

QAF IN MOSUL ARABIC: LEVELLING OR RESISTANCE?

ABDULKAREEM YASEEN
(Newcastle University)

Abstract

The literature on phonological variation and change has reported that a process of dialect levelling amongst Arabic varieties spoken in urban settings has been in operation. Iraqi Arabic dialects and those spoken in neighbouring areas that are akin to them are believed to be undergoing such a process as a result of different factors. This article assesses whether this process is occurring in the variety of Arabic spoken in Mosul, Iraq.

Notwithstanding various comments referring to the supplanting of Mosul Arabic (henceforth MA), this paper presents evidence that the variety appears to be resisting the levelling that is currently occurring in other parts of Iraq. The results show that [q], one of the traditional features of MA, is still robustly maintained by speakers of MA stratified by gender, age and social class. The article suggests that the social meaning attached to this sound and the type of relationships maintained within the community of MA are the best possible factors that can be adduced to explain its preservation since this particular sound defines, at least linguistically, the community of MA.

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen considerable theoretical as well as methodological strides in the variationist research, notably in the realm of phonological variation and change. Labov's Martha's Vineyard study (1963) has sparked an upsurge of research interest in elucidating the multi-dimensional trajectories of phonological change through exploring inter- and intra-speaker variation (Foulkes & Docherty 1999). A key more recent offshoot of this strand of research is the theme of levelling. Levelling, or supralocalisation, is a phenomenon whereby natives of certain traditional dialects gradually abandon their traditional linguistic features, whether by choice or under duress, in favour of competing equivalents of a broader regional usage. Thus, features which make different dialects distinctive smooth out or completely vanish (Trudgill 1986: 98, Williams & Kerswill 1999: 149). Hinskens (1993: 11) defines levelling as a process in which the number of structures distinguishing a dialect from other varieties decreases, including those features socially perceived as prestigious and standard.

As a contact-induced process, levelling is seen as a process facilitated by *inter alia* increased mobility and immigration in a particular area. Dialect levelling (or more appropriate in this study, accent levelling) has become a focus of research and discussion in particular with reference to British English. Scholars such as Trudgill (1986), Kerswill (1996a) and Britain (1997) have extensively examined levelling as they tracked changes triggered by dialect contact, which has in turn been brought about by the social upheavals that have been taking place in Britain since the twentieth century.

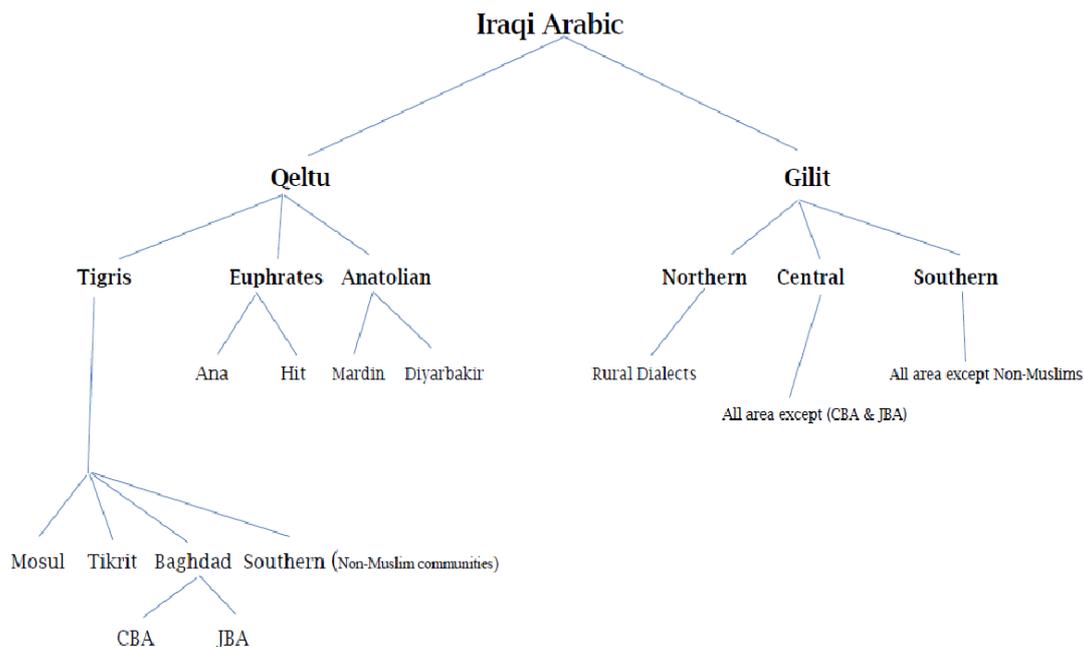
Dialect levelling has also been a recurrent theme in the literature, the applicability of which is extending well beyond the Anglocentric sphere. A number of studies followed the British pattern to include many parts of Europe such as Norway (e.g. Kerswill 1996b, Haug Hilton 2010, Røyneland 2009) and France (e.g. Armstrong 2001, 2002, Temple 2001, Esch 2002, Hornsby 2002, Pooley 2002, Lodge 2004, Boughton 2005) as well as areas beyond Europe such as the Arab world (e.g. Gibson 2002, Manfredi 2012) to name but a few.

2. Iraqi Arabic dialects

Of the various varieties spoken in Iraq, Iraqis are known for speaking a nation-wide variety called Iraqi, also known as Mesopotamian, Arabic. Iraqi Arabic (henceforth IA) is a continuum of Arabic varieties spoken in the Mesopotamian basin of Iraq, which extends beyond Iraq's territory to include adjacent parts of neighbouring Syria, Turkey and Iran. IA is predominantly centralised in Iraq and is the mother language to over 80% of the Iraqi people (Peoples & Bailey 2011: 298).

Blanc (1964) established a bipartite linguistic classification of IA that has remained in fashion throughout much of the work on the spectrum of Arabic dialects spoken in the Mesopotamian area. He charted the division of the dialects of Mesopotamia into two main dialect groups, *qeltu* and *gilit*¹ dialects, coined from the realisation of the 1st person singular past tense of the verb 'say'. Jastrow (1978) classified the *qeltu* dialects into three further groups: the Tigris, Euphrates, and Anatolian group. The *qeltu* group includes Maslawi Arabic (henceforth MA), as well as ethnically-based dialects such as Christian Baghdad (CBA) and Jewish Baghdad Arabic (JBA) (See Diagram 1 below).

Diagram 1. Iraqi Arabic dialect classification based on Blanc (1964) and Jastrow (2006)



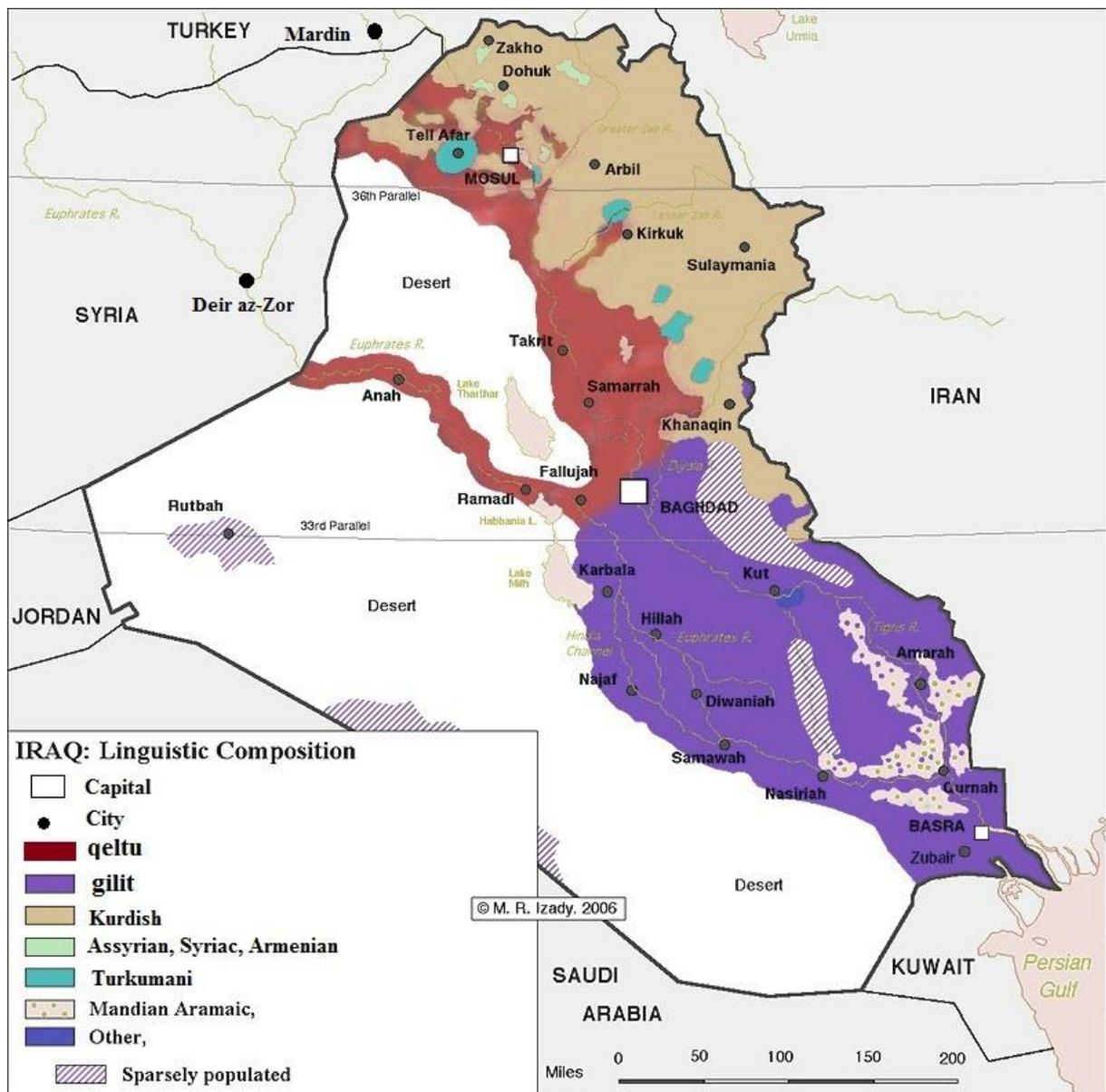
There is, in fact, no definite geographical feature dividing the two dialect areas and there are areas of variation where both may be heard. However, Holes (2007: 124) notes that an isogloss can be drawn between these two main Iraqi dialect groups (as illustrated in Figure 1); it runs approximately between the town of Falluja on the Euphrates River and the town of Samarra on the Tigris.

The *qeltu* dialects are spoken by Muslims north of Baghdad (e.g. Mosul and Tikrit) and by Christians and Jews in the whole dialect area which extends from Baghdad up to northern

¹ This is the nearest transliterated form of this term to how it is pronounced in Iraqi Arabic although other forms exist (e.g. *gelet* as in Abu Haidar 2007).

Iraq, northeastern Syria and southern Turkey. The majority *gilit* dialects are spoken in the rest of Iraq, and parts of Iran and are akin to Najdi Arabic, a variety spoken in northeastern Arabia (Biadisy et al. 2009: 55).

Figure 1. The distribution of *qeltu* and *gelet* dialects in Iraq and beyond (based on Collin 2009: 250)



3. Mosul

The capital of Nineveh province, Mosul is a city in northern Iraq. It is Iraq's third largest city and the major metropolitan centre in the northern region of Iraq (Figure 2). Situated some 363 km northwest of Baghdad, Mosul is sandwiched in a hilly area between the mountains in the north and east and the Al-jazeera desert in the south and the west. The Tigris River divides the city into two parts. These two parts are locally known as *Sahel Al-ayman* 'Right bank' and *Sahel Al-ayasar* 'Left bank'. Both banks contain a sprawling web of historic as well as newly-built neighbourhoods.

Mosul's society is often depicted as a kaleidoscope of different ethnicities and religious groups that include Arabs, Christians, Kurds, Yazidis, Turkmen, Kaka'is and Shabaks. Corresponding to this variety of inhabitants is a number of languages ranging from Arabic, Neo-Aramaic, and Kurdish to Shabaki and Turkmen. Arabs constitute the majority of the inhabitants in Mosul and their areas are found on both banks of the city. The areas of the other ethnic groups can be found largely on the right bank. Although these ethnic groups have their own languages, they still speak Arabic, which acts as the lingua franca that binds the different population groups of Mosul into a whole.

Figure 2. Map showing the geographical location of Mosul in Iraq



3.1. Maslawi Arabic (MA)

MA is the Arabic variety spoken by the people of the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, 352 km north of Baghdad. Thanoon (2010) claims that the origin of the Mosul dialect can be traced back to the Arab tribe, *Bani Tamim*, who settled in Iraq in pre-Islamic times. MA is influenced by the languages of the ethnic groups of Mosul such as the Kurds, Turkmen, and Christians (Ibid.). Irrespective of their ethnic or religious backgrounds, all Maslawis speak MA with some differences. Blanc (1964: 164) notes that MA is akin to CBA in that both share noticeable similarities. Still, each variety has some exclusive linguistic features that distinguish one from the other.

4. Levelling in MA

Levelling is believed to be occurring in *qeltu* varieties, not least in MA, in that some of the defining linguistic features of the *qeltu* group are losing ground to supralocal ones (e.g. *gilit*). Although no previous surveys of dialect levelling have been carried out on MA, anecdotal evidence, however, can serve as an indicator of the occurrence of this process. Early remarks germane to the issue of levelling, albeit impressionistic in nature, can be found in Palva (1983: 101) and Abu-Haidar (2007) who claim that levelling is underway in the *qeltu* dialect group. The quotes below are separated by more than two decades, yet they both agree on the occurrence of levelling in *qeltu* speaking areas, including Mosul. Palva (1983: 101) states:

Due to the radical change in the modern society, local dialects are today exposed to substantial linguistic interference. On the other hand, *qeltu* dialects represent almost everywhere a geographically recessive type. In Iraq and in the Syrian town Der iz-Zor they are losing ground to the dominant *gilit* dialects, and in Anatolia to Turkish and Kurdish. In many places in Anatolia the socio-religious minorities have already become extinct or have left the area, and many dialects will become extinct during the next generation.

A similar observation is also made by Collin (2009) whose personal communication with scholars like Farida Abu-Haidar and Clive Holes has led him to conclude that levelling tendencies are afoot in Mosul as well as other cities in northern Iraq and that the boundary between the dialects of Mosul and Baghdad is drifting further up to the north:

Tikrit was once a *qeltu*-speaking town. Nowadays, the majority speak *gelet*. Mosul is going that way too. Kirkuk pre-1979 was predominantly Turkoman-speaking. By the time of the invasion in 2003, the Turkomans had become a minority and you could find all kinds of southern and central *gelet* varieties throughout Kirkuk. (Abu Haidar, p.c. cited in Collin (2009))

Collin goes further to refer to Abu Haidar's claim that the influence of Baghdad plays a major role in the current change in those areas given the status of MBA as a prestigious norm for the young to imitate. Capitals are typically depicted as modern, cultural centres whose dialects are nationally perceived as the prestigious varieties. Baghdad is no exception. Its dominant *gilit* variety is viewed as the nation-wide variety spoken by and intelligible to a large part of the Iraqi people. That is why this variety is diffusing to major population centres in the northwest of Iraq like Mosul (Ibid.). Al-damluji (2014) also claims that more "foreign" variants are gaining currency in the dialect of Mosul, which seems to be "fighting for survival" amid the influence of the Bedouin-type dialects of Iraq.

The alleged recessiveness of MA is also drawing public interest, receiving an airing in the public press, as it frequently appears in the local as well as national papers. For instance, Elyas (2013) argues that Maslawis are "fearing the extinction of their dialect" owing to reasons similar to those sketched in the next section. Still on the local level, Maslawis in general note that their accent is not heard very much nowadays, attributing this to the influence of non-MA speaking folks who have flooded the city in recent years for different reasons such as urbanisation, and sectarian tensions (more details in Section 5 below). This resulted in a demographic change in Mosul in which non-Maslawis have become the majority, according to Maslawis themselves.

5. Factors behind dialect levelling in Mosul

The precipitating factors often cited in research and commentaries on the occurrence of levelling in MA are the unprecedented events (sketched below) that took place in Iraq in general and more particularly in Mosul during the past few decades. The social changes brought about by such events have collectively led to the disintegration of the traditional community of Mosul and consequently led to the retreat in the use of MA. These factors can be described as follows.

5.1. Socio-psychological reasons

5.1.1 Mobility, contact and accommodation

Mosul has attracted immigrants from far and wide during the last three decades. The influx of newcomers (e.g. workers, farmers, and others) to Mosul from other parts of Iraq has at times been noticeable, locals claim, given the recognition of Mosul as a major economic and cultural centre of the northern region of Iraq. The newcomers who flooded Mosul have had a fragmenting effect on the social and demographic structure of Mosul. Such an effect has manifested as disintegration of closely-knit social networks and burgeoning of weak ties, which, according to Milroy & Milroy (1985), constitute an easy channel through which linguistic changes could make inroads into a community. Another linguistic corollary of the social network theory of Milroy & Milroy (Ibid.) is that tightly-knit networks, on the other hand, tend to preserve localised linguistic forms.

In this light, the change in the social structure of Mosul brought Maslawis into contact with people speaking different varieties. As a result, linguistic accommodation, visibly on the part of Maslawis towards the newcomers' speaking habits has surfaced. Locals claim the variety is now more tolerant of non-MA linguistic elements, which are being absorbed by Maslawi youth. Mosul, then, appears to be an example of a community in which dialect contact is the norm.

5.1.2. Baghdadisation

Baghdadisation, as Duri (1978) put it, is 'the attachment to everything that is Baghdadi'. On the linguistic level, this means the convergence of speakers of other Iraqi dialects on Baghdadi Arabic (BA) – usually reflecting the wish of young people to sound like Baghdadis. Maslawis themselves comment that Mosul's young people nowadays tend to Baghdadise (or, as Maslawis say, *yitbaghdad*) in their speech.

5.2. Socio-political factors

5.2.1. Urbanisation

Urbanisation has been one of the main social changes that developed in the Arab world during the past half century (Miller 2004: 177). The effects of these demographic changes were felt more readily in the oil-rich countries whose economic boom led to the urbanisation of large areas and consequently promoted linguistic variation and change (Bassiouney 2009: 114). This is true of many Arab countries including Iraq.

5.2.2 Bedouinisation

A major consequence of the urbanisation movement is the so-called Bedouinisation. Already in operation in Baghdad (Abu Haidar 2006a), Mosul has been the recipient of people of Bedouin background over the past decades. This movement ensued for several reasons such as:

- a) Rural to city movement.
- b) Sectarian conflicts that brought people of different parts of Iraq to Mosul.
- c) Arabisation policy: A government-run policy that involved the displacement of non-Arabic speaking people of Mosul and other areas during the past decades and repopulating their areas with Arabic speaking people of rural and Bedouin backgrounds, which further increased the number of Bedouinised groups in Mosul.

5.2.3. Media

The putative role of the media is also reported in enhancing the process of dialect levelling (Gibson 2002: 25). Since the third gulf war, there has been an upsurge in the emergence of television channels directed at the youth market in which non-standard registers and accents (e.g. southern *gilit* varieties) have, to the detriment of other varieties, become *de rigueur*. In addition to this, there has been greater exposure to Modern standard Arabic (henceforth, MSA) through its widespread use in the media.

6. This study

This paper reports preliminary findings of a larger study on phonological variation and change in Mosul. The study is concerned with the phonological patterns and the trajectory of change in MA. This paper looks at the variable (q), as one of the main differentiating variables between *qeltu* and *gilit*, to assess whether the process of levelling is occurring in this sound and explain why it is (not) happening.

6.1. The variable

Abstractly corresponding to the 21st letter of the Arabic alphabet (ق) (qaf), the sound (q) and its dialectal manifestations have received a good amount of attention in Arabic phonology (Al-Ani 1976: 48). It is one of the features upon which Blanc's (1964) *qeltu-gilit* classification is based. Like all *qeltu* dialects, MA is characterised by the retention of the MSA voiceless, unaspirated stop [q] in all environments, even in those where it is usually [g] in *gilit*, as in *sooq* 'market' [sɔːq] v. [suːg]. However, *gilit* has both variants [g] and [q] in certain distributions (for instance, *haq* 'right' [hɑq]).

(qaf) is also one of the interesting variables in Arabic given its geographical, social, and stylistic dimensions in the Arabic speaking communities. Hachimi (2005: 124) notes that dialectologists have employed the different realisational variants of (q) to delineate isoglosses to mark dialect boundaries of Arabic. This distinction has been in existence since as early as the pre-Islamic era (Ibid.). Blanc (1964: 29) notes that Arab sources appear to agree as to the existence of, for instance, a sedentary vs. nomad dichotomy based on the different realisations of (q). The [q] vs. [g] distinction is still an important marker in establishing the Bedouin and sedentary dialectal dichotomy in the Arabic-speaking world (Cadora 1992). This is typified by the use of the voiced velar stop [g] as being characteristic of Bedouin varieties while the voiceless uvular stop [q] is typical of its sedentary (urban) counterparts. A good example is presented by Blanc (1964) whose classification of the group dialects of IA was based upon [q] and [g] where the former is characteristic of the sedentary *qeltu* group of dialects and the latter is a feature of the *gilit* dialects.

6.1.1. Previous accounts of (qaf)

(q) is one of the recurrently visited variables in the literature on Arabic speaking communities (e.g. Blanc 1964, Cadora 1970, Al-Ani 1976, Abdel Jawad 1981, Holes 1987, Haeri 1991, 1997, Al-Wer 2007). These studies have shown that not only does this variable dichotomise communities into urban and rural but also it correlates, albeit differently from one dialect to another, with a set of social variables such as gender, social class, education, urban/rural backgrounds and stylistic levels (Hachimi 2005: 126). For instance, in Amman, Jordan, the increasing use of the standard variant [q] was found to be associated with formality of style and level of education, and was also found to be favoured by men and *fellahin* ‘rurals’ (Ibid.). This same variable is also now supplanting the traditional variants, [g], [ʔ] and [k] in the speech of the Jordanian people in Irbid (Al-Khatib 1988: 87).

6.1.2. Variants of (q)

Having developed differently in the Arabic-speaking world, (q) showcases several variants ranging from unvoiced, voiced, palatalised, or even [k], with each variant of these dating well back in history (Edzard 2006: 2). A main variant of (q) is the voiceless uvular stop [q], which is one of the consonants of the phonemic inventory of MSA (Ryding 2005: 15). This variant is still maintained in a number of urban dialects in the Arab world. It is well reported in different varieties in Syria, Tunisia, Morocco and Iraq. The voiceless uvular stop also exists in relatively few other places in Arabia – particularly in parts of Oman and Yemen (Edzard 2006).

Another common variant of (q) is the voiced velar stop [g]. This variant can be heard in the *gilit* varieties of IA, the Arabian Gulf countries, and many other Bedouin varieties in the Arab world like Upper Egypt *Said Misr* (Hachimi 2005). (q) is also debuccalised to a glottal stop [ʔ]. This variant can be found in Cairene Arabic and several other urban varieties spoken in the Levant countries such as Syria and Lebanon (Ibid.).

6.1.3. Phonological change involving /q/

Researchers attendant on the phonological variation and change of this variable from a historical perspective (e.g. Cantineau 1937, Garbell 1958, Johnstone 1963, Blanc 1964, Ferguson 1996, Edzard 2006) agree that [q] has witnessed several changes that date back over centuries. These changes have been reported in the different varieties of Arabic. Sibawayh, in his book *al-Kitab*, which is considered the first comprehensive and systematic grammar of the Arabic language, classified the consonants of the sound system of classical Arabic into two main groups: *majhurah* ‘voiced’ and *mahmusah* ‘voiceless’. At first, [q] was classified as a voiced sound *majhour* (i.e. [g]). Later, probably in the eighth or ninth century, [g] appears to have been devoiced to become (q) (Blanc 1964: 29). Blanc (1969) also argues that this sound has gone through a linguistic push chain mechanism in which the Semitic /g/ as part of a triangle of velar phonemes (g, k, q), was fronted to [gj], [j] and largely developed in Bedouin settings into [g] (Edzard 2006).

This sound has been reported to be undergoing different phases of change in different parts of the Arab world surfacing with various manifestations. To illustrate this change in the behaviour of (q) variants, let us have a look at the findings reported for this variable in the Arab world. On the one hand, Ferguson (1996: 195) notes that [q] is receding in the face of standard prestigious norms, although with different interpretations of the notion of standard and prestige depending on the community studied.

In his study on the descriptive grammar of the Palmyra (also known as Tadmur) dialect, Cantineau (1934) found that Palmyra’s localised form [q] was being supplanted by the regional

standard prestige variant [ʔ]. In Bahrain, speakers of rural Shiites background are shifting from their traditional [q] to [g], a characteristic of the urban educated Sunnis (Holes 1987).

In Iraq, [q] is perceived as an urban variant and is almost a typical realisation in *qeltu* varieties CBA and JBA, although these two communities have dwindled in number and the remaining members of these communities have already started adopting the *gilit* [g] (Abu-Haidar 1991). Al-Ani (1976) notes that the preservation of [q] is a firmly established feature in both Mosul and Tikrit. He reasons that the people of these chief *qeltu* areas are conservative in nature and their lives have seen little change. He also notes that these areas have been exporting rather than importing immigrants to other areas, especially to the capital city, Baghdad.

That said, this is not the whole picture of *qeltu* in terms of the (q) sound, however. The realisational distribution of [q] in other *qeltu* type varieties such as those spoken in Hit and Ana is rather different from Mosul and Tikrit in that it is in an intermediate stage, Al-Ani (1976) claims. A great deal of lexical items with (q), especially in Hit, are observed as [g] rather than [q]. Furthermore, recent local commentaries (e.g. Abu Haidar 2007) and personal observations of the speech of Tikritis, for instance, suggest that [g] in Tikrit is gaining more ground at the expense of the traditional [q].

7. Methodology

The study was carried out from a variationist perspective. This tradition grows out of questions to explore the possible contribution of a constellation of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors in shaping the phonological variability and change of language varieties. Variationist fieldwork approaches have their roots in other areas of language study, including historical and comparative linguistics, and traditional dialectology (Chambers & Trudgill 1998). However, it was the ground-breaking work of Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) that established the modern variationist enterprise (Schilling 2013: 4). The variationist tradition is borne on the premise that dialectal variation is not random. Rather, it is governed by what Labov and his colleagues called “orderly heterogeneity” whereby regular patterns can be discerned by correlating social structure with the linguistic structure. This involves studying populations stratified by social parameters such as age, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status. These parameters are subject to different distributions across communities. Moreover, different patterns have emerged from each study conducted since these parameters, although often showing common linguistic patterns, are interpreted and thus approached differently by researchers (Tagliamonte 2011: 6).

7.1. Data

The dataset upon which the remarks of this paper are based was collected from 16 speakers of MA. A total of 539 tokens of (qaf) were coded. A ceiling of one single iteration of the same lexical item that contains this sound was adopted to ensure a variety of lexical items for each speaker rather than a sample dominated by repetitive words. Established elicitation techniques (e.g. informal sociolinguistic interviews, a map task, and picture-naming) were used to collect the data. The sociolinguistic interview is one of the most common methods of data collection used by variationists (Milroy and Gordon 2008). A typical sociolinguistic interview usually comprises questions relating to topics such as demography, community, neighbourhood, etc. and is gradually steered towards other preferable issues (Tagliamonte 2006: 39). It is not unproblematic to collect enough tokens of certain linguistic features in sociolinguistic interviews, especially if one aims to keep the effects of the fieldworker to a minimum (Hilton 2010: 131). Therefore, different types of elicitation methods were used to obtain enough tokens. The first, and main, part of each recording session consisted of informal conversation between

the informant and the author as a part of the sociolinguistic interview sketched above. This part often started with a conversational module in which a number of exploratory questions centred on topics of general interest such as demography, community, neighbourhood, etc. This technique serves as an assessment of whether the interviewee shows willingness to talk about any particular topic and then the interview progresses into more modules allowing informants to extend on any topic that particularly interests them, and to tell stories or narratives (Meyerhoff, Adachi, Nanbakhsh, & Strycharz, 2012: 130). These modules can be re-adjusted and combined by the interviewer into a larger conversational network in which the course of natural conversation is ensured so as to elicit more extended amounts of impromptu, carefree speech (Schilling 2013: 93).

The second part was composed of talk generated by two other techniques of collecting data used in the variationist tradition – the picture description task and map task. In the former, target tokens were elicited by presenting informants with a set of pictures depicting an event or a process, which the informants were asked to describe or discuss each picture. Regarding the latter, it involved two participants (i.e. the informant and the author) holding a map with the first participant's map showing landmarks and routes while some of these were missing on the second participant's map and vice versa. The first participant drew the route on his map as described by the second participant. The details in the maps were presented in a way to stimulate corrections and some discussion until the target was reached.

7.2. Speakers

The 16 speakers recruited for this study were born and raised in Mosul. All of them had recently arrived in the UK, with their families, for education and business purposes. MA speakers are locally pigeonholed as *qiqu* – a shibboleth used to describe the prototypical MA speakers derived from the use of voiceless uvular stop [q], a well-known feature of *qeltu*. They are also called *qhah* [qħaħ]: an MA-specific word meaning 'natives' to refer to deeply-rooted natives of Mosul. The speakers were divided by gender (10 males and 6 females) and grouped into three age brackets representing three main broadly-defined life stages: youth (18-30), middle age (30-45), and old (50+). Six young speakers were recruited while five speakers were recorded for each of the middle and old age cohorts. These three age groups span the three generations of MA speakers. In the generational differences that may or may not surface across these three generations, in particular between young and old groups, one can discern whether or not a change is occurring. The speakers were from two social classes prevailing in the MA-speaking community: lower middle class and middle class. Speaker selection was facilitated by judgment sample, using the widespread "friend of a friend" technique (Milroy 1987: 66). This technique involved approaching a local community member to whom the nature of the research is disclosed. This person was asked to suggest potentially suitable informants who can fulfil the criteria.

All the informants hail from MA speaking areas, which are largely centred in the old alleys in central Mosul on both sides of the city (see Figure 3). These areas are surrounded by the seven old gates of Mosul, all within the right bank area (*Sahel Al-ayman*), and whose catchment area includes neighbourhoods and alleys such as *Midan*, *Dawwasa*, *Sarjkhana*, *Nabi Sheet*, *Alnajjar*, *Bab altoob*, *Jamsheed*, *Farooq*, *Alrifā'i*, *Khatoonia*, and *Ahmadia*. Certain MA-speaking neighbourhoods located in the left bank also include *Alfaisaliya*, *Kafa'at*, *Alhadbaa'*, *Sumer*, *Andalus* and *Aldhubbat*.

particular variable. Table 1 shows a sample of the words produced by the speakers and how they were realised by them as against how they are realised in *gilit*.²

Table 1. Table showing a sample of the words extracted for analysis

Word	<i>qeltu</i>	<i>gilit</i>	Gloss
quul	[qu:l]	[qu:l]	say
qasseer	[qas ^s r:ɣ]	[gis ^s r:r]	short
qaed	[qɛ:ʕid]	[ga:ʕid]	sitting
lahaqtu	[lahħaqtu]	[lahħagit]	I followed
urooq	[ʔrɪʕɔ:q]	[ʔrɪru:g]	a type of bread
qroon	[qru:n]	[gru:n]	horns
maslooq	[maslɔ:q]	[maslu:g]	boiled
fooq	[fɔ:q]	[fɔ:g]	up
sooq	[sɔ:q]	[su:g]	market
qasaseeb	[qas ^s ɛ:s ^s i:b]	[gis ^s a:s ^s i:b]	butchers
sandooq	[s ^s andu:q]	[s ^s andu:g]	box
yethooq	[ʔiðu:q]	[ʔiðu:g]	tasting
aqraba	[ʕaqqabi]	[ʕagruba]	scorpion
yeaalqoon	[yiʕalqu:n]	[yiʕalqu:n]	hanging
tqoom	[tqɔ:m]	[tqu:m]	standing up
yetbaq	[yit ^s buq]	[yit ^s ubg]	standing by
qumtu	[qumtu]	[gumit]	I did
teaa'liq	[tiʕliq]	[tiʕliq]	jumble
qussa	[qus ^s a]	[gus ^s a]	forehead
qloob	[qlu:b]	[glu:b]	hearts

One single exception was the word *garayib* ‘relatives’, which was realised with [g] by all the speakers indicating that this word is adopted that way since no alternative words appear to be available in the lexicon of MA, it is suggested. The preservation of [q] shows us that MA appears to be resisting the levelling of this variant, unlike the case reported in other *qeltu* varieties such as Hit, Tikrit, and Ana as well as other *qeltu* varieties spoken outside the political boundaries of Iraq. This result also corroborates Al-Ani’s (1976) statement that Mosul is considered a stronghold for [q]. In addition, the retention of this defining feature provides evidence that MA is not destined to be dominated by *gilit* as was predicted by Abu Haidar (2007) and Palva (1983), at least as far as (q) is concerned. This means that, contrary to its sister CBA (Abu-Haidar 1991), it could survive as an established variety, at least for generations to come, unless conditions (e.g. disappearance of its speakers) similar to those of both CBA and JBA occur.

The reason for this preservation, it is suggested, is that this variant has its own social connotations that are strong enough to keep it intact among competitive alternatives. It acts as a symbol of Maslawi identity, which the MA-speaking community attempts to assert in view of the diluted environment of present-day Mosul. Participants have commented that their dialect remains part and parcel of their identity, and thus gives them pride to maintain it and to be recognised with it despite the fact they are being dominated by non-Malsawi people. It must also be remembered that this variant in particular is so special for Maslawis that even the

² The pronunciations for *gilit* are not part of the data collected for this study. Rather, they were provided by the author, as a native speaker of *gilit*, to give the reader a flavour of the differences between the two dialects concerning the sound /q/.

shibboleths *qiqu* and *qhah* by which they are known are based on it. Therefore it survives being supplanted even when the community is experiencing external pressures and concomitant linguistic change is expected in the variety.

Another possible reason is the nature of the relationships that exist between the members of the MA community. While the newcomers from several parts of Iraq have infiltrated into Mosul, it is reported that the MA-speaking community is still clustered around certain areas in central Mosul. Moreover, the affinity relationships in the community have not been disturbed. Some of my participants mentioned that all *qiqu* families know each other and still maintain relationships over their life span. Therefore, these factors have collectively maintained, to some extent, closely-knit ties that connect the community. Under such conditions, Milroy & Milroy (1985) note, linguistic traditions most likely tend to remain in use.

9. Conclusion

This paper was an investigation of the process of dialect levelling in the Arabic variety spoken in Mosul, Iraq. It was a contribution from a larger project investigating phonological variation and change in the same variety. Earlier in this paper, it was shown that several *qeltu*-type varieties are currently undergoing change in this particular sound due to numerous external factors. Mosul, which has witnessed a number of social upheavals, is thought to be on the march, and thus inevitably stands as a prime site for levelling. The study attempted to assess the levelling of [q], a process that has been reported in some *qeltu*-varieties in Iraq and beyond.

Given the almost categorical realisation of (q) as [q] by all speakers of all socially-stratified groups incorporated in the study, there is enough evidence of phonological resistance rather than levelling in MA in which [q] is still robust. It is thus not losing its marked features like its sister *qeltu* dialects in Hit and Tikrit as reported in the literature despite the social shakeup that resulted from the events mentioned earlier. While the fragmentation of the hitherto cohesive demographic fabric of Mosul has visibly intensified as a result of those events, the linguistic behaviour of MA speakers, unlike that of the natives of Hit and Tikrit, appears to be resisting such a pressure by maintaining close relationships and this is manifested in the preservation of identity-defining dialectal features (e.g. [q]).

References

- Abdel-Jawad, H. R. E. (1981). *Lexical and phonological variation in spoken Arabic in Amman*. Ph.D dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Abu-Haidar, F. (1991). *Christian Arabic of Baghdad*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Abu Haidar, F. (2006). Bedouinization. In Versteegh, K. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics*, 1, 269-274. Boston: Brill.
- Al-Ani, S. (1976). The development and distribution of the Arabic sound 'qaf' in Iraq. In Berkes, N. & Donald, P. L. (eds.), *Essays on Islamic civilization*, 48-56. Leiden: Evert Jan Brill.
- Al-damluji, S. (2014). *Mosul in the early twentieth century*. Amman, Jordan: Alitaliaa Scientific House.
- Al-Khatib, M. A. A. (1988). *Sociolinguistic change in an expanding urban context: a case study of Irbid city, Jordan*. Ph.D dissertation, University of Durham.
- Al-Wer, E. (2007). The Formation of the dialect of Amman. In Miller, C. (ed.), *Arabic in the city: issues in dialect contact and language variation*, 5, 55-76. London: Routledge.
- Armstrong, N. (2001). *Social and stylistic variation in spoken French: a comparative approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

- Armstrong, N. (2002). Nivellement et standardisation en anglais et en français [Grading and standardization in English and French]. *Langage et société* 102(4), 5-32.
- Bassiouney, R. (2009). *Arabic sociolinguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Biadisy, F., Hirschberg, J., & Habash, N. (2009). *Spoken Arabic dialect identification using phonotactic modeling*. Paper presented at the EACL 2009 Workshop on Computational Approaches to Semitic Languages.
- Blanc, H. (1964). *Communal dialects in Baghdad* (Vol. 10). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Blanc, H. (1969). *The fronting of Semitic g and the qāl-gāl dialect split in Arabic*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Semitic Studies held in Jerusalem.
- Boughton, Z. (2005). Accent levelling and accent localisation in northern French: comparing Nancy and Rennes. *Journal of French Language Studies* 15(03), 235-256.
- Britain, D. (1997). Dialect contact, focusing and phonological rule complexity: the koineisation of Fenland English. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 4(1), 141-70.
- Cadora, F. J. (1970). Some linguistic concomitants of contactual factors of urbanization. *Anthropological Linguistics* 12, 10-19.
- Cadora, F. J. (1992). *Bedouin, village and urban Arabic: an ecolinguistic study* (Vol. 18). Leiden: Brill.
- Cantineau, J. (1934). *Le dialecte arabe de Palmyre: grammaire* [The Arabic dialect of Palmyra: grammar] (Vol. 1). Beyrouth: Institut français de Damas.
- Cantineau, J. (1937). *Etudes sur quelques parlers de nomades arabes d'Orient. (deuxième article)* [Studies on some dialects of Arab nomads of the East (second article)]. Paris: Librairie Larose.
- Chambers, J. K., & Trudgill, P. (1998). *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collin, R. O. (2009). Words of war: the Iraqi tower of Babel. *International Studies Perspectives* 10(3), 245-264.
- Duri, A. (1978). *Mawrid*. State Cultural Affairs House, Ministry of Culture and Arts, Iraq: Aljahidh Press.
- Edzard, L. (2006). qaf. In Versteegh, K. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics*, 4, 1-4. Boston: Brill.
- Elyas, S. (2013). Mosul locals fear loss of their local language, <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/3248/mosul-locals-fear-loss-of-their-local-language.htm> [Retrieved on 4th September 2015].
- Esch, E. (2002). My dad's auxiliaries. In Jones, M. C. & Esch, E. (eds.), *Language change: the interplay of internal, external, and extra-linguistic factors*, 81-110. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1996). *Sociolinguistic perspectives: papers on language in society, 1959-1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foulkes, P., & Docherty, G. (1999). *Urban voices: accent studies in the British Isles*. London: Arnold.
- Foulkes, P., & Docherty, G. (2006). The social life of phonetics and phonology. *Journal of Phonetics* 34(4), 409-438.
- Garbell, I. (1958). Remarks on the historical phonology of an East Mediterranean Arabic dialect. *Word: journal of the International Linguistic Association* 14(2-3), 303-337.
- Gibson, M. (2002). Dialect levelling in Tunisian Arabic: towards a new spoken standard. In Rouchdy, A. (ed.), *Language contact and language conflict in Arabic: variations on a sociolinguistic theme*, 24-40. London: Routledge Curzon.
- Hachimi, A. (2005). *Dialect leveling, maintenance and urban identity in Morocco Fessi immigrants in Casablanca*. Ph.D dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa.

- Haeri, N. (1991). Sociolinguistic variation in Cairene Arabic: palatalization and the /qaf/ in the speech of men and women. Ph.D dissertation, University of Philadelphia.
- Haeri, N. (1997). The reproduction of symbolic capital: language, state, and class in Egypt. *Current anthropology* 38(5), 795-816.
- Hilton, N. H. (2010). Regional dialect levelling and language standards: changes in the Hønefoss dialect. Ph.D dissertation, University of York, UK.
- Hinskens, F. L. M. P. (1993). *Dialect levelling in Limburg: structural and sociolinguistic aspects*. Tübingen: Niemeyer (Linguistische Arbeiten).
- Holes, C. (1987). *Language variation and change in a modernising Arab state: the case of Bahrain* (Vol. 7). Taylor & Francis.
- Holes, C. (2007). Colloquial Iraqi Arabic. In Postgate, J. (ed.), *Languages of Iraq, ancient and modern*, 123-134. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq.
- Hornsby, D. (2002). Dialect contact and koinéization: the case of northern France. *Contributions to the Sociology of Language [CSL]* 86, 19-28.
- Jastrow, O. (1978). Die mesopotamisch-arabischen qaltu-Dialekte. Band I: Phonologie und Morphologie [The Mesopotamian-Arabian qaltu dialects. Volume I: phonology and morphology]. *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes Wiesbaden* 43(4), 1-330.
- Jastrow, O. (2006). Iraq. In Versteegh, K., Elgibali, A., Woidich, M. & Zaborski, A. (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics*, 414-427. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Johnstone, T. M. (1963). The affrication of “kaf” and “gaf” in the Arabic dialects of the Arabian Peninsula. *Journal of Semitic Studies* 8(2), 210-226.
- Kerswill, P. (1996a). Dialect levelling, koinéisation and the speech of the adult migrant. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 3(1), 237-246.
- Kerswill, P. (1996b). Milton Keynes and dialect levelling in south-eastern British English. *English: History, Diversity and Change* 1, 292-300.
- Labov, W. (1963). The social motivation of a sound change. *Word: Journal of the International Linguistic Association* 19(3), 273-309.
- Lodge, R. A. (2004). *A sociolinguistic history of Parisian French*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Manfredi, S. (2012). Dialect mixing and dialect levelling in Kordofanian Baggara Arabic (Western Sudan). In Barontini, A., Vicente, A., Zimari, K. & Caubet, D. (eds.), *Dynamiques langagières en arabophonies: variations, contacts, migrations et créations artistiques. Hommage offert à Dominique Caubet par ses élèves et collègues*, 141-162. Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, Área de Estudios Árabes e Islámicos.
- Mappery.com (2015). Mosul Area Map. <http://www.mappery.com/map-of/Mosul-Area-Map> [Retrieved on 30 September, 2014]
- Meyerhoff, M., Adachi, C., Nanbakhsh, G., & Strycharz, A. (2012). Sociolinguistic fieldwork. In Thieberger, N. (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of linguistic fieldwork*, 121-146. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, C. (2004). Variation and changes in Arabic urban vernaculars. In Woidich, M., Haak, M., de Jong, R. D. & Versteegh, C. H. M. (eds), *Approaches to Arabic dialects: collection of articles presented to Manfred Woidich on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday*, 177-206. Leiden: Brill.
- Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (1985). Linguistic change, social network and speaker innovation. *Journal of Linguistics* 21(02), 339-384.
- Milroy, L. (1987). *Observing and analysing natural language: a critical account of sociolinguistic method*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Milroy, L., & Gordon, M. (2008). *Sociolinguistics: method and interpretation*. Oxford: Wiley.

- Palva, H. (1983). Review of Otto Jastrow, *Die mesopotamisch-arabischen qeltu-Dialekte. Band I: Phonologie und Morphologie* [The Mesopotamian-Arabian qeltu dialects. Volume I: phonology and morphology]. Wiesbaden 1978. *Acta Orientalia* 43, 100-104.
- Peoples, J., & Bailey, G. (2011). *Humanity: an introduction to cultural anthropology*. Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning.
- Pooley, T. (2002). The depicardization of the vernaculars of the Lille conurbation. *Contributions to the Sociology of Language [CSL]* 86, 29-62.
- Røyneland, U. (2009). Dialects in Norway: catching up with the rest of Europe? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2009, 7-30.
- Ryding, K. C. (2005). *A reference grammar of modern standard Arabic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schilling, N. (2013). *Sociolinguistic fieldwork*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tagliamonte, S. A. (2006). *Analysing Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Temple, R. (2001). The interaction between speaker sex and changes in regional patterns of voicing in metropolitan French: a case of over-levelling. In Hintze, M. A., Pooley, T. & Judge, A. (eds.), *French accents: phonological and sociolinguistic perspectives* 148-164. London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research.
- Tagliamonte, S. (2011). *Variationist Sociolinguistics: Change, Observation, Interpretation*. Malden, MA: Wiley.
- Thanoun, T. (2010). *Abhath fi tarikh Almosul almuasser* [Research on the contemporary history of Mosul]. Mosul: Ibn Al-Atheer House.
- Trudgill, P. (1986). *Dialects in contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Williams, A., & Kerswill, P. (1999). Dialect levelling: change and continuity in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull. In Foulkes, P. & Docherty, G. *Urban voices: accent studies in the British Isles*, 141-162. London: Arnold.
- Weinreich, U., Labov, W., & Herzog, M. I. (1968). *Empirical foundations for a theory of language change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

*Abdulkareem Yaseen
School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences
Newcastle University King George VI Building
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 7RU
United Kingdom*

a.y.a.ahmed@newcastle.ac.uk