



Notes on Language Change and Standardization in Damascus Arabic

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Abstract. This paper attempts to point out some linguistic changes observed in Damascus and its tendency towards standardization. The objective is to provide new material to update the sociolinguistic state of Damascus Arabic. Because the main studies focused on this variety were written some years ago, they generally do not reflect the changes and trends in the language produced by the contemporary social context.

This study examines eleven types of morphological and morpho-syntactical variants from a corpus of texts gathered in Damascus between 2007 and 2010, and produced almost wholly by young informants. Results are compared to the data available in previous grammars and papers, and demonstrate a rapid standardization taking place mainly through variant reduction (koineization), the decline or disappearance of traditional features (variety shifting), and the spreading of variants previously assigned to particular collectives to others (homogenization). Finally, new tendencies in Damascus Arabic observed in our data which merit further sociolinguistic research are indicated.

Keywords: Arabic sociolinguistics; language change; language standardization; the Levant; Damascus Arabic.

[es] Observaciones relacionadas con el cambio lingüístico y la estandarización en árabe de Damasco

Resumen. Este artículo pretende señalar algunos cambios lingüísticos observados en el árabe de Damasco y su tendencia a la estandarización, al mismo tiempo que presenta material actualizado de dicha variedad. La mayor parte de los estudios centrados en el árabe de Damasco han sido escritos hace varias décadas, por lo que no reflejan los cambios y tendencias del lenguaje producido en el contexto social actual.

El estudio analiza once variantes morfológicas y morfosintácticas extraídas de un corpus de textos recogidos en la ciudad de Damasco durante los años 2007 y 2010, y producidos casi exclusivamente por informantes jóvenes. Los resultados hallados son comparados con la información existente en gramáticas y artículos previos, y demuestran una rápida estandarización que está teniendo lugar a través de la reducción de variantes (koinización), el declive o desaparición de rasgos tradicionales (variación), y la propagación de variantes anteriormente relacionadas con ciertos colectivos a otros (homogéneización). Por último, el artículo señala nuevas tendencias del árabe de Damasco detectadas en nuestro corpus las cuales requieren más estudio.

Palabras clave: Sociolingüística árabe; cambio lingüístico; estandarización; Levante; árabe de Damasco.

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expressing the progressive aspect; 1.10 Distal locative demonstrative; 1.11 Temporal conjunction *lamma* ~ *lamman*; 2 Conclusion.

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0 Introduction

This study will point out some linguistic changes observed in Damascus, the Syrian capital, in the years previous to 2011.² It analyzes, from a sociolinguistic perspective, a variety of morphological and morpho-syntactical features to show that Damascus Arabic is in continuous permutation trending toward standardization. The results here presented are based on a corpus of texts gathered between 2007 and 2010 and consisting of about 8 hours of interviews (totaling some 63,350 words) produced by 50 informants.³

Our findings will be compared with the data available in previous works focusing on Damascus Arabic, particularly the grammars of Cowell⁴, Grotzfeld⁵, and Ambros⁶, and the compilation of texts of Bloch & Grotzfeld⁷. The sociolinguistic studies of Lentin⁸ based on fieldwork at the end of the 1970s have been the most valuable sources of comparison for this study.

This paper discusses the following eleven variants: (1) 1st person pronoun for the plural *nəħna* ~ *ləħna*; (2) 3rd person pronoun for the plural *ħanne* ~ *ħannen*; (3) *-h-* in the 3rd person feminine and plural pronominal suffixes; (4) Relative pronouns; (5)

² I owe a debt of gratitude to Stephan Procházka for his kindness, expertise, and thoughtful comments. He is of course not responsible for any shortcomings.

³ The data-gathering was initially intended for a description of the dialect of the youth in Damascus. Therefore the fieldwork was carried out following the methodology required for a linguistic study and not for a sociolinguistic one. It consists of about eight hours of interviews totaling approximately 63,350 words. In these interviews the informants mainly described different places in Damascus, traditions of the society, and personal experiences. Some other interviews, fewer in number, narrated different general or personal events in the past. The data used for this study do not include any conversations nor draw from any sociolinguistic questionnaires. The entirety of the corpus has been published in BERLINCHES RAMOS, Carmen, “*Kəll səne w ʔəntu səlmūn!* Five dialectal texts about Muslim religious feasts in Damascus”, in *Mediterranean Language Review* 24 (2017) 175-186, BERLINCHES, Carmen, *El dialecto árabe de Damasco (Siria): estudio gramatical y textos*, Zaragoza, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2016, BERLINCHES RAMOS, Carmen “Textos Dialectales sobre la Ciudad de Damasco”, in *Romano-Arabica Journal XIV: ‘Amiyya and Fuṣṣa in Linguistics and Literature* (2014), 33-5, BERLINCHES RAMOS, Carmen, “Texts Related to Cooking in the Arabic Dialect of Damascus”, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 103 (2013), 25-48, and BERLINCHES RAMOS, Carmen, “Dos textos en árabe dialectal de Damasco”, in *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes* 22 (2011), 27-136, but extensively revised for this paper. I would like to thank my friend and informant Rīm Rāšed for helping me with this task.

⁴ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar of Syrian Arabic (Based on the Dialect of Damascus)*, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 1964.

⁵ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre des Damaszenisch-Arabischen*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1964. GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik (Dialekt von Damaskus)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1965.

⁶ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, Malibu, Undena, 1977.

⁷ BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte. Mit Übersetzung, Anmerkungen und Glossar*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1964.

⁸ LENTIN, Jérôme, *Remarques sociolinguistiques sur l’arabe parlé à Damas. (Thèse de doctorat de 3^o cycle)*, Paris, Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle–Paris III, 1981 (I am deeply thankful to Marie-Aimée Germanos for providing me with a copy of this source), and LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données sociolinguistiques sur l’arabe parlé à Damas à la fin des années mille neuf cent soixante-dix”, in *Arabic Dialectology. In Honour of Clive Holes on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, E. Al-Wer and R. De Jong (eds.), Leiden, Brill (2009), 109-170.

Indefinite pronoun *hada* ~ *hadan*; (6) Particles for the non-verbal negation *māl-* ~ *mān-*; (7) Particle *ma* in non-verbal negations; (8) Verbal modifiers for the future tense; (9) Verbal modifiers expressing the progressive aspect; (10) Distal locative demonstrative; (11) Temporal conjunction *lamma* ~ *lamman*.

These variants were selected for different reasons. First, we recognized that some variants which had not been listed in the Syrian Arabic grammars, or mentioned only as secondary variants, in fact appear very frequently in our data, which implied that they have increased in use. Second, our data did not show any occurrences of some variants that were registered in older sources, which could mean that they have today disappeared. Third, and in line with the previous one, we wanted to check the status of those variants which Lentin (at the end of the 1970s) had considered to be in decline and determine whether they are still in use or if their use is now limited to certain sectors of the population. Fourth, we wished to find out if variants formerly considered characteristic of traditional areas of the city were still used by the youth or used in newer areas of the city. Finally, we wanted to determine if those linguistic features formerly attributed to the Christian community are still characteristic of this community or have spread to others.⁹

In the analysis, we first state what older sources on Damascus Arabic record about each of the variants selected. Then, wherever possible, show the results obtained by Lentin at the end of the 1970s. Finally, we present our results and state our conclusions and perspectives.

This study is based on two facts: First, the main sources on Damascus Arabic were published more than fifty years ago and therefore do not reflect all the nuances of the language today. Second, in the past few decades the city of Damascus has experienced important social changes which have had an impact on the language of its citizens. Perhaps the most important of these changes is the increase in urbanization, which, with the high degree of urban primacy in the Middle East, constitute the common causes of dialect change in the region.¹⁰ During the 19th century, particularly in Damascus, urbanization rapidly increased,¹¹ resulting in a considerable increase in population during the past century, due mainly to significant internal migration, especially during the 1970s, which drove the expansion of the urban suburbs.¹²

Another important social event in the Middle East which has contributed to language change is the increasing proportion of youth since 1980. In Syria this trend peaked in 2005, when youth (15-24 years old) constituted 25.8% of the population.¹³ These data are relevant because youth, especially teenagers, are considered the most active initiators of language change.¹⁴

⁹ Concerning this matter, see fn. 27.

¹⁰ HOLES, Clive, "Community, dialect and urbanization in the Arabic-speaking Middle East", in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 58 (1995), 271, 285. Particularly in Syria, where 75% of the population is concentrated in the main cities, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia, and Tartous (cf. *GUIA PAIS SIRIA*, Economic and Commercial Office of Spain in Damascus, March, 2008, p. 5). At the end of 2008, while the data for this study was being collected, Damascus proper had 1,690,000 inhabitants, with another 2,570,000 in its rural suburbs (Central Bureau of Statistics, <http://cbssyr.sy/index-EN.htm>).

¹¹ MILLER, Catherine, "Arabic urban vernaculars: development and change", in *Arabic in the City: Issues in Dialect Contact and Language Variation*, C. Miller et al. (eds.), London, New York, Routledge (2007), 16.

¹² MILLER, Catherine, "Arabic urban", 8.

¹³ BUCKNER, Elizabeth S. and SABA, Khuloud, "Syria's next generation: youth un/employment, Education, and exclusion", in *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues* III (2010), 87.

¹⁴ MILLER, Catherine, "Arabic urban", 22 (citing ECKERT, Penelope, *Linguistic Variation as Social Practice: The Linguistic Construction of Identity in Belten High*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

Standardization is defined by Ferguson¹⁵ as:

[T]he process of one variety of a language becoming widely accepted throughout the speech community as a supradialectal norm – the ‘best’ form of a language – rated above regional and social dialects, although these may be felt to be appropriate in some domains.

Ferguson¹⁶ mentions at least three tendencies involved in the process of language standardization: *koinization*, *variety shifting*, and *classicization*. *Koinization* implies the reduction of dialect differences, both by dialect leveling and by simplification. According to Palva¹⁷ dialect contacts favour a centralizing tendency and give growing prominence to the speech-form of the central town of a region, often the capital, which thus tends to become the model dialect. Concerning *variety shifting*, Ferguson explains that specific linguistic features are viewed as marking identity with particular social groups and particular communicative functions or occasions of use. Standardization occurs when variety shifting tends toward the spread of the supradialectal norm. Finally, *classicization* refers to the adoption of features considered to belong to an earlier prestige norm.

Damascus Arabic is considered a prestige variety and even the national standard.¹⁸ It is a very well established dialect, and therefore successive waves of migration have not seriously affected its development.¹⁹ Since a decade ago, as this paper will show, Damascus Arabic exhibits many signals of standardization, among them the significant reduction of variables (koineization), the decline or disappearance of traditional features²⁰ (variety shifting), and the reduction of differences among different communities or collectives (homogenization). All these tendencies have been previously detected but seem to be more active today. We have also identified a few new tendencies requiring further research.

Informants

Our informants were 25 men and 25 women, at the time the study all of them young (15-32 years old), except for two middle-aged (47-49) and two elderly (70-75) individuals.²¹

¹⁵ FERGUSON, Charles. A., “Standardization as a form of language spread (1987)”, in *Structural Studies in Arabic Linguistics: Charles A. Ferguson’s Papers 1954-1994*, K. Belnap and N. Haeri (eds.), Leiden, Brill (1997), 69.

¹⁶ FERGUSON, Charles. A., “Standardization as”, 70.

¹⁷ PALVA, Heikki, “Patterns of koineization in modern colloquial Arabic”, in *Acta Orientalia* 43 (1982), 31.

¹⁸ LENTIN, Jérôme, “Damascus Arabic”, in *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* I, K. Versteegh (ed.), Leiden, Boston, Brill (2006), 546. Lentin also claims that it can be characterized as the Syrian koinic dialect (p. 546).

¹⁹ MILLER, Catherine, “Arabic urban”, 16. Migrants typically maintain their own dialects during a transitory phase of acquisition and accommodation, or keep it as an intimate home language side-by-side with the urban standard (MILLER, Catherine, “Variation and changes in Arabic urban vernaculars”, in *Approaches to Arabic Dialects: A Collection of Articles Presented to Manfred Woidich on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, M. Haak, R. De Jong and K. Versteegh (eds.), Leiden-Boston: Brill (2004), 193). Thus the formation of a third variety – designated by Messaoudi as “New Urban Dialect” – is not happening in Damascus, at least so far (MESSAOUDI, Leila, “Variation and koineization in the Maghreb”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Sociolinguistics*, E. Al-Wer and U. Horesh (eds.), London-New York, Routledge (2019), 207).

²⁰ In this paper the term *traditional* refers to those features traditionally perceived as typically Damascene

²¹ Among them, three generations are from the same family (grandmother, mother, and daughter) and two are siblings (male and female). The reasons of this choice have been explained in fn. 3.

	Young (15-32)	Middle-aged (47-49)	Old (70-75)
Men	23	1	1
Women	23	1	1
Total	46	2	2

Forty five informants, and their parents, were from Damascus. Two of the parents came from other areas of the country. Three of the informants were born and raised abroad, but their parents were from Damascus. Two of them, and their parents, did not originally come from Damascus, but they had lived and studied in the capital for a considerable time.²² All the informants except two had only one native language, Damascus Arabic.

At the time of the recording, 34 of the informants were studying at the University or had already graduated,²³ eleven had finished secondary school, three had finished primary school, and two of them – the two eldest – had no formal schooling.²⁴ Twenty-three were working (for the state, for private companies, or self-employed), twenty were still students, four were housewives, two were unemployed, and one was retired.

	University studies	Secondary school	Primary school	Illiterate
Men	14	8	2	1
Women	20	3	1	1
Total	34	11	3	2

Concerning the areas of the city in which the informants lived, eighteen came from traditional areas (Bāb ʾMṣalla, Bāb Sīrīze, Rəkn əd-Dīn, Sārūza, Šēx Muḥyəd-dīn, Kafarsūse, Mazze Basatīn, and Mīdān); 24 came from newer areas (ʾAṣāf, ʾUṣūr, Barāmke, Tižāra, əž-Žəsʾr əl-ʾAbyaḍ, Ḥalbūni, ʾTəlyāni, Mazze Šarʾiyye, Mazze Garbiyye, Mazze Žabal, Mazze ʾŌtöstrād, Mazraʿa, Mālki, Maysāt, Mḥāžrīn, Šāreʿ Bağdād and ʾTəlyāni); and eight came from peripheral areas (Žōbar, Ḥarāsta, Dūma, and Mašrūf Dummar).²⁵

²² They come from Swēda in the south of the country, and Salamiyye in the center. These two informants were selected as examples of the migrants coming from other regions of the country who have lived and studied for a long time in the capital and have accommodated their native varieties to the dominant one (in this case Damascus Arabic). As for those born and raised abroad, the aim was to detect any particularity due to their language isolation.

²³ Since 2000 Syria had instituted numerous reforms to its system of higher education, which caused an increase of youth university enrollment, up to 26% in 2009 in urban areas (BUCKNER, Elizabeth S. and SABA, Khuloud, “Syria’s next generation”, 93). In 2009 there were 6,763 students in Damascus and in 2011 17,322 (*Central Bureau of Statistics* <http://cbssyr.sy/index-EN.htm>).

²⁴ Education as a variable has not been considered in this paper. A study of this and the influence of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) on Damascus Arabic is planned.

²⁵ These peripheral areas are the result of the expansion of the city during the past century (cf. MILLER, Catherine, “Arabic urban”, 8). A precise map of the different neighborhoods in Damascus is available in LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 167.

	Traditional areas	Newer areas	Peripheral
Men	12	11	2
Women	6	13	6
Total	18	24	8

Of the informants, 44 were Muslims²⁶ and 6 were Christians.²⁷ In Damascus the Christians are mostly concentrated in Christian neighborhoods.²⁸

	Muslim	Christian
Men	24	2
Women	20	4
Total	44	6

Finally, although the interviews were spontaneous, informants were aware of the presence of a recorder, of the purpose of the study, and of the fact that they were talking to a non-native speaker. Perhaps this was the reason some of them began their speeches in a formal register, relatively close to MSA, but then relaxed and switched to their native variety. This might have slightly altered the results.

1 Analysis

1.1 1st person plural pronoun *nəḥna* ~ *ləḥna*

nəḥna is the only variant for the 1st person plural pronoun that appears in Grotzfeld,²⁹ Ambros,³⁰ and Stowasser & Ani.³¹ Cowell³² mentions both variants, characterizing *ləḥna* as stylistic and dialectal.³³

²⁶ One woman is officially Muslim because her father belongs to that religion and in Syria the father passes religious affiliation on to the children; but she was raised by her Christian mother as a Christian.

²⁷ Christians constituted 10% of the total population of Syria, most of them living in the capital (cf. *GUIA PAIS SIRIA*, Economic and Commercial Office of Spain in Damascus, March 2008, 5). Our data also includes Christian informants because they represent a certain percentage of Damascene society, and also because minor linguistic differences between Muslim and Christian communities have been detected before (LENTIN, Jérôme, “Damascus Arabic”, 546) and we wished to check if those differences still existed and/or how they evolved. But in the event we observed no differences in dialect among the many Muslim and Christian groups in Damascus.

²⁸ The main are: ʔAṣāṣ, ʔUṣūr, Bāb Tūma, and Tižāra (partially). Lentin labels a number of forms as Christian or Lebanese: they could be loans from (Christian) Lebanese (LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 117). However, it is also possible that Lebanese and Damascene Christians have preserved in these forms features lost by the Muslims in Damascus.

²⁹ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 18.

³⁰ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 31.

³¹ STOWASSER, Karl and ANI, Moukhtar, *A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic (Dialect of Damascus)*. English-Arabic, Washington, Georgetown University Press, 1964, 260. Kassab, focusing on Syrian Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, also cites this variant (KASSAB, Jean, *Manuel du parler arabe moderne au moyen-orient. Tome premier: Cours Élémentaire*, Paris, Geuthner, 1970, 38).

³² COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 539.

³³ Behnstedt shows *ləḥna* as typically Alawi (BEHNSTEDT, Peter, *Sprachatlas von Syrien. 1: Kartenband*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1997, 511, map 255).

Lentin's findings at the end of the 1970s were:³⁴

	Informants
<i>nəḥna</i>	9
<i>näḥna</i>	14
<i>nəḥna ~ näḥna</i>	10
<i>naḥna</i>	19
<i>näḥna ~ naḥna</i>	6
<i>ləḥna</i>	3

In our study two variants were detected: *nəḥna* (170 instances) and *ləḥna* (34 instances):

	Informants
<i>nəḥna</i>	18
<i>ləḥna</i>	4
<i>nəḥna ~ ləḥna</i>	8

Nəḥna is by far the predominant variant, being used 170 times by eighteen informants (though one informant used it 54 times). *Ləḥna* was used by four informants, and eight informants combined both variants.

Of the four informants who used *ləḥna* exclusively, two are the eldest, one of whom used it 10 times, almost a third of the total instances. The third informant was a young man from a traditional neighborhood, and the fourth a young woman born and raised abroad.

The eight informants who used both variants did so approximately equally, except for two (mother and daughter) who mainly used *ləḥna*. All were Muslims.

Finally, the variant *ləḥna* seems to predominate in traditional parts of the city, since seven of the twelve informants who used it came from these areas (Kafarsūse, Sārūža, Šēx Muḥyaddīn (x2), Mīdān, Mazze (Basatīn), and Bāb Srīže). The eighth informant was the woman who was raised abroad and whose speech showed other traditional features.

Thus at the time of the study the variant *nəḥna* clearly predominated. The use of *ləḥna* had been declining (Lentin registers only 3 informants)³⁵ and, according to our number of instances, seems to be still in decline. It is used in all areas of the city (traditional, new, and peripheral), but has not been detected among the Christian community.

The variant *naḥna* appears in Grotzfeld,³⁶ but not in his 1965 grammar.³⁷ It is the most frequent variant in Lentin,³⁸ but, surprisingly, does not appear in our data.

³⁴ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 134.

³⁵ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 134.

³⁶ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 40. Grotzfeld registered this variant in one Christian informant, and considered the assimilation *i > a* influenced by *ḥ*.

³⁷ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*.

³⁸ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 134.

1.2 3rd person plural pronoun *hanne* ~ *hannen*

Hanne was given as the personal pronoun for the 3rd person plural in Grotzfeld's grammar³⁹ and Stowasser & Ani's dictionary,⁴⁰ in neither of which the variant *hannen*⁴¹ appears. *Hanne* is the only variant found in Bloch & Grotzfeld⁴² as well. However, Cowell⁴³ and later sources like Ambros⁴⁴ and Kassab⁴⁵ mention both variants.

Lentin shows that at the end of the 1970s both variants were used to approximately the same degree:⁴⁶

	Informants
<i>hanne</i>	15
<i>hannen</i>	19
<i>hanne</i> ~ <i>hannen</i>	9

In our research 34 informants used *hannen* 161 times, whereas only two informants used *hanne* (3 instances), and then just in combination with *hannen*. No informant used *hanne* exclusively.⁴⁷

	Informants
<i>hanne</i>	-
<i>hannen</i>	34
<i>hanne</i> ~ <i>hannen</i>	2

These results are interesting because, though grammars and texts published in the 1960s give *hanne* as the main variant (some of them do not even mention *hannen*), Lentin's data and ours show *hannen* to be widespread in the city. A rapid decline of the variant *hanne* must have taken place.⁴⁸

1.3 *-h-* in 3rd person feminine and plural pronominal suffixes

In Cowell⁴⁹ the 3rd person feminine and plural pronominal suffixes show a *-h-* (*-ha*, *-hon*), but he mentions (p. 541) that *-h-* may be dropped after consonants and sometimes

³⁹ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 18.

⁴⁰ STOWASSER, Karl and ANI, Moukhtar, *A Dictionary*, 238.

⁴¹ Many scholars consider the *-n* ending of this variant to be influenced by an Aramaic substrate. Cf. BEHNSTEDT, Peter, "Noch einmal zum Problem der Personalpronomina *hanne* (3.Pl.), *-kon* (2.Pl.) und *-hon* (3.Pl.) in den syrisch-libanesischen Dialekten", in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 141 (1991), 235-252, and OWENS, Jonathan, *A Linguistic History of Arabic*, Oxford, University Press, 2006, 244.

⁴² BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*.

⁴³ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 539.

⁴⁴ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 31.

⁴⁵ KASSAB, Jean, *Manuel du parler*, 38.

⁴⁶ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 139

⁴⁷ Surprisingly, Klimiuk's informant does (KLIMIUK, Maciej, *Phonetics and phonology of Damascus Arabic*, Warsaw, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2013, 100).

⁴⁸ Perhaps this has been influenced by the new generation's better knowledge of MSA: they avoid a form which is almost identical to the MSA fem. pl. *hunna*.

⁴⁹ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 539.

– especially in Lebanon – after long vowels. Grotzfeld⁵⁰ shows both *-h-* and ‘*-h-*less’ variants after a consonant, adding that *-h-* is commonly elided in the latter. After vowels he lists only variants with *-h-*. Ambros⁵¹ has the same information as Grotzfeld.

The presence or absence of *-h-* in Damascus Arabic has been previously investigated.⁵² These studies indicate that the decline of *-h-* has been significant in the past few decades, and detect a tendency to elide *-h-* after consonants and after vowels other than *a*.⁵³ Our findings confirm such results.

To present our findings more clearly, we first focus on the number of informants who used each variant, and then on occurrences.

a) Informants

<i>-ha, -hon:</i> 36 informants		<i>-a, -on:</i> 40 informants	
after consonant	after vowel	after consonant	after vowel
5	36	36	39

Among the 36 informants who used *-h-* pronominal suffixes after a vowel, seven did it exclusively after *ā*, which means that only 29 informants (58% of the total) used it after another vowel. Only five informants (10%) used *-h-* after a consonant. One of them was the male elder informant. The other four were young women, two of whom belonged to neighboring traditional areas (Rakn ʔd-Dīn and Šēx Muḥyaddīn) and used it several times (12 and 7 instances, respectively). These two women also used other traditional features in their speech.⁵⁴ The other two women came from a newer neighborhood (Mazze Žabal) and used the *-h-* after a consonant once and three times, respectively. All four women were Muslim and had attended the University.

b) Occurrence

The data contain a total of 1253 cases of *-h-* and ‘*-h-* less’ pronouns:

<i>-ha, -hon:</i> 170 instances		<i>-a, -on:</i> 1083 instances	
after consonant	after vowel	after consonant	after vowel
24	146	675	408

The table shows that there is no change in the tendency to elide *-h-*, a phenomenon earlier observed by Lentin and Ismail.

⁵⁰ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 42-43, and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 19-20.

⁵¹ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 31-32.

⁵² By ISMAIL, Hanadi, “The Variable (h) in Damascus: Analysis of a Stable Variable”, in *Arabic Dialectology. In Honour of Clive Holes on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, E. Al-Wer and R. De Jong (eds.), Leiden, Brill (2009), 249-270; LENTIN, Jérôme, *Remarques sociolinguistiques*, 235-236; and LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 158-159. To the best of my knowledge, these are the last sociolinguistic studies about Damascus Arabic published so far.

⁵³ The *-h-* does not completely disappear but reappears in emphatic contexts. It is practically always retained after *ā*. Our data do not contain any cases of the *-āa* (šāfnāa) registered by Lentin (LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 158)

⁵⁴ Like the variant *ḥadan* for the indefinite pronoun (see section 1.5).

Of the 146 instances of *-h-* pronouns occurring after vowels, 40 occurred after *ā*,⁵⁵ 26 after *ē*, 78 after another consonant, and 2 took place in religious contexts.⁵⁶

Moreover, the elision of *-h-* after *ī* and *ū* causes the insertion of a *y* or a *w*, respectively, to avoid a hiatus.⁵⁷ For instance: *fīha* > **fīa/fīya* > *fīya/fīyya*, *ʔabūha* > **ʔabūa/ʔabuwa* > *ʔabuwwa*. In our data this phenomenon happens quite frequently, particularly after *ī*:

	Instances		Instances
<i>-īha/-īhon</i>	41	<i>-īyya/-īyyon</i>	396
<i>-ūha/-ūhon</i>	31	<i>-uwwa/-uwwon</i>	90

We have not found any of these cases in Bloch & Grotzfeld,⁵⁸ where *-h-* is always retained. This could mean that the tendency to drop it after *ī* and *ū* has recently increased. Cowell, however, registers it.⁵⁹

We have also noticed a few cases of *-h-* dropping after *ē*, which also causes a hiatus. The examples concern the two prepositions *ʕala* (> *ʕalē-*) and *ḥawāli* (> *ḥawālē-*):

	Instances		Instances
<i>ʕalēha/hon</i>	31	<i>ḥawālēha/hon</i>	0
<i>ʕalēya/yon</i>	6	<i>ḥawālēya/yon</i>	0
<i>ʕalēa/on</i>	22	<i>ḥawālēa/on</i>	2

These results indicate that the cases with hiatus were used more frequently than those in which *y* is inserted between the preposition and the suffix. Because the data of Ismail shows *-h-* occurring nearly invariably after *ē*,⁶⁰ this could be a new tendency meriting further research.

Finally, the types of words to which *-h-* pronouns were suffixed in our data were:

	Instances
Prepositions	65
Verbs	56
Nouns	13
Pronouns ⁶¹	1

⁵⁵ *-h-* is almost never dropped in this case (see fn. 53).

⁵⁶ In both cases it was suffixed to the preposition *ʕala* (= *ʕalayha*).

⁵⁷ ISMAIL, Hanadi, "The Variable (h)", 255.

⁵⁸ BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*.

⁵⁹ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 541.

⁶⁰ ISMAIL, Hanadi, "The Variable (h)", 255.

⁶¹ The only example of this kind was *baʕḍha*, which acted as a reciprocal pronoun in the context where it appeared: *an-nās ʕalāqāta maʕ baʕḍha kif* 'how is the relation between the people'.

-h- pronouns were suffixed with more frequency to prepositions and to verbs with a vowel ending, the prepositions *fī-* and *ʕala* being by far the most often treated.⁶² The *-h-* appears most often with defective verbs (e.g. *sāwa*, *bisāwi* > *mānsāwīha*) and with those conjugated in the 3rd person of the plural (e.g. *ḥaṭṭ*, *biḥaṭṭ* > *biḥaṭṭūhon*).

One last issue concerns the preposition *maʕ* when *-h-* suffixes were inserted: The old variant *maʕāha/hon* was the one most used in the data (9 instances). The old-fashioned reciprocal assimilation *maḥḥa/on* is still in use, though appearing just 3 times.⁶³ Also appearing only 3 times in our data were examples of suffixation to form *maʕ* > *maʕha/hon*.

1.4 Relative pronouns

The variants for relative pronouns given in the main sources are: *halli*, *yalli*, *yəlli*, and ^ʕ*lli* (Cowell);⁶⁴ *yəlli*, (*ə*)*lli*, *halli* and *yalli* (Grotzfeld);⁶⁵ *lli*, (*ʔ*)*əlli*, and *halli* (Ambros, considering *yalli* and *yəlli* free variants).⁶⁶

The variant *halli*⁶⁷ appears in all three main sources for Syrian Arabic above, none of which consider it old-fashioned. In Bloch & Grotzfeld it appears frequently and therefore seems to have been in regular use.⁶⁸ Only Lentin claimed that *halli* probably was an old form, frequent in old sources.⁶⁹

The variants appearing in our corpus are *yəlli* and its shorter version (^ʕ)*lli*, *yalli*, and *halli*, with a total of 405 occurrences:

	Instances	Informants
<i>yəlli</i> or (^ʕ) <i>lli</i>	379	46
<i>halli</i>	19	3
<i>yalli</i>	7	2

The results indicate that at the time of our study *yəlli*, used by 46 informants (92%), was by far the predominant variant. Only 3 informants (6% of the total) used *halli*. Two of them were the elder informants and one a woman, age 45, native to a very traditional neighborhood (*Bāb əs-Srīze*). The three combined *halli* with (^ʕ)*lli*, but only one also used *yəlli* (though seldom). *halli* was not used by any young informant. For all these reasons, it can be considered obsolete and probably soon to disappear.

⁶² Ismail observed in her data that all tokens produced by two frequent users of *-h-* occurred in prepositions where *-h-* was preceded by a consonant. However, she had no examples of *-h-* in prepositions with a vowel ending (ISMAIL, Hanadi, “The Variable (h)”, 265). In my data, pronouns with *-h-* occurred in eight different prepositions, among them *fī-* (20 instances) and *ʕala* (29 instances). Moreover, Bloch & Grotzfeld systematically shows a *-h-* pronoun suffixed to prepositions with a vowel ending (BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*).

⁶³ *-ḥ-* > *-ḥḥ-*, already detected by Driver in 1925 (DRIVER, Godfrey Rolles, *A Grammar of the Colloquial Arabic of Syria and Palestine*, London, Probsthain, 1925, 8). This assimilation was used by the eldest informant and by a young man from a traditional neighborhood (Kafarsūse).

⁶⁴ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 494.

⁶⁵ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 51, and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 24.

⁶⁶ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 89.

⁶⁷ < *hā* + *illi* (GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 24).

⁶⁸ BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*.

⁶⁹ LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 159.

In our corpus the variant *yalli*⁷⁰ was used by only 2 informants (4%). In both cases they, but not their parents, were originally from Damascus.⁷¹ Both combined it with ^(ə)*lli*, but only one also used *yəlli* (once). However, *yalli* is registered in Grotzfeld,⁷² Lentin,⁷³ and Aldoukhi, Procházka and Telič.⁷⁴ The last source presents *yalli* as the most common variant, but *halli*, *yəlli*, *həlli* are also mentioned.

1.5 Indefinite pronoun *ḥada* ~ *ḥadan*

The variant *ḥadan* for the indefinite pronoun is not found in the main sources of Syrian Arabic.⁷⁵ Barthélemy links this variant to Lebanon and Jerusalem.⁷⁶

In Lentin's study there is a section dedicated to both variants, revealing the following use:⁷⁷

	Informants
<i>ḥada</i>	30
<i>ḥadan</i>	1
<i>ḥada</i> ~ <i>ḥadan</i>	10

Our corpus shows examples of the two variants, with a significant difference in the number of occurrences for each: *ḥada*: 95 instances; *ḥadan*: 15 instances:

	Informants
<i>ḥada</i>	25
<i>ḥadan</i>	0
<i>ḥada</i> ~ <i>ḥadan</i>	3

No informant used *ḥadan* exclusively. The three informants who combined both variants were Muslim women, two of whom belonged to two traditional neighborhoods (Rəkn əd-Dīn and Šēx Muḥyeddīn) and used *ḥadan* more often than *ḥada*.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ According to Grotzfeld, *yalli* is a hybrid of *yəlli* and *halli* (GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 24).

⁷¹ The parents of the first informant were from Maṣlūla (56 km northeast of Damascus); the father of the second informant came from the Golan Heights and his mother was from Palestine.

⁷² GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 51 and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 24. In the former he stated that he rarely heard *yalli* clearly articulated, his informants always slurring *yəlli* and *yalli*.

⁷³ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 159.

⁷⁴ ALDOUKHI, Rima, PROCHÁZKA, Stephan and TELIČ, Anna, *Lehrbuch des Syrisch-Arabischen I. Praxis-naher Einstieg in den Dialekt von Damaskus*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2016, 214. Whereas in Kassab only the variants *yalli* and *halli* appear (KASSAB, Jean, *Manuel du parler*, 80-82).

⁷⁵ For instance, COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 52, GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 52, and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 25. Nevertheless it appears in KASSAB, Jean, *Manuel du parler*, 139.

⁷⁶ BARTHÉLEMY, Adrien, *Dictionnaire arabe-français. (Dialectes de Syrie: Alep, Damas, Liban, Jérusalem)*, Paris, Geuthner, 1935-1969, 146.

⁷⁷ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 139.

⁷⁸ Informant 1: *ḥadan*: 8 instances; *ḥada*: 3 instances. Informant 2: *ḥadan*: 8 instances; *ḥada*: 6 instances. Lentin observed that *ḥada* is used when in predicates and *ḥadan* when referring to the topic of discussion (LENTIN,

The same two informants displayed other traditional features in their speech.⁷⁹ The third informant was a woman born and raised abroad who learnt the dialect from her parents, and who used other traditional features.⁸⁰ She nevertheless employed *ḥadan* less frequently than *ḥada*.⁸¹

Given these results, it would be fair to assert that *ḥadan* continues in a state of decline, as before observed, and seems to be relegated to traditional areas of the city or to speakers who show a traditional or conservative style. Its extinction in the future would not be a surprise.

1.6 Particles for the non-verbal negation *māl-* ~ *mān-*

*Māl-*⁸² and *mān-*⁸³ (+ pronominal suffixes) are two particles used in non-verbal negations⁸⁴ with *mu* and, to a lesser extent, *ma*.

We will focus on the relation of the variant *mān-* to the Christian community.⁸⁵ Lentin states: (1) it was characteristic of Christians (and Jews); and (2) traditional Muslim areas and Christians from the Old City other than Bāb Tūma did not use it. And he collected the following data about the two variants:⁸⁶

	Informants
<i>māl-</i>	21
<i>mān-</i>	9
<i>māl-</i> ~ <i>mān-</i>	11

In our corpus, 27 informants used these two variants. *Māl-* appeared in a total of 54 instances and *mān-* in 21:

	Informants	Muslim informants	Christian informants
<i>māl-</i>	15	14	1
<i>mān-</i>	6	4	2
<i>māl-</i> ~ <i>mān-</i>	6	5	1
Total	27	23	4

Jérôme, *Remarques sociolinguistiques*, 129). Unfortunately our data do not show these differences, which simply confirms its decline and survival only among informants who exhibit traditional speech (see examples in BERLINCHES, Carmen, *El dialecto*, 235-237 and 251).

⁷⁹ Such as *-h-* in the 3rd person feminine and in plural pronominal suffixes (see section 1.3).

⁸⁰ Such as the variant *lḥna* for the 1st person plural pronoun (see section 1.1).

⁸¹ *Ḥadan*: 1 instance; *ḥada*: 3 instances.

⁸² Probably from *mā* + *-l-* (< *ʔal-*). Cf. COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 385.

⁸³ Probably the result of the assimilation *l* > *n*, starting from the 1st person singular *māl̥ni* > *manni*.

⁸⁴ A tendency to use these particles with active participles has also been observed (cf. LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 140). Another variant, *mann-*, is considered by Lentin as unusual (LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 141); it is associated by Cowell with Lebanon (COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 388). However, it does not appear in our data.

⁸⁵ Grotzfeld claims that *mān-* is used in other dialects but does not mention which (GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut- und Formenlehre*, 130).

⁸⁶ LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 141.

The data show that *mān-* is alive in the Christian community⁸⁷: among the six Christian informants who participated in our study, four used it. By contrast, *māl-* continues to be the most common variant in use within the city, and Muslims generally opted for that. However, among this second group *mān-* also seems to be used frequently (more than half of the Muslim participants used it), possibly more than previously.⁸⁸

Also, it seems that *mān-* has spread, at least partially, among traditional Muslim neighborhoods, since three informants from Mīdān, Kafarsūse, and Bāb ʿMṣalla used it. The informant from Bāb ʿMṣalla was nevertheless Christian.

1.7 The particle *ma* in non-verbal negations

Although, as was stated in the previous section, the particles most frequently used in Damascus Arabic for the non-verbal negation are *mu*, *māl-*, and *mān-*, there are cases in which the particle *ma* – which usually appears in verbal negations – is used instead.⁸⁹

This phenomenon has already been documented by Lentin, who designated it an old-fashioned minority use characteristic of the Christian community.⁹⁰

In our corpus we found:

(1) Among our 50 informants, twelve (24%) used *ma* in non-verbal negations. The particle negated participles (active and passive), prepositional phrases, adverbs, adjectives, and nouns.⁹¹ (2) *ma* is in current, though limited, use by the young generations. Only three young informants from the Christian community used it, but it was also used by two young Muslims living in neighborhoods where Christians predominate (ʿAṣṣāṣ and Šarʿi Tižāra). (3) It was used by three informants from traditional neighborhoods (Rəkn əd-Dīn, Mīdān and Kafarsūse), seven – all Christians – from newer areas (Mazze, Šarʿi Tižāra, ʿAṣṣāṣ, Šāreṣ Baġdād, and Quṣūr), and two from the suburbs (Mašrūṣ Dummar and Dūma).

	Traditional areas	Newer areas	Peripheral
Muslim	3	4	2
Christian	-	3	-
Total	3	7	2

⁸⁷ Klimiuk's Christian informant also uses the variant *mān-* (KLIMIUK, Maciej, *Phonetics and phonology*, 105, 109 and 118).

⁸⁸ Unfortunately it has not been possible to find data about the number of Muslims and Christians who previously used these particles.

⁸⁹ According to Lentin, this particle could be the abbreviated form of *maw* or *may*, or the particle used in verbal negations (*ma*). In some cases it is the only possible negation, particularly in pseudo-verbal constructions (LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 142). See for instance SALAMÉ, Claude and LENTIN, Jérôme, *Dictionnaire d'arabe dialectal syrien (parler de Damas), lettre B* (283 pp.), 2010, [Online, available in <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/IFPO/halshs-00504180/fr/>], 104: *ma ḥada ʿaṣīr ḥarbe, hal-ʿakle ma fiya barake*.

⁹⁰ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 142.

⁹¹ The examples are: *ma zāyirīn, ma maṣʿūl* (x2), *ma maṣṭarr, ma baḍ-ḍarūra, ma (ktīr) ṣālye, ma lāzem* (x4), *ma ktīr* (x5), *ma (ktīr) muḥabbaz, ma (ktīr ʿanno) dāxle (ṣalēha l-madīne), ma ʿarāybi, ma lāzem* (x4).

These findings suggest that non-verbal negation with *ma* is in regular use and with a higher frequency among the Muslim community. It is used in widely-scattered areas of the city. On the other hand, other variants for non-verbal negations that were documented some time ago, like *mau* and *mai*,⁹² *mau* and *mō*,⁹³ have now disappeared.

1.8 Verbal modifiers for the future tense

Several variants for the verbal modifier for the future are recorded in older sources: *raḥ-raḥa-lah-*, *laḥa-*, *ḥa-*, and *rāyeh* (Cowell);⁹⁴ *raḥ*, *raḥa*, *laḥa*, and *ḥa* (seldom) (Grotzfeld);⁹⁵ *laḥa* (the main one), *laḥ*, *raḥa*, *raḥ*, and *ḥa* (Ambros).⁹⁶ Moreover, we find variants *raḥa* and *laḥa* in the texts of Bloch & Grotzfeld, though not as frequently as *raḥ*.⁹⁷

At the end of the 1970s Lentin collected the following data:⁹⁸

	Informants	
	Used alone	Used in combination
<i>raḥ</i>	10	10
<i>ḥa</i>	0	8
<i>rāyeh</i>	2	8
<i>raḥa</i>	1	6
<i>laḥa</i>	6	1
<i>laḥ</i>	3	1

Our data contain only three variants: *raḥ* (64 instances), *ḥa*⁹⁹ (28 instances), and *laḥ* (4 instances). The number of informants who used each is:

	Informants
<i>raḥ</i>	12
<i>laḥ</i>	0
<i>ḥa</i>	6
<i>raḥ</i> + <i>ḥa</i>	5
<i>laḥ</i> + <i>ḥa</i>	2
<i>raḥ</i> + <i>laḥ</i>	0

⁹² GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 131.

⁹³ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 99. *Mau* also appears with some frequency in BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte* (see for instance pp. 50, 112 and 120).

⁹⁴ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 322. Cowell considers variants with *l* typical of Damascus.

⁹⁵ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 59. *Laḥ* is added to the list in his grammar (GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 87).

⁹⁶ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 76.

⁹⁷ BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*.

⁹⁸ LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 129.

⁹⁹ *Ḥa-* seems to be preferred for actions that will happen immediately and with great certainty (cf. ALDOUKHI, Rima, PROCHÁZKA, Stephan and TELIČ, Anna, *Lehrbuch des Syrisch-Arabischen*, 234).

Rāyeh, the second most used variant after *rah* in Lentin's study, does not appear in our data at all. *Lah* is seldom used in our data: only two informants combined it with *ha*. No informant used the variants *rah* and *lah* in combination. This could be due to the few examples of *lah* in the corpus,¹⁰⁰ or, because *rah* and *lah* have the same value for the future, speakers opt for one or the other. But *ha* does include connotations for the future which makes its use necessary in certain contexts.¹⁰¹

Unfortunately, as it can be seen in the following table, it is not possible to determine in which areas of the city each variant predominates:

	Traditional	Newer	Peripheral
<i>rah</i>	4	9	4
<i>lah</i>	0	2	0
<i>ha</i>	6	6	1

Perhaps *ha* could be regarded as the most traditional variant at the time of this study, since it prevails in traditional areas and is almost absent from the suburbs. However, this assertion must be taken as applicable only to the time of the study, and needs further investigation.

In conclusion, the number of variants for verbal modifiers expressing future tense have been significantly reduced recently. Most of them seem to be obsolete (*rāyeh*, *raha*, *lahā*); and *lah*, considered typically Damascene, is seldom used.

1.9 Verbal modifiers expressing the progressive aspect

For a long time *ṣam* has been regarded as the main modifier for expressing the progressive. However, the following variants have also been registered: *ṣam*, *ṣamma*, and sometimes *ṣamm*, *ṣam*, and *ṣammāl* (Cowell);¹⁰² *ṣam* and *ṣamma* (Grotzfeld);¹⁰³ *ṣam* and (variant) *ṣamma* (Ambros).¹⁰⁴

In our study only two variants were detected: *ṣam* (286 instances) and *ṣamma* (7 instances). The two informants who used *ṣamma* combined it with *ṣam*, the latter being by far the most used.¹⁰⁵

	Informants
<i>ṣam</i>	41
<i>ṣam</i> ~ <i>ṣamma</i>	2

¹⁰⁰ But Lentin observed the same phenomenon (LENTIN, Jérôme, *Remarques sociolinguistiques*, 148).

¹⁰¹ See fn. 99.

¹⁰² COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 320.

¹⁰³ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Laut-und Formenlehre*, 59, and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 87.

¹⁰⁴ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 75. Feghali recorded a few more variants in Lebanon: *ṣammāl*, *ṣammā*, *ṣamma*, *ṣam*, and the shortened form *ṣan* (FEGHALI, Michel, *Syntaxe des parlers arabes actuels du Liban*, Paris, Geuthner, 1928, 43).

¹⁰⁵ Informant 1: *ṣam*: 10 instances, *ṣamma*: 3 instances. Informant 2: *ṣam*: 15 instances, *ṣamma*: 4 instances.

The sister of one of the two informants who combined both variants was also interviewed, and exclusively used *ʕam*. The speech of the second of these two informants showed other features that may be regarded old-fashioned¹⁰⁶; but her mother and her grandmother, who also participated in this study, stuck to *ʕam*.

This data suggests that *ʕamma* is in deep decline. Other variants (*ʕamm*, *ʕammāl*) registered in older sources were not used by a single informant and do not seem to be part of the speech of the new generations, for whom *ʕam* is the only particle in general use for expressing the progressive aspect.

1.10 Distal locative demonstrative

We noticed an important change regarding the use of the variants for the distal locative demonstrative. In older sources we find the following:: *hnīk*, the main one, *hnīke* used sometimes, and *hunīk*, Cowell relates it to Lebanon (Cowell);¹⁰⁷ *hnīk(e)*, the main one, and *hunīk(e)* (Grotzfeld);¹⁰⁸ *hnīk(e)* (Stowasser & Ani);¹⁰⁹ *hnīk* (Ambros);¹¹⁰ Bloch & Grotzfeld show *hnīk(e)* but state that the variant *hunīke* is not rare.¹¹¹

At the end of the 1970s Lentin recorded the following:¹¹²

	Informants
<i>hnīk(e)</i>	21
<i>honīk</i>	12
<i>hunīk</i>	5
<i>henīk</i>	1
<i>hənīk(e)</i>	2

Lentin's results show that at the end of the 1970s *hnīk(e)* was the most common variant, followed by *honīk*,¹¹³ while *henīk*¹¹⁴ and *hənīk(e)* were used infrequently.

The present study registers only the variants *hnīk(e)* and *hunīk(e)*:

	Informants
<i>hnīk(e)</i>	15
<i>hunīk(e)</i>	9
<i>hnīk(e) ~ hunīk(e)</i>	2

¹⁰⁶ For example, pronominal suffixes showing -h- (see section 1.3).

¹⁰⁷ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 559. He also cites the variants *hawnīk* of Lebanon, and *hənāk* and *hunāk* of Palestine.

¹⁰⁸ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ STOWASSER, Karl and ANI, Moukhtar, *A Dictionary*, 238.

¹¹⁰ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 93-94.

¹¹¹ BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*, 6, fn. 1.

¹¹² LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 129.

¹¹³ Lentin points out that *honīk* is sometimes pronounced *hunīk(e)* and *hənīk(e)* (LENTIN, Jérôme, "Quelques données", 129).

¹¹⁴ I personally have never heard this form in Damascus.

Thus at present variants with *u* seem to be significantly more employed than in the past. Accordingly, one each of the elder and of the middle-aged informants used variants without *u*. The following table shows the number of occurrences of each variant:

	Variants without <i>u</i>		Variants with <i>u</i>	
	<i>hnīk</i>	<i>hnīke</i>	<i>hunīk</i>	<i>hunīke</i>
Instances	31	21	32	9
Total	52		41	

Surprisingly, the variants *honīk* and *hənīk(e)* did not appear at all in our data, hence can at present be considered marginal.

The variant *hunīk(e)*, related to Lebanon, may be characteristic of the Christian community.¹¹⁵ However, we cannot state this categorically because only three of our six Christian informants used it.¹¹⁶

Finally, apart from the apparently more frequent use of variants with *u* than in the past, we once again find a reduction in variants because *honīk*, *hənīk(e)*, and *henīk* do not appear in our study.

1.11 Temporal conjunction *lamma* ~ *lamman*

The sources register the following variants for the temporal conjunction meaning ‘when’: *lamma* and *lamman* (Cowell);¹¹⁷ *lamma* and *lammen* (Grotzfeld);¹¹⁸ *lamma* (Stowasser & Ani).¹¹⁹ In Bloch & Grotzfeld the variant *lammen* often appears.¹²⁰ Finally, in the text provided by Ambros only *lamma* is used.¹²¹

Lentin’s study gives us the following results:¹²²

	Informants
<i>lamma</i>	20
<i>lamman</i>	11

Our corpus contains only the variants *lamma* (55 instances) and *lamman* (4 instances):

¹¹⁵ Lentin noted that all his informants who used *honīk*, alone or alternated with *hnīk*, were Christians (LENTIN, Jérôme, *Remarques sociolinguistiques*, 126).

¹¹⁶ Two of them used *hnīk* (1 instance each) and the third one *hunīk(e)* (6 instances). But Klimiuk’s informant (Christian) only uses the variant *hūnīk* (KLIMIUK, Maciej, *Phonetics and phonology*, 109-109).

¹¹⁷ COWELL, Mark W., *A Reference Grammar*, 359.

¹¹⁸ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 74.

¹¹⁹ STOWASSER, Karl and ANI, Moukhtar, *A Dictionary*, 262. Barthelémy, focusing on Aleppo, registered more variants: *lamm*, *lammān*, *lammāl*, and *lamma* (BARTHÉLEMY, Adrien, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, 766).

¹²⁰ BLOCH, Ariel and GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte*, see for instance pp. 2, 18, 24, and 56.

¹²¹ AMBROS, Arne, *Damascus Arabic*, 98.

¹²² LENTIN, Jérôme, “Quelques données”, 140.

	Informants
<i>lamma</i>	17
<i>lamman</i>	1
<i>lamma ~ lamman</i>	1

Lamma is obviously the predominant variant in our study. The informants who used *lamman* include a young man who used it exclusively, and one of the eldest participants, who used both variants indifferently. It is clear that the decline of the latter during the past few decades has been significant. The variant *lammen*, cited in older sources, did not appear once, confirming its extinction. Therefore, *lamman* will probably disappear from speech, leaving the variant *lamma* as the only one in use.¹²³

2 Conclusion

Although Damascus Arabic has remained notably stable over the past two centuries,¹²⁴ updated data show visible changes reflecting the new social circumstances of the city, especially urbanization and a higher percentage of youth. At the time of this study (2008-2010), the dialect of the capital exhibited a noticeable decrease in the number of variants¹²⁵ and the disappearance of the most dialectal or traditional features, resulting in linguistic homogeneity among the various communities and neighborhoods. All of these are clear signs of standardization, a process which takes place when variety shifting tends toward the spread of a supradialectal norm.¹²⁶

We have detected several cases of **reduction of variants**, a sign of language koineization through language leveling and simplification:

- (1) **Personal pronouns:** The variant *lāhna* for the 1st person plural pronoun seems to be old-fashioned, relegated to older informants and used mostly in traditional areas.
- (2) **Relative pronouns:** The variant *halli* is in clear decline: none of the young informants used it, implying its total extinction is imminent. The variant *yalli* seldom appeared in our corpus, and only in informants whose parents are not from the capital.¹²⁷
- (3) **Indefinite pronouns:** The variant *ḥadan* was used only by informants who showed other traditional features, and it too could soon be extinct.
- (4) **Particles for non-verbal negation:** Some variants for negation mentioned in older sources (*mau*, *mai*, and *mō*) have been completely lost, with only *ma* and *mu* remaining.¹²⁸
- (5) **Verbal modifiers:** Older variants of the verbal modifier for the future tense (*raḥa-*, *laḥa-*, and *rāyeh*) were not used in our corpus and might be

¹²³ Lentin stated that *lamma* and *lamman* could be on the way to extinction; but our findings suggest that, at least at the time this study was carried out, it was still alive and in use (LENTIN, Jérôme, *Remarques sociolinguistiques*, 145).

¹²⁴ LENTIN, Jérôme, "Damascus Arabic", 546.

¹²⁵ "The adoption of preferred variants is the essence of standardization, as indeed is the essence of all language change" (FERGUSON, Charles. A., "Standardization as", 75).

¹²⁶ FERGUSON, Charles. A., "Standardization as", 70.

¹²⁷ However, this merits further research because other sources consider it to be in current use (see section 1.4).

¹²⁸ In addition to the particles *māl-*, *mān-*, with the same function.

considered obsolete, only *raḥ*, *ḥa-*, and *laḥ* remaining. Similarly, older variants for the progressive marker did not appear in our corpus (*ṣamma-*, *ṣamm-*, and *ṣam-māl-*): the only one in current use is *ṣam*. The variant *ṣamma* can still be heard, though seldom. (6) **Distal locative demonstrative**: The variants *honīk*, *ḥanīk(e)*, and *henīk*, registered in older sources, do not appear in our data, suggesting near disappearance. (7) **Temporal conjunction**: The variant *lamma* seems to be the only one in current use. The variant *lamman* is in decline, being heard only occasionally. *Lammen* is definitely extinct.

The **decline or disappearance** of those variants traditionally considered **typically Damascene or mainly heard in traditional areas of the city** is a sign of variety shifting, and therefore of standardization. This paper has shown the decline or near-extinction of several such variants, including the pronouns *ḥadan* and *lāḥna*, the modifiers for the future *laḥa* and *laḥ* (showing *l*), the relative pronoun *halli*, and the *-h-* in 3rd person feminine and plural pronominal suffixes, all of which have been mostly detected in traditional areas, in elder informants, or in informants showing traditional speech. Informants who usually used traditional features in their speeches were all Muslim, which suggests that Christians are linguistically more progressive.

Another sign of variety shifting and homogenization, and therefore of standardization, is the spreading of **variants assigned to particular religious groups** (Muslim or Christian) associated with certain neighborhoods to other areas of the city of mixed or of different religious persuasion. This is the case of the variants *mā-* and *mān-* for non-verbal negation, formerly characteristic of the speech of the Christian community in Damascus but now apparently of higher use among Muslims.

On the other hand, although most of our findings are consistent with previous socio-linguistic studies, we have found three cases of what could be considered **new tendencies**: (1) In the 3rd person plural pronoun (*ḥanne* ~ *ḥannen*) we have detected a higher presence of variants showing the *-n* ending. This contrasts with the tendency of other variants, like *ḥadan* and *lamman*, to drop the final *-n*. However, the final *-n* has a different origin in each case: many scholars, as was mentioned, relate the final *-n* in *ḥannen* to an Aramaic substratum¹²⁹; but in *ḥadan*, according to Grotzfeld, the final *-n* comes from *ʔaḥdā* = *ʔaḥadan* and therefore is an old *tanwīn*.¹³⁰ As for *lamman*, Barthélemy indicates that it is the contraction of the particle *lamm* and the conditional conjunction *ʔan*.¹³¹ (2) Secondly, there seems to be a greater presence of the hiatus *-ēa-* originated after the dropping of *-h-* in the 3rd person feminine and plural pronominal suffixes and registered in the prepositions *ṣalēa* and *ḥawālēa* (quite frequently in the first case). (3) Finally, it seems that variants for the distal locative demonstrative with *u* in the first syllable (*hunīk*, *hunīke*) are in more frequent use and in the future might become the most used variants.

The variants selected for this study do not show any gender differences.¹³² Several studies indicate that young women's speech has more locally prestigious features

¹²⁹ See fn.41.

¹³⁰ GROTZFELD, Heinz, *Syrisch-arabische Grammatik*, 25.

¹³¹ BARTHÉLEMY, Adrien, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, 766.

¹³² The analysis registers three women who have shown traditional features, which could merely be a coincidence or due to the fact that two of them come from two neighboring traditional neighborhoods. In any case, they are both young, educated, and Muslims. Third one was born and raised in a non-Arabic speaking country and learned the dialect from her parents at home – which could be the reason for her conservative style.

than men's speech.¹³³ This will be examined in a future paper on MSA features in Damascus Arabic.

Our findings, although at times based on a limited number of instances, show that at the time of the study standardization in Damascus was well in progress. Moreover, the changes seem to be occurring much more rapidly than in the past.

More data from the field and further study of these and other, thus far uninvestigated, variants would give us a better understanding of the process of standardization and the development of Damascus Arabic. Also, the nine years of political instability has surely had an impact on the language situation in the capital (for example, by putting different varieties in contact, leveling the language, etc.). We hope to be able to return to Damascus soon to visit our friends and informants and resume our study of the city's complex language.

¹³³ IBRAHIM, Muhammad H., "Standard and prestige language: a problem in Arabic sociolinguistics", in *Anthropological Linguistics* 28 (1986), 124, and ABU-HAIDAR, Farida, "Are Iraqi women more prestige conscious than men? Sex differentiation in Baghdadi Arabic", in *Language in Society* 18/4 (1989), 479.