In this article we look at the process of depalatalisation of /č/ in the dialect of the city of Salt in Jordan. In particular, the discussion focuses on the morphological and syntactic consequences of the loss of this feature. The analysis is based on approximately fifty hours of recorded interviews with a broad mix of native speakers of the dialect.¹

We begin with background information about Jordanian dialects and the dialect of Salt.

THE DIACLECTS OF JORDAN

The varieties of Arabic spoken in Jordan are amongst the less documented dialects of the Levant. Until the completion of Herin (2010), no Jordanian dialect had been fully described. Indeed, much of the descriptive work on Jordanian varieties was the labour of a single scholar, Heikki Palva who published descriptions of various Jordanian dialects. Jordan does not have indigenous non-Arabic-speaking groups; the minority languages spoken in its territory were introduced relatively recently.²

The dialects spoken in Jordan were first classified by Cleveland (1963) in terms of biʾūl, bikūl, bigūl and yigūl dialects—reflecting the realisation of the 3rd person singular of the imperfective of the verb gāl “say” in different dialects. According to this classification, the biʾūl dialects represent the urban varieties in which etymological *q is realised as [ʔ], bikūl designates the central rural Palestinian dialects in which *q is realised as [k], and bigūl refers to dialects in which the reflex of *q is [g]. The term yigūl refers to the dialects of the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations, which

¹ All of the interviews were conducted in Salt itself. Part of these data formed the basis of the analyses presented in Al-Wer 1991, Herin 2010 and Al-Wer & Herin 2011.
² One exception to this may be Domari, the Indo-Aryan language of the Middle Eastern Dom. The date of their arrival to Jordan is not documented. Other languages spoken in Jordan are Turkish, Armenian, Chechen, and Circassian.
lack the indicative marker $b$- and whose main reflex of $*q$ is $[g]$. A slight modification to this classification was introduced by Palva (1984). In particular Palva added the group $biqūlu$ to include the northern Palestinian dialects in which the reflex of $*q$ is $[q]$. It is obvious from Cleveland’s and Palva’s taxonomies that what they meant by ‘Jordan’ was actually the two banks of the Jordan River, that is Palestine and Transjordan. Strictly speaking, and keeping to the terms of reference we use in this article (see ft. 3) only the $bigūlu$ and $yigūlu$ groups are native to Jordan. The $bikūlu$ varieties were introduced in Jordan by Palestinians from central and northern West Bank towns and villages after they were expelled from their homeland in historical Palestine. Speakers of $biʾūlu$ varieties are originally from Palestinian cities (e.g. Jaffa and Haifa as well as Nablus, Jerusalem, Hebron, etc). Smaller groups of speakers of $biʾūlu$ dialects in Jordan are originally from Damascus and various other cities in the region. The dialect of Amman, which is now almost an autonomous variety with native speakers of its own, is the outcome of contact between central Jordanian varieties, whose main representative is the dialect of Salt, and urban Palestinian.

The sedentary varieties of Jordan are closely related to those spoken in Ḥōrān, a region located between Syria and Jordan and one of the oldest settlements of agrarian communities in the Levant. The Ḥōrānī dialects were described by Jean Cantineau (1940 and 1946). Data about Jordanian varieties proper first appeared in the linguistic atlas of Bergsträsser (1915), but these are very scarce. Most of the descriptive work was done by Palva and appeared in several articles from the late sixties onward, covering both sedentary and nomadic varieties. Another angle from which Jordanian dialects have been studied is sociolinguistics. Indeed, modern Jordan is a very interesting case study for issues related to dialect contact, most notably between varieties of the west and the east banks of the Jordan River.

It is sometimes convenient to distinguish between the native Jordanian dialects in terms of ‘sedentary’ and ‘Bedouin’. The main differences

---

3 The West Bank was officially part of the Kingdom of Jordan during 1950–1988. In this article ‘Jordanian’ refers to the dialects of Jordan proper only, i.e. East Bank dialects.

