BIDIRECTIONAL LINGUISTIC CHANGE IN RURAL CHILD AND ADOLESCENT LANGUAGE IN SYRIA

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Abstract

Investigating the spread of the urban feature the glottal stop [ʔ] in place of the rural voiceless uvular stop [q] in the speech of rural children and adolescents in the Syrian village, Oyoun Al-Wadi, a bidirectional linguistic change is observed. Girls retain their mothers' urban feature in preadolescence and adolescence; boys who initially acquire the urban feature start switching to the rural feature around age eight and increase their use of this feature with age. Thus, the observed variation and changes are gender- and age-related and result from different meanings associated with urban and rural sounds. Preadolescence emerges as the period in which kids are emotionally involved in building a social identity, indicating early development of sociolinguistic competence.

Keywords

rural vs. urban, Syrian Arabic, variation and change, children and adolescents, gender

CAMBIO LINGÜÍSTICO BIDIRECCIONAL EN EL HABLA RURAL DE NIÑOS Y ADOLESCENTES EN SIRIA

Resumen

Investigando sobre la propagación de la oclusiva glotal [ʔ] urbana en lugar oclusiva uvular [q] rural en el habla rural de niños y adolescentes en la localidad siria de Oyoun Al-Wadi se observa un cambio lingüístico bidireccional. Las jóvenes conservan la realización urbana de sus madres en la preadolescencia y en la adolescencia; los jóvenes, que adquieren inicialmente la realización urbana empiezan a cambiar a la realización rural cuando tienen alrededor de ocho años e incrementan su uso con la edad. Así, la variación observada y cambios están relacionados con el género y la edad y son el resultado de diferentes significados asociados con formas urbanas y rurales. La preadolescencia es el período en el que los niños

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están involucrados emocionalmente en la construcción de una identidad social, lo que muestra el desarrollo temprano de la competencia sociolingüística.

Palabras clave

rural vs. urbano, sirio árabe, variación y cambio, niños y adolescentes, género

1. Introduction

This study investigates the spread of the urban feature the glottal stop [ʔ] (in Arabic *hamza)* in place of the rural voiceless uvular stop [q] (in Arabic *qaf*) in the vernacular Arabic of non-migrant, rural children and adolescents who are residing in the Syrian village of Oyoun Al-Wadi (cf. Ornaghi 2010). The variable (q) is realized in the Arabic variety of Oyoun Al-Wadi and urban varieties such as the ones spoken in Hims and Damascus as shown in Table 1. Children and adolescents are selected for this study for two main reasons. First, they are more likely to adopt incoming urban features and exhibit linguistic change than older speakers in the village. Second, their current linguistic behavior will impact as well as give predictions regarding the future linguistic behavior and trajectory of the village's variety.

Variable	Variants in the speech of speakers from Oyoun Al-Wadi	Variants in urban varieties
(q)	[q] ~ [ʔ] ~ [ʁ]*	[ʔ]

* The [ʁ] variant, the voiced uvular fricative, rarely occurs; thus, its tokens are excluded in this study.

Table 1. Realization of the variable (q) in Oyoun Al-Wadi and urban varieties.

The study shows that a bidirectional linguistic change is taking place in the village. Girls continue to use their initially acquired mothers' urban feature in their preadolescent and adolescent years, whereas boys who initially acquired and used their mothers' urban feature start switching to the village's feature around the fourth grade (i.e. age eight or nine) and increase their use of this feature with age. The study also shows that the observed variation and changes result from the different meanings associated with the urban and rural sounds under investigation, and that these variation and changes are not only gender-related but also age-related (Kerswill 1996). The study

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also shows that the kids' emotional involvement in building a social identity starts in preadolescence, indicating early linguistic maturity and sociolinguistic competence.

1.1. Examples of the observed variation-[q] vs. [ʔ]

(1)   *ħarq ~ ħarʔ*   'burning'

(2)   *waqt ~ waʔt*   'time'

(3)   *qabl ~ ʔabl*   'before'

1.2. Research questions

In light of the observed variation in the speech of rural children and adolescents in the Syrian village of Oyoun Al-Wadi, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the linguistic patterns of use of the variable (q) in the speech of rural, non-migrant children and adolescents in the village of Oyoun Al-Wadi?

2. What social factors influence the use of the variable (q)?

3. What could the linguistic behavior of the children and adolescents in the village of Oyoun Al-Wadi inform us about the sociolinguistic situation in the village?

1.3. Background

Many sociolinguists investigated variation in urban and suburban centers and in the speech of rural migrants to urban centers (e.g. Amara 2005; Gal 1978; Habib 2005, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2011a, 2011b; Hachimi 2007; Kerswill 1993; Miller 2005). Very few studies dealt with language variation in a rural setting (Hazen 2002; Ornaghi 2010; Walters 1989, 1992). Regarding Arabic dialects, rarely any sociolinguistic study touched on variation and change in child and adolescent language. Al-Wer (2007: 62), in her study of the formation of a dialect in the city of Amman in Jordan, included 20 participants, some of which are adolescents, in a young age group to compare their linguistic behavior to their parents and grandparents. Although the youngest speaker in

the study, and thus in the young age group, was 12, the age range in this group could be very wide and may include many participants in their twenties. This is assumed because Al-Wer (2007: 63) indicated that six other participants aged 17-20 were added to the sample, indicating that the young age group not only included adolescents but also post-adolescents and adults, all of which are the children and grandchildren of the two older age groups, the parents and the grandparents. The latter has a speaker whose age is 78, indicating that some of the parents could be in their fifties and their children in their late twenties or thirties.

Other studies mainly investigated children's acquisition of certain dialectal phonological patterns when they migrate from their home country or area to a new country or area (e.g. Chambers 1992; Kerswill 1996; Kerswill & Williams 2000; Payne 1980; Tagliamonte & Molfenter 2007). These studies indicated that child's acquisition of a second dialect feature depends on the linguistic level, the complexity of the rules involved, and the age of the child (Chambers 1992; Kerswill 1996: 199; Payne 1980). Most of these studies indicated that most grammatical rules are acquired by children by the age of 6 or 7 when children start asserting themselves. For example, Payne (1980) found the age of arrival to the Philadelphia suburb, King of Prussia, played a significant role in the children's second dialect acquisition. For her, eight is the cut-off age, i.e. at age eight or after this age, it is hard for children to master a new form especially grammatically complex ones. Similarly, Chambers (1992) found that Canadian children younger than eight were more adaptive to the British forms than older kids were. Kerswill & Williams (2000) presented the case of a child, James, who at age 4 talked like his mother. By age 6, he started talking like his peers, which suggests age-grading linguistic behavior among children (Kerswill & Williams 2000: 109). Thus, previous research has shown that children initially adopt their caregiver's language, and that the influence of other adults and children increases gradually (e.g. Kerswill 1996; Stanford 2008). With time, children's speech becomes more like that of their peers (Kerswill 1996: 192; Kerswill & Williams 2000: 97; Stanford 2008).

In addition, many previous studies emphasized that adolescents use linguistic variation to negotiate meaning, social relationships, and identities, and are significant bearers of language change (e.g. Eckert 1988, 1991; Jørgensen 2003; Kerswill 1996:

198). Kerswill & Williams (2000) indicated that because the identity of migrant adults is more fixed than that of children who are characterized with a developing social identity, children are more motivated than adults to change their speech along their life course, moving away in adolescence from their caregivers' dialect. Very few studies indicated the role of preadolescents as leaders of linguistic change (Turell 2003: 7). However, some studies showed that children are capable of evaluating language and manipulating language from a very young age for various purposes. For example, Nesdale & Rooney (1996) indicated that children evaluate language use from preschool age and these evaluative responses increase with age. Similarly, Bolonyai (2005) presented a case in which preadolescent girls use strategic and meaningful linguistic choices or code-switches between English and Hungarian to achieve distinction, dominance, and power. Stanford (2008) showed children's orientation at a very young age to the variety of their father's clan even when spoken to in their mother's matrilect. The reason for this patrilectal orientation is their early orientation to the identity of their father's clan and being subject to ridicule, admonishment, laughter, and gossip if they use the matrilect variety.

In light of the reviewed literature, the current study aims to fill a major gap in Arabic dialectology studies, i.e. the study of the linguistic behavior of Arab children and adolescents and its expected influence on the general future linguistic behavior of their respective Arab communities. The study also partially attempts to fill a gap that exists in presenting "the emerging social meaning of child variation within the family and peer group interactional setting" (Roberts 2004: 344). It also adds to the meager sociolinguistic variationist studies in rural areas compared to the great number of studies done on urban dialects and urban centers in the Arab world and elsewhere.

2. Location, population, and history of Oyoun Al-Wadi

Oyoun Al-Wadi is a majority Christian village administratively under the city of Hims that is in the mid-west of Syria. It is located in the north west of the Hims Governorate to the west of the city of Hims and on the border of the Tartus

Governorate in the southern part of the Alawite Mountains (Jabour 2010). To the west of it is the small town (originally village) of Mashta Al-Helou; to the east are the villages of Al-Jwaikhat and Trez. The whole area is a tourism area to which visitors from all over the country and from other countries come to enjoy nature and the fresh, cooler air of the mountains in the summer, which makes the village subject to dialect contact. The village's name which means 'The Springs of the Valley' is derived from the numerous running fresh water springs in the village. The population of the village according to the 2005 statistics of the civil registration bureau is 2600 (collected and presented on www.Mshtawy.com by Zakhour Shahem, a recently deceased Mayor of Oyoun Al-Wadi).[†] However, due to internal and external migration, this number is expected to be much lower especially in the winter.

This village constitutes a good focal point for investigation as the village has seen many changes in the past three to four decades due to external immigration and internal migration. External immigration to Western countries, particularly the Americas, started towards the end of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century. Internal migration to urban centers particularly to Damascus and Hims was rare until 1939. After 1939, it increased slightly. However, in the late sixties and early seventies, internal migration increased tremendously. In recent years, commuting between rural and urban centers has become easier and more frequent. More rural people live in urban centers, and thus one would have more frequent contact with relatives who live in urban centers. In addition, more people are seeking education and jobs in urban centers, which is conducive to contact with urban dialects. Thus, the village is currently in a transformational period, which makes it a very hot spot for investigating language variation and change. It also fits as a model for other language variations and changes that are going on in other rural areas in Syria, the Arab World, and other parts of the world.

In addition, the village has a rich history that is related to the present linguistic behavior of speakers, particularly males. The father of Oyoun Al-Wadi, Sabiq Suleiman Ma'louf from whom most of the village people descend, migrated from the village Kafr 'Oqab now in Lebanon and settled in Oyoun Al-Wadi in Syria in A.D. 1700. Another

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[†] www.Mshtawy.com is the website of the neighboring town, Mashta Al-Helou.

family came and settled in the village around A.D. 1810, and after the mid of the 19th century, a few more families came and settled in Oyoun Al-Wadi. When Sabiq Ma'louf arrived to Oyoun Al-Wadi, it was called Oyoun 'Affan 'The Springs of 'Affan' after its Agha's name, 'Affan Agha, by the Turkmens who owned and ruled the area. Turkmens are Turkish tribes that lived in Turkmenistan and neighboring areas in Iran and Afghanistan. They entered Syria with the Ottoman Conquests, settling in some of its areas among which is Oyoun Al-Wadi. Around A.D. 1750, The Turkmens fought among themselves and left the area of Oyoun Al-Wadi, Mashta Al-Helou, Al-Jwaikhat, and Trez under the management of Sabiq Ma'louf who was known for his intelligence, bravery, and strength. He was an agent for the Agha, distributing land on farmers, collecting harvests, and marketing them. The sons and grandchildren of Sabiq Ma'louf were also known for their chivalry, ferocity, and toughness (Ma'louf 1978). These characteristics/values of the father of the village and his sons persist in the mentality of males in the village and continue to play a role in their present time everyday behavior, including their linguistic behavior.

Illiterate people are rare in the village in the present day. The first primary school was opened in the village in 1926. The first secondary school in the whole countryside of Syria was established in the neighboring village Mashta Al-Helou in 1948 by Dr. Hanna Ma'louf who is from the village of Oyoun Al-Wadi (Al-Ma'louf 2008). Before establishing this secondary school, high school education was a dream. Before the mid of the 20th century, electricity and paved roads were limited to cities (Habib 2010b: 69). In Oyoun Al-Wadi, water and electricity were connected to homes in 1963 and 1965 respectively. The spread of private and public secondary schools led to increase in education and more people seeking and obtaining university degrees. This in its turn led to major migration waves to cities to improve one's lifestyle and financial situation through obtaining white-collar jobs instead of working in the farm. In other words, the increase of education led to economic, social, and health development. However, despite the large number of internal migration and external immigration, the people of Oyoun Al-Wadi retain their pride in their beautiful village and their impetuous demeanor, and maintain very strong ties with their roots, families, and relatives in the village. Their sense of belonging to the village is unbeatable.

This strong sense of belonging to their village is also reflected in their behavior towards and relations with neighboring villages. It is worth noting the historical animosity between Mashta Al-Helou and Oyoun Al-Wadi that goes back to A.D. 1879 when a fight broke over the ownership of a land between the two villages (called Al-Qash'at). The fight continued between the two parties until it was resolved by endowing Mashta Al-Helou with the church that belonged to Oyoun Al-Wadi and located on the border of Mashta Al-Helou. This action led to harsh feelings, and fights were repeated at every visit to the church. The fights were sometimes bloody in that once two were killed from each side. Those uneasy feelings between the two villages continue to the present day. This is reflected in the linguistic differences between the two villages. While contact between two varieties over the years often results in similarities between the two, in the case of Oyoun Al-Wadi and Mashta Al-Helou, the two varieties grew apart. The main difference between the two varieties is that the voiceless uvular stop (q) is produced as [q] in Oyoun Al-Wadi and as [ʔ] in Mashta Al-Helou, e.g. *ħalq* vs. *ħalʔ* 'throat' respectively. This history between Oyoun Al-Wadi and Mashta Al-Helou will explain the present day conflict even among the younger generation of children and adolescents regarding the use of [q] and [ʔ] particularly among boys.

It is also worth noting that in the past, marrying non-local women was rare. When a new woman came to the village, she would be criticized if her dialect did not contain the [q] sound (Al-Ma'louf 2008: 93). In the last twenty to twenty-five years, marriage to non-local women became much more common. It could actually be described as a major trend in the village. According to a knowledgeable person from Oyoun Al-Wadi, Jamil Habib (personal communication, 2010), the number of non-local married women is 435; the number of local married women is about 90. This means that in the present day, the number of out-of-town married women is about five times the number of local married women. This trend of marrying women from outside the village also led women from the village to marry men outside the village. The number of local women married to men outside the village is 377 (Jamil Habib, personal communication, 2010). This increase in marrying women and men from outside the village is not surprising given the increased migration to urban areas in the late sixties and early seventies (Habib 2010b). Seeking higher education and jobs in the city increased contact with urban people and

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rural people who came to the city for similar purposes. This increased personal contact led to relationships with people from outside the village, and thus marriage to those people. Hence, the current family situation in the village is much more diverse than it was 25-30 years ago. In the past, village people mainly communicated with each other while working and playing in their farms, shepherding the cattle, or harvesting crops. Thus, they had minor contact with outsiders. Consequently, they fell in love with each other and got married.

3. Methodology and data

3.1. Speech sample and data collection

The speech sample consists of the naturally occurring speech of 50 speakers aged 6-18. Speakers were recorded during spring 2010 in the village of Oyoun Al-Wadi. The author went initially to the village's schools to observe classes to familiarize children and adolescents with her. She also observed whether the teachers' dialects were influential in the classroom. She was able to collect in the classrooms the contact numbers of the students' parents to obtain their permission to interview and record their children. Schools, teachers, and parents were very helpful and showed great willingness to allow their children to participate in the project. Some of the parents and teachers volunteered information themselves and were willing to participate in the project themselves. Some recordings took place at the parents' home. However, it was preferable to carry the interviews in the author's home after experiencing great difficulty and sound clarity problems at the parents' home. It is common in the village's culture for visitors to come unexpectedly and interrupt interviews or talk during the interview, which would make the sound quality very poor. Thus, parents were asked if possible to send their children to the author's home. They were happy and willing to do so.

Data collection was carried out in naturalistic settings to elicit the most natural speech from participants. The interviews, conducted in the presence of family members

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or friends, included initially gathering personal information. Information solicited concerned the child; his parents; extended family; linguistic features and varieties used by family members, friends, classmates, teachers and relatives; connection to urban centers and people living in urban centers; degree of contact with speakers that use urban features; and TV programs watched and hours spent watching programs that contain the linguistic features under investigation. The informal interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes with each individual speaker. A high quality digital recorder (marantz Professional Solid State Recorder PMD660) was used with a built-in microphone to record the interviews. The built-in microphone was used to avoid drawing the participants' attention to the recorder, and thus to elicit the most naturalistic speech possible. During the interviews, children and adolescents were asked to tell stories or jokes or talk about some event or story that affected them, their friends, their family, or others or they heard recently in the news or from acquaintances.

The choice of the village Oyoun Al-Wadi was based on a number of reasons (Section 2). In relation to data collection, two reasons play significant roles in obtaining the most naturalistic and suitable data for the study. First, the author is familiar with the village and its culture and acquainted with the variety spoken in the village. Second, she is an in-group member that allowed her to integrate easily into the community, obtain the most naturalistic data, and compile abundant information about the participants, their families, their practices, their likes and dislikes, the societal and cultural changes that are taking place, etc.

3.2. Social factors

The social factors that are taken into consideration in this study are gender, age, mother's origin, and area of residence. Gender is divided equally into 25 males and 25 females. The sample is divided into four age groups that are almost equally divided regarding the number of participants and the number of girls and boy in each group. The youngest age group contains 12 speakers aged six to eight, of which six are girls and six are boys. The second age group contains 13 speakers aged nine to eleven, of which six are girls and seven are boys. The third age group contains 13 speakers aged 12 to 14, of

which seven are girls and six are boys. The oldest age group contains 12 speakers aged 15 to 18, of which six are girls and six are boys. There are 12 mothers from Oyoun Al-Wadi and 38 mothers from outside Oyoun Al-Wadi. This is not surprising given the large difference in the number of married women from Oyoun Al-Wadi and from outside Oyoun Al-Wadi. As for area of residence, 31 speakers come from l-Hara l-Fu[ʔ]/[q]aniyyi 'the Upper Quarter'; 15 speakers come from l-Hara t-Tiht[a:]/[e:]niyyi 'the Lower Quarter'; and four speakers come from Harit l-Madraj 'the Downhill Quarter'. Table 2 shows the social distribution of the study participants.

It is worth noting that there is also a kind of challenge between the Lower Quarter and Upper Quarter. The people from the Lower Quarter think that they are more sophisticated than the people of the Upper Quarter even in their speech, i.e. they are more urbanized and use more urban features in their speech. They even call the Upper Quarter *l-rif* 'the countryside/the village' and they call the Lower Quarter *l-madini* 'the city'. In reality, no major difference is observed between the two quarters, as the quantitative results will show (Sections 4.2 & 4.3). They are mainly perceptive differences based on subjective feeling of superiority, even though the people from the Upper Quarter seem to acquire more wealth and own more land in the village than people from the Lower Quarter.

3.3. Data

Table 3 shows the distribution of [q], [ʔ], and [ʁ] in the speech of the 50 participants. It shows that there is a general tendency towards the use of the urban form [ʔ] with 78% use of [ʔ] compared to 21% use of [q]. The use of [ʁ] is insignificant, as it constitutes less than 1%. However, comparing the linguistic behavior of boys and girls across the different age groups reveals the following: (1) boys and girls behave similarly in the youngest age group (Table 4); and (2) girls maintain their use of the urban form throughout their preadolescence and adolescence, while boys show higher percentages of the rural form from age nine and up (Table 4). Table 4 shows that in the age groups 9-11, 12-14, and 15-18 three out of seven boys, four out of six boys, and three out of six boys respectively use very high percentages of [q].

#	Name	Age	Grade	Gender	Mother's Origin	Area
1	'Adan	6	1st	M	Not from Oyoun Al-Wadi (NFO)	Upper Quarter (UQ)
2	Max	6	1st	M	NFO	UQ
3	Shama	6	1st	F	NFO	UQ
4	Sandy	6	1st	F	NFO	UQ
5	Jerjes	7	2nd	M	NFO	UQ
6	Rico	7	2nd	M	NFO	UQ
7	Halab	7	2nd	F	NFO	UQ
8	Jessy	8	3rd	F	NFO	LQ
9	Talia	8	3rd	F	From Oyoun Al-Wadi (FO)	LQ
10	Neomi	8	3rd	F	FO	LQ
11	Eli	8	3rd	M	NFO	LQ
12	'Anis	8	4th	M	NFO	UQ
13	Dani	9	3rd	M	NFO	UQ
14	Ward	9	3rd	M	FO	LQ
15	Rula	9	3rd	F	NFO	UQ
16	Lina	9	4th	F	NFO	LQ
17	Jorgos	9	4th	M	FO	Downhill Quarter (DQ)
18	Mary	10	5th	F	NFO	UQ
19	Margaret	10	5th	F	NFO	LQ
20	Jabour	10	5th	M	NFO	UQ
21	Rami	11	5th	M	FO	LQ
22	Lu'ai	11	6th	M	NFO	UQ
23	Jano	11	6th	M	NFO	UQ
24	Jenny	11	6th	F	NFO	UQ
25	Rasha	10	6th	F	NFO	UQ
26	Fuad	12	7th	M	NFO	DQ
27	Naji	13	7th	M	NFO	UQ
28	Salina	13	7th	F	FO	LQ
29	Rouda	13	7th	F	FO	LQ
30	Rachel	13	8th	F	FO	LQ
31	Randa	13	8th	F	NFO	UQ
32	Roma	13	8th	F	NFO	LQ
33	Imad	13	8th	M	NFO	UQ
34	Rojer	14	8th	M	FO	DQ
35	Husam	14	8th	M	NFO	UQ
36	Rada	14	9th	F	NFO	UQ
37	Wardi	14	9th	F	FO	DQ
38	Maher	14	9th	M	NFO	UQ
39	Ola	15	10th	F	NFO	UQ
40	Salam	15	10th	F	NFO	UQ
41	Peter	15	10th	M	FO	LQ
42	Andy	16	10th	M	NFO	UQ
43	Nariman	16	11th	F	NFO	UQ
44	Rimona	16	11th	F	NFO	UQ
45	Miller	16	11th	M	FO	LQ

46	'Atif	17	11th	M	NFO		UQ
47	Naseem	17	12th	M	NFO		UQ
48	Kamal	18	12th	M	NFO		LQ
49	Hala	17	12th	F	NFO		UQ
50	Ghada	17	10th	F	NFO		UQ

Table 2. Social distribution of the study participants.

#	Name	[q]	%	[ʔ]	%	[ʁ]	%	Total
1	'Adan	0	0	38	100	0	0	38
2	Max	0	0	49	100	0	0	49
3	Shama	0	0	136	100	0	0	136
4	Sandy	1	0.5	191	99.5	0	0	192
5	Jerjes	3	4	69	96	0	0	72
6	Rico	1	2	42	98	0	0	43
7	Halab	8	13	52	87	0	0	60
8	Jessy	3	3	103	97	0	0	106
9	Talia	18	20	73	80	0	0	91
10	Neomi	11	17	51	81	1	2	63
11	Eli	5	5	100	94	1	1	106
12	'Anis	2	2	96	98	0	0	98
13	Dani	3	6	46	94	0	0	49
14	Ward	5	4	125	96	0	0	130
15	Rula	7	9	72	91	0	0	79
16	Lina	0	0	77	100	0	0	77
17	Jorgos	62	89	8	11	0	0	70
18	Mary	7	4	177	96	0	0	184
19	Margaret	13	14	79	86	0	0	92
20	Jabour	35	27	95	73	0	0	130
21	Rami	113	46.5	123	50.5	7	3	243
22	Lu'ai	84	97	3	3	0	0	87
23	Jano	4	4	106	96	0	0	110
24	Jenny	7	7	88	93	0	0	95
25	Rasha	1	2	50	98	0	0	51
26	Fu'ad	102	100	0	0	0	0	102
27	Naji	2	2	107	98	0	0	109
28	Salina	4	3	117	97	0	0	121
29	Rouda	0	0	89	100	0	0	89
30	Rachel	19	19	83	81	0	0	102
31	Randa	1	1	114	92.5	8	6.5	123
32	Roma	2	1	213	99	0	0	215
33	Imad	72	89	8	10	1	1	81
34	Roger	37	95	1	2.5	1	2.5	39
35	Husam	9	21	34	79	0	0	43
36	Rada	10	11.4	76	86.4	2	2.2	88
37	Wardi	40	95	2	5	0	0	42
38	Maher	104	86	16	13	1	1	121

		[q]	%	[ʔ]	%	[ʁ]	%	Total
39	Ola	1	1	159	99	0	0	160
40	Salam	54	25	166	75	0	0	220
41	Peter	47	82	10	18	0	0	57
42	Andy	16	28	42	72	0	0	58
43	Nariman	9	5	167	95	0	0	176
44	Rimona	9	14	54	86	0	0	63
45	Miller	29	43	36	53	3	4	68
46	'Atif	1	1	82	99	0	0	83
47	Naseem	9	8	106	92	0	0	115
48	Kamal	116	97	4	3	0	0	120
49	Hala	1	1	152	99	0	0	153
50	Ghada	0	0	149	99	1	1	150
	Total	1087	21	4036	78	26	1	5149

Table 3. Distribution of [q], [ʔ], and [ʁ] in the speech of the participants.

All other speakers use percentages of [q] that range between 0-28%, with the higher percentages used by boys. This indicates that girls show higher tendency towards the use of the urban form than boys do. There is a clear shift in their speech towards the urban form [ʔ]. On the other hand, boys show more inter-speaker variation and greater tendency towards the rural form. About half of the boys use more [q] than [ʔ] in the three older age groups.

Age group	Girls' behavior	Boys' behavior	Details
6-8	Mainly [ʔ]	Mainly [ʔ]	No difference
9-11	Mainly [ʔ]	3/7 boys use high percentage of [q]	Jorgos (4th grade, 9) = 89% Rami (5th grade, 11) = 46.5% Lu'ai (6th grade, 11) = 97%
12-14	Mainly [ʔ]	4/6 boys use high percentage of [q]	Fu'ad (7th grade, 12) = 100% Imad (8th grade, 13) = 89% Roger (8th grade, 14) = 95% Maher (9th grade, 14) = 86%
15-18	Mainly [ʔ]	3/6 boys use high percentage of [q]	Peter (10th grade, 15) = 82% Miller (11th grade, 16) = 43% Kamal (12th grade, 18) = 97%

Table 4. Gender and age groups differences in the use of [q] and [ʔ]

4. Quantitative analysis and results

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is used to perform the statistical analysis. A binary logistic regression test is carried out to investigate the main effects of

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the social factors, gender, age, mother's origin, and area of residence, on the use of each of the linguistic variable (q). The results are reported in the following sections. In this study, the variant [ʁ] (Tables 1 & 3) is excluded from the quantitative analysis because of its very limited occurrence in the speech of the 50 participants. Eliminating it will not affect the statistical results.

4.1. Distribution of variants according to the social factors under investigation

The distribution of the variants according to gender reveals that girls use the urban form more than boys (Figure 1). The distribution of variants according to age shows that age groups vary considerably in their use of [q] and [ʔ] (Figure 2). Figure 2 shows that the youngest age group uses [ʔ] the most. This use decreases with age. It reaches its lowest point in the age group 12-14. In contrast, the use of [q] increases with age and reaches its highest point in the age group 12-14. This is not surprising given that four out of six boys in this age group use very high percentages of [q] and almost no [ʔ]. The use of [ʔ] increases slightly in the oldest age group but remains at a much higher level than the youngest age group. The pattern in Figure 2 indicates a change in progress towards the rural form. The distribution of variants based on whether the speaker's mother is from Oyoun Al-Wadi or not reveals some difference (Figure 3). The distribution of variants according to the area of residence shows there is no noticeable difference between the residents of the Upper and Lower Quarters (Figure 4). However, the difference is great between these two Quarters and the Downhill Quarter. The residents of this Quarter have almost 100% use of [q] and almost no use of [ʔ]. This is because the Downhill quarter is somehow isolated from the rest of the village. Most of the people who live in this Quarter are either pure people from Oyoun Al-Wadi or few Alawite families that settled later in the village and whose speech is characterized with [q] (Habib 2010b: 68).
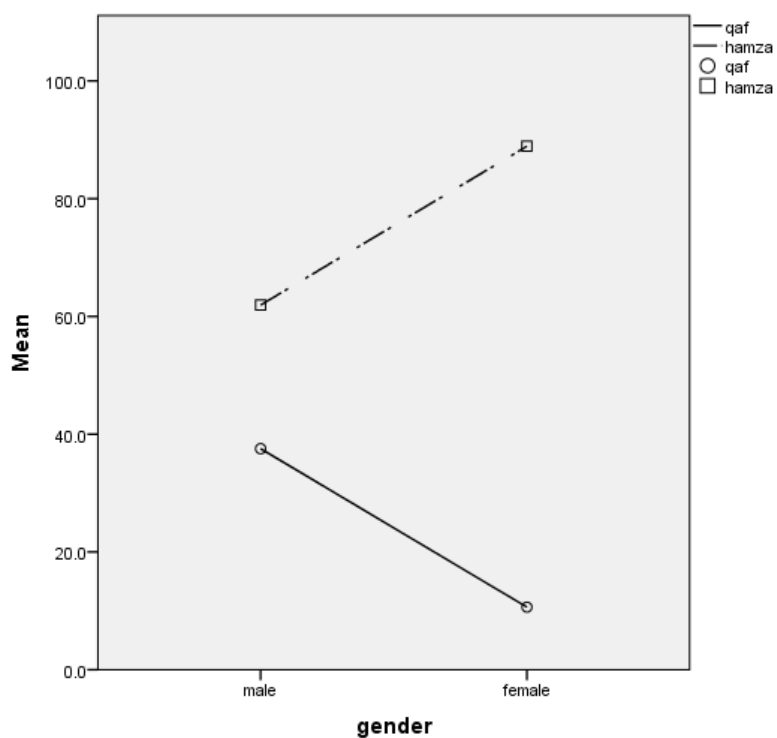
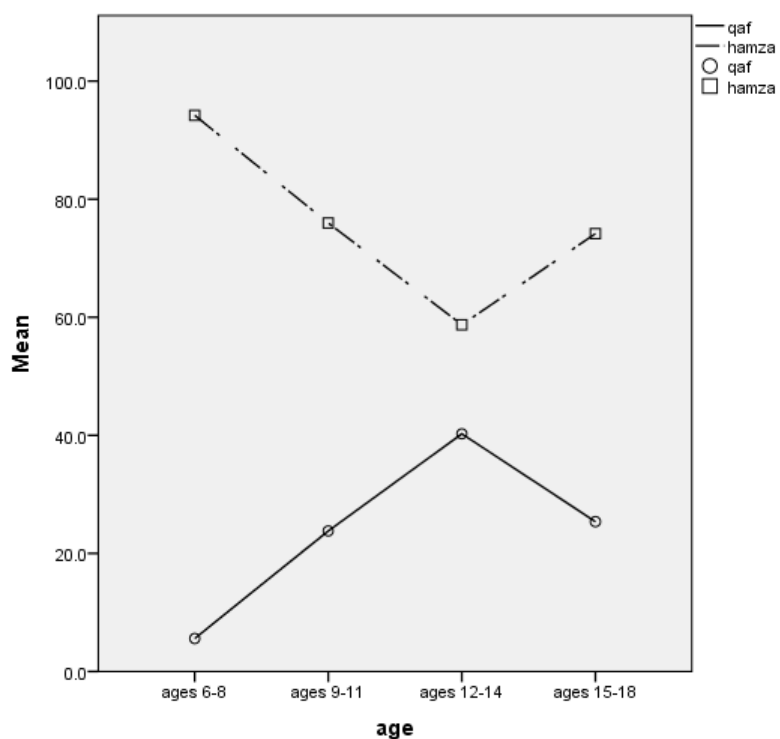Figure 1. Distribution of [q] and [ʔ] according to gender.

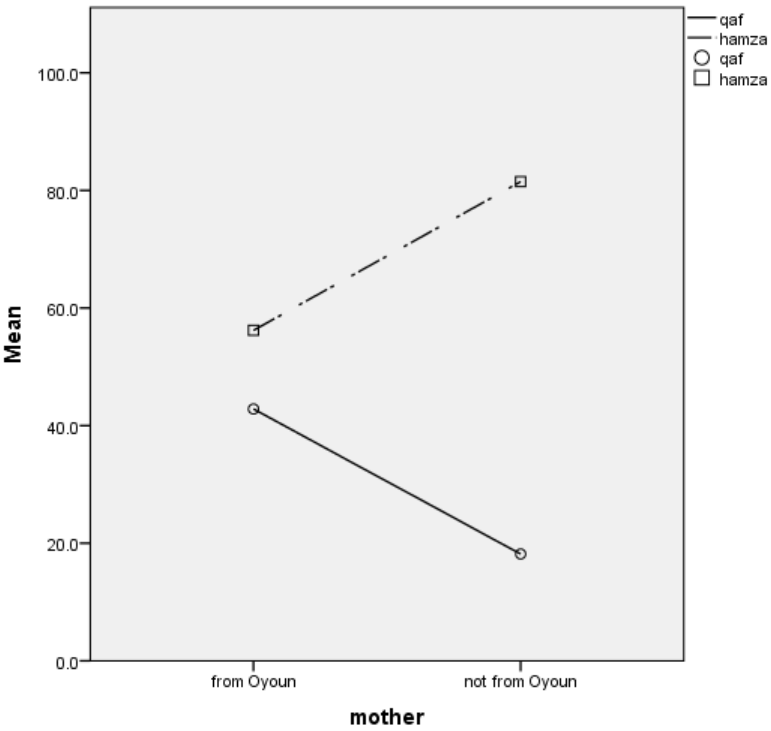Figure 2. Distribution of [q] and [ʔ] according to age.

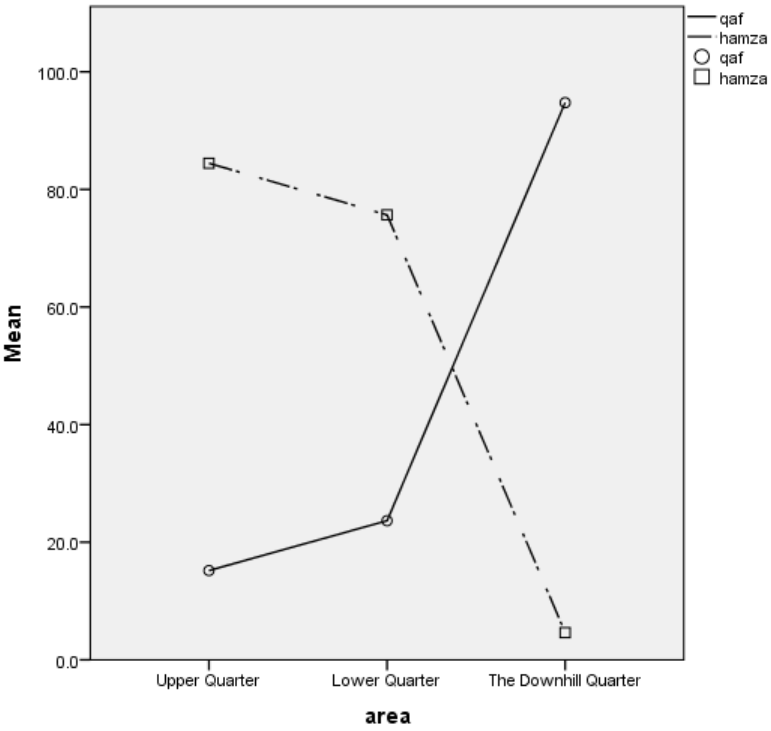Figure 3. Distribution of [q] and [ʔ] according to mother's origin.

Figure 4. Distribution of [q] and [ʔ] according to area of residence.

4.2. Results of the binary logistic regression test

Table 5 summarizes the results of the binary logistic regression test. The numbers in it represent the *p-values* that are considered significant at ≥ 0.05. Table 5 shows that gender and area of residence play a significant role. What is interesting is that mother's origin emerges as statistically insignificant; it does not play a role in the observed inter- and intra-speaker variation in the use of (q). The results in Table 5 can be interpreted as follows based on the coefficients (*B*) and their exponentials (Exp(*B*)) in the Parameter Estimate Tables that are not included for space purposes. Only the coefficients and exponentials that show significance are reported here. The odds that males would use the rural sound [q] (*p* = 0.000; *B* = 2.134; Exp(*B*) = 8.450) are 9 times the odds that females would use it. Although age emerged as statistically insignificant in the Main Effects Table, the Parameter Estimate Table shows that the use of the urban sound [?] by the youngest age group is statistically significant and that the odds that this group would use [?] (*p* = 0.047; *B* = 1.899; Exp(*B*) = 6.679) is 7 times the odds that the older age groups would use it. Regarding area of residence, the Parameter Estimate Table also shows statistical significance; the odds that the Upper Quarter (*p* = 0.022; *B* = 4.581; Exp(*B*) = 97.615) and the Lower Quarter (*p* = 0.049; *B* = 3.737; Exp(*B*) = 41.992) would use the urban sound [?] are respectively 98 times and 42 times the odds that the Downhill Quarter would use it.

Independent factor	(q)
Gender	0.000
Age	0.104
Mother's origin	0.688
Area	0.006

Table 5. Main Effects of gender, age, mother's origin, and area on the use of the variable (q).

These results indicate obvious gender differences whereby boys use more rural forms than girls. There are also differences between the youngest age group and the three older age groups. The youngest age group uses [?] almost categorically. However,

the use of [ʔ] decreases and the use of [q] increases in the three older age groups, mainly among boys (Table 4), which could indicate a change in progress initiated by boys in the age group 9-11 and advanced by age group 12-14 (Figure 2). Despite the slight dip in age group 15-18, this group exhibits high usage of [q] comparable to age group 9-11. Some differences also exist among the three areas of residence. Speakers who reside in the Downhill Quarter use more rural forms than speakers residing in the Upper and Lower Quarters.

4.3. Discussion of results with the help of ethnographic information

The findings in this study require further explanation through more thorough ethnographic investigation. During the interviews and informal conversations, many male speakers, parents, and siblings mentioned that they noticed themselves, their son(s), or their brother(s) respectively change his/their speech (i.e. started using the [q] sound) towards the fourth or fifth grade, i.e. around eight or nine years of age. A couple of speakers mentioned the third grade, and one sister mentioned that she noticed her brother started changing in the first grade.

The social meanings of the urban and rural variants were also extracted from the interviews. A summary of these extracted social meanings is presented in this paper. Many girls said that they do not like the *qaf* sound for reasons such as being unpleasant, ugly, harsh, not soft, and old fashion. They feel it is for men and that it requires more effort in pronunciation (i.e., more stress or pressure is used in its pronunciation). For them, *qaf* is *Daiʿaje* 'rural' and shameful. On the other hand, *ʔaf* is nicer, prettier, better, softer, gentler, and more refined for girls.[‡] *ʔaf* is *Nahawe* 'lit. grammatical, but it refers to the urban form in the village's sense of the word'. Boys and parents also mentioned these reasons to explain why girls use or should use [ʔ]. Some of the younger boys also mentioned these reasons for their use of *ʔaf.*

On the other hand, most boys like the *qaf* sound more for reasons such as manliness, masculinity, immensity, strength, and power. It makes them feel masculine

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[‡] They use the word *ʔaf* to indicate *hamza*, replacing the [q] of *qaf* with [ʔ] as a convention of their pronunciation of *qaf*.

like their father. For some, it is more suitable, nicer, and easier (in the sense it comes more natural to them). It makes them feel they belong to the village, as opposed to feeling like strangers. Some of them use it to satisfy the father or spite the mother or to show independence and individuality. The sound [q] gives them a strong feeling of association with their village and represents for them features of manhood in their village: strength, valor, and toughness.

Boys may ridicule other boys if they use *ʔaf*, giving each other names such as, *Mishtawe* (i.e., a person from Mashta Al-Helou) and *tant* 'lit. aunt, but it is used to mean gay or weak' (cf. Al-Wer 2007: 67), meanings associated with *ʔaf* among boys in the village. It is worth noting that some of them associate the word *Mishtawe* with *tant*. Thus, accusing someone of being *Mishtawe* means that one is from Mashta Al-Helou and thus betraying his roots and supporting his adversaries. This is also considered an insult to a boy from Oyoun Al-Wadi because it indicates weakness given the association of *Mishtawe* with *tant* and thus weakness. This linguistic reaction of the village's boys is not surprising as ridicule (Stanford 2008) and peer pressure (Romaine 1995: 238) have been indicated as major influences on children's speech and acquisition of another feature or dialect.

However, despite these conflicts we observe some boys move on with their lives careless of what their friends may call them. They maintain extensive use of [ʔ]. This indicates there is a linguistic conflict that results from oppositional forces. These forces work at the intra- and inter-speaker levels. These forces will be called centrifugal forces and centripetal forces. Centrifugal forces refer to the external social forces and the prestige brought about by the urban forms. Centripetal forces refer to the village sense of belonging and male values such as toughness, masculinity, ferocity, etc. Sometimes the centrifugal forces overcome the centripetal forces and vice versa.

In addition, speakers mentioned that the area they grow in or their surrounding environment influences their speech. Some girls mentioned that boys are allowed more freedom of movement than girls are, and thus have more opportunities to communicate with the traditional village people in the street outside their homes. More contact with the village environment and with male friends allows them to use more [q]. On the other hand, girls have less freedom of movement; they stay mostly at home with their

mothers. Even their contact with their female friends is limited to the homes of each other. Hence, they retain their mothers' form. Furthermore, there are very limited friendships among boys and girls in the village, which limits communication between them as well as mutual linguistic influence.

5. Conclusion

The study shows a wide spread of the urban feature among the village's children. However, there seems to be two linguistic trends that are gender- and age-related. The spread of the urban feature is retained in the girls' speech in their preadolescence and adolescence but overturned towards the rural feature in the boys' speech. Boys who, like girls, acquired their out-of-town mothers' feature initially start around the age of eight switching to the village feature because it carries meanings of vigor, bravery, virility, masculinity, and a strong sense of belonging to the village. Girls, on the other hand, are encouraged and continue to use the urban feature because it carries meanings of femininity, softness, delicateness, and refinement. Boys start at the age of eight conceptualizing the various meanings associated with the rural and urban forms and refuse to identify with the latter meanings, abandoning the urban feature and adopting the rural feature around the fourth grade.

Variation in adolescent language has been investigated by many but mainly in urban and suburban areas, indicating that "emotional involvement in social identity" is more salient in adolescence than in any other life stage (Eckert 1988: 206; 1991). The desire to have distinct social identities makes adolescents significant bearers of language change (Eckert 1988, 1991; Kerswill 1996: 198). The present study rather focuses on a rural community and finds that the youth's emotional involvement in building a social identity starts earlier in life than in adolescence (i.e. in pre-adolescence). The boys' desire to have a distinct social identity from girls, i.e. an identity that is charged with masculinity and manliness, emerges as early as eight years of age. In some cases, it starts earlier. This finding is significant because it relates to the age in which children start conceptualizing the social meaning of linguistic variables and implementing this knowledge in their speech. It reflects on the linguistic maturity and

sociolinguistic competence of kids and their ability to differentiate and choose among linguistic variants at an early stage of their life. These children's linguistic behavior accords with Kerswill's (1996: 181) definition of sociolinguistic competence as "a person's ability to recognize language varieties within the community, to evaluate those varieties socially, and to exploit them in the communication of social meaning."

In this study, it is apparent that the social and psychological development of children and the social meanings development of sounds are concurrent at every stage of their lives. However, this development and gender differentiation process (Labov 2010: 254) is more apparent in boys' than in girls' linguistic behavior because tangible change towards the use of rural forms is observed in their speech in their preadolescent and adolescent years. As soon as they start recognizing the importance of certain sounds to the development of their local and masculine identity, boys deviate from their mothers' form. The fact that girls do not deviate from their mothers' form does not exclude them from this development and gender differentiation process. By retaining their mothers' urban form, girls are announcing their feminine, soft, and more refined status. The development of social meaning in relation to gender differentiation in the girls' case can be gleaned from the story of a 13-year old girl who used the rural forms earlier on in her life because both her parents are from Oyoun Al-Wadi and use rural forms. In her early adolescent years, she adopted the urban form due to friendly, familial, and societal encouragement to sound more refined and soft. The recognition and adoption of norms that are more appropriate for females and males (Walters 1991: 213) is a major part of this social and psychological development as well as the gender differentiation process.

Thus, the different social meanings of the urban and rural sounds in this study lead to salient linguistic differences between boys and girls and among boys from different age cohorts, resulting in the acquisition of different features at different stages in their lives and in bidirectional linguistic changes in youth language within the same community.

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