

A SOCIOPHONETIC STUDY OF DIALECT CHANGE IN IRAQ: THE CASE OF ANAH DIALECT

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Abstract

This study investigates the occurrence of dialect levelling in the variety of Arabic spoken in Anah, Iraq in terms of the current phonological patterns and change triggered mainly by dialect contact between *qeltu* and *gilit* speakers. The study provides a quantitative sociophonetic description of the speech of 60 (30 males and 30 females) Arabic Iraqi Ani (AIA henceforth) speakers. This study investigates the change in two phonological processes: qaf velarisation and Imala (deflexion) under the effect of informants' age and gender and social network. Following Labov's (1984) conversational network method, all informants were interviewed individually to collect the linguistic variables required for analysis. Results show that according to the increasing adoption of *gilit* features by Ani speakers, levelling is occurring in the AIA. Results also revealed that levelling has not yet reached the completion level, yet it is in a very advanced phase.

1. Introduction

The field of language variation and change has been long time ago a rich area of linguistic investigation. Considerable steps have been achieved in this field, however there still much to be investigated. The literature on phonological change and variation has stated that change (majorly levelling) amongst Arabic varieties has been in operation. Some Iraqi Arabic dialects are believed to be undergoing such a process. However, the study of dialect change and variation in Iraq has not been a prominent field of research. Most of the existing studies on IA (Iraqi Arabic) dialects

were made decades ago and they need to be updated now. Thus, it is very probable that there will be some recognizable changes in the linguistic, most probably the phonological, situation of the location under study. Change, mainly levelling is believed to be occurring in the *qəltu* variety spoken in Anah.

The concept of dialect levelling has been one of the excessively investigated concepts within the variationist research. In general, dialect levelling, or supralocalisation, is the superseding of local native linguistic forms of a dialect in favour of other equivalents of broader regional or national dominance. In other words, this phenomena leads to the progressive abandoning (in some instances, total eradication) of classical linguistic differences existing between dialects of a certain language. One of the earliest definitions of leveling is the one proposed by Trudgill who defines levelling as “the reduction or attrition of marked variants” (Trudgill, 1986: 98). He further pointed out that the ‘marked variants’ are those forms which are in minority or unusual in a community as a whole (ibid).

The literature on levelling reveals that there are a number of factors hypothesized to be the main causes of such a process. These factors involve linguistic convergence and divergence (Hinskens, 1998), spatial mobility (Britain, 2002, 2009), speakers’ Social Network Integration (SNI) (Milroy, 1980, 2002), and communities of practice (Eckert, 1988, 2000) to name but a few.

In view of the considerable researches investigating its occurrence in different languages and dialects around the world such as French (Hornsby, 2007), English (Cheshire et al., 1999; Kerswill and Williams, 2000b; Milroy, 2002; Kerswill, 2003; Torgersen and Kerswill, 2004; Britain, 2009), Scottish English (Dyer ,2002), Limburg (Hinskens,1998), Norwegian (Hilton, 2010), Luxembourgish (Gilles, 1998), Romani (Leggio & Matras ,2017), Mandarin (Hsu, 2009), and Arabic (Versteegh, 1993; Hachimi,2007 ; Al-Rojaie, 2013; Manfredi, 2013; Al-Azraqi, 2016 ; Ahmed, 2018; Mohammed, 2018), the concept of dialect levelling has come to be perennial subject in variationist researches.

2. Iraq’s Linguistic Scenario

Linguistically speaking, Iraq has a heterogeneous population of religious and ethnic diversity resulting in a great linguistic variation. Of all the varieties found in Iraq, Mesopotamian Arabic or as generally known as Iraqi Arabic (henceforth IA) is the major variety spoken in Iraq as it is the mother tongue of more than 80% of Iraqi people (Peoples & Bailey 2011: 298). The *qəltu-gilit* classification set up by Blanc (1964) is the first main and widely used classification of Iraqi Arabic dialects. It has

been used in the literature to refer to the division of Arabic dialects spoken in the Mesopotamian area. Jastrow (2006 d) classifies the *qəltu* dialects group to further three subgroups (as shown Figure 1 below): Euphrates, Tigris, and Anatolian. The Euphrates group expands along the Euphrates River in Iraq (Hīt [hi:t] and ʿĀna [ʕa:na]) and in Syria (Dayr al-Zawr). The Tigris group includes Christian Baghdadi Arabic (CBA), Jewish Baghdadi Arabic (JBA), dialects spoken by Muslims of the region between Mosul down to the city of Sāmarrā, and the dialects spoken by Jewish and Christian communities in the entire *qəltu*-speaking zone. Finally, the Anatolian group consists of the dialects of Diyarbakir, Daragözü, Mardin and Siirt in Turkey.

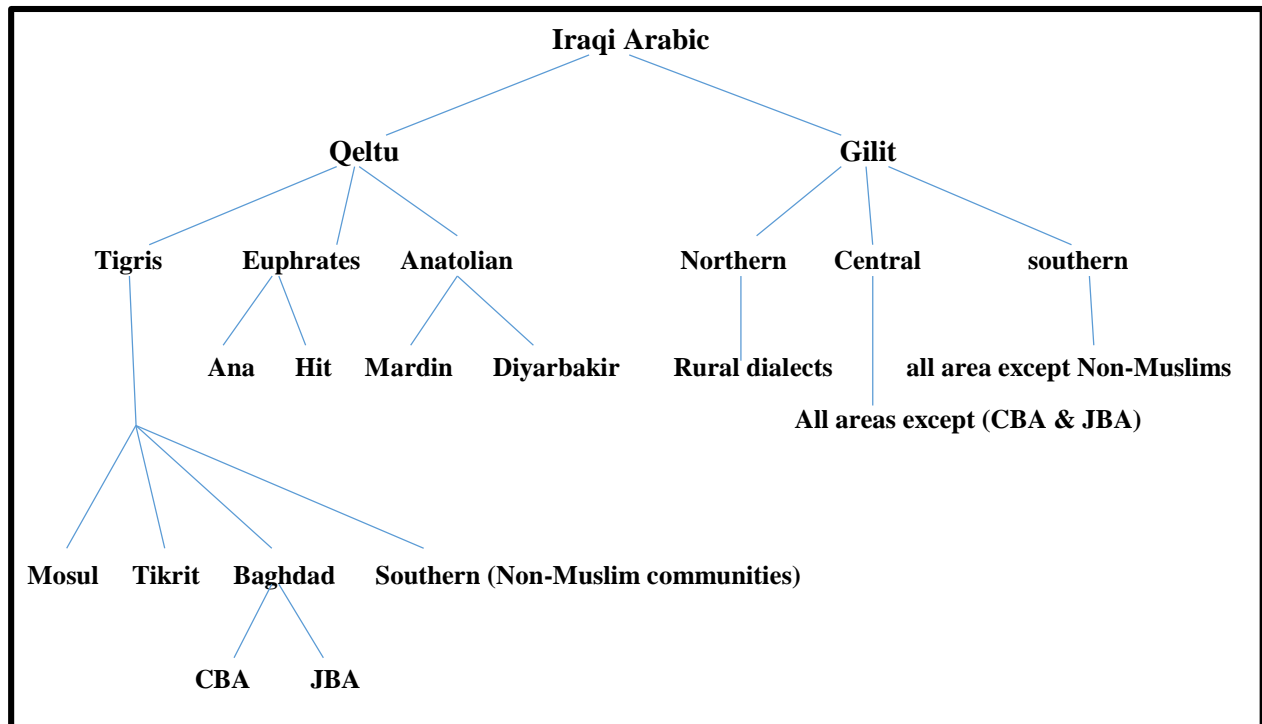


Figure (1): Overall classification of Iraqi Arabic dialect based on Blanc (1964) and Jastrow (2006 d)

3. Research Site

The research site of this study is Anah (as shown in figure 2), also known as Anna, which is an Iraqi town that lies on the Euphrates river and is the capital of Anah district. It is located 90Km east of the Syrian border and 250 Km northwest of Baghdad. It is considered one of the ancient cities in Iraq and it is one of the main urban centers of Al-Anbar governorate in the western part of Iraq. (Al-Hatab, 2013: 272).

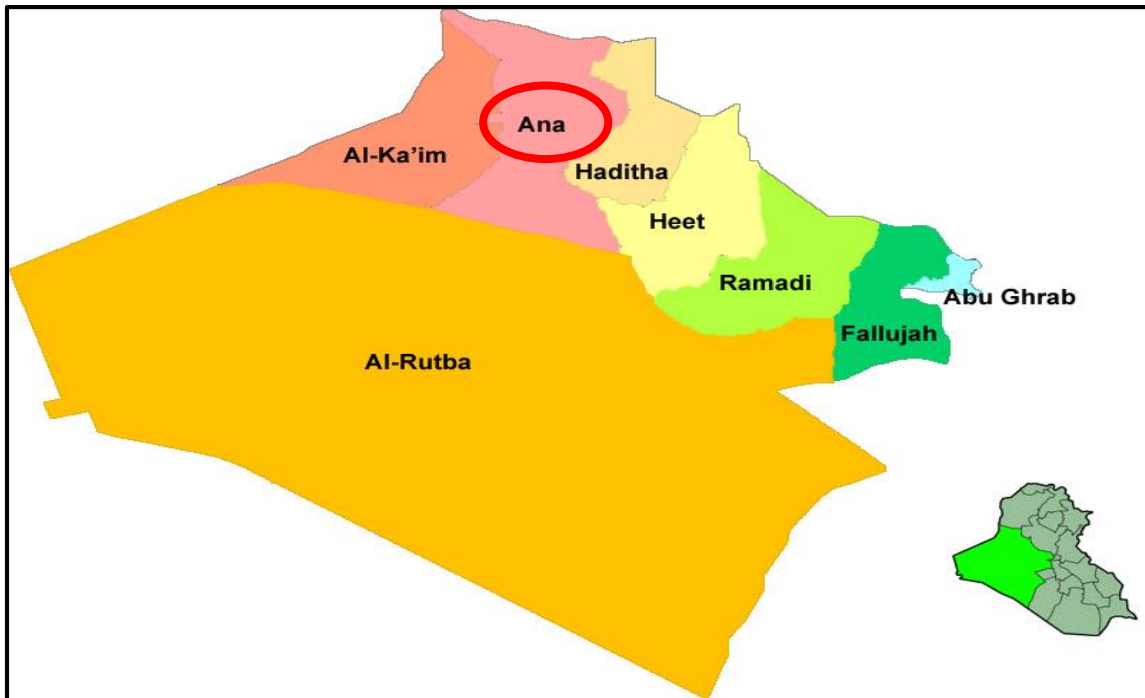


Figure 2. Map showing the geographical location of Anah in Iraq

4. This Study

This study is a sociophonetic investigation that has been carried out following the variationist framework pioneered by William Labov and colleagues in 1960s. The variationist study aimed to figure out how a variety of factors (linguistic and nonlinguistic) interact with each other to control change of language varieties. The pioneers of this field proposed that linguistic variation occurs not in a haphazard but rather a structured and patterned manner or as they labeled it “orderly heterogeneity”. Variationists attempt to trace not just the changes in linguistic forms that came to an end (completed) but also and more importantly those that are in progress (Schilling, 2013: 4). Therefore, researchers try to capture ordered patterns of variation by quantitatively displaying the interaction and correlation of linguistic structures with social ones. As such, this study presents some of the preliminary results of a larger research investigating the change and variation in the current phonological situation by examining the change and variation in the use of two phonological processes: qaf velarisation and Imala (deflexion) in the Ani Iraqi Arabic dialect so as to determine whether the process of levelling is occurring in this dialect or not.

5. Study Aims and Questions

The aims of the current study are stimulated by the sporadic findings in the literature, which pointed to an abandonment and rejection in the use of traditional Iraqi Arabic dialects in favour of a more prevalent prestigious dialect, i.e. to a levelling process. This study is hoped to contribute to the already existing studies by examining two linguistic phonological processes which are hypothesized to be showing variation and change in this dialect. Accordingly, this study aims to:

- 1- Provide a quantitative account of the current patterns of the phonological change and variation in the dialect spoken in Anah Iraq in respect of two phonological processes so as to determine whether the process of dialect levelling is occurring in this dialect or not.
- 2- Determine whether the process of dialect levelling, if found, in the AIA has reached completion or not.
- 3- Determine whether informants' age and gender and social network have an effect on their adoption of gilit variants.
- 4- Determine if there is a gender difference regarding the adoption of the gilit variants (features).

In doing so, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1- Does the dialect spoken in Anah experiencing a levelling process?
- 2- Does phonological levelling reach completion or not?
- 3- Is dialect leveling in Anah lead by male or female speakers?
- 4- How does Ani speakers' age and gender and social network influence their linguistic behavior?

6. Methodology

6.1 Sample size, design & sampling method

The sample in this study has been selected by using two sampling methods: purposive (judgment) and snowball. The judgment method was firstly implemented according to a set of predetermined criteria. Accordingly, informants, who were born and raised in Anah, aged over fifteen and who might have contacted with gilit speakers in different situations and degrees were chosen. After that the snowball method was implemented. The researcher started by contacting with 6 Ani persons who

introduced me to their families, relatives and friends, then those in turn introduced me to their relatives and families and so on until the required number was recruited. The sample of the present study is composed of 60 speakers (30 males and 30 females), who were born and raised in Anah. Their ages range between 15-60+ years stratified into three age groups: 15-29, 30-59 and 60 and over. Table (1) shows the number of informants participated in this study classified by age groups and gender.

Age group	Males	Females	Total
15 - 29	10	10	20
30 - 59	10	10	20
Over 60	10	10	20
Total	30	30	60

Table (1): The distribution of informants by gender and age

6.2 The Variables

6.2.1 Velarisation of Qāf

The qāf sound is one of the sounds that are given a grate attention in the Arab researches especially those regarding dialectal variation. This sound is used as one of the most unique features in classifying Iraqi dialects (Blanc, 1964) as well as other Arabic ones such as Egypt (Schmidt, 1974), Bahrain (Holes, 1983), Syria (Jassem, 1987) and Jordan (Abdel-Jawad, 1987).

In Iraqi Arabic, the [q] variable show a number of variants that serve as dialectal feature forming the base for the distinction between the two major dialect groups in the country namely known as the qəltu and gilit. Whereas the voiceless uvular stop [q] is considered as a stigmatized feature of the qəltu dialect, the voiced velar stop reflex [g] is considered as a stigmatized feature of the gilit group.

On the one hand, the variant [q] exist in varying degrees in both the qəltu and gilit dialects with being a categorical one in the former one. On the other hand, the [g] variant is found in all gilit dialects and is characteristically established as differentiating feature of that dialect although it was noted that the qəltu dialect in ‘Āna has some instances of [g] (Blanc, 1964:27).

6.2.2 Imala (deflexion)

Imāla (deflexion) is defined as a phonological process by which /aa/ is bended to /ee/ or /ii/ and /a/ to /i/. (Al- Sammarai' & Shooka, 2004: 64). It was stated that the term Imala (inclining) is traced back to Sibawaih and it primarily compromises changing the long /aa/ to an ee-like form when occurring in the context of /i/ that is found in the preceding syllable or the following one. Imala can be utilized with the short vowel /a/ as well but with a limit frequency (Owens, 2006:197). It was stated that Imaala is the approaching of /a/ to /i/ and /aa/ to /ii/ which occur to facilitate articulation and reduce the effort in pronunciation (Anees, 1973:67; Ali, 1977:313).

Imalization process is a stigmatized feature of SA which occur clearly and most notably in the recitation of the Holy Quran. Imala is also a prominent characteristic in the qeltu Arabic dialects phonology (Jastrow, 1978b:26-28). AIA is one those dialects that has Imala as one of its stigmatized unique features. Within the current study, three types of Imala, presented in table (2) below, have been observed and are taken into consideration in the analysis of this variant.

Type of Imala	Qeltu	Gilit	Gloss
/a/ to /i/	/tinnu:r/	/tannu:r/	Oven
/aa/ to /e/	/meʕu:n/	/maaʕu:n/	Dish
/aa/ to /ii/	/dzjeriin/	/dziraan/	Neighbors

Table (2): types of Imala

6.3 Data Collection

The data of the current study were collected by interviewing and recording the speech of people from Anah by employing the conversational network method followed by Labov in his Philadelphia study (Labove, 1984: 35). The informants were interviewed individually and the interview lasted for 20-30 minutes. The interview included two parts. In the first one informants were asked to talk about different topics and discuss them at length. These topics include childhood, neighborhood and schooldays memories, memories of the old town of Anah, games, jobs and works, marriage customs, war times, cooking, fasting in Ramadan and Eid customs, etc. while the second part of the interview consists of a picture naming task in which

informants were given a set of pictures that included one or more of the variants under investigation and asked to provide a description of each picture.

In addition to the interview, a questionnaire is also used to gain information regarding informants' social network integration. It is composed of 10 close-ended questions which are relevant to informants' social activities and exposure to the gilit community, i.e. the gilit dialect. These questions aim to measure and examine informants' consistency and amount of exposure to the gilit community in different situations; that is, in what cases and how often they get to contact with gilit-dialect speakers. They also show informants' level of contact with their own community, i.e. the Anah community.

6.4 Measuring Informants' Social Network Integration Scores

One of the most important independent factors investigated in this study is informants' SNI, a concept which was introduced by Milroy (1980) in her Belfast research. This concept has been considerably implemented by sociolinguists in researches on mobile and non-mobile speakers and on loose-knit communities as well as close-knit ones. Informants' degree of integration within the gilit community has been collected using the questionnaire as shown in previous section. In order to measure informants' degree of integration, Social Network Integration index (SNII) has been implemented to calculate informants' SNI scores. Table (3) shows informants' scores on this index.

SNII score	Number of informants	SNII score	Number of informants
0	1	13	2
1	1	14	2
2	0	15	0
3	5	16	0
4	11	17	0
5	11	18	0
6	3	19	0

7	2	20	0
8	2	21	0
9	3	22	0
10	3	23	0
11	10	24	0
12	4	25	0
13	2	26	0

Table (3): Informants' scores on the SNII

6.5 Data Analysis

After completing the interviews, the researcher started the analysis by listening to the audio file of each informant separately and counting the frequencies of each variants on the basis of auditory judgment. After that the data were subjected to acoustic study using the latest version of PRAAT open-source freeware phonetic analysis software (Boersma and Weenink 2017). Then the extracted data were set to statistical analysis by using a set of tests to measure the correlation between the dependent and independent variables with regards to individual informants and as groups as well. All the statistical work was achieved by using IBM SPSS statistics 26 software. Bivariate test (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) was used to measure the relationship between one dependent and one independent variable individually and multivariate tests (ANOVA and T-test) were implemented to check the difference between the use of the variables as groups.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Distribution Across Age Groups

This section presents the results of the variation in the use of the two phonological variants under investigation in relation to age. Figure (3) shows the overall distribution of the two dependent variants in terms of informants' age groups.

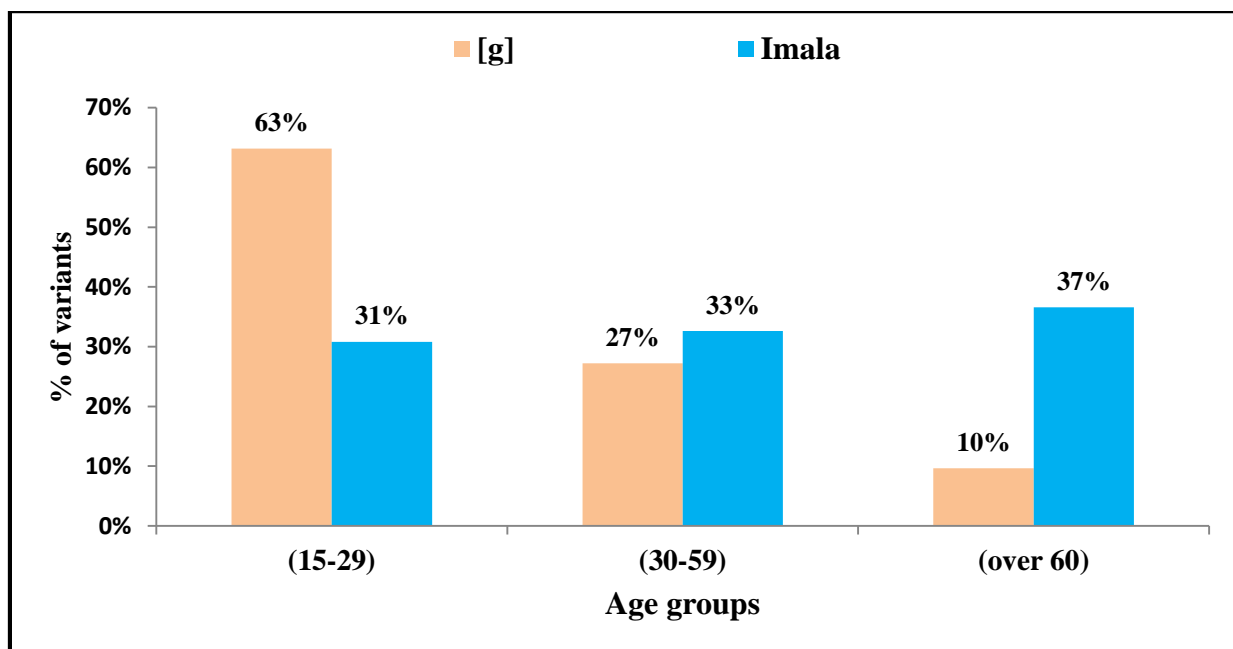


Figure (3): Overall age-related distribution of variants

7.1.1 Qaf Velarisation

As Figure (3) shows, the best correlation between age groups and the use of the two variants is in the use of the variant /g/. Younger informants scored the highest rate in the use of the variant /g/ with a rate of 63%. This rate goes down to 27 % in the middle-aged group, and it further decreases to 10 % in the older age group. Pearson Correlation test result proves that differences among the three age groups are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. In addition, results set forth that there is a significant negative relationship between informants' use of /g/ and their age, ($P=0.000$) and that this relationship is a very strong one ($r = -0.917$). This denotes that the younger the informants the more frequent they get to adopt the *gilit* variants.

The fact that older informants actually used this *gilit* variants with a rate of 10% indicates that this variant is not recent. It was noticed that the dialect of Anah has both [q] and [g] as reflexes of [q] but the proportion of words with [q] is far greater than that of words with [g] (Blanc,1964:27 ; Jastrow,1978:42-43 as cited in Khan, 1997:56). However, it can be noticed that the linguistic behaviour of informants in the three age groups points to a case of dialect convergence towards the *gilit* dialect among AIA speakers as the rate increases to 27% and 63% in the middle-aged group and younger groups respectively.

To examine if there are any statistically significant differences among the means of informants' use of /g/ among the three age groups, a further analysis is supplemented using ANOVA test. The result of ANOVA test shows that there are statistically significant differences between the averages of participants' use of the variant /g/ according to age group, where the (F= 640.156) with a significance value of (P= 0.000), which is statistically significant at the significance level (0.05). Table (4) presents the distribution of the reflexes of (q) according to age groups along with results of ANOVA test.

Age group	Percentage of /g /	Percentage of /q/	Subtotal
Over 60	13% (64 tokens)	87% (438 tokens)	502
30 – 59	38% (180 tokens)	62% (293 tokens)	473
15 – 29	83% (418 tokens)	17% (83 tokens)	501
ANOVA: F= 640.156 ; P= 0.000 < 0.05			Total= 1476

Table (4) : Distribution of reflexes of (q) according to age group

In addition to ANOVA test result, Multiple Comparison (Tukey HSD) test, as shown in Table (5) below, shows that there are statistically significant differences in the use of the variant /g/ among the three groups in favor of the younger age group (15-29) with a mean difference of (11.900) and (11.700) vs. the middle-aged group (30-59) and the older group (over 60) respectively. The test also shows that there is a significant difference between the middle- aged group and the older aged group in favor of the middle-aged group with a mean difference of (5.800).

Age group	Mean difference	Sig.	Statistical difference
(15 – 29) vs. (30 – 59)	11.900* ¹	0.000 < 0.05	significant
(15 – 29) vs. (over 60)	17.700*	0.000 < 0.05	significant
(30 – 59) vs. (over 60)	5.800*	0.000 < 0.05	significant

Table (5) : Differences in the use of /g / among age groups

¹ *The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Hence, it can be clearly seen that there is a cumulative changing pattern regarding the use of the variant /g/ in terms of age groups as shown in Figure (4). As a result of these analyses, it can be concluded that there is a noticeable increasing tendency towards the /g / variant especially and mostly among younger age speakers.

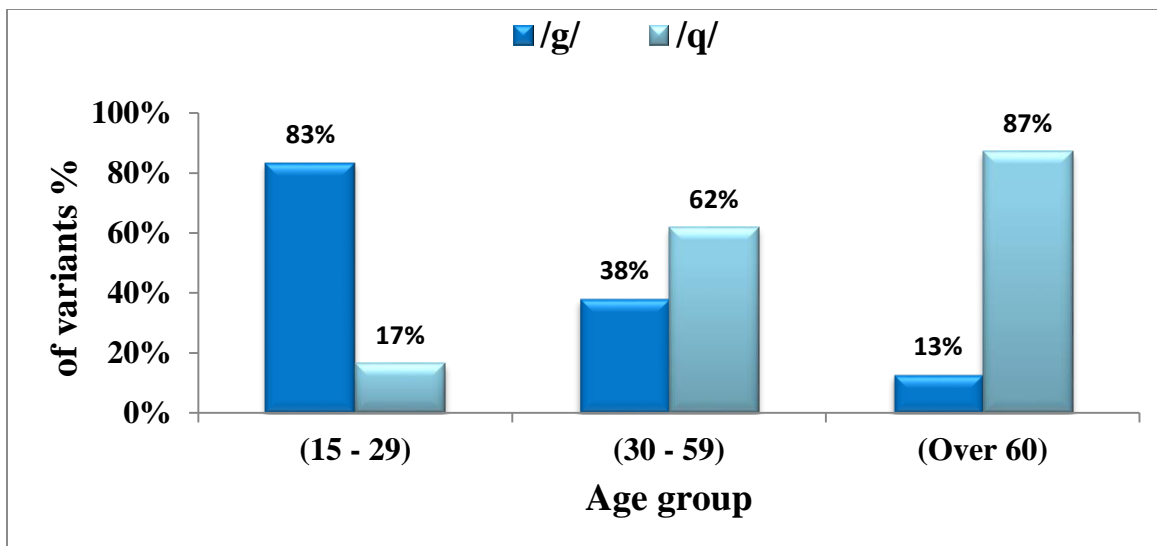


Figure (4): Age-related distribution of /q/ reflexes

7.1.2 Imala (deflexion)

Analysis of the relationship between the informants' use of *Imala* and their age, presented in Fig. (3), shows that there is, to some extent, a correlation between these two variables with a rate of frequency ranging from 37% in the older age group to 33% in the middle-aged group and then slightly drops down to 31% in the younger age group. Although Pearson Correlation test result reveals that differences among age groups are statistically significant ($P= 0.000$) at the 0.01 level, result points out that, in contrast with the previous variable, the relationship between informants' use *Imala* and their age is a positive and to some extent a moderate one ($r= 0.654$).

To examine the differences referred to by Pearson Correlation Coefficient test, ANOVA test has been implemented. Results of this test, presented in Table (6) below, show that there are statistically significant differences between the averages of participants' use of *Imala* in terms of their age group, since ($F= 18.629$) with a significance value of ($P= 0.000$), which is considered to be statistically significant at the significance level (0.05).

Age group	Imala	No Imala	Subtotal
Over 60	94% (712tokens)	6% (45 tokens)	757
30 – 59	82% (634tokens)	18% (139 tokens)	773
15 – 29	75% (599tokens)	25% (196tokens)	795
ANOVA: F= 18.692 ; P= 0.000 < 0.05			Total= 2325

Table (6) : Distribution of Imala according to age group

In addition, Multiple Comparison (Tukey HSD) test result, presented in Table (7) below, shows that there are statistically significant differences in the use of Imala between the older age group (over 60) and younger group (15-29) and between the older age group and the middle-aged (30-59) one in favour of the older group in both cases while there was no significant difference between the younger and the middle-aged group.

Age group	Mean difference	Sig.	Statistical difference
(15 – 29) vs. (30 – 59)	- 1.750	0.164 > 0.05	Not significant
(15 – 29) vs. (over 60)	- 5.650	0.000 < 0.05	significant
(30 – 59) vs. (over 60)	- 3.900	0.000 < 0.05	significant

Table (7): Differences in the use of Imala among age groups

Consequently, it can be easily seen that informants' age has no strong impact on their use of Imala in comparison with its impact on the previous variable since the decrease in the rate of informants' usage of this variant is to some extent negligible as this variant is still being used at high rates as shown in figure (5).

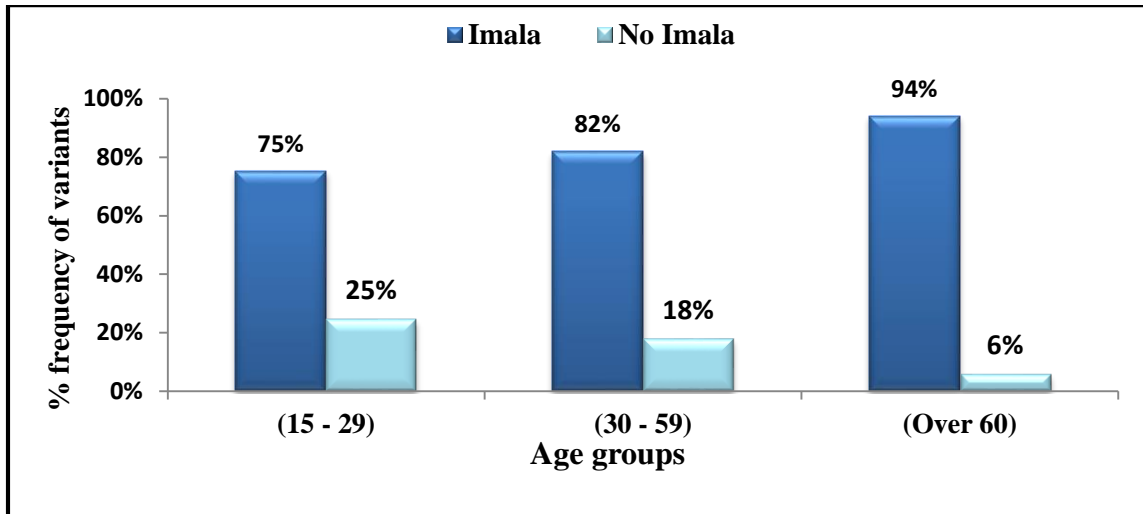


Figure (5): Age-related distribution of Imala

7.2 Distribution According to Gender

This section presents the correlation between the two variants and gender starting by discussing the use of each variants in relation to gender individually then as groups. Figure (6) shows the overall distribution of informants' use of the two dependent variants in terms of their gender.

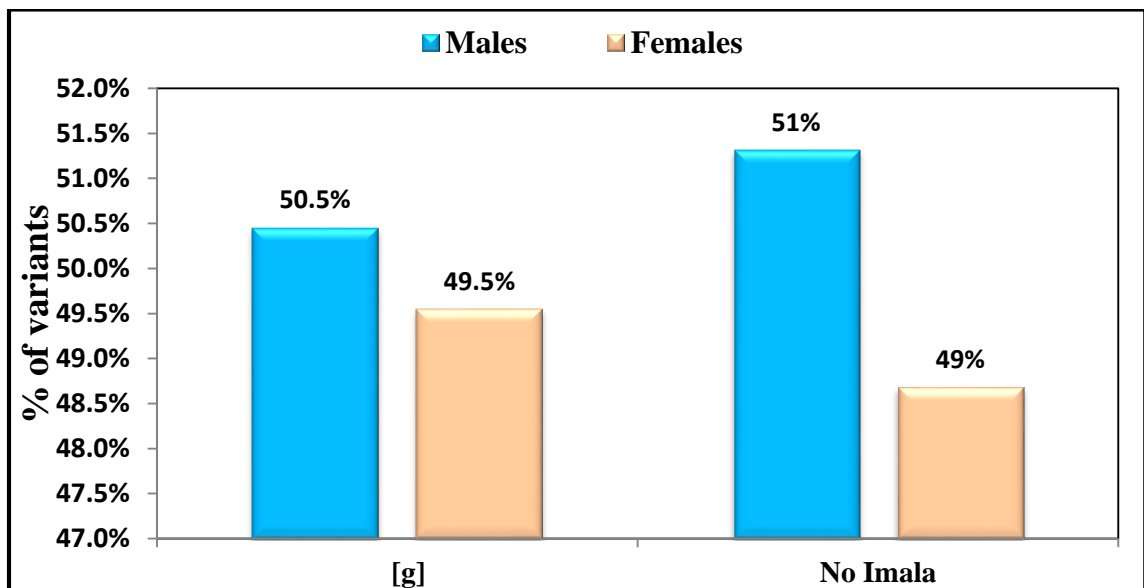


Figure (6): Overall gender-related distribution of variants

Figure (6) displays the overall pattern of variation for all two variables according to gender. From the figure, it can be clearly noticed that male informants used all the variants in higher rates than females did. This observation agrees with that presented by Mohammed (2018) but contrasts with the hypothesis that women acquire the new prestigious dialect feature more than men (Jassem, 1987 as cited in Mohammed, 2018:164). Table (8) below presents the correlation coefficients (r) and the P value of the two variants in terms of gender.

Variants	Correlation coefficient (r)	Sig. (P value)
[g]	- 0.013	0.920 > 0.01
Imala	0.064	0.628 > 0.01

Table (8): Correlation of variants with gender

Generally, as shown in Table (8), it seems that there is no association between informants' use of each variable and their gender since the differences proved to be insignificant at a significance level of 0.01.

7.2.1 Qaf Velarisation

Analysis of the individual relationship between the informants' use of /g/and their gender using Pearson Correlation Coefficient test shows that there are no significant statistical differences between males and females in the use of this variant as (P= 0.920 > 0.05) at the 0.05 level and (r= - 0.013) which shows that it is a negative weak relation. To examine the differences between males and females as groups, an independent T-test was implemented. Results of this test are shown in Table (9) below.

Gender	Mean	T value	P value (sig.)	Statistical significance
Males	11.13	0.101	0.920 > 0.05	Insignificant
Females	10.93			

Table (9) : T-test results of informants' use of /g/ in terms of gender

Data presented in Table (9) show that the mean of male informants' use of the variant /g/ scored (11.13) which is slightly higher than that of female ones which was (10.93) with a t-value of (t = 0.101) and a significance value of (P= 0.920) which is greater than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that there are no statistical significant differences between males and females in /q/ velarisation in terms of their gender.

Gender	[g]	[q]	Total
Males	46% (334 tokens)	54% (396 tokens)	730
Females	44% (328 tokens)	56% (418 tokens)	746

Table (10) : Percentage of /q/ velarisation according to gender

Data presented in Table (10) show that males seem to use the *gilit* dialect more than women do by adopting the variant /g/ more frequently than women do as male informants use it 46% while females use it 44%. However, both males and females scored higher rates in the use of the variant /q/ in favour of /g/ with a rate of 54% and 56% for males and females respectively. This shows that, in contrast with age factor, gender has no impact on informants' use of this variant which contradicts with Mohammed's (2018) findings which revealed that gender has a greater effect than age in terms of the use of /g/.

7.2.2 Imala (deflexion)

Analysis of the individual relationship between informants' use of Imala and their gender by using Pearson Correlation Coefficient test reveals that there are individual significant statistical differences between males and females in the use of this variant as (P= 0.031 < 0.05) at the 0.05 level and (r = 0.280) which shows that it is a weak but positive relation.

The collected data are further analyzed to show these significant differences between males and females as groups in using this variant. To do so, an independent T-test was implemented. Results of this test are presented in Table (11).

Gender	Mean	T value	P value (sig.)	Statistical significance
Males	31.37	- 2.217	0.031 < 0.05	significant
Females	33.47			

Table (11) : T-test results of informants' use of Imala in terms of gender

Data presented in Table (10) show that the mean of male informants' use of Imala is (31.37) which is lower than that of females which is (33.47) with a t-value of ($t = - 2.217$) and a significance value of ($P = 0.031$) which is lower than the significance level (0.05). These results indicate that there are statistical significant differences between males and females in favor of females in using this variant in relation with their gender since females scored higher rates in using it. Consequently, these rates alongside with T-test results show that males informant tend to abandon the local AIA forms (the ones with Imala) and use the gilit forms (the ones without Imala) more frequently than women do. However, results presented in Table (12) show that both males and females informants still favour using the local form (with Imala) in higher rates than the non-local ones (with no Imala) as they scored 83% and 84% for males and females respectively.

Gender	Imala (no lowering)	No Imala (lowering)	Total
Males	83% (941tokens)	17% (195 tokens)	1136
Females	84% (1004 tokens)	16% (185 tokens)	1189

Table (12) : Percentage of Imala according to gender

7.3 Distribution According to Social Network Integration

7.3.1 Individual Language Behaviour

This section is devoted to show and discuss informants' individual linguistic differences in the use of the two dependent variables in accordance with their individual SNI scores. In order to do so, Pearson Correlation Coefficient test is implemented with the two variables under investigation.

In terms of the variant /g/, results show that there is a strong correlation between informants' use of /g/ and their SNI scores since ($r = 0.867^{**}$; $P = 0.000 < 0.01$). This means that informants' SNI impact their use of /g/, i.e. the more their integration the more frequent they get to use this variant. This strong positive relation

between these two variables is shown in figure (7) as the markers are distributed equally and almost tightly around the trend line.

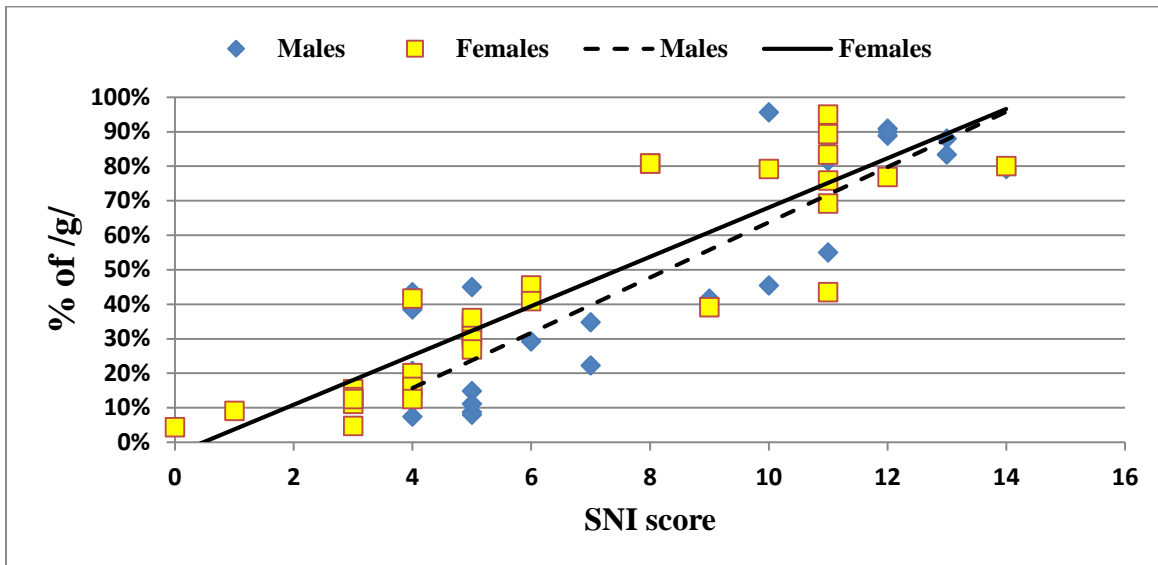


Figure (7): Informants’ individual use of /g/ according to SNI

Regarding Imala, the analysis shows that there is a strong but negative correlation between informants’ use of Imala and their SNI since ($r = -0.618^{**}$; $P = 0.000 < 0.01$). These results again reveals that informants’ SNI impact their usage of this variant, i.e. the more they integrated in the gilit community the more they seem to abandon the local forms (with Imala) and adopt the non-local ones (without Imala). This is clearly shown in figure (8) below by the descending trend lines for both males and females.

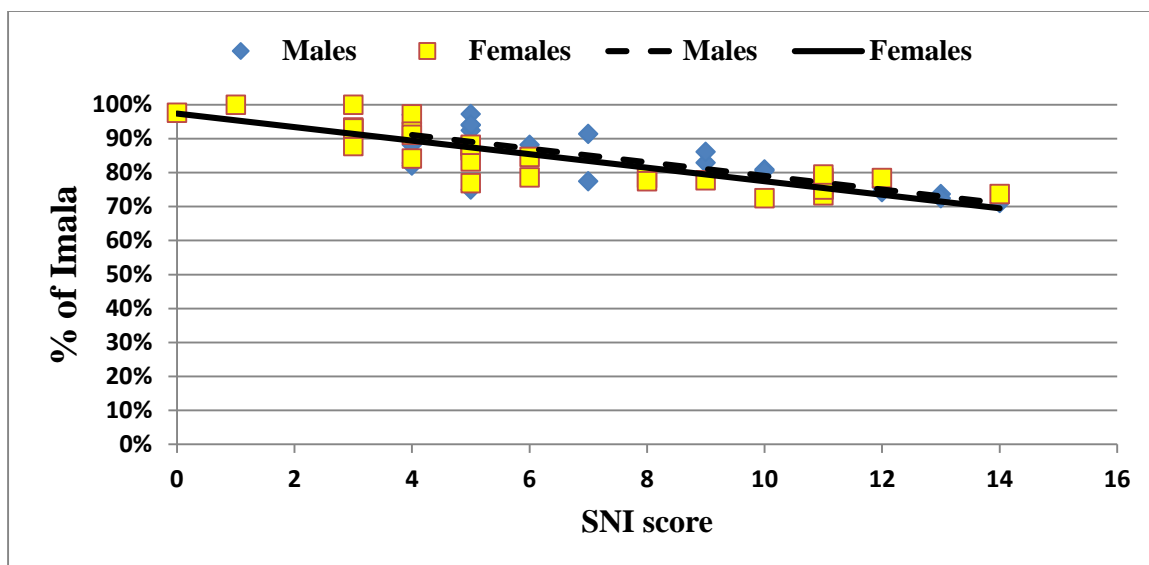


Figure (8): Informants' individual use of Imala according to SNI

7.3.2 Group Language Behavior

After gaining information regarding the change pattern in informants' individual use of each of the two variables under the effect of their SIN, which was provided by their individual language behavior, it is important to provide some insights regarding the linguistic behavior of speakers as a group (as a speech community) towards the gilit community. Therefore, this section aims to examine how informants' integration in the gilit community affects their use of the two dependent variables under study. In order to do so, the linguistic scores were presented at groups' level. Informants were given a score according to a criteria named as the Social Network Integration index (SNII). The scores ranged between 0 (unintegrated) to 26 (highly integrated). The lowest score in the twenty-six-points SNII was 0 while the highest score was 14. Hence, the mean score in the index was 7². Since the central point is the group language behavior, a view of the overall behavior of informants' behavior as groups regarding their use of each variant is provided.

² Taking into consideration that the mean score in the SNII is 7, informants' scores along the fourteen-point continuum were considered in relation to this mean and accordingly they were divided into three groups: 0-4 points, 5-9 points, and 10-14 points.

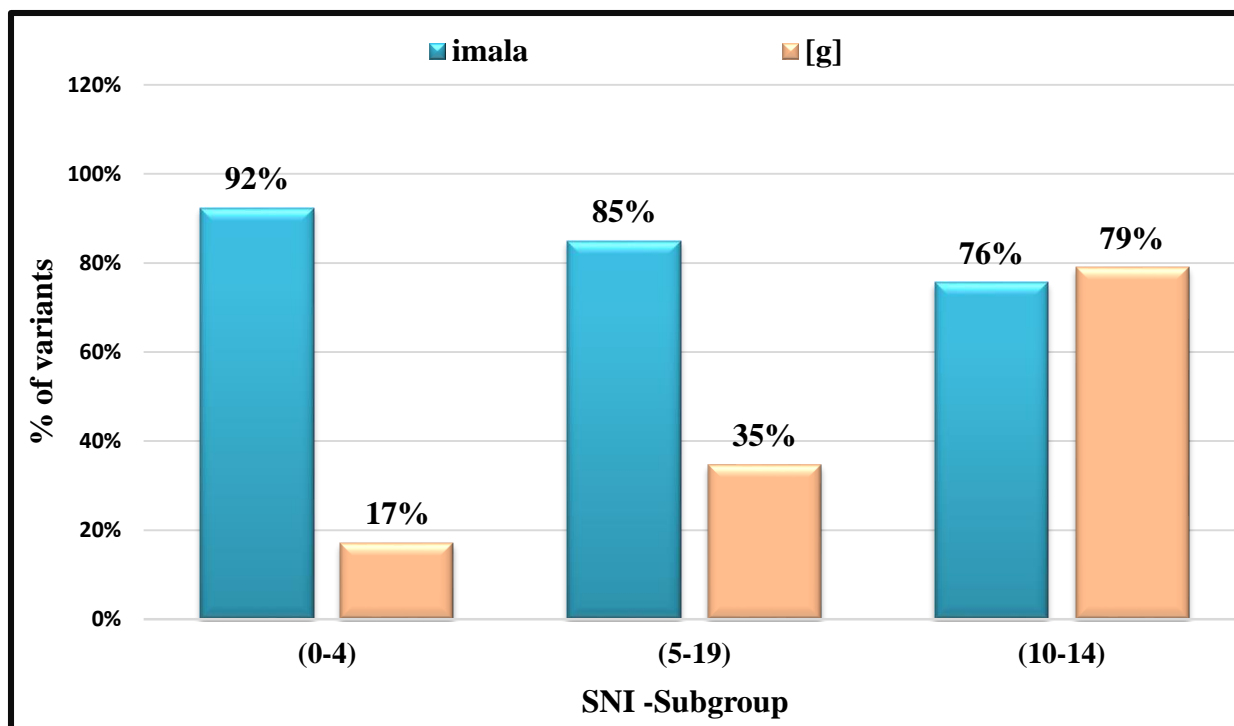


Figure (9) : Percentages of the variants according to SNI

In general, informants' SNI scores as a group, in using each of the variables, show to some extent a similar pattern to that observed in the individual language behaviour. Informants' use of the gilit variables seems to show a pattern similar to the age -related patterns presented in previous section. For the variable [g], the highest SNI group, who scored 10-14 points on the SNII, scored the highest rates in using this variables. This shows that the group with the highest SNII scorers are the leading group of the change towards the gilit dialect. Such a pattern agrees with previous studies (e.g. Milroy, 1980 and Mohammed, 2018) regarding the effect of SNI on the changing linguistic behavior. These studies and others show that the increasing SNI scores correlate with the increasing linguistic variable scores, i.e. the less the informants' integration with their local community the more they get to adopt the new dialect and abandon their own and consequently leading to a change away from their local native dialect.

In terms of /g/, the high SNII group (10-14 points) subgroup scored the highest rate among the three subgroups with a rate equals 79%, which drops down to 35% in the middle one and further drops to 17% in the low subgroup. Concerning Imala, it shows a different pattern from the variant [g] since it shows an increasing pattern in

correlation with SNII while Imala shows a decreasing one. It begins with a rate of 92% in the low subgroup, which then decreases to 85% in the middle subgroup and further drops down to 76% in the high subgroup. This means that informants progressively seem to show a tendency to abandon the use of this variant under the impact of SNI. However, even the lowest rate scored in using Imala is still considered a high one.

Table (13) presents the significance correlation between informants' SNII scores and the use of the variants at the group level. As the data in the table show, there was a moderate positive relationship in terms of the variants /g/ and informants' SNII scores, and a negative moderate relation regarding the use of Imala.

Variant	Strength of relationship	Sig.
/g/	0.585**	P= 0.000 (P < 0.01)
Imala	-0.597	P= 0.000 (P < 0.01)

Table (13): Correlations between language scores and SNII

8. Conclusion

After performing analysis, it can be concluded that according to the increasing adoption of gilit features by Ani speakers, levelling is in operation regarding the AIA. Results also show that according to the rates of usage regarding the gilit variants by Ani speakers, levelling has not yet reached the completion level, yet it is in a very advanced phase. The analysis reveals that informants' age and social network influence their adoption of the gilit dialect and consequently motivating levelling, while informants' gender show no impact on any of the variants, thus it has no impact on informants' adoption of the gilit dialect and consequently has no effect on levelling regarding the qeltu Ani dialect. Finally, findings also reveals that levelling is led by both males and females since the analysis of variants between them proved to be insignificant, i.e. there is no difference regarding their use of the variants except Imala and hence, both of them are considered as leaders of change (levelling).

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