

## **Palestinian Arabic in the diaspora: Evidence from dialect contact in Lebanon**

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Population displacement and migration triggered by protracted conflict have led to extensive contact between speakers of different varieties of Levantine Arabic (Horesh & Cotter 2016). Observing that these social processes open up avenues for exploring contact-induced change in the Arabic-speaking world, we investigate the possibility that Palestinian Arabic (PA), as spoken by Palestinian refugees in Beirut, is converging with Lebanese Arabic (LA), the majority and socially dominant variety.

Our synchronic data come from 45 hours of spontaneous speech recorded from 39 speakers of PA and 27 speakers of LA, stratified by age, sex, and level of education. To extend the time-depth of the analysis, we additionally examine two diachronic sources representing each comparison variety: (i) a sub-set of the *Palestinian Oral History Archive* (POHA), comprising recordings elicited in Lebanon from first-generation Palestinian refugees born as early as 1897; and (ii) a series of plays belonging to the *Lebanese Popular Theatre Corpus* (LPTC), performed in colloquial LA and televised between the early 1960s and 1983.

Drawing on the framework of comparative variationist sociolinguistics (e.g., Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), our linguistic focus is on a socially salient phonological variable involving the raising of /a:/ to [e:] in word-medial position, a stereotypical feature of LA (Naim 2006), but traditionally absent from the PA spoken in Beirut (Hennessey 2011). We also examine two morpho-syntactic variables, the expression of verbal negation and future temporal reference, whose structural congruence in the two contact varieties should ostensibly enhance the possibility of convergent change (Thomason 2001:76). To the extent that convergence has taken place, we hypothesize that it should be detectible in socially salient aspects of segmental phonology (Trudgill 1986:20) and that it should have affected multiple linguistic components (Thomason 2001: 92-93), as gauged from detailed quantitative examination of the *internal structure* of the targeted variable systems in each variety (Poplack 2020:47).

Results reveal evidence of contact-induced change in PA in the raising of /a:/ to [e:] in word-medial position, and dialect levelling affecting the system of verbal negation, where there is a reduction in socially marked variants used by educated third-generation Palestinians. By contrast, the expression of future temporal reference in PA diverges from LA, notably in relation to the dramatic increase in the use of the proclitic future marker, *ħa-*, also observed in varieties of PA spoken outside Lebanon (AbuAmsha 2016).

Among the major factors shaping the outcomes of dialect contact in Beirut, we implicate the social characteristics (generation, level of education, mobility) of speakers, as well as the communal insularity of Palestinian refugee camps. Although our general findings do not impeach the influential view that extra-linguistic factors are primordial determinants of contact-induced change (Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Thomason 2001), our results relating to the variable expression of futurity caution that: (i) internal, structural constraints act with external ones in determining the outcomes of contact (Sankoff 2013:502); and that (ii) contact-induced change cannot be adduced from shared surface correspondences alone, contra Leddy-Cecere (2018).

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