

## An Investigation of Language Attitudes and Dialect Change in Frenda Spoken Arabic: Case of The Arabic Pragmatic Marker (*yaḥayyi*).

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### Abstract:

The present paper is intended to examine Frenda speakers' individual attitudes towards their dialectal behaviour introduced by the use of the Arabic pragmatic marker '*yaḥayyi*'. The methodological framework of this study employs a self-filling written questionnaire which was conducted on-line and distributed to a total number of (48) respondent who are native and local inhabitants of Frenda. The results revealed that Frenda speakers exhibit negative attitudes towards the use of '*yaḥayyi*' particularly outside their local area when they interact with non-local speakers. Speakers stated their willingness to shift away from using this marker outside the region as the item in question is socially-stigmatised, carries a bedouin and is measured as a sociolinguistic stereotype.

**Keywords:** Dialect Change, Pragmatic Marker, Language Attitudes, Sociolinguistic Stereotype

### 1- Introduction

The study of language variation aims to examine the social forces that govern speakers' linguistic use. The variationist field was pioneered by the work of Labov in New York in 1966. The primary goal is to search and isolate any possible correlations between language use and social factors namely age, gender, education, ethnicity, etc. Advances achieved in the field of social psychology caught the interest of sociolinguists who turned their attention to study the psychological motives that lead speakers to adapt and change their speech. Ever since the implementation of the notion of attitudes in the stream of sociolinguistics, numerous studies had been devoted to examine the interplay between language variation and speakers' attitudinal reactions and judgments towards language varieties and speakers as well.

Language attitudes-related studies were initiated by social psychologists among them Lambert (1967) and his associates and later in Labov's studies (1966, 1972a) and Giles (1982). This concept had been extensively employed in sociolinguistics literature to study how speakers adjust their speech based on

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certain evaluative characteristics which they observe in their own variety or others' varieties. Dendane (2007) argues that "the social psychological perspective and its principles have contributed, and still contribute, to a large extent, to the development of a broad sociolinguistic theory" (p.3). This theory seeks to interpret the dynamism of language variation and change as psychologically-motivated processes. Sociolinguists and dialectologists were preoccupied in developing methods and strategies to examine attitudes. In this respect, Ech-charfi (2017) admits that "the basic problem in this area was conceived of as one of operationalization" (p.150). Accordingly, fieldworkers were highly concerned in developing new techniques, instruments and methods that can better observe and examine attitudes. Among these new analysis tools we mention the matched-guise technique, self-reporting scales, recording MP3's, self-reporting written questionnaires, and the direct (oral or written) method. In this research paper, an online written questionnaire is designed to examine Frenda speakers' attitudes towards the use of pragmatic marker /yaʕayyi/.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

-Are Frenda speakers losing their Arabic pragmatic particle /yaʕayyi/?

-What individual attitudes do Frenda speakers exhibit towards their use of /yaʕayyi/?

To answer the above questions we put forward the following hypotheses:

- The pragmatic marker /yaʕayyi/ is undergoing change in progress as several Frenda speakers are gradually shifting away from it.
- Frenda speakers are gradually losing the pragmatic marker /yaʕayyi/. based on their negative attitudes towards its social connotation as a bedouin stigmatised feature outside their speech community.

### 1. Frenda: A Linguistic Melting Pot

The present investigation is carried out in the region of 'Frenda'. The area is located in the west of Algeria as part of '*les hauts plateaux*', 300 kilometres to Oran, 100 kilometres to Mascara and 50 kilometres to Tiaret. The social hierarchy of Frenda is predominantly based on genealogical relationships as several families are related by blood. These social cohorts are known as 'الاعراش'. Many of these groups descended from the tribe of Banu Hilal. A large portion of these tribes was bedouin and installed near the outskirts of Frenda. They demonstrated bedouin linguistic features mainly the use of interdentals /d̪/, /θ/ and /d̪/.

This social structure loosened as the demography had been in constant change during the last 20 years. Frenda witnessed a heavy in-migration from rural inhabitants during the black nineties to seek security and search for better life conditions. The new settlers intermingled with native urban inhabitants. New generation who are Frenda-born rebelled against their parents' rural norms and adopted new urban once. One can straightforwardly notice that Frenda speakers, particularly younger-age, exhibit both sedentary and bedouin linguistic traits in their dialectal speech.

More importantly, ecological growth played a major role in the development of the dialect of Frenda as the region made a transition from a fully-bedouin region into urbanised one thanks to building roads and trade. This resulted in dialect contact with other sedentary speakers in which numerous middle-aged speakers shifted away from their old rural features into other urbanised ones.

### 2. Pragmatic Markers

They are often referred to as 'discourse markers' which stand for words or phrases used at sentence boundaries or alone. Brinton (1996) describes them as lexical items which are "optional, difficult to translate, marginal in respect to word class, syntactically quite free, empty of lexical meanings and they do not have propositional meanings or grammatical functions" (1996, p.6; in Mahdi and

Majeed, 2020, p.13507). Pragmatic markers include adverbials (amazingly), interjections (oh, OMG) and expletives (by the way). Syntactically, they are independent, detachable or loosely attached to a sentence (Schiffirin, 1987, Brinton, 1996; in Al-Khawaldeh 2018, p.115). As their name implies PM's are widely used in spoken discourse whose meaning depends on the pragmatic context of the utterance, the intention of the speaker and the encoding effort of the hearer. In colloquial Arabic, PM's or DM's are extensively used to serve various pragmatic functions. For example, the pragmatic marker '*nichen*' is employed to serve the following functions:

- An index of direction, /ru:ħ nich3:n/ (go straight).
- Expression of acceptance to another utterance, /nichen/ (right).
- Used with a negative particle, /marakch nichen/ (you're not normal).
- Tag question, *rak jey, nichen?* (You're coming, right?)

Another set of discourse markers used in our colloquial Arabic includes the following examples /wallah/ (I swear to Allah), /inchalah/ (Allah willing), /y3:k/ (so), /ʃufes/ (no way), /hawzi/ (oh god).

In this paper, the pragmatic marker /yaʕayyi/ is employed to forward a reply or a reaction to what other speakers say. PM's are generally examined from syntactic or pragmatic standpoints. However, this research is different as it attempts to examine this marker from a socio-psychological perspective in attempt to reveal speakers' attitudes towards language use.

### **3. Concept of Language Attitudes and Language Variation and Change**

Interest in language attitudes in relation to dialect variation and change is attracting many scholars' attention during the recent years to interpret dialect variation particularly in accommodative situations.

This concept was primarily borrowed from the field of social psychology into the field of sociolinguistics. The concept has been differently defined by various scholars. Peterson (2020) considers language attitudes as “ (a related concept to language ideology) beliefs or judgments people have about certain social styles of language, features of a language, or varieties of a language” (p.8).

Labov contends that attitudes-related research in sociolinguistics attempts to take into account “a record of overt [and covert] attitudes towards language, linguistic features and linguistic stereotypes” (1984, p.33; in Kherbache, 2017, p.179). Attitudes can serve to amplify the occurrence of linguistic stereotypes.

From a psychological perspective, Walters (2006b) says that “language attitudes are psychological states related in complex ways to larger abstract language ideologies” (2006, p.651; in Bassiouney, 2009, p.204). Said differently, attitudes can be loaded with ideological implications that include people's subjective judgments towards language varieties or certain linguistic features in these language systems.

Dialect variation in the Algerian context is remarkably driven by speakers' attitudes towards their own dialects or other dialects. Several studies, conducted under a contact-induced standpoint, have shown clear-cut correlation between both constructs. Most studies focused on phonology by examining the three interdenatls [θ], [d̥] and [d]. On the other hand, less attention has been paid to analyse lexical units, pragmatic markers, linguistic particles or discourse markers.

Dendane (2007) showed that Tlemcani speakers' attitudes towards the glottal stop [ʔ] and the velar voiced [g] and uvular [q] lead to variation in the so-called dialect. In a different study, Moussadek (2013) concluded that attitudes of Mascarian speakers towards the pragmatic marker [ma] lead to dialect variation in Mascarian spoken dialect. In a contact-induced study, Kherbache (2017) shows a

tight correlation between attitudes of Beni Snous and their variable use of the interdentals among three tribes.

#### 4. Method and Sampling

The methodological framework of this paper joins two different study fields namely variationist sociolinguistics and social psychology. Thus, the main objective is to determine whether speakers' subjective judgments and reactions lead them to shift away from the linguistic particle 'yaʕayyi' and adopt another variant.

The total population selected for this study is (48) local speakers born and raised in Frenda. Albirini (2013) claims that "data collected from a selectively small yet representative sample may provide a good basis for describing general language-related trends in the speech community" (p.84). To reach the possible number of samples, we relied on the snowball technique whereby "the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others" (Bryman, 2012, p.202). Accordingly, we invited the initial samples to fill in the questionnaire via an online link on Facebook and invite their friends and friends of their friends to fill it in.

Attitudes-related data are gathered by means of a self-completion questionnaire distributed on-line via Facebook. The questions comprise of close-ended questions represented by multiple choice, Yes/No questions answers to receive abundant answers and save time.

#### 5. Results

Shortly, we shall introduce both linguistic and quantitative analyses of the variable in question to identify any possible correlation between speakers' linguistic behaviour and their attitudes.

##### 6.1 Linguistic analysis

As far as this study is concerned, the pragmatic marker /yaʕayyi/ is composed of two parts;

The particle /ya/ which is used as vocative particle<sup>1</sup>, 'ʕay'<sup>2</sup> which is a lexical expression used to show surprise in the middle of a conversation and one of the interlocutors is not able to express him/herself. The suffix 'yi' is put to refer to the possessive case. This particle is used as:

- An interjection particle to denote surprise when hearing bad or shocking news:

A: /ketlu:h meski:n/ (they killed him, the poor)

B: /yaʕayyi/!

- An interjection particle used when hearing a strange piece of information or not fully believing what the other interlocutor is telling.

A: /lqayt melyu:n ʕayah/. (I found a million cash)

B: /yaʕayyi/!

This same particle is used in regions of Mahdia and Ain Dheb as /ya ʕayti/. It can be used separately (see above B examples) as an independent expression or inside an utterance /yaʕayyi fara:h ygu:l/ (OMG, what is he saying?).

##### 5.2 Quantitative Analysis

This section is dedicated to statistical analysis of the selected linguistic variable in correlation with speakers' reactional attitudes. It comprises of (10)

<sup>1</sup> It is referred to in Arabic grammar as حرف نداء.

<sup>2</sup> According to *al-Ra'id*, *al-Ghani* and *al-Wasit* dictionaries.

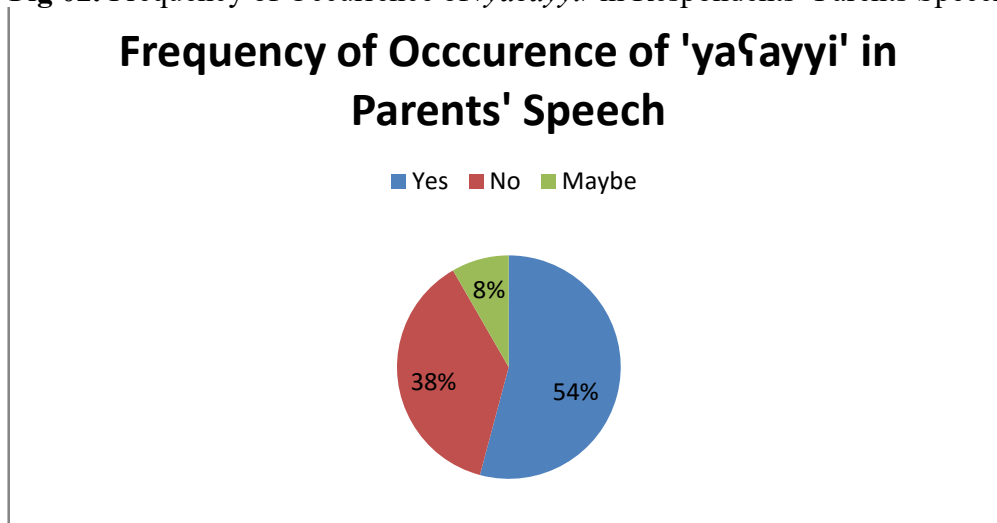
questions to measure speakers' individual judgments towards the change of the pragmatic marker /yaʕayyi/.

**Fig 01.** Frequency of Occurrence of /yaʕayyi/.



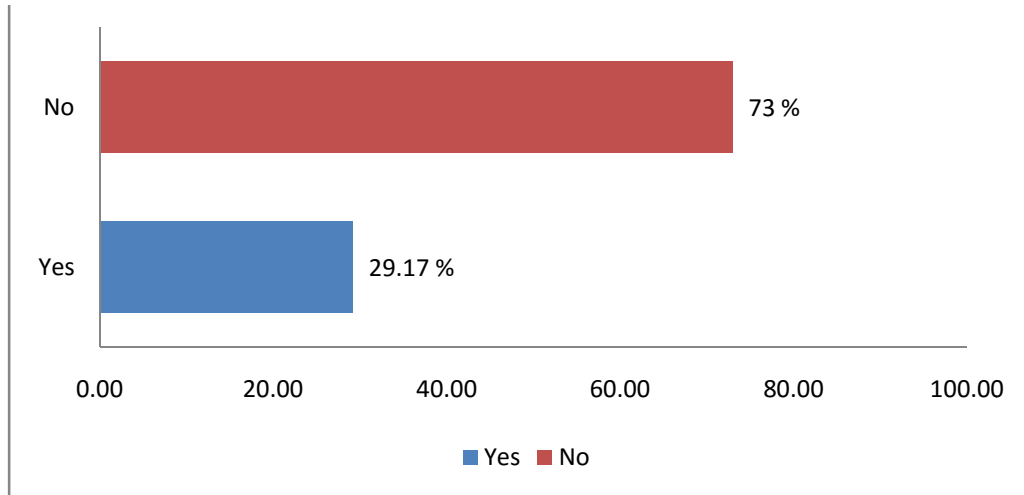
According to the results displayed in the above figure 01, (30) speakers out of 48 stated that they use the pragmatic particle in their daily speech which they consider as their native speech while (18) reported that they don't use regarding maybe due to its bedouin connotation and stigmatised nature.

**Fig 02.** Frequency of Occurrence of /yaʕayyi/ in Respondents' Parents Speech.



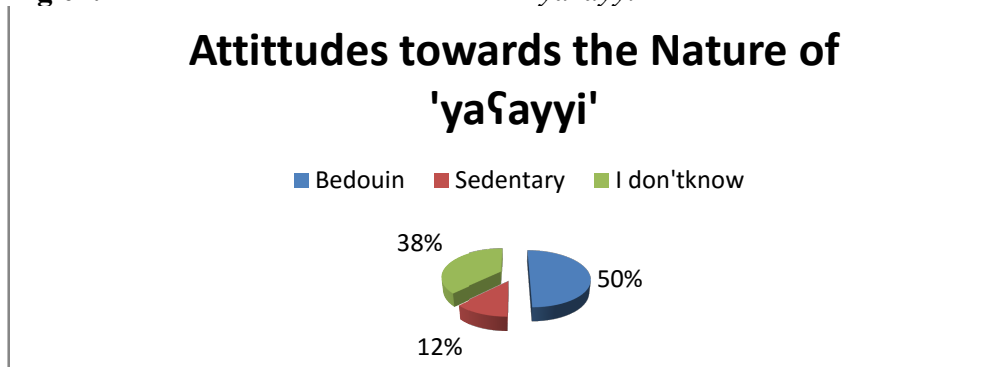
The above pie chart demonstrates that 54% of population stated that their parents frequently use /yaʕayyi/ in their which implies that speakers acquired this linguistic item from their parents during childhood and represents Frenda's old dialectal speech. 38% of speakers said that their parents speech don't show any use of this feature which could be interpreted as undergoing change and gradually becoming lost in their speech. Only 8% were hesitant to say that their parents use the marker in their speech which suggests that even their parents are shifting away from this marker.

**Fig 03.** The Origin of /yaʕayyi/.



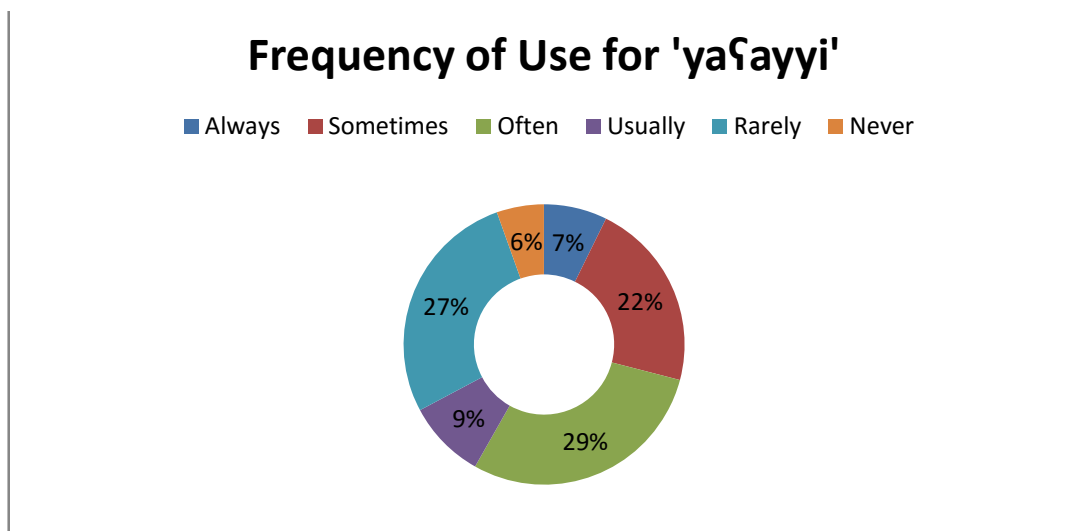
Results in the above histogram show that 73% report that they don't know the origin of the marker /yaʕayyi/ as they think that this item doesn't belong to MSA and they never encounter such item before while 29% said they know its origin as they consider it an original Arabic term and that most of our speech is derived from standard Arabic.

**Fig 04.** Attitudes Towards the Nature of /yaʕayyi/.



Half of the population (50%) stated that the nature of the marker /yaʕayyi/ is bedouin as they frequently hear older-age Freneda speakers who are have a rural origin use it and is being stereotyped by non-native speakers. Other 12% of respondents labelled it as sedentary as they find it employed inside Freneda which is originally an urban area. Remarkably, 38% reported that they don't know the nature of the item maybe as they couldn't decide its origin.

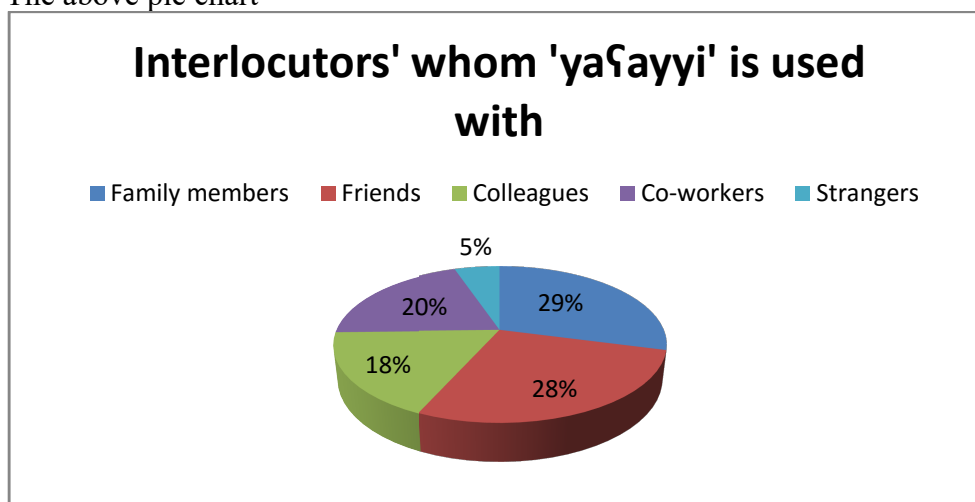
**Fig 05.** Frequency of Use for /yaʕayyi/.



As the figure represents, 29% of population said that often employ the marker /yaʕayyi/ in their speech while remarkably 27% of respondents rarely use the same item due to its stigmatised nature. Only 6% of respondents reported that they never use this item in their dialectal speech which they replace it substitute it with another lexical item.

**Fig 06.** Interlocutors Whom /yaʕayyi/ is Employed with.

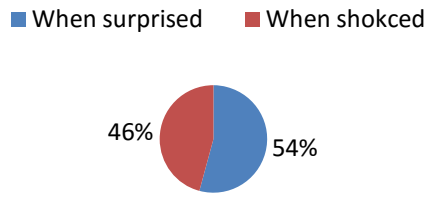
The above pie chart



illustrates that 28% use the item when they interact with their friends which suggest that this item is widely used among younger-age generation. 29% of respondents use /yaʕayyi/ when they interact with members of their families as this suggest their favourable feeling when using the item. Another 20% of individuals use it when they are at workplace with their co-workers. The least proportion (5%) of respondents mentioned that they naturally use the marker with strangers without feeling awkward or strange.

**Fig 07.** The Context Where /yaʕayyi/ is Employed.

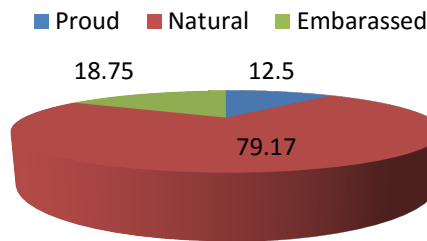
### Situations where 'yaɣayyi' is used.



The above figure shows that the pragmatic marker 'yaɣayyi' is multifunctional as it used in two different situations. 54% stated that they use it when they are surprised of something strange they hear while 46% of respondents use it when shocked about something bad they hear.

Fig 08. Attitude Towards the Use of /yaɣayyi/ inside Frenda.

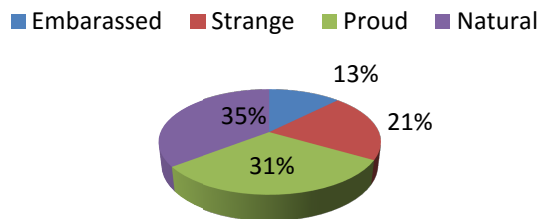
### Attitude towards the Use of 'yaɣayyi' Inside Frenda



The figure 08 shows that 79% of respondents feel natural when they use it inside their place of residency as being part of their natural native dialectal speech and linguistic identity. In addition, it marks their regional origin as Frenda native speakers. Oddly, 18.75% of individuals feel embarrassed when they use it inside their place of residency based on their negative attitudes towards this item as a marker of bedouinity. Only 12.5% of local speakers feel proud when they use /yaɣayyi/ which marks their bedouin identity, belonging and loyalty to the dialect of Frenda.

Fig 09. Attitudes Towards the Use of /yaɣayyi/ Outside Frenda.

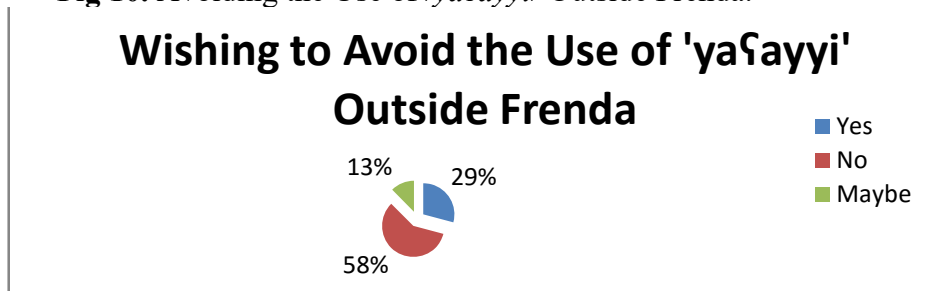
### Feeling of Using 'yaɣayyi' Outside Frenda





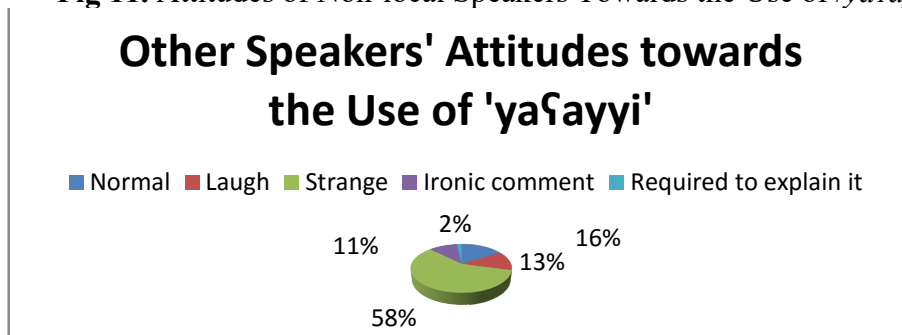
The above figure shows individual attitudes towards the use of /yaʕayyi/ outside Frenda. A total proportion of 35% feel natural when they use the marker outside Frenda as this item is part of their dialectal speech. 31% of respondents reported that they feel proud when they use it outside Frenda as they being part of their identity. Conversely to their attitudes towards the same item inside Frenda, A ratio of 21% mentioned that they feel strange when they use /yaʕayyi/ based on both the negative attitude of the other interlocutor and the stereotypical nature of the marker. The other remaining 13% of respondents feel embarrassed when using the marker outside Frenda based on its stigmatised nature outside the region and relationship to bedouinity, conservatism and illiteracy.

**Fig 10.** Avoiding the Use of /yaʕayyi/ Outside Frenda.



Respondents were asked to report their intention to avoid the use of /yaʕayyi/ outside Frenda. This would reveal their individual judgments towards dialect change. As the **graph 10** displays, 58% report their disfavour to avoid the use of this item outside their speech community as they view it as part of their identity and a marker of their regional origin and group belonging. In contrast, 29% said that wish to avoid the use of the same item based on other speakers' negative and stereotypical judgments which make them shift away from it. The other 13% was hesitant to take either options.

**Fig 11.** Attitudes of Non-local Speakers Towards the Use of /yaʕayyi/.



The graph above shows the reactional judgments of non-local speakers towards the use of the marker by local Frenda individual speakers. More than half of the total population (58%) reported that non-local speakers feel strange when they use /yaʕayyi/ in their speech while 16% of individuals said that they feel natural as they acknowledge this item as a dialectal characteristic which is peculiar to the region of Frenda. Other 13% of respondents reported that non-local speakers usually give them ironic comments as *ʕrubi* (descendant of the countryside) or *'mghandef* (bald). This again reflects the stereotypical and stigmatised nature and the negative attitudes towards the marker in question mainly by non-local speakers.

## 6. Discussion and Interpretation of the Results

In the course of this investigation we have come up to the result that dialect variation and change are not solely constrained by linguistic factors but also governed by psychological reactions and individual judgments of speakers towards features in their dialects or dialects of others.

As far as this study is concerned, the main focus was to examine the correlation between Frenda speakers' individual attitudes and their linguistic behaviour namely the use of the pragmatic marker /*yaʕayyi*/.

On the one hand, speakers who are inclined to preserve the so-called marker in their dialectal speech are said to maintain their bedouin linguistic identity and norm as they demonstrated positive attitudes towards the use of /*yaʕayyi*/ particularly with non-local speakers. In this respect, Racz (2013) states that "a marker is a variable they will use to express their social standing or attitude" (p.5). Thus, /*yaʕayyi*/ is a marker of Frenda speakers' regional origin.

On the other hand, local speakers who tend to shift away from the use of this item are said to show negative attitudes towards /*yaʕayyi*/ as being a linguistic stereotype which is stigmatised particularly by non-local speakers. Additionally, speakers tend to refuse salient features related to local beduinity and endorse features related to innovation.

All in all, language attitudes play a central role in fostering language variation and change as many Frenda speakers shift away from local, bedouin and socially-stigmatised features as they wish to exhibit their identities and ideologies. Local ideologies are manifested in a number of other ways, most obviously as reactions and attitudes to the linguistic varieties or forms imagined as characteristic of socially salient groups (Britain and Cheshire, 2003, p.162). To wrap it all up, both of our hypotheses are confirmed.

## 7. Conclusion

Quantitative results of this study showed a tight correlation between speakers' linguistic behaviour and their psychological attitudes towards the feature in question. Individual identities and ideologies were significant as individual speakers wish to drift away from salient, local, bedouin and socially-stigmatised features and adopt another linguistic identity which is more favourable to them. Linguistic stereotypes are significant as speakers avoid them based on their substandard social connotation particularly outside the speech community from non-local speakers.

Results obtained by means of this investigation led us to observe the interference of various factors that led to dialect change based on speakers' attitudes. A quantitative analysis of the variable in question in relation to social variables such as age, gender and education would result significant results and help interpret Frenda speakers' linguistic behaviours. Conducting a contact-based study would help to demystify the social motivations of such linguistic behaviour given the fact that on-going change is partially driven by non-local speakers in contact with local ones.

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