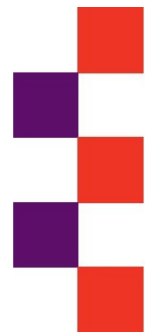# Dialect contact and change in an Arabic morpheme: The feminine ending in Jordan and Palestine

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Arabic feminine ending

- **Feminine ending**: In Arabic dialects, there is a suffix that denotes feminine grammatical gender in many nouns and most adjectives
  - Unbound state: V#
  - Construct state: Vt
  - **We are only concerned with the *unbound* state**
- The vowel quality is either *a*-type or *e*-type (incl. [i])
- In Modern Standard Arabic it is always read from written form as [a]

Some history

- **Proto-Central Semitic and Proto-Semitic** had *at / *t allomorphy (Huehnergard 2017)
  - Arabic levelled out *-t in favor of –at
  - Some Central Semitic languages (e.g., Arabic, Hebrew) *-at > -ā (unbound nominals)
- In Old Arabic (e.g., Safaitic, Nabatean):
  - /ah/ as a suffix alternates with /at/ in the unbound (non-construct) state (Al-Jallad 2015, 2017)
  - Al-Jallad argues that the loss of /t/ in the unbound state may have reflected an isogloss separating North Arabian nomad varieties from the sedentary dialects of Horan, Edom, Petra, Nagab
- **The quality of the vowel is therefore reconstructed as /a/**

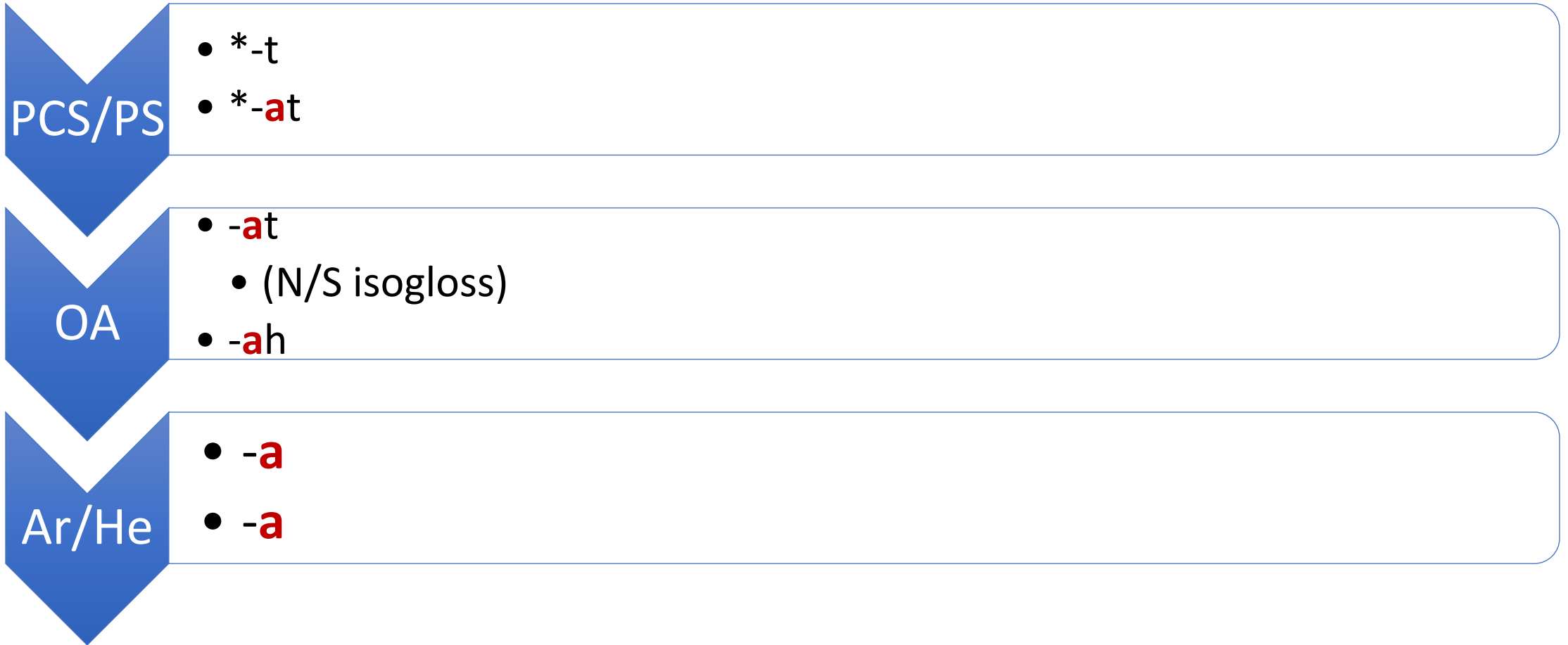# Some history

PCS/PS
- *-t
- *-at

OA
- -at
  - (N/S isogloss)
- -ah

Ar/He
- -a
- -a

Some history

PCS/PS
- *-t
- *-**a**t

OA
- -**a**t
  - (N/S isogloss)
- -**a**h

Ar/He
- -**a**
- -**a**

Range of variation in contemporary Arabic dialects

- The range can be represented along a continuum
  - Dialects that always realize the ending as a low vowel (e.g., North African, incl. Cairo[!])
  - Dialects that always realize it as a non-low vowel (e.g., Mesopotamian, eastern Peninsular dialects)
  - *In between*: Dialects that raise *or* lower *conditionally*.

  - **Jordanian and Horani:** default **+low** with conditional raising
  - **Palestinian:** default **–low** with conditional lowering

Range of variation in contemporary Arabic dialects

Unconditional /a/ (N. Africa) — *Conditional* /a/ or /e/ (Levant) — Unconditional /e/ (E. Ar. Pen.)
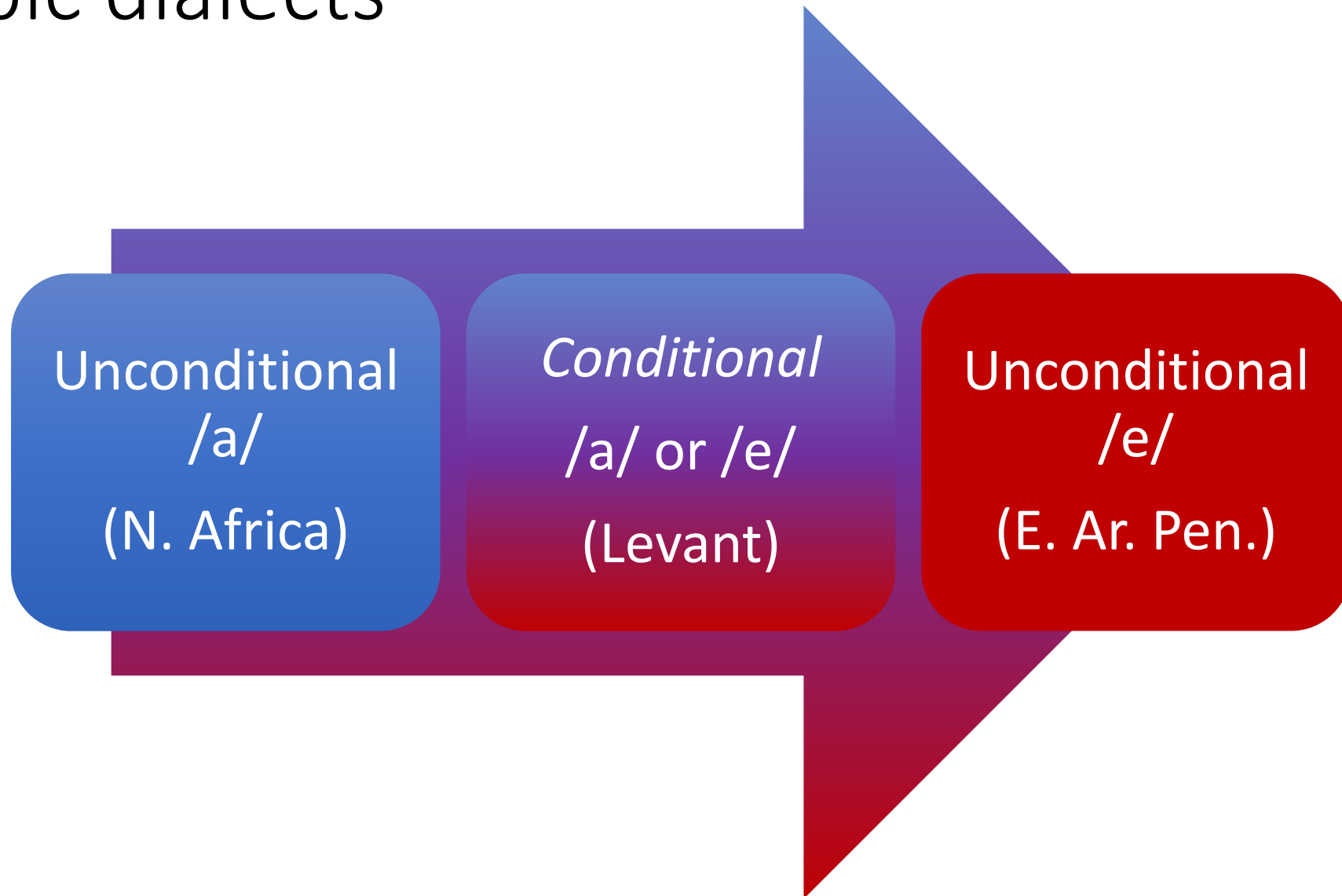
Dialects that raise/lower conditionally

- Focus on Levantine dialects: Jordan and Urban Palestine
- Palestinian is phonologically identical to the Levantine koine

- Two cases of contact: different types of contact (new dialect formation in Amman; forced migration in Gaza)
- Two cases of dialect change (Ḥāyil; Ḥasa – both in the Arabian Peninsula)

Amman, Jordan

- Contact between Jordanian & Palestinian → new dialect formation

- **Input varieties:**
- Jordanian dialects and Urban Palestinian dialects differ in the phonology and phonetics of the feminine ending.
    - Jordanian dialects use /a/ in all environments except after coronal sounds: a half open [ɛ] ([a] is the default variant)
    - Urban Palestinian: the feminine ending is realized as [e]/[ɪ] except after velarized, emphatic and pharyngeal sounds where [a] is used ([e] is the default variant)

Jordanian raising

Coronal	*maǧnūn-e*	'crazy'
Labial (front)	*ǧēb-e*	'pocket'
Labial (back)	*magsūm-a*	'divided'
Post-velar	*barak-a*	'God's benediction'
Velarized	*mabṣūṭ-a*	'happy'
r (in environment of *i*)	*kbīr-e*	'large'
r (elsewhere)	*mar-a*	'woman'
w (in environment of *i*)	*ḥilw-a, kilw-a*	'pretty,' 'kidney'
w (elsewhere)	*gahw-a*	'coffee'

Palestinian raising

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Amman, Jordan

- **Output varieties:**
- "Fudged" form (Trudgill 1986) – Palestinian phonology with Jordanian phonetics:
- /e/ everywhere except after velarized, emphatic, pharyngeals; /e/ is realized as [ɛ]

3rd generation Ammanis

Age	Sex	% [ẹ]	N
12	M	50%	32
13	M	49%	33
12	M	34%	26
16	M	20%	35
17	F	5%	47
20	F	5%	60

% [ẹ] among Ammanis of Palestinian heritage
(Al-Wer 2002: 72)

Amman, Jordan

- **Explanation**:
    1. Regional koineization (incl. Palestine, Syria, Lebanon)
    2. Markedness of raised /a/ for Jordanians
        - Not just for (AH): *mbēreḥ < mbāreḥ,* 'yesterday,' *sēʿa < sāʿ-a* 'hour, clock'
        - Even *ʾimm < ʾumm* 'mother,' *kibb < kubb* 'throw (IMP)'

Palestine

- Gaza & Jaffa
  - Gaza is the only city dialect in the Levant that traditionally aligns with Cairo (AH)
  - In other features, it is clearly a Levantine dialect

  - Jaffa maintains Palestinian pattern for (AH)
    - Also confirmed in our data from Nazareth, Umm Al-Fahm, Kufur Yasif
    - [e] is default; lowered after velarized, pharyngeal, emphatic, post-velar

  - In the aftermath of 1948, refugees from around Palestine have been forcefully relocated to Gaza, creating a contact situation which differs from the Jordanian one (Palestinian-Palestinian)
  - Palestinians in Gaza have been isolated from the rest of the Arab World

Palestine

- **Input varieties:**
- Jaffa is similar to the Palestinian input in Amman
- Traditional Gaza dialect is on the periphery of the Levantine continuum

- This had not been a sociolinguistic variable in either of the two traditional dialects
- Variation in the Gaza dialect, among speakers of a Jaffa refugee background, is clearly a result of this situation of contact in isolation

Dialect Background	Total Tokens	% [e]	Log Odds
Jaffa	416	30% (N=123)	0.821
Gaza	694	7% (N=51)	-0.821

Rbrul results for [e] realization for feminine ending (ah) by dialect background

(R^2= 0.204 p= 0.000)

%[e] in phonologically raising environments
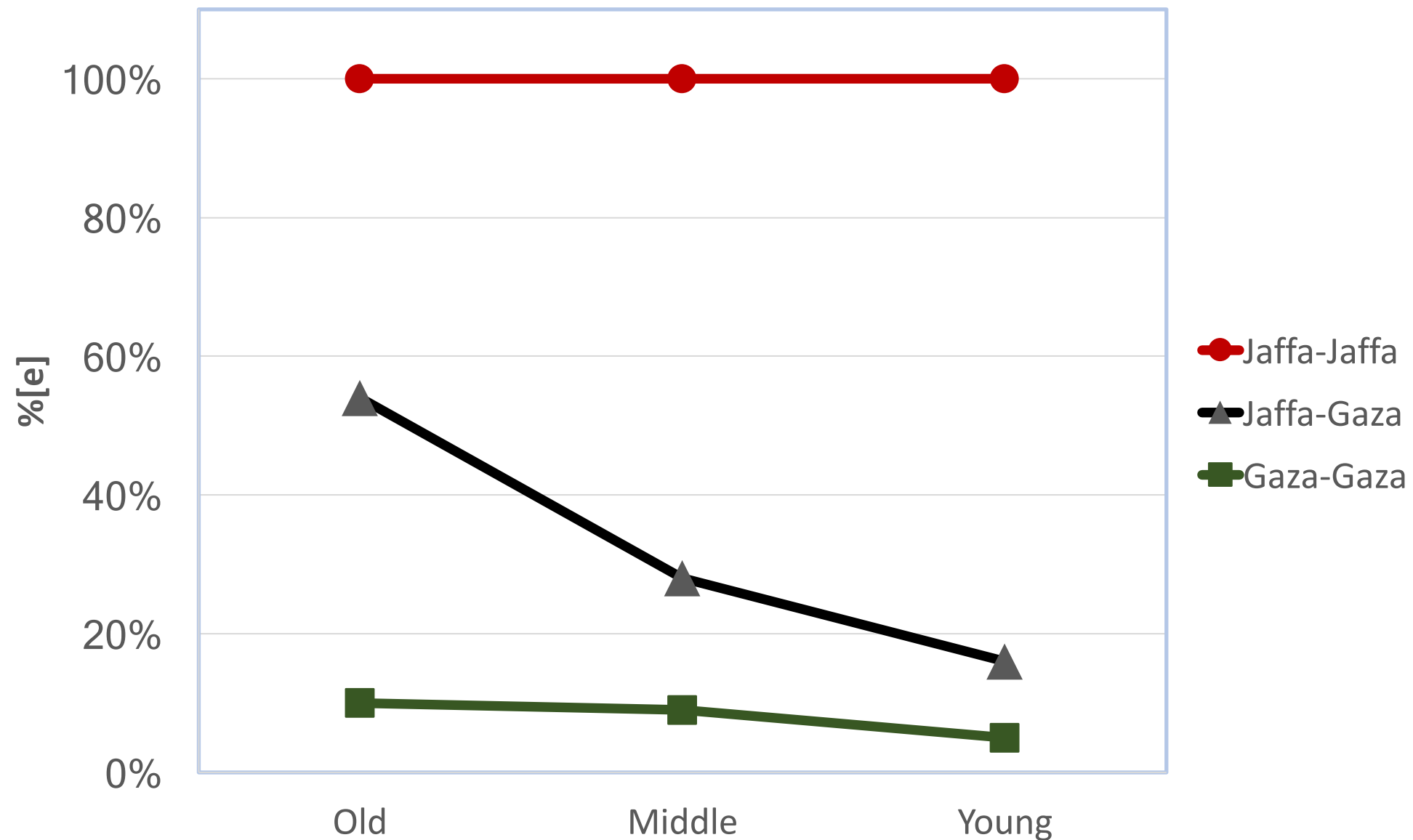
Peninsular dialects

- Ḥāyil & Ḥasa
  - Same feature found to be variable & undergoing change
  - While the trajectory of change in both communities is similar, they vary in the layering of the linguistic constraints
  - Each of these cases was analyzed in relation to internal (linguistic) and social (e.g., contact, sect) factors

Ḥāyil
(Al-Ammar, forthcoming 2017)

- Youngest age groups favor (FW 0.87) → change in progress
- Women favor (FW 0.55); men disfavor (FW 0.45)
- High contact group favor (FW 0.87); low contact disfavor (FW 0.17)
- [a] favored after /j/ (FW 0.60); disfavored following emphatics (FW 0.43)

Ḥasa
(Al-Bohnayya, forthcoming)

- Bi-sectarian community (Sunni & Shi'ite)

- For some environments (emphatic & velar), the change e>a is complete

- Among other environments: [a] is (variably) favored by pharyngeal (FW 0.85) & labial (FW 0.56)

- Socially, [a] is favored by women (FW 0.57), Shi'ite (FW 0.61) and… younger speakers (FW 0.64) → change in progress

Final observations

- All four cases involve contact, of different types:
  - Amman: Formation of a new community with a new dialect (input varieties vary subtly)
  - Gaza: Displaced group within same broad ethnic community (host dialect is exceptional in a small number of features)
  - Different trajectory in two Peninsular varieties – motivated by social factors (linguistic factors playing a role in determining the structure of the progression)

Final observations

- Not all linguistic changes are intuitive
- In fact, it may be the case the counterintuitive changes are more frequent
- If indeed counterintuitive changes are the norm, then we *must* conclude that change is primarily motivated by social factors.

And thanks to Jonathan Owens for helping us articulate what we knew but didn't know we knew

Conclusions

- Koineization?
  - "Meillet [1975] suggested that it was easier to define the structure of a koine by what is was not (the dialectal features it lacked) than by what it was" (Tuten 2003)
  - In Arabic, it would be odd to say that the output varieties lack dialectal features
  - Even the input is dialectal
  - However, the outcomes comprise a mixture of dialect-*specific* features and *supralocal* features

Conclusions

- "In koineization, speakers of different dialectal origin come together, leaving behind their communities and established social networks. In this context, many features of their speech lose their functionality" (Tuten 2003: 53)

- "There exists long-standing confusion between the terms koine and standard and a tendency to conflate or integrate the processes of koineization and standardization" (Tuten 2003: 84)

- "Socially, the process of standardization begins with the *selection* of a dialect to serve as the base of the standard" (Tuten 2003: 84, based on Haugen (1966)

Conclusions

- When we talk about a vernacular standard in Arabic, we do not mean what's known as Modern Standard Arabic, but rather a widely used dialect, representative of a large region or major city(ies), e.g., Hijaz, Beirut, Casablanca.

- "Although the primary dialects lack written grammars and are generally considered to be nonstandard, where they belong to important urban centers, such as Athens or Cairo, they represent a sort of urban standard variety that has prestige and that those outside of such centers must learn for purposes of communication and assimilation" (Haeri 2000: 68, discussing Ferguson 1996)

Conclusions

- "Simplification will occur in sociolinguistic contact situations only to the extent that untutored, especially short-term, *adult* second language learning occurs, and not only occurs, but dominates" (Trudgill 2011: 40)

- "Contact leading to complexification will also be of a particular but different type. We can expect to see additive complexity developing in long-term, co-territorial contact situation which involve childhood—and therefore pre-threshold and proficient—bilingualism" … It is this kind of situation which gives rise to the phenomenon of the Sprachbund. 'Strong linguistic areas are typically characterised by large numbers of small linguistic communities *on good social terms*. Their members are in frequent contact and often become bilingual' (Mithun 1999:314)" (Trudgill 2011:42)

- "It is not the case, however, that contact in the history of Arabic has led *only* to simplification. As the hypothesis outlined above would lead us to expect, in other types of sociolinguistic situation complexification has taken place [e.g., Maltese]" (Trudgill 2011:46)