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# The Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira Revisited

**ABSTRACT**  This study proposes a description of the current dialectal Arabic spoken by the Jewry of Essaouira (Mogador)—also called Judeo-Arabic—considering updated data obtained with speakers of different generations. The decreasing number of Jews living in Essaouira during the last century suggests that a dialectal levelling process towards the Muslim dialect may have taken place, due to the contact with the Muslim majority. In this way, this study tracks the preservation or change of the linguistic features which traditionally characterised the Jewish dialect of the city (Lévy 1994, 2009; Heath 2002; Chetrit 2012, 2015) in the speech of two Jewish informants: 84 and 60 years old respectively—the second being known as the last Jew living permanently in the city. This preliminary analysis demonstrates that the levelling process towards the current Muslim dialect has not been concluded, which is attested not only by the maintenance of some old Jewish dialectal traits but also by lexicon and phonetical traits described here for the first time. On the other hand, the comparison of the Jewish dialect with the Muslim dialect of the majority (Francisco 2019) indicates that the levelling process might have begun much earlier before the decline of the Jewish population, in a time when the two communities were very similar in number (Schroeter 1988).

**KEYWORDS**  Arabic dialectology, communal dialects, Essaouira, field research, Judeo-Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, linguistic levelling

## 1  Introduction

It is well known that the Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira is characterised mainly, but not only, by pre-hilalian features and shared traits with the Atlantic strip and Marrakesh Jewish dialects[1], as demonstrated by the studies of Lévy (1994, 2009), Heath (2002) and

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1  Heath (2002: 26) includes the Jewish dialect of Essaouira in what he called 'Atlantic strip group' along with Muslim and Jewish varieties from Casablanca down the Doukkala area, comprehending El Jadida, Azemmour and Safi. On the other hand, Chetrit (2015: 17) classifies the Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira exclusively among the Jewish dialects of North Africa, including it among the urban and semi-urban dialects of the 'Western Qal group,' in his terminology.

Chetrit (2012). This variety had been representative of the Arabic dialect of Essaouira for a long time, given that the data concerning the Muslim variety had been restricted to Socin (1893), due to a general lack of linguistic interest in the city, since its Muslim population had been considered 'mainly Berber-speaking until recently' (Heath 2002: 28). On the other hand, I could demonstrate (Francisco 2019) that dialectal Arabic has predominated in the city, though we cannot ignore the important number of Tachelhit speakers among its first settlers—mostly from the Haha territory— until today, but also of dialectal Arabic speakers from the Chiadma territory, north of Essaouira, and of groups from urban and rural milieus who ended up speaking a levelled Arabic dialect.[2] Nevertheless, the Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira still plays an important role in the description of local Arabic and in the analysis of maintenance and change of linguistic features, due to the size and proportion of the Jewish community in the course of the history of the city.

Some sources indicate that the Jewry of Essaouira might have reached half of the total population of the city during the second part of the 19th century and could have even outnumbered the Muslims at some point. However, the size of the community decreased abruptly in the 20th century (see Table 1), finally being represented by only one last person living permanently in the city.

The Jewish population of the city was composed of both *megorashim* ('expelled') of Andalusi origin and *toshavim* ('residents, natives'), Berber Jews. The majority of the Jews belonged to the latter; coming originally from the Sous, they used to live in the Mellah under poor material circumstances (Schroeter 1988: 196). In fact, the Jewish community was divided into two 'classes': the Mellah Jews and the *Qaṣba* Jews, who were closer to the foreign elite and the Muslim aristocracy. Lévy (2009: 362) explains the difficulty to differentiate the dialect spoken by the two groups in 1973, since the 'melting pot' effect had already taken place long before, due to the huge number of people migrating from the south—a process that also happened with the Muslim dialect, in my opinion.

The Jewish community seems to have held close relations with Muslims in the quotidian life. Different from other Moroccan urban centers where the segregation between both communities was severer, such as Marrakesh and Meknes, the medina of Essaouira was quite small and the Mellah was not walled-off, similar to the situation in Oujda and Azemmour, where Jews and Muslims used to live in the same streets

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2  Essaouira is situated at the border between the Haha and the Chiadma territories, therefore, both Tachelhit and distinct Arabic dialects have been in contact and continuously spoken since the foundation of the city in 1765. Essaouira has become a melting pot of Arabic- and Berber-speaking tribes from distinct parts of Morocco, such as the Sous region, Marrakesh, Safi and Fez (al-Kānūnī 1932; ar-Ragrāgī 1935; aṣ-Ṣiddīqī 1969; as-Sūsī 1966; Schroeter 1988). The lexicon of the current Arabic of Essaouira attests this long contact between distinct groups, presenting words with a particular connotation such as the Tachelhit loanwords: *tāġārt* 'the beach of Essaouira' and *āylāl* 'seagull.'

TABLE 1. The number of Jewish and Muslim communities of Essaouira
(adapted from: Schroeter [1988: 219–220], Ottmani [1997: 271], Lévy [2009: 363]).

|  | Jews | Muslims and foreigners |
|---|---|---|
| 1867 Beaumier[I] | 6,000 | 6,000 |
| 1875 Spanish consular report | 7,500 | 10,500 |
| Beaumier | 10,000 | 7,500 |
| 1878 French consular report | 11,500 | 6,000 |
| 1879 *Alliance Israelite Universelle* | 6,000 | – |
| 1896 George Broome | 7,500 | 7,500 |
| 1927 French Protectorate | 7,750 | 9,850 |
| 1973 Simon Lévy | 150 | – |

I   French consul in Essaouira (Mogador).

(Heath 2002: 10), which should lead—in the case of Essaouira—to a less sharp dia-lectal cleavage. Usually, the North African cities are well known for Jewish dialects of sedentary type which resist the influence of Bedouin (nomadic, central-type) dia-lects spoken by Muslims (Khan 2016: 43). However, what is the current situation of the Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira and its differences from the Muslim variety? Has any change taken place due to the neighbour relations between both communities or even because of the large number of Judeo-Arabic speakers in the city?

Considering these questions, the purpose of this paper is to describe the current situation of the Jewish dialect of the city, analysing maintenance and change in the linguistic features appointed by Lévy (1994, 2009) as most characteristic of the Jewish dialect of Essaouira.[3] These are: the neutralisation of sibilants /š/ > /s/, /ž/ > /z/; the articulation of *qāf; no reduction of diphthongs; the suffix -īt (3FSG perf.); and the predominance of the preverb ta- over ka-. Finally, the paper examines some lexical items of the Jewish dialect comparing it to their equivalents in the current Muslim dialect (Francisco 2019).

The study compares these features in a diachronic perspective, considering the data collected by Lévy in 1973 with at least four informants, and comparing them with two younger speakers recorded by me.[4] Asher (J1) is an 84-year-old man currently living in Israel, who left the city when he was 16 and part of whose family is originally from Ifrane. The second informant is Joseph (J2), around 60 years old, who presents

3   Lévy (2009: 363) identifies these salient features in agreement with the opinions of his infor-mants from Essaouira after a group interview.

4   For a more general view of the speech of each informant, see 'New Texts in the Arabic Dialect of Essaouira (Jewish and Muslim Varieties)' in the texts section of this volume (Francisco 2022).

himself as the last Jew living permanently in the city, despite having been abroad for some years. Part of his family is from the Berber zone of Ayt Bayoud.

In the following part, I track the salient Jewish features in Lévy's data, in the speech of J1 and J2, and contrast them with the Muslim data in order to confirm if any kind of levelling process (Palva 1982) has taken place between the Jewish and Muslim varieties, eliminating the salient Jewish features.

## 2   Linguistic features appointed by Lévy

### 2.1 /š/ > /s/ and /ž/ > /z/

Lévy (2009) attested the total neutralisation between the sibilants /s/, /z/ and the fricatives /š/, /ž/, respectively (Table 2). This trait continues to be predominant in J1.

TABLE 2.  Neutralisation between sibilants and fricatives in J1.

|  | *š > s* | | *ž > z* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| J1 | *dāksi* | 'that, that thing' | *zūz* | 'two' |
|  | *āsnu* | 'what?' | *ʕzəbni* | 'I liked' |
|  | *xənsa* | 'bag' | *ṛāzəl* | 'man' |
|  | *ʕăsṛa* | 'ten' | *ḥwāyəz* | 'things' |
|  | *Maṛṛākəs* | 'Marrakesh' | *izīw* | 'they come' (imperf.) |
|  | *ʕāyəs* | 'living (place)' | *zəddi* | 'my grandfather' |

However, some exceptions are found in specific lexical items. For /š/: *šŭkṛān* 'thanks,' *š-šəlḥa* 'the Berbers,' *škūn* 'who,' *māši* 'no, not' (negation particle). For /ž/: *žəddi* 'my grandfather' (more frequent than *zəddi*) and *žəddāti* 'my grandmother,' *mūžūd* 'present, available,' *džāža* 'hen,' *žīht* 'side,' *mžŭwwəz* 'married' and *lāplāž* 'the beach of Essaouira.'[5] Lévy registers a single occurrence of /ž/ in *xāriž* 'outside' (2009: 367) and /ś/ in *mśāt* 'she went' as a result of the effort of pronouncing /š/, according to the author.[6]

For J2, the neutralisation is not attested, which makes his speech quite similar to the Muslim variety phonetically. Despite that, there remained some occurrences of the neutralisation in very few lexical items in his speech, such as: *həzzāla* 'widow' (< *həžžāla*) and *fīsṭa* 'holiday, festivity' (< *fīšṭa*).

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5   < Fr. *la plage* 'the beach.' It consists of a toponym in Essaouira used by old and young generations. The French article *la* got prefixed to the borrowing in the local Arabic, as can be seen in other examples: *lākāl* 'the quay in the port of Essaouira' (< Fr. *la cale*); *lāmāṛya ~ lāmāṛịyya* 'tide' (< Sp. *la marea*) (Francisco 2019: 161).

6   Chetrit (2015: 6) mentions the same intermediary consonant [ś] nearer to [š] in Moroccan Jewish dialects.

The neutralisation between the sibilants and the fricatives, which used to characterise the Jewish dialect, seem to have become occasional not only in the youngest informants, as it could be verified in the speech of the older speakers.

## 2.2  The articulation of /q/ as [k], [q]

The *\*qāf* /q/ realisation in both Muslim and Jewish dialects tend to be [q] in urban and rural Essaouira, while the variant [g] occurs in specific lexical items—e.g. *bəgṛa* 'cow,' *gəmṛa* 'moon'—found in both dialects, though being more frequent among Muslims (Socin 1893; Francisco 2019). In Jewish dialect, the verb 'to say' was registered firstly as *qāl* 'he said' (Lévy 2009: 365), but appeared in J1 and J2 as *gāl*, like in the Muslim dialect: *gŭtt* (< *gŭlt*) 'I said,' *ngūl lək* 'I will tell you' (J1) and *gālt* 'she said' (J2).

Curiously, the variant *ḵāl* 'he said' was also found in J1, whose speech presents the total neutralisation /q/ > /k/, articulated [k] ~ [ḵ], as in: *ḵūl li* 'tell me,'[7] *l-kəṣba* 'The *Qaṣba*,' *ma ʕkəlt-s* 'I don't remember.' Lévy had registered this phenomenon—he denominates *l-ḥaḍra ṣ-ṣġīṛa* 'la petite façon de parler'—in a single speaker from the Mellah of Essaouira, who presented a single occurrence of [q] (2009: 367). This phenomenon occurs rarely in J2, e.g. *mʕīlkāṭ* 'spoons.' The author adds that he confirmed the same feature in Safi and Azemmour.

Although J2 uses exclusively *gāl*, he uses the glottal [ʔ] in the imperative form of the verb 'to say' only once: *ʔălli āš* 'tell me what.' The glottal realisation of /q/ occurs in other Jewish dialects as well (Chetrit 2015), but in the case of Essaouira it is a strange and rare phenomenon, even though Lévy (2009: 363) explained it as the neutralisation /k/ > /ʔ/ found in a single Souiri speaker whose family was from the Sous. This could explain the occurrence of the glottal in J2; however, the fact is that the imperative form he uses is **not** *\*ʔūl li* (< *qūl li*) but the northern imperative form with short vowel *ʔălli*, suggesting that either he preserved an old form once found in Jewish dialect of Essaouira or it might be the result of the influence of another Jewish dialect he is in contact with, since his family has been living in Casablanca.

To conclude, the Jewish dialectal variants [ʔ], [k] and [ḵ] seem to have lost space to the prestigious [q] and later to the Muslim [g] in some cases. The speech of J2 demonstrates this change by the alternation between [q] and [g]: *mqābəl* ~ *mgābəl* 'keeper,' *tlāqīti* ~ *tlāgīti* 'you found.'

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7  J1 alternates between [ḵ] ~ [g] for the verb 'to say.'

## 2.3 No reduction of diphthongs

Lévy pointed out that the Jewish dialect of Essaouira did not reduce the diphthongs, as he demonstrates in the examples: *ḥăyṭ* 'wall,' *lăyl* 'night' and *răwz* 'rice' (2009: 363). In the same way, J1 keeps mostly not reducing diphthongs in both plain and pharyngealised consonantal contexts, while we can attest a more consistent change to the reduction in J2's speech, like we find it in the Muslim variety: /ăw/ > /ū/, /ăy/ > /ī/, in all consonantal contexts[8], even though many diphthongs were preserved in specific lexical items (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Diphthongs in the Jewish dialect of Essaouira.

|  | Diphthongs | | Monophthongs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| J1 | *făyn* | 'where' | *lūz* | 'almond' |
|  | *mnăyn* | 'from where' | *l-īhūd* | 'the Jews' |
|  | *t-tnăyn* | 'two o'clock' |  |  |
|  | *ṭăyṛ* | 'cock'[I] |  |  |
|  | *ḍăyf* | 'guest' |  |  |
|  | *ăwkāt* | 'times' |  |  |
| J2 | *mnăyn* | 'from where' | *fīn* | 'where' |
|  | *ăymta* | 'when' | *lūz* | 'almond' |
|  | *ṭăyfūṛ* | 'plate' | *lūn* | 'color' |
|  | *făṛṭăyṭu* | 'butterfly' | *šūk* | 'thorn' |
|  | *xăyma* | 'tent' | *l-yūm* | 'today' |
|  |  |  | *līl* | 'night' |

I   In the southern Jewish dialects, *ṭăyṛ* means 'cock' (Lévy 2009: 343). J1 defines it for us as *ṛāzəl d-džāža* 'the husband of the hen.'

Despite reducing diphthongs more frequently, the Muslim variety preserves—in a smaller number—diphthongs in plain consonantal contexts as well, including some words common to the Jewish dialect: *ăymta* 'when,' *mnăymta* (< *mən ăymta*) 'a long time ago,' *tawb* 'fabric,'[9] *ăysri* 'left-handed,' *skăyri* 'inebriate' (Francisco 2019: 77).

   This fact might be explained in two complementary ways. Firstly, as an outcome of the contact with the Chiadma population, settled on the outskirts of Essaouira, since their speech contains diphthongs in plain and pharyngealised contexts with

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8   As it is expected for hilalian central type dialects (Heath 2002), diphthongs close to pharyngeal and pharyngealised consonants may alternate with monophthongs: *ṣūf* ~ *ṣăwf* 'wool,' *bīḍ* ~ *ḅăyḍ* 'eggs.'

9   Different from the northern variant *ṭăwb* 'dress, costume' (Vicente 2000: 35), in Essaouira it means 'fabric,' like in Marrakesh (Sánchez 2014: 83).

a higher frequency than we attest in the urban milieu:[10] *nsăyt* 'I forgot,' *bnăyna* 'we built,' *ḅăyḍa* 'white (F)' (2019: 79). Secondly, diphthongs are also found in the Sous region, where a substantial part of the first settlers of Essaouira—Muslims and Jews—came from. The variant *ăymta* 'when' with a diphthong may be evidence of this influence since—in southern Morocco—*ăymta* is found basically in Essaouira and in the Sous[11], while all the Atlantic Strip and Marrakesh have the variant *īmta* (Heath 2002: 481).

To sum up, J2 presents a higher frequency of reduced diphthongs, like Muslims, than his older peers. However, the examples above demonstrate that the preservation of diphthongs might have occurred even more frequently among Muslims at some point—especially in plain consonantal contexts. Therefore, perhaps in the past diphthongs were even more frequent, not being a distinguishing feature between Muslim and Jewish dialects.

## 2.4 Suffix *-īt* (3FSG perf.)

As a morphological feature of the Jewish variety, Lévy points out the occurrence of the suffix *-īt* (3FSG perf.) alternating with *-(ə)t*, such as: *qāmīṭ* 'she got up,' *okʕīt* 'happened' and *tfəkkīt* 'was saved,' but *xərzəṭ* 'she went out' (2009: 363–368).[12] The same feature was found in J1: *səṛbīṭ* 'she drank,' *dəzbādīt* 'she went out'[13] and *kānīt* 'she was.' On the other hand, it has a **single** occurrence in J2: *əṣ-ṣwīṛa kānīt ġzāla* 'Essaouira was wonderful.'

Like in the Muslim dialect, the suffix *-(ə)t* predominates in J2 for simple hollow verbs, even though variants such as *kānt* was registered by Lévy (2009: 367) and found in J1, indicating that a change towards the suffix *-(ə)t* with simple hollow verbs was already in progress a long time before.

Heath proposed that the suffix *-īt* in the Jewish dialects of Safi and Essaouira originated as 'a mutation of *-at*, or else as a lengthening of *-ət*, functioning to keep the 3FSG distinct' from the first person (2002: 224).[14] In my opinion, his first hypothesis is corroborated by the Muslim dialect usage of the suffix *-āt* (3FSG perf.), occurring in all but hollow and defective verbs, in urban and rural Essaouira and also parts of

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10  In fact, urban speakers usually associate diphthongs with the speech of the rural surroundings.

11  Destaing (1937 I: 178).

12  The author's transcription was maintained.

13  See the section 3.1. of this paper.

14  This seems to be a feature brought from southern Morocco, as Heath attests the suffix in several southern Jewish dialects: Taroudant, Tiznit, Aoulouz, Tazenakht, Iqilnuqu and (Had-)Tahala. Also in Tazzerte and Beni Mellal (2002: 547, map 4–20).

southern Morocco.[15] In fact, it predominates in J2: *ḍaṛbāt* 'she hit.' Curiously, according to two female Muslim informants in Essaouira, elder women in the medina used to add *-āt* to hollow verbs, as in the following examples provided by them: *\*šāfātni* (< *šāfətni*), *\*mātāt* (< *mātət*), just as the Jewish dialect usage of *-īt*. In this way, the usage of the suffix *-īt* (3FSG perf.) with hollow verbs in the Jewish dialect could be the result of morphological analogy with verbs presenting *-āt* in the local Muslim dialect.

To sum up, it seems that the salient suffix *-īt* has almost disappeared in the younger informant (J2), except for a punctual occurrence.

## 2.5  The suffix *-ti* (2SG perf.)

The usage of the suffix *-ti* (2SG perf.) for masculine and feminine (Lévy 2009: 363; Heath 2002: 546, map 4–15) has been attested in J1 and J2. In Essaouira, the suffix *-ti* (2SG perf.) is shared by both Muslim and Jewish dialects, which could be a sign that dialectal levelling was in progress a long time before. In this case, we do not attest an isogloss separating communal dialects like in Fez, where *-ṭ* (2SG perf.) for both masculine and feminine is exclusive of Jewish speech, distinguishing it from the Muslim speech with *-ṭi* (2009: 225).

## 2.6  Predominance of the preverb *ta-*

The Jewish dialect presents a predominance of the imperfective preverb *ta-* over *ka-* (Lévy 2009: 363) and it is also encountered in J1 and J2 who **never** use *ka-*. On the other hand, the Muslim variety does contain both preverbs, *ka-* nowadays being found more frequently in the rural speakers of Essaouira (Francisco 2019), but also in the medina, even though in the latter *ta-* still predominates among Muslims. This seems to be another feature which may have been the result of an old levelling, predominating *ta-*over the pre-hilalian *ka-*, more frequent in the north and in old urban dialects (Aguadé 1998: 12). This reality is very similar to the Marrakesh situation, where *ta-* predominates in the Jewish and Muslim dialects (Heath 2002: 544, map 4–1).

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15  Settat (Aguadé 2013: 4), Tafilalt (Heath 2002: 223), Marrakesh (Sánchez 2014: 116), Essaouira (Francisco 2019: 94).

## 3 New-old Jewish features

The features below, most of them lexical items, were found in J1 and J2 and can also enhance the visualisation of a dialectal levelling process. They are separated into two groups:

### 3.1 Indication of maintenance

/l/ > /n/: this consists of a southern feature encountered in Tafilalt (Behnstedt 2004). It occurs frequently in J2: *ṇūṛa < ḷūṛa* 'behind,'[16] *mənyūn < məlyūn* 'million,' *mənyāṛ < məlyāṛ* 'billion,' *āylān < āylāl* 'seagull.'[17] On the other hand, we can also find the inverse /n/ > /l/: *blītāt < bnītāt* 'little girls' (J1).

The usage of *fḥāl* over *bḥāl* 'like, similar to': J1 and J2 keep using *fḥāl* exclusively, the second one being restricted to Muslims. However, in Socin (1893) *fḥāl* appears in the Muslim speech as well.

The use of *ṣāfd* 'to send' in J1 and J2: *ṣāfd li* 'send to me'; instead of *ṣīfəṭ*, which seems restricted to Muslims.

The alternation between *ddi ~ di*[18] and *lli ~ li* in both J1 and J2, even though the former seems to use *di* much more frequently. It is also reflected in the use of adverbial *məddi* 'when' (J1) replaced by *məlli* (J2), also used by Muslims together with *fāš* 'when.'

The verb *dəzbād* (< *təžbād*) 'to go out' is used by J1 frequently, but occurs seldomly in J2, e.g. in the expression: *dəzbād m-ʕlĭyya* 'go away!'; who prefers the variant *xrəž*.

### 3.2 Indication of change

On the other hand, many other traits have disappeared from J1 to J2, attesting a tendency to change towards the Muslim variety.

The usage of *ṛa* 'to see' only by J1: *ṛātni* 'she saw me,' *ās ta-tṛa?* 'what do you see?' But J1 also gives *ās ta-tšūf?* 'what do you see?' probably because the verb *šāf* has always occurred frequently in the city. J2 uses only the latter, like Muslims. Heath

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16  This word specifically is found in the Jewish dialect of Marrakesh and also in the north (Heath 2002: 549, map 4–32).

17  *āylāl* designates specifically the 'seagull' in Essaouira, attested among elder speakers, and consists probably of a loanword from Tachelhit. On the other hand, the variant *āylān* (J2) is also found in Marrakesh (Sánchez 2014: 401) in the name of a gate in the medina: *bāb āylān*.

18  Pre-hilalian feature also found in Andalusi Arabic: *a/iddí* (IISUZ 2013: 80).

registered *ṛa* as the only variant in the Jewish dialect of Essaouira, but finds both variants in the Jewish dialect of Marrakesh (2002: 512, map 2–42).

The complete replacement of the pronoun *ntīna* 'you' (2MSG), predominant in J1, by *nta* (2MSG) in J2, in line with Muslims.

Substitution of the frequent *ʕməl* 'to do'*: nəʕməl* 'I will do' (J1) by *dār* (J2).

The replacement of the verb *ḥdāz* 'must' (< *ḥtāž* 'need'),[19] in J1, by the usual particle *xəṣṣ* 'must' in J2. It is the first time the verb *ḥdāz* is registered in Essaouira, occurring frequently in J1 who agrees it with the main verb: *nəḥdāz nəmsi* 'I must go,' *təḥdāz təmsi* 'you must go.'

The substitution of *xlāq ~ xlāk* (J1) by *dzād* (J2) 'to be born,' predominant in the urban and rural Muslim dialects of Essaouira.

## 4 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to describe the current situation of the Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira, analysing the salient features of this variety and their maintenance in the speech of speakers of different generations. The findings of the study confirm the hypothesis of a dialectal levelling towards the Muslim dialect of Essaouira as we expected, supposedly based on the long period of close contact between Muslim and Jewish communities, followed by the decrease of the Jewish population in the city in the 20th century. Tracking the maintenance of salient features of Jewish dialect and comparing the Jewish dialect with the current Muslim dialect suggest that the levelling process may have occurred at two different moments.

Firstly, the levelling could have happened when both communities were similar in numbers, as some salient features of the Jewish dialect were shared by the Muslim dialect as well, such as the predominance of the preverb *ta-*, the suffix *-ti* (2SG) and the no reduction of diphthongs. This could explain the reason why these features have been maintained by informants of distinct ages.

Later, the dialectal levelling evolved as attested by the younger informant (J2) who has lost the other distinctive features of the Jewish dialect, but specific lexical items seem to preserve vestiges of these features in his speech—such as *kānīt* 'she was,' demonstrating that the levelling process has not been completed. Furthermore, he maintains the usage of the lexicon of the Jewish variety, also found in J1, such as: *fḥāl* 'like, similar to' and the relative *di ~ ddi*. Some of these features, found also in J1, were registered in the local Jewish dialect for the first time, such as the verb *dəzbād* 'to go out' and the phenomenon of interchange between /n/ and /l/.

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19  Heath (2002: 501), Prémare et al. (1994 3: 263).

This study was a partial assessment of the status of the Jewish dialect of Essaouira, since it did not explore several other features of the variety that could demonstrate other aspects of the long dialectal levelling in progress. Besides, it would be important to obtain linguistic data from other informants of the same age of J2—or even younger—, who had left the city much before, in order to estimate if the levelling verified in J2 occurred throughout his generation or only in his case because he is in permanent contact with Muslim dialect speakers.

Finally, the analysis carried out here demonstrates the importance of continuing linguistic data collection for the Judeo-Arabic of Essaouira. For instance, registering *ḥdāz* 'must' and other new words for the first time in Essaouira demonstrates the importance of describing the Jewish dialect in this area, especially if we consider the reduced number of speakers left.

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