

# Socio-economic change and language change in the Eastern Arab world

Autor(en): **Holes, Clive**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen  
Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société  
Suisse-Asie**

Band (Jahr): **53 (1999)**

Heft 1

PDF erstellt am: **21.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147445>

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern. Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE AND LANGUAGE CHANGE IN THE EASTERN ARAB WORLD

Clive Holes

### 0. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how recent changes in the societies and economies of the countries of the Arabic-speaking Middle East have affected, and continue to affect ordinary people's habits of speech. The forms of language we habitually use when talking to each other, like the clothes we wear, say something about us: most obviously, perhaps, where we come from and the level of education we have, but also, in some societies, the social class we belong to, or even our religious affiliation. Some of the groups we belong to we are born into and have no choice about – our sex, for example, or caste in traditional Hindu society. On the other hand, some – perhaps most – of our group memberships are socially acquired: membership of a trade-union say, or, in my case, of the fellowship of an Oxford University college. An individual's social identity can be conceived of as the sum of his or her memberships in innumerable groups of this sort. Some of these may be completely independent of each other, but in specific cases – religious caste and social class in India, for example, or being female and being illiterate in the pre-oil societies of Arabia – they may almost completely overlap. Self-evidently, not all of the groups of which we are members – not even most of them – imply any special linguistic behaviour; but in all human societies which have been investigated so far, language differences have come to be associated with, and have sometimes been consciously employed to mark off, social differences of one kind or another.

In Europe and America for the last three decades, a dominant research theme in sociolinguistics has been the correlation of differences in socio-economic class, defined by indices of wealth, occupation and education, with language variation. Research has tended to concentrate on urban populations in cities like New York, Detroit, Norwich and Belfast. The results have shown that socio-economic class is indeed strongly correlated with communal patterns of language use, and changes in linguistic behaviour come about essentially via the adoption, by socially ambitious members of groups low in the social pecking-order, of the speech patterns of

those higher up. But there are difficulties in exporting this approach to the Arab world. Some are methodological (which we will not go into here) but others concern the central issue of the structure of Arab societies. In many Arab countries, large cities are a recent phenomenon, and often resemble collections of accidentally juxtaposed communities: independent worlds which have not yet coalesced to form a single urban mass in which there are gradations of wealth and education, as in the West. In Arab cities, while everyone in one sense “speaks Arabic”, there are constituent communities whose major distinguishing characteristics may be sect, religion, life-style or even nationality, and any of these may be associated with communal differences in language use. The constituent communities often originally arrived in the city as a consequence of migrations, or the displacement of populations because of wars, or other force majeure, or as a result of government intervention (e.g. sedentarisation of nomads), or because of population drift from distant areas of the country caused by inequalities of economic opportunity. But the Arab world has not experienced to anything like the same degree as the West the twin processes of urbanisation and industrialisation, which in the West have tended, within a few generations, to reduce or completely eliminate the social significance of differences “imported” from outside into the new urban environment. As a consequence, it is no exaggeration to say that the western paradigm of social class as the main variable which co-varies with significant differences in language behaviour in urban societies is inapplicable in large parts of the Arab world, or at least not yet fully applicable.

In what follows, I shall attempt to show what the main forces are which are altering the linguistic complexion of Arab cities by examining three case studies. The three locations chosen are Manama, capital of the Gulf island state of Bahrain, Amman, capital of Jordan, and Baghdad, capital of Iraq. The choice is motivated solely by the availability of data: in the first case my own, and in the latter that of two other researchers.

Like many Arab cities, each of these places contains distinct communities which define themselves by their religious allegiance and/or historical origin and the parts of the city in which they live. And whilst the members of each of these constituent communities no doubt think of themselves in political terms as “Bahraini”, “Jordanian” or “Iraqi”, and more loosely, as also forming part of a supranational ethnic community of Arabs, an important part of their identity continues to be defined by the more local or spe-

cific sets of beliefs, customs, and frames of reference. Part of the business of state-building – though this is rarely if ever publicly articulated – involves the government or ruling group defining and foregrounding what, in its view, it means to be “Bahraini”, “Jordanian”, “Iraqi”, etc., and also, by implication what it therefore does not mean. This is done chiefly through the state education system and the media. What I hope to show is that some communal identities have been marginalised or even excluded in this process, as have the habits of behaviour, including the habits of speech, which are part of them.

Each constituent community in our three case studies is associated with a variety of Arabic felt by its members (and non-members) to be an important marker of its identity. In Bahrain, this sociolinguistic distinction is basically sectarian, between the so-called ‘*Arab* (roughly “tribal Sunni Arabs”) and *Baḥaarna* (local Arabic-speaking Shi‘is); in Amman it is partly socio-economic, between town-dwellers (*madaniyyiin*) and those whose roots were originally in the countryside outside (divisible into *fallaaḥiin* “peasant-farmers” and *badu* “(settled) bedouin”), and partly political, between Palestinians originally from the West Bank of the Jordan and “real” Jordanians from the East Bank; and in Baghdad it is a religious divide, between Muslims and Christians.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, in each city, other important sociolinguistic distinctions associated with gender and education which have come to the fore as a result of the social changes which have occurred throughout the region in the last 50 years. Although the linguistic differences associated with these factors, at this point in time, are still subordinate to the primary, communal divisions, new sociolinguistic structures are beginning to emerge in all of our case studies. Contextual switching in speech – that is, matching how one speaks to the identity of an interlocutor, or to the topic one is speaking about – is a characteristic of life in any modern city. In the Arab case, this process of conversational negotiation is usually played out in public contexts – buying and selling in the market; dealing with the police, officialdom or other government representatives; and in the question and answer of the school-room or lecture theatre, to list just a few examples – against a socio-political agenda which is set by a ruling group

---

1 Until the early 1950’s there was a sizeable Jewish community in Baghdad, the vast bulk of which migrated to Israel.

from a community to which one may not belong, and which may have a history of hostility or at least friction with one's own. Whether or not, in the long-term, the process of linguistic accommodation and convergence, which are the observable result of these kinds of public contact assume a more permanent character, and subvert the original communal dialect distinctions even in domestic contexts, is the question I should like to address in this paper. Are there communities in the Arab world today which feel themselves under such pressure that they end up losing one of the defining marks of their identity – their communal dialect? The classic historical example of this in the Middle East is the adoption of Arabic (and embracing of Islam) by those who lived in the territories conquered by the Arabs, and who formerly spoke Coptic, Aramaic, Berber or Persian; but in the Arabic-speaking Middle East of today, what social forces are driving the engines of linguistic change?

### 1. Urbanization

Since World War II, the countries of the Middle East, including our three case studies, have undergone enormous social change. There has been a rapid rise in population, and this has been accompanied by widespread urbanization and a shift in employment patterns from agriculture to the service sectors. By 1982<sup>2</sup> 55% of the population of Jordan, 67% of the population of Iraq and 72% of the population of Bahrain were classed as "urban". Moreover, compared with the West, where the population of major cities is falling as a proportion of total population, many Arab countries, including all of our case studies, show a high degree of urban primacy. Baghdad and its metropolitan area, for example, with a population of 4.8 million in 1987 represented more than 25% of the total population of Iraq. Until the creation of Jordan as an independent state in 1949, the east bank of the original Emirate of Transjordan lacked any large urban centre: in 1943, Amman had only 30,000 inhabitants. By 1979, this figure had jumped to a permanent population of 650,000 (33% of Jordan's total), rising to 1 million during the working week.<sup>3</sup> This rapid post-war urbanization has meant a significant shift away from village-based occupations such as agriculture: in

---

2 Blake *et al.* (1987: 52).

3 Mostyn (1983: 157).

Jordan, whereas 44% of the population had been employed on the land in 1960, by 1980, the figure had fallen to 20%, the service sector having leapt from 30% to 60% over the same period. In Gulf states like Bahrain, where the distances are so short that a change in domicile is unnecessary, there has still been the same switch from village to city-based employment: by 1980, no less than 96% of the Bahraini population was employed in the service or industrial sectors, with an overwhelming concentration in the capital, Manama.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Literacy

Urbanization and industrialization have been accompanied by (indeed have only been made possible by) a rise in levels of literacy. By the mid-80s “fully literates” accounted for about 30% of the population in Iraq, nearly 50% in Bahrain and about 65% in Jordan.<sup>5</sup> The literacy rates for the same countries 30 years before would have almost certainly been less than half this (had they been available). In all cases, the rate of literacy was, and remains, higher among men than women. Literacy, in an Arabic context, means a functional ability to read and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The main means by which MSA is acquired is overwhelmingly the government school system, though a partial passive familiarity with this kind of Arabic in certain limited contexts (e.g. news broadcasts) may also rub off on to non-literates via the now ubiquitous electronic media.

Describing the range of hybrid varieties which result from the influence of MSA on dialectal speech, and explaining what triggers shifts up and down the spectrum of speech style have been the major focuses of research in Arabic sociolinguistics for the last 30 years. In what follows, however, we will be only indirectly concerned with these issues since, overwhelmingly, the ordinary Arabic speaker, whatever the level of his formal education, continues to use a local variety of Arabic – “Egyptian”, “Palestinian”, “Kuwaiti”, etc., as the case may be – in all his everyday domestic and public social dealings. Labels like “Educated Kuwaiti Arabic” describe varieties of Arabic in which, whatever the level of MSA influence, the most salient

---

4 See Blake *et al.* (1987: 55) for full data on the changes in patterns of employment in the Middle East.

5 Blake *et al.* (1987: 41).

features remain the local ones – in this case, that bundle of (mainly phonological and morpho-syntactic) dialectal features which Arabs associate with Kuwait. It is rare indeed for the point to be reached where the geographical origin of an ordinary person's speech is completely obscured, even in the few contexts where he may be making a conscious effort to suppress it (such as when called upon to give a formal public address). The linguistic prestige conferred by the correct oral use of MSA or something like it, is undeniable but it is an "overt", non-local type of prestige, inappropriate and irrelevant to most of the speech contexts encountered in everyday life.

It is against this general background that we shall examine language variation and change in our three locations.

### 3. Case study 1: Bahrain<sup>6</sup>

The major social and linguistic division in Arabic-speaking Bahrain is that between the so-called 'Arab and the *Baḥaarna* communities. This division, which applies only to the ethnically Arab population of Bahrain, is essentially sectarian, between the orthodox Sunni 'Arab and the Ja'fari Shi'i *Baḥaarna*. Although no census of sectarian affiliation has been taken since 1941 (a fact which in itself indicates the sensitivity of the sect issue), it is thought that the Shi'a are in a slight majority. However, the exact balance is difficult to gauge because the terms "Sunni" and "Shi'i" include population elements which do not form part of the 'Arab-*Baḥaarna* social divide: there is a large group of Farsi-speaking Shi'a from southern Iran, for example, many of whom live in the capital, Manama, but who are not *Baḥaarna*. The 'Arab, despite their probable numerical inferiority, provide the ruling family, and have tended to dominate government and commerce. There is a history of sectarian friction, which, however, has considerably lessened during the last 30 years or so.

The origin of the linguistic divide between the two communities is geographical: the 'Arab dialect is an offshoot of the dialects of Najd, the area from which the forefathers of the present-day 'Arab emigrated to the Gulf coast 200 years ago. On the other hand, the dialect of the *Baḥaarna*, who take pride in their claim to being the original inhabitants of Bahrain

---

6 The data on which this case-study is based are derived from Holes (1983a, 1983b, 1986, 1987).

(hence their name), has much in common with the dialects of the sedentary population of northern Oman,<sup>7</sup> with which it almost certainly had a historical connection. But if the origin of the Bahraini dialectal division was geographical, its preservation, up to the present time, in an area no bigger than a small English county, has been due to social and economic factors whose effects have only begun to diminish in strength in the last 20 to 30 years. As late as the mid-1970s, the two communities lived almost totally separated from each other in more than 60 sect-exclusive villages scattered throughout the island, and in separate quarters of the two largest towns, Manama and Muharraq. There was and still is no marriage between them, and until recently their patterns of employment were different.

The face of Bahraini society slowly began to change with the discovery of oil in the 1930s. The changes accelerated rapidly through the 1950s, 60s and 70s as state education for all became the norm and the traditional activities of agriculture, pottery, weaving, fishing, boat-building and pearling, which tended to be based in particular communities, went into a rapid and permanent decline. Pearling ceased altogether in 1969, having been the biggest single employer until the mid-30s, and by 1980 only 4% of the working population was engaged in full-time agriculture, which had been the mainstay of the rural *Bahaarna* economy. By the early 1970s, Bahrain had become a major exporter of aluminium, and in the 70s and 80s filled the gap left by the collapse of Beirut as the Middle East centre for international banking and commerce. The social effect of these changes has been to bring the two communities into closer contact with each other in a wider variety of contexts. Where once the main contact might have been between the *Bahraani* market stall-holder and the 'Arab shopper, the new places and types of employment, not having originated in any indigenous community, are neutral ground in which 'Arab and *Bahaarna* are required to work side by side. The same is true of the mixed neighbourhoods in the new towns and settlements which have proliferated since the 1960s, and of course the new government schools do not practise sectarian discrimination in whom they admit.

Neither the 'Arab (henceforth "A") nor the *Bahaarna* ("B") dialects have ever been completely internally homogeneous, but there is a set of features which the A dialects as a group share, corresponding to a different set shared

---

7 Prochazka (1981), Holes (1991: 656).



by the B dialects. These features are most obvious in the speech of those who have been least affected by the socio-economic changes sketched out above: those over 50 years of age as a whole, and women in this age group in particular. Illiteracy reaches almost 100% in this latter group, whereas among town-dwelling men under 20 the rate of illiteracy even 20 years ago was only 15%.<sup>8</sup> Aside from their lack of familiarity with Modern Standard Arabic, elderly village women tend also to have had the least social contact with other Bahrainis from outside their immediate local community. Consequently, their speech has become a reservoir of dialectal conservatism.

The differences between the Bahraini A and B dialect-groups permeate every level of language structure and represent, in terms of general typology, a variation on the familiar theme of the “bedouin” (= here ‘*Arab*’) versus “sedentary” (= here *Baḥaarna*) historical split found elsewhere in the Arab world.<sup>9</sup> In segmental phonology, for instance, the following major distinctions may still be observed in uneducated village speech:

| <i>Old Arabic (and MSA)</i> | <i>‘Arab (A)</i> | <i>Baḥaarna (B)</i> |              |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| velars and uvulars          |                  |                     |              |
| /q/                         | /gaal/           | /kaal/              | “he said”    |
|                             | /jiliil/         | /kaliil/            | “a little”   |
| /k/                         | /cam/            | /cam/               | “how much?”  |
|                             | /kil/            | /cil/               | “all”        |
| interdentals and dentals    |                  |                     |              |
| /θ/                         | /θaani/          | /faani/             | “second”     |
| /ð/                         | /haaði/          | /haadi/             | “this”       |
| /ð/                         | /maðluum/        | /madluum/           | “wronged”    |
| /d/                         | /ðeef/           | /deef/              | “guest”      |
| alveolars                   |                  |                     |              |
| /j/                         | /yaab/           | /jaab/              | “he brought” |

Table 1: Communal phonological variants: Bahrain

The different treatments of OA /q/ and /k/ are the clearest indicator of the different historical origins of the A and B dialects. The A group of dia-

8 Holes (1987: 18).

9 Cantineau (1960: 68-9), Holes (1983b, 1996: 34-42).

lects has one of the classic Bedouin developments, found throughout the Gulf littoral and eastern Arabia, southern Iraq and large areas of the Jordanian and Syrian desert: fronting and voicing of /q/ to /g/,<sup>10</sup> and the subsequent conditioned affrication of the resulting /g/-/k/ pair of velar stops in historically front-vowel environments. The B group, on the other hand, followed one of the main sedentary developments (= "ruralite"), fronting all instances of OA /q/ to a voiceless, retracted velar /k/, and, presumably as a phonological consequence, affricating original OA /k/ in all environments, whether in contiguity with front or back vowels, to /c/. In these particulars, the B dialects closely resemble not only the northern Omani dialects referred to earlier but also the rural dialects of central Palestine (see case study 2 below). Thus rural B speakers have /c/ in many words in which A speakers have /k/, e.g. B /taacil/, A /taakil/ "you eat" (<OA /ta'kul/), B /macaan/, A /mukaan/ (<OA /makaan/) "place", whilst A speakers have /g/ or an affricated /j/ where rural B speakers have /k/, e.g. A /bugar/, B /bakar/ "cattle" (<OA /baqar/), A /jiriib/, B /kariib/ "near" (< OA /qariib/). The development of the OA interdental follows the same bedouin-sedentary dichotomy, the A reflexes maintaining and even extending the OA continuants, just as many other originally bedouin dialects do,<sup>11</sup> and the B dialects replacing them with stops, like many other sedentary dialects. The B variant /f/ <OA /θ/ is also historically a sedentary rural feature<sup>12</sup> though a rarer one. In the A dialects, the sound corresponding to OA /j/ has fallen in totally with the glide /y/, whilst in most B dialects it is an alveolar, as it is in normative pronunciations of MSA.

Since phonological differences between the A and B dialects are the most noticeable, and are so pervasive, they will be the main focus of attention in our consideration of how dialect change is occurring; but morphological and vocabulary differences also abound, and a few examples will be given here. The B dialects have an unusual set of 2nd person pronouns, a participial construction which is distinct from that of the A dialects, and a

---

10 The exact pronunciation of OA /q/ is disputed. In ancient times it may have been a voiced uvular (= /G/) (Blanc 1969), in which case the A dialectal development would have merely involved fronting.

11 Rosenhouse (1984: 8).

12 Blanc (1964: 19).

question marker which forms yes-no questions. Compare, for example, the typical sentences:

*is-sannuur kaatlatinnuh intiin ah?* (B)  
*il-gatu gaatlatah intay?* (A)  
 “Was it you (f) who killed the cat?”

There are different words for many common objects and concepts, e.g. A /*raah*/, B /*ghada*/ “to go”, A /*tagg*/, B /*darab*/ “to beat”, A /*tamm*/, B /*dall*/ “to continue to do s’thing”, or distinctive realisations of etymologically cognate items, e.g. A /*yad*/, B /*iid*/ “hand”, A /*rayyaal*/, B /*rajil*/ “man, husband”, A /*sinhu*, *sinhi*/, B /*weeshu*, *weeshi*/ “what?”.

Certain of these variants have come to acquire the status of community markers. In the case of the B speakers, the /*f*/ variant of OA /*θ*/ in particular occasions ribald comment from A speakers. The /*f*/ variant seems to have acquired this saliency because its A analogue /*θ*/ also coincides with the MSA (“correct”) pronunciation. On the other hand, the A speakers’ /*y*/ should theoretically mark them out in a similar way, since here it is the B speakers’ variant, /*j*/, which agrees with the standard pronunciation. In the case of the velar/uvulars, the groups differ from each other again, but in this case neither group has MSA-like dialectal reflexes. What then have been the effects of increasing urbanization and literacy on this linguistic situation?

The answer is a gradual breakdown in the correlation between community and dialect, which is particularly noticeable in the speech of the young literate. A modified form of the original A dialect is now widely heard in Manama (and indeed in the rest of Bahrain), and seems to have acquired the role, in public, particularly in intercommunal speech contexts, of a neutral “standard dialect” for both A and B speakers. In this type of intercommunal speech context, the reflex of OA /*q*/ is overwhelmingly /*g*/; /*j*/ may still be heard in a few words, but never the B variant /*k*/). The reflex of OA /*k*/ is /*k*/ except in a few high frequency items in which /*c*/ has become the norm for all, e.g. /*cam*/ “how much; few”, /*ceef*/ “how”, /*sicciin*/ “knife”, /*samac*/ “fish”. Significantly, it is in just the items where the A and B dialects share the non-standard variant /*c*/ that it is most stable. In the interdentalals, the A forms /*θ*/ and /*ð*/ have completely supplanted the B forms /*f*/ and /*d*/, so all younger literate speakers tend to have forms like /*θaani*/ and /*haaði*/, but in the case of the reflexes of the OA emphatics /*d̥*/ and /*ð̥*/, the variants of this

intercommunal dialect tend to correspond more closely to the (“correct”) MSA pronunciations and distributions of these sounds, whereby ض = /d/ and ظ = /ð/. In the alveolars, the A dialectal variant /y/ has maintained its ground despite its non-standardness, and there are even examples of educated speakers of the B dialects, which have standard-like /j/, switching to /y/. In summary, the pronunciation of the new “shared” dialect, spoken by the young literates of both communities, looks like this:

| <i>OA (and MSA)</i> | <i>intercommunal dialect</i> |              |
|---------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| /q/                 | /gaal/                       | “he said”    |
|                     | /galiil/                     | “a little”   |
| /k/                 | /cam/                        | “how much?”  |
|                     | /kil/                        | “all”        |
| /θ/                 | /θaani/                      | “second”     |
| /ð/                 | /haaði/                      | “this”       |
| /ḏ/                 | /maḏluum/                    | “wronged”    |
| /d/                 | /ḏeef/                       | “guest”      |
| /j/                 | /yaab/ or /jaab/             | “he brought” |

Table 2: Intercommunal dialect: Bahrain

This intercommunal dialect seems to have originated at some point earlier in this century through the fusion of A and B dialects in Manama.<sup>13</sup> The recent growth in importance of this city as a population, commercial, and political centre – so that in effect it has become a city-state of which the smaller towns and villages are satellites – seems to have led to the new dialect stabilizing and spreading. Its phonological structure, when compared with the rural A and B dialects which were its original constituents, suggests that it is the product of social pressures which are experienced differently by the different sectarian communities of the city, as well as by those who live in the villages outside and commute into it, against a general background consciousness of the norms of “correct” literary Arabic, inculcated by the school system. Most obviously, the literate B speakers have totally abandoned stereotypically B variants: i.e. those which are neither MSA-like nor shared by the A dialects (/k/ <OA /q/, /f/ <OA /θ/ and /d/

---

13 Johnstone (1967: xxix).

<OA /ð/). Interestingly, in the case of the abandoned /k/, the replacing variant is not the MSA one, but that of the socially and economically dominant A group: /g/. The unconditioned use of /c/, once another stereotypical marker of B speakers, has also totally disappeared, but /c/ tends to be retained as a reflex of OA /k/ in a few high-frequency words in which the A dialect shares it. The interdental /θ/ and /ð/, being common to both MSA and the A dialect, have exerted a double pressure which has led to them completely replacing the B variants /f/ and /d/. To some extent, the B speakers have even abandoned B variants which are MSA-like but non-A, e.g. the variable replacement of /j/ in words like /jaab/ by /y/. Thus two complementary processes seem to be in operation: the total *loss* of stereotypically B, and therefore stigmatised variants, and a general *accommodation* to shared, or more locally prestigious A variants. For the young and literate A speakers, on the other hand, the intercommunal dialect represents only a small shift away from the variants used by their non-literate kinsfolk. Stereotypically A features, i.e. those that are locally particular to them and at the same time non-standard, survive and even prosper: /g/ <OA /q/ (e.g. /gara/ “he read”), /y/ <OA /j/ (e.g. /yidiid/ “new”) (a change which historically affected all instances of OA /j/); and even /j/ < OA /q/ (e.g. /jiddaam/ “in front of”), which was confined to a limited phonological environment and is every bit as much a marker of A speakers as /f/ < OA /θ/ is of B ones, still survives as the normal pronunciation in a few words. Where there has been change in the A dialect, it is limited and variable, and confined to switches towards MSA variants e.g. the replacement of /c/ by /k/ in some words. Similar changes in vocabulary usage can be observed, with the B dialects losing those elements which are peculiar to them and replacing them with their A equivalents.

Let us recall that we are describing here behaviour in public speech-contexts where the speakers were conscious of the presence of a tape-recorder. None the less, the convergence of educated A and B speakers was invariably asymmetrical, and strongly in the direction of a modified form of the A dialect. Aside from this, there is a lot of other circumstantial evidence to suggest that this modified A dialect has normative value for Bahrain as a whole. For example, in virtually all attempts, written and spoken, at representing “typical” Bahraini speech – written or spoken radio and television soap operas, women’s programmes, children’s hour, and the speech bubbles in newspaper cartoons – it is an educated variety of the A dialect which is

used. As one would expect, educated B speakers who work in, but live outside Manama in villages where the original B dialects are still spoken by the older generations, switch to plainer varieties of the B dialect in domestic contexts with family and neighbours. There is often a wide gap between the dialect they use in the communally mixed environment of the office, factory or school and what they use at home or in the local mosque or shop with the two generations senior to them. Home is a context where a B speaker's use of the modified A dialect which he would unthinkingly use in the workplace would be felt to be out of place, and might be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to dissociate himself from his *Baḥarna* identity.

Thus, in Bahrain the linguistic effect of urbanization and increased literacy has been to level dialect differences in intercommunal speech contexts, but to do so in a way which reflects the status relations of the local communities. The A-dialect, being that of the local ruling group, has exerted and continues to exert a covert pressure on the B-dialect, the speakers of which historically regard themselves as the social underdogs. It is noticeable that, outside the context of formal public speaking, MSA, the vehicle of overt linguistic prestige, exerts only a minor influence, at least on that most socially salient of all aspects of language, its pronunciation.

#### Case study 2: Jordan<sup>14</sup>

Compared to Bahrain, urbanization and its accompanying social change in Jordan has occurred on a much bigger scale, and the forces which caused it, initially at least, were different. Following the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967, there was massive Palestinian immigration into Jordan. In 1948, this was from areas which eventually became part of Israel proper, and in 1967 there was a further influx from the West Bank of the Jordan, an area which had been incorporated into the Jordanian state after 1948. The initial expansion in the population of Amman was caused almost entirely by this mass Palestinian immigration. As well as their political aspirations, the Palestin-

---

14 This analysis is based on Abd-el-Jawad (1986), Abd-el-Jawad and Awwad (1987), Suleiman (1993), and comparative material from Bauer (1926). Data from these studies is supplemented by an analysis of unpublished recordings of educated and uneducated people of urban Palestinian, rural Palestinian, and Jordanian origin, made by the author in Amman in 1989, and in Jerusalem, Palestinian villages and Amman in 1990, 1992, 1993.

ians brought with them their local dialects which differed in certain respects from those of East Bank Jordanians. In Palestine, a three-way set of phonological equivalences exists between the speech of urbanite (U), ruralite (R) and Bedouin populations (BED) as below:

| <i>OA (and MSA)</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>R</i>  | <i>BED</i>          |             |
|---------------------|----------|-----------|---------------------|-------------|
| /q/                 | /ʻalb/   | /kalb/    | /galb/              | “heart”     |
| /k/                 | /kalb/   | /calb/    | /kalb/ or<br>/calb/ | “dog”       |
| /θ/                 | /tuum/   | /θuum/    | /θuum/              | “garlic”    |
| /ð/                 | /haada/  | /haaða/   | /haaða/             | “this”      |
| /ð̣/                | /ndiif/  | /nað̣iif/ | /nað̣iif/           | “clean”     |
| /ḍ/                | /ðarab/  | /ð̣arab/  | /ð̣arab/            | “he hit”    |
| /j/                 | /ʒaar/   | /jaar/    | /jaar/              | “neighbour” |

Table 3: Communal phonological variants: Amman

The majority of the Palestinians who settled in Amman or the refugee camps near it were sedentaries who spoke U or R dialects, and it is likely that within this group U speakers were in a majority. The small town of Amman to which they gravitated was populated in the late 1940s largely by people who spoke dialects which were very similar to that of the Palestinian BED speakers from across the River Jordan, and had much in common, indeed, with those of Bedouin speakers (such as A speakers in Bahrain) from a much wider area of the eastern Arab world.

By 1970, the population of Amman had rocketed to 550,000 (from 30,000 in 1943), and the sheer weight of numbers of U- and R-dialect speakers in Amman and its surrounding area made its streets sound like those of a Palestinian city.<sup>15</sup> The Jordanian state offered all Palestinians who wished it – even those from areas of pre-1948 Palestine over which it had never had any control – Jordanian passports and right of abode in Jordan. Although many of the immigrants became absorbed into the mainstream of Jordanian life, a considerable proportion, particularly of the less well-educated and less well-off, clung on to their Palestinian identity, and tended to congregate in Palestinian communities, whether in refugee camps or particular suburbs of Amman. The violence which erupted in the late 1960s

---

15 Suleiman (1993: 16).

and early 1970s, and which led to the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan, was essentially a war between two polities: the Hashemites and their supporters, who increasingly felt their power was in danger of being usurped, and who presented themselves as representing the interests of the "real" Jordanians, versus the Palestinian leadership, which claimed to represent the immigrants. Once the political supremacy of the Hashemites was re-established, the social equilibrium was by and large restored. None the less, the degree of Palestinian integration into, and identification with, the Jordanian state and society remains uneven.

The population growth of Amman and other Jordanian cities is not, however, completely accounted for by Palestinian immigration. Like other Middle Eastern states, Jordan has experienced a long-term drift from the countryside and the desert into its towns and cities. In slightly more than a century, for example, one of the major Bedouin tribes of Jordan, the Bani Sakhr, speakers of a typical Jordanian BED dialect, have moved from being fully nomadic camel-rearers to sedentarized sheep-rearers and farmers/landowners living in a scatter of villages in the Balqa' region adjacent to Amman.<sup>16</sup> Many of the settled descendants of the formerly nomadic tribe now supplement their family income by working in Amman for businesses and government ministries, or, at the lower echelons, as messengers, taxi-drivers or watchmen.

These social and political developments have had, and continue to have, profound effects on spoken Jordanian Arabic. Amman (and also Irbid, the second largest city) has for the last 40 years been a city in which three different dialects have coexisted. As may be appreciated from the chart of phonological correspondences above, it is in the synchronic reflexes of OA/MSA /q/ and /k/, in which each of the competing dialect types has a markedly different set of variants, that the dialect differences are most obvious. Recent studies<sup>17</sup> have shown that not only are speakers aware of the values carried by the different variants as badges of identity and origin, but

---

16 Lewis (1987: 124ff).

17 Sawaie (1986), Abd-el-Jawad (1986). The latter is a quantitative study based on recordings of speakers drawn from different generations in 200 Jordanian households, divided between U, R and BED communities.



that the younger generations in all three communities are changing the way they speak in ways which reflect these perceptions.

Although the contemporary linguistic situation is characterized by a great deal of communal and individual variation, some definite general tendencies can be observed. Let us begin with the shibboleth-like reflexes of the OA consonants /q/ and /k/.

Broadly speaking, young women as a group, whichever community they come from, U, R, or BED, strongly favour the glottal stop /ʔ/ as a dialectal reflex of OA /q/. Young men from the same communities show a different pattern: U-dialect speakers tend strongly to preserve their /ʔ/, but show a slight tendency to switch to /g/; BED-speakers show a rather stronger tendency to switch in the opposite direction from their /g/ to the U variant /ʔ/; and male R-dialect speakers switch strongest of all away from their variant /k/, replacing it with /g/ and /ʔ/ in roughly equal measure.<sup>18</sup> Studies of speaker attitudes to these variants help to illuminate what is happening.<sup>19</sup> The /ʔ/ variant seems to have become associated in younger speakers' minds with an urban environment (and social sophistication), while /g/ is thought of as typically "Bedouin" and carries overtones of a rough, tough masculinity. The /k/ variant, on the other hand, because it is associated with village life and the relatively lowly occupation of farm labouring, carries neither of these positive sets of connotations. Hence young women, as a group, are tending overwhelmingly to converge on /ʔ/, while the men, whatever their communal origin, appear ambivalent as between the social values of /ʔ/ and /g/. The loser in all this is /k/. The affricated variant /c/ <OA /k/ is also disappearing fast from the speech of the young of all communities and being replaced by /k/. In Jordan, as elsewhere in the eastern Arab World /c/ derived from OA /k/, as in /cbiir/ "big, old", seems to receive the same negative evaluation as /k/ <OA /q/,<sup>20</sup> and presumably for the same reasons: it too is a feature of the ruralite dialects where, as we have already noted in the Bahrain case-study, all instances of OA /k/ historically became /c/.

---

18 Abd-el-Jawad (1986: 56).

19 Hussein (1980), Abd-el-Jawad (1981).

20 Lecerf (1970: 108).

The motivation for contemporary variation and change may be even more complex than this explanation suggests, however. In a recent study,<sup>21</sup> Suleiman points out that the variants in question have a local political, as well as a social valency. In an urban Jordanian context, /g/ is unmistakably an East Bank (= "pure Jordanian"), feature, while /ʔ/ and /k/ (and a fortiori /c/ <OA /k/) are geographically West Bank (= "Palestinian"). /k/ as a reflex of /q/ is, in particular, marked as Palestinian as it does not occur anywhere as a native East Bank variant; /ʔ/, on the other hand, is not so unambiguously Palestinian in that it is also typical of cities in neighbouring Syria, Lebanon and Egypt. According to Suleiman, in public contexts where they are dealing with authority figures such as policemen (who are overwhelmingly from the East Bank and hence BED /g/-dialect speakers), Palestinian men tend to eschew linguistic features which mark them out as not being East Bankers. Thus whether they are, within their own communities, ruralite /k/- and /c/-users or urbanite /ʔ/-users, they tend to make an outward show of solidarity and empathy with their East Bank interlocutors by switching to the BED variant /g/ and (if they are R-speakers at home) by dropping /c/. Women, as we have already noted, whatever their dialect background are subject to a different kind of pressure to sound "feminine" and "sophisticated", and so converge on /ʔ/, whether they are East bank Jordanian or West Bank Palestinian. Observation of Palestinian behaviour in public contexts where interlocutors are not known to each other suggests that Suleiman's analysis is correct, though it remains to be demonstrated conclusively.

Let us now turn briefly to developments of the OA interdental /θ/, /ð/ and /ð̣/. Once more there is a tendency for the U, R and BED dialects to converge.<sup>22</sup> In informal speech contexts, the stop (= U) variants and a set of sibilant variants, /s/, /z/ and /ẓ/, which seem to have originally arisen between two and three hundred years ago,<sup>23</sup> are overwhelmingly favoured above the interdental variants, viz. /t/ and /s/ rather than /θ/; /d/ and /z/ rather than /ð/; and /d/ and /z/ rather than /ð̣/. These variants are ranked sty-

---

21 Suleiman (1993).

22 Abd-el-Jawad and Awwad (1987: 79-83).

23 According to Garbell (1978: 215), these sibilant variants arose between the 16th and 18th centuries as a result of Turkish becoming the official language of the area. The Turkish pronunciation of "learned" Arabic words which had been borrowed into Turkish some time before was re-borrowed back into the educated spoken Arabic of the time.

listically with respect to each other, the sibilants being seen as higher style than the stops in lexical items where there is a choice.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, both the stop and sibilant variants are also associated with the dialects of all the neighbouring towns and cities of the Levant, including Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut, and Jerusalem, as well as Cairo and Alexandria. They have, in other words, no specifically “Palestinian” overtones. Even for Amman BED speakers, it seems, the stops and sibilants are supplanting the interdental variants, which do not, it would appear, carry the same positive “Bedouin” and “Jordanian” connotations as /g/. Observation suggests that very much the same thing is happening to the alveolar variants /ʒ/ and /j/: /ʒ/, as a general Levantine urban variant is gaining ground at the expense of the (in a Jordanian context) BED variant /j/.

From the foregoing, it emerges that an Amman urban dialect is in the process of formation which, though not identifiable with any one of the constituent communal dialects, is heavily influenced by the U dialect originally brought by the Palestinian immigrants. This serves as a communally neutral variety for all speakers, but in particular for younger ones, in informal public contexts. In more formal contexts, there is a tendency, as elsewhere in the Arab world, to substitute the standard variant (which, it will be noted coincides phonologically in several cases with the BED and R variants). The outline structure of this new dialect, in terms of the variables we are treating here, is thus:

| OA (and MSA) | <i>intercommunal dialect</i> |                            |             |
|--------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
|              | <i>informal style</i>        | <i>formal style</i>        |             |
| /q/          | /ʔaal/ or /gaal/             | /ʔaal/ or /gaal/ or /qaal/ | “he said”   |
| /k/          | /kalb/                       | /kalb/                     | “dog”       |
| /θ/          | /tuum/ or /suum/             | /suum/ or /θuum/           | “garlic”    |
| /ð/          | /haada/ or /haaza/           | /haaza/ or /haaða/         | “this”      |
| /ð̣/         | /ndiif/ or /naziif/          | /naziif/ or /nað̣iif/      | “clean”     |
| /j/          | /ʒaar/ or /jaar/             | /ʒaar/ or /jaar/           | “neighbour” |

Table 4: Intercommunal dialect: Amman

24 Abd-el-Jawad and Awwad’s 1987 study makes it clear that the synchronic choice of interdental, stop or sibilant is conditioned not just by the formality of speech-context, but more fundamentally by the connotations of the lexical item as more or less “core dialect” or more or less “standard”.

As we have noted, variation in both these styles is partly lexically conditioned, and, in informal styles, related to affective factors, such as the degree to which a speaker feels inclined or even obliged, in certain circumstances, to empathize and identify with an interlocutor.

Significant in more general terms is the fact that, although the dialect of the numerically dominant community in Amman (the U-dialect speakers) is the basis for the new dialect, phonological elements from speakers of the BED dialect also form part of it. In this sense, it is a dialectal “compromise”, like the modified A dialect which fulfils a similar role in Bahrain. Also as in Bahrain, the historically ruralite dialect is fast disappearing from (public) view, and has played no role in the formation of the new dialect. Its role is marginal in public contexts, and it tends to be used only in the home and other more local settings. The main difference between Amman and Bahrain is that whereas in Bahrain it is a historically bedouin dialect which has come to form the basis of the new intercommunal urban dialect, in Amman it is a historically sedentary one. Variants which have been regarded as having a particular socio-historical significance in the development of Arabic are thus being synchronically reinterpreted, and acquiring new sets of local social meanings. This is a consequence of the different impacts which the area-wide phenomenon of urbanization has had. Where once, for example, in both Bahrain and Jordan, the use of /g/ was the mark of someone whose ancestry allied him, however distantly, with the Bedouin tribal structure of the eastern Arab world, its use today conveys no such automatic connotation in either country. It is interesting and amusing to note that variation of the kind described here is often exploited as a device for characterization in media plays and soap-operas. For example, *al-tajriba*, a 13-part television *musalsal* broadcast in 1987, whose action takes place in Amman, has the wealthy, macho, industrialist paterfamilias invariably using /g/ as his dialectal variant for OA /q/, but varying between the full range of stop, sibilant and interdental variants of words containing OA /θ/, /ð/, and /ḏ/, depending on the formality of the speech context. His pampered daughters, on the other hand, invariably use the glottal /ʔ/ for OA /q/, and only the stop and sibilant pronunciations of OA /θ/, /ð/, and /ḏ/!

### Case study 3: Baghdad

Following the revolution of 1958, a programme of urban renewal and expansion began which changed the face of Baghdad. At the time of the

revolution, the population of the city was 780,000.<sup>25</sup> Urban expansion continued to gather pace through the following three decades, so that by 1987 the population had grown to 3.2 million (4.8 million if the immediately surrounding metropolitan area is included).<sup>26</sup> This compares with a total Iraqi population at that time of 17.25 million, of whom approximately two-thirds could be classed as urban in terms of domicile and employment. The major factor in the rapid growth of the city's population has been economic migration from rural areas of Iraq.

Of the total Iraqi population, perhaps 75% are Muslims whose first language is Arabic. There are claimed to be 1 million Christians of various denominations,<sup>27</sup> of whom perhaps three quarters are first-language Arabic speakers. The largest concentration of Christians is in Baghdad, where it was recently estimated that there are 100 churches.<sup>28</sup> There is a tiny rump minority of Jews, numbering now about 2,500 (compared with 50,000 in 1920, or 25% of the then population of Baghdad).<sup>29</sup>

Before we consider the contemporary linguistic effects of urbanisation, a brief sketch of the linguistic history of Iraq is in order. In contemporary Iraq, there are two main types of dialect, again reflecting the historical divide between bedouin and sedentaries noted in the first two case studies. But religion also correlates closely with dialect, in a way which bears witness to the country's turbulent history. In the north, the sedentary-bedouin distinction cuts across the religious one: sedentaries, Muslim or non-Muslim, speak a sedentary type of dialect (called *qeltu*-dialects, so-called after their pronunciation of the word "I say"), while those historically of bedouin stock, who are all Muslim, speak bedouin dialects (known as *gelet*-dialects for the same reason). In the south of Iraq, including Baghdad, however, the dialectal fault-line corresponds more closely to religious affiliation: here the Muslims all speak *gelet* dialects whatever their degree of sedentarization, while the non-Muslims, who are all town-dwellers, speak *qeltu*

---

25 Blanc (1964: 8).

26 The population statistics for present day Baghdad and Iraq are taken from the 38th edition (1992) of the *Middle East and North Africa Yearbook*.

27 Abu-Haidar (1991: 1).

28 Abu-Haidar (1991: 1).

29 Blanc (1964: 8).

dialects similar to those spoken by sedentaries in the north.<sup>30</sup> This situation came about as a result of the sack of Baghdad and the towns of Lower Iraq by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. Up to that point, it is probable that in Baghdad and the other southern Iraqi towns, the type of dialect spoken by the whole population was of the *qeltu* type, i.e. like that spoken by today's Christian Baghdadis and the northern Iraqi sedentaries, whether Christian or Muslim. When the Mongols arrived in February 1258, Baghdad was largely destroyed and its Muslim population virtually wiped out. The non-Muslim population, however, was spared. In 1401 the city suffered a further debacle at the hands of Timur, and there was again mass slaughter and destruction of buildings and the water supply system. Over the succeeding centuries, Baghdad and the towns of Lower Iraq were gradually repopulated by sedentarizing bedouin from the deserts to the west and south-west of Mesopotamia. These settlers eventually came to be in the majority. They have continued to speak a dialect which, whilst it has absorbed sedentary influences, has remained up to the present day bedouin in type. The upshot is that in Baghdad two quite different communal dialects exist which continue the historical bedouin-sedentary split: Muslim Baghdadi (MB), a bedouin-type dialect, which is the dialect of the majority, and Christian Baghdadi (CB), a sedentary dialect, the dialect of what has become a small minority. The once large Jewish community, which left Baghdad *en masse* in the early 1950s, also had its own sedentary-type dialect (JB)<sup>31</sup> similar in type to CB, but this has now all but disappeared from Baghdad.

Up to the present time, there have been no quantitative studies of dialect variation in Baghdad or, for that matter, anywhere else in Iraq. The evidence for contemporary change within each of MB and CB, and for cross-dialectal influences between them is in the form of a participant observer's reports,<sup>32</sup> which can be compared with earlier comprehensive descriptive studies of Baghdadi. MB as described in the grammatical and lexical works of the early 1960s,<sup>33</sup> although manifestly a bedouin *gelet*-dialect, shows evidence of long-term exposure to non-bedouin influences. This is clear if

---

30 Blanc (1964: 3-10).

31 See Blanc (1964: *passim*) and Mansour (1991) for a comprehensive description.

32 Abu-Haidar (1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1991: 143-150).

33 Erwin (1963), Blanc (1964), Woodhead and Beene (1967).

these descriptions of MB are compared with accounts of the bedouin *gelet*-dialects of Lower Iraq and its north Arabian desert fringes (the demographic reservoir from which Baghdad was repopulated) which have been published subsequently.<sup>34</sup> In MB one finds, for example, only sporadic and lexically fossilized examples of the affrication to /j/ of /g/ <OA /q/. The incidence of /c/ <OA /k/ is somewhat greater, and it, too, has become morphologized and lexicalized: not only does it feature in some alternations such as /caan/ “he was”, /ykuun/ “he is”, but distinguishes cognate pairs such as /baacer/ “tomorrow”, /baaker/ “virgin”. Compare this with the situation in Lower Iraq, where the dialectal vocabulary is permeated by the results of the same historical affrication of /g/ and /k/ in front-vowel environments.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, /y/ <OA /j/, a phonological feature universal to *gelet*-dialects south of Kut and Samawa,<sup>36</sup> also shows up in Baghdadi, but only very sporadically, e.g., in /yamm/ (</ganb/) “next to, beside” and in one or two other words. On the other hand, one finds in MB plentiful examples of dialectal “core items” with the sedentary reflex /q/, a variant which is almost completely absent from the dialects of Muslim Lower Iraq,<sup>37</sup> and which cannot be ascribed to MSA influence, e.g. /buqa/ “to remain”, /qera/ “to read”, /qubal/ “to accept”. Other aspects of the phonology and morphology of MB show similar shifts away from the extremes of *gelet*-dialect forms: the so-called “*ghawa*” syndrome<sup>38</sup> is totally absent; typically bedouin syllabic catenations of the CCvCv(C) type in nouns and perfect tense verbs are lacking (MB has CvCCv(C) forms); and there is no gender distinction in the plural forms of the verb, as there is the bedouin dialects. In the first and second of these respects, MB agrees with the fully sedentarized bedouin dialects of southern Iraq;<sup>39</sup> in all three it differs from the more extreme “nomadic” type of dia-

---

34 Ingham (1973, 1976 on southern Iraqi dialects; 1982 on north-east Arabia).

35 Blanc (1964: 25-8).

36 Ingham (1976: 67).

37 Blanc (1964: 27); Abu-Haidar (1987: 43-5).

38 This is the tendency in bedouin dialects for non-final CaC-syllables closed by a “guttural” consonant to become CCa: thus /*ghawa*/ “coffee”, rather than /*gahwa*/, /*nxala*/ “palm-tree” rather than /*naxla*/, etc.

39 Ingham (1976: 73; 1982: 38).

lect found in the same area.<sup>40</sup> Historically, then MB seems to have started life as a mixture of bedouin dialects which were levelled over several centuries as its speakers settled and came into contact with long-established, and at that time influential non-Muslim urban populations. The twentieth century, however, has witnessed a reversal of this trend. Since the independence of Iraq some 60 years ago, and the gradual coming to political prominence of the urban Muslim population, MB has assumed the position of “prestige” dialect<sup>41</sup> which has rendered it seemingly impervious to the influence of other Iraqi dialects. It is to the linguistic effects of this socio-political change that we now turn.

The typical communal variants of the phonological variables on which we have been focusing are as below. Although the JB forms must now be regarded as a marginal part of the synchronic picture, they are included for the sake of completeness:

| <i>Old Arabic (and MSA)</i> | <i>MB</i>       | <i>CB</i> | <i>JB</i> |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| /q/                         | /gelet/         | /qeltu/   | /qeltu/   | “I said”      |
|                             | /jiriib/        | /qaghiib/ | /qaghiib/ | “near”        |
|                             | /buqa/          | /baqa/    | /baqa/    | “he remained” |
| /k/                         | /kitab/         | /katab/   | /katab/   | “he wrote”    |
|                             | /calib/         | /kalib/   | /kalb/    | “dog”         |
| /θ/                         | /θaani/         | /teeni/   | /θiini/   | “second”      |
| /ð/                         | /haaða/         | /haada/   | /haaða/   | “this”        |
| /ð/                         | /ðaalim/        | /ðaalim/  | /ðaalim/  | “tyrant”      |
| /d/                         | /ðurab/         | /ðaghab/  | /ðaghab/  | “he hit”      |
| /j/                         | /jaa/ (or /ija/ | /jaa/     | /jaa/     | “he came”     |

Let us now examine how these communal baselines are changing. Already in the Baghdad of the 1960s, Blanc comments that the affricated variants /j/ <OA /q/ and /c/ <OA /k/ were becoming stylistic markers which were avoided in mildly formal MB speech, e.g., /jiriib/ “near” would be realized as /geriib/ or, even more formally, /qariib/; /cbiir/ “big” as /kabiir/.<sup>42</sup> He further reports that rural Muslims from the south who had migrated to Baghdad, and who unconsciously continued their “city” behaviour when

40 Ingham (1976: 73; 1973: 540).

41 Blanc (1964: 170).

42 Blanc (1964: 25, 27).



visiting their relatives back in the south, replacing their “rural” /j/ by /g/ (e.g. saying /*gaa'id*/ instead of /*jaa'id*/), were mocked by their fellow villagers for “putting on city airs”.<sup>43</sup> More recent studies of MB done in the 1980s<sup>44</sup> suggest that these erstwhile stylistic shifts are now assuming a more permanent character, at least in the speech of young and educated speakers of MB. The /j/ <OA /q/ affricate has now virtually zeroed out and been replaced by /q/, just as /c/ has been supplanted /k/ in lexical items where MSA analogues exist, e.g.<sup>45</sup>

|           |             |   |           |
|-----------|-------------|---|-----------|
| /j/:      |             |   |           |
| /rafiqi/  | “my friend” | ⇒ | /rafiqi/  |
| /ghamiiq/ | “deep”      | ⇒ | /ghamiiq/ |

|            |          |   |            |
|------------|----------|---|------------|
| /c/:       |          |   |            |
| /cilma/    | “word”   | ⇒ | /kalima/   |
| /shibbaac/ | “window” | ⇒ | /shibbaak/ |

Where the MB variant survives, there tends to be a semantic difference between it and the MSA analogue form, such that the MB word retains its original, usually concrete meaning and the MSA form is an abstract semantic extension of this, e.g.<sup>46</sup>

|          |                   |          |                           |
|----------|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| /g/:     |                   |          |                           |
| /gaabal/ | “to face someone” | /qaabal/ | “to meet, interview”      |
| /allag/  | “to hang”         | /allaq/  | “to comment on”           |
| /ugda/   | “knot”            | /uqda/   | “(psychological) complex” |

|           |                      |           |                        |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| /c/:      |                      |           |                        |
| /calaawi/ | “kidneys (culinary)” | /kalaawi/ | “kidneys (anatomical)” |
| /milac/   | “to marry”           | /milak/   | “to possess”           |
| /ciwa/    | “to brand, scorch”   | /kiwa/    | “to iron”              |

It is apparent from the semantic range of the lexical innovations containing /q/ and /k/ that the source must be MSA. This is underscored by a

---

43 Blanc (1964: 28).

44 Abu-Haidar (1987, 1988a, 1988b).

45 Abu-Haidar (1987: 44, 47).

46 Abu-Haidar (1987: 46, 48).

participant observer's statement that, despite the fact that a proportion of the recent migrants into Baghdad are speakers of northern *qeltu*-dialects (i.e., they have /q/ and /k/ as dialectal variants like CB), such speakers "do not seem to have contributed any linguistic innovations... After settling in Baghdad most of them become bi-dialectal, and in interaction with MB speakers they invariably style-shift to MB".<sup>47</sup> Nor is there evidence of a shift by MB speakers from the interdental fricatives of their dialect to the corresponding stops of CB. Abu-Haidar notes some "rural" (i.e. central/southern Muslim) features which she claims have diffused into contemporary MB, apparently as a result of immigration,<sup>48</sup> but these almost all involve minor non-phonemic differences in stress placement, vowel length or short-vowel quality in a limited range of forms and environments, and are not typical of all MB speakers. The phonology of today's MB, compared with that spoken in the 1960s, thus shows a further degree of shift away from features which could be considered, in an Iraqi context, "rural", despite large-scale immigration from the countryside. MB remains a Bedouin *gelet*-dialect, but a historically levelled one into which MSA features, rather than those of other Baghdadi or Iraqi dialects, are now percolating at a rapid rate. Only in the speech of the older inhabitants, and in particular the women,<sup>49</sup> does the "plain" MB of the era before the urban expansion of the last 30 years survive.

Let us now turn briefly to changes in CB. Even at the time of Haim Blanc's investigations in the early 60s, MB had already attained the status of a local lingua franca, and was reportedly used by Christians and Jews in public and intercommunal situations. As I have suggested, this public pre-eminence of MB seems to be a relatively recent phenomenon. In 1920, before Iraq's independence, it is estimated that one-third of Baghdad's population spoke CB, JB or some other language.<sup>50</sup> Independence was accompanied by the gradual rise to political pre-eminence of the Sunnis of central Iraq, and, in more recent days, by the physical expansion of their political power-base in Baghdad. In relative terms, both the size and the political in-

---

47 Abu-Haidar (1988a: 77).

48 Abu-Haidar (1988a: 77-9).

49 Abu-Haidar (1988b).

50 Blanc (1964: 8).

fluence of the non-Muslim population in Baghdad shrank, and provided the incentive for a dialectal accommodation to MB which had previously, one presumes, been unnecessary. This accommodation has continued through the 1980s and 90s. Abu-Haidar's 1990 and 1991 studies of CB show that not only do CB speakers continue routinely to use MB in public and intercommunal contexts "requiring a certain level of formality and perhaps more guarded behaviour"<sup>51</sup> but the younger generation has begun to shift – variably, so far – to MB forms even in purely domestic ones. The shift is occurring most consistently in just those areas of the dialect where CB differs from MB and from the other *qeltu*-dialects of central and northern Iraq. It is less consistent in features where CB shares its non-MB forms with other *qeltu*-dialects.<sup>52</sup>

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Taken together, our case studies suggest that a common factor promoting dialect change in the contemporary Arabic-speaking Middle East is urbanization. Linguistically, the expanding city provides the crucible in which new combinations of dialect features are forged, and bestows on them a prestige such that the behaviour of users suggests that they are coming to be regarded as national "standard dialects". City-dwellers whose native dialects differ markedly from them, and others who come into the city from outside even temporarily, feel constrained to use them (or at least to try to) in public contexts. The norms of these emerging standard dialects are, it seems, complementary to, rather than in conflict with those of MSA: MSA provides a reservoir of vocabulary, phraseology and pronunciation standards which can be dipped into if and when an increased formality of circumstances require, but it is not the case that MSA norms provide some kind of neutral ground for intercommunal communication on everyday subjects – this function is fulfilled by the emerging intercommunal dialects.<sup>53</sup>

Which of the dialects in a particular society actually ends up acquiring this intercommunal status, or making the major contribution to it, depends

---

51 Abu-Haidar (1991: 143).

52 Abu-Haidar (1990: 51-3).

53 Ibrahim (1986).

not just on the size of the community that speaks it but at least as much on that community's political importance, and this can of course change over time. In Bahrain, it is the dialect of the numerically smaller but politically more powerful 'Arab which has attained this position. In Amman, the original East-Bankers, now vastly outnumbered by the immigrant speakers of other dialects are none the less contributing significantly to the formation of the new dialect, and for very much the same socio-political reasons as in Bahrain. In Baghdad, the last 50 to 60 years have seen an enormous change in the significance of the Muslim city dialect both in terms of the numbers of those who speak it or something like it, and in terms of its importance as a political symbol. Saddam Hussein, though himself a native of Tikrit, which has a northern *qeltu*-dialect, regularly uses MB as his preferred mode dialectal speech at press conferences and in sections of his public addresses.<sup>54</sup> Other Iraqi dialects, which, internal evidence suggests, contributed to the formation of MB over previous centuries, are no longer doing so. In all three of our case studies, the new "city dialect" has begun to lose whatever historical associations it had as a marker of a particular community, and come to be seen by those both inside and outside the city as the "standard" dialect. The competing dialects, on the other hand – rural Shi'i in Bahrain, ruralite Palestinian dialects in Amman, and Christian and Jewish Baghdadi – have receded from view in public contexts, but live on, at least among the old, as markers of communal identity in domestic ones.

In conclusion, it is worth pointing out that the forecasts which were being made in the 1950s and 60s that, as a result of rising levels of literacy, differences between the Arabic dialects would be levelled, to be replaced by a local version of an MSA-influenced koinè, have not proved true. For example, Johnstone, reporting in 1967 on researches he did in the Gulf in the late 1950s, made the following prediction about Kuwait: "There is no real doubt therefore that the Kuwaiti dialect is doomed to disappear in a relatively short time...Young Kuwaitis already found it difficult and even embarrassing to speak 'pure' Kuwaiti at the time of my visit."<sup>55</sup> As a matter of fact, the Kuwaiti dialect has not disappeared: indeed, in the late 1980s it was being exported to neighbouring countries in the form of television

---

54 Mazraani (1993: 134ff).

55 Johnstone (1967: xxviii).

soap-operas. Although (or perhaps because) Kuwaitis have since the late 1940s been a minority – and one which has grown steadily smaller – in their own country, badges of Kuwaiti identity seem to have proportionately grown rather than diminished in importance. The diverse tribal dialects which could still be distinguished, and arranged in a pecking order of social prestige in the small walled town of Kuwait and its hinterland of the late 1950s<sup>56</sup> have collapsed, not into “a local version of the pan-Arabic koinè”, but into a levelled but still distinctively Kuwaiti dialect which Kuwaitis routinely use, as far as one can observe, in all dialectal contexts, public and private, in their now sprawling metropolis of well over a million inhabitants. Recent political events have if anything served to reinforce this trend to emphasize what makes Kuwaitis different from their neighbours. This is but one more example of how dialectal resources can be remodelled and rearranged not just to serve the needs, as in our three case studies, of new communities and polities, but also to underline the continuity of old ones.

## REFERENCES

- ABD-EL-JAWAD H.R. 1981. *Lexical and Phonological Variation in Spoken Arabic in Amman*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- 1986. “The Emergence of an Urban Dialect in the Jordanian Urban Centers”. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 61: 54-63.
- ABD-EL-JAWAD H.R. and M. AWWAD. 1987. “Reflexes of Classical Arabic Interdentals: A Study in Historical Sociolinguistics”. *Al-Abhath* XXXV: 75-102.
- ABU-HAIDAR F. 1987. “The Treatment of the Reflexes of /q/ and /k/ in the Muslim Dialect of Baghdad”. *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 17: 41-57.
- 1988a. “Speech Variation in the Muslim Dialect of Baghdad – Urban Versus Rural”. *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 19: 74-80.
- 1988b. “Male/Female Linguistic Variation in a Baghdad Community”, in: A. K. IRVINE et al. (ed.), *A Miscellany of Middle Eastern Articles*, p. 151-162. Harlow: Longman.
- 1990. “Maintenance and Shift in the Christian Arabic of Baghdad”. *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 21: 47-62.
- 1991. *Christian Arabic of Baghdad*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

---

56 Johnstone (1961, 1964, *passim*).

- BAUER L. 1926. *Das palästinensische Arabisch*. Leipzig: Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung.
- BLAKE G., DEWDNEY J. and MITCHELL J. 1987. *The Cambridge Atlas of the Middle East and North Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BLANC H. 1964. *Communal Dialects in Baghdad*. Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs, x).
- 1969. "The Fronting of Semitic g and the qal-gal Dialect Split in Arabic", in: *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies held in Jerusalem, 19-23 July 1965*, p. 1-37. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- CANTINEAU J. 1960. *Études de linguistique arabe*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- ERWIN W. 1963. *A Short Reference Grammar of Iraqi Arabic*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- GARBELL L. 1978. "Remarks on the Historical Phonology of an East Mediterranean Arabic Dialect", in: S. AL-ANI (ed.), *Readings in Arabic Linguistics*, p. 203-240. Indiana: Indiana Linguistics Club (reprint of *Word* 14: 303-337, 1958).
- HOLES C.D. 1983a. "Patterns of Communal Language Variation in Bahrain". *Language in Society* 12: 433-57.
- 1983b "Bahraini Dialects: Sectarian Differences and the Sedentary/Nomadic Split". *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 10: 7-38.
- 1986. "The Social Motivation for Phonological Convergence in Three Arabic Dialects". *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 61: 33-51.
- 1987. *Language Variation and Change in a Modernising Arab State: The Case of Bahrain*. London: KPI.
- 1991. "Kashkasha and the Fronting and Affrication of the Velar Stops Revisited: A Contribution to the Historical Phonology of the Peninsular Arabic Dialects", in: A. KAYE (ed.), *Semitic Studies in Honor of Wolf Leslau*, p. 652-678 (vol. 1). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- 1996. "The Arabic Dialects of South-Eastern Arabia in a Socio-Historical Perspective". *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 31:34-56.
- HUSSEIN R.F. 1980. *The Case for Triglossia in Arabic: With Special Emphasis on Jordan*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York.
- IBRAHIM M.H. 1986. "Standard and Prestige Language: A Problem in Arabic Sociolinguistics". *Anthropological Linguistics* 28(1): 115-126.
- INGHAM B. 1973. "Urban and Rural Arabic in Khuzistan". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* xxxv(1): 533-53.
- 1976. "Regional and Social Factors in the Dialect Geography of Southern Iraq and Khuzistan". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* xxxix(1): 62-82.
- 1982. *North East Arabian Dialects*. London: KPI.
- JOHNSTONE T.M. 1961. "Some Characteristics of the Dosiri Dialect of Arabic as Spoken in Kuwait". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* xxiv(2): 249-97.
- 1964. "Further Studies on the Dosiri Dialect of Arabic as Spoken in Kuwait". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* xxvii(1): 77-113.

- 1967. *Eastern Arabian Dialect Studies*. London: Oxford University Press.
- LECERF J. 1970. Review of T.M. Johnstone, *Eastern Arabian Dialect Studies* (1967). *Arabica* 17: 101-108.
- LEWIS N.L. 1987. *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MANSOUR J. 1991. *The Jewish Baghdadi Dialect: Studies in the Judaeo-Arabic Dialect of Baghdad*. Or-Yehuda: Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center.
- MAZRAANI N. 1993. *Aspects of Language Variation in Arabic Political Speech Making*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge.
- MOSTYN T. (ed.). 1983. *Jordan: A Middle East Economic Digest Practical Guide*. London: MEED.
- PROCHAZKA T. 1981. "The Shi'i Dialects of Bahrain and their Relationship to the Eastern Arabian Dialect of Muharraq and the Omani Dialect of al-Rustaq". *Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik* 6: 16-55.
- ROSENHOUSE J. 1984. *The Bedouin Arabic Dialects*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- SAWAIE M. 1986. "A Sociolinguistic Study of Classical and Colloquial Arabic Varieties: A Preliminary Investigation into some Arabic Speakers' Attitudes". *al-Lisan al-'Arabi* 26: 1-19.
- SULEIMAN Y. 1993. "The Linguistic Situation in Jordan and Code-Switching". *New Arabian Studies* 1: 1-20.
- WOODHEAD D.R. and W. BEENE. 1967. *A Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic. Arabic-English*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.