs.

### *Question only proverbs*

To express the disability to do something, one says *شو طالع بالأيدي؟ shu talii' biliid?* What is in hand? The word 'biliid' is used with different possessive adjectives to refer to the speaker or the person whom the user of the expression is talking about, such as *شو طالع بأيدي؟ shu talii' ibiidi?* What is in my hand, or *شو طالع بيدك؟ shu talii' biidak?* What is in your hand? To show an unwillingness to go back to useless or harmful things that people suffer from, they say *شو خابر من رمضان تا أودعه؟ shu khabir min Ramadan ta awadu'uh?* What do I expect of Ramadan to farewell it? When age is not associated with a particular behavior, people express their view about the old person who behaves in a dishonorable manner by saying *شو دخل الشيب بالرزالة؟ shu dakhil ilsheab bilrazalih* What does gray hair have to do with bad behavior? To express the great difference between two people or things in behavior, qualities, or morals, the proverb is *شو جاب لجاب؟ shu jab lajab* used what equals this to that?, which is similar to the English expression as different as chalk to cheese. *شو لم الشامى على المغربي؟ shu lam ilshami*

*a'ala ilmughrabi?* What combined the Shami with the Moroccan? is used to express astonishment at the meeting of two parties or persons who are different, incompatible with each other, or far apart. The word Shami refers to the person who is from the Levant. The expressions شو *shu ma dhal zulum?* and شو مش ظال زلم؟ *shu mish dhal zulum?* and شو مش ظايل زلم؟ *shu mish dhail zulum?*, which all mean what, are not there any men left?, are used to jeer and mock the appearance of worthless people who are trying to take hold of big or important situations. شو هامه؟ *shu hammuh* What worries him? is used that a person does not care about what happened or going on. Similar to this meaning is the proverbial expression شو ورانا؟ *shu warana?* What is behind us?, which means that there is nothing that worries us. The proverb شو بدك بطولة السيرة؟ *shu baddak ibtulit ilsirih?* What do you want of the long story? is used to call for not talking too much and to summarize the speech. The expressions شو جاياك منه؟ *shu jaiiak minuh?* and شو طايلك منه؟ *shu tailak minuh* both mean What do you benefit of him? are used as a call to prevent someone from helping or standing with another person especially when this person cannot be depended on or trusted. شو الدعوة؟ *shu ilda 'wah* and بل شو الدعوة *bal shu ilda 'wah* What is on earth? They are used to express the exclamation of someone who tries to not accept the help of others, so the one who offers the help expresses his wondering about that person. The proverb شو ابال الضيف؟ *shu ibbal ildheaf?* What is in the guest's mind? is used to address a person to say what is going on in his mind, or what he wants. Asking about something, or someone about his condition, the asker can say شو الاخبار؟ *shu feeh ma feeh?* What is up, شو اخبارك؟ *shu akhbarak?* What is your news. What is your point, or what do you want exactly? might be expressed with شو زبدة الحكي؟ *shu zubdit ilhaki?* What is the butter of the speech?, where the word 'butter' means the 'core' of the speech. No matter what it is, or whatever it is, is expressed with شو ما كان؟ *shu ma kan?* Whatever it is? شو هالحكي؟ *shu halhaki?*, شو هالكلام؟ *shu halkalam?*, شو هالسواليف؟ *shu halsawalif?*, شو هالسوالفة؟ *shu halsoalafih?*, شو هالسالفه؟ *shu halsalfih?*, all meaning What is this speech?, are used to express wondering about one's speech. شو فيه عندك؟ *shu feeh e'andak ilyoam?* What do you have today? and شو مشاريعك اليوم؟ *shu mashareea'k ilyoam?* What are your plans for today? are used to asking someone about his plans for today. When someone makes a party or brings sweets to his colleagues at work, he is asked about the reason for that by saying شو المناسبة؟ *shu ilmunasabih?* What

is the occasion? For a confused situation, people may say شو هالسولافة *shu halsoalafih illtarma?* What a deaf speech i.e., situation?, شو الطرمة؟ *shu halfawdha?* What a mess? or شو هالمبيعة؟ *shu hal meamaa'h?* What chaos? To mock someone of being with little experience or understanding, people say شو يعرفك؟ *shu iba'rfak?* What makes you know?, شو يفهمك؟ *shu ibfahmak?* What makes you understand?, or شو يفهمك بعدك زغير؟ *shu ibfahmak baa'dak zagheer?* What makes you understand, you still young? To express the absence of something new or more than what already exists, people use the expression شو جابت من دار أبوها؟ *shu jabat min dar abooha?* What does it bring from its father's house? Losing hope to get something from a useless person, or from the one who does not like to help others, one may express his view about such person with شو مترجي منه؟ *shu mitrajji minuh?* What do you expect of him? To express dissatisfaction with the many demands and requests for money, especially from family members, the head of the family expresses his annoyance at this by saying شو أنا قاعد على بنك؟ *shu ana qaaid a'ala bank?* What, am I sitting at a bank? شو مال سخام بينه؟ *shu mal iskham beanuh?* What is the matter with him, and شو مال ضربيه؟ *shu mal dharibuh?* What hit him? are used to express annoy of someone who behaves in a nervous and irritable way. شو الصوص وشو مرقتة؟ *shu ilsuus wishu marqatuh?* What is the chick and what its broth? is used to underestimate someone's value and that he is not worth anything. When someone meets another one for the first time and does not know his name, he asks him about his name without the intention to humiliate him by saying شو إسمك بلا زغرة؟ *shu ismak bala zughrah?* What is your name without humiliation? To describe a person in a hurry who stays standing and does not want to sit down, people say شو خلقان يوم الوقفة؟ *shu khalqan yoam ilwaqfa?* What are you born on the day of standing 'on the mount of Arafa'? To express mockery and insult a person who claims to know something while he is not, people say شو فهم الحمير يشم الورد؟ *shu fahham ilhameer ibsham ilward?* What makes the donkeys understand to smell the roses? As a kind of disapproval of someone accepting something even though it is harmful to him, people say شو جابرك عليه؟ *shu jabrak a'aleah?* What forces you to accept it? شو جابك لهالصورة الضيقة؟ *shu jabak lahalsura ildhaiqa?* What brought you to this narrow situation? is said to someone who puts himself in trouble when he does not need it. شو مخلفك وناسيك؟ *shu imkhalfak winaseek?* What, did I beget you and forget you? is used by someone to express his annoy of the one who keeps insisting on him or keeps sticking to him in a bothering way. To

compare two different places or two opposite things, people say شو جاب الزرقا للبلقا؟ *shu jab ilzarqa lilbalqa?* what equals *ilzarqa* to *ilbalqa*? The words ‘*ilzarqa*’ and ‘*ilbalqa*’ refer to the two Jordanian governorates Alzarqa’ and Albalqaa’. The proverb يا شباط شو خليت وراك؟ *ya shbat shu khalleat warak?* O, *shbat* ‘i.e., February’ what did you keep behind you? is used to show that the month of February witnesses a lot of rain than the months before it which are the months of winter in Jordan. To ask about what is going on, some may say شو القالة؟ *shu ilqalah?* What is the matter?

### Question-Answer Proverbs

The severity of the need that pushes a person to accept something that is not appropriate or to ask for help from bad people or who do not have a positive relationship with the person seeking the need is expressed through the proverbs شو بوزيك على المر غير الأمر؟ *shu biwadeek a’ala ilmur ghear ilamar minuh?*, شو بوزيك على المر غير الأمر؟ *shu biwazeek a’ala ilmur ghear ilamar minuh?*, that both mean What pushes you to the bitterness except for the more bitter thing, or شو رماك على المر غير اللي أمر منه؟ *shu ramak a’ala ilmur ghear illi amar minuh?* What throws you to the bitterness except for the more bitter one? Someone would express his displeasure by asking him or someone else to welcome someone in an exaggerated way by saying نرقصله؟ *shu ya’ni, nurquslih?* What does it mean, shall we dance for him?, شو يعني أرقصله؟ *shu ya’ni irqusluh?* What does it mean, shall I dance for him?, أدبكله؟ *shu ya’ni, adbukluh?* What does it mean, shall I adbukluh ‘i.e, dance’ for him? To get rid of the things that cause problems for the person, people express this with شو بريحك من الولد؟ *shu biraihak min ilwalad?* talaq ummuh what makes you get relax of the child? divorcing his mother. To call for reconciliation and abandon previous differences, the person who wants reconciliation says to the other party شو بدنا باللي راح؟ *shu badna billi rah?* Ihna iwlad ilyoam What do we want of that passed? We are the children of today. When the patient wants to speed up recovery by just taking the medicine, or when a person wants things to be done at once, the listener urges him to be patient, saying شو هي؟ كايته؟ *shu hii? kaynih mashit rasool?* What? Is it a wipe of a messenger? شو عرفك إنها كذبة؟ قال من كبرها؟ *qal suh a’arrafak inha kithbih?* *Qal min kuburha* he said what made you know that it is a lie? He said its size is used to exaggerate the news which leads to suspicion, not believing, and denial.

## CONCLUSION

Language and society are intertwined with each other, as there is no language without society and no society without language. Language is a large container that accommodates human knowledge that contributes to building relationships between individuals and enhances their ability to express, analyze and interact with the life variables that the human beings live at the individual and collective level within their community or in the world in general. The linguistic heritage of the society is an aspect of intangible folklore, as this heritage contributes to strengthening and deepening the various positive values and behaviors to urge people to follow them and criticizing the negative ones in an attempt to urge people to stay away from them. Proverbs are a rich source that contributes to enhancing the individual's ability to support his words and attitudes towards others and the various events that he encounters in the course of his life. As part of the Arab and international societies, Jordanian society is characterized by many linguistic features that overlap and interact with social, cultural, religious, and economic values, which are expressed in different expressions such as singing, riddles, tales, terms, and proverbs. Proverbs in the Jordanian spoken Arabic constitute a wide source of wisdom, direction, and guidance where their linguistic formulas and social goals, and function vary. The present research has deliberately studied a type of these proverbs, that is, the questioning proverbs, by studying two basic aspects of them, namely, the proverb with the question only and the proverb with question and answer. The findings of the study showed the diversity of these proverbs and the multiplicity of their social goals and functions. The study hopes to have provided some knowledge about this sociolinguistic aspect in Jordanian society, with the desire to urge further similar studies on other sociolinguistic aspects.

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