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ASPECTS OF RAPID SPEECH IN NONSTANDARD POOR ENGLISH SPEECH FORMS: A SOCIO-PHONETIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the socio-phonetic features of English rapid speech, focusing on how non-native speakers—like Nadia Murad—manage these features in high-stakes situations like her speech at the White House. Rapid speech usually involves changes like assimilation, elision, and the use of linking and intrusive sounds, which can be difficult for non-native speakers to understand and produce. The paper uses a qualitative methodology and focuses on socio-phonetic analysis to determine how Murad's speech differs from the norms of native speech. Murad's English communication may be less natural and fluid because, according to preliminary findings, her speech shows less phonological blending typical of native speech patterns. This work attempts to improve our knowledge of the way rapid speech affects non-native speakers and tries to provide information on phonetic training that can improve their ability to communicate effectively.

KEYWORDS: Socio-phonetics, Rapid Speech, Assimilation, Elision, Foreign Accent.



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INTRODUCTION

Non-native speakers of English are expected to encounter difficulties in listening to and communicating with native speakers, and that is because of the aspects of rapid speech. Alameen and Levis (2015: 159) also state that words spoken in rapid speech may sound different from those same words when they are uttered in isolation—also called the citation form. Moreover, words when pronounced in context often undergo some modifications by the native speakers, which may include deletions, additions, or changing sounds into other neighbouring ones. It is worth mentioning that these aspects are also known as aspects of connected speech; the term “connected” is used interchangeably with “rapid” in this paper. All languages modify sophisticated sequences in rapid speech in order to simplify the articulation process, but the ways in which these modifications are done differ among languages. Furthermore, most native speakers of a language are completely unaware of such simplification processes (Collins and Mees, 2013: 120). Therefore, many non-native speakers miss a lot of details in communication which prevents them from interacting well with native speakers. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following questions: (i) what are the aspects of rapid speech of English? (ii) What are the main errors committed by non-native speakers of English in rapid speech? With the aim of identifying the aspects of rapid speech in English and finding out the ways in which these aspects work in English, it is hypothesised that aspects of elision and linking are the most common ones. Depending on the literature in this field, a review of the aspects of rapid speech in English is made. In addition, this paper attempts to study the aspects of rapid speech found in Nadia Murad’s speech in the White House socio-phonetically.

This study illustrates the aspects of rapid speech in English that are significant in determining language users’ competence in understanding and using English correctly. Realising such aspects helps learners deal with language in a

better way, as well as improve their listening and speaking skills. This study is limited to Nadia Murad’s (an Iraqi Nobel Prize winner) speech in the White House during the Donald Trump meeting with the survivors of religious persecution on July 17, 2019.

2. Socio-phonetics

Socio-phonetics is a recently emerged discipline within the field of sociolinguistics. Deshaies-Lafontaine (1974) initially employed the term “socio-phonetic” in a dissertation on the variability of Canadian French, as stated by Hardcastle et al. (2010). This research was conducted within the emerging field of Labovian, or variationist, sociolinguistics. However, previous studies have collectively offered valuable knowledge in the fields of phonetics and sociolinguistics. Labov’s (1966) study on stratified New York English, which is widely recognised in the field of sociolinguistics and socio-phonetics, was preceded by Ladefoged and Broadbent’s (1957) observation that a speaker’s regional origin can accurately predict both their speech production and perception. Socio-phonetics is the term used to describe research in variationist sociolinguistics that focuses on phonetics. It examines the relationships between social factors such as speaking style, speaker background, and group membership issues, as well as the phonetic and phonological aspects of language.

The study of socio-phonetics has advanced our knowledge in a variety of fields related to the interface between language and society. For instance, Strand (1999) demonstrated how listeners’ expectations regarding a speaker’s purely social characteristics can affect phonological categorization by using a synthetic /s/ to /ʃ/ continuum paired with both female and male faces. The study found that category boundaries varied between male and female speakers, with women’s boundaries occurring at higher frequencies and men’s at lower frequencies. This could be expected since men typically produce fricatives at lower frequencies

than women. Research on how people perceive speech has provided insight into how well listeners can recognise changes in sound as they occur. They claimed to have discovered an apparent—but nonexistent—vowel merger there that Utah English speaker had trouble identifying. Research on speech perception has also provided evidence that the speech signal itself, as well as physical characteristics such as sex and age, may influence listeners' assessments of the speaker's personality (Giles & Powesland, 1975).

In addition to its potential advantages in phonetics and sociolinguistics research, sociophonetics can also provide insights into pedagogical concerns such as the utilisation of African American English in educational settings and the capacity of automated speech recognition systems to accommodate natural variation, among other domains. In addition, Foulkes et al. (2010) have found that sociophonetics research has provided valuable insights for making modifications to the phonological framework.

3. Rapid Speech

To begin with, Roach (2009: 107) states that scientists, many years ago, have tried a lot to develop machines that can produce speech of “pre-recorded” words. Such machines are very useful for only limited messages objects such as talking clocks. For other purposes, it turned out to be useless because the speech was so unnatural and lack fluency of humans' rapid speech. Humans' normal way of speaking differs a lot from a mechanical speech, as native speakers of a language do not produce words in isolation as machines do.

According to Crystal (1995: 247), “vowels and consonant segments combine into syllables; syllables combine into words; and words combine into phrases and sentences.” The process of producing rapid speech affects the pronunciation of many of these segments in a number of different ways. Some segments tend to run together; some segments may be added to ensure the flow of speech; and some may totally disappear. Alameen and Levis (2015: 160) say that the form of words spoken in isolation

are delivered slowly in a careful style. Whereas “connected speech forms often undergo a variety of modifications that cannot always be predicted by applying phonological rules.”

Richards and Schmidt (2010: 117) refer to rapid speech as a continuous sequence of spoken language, as opposed to words or sounds produced in isolation. Cruttenden (2014: 239) says that “Speech is an ever-changing continuum of qualities”, and he adds that the written form of English completely differs from the spoken one of it, while writing shows a sequence of discrete linguistics units; these units are combined in rapid speech without any pauses.

Underhill (2005: 58) mentions that rapid speech is not only a string of individual words, but it also consists of a flow of sounds which are simplified by the process of connecting and modifying certain phonemes. These connections and modifications are systematic and include many aspects such as assimilation, elision, linking and intrusive sounds.

3.1 Aspects of Rapid Speech

In this section, it will be dealt with some important aspects that influence and modify the complex process of rapid speech. These aspects are considered by many as deviations from the normal phonological rules, though they are systematic.

3.1.1 Assimilation

Richards and Schmidt (2010:36) define assimilation as a phonological process that occurs when a speech sound changes its quality due to the influence of a neighbouring sound, it becomes more like or even identical to the neighbouring sound. Roach (2009:110) says that the process of assimilation does not occur when a word is pronounced in isolation, while it is more likely occurs in rapid, casual speech. In rapid speech, a phoneme is realized differently as a result of being near some other phoneme that belongs to an adjacent word.

Several types of assimilation can be recognized. Crystal (2008: 40) states that when a final sound becomes more like the following sound, then this type of assimilation is called regressive:

(1) “ten bikes” is pronounced as /tem baɪks/.

When an initial sound changes due to the

influence of a preceding sound, then this type is called progressive—which is less common:

(2) “lunch score” articulated with the s-becoming /ʃ/, under the influence of the preceding -ch.

A third type is called coalescent assimilation, this type occurs when there is a fusion of the sounds upon each other, as when a final /t/ or /d/, and an initial /j/ following combine to form /tʃ/ or /dʒ/, e.g.:

(3) “don’t you” is pronounced as /dəʊntʃu/.

Furthermore, Underhill (2005: 60) describes some cases in which assimilation occurs. For words that end with alveolar consonants (/t/, /d/, and /n/) and followed by a word that starts with (/p/, /b/, and /m/), these consonants assimilate to the place of articulation of the consonant at the beginning of the next word, hence they become bilabial as in:

(4) “in bed” is pronounced as /ɪm bed/.

(5) “good boy” is pronounced as /gʊd bɔɪ/.

/s/ becomes /ʃ/, and /z/ becomes /ʒ/ when these sounds are followed by words that starts with /ʃ/:

(6) “this shop” can be heard as /ðɪʃ ʃɒp/, and ‘these shops’ as /ði:ʒ ʃɒps/.

Due to some reasons voicing may change too. For an instance, /v/ becomes an unvoiced /f/ under the influence of the following unvoiced /t/:

(7) “have to go” is pronounced as /hæf tə gəʊ/.

3.1.2 Elision

Another aspect of rapid speech is the process of elision. It occurs in casual, rapid speech especially at or in the word boundaries (Cruttenden, 2014: 315). Collins and Mees (2013: 123) say that this process involves a deletion of a phoneme, thus the phoneme is said to be elided. While Roach (2009: 113) defines elision as a process in which a phoneme has zero realization or be omitted.

Underhill (2005: 61-62) demonstrates that elision does not occur in a word spoken in isolation. Most non-native speakers often do not elide, that is why their articulation may sound like mechanical rather than natural and casual one. To be aware of such process, is very helpful for learners to enable them to listen and comprehend correctly to native speakers. For the most part /t/ and /d/ are elided in English,

especially when they are in a middle of two consonants:

(8) “next please” /neks pli:z/.

(9) “I don’t know” /aɪ dəʊ nəʊ/.

(10) “old man” /əʊl mæn/.

(11) “you and me” /ju: ən mi:/.

Alameen and Levis (2015: 162) state that “some types of contractions are included in the category, mainly where one or more sounds are deleted in a contraction (e.g., cannot becomes can’t).” Another case is the loss of final v in ‘of’ before consonants, e.g. lots of them /lɒts ə ðəm/ (Roach, 2009: 114).

3.1.3 Linking and Intrusive Sounds

The term linking has been used in two different ways. It can refer to rapid speech phenomenon in general because all human beings link words forming units larger than the single word where word boundaries seem to disappear. The other definition is more specific, it is what happens to sounds at word boundaries in one thought group when two words are joined by connecting the last sound of one word to the first sound of the following word (Alameen, 2007: 7-8).

Underhill (2005: 65) says that linking refers to the smooth joining together of words in rapid speech. Of course, two words can have a silence between them, but linking is concerned with the way sounds are fused together at word boundaries. According to Crystal (1995: 247), linking is a sound which may be introduced between words or syllables to help them run together more smoothly. The chief example of this in English is the pronunciation of word-final /r/ in RP (and other non-rhotic accents). Received Pronunciation speakers pronounce the /r/ in such words as clear and mother only when there is a following vowel:

we find (12) /klɪə/ in clear question, but (13) /klɪər/ in clear answer. This is usually called linking r.

3.1.3.1 Linking /r/

In real rapid speech, however, we link words together in a number of ways. The most familiar case is the use of linking r, the phoneme r does not occur in syllable-final position in the BBC accent, but when the spelling of a word suggests a final r, and a word beginning with a vowel follows, the usual pronunciation is to pronounce

with r (Roach, 2009: 115).

For example:

(14) “here” hɪə but ‘here are’ hɪər ə

(15) “four” fɔː but ‘four eggs’ fɔːr egz

McCully (2009: 174) states that /r/ is known as linking r, since one of its functions is precisely to link a syllable-final vowel with the vowel of a following syllable (in a different word). Therefore, the appearance of /r/ can be seen as an aspect of rapid speech. Another examples of linking r by Kelly (2000: 111):

(16) “Her English is excellent.” (/r/ is pronounced)

(17) “Her German is absolutely awful, though!” (/r/ is not pronounced)

(18) “My brother lives in London.” (/r/ is not pronounced)

(19) “My brother always phones at the wrong time.” (/r/ is pronounced)

3.1.3.2 Intrusive /r/

Richards and Schmidt (2010: 301) state that intrusion occurs when an extra consonant is added at the end of a word to link it to a following word starting with a vowel. In English, an intrusive r is often added, especially before and. For example: (20) “China and Japan” /tʃaɪnər ən dʒəpæn/

(21) “Lena and Sue” /liːnər ən suː/

3.1.3.3 Intrusive /j/

When a word ends in /iː/, or a diphthong which finishes with with /ɪ/, speakers often introduce a

/j/ to ease the transition to a following vowel sound. This is because /iː/ and /ɪ/ form the starting point for the semi-vowel /j/. (Kelly, 2000: 111):

(22) “I agree, wholeheartedly.” /aɪ j əgriː/

(23) “She always takes my arm.” /ʃiː j ɔːlweɪz/

3.1.3.4 Intrusive /w/
When a word ends in /uː/, or a diphthong which finishes with /ʊ/, speakers often introduce a /w/ to ease the transition to a following vowel sound (ibid):

(24) “Go on! Go in!” /gəʊwɒn/ /gəʊwɪn/. This is because /uː/ and /ʊ/ have lip rounding and form the starting point for the bilabial semi-vowel /w/.

3. Methodology

This study conducts a qualitative method of analysis, concerned with the aspects of rapid speech found in the selected data. This method of analysis focuses on the descriptive results of the collected data. The model of this study is an eclectic one, which is based on literature related to socio-phonetic approach to the aspects of rapid speech, namely, assimilation, elision, and linking and intrusive sounds, as illustrated in Fig. (1). This model involves comparing the phonological process of standard and nonstandard English, particularly in rapid speech. It attempts to examine how nonstandard variations of English, like Murad’s one, diverge from the standard phonological expectations in rapid speech contexts.

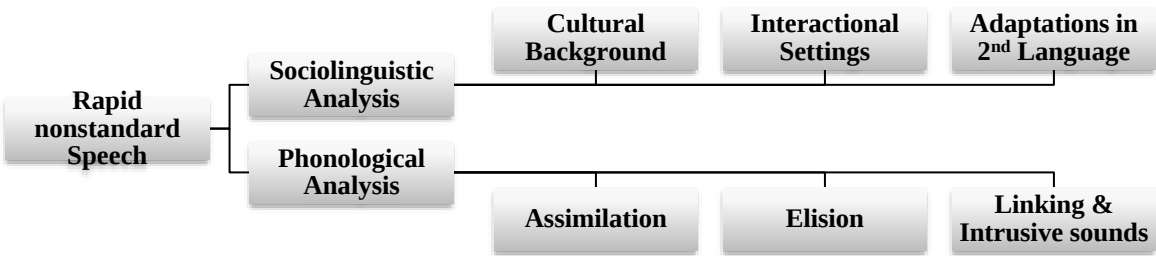


Figure 1 The Eclectic Model of the Study

4. Data Analysis

The subsequent excerpts are taken from a speech that Nadia Murad delivered in the White House on July 17, 2019, in front of Donald Trump. The speech took place during a meeting with

individuals who suffered religious persecution.

Text (1)

I’m from Iraq and I cannot see my family.

The connections between the components of the model and Nadia's speech are analysed. Her

cultural background, the possible formality of the interactional setting, and the phonological features she uses or does not use all combine to create a speech style that may differ from native speaker norms, particularly in casual settings. Even if this difference might make her speech more formal and clearer, it might also somewhat disrupt the natural flow and the listeners' sense of spontaneity.

(a) Phonological Analysis:

1. Assimilation: This process is not clearly visible in the extract. Individual words are pronounced clearly, with no significant sound changes caused by the influence of neighbouring sounds.

2. Elision: The speaker, Nadia, chooses not to use elision, which is common in spoken English. In both formal and informal English, "cannot" is frequently shortened to "can't." The lack of this contraction in Nadia's speech may affect the fluidity and naturalness perceived by native listeners, as elision is a characteristic feature of relaxed and spontaneous speech. Her use of the full form "cannot" suggests a more deliberate and possibly formal approach to speech, which may not be entirely consistent with native English speakers' casual conversational norms.

3. Linking /r/ and Intrusive Sounds: There are no instances of linking /r/ or intrusive sounds in this extract. The sentence structure and word choices are not conducive to these phonological features.

(b) Sociolinguistic Analysis

1. Cultural Background of the Speaker: As an Iraqi English speaker, Nadia's speech patterns may be influenced by her first language, including pronunciation and grammatical construction choices, such as using "cannot" instead of "can't." This choice may reflect linguistic interference, with the more formal construction preferred, possibly due to formal parallels in her native language structures.

2. Interactional Settings: The formality of Nadia's language ("cannot" instead of "can't") indicates a formal setting or an intention to convey seriousness and clarity. This is frequently observed in second language speakers who are concerned about being understood correctly in

important communicative situations.

3. Adaptations in Second Language: Nadia's use of "cannot" rather than "can't" may also indicate a divergence from the colloquial speech patterns common among native English speakers. This difference could be due to a conscious decision to use formal speech, reflecting either personal preference or a less internalised command of informal English norms. It could also be a defensive adaptation strategy, attempting to avoid errors in less common informal speech patterns.

Text (2)

After 2003, we started to disappear from our area, from our homeland.

Nadia Murad pronounces the linking /r/ in "disappear from" differently than most English speakers because of her Iraqi Arabic background. This implies that, shaped by her native phonetic rules as well as reinforced by the formal character of her speaking engagements, in which she may value clarity over adherence to English phonological subtleties, her adaptation of second language phonology is divergent rather than converging.

(a) Phonological analysis:

1. Linking /r/ and intrusive sounds: In Standard British English, the linking /r/ occurs when a word ending in /r/ is followed by a word beginning with a vowel sound, which allows for a smooth transition between words. While "disappear" ends with /r/, the following word "from" begins with a consonant. Standard phonetic practice would not anticipate a linking /r/ here. However, Nadia's pronunciation includes a pronounced /r/ at the end of "disappear" before the word "from," which is unusual in this phonetic context. This could reflect her non-native speaker status as well as her phonetic environment in Iraqi Arabic, where phonetic linking may be less strictly regulated by the phonetic context of the words that follow.

(b) Sociolinguistic analysis:

1. The Cultural Background of the Speaker: Nadia Murad, being from Iraq, may be influenced by the phonological norms of her native language, Iraqi Arabic. Arabic phonology does not follow the same /r/ linking rules as English, which can result in the transfer of L1

phonetic habits into L2 English pronunciation.

2. **Interactional Settings:** Given the serious nature of the subject and her previous public speaking engagements, the context of her speech is most likely formal. This setting may influence her speech to be more careful or deliberate, but the influence of her L1 phonetic habits remains clear.

3. **Adaptations in the Second Language: Divergence:** As previously stated, instead of conforming to native-like English pronunciation patterns, Nadia's speech diverges by retaining characteristics typical of Iraqi Arabic phonology. This divergence is exemplified by her pronunciation of the linking /r/, which is not typically expected in English.

Text (3)

We come to here, we go to Europe, we go to Arab country that ISIS did this.

(a) phonological analysis:

1. **Linking /r/ and Intrusive Sounds:** Nadia's speech does not include an intrusive /w/ in the transition from "go to Arab." The lack of this linking phoneme, which could provide fluidity in native-like speech, results in more segmented and potentially perceived mechanical delivery.

(b) Sociolinguistic Analysis.

1. **The Cultural Background of the Speaker:** Nadia's phonetic characteristics, such as the lack of certain linking sounds found in English but not in Arabic, reflect her cultural and linguistic background. Arabic does not typically use linking or intrusive sounds like English, which influences her second language phonological processes.

2. **Interactional Settings:** In formal settings, speakers frequently try to stick to standard language structures. Nadia's avoidance of contractions or linking sounds may reflect an attempt to use what she perceives as a more 'correct' or formal version of English, albeit with a more stilted delivery.

3. **Adaptations in a Second Language:** Nadia's speech differs from native English speech patterns, especially in the use of linking and intrusive sounds. This difference can be attributed to her phonological transfer from her native language (Arabic), which lacks these characteristics, affecting her fluency and listener perception in English.

Text (4)

If I cannot go to my home and live in a safe place and get my — like, my dignity back, this is not about ISIS, it's about (inaudible).

(a) Phonological Analysis:

1. **Assimilation:** The speech segment "get my dignity" demonstrates a lack of phonological assimilation, which is typical of native English speech. Assimilation is the process by which consonants change where or how they are articulated when they are adjacent to other consonants. In this case, Nadia articulates each consonant clearly and without modification, indicating a more segmented and less fluid speech production. This can be attributed to her background as a non-native speaker, as phonetic elements from her first language are likely to influence her English pronunciation.

(b) Sociolinguistic analysis:

1. **The Cultural Background of the Speaker:** Nadia's speech patterns are heavily influenced by her Iraqi cultural background. The phonological features observed, such as the lack of assimilation, can be interpreted as a reflection of the phonetic characteristics of her first language, where such phonological processes may be less common or differ from those found in English.

2. **Interactional settings:** Given the likely formal context, Nadia's speech appears to be focused on clarity and correctness. This formal setting could explain her precise articulation, which avoids the typical informal reductions or assimilations seen in casual English speech.

3. **Adaptations in second language:** Nadia's pronunciation differs from typical native speaker patterns, reflecting her status as a non-native speaker and her unique path to learning English. Her speech exemplifies a common second language acquisition scenario in which transfer from the first language and a desire for clarity in formal settings influence pronunciation.

4. Results and Discussion

This study adopts a socio-phonetic approach to qualitatively analyse rapid speech. This approach enabled a comprehensive investigation into the phonological processes and sociolinguistic

contexts surrounding Nadia Murad's English speech. The study employs an eclectic model to gain valuable insights into the deviations of nonstandard variations of English, specifically Murad's speech, from the phonological norms observed in native speech patterns. An examination of several speech excerpts indicated a deficiency in assimilation, elision, and intrusive sounds. Murad demonstrated precise articulation by spelling out each word clearly in phrases such as "get my dignity" and "cannot go to my home," thereby avoiding phonological modifications like assimilation, where adjacent consonants affect each other's pronunciation. Given Murad's non-native speaker status, it was anticipated that this pattern would occur, as non-native speakers often do not possess the phonological processes that are present in native English. In addition, the absence of elision in circumstances where native speakers typically employ contractions (such as using "cannot" instead of "can't") suggests a purposeful and potentially formal manner in her speech. Decisions like these, certainly, affect how speech is perceived in terms of its smoothness and authenticity, as native speakers often omit sounds in casual and spontaneous conversation. A sociolinguistic analysis reveals that Murad's Iraqi cultural background significantly shapes her speech patterns. The absence of assimilation and elision can be understood as linguistic interference stemming from her native language, which does not employ these phonological processes to the same extent as English. Her speaking settings, such as delivering a speech in front of a political figure and other formal public speaking engagements, are likely to promote a more careful and straightforward style of speech. Her preference for using complete word forms and avoiding informal speech patterns demonstrates her commitment to maintaining formality. This approach may serve as a tactic to ensure clarity and accuracy when communicating in a second language. Murad's strategies for adapting to her second language differ from native speaker norms, rather than aligning with them. This divergence is characterised by the preservation of phonological attributes from her initial language

and a noticeable inclination towards formal speech patterns. These attributes are likely to enhance both the effectiveness of communication and personal comfort in formal interactions.

5. Conclusions

The study of socio-phonetics and fast speech has made significant progress in understanding the complex relationship between linguistic characteristics and social settings. Sociophonetics has shown that social characteristics, such as the speaker's background and group membership, have a significant impact on the phonetic and phonological aspects of language. Groundbreaking research, such as that conducted by Labov and Strand, has highlighted the impact of social factors on linguistic variables. For instance, their research has uncovered the impact of gender on the perception of phonetic categorization. The study of language variation and its social significance not only broadens our understanding, but also has practical applications in areas such as education and speech recognition technology. Similarly, studying fast speech provides valuable insights into the dynamic properties of spoken language, revealing how phonetic components like assimilation, elision, and intrusive sounds contribute to the smoothness of fast, connected speech. Acquiring this comprehension is critical for both fluent speakers and those learning the language, as well as for professionals in linguistics and speech therapy who work to improve communication skills and promote inclusivity in language usage. In conclusion, these linguistic investigations improve our understanding of language as a social instrument and highlight the importance of combining linguistic research with practical implementations to address real-world needs, thereby increasing the relevance of linguistic studies in the modern era.

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 18. Appendix
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 20. MS. MURAD: I'm from Iraq and I cannot see my family. They are in (inaudible), because when ISIS attack us, no one protect us. After 2003, we started to disappear from our area, from our homeland. And then when ISIS attack us in 2014, they killed six of my brother. They killed my mom. They took me to captivity with my (inaudible) sister-in-law, with all my sister and my nieces.
 21. And today we have 3,000 Yazidi women and children in captivity. So although they said ISIS is defeated, but where is those 3,000 Yazidi?
 22. And our home is destroyed. We come to here, we go to Europe, we go to Arab country that ISIS did this. Everyone saw that. And we — I appreciate Vice —
 23. MS. MURAD: Yes. Vice President — he help us a lot, but now today, you can't solve our problem. Now there is no ISIS, but we cannot go back because Kurdish government and the Iraqi government, they are fighting each other who will control my area.
 24. And we cannot go back, if we cannot protect our dignity, our family. But we get a lot of support from President Macron. He push — he put a lot of pressure in Iraqi and Kurdistan government to help minorities. The Yazidis will stay in their home, but we still continue

to emigrate to find a safe place to live. I hope you can call or anything to Iraqi and Kurdistan government to —

25. MS. MURAD: But, if I can —

26. MS. MURAD: And Iraqi. Iraqi government. If I cannot go to my home and live in a safe place and get my — like, my dignity back, this is not about ISIS, it's about (inaudible). My

people cannot go back. We are not million of people; we are only half million people. And after 2014, about 95 years — 95,000 years, Yazidi, they immigrate to Germany through a very dangerous way. Not because we want to be a refugee, but we cannot find a safe place to live. All this happened to me. They killed my mom, my six brother. They left behind —