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Linguistic Representations and Dialect Contact: Some Comments on the Evolution of Five Regional Variants in Beirut

Marie-Aimée Germanos
INALCO
magermanos@yahoo.com

Abstract
This article focuses on the results of dialect contact in the Lebanese capital of Beirut, a city that has experienced a considerable and continuous level of migration since the beginning of the nineteenth century. We examine the leveling and reallocation of five regional variants Lebanese Arabic, drawing on a corpus of interviews and conversations collected between 2005 and 2009 from forty-seven participants. Using the distribution of two variants as a case study, we will first demonstrate the leveling tendency of minority (geographically speaking) forms. We will then attempt to expose the impact of sociolinguistic representations—latent prestige, stigmatization, and speaker awareness of linguistic variation—on the retention of a third minority form, on the leveling of a majority form, and on the stylistic reallocation of a variable that has remained below the level of speaker awareness (and whose two variants are used relatively equally across geographical areas).
Introduction¹

In this article, we will focus on the effects of dialect contact in Beirut, a city which has been a melting pot for speakers of different varieties of Lebanese Arabic owing to significant levels of continuous migration over the past two centuries. Our theoretical framework consists, first, of Trudgill’s (1986) description of the mechanisms that come into play during the formation of intermediate varieties in contact situations between diverging dialects and, second, of Labov’s (1972) work on variable differentiation on the basis of stylistic variation and speaker awareness.

Beirut’s population rose from fewer than about ten thousand at the beginning of the nineteenth century to 426,861 by the end of the twentieth century.² This growth was mainly due to a constant influx of migrants, triggered by a series of economic, sociopolitical, cultural, and administrative factors. The number of non-native residents was still high in the 1970s³ and, in all likelihood, remains so to this day.⁴ One of the consequences of this relatively recent expansion is the most frequently cited distinction in Beiruti social representations between native residents and those considered non-native, even though they may have been born in Beirut and their families may have been living there for several generations (cf. for example Tarazi-Fawaz 1983, 1).

This distinction is reflected in the linguistic psyche: the term bäyrûte (Beiruti) refers specifically to the dialect of the native residents of the city. It is differentiated just as much from regional dialects, perceived and described on the basis of specific linguistic features, as from a final variety, which is referred to as normal (ʕādiyye, tabiʕiyye) or as having no linguistic peculiarities (lähzê bayda or “white language”) or specific geographical localization (“Lebanese”, mādâne or “city” language). The main characteristic of this latter variety, which the majority of participants in this study said they used, is the disappearance of distinctive features from bäyrûte and other regional varieties.

In order to assess the effects of dialect contact in Beirut, we will compare the evolution of five regional variants of Lebanese Arabic: the uvular realization [q] of /q/, the closed realizations of final [a] as [e] and [ɛ], the

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¹ This article is based on some of the results obtained in my PhD study (Germanos 2009), carried out at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle under the supervision of Jérôme Lentin.

² 1,705,000 people in the whole conglomeration (Verdeil 2002, 119).

³ At the time, more than a third of Beirut’s residents had been born in another town (Gemayel 1979, 213).

⁴ Many refugees settled in the city during the Lebanese Civil war from 1975 to 1990 (Husseini 1992).
emphatic glottal realization [ʔ] of /q/, the retention of diphthongs [ay] and [aw] in final closed syllables, and the loss of /a/ in open, unstressed syllables in perfective conjugations of Form I faʕal-type verbs. Speakers are highly aware of the first four variants, as they are distinctive features of one or more regional varieties (including bāyrūte). There is no awareness of the final variant, however, among those who participated in the study. Fleisch’s (1974) and Behnstedt’s (1997) studies, among others, show the geographical distribution of these variants, while other studies carried out in some districts of Beirut at the beginning of the twentieth century (Mattsson 1910) and in the 1980s (see Srage 1997, Naïm-Sanbar 1985, and Farès 1982) show the evolution of their use in the city. Following a description of the leveling of the two minority (geographically speaking) variants, we will focus on the moderate retention of a third form. We will examine the influence of stigmatization as a “regional” feature and speaker awareness on the leveling of the majority form and on the stylistic reallocation of the two variants of a final variable.

The corpus examined in this study is comprised of sociolinguistic interviews and conversations collected between 2005 and 2009 from forty-seven speakers residing either in Beirut or in its closest suburbs. In order to assess the effects of dialect contact, we met with twelve migrants from different regions, sixteen speakers native to Beirut, and nineteen (grand-) children of migrants, who were either born in the city or who had settled there during childhood. These speakers were split into three groups according to date of birth: before 1950 (N = 17), between 1950 and 1970 (N = 16), and after 1970 (N = 12). They all belong to the main religious groups present in Beirut and live in various neighborhoods of the city.

In regard to these last two factors, it should be mentioned that Beirut has experienced diversity for a long time, with its residents belonging to various communities, mainly Muslim and Christian, but that the urban space has always been divided in accordance with religious persuasion to a certain extent, as in other Arab cities. Moreover, a significant redistribution of religious communities took place during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), and the city was separated into two areas (one mainly Christian, the other mainly Muslim) by a demarcation line. As far as the linguistic psyche is concerned, however, when speakers refer to community variation, they usually present it as being secondary to

5. Twenty-nine of our participants were Muslim (fourteen Sunnis, eleven Shiites, and four Druzes) and eighteen were Christian (eight Maronite, seven Greek Orthodox, and three Greek Catholic).
geographic localization (within or outside the boundaries of Beirut). While the regional and community factors may partially overlap since certain communities are perceived to be linked to one or more regions or suburbs (Marshak 2008, 97), informants agree in fine that regional difference is the primary source of variation. Even though there is a virtual consensus among informants that a minority of features are sometimes perceived as being Christian, Muslim, or Druze, they also maintain that the Beiruti Sunnis do not speak like the Sunnis in Tripoli, for example, or that the Christians from Achrafieh (a Beirut district) speak differently from those who live in the mountains.

1. The Leveling of Minority Forms:
The Examples of /q/ > [q] and /ā/ > /a/ > [e], [ɛ]
One of the first observations to emerge from the study of the selected variants is the leveling of minority (geographically) forms, that is to say, those used by the minority of speakers in Beirut. This leveling can be observed in both Beiruti and non-Beiruti variants. In respect of the former, we will present below the example of /q/ > [q] and, for the latter, the example of the closed realizations [e] and [ɛ] of the old final /ā/.

1.1. Uvular [q]
The consonant /q/ is pronounced like a uvular [q] by the oldest speakers in a small central region of Mount Lebanon (Behnstedt 1997, map 18). In other regions, it is most often rendered by a glottal, possibly emphatic [ʔ]6 (see §2 below). Linguistically, speakers are highly aware of the /q/ > [q] variant. It is presented as characterizing the dialects of (southern) Mount Lebanon, or of Mount Lebanon’s (southern) Druzes in particular. It can be found in relatively similar proportions (< 6.5%) in the speech of migrants from the region where /q/ > [q] is retained and of all the other groups of informants studied in the corpus. However, the use of this variant is limited, for all of the speakers, to specific items and it is not a case of dialectal variation, but of standardizing usage (in the sense of using standard Arabic, a variety where the realization of the phoneme is usually [q]). It is found, therefore, particularly in toponyms, family names, names of institutions, or in borrowings from standard Arabic (such as muqāwame, “resistance”), where other features of this variant can sometimes be observed (for example, the retention of /u/ in the open unstressed syllables in muqāwame). The only case of /q/ > [q] used as a

6. And, to a lesser extent, by [g] in the Bedouin dialects of Wadi Khalid (Herin and Younès 2011).
dialect variant was extracted from the data of a Druze speaker—whose family originally came from southern Mount Lebanon but who was born in Beirut—during a reactivation of his religious allegiance (extract i). In this anecdote, which is specifically about a Druze using [q] to trick a “non-Druze,” NH does not use /q/ > [q] only in the reported speech of the Druze protagonist (bēgīn, fōq, etc.), but also—though less often than /q/ > [ʔ]—when he takes on the role of the storyteller (yətaqāsamu, qallo):


A Druze and a non-Druze have brought a roast chicken [fārrūʒ] to share. The Druze suggests that: “Each bit of the roast chicken that has the letter qâf [in its name] will be mine, and the other bits will be yours.” He says:

“Let’s start from the top. The neck [ʕənəq] is mine.” Then he tells him: “The breast, that’s the ribcage [ɡafaʃ], so it’s mine. And down here, the pelvis is called qarərhə, so it’s mine, and those are the feet [s-sīqən] with a qēf,” so they were also his. There was nothing left of the roast chicken. So [the non-Druze] says to him: “You might just as well have called it qarrūʒ from the start and taken it all without going through all this!”

Excluding this extract, /q/ > [q] did not emerge as a dialect variant in any of the Beirut recordings, including those from migrants originating from regions where it is partially retained. We noted, however, that these migrants had been living in Beirut for a long time at the time of recording, and that some might use it with speakers from their native regions (Germanos 2008). The fact that this variant has undergone leveling is undeniable. It is relatively old: /q/ > [q] is absent, or almost, among the speakers recorded by Srage (1997), Naïm-Sanbar (1985), and Mattsson (1910). This is not at all surprising: speakers, including those outside of Beirut, have been acutely aware of this variation for a long time (cf. Fleisch 1974, 136). This awareness is heightened by the phonetic difference between [q] and [ʔ], by their phonological status as two distinct consonants in standard Arabic (represented by two different letters in the alphabet), and by the linguistic change that characterized the evolution of the variable in Lebanon during the twentieth century. At the beginning

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7. Aside from ʕənaq, the words with [q] in this anecdote are not the usual names of parts of a chicken in Lebanese Arabic.
of the century, in fact, /q/ > [q] was used over a much wider geographical area than it is now (cf. Bergsträsser 1915, map 4).

1.2. Closed Realizations of /a/ ([e] and [ɛ])
Derived from the Old Final /ā/

We will focus in this section on the example of one minority variant which was used, at least in part, by native Beirutis: the closed realization of some /a/ as [e].

In word-final position, the realization of /a/, derived from the old /ā/, can vary in its degree of openness in Lebanon. It is pronounced as [i] in the South, [e] among some Beirutis (especially Sunnis in the 1980s), [ɛ] in the North, and as [a], which is the most common in Lebanon. It is found especially in 1st person independent personal pronouns, both singular, ʔana and plural, nƏñna, in suffix pronouns -na (1st person plural) and -ha (3rd person feminine singular), and in some lexical items.

There is speaker awareness surrounding the realization [e], and it is presented as one of the distinctive features of bäyrüte (extract ii):

ii. MA [about his brother]: I was shocked by his accent: he’s travelled overseas, he’s still got it (…) he’s still got his accent, when he comes [to Lebanon] he says ʔane:: wänhe:: (…) his Arabic dialect, his Arabic, is Beiruti.

In the corpus, this variant is used very little by informants born in Beirut after 1950, and there are only three tokens from speakers born between 1950 and 1970: two of these come from situations similar to the one in extract i, in which NH uses /q/ > [q] by reactivating a distinctive feature of local identity (see extract iii below), and a third token comes from a female informant from southern Lebanon, who uses all the variants from [i] through to [a] in the pronoun /ʔana/.

iii. HG [about an exchange he had in a restaurant with a waiter who had eavesdropped to hear what he was saying or, rather, to hear how he spoke]: I told him “what is it?” he said “your accent is familiar”; I told him “it’s niḥbeve” (…) I saw straight away where he was going with it, so I [ʔane], I didn’t let myself be intimidated.

Apart from these three examples, [e] is found only among some Beirutis (2.7%) or migrants (0.28%) born in Beirut before 1950.

8. In dialectal Arabic, the length opposition in the vowels is neutralized at the end of the word.
9. Interviews translated from Arabic.
10. The Mousaitbeh (a district of Beirut) dialect.
In respect of the former, the intermediate variant [ɛ] is already more common than [e] (11.71%).

This Beiruti variant has therefore undergone a process of leveling. This is also in evidence in another minority Beiruti form: the retention of initial h- in 3rd person affix pronouns, both feminine, -(h)a, and plural, -(h)un (Germanos 2009).

Neither of these two variants are used very much these days and speakers show little awareness of them. They are most often presented together to imitate the Beiruti dialect with the example of -he::: for the pronoun -(h)a. This also shows a third distinctive feature of bäyrûte: the drawl, or its tendency to lengthen final vowels. Speakers indicate that it gives the impression of a certain laziness, or at least nonchalance (extract iv). This attitude toward dialects perceived as having a drawl, including bäyrûte, probably did little to raise the prestige—even latent prestige—of these variants for the Beiruti speakers who used them.

iv. HS: Beirut Sunnis, when they speak, you can hear that they have a special accent; elderly Sunnis have taken all their ti:::me [ʕəndun wāʔə ::t], that’s how [they speak].

Not all recognized local variants undergo a similar leveling in Beirut. A third Beiruti variant, the [ʔ] realization of /q/, which has a different connotation, is retained more often than the first two (even if it is not often used nowadays).

2. Latent Prestige and the Moderate Retention of a Minority Beiruti Form: The Case of /q/ > [ʔ]
The emphatic glottal realization [ʔ] of the /q/ phoneme, described in Beirut by Naïm-Sanbar (1985), has been reported in only a few other Lebanese dialects. It appears, therefore, to be rare and not very widespread throughout the country. This variant receives a high level of linguistic attention and is generally presented as a distinctive feature of bäyrûte.

v. MA: there are still many older Beirutis who speak the real Beiruti language. They say for example “the mouthful [loʔmît] the mou- [loʔ-] the mouthful [loʔmît] of milk rice was still in his mouth.”

In the corpus, this variant is found in the data of a number of speakers who come from regions outside Beirut but who were born in the capital before 1970 (13.68%), as well as in Beiruti informants of all ages

11. It was reported only for Mazboud (Tohmé 1989, 95).
(10.3%), including those born after 1970 (6.52%) since it was used by a young Beiruti man, aged 27.

The variant /q/ > [ʔ] is, therefore, retained more often than the two other Beiruti variants presented in §1.2, while also being less widespread geographically. This is owing to the latent prestige that it enjoys as a local identity marker associated with some areas of Beirut, and perhaps also as a marker of masculinity.

Speakers did not express this latter view explicitly but, generally speaking, the emphasis is much less widespread in women than in men in Beirut (Naïm-Sanbar 1985, Germanos 2009) and only one of the women interviewed occasionally uses /q/ > [ʔ] (compared with four men). This supports our hypothesis that this variant is perceived as masculine.

Another noteworthy fact concerning the use of /q/ > [ʔ] is that, nowadays, it can only be found in speakers (Christian and Muslim) living in certain majority-Muslim districts (most notably Mousaitbeh, but also Tarik el-Jdideh for one female informant). From a diachronic viewpoint, this might mean either that the variant disappeared very early from the dialect(s) of Christians native to the city who had settled in majority-Christian neighborhoods, or that they had never used it. The prestige associated with its use as a marker of kinship with Beirut’s Muslim residents had already been pointed out by Naïm-Sanbar (1985, 178) in regard to a Christian informant.

In our corpus, two informants—one Christian (HG in extract iii above), the other Muslim (extract vi)—also express a sense of pride in speaking bäyrûte (or msītbēwe).

vi. MA: as far as I’m concerned, I don’t feel any shame, there are people who change the way they speak (…) everyone has their own character, and grows up in a particular environment; as far as we’re concerned, thank God, we don’t feel any shame (…) we were born in Beirut and we speak Beiruti.

These two informants came from rather disadvantaged backgrounds. Beiruti speakers from wealthier classes did not show a positive attitude toward bäyrûte, regardless of the neighborhood they lived in, and some even call the variety “heavy.” This is the same for a female participant from a disadvantaged background, who claimed to use bäyrûte but does not do so with the researcher. This speaker also she exhibited a positive attitude toward the “Christian” way of speaking, which she felt to be more “appropriate.” Finally, it is arguable that the prestige associated with a local identity, which is explicitly expressed by HG and MB, may somehow explain the retention of /q/ > [ʔ] by the youngest informant,
who uses it despite being mocked for doing so and in spite of the fact that he does not consider it “very pretty” (extract vii):

vii. WF: “[in junior high school] my friends no longer came from Beirut, they came from all over the place and they started telling me ‘you …,‘ I was known as ‘the Beirut’ at school, I was the most Beiruti person at the school, they used to say ‘you, the Beiruti real deal [ʔɔ̰ ʔɔ̰ ʔɔ̰ ʔɔ̰]’, and so … [I told myself] ‘well, ok!’; I started to feel that it was visible, so, little by little, my accent changed; especially when I went to university [my accent changed], even if there were many students from Beirut and other regions too, but you know, that’s not very pretty, to say it like that, ʔɔ̰ ləllo [I told him] and ʔa lle [he told me].”

The analysis of these variants shows, therefore, that leveling can also affect those minority variants that were initially used in Beirut and which are perceived as distinctive of bäyrūte. The subjective values attached to them contribute to their different evolutionary rhythm. Speakers born after 1950 no longer use (except in cases when local identity is reactivated) the two variants that are markers of the drawl (among other things), denoting a certain nonchalance. The third variant is retained to a degree, even if it is rare, because of the prestige (overt or latent) that it enjoys among the men living in some of Beirut’s Muslim neighborhoods (especially from disadvantaged backgrounds). It is, in fact, perceived as a marker of local identity and also probably carries with it a connotation of masculinity.

3. The Leveling of Stigmatized Majority Forms: the Example of Diphthong Retention in Final Closed Syllables

Somewhat more surprisingly than for the examples presented in §1, a majority (geographically) variant in Beirut is also undergoing a leveling process. The variant is the retention of the diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ in final closed syllables. In most Lebanese dialects, these diphthongs are retained in all word positions. They can be reduced, however, in long vowels [ē] or [ε̄] and [ō] or [ɔ̰] respectively, generally in closed syllables (in northern Lebanon) or specifically in final closed syllables (which occurs in Beirut, cf. Naïm-Sanbar 1985 and Srage 1997). In the corpus, [ay] and [aw] in final closed syllables are relatively rare, and are completely absent among speakers born in Beirut after 1970. They are found particularly among migrants and, to a lesser extent, among migrants’ (grand-) children born in Beirut before 1970 (see Table 1).
Table 1 – Diphthong retention in final closed syllables by place of birth and origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of informants</th>
<th>Variable occurrence (N)</th>
<th>Diphthong retention (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrants from regions where [ay] and [aw] is retained (N=10)</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>37.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other migrants (N=2)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants’ children or grandchildren (N=19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born before 1950</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>4.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born between 1950 and 1970</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born after 1970</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>6.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Beirut residents (N=16)</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diphthong retention in closed final syllables is now stigmatized at least by some informants (extract viii, where LS is surprised by ZL’s [one of her friends] using this variant despite belonging, in her mind, to the “bourgeoisie”).

viii. LS: you say, like that, ?äyn et wäyn, you use the ye, too; [when I hear you] I wonder “is it possible that ZL could talk like that?”

This stigmatization seems to be a recent development, however. Grotzfeld (1983, 93, footnote 23) noted in the 1980s that the persistence of [ay] and [aw], like their reduction as [ɛ] or [ɛ̃] and [ɔ] or [ɔ̃], “passed right through Beiruti Arabic.” Further evidence of the recent nature of this stigmatization is the fact that, for some speakers, the variation remains below the linguistic awareness level, and they do not comment negatively on it. Extract viii above is followed by an exchange between LS and her friend, where ZL (born before 1950) had not seemed too convinced she had heard any difference between wēn and wäyn. Following extract viii is ZL’s response, in which she refutes the stigmatization from LS, arguing that her pronunciation shocks her friend “because she [wa] s not used [to it]”:

FS: you, for example, you say wäyn.
FM: why, how do you say it?
FS: wēn.
ZL (apparently fairly unconvinced of having heard any difference): ah.
(…)
FS: you say it like that, ?äyn et wäyn, you use the ye, too; [when I hear you] I wonder “is it possible that ZL could talk like that?”
ZL: that’s because you’re not used [to it].
The retention of diphthongs in closed syllables is not the only majority variant in Beirut to undergo a leveling process. The same is happening with verbal negations constructed with a ...ʃ element. They are diffused across a large area of southern Lebanon and also have a high level of speaker awareness attached to them among the informants, who attribute their use to people from various regions of Lebanon (but not from Beirut). Stigmatization of these forms has led to the reduction in their use. Variously perceived as “not sweet,” “ugly,” “common,” and even “vulgar,” the absence of any positive connotations attached to these variants coupled with their identification as a distinctive feature of regional use contribute to their leveling during the final stage of linguistic change. The use of variants that are salient and distinctive of a particular region is, in fact, generally an attitude that is disapproved of by those interviewed, and almost all privilege a variety of Lebanese Arabic that is “normal,” which, to them, means free of any discernible regional features.

While existing data does not tell us the distribution of ...ʃ negations when they began to take on negative connotations (i.e. from the first quarter of the twentieth century, cf. Féghali 1928, 220–221), negative attitudes toward [ay] and [aw] in final closed syllables have undergone a change from below (a change occurring while speakers have not yet become aware of the variation). Such a change was indeed found at least in the Ras el-Nabeh district at the beginning of the 1980s, when Grotzfeld (1983) reported that diphthong retention also passed as Beiruti. Following on from this change from below, the diffusion of stigmatization (and of the level of linguistic awareness) has been irregular. Even to this day, some of the oldest speakers remain unaware of this variation. This disparity, where the variant is a stereotype for some but barely an indicator for others, goes hand in hand with its distinctive distribution. Of all the variants in Beirut undergoing a leveling process, it is the only one to show a very frequent retention rate (>60%) among several informants (all born before 1950).

12. There are three variants: one is simple (for example, kenitʃ, meaning “she wasn’t”), and two are compound with an initial ʔa ... or ma (ʔa kenitʃ, ma kenitʃ). Informants contrast them with just one “normal” variant with initial ma ... only (ma kēnit).

13. On this point, see Farès (1982), who reports that, in this neighborhood, it was mainly Shiite informants from both the most disadvantaged and the wealthiest classes who retained diphthongs in closed final syllables, but none were found in any middle-class informant.
4. Stylistic Reallocation: The Processing of /a/ in Form I Verbs

In the Lebanese dialects, /a/ can be dropped or retained in unstressed open syllables in perfective conjugations of Form I faʕal-type verbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>/a/ retained</th>
<th>/a/ dropped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>tārāk(“)t</td>
<td>trākt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>tārākna</td>
<td>trākna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine singular</td>
<td>tārāk(“)t</td>
<td>trākt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine singular</td>
<td>tārākte</td>
<td>trākte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>tārākto</td>
<td>trākto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine singular + suffix</td>
<td>tārāk + -al-o</td>
<td>tārkt + -al-o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine singular</td>
<td>tārākkit</td>
<td>tārkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>tārākkit</td>
<td>tārkkit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The loss of /a/ was still very widespread in the northern half of Lebanon at the end of the 1950s (Fleisch 1974, 122–139). In our corpus, it is retained much more frequently by all three age groups than the variants presented above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of informants</th>
<th>Variable occurrence (N)</th>
<th>Drop of /a/ (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrants (N=12)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants’ children or grandchildren (N=19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born before 1950</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>38.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born between 1950 and 1970</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>59.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born after 1970</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>86.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born after 1970</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Beirut residents (N=16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born before 1950</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>34.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born between 1950 and 1970</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born after 1970</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>41.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born after 1970</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A detailed analysis of these occurrences suggests, at least for some of the speakers, a stylistic variation between the two variants. In fact, in many cases the /a/ is dropped in verbs expressing some degree of intensity,
for example in *farto* (“they exploded [with laughter]”), or a specific emotion, such as the irritation in *ʔratt (*“I had to put up with [a long haul]”). Other occurrences can be found in emotional accounts (extract ix, where SJ tells of the displacement of his family during the Lebanese Civil War):

ix. SJ: we were displaced [by the war], basically … I mean that we ran away [hrabna], we left [trākna] our homes.

Furthermore, the same verb can successively drop and then retain the /a/ as the speaker reformulates his/her statement—in this case, the /a/ is dropped in the most emotional formulation. In the first part of extract x, CK objectively explains the “sharing of the blame” between Christians and Muslims as concerns the damages caused by the war, and then, after a sigh, he repeats his last statement in a more resigned tone, emphasizing this time the “big mess” that resulted, rather than on the share of blame.

x. CK: you can’t say it was the Christians or the Muslims [who caused the damage during the war] they all made a big mess *[xarabo d-donye kolla]* [2 sec.] they all made a big mess *[xarbo d-donye kolla]*.

This variant has therefore undergone stylistic reallocation, rather than leveling. The fact that it is relatively rare among informants born after 1970 is mainly due to the reduced number of occurrences of *faʕal*-type verbs among them. Complementary data would, however, need to be collected from this age group for a study of variation among young speakers residing in Beirut. Of all the variants examined, it is the only one that is not openly or spontaneously mentioned by any informant, testifying to a low level of linguistic awareness in this case. This may explain the trend toward a stylistic reallocation of the two variants, rather than toward leveling through reduction of one of them.

**Conclusions**

The distribution of these five variants shows that the effects of dialect contact in Beirut are currently influenced both by a geographic factor—that has an impact on the number of speakers using the regional variants studied—and by the representations associated with the use of one or other of the variants.

In fact, leveling can affect minority variants—regardless of whether or not they are Beirut, such as uvular /q/, the maintenance of *h*- in suffix pronouns, and the realization /-ā/ > [e]—just as much as majority variants if they are stigmatized as “regional.”
The pejorative value of retaining \( h- \) in suffix pronouns and pronouncing [e] for /-ā/, as well as the lengthening of final vowels as markers of bāyrūte’s drawl denoting a certain nonchalance strips the Beiruti variants of the latent prestige attributed to another minor variant initially employed in the city. The variant /q/ > [ʔ] is perceived as a marker of local identity and probably also as a marker of masculinity, and is thus relatively unaffected by leveling due to the latent prestige that men (especially from the working class) attach to it. As to geographically widespread linguistic forms, their evolution and use depend, at least in part, on the level of speaker awareness and stigmatization attached to them. Two of the stigmatized variants with a high, albeit not generalized, level of linguistic awareness (negations with … / and diphthong retention) are absent among the youngest native Beirut informants. Conversely, the fact that the variation itself remains below the speakers’ level of awareness has resulted in the stylistic reallocation of two variants of one variable (loss or retention of /al/ in the perfective conjugations of Form I fautāl-type verbs).

Furthermore, the analysis of diphthong processing is another reminder of the evolving and transforming nature of linguistic representations diachronically and of their synchronic variability, since what constitutes a stereotype for some speakers may be a case of negligible variation for others. A similar disparity was noted in Beirut for at least one other variant: the analytic genitive exponent tēʕ (the other exponent used in Beirut is tabaʕ.) Several Christian speakers identify tēʕ as a distinctive feature of “Muslim” speech and stigmatize it rather heavily (at best as heavy, at worst as vulgar). The majority of Muslim informants who were asked about the difference between tēʕ and tabaʕ were surprised at the question, as they did not perceive there to be any difference between the two forms. Only one young Muslim female informant expressed a negative attitude toward tēʕ; she described it as “heavy” and strongly denied ever using it. We can, in fact, see a clear usage distinction in Beirut between tēʕ (which is never used by Christian informants in the corpus, while it is used by a number of Muslim informants) and tabaʕ (used by both Christians and Muslims). These discrepancies, these apparent-time “non-shared” stigmatizations could undoubtedly account, among other things, for the different pace at which variants evolve in situations of dialect contact.
References


