



## Cross-generational Dialect Familiarity and Use in Oman: The Case of Al-Hamra

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## Cross-Generational Dialect Familiarity and Use in Oman: The Case of Al-Hamra

Shorooq Rashid Al-Abri, Ghada Said Al-Harathi, C. J. Denman and Rahma Al-Mahrooqi

### Abstract:

Although a number of researchers have focused on describing the unique linguistic features of various Omani dialects, relatively little attention has been paid to their cross-generational familiarity and use. The current study investigated this issue by exploring the abilities of 95 young (20 years or younger) Al-Hamra residents to provide the meanings and correct usage of 20 words identified as being characteristic of the traditional Al-Hamra dialect. Sixty-one elderly residents (60 years or older) were also asked to perform the same task for vocabulary representing the speech of younger residents. Results indicate a limited understanding of, and ability to use, words from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect among younger residents, with elderly respondents also struggling to understand vocabulary selected from the younger group's speech. Findings suggest that, in addition to limited cross-generational understanding of the speech typifying younger and older groups in the region, younger people may be losing familiarity with the traditional Al-Hamra dialect. The paper discusses factors that may impact on the situation, and offers ways, such as encouraging wider use of the traditional Al-Hamra dialect in the community and creating lexical resources of dialectical words and phrases, of helping preserve this part of Oman's unique cultural and linguistic landscape.

Keywords: Al-Hamra dialect; Cross-generational change; Dialect loss/shift; Oman; Vocabulary recognition.

### معرفة اللهجة بين الأجيال واستخدامها في سلطنة عمان: لهجة الحمراء أنموذجاً

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#### المخلص:

بالرغم من اتجاه العديد من الباحثين للتركيز على وصف الميزات اللغوية الفريدة لعدد من اللهجات العمانية المختلفة، إلا أن القليل منها كانت معنية بدراسة التغير الحاصل لاستخدام الأجيال للهجات ومعرفتهم بها. ومنها هذه الدراسة التي هدفت لمناقشة التغير الحاصل في استخدام المفردات بين الأجيال في لهجة الحمراء. تكونت عينة هذه الدراسة اجمالاً من ١٥٦ شخصاً يعيشون في ولاية الحمراء؛ ٦١ منهم كبار السن (٦٠ سنة وأكبر) و٩٥ صغار السن (٢٠ سنة وأصغر). أجرى الباحثون مقابلة لكل فئة حيث قدمت لهم ورقة فيها ٢٠ مفردة مختلفة من لهجة الحمراء. تم اختيار ٢٠ مفردة شائعة الاستخدام لدى صغار السن لتمثلهم وتم عرضها على كبار السن لاستطلاع إن كانوا سيعرفون معانيها ويستطيعون استخدامها في جمل، بينما عرض لفئة صغار السن ٢٠ مفردة شائعة الاستخدام لدى كبار السن من أجل قياس مدى معرفتهم بها وقدرتهم على استخدامها في جمل. أشارت النتائج إلى أن بعضاً من المفردات التي يستخدمها كبار السن لم يفهمها صغار السن والعكس صحيح كذلك. هذه النتيجة تشير أن هناك تغير حائل في فهم المفردات واستخدامها في لهجة الحمراء. فقد يفقد فئة صغار السن الالفة والمعرفة باستخدام هذه اللهجة. وفي الخاتمة ناقشت الدراسة العوامل المحتملة التي أدت إلى تغير في فهم المفردات في لهجة الحمراء واستعرضت أيضاً عدداً من التوصيات، منها عمل معجم خاص بالكلمات والسمات اللغوية الفريدة للهجة سكان الحمراء مما يساهم في حفظ اللهجة من الاندثار في المستقبل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لهجة الحمراء، التغير اللغوي بين الأجيال، تحول اللهجة، عمان، تمييز المفردات.

## Introduction

members, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances (Zaidan, 2012). Different Arab dialects have existed across Arabia, North Africa, and certain regions of East Africa's littoral, since at least around the time of the language's spread, alongside Islam, throughout the region in the 7th century. It was this century that witnessed the rapid expansion of Muslim-controlled lands through significant territorial conquests and mass conversions.

Arabic's geographical isolation in certain towns and regions across the growing empire, its constant contact with other languages, the absorption of people from different races and cultures, and the historical lack of formal education in Standard Arabic throughout much of the region, acted together to encourage the formation and maintenance of a diverse range of Arabic dialects. In Oman, both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that the use of Arabic dialects is widespread and may be more common than elsewhere in the Arab Gulf (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, & Sultana, 2016).

Arabic dialects in Oman have been impacted upon by a number of historical, social, and geographical factors. Factors that contributed to dialect change were often most apparent in Oman's ports, and especially in Muscat and the towns of Musandam and Dhofar. These ports have acted as major trading centers in the region for centuries, exposing their inhabitants to a wide range of languages and Arabic dialects which resulted in word borrowing and dialect change. A similar process also occurred with Omani traders moving throughout the country's Indian Ocean empire, especially during the time it was based in Zanzibar and encompassed the subcontinental possession of Gwadar and much of east coast Africa (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2014).

In contrast, another set of factors contributed to the preservation of Omani dialects. In the mountains and the interior of the country, communities were often isolated from the outside world which meant their exposure to other languages and dialects was minimal. This was especially true for women in these areas, whose domain was mainly the home and the neighborhoods in which they lived, thereby ensuring that they played a key role in the preservation of the traditional dialects of their towns and regions. Policies of national isolation were also enforced during the reign of Sultan Taimur (1932-1970), generally leaving Omani people without access to travel, formal education, paved roads, or even radios and televisions (Al-

Mahrooqi & Denman, 2014; Couto, 2015; El-Ashban, 1979; Peterson, 2004a). While directly contributing to the lack of social and economic development that made Oman one of the least developed countries in the world at the time, these policies nonetheless acted to support the preservation of distinct dialects throughout the sultanate.

The combination of these factors resulted in previous generations in Oman often growing up with little contact with the outside world and, to this day, remaining strongly connected to traditional lifestyles, including holding strong links with their villages, pre-modernization jobs, traditions, customs, and spoken dialects. From the time Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, the country began on the path to modernization, and new generations of Omanis have been raised in a world that is almost unrecognizable to their forebearers. Young Omanis can now attend a free universal schooling system in which Modern Standard Arabic is the language of instruction, and can follow this by entering the well-developed tertiary-education system where English is often used as the medium of instruction.

In addition to these education opportunities, new generations of Omanis now have unrestricted access to international travel and can use modern communications technologies that allow them to interact with people from all over the country, the region, and the world. Modernization has also brought with it demographic change, and more Omanis today live in large cosmopolitan cities where English acts across a wide variety of domains as a lingua franca. As a result, young Omanis face certain challenges in relation to the expression of their identities that older generations, despite the many difficulties they faced, did not. These include concerns related to the preservation and practice of their traditions, values, beliefs, and, most pertinently for the sake of this paper, language and dialect use.

Given the nature and extent of these challenges, the current study sought to explore cross-generational familiarity with, and use of, Oman's Arabic dialects by focusing on the case of the historical Omani town of Al-Hamra in the Al Dakhiliyah region. The study examined whether younger residents in the region displayed familiarity with vocabulary that was selected to represent the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, and whether elderly residents could understand and use words selected from the younger participants' speech. The study was premised on the belief that evidence of limited understanding of vocabulary items

representing the other group's speech may indicate the existence of a cross-generational communication gap, and that younger participants' inability to define and use words from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect may suggest a process of dialect loss. Similarly, evidence of understanding and familiarity of the two group's vocabulary items would be interpreted as indicating the lack of a communication gap and the healthy status of the traditional dialect.

## 2. Literature Review.

### 2.1 Languages in Oman.

Almost all of the nations of the Arab Gulf have undergone rapid societal change since independence from Britain and the discovery and exploitation of large oil and gas reserves. These changes have had a variety of impacts on people's daily lives, including in terms of their preferred lifestyles, access to education and employment, travel, and language use. Before the introduction of national education systems, including universities and colleges, in the post-independence era, most educated Gulf Arabs received their educations in Qur'anic schools where pupils learned the Qur'an and basic literacy skills. These were complemented in certain towns by tribe-funded community schools run with some of the profits of the pearling industry, before the crash in that market in the 1920s, in addition to a handful of missionary schools that existed throughout the region (Al-Khwaiter, 2001; Denman, 2012; Verde, 2010). Following the widespread discovery of oil across much of the Arab Gulf in the post-war period, governments introduced free universal public schooling where Standard Arabic is used as the medium of instruction. Before the introduction of formal state-sponsored education systems, Standard Arabic experienced a revival across many Arab nations, and especially in those of North Africa and the Levant, during their struggles for independence against European colonizers (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2014). In the period following World War II, Standard Arabic became the language of independence movements around the region, while also acting as a marker of pan-Arab identity. During this time, colonial education policies, and especially those introduced by French and Italian administrations, sought to replace Arabic with European languages as a way of binding colonies to the metropolis. While these policies experienced varying degrees of success, many mosques and civil groups supported the teaching and use of Standard Arabic as one way of protecting traditional identity

and resisting colonial rule. As a result, the language usually assumed a prominent role in the post-colonial societies of the Arab world and was often central to newly-established national governments.

Within Oman, British influence was usually enacted, with the possible exception of the period from around 1958 to 1970 when the sultanate was under de facto British rule (Allen & Rigsbee, 2000; Barrett, 2011), in an indirect way that befitted the country's status as an unofficial protectorate (Barrett, 2011; Ghubash, 2006). As a result, the independence movements that were witnessed elsewhere in the Arab world were generally absent from Oman. In addition, the introduction of a formal education system was largely resisted by Sultan Taimur, and it was not until his son, Sultan Qaboos, came to power in 1970, that a free universal education system was established. The educational reforms introduced from this time were wide-reaching and, some six years into the new reign, the country went from having two or three public schools with around 900 male students to more than 200 schools with over 55,000 students, both male and female. This figure now stands at more than 1,100 public schools with approximately 600,000 students in addition to a well-developed network of private schools and a tertiary education system featuring both public and private institutions (Issan, 2013; National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020). Government schools in Oman use Standard Arabic as a medium of instruction, private schools use English or Arabic or a combination of both, while most tertiary institutions use English for science- and some humanities-based majors and Standard Arabic for others.

Within this context, achievement in both Standard Arabic and English is often associated with educational and professional success and social mobility. Upon completing school studies in Standard Arabic, many students progress to universities or colleges where their studies in English or Standard Arabic (depending on their colleges and majors) require high levels of proficiency in the languages. After graduation, many students have traditionally sought higher-level degrees abroad, and continue their studies in English-speaking nations before returning to Oman to jobs that demand English proficiency (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Moody, 2009). For these students, Standard Arabic and English are the most important languages for their social and economic progress, and their exposure to different languages and linguistic varieties, in addition to the status associated with

these languages, makes them more likely to use their traditional Arabic dialects on a less frequent basis. The situation encountered by younger Omanis stands in contrast to that of older generations who often did not have access to formal education and usually did not travel beyond their towns or regions. As such, they were generally not exposed to outside influences, and also did not experience the socializing effects of formal education. Moreover, as Oman was one of the least developed nations in the world in the decades before 1970 (Scholz, 2013), speakers of one language or dialect were unlikely to hold a higher status than speakers of another. Subsequently, little reason existed to move away from traditional dialects. The existence of local Arabic dialects in Oman, in addition to the nation's indigenous languages (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2015; Peterson, 2004a, 2004b), is often attributed to a combination of the isolation of certain parts of the country and historical waves of migration from central and eastern Arabia, Persia, India, and the littoral of East Africa (Holes, 2011). While the port cities of Oman have been trading for centuries with merchants from across the Indian Ocean and beyond, thereby opening them up to a great deal of linguistic influence, the interior has been more self-sufficient, less mobile, and traditionally reliant on agriculture. Self-reliance often meant little need to venture beyond a town or region and, subsequently, limited contact with speakers of different languages and dialects.

## 2.2 Omani Arabic and the Al-Hamra Dialect.

Ghobashi (2008) claims that Omani Arabic dialects can be divided into two main groups. These are the sedentary dialects associated with groups living in the mountainous areas of the interior, and the Bedouin dialects that are spoken by the people of the deserts. While these two groups contain a number of subcategories, the author states that six distinct features mark all Omani dialects as different from those used across the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. Ghobashi (pp. 9-10) describes these differences as:

1. The interdentalals /t/, /d/ and /d/ are retained.
2. The absence of the ghawa-syndrome (except for the Bedouin dialect in the north-west Oman).
3. The 2nd singular female object and possessive suffix is -iš, with the exception of the north-west Bedouin dialect where it is -iĉ and the al-Wahība dialect where it is a palatalized -ik.
4. There is an obligatory -in(n)-infix between an active participle having verbal force and an object suffix.

5. Feminine plural verbs, adjectives and pronouns occur regularly.

6. The 'internal' passive (mabni-lmaghūl) is common in the Omani dialects.

Additional distinguishing features of Omani Arabic dialects, according to the author, include: the existence of the pronouns *anta* and *anti*, while *ħanna* and *ħan* are only common in Bedouin dialects; the third person suffix *-ah* is also only commonly used in Bedouin dialects, while *-uh* is encountered in sedentary dialects; the 2nd singular female suffixes of *-ik* and *-iĉ* are also only commonly found in Bedouin dialects, while their variations *-ĉim* and *-ĉin* can only be found in a handful of villages of Jebel Akdhar; the (*hā*)- element can be omitted when demonstratives are used adjectivally; the relative pronouns of *bu*, *illi*, *illadi*, *il* are all frequently used by speakers, although *bu* is often the main form chosen in sedentary dialects; the sentence placement of interrogatives is not fixed and is determined by pragmatic considerations; negative particles are generally formed with *mā* regardless of whether they are connected with verbs, adjectives, or prepositional expressions, while *lā* is employed in negative imperatives and optatives; *ha* can be used for either denial or approval depending on the associated head movement; and plural nouns are usually formed with *-in* and *-āt*.

The Al-Hamra dialect is one example of the numerous Arabic dialects encountered across Oman. Al-Hamra is a mountainous area that consists of 83 villages and can trace its existence back around 400 years. It has a population of approximately 17,422 people (A. Al-Abri, 2011), and is close to some of Oman's most visited tourist sites. Although the people of Al-Hamra now enjoy the same education, employment, and travel opportunities as the rest of the country, before 1970 it was, like much of Oman, poor and isolated. It was for these reasons that many of the male residents of Al-Hamra during that period chose to work in Bahrain or Saudi Arabia. This combination of isolation (mainly for women left behind to raise families) with the mingling of Al-Hamra's young male residents with speakers of other Arabic dialects and languages across the region contributed to the emergence of a somewhat unique Al-Hamra dialect.

According to Al Nabhani (2007), the Al-Hamra dialect has 27 consonants and 12 vowels. Other distinguishing features include the fact that the consonants [d] and [q] are lost, while the vowels [e], [o], [e:], and [o:] are used. Al Nabhani continues that velarization, or extending consonant sounds by adding

a long vowel sound after them, also occurs in the Al-Hamra dialect. In addition, delication, in which sounds become shorter, also occurs, such as in the example of (Ta) becoming [ta], while the dialect also tends to omit a number of sounds. To illustrate, the author offers the example of [mezru] being spoken as [mezu]. Alkashkasha, or changing the letter K to Sh, also occurs, with the author claiming that this is especially the case when talking to females. K. Al-Abri (2002) and S. Al-Abri (n.d.) add that people generally adjust words by deleting or adding sounds to form sentences, and also often form questions by softening the hamza sound or by replacing it altogether with another sound like verbs and “ma” and “moo”. In addition to these differences, the Al-Hamra dialect has a number of unique words, examples of which are featured in Table 1.

### 2.3 Dialect Use in the Arab Gulf.

Holes (2011) states that there are four main factors associated with the misuse of dialectic vocabulary items in the Arab Gulf states. The first is physical communication, which is associated with greater mobility of the region’s citizens due to the continuing rapid developments in its infrastructure, including airports and roads. This mobility has increased the exposure of Arab Gulf citizens to the different dialects spoken across the region – a factor that may be even more influential in Oman given the travel restrictions that were placed on almost all citizens before 1970. Closely tied with mobility is the growth of media in the Arab Gulf. Holes states that public television and radio channels, in addition to satellite TV featuring hundreds of channels from all over the Arab world, expose audience members to numerous varieties of Arabic, including those spoken in Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar and so on. In addition, information and communications technologies allow people from a variety of linguistic backgrounds to interact in ways

that have not been previously witnessed.

Free universal education has also had an important impact on cross-generational change in dialect use in the Arab Gulf. Not only do government education systems support instruction in Standard Arabic, but Classical Arabic is supported through Islamic studies and in Arabic language classes. Further, with the rapid boom in public schools following 1970, Oman’s government imported a large number of foreign teachers from other Arab nations, such as Palestine and Egypt, in addition to instructors from subcontinental nations, including Pakistan and India. Although this situation has been somewhat reversed nowadays due to the continued process of Omanization, the Omani school system still has a relatively large number of foreign-born teachers, especially at the higher levels, with there being evidence of students adopting features of these teachers’ dialects. Studies in English-medium tertiary institutions also lead to the greater use of English words and phrases in everyday speech in the region, while the propensity among a large number of university students to pursue higher education degrees overseas has resulted in greater exposure to other languages.

Demographic shift resulting in an increasing number of Omanis leaving their villages for larger cities, usually in pursuit of education and employment opportunities, has led to more people living in cosmopolitan centers where English is often employed as a lingua franca. The migration to the cities has generally weakened connections between people and their villages, which has reduced the amount of communication these people conduct with their extended families and communities in their dialects. Furthermore, as more women continue to enter the workforce, nannies and other carers have been brought into Oman – often from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines – with these usually interacting with the children in their care in English. Other factors identified by Holes (2011) as influencing the use of dialects in the Arab Gulf include globalization and its links with English, eternal migration, and a sense of inferiority that some Omanis may have concerning their traditional dialects.

Holes (2011) continues that dialect distinctions across the Gulf, including in Oman, are now fading. Arabic dialects that could be heard throughout the region more than 30 years ago are now beginning to blend and display evidence of becoming more homogenous. Anecdotal evidence suggests that characteristics setting dialects apart, such as those

Table 1: Unique words in the Al-Hamra dialect

Word	Meaning
/ɣə'nəfəh/ : غنفة	A sofa
/x'bɪ/ : خيش	Wash your face
خش : /xɪ/	Face
مكيرين : /məke:re:n/	A stick that is played with as a sword
شمبرانة : /ʃɪmbʔɑ: nəh/	Praying mantis
جاز : /dʒəz/	Acognatha manca (a type of scarab beetle)
/məsjehəf/ : مسيهير	Ground cricket
/ħŪmədh/ : حمدة	Alga making bad smell

discussed in relation to the Al-Hamra dialect above, are now disappearing or becoming only marginally present in people's speech. With specific reference to Oman, this process is being hastened by factors including increased contact with people who use different dialects/languages, the number of Omanis receiving their educations in other Gulf countries and, subsequently, adopting aspects of those dialects, and some Omanis believing that other Gulf dialects are more prestigious than their own. Moreover, the popularity of Arabic language media products from Kuwait and Bahrain means many Omani people are also exposed to dialects from these nations, while those working in the media in Oman usually employ Standard Arabic, as Omani dialects are not considered appropriate for this purpose.

In addition to these concerns, there is some evidence that the use of Omani dialects has been somewhat stigmatized as some people believe their use is a sign of backwardness or a lack of education (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, & Sultana, 2016). Speakers of these dialects, and younger people who are exposed to Standard Arabic, other Arabic dialects and English to a much greater extent than their grandparents, may believe that using these dialects results in them not being understood or being seen as lacking social standing. The process of dialect displacement in Oman has largely resulted in Omani dialects being marginalized, while people prefer to use non-Omani dialects that have a higher status associated with them, in addition to Standard Arabic and English. This is often in evidence among educated people and those who occupy more prestigious social positions based on personal wealth, high status jobs, and power and connections. These speakers often use a mix of Standard Arabic and non-Omani Arabic dialects as an indicator of prestige and success.

Further, nowadays many parents see Modern Standard Arabic and English as the keys to their children's futures (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, & Sultana, 2016; Charise, 2007). As a result, they may encourage the learning of these languages at the expense of dialects and minority languages that often have been spoken by their communities for centuries. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2014) remind readers that both English and Standard Arabic enjoy relatively high statuses in Omani society, and many young people prefer using these languages rather than either Omani dialects or minority languages.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Sample.

In order to explore the issue of familiarity and use of the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, in addition to the potential existence of cross-generational communication gaps in the region, elderly (60 years old or older) and younger (20 years old or younger) people who normally resided in Al-Hamra were recruited through a process of convenience sampling. For both the elderly and younger participants, members of the research team, after receiving formal invitations, visited the residents' houses in Al-Hamra and asked if they would like to take part in the research. As the team members responsible for this part of the research were also Al-Hamra residents, potential participants were generally welcoming towards them and often expressed a willingness to participate after being informed of the study's voluntary nature, their right to withdraw, issues of confidentiality and anonymity and so on. After receiving permission from administrators and teachers, the researchers also went to several Quran'ic schools in Al-Hamra where elderly people learned the Quran in order to ask for volunteers. For the younger sample, the researchers also approached potential participants at a public university in the capital who were from Al-Hamra. Following this process, 61 elderly participants and 95 younger participants agreed to take part in the study.

#### 3.2 Instrument and Analysis.

Preliminary interviews with 19 elderly and younger Al-Hamra residents selected from the main sample resulted in the selection of 20 words by the researchers that were considered to be characteristic of the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, and another 20 that were deemed to be more typical of the speech of younger people in the region. These words formed the basis of two separate vocabulary recognition sheets – one containing vocabulary from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect to be administered to the younger sample, and the other containing vocabulary used by the younger group to be administered to the elderly sample.

Participants were presented with the vocabulary recognition sheets and asked to give the meaning of the 20 words and examples of their use. For elderly participants, one of the research team members sat with the respondents during this process to explain the task and read the words aloud when they were illiterate or otherwise had trouble reading. In these cases, the elderly participants provided an oral response regarding the words' meanings and

examples, and the researcher recorded responses on the sheet themselves. Table 2 features the words used in the vocabulary recognition sheet for elderly participants. As can be seen, many of the selected words were related to food, education, technology, games, and daily activities.

Table 3 contains the words on the vocabulary recognition sheet presented to younger participants. These words were from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect and were generally related to food, traditional games, plants, customs, history and daily activities. All of the participants from the younger generation were literate. The researchers read each word once, only repeating it if requested, and asked participants to write their own answers on the vocabulary recognition sheet. For some of the younger participants who felt writing their responses to be difficult, the researchers recorded their answers.

The research team analyzed the data through a process that involved meeting to discuss each response to the meaning and example components of the vocabulary recognition sheets to decide if responses were correct or incorrect. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the percentage of correct, incorrect, and non-responses to both the meaning and example sentence columns for each of the selected words, in addition to column totals.

Table 2: Vocabulary recognition sheet for elderly participants

Transcription: الكلمة	Translation
/mawsu:ʔəh/ موسوعة	Encyclopedia
/ʃiləh/ شلة	Coterie
/jʔuð'/ يعظ	Bite
/blej stefən/ بلاي سيتشن	PlayStation
/qit'/ قط	Cat
/mərəħnə/ مرحنا	Having fun
/ildʒərəʃ/ الجرس	Bell
/ti:ɖʒa:n/ تيجان	Crowns
/ʔənf/ أنف	Nose
/kʌʔs/ الكأس	Cup
/ħa:su:b/ حاسوب	Computer
/bri:zi/ بريزي	Prize program
/ʃa:ru:x/ صاروخ	Rocket
/faʔ'e:rəh/ فطيرة	Pie
/məxədəh/ مخدة	Pillow
/wəʔ'jit' ʔəza:l/ وطفية غزال	A kind of sandals commonly used by men
/əɪba:d/ الأيباد	I-Pad
/so:mo/ سومو	Sumo
/fuʔ'u:r/ فطور	Breakfast
/balantʃi:/ بلانتي	Penalty

#### 4. Results.

Table 4 features the elderly participants' responses for the meaning component of the vocabulary recognition sheet. Overall, participants offered correct meanings of the words 54.0% of the time, with only 22.2% of responses being wrong and the remaining 23.7% being non-responses. (All percentages have been rounded to one decimal place; as a result, some totals may be 0.1 higher or lower than 100.) The words /məxədəh/ (96.4%), /ʔənf/ (92.9%), /fuʔ'u:r/ (91.1%) and /wəʔ'jit' ʔəza:l/ (91.1%) recorded the highest correct percentages, while the words that received the lowest correct percentages were /bri:zi/ (1.8%), /so:mo/ (3.6%), /balantʃi:/ (16.1%) and /mawsu:ʔəh/ (16.1%). The words /ʃa:ru:x/ (51.8%), /mawsu:ʔəh/ (46.4%), /ʃiləh/ (46.4%) and /ti:ɖʒa:n/ (33.9%) recorded the highest incorrect percentages, while /bri:zi/ (71.4%),

Table 3: Vocabulary from the older generation presented to younger participants

Transcription: الكلمة	Translation
/dʒʃi:r/ جشير	Mash that is used to make soup
/ʃənə:ʃəl/ شناشيل	Things that are dangled from the end of women's scarves to make sounds
/tʃtəh:wəʃ/ تتهاوش	Fighting
/nuqnum/ نقم	Reap
/bʌrʔəʃ/ برغش	A name of an Omani ruler that was also traditionally used to mean money
/ʔʌrʒəm/ أرزم	Being old
/dwe:n/ دوين	Near
/ʔəzdʒur/ أزر	Getting water out of the well
/ʃisbuq/ عسبقي	A plant that grows in the mountains and is used for feeding goats
/ʃħʃ/ شحص	A plant that grows in wadis (dry riverbeds) and is used as fuel for barbequing
/ʃwe:sjəħ/ عويسية	Adjective meaning "getting/becoming harsh"
/əlmisa:ni/ الميسانى	Type of grain that people grow in summer
/ʃə:ru:ɖʒ/ صاروج	Mud that has been fired to use as building material
/nisfər/ نسفر	The action of putting stuff on a donkey and taking it to a souq (market); Like travelling
/ʃəxbər/ صخبير	A plant that grows in the mountains and is used for making a sleeping place for animals
/xərs/ خرس	A big bowl made of iron or date palm leaves where dates are stored
/ʃɪnħə:r/ صنهار	Middle of the day
/daxa:tər/ دخاتر	Doctors
/sba:t a:r/ سباتر	Seventeen
/sme:kəħ/ السمكة	A game that women traditionally played



/so:mo/ (69.6%), /balanʃi:/ (66.1%), /mʌwsu:ʔəh/ (37.5%) and /blej steʃən/ (37.5%) received the highest non-response percentages.

Table 5 features elderly participants' responses to the example component of the vocabulary recognition sheet. The total percentage for the non-response column received the highest percentage of 92.4%, with only 6.5% of correct examples given and 1.1% being incorrect. The words that received the highest correct percentages were /jʔuð'/ (14.3%), /ildʒərəʃ/

(14.3%), /kʌʔs/ (10.7%) and /fuʔ'u:r/ (10.7%), while /bri:zi/ (0.0%), /ħa:su:b/ (1.8%), /so:mo/ (1.8%) and /əɪba:d/ (1.8%) recorded the lowest correct percentages. All words on this component of the vocabulary recognition sheet received high levels of non-response. These include /bri:zi/ (98.2%), /əɪba:d/ (98.2%) and /blej steʃən/ (96.4%) which recorded the highest non-response percentages, although all items received non-response scores above 85%.

Table 6 displays younger participants' responses

Table 4: Elderly participants' vocabulary recognition instrument: Vocabulary meaning

Word/transcription	Translation	Correct	Incorrect	Non-response
/mæxədəh/ مخدة	Pillow	96.4%	1.8%	1.8%
/ʔənf/: أنف	Nose	92.9%	3.6%	3.6%
/fuʔ'u:r/ فطور	Breakfast	91.1%	1.8%	7.1%
wəʔ'jit' / وطيية :/ʔəza:l غزال	A kind of sandals commonly used by men	91.1%	3.6%	5.4%
/qit'/: قط	Cat	87.5%	5.4%	7.1%
/ildʒərəʃ/ الجرس	Bell	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%
/fəʔ'e:rəh/ فطيرة	Pie	76.8%	12.5%	10.7%
/jʔuð'/: يعظ	Bite	73.2%	12.5%	14.3%
/kʌʔs/: الكأس	Cup	64.3%	16.1%	19.6%
/ħa:su:b/ حاسوب	Computer	55.4%	30.4%	14.3%
/əɪba:d/ الأيباد	I-Pad	46.4%	32.1%	21.4%
/mərəħnə/ مرحنا	Having fun	44.6%	32.1%	23.2%
/ʃiləh/: شلة	Coterie	39.3%	46.4%	14.3%
/ʃa:ru:x/ صاروخ	Rocket	39.3%	51.8%	8.9%
/blej steʃən/ بلاي سيٲشن	PlayStation	33.9%	28.6%	37.5%
/ti:ɗa:n/ تيجان	Crowns	32.1%	33.9%	33.9%
/mʌwsu:ʔəh/ : موسوعة	Encyclopedia	16.1%	46.4%	37.5%
/:balanʃi/ بلانتي	Penalty	16.1%	17.9%	66.1%
/so:mo/ سومو	Sumo	3.6%	26.8%	69.6%
/bri:zi/ بريزي	Prize program	1.8%	26.8%	71.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>54.0%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>

Table 5: Elderly participants' vocabulary recognition Instrument: Vocabulary example

Word/transcription	Translation	Correct	Incorrect	Non-response
/mæxədəh/: مخدة	Pillow	96.4%	1.8%	1.8%
/ʔənf/: أنف	Nose	92.9%	3.6%	3.6%
/fuʔ'u:r/ فطور	Breakfast	91.1%	1.8%	7.1%
/wəʔ'jit' وطيية :/ʔəza:l غزال	A kind of sandals commonly used by men	91.1%	3.6%	5.4%
/qit'/: قط	Cat	87.5%	5.4%	7.1%
/ildʒərəʃ/: الجرس	Bell	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%
/fəʔ'e:rəh/: فطيرة	Pie	76.8%	12.5%	10.7%
/jʔuð'/: يعظ	Bite	73.2%	12.5%	14.3%
/kʌʔs/: الكأس	Cup	64.3%	16.1%	19.6%
/ħa:su:b/: حاسوب	Computer	55.4%	30.4%	14.3%
/əɪba:d/: الأيباد	I-Pad	46.4%	32.1%	21.4%
/mərəħnə/: مرحنا	Having fun	44.6%	32.1%	23.2%
/ʃiləh/: شلة	Coterie	39.3%	46.4%	14.3%
/ʃa:ru:x/: صاروخ	Rocket	39.3%	51.8%	8.9%
/blej steʃən/: بلاي سيٲشن	PlayStation	33.9%	28.6%	37.5%
/ti:ɗa:n/: تيجان	Crowns	32.1%	33.9%	33.9%
/mʌwsu:ʔəh/: موسوعة	Encyclopedia	16.1%	46.4%	37.5%
/:balanʃi/: بلانتي	Penalty	16.1%	17.9%	66.1%
/so:mo/: سومو	Sumo	3.6%	26.8%	69.6%
/bri:zi/: بريزي	Prize program	1.8%	26.8%	71.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>54.0%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>

for the meaning part of the vocabulary recognition sheet. Here, the total percentage for the non-response (47.3%) and the correct (36.3%) columns are quite similar, with both being much higher than the percent of incorrect responses, which was 16.5%. The words from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect that recorded the highest correct percentages for this group were /dəxɑ:tər/ (93.3%), /tɪtħə:wəʃ/ (75.3%), /ʃɪnħə:r/ (69.7%) and /ʃə:ru:dʒ/ (60.7%). The words that recorded the lowest correct percentages were /sme:kaħ/ (0.0%), /sba:ta:r/ (3.4%), /ʃwe:sjəħ/ (4.5%) and /nuqnum/ (7.9%). The words /sba:ta:r/ (59.6%), /sme:kaħ/ (46.1%), and /ʔəzdʒur/ (30.3%) recorded the highest incorrect percentages for this component of the vocabulary recognition sheet. In the non-response column, /əlmisɑ:ni/ (78.7%), /nuqnum/ (77.5%), /ʃwe:sjəħ/ (68.5%) and /bɪrɣəʃ/ (60.7%) recorded the

highest percentages.

Table 7 demonstrates that the total percentage of non-responses for the meaning component of the younger participants' vocabulary recognition sheet was 68.3%, while the incorrect (8.2%) and correct (23.5%) columns received much lower scores. The words /dəxɑ:tər/ (59.6%), /tɪtħə:wəʃ/ (48.3%), /ʃə:ru:dʒ/ (42.7%) and /ʃɪnħə:r/ (42.7%) displayed the highest correct percentages, while /ʃwe:sjəħ/ (0.0%), /sme:kaħ/ (0.0%), /sba:ta:r/ (3.4%) and /nuqnum/ (5.6%) recorded the lowest. The words /sba:ta:r/ (32.6%), /sme:kaħ/ (28.1%) and /ʃwe:sjəħ/ (18.0%) received the highest incorrect percentages. For non-responses, /nuqnum/ (91.0%), /əlmisɑ:ni/ (88.8%) and /ʃwe:sjəħ/ (82.0%) recorded the highest percentages.

Table 6: Younger participants' vocabulary recognition instrument: Vocabulary meaning

Word/transcription	Translation	Correct	Incorrect	Non-response
دخاتر :/dəxɑ:tər/	Doctors	93.3%	0%	6.7%
تتهاوش :/tɪtħə:wəʃ/	Fighting	75.3%	10.1%	14.6%
صنھار :/ʃɪnħə:r/	Middle of the day	69.7%	1.1%	29.2%
صاروج :/ʃə:ru:dʒ/	Mud that has been fired to use as building material	60.7%	6.7%	32.6%
شناشیل :/ʃənə:ʃəl/	Things that are dangled from the end of women's scarves to make sounds	47.2%	14.6%	38.2%
عسبوق :/ʃɪsbuq/	A plant that grows in the mountains and is used for feeding goats	46.1%	11.2%	42.7%
دوین :/dwe:n/	Near	42.7%	11.2%	46.1%
خرس :/xərs/	A big bowl made of iron or date palm leaves where dates are stored	40.4%	28.1%	31.5%
صخبیر :/ʃɪxɪbər/	A plant that grows in the mountains and is used for making a sleeping place for animals	37.1%	7.9%	55.1%
شحص :/ʃɪħħʃ/	A plant that grows in wadis (dry riverbeds) and is used as fuel for barbequing	36.0%	4.5%	59.6%
چشیر :/dʒʃi:r/	Mash that is used to make soup	34.8%	20.2%	44.9%
نسفر :/nɪsfər/	The action of putting stuff on a donkey and taking it ;(to a souq (market Like travelling	32.6%	7.9%	59.6%
برغش :/bɪrɣəʃ/	A name of an Omani ruler that was also traditionally used to mean money	31.5%	7.9%	60.7%
أرزم :/ʔɑrʒəm/	Being old	25.8%	15.7%	58.4%
أزجر :/ʔəzdʒur/	Getting water out of the well	20.2%	30.3%	49.4%
المیسانی :/əlmisɑ:ni/	Type of grain that people grow in summer	16.9%	4.5%	78.7%
نقنم :/nuqnum/	Reap	7.9%	14.6%	77.5%
عویسیة :/ʃwe:sjəħ/	“Adjective meaning “getting/becoming harsh	4.5%	27.0%	68.5%
سباتر :/sba:ta:r/	Seventeen	3.4%	59.6%	37.1%
السمكة :/sme:kaħ/	A game that women traditionally played	0%	46.1%	53.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>36.3%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>47.3%</b>

## 5. Discussion.

Standard Arabic has been used along with local dialects in the Arab world for centuries. While local Arabic dialects are, in many ways, more deeply entrenched in Oman than in most other Arab Gulf nations, societal changes since the advent of modernization from 1970 mean that they may be under threat. This study investigated the issue of cross-generational understandings of vocabulary items in Al-Hamra by asking younger participants to identify the meaning and provide example sentences of 20 words considered to be typical of the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, and requesting elderly participants to do the same for vocabulary that was deemed more typical of younger people in the region. A sample of 61 elderly (60 or older), and 95 younger Al-Hamra residents (20 or younger) was administered vocabulary recognition sheets based on words selected as being more typical of each group through preliminary interviews.

Findings suggest that there may be a cross-generational gap in communication between elderly and younger participants, as evidenced by the fact that elderly participants could only correctly identify around 54% of the words selected as being more typical of the younger group's speech, while only around 36% of younger participants could accurately define words selected from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect. Moreover, younger participants only offered accurate examples using words from the traditional dialect in 24% of cases, while this figure was only about 7% for elderly participants.

These results indicate a potential cause for concern. First, gaps in communication between generations can affect the ability, or even the motivation, to exchange experience, knowledge and culture between different age groups, which can be especially problematic in societies with strong oral traditions (Abdi, 2007; UNESCO, n.d.). However, perhaps most concerning

Table 7: Young participants' vocabulary recognition instrument: Vocabulary example

Word/transcription	Translation	Correct	Incorrect	No-response
/daxa:tər/: دخاتر	Doctors	59.6%	0%	40.4%
/t̪iḥa:wəʃ/: تتهاوش	Fighting	48.3%	4.5%	47.2%
/ʃə:ru:ɗɟ/: صاروج	Mud that has been fired to use as building material	42.7%	1.1%	56.2%
/ʃinħə:r/: صنهاار	Middle of the day	42.7%	0%	57.3%
/ʃənə:ʃəl/: شناشيل	Things that are dangled from the end of women's scarves to make sounds	33.7%	5.6%	60.7%
/dwe:n/: دوين	Near	31.5%	3.4%	65.2%
/xərs/: خوس	A big bowl made of iron or date palm leaves where dates are stored	27.0%	14.6%	58.4%
/ʕisbuq/: عسيق	A plant that grows in the mountains and is used for feeding goats	25.8%	4.5%	69.7%
/ʃaxbər/: صخبير	A plant that grows in the mountains and is used for making animals' sleeping places	23.6%	2.2%	74.2%
/ɗɟi:r/: جشير	Mash that is used to make soup	23.6%	13.5%	62.9%
/bərɟəʃ/: برغش	A name of an Omani ruler that was also traditionally used to mean money	23.6%	1.1%	75.3%
/ʔərzəm/: أرزم	Being old	21.3%	9.0%	69.7%
/nɪsfər/: نسفر	The action of putting stuff on a donkey and taking it to a souq (market) Like travelling	19.1%	2.2%	78.7%
/ʃħʃ/: شحص	A plant that grows in wadis (dry riverbeds) and is used as fuel for barbecuing	18.0%	3.4%	78.7%
/ʔəzɟur/: أزر	Getting water out of the well	11.2%	15.7%	73.0%
/almisa:ni/: الميسانى	Type of grain that people grow in summer	9.0%	2.2%	88.8%
/nuqnum/: نقتم	Reap	5.6%	3.4%	91.0%
/sba:ta:r/: سياتر	Seventeen	3.4%	32.6%	64.0%
/ʕwe:sjəħ/: عويسية	“Adjective meaning “getting/becoming harsh	0%	18.0%	82.0%
/sme:kaħ/: السمكة	A game that women traditionally played	0%	28.1%	71.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>23.5%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>68.3%</b>

is the fact that younger participants were often unable to define and accurately use words from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect. This may suggest that a process of dialect loss is taking place in the area. The loss of the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, if it is indeed occurring, may be associated with the eventual loss of the area's unique sense of cultural identity. As traditions, customs, ways of living and seeing the world, and activities and handicrafts, can be transferred to younger generations through the use of languages and dialects, the loss of the Al-Hamra dialect has the potential to not only affect the social fabric of the area, but also of Oman as a whole (see Coleman, 2015).

It is therefore important that steps are taken to help preserve the traditional Al-Hamra dialect. For instance, Al-Hamra residents could make a concerted effort to teach their children about traditional words and phrases from the dialect and encourage them to use these when interacting with family and community members. Members of the community could also partner with other concerned stakeholders, such as academics, linguists, government officials, local business owners and so on, to support the creation of reference resources of traditional Al-Hamra dialectal words, following in the footsteps of language preservation projects taking place around the world (see *Endangered Languages Documentation Programme*, 2020; Kraisame, 2018). Further, linguistic features of Omani dialects, including the Al-Hamra dialect, could be taught as elective courses in higher education institutions across Oman, while extra-curricular classes in local dialects could be offered at government schools and community centers across the country. Examples of similar actions taken in support of minority and indigenous languages, if not dialects themselves, can be encountered worldwide (Simpson, 2014; Tarsoly & Valijärvi, 2020).

However, in recommending such courses of action, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the current study. Perhaps the most important is the somewhat limited nature of the methodological approach. The fact that only 20 vocabulary items from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect were selected to present to younger participants means that any conclusions drawn about their familiarity with the dialect's lexis at large must necessarily be made with caution. Future research could expand this approach by presenting younger participants with a much wider range of vocabulary items from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, in addition to examining respondents' understandings of phrases

in the dialect. This would offer a much more accurate picture of whether younger people in Al-Hamra are, in fact, losing familiarity with the traditional dialect. A similar approach could be taken for presenting the words chosen as typical of younger people in the region to elderly participants. Further, the impact of the relatively small sizes of the elderly and younger participant groups, and the convenience sampling techniques employed, on the generalizability of the findings should also be taken into account. Although data collection constraints necessitated the sampling approach used here, seeking to generalize to a population of around 17,000 people from a sample of 156 participants is a limitation that should be addressed in future investigative work.

## 6. Conclusion.

This study explored the level of familiarity, in terms of meaning and correct usage, of young people from Al-Hamra with words selected from the traditional Al-Hamra dialect, and elderly people's familiarity with vocabulary more typically used by younger people in the region. Although the above limitations mean the study's findings need to be viewed with a certain degree of caution, results may suggest that younger people might be losing familiarity with the traditional Al-Hamra dialect. A cross-generational communication gap may also exist, with evidence that elderly participants lack familiarity with, and the ability to accurately use, words that are more characteristic of the language used by younger people in the region.

As discussed above, factors associated with this situation could be argued to include the greater education, communication, and travel opportunities available for younger people in the region, and the country as a whole, when compared to previous generations, in addition to the relatively high status of Standard Arabic and English in the sultanate. Further research into whether younger people in Al-Hamra are losing their familiarity with, and the ability to use, the traditional Al-Hamra dialect is necessary to better understand the extent and true nature of this issue. Future research could also explore other Omani dialects, with the understanding that, once a dialect is lost in favor of Standard Arabic or English, the histories, culture/s, stories, poems, beliefs, values, ways of seeing the world, and handicrafts, associated with the dialect are also prone to disappear, taking part of Oman's unique identity with it.

## Acknowledgements.

The research reported in this paper was supported by the Faculty Mentored Undergraduate Research Award Program (FURAP) scholarship funded project, The Research Council, Oman.

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