On the Linguistic Encoding of Love, Empathy and the
Divine Being in Palestinian Arabic

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Introduction

In this paper, we argue that the concept of MOTHER constitutes a fundamental component in the human conceptualization of love, empathy, and the Divine being. Some theories of psychology, psychoanalysis, and other disciplines attribute a prominent role for the mother-child relation in the very formation of the human SELF or identity. We present some linguistic evidence from Palestinian Arabic (and Hebrew) to substantiate the claim that the predicate *woman*/*feminine* is a necessary element in individuating the mental space of these concepts. Further linguistic evidence from Palestinian Arabic will be adduced for the lexicalization of the interdependence of the SELF- (significant) OTHER relation. We conclude by drawing some theoretical implications which relate to the proper treatment of proper names and the use of empathy in education (cf. Rogers 1983).

0. Palestinian Arabic manifesting positive affective attitudes

Palestinian Arabic exhibits facts that express positive emotions such as love, affection, intimacy, and empathy. The positive attitudes of love and empathy are realized in vocatives featuring the nominal expression *yamma*/*ma:ma* ("mother!') in initial position, as illustrated in (1).

(1) **Love and empathy realized in vocative construction as *yamma* ("Mother!")**

a. **yamma**, taʕal kul! (**Mother-calling-son situation**)
    mother, come-3ms eat-3ms
    "Mother, come to eat!"/ " يمّه تعال كل!"

b. **yamma**, taʕali kuli (**Son-calling-mother situation**)
    mother, come-3Fs eat-3Fs
    "Mother, come to eat!"/" يمّه تعالي كلي!"

In uttering (1a), the mother expresses total empathy with her son by addressing or calling him by a nominal expression used to refer to herself in the unmarked case, namely *yamma*. We take the sense of empathy (and affectionate feeling) expressed in (1a) to be the spell-out of speaker's identification with the addressee. The same positive attitude seems to be expressed in Hebrew by the nominal expression *ma:mi* ("mother"-vocative), as illustrated in (2).

(2) **Love and empathy realized as _ma:mi_ in Modern Hebrew**

   a. **ma:mi**, bo leʔxol!   (**Woman-calling-man situation**)

   mother, come to eat

   "Mother, come to eat!"/ ״מאמי בוא לאכול!״

   b. **ma:mi**, bo leʔxol!   (**Mother-calling-man situation**)

   mother, come to eat

   "Mother, come to eat!"/ ״ מאמי בואי לאכול! ״

In uttering (2a), a woman expresses total empathy and affectionate love with her boyfriend or beloved man (=addressee) with the complex noun *ma:mi*. Sentence (2b) expresses the same empathy and love when uttered by a mother addressing her son. The linguistic data in (1) and (2) raise the following question: What makes it possible that natural languages such as Arabic and Hebrew encode total identification with the male addressee. We propose (3) as a null hypothesis that accounts for the linguistic facts displayed in (1) and (2).

(3) **The null hypothesis**

The human mind uses the concept MOTHER as a true/authentic expression of empathy, intimacy, and love.

The second piece of evidence for the positive affective attitude comes from the feminization of masculine proper name in Palestinian Arabic, as illustrated in (4). Notice that although the proper name *sammura* in (4c) refers or designates a

male individual in the external world, it shows feminine agreement with the finite verb *ʔakl-at*. It is a common language of Palestinian mothers to feminize proper names when they refer to their little children, just like lovers do when they refer to each other in their "baby- talk" communication.

(4) **Feminine dimunitivization of masculine proper names in Palestinian Arabic**

a.	samir	ʔakal	t-tuffaḥa
	Samir	eat-Pst-3ms	the-apple
b.	Sammur	ʔkal	t-tuffaha
	Samir-Dim	eat-Pst-3ms	the-apple
c.	sammur-**a**	ʔakl-**at**	t-tuffaḥa
	Samir-Dim-F	eat-Pst-3ms	the-apple
d.	ha s-sammur-**a**	ʔakal	t-tuffaḥa
	this the-Samir	eat-Pst-3ms	the-apple

The grammatical feminization of masculine proper names in Palestinian Arabic thus shows that the attribute *feminine* is a basic ingredient in conceptualizing the concept of love, affection, intimacy and empathy.

2. **Expressing love attitude/relation via the first proper name**

If we analyze *yamma* as a special proper name just as the proper name *alla* ("الله"), we can draw the following claim:

(5) An individual *x* enters a love relation/ has a love attitude towards an individual *y* if and only if the former is able to address or call the latter with his or her first proper name.

The idea in (5) embodies the insight that in a romantic love relation, a person feels he or she is born anew, i.e. the new affective state of mind and heart discloses a new world of meaning and new conception of the SELF. We maintain that humans have a unique relation to their first names. This has to do with the fact that the very act of name giving to the born child by

the parents symbolizes a valuable **gift**/meaning to the child. It is given as an act of parents' love. We in fact possess our names (just as we as children possess our mothers!) and it is not unreasonable to give one's **precious** thing (i.e. one's name) to the one he or she loves. Thus, when a mature person is ready to give his/her first name to another (mature) person by addressing or calling another person by that name, he or she conceives the world and his or her identity from that affective attitude. The rebirth of each individual in the love relation makes each receive the other' name.

Further evidence for the conceptual connection between positive/negative affective attitude and proper names comes from the expression of hate/negative attitude towards someone:

(6)   a.   issa   bamḥa   ismak

               Now   erase-PRES-1ps   name-2ms

               "I now erase your name."/"اسّه بمحى اسمك!"

               (Meaning roughly: I now kill you.)

        b.   issa   banass-ik   ismak

               Now   make-forget-2ms   name-2ms

               "I now make you forget your name."/"اسّه بنسّيك اسمك!"

               (Meaning roughly: I now do something very bad to you.)

The intimate relation of people to their names is so fundamental to the point that the ontological distinction between the name and its referent in the case of (6a) is obliterated.

To conclude, the proper name- analysis of *yamma* (or *ma:mi*) necessitates the reconsideration of the proper treatment of the semantics of proper names in natural language. Proper names are ambiguous nominal expressions and do not necessarily refer to a unique individual, as usually assumed, and they are flexible enough to be used from different perspectives.

3. The Palestinian Arabic *mahsu:bak* ("your considered"): A lexical version of the first person singular pronoun

It is a fascinating fact of Palestinian Arabic that the first person reference can be established not only by a ***functional*** strategy, as in (7), but also by a ***lexical*** one as exemplified by (8) and (9).

(7) **ʔana**   zur-it   lundun   w   baris

I-nom   visit-Pst-1ps   London   and   Paris

"I visited London and Paris."

(8) **maḥsu:b-ak**   zar   lundun   w   baris

Considered-you-2ms-gen   visit-Pst-3ms   London   and   Paris

"I visited London and Paris."

(9) **maḥsu:b-t-ak**   zaar-at   lundun   w   baris

Considered-you-2fs-gen   visit-Pst-3Fs   London   and   Paris

"I visited London and Paris."

We present the salient characteristics of *maḥsu:bak* in (10).

(10) a.   It has the semantic interpretation of the first person singular.

b.   First person reference is obtained by using the second person pronoun.

c.   When it occupies a nominative position, the finite verb has the third person singular form.

d.   The semantic import in using the ***lexical*** version of the first person is the empowerment of the value of the speaker. The extension of the speaker's ego includes the addressee(s).

e.   It is more limited in use than the **functional** category *ʔana* ("I") in that one may use it only among people of the same rank socially speaking. (Its salient use is among friends.)

f.   It inflects for gender, in contrast to the ***functional*** status of the first person pronoun.

g.   Syntactically, the lexical complex *maḥsu:bak* with the genitive second person clitic attached to the lexical noun *maḥsu:b* ("considered") triggers third person singular agreement on the finite verb although semantically it refers to the speaker of the sentence.

h.   It is impossible to attach the genitive third person singular clitic *–u* ("-his") or *–ha* ("-her") to the lexical noun *maḥsu:b* ("considered") to refer to the speaker of the utterance of (8) or (9): *maḥsu:b-u* and *maḥsu:b-ha* are ill-formed expressions in Palestinian Arabic. Nor is it possible to have *maḥsu:b-i* ("my considered') as a lexical version of the second person (singular) pronoun.

Given this set of properties, we draw the following theoretical implications:

Some theoretical implications

- Universal Grammar allows the possible existence of a lexical version of the first person singular.
- First and second person pronouns classify together in contrast to the third person.
- The first person singular outranks the referentiality of all other pronouns in natural language, as shown by the lack of a lexical version of the second person (singular) pronoun.
- The translatability of even functional words such as pronouns into other languages such as English is not quite available.

The use of the second person clitic on propositional attitude verbs has the expression of affective *intersubjective* relation and *empathizing* attitude towards the other, as shown in (11).

(11) a. ʔana bafakkir-**lak**   innu   Rashid   mriḍ

         I   think-to you   that   Rashid   sick

      b. ʔana baʕrif-**lak**   innu   rashid   mriḍ

         I   know-to you   that   Rashid   sick

      c.* ʔana baʕrif-**lu**   innu   rashid   mriḍ

         I   know-to him   that   Rashid   sick

We take the presence of the second person singular clitic –*lak* in (11) to encode the recognition of the addressee and the intimacy between the speaker of (11a) and (11b) and the addressee. Moreover, the speaker intends to convey that the thought that the addressee may benefit from his acquaintance with the object of the attitude entertained by the speaker. The ungrammaticality of (11c) is due to the fact that the attached clitic -*lu* on the finite verb is a genitive third person singular.

Further evidence for the use of different pronoun expressing empathy attitude comes from the use of reflexive pronouns, as shown in (12).

(12) **<u>The use of reflexives as an expression of empathy in Arabic</u>**

   a. ḥuṭṭ   ʕalik   kabbut!

       Put-2ms   on-2ms   jacket

       "Put on you a jacket!"

   b. ḥuṭṭ   ʕala   **ḥa:lak**   kabbut!

       Put-2ms   on   self-2ms   jacket

       "Put on you a jacket!"

   c. John loves **himself**

       (The reflexive anaphor *himself* must be referentially dependent on *John*)

   d. John loves **him**

       (The pronoun *him* cannot be referentially dependent on *John*)

The use of the reflexive pronoun *ḥa:lak* instead of the personal pronoun in (12b) shows that the mother expresses affection empathy toward her son.

4. <u>The concept of the divine being in Arabic is related to maternity and womanhood</u>

It is a fascinating fact of Palestinian Arabic that the nominal attributes *ʔal-raḥma:n* and *ʔal-raḥim* are derived from the ethical concept *rḥme* ("mercy or compassion") and the latter is constructed from the nominal root *raḥem* ("womb"), which is inherently ***feminine***. We hypothesize that the proper name *alla* ("الله") is in fact a feminine noun that underwent conversion into masculine by the advent of the Islamic religion or ideology. There is a set of data in Palestinian Arabic that suggest that the concept of mother carries divinity meaning. First, native speakers of Northern Palestinian Arabic utter the complex nouns *yamma:* ("O mother!" and *ya: alla* (Oh God!) in extreme situations of **fear** with non-distinct meaning. Second, native speakers of Northern Palestinian Arabic utter the complex nouns *yamma:* and *ya alla* in **exclamative** sentences with non-distinct meaning:

(13)   *ya alla ma aḥla:-ha*   *yamma: ma aḥlaa-ha*
    O God! How pretty she is!   O mother! How pretty she is!

Third, native speakers of Northern Palestinian Arabic utter the complex nouns *yamma:* ("O mother!" and *ya: alla* ("O God!") in **ecstatic** mode of experience (for example the moment of sexual orgasm) with non-distinct meaning. Finally, native speakers of Northern Palestinian Arabic use the female genitals of the mother and the name of the divine being in **curses**/**swear**s/**oaths** in extreme situations of anger and frustration with non-distinct meaning.

5. Concluding remarks related to education

We would like to conclude this paper with reference to the role of empathy in education. Rogers' (1983) humanistic approach to education includes empathic understanding as the element that establishes a climate for self-initiated experiential learning. When the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then the likelihood of significant learning is increased. Students feel deeply appreciative when they are understood- not evaluated, nor judged, simply understood from their own point of view, not the teacher's. The very act or attitude of the teacher towards his or her students expressed by the Palestinian Arabic expression "*mˁalmi/ mˁalimti*" (my teacher) manifests the authentic mode of caring, trust, and prizing of the student by his or her teacher. It seems to us that conceiving of humans as autonomous whole persons that deserve positive affective attitude is a very fundamental condition to regulate human relation on respect and trust. The Palestinian Arabic Facts invite the perspective in which human relations can be regulated on the basis of "mothering" the other, rather than that of "brothering", as conceived in Islamic ethics.

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