



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

A transitional Arabic dialect of the northern Omani interior

Eades, D

Title	A transitional Arabic dialect of the northern Omani interior
Authors	Eades, D
Publication title	Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik
Publisher	Harrassowitz Publishing House
Type	Article
USIR URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/18728/
Published Date	2011

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: library-research@salford.ac.uk.

A transitional Arabic dialect of the northern Omani interior¹

Domenyk Eades*

Abstract:

A major classificatory division of the Arabic vernaculars spoken throughout much of the Arab world is that of the socially-based Sedentary (S) versus Bedouin (B) dichotomy. In studies of the Omani dialect area these terms are used to distinguish between the speech of the traditionally settled populace concentrated around the mountainous interior of the country (S type) on the one hand, and the nomadic and recently settled communities of the deserts (B type) on the other. In some transitional regions located in the area between these two regions the classification of dialects is somewhat blurred, as the varieties of Arabic spoken there exhibit characteristics of both S and B types. The town of al-Darīz, which is located in the interior of northern Oman, lies in one such transitional region.

The present contribution examines important structural features of the spoken Arabic of al-Darīz and places the findings within the broader Omani context. It is shown that although the dialect exhibits some characteristics of accommodation to the speech of nearby Bedouin communities with respect to certain phonological features, the dialect of al-Darīz retains most of the distinctly S-type features spoken among the historically settled communities of the mountain region to the north of the country. This is in striking contrast with the situation in the town of al-Mintirib, which is located to the south of al-Darīz, where the speech of the historically sedentary population exhibits most of the B-type features which characterise the

1 This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 8th Conference of the International Association of Arabic Dialectologists held at the University of Essex, UK, 28–31 August 2008. This study is part of a larger project on the spoken Arabic of the Šarqiyah region of Oman, which is funded by Sultan Qaboos University. Many thanks to CLIVE HOLES and ADEL ABU RADWAN for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper; any errors of fact or interpretation are my own.

* Department of English, College of Arts & Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, P.O. Box: 42, P.C.: 123 Al-Khod, Muscat, Oman. Email: dceades1@hotmail.com.

speech of the surrounding nomadic population. The differences in the spoken Arabic of al-Darīz and al-Mintirib can be explained by the contrasting socio-historical circumstances in which the dialects of each town has developed.

Introduction

The primarily classificatory division of the Arabic dialects of Oman is that of the familiar socially-based Sedentary (S) versus Bedouin (B) dichotomy. This division is marked by distinct contrasts in various phonological, morphological, and lexical features. However, in some regions the distinction between these types is blurred. In this regard, HOLES (1989) observed the following:

There are transitional areas where the population is a mix of Hadar and Badu groups, and in which both dialect types, or a 'mixed' dialect, can be heard. This is true of many of the townships and villages of the northern Šarqīyya, such as Mintirib and al-Darīz. (p. 452).

HOLES noted that these mixed dialects are generally S in character, but exhibit certain B features resulting from a history of inter-group contact. Apart from these observations, the dialects spoken in this transitional region have not been described to date. The present study is an attempt to fill this gap.

Here we describe aspects of the spoken Arabic of al-Darīz, a small town which lies between the vast desert of the Wahība Sands and the Jabal Hajar mountain range in the northern Šarqīyyah region of Oman. The town is populated mainly by families belonging to the tribe of al-Ḥurt² (sing. al-Ḥārītī), a large tribe whose members reside in locations throughout the northern Šarqīyyah. Most of the population who live in the area surrounding the town is Bedouin. The dialect of al-Darīz is compared with data from al-Mintirib a small town located on the edge of the Wahība Sands, whose population also consists of a sedentary population living among a large Bedouin population belonging mainly to the Āl-Wahība tribe. In striking contrast with the dialect of al-Darīz, the speech of the historically sedentary population of al-Mintirib has accommodated almost entirely to that of the surrounding Bedouin communities.

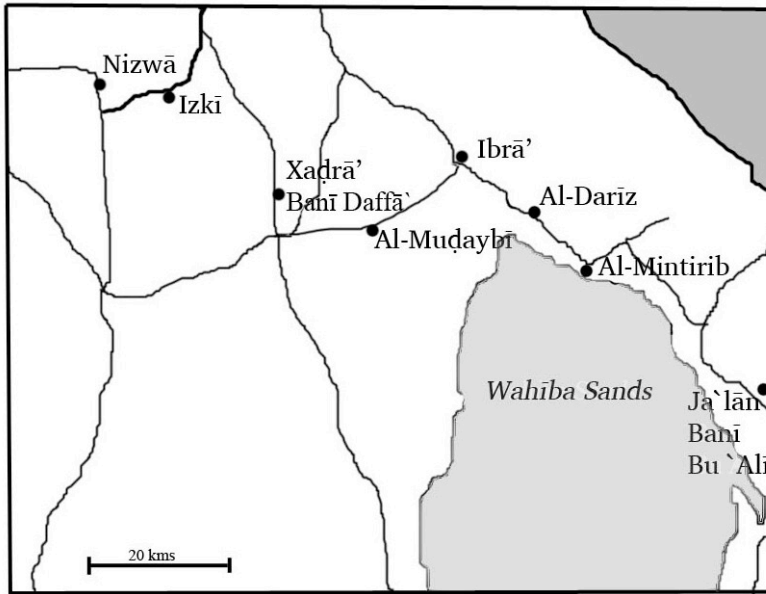
2 The name of the tribe is sometimes spelt 'al-Ḥirth' in the literature.

In the following sections, important structural characteristics of the dialect of al-Dariz are described and compared with the dialect of al-Mintirib as well as the dialects of various other locations in the Omani interior. This is then followed by discussion of the differences in the socio-historical circumstances in which each of the dialects has developed.

1. Location of the study

Oman is located in the south-east of peninsular Arabia. The interior of the country consists of two major ecological and socio-cultural regions: the mountain region which extends throughout the north of the country, where much of the sedentary population is concentrated; and the desert region, in which the Bedouin population is concentrated. The area between the desert and the mountains is populated by large rural Bedouin communities but is interspersed with villages and towns in which historically sedentary communities reside. One such town located in this transitional region is al-Dariz, which lies approximately four kilometres to the north of the Wahiba Sands, a large sand desert which is populated mainly by Bedouin. Most families residing in al-Dariz belong to the tribe of al-Ḥurt, a large tribe whose members established the village after migrating from the large settlement of Ibrā' in the mid-18th century (BONNENFONT and GRANDMAISON 1977: 93). Most sections of the tribe are historically sedentary, while a small part is Bedouin. Families belonging to the tribe live in villages throughout the area between al-Dariz and Ibrā'. In Ibrā' itself the southern half of the town is largely populated by members of al-Ḥurt, while population in the northern half of the town belong predominantly to the sedentary tribe of al-Masākirah (sing. al-Maskarī).

Another town located in this transitional region at the edge of the Wahiba Sands is the town of al-Mintirib, in which the majority of the population belong to the large sedentary tribe of al-Ḥaḡriyīn (sing. al-Ḥaḡarī). The spoken Arabic of al-Mintirib differs significantly from that of al-Dariz due to the greater degree to which the dialect of al-Mintirib has accommodated to the speech of the surrounding Bedouin communities. The S-type speech of three other towns in the Omani interior (Izkī, Ibrā', Xaḍrā Bani Daffā`) is examined here for the purpose of comparison. The locations surveyed in the study are shown in Map 1 below:



Map 1: The Šarqiyah region of Oman

In the following section, various phonological features of the spoken Arabic of al-Darīz are described and compared with S-dialect data from the mountain region to the north, and B-dialect data from al-Mintirib.

2. Phonological contrasts marking the S/B division in the region

The division of Omani dialects into the S and B types is based on certain contrasting phonological, morphological, and lexical features. In two typological surveys of the Omani dialect area, HOLES (1989, 1996) outlined important structural features which distinguish the Omani S dialects from those of the B type. These feature contrasts also largely apply to the spoken Arabic of the Šarqiyah region, although some the S/B division in the Šarqiyah region is also characterised by certain other contrasts unique to the speech of the region.

In this section, some of the structural differences marking the distinction between S and B dialects in the Šarqiyah region are described. This classification is based upon the feature contrasts described by HOLES, but incorporating new data gathered in various locations throughout the Šarqiyah region. A major phonological contrast marking the S/B division in this region concerns the reflexes of OA **q/*ğ*:

a) Reflexes of OA *q/*ğ

OA	*q	*ğ
S type	q	g / ğ / ʃ
B type	g	y

The mixed nature of the Darīz dialect is manifested in the fact that the S-type reflex of *q is retained in the dialect, but the reflex of OA *ğ has accommodated to the B-type reflex, which is represented by the palatal approximant [y]. These features are illustrated in the underlined lexical items in example (1), which is an excerpt of a conversation about how houses are constructed in Darīz:

(1) A: *yisawwa luh tīn, yīğayyilū-h³ mi l-arḍ fōq. wə yisəwwyūh fōq šabbīyah, šabbīyah; we l-mərzāb min ḥadīd wə min ḥaṭab*

B: *hādā mərzāb. yisawwyū-h min ḥayar.* (al-Darīz)

A: Mud is made for it. They mix it from the ground, and they make at the top a drain, a drain. The gutter is from metal and wood.

B: This is a gutter. It is made from stone.

Nevertheless, the occurrence of this form is restricted to certain social contexts, and has a pragmatically-conditioned variant form: the voiced palatal affricate [ğ], which occurs elsewhere only in dialects of the S type. Thus, the following variant forms occur in the dialect of al-Darīz: *yā ~ ġā* ‘he came’, *dayāy ~ dağāy* ‘chicken’, *yibāl ~ ġibāl* ‘mountains’. In a discussion which took place between a group of elderly speakers from the town which was recorded during the course of this study, the palatal approximant [y], or a slightly fricated version of this, was used by all of the speakers throughout the conversation. However, in separate interviews two speakers often used the form [ğ] in variation with [y]. When asked about the reason for this variation, two speakers remarked that the variant form [ğ] is heard in the speech of people from al-Darīz only when speaking with non-Bedouin people from outside of the town. The speakers are apparently conscious of the social value of the form [y] (< OA *ğ), and the fact that for speakers outside of the al-Darīz this is a distinctive marker of Bedouin speech.

3 There is a tendency in many parts of Oman for intervocalic *q (/q/ or /g/) to be realised as a velar fricative.

Other criteria which mark the S/B distinction are shown in points b) to e) below. Some of these were employed by HOLES (1989, 1996) in his classification of the Omani dialect group:

	S type (Ibrā', Xaḍrā Banī Daffā')	B type (al-Mintirib)
b)	-iṣ as 2 sing. fem. enclitic, e.g. <i>bētiṣ</i> 'your (2 FEM) house'	-ik as 2 sing. fem. enclitic (e.g. <i>bētik</i>)
c)	No raising of final /a/ (e.g. <i>bētha</i> 'her house')	Raising of final /a/ to /e/ (<i>imāla</i>) (e.g. <i>bēthe</i> 'her house')
d)	<i>qahwa</i> only	<i>gahwa</i> varies with <i>ghawa</i>
e)	CvC(v)Cv(C) forms only (e.g. <i>kitbat</i> 'she wrote')	CvC(v)Cv(C) varies with CCvCv(C) (e.g. <i>ktabat</i>)

The Darīz dialect retains most of the S-type listed in (b–e), as well as various other distinctly S-type phonological features described by HOLES (1989, 1996). However, in terms of lexical stress and phonotactics, i.e. criterion e), the dialect has evidently accommodated to B-type speech. The nature of this accommodation is examined in some detail in the following section.

3. Lexical stress and phonotactics

One of the most significant feature contrasts distinguishing the Šarqīyah S dialects from B ones pertains to lexical stress and phonotactics. In words with only light syllables, i.e. syllables with a short vowel and no coda, B dialects of the interior show a general tendency to exhibit word-final stress and to contain initial consonant clusters; S dialects, on the other hand, typically exhibit initial stress and have structures of the pattern #CvC... The most distinctively B-type manifestation of this tendency is seen with respect to the *gahawah*-syndrome phenomena. This is described by DE JONG (2000: 107) as the resyllabification following the insertion of a vowel between X and C in XC sequences. This can be summarised as follows:

gahawah-vowel insertion rule:

∅ > a / (C)aX__C(V)

X = any of the back spirants h, ḥ, ʕ, x, ġ

In many dialects in which gahawah-vowel insertion occurs, the insertion rule is followed by the reduction of #CvC... to #CC (e.g. *gahwa* → *gahawa* → *ghawa* ‘coffee’).

In the following, phonotactic patterns marking the S/B division are described. The examples representing the B type are drawn from data gathered in al-Mintirib, and those representing the S type from the towns of Ibrā’ and Izkī, which are located in the mountain region to the north-west of al-Darīz.

3.1 Omani S and B types

A distinctive contrast marking the S/B dialect division in the Šarqīyah region, as in many other parts of the Arab world, is within the domain of stress and phonotactics. B type dialects exhibit the pattern #CC..., with phonological words showing a tendency toward non-initial stress; S type dialects on the other hand exhibit the pattern #CvC... and tend to exhibit initial stress. This is shown in the following in words of various phonotactic patterns:

B type (al-Mintirib)	S type (Ibrā’, Izkī)	
<i>bgára</i>	<i>báqra</i>	‘cow’
<i>gháwa</i>	<i>qáhwa</i>	‘coffee’
<i>rgába</i>	<i>ráqba</i>	‘neck’
<i>dxálaw</i>	<i>dáxlō</i>	‘they entered’
<i>gumár</i>	Ibrā’: <i>qmár</i> ; Izkī: <i>qámar</i>	‘moon’

3.2 Lexical stress: al-Darīz dialect

The speech of al-Darīz has retained most Omani S-type phonological and morphological features, but in the domain of stress and phonotactics the dialect exhibits extensive accommodation to the B dialects. The following sub-sections show examples of lexical items in the dialect of al-Darīz with respect to six separate phonotactic structures

3.2.1 Initial stress

1) *CvCvC (= C’CvC)

Like the S dialects of the region, and some B ones, the dialect of al-Darīz exhibits initial stress in many stems cognate with OA *CvCvC. Examples include *hátāb* ‘firewood’, *yámal* ‘camel’, *gánam* ‘sheep, goat’. It should be

noted, however, that the speech of B communities on the coastal side of the Wahiba Sands tends to exhibit initial CvC... structures which have been restructured to CC in the speech of B communities further inland. In contrast with B dialects, the pattern #CvC... occurs in the dialect of al-Dariz in nouns marked by possessive enclitics: *qálam* ‘pen’, *qálmī* ‘my pen’ (B: *gálam*, *glámi*)

2) *CvCCv(C) (= C[́]vCCv(C))

In contrast with B dialects, no phonotactic restructuring takes place in words of the pattern *qahwa*, i.e. no *gahawa* vowel is inserted and no subsequent restructuring occurs. Examples of this pattern in the speech of al-Dariz include *qáhwa* ‘coffee’, *náxla* ‘a date palm’, *yá‘da* ‘sheep’, *náxla* ‘a date palm’, *dáhrəh* ‘his back’.

In spite of these distinctly S-type patterns shown above, most other phonotactic structures in the dialect of al-Dariz exhibit B-type patterning. These are outlined in the following section.

3.2.2 #CC..., non-initial stress (B-type structures)

3) *CvCvC (= CC[́]vC)

Examples of CC[́]vC with nouns include *bšál* ‘onion’, *bḥár* ‘sea’, *qmár* ‘moon’ (the S dialect of Ibrā’ exhibits similar forms, whereas in Izki these are: *bášal*, *báṭan*, *báḥar*, *qámar*). Some of these involve insertion of a *gahawa* vowel (DE JONG 2000: 107, see above), e.g. *bṭán* ‘stomach’ and *lḥám* ‘meat’.

4) *CvCvCv(C) (= CC[́]vCvC)

Examples of verbs of the pattern CC[́]vCvC include *šrábit* ‘she drank’, *ktábəh* ‘he wrote it’, and *drásit* ‘she studied’ (S: *šárbit*, *kítbuh*, *dársat*); nouns of this pattern include *rqába* ‘neck’ and *bqára* ‘cow’ (S: *ráqba*, *báqra*).

5) *CvCvCatuh (= CC[́]áCctəh)

Examples of this pattern include *bqártəh* ‘his cow’, *rqábtəh* ‘his neck’ (S: *baqrítuh*, *raqbíttuh*).

6) *CvCvCat-hu (CC[́]vCátt-ah)

This pattern includes perfect verbs which bear the feminine suffix *-it* and take a pronominal object enclitic. These forms contain initial clusters. Examples of this pattern include *drasáttəh* ‘she studied it’, *ktabáttəh* ‘she wrote it’ (S: *darsítuh*, *katbíttuh*).

In conclusion to this section, it was shown here that while there has been accommodation to the stress patterns of the B dialects in the region, some S-

type patterns have been retained. Table 1 below shows in summary the stress and phonotactic patterns of the dialect of al-Darīz in comparison with the S and B dialects of the region.

		al-Darīz	B	S
1) ĆvCvC(v)	<i>ḥátab</i>	✓ (some stems)	✓ (few stems)	✓ (most stems)
2) ĆaCCa(C)	<i>qáhwa</i>	✓	x	✓
3) CĆC	<i>qmár</i>	✓	✓	✓ (Ibrā’)/x (Izki)
4) CĆvCv(C)	<i>šrábit</i>	✓	✓	x
5) CCvĆvCv(C)	<i>bqártah</i>	✓	✓	x
6) CCaĆaCv(C)	<i>ktabáttah</i>	✓	✓	x

Table 1: Summary of stress and phonotactic patterns across the dialects of the northern Omani interior

Many instances of the B-type feature #CC... occurred in the data from al-Darīz, but this did not occur in all structures, most notably those of the *qahwa* (ĆaCCa(C)) type. The dialect is thus in this sense contrasted with that of al-Mintirib further to south. In spite of the fact that the form *ghawa* is a stereotypical characteristic of Bedouin speech, is heard in the speech of both sedentary and Bedouin members of the population of al-Mintirib, in contrast with the situation in al-Darīz.

4. Morphological features in relation to Omani S and B types

HOLDS (1989: 454) listed four separate morphological parameters by which Omani B dialects are contrasted with those of the S type. According to various important morphological/morpho-phonological features, the dialect of al-Darīz falls within the Omani S category. These features are listed along with an additional feature marking this division in the Šarqīyyah region. Contrasting B type equivalents are provided in brackets for comparison:

- 1) Final *-u* and *-i* (B: *-ūn* and *-īn*): *yitnaqqalu* ‘they move around’, *tizar’i* ‘you (sg. fem.) plant’
- 2) Final *-uh* (B: *-ah*): *nširbāh* ‘we drink it’, *bētāh* ‘his house’ (B: *nširbah*, *bētah*)
- 3) Initial /yō/ in some weak verbs (B: *yā*): *yōkil* ‘he eats’, *yōxad* ‘he takes’ (B: *yākil*, *yāxad*)

4) Prefixes for verbs Form V and VI show /yit/- (B-type /yti/-): *yit'allam* 'he learns', *yitkallam* 'he speaks' (B: *yiti'allam*, *yitikallam*)

5) Stem-final /y/ is retained when stem bears suffixed element: *yimišyu* 'they walk', *yibinyu* 'they build' (B-type: *yimšūn*, *yibnūn*)

According to these criteria, the dialect of al-Dariz belongs to the S type as it exhibits all five of these S-type morphological features.

5. Discussion

In the preceding sections, it was shown that the spoken Arabic of al-Dariz exhibits some accommodation to Omani B-type speech. This has no doubt resulted from the historically close relationship between the population of the town and the large Bedouin communities nearby. The accommodation of the speech of a non-mobile population to the neighbouring nomadic community is the inverse situation of what typically occurs when nomads come into contact with sedentary communities (TRUDGILL 1986: 3). The most likely reason for this in the Omani context is the fact that the economic, military, and cultural influence of the sedentary communities of the Omani interior over the surrounding Bedouin populace is minimal. In many parts of the interior, the economic and political influence of the Bedouin was significantly greater than that of the settled communities in the towns. This is in contrast with the situation in some larger towns of the Omani interior and in parts of coastal Oman, where it is common to find Bedouin or descendants of Bedouin whose speech is heavily influenced by that of the sedentary population of the towns in which they have settled or worked for extended periods. In contrast with the historically sedentary communities close to the desert rim such as al-Mintirib, the influence of Bedouin speech on the dialect of al-Dariz has been somewhat limited, and this is most likely due to the distinct social history of the town.

5.3 Socio-historical background

While dialect accommodation is the inevitable result of sustained contact between different communities (TRUDGILL 1986, 2008), the extent to which this accommodation takes place varies from one community to another and the direction of accommodation is potentially determined by a range of social factors. MILROY (2003: 170) points out that the process of accommodation is slower in those communities in which traditional social networks are maintained. This appears to be one explanation for the preservation of a wide range of S-type features in the dialect of al-Dariz. In spite of some accommodation having occurred in the dialect, the close-knit,

tribally homogeneous nature of the community may partially explain why the dialect spoken by the population of the town has retained many S-type features. The preservation of these features brings the dialect of the town into contrast with the speech of the surrounding Bedouin communities, which constitute the bulk of the populace throughout the wider region in which the town is located.

In the Šarqiyyah region of Oman, the influence of Bedouin speech on the speech of many sedentary communities is significant. This has most likely occurred as a result of the distinct socio-historical circumstances in which the dialects of this region have developed. Prior to the unification and modernization of Oman which began in 1970, the populations of the towns and villages in the interior were politically and economically autonomous from any centralised urban-based power (WILKINSON 1987: 37). The population of the towns was structured in a similar way to the nomadic Bedouin communities, being organised into tight-knit tribal groups, and in the Šarqiyyah region, the direct loyalties of a given tribe typically did not extend beyond their own area (WILKINSON 1987: 262). These sedentary communities had a relationship of interdependence with nearby Bedouin tribes in economic and military terms, with some Bedouin tribes being significantly larger and more powerful than many of the sedentary tribes. This is in contrast with many regions elsewhere in the Arab world, where the focus of cultural and economic influence often emanates from an urban centre into the rural areas. The distinct nature of the relationship between Bedouin and settled populations in the Omani context meant that the speech of the numerically greater Bedouin population has had varying degrees of influence on the speech of the settled people in towns around the desert fringe. The preceding sections showed that the dialect of al-Darīz did not undergo the same degree of accommodation to B speech which occurred in the dialect of al-Mintirib. This can perhaps be explained by differences in the nature of the relationship between the S and B communities in the two towns.

The population of al-Mintirib, like al-Darīz, comprises a historically sedentary populace who resides in a region populated mostly by Bedouin. However, in contrast with al-Darīz, the speech of al-Mintirib exhibits very few, if any, of the S-type features which have been retained in the dialect of al-Darīz. Rather, the speech of the sedentary population of al-Mintirib has accommodated almost entirely to the speech of the surrounding B communities.⁴ The striking differences in the degree of accommodation to the B

4 One notable feature which distinguishes the speech of the S tribes of al-Mintirib

dialects in these two towns can most likely be explained by differences in the relationship between the sedentary and Bedouin populations in each of the two towns. The most significant difference in the social structure of the communities of al-Mintirib and al-Dariz is in their patterns of social interaction, particularly in terms of differing marriage patterns.

The retention of many S-type features in the dialect of al-Dariz correlates with the fact that the population of the town maintains close kin ties with the large sedentary communities to the north. The town of al-Dariz constitutes the southernmost boundary of the traditional lands (*dīra*) of the tribe of al-Ḥurṭ. The population of the town has traditionally enjoyed close ties with other members of their tribe who live in other towns located within this area. These ties are most clearly manifested by the fact that the people of the town generally marry from among other members of the tribe who reside in towns further to the north such as Ibrā'. Marriage practices vary to some degree throughout Oman, although the general pattern for much of Oman has traditionally for people to marry from within their own tribe (Federal Research Division 2004: 70). However, in some areas intermarriage may customarily occur across certain defined tribal groupings. Marriage among the tribe of al-Ḥurṭ, who constitute the majority of the population of al-Dariz, is generally restricted to within the tribe. The population of al-Dariz therefore largely constitutes a tribally homogeneous community, and the maintenance of these tribal links appears to have inhibited the linguistic influence of the B communities in the area surrounding the town. Accordingly, the fact that much of the tribe resides in locations away from the mainly Bedouin-populated areas as well as the distinct marriage patterns in the community have most likely contributed to the preservation of distinctly S-type features in the dialect of the town.

In contrast with the tribe of al-Ḥurṭ in al-Dariz, the traditional lands of the mostly sedentary tribe of al-Ḥaḡriyyīn, the largest tribal grouping in the town of al-Mintirib, do not extend to areas in the north, but are restricted to the region located on the eastern side of the Wahiba Sands. All of the traditional lands of al-Ḥaḡriyyīn are therefore located in a region which is populated by high proportion of B speakers. Furthermore, the traditional

from their B counterparts is the retention of the final *-ūn*, which is commonly heard in the speech of the Bedouin in the town. Thus: *yšīrbūn* (al-Mintirib B), *yšīrbu* (al-Mintirib S). It is worth noting that in the speech of both S and B communities to the east of al-Mintirib, *-ūn* has disappeared and only *-u* is used. As such, the final *-u* of sedentary speech in al-Mintirib cannot strictly be considered a manifestation of an 'S-type' feature.

marriage patterns of the tribe of al-Ḥağriyyīn differ from those of the population of al-Darīz. Inter-marriage with the large B tribe of the nearby Āl Wahība has traditionally been the norm among members of al-Ḥağriyyīn. For this reason, the S and B communities in and around al-Mintrib are more closely interlinked in socio-cultural terms than S and B communities further to the north. This relationship has evidently had a significant impact on the variety of Arabic spoken in the town of al-Mintirib.

6. Conclusion

The spoken Arabic of al-Darīz in northern Oman shows some degree of accommodation to the speech of the surrounding Bedouin populace. However, this accommodation is limited in comparison with the Arabic spoken in al-Mintirib. The linguistic contrasts between the communities in the two locations correlate with differences in the relationships between the historically sedentary communities and nearby Bedouin communities in the two towns. In particular, the retention of many S type features in the speech of al-Darīz correlates with the preservation of strong kin ties with communities located closer to the sedentary ‘heartland’ to the north. This has evidently resulted in an inhibition of the kinds of changes that have occurred in the dialect of al-Mintirib. In the broader Omani context, the linguistic situation in the Šarqīyah region may provide an insight into motivations for the structural conservatism which characterises the Omani dialect area, where much of the country was isolated until relatively recently and traditional social structures remained largely unchanged for centuries. With the rapid economic, political and social changes that have taken place in Oman in recent decades with the modernization of the country, it remains to be seen how the speech of the communities in the desert fringe will be affected.

Text: Life in al-Darīz

The following text is part of a discussion recorded in al-Darīz in February 2008. The discussion is between the author (A) and three male members of the tribe of al-Ḥurṭ (B,C,D) who were between fifty-five and seventy years of age.

1. A: *kēf kānat əl-ḥayāh awwəl?*
2. B: *awwəl qabəl is-sab`ināt, awwəl, ‘alə ḥmīr*
3. C: *nistaxdim il-ḥamīr, bi t-tanaqqul...*
4. D: *...tanaqqul miskat hini, ‘alə miskat...*

5. A: *wə šē ḥamīr, al-ḥīn mā šē ḥamīr?*
6. C: *qalīl qalīl... mā ḥad yista‘mil-hən... ‘ind-həm jimāl*
7. D: *yimāl wāyidāt*
8. B: *al-bōš yiyībən al-aḡrād mən šūr, mən məsqaṭ, ila həna... mən sa‘udiyə, mən dəbē*
9. D: *fi l-blād wə hādə, yiyību bōš, yirkibū-hən,*
10. C: *as-sibāq ya`nī, sibāq... mārkaḏ*
11. A: *mā šē ḥad mutanaqqil?*
12. B: *awwal hini badū; awwal, idā ybayū yitnaqqalū, in kān ba‘id wāyid, ‘ala bōš wella ‘ala ḥmī...*
13. D: *ḥad mi l-ōlād tō tanaqallū la miskaṭ*
14. C: *awwal... yisā‘irū, yisā`irū bas ifriqā, wə yisā`iru...*
15. D: *awwəl, hādə yišillu l-bisər... hādə l-bisər, t‘arəf al-bisər? hādə l-bisər mal al-bōš, yišillū-h fōq ar-rəkāb. tilqa xamsīn nāqa kəll-hən māšīn rəbā` yəmhūr; māšīn šūr, wə māšīn miskaṭ, ḥal bī` al-bisər*
16. C: *qāfilə yisəmmiyū-h qāfilə... min bā`ū l-bisər yābō rənz wə yābō bən, wə yābō ḥāyāt tāniyə... ya`nī mūnə ḥal sanah taqribən... wə bən, wə mā adri wēš.*

1. A: How was life long ago?
2. B: Long ago before the [nineteen] seventies, before, [we relied] on donkeys.
3. C: We used donkeys, when travelling.
4. D: ...when travelling to Muscat... to Muscat.
5. A: [So] there were donkeys. Are there donkeys nowadays?
6. C: Few, few... nobody uses them... They have camels.
7. D: There are a lot of camels.
8. B: Camels would bring goods from Sur, from Muscat, to here... from Saudi Arabia, from Dubai...
9. A: In the [larger] towns and here, they would bring camels, they would ride them.
10. C: I mean a contest, contest... racing
11. A: Nobody moved around?
12. B: Long ago there were Bedouin here; long ago. If they wanted to move, if it was very far, [it was done] on camels or donkeys.

13. D: Some of the children now have moved to Muscat.
14. C: Long ago, they travelled, travelled to Africa, and they travelled...
15. D: Long ago, They took dates... Dates. Do you know dates? These dates [went] on camels. They took them on riding animals. You could find fifty camels, all of them walking together, in a group; walking to Sur, and walking to Muscat, to sell dates.
16. C: A convoy, they call it a convoy... Those who sold dates brought back rice, and brought back coffee beans, and brought other goods... I mean food supplies for about a year... and coffee beans, and I don't know what else.

References

- BONNENFANT, PAUL and GRANDMAISON, COLLETTE (1977): The Ibrā' and Muḍayrib Area, pp. 91–94. *The Journal of Oman Studies*, vol. 3 part 2. Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, Sultanate of Oman.
- DE JONG, RUDOLF (2000): A grammar of the Bedouin dialects of the northern Sinai littoral. Leiden: Brill.
- Federal Research Division at the Library of Congress (2004): Oman: a country study. Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing.
- HOLES, CLIVE (1989): Towards a dialect geography of Oman, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 52.
- HOLES, CLIVE (1996): The Arabic Dialects of South Eastern Arabia in a socio-historical perspective, pp. 34–54, *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik* 31.
- MILROY, LESLEY (2003): Social and linguistic dimensions of phonological change: fitting the pieces of the puzzle together. In: BRITAIN, DAVID and JENNY CHESHIRE (eds.): *Social Dialectology: In Honour of Peter Trudgill*, pp. 165–178. John Benjamins.
- TRUDGILL, PETER (1986): Dialects in contact. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- TRUDGILL, PETER (2008): Colonial dialect contact in the history of European languages: On the irrelevance of identity to new-dialect formation, pp. 241–280. *Language in Society* 37.
- WILKINSON, J. (1987): The Imamate Tradition of Oman. Cambridge: CUP