A change in the usage of negators in Abha Arabic through dialect levelling

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Abstract The current study adopts a quantitative approach to investigate the usage of the four negators in the Abha dialect, namely *mā*, *lis*, *lim*, and *lā*. The Abha dialect, which is spoken in Abha city in southwest Saudi Arabia, seems to be making less frequent use of some of these negative particles, which is resulting in being simplified in the dialect. Previous studies have shown that young educated speakers drive this simplification process. This study shows that in case of negators, there is a kind of ‘levelling’ taking place among middle-aged speakers and that a major shift in usage is being led by younger speakers. Our results show that the negator *mā* substitutes the other negators *lis*, *lim* and *lā* in some cases. This substitution is occurring in both verbal and non-verbal predications. Changes seem to occur among Ṣasīri speakers more than among Qaḥṭāni speakers. One possible explanation is that this change is indicative of a shift towards a variety of Abha dialect that is used by the Qaḥṭāni and that is regarded as more prestigious, but this does not seem to be the case as these negative particles are also becoming less used by Qaḥṭāni speakers. Overall, the results show that both groups are levelling their own dialects towards a common variety.

Key Words: Arabic, negation, dialect levelling, language change, Abha.

Introduction

Language change is a normal process in any speaking community; however, radical changes can lead to the loss of distinctive linguistic features. This is occurring currently in the case of the Abha dialect, which is spoken in southwest Saudi Arabia. Previous studies have shown that the Abha dialect is

changing through the processes of levelling and simplification, which is leading to the loss of distinctive features (Al-Azraqi, 2014). Levelling is a process of koineization that often happens when mutually intelligible but distinct dialects of the same language come into contact, which then causes items from each dialect to be incorporated into the other

in a process of linguistic accommodation (Britain & Trudgill, 1999). This process of koineization can take place relatively swiftly; indeed, it may take only two or three generations to complete (Kerswill, 2002, 2006; Kerswill & Willian, 2005). Siegel (1985) points out that the development of a 'koine' is characterized by reduction and simplification, which are processes that lead to a decrease in the referential or non-referential potential of a language.

There are some indications to suggest that some particles in the Abha dialect, such as coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, response particles, negative particles, and even articles, are becoming simplified. For instance, it has been found that *gid*, which is one of the particles used in the Abha dialect in various syntactic forms, has lost some of its functions (Al-Azraqi, 2014). It is a similar picture for conjunctions; some subordinators and coordinators seem to be used less frequently nowadays, and some are even disappearing from everyday speech. In particular, young educated speakers who are third-generation immigrants seem to be limiting their use of some conjunctions (Al-Azraqi, in press).

Gibson (2002) mentions that there is a common assumption that the direction of change seen in modern Arabic dialects, which is towards Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), can be explained by the social prestige of MSA in addition to people's greater exposure to it as a result of its use in the media and education. In his study on dialect levelling in Tunisian Arabic, which focused on four variables, Gibson found that the behaviour of Tunisian speakers concerning the use of /q/ is consistent with this hypothesis, whereas the other three cases he investigated are changing towards another dialect rather than MSA. Hinskens (1998) researched dialect levelling in the Dutch province of Limburg. Based on

his findings, he argues that dialect levelling does not necessarily lead to convergence with the Standard language and, in some cases, there is even divergence. Trudgill (1986) suggests that situations that involve transplantation and contact between mutually intelligible dialects lead to the development of new dialects. The specific qualities that distinguish the variants of the different dialects are reduced until only one variant, remains. This one variant often contains some of the qualities of each of the original dialects.

Accommodation may also lead to the development of inter-dialectal forms, forms that are not present in the contributing dialects but which may be the result of hyper-adaption. This process may take a long time.

The levelling taking place in the Abha dialect does not seem to be moving towards Standard Arabic. In fact, the Abha dialect is losing some features that have equivalents in Standard Arabic. Therefore, one of the main aims of this study is to identify the mechanism underlying this phenomenon and offer some possible explanations for its occurrence, focusing in particular on changes to the usage of negators among two different groups of Abha speakers, the Qahtāni and Ḥasīri dialect groups.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: First, some background is provided on the region and city of Abha and its dialect. Then, an overview is given on negation and the usage of negative particles in Standard Arabic in general, followed by a review of the literature on negation in Arabic varieties. Next the aim of the current study and its methodology are presented. This is followed by the results and a discussion thereof. The paper then ends with some concluding remarks.

Abha and the Abha dialect

The earliest known mention of the name of Abha occurs in the book of al-Hamadānī (al-Hāmadānī, 1983), and this is also the only classical book to mention Abha. This book refers to the Abha Valley in the eleventh century (Jrais, 1997). Before the nineteenth century Abha was not a city but a collection of villages within the Abha Valley. As this collective became concentrated in one area, Abha began to be known as a city and in AH1242 (1827), Abha was selected as the capital of the government of Ṣasīr, led by Ali al-Muḡēdī. After that time, Abha grew in size and population, particularly during the Ottoman period (AH1289 (1872) to AH1336 (1918)), and it has continued to increase since the Saudi period (from AH1338 (1920) to the present day) (Jrais, 1995, 1997; Al-Azraqi, 2014).

As Abha developed, many people from both nearby and distant villages migrated to the city looking for education, jobs, and better services, bringing with them their own local dialects. The early settlers in Abha came from nearby tribes such as the Banī Muḡēd, Alkam, Rabī'ah w-Rfēdah, and Banī-Mālik as well as from tribes and villages further afield such as Qaḥṭān, Ṣahrān, and Rijāl ālmaṣ among others (an-Niṣmī, nd; ḥamzah, 1968; ṣākir 1981).

The levelling of dialects takes place when immigrants do not live in separate communities (Chambers & Trudgill, 1980). Unlike in the case of Ṣan'ānī Arabic speakers (Watson, 2007), no effect of tribal origins on social networks in the Abha community has been observed (Al-Azraqi, 2014). People of different origins communicate at work, at school, and in public places. The different tribal groups and the Abha community as a whole appear to be well integrated. Indeed, it is not always possible to determine a speaker's tribal origin, especially when the

individual is a third-generation immigrant, not least because of the unified dialect that Abha speakers tend to use nowadays (Al-Azraqi, 2014).

The dialect of Abha can be described as the result of contact between the speakers of two major dialect groups, Ṣasīri and Qaḥṭāni. Both the Qaḥṭān and Ṣasīr have several sub-tribes. The Qaḥṭān sub-tribes live in the north and east of Abha and the Ṣasīr sub-tribes come from the west and south of Abha. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to outline all of the details of their sub-dialects here, but suffice it to say that, usually, the differences between the sub-tribes are not so great as to affect the aim, argument, and results presented in this study. Before elaborating the explicit aim of this study in relation to the usage of negators in the Abha dialect, some background is provided on negation in Standard Arabic and in the Abha dialect.

Negation and negative particles in Arabic :

Negation in Standard Arabic has been discussed syntactically; however, Arabic books look at the issue of negation by discussing the negative particles which are scattered among different subjects.

The negative particles in Standard Arabic are: *laysa*, *mā*, *lā*, *lan*, *lammā*, *lam*, and *lāt*. They occur in verbal and non-verbal predication and fulfil a variety of functions in sentences. Non-verbal predicates are normally negated with *laysa* or *mā*. The negative particle *laysa* does not have to be adjacent to the verb it negates (Murphy, 2014). It can also be inflected for person and gender like a verb. *laysa* functions as verb and it is used to negate the present tense. Fehri (1993) terms the negative particle *mā* a 'neutral' negator because it occurs with both verbal and non-verbal predicates. When *mā* precedes the verb in the perfect tense, it denotes the past and

when it precedes the verb in the imperfect tense, it denotes the present.

lā in Standard Arabic has four main functions:

- 1- *lā an-nāfiyyah*, in verbal predication, precedes the imperfect verb and is usually used to negate the future.
- 2- *lā* when preceding the imperfect verb can also denote the present as in:

lā yaḏhabu al-ḥaqq “The (lit.right) is never gone.”

lā can also precede the perfect verb. In this case there is a double negation as in:

lā sallama w lā ṣāfaḥa
“(Lit.) Neither greeting nor hand shaking.”

When *lā* precedes the perfect verb without duplication, it carries the sense of wishing such as “I wish not that” or praying as “I pray that ...” (Eid, 1991: 265, 305, 313, 377):

lā samaḥ ʔAllah “(Lit.) Wishing Allah forbids.”

- 3- In the case of *lā an-nāhiyyah* when *lā* is used before an imperfect verb for a negative command, it is the only particle used for this function. It carries the sense of the present or the future as in:

lā tadxul hunā
“Do not come in.”

- 4- *lā an-nāfiyyah lil jins* occurs in non-verbal predication. Consider the following examples:

lā tāsata li maxlūq “(Lit.) No obedience to a creature.”

lā makān lakum hunā “No place for you here.”

Note that *lā* has different syntactic functions with *hālat al’iṣrāb* (Abdul ḥamīd, nd (1): 393-415; Hasan, 1975:(1) 685-712).

As for *lam*, it precedes the imperfect verb only. It always indicates the past tense even though it occurs with an imperfect expressing negation in the past as in:

lam yaʔtī ar-rajulu
“The man did not come.”

lan precedes the imperfect verb as well but indicates the negative in the future as in:

lan tastaṭīʿa “You will not be able to.”

inn and *lāt* are negators that are used rarely. *inn* occurs with the perfect to denote the past and with the imperfect to denote the present and future. *lāt*, on the other hand, occurs in nominal predication only, for more information about negative particles and their function (see Abdul ḥamīd, nd (1): 298-415; Hasan, 1975(1): 593-613, 685-712; Eid, 1991: 261-268, 305-319).

Studies on negation in Arabic varieties:

Studies on negation in MSA and Arabic varieties have focused on changes in the negation process and the use of negative particles. They analyse Arabic negation in terms of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, typology, or diachrony. Some of the main studies in this area are given here.

Badawi et al. (2004) have observed that the position of certain negative particles and their concomitant parts in relation to the rest of the sentence or phrase is becoming more and more flexible in modern written Arabic (MWA). In MWA, the negative particles used in verbal and nominal sentences are: *mā*, *lā*, *lā buddā*, *law-lā*, *ann*, *lam*, *lan*,

lammā, *laysa*, ‘*abadan*’ (Badawi et al., 2004).

Ouhalla (1989,1990) and Benmamoun (1992) set the stage for the recent discussion of negation in Arabic and all of its varieties, including MSA.

Benmamoun’s (2003) is a valuable work that offers a solid discussion on verbal and nominal negation. Negative polarity items (Benmamoun, 1996) are conducted on Standard Arabic, see also (Benmamoun, 1997,2000) and (Benmamoun et al,2014).

As regards the scholarly discussion on the encoding of negation in Arabic, Murphy (2014) has identified two broad forms, which he labels descriptive grammars and linguistic analyses. Descriptive grammars of specific varieties of Arabic generally include a section exemplifying the ways that negation is encoded in their respective dialects.

With respect to work on the Arabic varieties, Cowell’s (1964: 383-391) presentation of negation in Syrian Arabic is widely quoted. As for Egyptian Arabic, Abdel-Massih et al. (1979: 133-141) provide a concise overview while Woidich’s (1968) PhD dissertation provides details about every construct used to express negation. Ingham’s (1994: 44-46) brief discussion of negation in Najdi Arabic is also useful to understand the function of negation in Arabic.

Woidich (1968) adequately covers the coding of negation with nominals and noun phrases in Egyptian Arabic. More recently, Al-Momani (2011) has discussed the syntax of sentential negation in Jordanian Arabic. This variety of Arabic employs different negative particles, namely *ma...š*, *mā*, *miš*, and *lā*, in the context of the past, present, and future tenses, respectively. Brustad (2000: 282), in her study compares the syntax of the Moroccan, Egyptian, Syrian, and Kuwaiti dialects of spoken Arabic. She found that ‘the

syntax and pragmatics’ of the negative pairs correspond closely to one another from dialect to dialect. The negative particles in these dialects, namely *mā*, *miš*, *mū*, *māš* (*i*), *mā...ši*, are used in a range of ways (Brustad, 2000: 277-314). Watson (1993: 253-267) in her study on Sanāni Arabic discusses negation in verbal and non-verbal predication. She argues that the negative particles in Sanāni Arabic have similarities with those of Egyptian, Palestinian, and Lebanese Arabic. These particles are *mā*, *miš*, *mūš*, *māš*, *maš*, *gayr* and *lā*. Al-Shurafa’s (2006: 52) investigation of nominal and verbal negation in Palestinian Arabic indicates that *ma -sh* alternates in the same contexts with *mā* where they both occur interchangeably, and mainly in verbal sentences, whereas *mish*, which is the third negative particle in Palestinian Arabic, predominates in the negation of nominal sentences.

Some years ago I studied negation in Abha Arabic and discussed the syntactic function and process of negation in this dialect (Al-Azraqi, 1998). There are four negative particles currently used in the Abha dialect. These particles are: *lis*, *mā*, *lim*, and *lā* (Al-Azraqi, 1998). All of these particles are used to denote negation; however, *lā* can also be used for negative commands. *lā* and *mā* are the most common, whereas *lis* and *lim* are restricted to the Ṣasīri group of Abha speakers, as will be discussed below. *lis* may be described as similar to the classical *laysa* as it can be attached to pound pronouns. While there have been several studies on negation in Arabic dialects, the changes now occurring in the Abha dialect have not yet to be recorded and discussed in the literature. The present study aims to address this omission.

Aim of the study:

The current study looks at the changes taking place in the Abha dialect, which

initially evolved through language contact among the various tribal groups in the Abha region, as explained above. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the change in the usage of the negative particles *mā* and *lā* as well as *lis* and *lim* in verbal and non-verbal predication among the two main Abha dialect groups, namely the Qahtāni and Ṣasīri. It is hypothesized that communication between the different generations of the two dialect groups is resulting in a shift in the extent of the usage of negative particles. It is anticipated that an examination of the usage patterns of these negative particles will reveal whether the social variables of age and dialect group are playing a role in this change.

Methodology:

With respect to the size and makeup of the sample, as explained above, *lis* and *lim* were originally features of the Ṣasīri dialect group. Therefore, we needed to ensure that there was a good distribution of Qahtāni and Ṣasīri participants in our study to avoid bias in the results. It was important also to ensure that there was a suitable range of ages in both the dialect groups in the sample. It should be emphasized that the main purpose of this study is not to compare the two dialect groups, but to reveal the change in the usage of these negative particles within each group.

As regards the social variables considered in the study, although level of education is an important indicator when studying dialects in Saudi Arabia, this variable was not considered in the present study on the basis of the finding in Al-Azraqi (2014), which revealed a stable relation

between level of education and age: usually, semi-educated and uneducated people are over 55 years of age, whereas younger people are mostly educated. Gender as a social variable might be an important factor in the change in the usage of negators; however, it was not possible to include an equal number of men and women in the two dialect groups in the sample, so unfortunately, it was not possible to include gender as a variable. Thus, the potential influence of two social variables – age and dialect group – was investigated in this study. Age was considered on the basis of the claim that looking at linguistic differences between speakers of different ages facilitates the study of linguistic change.

A total of 78 speakers of the Abha dialect participated in the study. First, interviews were conducted to explain the purpose of the study clearly. Then, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire, which included a section covering the use of negative particles in 43 sentences. For each item, the participants were asked to choose the sentence they used regularly. The questionnaire was completed during the interviews or sometimes the participant filled it in after the interview and returned it by email. Three assistants helped in conducting the interviews and collecting the questionnaires.

The 78 participants were aged from 15 to 75 years. For the analysis, they were divided into four groups, as shown in Table 1. A range of 15 years was considered suitable based on the assumption that this range captures the common features of the different age groups.

Table 1: Age of participants

Age	No. of participants
15–30	20
31–45	19
46–60	20
61–75	19
Total	78

As explained above, the speakers of the Abha dialect originate from several different origins but mainly from the Qaḥṭāni and Ṣasīri tribes. For the sake of this study, we needed knowledge of whether the speaker was Qaḥṭāni or Ṣasīri regardless of his or her sub-tribe. As mentioned, usually, the differences across the sub-tribes are not that big in terms of linguistics. Thus, the participants were also grouped according to these two tribal origins, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants by dialect group.

Sub-group	No. of participants
Ṣasīri	40
Qaḥṭāni	38
Total	78

Results and discussion :

Overall, the results show that *mā* is

used as a substitute for the other negators (*lā*, *lim*, and *lis*) in most cases, and particularly among younger speakers. This finding reflects the simplification process that the negators in the Abha dialect are undergoing. This will eventually lead to the loss of negators. The results of the analysis of the usage of *mā* in verbal and non-verbal predication and its substitution of *lā*, *lim*, and *lis* are discussed in this section.

mā in the Abha dialect mainly means “not”. It is usually used before a verbal and non-verbal sentence itself. It is the most common negator used by the people in Abha. Consider the following examples:

mā ʔaʕrifah

“I do not know him.”

mā daxal ʕalēhum

“He did not enter (lit. on them).”

mā btāxuḍah

“She will not take it.”

mā l-ghurfah lik lhālik

“The room is not for you alone.”

mā hū byuḡʕud

“He will not stay.”

mā ʕalēh ǧaṭā

“There is no cover on it.”

As *mā* can be used in both verbal and non-verbal predication, it can substitute for all the other negative particles, as discussed in more detail below.

***mā* substitutes *lis* in verbal and nominal**

predication

lis is thought to derive from the Standard Arabic *laysa*. *lis* has been a long-standing feature in the Abha dialect. It is not attested in other Arabian dialects as far as I know. Whether this particle used to be in many dialects then disappeared or was only in use in the dialects of south Arabia remains uncertain. Although there are several variants of *lis* in the region of the Tihāmah and al-Hijāz mountains, only one variant of *lis* was found in Abha as a result of the movements of the Ṣasīri tribes. *lis* is mostly used by Ṣasīri speakers in the city of Abha; in Rijāl ālmaṣ and other Ṣasīri suburbs, *lis* is used extensively in everyday life.

lis is mainly used before a nominal sentence and can be attached to a pronoun. Consider the following examples:

lis xālīd hīnah

“Khalid is not here.”

lishī btījī

“She will not come.”

lisantū taṣrifūnah

“You do not know him.”

lis hnā ṣaḥad

“There is nobody here.”

lis fīh mā

“There is no water.”

lis fiyyah

“I cannot.”

lis is used before an imperfect verb to indicate negation in the present. It is also used sometimes for negation in the future. Consider the following examples:

lis tigdar lah “She is not willing to

do it.”

lis yiswīh

“He will not fix it.”

laysa in Standard Arabic is considered to be a verb by some grammarians because it takes bound subject pronouns. *lis*, on the other hand, takes both bound object pronouns and free subject pronouns. Bound object pronouns are always attached to nouns to indicate the object or the possessor. Free subject pronouns often occur at the beginning of the nominal sentence as a predicand. The use of *lis* either with free subject pronouns or bound object pronouns originates in Ṣasīr and Tihāmah (Al-Azraqi, 1998).

We should mention here that *lis* and *mā* function in the same way as the Standard negator *lan*. *lan* in Standard Arabic precedes the imperfect verb and denotes the negative future. *lan* is not used in Abha Arabic; rather, *lis* and *mā* plus a bound pronoun suffix are used before an imperfect verb preceded by *b* to denote the negative future. For example:

In Standard Arabic:

lan ṣusāfira l-yawm

“I am not going to travel today.”

In Abha dialect:

lisnī basāfir ʔa l-yōm

“I am not going to travel today.”

mānī basāfir ʔa l-yōm

“I am not going to travel today.”

In the Abha dialect, when *mā* substitutes *lis*, the imperfect verb denotes the past tense. From Figure (1) it can be seen that

there is a marked downward trend in the usage of *lis* for verbal predication in the younger generations of Ṣasīri speakers despite this word originating in this dialect sub-group. While there is no evidence that *lis* was originally a feature in the Qaḥṭāni dialect,

from Figure (2) it can be seen that a few Qaḥṭāni speakers living in Abha city do use it in this way. From the results, the majority of the Qaḥṭāni speakers who use *lis* are middle-aged; old and young speakers use it less or not at all.

Figure 1: Comparison of the usage of *mā* and *lis* in verbal predication among Ṣasīri speakers by age.

Figure 2: Comparison of usage of *mā* and *lis* in verbal predication among Qaḥṭāni speakers by age.

In nominal predication in the Abha dialect, *lis* precedes free pronouns as well as attached pronouns, as explained above. However, in cases where *mā* substitutes *lis*, only free pronouns follow. There is also one instance in the data where the pronoun *ni* is attached to *mā*. Figures (3) and (4) show a comparison of the usage of *mā* and *lis* in nominal predication by Ṣasīri and Qaḥṭāni speakers, respectively. A similar picture to that for verbal predication can be seen, where

mā is used more than *lis* by most of the younger speakers in both the Qaḥṭāni and Ṣasīri sub-groups.

Also, the Qaḥṭāni speakers who use *lis* are mainly middle-aged. Probably, because of the cross dialect interaction and the levelling that the Abha dialect is undergoing, *lis* is used slightly more by middle-aged Qaḥṭāni speakers than by the older and younger generations of this sub-group.

Figure 3: Comparison of usage of *lis* and *mā* in nominal predication among Ṣasīri speakers by age.

Figure 4: Comparison of usage of *lis* and *mā* in nominal predication among Qaḥṭāni speakers by age.

Thus, overall, Figures (1) to (4) show that people in the age group 31–45 are levelling the dialect. The ʕasīri sub-group is starting to change *lis* to *mā* while the Qaḥṭāni sub-group is starting to use *lis* as well as *mā*. Moreover, the figures show that *mā* is clearly preferred over *lis* in both verbal and nominal predication by the younger generation of both the Qaḥṭāni and ʕasīri groups.

Mā substitutes *lim* in verbal predication

lim is also a feature of the ʕasīri dialect. *lim* is a negative particle which has been used by people originally from ʕAsīr and the Tihāmah. *lim* can be considered to derive from the Standard *lam*. *lim* precedes the imperfect verb in the same way as *lam* in Standard Arabic. It always indicates the past tense even though it occurs with the imperfect to express negation in the past:

In Standard Arabic:
lam yaʔtī ar-rajulu.
“The man did not come.”

In Abha dialect:
lim adrī bah
“I did not know about him.”

lim yrūḥ šughlah min ʔisbūʕ
“He has not gone to work for a week.”

lim ʔagūl lah
“I did not tell him.”

The data shows that the younger generation uses *lim* less than *mā*. When *mā* is used in verbal predication, it occurs before the perfect verb to negate past tense. The same change process as that seen in the substitution of *lis* by *mā* in verbal predication can be observed in Figures (5) and (6) below.

Figure 5: Comparison of usage of *lim* and *mā* in verbal predication among ʕasīri speakers by age.

Figure 6: Comparison of usage of *lim* and *mā* in verbal predication among Qahtāni speakers by age.

Mā substitutes lā in verbal predication

lā is mostly used before the imperfect verb to convey a negative command, and it is the only particle used for this function. Consider the following examples:

- lā tāxudīnah*
“Do not take it!”
- lā tugʕud ʕindik*
“Do not sit over there!”

It is also used before the perfect verb in the sense of praying, wishing or even cursing, as in:

- lā kithir xērik* “(lit.) May God not reward you.” *lā hantī*
- lā ant minnā wa lā hin minnik* “(Lit.) You are not from us and we are not from you.” *lā ʕigirtī*
- “(lit.) May God not allow any degradation to fall upon you.”
- lā tiʕibtū*
“I hope you have not got into any

- trouble.”
- Repetition of *lā* also occurs in nominal sentences, such as:
lā ʔakil wa lā ʕurb
“Neither food nor drink.”
mā ʕuft lā ʕalī w lā Ahmad “I have not seen Ali or Ahmad.”
utrukah, lāhū ʔillī bisāʕidnā “Leave him, he is not (the one
wa lā ʕay
who is) going to help us or anything.”
- lā ant minnā wa lā hin minnik*
“(lit.) May God not allow any disgrace to fall upon you.”
- Some speakers use *lā* before pronouns, as in:
lāni barūh ʕal-yōm
“I will not go today.”
- lā* is used in verbal predication in the imperfect case to swear or make an

declaration:

wallah in hin lā niʕrifah
“By God, we do not know him.”

Before the imperfect verb, *lā* can used, but with doubling, as in:

lā yismiʕūn wallā yistiʕixūn “They do not even listen or obey.”

The data analysis shows that the use of *lā* in verbal predication in the imperfect case is

falling into disuse among the younger generation of both ʕasīri and Qaḥṭāni groups. From Figures (7) and (8), it can be seen that this change is more apparent among ʕasīri speakers. Also, the ʕasīri older generation use *lā* before the imperfect verb more than older Qaḥṭāni speakers. Based on the sentence examples in the questionnaire that the participants were asked to complete, the uses of *lā* in the other contexts outlined above do not seem to be undergoing any change at present:

Figure 7: Comparison of usage of *lā* and *mā* in verbal predication (imperfect case) among ʕasīri speakers by age.

Figure 8: Variation of *lā* and *mā* in verbal predication (imperfect case) among Qaḥṭāni speakers by age.

Conclusion:

This study has aimed to illuminate the pattern of usage of some negators among speakers of the Abha dialect. Previous studies have discussed the disappearance of other linguistic features in this dialect, which could be the result of education, cross dialect interaction, and other social factors, (Al-Azraqi 1998, 2014). Koineization seems to be occurring in this dialect, leading to levelling and simplification of some features. The Abha dialect is currently rich, with four negative particles (Al-Azraqi 1998). However, this study has shown that the negator *mā* substitutes the other negators *lis*, *lim* and *lā* in some contexts in both verbal and non-verbal predications, particularly among the younger generation.

Most Arabic dialects have between two to three negators (Benmamoun, 1992; 2013), and these too seem to be under some threat. Murphy (2014) discusses the use of *mā* in Damascus Arabic where it seems to have an effective function in both verbal and non-verbal predications. Al-Shurafa (2006: 57) pinpoints how *mā* substitutes *mesh* in a special nominal structure in Palestinian Arabic and that this is leading to *mesh* falling into disuse. In the case of the Abha dialect, there are still four negators, but *mā* is obviously the dominant among them, as shown by the results.

This leads to the question of whether we are seeing a convergence in the Abha dialect or whether levelling is taking place that is leading to the elimination of previously stigmatized features. Gibson (2002: 29) has argued that the shift in dialect levelling in Tunisian Arabic is towards a variety that is regarded as more prestigious despite the assumption that MSA is the main influence on changing the Arabic dialects today. In the case of the Abha dialect, *lis* and *lim* are stigmatized features for Ṣasīri speakers and this might be the reason for their loss. Ṣasīri speakers are stereotyped by these negators, which can lead them to shift to using *mā* instead especially when they communicate with non-Ṣasīri speakers. It is evident from the data that the changes occurring in the

Ṣasīri group are more noticeable than those among the Qaḥṭāni speakers. Perhaps we could read this change as evidence of a shift towards a prestigious variety of Abha dialect used by the Qaḥṭāni group, but this does not seem to be the case. Qaḥṭāni speakers are also losing some features as well (Al-Azraqi, 1998; 2014). Therefore, I argue that both groups are levelling their own dialect towards a common variety which is evolving right now among the younger generation.

Although *lis* and *lim* have equivalents in Standard Arabic, namely *laysa* and *lam*, they are disappearing among younger speakers in Abha dialect. This means that the change happening in the studied variety is not towards the Standard Arabic. Interestingly, *mā* is appearing less often in verbal sentences in modern written Arabic. It is generally held that the wide use of *mā* in many dialects has been responsible for its decreased usage in modern written Arabic (Badawi et al., 2004: 463).

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التغير في استعمال أدوات النفي في لهجة مدينة أبها

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مستخلص تعتمد الدراسة الحالية على نهج كمي وذلك لفحص استعمال أدوات النفي الأربع المستخدمة في لهجة مدينة أبها (بجنوب غرب المملكة العربية السعودية). وهذه الأدوات هي: *ما*، *ليس*، *لم*، و *لا* - حيث يبدو أن أدوات النفي بهذه اللهجة في مرحلة تغير، فأصبح البعض منها يُستخدم بشكل أقل. وقد أظهرت دراسات سابقة أن فئة المتعلمين الشباب وراء عملية التبسيط في لهجة أبها. بينما تبين الدراسة الحالية أنه في حالة استخدام أدوات النفي، فهناك نوع من التبسيط يظهر بين فئة متوسطي العمر وأن هناك تغيرًا كبيرًا في استخدام هذه الأدوات بين المتحدثين الشباب. وتُظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن أداة النفي *ما* تحل مكان أدوات النفي الأخرى *ليس*، و *لم*، و *لا* في بعض الحالات. ويحدث هذا الإحلال في الجملة الأسمية والجملة الفعلية. وهذه التغيرات تحدث على ما يبدو بين المتحدثين العسيريين أكثر من المتحدثين القحطانيين. وقد يفسر هذا التغير على أنه يسير بمساق صورة راقية من اللهجة يتحدثها القحطانيون، ولكن لا يبدو أن هذا ما يحصل. فأدوات النفي يجري عليها التغير حتى بين المتحدثين القحطانيين ولكن في اتجاهات أخرى. وعموماً فنتائج هذه الدراسة توضح أن المتحدثين في كلتا المجموعتين يقومون بتسطيح لهجاتهم نحو صورة واحدة مشتركة. الكلمات المتاحة: العربية - أدوات النفي - التغير اللغوي - مدينة أبها.