**Abstract**

The Jewish community in Damascus is an old one, residing for centuries mainly in the its own quarter of the old city. The aim of this study is to establish whether the Dialect of Damascus Jews (DDJ) differs qualitatively from the Arabic dialect of the city’s Muslim inhabitants.

It has previously been assumed that the dialect spoken by the Jews of Damascus is not distinct, except for the usage of some Hebrew borrowings. This study challenges that assumption, identifying several crucially distinctive features in DDJ phonology, morphology and lexicon.

The study is based on extensive fieldwork interviews with numerous individuals, most of whom are among those last Jews to have lived in Damascus who departed Syria in the early 1990s. A large number of potentially distinctive features of this dialect in phonology, morphology, and lexicon were identified from the interview recordings and compared to cognates in the Common Dialect of Damascus (CDD) identified in published research. Many previously unidentified differences between DDJ and CDD in phonology, morphology and lexicon emerged. These findings were re-verified with informants for accuracy.

An example of phonological difference is found in the medial *a* in DDJ forms like *ʾaxadet* ‘she took’ not present in CDD’s *ʾaxdet*.

Morphological variation is observable in DDJ’s *bədd-i ʾaˀābl-o* ‘I want to see him’, compared to the CDD equivalent *bədd-i ˀābl-o*. Numerals 11-19 have only one set in DDJ (e.g., *ṭnaʿš* ‘twelve’) used in both the absolute and construct forms (e.g.: *ṭnaʿš bēt* ‘twelve houses’), whereas CDD has distinct sets (e.g., *ṭnaʿš* in the absolute form and *ṭnaʿšaṛ bēt* ‘twelve houses’ in the construct form).

Examples of variant lexical items in DDJ are: *ʾarāḥ* ‘he went’ (cf. CDD *rāḥ*), which is also in use among Egyptian Jews; *ˀbūl* ‘a welcome ceremony held upon the birth of a daughter’ (cf. CDD *mōled*); *šēxa maryam* ‘a woman whose appearance and mind are not right’ (cf. CDD *habla*); and *wədən* ‘an ear’, apparently used only by Damascene Arabic Jews (cf. CDD *ʾədən* for Muslims, *dēne* for Christians).

The study also demonstrates how DDJ, like other Jewish languages, was influenced not only by the local language and Hebrew, but also by other foreign languages – in the case of DDJ, certain borrowings from Spanish and French.

It furthermore describes the patterns for given names among Damascene Jews over the last five generations, which provides valuable insights and which has not typically been examined in Arabic dialectal studies.