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# **Linguistic Insecurity and Dialect Divergence in Southwestern Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Malki Dialect**

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## Linguistic Insecurity and Dialect Divergence in Southwestern Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Malki Dialect

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### ABSTRACT:

Malki is an under-researched Arabic dialect spoken by an isolated speech community in Southwestern Saudi Arabia. The aim of this study is to uncover whether Malki dialect speakers experience linguistic insecurity and do environment, age, and gender as variables affect linguistic confidence? Data was gathered for quantitative analysis via survey on the Malki dialect using a five-point Likert scale. A descriptive statistical analysis and ANOVA test were conducted on 257 surveys, identifying eight groups determined by age and gender. Results showed that more formality of the environment and age of the participant were the most significant variables affecting attitudes about the Malki dialect. The greatest disparity occurred between the oldest age group (51+) and the youngest age group (18-25). Participant gender had no significant effect on linguistic insecurity.

**Keywords:** dialect divergence, linguistic insecurity, Malki dialect, Modern Standard Arabic, Saudi Arabia

عدم الثقة اللغوية واختلاف اللهجات في جنوب غرب المملكة العربية السعودية: دراسة للهجة المالكية

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ملخص:

اللهجة المالكية هي لهجة عربية قليلة الدراسة تُحدِّثها مجتمع نطق معزول في جنوب غرب المملكة العربية السعودية. يهدف هذا البحث إلى كشف ما إذا كان متحدثو اللهجة المالكية يعانون من عدم الثقة اللغوية وما إذا كان البيئة والعمر والجنس يؤثران على الثقة اللغوية. تم جمع البيانات للتحليل الكمي عن طريق استبيان حول اللهجة المالكية باستخدام مقياس لايكترت من خمس نقاط. تم إجراء تحليل إحصائي وصفي واختبار ANOVA على ٢٥٧ استبياناً، محددة لثمانى مجموعات بناءً على العمر والجنس. أظهرت النتائج أن شكلية البيئة وعمر المشارك هما أكثر المتغيرات تأثيراً على العقلية حول اللهجة المالكية. حدث أكبر اختلاف بين مجموعة الأعمار الأكبر (٥١+) ومجموعة الأعمار الأصغر (١٨-٢٥). لم يكن للجنس المشارك تأثير كبير على عدم الثقة اللغوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اختلاف اللهجة، الثقة اللغوية، اللهجة المالكية، اللغة العربية الفصحى الحديثة، المملكة العربية السعودية.

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## Introduction

Arabic is a *diglossic* language characterized by the marked distinction between its language varieties or dialects and the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). MSA is the high form of Arabic and speakers do not use it in everyday conversations. Rather, they speak one of the lower prestige varieties of Arabic, referred to as dialects. In some countries of the Arab world, there are multiple regional dialects that have distinctive features from one another (Ferguson, 1996), and Saudi Arabia is not an exception. Saudi has many distinct dialects that can be clustered into four separate categories: varieties of Najd spoken in central, northeast, and some southern parts of Saudi Arabia, Hijazi language varieties spoken in western Arabia, and Tihami and mountains dialects are spoken in the southwest (Al Zumor, 2019; Albirini, 2016; Cotter & De Jong, 2019; Holes, 2006; Prochazka, 1988). The 1980s saw a rapid urbanization of dialects as a massive influx of people relocated to major cities from more rural areas in order to find jobs (Albirini, 2016). This was driven by the need for laborers to help build the fledgling country's infrastructure, civil services, and military. The type of local immigration had an impact on regional dialects through social interaction and social stratification. Some dialects gained more power, prestige, and standardization, while others did not (Albirini, 2016). One of the dialects significantly affected by this language shift is the Malki dialect spoken by an isolated speech community in Southwestern Saudi Arabia. Malki dialect speakers are suspected to suffer linguistic insecurity or a lack of confidence in their own dialect when compared to MSA. Labov (2006) defined linguistic insecurity as the unconscious lack of confidence a person has regarding their speech, dialect, or language as a whole when compared to the other dominant language varieties in that society. This study aims to discover through quantitative analysis whether Malki dialect speakers experience linguistic insecurity and whether environment, interlocutors, and setting affect how that insecurity manifests and if age and gender affect attitudes towards the Malki dialect.

## Literature Review

### *Dialects*

In their attempt to define the boundaries of a dialect, language purists consider the dialect used by people of power as the correct or standard form of language (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2014). However, from a linguistic standpoint, no dialect is more correct, more logical, or more complex than any other (Fromkin et al., 2014). In the United States, for example, Standard American English (SAE) is widely considered the dominant or prestige dialect. While SAE is considered an

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“idealized” dialect, as its boundaries are difficult to define and it has no natural speakers, any divergence from this idealized dialect might still incur low prestige (Fromkin et al., 2014).

Each dialect within a sociolinguistic context has differing levels of power and prestige attached to it, which can influence attitudes towards that dialect, including that of its speakers (Labov, 2006). “Language attitudes permeate our personal and social lives on a daily basis. Whether they are expressed overtly, kept latent, or enacted in our speaking and attitudinal acts language attitudes determine how languages, speakers, and language behavior are construed” (Albirini, 2016, p. 78). Attitudes towards and the stigmatization of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the United States has spawned a large body of research. In fact, AAVE is one the most studied dialects in the United States as it is considered a rich source of information for investigating the relationship between language and historical, political, and social factors (Fromkin et al., 2014; Labov, 1972). Such studies have confirmed that most of the dialects in the United States have distinctive differences based on geographic regions and are not necessarily based on race, ethnicity, color, or class (Fromkin et al., 2014).

Similarly, in the British Isles, we also find significant diversity in dialects spoken in different regions, each with distinctive features (Talbot, 2010). In France, the Parisian dialect is the idealized and preferred by people who look for success as it bears greater prestige than other French dialects. This scenario is a reflection of the same sociolinguistic phenomenon that occurs in almost all languages and countries. We find one dominant language variation and many dialects around that have less power, prestige and/or social status. The differences between these dialects arise naturally in most cases as a result of social contact between different language groups.

### ***Arabic Dialects of Saudi Arabia***

In the Arabian Peninsula, we find several clusters of regional dialects that have distinctive features, not only in pronunciation but also in the choice of words and syntax. The earliest studies of Arabic dialects were carried out during the British presence in Yemen. For example, Landberg (1901, 1908, 1913) studied some southern dialects of Arabia as Hadramut and Dathina (as cited by Prochazka, 1988). Later in the late 1950s, after the discovery of oil, many American companies with their scientific, social, and ethnographic teams resided in the central part of Arabia. Their interaction with locals served to produce many linguistic studies, including Johnstone’s studies (1963, 1967, 1965, as cited by Prochazka, 1988), which focused

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on Najdi dialects such as Unaizah, the southern Najdi dialect, and some of the Bedouin dialects. Later, as the economy improved, universities and colleges with social sciences departments were established in greater numbers. Enabling both Saudi and non-Saudi researchers like Abboud (1975) and Prochazka (1988), to study many of the dialects in Arabia. In the last two decades, there have been several studies that described distinctive features of some of the major dialects like Najdi and Hijazi (e.g., Al-Wer & Horesh, 2019; Cotter & De Jong, 2019; Holes, 2006).

### ***Linguistic Insecurity and Dialect Divergence***

Linguistic insecurity is a common phenomenon amongst speakers of dialects that diverge from the standard language variety. In Saudi Arabia, the official dialect is Standard Arabic (SA) however, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the common variation used by the wider speaker community (Albirini, 2016). As a diglossic language, Arabic has myriad dialects and language variations, some of which are considered less prestigious than MSA, SA, and certainly less prestigious than Classic Arabic (CA). In the Arab context, variation has been studied extensively and been recorded across regions, social parameters, time, and speech communities (Albirini, 2016). Language and dialect variation in Arabic is influenced by regional, social, stylistic, and temporal variation. Speakers of non-standard or less-prestigious language variations are often self-conscious about their language use, manifesting as linguistic insecurity.

This phrase was first coined by Labov in 1966 and described as the gap between speakers' ideal of a standard language and their perception of their own dialect or language variety as well as their linguistic competence in that language (Albirini, 2016). Meyerhoff (2006), further defined the term as "Speakers' feeling that the variety they use is somehow inferior, ugly or bad (with) Negative attitudes to one's own variety expressed in aesthetic or moral terms" (p. 181). This perception may refer to either the speakers' insecurity about whether the language variety itself is "good" or insecurity about their proficiency in that language variety (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017). Insecurity could occur when speakers compare the phonetic, syntactic, and/or stylistic features of their own dialect with what they perceive as the "correct" form of language use (Macaulay, 1975). Francard (1989) described linguistic insecurity as the speakers' awareness of the distance between their idiolect and sociolect and what they perceive as more prestigious or authoritative varieties, spoken by a ruling class or more powerful and wealthier speech communities. This may cause the speakers, subconsciously, to adopt a series of

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mechanisms to minimize the feelings of insecurity, including hypercorrection and code-switching.

Similarly, Labov (2006) explained that speakers with greater levels of linguistic insecurity might experience hypercorrection, self-correction, doubt, or fluctuation between multiple speech styles in an attempt to comply as much as possible with the dominant type of language in a setting. In 1966, Labov surveyed the social dialect of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The results found that when speakers have an audience in mind; they adjust their speech to suit that audience. This often led to over-compensation, where speakers of a “lower” social dialect adopted the affectations of a more prestigious dialect but hypercorrected so that the affectation became more exaggerated and diverged even further from the target dialect (Labov, 2006).

### ***Language Ideologies***

Sociolinguists regarded prestige as a complex notion that speakers orient themselves to in different ways. What might be considered “prestigious” for x might not be so for y. Nonetheless, prestige is not necessarily an element that speakers are aware of, or something that is constantly associated with the highest social class or more powerful speakers. Such observations led sociolinguists to differentiate between *covert* and *overt* prestige.

*Overt* prestige is commonly associated with the variant that people usually are aware of and associate with speakers of a higher social status. Speakers may also orient themselves towards other types of prestige. For example, Arabic speakers across the Arab World sometimes show a great command of their local vernaculars and MSA, an impressive task as each variant has lexical and phonetic systems distinct from any others (Albirini, 2016). Similarly, many German speakers master at least two variants: their local vernacular German and Standard German or Hochdeutsch. They often learn the local dialect at home and learn the standard one at school. Prestige is one of the crucial elements speakers unconsciously rely on when shifting from one variant to the other. *Covert* prestige, on the other hand, reflects the values of smaller speaker communities who express respect for their less prestigious minority dialect and show a preference for it over more prestigious standard dialects.

Albirini (2016) identified this as “important in the Arab context because language prestige hinges mostly, but not solely, on Arabic speakers’ attitudes toward SA

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(Standard Arabic), QA (Colloquial Arabic), and the local and global languages that exist in the Arabic sociolinguistic arena” (p. 78).

### ***Linguistic Insecurity in a Multilingual Setting***

Labov (2006), Macaulay (1975), and Meyerhoff's (2006) definitions of linguistic insecurity fail to encompass the complex relationship between linguistic insecurity and dialect shift in multi-dialect communities. Studies that explored this concept within a multi-dialectal context like those of Abtahian, Cohn, and Pepinsky (2016), Bonner (2001), and Zentz (2014) have found that speakers' feelings of insecurity and embarrassment about using their local dialect often correlates with the shift towards the dominant dialect (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017). Abtahian and Quinn (2017) identified three types of linguistic insecurity that occur in language endangerment situations that often correlate to pertinent sources of shame or embarrassment for speakers:

1. The insecurity of young speakers who are criticized by older fluent ones for not knowing how to speak “properly” (Lee, 2009 as cited by Abtahian & Quinn, 2017).
2. The insecurity of speakers who were punished for using their native (local) language or variety (Reyhner, 2004, as cited by Abtahian & Quinn, 2017).
3. The insecurity of non-speakers whose identity/solidarity is questioned for not knowing how to speak the ancestral language or variety (Wyman, 2009 as cited by Abtahian & Quinn, 2017).

It is worth noting that the majority of the literature on linguistic insecurity revolves around speakers of minority dialects' knowledge of the dominant or more prestigious. In line with Abtahian and Quinn's (2017) this paper focuses on a minority dialect (Malki) speaker's perceived competence or incompetence in their heritage language or language variety.

When discussing the first type of linguistic insecurity, Lee (2009), in her study of Navajo teenagers, found that young speakers have higher tendencies to maintain their local variety even if they are not proficient in it. Similarly, Abtahian et al. (2016) identified a large-scale shift in Indonesia, from widespread local varieties toward the use of the nationally dominant variety, Bahasa Indonesia. This shift is reportedly due to the feeling of incompetence when using local dialects as well as the general perception that the dominant language is more prestigious and powerful (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017).

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Garcia (2009 ) suggested that embarrassment about their mixed language practices is also strong motivator for youths to shift further toward dominant languages or language variants (as cited by Wyman, 2009). Bonner's 2001 study on adult speakers of Belizean support this claim with findings that adults expressed “shame” when speaking it Belizean. This was a significant factor that led them to shift towards Belizean Creole, which is seen as more prestigious and beneficial language variation in a multilingual setting.

### ***Identifying the Research Gap***

There is a growing body of research on language attitudes towards dialect varieties in Saudi Arabia (al-Rojaie, 2023). Several of these studies explore how speakers of a dialect variant view their own dialect (Alhazmi, 2018; Alhazmi & Alfalig, 2022; Alrumaih, 2003). However, they shed less light on social stratification embedded within the variation of these dialects. Another research gap is the study of southern-western dialects of Arabia such as Malki, Zahrani, Asiri and Shihri, on which little research has been conducted. This is potentially due to the physical barrier of the Sarawat mountains range that secludes these dialects and dialect-speakers from the rest of the Arab Peninsula. For years people in these mountains were isolated from the other language communities in Arabia. This physical barrier appears to have had a significant social, psychological, and linguistic impact on speakers of these southern dialects. As, according to Labov (2006), “isolation leads to linguistic diversity, while the mixing of populations leads to linguistic uniformity” (p. 6).

A thorough review of the literature on Saudi Arabian dialects has made it clear that southern dialects are under-researched. Therefore, this study focuses on one major southern dialect, Malki, which could be seen as a representative of the other varieties in the same dialectical continuum. The study will not touch on any of the phonological or morphological aspects of Malki. Rather, it will primarily try to discover how sociolinguistic factors influence the attitudes and confidence of the Malki speaker community. Further, how age as a sociolinguistic variable affects the presence of linguistic insecurity in Malki-speakers (Eckhart, 1998).

Here are examples of unique features of the Malki dialect:

There are expressions unique to Malki speakers that would not be used with non-Malki speakers due to the potential misunderstanding or feared linguistic profiling.

1. "hawayh هويه" meaning (why)

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2. "ahlayh: أحليه" meaning 'that is it' as a response to the question why? When the respondent does not want to give an explanation in a way that indicates anger.
  3. The unique pronunciation of the Arabic voiced post-alveolar affricate ج which in MSA is pronounced  $\widehat{d}ʒ$  as in Jim. Is pronounced as the voiced palate-alveolar affricate ʒ in the Malki dialect as the "s" in "pleasure".

Variation in language is persistent and inevitable. In every speech community, the speed of language change or shift varies. Some speech communities witness gradual change as their speakers age, while some others adopt the style and/or certain sound and lexical features of other dominant language varieties and dialects. This contributes to the negative evaluations of younger speakers' speeches by the older people in the same speech community, and in turn may result in further linguistic insecurity to the younger members of the speech community (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017). In this paper, we discuss language variation with respect to language insecurity and dialect divergence in one of the main speech communities in Southwestern Saudi Arabia (Bani Malik). With the advent of the internet and prevalence of social media, such communities who treated the high mountains as a geographical barrier, especially before the country's economic prosperity, came into direct contact with more dominant dialects' speakers.

## Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design and gathered data primarily through an online survey which was completed by 403 respondents. The survey has ten items whose responses were arranged according to a linear Likert five-point scale. Ranging from Strongly Disagree (1 in scale) to Strongly Agree (5 in scale); the intervals used were points rather than specific labels so all data was analysed at an interval-level. These items address three issues:

- (1) The respondents' current use of the Malki dialect.
- (2) Speakers' attitudes towards the dialect's prestige.
- (3) Speakers' willingness to transfer the dialect to their offspring.

The survey included two logic questions that helped avoid skewed data. The first item asks how often the respondent speaks the dialect with family and relatives. The second, on the other hand, asks how often the respondent speaks it with outsiders. In case the respondent states that they never speak it with family and relatives, then

also they will do the same with outsiders, but not vice versa. As a result of these two logic items, 54 responses were disregarded.

### ***Participants***

We examined the participant responses from all Malki dialect speakers who responded to a Google Forms survey on Malki in April 2020 (see Table 1 for demographic information). The survey was advertised on Malki-only online forums and social media groups. As this is a quantitative study and the participants fall into eight groups, we used stratified probability sampling. The sample size was determined using a sample size calculator, set to a confidence level of 99% and a margin of error within  $\pm 5\%$  of the surveyed value. This was to ensure accurate analysis of the groups with fewer responses. From the population of 403 respondents the study needed 252 participants. The percentage of the population each category represents was then multiplied by the sample size 252, this gave the indication of how many participants needed to be sampled from each strata (See Appendix B).

Table 1. Population Demographic Numbers and Percentages

	18-25		26-40		41-50		51+	
Female	22	5%	40	10%	17	4%	13	3%
Male	23	6%	116	29%	86	21%	86	21%
Total	45	11%	156	39%	103	26%	99	25%

n = 403

### ***Research Instruments***

The survey was designed using Google forms as it has the option to create multiple Likert-scale questions, offers basic analysis, and collates the data into a single .CSV file for analysis. The data was then entered into IBM SPSS Statistics software (SPSS) and sorted by variable type.

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## ***Research Procedures***

A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the original 8-item linguistics survey<sup>1</sup> about use of the Malki dialect to determine the behavior of distributions of each item and to assure statistical assumptions of normality are met for all further analyses. The analysis measured the mean, standard deviation, median, skewness, and kurtosis. A Cronbach's alpha test was also conducted along with a principal component analysis to assess the internal consistency of the survey. An initial factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) F-test was conducted to compare the variance in each group mean from the overall group variance and indicate if these figures held statistical significance. Finally, a 2 (Gender) x 4 (Age Group) factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post-hoc Turkey HSD analyses was conducted to test if a difference in component scores existed between men and women across the age groups.

## **Results**

The survey was designed to gather data on Malki-dialect speakers' attitudes towards their dialect. Each item, whether taken individually or in combination, address specific sociolinguistic indicators of linguistic insecurity. Items one, two, and seven, address perceived linguistic proficiency and familial attitudes towards the dialect and their use of it. Items three and six relate to the influence of language attitudes outside of the home, and the external pressures to conform to the standardized dialect, especially in a learning environment where perceived incorrect language use could result in punishment (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017; Lee, 2007, 2009). Items four, five, and seven gather data on the dialect's perceived level of prestige. Item four is about code-switching habits and was designed to detect dialect-leveling (Cheshire & Edwards, 1998), and item five's question directly addresses perceptions of the dialect's prestige. Item seven was designed to gather data on whether participants feel that the Malki dialect holds enough value to be taught to their children and other young relatives.

## ***Do the Malki speech community experience linguistic insecurity and if so, what external factors influence linguistic insecurity?***

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<sup>1</sup> Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency ranging from zero (no internal consistency at all) to one (perfectly internally consistent) (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). A Cronbach's alpha test was conducted on the initial 10-item linguistics survey to assess its internal consistency. The survey showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74, however, two items showed poor item-total correlations and too large an increase in Cronbach's alpha and so were dropped from the survey. A second analysis of the 8-item survey produced a higher Cronbach's alpha score of 0.85; showing improved reliability. Further analysis was conducted on the reduced 8-item survey.

The results indicate that members of Malki speech community do experience linguistic insecurity, the low mean results for items three and six indicate discomfort or unwillingness to speak the Malki dialect in official settings (Appendix B). We can also see from the high F-values and p-values lower than 0.05 in Table 2 that items one, three, four, five, six, and seven are statistically significant and therefore warrant further analysis. Statistical significance is indicated by a p-value of less than 0.05.

Table 2. Combined results of descriptive analysis and ANOVA test

#	Item	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis	F	P-value
1	Currently, I am competent to speak in Malki dialect	4.20	0.99	-1.01	0.25	4,366	0,005
2	Currently, I speak Malki dialect with family and relatives	3.61	1.20	-0.41	-0.84	1,532	0,206
3	Currently, I speak Malki dialect at school or work	2.55	1.23	0.36	-0.79	5,022	0,002
4	When I speak in Malki dialect, I feel confident and do not shift to other forms or style	3.17	1.36	-0.08	-1.17	2,708	0,045
5	The Malki dialect enjoys a great deal of prestige compared to other dialects in the country	3.43	1.34	-0.35	-1.01	5,117	0,002
6	When I visit governmental offices, I still use Malki dialect	2.59	1.33	0.29	-1.05	6,748	0,000
7	Currently, I wish that my kids and relatives continue speaking in Malki dialect	3.20	1.34	-0.11	-1.08	2,922	0,034
8	In the past, I watched and still watch a lot of movies and TV shows that use the Maliki dialect.	3.00	1.58	-0.16	-1.50	2,293	0,078

*Note:* All values of skewness and kurtosis are  $\leq 2$  indicate a normal distribution for this dataset.

### ***Do age and gender affect linguistic insecurity?***

A 2 (Gender) x 4 (Age Group) ANOVA test was conducted to test if a difference in component scores existed across genders and the age groups of 18 – 25 years old, 26 – 40 years old, 41 – 50 years old, and 51 or older. While no significant main

effect was found in the component score for gender, a main effect of age group was found for component scores of the 8-item linguistic survey.  $F(3,395) = 3.90$ ,  $p = .009$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ . The effect size estimates for this difference are considered small.

Table 3. ANOVA results

Variable	SSE	Df	MSE	F	p	$\eta^2$
(Intercept)	7.20	1	7.20	7.51	0.006	
Gender	1.37	1	1.37	1.43	0.233	0.000
Age	11.23	3	3.74	3.90	0.009	0.039
Gender x Age	5.80	3	1.93	2.02	0.111	0.014
Residuals	378.62	395	0.96			

A post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD with multiple comparisons was conducted to understand this main effect and to analyse its constituent parts. The analysis showed Individuals in the age group 51+ ( $M = 0.30$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) had significantly higher component scores than individuals in the 18 - 25 age group ( $M = -0.39$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ),  $p = .002$  for items one, three, and six. Additionally, individuals in the age group 51 + had significantly higher component scores than individuals in the 26 - 40 age group ( $M = -0.09$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ),  $p = .002$  for item 5. Older individuals had in general, higher component scores than younger individuals. There were no other statistically significant comparisons between age groups. No significant interaction was found between gender and age,  $F(3,395) = 2.02$ ,  $p = 0.111$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ .

### Findings

We narrowed the discussion to focus on six items of the final 8-item survey, as their high F-values and comparatively low p-values indicate significant statistical data. As Table 4 indicates, the youngest age group (18-25) demonstrated the lowest mean across all items, ranging from 1,19 for item six, to 3,80 for item one. In contrast, the oldest age group (51+) consistently scored the highest mean across all items ranging from 2.84 for item three and 4.38 for item one. This indicates a wide gap between the oldest and youngest Malki participant age groups in terms of how they use and view their dialect. This is further supported by the Tukey post hoc p-values when comparing the two age cohorts; item six shows the lowest significant p-value of 0.0001 and item seven the highest significant p-value, of 0.034. The age group

26-40 is only statistically significant in item five, the mean is still relatively high at 3,31 but the p-value of 0.002 indicates that this variable is still significant. Item four was not included in the table below as there were no significant p-values when comparing the age groups.

Table 4. Combined Descriptive, ANOVA, and Tukey Results

Item	Group	M	SD	F	df	p-value	$\eta^2$
(1) Currently, I am competent to speak in Malki dialect	51 +	4,38	0,934	4,366	3	0,005	0.032
	18-25	3,80	1,057				
(3) Currently, I speak Malki dialect at school or work	51 +	2,84	1,441	5,022	3	0,003	0,036
	18-25	2,07	0,915				
(5) The Malki dialect enjoys a great deal of prestige compared to other dialects in the country	51 +	3.88	1.11	5,117	3	0.002	0.037
	41-50	3.29	1.28			0.009	
	26-40	3.31	1.44			0.004	
	18 - 25	3.20	1.39			0.002	
(6) When I visit governmental offices, I still use Malki dialect	51 +	2,97	1,446	6,748	3	0,000	0.048
	18-25	1,93	1,009				
(7) Currently, I wish that my kids and relatives continue speaking in Malki dialect	51 +	3,45	1,319	2,922	3	0,034	0.021
	18-25	2,76	1,351				

\*n= 257

To determine the significance of this gap, a detailed analysis of the survey's results was crucial. When looking at items one and seven, which tackle competence and the use of the Malki dialect in a familial setting, the results show a significant mean difference of 0,58 between the youngest and oldest groups for item one, and 0.69 for item seven. The effect of this significance can be determined by looking at the Eta-Squared ( $\eta^2$ ) figure where  $\eta^2 = 0.01$  indicates a small effect;  $\eta^2 = 0.06$

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indicates a medium effect; and  $\eta^2 = 0.14$  indicates a large effect (Berg, n.d.). So, for items one ( $\eta^2 = 0.032$ ), and seven ( $\eta^2 = 0.021$ ) age is relevant as a factor, however, the effect is small.

The results for items three and six give an indication of the attitude towards speaking Malki in an official setting, whether that is in a school, at work, or in a government office. Sankoff and Laberge (1978) suggest that an awareness of the standard language requires an awareness of the corresponding standard language market (as cited by Eckhart, 1998). The terms by which standard language market can be primarily defined involve institutional participation, with particular focus on educational and commercial institutions, as well as the underlying social systems and networks that provide support for the institutions (Eckhart, 1998). It is therefore telling that item three produced the lowest mean at 2,55 and item six produced the second lowest mean of 2,59. While their Eta-squared figures, item three ( $\eta^2 = 0,036$ ) and six ( $\eta^2 = 0.048$ ), indicate that the impact is a small one.

## **Discussion**

The analysis showed that while members of the Malki-dialect speech community experience linguistic insecurity, it is more apparent in younger members, and more prevalent in formal settings. Each age group analyzed had different overall psychological features, understanding, interpersonal relationships, and social interactions from and with one another. Investigating the level of linguistic insecurity across the four age categories gave a more detailed picture of issues with linguistic insecurity among Malki dialect speakers.

### ***Age***

Age as a sociolinguistic variable has been approached in a number of ways; from age-grading at the individual level to age stratification for a larger speech community. These are often split into groups according to either chronological age or life-stage (Alshangiti, 2022; Eckhart, 1998). Chronological grouping falls into five categories in variationist quantitative studies; childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age, whereas childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, our data fell across four age ranges within the adult age cohort (Eckhart, 1998). “The emphasis in the field of variation on the vernacular and standard language as poles of social stratification and of stylistic ranges has led to a view of language development that involves a developing awareness of the standard language” (Labov, 1964, as cited by Eckhart, 1998, p. 111).

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There was a wide divergence in how the younger participants (18-25) responded to the survey and how adults the older age groups responded (51+). With the older group consistently representing the highest mean scores indicating fewer issues with linguistic insecurity. While the youngest group consistently scored the lowest means across all ten survey items, indicating far less confidence in their dialect proficiency and greater levels of linguistic insecurity. Recognizing that self-assessments of language proficiency are problematic the divergent responses of youth and adults nonetheless signify local perceptions of language vitality that have important implications. The results show a common trend of linguistic insecurity in younger participants; where often, a perceived lack of competence in a language variation affects their willingness to speak it; a sentiment often linked to shame and fear of criticism from older, more fluent, family members (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017; Wyman, 2009).

Educational establishments are the dominant institutions in the lives of children and adolescents; a system that is rife with institutional and social factors that affect students' linguistic insecurity (Abtahian & Quinn, 2017; Baldaquí Escandell, 2011; Bonner, 2001). While the lives of adults are largely dominated by workplace institutions and their tendency towards speaking a more standardized dialect could be due to a number of factors. It could indicate a desire not to lose prestige by speaking a non-standard dialect, or it could simply denote a desire not to stand-out, a need to assimilate, and collaborate in a team-environment. In the case of the elderly, those institutions are often nursing homes, or retirement villages. Standard language norms are dominant in the workplace and schools. However, in the case of institutions for the elderly linguistic norms are more complex (Eckhart, 1998). This speaks to insecurity in speaking a language variant that diverges from MSA in a more rule-based setting, with an environment that has a wider range of non-Malki dialect speakers. Limitations placed on age and institutionally specific practices can be seen to have a significant impact on the lives of people engaging with those institutions (Eckhart, 1998). This impact may have an influence not only on the social networks formed but also on language variety needs.

The Malki dialect, as indicated earlier, is part of the mountains dialect continuum and historically language change has been influenced by the speaker community's physical isolation. In the 1990s, Malki people's physical isolation was broken down by the advent of electricity and paved roads, appear to cling to their dialect and view it as competitive as the other dominant dialects. The prolonged absence of contact with other, more standardized language variations, has ostensibly led to a wider gap developing between these dialects, in terms of mutual intelligibility and

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prestige. The majority of respondents from the older groups preferred their spouses and kids to maintain the Malki dialect and indicated that they would like the dialect to be transferred to the next generations.

When it comes to prestige (assessed in item five), it appears that the majority of responses did not deviate too far from the middle of the Likert scale, in this case the number three. This indicates a potential central tendency bias (Glen, 2016). The wording of item five (Malki dialect enjoys a great deal of prestige) was subsequently reassessed and determined to be a leading statement as it presupposes an answer via indirect bias. The phrasing implies that the language variant already enjoys a level of prestige which injects indirect bias into the data. The respondents might have felt that a more neutral answer would neither disagree with the statement, risking tribal pride, nor agree with the statement as the respondents might feel the contradiction to reality.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

This study addresses only one dialect of the continuum. Therefore, to have a great deal of evidence about the linguistic insecurity in all the dialects in the same dialect continuum, similar studies are needed to other dialects such as Jizani, Zahrani, Shihri, Asiri, Faify, and Tihami. Studying such dialects also helps us understand whether they might decay in few decades as a result of the linguistic insecurity caused by severe stigmatization and linguistic profiling. In addition, this study tackles the age factor as an essential factor to determine speakers' attitudes towards their dialects. Therefore, more factors are also important to investigate such as gender, place of residence, level of income and level of education. Studying such variables leads to more thorough understanding to the correlation between dialect decay and the interaction of such elements.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to determine whether Malki dialect speakers experience linguistic insecurity and what external and internal factors affect a speaker's attitude toward their own dialect. An aim which is significant as the Malki language variant is under-researched, especially regarding the sociolinguistic aspects of the mountain dialects of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study, together with many future studies of this kind, might raise the sociolinguistic awareness of not only the southern (mountains) people, but also of the other outsiders. If successfully achieved, the sociolinguistic awareness could curb the level of stigmatization and linguistic profiling that create less harmony of the national unity and also to people's interpersonal relationships. Similarly, this study, which investigated one

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stigmatized dialect in the Arabian Peninsula, delves into different type of complications such as the long-term effects of geographical isolation on generational linguistic insecurity To gather more evidence, there is a need to study other dialects in the same continuum and also to discuss many other factors other than age, so we can get a bigger picture of the sociolinguistic explanation of such mountains dialects.

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## Appendix A

### 10-item Malki Dialect Survey

Table 5. *List of Survey Questions*

#	Survey Question
1	Currently, I am competent to speak in Malki dialect
2	Currently, I speak Malki dialect with family and relatives
3	Currently, I speak Malki dialect at school or work
4	When I speak in Malki dialect, I feel confident and do not shift to other forms or style
5	The Malki dialect enjoys a great deal of prestige compared to other dialects in the country
6	When I visit governmental offices, I still use Malki dialect
7	Currently, I wish that my kids and relatives continue speaking in Malki dialect
8	Currently, I smile and sometimes laugh when I hear someone speaks in Malki dialect
9	Usually, I shift to Malki dialect when I want to let the people around me to smile or laugh
10	In the past, I watched and still watch a lot of movies and TV shows that use the Maliki dialect.

## Appendix B

### Stratified Probability Samples

Table 6. *Total Sample Size by Group*

	18-25	26-40	41-50	51+
Female	13	25	11	8
Male	14	73	54	54
Total	28	98	64	62

n = 252

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## Appendix C

### Results for all 8 Survey Items

Table 7. Combined results of descriptive analysis and ANOVA test

#	Item	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis	F	p-value
1	Currently, I am competent to speak in Malki dialect	4.20	0.99	-1.01	0.25	4,366	0,005
2	Currently, I speak Malki dialect with family and relatives	3.61	1.20	-0.41	-0.84	1,532	0,206
3	Currently, I speak Malki dialect at school or work	2.55	1.23	0.36	-0.79	5,022	0,002
4	When I speak in Malki dialect, I feel confident and do not shift to other forms or style	3.17	1.36	-0.08	-1.17	2,708	0,045
5	The Malki dialect enjoys a great deal of prestige compared to other dialects in the country	3.43	1.34	-0.35	-1.01	5,117	0,002
6	When I visit governmental offices, I still use Malki dialect	2.59	1.33	0.29	-1.05	6,748	0,000
7	Currently, I wish that my kids and relatives continue speaking in Malki dialect	3.20	1.34	-0.11	-1.08	2,922	0,034
8	In the past, I watched and still watch a lot of movies and TV shows that use the Maliki dialect.	3.00	1.58	-0.16	-1.50	2,293	0,078