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Cross-Dialectal Varieties in Phonological Processes of Damascene Syrian Arabic and Tihami Yemeni Arabic

Varietas Dialek Silang dalam Proses Fonologis Bahasa Arab Suriah Damaskus dan Yaman Tihemi

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Abstrak

Tulisan ini merupakan penelitian kontrastif/komparatif dari proses fonologis utama dalam dua varietas Bahasa Arab: Suriah Damaskus dan Yaman Tihami. Penelitian ini mencoba menentukan persamaan dan perbedaan dua varietas tersebut. Data dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan dari penutur asli bahasa Arab Suriah dan Yaman Tihami berusia 6 sampai 60 tahun, berjenis kelamin laki-laki dan perempuan, dan dari berbagai latar belakang pendidikan dan profesi. Data diambil dari rekaman pembicaraan sehari-hari berupa percakapan maupun argumen dari beberapa informan yang terpilih di ranah pribadi atau publik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua dialek memiliki kesamaan dalam semua proses fonologi. Keduanya menunjukkan fitur yang hampir sama untuk proses asimilasi, faringalisasi, imalah, sinkop, dan epentesis. Namun, kedua dialek tampaknya memiliki fitur yang sedikit berbeda untuk proses rangkap, glottalisation, harmoni vokal, pemendekan dan pemanjangan vokal, dan penghapusan konsonan. Kedua dialek tersebut menjadi contoh varietas dialek silang yang ditemukan dalam proses fonologis utama dalam Bahasa Arab.

Kata kunci: asimilasi, bahasa Arab, fonologi, Suriah, Yaman

Abstract

This paper is a comparative/contrastive investigation of the major phonological processes in two Arabic varieties: Damascene Syrian and Tihami Yemeni. It pinpoints the similarities and dissimilarities between those two varieties. The data in this study were collected from native speakers of Arabic Syria and Yemen Tihami aged 6 to 60 years, both males and females belonging to different professions and educational levels. The materials used in this study were the recordings of samples of various casual conversations, arguments and chatting of the selected informants from both groups both in public and private places. The result of the study shows that both dialects share all the phonological processes being investigated. They exhibit almost identical features as to the processes of assimilation, pharyngealisation, imalah, syncope, and epenthesis. However, the two dialects seem to have slightly different features as to the processes of gemination, glottalisation, vowel harmony, vowel shortening and lengthening and consonant deletion. The two dialects investigated here exemplify the cross-dialectal variety found in the major phonological processes in Arabic.

Keywords: Arabic, assimilation, phonology, Syrian, Yemeni

INTRODUCTION

Many Arabic varieties which got their importance from their dominating status have been investigated. Those varieties showed some phonological variations in vowel structure and consonantal production. The phonological variations can be obviously

seen from two dialects: Damascene Syrian Arabic (DSA) and Tihami Yemeni Arabic (TYA). Before phonological processes of two dialects are compared, the Standard Arabic will be briefly described.

Arabic has 28 consonantal phonemes (including two semi-vowels), expressed by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, and six vowel phonemes (three short vowels and three long ones). Arabic has many dialects but not all 28 phonemes are usually realized in these dialects. In spite of speech variability, communication is still possible between the speakers of those different dialects. Arabic regional dialects can be divided into different groups. Newman (2002:63) provides a slightly different classification namely Classical Arabic, Eastern Arabic, Western Arabic and Maltese. Syrian and Yemeni Arabic dialects belong to the same group, i.e. the Eastern Arabic dialects.

The difference of dialects can be seen from the phonological processes. The first one is syncope in which the dialect destroys weak 'monomoraic syllables' (Watson 2007) and epenthesis (Kiparsky 1997) in which all syllables require onset (Broselow 1979). The second difference is assimilation (Teifour 1997) which includes progressive and regressive, pausal glottalisation, imalah (Qafisheh 1983) and pharyngealisation (Al-Omar 2009; Qafisheh 1983). Furthermore, the difference can be seen from pausal phenomena (Watson and Asiri 2007) and vowel harmony (Versteegh 2006). Previous linguistic research has been conducted on Arabic dialects in Central Arabia (Ingham 1994) and Kuwait (Taqi 2010). Another paper specifically examined the change of /q/ in various Arabic dialects (Sawaie 1993), which is also useful for this research. Despite the various linguistic diversities, little has been done to examine the phonological aspects of Damascene Syrian and Tihami Yemeni. This paper is a comparative/contrastive investigation of the major phonological processes in two Arabic varieties: Damascene Syrian and Tihami Yemeni. It aims to pinpoint the similarities and dissimilarities between those two varieties.

METHOD

Data were taken from the natural conversations of two groups of people. The members of the first group are native speakers of Damascene Arabic whereas those of the second group are native speakers of Tihami Yemeni Arabic. The age of the informants ranged from 6 to 60 years old, both males and females belonging to different professions and educational levels. Furthermore, informants were chosen on the grounds that they have not any immigration experience or a long stay in another place other their own which may have modified their accent. Moreover, all informants suffered from no impairment in producing utterances.

The materials used in this study were the recordings of samples of various casual conversations, arguments and chatting of the selected informants from both groups both in public and private places. Fifteen recording sessions were conducted for the informants of each dialect with a total of 3 hours for each dialect. After that, the conversation was transliterated. The phonetic data was analysed using guidance from Ladefoged (2003) and further elaborated using a comparative/contrastive method

adapting the 'Moraic theory', which has first been used by Hayman (1984) and others, e.g. Hayes (1989) and Broselow, Chen, and Huffman (1997:47-82).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Assimilation and Geminataion

Assimilation which occurs within words falls into two sub-types. These are labeled as 'total assimilation' and 'partial assimilation'. In DSA, the total regressive assimilation can be shown from [ʔitTabbiha] which changes into [ʔiTTabbiha] 'to apply it', [fi:nanru:H] into [fi:narru:H] 'can we go'. Meanwhile, partial regressive assimilation can be found like [witzawwaj] which changes into [widzawwaj] 'got married', [sGa:r] into [zGa:r] 'they are small'. On contrary, in TYA total regressive assimilation can be seen from [tθibbit] changing into [θθibbit] 'to fix', [ttiSalna] into [ttiSanna] 'we phoned'. For partial assimilation, /t/ changes into /d/ like in [ʔitDakkar] which changes into [ʔidDakkar] 'I remember' and /b/ changes into /p/ like in [bTe:Hah] -> [pTe:Hah] 'falling down'. However, progressive assimilation seems to be rare in TYA like [diwwirlak] □ [diwwirrak] 'to find' which is not used in DSA (Qafisheh, 1983, 1992)

From the data, gemination clearly occurs. Ladefoged (2003: 250) pointed out that "long consonants (or vowels) which can be analyzed as double consonants (or vowels) are called geminates". In DSA medial gemination is [ʃammu] 'his uncle'; gemination resulting from consonant deletion is [minnun] 'from them'. In addition, all the consonants could be geminated either initially or medially such as [nniʃtiGil] 'to work' (initial gemination) and [yximmin] 'to guess'. In TYA, some examples of gemination resulting from consonant deletion are [mmawra:q] 'the documents', [mmasʔu:l] 'the official', and [mmiʃkilah] 'the problem. The use of gemination to replace the prefix /im/ which is commonly used in the Tihami dialect representing the definite article /al/. Others like [fi bbe:t] 'at home' and [ʔadduh] 'Abduh' (proper name) illustrates the use of geminated /d/ as a result of /b+d/, /d+t/, r+l/ which are assimilated resulting in gemination cases.

Pharyngealisation

The process of pharyngealisation seems to be a common phenomenon to both DSA and TYA. Emphatic consonants can occur with the non-low vowels and make them necessarily emphatic. This process can occur from the left to the right, and vice versa. The way in which this process occurs in DSA is clear in the examples like [Da:ʃit] 'was lost' which shows left to right pharyngealisation and [be:D] 'eggs' which shows right to left pharyngealisation. As Al-Omar (2009) stated, pharyngealisation was also found to occur from the left to the right and vice versa in Syrian Arabic

The emphatic consonants can occur in TYA when the vowel /a/ is lowered. This lowering happens to /a/ because its emphatic neighboring vowels are backed and velarised. For example, the /a/ in /GalaT/ (wrong) or /mzalaT/ (money) are pronounced differently from that of /Galat/ (became expensive) and /nzalat/ (walked down). In TYA, Emphasis spread from left to right is interrupted by some vowels and consonants which are called 'blockers' such as [SSaba:H] 'morning',

[mSiGe:r] ‘the younger’, and [mzalaT] ‘money’. Some emphasis can spread from right to left such as [GalaT] ‘wrong’, [ʔabyaD] ‘white’ and [ʔaxaT] ‘to draw a line’. Since the process of pharyngealisation proved to be similar in DSA and TYA, this leads us to argue that this process is not dialect-specific.

Epenthesis

Epenthesis is defined as the act of inserting a helping vowel within consonant clusters. Qafisheh (1983:43) says that “its occurrence does not affect the meaning and it is used only as an aid to pronunciation”. Epenthesis occurs in DSA between words when a word ends with a single consonant and is followed by a word beginning with double consonants, for example, [mn i hni:k] ‘from there’ and [hum i zGa:r] ‘they are young’. In addition, DSA also allows for epenthetic vowels to occur within the same word to separate the two consonant clusters. Al-Badarin (1999) attributes this phenomenon to the consonant cluster with rising sonority values that cause vowel epenthesis, for example [ribiʃ] ‘a quarter’, [waʔitʔ] ‘time’, and [kinit] ‘I was’. In TYA, epenthesis occurs between words when a word ends with a single consonant and is followed by a word beginning with double consonants. Of course, the inserted vowel occurs more frequently between the first and the second consonant. The examples of epenthesis between words are [ruH i stilim] ‘go to get’, and [Dall a ysu:qaHna] ‘continued pushing’. In many cases in the data, it appeared that the insertion can occur between the second and the third consonant particularly when the first and second consonants were geminates or there was a consonant deletion. This is clear in the example like [waraθt a Hmad ʔali] ‘followers of late Mohammad Ali. In addition, the epenthetic vowel occurs between the boundaries of the two words, for example, [Dall a ysu:qaHna] ‘continued pushing’. From here, it can be said that this phonological process is common to DSA and TYA.

Imalah

The term ‘Imalah’, according to Owens (2006), means ‘inclining’ which involves the change of the long /a:/ medially or finally into an ‘e:-like’ value in the contexts of an /i/ in a preceding or following syllable. The data showed that *imalah* is frequently found in DSA. One type of *imalah* in DSA is the change of the long /a:/ into an /i:/ or /e:/ value such as [ha:k] changing into [he:k] ‘like that’, and [hna:k] changing into [hni:k] ‘there’. These two examples show the process of bending the long /a:/ into either /i:/ or /e:/. Another *imalah* in DSA is the change of the diphthong /ei/ into /e:/ or /ei/ into /e:/, for example [halyidein] into [halyide:n] ‘these hands’.

In TYA, the first type of *imalah* in TYA is the change of the long /a:/ into an /e:/ value for example [yite:h] ‘to come’. The second type of *imalah* in TYA is the case of bending the short /a/ into an /i/. This is found in some Tihami districts (Abbs, Bait Al-Faqeeh and Al-Muxa) including [tʃeʔ] ‘to want’. The third type of *imalah* is the change of the diphthong /aw/ into a long vowel /o:/ and also the diphthong /ei/ into /e:/, for examples, [lyawm] into [lyo:m] ‘today’, [reita:h] into [re:ta:h] or [reita:h] into [re:ta:h] which means ‘you saw’. These cases of *imalah* occur medially or finally. The cases of *imalah* are almost similar in DSA and TYA. This proves that this process is deeply rooted in both varieties.

Glottalisation

Glottalisation is one of the major properties of DSA and this can be attributed to the common use of the glottal stop either as one of the stop consonants or as a substitution for the stop sound /q/. The process of replacement of /q/ into /ʔ/ occurs initially, medially, and finally as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Initial, Medial and Final Replacement of /q/ into /ʔ/ in DSA

no.	item	medial replacement			final replacement	
		meaning	Item	meaning	item	meaning
1	?ilit	I said	wa?it	Time	Ta:ri?	Tareq*1
2	?adi:m	Old	biyi?dir	I can	fi:?	wake up
3	?a:litli	she told me	birdi?aani	Orange	?innafa?	tunnel
4	?aʕad	Sat	?ilʕa?il	human mind	da?a:yi?	few minutes

It should be noted here that this case of glottalisation in DSA is used also as an example of sound replacement. Glottalisation also occurs in TYA and this can be attributed to the common use of the glottal stop either as one of the plosive consonants or as a substitution for another sound like /ʕ/. The most frequent case of glottalisation found in TYA is the use of the glottal stop /ʔ/ instead of the Arabic consonant /ʕ/. This is exemplified in the utterances listed in table 2 below.

Table 2. Initial, Medial and Final Replacement of /ʕ/ with /ʔ/ in TYA

initial replacement			medial replacement		final replacement	
no.	Item	meaning	Item	meaning	item	Meaning
1	?a:d	Still	mi?taz	Mutaz	mamnu:ʔ	Forbidden
2	?ale:kun	on you	wba?de:n	Then	yidfa?	to pay
3	?a:Sim	Asim*	ti?ni	you mean		

Glottalisation is also used in TYA before the pause in connected speech and is called 'pausal glottalisation'.

In TYA, *imalah* is used before glottalisation. This can be seen from [minniha?] into [minnihi?] 'of that', [masawwa?] into [masawwe?] 'what he did', [kullana?] into [kullani?] 'everyone. From here, it can be said that the process of glottalisation is commonly used in TYA and DSA but it is used differently in the two varieties as it is rather restricted to the case of substituting /ʔ/ for /q/ in DSA.

Vowel Harmony

Goitein (1960:30) defines 'vowel harmony' as "a type of long-distance phonological process or the phonetic influence of one vowel on another". To put simply, vowel harmony is the influence of one vowel on another. Versteegh (2006) points out that the Eastern Arabic dialects of the pre-Islamic period exhibit some form of vowel harmony. To illustrate, the phonetic quality of /I/ is harmonized in the Eastern dialects but not in the Western dialects, as in words such as /tuktub/ 'she writes' and /tuTbux/ 'she cooks'.

The data showed one type of vowel harmony in DSA. This occurs in words with a 'kasra' in the position of the second vowel. Such words receive the change of raising the vowel of the initial syllable into /i/. This can be seen from [ribiʃ] 'a quarter', [kinit] 'I was', [limhim] 'importantly', [ʔirnih] 'place', [Hilwih] 'pretty' and [niHki] 'to talk'. The first four examples have the back vowel /u/ in their underlying form while the rest of examples have /a/ in the initial syllable of each of the two words. Both of them, i.e. /u/ and /a/ are changed into /i/ in the output pronunciation. It is the /i/ which occurs in the second syllable in the words affects its preceding counterparts to become another /i/ proving a case of vowel harmony in DSA.

From the data, the (CACIC) syllabification form for verbs with a 'kasra' in the position of the second vowel in TYA receives the change of raising the first vowel to /i/ when they are consonant initial /ʔarif/ (knew) which becomes /ʔirif/ (knew) and /labis/ (wore) which becomes /libis/ (wore). If the root vowel has the phonetic quality of being round (e.g. /u/), then, the quality of roundness spreads to other high vowels (e.g. /i/) in the suffix. The examples of vowel harmony in the imperfect verbs in TYA are [yidrus] into [yudrus] 'he studies', [yiktub] into [Yuktub] 'he writes' and [yittiSilluh] into [yuttuSulluh] 'he calls him'. In these examples, the root vowel /u/ is round while the prefix vowel /i/ is a close/high unrounded vowel. Here, the phonetic quality of roundness spreads to the prefix vowel in a regressive, right-to-left manner resulting in the process of vowel harmony.

Vowel harmony, however, is not limited to the verbs only in TYA. It is also observable in the nouns and adjectives, such as [ʔundukun] (adj) 'with you', and [munnuh] (adj) 'of them'. The same rules mentioned above concerning the verbs are also applicable to nouns and adjectives. To sum up, the discussion above shows that the cases in which vowel harmony occurs in DSA and TYA are different. Some cases of vowel harmony in TYA prove some differences between TYA and DSA.

Syncope

Syncope or vowel deletion occurs in DSA. It is commonly restricted to the unstressed, high vowels in initial monomoraic syllables when followed by a stressed bimoraic syllable with some limited cases for syncope that occur in the middle of the word. Syncope occurs initially like [mine:n] into [mne:n] 'where from', [tafa:jaʔit] into [tfa:jaʔit] 'I was surprised'. In the word [mine:n], for example, syncope occurs in the underlined syllable as this is an initial monomoraic unstressed syllable. This holds true to other cases of syncope. A limited number of cases in which syncope occurs in the middle of words are also found in DSA. The examples of medial syncope are [sala:matak] changing into [sala:mtak] 'may you be safe' and [mwa:faʔatu] changing into [mwa:faʔtu] 'his agreement'.

Syncope occurs frequently in TYA. It is commonly restricted to the unstressed, high vowels in initial monomoraic syllables when followed by a stressed bimoraic syllable with some limited cases for syncope that occurs in the middle of the word. The examples of initial syncope are [ma□a:ri:ʃ] changing into [m□a:ri:ʃ] 'projects', [Zuru:fak] into [Zru:fak] 'circumstances'. The underlined syllable in the word /

ma□a:ri:ç/ (projects) is an initial monomoraic unstressed syllable. That is why, the /a/ is deleted from this syllable in the second column as a sign of syncope.

Consonant Deletion

Consonant deletion is another intrinsic property of DSA. The data showed that many cases of consonant deletion can be found in DSA. Some of those cases are presented here. The first case is the deletion of the /ʔ/ after the prefix /wa/ or after /t/ as in [waʔallah] which changes into [wallah] 'by God', [waʔalHamdu] into [walHamdu] 'praise be to'. The /ʔ/ is also deleted if it is followed by /w/ as in /çandu wla:d/, originally /çandu ʔawla:d/ 'he has sons'. Interestingly, the above-mentioned case is found in both DSA and TYA.

Other consonant deletions in DSA are the deletion of /l/ after /ç/, and the deletion of the /f/ at the end of certain words especially those ending with a two-consonant cluster. The examples are [wnuS] from [wnuSf] 'and a half' and [ʔilmaSari:] from [ʔilmaSari:f] 'money'. Similar cases of consonant deletion in DSA have also been found by Teifour (1997).

In TYA, the consonant deletion can occur initially, medially and across the word boundaries. The most frequent deletion is the glottal /h/, for example [tiyya lkilmah] from [tiyyah lkilmah] 'this word' and [mʔa:ya lak] from [mʔa:yah lak] 'for you'. The second and probably the most frequent type of consonant deletion in TYA is that of /ʔ/. This process occurs within words and across word boundaries in connected speech. Within words, deletion occurs initially and medially. The deletion of /ʔ/ occurs when /ʔ/ serves as the onset as well as the nucleus of the syllable. The segment that remains after the deletion is only the coda of the syllable as shown in figure 1.

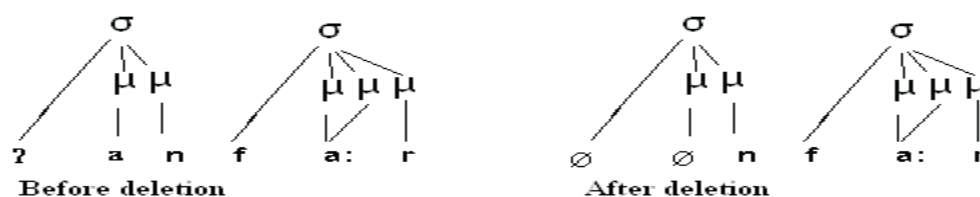


Figure 1. The Deletion Process in Tihemi Yemeni Arabic

As shown above, the first syllable of the word /ʔanfa:r/ (guys) undergoes the change, i.e. deletion and becomes /nfa:r/. The onset and nucleus of the first syllable are marked with /∅/ to indicate that they are deleted and what remains is only the coda, i.e. the consonant /n/. Meanwhile the medial deletion of /ʔ/ occurs when /ʔ/ follows the /a/ or /i/ in the middle of the word. Examples are [tiyyah laya:m] from [tiyyah lʔaya:m] 'nowadays' and [Yabni] from [yaʔibni] 'to build'. Furthermore, the deletion of /ʔ/ across word boundaries often occurs in the second word rather than in the first one. Deletion also occurs when /ʔ/ is the onset of the syllable and is followed by a short vowel which stands as the nucleus of the syllable. After deletion, the onset and the nucleus disappear, for example [fi mHisi lli] from [fi mHisi ʔilli] 'in the well'. Three other cases of consonant deletion occurred less often in TYA. The first

of which is the bilabial nasal consonant /m/ deletion when it precedes the emphatic /H/ sound at the beginning of the word as in the name /mHammad/ which is pronounced as /Hammad/ without /m/. The second case is that of the voiceless fricative /f/ deletion when it is preceded by the emphatic sound /S/ in words such /wunuSf/ (and a half) which is produced as /wunuS/. The reason for this deletion seems to be the effect of the emphatic sound /S/ which spreads forwardly causing the loss of the voiceless fricative /f/.

Vowel Lengthening

In DSA, syllables tend to be lengthened and short vowels are frequently getting longer durations. The study of those durations is in need of some detailed investigation using many experimental utilities. Here, we are just concerned with describing how this process occurs in DSA. Our data showed that short vowels receive a remarkable lengthening in the speech of Damascenes. The process of lengthening usually occurs medially, such as [Sura laʔilu] which changes into [Sura la: ʔilu] 'a photo for him', [laHa:li] into [la:Ha:li] 'addressing myself'.

In Classical Arabic, the coda of the syllable in which this process occurs is occupied by a glottal stop. In TYA, the glottal stop witnesses deletion and compensatory lengthening for the short vowel preceding it. The vowel lengthening in TYA includes [raʔs] changing into [ra:s] 'head', and [faʔs] into [fa:s] 'axe'. As it is clear in the examples, the words (raʔs and faʔs) from Classical Arabic include the glottal stop in the coda of all those monosyllabic words. The words in the second column include the long vowels used as compensatory vowels after the disappearance of the glottal stops in the first column. In short, vowels are lengthened in both DSA and TYA but the rules which govern the occurrence of this process in DSA and TYA are different. Vowel lengthening is found to be clearer in TYA than in DSA.

Vowel Shortening

Vowel shortening cannot be appropriately described without the use of some laboratory facilities, something which was not available to us the moment we did this study. Vowel shortening seemed to be rare in DSA. It was found to be restricted to some imperfect verbs when some suffixes are added to them. The examples are [Sa:r] which changes into [Sarlu] 'happened to him' and [ra:H] which changes into [raHlu] 'he went to him'. According to the examples, the imperfect verbs in the first column have long /a:/ while this changed into its short counterpart /a/ in the second column. This proves the occurrence of the process of vowel shortening.

The data showed that the durations of the vowels in the syllable structures in TYA are affected by the following factors. First, the vowel duration is influenced by the character of the segment which follows the vowel whether it is voiced or not. The voiceless consonants shorten the duration of the preceding vowels while the voiced ones prolong them. For example, the duration of the long vowel /a:/ in the word /na:qah/ (she-camel) (which includes a voiceless stop after a long vowel) and the word /na:r/ (fire) are different because of the effect of the voiceless stop consonant /q/ in the former and the existence of the glide voiced consonant /r/ in the latter. Second, the position of the syllable within the word also changes the duration of the

vowel: the final position of syllables has the longest duration, particularly if it occurs before a pause. The long vowel /e:/ in the word /ʔale:h/ (on it), which occurs in the final syllable of the word, is longer than the same long vowel in another word which is /ke:fak/ (how are you). Third, the utterance speed also stands as another factor that affects the duration of vowel in TYA. The duration of the slow word /ba:k/ (went), for example, seems to be longer than the duration of the same word in rapid speech. Fourth, stressed syllables in TYA are longer than the unstressed ones. This confirms the influence of stress on the process of shortening and lengthening of the vowels in TYA.

Vowels are shortened in both DSA and TYA but the context where these occur are different in the two varieties. This shows that these two dialects maybe dissimilar as far as vowel shortening were concerned.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both DSA and TYA seem to share all the phonological processes being questioned in this paper but some of those processes proved some variation in their occurrence in the two dialects. As far as assimilation is concerned, DSA and TYA proved to share the existence of regressive assimilation which had two types, total and partial assimilation. Progressive assimilation proved to be rare in TYA and it does not seem to be used in DSA. The process of pharyngealisation seems to be a common phenomenon to both DSA and TYA. This study, however, did not cover all aspects of phonological processes in both dialects. Further studies are required to identify the linguistic phenomena in order to understand the processes of language change within a certain period of time in the past.

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