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
- *-at

OA
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Ar/He
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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 (Ĥāyil; 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coronal</td>
<td>mağnūn-e</td>
<td>‘crazy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labial (front)</td>
<td>ġēb-e</td>
<td>‘pocket’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labial (back)</td>
<td>magsūm-a</td>
<td>‘divided’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-velar</td>
<td>barak-a</td>
<td>‘God’s benediction’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velarized</td>
<td>mabṣūṭ-a</td>
<td>‘happy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r$ (in environment of $i$)</td>
<td>kbīr-e</td>
<td>‘large’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r$ (elsewhere)</td>
<td>mar-a</td>
<td>‘woman’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$w$ (in environment of $i$)</td>
<td>ḥilw-a, kilw-a</td>
<td>‘pretty,’ ‘kidney’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$w$ (elsewhere)</td>
<td>gahw-a</td>
<td>‘coffee’</td>
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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>% [%(\epsilon)]</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% [%\(\epsilon\)] 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): \( mbēreh < mbāreh \), ‘yesterday,’ \( sēʿa < sāʿa \) ‘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

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<th>Dialect Background</th>
<th>Total Tokens</th>
<th>% [e]</th>
<th>Log Odds</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>30% (N=123)</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>7% (N=51)</td>
<td>-0.821</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

\[(R^2 = 0.204 \ p = 0.000)\]
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
Hayil
(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)
Haša
(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)