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# An Investigation of Language Variation and Change Among Three Age-Groups: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** Despite the hostile view and belief toward the inclusion of language use in linguistic study and theorizing by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some linguists have revolutionized linguistics. They authentically showed the importance to account for the social factors in linguistic theory. Indeed, the progress of research in linguistics in general and sociolinguistics in particular has led many linguists to stress the fact that no language is a monolithic and homogeneous (e.g. Bell 1976). In their view, language is a heterogeneous and dynamic system. Sociolinguists, therefore, aim to relate language and language users to the speech community where people interact. The present study is a sociolinguistic investigation which aims to relate linguistic aspects to other social aspects to examine certain linguistic features in Algerian Arabic, a variety which reflects linguistic variation in apparent time that rightly correspond to language change in real time in Sidi Bel Abbes speech community. This city is part of a diglossic and multilingual society- Algeria. As a matter of fact, our study tackles a problematic issue: How can the social changes (extra- linguistic factors) bring about changes in the linguistic system and how can individuals' speech differences make people themselves distinct on the ground of their affiliation to a certain social group? To explore the issue from a sociolinguistic angle, concrete data have been collected from different real set-ups, aiming to provide true evidence to our scope: language variation that leads to change, change in progress and completed change.

**Keywords:** Language Variation, Language Change, Apparent and Real Time, Vernacular, Sociolinguistic Quantitative Paradigm, Linguistic Variable

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## 1. Introduction

Algeria defines itself as part of the Arab and Muslim world. It was under the possession of the French colonialism from 1830 to 1962, without neglecting the presence of the Turks, Spanish and Italians, too. The consecutive presence of different peoples in Algeria has brought about many changes in most Algerian cities and the present city- Sidi bel- Abbes is no exception. In fact, contact with distinct peoples speaking these different languages has led to an interesting linguistic substratum effect.

Officially, and exactly in 1979, "Arabisation" was proclaimed by President Houari Boumediene to include all sectors. Its aim was the arabisation of French legislation, teaching...etc. However, despite the arabisation of teaching,

the court, for instance, *French* (Fr) language has had a privileged status in a variety of domains such as the economic and financial sectors, teaching at the university, especially the scientific subjects and it is the language of men holding power. The mother tongue(s) of Algerians is *Algerian Arabic* (AA) and *Berber* (or *Tamazight*). The latter language variety has known a shift of its status from a low variety to a national and standard language in February 2016.

The Algerian linguistic landscape is, therefore, known by the presence of two official languages: French (Fr) and *Standard Arabic* called High Varieties (H) in Ferguson's (1959) terms, and *Low Varieties* (L) (ibid.); which are namely *Algerian Arabic* (AA) spoken by the majority of Algerians with slight linguistic differences, but it doesn't lack its

mutual intelligibility among speakers deriving from the different corners of the country. And Berber (Ber.) used mainly in *Tiziouzou, Béjaia, Jijel*, and in some other regions in South Algeria. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Berber has gained an official status, it still lacks its real status. It is not a marginalized language, but because it is not known to all Algerians. It has different linguistic system at all linguistic levels: morpho-phonology, syntax and importantly its distinct lexis.

So, the presence of these language varieties makes Algeria both a diglossic and bilingual speech community. However, one can venture to say that the classification of the languages used in Algeria is merely a theoretical rather than a practical one. It doesn't reflect the authentic and actual linguistic profile of Algeria, mainly, because of the disruptive functional roles of SA and AA (H/L). This is due to the negative attitudes of the young generation to use SA and their no mastery of the language itself, on the one hand. On the other hand, because of the high rate of illiteracy factor- an important proportion of old and elder groups are illiterate.

Besides, the main outcome of languages in contact is bilingualism. Generally speaking, Algerians don't escape from the necessity to code switch between the language varieties. Possible code- switches are between SA/Fr, Ber/Fr, or AA/Ber/Fr. Code- mixing is noticeable in the utterances of the illiterate speakers. Their utterance, in fact, is not free from borrowed words derived from French or Spanish.

The emergence of the "*Algérianisation*" of loans in the speech of all age- groups is of a paramount importance. Loanwords submit to the morpho-phonological rules and the grammatical structure of the linguistic system of either Algerian Arabic or Berber. Thus, we agree that this complex linguistic situation is a symbol of richness and vitality rather than pejoratively judging it.

Indeed, the main scope of the present paper is, therefore, to study Algerian Arabic used in Sidi Bel-Abbes speech community-as a case study. I begin to define, first, this vernacular to say that it is a dialectal variety and the functional daily mode of expression. It is the vernacular used by the majority of Algerians, with slight marked discrepancies that affect its homogeneity.

It witnesses a variety of linguistic processes due to the impact of the dynamics of language contact. It is a melting pot of different language varieties. It is a derived form from Classical Arabic (CA), from which it (AA) structured its simplified intra- lingual system.

Algerian Arabic is also a mixed code, marked by the presence of a considerable amount of borrowed words, which have rooted into it from, first the Berber substratum, then, from Turkish, Spanish, and mainly French. The substratum effects of all these languages make this dialectal vernacular a mixed inter- lingual variety. Linguistic elements derived from all these distinct linguistic systems intermingled and interpenetrated in such a kind of co-existing linguistic system to make- up a complex system called: Algerian Arabic.

## 2. A Linguistic Survey

Language, like all existing things, is subject to change. It is a dynamic phenomenon in the sense that it changes in diverse ways, in different places and at different times. The exploration of such a process is the province of "historical linguistics", "*a branch of linguistics which studies the development of language and languages overtime.*" (Crystal, 1983: 174). In fact, linguists acted as if languages were not variable. Most linguistic theories have started from the assumption that variability in languages is unmanageable or uninteresting or both. In other terms, linguists rejected it so that it might not put obstacles in their language description. For them, variability was a heterogeneous property of language and this heterogeneity involves a great deal of randomness. This point could evoke misapprehension and confusion in their process of linguistic theorizing. In this respect, McMahon (1994: 225) writes:

*This kind of temporary evasion may be unobjectionable enough in itself- we cannot after all, expect to produce a theory of everything instantaneously, and must therefore operate with a certain list of priorities- but it becomes dangerous when it is enshrined as an instated principle: variation studies have become a neglected and perhaps unfashionable area of linguistics and this has had profound consequences for historical linguistics.*

Therefore, linguists were content with the homogeneous property of languages as constituting a uniform entity, towards an adequate framework of linguistic theory. The empirical study of variation has yielded a major discovery: language change can be observed as it occurs (op.cit.). This is possible using the apparent time method, a substantive advance in the study of language.

In historical studies of language change in progress, the most satisfactory method was obviously to investigate a particular community, then, return, ten years later, and carry out a further investigation. This way of study of language change was known as the "real-time" method. However, this way has shown some disadvantages, it is not convenient to wait a decade or more if we want to find out what is going on right of the linguistic changes, today.

An alternative and an immediate method, however, is to investigate linguistic change in apparent time. This method is the simplest way of studying language change (Labov, 1972) who overcame this obstacle. It is based on the analysis of the distribution of linguistic variables across different age groups in a community. That is, it works with statistically correlating variant frequency with the age of speakers. If the frequency of a variant increases, or decreases, across generation groups, a change is taking place. Crucially, the apparent time method has significantly shortened the length of time needed to achieve a research.

## 3. Method

To collect data in Sidi Bel Abbes speech community among the distinct groups is not an easy task, particularly

among the informants. There was an important proportion of illiterate individual speakers who cannot fill in the written questionnaire, on the one hand. On the other hand, we were confronted by the “observer’s paradox” (Labov, 1972) when interviewing other informants like young and elders groups. To avoid the problem, we shifted our attention to the use of the oral questioning but avoiding uttering the right linguistic item, in order not to influence them and their responses and the participant observation. The use of the latter in the field of sociolinguistics “has come into being as a complementary method of data collection in some functions other than as a linguist, but observing and noting particular types of linguistic data” (Wolfram, 1990: 125). Because of its advantages, participation in the community’s life as an insider can usefully enhance the “naturalness” of the observer’s position rather than making it more artificial. (Jahoda et al, 1951: 142). Deciding to use this technique marked its usefulness. In effect, my long-term involvement in a number of daily conversations is of crucial importance. Besides, to obtain statistically analyzable data, a questionnaire consisting of an already prepared list of

questions about our selected core variables was given to the informants (i.e.; who are able to read and write).

**3.1. Deciding About the Sample**

Our sample constitutes of 153 informants, males and females. All of them are residents in Sidi Bel Abbes speech community. They are divided into three main categories: young group (+15), elders group (+30) and old group (+50).

**3.2. Determining the Linguistic & Non-linguistic Variables**

In a quantitative analysis of linguistic variation, it is of paramount importance to, first, select and then identify the set of variables to be studied. Generally speaking, “a variable is a hypothesis constituent to which diverse values could be ascribed and which, as its name indicates, varies.” (Déplteau, 2000: 163.) In fact, the dependent variables of the present study are of three linguistic levels: phonological, morphological and lexical. Their correlation is controlled by two independent variables age and gender, as shown explicitly in the following figure:

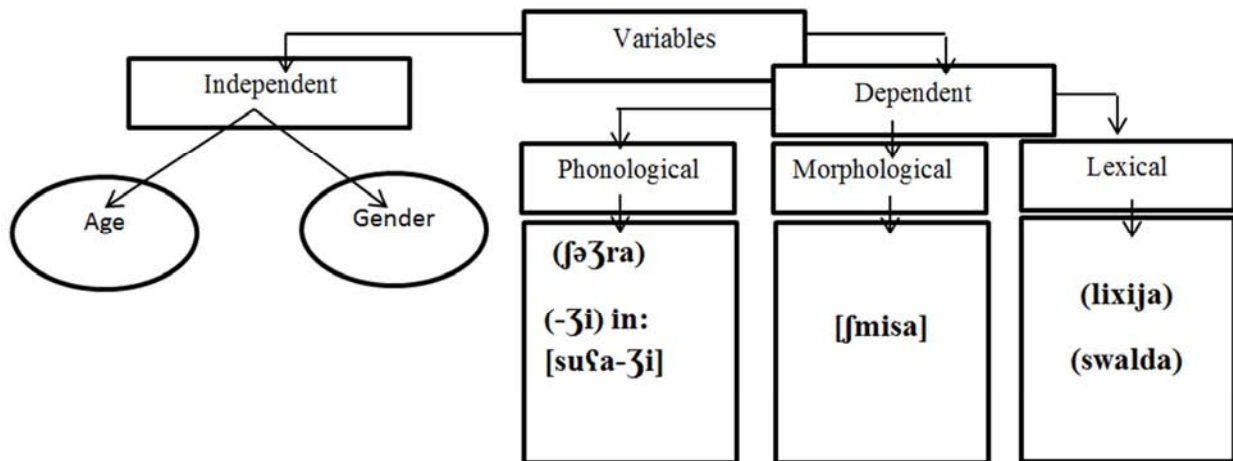


Figure 1. Core Variables of the Study.

These two socio- demographic factors correlated to linguistic features, may significantly explain the phenomenon of language variation and change.

**4. Quantitative Analysis**

The hallmark of a quantitative sociolinguistic analysis is its focus on demonstrating the possible correlations between linguistic variables and extra- linguistic ones. Our aim in the present section is to present the statistical description of our data in order to detect any significant correlation between the selected linguistic variables and extra- linguistic parameters or the socio- demographic variables (age and gender), in connection to the social background of the speakers. Thus, in the following sections we shall explore the results obtained from our data treated by SPSS. Our interpretations will rely on the findings of the questionnaire data as they are presented across this practical part.

**4.1. Phonological Variables**

Variable (ʃ) in (ʃəʒra) (=a tree)

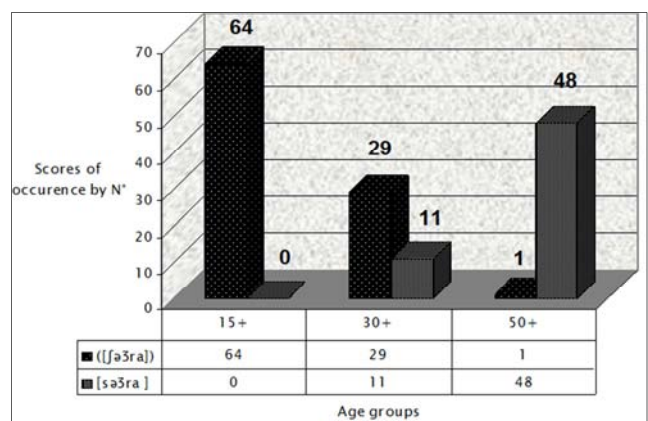


Figure 2. The Distribution of (ʃəʒra) and [səʒra] Among Age Groups.

Table 1. Results of [ʃəʒra] and [səʒra] by Age.

Age	Nimber		Index%		Total (N°)
	[ʃəʒra]	[səʒra]	[ʃəʒra]	[səʒra]	
+15	64	0	42%	0%	64
+30	29	11	19%	7,18%	40
+50	1	48	1%	31,37%	49
Frequency	94	59	62%	39%	
Total	153		100%		153

**Interpretation of the Results**

The Arabic lexical item [ʃaʒara] exists in Algerian Arabic as (ʃəʒra). The shift of /ʃ/ to [s] is not restricted only to this word, but it can also be found in some Fr. Words like French verbs “charger” (to fill in) and “chercher” (to look for). These verbs are noticed to be uttered by illiterate old people as [jsarʒi] and [jsarʃi], respectively.

Our concern in the present study is to put under investigation the item (ʃəʒra), because it is noticed to have a competing variant [səʒra]. As it is shown in the graph above, this variation appears over the three age groups in an ascending order as follows: old, middle- aged, young. The older people’s realization of /ʃ/ as [s] is the highest of all.

Comparing the results a total absence of the variable (ʃəʒra) is noticed in the speech of old generation only 1%. As opposed to the young who score 64% of the use of the variable. Middle- aged group score a high rate for their use of

the variable, too.

This is mainly due to the age and to the education factor. Illiterate persons are unable to produce the /ʃ/ sound they dissimilate it to [s] sound. So, we can note that middle- aged and young opted for the use of (ʃəʒra) rather than [səʒra].

Therefore, the [s] seems to be a highly stigmatized feature related to old generations’ usage, while the standard /ʃ/ is significantly an educated middle- aged and young speakers’ specific feature.

**4.2. Morphological Variables**

**Variable (-ʒi) in: [suʃa-ʒi]**

Some linguistic forms are borrowed from Turkish. We may provide the word [bejlək] which refers to something that is under the possession of the government like [ʒna:nlbejlək] (garden). This word exists in the dialect used in Sidi Bel Abbes unmodified both semantically and structurally.

The suffix or the bound morpheme (-ʒi) is added to few Arabic words. Examples where the feature occurs are [sfan-ʒi], [qahwa-ʒi], [qmar-ʒi] and [suʃa-ʒi], for which it is said that the suffix [-dʒi] (-whose pronunciation in Algerian Arabic spoken in Sidi Bel Abbes is [-ʒi] refers in Turkish to the person i.e., “who is” or “who does”. It is worth noting that this feature is put under analysis for the main purpose to detect whether it still exists or not.

Table 2. Questionnaire Data- Results of the Frequency of (suʃa-ʒi) and Its Variant [mu:l swajaʃ].

Age	Number		Index%		Total (N°)
	[suʃa-ʒi]	[mu:l swajaʃ]	[suʃa-ʒi]	[mu:l swajaʃ]	
+15	14	40	18%	53%	64
+30	28	9	37%	12%	40
+50	33	14	44%	18%	49
No answer		14		9%	14
Other answers			1		1
Frequency	75	63	49%	41%	
Total	138		100%		153

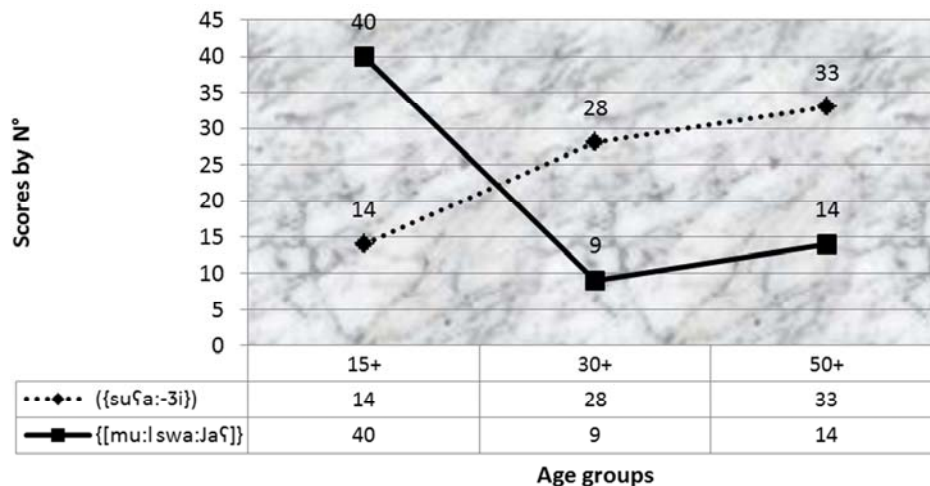


Figure 3. The Correlation of (-ʒi) and [mu:l-] in (suʃa-ʒi) by Age.

**Interpretation of the Results**

The figure above presents, obviously, the type of correlation of the linguistic variable (suʃa-ʒi)(= a person who repair and buy watches) with the socio-demographic

variable: age. Here the correlation is weaker only 14% of its use among younger group, but a score is marked by old. It may be noticeable that the points (of the line- graph, above) do not cluster so strongly round a straight-line for the



variable.

In other words, the results which appear above show that there is an extensive use of (suḥa-ʒi) by the older generation and a lesser use by the younger generation, while the middle-aged as a mediating age- group between the older generation and the younger one; maintain the use of the variable, but score less than the old. Thus, the informants whose score is very low have changed the suffixation process in the already mentioned lexical item (simple word) to a compound word. It occurs in a similar way in all of these lexical items: (suḥa-ʒi), (qahwa-ʒi), (sfan-ʒi) occur respectively in the speech of young, as: [mu:l swa-jaʕ]; [mu:l lqahwa], and [mu:l sfanʒ].

So, the stereotyped feature- Turk. (-ʒi) that appears in the above words seems to be significantly a marker of especially, old generation usage rather than the younger one. The old adapted the feature perhaps because of its simple structure and economy of utterance. While young speakers tend to alter the suffix which is a borrowed linguistic element from Turkish form to its counterpart the Arabic form [mu:l-]. The latter may remind us of the standard Arabic form [ʃa:hibu [ʃajʔ] (i.e., the owner of something or, the one who possess something...). Thus one may say that young speakers, consciously, correct to the more standard form i.e., they hypercorrect.

We conclude that the morphological feature: Turk. Form (-ʒi) is undergoing change. Nevertheless, we may wonder whether this feature will disappear in the future.

**Variant [ʃmisa]- The Diminutive Case of the Variable (ʃams)**

The diminutive case is that linguistic form expressing the meaning of “small”. In Arabic, the “fuḥa” pattern usually is “fuḥajla”, while in English, the form is found in few words to which the suffix {-let} is added as in “book”-- > “booklet”. Likewise, in French “fille” -->“fillette”, to mean “little girl”.

In Algerian Arabic, our studied dialect, one may find the case in a variety of words like: /da:r/-->[dwajra],/xubz/-->[xbajza],/ʃams/-->[ʃmajsa]...etc. “home, bread, sun”, respectively, in the diminutive form.

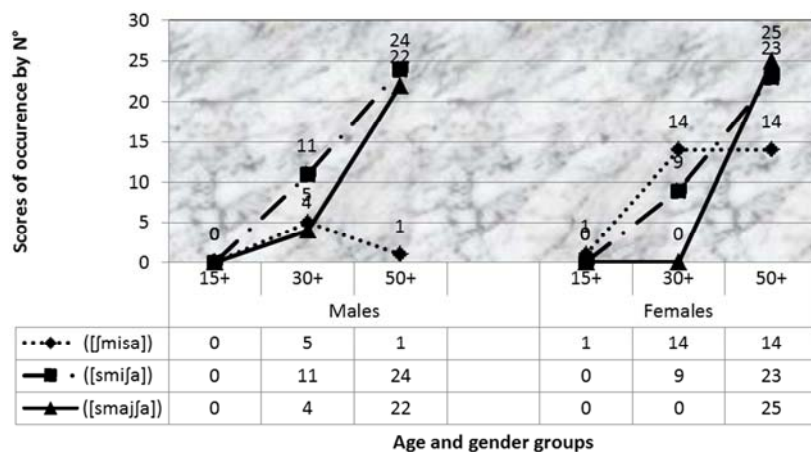
Our concern in the present section is to detect the state of the diminutive case in the different generations’lects, that is, to find out whether this grammatical case is variable or undergoing change.

It is through the analysis of the above example i.e.,/ʃams/--> [ʃmejsa], that we may assert our claims as far as the diminutive case is concerned.

Based on our questionnaire, the following table displays the results of the occurrences of the variant (ʃmisa) in a dual relationship with age and gender.

*Table 3. Results of [ʃmisa] and Its Variants by Age and Gender.*

Gender	Age	Number			%		
		[ʃmisa]	[smifa]	[smajfa]	[ʃmisa]	[smifa]	[smajfa]
Male	+15	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%
	+30	5	11	4	3%	7%	3%
	+50	1	24	22	1%	16%	14%
	Total	6	35	26	4%	23%	17%
Female	+15	1	0	0	9%	0%	0%
	+30	14	9	0	9%	6%	0%
	+50	14	23	25	1%	15%	16%
	Total	29	32	25	19%	21%	16%
Noanswer		0			0%		
Frequency		35	67	51	23%	44%	33%
Total		153			100%		



*Figure 4. Results of [ʃmisa] and Its Variants by Age and Gender.*

**The Linguistic Analysis**

The diminutive case of the lexical form /ʃams/ is operated on the basis of the fuḥa- pattern “fuḥajla”-->/ʃumajsa/.

That is to say:

Noun singular Diminutive case  
[ʃams]→“fuḥajla”-->/ʃumajsa/



Figure 5. Pattern of the Diminutive Case of [ʃəms].

[ʃmisa]~[smiʃa]

(Metathesis is obtained, here)

Or, [smajʃa]

The diminutive case; therefore, is obtained as follows:

- Syncope of V<sub>1</sub> in the original word i.e., the singular form of the noun.

Insertion of a diphthong “aj” between C<sub>2</sub> and C<sub>3</sub> or its alternative variant short vowel “i”. We obtain the following structure C<sub>2</sub>ajC<sub>3</sub>~C<sub>2</sub>iC<sub>3</sub>. The substitution of the diphthong by a short vowel is referred to as the phonological process of reduction.

- Obtaining a cluster of C<sub>1</sub>C<sub>2</sub>.
- Addition of a vowel “a” finally to have a feminine case of the diminutive form.
- A metathesis is generally obtained in the different dialects as [ʃəms] vs. [səmjʃ]

Note that the diminutive of [ʃəms] has three distinct realizations in the speech of our designed groups. The individual speakers rather use [smiʃa] or [smajʃa]. They vary in the pronunciation of the /ʃ/ and [s] sound. They, indeed, utter the diminutive form as [ʃmisa] or [smiʃa] forms.

Our results mentioned in the above figure reveal that:

#### A) The variant {ʃmisa}

The use of this variant appears less in the speech of the old group and a moderate use is obtained among the middle-aged group. The female group, on the other hand, shows a relative important score of their use of this feature. Either the middle-aged or the old female level off their use of the already mentioned feature to 14 cases only. This proportion is an accepted rate compared to the male group. They show a very restricted use, whereas, the old males and the young females scored a very weak rate; and, there were a null use by the young males.

#### B) The variant [smajʃa]

The line- graph shows a plateau in the language behavior of the young and the middle-aged females for their null use of this linguistic feature, then, it dramatically rises to reach a peak in the old women’s language use.

Less use of this variant [smajʃa] is obtained among the middle-aged males, but a considerably sharp rise of its use occurs with the old males, while a null use of the feature among the young across the two genders is attested.

#### C) The variant [smiʃa]

Here, what is important is the direction of the line- graph across the two gender groups. Obviously, a positive correlation is mentioned; we mean the younger the individuals are, the less use is, and the older people are the more use is noticed. An absolute absence of the diminutive case is noticed among the young across the two genders.

The figure shows, also, a gradual increase of the use of this feature by the middle-aged and the old groups, to reach its

highest rate among the old group.

On the whole, two major conclusions can be drawn from the above patterns. In fact, the variant [smiʃa] is a more favored feature than the two others across the middle-aged and the old groups.

The diminutive case, therefore, can be considered to be an old generation exclusive feature. The rejection of young group to this linguistic form may be explained as a less-prestigious and less modern pattern that is required to suit best the urban language behavior.

On the other hand, the presence of this grammatical feature in the language behavior of the mediating group i.e., the middle-aged group is, perhaps because they accommodate or they show their closeness to their parents’ behavior to a restricted extent.

As for the adequate results we have obtained, which explicitly show the different uses of the variable and its competing variants among the distinct age groups across the two genders, though there remains, a clumsy picture that implies the difficulty to detect what feature is undergoing change and which one has already completed change.

The above figure cannot supply an obvious view to make a decision about the point in hand, that is why we propose the figure below which shows the ranking of the different uses of the variable [ʃmisa] and its competing variants [smiʃa] and [smajʃa] in relation to the gender factor only.

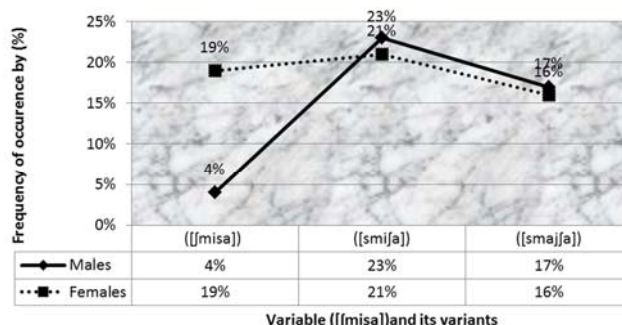


Figure 6. Ranking the Use of [ʃmisa] and Its Variants among Gender Groups.

Admittedly, the linguistic features witness variation even among the same group, for instance; the use of [ʃmisa] is maintained by females rather than males who show negative attitude associated with the use of this variant. In other words, the female society is “conservative”; as it is known in sociolinguistic literature, and they consider the variable as a prestige- pattern which tends to be similar to the Standard Arabic form, as it does not undergo metathesis.

Furthermore, with reference to the results showed in the above figure, one may conclude that the three linguistic features are strong enough to resist change, they all show variation to slight distinct rates. What is more is that a change in progress of the variable is initiated by the male younger group (only 4% of its use is obtained), because the linguistic feature may be seen as an indicator (Benrabah 1994) of effeminacy.

### 4.3 Lexical Variables

#### Variable (lixija) (= bleach)

A number of Spanish words, borrowed into some varieties of Algerian Arabic, especially in North West of Algeria, are either retained or modified. The retention of these linguistic

components in the Algerian Arabic linguistic system means that they are borrowed in that system, for which the linguistic constituents are either kept semantically and structurally unchanged or kept semantically intact but structurally changed. Instances of these are the following:

Table 4. Some Spanish Loan Words.

Spanish lexical items	Modified/or changed		Unchanged	
	Semantically	Structurally	semantically	Structurally
[baʔato](a lot of)			√	√
[basura](rubbish)			√	√
[swalda](money)		√	√	
[lixija](bleach)			√	√
Recibo>[risimbo](receipt, bill)		√	√	
Armario>[marju](wardrobe)		√	√	
Bonito			√	√
Kalamar			√	√
Boga			√	√
Sipya	Names of Fish		√	√
Sardine			√	√
Raya			√	√
Latcha			√	√

So, this very short presentation of some of the integrated Spanish words into Algerian Arabic shows us that our selected variable (lixija) is kept intact both semantically and structurally. Our main concern in this section is to detect the

presence or the absence of this linguistic item over the age and gender groups, and how it contrasts with the French lexical item [ʒavel].

Table 5. Questionnaire Data: Results of the Frequency of the Variable (lixija) and Its Variant [ʒavel].

Gender	Age	Numbers		%	
		(lixija)	[ʒavel]	(lixija)	[ʒavel]
Male	+15	3	13	9,7%	48%
	+30	9	8	29%	30%
	+50	19	6	61%	22%
	Total	31	27	100%	100%
Female	+15	9	38	20%	77%
	+30	15	8	33%	16%
	+50	21	3	46%	6%
	Total	45	49	100%	100%
Noanswer		1		1%	
Frequency		76	76	50%	50%
Total		152		100%	

#### Interpretation of the Results

The figure above shows the results of the questionnaire data representing the use of the variable (lixija), which is originally, a Spanish item and its variant [ʒavel] which is a French lexical item.

The results, then, reveal that the variable (lixija) correlates with gender and age factors. In addition, it is worth mentioning from our line graph representing the variant [ʒavel], that this form is more used by the young generation whatever their gender and less used by the middle- aged and the older group.

Nevertheless, according to our questionnaire data, the results show a high index score marked by old male (61%) for the use of (lixija) which is over the score of old female (46%). This paradoxical point contradicts linguists' claims, which suggest that female society is more conservative and

women tend to keep old traditions and speech forms.

Therefore, we come to draw some concluding remarks about the possible correlations of the variable in hand:

- The index score of the variant [ʒavel] is in a decreasing occurrence, more use by the young and less use by middle- aged and particularly by the old
- In addition, the results report that the old- group uses the variable (lixija) more than the young group and the middle- aged group.
- It appears, then, that one variable is a feature specific to the old generation, while the variant is a characteristic of young. One can note that a highly positive correlation is noticed by the use of the variable (lixija) by the three age groups across the two genders, as opposed to its competing variant [ʒavel].



**Variable (swalda) (=money)**

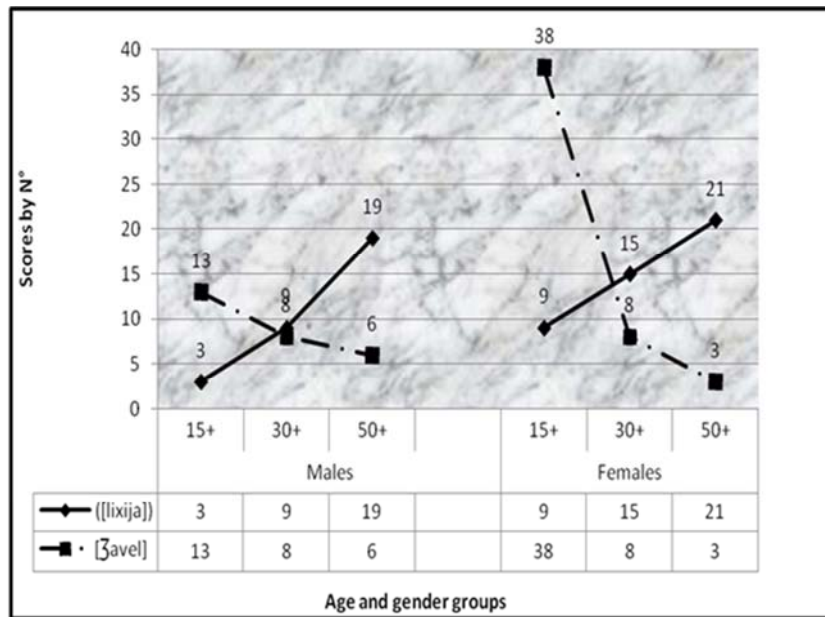


Figure 7. Correlation of (lixija) and [ʒavel] with Age and Gender.

Table 6. Questionnaire Data: Frequency of the Distribution of the Variable (swalda) and Its Variant [draham].

Age	Number		Index%		Total (N°)
	(swalda)	[draham]	(swalda)	[draham]	
+15	0	63	0%	41%	63
+30	2	38	1.3%	25%	38
+50	29	19	19%	12.5%	19
No answer		2		1%	2
Frequency	31	120	20%	78%	
Total	151		100%		153

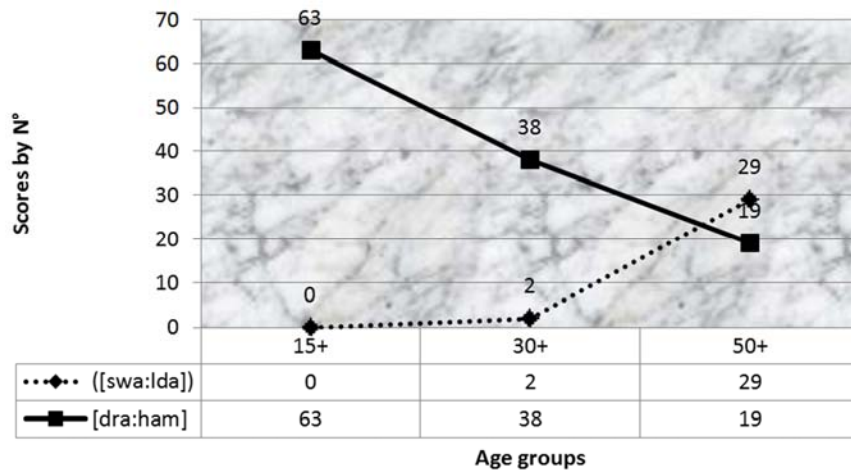


Figure 8. Distribution of (swalda) and [draham] among Age Groups.

**Interpretation of the Results**

The figure above shows the Spanish lexical item (swalda) distributed over the three age groups. As the results show, the scores for (swalda) mark the highest rate among the old group, while the scores for the same variable rates lower among the middle- aged group only 2 cases, and the absolute absence of the form (i.e., 0%) among the younger group.

So, the results reveal clearly the contrasting directions of

the use of this variable among the young and the old.

Significantly, the wide gap between the scores of the use of the variable (swalda) and its variant (Arabic lexical item) [draham], shows obviously the type of correlation between the variable and the age factor. That is a high positive correlation (with age parameter) for (swalda) and a high negative correlation for [draham]. Therefore, the Spanish lexical item is undergoing change and it is replaced by its

competing variant [draham] over the wide range of young and middle- aged individual speakers.

### 5. Sociolinguistic Synopsis

#### 5.1. Modeling Variation: Stable Variables, Variables Undergoing Change, and Cases of Completed Change

Age is a quite significant factor in our analysis. The way our informants are divided into three age groups (old, middle- aged, and young) as explained along our analysis,

may provide an obvious picture of the interaction of the age factor with the choice of the competing variants, as it is clearly shown in the figure below:

Table 7. Grouped Data: Distribution of the Variables by Age.

Speakers by age	Phonological [səʒra]	Morphological (suʃa:-ʒi)	Lexical (swalda)
+15	0	14	0
+30	11	28	2
+50	48	33	29

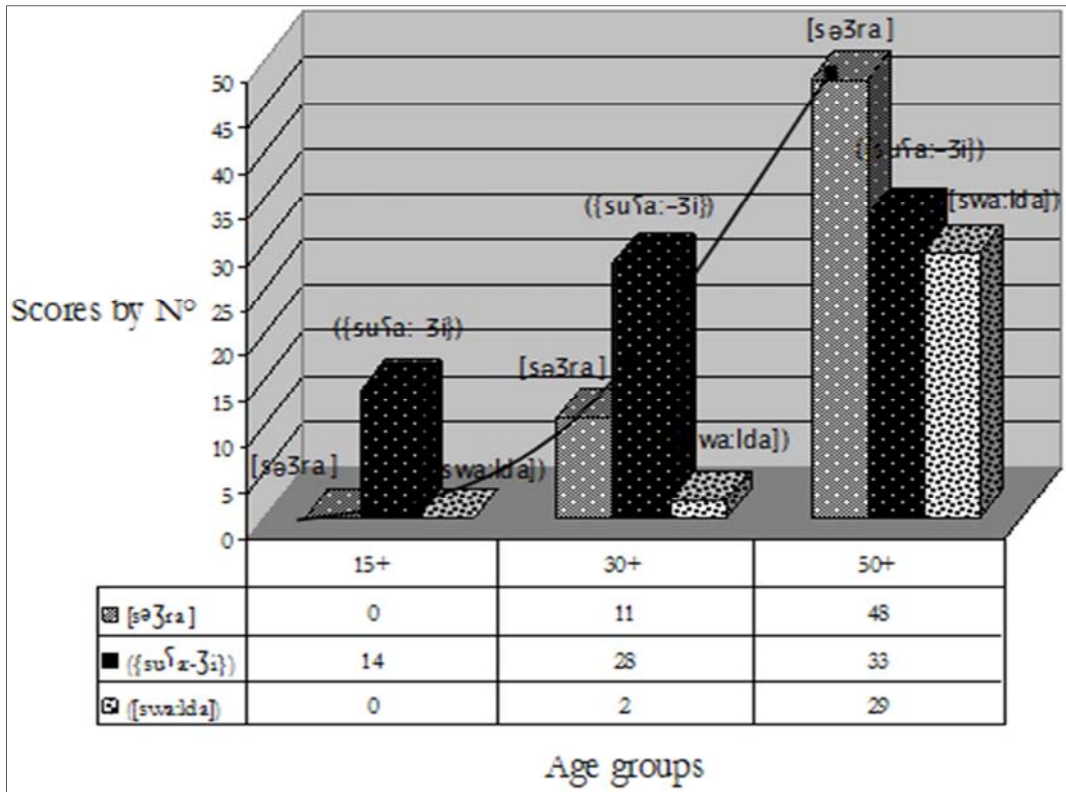


Figure 9. Grouped Data: Distribution of the Variables by Age.

The line graph goes straight forward in the same increasing direction i.e., a positive correlation. The young score the lowest rates for the use of the variables, while the old group scores the highest ones. Furthermore, the results show important points in the language use among the younger group. The first is the absence of the existence of the variables (swalda) and [səʒra]

The second is the slight presence of the variable (suʃa-ʒi), which scores only 14 cases. It is an important rate, which indicates the fact that the variable (suʃa-ʒi) is in a stage of variation among the young generation.

To put it concisely, according to the wide gap which exists among the young and the old groups, we may say that our chosen variables are either undergoing change or they have completely changed.

Therefore, the linguistic differences of the uses of the variables are well established. The young tend to produce correct forms i.e., they hypercorrect the sound variants ([s]>/f/), standard lexis [draham] and sometimes avoid using the

loan words (the Turkish suffix (-ʒi) in (Suʃa-ʒi). Therefore, we may, explicitly classify our data according to three levels, which reflect three suggested stages of the linguistic phenomenon- language variation and change in the figure below

The young, therefore, appear to have made a change in using different variants for the different variables we have examined here. These may sometimes correspond rightly to the uses of the middle- aged in some cases (level two in the above figure, while in others the variants are totally different from the ones used by the middle- aged and the old (level three).

As a result, language change is driven by a desire by one social group to differentiate itself from other social groups. Therefore, teenagers or the young generation promote language change. It is through their flexible personality that they are eager to adapt any new feature. Their creative nature in innovating makes them more easily influenced by aspects of modernity and technological developments.

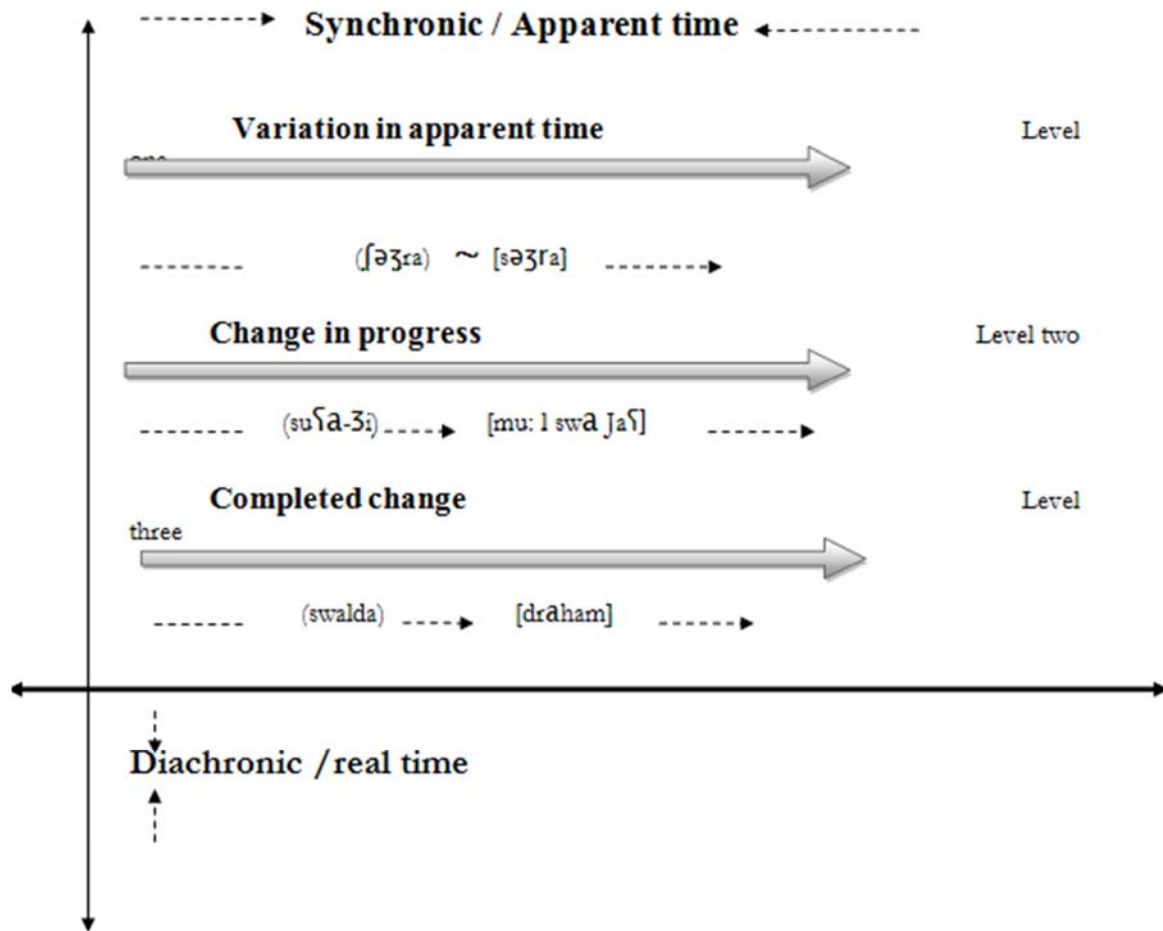


Figure 10. Showing Cases of Change in Progress and Completed Change.

These social aspects are, generally, peculiar to the urban society for which teenagers find it necessary to adapt new linguistic prestige— patterns that are appropriate to the urban language uses, while, the old generation is more conservative. Older speakers are holders of the archaic traits which symbolize tradition.

On the other hand, there is some evidence that the middle-aged produce much closer patterns to the old patterns than does the younger generation; they are also in disfavor of some linguistic features which they see as indicators of effeminacy in Benrabah's (1999) terms (op.cit.). Their language choices are strongly influenced by the forces of their job's network, for purposes of their social and economic success. Accordingly, Chambers et al (1998: 79) confirmed this:

*We can ... account ... that for younger speakers the most important social pressures come from the peer groups and that linguistically they are more strongly influenced by their friends than by anybody else. Then, as speakers get older and begin working, they move into wider and less cohesive social networks .... (Older) are more influenced by mainstream societal values and perhaps, by the need to impress, succeed and make social and economic progress ... For older, retired people, on the other hand, social pressures are again less. Success has already been achieved (or not, as the case may be), and social networks may again be narrower.*

Therefore, a clear-cut picture about the discrepancies existing in the speech of the distinct groups has already been reached. Certainly, where sociolinguistic differences exist resulting in a degree of choice of a certain variable, the dialect is consequently variable.

## 5.2. Mapping Linguistic Variation and Change within Sidi Bel-Abbes Speech Community

As we have attempted in the previous sections to present the results of the data central to the core of the present study. Our main task in this section is to unite the previous results into a simple account toward a preliminary explanation of the sociolinguistic meaning of the existing linguistic variation/change among three age- groups, all native speakers of Algerian Arabic spoken in Sidi Bel Abbes speech community.

There are three major facts; pointing in a similar direction, which require interpretation:

- We may assume that the age factor has a significant impact on the disparities found in the various patterns of variation in the examined data.
- There are fewer differences in males and females' language behavior; indeed the gender factor showed less significant discrepancies across the different groups in this speech community.
- The presence or absence of a given linguistic feature in

the language behavior of the individuals may be explained as a socio- psychological factor related to distinct language uses. That is, the individuals make linguistic choices in order to identify with a particular group, or show their group affiliation through the uses of the linguistic patterns. In regard of this, another important fact is the impact of the forces of the peer-pressure particularly upon the younger generation.

In fact, as far as our case study is concerned, it is a matter of conflicting language behavior across generations. Nevertheless, we cannot see the linguistic discrepancies on the extreme sides of the pendulum. Indeed, what characterizes this situation is a socio- psychological factor (op.cit). It is, therefore, a factor of affiliation with whom the group they belong and identify themselves with.

To put it more explicitly, on the one hand, the old generation tends to maintain the old resort to linguistic conservatism; while on the other hand; the young generation shows their willingness to reject all what is traditional. This is clearly reflected through their use of language. They submit to the pressures of the peer- group<sup>1</sup>. They become influenced so that they are strongly integrated and share common social norms.

Moreover, the language behavior of the young generation is well known for being open to change. It is also characterized by a persistent loss of old linguistic traits to be substituted by others. These are considered as new- fashioned linguistic features that are more modern, prestigious and suit best the modern urban society. Referring back to our results shown previously, the over use of the variables; for instance, (suḥa-ḥi) and (swalda) is a compulsory indicator that the old are very attached to their tradition in the colonial period. They are alien to any new variety of language, to any new linguistic constituents that they may regard as a break to their social organization or network.

On the other hand, the middle- aged generation also may show sometimes their absolute disagreement with the young language behavior by adapting old linguistic traits to be closer to the usage of the old group. Other times, they may show their consent by using new linguistic elements, being considered as young exclusive features. Besides, in spite of the adequate and consistent results obtained in our study, no significant distinction was reflected by the gender parameter in our studied speech community, except for few cases.

So, an important conclusion that can be drawn, here is the fact that speakers of the young generation are in competing position with the old generation, the formers innovate and hardly use the old linguistic features or traits.

To draw a general conclusion, we may say that the old generation is merely conservative to all what symbolizes traditional behavior, whereas the young generation supports strongly what symbolizes modernity and civilized world. The middle- aged generation on the other hand, keeping- between but they show mostly their closeness to the elders' tradition. Respectively, According to De Saussure, two important

factors which govern dialect development are termed "*l'Esprit de Clocher*" (provincialism) and "*Force d'Intercourse*" (power of communication). These two forces work in opposing directions: "*provincialism*" keeps a restricted linguistic community faithful to its own traditions, whereas, "*force d'intercourse*" spreads language and gives up its unity. With the prevalent facilities of communication among the people, the high degree of industrialization and urbanization, the increasing mobility among the members of different dialects in distinct speech communities within the same country, and the spread of education, the dialect situation at present is more affected by the "*force d'intercourse*", as it is the case of the young generation in the speech community than by the "*l'esprit de clocher*"- the case of either feminine society or old generation in our case. Provincialism has become a powerful factor in decreasing the gaps between dialect divisions.

Here again, it is important to rise a sociological issue, the generation's conflict. That is to say the young reject gradually their culture and tradition (including the language) towards adapting a new modern and even foreign one. They regard this new manner as prestigious and a sense of belonging to a civilized, urban society, not paying attention to their elder's origins and their "mother" tradition. We may venture to say that in a few years from now, not only will the old generation's exclusive features disappear, but also the old dialect will no longer exist, because the young behave in a permissive way toward language innovations, and perhaps; even, the recent dialects will disappear.

Nevertheless, we may imagine that there still remain exceptions to these new favored norms, and they certainly maintain the true sense of our Algerian heritage, of which language takes part.

In fact, it is natural to influence and to be influenced, to change things and to be changed by the way, but not to reject what is part of us. Our language is the sign and marker of our existence in our societies across decades. Therefore, language change as determined by the time dimension is like an earthquake, when it happens it leaves its traces. The gravest traces are similar to a way or another to the serious changes/ modifications in a language.

Finally, we may raise a crucial difficulty in the sociolinguistic investigation of languages. How do we; scientifically and adequately, approach the impact of social factors such as ethnicity, social class and illiteracy which are not socially- structured in our context, paying attention to the power that they exert upon linguistic systems.

Thus, the understanding of the relation between urban mobility and other aspects of language practice is crucial to the understanding of the social meaning of variation and the spread of linguistic change in an urban context.

## 6. Conclusion

A study of the interplay of linguistic variables and social parameters in the pronunciation or the use of lexis and the structures in Algerian Arabic is useful to detect linguistic

<sup>1</sup>The notion is dealt by Milroy and Milroy (1993), Downes (1998)

phenomena such as variation and change as it occurs. In the light of the preceding discussions and figures, we can draw a main conclusion that discrepancies at all linguistic levels exist, and it is instructive to note that age is a significant factor to distinguish not only groups in response to their uses but to indicate either language change process as taking place i.e., change in progress or completed change has already taken place.

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