

## The /dz/ Variant in the Speech of Arab Tribes in Saudi Arabia

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**Abstract:** This paper is a sociolinguistic study of selected people who originally belong to three Bedouin Tribes in Saudi Arabia, namely, the Qahtani, Shamari and Anizi tribes, and who now currently reside in Al Ahasa (Saudi Arabia). The speech of forty-eight informants from these tribes has been investigated to examine variation in the speech of these groups and to identify possible correlations with selected extra-linguistic factors. The variant [dz] of the (Q) variable will be used as a basis to investigate this variation because it is a unique characteristic feature of the dialect of these groups and is used, to a great extent, in their phonetic inventory.

**Keywords:** linguistic variation, sound change, linguistic accommodation.

### صوت الـ /dz/ في لهجات القبائل العربية البدوية في المملكة العربية السعودية

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**الملخص:** أجريت هذه الدراسة على أشخاص ينتمون إلى ثلاثة قبائل بدوية عربية في المملكة العربية السعودية. وهذه القبائل الثلاثة هي القحطاني والعنزي والشمري. ولقد قمنا بمقابلة ٤٨ متحدث من هذه القبائل كعينة لدراستنا، هادفين لمعرفة التباين اللغوي في لهجتهم وتأثير بعض العوامل الاجتماعية على هذا التباين. ولدراسة هذا التباين قمنا باختيار الحرف (ق) كمتغير واحد اصواته، وهو الصوت /dz/ الذي يعتبر من اهم ميزات لهجة هذه القبائل، لتحديد هذا التباين اللغوي. وقد أظهرت الدراسة استخدام هذا الصوت النادر بلهجتهم وما زال يعتبر ميزة خاصة للهجة هؤلاء.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** لهجات، القبائل العربية، المملكة العربية السعودية.

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## 1. Introduction

Three tribes will be investigated in this study linguistically. These are: Qahtani, Anizi and Shamari. The three tribes are considered some of the largest tribes within the Arabian Peninsula as a whole, and in Saudi Arabia, in particular. The people who belong to these tribes possess a certain amount of social prestige because they belong to large tribes. These particular tribes are significant because their history is deeply rooted in the history of the Arab world. The Qahtani tribe is known to trace its tribal history the furthest in Arab history. The Anizi tribe is also a very old Arab tribe that has been recorded to have been in existence long ago, and today it has many branches. On a historical level, the dialect used by the Shamari tribe is indeed a dialect of a people whose history is deeply rooted in the history of the ancient Arab tribes who lived in the area thousands of years ago.

For example, one of the great figures in Arab history is Hatim Al Tai who belonged to the Tai tribe, a branch of the Shamari clan. Hatim Al Tai was a famous pre-Islamic Arabian poet. Stories about his extreme generosity have immortalized him for modern-day Arabs, as illustrated in the proverbial phrase "more generous than Hatem (Abu Sudirah, 1996, Salim, 2010)." Thus, this study aims to investigate the Arabic dialect of select tribes who play a prominent role in the history of Arab tribes.

## 2. The (Q) Variable

The Standard Arabic voiceless uvular stop (Q) is in many areas the most salient phonological feature with which speakers of colloquial Arabic varieties can be identified. It has at least five reflexes: [q], [g], [k], [dʒ] and [ʔ] in present-day spoken Arabic. Given the evidence we have gathered in our study, we can add another allophone of the (Q) variable. It is the voiced alveolar affricate /dz/ which is unique to the dialects of these Bedouin tribes (Qahtani, Anizi, and Shamari). Owens stated that in the Bedouin dialects the velar /g/ became /dʒ/ and it also became /dz/ (Owens, 2013). Holes indicates that the [dʒ]/[dz] variants are largely limited to the Eastern Arabian peninsula and Gulf region. Arab linguists (e.g. Abdo 1969; Abdel-Jawad 1981) have frequently used (Q) with its various reflexes as a parameter for drawing lines between the different dialects of Arabic (Al Khatib, 1988). Our study shows that it is true that although the /dz/ sound is used among the members of these tribes, some Arabic speakers, who do not belong to these tribes, live only a few kilometers from their 'dairathom', i.e. 'their homes' place,' just to use the local terminology, are not aware of this variant.

Blanc states that the (Q) variable has undergone several changes (Blanc, 1964). Some of these changes are related to the group of dialects described by Blanc as *geltu*-dialects (the dialects characteristic of Bedouin people) and others to the group of dialects described as *qeltu*-dialects (the dialects related to urban and rural regions which constitute the sedentary Arab population). The (Q) variable is realised as [g] in Bedouin or semi-Bedouin dialects (i.e. the dialects of people who do not live a fully Bedouin life, such as the people of the Al Ahasa district where many of our informants were interviewed) in Southern Iraq and the Jordanian and Syrian deserts (Abdel-Jawad, 1981; Kanakri, 1988; Irshied, 1984; El Salman, 2003; El Salman and Al Haisoni, 2013). In other Bedouin dialects further changes took place leading to the realisation of the front allophones of /g/ as [ʒ] or [dʒ] (Abdel-Jawad 1981; Kanakri 1988; Al Khatib 1988).

For example, the (Q) variable is expressed as /d3/ in the Shamari Bedouin dialect (El Salman and Al Haisoni, 2013).

Indeed, the (Q) variable in our study has also been exhibited as /dz/ in the Bedouin dialects in Saudi Arabia. This, in fact, indicates the importance of our study; the study demonstrates the fact that the (Q) variable has, in fact, another variant which has, until now, not been discussed in previous studies conducted in the Arab world (such as, for example, Abdel-Jawad, 1981; Al Khatib, 1988; Kanakrih, 1988; Al Wer, 1990; Dhahir, 1998). In addition, it shows the possible relations between social implications and other linguistic implications. The study clearly shows how the use of some variants of some phonemes becomes obligatory among members of the same social group, or, in this case, tribe. In other words, the use of a given dialect with its key features became a 'social fact,' a term used by De Saussure in 1915; if a person did not adhere to and use the group's dialect, one would appear odd, or out of place.

### 3. The /dz/ Variant of the (Q) Variable in the Speech of the Studied Tribes

The (Q) variable is possibly the most studied variable in the Arabic language. Whenever linguists feel that it has been fully investigated and they might have nothing to add with regard to it, new information relating to it emerges and linguists find themselves again involved in a new discovery. The most recent discovery that, as far as we know, no other studies have ever indicated, is that the (Q) variable has an additional variant which has never been mentioned as one of its variants before. It is the voiced alveolar affricate /dz/. In the remote and relic areas in the heart of the desert of Saudi Arabia, the /dz/ variant is still actively used, and other words, which are known to be pronounced with the /q/ variant in other areas in the Arab world, are known here only if they are pronounced with the variant /dz/. It is difficult to find someone who belongs to any of these Bedouin tribes who might pronounce a word like 'ibriq' (pot) as it is usually pronounced by any Arabic native speakers; instead, they may pronounce it as /ibridz/. As some tribal men put it, /ibriq/ became /ibridz/ in their dialect. Thus, we decided to start investigating this variant in its natural context as one of the (Q) variable variants.

### 4. Methodology

In order to study the /dz/ sound in its social context, and in order to know how it is socially employed by the tribal people, a sample of forty-eight informants from these tribes were selected for the study. The aim is to investigate the speech of the members of the tribe, in particular the use of the /dz/ variant in their speech. Table (1) shows the distribution of informants by sex and age.

Table 1: Distribution of informants by sex and age

Age	M	F	Total
Young	8	8	16
Middle	8	8	16
Old	8	8	16
<b>Total</b>	24	24	48

Interviews were conducted with members of the selected tribes using the face-to-face technique. We did not face any difficulty in approaching and interviewing male informants of different age-groups. The inherent difficulty of interviewing females was, of course, present as it often is in conservative societies. To overcome this obstacle, we used a questionnaire and I depended on the information I succeeded in obtaining from our female students about the variant and its use among members of their families. Because we were not able to avoid the difficulty of a male-to-female interview, we were obliged to engage a female to help us carry out the interviews. Additionally, some male students assisted in conducting interviews with their female relatives on our behalf. We chose two female students and two male students to help us in this task. We trained them and showed them how the interviews should be held.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Table 2: The distribution of the variable (Q) by age and sex

Sex	M				F				
	Age	[dz/in] %	[dz/ou t]%	[g/in] %	[g/out]	[dz/in] %	[dz/ou t]%	[g/in] %	[g/out]
Young		70	15	30	85	60	10	40	90
Middle		79	20	21	80	75	25	25	65
Old		80	70	20	30	82	78	18	12

As indicated in Table (2), two variants of the (Q) variable were considered in our study. These are the voiced velar stop /g/ and the voiced alveolar affricate sound /dz/. This is because the glottal stop, which is the urban variant, is not found in the phonetic inventory of these tribes. Also the uvular /q/ variant has not been included as it is the SA variant which is not commonly used by the members of the selected tribes.

Table (2) concretely displays that the /dz/ sound is used in the speech of the members of these tribes. The older generations use it as well as the younger. Table (2) shows that its use is frequent within the borders of areas where the population of the tribes is relatively high.

According to our research, as indicated in table (2), older males use the variant in 80% and older females in 82% of the total number of occurrences of the (Q) variable. The middle-aged group also uses it in a high percentage among members of the tribe. The results for this age group were 79% among males and 75% among females. Smaller yet still significant percentages were found among the younger generation with male use at 70% and female use at 60%.

This means the [dz] variant is still actively used when the members of these tribes converse with each other. Within the tribal context, neither age nor sex appear to be significant factors in dictating its use. SPSS analysis shows that sex has a very low significance with regard to the use of the [dz] variant ( $P < .05$  while  $P < .278$  for sex in the use of the [dz] variant), and SPSS analysis also indicates that age has a low significance concerning the use of the [dz] variant ( $P < .05$  while  $P < .300$  for age in the use of the [dz] variant).

The use of this variant drastically decreases when speech occurs outside of tribal boundaries and with people who do not belong to the tribes. In this setting, older males use the (Q) variable 70% of the total number of occurrences while older

females use it 78%. The middle-aged group also uses the variable less percentage than when with the tribe. The percentage of occurrence was 20% among males and 25% among females. The percentages were even lower among the third age group, the young with a 15% total occurrence among males and 10% among females. This means that age is significant in the use of this variant in this context.

Thus, it can be concluded that the young do not preserve the native [dz] variant when they are outside the context of the tribe. The young, in general, try to follow the patterns which denote the social meanings they seek or determine as important. The cost and reward principle suggested by Scotton is obviously in effect here. According to Myers-Scotton, "a major motivation for using one variety rather than another as a medium of an interaction is the extent to which this choice minimizes costs and minimizes rewards for the speaker (Myers-Scotton, 1995: 100)." Outside the tribe and with people from the larger speech community, tribal members aim to be part of the larger, more collective group. Thus, avoiding the speech attributes which do not conform to the speech attributes of the larger group is expected. The young are more progressive in making and using sound changes due to the fact that there is less social pressure on them than on the older generations (Al-Wer, 1991). Within the tribe such an innovative behaviour pattern could not pass without much criticism by the community. Yet outside the tribe, innovation is more acceptable.

Words that are pronounced with the /dz/ variant are difficult to recognize by those who do not use this variant. This very peculiarity of this variant and the fact that it is almost exclusively used and recognized by members of these tribes have, as a result, determined that a key index be that the speaker is a 'real member' in the tribal community (see also Gee, 1999). As a result, the use of the variant is understood as an attempt to associate oneself with the group. So, within the group, everybody aims to portray themselves as true members of the Bedouin community. Given the cost and reward principle suggested by Scotton, the reward is to fulfill the characteristics of members of the tribal community, and this is achieved by the use of the special Bedouin variant /dz/.

When outside the tribal boundaries, the use of the variant is a cost that the young do not want to afford to take because it will identify them as non-local and, therefore, not part of the larger speech community. Thus because the desire to belong and not be ostracized for their differences is so strong among the younger generation, they avoid using the variant. This also explains the high percentage of its occurrence in the presence of other members of the tribes. This also means that any attempt by any member of these tribes to abandon the variant would have been perceived as an attempt to disassociate themselves from the Bedouin group which is something which no one wishes to do.

This, we believe, was the main reason for a general reluctance among females to also avoid using the variant in exchange for a variant which is not stigmatized and might be more socially appropriate for them. A choice alternate variant would reflect softness and urbanization which are features regarded as fitting to the nature of women in some parts of the Arab world (Al-Wer, 1999: 41; Amara, 1999: 70). Notice that women use it in a high percentage when talking to people from the same group.

It is worth mentioning that some words are lexically conditioned in that they are only used with the /g/ variant. Some of these words are: [3iqal], [3oqbal], [aqbal] 'I

accept' and [qabil] 'before.' The shift to the use of the [g] variant of the (Q) variable does not mean shifting from the use of the [dz] variant in this case as these words are lexically conditioned. It should also be noted that the pronunciation of other words have been fossilized with the /dz/ variant. All of the informants used them with the /dz/ variant in all contexts and domains. Some of these are: [ibriiq], [ibriidz] 'tea pot;' [ghiriq], [ghiridz] 'he sank;' and [rafiiq], [rafiidz] 'mate.'

## 6. Conclusion

The study shows that the essential (Q) variable, which has been well studied in the Arab world, has an additional variant in the /dz/ sound. None of the previous studies which have been carried out in the Arab world (see, for example, Abdeljawad, 1981; Kanakrih, 1988; Al Khatib, 1988; Al Wer, 1990; El Salman, 2003a; El Salman, 2003b) mention this variant as one of the possible allophones of the /q/ phoneme. This study sheds light on this variant and supports the objective of investigating the possible correlation between the use of this rare variant and other possible social factors.

The study shows that, to a great extent, the use of this variant is affected by the context and the domain where it is used. In fact, its use decreases to 10% of the total number of occurrences of the (Q) variable in the speech of its users when found in any context outside the tribe. Yet the use of this variant significantly increases within the tribe context. Its frequency reaches 80 percent in the speech of the old, and it was also very high in the speech of the young, reaching 70 percent. Differences in the social factors (such as age and the sex) play insignificant roles in the use of the variant. The only factors which appear to have any influence in its use are the setting, or context, of the speech and whether the interlocutors are or are not members of the tribe. In the presence of other tribal people, the variant is used in a high percentage throughout the conversation which means that social pressure directly affects its use here. Outside the tribe and when the interlocutors are members of other groups, its use obviously decreases. In other words, once the social pressure is no longer present, accommodation to another's speech becomes possible.

The study also shows that this variant is unique to the people of the tribes. The variant is also very exclusive in the sense that other Saudis who reside in close proximity to the tribes and who have daily contact with them are not aware of the variant's existence. It is this peculiarity that has resulted in the use of the variant as a solid indicator of one's membership to a tribe. Yet is it also this peculiarity which has kept the variant in obscurity for so long. As a result the words pronounced with the variant are not easily understood. Thus, its use is avoided when among non-tribal persons. It could be compared to a minority dialect which is highly used among minority members to emphasize their belonging to the group, and at the same time, its use is avoided in order not to be understood as they try to disassociate themselves from the larger group where they live.

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