

THE USE OF DIALECTAL *TANWĪN* IN QATARI ARABIC

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ABSTRACT • The aim of the present paper is to analyse the use of dialectal *tanwīn* in the Arabic dialect of Qatar. Section (1) provides a brief description of the linguistic situation in Qatar and attempts a definition for the general label “Qatari Arabic”. Section (2) examines the function and contexts of use of the *tanwīn* in other dialects of the area: dialects are taken into account for which material is available in the current literature, and that can be related to Qatari Arabic in terms of either common origin or geographical proximity. Section (3) describes the use of dialectal *tanwīn* in Qatari Arabic by presenting original examples drawn from oral interviews gathered on the field with Qatari natives: these examples cover a variety of syntactic contexts, all involving an indefinite nominal (namely a noun or an active participle) followed by some modifying element (an adjective, an adverb, a direct object or a prepositional phrase). Some examples are also provided concerning the use of dialectal *tanwīn* in set phrases and idiomatic expressions. Finally, section (4) tries to assess the position of Qatari Arabic within the frame of the other peninsular dialects with regard to the use of *tanwīn*, and gives some insight on the evolution of this phenomenon over time.

KEYWORDS • Arabic dialectology, Gulf dialects, Indefiniteness, Qatar, Tanwīn

1. The linguistic situation in Qatar

The tiny peninsula of Qatar, which stretches out in the waters of the Persian Gulf from mainland Arabia, is home to the Emirate of Qatar, since 1971 an independent sovereign state whose territory officially amounts to 11,586 squared kilometres. For an area so small, the country hosts considerable linguistic diversity, in terms of different dialectal variants of Arabic. This situation is the result of hundreds of years of population movements within the Arabian Peninsula (let alone between the two shores of the Gulf), which eventually brought together in the same area groups of different ethnic origin, each one characterized by its own linguistic peculiarities. If interrogated on the subject, any Qatari native will unhesitatingly identify the main linguistic split within the country as the Bedouin/sedentary divide (*badū* and *ḥaṣar*¹ respectively being the Arabic terms employed). Many sub-divisions exist within the *badū* (according to which tribe a speaker belongs to), while the sedentary dialects are thought to be more or less uniform (although minor differences exist within this latter group, too). It must be noted here that the two labels *badū* and *ḥaṣar* are derived directly from the metalinguistic discourse of the Qataris themselves, and are somehow in conflict with the use that Arabic dialectologists have traditionally made of the same two categories (according to which all the dialects currently spoken in Qatar would be described as Bedouin, due to inherent linguistic features such as syllabic structure, realization of certain phonemes, and so on). This discrepancy

¹ I have here adopted a transcription that is consistent with the pronunciation of my informants, who systematically have [z] as a reflex of Old Arabic [d] (ض), as is the case with most dialects of the area.

can be readily explained by looking at the history of the region and its inhabitants: it is a well-known fact that a good portion of what is now the population of the Gulf Coast originally descended from central Arabian Bedouin tribes, who moved from Najd to the coastal region in periodical waves of migration. The last of these migratory pulses occurred between two to three centuries ago: over time, the dialects spoken by these once nomadic populations underwent a considerable process of linguistic reduction and simplification (Ingham 1982: 33), and eventually gave origin to those varieties which are now collectively referred to as “Gulf Arabic” (Holes 2007)².

As far as Qatar is concerned, some of those who came from central Arabia permanently settled along the coasts of the peninsula and eventually became sedentarized, while others maintained a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life in the inner deserts (Al-Amadidhi 1985: 36)³: this state of things remained unchanged until a few decades ago, giving rise to the sedentary/nomadic split mentioned above, which was – and partly still is – as evident in language as it was in lifestyle. T. M. Johnstone, in his classical study of the dialects of the Gulf Coast, writing about Qatari Arabic reported that that spoken in the city of Doha “is a dialect which, more than any other in the area, resembles the ṢAnazi [viz. Najdi] dialects in phonology and vocabulary, as well as in certain morphological features of importance” (Johnstone 1967: xxix, transcription adapted). This is the same dialect the present article is centred on, which is to say the dialect spoken by that part of the population of Qatar which refers to itself as “sedentary”⁴; in the following pages I will analyse the use of one of those conservative morphological features listed by Johnstone for this dialect, namely the dialectal *tanwīn*⁵.

2. Dialectal *tanwīn* in other peninsular dialects

The *Tanwīn*, in Classical as well as Modern Standard Arabic, is a morphological affix whose main function is to mark case (via three different allomorphs: *-un* for nominative, *-an* for accusative, *-in* for genitive), mostly (but not exclusively) on indefinite nouns. Its dialectal counterpart is generally considered to be somehow related to it, be this relation one of direct descent or the result of parallel evolution from a common ancestor. There are, however, remarkable differences that set dialectal *tanwīn* clearly apart from its Classical cognate: to name

² The idea that all the dialects spoken today from Kuwait to coastal Oman can be considered a fundamentally homogeneous linguistic entity is widely accepted by the speakers themselves, and many textbooks of “Gulf Arabic” are now available to the student willing to learn this variety (Qafisheh 1975, Holes 1990, Feghali 2008). It has to be noted, however, that some of the dialects which were supposedly spoken by the sedentary population of the Gulf coast prior to the arrival of the Najdi immigrants still survive today in certain areas of the Arabian peninsula: on this point see – among many other works on the subject by the same author – Holes (2006).

³ Although at least part of the coastal population of Qatar came by sea from other areas of the Gulf. On this point, cf. Johnstone & Wilkinson (1960: 444): “The tribes of Qatar appear to have originated from two sources: from the Arabian Peninsula via al-Ḥasā province, or by settlement along the coast from different parts of the Gulf. On the whole, the former are the badū whose *dīras* cover enormous areas in and along the borders of the Rub’ al-Khali [...]. Amongst the settled tribes it is hard to determine which are badū tribes that have settled, and which come from overseas”.

⁴ This includes tribes such as the Al-Muhānnada, the Āl Bū Kuwāra, the Sāda, the Čibisa, and so forth. I am not aware of any study dealing specifically with the dialects spoken by the Bedouin tribes which have branches in Qatar (as for instance the Hawāğīr, the Manāšīr and the Naṣīm), except for Ingham (1986) which focuses the dialect of the Āl Murra.

⁵ I adopt here the definition of “dialectal *tanwīn*” proposed by Holes (2004: 89), to distinguish *tanwīn* in Qatari Arabic from Classical *tanwīn* (see section 2 below).

but the most relevant⁶, in all dialects in which it appears the *tanwīn* is restricted in its allomorphy, with only one possible realization⁷. This also means that there is no Arabic dialect, among those hitherto known to us, where *tanwīn* works as a case marker.

Extremely rare outside the boundaries of the Peninsula, *tanwīn* is on the contrary a fairly common feature in the dialects of Central and Eastern Arabia (though, as we will see, its frequency and contexts of use vary depending on the dialect). As far as Qatari Arabic is concerned, Johnstone (1967: 117, transcription adapted) merely notes how the *tanwīn* “occurs frequently in ordinary conversational style, though it is not such an important feature of the noun as in central Najdi dialects”, without going into deeper details about its semantic values or syntactic functioning⁸. Accurate descriptions of the use of dialectal *tanwīn* exist, on the other hand, for some neighbouring or closely related dialects such as those of Bahrain (Holes 1983 and Holes 2004, for both Sunni and Shiite dialects) and Central and Southern Najd (Ingham 1994 and Ingham 2010)⁹. In all these dialects *tanwīn* normally occurs on an indefinite nominal¹⁰ followed by a non-possessive modifier, its main function being that of a linker, a juncture feature which binds together closely related syntactic elements; as such, *tanwīn* can also be regarded as a signal of non-pausality, or non-completion of a syntactic string¹¹. The nature of the elements it links together, which is to say the nominal and its modifier, as well as the regularity of the occurrence of *tanwīn*, varies from dialect to dialect: in the Bedouin dialects of central and southern Najd it can occur on nouns when followed by adjectives, prepositional phrases and modifying clauses¹², or on active participles followed by a non-suffix object, a subject, an adverb or a prepositional phrase. In the dialects of southern Najd, even the adjective may sometimes show nunation when modifying a noun marked with *tanwīn*. The dialects of the Gulf Coast, such as the Sunni (Bedouin) and Shiite (sedentary) dialects of Bahrain, on the other hand, make a more limited use of *tanwīn*: it can be found on the noun when followed by an

⁶ See Holes (2011: 81) and Durand (2008) for a more systematic analysis.

⁷ This may vary from one dialect to another, but inside the Arabian Peninsula the commonest form is undoubtedly *-in*. Adverbials with an *-an* ending, which are common in almost every Arabic dialect, are probably to be considered loans from Standard Arabic, and will not be dealt with here.

⁸ Apart from Johnstone’s book, scientific studies on Qatari Arabic are virtually non-existent, if not in the form of a number of unpublished MA and Ph.D. thesis; none of these works, however, deal with the issue of dialectal *tanwīn*, and the only other reference to this morphological feature that I am aware of is a brief note in Al-Easa (1993; see section 3.1 below).

⁹ Remarks about the use of *tanwīn* can also be found in the descriptions of other dialects of the area which can be of some comparative interest: see Johnstone (1961) for the dialect of the Dawāsir and the ṢAǧmān and Ingham (1986) for the dialect of the Āl Murra. Regrettably, Prochazka makes no mention of this phenomenon for the dialects of al-Ḥasa and al-Qaṭīf (cf. Prochazka 1988 and Prochazka 1990 respectively). More examples of the use of *tanwīn* in the Shiite dialect of Bahrain are to be found in al-Tajir (1982: 94), though not accompanied by any detailed description of its value and function.

¹⁰ Although in the dialects of the Āl Murra and of the Dawāsir even proper names can show nunation. It is also true, as Ingham (2010:82) points out, that active participles can take *tanwīn* even if, being mainly verbal in function, they would not be expected to participate in any definiteness/indefiniteness contrast.

¹¹ It is indeed true that *tanwīn* almost exclusively occurs in non-pausal position, though again exceptions to this rule can be found in the dialects of southern Najd, i.e. those of the Āl Murra and the ṢAǧmān.

¹² What Ingham refers to as embedded sentences, i.e. relative clauses not introduced by a pronoun (which is always the case in Arabic when the antecedent is indefinite); cf. the following example (Ingham 2010: 84, transcription adapted): *min ṣind-ih dilūl-in y-ǧība-ha b-hāda u-y-nawwux-ha?* “who has a camel which he can bring and hobble here?”.

adjective, but it appears to be extremely rare in the Sunni dialects¹³. Even in the Shiite dialects, however, nouns bearing *tanwīn* followed by other kinds of modifiers are uncommon.

Whatever the dialect taken into account, it has to be kept in mind that dialectal *tanwīn* is always to a large extent an optional feature (much more so in the dialects of the Gulf Coast), therefore passible of deletion or insertion because of stylistic and prosodic factors. For instance, Holes (2004: 91) notes how *tanwīn* is particularly frequent on nouns followed by the adjective *zēn* “good”, and that it regularly appears on the word *kill-in* “everyone” in the Sunni dialect of Bahrain. Ingham (1994: 49) reports the same regularity for central Najd, which is shared by the word *ḥad-in* “anyone”. Johnstone (1961: 266) observes how nunation is particularly common on the words *ḥad-in* and *šayy-in* “something” in the dialect of the Dawāsir. We will see how these same examples occur in our texts as well. In general, in every dialect in which it appears, the incidence of dialectal *tanwīn* appears to be considerably higher in frozen forms and fixed expressions such as riddles, idioms and proverbs, as well as in poetry¹⁴.

3. The incidence of dialectal *tanwīn* in Qatari Arabic

The examples I present in this paragraph come mainly from five hours of recorded interviews with four Qatari speakers (one woman and three men) which were recorded in Doha and Madinat ash-Shamal (on the northern coast of Qatar) in the mid-eighties by the employees of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Qatar¹⁵. These four speakers, back at the time, were already in their late sixties, meaning that they were born roughly around 1920, long before formal education was introduced in Qatar¹⁶; the dialect they use is therefore, under many aspects, markedly different from the speech of the younger generations, which shows evident signs of standardization and koineization. Although I myself have gathered more than twenty hours of recordings during my fieldwork period in Qatar in 2013, in fact, this material shows almost no trace of dialectal *tanwīn*. The reasons for this discrepancy are many, and will be dealt with in detail in the last paragraph of this article. In the present section I will analyse separately each of the syntactic environments in which dialectal *tanwīn* can be found in Qatari Arabic.

3.1. Indefinite noun followed by adjective

This is by far the most common context in which dialectal *tanwīn* occurs in Qatari Arabic, similarly to what happens in the dialects of Bahrain described by Holes; in the same way, too, the most common adjective to follow a noun bearing *tanwīn* is *zēn* “good”, although occasionally other adjectives occur.

¹³ From all his vast data base of oral texts from Bahrain, Holes reports only a very few examples of this kind in the speech of an ṢArab Sunni speaker (Holes 2004: 92). This is consistent with Johnstone (1967: 103), who states that he found no occurrences of *tanwīn* in the dialect of Manama.

¹⁴ Holes (2004: 96), for instance, notes how examples of active participles followed by a non-suffix object bearing *tanwīn* are to be found in Bahraini traditional proverbs and poems, but are never encountered in the casual conversations of the speakers from that same area. Analogous considerations can be found in almost every work where dialectal *tanwīn* is mentioned: see Feghali (2008: 16), Holes (2008: 81) and Johnstone (1961: 264).

¹⁵ I am deeply thankful to Doctor Hamad Al-Muhannadi, head of the Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Qatar, for sharing these recordings with me.

¹⁶ This happened in 1952 for males and in 1955 for females (Al-Amadidhi 1985: 46).

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- (1) *šēl-t-in* *zēn-a*
poem-F.SG-IND good-F.SG
“a good poem”
- (2) *gašīd-t-in* *zēn-a*
poem-F.SG-IND good-F.SG
“a good poem”
- (3) *byūt-in* *zēn-a*
verse.PL-IND good-F.SG
“(some) good verses”
- (4) *šarē-na* *məḥməl* *šǧīr* *u-xadam-na-h*
buy-1PL.PAST ship little CONJ=use-1PL.PAST=PRON.3M.SG
- xadm-at-in* *zēn-a*
use-F.SG-IND good-F.SG
“we bought a little ship and we put it to good use” (lit. “we used it a good use”)
- (5) *ʔamma* *ʔalli* *yi-sāʔd-əh* *ʔl-ḥazz*
PREP PRON.REL 3M.SG.PRES-help=PRON.3M.SG ART=luck
- yaʔnī* *yi-ttafaǧ* *l-əh*
3M.SG.PRES-mean 3M.SG.PRES-find PREP=PRON.3M.SG
- bə-ḥāšbāʔ* *u-yi-bīʔ* *bīʔ-at-in* *zēn-a*
PREP=stone.PL CONJ=3M.SG-sell sell-F.SG-IND good-F.SG
- hū* *yi-stafzal*
PRON.3M.SG 3M.SG.PRES-deserve
“as for he who helps him luck, I mean, (he) who finds some pearls and makes a good bargain (lit. “sells a good sell”), he deserves (it)”
- (6) *ʔat-ō-k* *šī* *t-ʔīš* *ʔat-ō-k*
give-3PL.PAST=PRON.2M.SG something 2M.SG.PRES-live
- gall-at-ēn* *tamar* *ʔaʔ-ō-k* *ya-ʔnī* *šayy-in¹⁷*
gall-F.SG-DUAL date.COLL 3M.SG.PRES-mean thing-IND
- basīʔ*
simple
“they gave you something to survive, they gave you two *galla*¹⁸ of dates, I mean, they gave you something simple”

Although examples such as the above are not uncommon in the speech of the older generations, it has to be noted that the vast majority of indefinite nouns followed by adjectives show no sign of dialectal *tanwīn*. We already insisted on the fact that this feature always appears

¹⁷ The word *šayy-in* is one of the two occurrences of dialectal *tanwīn* that Johnstone (1967: 117) lists in his chapter on the morphology of Qatari Arabic: unfortunately the word is presented out of context, making impossible to determine by which kind of modifier it was followed.

¹⁸ A 56 lb sack of dates; cf. Holes (2004: 94), where the same word appears in the form *ǧilla*.

to be optional: on this point, Al-Easa (1993: 35, transcription adapted) interestingly comments that “when *-in* in Qatari Arabic is used as in *ḥadī rayyāl-in ṭayyib* “this is a good man”, it expresses an idea other than indefiniteness, namely, emphasis on the quality of goodness. Therefore, this morpheme has a semantic function rather than a syntactic and a morphological one”. This consideration apparently holds for all the examples presented here: in (1-3) the speaker is insisting on the good quality of the poems he just recited; in (4) he is explaining to the interviewer how he managed to preserve the good state of his trade when he became captain of a ship, even if he eventually sold the one who belonged to his father to buy a smaller one; in (5) he is pointing out the exceptionality of a lucky event, along with the idea that luck “helps those who help themselves”; finally, in (6), the speaker is stressing the meagre conditions in which the traditional Qatari pearl-divers used to live in the past. In general, many of these sentences, although they cannot be regarded as fixed or idiomatic (occurring, as they do, in a variety of context and in the flow of normal conversation), share the same “flavour of a ready-made piece of home-spun wisdom” which Holes (2004: 91) associates with the appearance of dialectal *tanwīn* in Bahraini dialects¹⁹.

3.2. Indefinite noun followed by prepositional phrase

In Qatari Arabic it is possible for an indefinite noun bearing *tanwīn* to be followed by a prepositional phrase, as the examples below show. Ingham (2010: 82) writes that in the dialects of Najd this is more common when the preposition involved is *li-* “for”, as in (7), though in Najdi as well as in Qatari Arabic other prepositions can occur (8-9)²⁰.

- (7) *kəll mā* *ṣadd-in* *l-əh* *hū*
 every time turn-IND PREP=PRON.3M.SG PRON.3M.SG
- xalf-əh*
 replace.3M.SG.PAST=PRON.3M.SG
 “every time he turned away (lit. “there was a turn for him”) he took his place”
- (8) *ḥada* *ḥagg* *ṣāḥb-in* *wiyyā-h*
 PRON.DEM PREP friend-IND PREP=PRON.3M.SG
 “this belongs to a friend with him”
- (9) *u-hī* *fi* *l-ḥəǧra* *maḡḥūm-in*
 CONJ=PRON.3F.SG PREP ART=room closed-IND
- ʕalē-ha* *bi-gfal*
 PREP=PRON.3F.SG PREP=lock
 “and she was in the room, (she was) locked inside (lit. “closed against her with a lock”)

3.3. Active participle

¹⁹ The fact that some kind of stylistic concern is present on the part of the speaker is manifest in (4) and (5) where a formal construction is adopted which is similar to the *maʕṣūl mutlaq* of Classical Arabic.

²⁰ Cf. also the second example given in Johnstone (1967: 114, transcription adapted): *nās-im min āl ṣabāḥ*, “people of the Āl Ṣabāḥ” (the *nūn* of the *tanwīn* is here assimilated to the following nasal consonant). Johnstone (1961: 265) also reports that in the dialect of the Dawāsir the commonest context for dialectal *tanwīn* to occur in is before the preposition *min* “from”, while I found no such occurrence in my texts.

Active participles can show nunation when followed by a non-suffix direct object²¹ (10) or by an adverbial modifier (11). These uses, however, appear to occur rarely, as the examples presented here were the only two found in the texts. No occurrences of active participles followed by prepositional phrases were recorded.

- (10) *haḍāk* *bdwī* *u-ḥāṭṭ-in*
 PRON.DEM Bedouin CONJ=put.PART-IND
- mar-t-əh* *u-ḥāṭṭ-in* *ṣyāl-əh*
 wife-F.SG.=PRON.3M.SG child.PLUR=PRON.3M.SG
- ṣala* *lə-bṣīr*
 PREP ART=camel
 “that one (is) a Bedouin and puts his wife and puts his children on the camel”
- (11) *mā* *fī* *yaṣnī* *ṭarīḡ*
 NEG EXS 3M.SG.PRES-mean road
- rāyḥ-in* *raṣsan* *sīdā*
 go.PART-IND directly straight
 “there is no road, I mean, going directly straight”

3.3. Frozen forms, set phrases and idioms

As we have seen in section 2, in other Arabian dialects dialectal *tanwīn* is often encountered in specific lexical contexts; the same seems to apply for Qatari Arabic, where it is possible to find nunation associated with the words listed above - namely *ṣayy-in* “something” (6, above), *kill-in* “everyone” (12) and *ḥad-in* “someone” (13)²² - although most of the time these occur without *tanwīn*.

- (12) *kall-in* *yi-rūḥ* *ṣala* *manḥiḡ-əh*
 everyone 3M.SG.PRES-go PREP manner=PRON.3M.SG
 “everyone goes his own way “
- (13) *u-ṣa-bbī* *nuwāṭīr* *yi-ḡṣad-ūn* *ṣand*
 CONJ=1SG.PRES-want guard.PLUR 3M.PRES-stay-PLUR PREP
- əl-ḥadū* *lə-ḥadd-in* *yi-yī*
 ART=present PREP=someone-IND 3M.SG.PRES-come
 “and I want some guards to watch over the present for someone who may come” (lit. “and I want guards to stay next to the present for someone (who) comes”)

There exist, then, set phrases where *tanwīn* is apparently used to establish a contrast of some kind between two or more elements. Consider (14a) and (15a) below, and compare it with

²¹ An *-in(n)-* infix between an active participle with verbal function and the suffix pronoun which serves as its object appears, on the contrary, in certain (mostly sedentary) dialects of coastal Arabia, which appear to be unevenly scattered from Bahrain all the way down to southern Yemen. See Holes (2011), and cf. also note 2 above.

²² The nunated form *maḥḥad-in* “no one”, which is often heard in Qatari traditional poems, apparently never occurs in plain colloquial style.

the analogous examples in (14b) and (15b) which Holes (2004: 90) reports for the Shiite dialects of Bahrain²³.

- (14a) *yōm-in* *a-šīd* *lə-hum* *ṭwēr* *yōm-in*
 day-IND 1SG.PRES-hunt PREP=PRON.3PL bird.DIM
- a-šīd lə-hum yarbūṣ yōm-in a-šīd lə-hum*
 gerbil
- u-ḷa-šwiy-əh* *u-ḷaṣṭī-hum*
 CONJ=1SG.PRES-roast-PRON.3M.SG CONJ=1SG.PRES-give-PRON.3PL
- īyyā-h*
 PREP=PRON.3M.SG
 “one day I hunt for them a little bird, one day I hunt for them a gerbil, one day I hunt for them and I roast it and I give it to them”

- (14b) *yōm-in čidi, yōm-in čidi*
 “one day like this, one day like that”

- (15a) *marr-in* *t-gūl-l-ī* *taṣāl*
 time-IND 2M.SG.PRES-say=PREP=PRON.1SG come.2M.SG.IMP
- marr-in* *t-gūl-l-ī* *rūḥ*
 go.2M.SG.IMP
- “sometimes you tell me to come, sometimes you tell me to go”

- (15b) *marr-in ḥalu marr-in murr*
 “sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter”

Finally, *tanwīn* appears in a number of Qatari traditional idioms and proverbs. The syntactical environments appear to be the same as those already seen in section 3.1 and 3.2, though the lexicon involved is more varied²⁴.

- (16) (*flān*) *lāyḥ-at-in* *ḡānm-a*
 (someone) beard-FEM.SING-IND prosperous-FEM.SING
 “(someone is) a prosperous beard” (referred to a noble, good-natured man)
- (17) (*flāna*) *ḥayy-at-in* *raqṭ-a*
 (someone) snake-FEM.SING-IND spotted-FEM.SING
 “(someone is) a spotted snake” (referred to a vicious, ill-tempered woman)
- (18) (*flān/flāna*) *ḥayā-t-in* *baṣad* *əl-mōt*
 (someone) life-FEM.SING-IND PREP ART=death
 “(someone is) life after death” (referred to somebody who survived a dangerous situation)

²³ Compare also (10) above, where the redundant repetition of the active participle bearing *tanwīn* could be similarly interpreted. As far as I am aware, no similar examples are reported for central Arabian dialects, and these forms could actually be peculiar to the Gulf and area only.

²⁴ Examples (16-18) are from Al-Muhannadi (2006, transcription adapted): even among the many idioms (more than five hundred) listed in the book, however, dialectal *tanwīn* appears irregularly, with the vast majority of indefinite nouns showing no trace of it.

4. Conclusions

It has to be stressed again that the morphosyntactic features analysed in this article are, in a sense, no longer part of the linguistic reality of modern Qatar. Although any native speaker would, if asked, easily recognize the examples presented above as sound utterances in his or her mother tongue, it is highly unlikely that they would use similar expressions in the course of their everyday interactions. Admittedly, the absence of dialectal *tanwīn* in the interviews I have myself recently recorded in Qatar could be due to the so called “observer’s paradox”: the presence of an element from outside the linguistic community could prevent some features from emerging which are perceived as connected to the most informal communicative contexts. It has to be noted, though, that the interviews were realized in a variety of situations, with speakers of all ages and both genders, sometimes with more than one speaker at a time conversing between them, or even with speakers that, having “entered” the conversation later for various reasons, were at the time not aware of being recorded. On the basis of these data, I am inclined to believe that the progressive disappearance of dialectal *tanwīn* from the linguistic habits of the younger generations of Qataris is due to the phenomena of koineization and standardization, which are having a remarkable influence on all the dialects spoken on the shores of the Arabian Gulf²⁵ (this is also consistent with similar observations made by Holes in different works on the Gulf Dialects²⁶). It is also worth noting that the only reference to dialectal *tanwīn* in Qatari Arabic found in modern literature (Al-Easa 1993: 35, see section 3.1 above) only takes into consideration its occurrence in the adjective phrase, making no mention of the other grammatical contexts examined in this article.

On these premises, I decided to collect the data presented in this article to document a linguistic reality, which can be of some interest from a comparative point of view, before it completely disappears. If we compare the examples given above with the descriptions of the use of dialectal *tanwīn* in different dialects of the area provided by Holes, Ingham and Johnstone, we see that:

- a) Qatari Arabic apparently makes a more extensive use of dialectal *tanwīn* than the Sunni dialect of Bahrain or other Najdi-descended dialects of the area²⁷: the contexts of use are more varied, and the frequency appears to be higher.
- b) Variation in the contexts of use also appear to be more pronounced in the dialect of Qatar than it is in the Shiite dialects of Bahrain, although in these dialects some

²⁵ As a matter of fact, major differences are detectable in the speech of old, uneducated speakers at all levels of language, from phonology to lexicon, and the disappearance of *tanwīn* is, in this sense, but the tip of the iceberg.

²⁶ At the end of the eighties Holes (1990: xii) was already warning his readers that “what Johnstone presents as ‘core’ forms in certain areas of the Gulf had, by the 1980s, it seemed to me from my data, receded to a stigmatized social periphery under the twin impact of MSA and interdialectal levelling”. More specifically, he writes about the use of dialectal *tanwīn* in Bahraini Arabic that: “comparative data for younger, educated speakers of the next two generations [...] showed little or no trace of this feature” (Holes 2004: 89).

²⁷ Two brief references to the use of *tanwīn* in the dialects of Kuwait and Abu Dhabi can be found in Johnstone (1967: 87, 127). The material presented in this notes appears however too scarce for accurate comparative analysis.

construction can be found which appear to be peculiar to the sedentary dialects of the Gulf coast, again denoting a different linguistic ancestry²⁸.

- c) Qatari Arabic makes a less extensive use of dialectal *tanwīn* than the dialects of central and southern Najd, in terms of both possible contexts of use and sheer frequency. Its presence (or absence) seems to be even more semantically and stylistically conditioned than in the dialects of central Arabia.

All of the above would seem to be consistent with the observations made by Johnstone in the 1960s (see section 1 above), in that Qatari Arabic appears to preserve conservative “ʿAnazi” features which have been lost in other Bedouin dialects of the Gulf coast. In other words, Qatari Arabic would seem to be (or, at least, to have been in the past) more resistant to those processes of linguistic reduction and simplification that, according to Ingham, interest all dialects of the Gulf area. The reason for this remains to be explained, but the geographical specificities of the peninsula of Qatar (i.e. its relative isolation, a feature which is normally connected to linguistic conservatism) might have played a role in the process²⁹. As a general remark, the better to understand this and other linguistic phenomena in the area we should reach a wider knowledge of how the “reductionist” change took place in the Gulf: where and when did this process start, how did it spread, and what have been the interactions with the other dialects of the area. Although it is obviously hard to pinpoint the various evolutionary steps that an oral variety went through in the course of many centuries, this remains an interesting line of research, which surely deserves further attention.

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²⁸ Consider, for instance, compound constructions such as *mifl-im mā* (“like”, “as”), *wakt-im mā* (“when”, “whenever”), *xalf-im mā* (“after”), which are typical of Shiite Bahrain but appear to be absent in the dialect of the Sunni population, as they are – as far as I could see from my data – in Qatari Arabic.

²⁹ Although it is true that coastal Qatar has always been well connected to the adjoining areas via maritime routes. There is no shortage of sources dealing with the history of the region: see, among many, the classical Lorimer (1915) or Anscombe (1997).

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