

## **Influence of TV and internal and external contact on variation in rural child language**

This study examines the influence of TV and internal/local and external/urban contact on the use of the variable (q) in the speech of 50 children from the village of Oyoun Al-Wadi, Syria. The variable (q) is realized as the rural form [q] or the urban form [ʔ]. The influence of TV is measured by the number of hours spent watching TV programs/serials in Syrian Arabic or other varieties. The effect of external contact is measured by the amount of time spent in contact with urban family members and friends by visiting them in cities or being visited by them in the village. The effect of internal contact is measured by the amount of time spent in contact with local friends. The purpose of this study is two folds: (1) introduce a new way to measure the strength and effect of contact and social networks and (2) examine the influence of social factors other than gender, age, residential area, and mothers' origin on the use of the variable (q). In previous studies on the variable (q) by the same speakers, gender and age emerged as statistically significant. Surprisingly, in the current study, those who have lower internal contact with local friends show higher use of the rural [q]. TV and external contact show no significant effect.

The naturally occurring speech of 50 children aged 6-18 constitute the data set. A mixed effects model is employed with speakers as the random effect and TV, internal contact, and external contact as the fixed effects. The time spent watching TV and internal and external contacts are measured individually on scales of 0-4; the digits 0-4 indicate respectively: none, very low, low, high, and very high. Each value is calibrated with a certain number of hours for TV or a certain number of days for internal and external contact.

Only internal contact emerged as statistically significant. Those with no or very low internal contact use the rural [q] more than those who have more internal contact. Despite the long hours many participants spend watching TV and contrary to previous work about the influence of media and TV on language variation and change (Carvalho, 2004; Stuart-Smith et al., 2013; Sayers, 2014), TV emerged as statistically insignificant. Likewise, external contact emerged as statistically insignificant. These results are surprising as one expects lower internal contact to lead to lower use of the local [q], and more exposure to urban TV serials and external urban speakers to lead to higher use of the non-local [ʔ].

These findings indicate that the use of rural and urban forms is neither related to the strength of internal and external contact nor to the abundance in watching urban TV serials. Rather, the use of the urban and rural variants is mainly related to the previously found significant factors, gender and age, and to the social interpretations/meanings of variants and how they situate the speaker in his/her environment as rural or urbane or as masculine or feminine. In other words, children adopt and use the sound that appeals to them and allows them to project themselves in a specific identity, demonstrating their competence in the associated social meanings and ability to manipulate their speech accordingly.

### **References**

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