

Article

New Perspectives on the Urban–Rural Dichotomy and Dialect Contact in the Arabic *gələt* Dialects in Iraq and South-West Iran

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Abstract: This paper reevaluates the ground on which the division into urban and rural *gələt* dialects, as spoken in Iraq and Khuzestan (south-western Iran), is built on. Its primary aim is to describe which features found in this dialect group can be described as rural and which features tend to be modified or to emerge in urban contexts, and which tend to be retained. The author uses various methodical approaches to describe these phenomena: (i) a comparative analysis of potentially rural features; (ii) a case study of Ahvazi Arabic, a *gələt* dialect in an emerging urban space; and (iii) a small-scale sociolinguistic survey on overt rural features in Iraqi Arabic as perceived by native speakers themselves. In addition, previously used descriptions of urban *gələt* features as described for Muslim Baghdad Arabic are reevaluated and a new approach and an alternative analysis based on comparison with new data from other *gələt* dialects are proposed. The comparative analysis yields an overview of what has been previously defined as rural features and additionally discusses further features and their association with rural dialects. This contributes to our general understanding of the linguistic profile of the rural dialects in this geographic context.

Keywords: dialect classification; dialect contact; urban; rural; *gələt*; *qəltu*; spoken Arabic



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1. Introduction

This study aims at a critical reevaluation of the urban–rural division in the *gələt* dialects and the description of linguistic dynamics correlating with urbanization tendencies.¹ The urban–rural dichotomy is used in the descriptions of Arabic dialects from different regions (cf., for example, [Abd-el-Jawad 1986](#); [Abu-Haidar 1988](#); [Ech-charfi 2020](#); [Holes 1995](#); [Ingham 1973](#); [Miller 2007](#); [Sharkawi 2014](#)). However, until today there is only a small amount of evidence for common linguistic tendencies found among Arabic dialects in urban contexts (cf. [Miller 2007](#), p. 2). Similarly, the clear-cut distinction into urban vs. rural regarding the *gələt* dialects² of Iraq and Iran still seems to be built on weak ground. This study tries to sum up what we do and what we do *not* know about the division of the *gələt* dialects into rural and urban ones. By including an areal perspective and new data from the *gələt* dialects of Khuzestan, we hope to arrive at a more detailed description of the characterizing factors of rural dialects in general and the linguistic consequences of urbanization for dialects of the *gələt* group more specifically.

The present work brings together hitherto used linguistic criteria for the distinction into rural vs. urban *gələt* and other features determined by the author as possibly rural. The existence of these features is compared in the *gələt* dialects described so far, including new data from the *gələt* dialects in Khuzestan and two cognate dialects (Šāwi and Khorasan Arabic).

The study also tries to retrace what processes are at work when different *gələt* dialects are in contact in urban contexts and questions the often not well defined and synonymous use of the terms ‘Bedouin’ and ‘rural’, as well as ‘sedentary’ and ‘urban’.

The study includes a small-scale sociolinguistic survey revealing what native speakers of (urban) Iraqi Arabic subjectively tend to perceive as typically rural or urban.

In general, the study and classification of the *gələt* dialects has received only marginal attention, especially when compared with the much better studied *qəltu* dialects (cf. Hassan 2021, p. 51). Even though a number of studies on *gələt* dialects has been published since Blanc's classification of the Iraqi dialects into *qəltu* and *gələt* in his seminal work on Baghdadi Arabic (Blanc 1964), they are still few. Among those who rely on freshly gathered data are: Hassan (2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2020, 2021), Mahdi (1985), Denz and Edzard (1966) and Abu-Haidar (2002) on South Iraqi Arabic; Ingham (1973, 1976), Leitner (2019, 2020) and Bettega and Leitner (2019) on Khuzestani Arabic; and Salonen (1980) on al-Shirqat (Širqāt)/Assur Arabic.

On lacking definitions: What do 'Bedouin', 'sedentary', 'urban', and 'rural' mean in the context of the gələt and qəltu dialects?

In his important paper on the linguistic character and development of Muslim Baghdad Arabic, Palva appears to use the labels 'urban' and 'sedentary', and 'rural' and 'Bedouin' interchangeably.³ By using the terms 'urban' and 'sedentary' as well as 'rural' and 'Bedouin' as quasi-synonyms (cf. Ech-charfi 2020, p. 67), we ignore the different nature of these terms and the different implications they have or had as socio-economic criteria at different times in history. It also ignores the fact that, for example, sedentary dialects can be rural as well. In Iraq, *urban* and *sedentary* as well as *rural* and *Bedouin* are indeed often closely linked, but a synonymous use of these concepts, especially for descriptions of the present-day linguistic classification, would be misleading. While—in our geographic context—*urban* and *sedentary* are concepts historically related to the *qəltu* dialects of Iraq, the concepts *rural* and *Bedouin* are historically associated with the *gələt* dialects.⁴

However, all four terms might denote very different things when looking at the present-day *gələt* dialects of Iraq and south-west Iran. Even though originally rural in character, many *gələt* speakers (or their ancestors) have moved to urban contexts and gradually replaced their rural identity with an urban one. Similarly, even though ultimately the *gələt* dialects are Bedouin, at present, the vast majority of their speakers lead a sedentary lifestyle. The usefulness of the latter distinction (sedentary vs. Bedouin type) has been recurrently criticized in the past years by scholars such as Janet Watson (2011, p. 859), who describes the Bedouin/sedentary split as “an oversimplification and of diminishing sociological appropriacy”.

For synchronic descriptions of present-day Iraqi Arabic, it is therefore mainly the terms 'rural' vs. 'urban' that remain useful to describe the different socio-economic circumstances people live under, whereas the importance of the question of sedentary (*ḥaḍār*) vs. Bedouin (*badu*) appears to be generally decreasing. This is also reflected in the sociolinguistic interviews I conducted with native speakers of Iraqi Arabic (see Section 3.3), who more often described certain features as typical of the countryside (*rif*, *aryāf*) or the city (*madīna*) than as typical of the Bedouin (*badu*; *ʕašāyir* lit. 'tribes'). In these interviews, the participants never use the term sedentary (*ḥaḍār*) to characterize or specify the use of a feature. Still, it is important that these terms are apparently meaningful to native speakers in the present day.

In Khuzestan the urban–rural distinction has not played a role for a long time, as most inhabitants are of rural origins, and distinctions were made based on other socio-economic factors closer to the sedentary–nomad split (cf. fn. 13). However, modern-day Khuzestan has witnessed a rapid growth of urban centers, especially in the city of Ahvaz (cf. 3.4), for which reason the term 'urban' and its socio-linguistic and socio-economic implications (e.g., increase of contact and leveling tendencies) must at least be considered as an arising category.

Regarding the historical linguistic situation in Baghdad, the predominant Muslim dialect used to be (according to Blanc 1964, p. 170, at least until the fourteenth century) of the *qəltu* type and thus was characterized, as stated above, by the features [+urban] and [+sedentary]. Starting in the fourteenth century, the city of Baghdad was populated by incoming *gələt*-speakers (especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cf. Palva 2009, p. 32), initially carrying the features [+rural] and [+Bedouin] and remodeling the former linguistic character of Baghdad, so that over the time its *gələt* character has become

predominant. Nowadays, MBA (Muslim Baghdad Arabic) is a *gələt* dialect associated by Arabic dialectologists with the features [+urban] and [+Bedouin], since the incoming rural Bedouin dialects in Baghdad have been urbanized (cf. Palva 2009, p. 38).

This process, the urbanization of rural dialects, contains the loss of highly marked rural features (e.g., the *gahawa*-syndrome), motivated by the speakers' wish to adapt to the urban linguistic profile. This is, of course, also observed for other urbanized *gələt*-speaking contexts, which do not have a *qəltu* substrate as we find it in MBA. The difference between MBA and other urbanized *gələt* dialects, which do not have a *qəltu* substrate, is that the *gələt* dialects in Baghdad have adopted some *qəltu* features (e.g., the marking of definite objects with a proclitic *l-*, cf. Palva 2009, p. 22). In this light, it appears useful to distinguish MBA from other *gələt* dialects that are nowadays spoken in (arising) urban contexts and which lack a *qəltu* substratum (e.g., Basra Arabic and Ahvazi Arabic).

This paper follows the assumption that eventually all *gələt* dialects are originally rural and Bedouin in character but focusses on the present-day definition of rural *gələt* features and their (lack of) prestige analyzing which features tend to be modified most readily in urban contexts.

The abovesaid shows the multifaceted nature of the terms 'Bedouin', 'sedentary', 'urban', and 'rural' and their historical and modern-day application for the regions of Iraq and south-west Iran.

Aims of This Paper

The purpose of this paper is twofold and can roughly be divided into one part focusing on synchronic aspects and the other dealing primarily with diachronic aspects. The former (Sections 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4) is dedicated to the following overarching questions:

- (i) What unites rural *gələt* dialects? Which features are marked rural features, i.e., strongly associated with rural speech by *gələt* speakers themselves?
- (ii) What happens to rural dialects when their speakers move to urban contexts? Which features tend to emerge (innovations) or be dropped as a consequence of the adoption of an urban lifestyle by *gələt* speakers?

The diachronic part of this study (Section 3.2) is a critical evaluation of Palva's derivations of certain MBA features (or lack of certain features in MBA) via the *qəltu* substrate, offering alternative explanations for the development of these features.

Against this background, this paper aims at reevaluating the hitherto applied linguistic criteria for the subclassification of the *gələt* group into urban and rural dialects and sheds new light on the question of the linguistic dynamics found in urban *gələt*-speaking contexts.

Section 2 presents the methods applied to answer the questions outlined above and the linguistic features focused on. Section 3 of this paper discusses the results of this study: Section 3.1 presents the distribution of the rural features analyzed, and is followed by a reevaluation of those MBA features which Palva explained as consequences of the *qəltu* substrate (Section 3.2). Section 3.3 presents of the results of a small-scale sociolinguistic survey conducted among five urban Iraqis who fled to Vienna during the past five years on subjective perceptions of rural forms in Iraqi Arabic. Section 3 closes with a case study of the city of Ahvaz, pointing out linguistic tendencies found in *gələt* dialects spoken in arising urban contexts (Section 3.4).

Section 4 discusses the results of this analysis in the light of the questions proposed above. Section 5 concludes the study and provides an outlook on possible future studies on the urban–rural distinction in the *gələt* dialects.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to answer the above-outlined research questions, this paper starts with a comparative overview of seven phonological and morphological features and their existence in the *gələt* dialects of Khuzestan, Kwayriš/Babylon, al-Shirqat/Assur, Basra, and Muslim Baghdad. While the first three are usually associated with rural speech, the latter two are usually taken to represent urban-type *gələt*. The analysis further considers the existence

of these linguistic variables in the Šāwi dialects of Syria and south-eastern Anatolia⁵ and the Arabic dialects of Khorasan. Including the Šāwi dialects and Khorasan Arabic hopefully contributes to a better understanding of their obvious typological proximity to the *gələt* dialects.

The following features investigated for the purpose of this paper have either been listed by Blanc (1964, p. 166)⁶ and/or Palva (2009, pp. 21–29) as typically rural (i), or are suggested by the author of this paper as possible further rural features (ii):

- (i) Rural *gələt* features as listed by Blanc and Palva:
 - Affrication of *q > g > ġ and *k > č in the vicinity of front vowels (Section 3.1.1);
 - Use of the *gahawa*-syndrome (Section 3.1.3);
 - Resyllabification of CaCaC-v(C) > CCvC-a(C) (Section 3.1.4);
 - Retention of gender distinction in the plural of pronouns and verbs (Section 3.1.5).
- (ii) Further rural features suggested by the author of this paper:
 - Raising (and elision) of *a in pre-tonic open syllables (Section 3.1.2);
 - Prefix *tv-* (vs. urban *t-*) for Form V and VI verbs (Section 3.1.6);
 - Imperative M.SG of final weak roots of the form ?vCvC (Section 3.1.7).

3. Results

This section discusses possible rural *gələt* features and their distribution based on the available sources on *gələt* dialects (illustrated in Table 1; features I-III are phonological, while IV-VII are morphological features).

Table 1. Distribution of (possible) rural *gələt* features⁷.

Rural Features	Khuzestan	Kwayriš	al-Shirqat	Khorasan	Šāwi	Basra	Muslim Baghdad
I. Affrication of *q in front vowel environment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
II. Raising of *a in pre-tonic open syllables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
III. <i>gahawa</i> -syndrome	Only a few remnants	Yes	Only a few remnants	Yes	Yes	Only a few remnants	No
IV. CaCaC-a(C) > CCvC-a(C)	Partly	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
V. Gender distinction in the plural	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes? ⁸	Partly
VI. Form V and VI prefix <i>tv-</i>	Partly	Partly	Yes	Arabkhane: <i>ti-</i> Khalaf: <i>it-</i>	Yes	No	No
VII. Imperative SG.M of weak verbs: ?vCvC	Partly	Partly	No evidence found	Yes	Partly	No	No

3.1. Rural *gələt* Features

3.1.1. Affrication of OA (Old Arabic) *q > g > ġ and *k > č in the Vicinity of Front Vowels

Generally, the phenomenon of a phonetically conditioned affrication of OA *k > č and *g > ġ is considered typical of Eastern Bedouin-type dialects of the Syro–Mesopotamian area (Palva 2006, p. 606). The phonetically conditioned affrication of *k is basically a feature shared by all *gələt* dialects but is somewhat more limited in urban varieties (Blanc 1964, p. 166): compare, e.g., MBA and Basra Arabic *akəl* (Blanc 1964, p. 166; Mahdi 1985, p. 64) and Khuzestani Arabic *ačəl*.

Similarly, the affrication of *q is traditionally more strongly associated with the rural type (Fischer and Jastrow 1980, pp. 142–43; cf. Blanc 1964, pp. 25–28, who calls the

affrication of *q “a hallmark of the countryside”; Palva 2009, p. 37, fn. 19). According to Blanc’s informants (Blanc 1964, pp. 27–28), speakers perceive forms with ǧ (< *q) instead of g or q as rural or ‘provincial’, or the use of g or retention of *q as urban.

According to the descriptions of Blanc (1964, pp. 26–27), in Muslim Baghdad Arabic the general reflexes of *q are g and q, thus without an affricated realization in front vowel environments. More recently, Palva notes for Muslim Baghdad Arabic that “the contrast between urban and rural *gələt* is diminishing”, because such features as the conditioned affrication of g (as well as the use of feminine plural forms in the 3rd person, cf. 3.1.5) are gaining ground in that dialect (Palva 2009, p. 37, fn. 19 and the references mentioned there).⁹

For Basra Arabic, Mahdi (1985, pp. 86–87, fn. 102) states that there is some variation between g and ǧ.

We also find these phenomena in the Šāwi-dialects (e.g., *čitīr* ‘much’ and *ǧidīm* ‘old’, Younes and Herin n.d., *EALL Online*), and in Khorasan Arabic (e.g., *čitab* ‘he wrote’; Seeger 2013, p. 314, and *ǧirīb* ‘close’, Seeger 2009, p. 310).

Regarding other Iraqi Arabic dialects, affrication of *q > ǧ is further attested in texts from al-Ḥilla (Denz and Edzard 1966, p. 68: *ǧiddām* ‘in front of’, or 70: *rǧīǧi* ‘my friend’).¹⁰

Thus, at present these phenomena also appear in urban contexts, although apparently to a lesser degree: In MBA, the ‘default form’ is still unaffricated, in Basra there is variation between affricated and non-affricated forms, and we find the same variation in present-day Ahvazi Arabic, e.g., *mədayyəǧ* ~ *mədayyəg* ‘worried’, *šədəǧ* ~ *šədəg* < *šidq^{un}* ‘truth’, *bəčān* ~ *bəkān* ‘place’, and the progressive marker *gāšid* ~ *ǧāšəd* cf. 3.2.2; Leitner 2020, pp. 30, 32). This might point at a tendency in urbanizing contexts towards de-affrication or replacement of ǧ and č with the less marked or less ‘provincial’ g and k. In other words, its marked rural character (cf. 3.3) makes this phonetic feature prone to be given up in contact with another dialect or other dialects. This, of course, contradicts Palva’s statement (as cited above) that the phenomenon of affricating g is gaining ground in MBA. This contradiction might result from analyzing data from different speech communities (Shiite vs. Sunnite; different quarters, etc.) of a city. Based on my data, however, I cannot confirm his observation, but must rather argue the contrary.

3.1.2. Raising of OA *a in Pre-Tonic Open Syllables

Examples from the dialects analyzed, which feature the raising of *a not only in *CaCin patterns, are: Kwayriš *šibāb* ‘youth’ (Denz 1971, p. 66); Khuzestan *səwāləf* ‘stories’ (Leitner 2020, p. 43); Khorasan *miǧlitin* ‘gathering’ (Seeger 2002, p. 637); Šāwi *sičāčim* ‘knives’ (Younes and Herin n.d., *EALL Online*); al-Shirqat: *dibāyeh* ‘slaughter animals’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 9, 28, Text 1, sentence 17); MBA: *sčāčim*¹¹ ~ *sičāčim* ‘knives’; and Basra: *diǧāǧa* ‘chicken’ (Denz and Edzard 1966, p. 80, Text VII) ~ *dyāy* (Mahdi 1985, p. 247). The overall picture we get from the distribution of this feature is that synchronically this phonological change is found in both urban and rural dialects. Examples such as *marākub* ~ *mṛākub* ‘ships’ and *manāqil* ~ *mṇāqil* ‘barbecues’ from Basra Arabic (Mahdi 1985, pp. 141–42), which appear both with and without the raising and subsequent elision of *a in the first (pre-tonic and open) syllable, might point to a slight tendency among urban varieties to preserve *a. However, this tendency was not really confirmed by the results of the sociolinguistic survey conducted for this study (cf. 3.3), in which most speakers produced forms with a raised *a.

Even though this phonological process is often inhibited by consonants of the guttural group (cf. Younes 2018, p. 5), we find various counterexamples, such as *mšābed* ‘temples’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 10, 29, Text 1, sentence 31) < *mašābid* probably via raising and subsequent elision of *a in the first syllable. Younes argues that in the Middle East this phenomenon probably predates the appearance of the *gahawa*-syndrome (Younes 2018, pp. 7–8) and treats it as a pan-Eastern Bedouin dialect phenomenon.

3.1.3. *gahawa*-Syndrome

The so-called *g(a)hawa*-syndrome is another feature described by Blanc (1964, p. 166) as typical of rural *gələt* dialects and not present in MBA. This morphological phenomenon denotes the reshuffling of non-final syllables closed by a guttural consonant (i.e., /x, ǧ, ħ, ʕ, ʔ, h/): CvC_G > CvC_Gv or CC_Gv, e.g., *gahwa* ‘coffee’ > *gahawa* or *ghawa*.

As for MBA, the incoming Bedouin tribes and the rural population that has settled in Baghdad apparently have given up this feature in the urban context.

Although there are many traces of this resyllabification rule still found in contemporary Khuzestani Arabic—e.g. *ʔahali* ‘my family’ and *xaḍar* ~ *ʔaxaḍar* ‘green’—it has ceased to be an active phonological process (cf. Section 3.4 and Leitner 2020, p. 50).

Also for Basra Arabic, there are only very few examples of this phonological rule to be found in Mahdi’s Ph.D. thesis, but many, which do not show the *gahawa*-syndrome, e.g., *naʕya* ‘ewe’ (not *nʕaya*) and *yiʕruf* ‘he knows’ (not *yʕaruf*) (Mahdi 1985, pp. 51, 99, respectively). The only examples found are some originally ʔ-initial words like *xaḍar* < *ʔaxḍar* ‘green’ or *ħawal* < *ʔahwal* ‘cross-eyed’, in which the first syllable was dropped after a vowel *a* was inserted after the guttural consonant (Mahdi 1985, p. 62).

The data on Kwayriš Arabic also shows mixed results: while we find, e.g., *naxla* ‘palm tree’ (cf. Meißner 1903, p. XVIII), we also get *lighawa* ‘the coffee’ (Denz 1971, p. 55), *(a)heli* ‘my family’ (Meißner 1903, p. 26), and *yǧalub* ‘he wins’ (Denz 1971, p. 68).

As for al-Shirqat, I found one word that is subject to this phonological rule in Salonen’s texts: *ʔäheli* ‘my family’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 21 and 42, Text 8, sentence 1) and *ʔahalu* ‘his family’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 22 and 44, Text 9, sentence 4)—but later, in another text, we find the same word without insertion of a vowel after the guttural: a *ʔahlu* ‘his family’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 24 and 46, Text 13, sentence 1).

This phenomenon is attested for both the Šāwi dialects (e.g., *ǧħaša* ‘female ass’, instead of *ǧahša*; Procházka 2003, p. 78), and for Khorasan Arabic (e.g., *yoǧodi* ‘he goes’, instead of *yoǧdi*).

Today, the productive use of the *gahawa*-syndrome appears to be very limited in most dialects and has thus ceased to be a good criterion for distinguishing rural from urban dialects as well as Bedouin-type from sedentary-type dialects. The reason for the loss of this feature is most likely related to its markedness (cf. Section 3.3).

3.1.4. Resyllabification of OA CaCaC-v(C) > CCvC-a(C)

Blanc described reflexes of the OA PFV verbal forms CaCaC-v(C), e.g., *katabat*, with initial CC- as typical rural *gələt* forms (Blanc 1964, p. 166). Ingham (1982, pp. 48–49, 52) describes such forms as characteristic of the Mesopotamian *bādiya* dialects, in contrast to the Mesopotamian *ħaḍar* dialects that have an initial syllable structure CiC-.

Basra Arabic and MBA both have forms of the structure CvCC-v(C), e.g., **katabat* > *kəṭbat/kitbat* ‘she wrote’ (Blanc 1964, p. 98; Leitner et al. 2021, p. 69; Mahdi 1985, p. 93). Also in present-day Khuzestani Arabic, the most common reflex is CvCC-v(C) and not CCvC-v(C)—e.g. *kəṭbat* ‘she wrote’. In Khorasan, we find the structure CiCiC-v(C), e.g. *čitibat* ‘she wrote’ (Seeger 2013, p. 314).

Forms of the type CCvC-v(C), e.g., *ktibet* ‘she wrote’, are found, e.g., in Kwayriš (Meißner 1903, pp. XLI, LII)¹², al-Shirqat (Salonen 1980, p. 80), in all Šāwi dialects (Younes and Herin n.d., *EALL Online*), and in certain (*ʕarab*-type¹³) dialects of Khuzestan (Leitner 2020, pp. 14–15). Among the urban speakers of Ahvaz, such forms are not used and are rather perceived as clearly rural.

3.1.5. Retention of Gender Distinction in the Plural

Palva states that gender distinction in the plural is a feature retained only in the rural dialects of southern Mesopotamia (Palva 2009, p. 23; cf. also Blanc 1964, p. 166, who states that this phenomenon is “only marginal in M[BA]”). He explains the lack of gender distinction in the plural of MBA as an inherited *qəltu* trait, albeit admitting that sedentarization or urbanization processes would probably have led to the same

development (*ibid.*). Ingham states that, based on his material from Iraq, Khuzistan, Kuwait, and Northern Najd, gender “distinction was maintained almost everywhere, except in the urban centres of Zubair, Kuwait, Basra and Baghdad” (Ingham 1982, p. 38).

My data shows that gender distinction in the plural is still maintained in all Khuzestani Arabic dialects, even in (modern) urban contexts (cf. the case study of Ahvaz below, Section 3.4), and it appears to be used in modern MBA and Basra Arabic as well (see Table 1 and fn. 8). Gender distinction in the plural was also maintained by all urban Iraqi speakers interviewed for the sociolinguistic study described in Section 3.3 and none of the interviewees associated the use of feminine plural forms with rural speech. Therefore, we might need to rethink the strict association of this feature with rural contexts.

3.1.6. Prefix *tv-* in Form V and Form VI Verbs

The retention of the vowel after the prefix *t-* in Pattern V and VI verbs, e.g., al-Shirqat *tahawwalaw* ‘they moved’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 11, 31, Text 2, sentence 12) and Kwayriš *yatalagga* ‘he meets’ (besides *itlagga*, Meißner 1903, p. XLIV), might be another rural feature of the broader Mesopotamian area.

At least for Khuzestani Arabic, my data suggests that forms with a vowel are typical of rural areas found, e.g., in the dialect of Ḥamīdiyya, e.g., *tačabbašət* ‘I have learnt’, *nəta ʕašša* ‘we have dinner’.¹⁴

Apart from rural Khuzestani Arabic, Kwayriš and al-Shirqat Arabic, we also find this trait in Khorasan Arabic (Volkan Bozkurt, pers. comm.), and in the Šāwi dialects (Behnstedt 1997, pp. 328–29, map 164; Behnstedt 2000, p. 444; Bettini 2006, p. 33). In contrast, it appears to be completely absent from the dialects of Basra and Baghdad, as well as urban Khuzestani Arabic (at least for the city of Ahvaz).

We might tentatively propose that the retention of the vowel in the prefix of Form V and Form VI verbs is a rural feature. However, this hypothesis definitely needs further elaboration and more data from other rural areas, especially in the form of sociolinguistic surveys.

3.1.7. Imperative SG.M of Final Weak Roots: ?vCvC

In MBA and Basra Arabic, the SG.M imperative of final weak roots ends on a vowel, e.g., *imši* ‘go (IMP SG.M)’ (Blanc 1964, p. 103; Mahdi 1985, p. 125). In Kwayriš, as well as in present-day Ahvazi Arabic, in addition to these forms, we also find forms lacking the final vowel, e.g., *?əməš* ‘go (IMP SG.M)’ (Leitner 2020, p. 19; Meißner 1903, p. XLVIII). The latter forms (lacking the final vowel) are also found in the Arabic varieties of Khorasan (?vCvC Volkan Bozkurt, pers. comm.) and Kuwait City (?vCC, Yousuf B. AlBader, pers. comm.), as well as in some Šāwi dialects (e.g., Urfa Arabic, Stephan Procházka, pers. comm.; cf. Behnstedt 1997, pp. 404–5, map 202; and Bettini 2006, p. 35).

For Khuzestani Arabic, Ingham describes the imperative form lacking the final vowel as *ʕarab*-type and, conversely, the form with the final vowel as *ḥadar*-type (Ingham 2007, p. 577; 1973, p. 544; cf. fn. 13 at the end of this paper on these terms). He further describes the introduction of a prothetic vowel before an imperative of the structure CəCC-v (i.e., IMP SG.F, PL.F, and PL.M; or IMP SG.M with a vowel initial object suffix)—e.g., *əkətbi* ‘write (IMP SG.F)’—as a rural feature (Ingham 1973, p. 542). In my corpus, this feature is also attested for speakers from Ahvaz.

The small-scale sociolinguistic study conducted for this paper confirms—at least partly, as some speakers stated that such forms did not exist—that urban speakers associate imperative forms of final weak roots lacking the final vowel with rural speech (cf. Section 3.3).

3.2. Reevaluating the Urban Character of MBA: A Question of Urban Features or Inherited qəltu Features?

3.2.1. Indefinite Article *fadd* ~ *fard*

The use of the indefinite article *fadd* or *fard* has been described as a shibboleth of Iraqi Arabic. Its use is, however, not limited to the nation of Iraq and we also find it in Arabic

dialects in Iran (in the provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan), and in Central Asian Arabic (cf. [Leitner and Procházka 2021](#)).

[Palva \(2009, p. 23\)](#) describes the indefinite article as a “sedentary feature found in the Mesopotamian dialect area” that is probably quite old. We can assume that in principle this is an old sedentary feature that has most likely developed in urban contexts that allow for contact with other languages, which make use of an indefinite article, e.g., Persian. This supports the theory that new linguistic categories are more likely to arise in urban contexts and contact situations.

Other than that, looking at the emergence of this feature does not tell us much about the synchronic urban–rural distinction in the *gələt* dialects.

3.2.2. Progressive Markers *da-* and *gāʕid*

[Palva](#) argues that the clitic progressive marker *da-* < *qāʕid* is a sedentary feature and writes that “the use of verb modifiers to mark different tense and aspect categories is a prominent sedentary feature very well developed in all *qəltu*-dialects [. . .], whereas in rural *gələt* dialects these categories as a rule are unmarked” ([Palva 2009, p. 20](#)). [Palva](#)’s view on the distribution of this feature is contradicted by data from several rural *gələt* dialects. In fact, [Palva](#) himself states several pages later that we do find progressive markers in many rural *gələt* dialects as well ([Palva 2009, p. 28](#): “In addition to the *qəltu*-type verb modifier *da-*, MB[A] also makes use of the unshortened active participle *gāʕed* in the same function [. . .]. This is an obvious imported rural *gələt*-type form . . . ”; cf. also [Denz 1971, pp. 82–82, 110, 116](#) on *ǧāʕid* in Kwayriš).

This fact is supported by [Hanitsch \(2019, pp. 266–71\)](#), who even states that: “Die vollen Formen [of the verbal modifiers deriving from OA *qāʕad* ‘to sit’] sind praktisch über das gesamte arabische Sprachgebiet hinweg anzutreffen. Besonders typisch sind sie für Dialekte nomadischen Typs oder mit nomadischem Adstrat” ([Hanitsch 2019, p. 267](#)). She adds that even though this verbal modifier was especially typical of nomadic dialects, it was also found in *qəltu*-type dialects spoken in the Syro–Mesopotamian area, as well as in rural sedentary dialects in Morocco, Tunisia, and Palestine ([Hanitsch 2019, p. 267](#)).

As [Palva \(2009, p. 28\)](#) states, the use of this progressive marker is also well documented from the Syrian Desert (*ǧāʕid*) and Ḥōrān (*gāʕid*). It is also used in many Šāwi dialects (*ǧāʕid* ~ *ǧāʕd* ~ *ǧāʕd*; cf. [Bettini 2006, p. 44](#); [Procházka 2018b, p. 281](#); [Younes and Herin n.d., EALL Online](#)) and in Khorasan Arabic (Volkan Bozkurt; pers. comm).

Some southern Iraqi dialects, e.g., Basra Arabic ([Mahdi 1985, p. 212](#)) as well as Najaf and Amarah Arabic (information provided by native speakers) use *ǧāy* (active participle of the verb ‘to come’) to mark progressive aspect.

It thus seems that only the shortened form, *da-*, is typical of urban dialects, not the use of a progressive marker per se.

3.2.3. Future Marker *rāḥ*

The future marker *rāḥ* evolved by a grammaticalization process from *rāyəḥ* ‘going’, which is the AP of the verb *rāḥ* ‘to go’. *rāḥ* is used as a future marker in Khuzestani¹⁵ ([Leitner 2020, p. 157](#)), Basra ([Mahdi 1985, pp. 210–11](#)) and al-Shirqat Arabic¹⁶, and in all dialects of Baghdad (cf. [Blanc 1964, pp. 117–18](#)). In addition to the dialects primarily analyzed in this study, it is found, e.g., though not very frequently, in Bahraini Arabic ([Holes 2001, p. 216](#); [Holes 2016, p. 304](#); [Johnstone 1967, p. 152](#); cf. [Taine-Cheikh 2004, pp. 219–220; 231](#) for a good overview regarding its distribution including examples from North Africa and the Levant). In Kuwaiti Arabic it is used to express proximal intent ‘to be about to’ ([Holes 2016, p. 304](#)).

According to an informant from Kerbala (participant D in Section 3.3), some dialects in central Iraq, e.g., Kerbala Arabic, also use *ḥa* to mark future tense.

Kwayriš (cf. [Denz 1971, p. 109, fn.11](#)) and Šāwi Arabic have no future marker. Khorasan Arabic uses the particle *ʕūd* to mark future tense (Volkan Bozkurt, pers. comm.).

Based on the fact that cognate forms of this future marker occur in Baghdadi Arabic (Muslim, Jewish, and Christian), as well as in Egypt, Damascus, and Beirut, Palva describes this future marker as an old urban and sedentary feature (Palva 2006, p. 612; Palva 2009, p. 21).

If the future marker *rāḥ* is indeed an old sedentary feature, it must have at one point been adopted by Bedouin Arab tribes (e.g., those that then settled in Khuzestan). To determine at what point this adoption happened is made difficult by the lack of historical data of, for example, Khuzestani Arabic. Similarly, the question of *why* this feature was adopted—that is, whether it was motivated by, e.g., intensive contact with Iraqi speakers or via the spread of urban features (often connected with a certain prestige)—remains unanswered.

Regarding its current distribution, the use of this future marker is definitely a feature typical of both the sedentary-type *qəltu* and the Bedouin-type *gələt* dialects (like the indefinite article, cf. 3.2.1). It would be interesting to find out, for example, whether this future marker is still not used in Kwayriš or in other Iraqi rural areas nowadays. In case it is used in present-day Kwayriš Arabic, this would support the theory of features found in urban centers spreading to rural areas. From a synchronic point of view, and based on our limited available data, we cannot, however, solidly claim that the use of the future marker *rāḥ* is an exclusively urban feature of present-day *gələt* dialects.

3.2.4. Emphatic Imperative Prefix *d-*

The prefix *də- ~ d-* is used to express an emphatic, more energetic form of imperative, as in the following example from Khuzestani Arabic (cf. Leitner 2020, p. 166 for more examples):

(1) Ahvazi Arabic (Leitner 2020, p. 166)
də-xáll *asələf* *xayya!*
 EMP-HORT tell\IPFV.1SG sister.DIM
 ‘Let me tell (my story), sister (and don’t interrupt)!’

In addition to Khuzestan, this prefix is also used in the described function in the Arabic varieties of Baghdad (Blanc 1964, p. 117), Basra (Mahdi 1985, p. 107), Kwayriš (Meißner 1903, p. XXXIV), Mardin (*qəltu*), and Harran-Urfa (Šāwi) in eastern Anatolia (Procházka 2018a, p. 169), in Christian-Maslawi Arabic (Hanitsch 2019, p. 61), and in some sedentary-type Bahraini Arabic village dialects (Holes 2016, p. 202). I was unable to find evidence for the use of this feature in Salonen’s work on al-Shirqat (Salonen 1980), nor in Denz and Edzard’s text recorded from a speaker from al-Shirqat (Denz and Edzard 1966).¹⁷

Colloquial Persian (especially the northern varieties) also uses a prefix *d-* for strong or emphasized imperatives, e.g., *de-boro* ‘Go (now)!’ (pers. comm., Nawal Bahrani and Babak Nikzat, May 2021) and the Mandaic imperative prefix *d-* (see Häberl 2019, pp. 694–95) may also be related.

Due to its co-occurrence in all Arabic varieties of Baghdad, Palva describes it as an old *qəltu* and with that as a sedentary feature (Palva 2006, p. 612; Palva 2009, pp. 21–22).

As for the origin of this prefix, Grigore (2019, p. 114) derives it from Ottoman Turkish (as an abbreviated form of *haydi/hayed/hadi* ‘Come on!’) and states that *de-* is also found in this function in contemporary varieties of Anatolian Turkish. Procházka questions this derivation arguing that “Turkish possesses a distinct suffix to intensify imperatives (*-sana/-sene*) and the use of *haydi* together with such forms is only optional” and instead points out that the particle might as well be of Arabic origin and a reflex of the OA demonstrative *dā/dī* (Procházka 2018a, pp. 183–84).

Whatever its ultimate source (language), its present-day distribution allows us to consider it an old areal feature of the broader Mesopotamian linguistic area, presently found in both rural and urban *gələt* dialects. One possible scenario for its distribution is that the Bedouin dialects that have arrived in the Mesopotamian area between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries have adopted this feature from the (rural and urban) sedentary dialects.

In case its origin is actually Persian, the question of an ultimate sedentary or Bedouin character of this feature is in principle redundant, even though, of course, it might again be

the sedentary dialects that first adopted this feature from Persian and then passed it on to the Bedouin dialects.

3.2.5. Lack of Features: Feminine Plural Forms, Resyllabification Rules, and Form IV Verbs

To explain the absence of feminine plural forms as “an inherited *qəltu* trait” (Palva 2009, p. 23) seems a bit counterintuitive. Instead, we suggest to explain this phenomenon as a modification (reduction/loss) of dialectal features of the incoming *gələt* speakers rather than an adoption of the absence of a category. Even though the difference in this explanation might appear minor, we deem it important to acknowledge the directions of language change. This alternative interpretation is actually touched upon by Palva himself (ibid.), stating that “the natural drift combined with dialect contact would probably have led to the same development, as it has actually done as part of sedentarization process, e.g., in urban centers such as Basra, Zubair and Kuwait.”

Although the loss of feminine plural forms is indeed often connected with urbanizing processes, this is not necessarily the case (cf. Ahvazi Arabic 3.4), nor is the lack of feminine plural forms perceived as an urban feature by urban speakers of Iraqi and Khuzestani Arabic (cf. 3.3).

Similarly, Palva lists the absence of the Bedouin-type resyllabification rules, such as the *gahawa*-syndrome or the rendering of OA CaCaC-v(C) > CCvC-a(C), among the inherited *qəltu*-type features, but explains this as a “phonetic adaptation by immigrant Bedouin speakers” (Palva 2009, p. 24). As was shown in Sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4, the active use of these phonological rules has reduced greatly, and its absence is not limited to *gələt* dialects that have been in contact with a *qəltu* dialect or been influenced by a *qəltu* substratum. It thus seems that this process (loss of phonological or morphological features) is triggered by the markedness of these features (cf. Section 3.3).

Finally, Palva also lists the absence of Form IV as a productive morphological category in MBA among the inherited *qəltu* traits, even though he himself admits that this feature was absent in Jewish and Christian Baghdadi as well (Palva 2009, p. 24). This verbal pattern has ceased to be productive in most dialects of this area (and beyond), also in rural dialects, and is therefore much rather a general tendency of spoken Arabic than a specific *qəltu* feature.

3.3. Markedness of Rural Features—A Small-Scale Sociolinguistic Survey among Urban Iraqis

Inspired by the question proposed in the introduction and the features previously described as rural (cf. Table 1), the author has undertaken a small-scale sociolinguistic survey among five urban Iraqis. Audio-recordings of all the interviews were made—of course, with the participants’ consent—and later partly transcribed. Some examples taken from these recordings are cited below with English translations.

The five participants, aged between 26 and 41 (three male, two female), are from different urban backgrounds (Falluja, Baghdad, Kerbala, Amarah), and all fled to Vienna within the past few years.

Participant A is a 33-year-old male graphic designer from Falluja, who fled to Vienna in 2015.

Participant B is a 41-year-old professional painter and was born and lived in Al-Adhamiyah in Eastern Baghdad until he fled to Austria in 2015.

Participant C is 26 years old and is also from Al-Adhamiyah, Eastern Baghdad. He went to study for some time near Tikrit. He then too fled to Vienna in 2015.

Participant D is a 28-year-old (female) doctor, who was born and studied in Kerbala, where she has also worked in a hospital after finishing her studies. She has moved to Vienna in September 2021.

Participant E is a 39-year-old mother of four children, who was born in the city of Amarah (Maysan), but then lived for more than a decade in Kirkuk before she and her family fled to Vienna in 2015.

A short interview was conducted with each interviewee individually (mostly in Iraqi Arabic) while focusing on three aspects:

- (i) Do the interviewees themselves reproduce rural features as described in Section 3.1?
- (ii) What do the participants think about the features described in Section 3.1 regarding their distribution, status, and use? (Which speakers, or in which regions, would we find them? Are they rural, *rīfi*, features?)
- (iii) What other features do the participants associate with rural speech?

To answer question (i), the participants were asked to translate certain words and phrases from English, German, or Standard Arabic into their native dialect to see whether they themselves reproduced rural features.

The other two questions were asked within an ‘open questions’ part of the interview, in which the participants could tell me what came to their mind when hearing specific words or features—e.g., the use of *ʔimiš* for ‘go’ (IMP SG.M) instead of *ʔimši*—or when thinking about the urban–rural distinction in the Iraqi dialects in general. Whereas for denoting ‘rural’ the Arabic adjective *rīfi* was used by all speakers and some of the younger speakers even used the English term ‘rural’ additionally (cf. the quote below), for the concept of *urban* no direct equivalent was used. Instead, the interviewees, for example, explained that *ahl il-madīna* ‘the city dwellers’ would use a certain form or not.

This survey yielded the following results represented in what we shall call a ‘Rurality Scale’. The stronger a feature is associated by speakers with rural contexts, the farther the bar related to these features goes to the right¹⁸ and, in consequence, the more likely it is that such a feature is modified or given up in urban contexts.

Of all (possibly) ‘rural’ features discussed in Section 3.1, only the raising of **a* and the use of gender distinction in the plural were found in the speech of my interviewees, who all lived in cities when living in Iraq. For the translation of ‘knives’, for example, all participants used the form *sičāčīn* (< *sakākīn* via raising of **a*), and the sentence ‘The mothers are baking bread’ was translated by all as *əl-ʔumhāt da-yixubzan*, i.e., using the third person feminine plural form of the verb.

As illustrated in Figure 1, among the ‘overtly rural features’ (cf. Abu-Haidar 1988, p. 75) in Iraqi Arabic are the *gahawa*-syndrome, the resyllabification of CaCaC-v(C) > CCvC-a(C), the affrication of **q*, and, albeit to a lesser degree, SG.M imperatives of IIIy/w verbs of the structure ʔvCvC, i.e. lacking the final vowel, and the pronunciation of **ğ* as [q].

The pronunciation of **q* as *ğ* in forms like **qalīl* > *ğilīl* and **qarīb* > *ğirīb* was considered a rural feature by four participants (B, C, D, and E). Speaker D even emphasized that this was a *very* rural feature as such forms were used mainly in *əl-mukānāt əl kullīš rural* ‘areas that are totally rural’ and therefore in general not that commonly heard. Speaker B associated this with the speech of northern tribes, where he has relatives, and said it was possibly also found among rural speakers from the south, but that he was not sure about that because he did not know any southerners. Speaker A considered it a northern feature that was, however, not limited to rural contexts but also found in urban contexts in the north.

As for the resyllabification of CaCaC-v(C) > CCvC-a(C), only the youngest participant (C) explained that forms such as *ktəbat* ‘she wrote’ or *glubat* ‘she turned’ did not exist. The other four speakers (A, B, D, and E) considered both the resyllabification of CaCaC-v(C) and the *gahawa*-syndrome as typically rural (e.g., A *bi-l-aryāf* ‘in rural areas’) or Bedouin (e.g., B *ʔašāyirna yğūlūha* ‘our tribes say it’) features. Speaker A and B again associate these features particularly with the speech of northern tribes.

As for the SG.M imperative of final weak roots, all of the interviewees used forms ending in a vowel and two of them (B and C) considered forms lacking the final vowel—e.g. *ʔəmāš* ‘go!’—as simply wrong or non-existent. The other three participants (A, D, and E) associated said forms with rural speech (e.g., A: *ʔimiš yistaxdimīnha b-ir-rīf ʔaktar* ‘*ʔimiš* is mainly used in rural areas’).

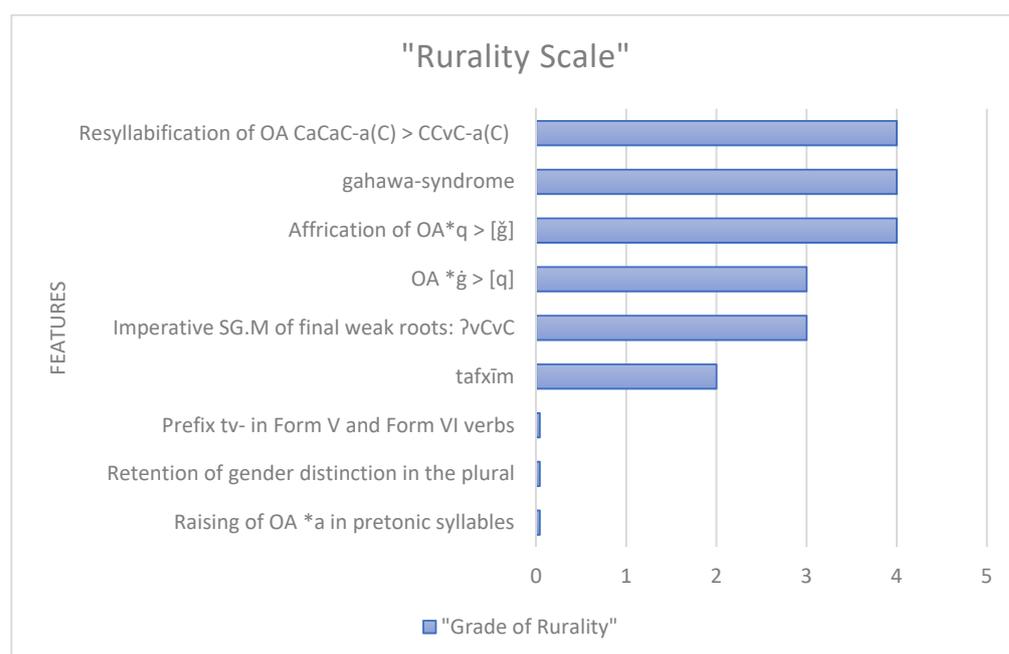


Figure 1. Scale of markedness of rural speech elements.

Interestingly, none of my interviewees associated the use of feminine plural forms with rural speech. In fact, most of them used verbs in the feminine plural form when translating sentences like ‘the girls washed . . . ’ or ‘the mothers are baking bread’, but only the speaker from Amarah (E) explicitly stated that the sentence would be wrong if I used a masculine plural verb instead (which would have been acceptable for the others).

Similarly, the retention of the vowel after the prefix *t-* in Pattern V and VI verbs or the raising of **a* were not mentioned as rural features by any of the interviewees. All of the participants produced forms of Pattern V and VI verbs without vowel retention only, e.g., *nətʃašša* ‘we eat dinner’, but did produce forms in which **a* was raised to *i*, e.g., *diǧāǧa* ‘a chicken’. The retention of the vowel in the prefix of Pattern V and Pattern VI verbs thus might be limited to rural areas but does not seem to be marked as a feature of rural speech. The raising of **a* is neither limited to rural areas nor a marked rural feature.

In addition to these features, three participants (A, C, E) mentioned the realization of **ǧ* as [q] and two (A and C) the use of *tafxīm* ‘emphasis’ (also described as ‘heavy speech’) as rural features. About the realization of **ǧ* as [q], participant A stated that *b-ir-rif mā nistaxdim il-ǧayn b-il-ʃumūm, nistaxdim il-qāf, maʔalan id-Deckel* [German for ‘lid (of a pot)’] *iħna b-il-ʃāmmiyya ingūl ʃalē qabaǧ humma igūlūn ʃalē qabaq ē kulla qāf* ‘on the countryside, they [lit. ‘we’] don’t use the [letter] *ǧayn* generally, they use the [letter] *qāf* [instead]; for example, for lid [of a pot] we say *qabaǧ* in our dialect, (while) they call it *qabaq*, yes, it’s all *qāf*s’. About the stronger use of emphasis in the dialects spoken in the north-western Iraqi province of Anbar, the same speaker says: *lahǧathum kulliʃ tiǧla* ‘their dialect is very heavy [i.e., characterized by emphasis]’.

Furthermore, participant A and C also mentioned the use of several lexical features as typically rural, e.g., the use of *xašš* ‘enter’ (instead of urban *ʔabb*, participant A¹⁹; cf. Abu-Haidar 1988), *dahhiǧ~dahhiǧ* ‘to see’ (vs. urban *bāwa ʃ*, participant C), and *ǧādi* ‘there’ (participant C).

As for the city of Baghdad, participant A (from Falluja) described its people and dialect as the most educated: *fa-tkūn lahǧathum hiyya l-lahǧa l-Karxiyya l-bēda lli hiyya qarība ʃa-l-fuṣṣā ya ʃni bī-ha kalimāt ʃāmmiyya u bī-ha fuṣṣā* ‘and their dialect is the “white” dialect of Karkh [Western part of Baghdad], which is close to the literary language, that is, it has dialectal words as well as words derived from the literary language’.

Participant E described the dialect of Baghdad as effeminate and unmanly, while she described the rural dialects as masculine.

In general, it appears that the purely geographical division into *ġanūbi* ‘southern’, *b-il-waṣaṭ* ‘in the center, central’, and *ġarbi* ‘western’ often plays a bigger role in the participants’ descriptions of the dialectal landscape that we find in Iraq.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that two pejorative terms used by city-dwellers to describe people from rural areas were mentioned in the interviews. These terms are *šrūġi* (PL *šrūġ*)²⁰ and *māṣḍān* (PL *māṣḍān*). While the former mainly denotes people from the south, the latter essentially refers to the marsh-dwellers, many of whom live in the Eastern province of Maysan, but is now often used to derogatorily describe an uneducated, uncultivated person. People of both groups have moved to (the suburbs of) Baghdad during the past decades (cf. Miller 2007, p. 14) and thus more contact situations with the city dwellers have arisen. Most of my participants mentioned that they only used those terms for people who lacked education, good taste in clothing, and had a more conservative lifestyle, but not to people who came from rural areas but were educated and have adapted to the city lifestyle. Only participant E, who was born in Maysan herself, said she was proud of the *māṣḍān* heritage of her people and considered it an important part of Iraqi culture.

3.4. Case Study Ahvaz, Khuzestan: Urbanization of a Rural *ġalət* Dialect

The city of Ahvaz, capital of the south-western Iranian province of Khuzestan, witnessed rapid urbanization and population growth in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, Ahvaz was no more than a village and in the early twentieth century it still had less than 50,000 inhabitants (see Oppenheim 1967, p. 22, fn. 1). During the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) numerous houses were destroyed (especially in the southern Khuzestani cities of Muḡammara/Khorramshahr and Abadan) and many families were forced to flee their hometowns. Many of the Khuzestani Arab war refugees left the province of Khuzestan altogether or went to comparably safer cities, such as Ahvaz. For this reason, during that time, the city of Ahvaz witnessed an immense population growth. According to Nejatian (2015), the number of inhabitants in Ahvaz grew from 334,399 in 1976 to 724,653 in 1991, and to 1,112,021 in 2011.

To look at the loss of rural features in Ahvaz might give us a hint as to what *ġalət* features are highly marked and first to be given up in arising urban contexts. Arising urban contexts are here defined as contexts which permit contact with other *ġalət* dialects (urban and rural) but not necessarily have an old sedentary or *qəltu* substratum.

Of the (possibly) rural features discussed in Section 3.1, Feature 1 (affrication of *q), Feature 2 (raising of *a in pre-tonic open syllables), and Feature 5 (gender distinction in the plural), are commonly found among all speakers of Ahvazi Arabic.

The remaining features discussed in Section 3.1 are not found in Ahvazi Arabic or are in the process of being dropped:

Feature 3: In Ahvazi Arabic as well as most present-day Khuzestani Arabic dialects, the use of forms that show the typical *ġahawa*-type resyllabification is limited to certain frozen examples—e.g., *ʔahali* ‘my family’ and *xadār* ~ *ʔaxadār* ‘green’—and not productive, e.g., Ahvazi Arabic *ġahwa* (not *ġhawwa*) ‘coffee’, and *naṣya* (not *nṣaya*) ‘ewe’ (cf. Leitner 2020, p. 50 for more examples).

Feature 4: Ahvazi Arabic does not have forms that show the Bedouin-type resyllabification rule of CaCaC-v(C)-structures, e.g., Ahvazi Arabic *kəṭbat* ‘she wrote’, and *šəbġat* ‘she hugged’. The Bedouin-type form is still typical of north-western Khuzestani towns and villages, such as Xafaġīya (Pers. Susangerd) and Ḥuwayza.

Feature 6: Most speakers of Ahvazi Arabic do not show retention of the prefix vowel in Form V and Form VI verbs. As stated above (3.1.6), this feature is more typical of rural areas and smaller Khuzestani towns and villages such as Ḥamīdiyya.

Feature 7: In present-day Ahvazi, but not among all speakers, the rural form of the SG.M imperative of IIIw/y verbs is still found, i.e., the one lacking the final vowel—e.g., *ʔəməš* ‘go! (IMP SG.M)’, *ʔəḥəč* ‘speak! (IMP SG.M)’. However, the form ending on a vowel that is associated with urban contexts (cf. Ingham 2007, p. 577; 1973, p. 544)—e.g.,

ʔəməši ‘go (IMP MSG)’—is also used in present-day Ahvazi Arabic. Thus, this rural feature is apparently still in the process of being dropped and substituted by the less marked urban forms.

Finally, present-day Ahvazi Arabic appears to use both typically *ʕarab*- and *ḥadar*-type words (cf. fn. 13 on these terms; Ingham 1973, p. 538). *ʕarab* words (associated with a rural lifestyle) include, e.g., (*le*-)ḡād ‘there’ (however, its *ḥadar* equivalent *hnāk* ‘there’ is equally attested in Ahvaz). *ḥadar*-type lexical items in Ahvazi Arabic are, for instance, *taʕadda* ‘to pass (i.e., go past something)’. Some lexemes that Ingham mentioned appear to be given up completely, e.g., the word for ‘meal’ today is neither *marag* (which Ingham lists as *ḥadar*) nor *ydām* (which Ingham lists as *ʕarab*), but *ʔakəl*; and the most commonly heard word for ‘mirror’ in present-day Ahvazi Arabic is neither *mnədra* (*ḥadar*) nor *mrāya* (*ʕarab*), but *məšūfa* (PL *məšūwəf*) and *məšaffa* (PL *məšaffāt*). In turn, sometimes items from both types are used, for example, ‘to look (at)’ may be expressed by *əštəba* (*ḥadar*), *bāwaʕ* (*ʕarab*), or *ʕāyan* (*ʕarab*) in present-day Ahvazi Arabic. Even though this distinction cannot be equated with the urban–rural distinction but is rather connected to occupational differences (cf. fn. 13), these processes found in the lexical domain support the assumption that Ahvazi Arabic has been subject to linguistic levelling tendencies since the times of Ingham’s fieldwork in 1969 and 1971. The result of this development is a dialect which does not clearly correspond to one of these sociolinguistic categories anymore and may rather be considered as of mixed typology. The reasons for the linguistic leveling and mixture of dialectal features observed for Ahvazi Arabic lie mainly in the rapid demographic changes that this city has witnessed during recent years. Its fast growth during and after the Iran–Iraq War, especially, has allowed for much (linguistic) contact among people of different geographic origins within Khuzestan and southern Iraq, calling for linguistic accommodation and triggering leveling processes (cf. Ech-charfi 2020, pp. 70–71, 75 on leveling tendencies in other new cities, such as Amman and Casablanca).

The fact that of all possible rural features discussed in Section 3.1, Feature 2 (raising of *a in pre-tonic open syllables) and Feature 5 (gender distinction in the plural) are not modified or dropped in Ahvazi Arabic is partly paralleled by the results of the sociolinguistic interview (cf. Section 3.3), according to which these features are not marked as rural features. The third feature that is not dropped in Ahvazi Arabic, Feature 1 (affrication of *q), shows that affrication of *q is apparently less marked in Khuzestan. This might be related to the fact that the urban category is newer in the Khuzestani society and the dichotomy of urban vs. rural features not as strong or long established as in Iraq, where urban centers have already existed for hundreds of years.

All features that are not found (anymore) in Ahvazi Arabic as described above—except for Feature 6—are the same features that were perceived as highly marked by the participants of the sociolinguistic interview.

4. Discussion

In the light of the scarcity of linguistic descriptions of *gələt* dialects in general (of both urban and rural contexts) and the fact that some of the descriptions date back more than 100 years (e.g., Meißner 1903 on Kwayriš), we must be careful when drawing general conclusions about the present-day classification of this dialect group. The following interpretation of our results is therefore to be understood as tentative and as re-opening the floor for debating this issue.

4.1. Historical and Modern MBA and the Quest for Urban *gələt*

The analysis in Section 3.2 lets us safely conclude that many features of MBA must not necessarily be explained as a consequence of the *qəltu* substrate but can also be interpreted as consequences of the urbanization of *gələt* dialects.

The fact that some features which have been explained as old urban and sedentary features are nowadays also found in rural Bedouin dialects that have not (or not likely)

been directly in contact with *qəltu* supports the theory that features often spread from prestigious urban centers to rural areas.

For example, the emphatic imperative prefix *d-* (cf. Palva 2009, pp. 22, 35), the use of the future marker *rāhī* and the indefinite article *fard* are nowadays attested for several urban and rural *gələt* dialects alike and (partly) also for the Šāwi dialects and dialects of Khorasan. In these dialects, the existence of these features cannot be explained via a *qəltu* substrate, which they do not have. More likely, they have spread—probably at a very early stage—from the longer established sedentary *qəltu* to the later incoming Bedouin *gələt* dialects. Nowadays, we may consider them areal features general to the southern Mesopotamian area and beyond.

Instead of explaining the absence of certain features of MBA—the lack of the resyllabication rules and the feminine plural forms—via the *qəltu* substrate, we suggest, rather, that these developments be seen as consequences of the urbanization of *gələt* speakers and the subsequent loss of marked features (cf. subsequent subsections). Some but not all of these marked features are mostly absent in modern urban contexts, e.g., Baghdad and Ahvaz, and are still strongly associated by speakers themselves with Bedouin and rural-type dialects (at least for Iraq). Notably, this is not the case with the gender distinction in the plural, which is gaining ground in modern MBA and is retained in the modern city of Ahvaz.

As for the question why—at least at the time of Haim Blanc’s descriptions of Baghdadi Arabic—the only urban or urbanized *gələt* dialects are found in Lower (and none in Upper) Iraq, we must keep in mind that most towns of Lower Iraq were built (or re-populated) not before the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after the massive depopulation of this area following the Mongol invasions (cf. Blanc 1964, p. 170, fn. 189 and the references mentioned there). This implies that we are mostly not dealing with longstanding sedentary populations (that were later Bedouinized or marginalized by the Bedouin immigrants, as in the case of MBA²¹) but much later (nineteenth, early twentieth century) sedentarized and urbanized Bedouin populations. In contrast, towns in Upper Iraq have had a more continuous (*qəltu*-speaking) population. In addition to that, the topography of Upper Iraq has been described as “more conducive to polarization between sedentary and non-sedentary life”, as the steppes allowed for grazing only, while the fixed banks of the river courses are well suited for permanent sedentarism (cf. Blanc 1964, pp. 170–71). This situation has definitely changed as more and more Bedouins have given up the nomadic lifestyle. The question of whether or not and to what degree we nowadays find urbanizing tendencies in the *gələt* dialects of Upper Iraq remains to be answered in future studies as we still lack the data needed for such an analysis.

4.2. Who Speaks Urban *gələt*?

Traditionally, Muslim Baghdad Arabic (MBA) has been considered the main representative of an urban *gələt* type besides the Arabic dialect of Basra (Blanc 1964, p. 165).²² However, considering the unique linguistic history of MBA, a *gələt* dialect that has a *qəltu* substratum (Palva 2009 argues for a mixed *qəltu/gələt* character of MBA; cf. Section 3.2 for a discussion of this description), it is questionable whether it is a good reference point for a general description of an urban *gələt* type. The specific character of MBA has indeed arisen in an urban context (though the sense of ‘urbanization’ here is not a socio-economic one), however, the contact between (Bedouin) *gələt* and (Sedentary) *qəltu* speakers has also shaped the linguistic profile of this dialect.

On the urban character of MBA and the urban–rural split among the *gələt* dialects, Blanc tentatively stated that “... [MBA] is closest to the urban dialects on which some data are available (Basra, Qal’at Šāleḥ) so that one dimly foresees a possible classification of urban vs. rural *gələt* dialects, as yet not solidly established” (Blanc 1964, p. 165).

Mahdi writes in the introduction to his thesis on Basra Arabic that “in studying BA, I found no justification for dividing BA [Basra Arabic] into two groups, i.e., urban and rural, [. . .] The linguistic boundaries between the town and the surrounding countryside are

simply not apparent [. . .] mainly because the town society is rural in origin and the towns depend basically on the surrounding villages and countryside for filling the needs and manpower. Those who live in the town are most of them originally villagers or cultivators who moved to the town for various reasons" (Mahdi 1985, p. XV). Basra has been almost completely destroyed in the fourteenth century and was subsequently moved to its modern location at al-ʿUbulla (Pellat and Longrigg 2012; Oppenheim 1952, p. 178) and was subject to massive immigration by speakers from rural areas of Lower Iraq. A major difference between Basra Arabic and MBA is that the former has no *qəltu* substrate.

In a similar vein, Bruce Ingham states in the introduction to his book *Arabian Diversions* (Ingham 1997, pp. ix–x) that geographically and demographically all Khuzestani Arabic dialects are really rural in character, for which reason he prefers to use the terms *ḥadār* vs. *ʿarab* instead of urban vs. rural for the subclassification of these dialects (cf. fn. 13 below).

Of course, since Ingham's descriptions (based on his fieldwork carried out in the 1960s and 1970s), new urban centers have developed (e.g., Ahvaz, cf. Section 3.4 below) and others have considerably grown. In both Iraq and Khuzestan, the past decades have witnessed massive population movements (to a considerable part caused the Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s), from rural to—already existing as well as newly arising—urban areas. The question of possible linguistic effects of these urbanizing tendencies among the *gələt* dialects will be discussed in Section 4.4.

Thus, we can see that even though the term 'urban' is clearly associated with cities, this does not necessarily mean that the speakers of a city speak an urban variety and even less does it mean that their families are of an old, established urban background.

4.3. About Rural *gələt* and the Markedness of Rural Features

The analysis of the possible (phonological and morphological) rural features in Section 3.1 yields no unanimously clear picture regarding their distribution. As we can see in Table 1, only Features 6 and 7 are clearly absent in the dialects of the urban centers Basra and Baghdad.²³ However, even regarding these features the picture is not clear when it comes to the supposedly rural dialects of Khuzestan and Kwayriš. The distribution of all other features (1–5), doesn't show a clear-cut distinction between rural and urban contexts either.

While Feature 1 (affrication of *q) is found in all dialects analyzed but MBA, Feature 2 is found in all dialects analyzed. Even though Features 3 and 4 are virtually absent from the dialects of Basra and Baghdad, they have also been dropped or are in the process of being dropped from what have usually been described as rural *gələt* dialects. Feature 5 stands out by being found in all varieties analyzed (urban and rural), albeit in MBA it can often be substituted by masculine plural forms.

This picture is in many points corroborated by the results of the sociolinguistic survey presented in Section 3.3 and the theoretical assumption that "overt stigmatization attached to certain rural features seems to be the main reason why these features are reduced during the accommodation process to urban speech" (Abu-Haidar 1988, p. 76).

How markedness may lead to the loss of features, how non-markedness can foster retention of features, and which features are relevant in our context, will be discussed in the following Section 4.4.

4.4. Linguistic Consequences of Urbanization

In the following, some general tendencies found in urban(izing) contexts will be discussed. 'General' is to be understood in the geographical context of the Mesopotamian area only, as supra-regional tendencies in urban and rural dialects of Arabic are difficult to find, and the analysis of such supra-regional tendencies was not within the scope of this paper. One possible supra-regional tendency might be the perception of urban dialects or urban features as effeminate vs. rural dialects as masculine (cf. Section 3.3; Miller 2007, p. 13; Ech-charfi 2020, p. 75). In general, urbanizing contexts are characterized by an

increase of contact (be it urban–rural, or rural–rural of two different rural backgrounds) and leveling tendencies; they also often go hand in hand with complexity reduction.

4.4.1. Loss of Features

It is often the case that a language becomes structurally simpler in contexts permitting a high degree of language (or variety) contact leading to linguistic leveling (cf. [Kerswill 2013](#), p. 521 and the references mentioned there). Based on this rule, we would expect categories such as gender distinction in the plural for verbs and pronouns to be given up in urban contexts.

Like most other *gəlat* dialects, including those spoken in urban contexts such as Basra, all Khuzestani Arabic dialects have retained gender distinction in the plural. This is a feature that in general is often given up in urban-type dialects, even when of Bedouin origin (cf. [Procházka 2014](#), p. 129). The use of feminine plural forms has even seemed to gain ground in the city of Baghdad. This fact was confirmed in the sociolinguistic survey conducted for this paper, which also showed that it is not indexed with rural speech or overtly marked as rural. This explains why it can be easily reintroduced in urban contexts, such as Baghdad, with the immigration of rural speakers, and why it is not rapidly given up in newer urban contexts, such as Ahvaz. Finally, the fact that feminine plural forms exist in the literary language might raise its prestige or at least increases the exposure of speakers to this feature, which in turn lends to the readiness to adopt a feature (Baghdad), as well as its resistance to be dropped (Ahvaz).

Due to increased literacy in cities, features that deviate from the literary language in a way that is clearly perceivable for speakers are often highly marked. Examples of such marked features (be it for their deviation from the literary language or for other reasons) are, e.g., the *gahawa*-syndrome, the Bedouin-type resyllabification rule, and SG.M imperative forms of final weak roots lacking a final vowel. At least for our geographic context, our small-scale sociolinguistic survey shows that these are among the features most readily given up in urban contexts and most strongly marked as rural among urban speakers. Inversely, the sociolinguistic survey also shows that those features that are apparently not indexed with rurality—especially Features 2 and 5 as described in Section 3.1—tend to be retained in both urban and rural contexts.

The current developments in Ahvazi Arabic (cf. Section 3.4) underline the proposed tendencies found in urban contexts regarding the loss of highly marked rural features.

4.4.2. Innovations

Reevaluating Heikki Palva's diachronic discussion of urban *qəltu* features as found in MBA has shown that urban contexts, especially those where contact with other languages plays an important role, may encourage the development of new linguistic categories. Examples of this are the emergence of an indefinite article (which in general is absent in Arabic), as described in Section 3.2.1, and of the emphatic imperative particle *d-* (provided we consider it a Persian loan; cf. Section 3.2.4).

The use of time (future), aspect (progressive) and indefiniteness markers may have arisen historically among sedentary communities but were at some point later adopted by Bedouin speakers. Most likely, this happened in urban contexts, which strongly facilitate contact situations.

5. Conclusions and Outlook

The distinction between urban and rural must not be given up completely for the *gəlat* dialect group. Trying to write about this distinction with respect to present-day dialects, we should, however, shift the focus onto synchronic sociolinguistic differences that we can observe among speakers who live in cities vs. speakers who live on the countryside. Following this, we should focus on the study of current linguistic trends as observed in arising urban contexts, such as Ahvaz.

Approaching the question of the urban–rural split among the *gələt* dialects, it also appears highly necessary to ask what is subjectively perceived as rural or urban speech by native speakers, rather than imposing what we think to be rural or urban based on the few dialectal descriptions we have from over a hundred years ago. By this critical reevaluation, the author by no means wants to lower the value of these seminal contributions made by Arabic dialectologists, but merely proposes a new way of approaching the classification of the *gələt* dialects.

One major factor that should be considered in any new attempt at classifying the *gələt* dialects by using the urban–rural dichotomy is the different nature of older or longer established urban communities, as found in Baghdad, and the communities of new cities, such as Ahvaz. While in the former, longer established urban communities witnessed rural immigration, in the new urban contexts most inhabitants—or at least their (grand)parents—still are of rural origin themselves. This means that there is no established urban community which would define the linguistically urban character of this city in the first place. Rather, it is the “cohabitation of different ethnic groups” (Ech-charfi 2020, p. 72) and groups of different geographical origin that is shaping the new urban profiles. This should not mean, however, that the linguistic profile of such urban spaces that *do* have established urban communities and that are facing rural immigration is only defined by the linguistic traits of the old urban community. In such scenarios we often observe that new urban sociolinguistic identities are coined by combining both old urban features and part of the rural linguistic heritage (cf. Ech-charfi 2020, pp. 72, 75–76 on a similar observation in Rabat, Amman and Casablanca Arabic). At least for modern MBA, the following citation from Ech-charfi applies “New urban identities are constructed linguistically by combining traditional urban and rural variants while rural stereotypes serve as the background against which urban identities are defined” (Ech-charfi 2020, p. 76).

Thus, in no scenario can we speak of a homogenous urban group that is clearly distinct from the rural population, as such groups are partly (Baghdad) or completely (Ahvaz) descended from rural populations themselves (cf. 4.1. and Mahdi 1985, p. XV, who states that all inhabitants of Basra are rural in origin). Rather, we can only try and capture linguistic trends found in urban contexts by observing which features are most readily modified or dropped and which adopted, and by asking speakers what features are perceived as rural. By this we can get to define the (socio-)linguistic profiles of the (modern-day!) urban and rural societies in Iraq and Khuzestan.

Importantly, the definition of the ‘default’ urban *gələt* type should not be limited to the scenario of MBA, a Bedouin type *gələt* dialect with a sedentary type *qəltu* substratum, but should be extended to include *gələt* dialects spoken in the context of newly arising urban spaces. Of course, the different nature of these two urban scenarios must be borne in mind.

In addition to the urban–rural distinction as treated in this paper, the *gələt* dialects can be divided by geographic aspects, e.g., into a southern and a northern group. For this question, the reader is referred to Hassan (2020, 2021), who discerns two geographic subgroups of Iraqi Arabic: *šrūgi* (south of Baghdad) and *non-šrūgi* (north of Baghdad) dialects, corresponding roughly to the Shiite and the Sunni groups of *gələt* speakers in Iraq, respectively (cf. fn. 20 on the derogatory nature of these terms).

The classification of the *gələt* dialects is still far from being solidly established, a situation which primarily results from the scarcity of data available on this dialect group.

We do hope, however, that this modest contribution has brought forth aspects of this classification hitherto not considered and presented some already considered aspects in a new light. Hopefully, this study will motivate other researchers to continue research on the classification, the historical development, and the modern urbanizing tendencies of this still under-researched dialect group.

One major desideratum in the investigation of the urban–rural split in the *gələt* dialects is a large-scale sociolinguistic survey showing how linguistic variables are perceived in terms of prestige, markedness, and other sociological factors, such as masculinity

vs. femininity, in various varieties of the *gələt*-speaking area. Ideally, this large-scale sociolinguistic survey would include additional variables: on the one hand, new variables from the domains of syntax and lexicon (e.g., *l̄-gāḏ* ‘there’ described as a typical rural *gələt* feature by Fischer and Jastrow 1980, p. 151), which could not be treated within the scope of the present study; and on the other hand, phonological features like the realization of *ḡ as [q] and the use of *tafxīm* ‘emphasis’ that were mentioned as rural features by the participants of the small-scale sociolinguistic survey conducted for this study.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The only part of this study that included ethically relevant human interaction were the sociolinguistic interviews. Since it was not possible due to the research agenda to anonymize gender, age, and locations, this was only but thoroughly done for names. All subjects were informed that their anonymity is assured, why the research was being conducted, and how their data was going to be used. All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval by an Ethics Committee was not deemed necessary as this is a non-interventional study, all conventions in terms of data usage were upheld, and there are no perceivable risks for the participants due to the conduction of the study or the publication of the material.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Both publicly available and private datasets were analyzed in this study. The publicly available datasets can be found in the references cited in this article. The private dataset stems from the author’s own fieldwork conducted in Khuzestan in 2016 and is available on request from the corresponding author.

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Abbreviations

DIM	Diminutive
EMP	Emphatic marker
F	Feminine
HORT	Hortative
IMP	Imperative
IPFV	Imperfective
M	Masculine
MBA	Muslim Baghdad Arabic
OA	Old Arabic
PL	Plural
SG	Singular

Notes

- I would like to express my gratefulness to my dear friends and colleagues Stephan Procházka and Ana Iriarte Díez as well as the reviewers for their valuable thoughts and critical remarks on draft versions of this article.
- Following Haim Blanc’s classification of Mesopotamian Arabic dialects into *gələt*- and *qəltu*-type dialects. These terms are the 1SG PFV verb forms for ‘to say’ (cf. Blanc 1964, pp. 7–8) which indicate certain phonological and morphological characteristics of these dialect groups.
- Compare, e.g., “rural *g*” (Palva 2009, p. 35) and “the voiced reflex of OA *q* is the most exclusive Bedouin feature” (*op.cit.*: 24).
- Historically, probably all *gələt* dialects outside Arabia were Bedouin or Bedouinized dialects (cf. Blanc 1964, pp. 167–68).
- The term ‘Šāwi-type Bedouin Arabic’ is used here to refer to a bundle of closely related dialects spoken by semi-nomads in various regions of the Fertile Crescent. Typologically similar dialects are found in many rural parts of Iraq, which is why the Šāwi and the rural Iraqi *gələt*-type dialects are often grouped together as ‘Syro-Mesopotamian (fringe) dialects’ or pre-ʿAnazī dialects (Palva 2006, p. 606).
- At the time Haim Blanc wrote his book on the Arabic dialects of Baghdad, the main scientific data available on *gələt* dialects were limited to (Meißner 1903; Weissbach 1968) on Kwayriš, his own data from one informant from the Musayyib district, and (Van Wagoner 1944) as well as his own data on the Arabic spoken in the Amarah district.

- 7 The sources used for Table 1 are: (Leitner 2020) for Khuzestani Arabic; (Meißner 1903) and (Denz 1971, which is based on Meißner 1903 and Weissbach 1908) for Kwayriš, (Salonen 1980) for al-Shirqat, (Seeger 2013, 2002; Volkan Bozkurt, pers. comm.) for Khorasan, (Behnstedt 1997; Bettini 2006; Jastrow 1996; Fischer and Jastrow 1980; Procházka 2003, 2018a; 2018b; Younes and Herin n.d., EALL online) for Šawi Arabic, and (Mahdi 1985) for Basra, (Leitner et al. 2021; Blanc 1964) for Muslim Baghdad Arabic (MBA); as well as (Palva 2009) and (Hanitsch 2019, pp. 266–71).
- 8 The sources are in fact contradictory on this question: while Mahdi (1985, pp. 94–106, 152–55) provides feminine plural forms for verbs and pronouns, Ingham (1982, p. 38) states that gender distinction in the plural has been given up in urban centers, such as Basra.
- 9 It is important to note that MBA shows interdialectal variation due to the subsequent immigration of rural people to the city; cf. Abu-Haidar (1988) on a number of phonological differences.
- 10 Blanc (1964, p. 204) reports that, even though the town was historically rather stable in comparison to most other towns in Lower Iraq, the population of Hilla has been Bedouin since its foundation; cf. Oppenheim 1952, pp. 185, 189, who writes that Hilla was deserted after the second Mongol invasion in the fourteenth century.
- 11 In several dialects, the raised vowel was elided subsequently, e.g., Khuzestani Arabic (ə)mrākəb ‘boats’ < *mərākəb < OA *marākib^u. Meißner (1903, p. XLI) also adds that the urban structure would be CvCCvC (*kitbet*).
- 13 Ingham (1976, p. 64; 1997, p. x) discerns three main socio-economical groups in Khuzestan: the *ʕarab*, the *ḥaḍar*, and the marsh Arabs. While the term *ʕarab* denotes a group of larger territorially organized tribes, who live—sometimes as semi-nomads—away from the river in the plain (*bādiya*) and are involved in occupations such as cereal, rice, and date cultivation, sheep herding, and water buffalo breeding, the *ḥaḍar* group are riverine palm-cultivating Arabs of mixed tribal descent, who live along the banks of the Shatt al-Arab and the lower parts of the river Karun. Ingham notes that while the *ʕarab* dialect shows “considerably more resemblance to the dialects of Arabia”, the *ḥaḍar* was “more strictly Mesopotamian” (Ingham 1997, p. ix). Cf. Ingham (2009) on some ‘fringe’ Bedouin dialects in Kuwait and north west of Nasiriyah, which share features with both the southern Mesopotamian *gəlat* group, e.g., affrication of OA *k > č and *q > ğ, and the northern Najdi dialects.
- 14 Cf. Ingham (1976, p. 74), who contrasts ‘nomadic’ forms like *taḥāča* and ‘sedentary’ forms like *thāča*; elsewhere, Ingham describes the prefix sequence CCv- in such structures, e.g., *nta ʕašša*, as rural (Ingham 1973, p. 541).
- 15 In Khuzestani Arabic, the active participle form *rāyəḥ* F *rāyḥa* is also used to express future intent (*āna rāyḥa* ‘I will make (for) you...’). We also find Khuzestani Arabic sentences with future reference that do not feature any future particle. In such cases, future reference is usually indicated by an IPFV verb or an active participle together with a temporal adverb like ‘tomorrow’ or ‘soon’.
- 16 There is one instance of *rāḥ* and two instances of *rāyeh* used as future markers in Salonen’s texts: *rāḥ tehergu* ‘it will burn him’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 13 and 33, Text 3, sentence 8), *rāyeh yiṭla ʕ* ‘he will come up’, *rāyeh yiḡrag* ‘he will drown’ (Salonen 1980, pp. 14 and 34, Text 4, sentence 4).
- 17 Of course, this particle is less common in narratives than in conversations and the fact it does not appear in these texts from al-Shirqat might be attributed to the nature of the text genre and must not necessarily mean that it does not exist in this Arabic variety.
- 18 The grade of rurality of a certain feature was measured quantitatively by the number of its mentions by the interviewees as a *rīfi* ‘rural’ feature. This means, if a feature reaches, for example, the number 3 on the ‘Rurality Scale’, three of the five interviewees have described this feature as typical of rural dialects.
- 19 Participant C, in contrast, stated that the form *xašš* was used in Baghdad as well, but only by elderly women.
- 20 Cf. Hassan (2020, 2021), who uses this term for dividing the Iraqi Arabic dialects into a northern and a southern group (the latter being associated with the term *šrūgi*), even though he acknowledges its pejorative and derogatory use (Hassan 2021, p. 52).
- 21 Cf. Blanc (1964, p. 170): “In the fourteenth century, the Baghdad Muslims were still speaking a *qəltu* type dialect . . . ”.
- 22 Blanc also refers to the dialect of the town of Qal’at Saleh as a representative of the urban group. The only description of this dialect, however, is an unpublished dissertation (Van Wagoner 1944) not available to the author of this paper.
- 23 Although we did not find evidence for the use of Feature 6 in the one source that exists for al-Shirqat, we cannot rule out that it does not exist in this variety. It is, however, also absent in the modern dialect of the city of Ahvaz.

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