The Semitic Languages

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59. Berber and Arabic Language Contact

Abstract

Languages spoken in North Africa, including both Arabic and Berber, are characterized by great diversity. Internal differences within the Berber linguistic group make it difficult to take an all-encompassing common language perspective which is sufficiently representative. In reality, we are dealing with regional varieties still insufficiently studied from both intradialectal and interdialaectal points of view. Important differences exist between the northern languages and those of the south and/or the so-called peripheral varieties. This internal differentiation can also be found, although less marked, between the various Arab dialects in North Africa, with extreme examples such as those of Djelfa (Algeria) or those from the Hassaniya in the Western Sahara and in Mauritania. The nature of the contacts between Arabic and Berber obliges one, therefore, to take into account historical contexts, dialectal dispersion, heterogeneity of speech, and the superposition of certain features through time. Moreover, the proximity between Arabic and Berber will appear within a regional configuration. Thus, the proximity and borrowings from a Berber dialect such as Kabyle will be more notable in the Algerian Arabic dialect of Algiers, and those of Zenaga will be much closer to the Hassaniya than to Arab dialects of the north.

1. Introduction

When discussing contact between Arabic and Berber (on Berber as a cognate family of Afroasiatic, see ch. 3), we are limited geographically to North Africa, and therefore to western varieties of Arabic. It is clear that we are principally dealing with dialectal Arabic. Even though, taking into account the Arabic language's diglossic situation, it is true that cases of contacts with Classical Arabic do take place, these are mainly restricted to very specific linguistic segments such as religious lexicon (Boogert/Kossmann 1997). It should also be noted, too, that the move towards a written Berber language in Algeria is producing a new phenomenon, yet to be fully described by Arabists or Semitists, but one of undoubted interest, namely the transfer of standard Arabic structures into Berber (Abrous 1991).
Languages spoken in North Africa, both Arabic as well as Berber, are characterized by great diversity. Internal differences within the Berber linguistic group make it difficult to take an all-encompassing common language perspective which can be outlined with precision and is sufficiently representative. In reality, we are dealing with local paralanguages in the best of cases regional varieties but still insufficiently studied from both intradialectal and interdialectal points of view. The differences between the northern languages (Riff Kabyle and others) and those of the south (Tachelbit, Touareg etc.) and the so-called peripheral varieties (Siwa, Zenaga) are quite important.

This internal differentiation can be also found, although less marked, within the various Arab dialects in North Africa, with extreme examples such as those of Djidjeli (Algeria) or those from the Hassaniya in the Western Sahara and in Mauritania (Taine-Cheikh 2008).

The nature of the contacts between Arabic and Berber in North Africa obliges us, therefore, to go beyond the strictly linguistic, and to take into account historical contexts, dialectal dispersion, heterogeneity of speech, and the superposition of certain features through time.

Moreover, very often, the proximity between Arabic and Berber will appear within a regional configuration. Thus, the proximity and borrowings from a Berber dialect such as Kabyle will be more notable in the Algerian Arabic dialect of Algiers, and those of Zenaga will be much closer to the Hassaniya than to Arab dialects of the north.

2. Vocalism

In the classical dialectological tradition, it is held that the North-African Arabic dialects lose the short vowels of Classical Arabic in open syllables. This loss is compensated by the insertion of ‘ultra-short’ vowel or ‘schwa’ of a neutral timbre often qualified as ‘lubricants’ due to the fact that they allow the pronunciation of sequences of more than two consonants. Although this phenomenon of vocalic reduction is not generalized in the same way in North Africa nor exclusively limited to this area (Cantineau 1941, 114), by general consensus, it is particularly marked in the North-African dialects (cf. P. Marçais 1977, 12; W. Marçais 1902, 47; Cantineau 1960, 107, etc.). The extent of the phenomenon of the loss of the vocalic substance becomes more notable as one travels from the east to the west of North Africa. In other words, it increases with the presence of Berber-speaking populations.

Some researchers do not see there a relationship with Berber or at least do not mention it (W. Marçais 1902; Cantineau 1960). Others, on the contrary, note the influence of the Berber substrate (Abdel-Massih 1976; Diem 1979; Schmitt-Brandt 1979). Durand (1995, 12) goes further in this direction and, following the example of certain Berber languages (El Mediouni 1985; Dell’El Mediouni 1988; Boukous 1988), advocates the pure and simple elimination of the schwas in the transcription of Moroccan Arabic and Berber.

3. Phonetics/phonology

As well as the vowel systems, the Berber and the North-African Arab dialects, because of their proximity, reveal many similarities in their consonant systems (Galand 1983).

Certain differences distinguish, however, the status of certain consonants in the two systems, in particular the interdentalts, the back consonants and the emphatic ones.

Berber and northern Arabic dialects share a clear tendency to weaken the articulatory tension. Spriritism is a characteristic which affects simple (lenis) occlusives from the northern Berber dialects (Basset 1952, 51). Its non-phonemic realization in the North-African Arabic dialects is often attributed to the influence of the Berber substrate.

This often leads to typically Berber realizations (P. Marçais 1952) such as:

- unconditioned alterations of dental /t/ and interdental /t/ towards an affricate consonant [ts] (W. Marçais 1902, 14; P. Marçais 1952, 608; Cantineau 1960, 37)
- the treatment of the lateral sound /l/, which may sometimes be realised as [l] (sidna ‘zi = sidna ‘l’i’ ‘Mr Ali’, [bl] < b’l: ‘b’l milk’ or articulated as [n] > [qnc-] > [qun-ni] ‘you tell me’, tending to disappear in medial positions: miech < (melb) ‘salt’, causing a compensatory lengthening. The pharyngeal /l/ and the laryngeal /l/ are also often considered as borrowings and often result from this influence (Chaker 1984 Galdan 1960)

31. Emphatics

The voiced emphatic dental consonant /d/ exists in the majority of the North African dialects as well as in the Jewish Arabic of Tunis (Cohen 1975). Originating from the former interdentals /l/, /l/ and /b/; they are today confused to give /d/.

In the mountain dialects such as those of northern Morocco (northern Taza), northern Oranian (Tierras) or northern Constantine (Djidjelli), it has continued to evolve towards a voiceless occlusive [t] realisation.

The geographical distribution of this phenomenon corroborates the specific conditions that these areas with a strong Berber influence present provide:

\[d > q > t\]

This confusion corresponds perfectly to the realizations in the Berber dialects where [t] is very frequently only an allophone of /d/ which intervenes in borrowings from Arabic or as a combined variant resulting from the consonant length or fortis (Chaker 1984, 85; Basset 1945–48, 33; Galdan 1988; Basset/Picard 1948; Beguinot 1931).

The confusion of /q/ is thus probably due to the influence of the substrate: he-l-tachana hatra ‘a green board’ (P. Marçais 1952, 608).

In conclusion, the appearance of the emphatic is sometimes also the result of contamination, which leads to an extension of the pharyngealization giving a suprasegmental phoneme (Schmitt-Brandt 1979, 233). This phenomenon also exists in Moroccan Arabic (Caubet 1993).

4. Morphology

In the majority of the languages of Morocco, but also in Djidjeli (Marçais, 1952, 302–320), a great number of nouns bearing the Berber morpheme prefix a- are attested. This phenomenon is so important that it has become a morphological process of derivation (Marçais 1952, 303ff.).
It becomes particularly apparent in the schemes acccv or acccv. These come from Berber words which have preserved their morphology while passing to Arabic: asliy 'log, yoke' [cf Kabyle alij, 'yoke']; azdzu 'rammer'; ayrum 'bread', etc., or Berberized forms of dialectal Arabic terms like: akaf (= kaf) 'shoulder'; adfer (= solder) 'chest'; azder (= zder) 'trunk'; akrâ (= kra) 'foot'; aflâd (= flâd) 'thigh'; adfer (= dfer) 'nail'. This competes with the Berber term asker which testifies to the phase of current transition (asker > adfer > dfer).

Another vestige of the Berber substrate can be seen in plurals with final suffix -en. These remain rare in the urban Djdjelli-speaking areas. They are better preserved in the mountains but appear only in names with initial a-, therefore Berber or Berberized terms (P. Marquès 1952, 367). This parallel use is probably condemned to disappear: (1) ajgòt/aqogòten 'cat(s)'; (2) awzre/awzwêren 'talon(s), heel(s)'; (3) ayryn/ayrnunen 'bread(s)'; (4) ay zwyk/awznin 'big' (s)poon(s).

Another noteworthy aspect, that serves as testimony of a transitional stage, is the disappearance of initial vocalic alternation (singular > plural), which is characteristic of the Berber dialects.

Certain North-African Arab dialects use an expressive suffix as a diminutive -isîl; this is very common in Berber: Muhú, Híddà, Wàrdás, 'Lîlûs for (Arabic) first names: Mul(înyed), Händ, Wardiyâ, 'Li'. This diminutive is found in Tunisia: qatîstå 'kitten'. The same suffix is also sometimes used in northern Morocco as a diminutive for names of animated beings: ifîns (ffi: 'nee') 'young girl's, from ifîla (ûfîla) 'girl'; ŏdû: nèš (Anjâra) 'small kids'; from ŏdû: wi (ûdî) etc. (Colin 1926, 571).

A characteristic use of the Berber influence, especially in Morocco, but also attested in the rest of North Africa, is the Berber circumfix morpheme ita-...-at. It comprises both a prefixed and a suffixed element and marks especially the feminine, but it is also used as a diminutive marker or as a means of forming very expressive abstract nouns, often with a pejorative sense, often designating physical or moral qualities: taḫra-yīni(ê) < brânyi: 'wickedness'; taṭebûrî < ta-kaβbâra 'arrogance' taklubî < kalb 'villainy' (P. Márçases 1977, 8).

However, î, particularly serves another more productive function (Guay, 1918). By taking the nace of the tradesman, Moroccan Arabic can form the name of his trade by framing it with both sides of the circumfix morpheme: ta...-i as in: bêqâqa 'grocer' > ta-rich-e < bêqâqa-e 'grocery/trade grocer'. As Colin already pointed out in 1947, these derivatives also designate the corresponding labour or technique in question: taserrâz < tâzerrâz < tâserraz 'upholsterer'; taberrez < berrezz 'shoemaking'; tabennay < benza 'masonry'.

In certain areas of Algeria (Algiers, Tlemcen, etc) the names of trades are also formed by adding a suffix of Turkish origin, -î. This is used to form 'names of professionals', derived from nouns which indicate either the manufactured object or the usual operation: hamâmî 'owner or worker in a Hamman', gâhâwi 'owner or worker in a café', jumûrghi (< jumûrghî) 'customs officer, tax inspector', sa'âghi 'clock maker', etc (Colin 1945–49, and W. Márçases 1902, 95).

5. The verb phrase: prefixed markers

The majority of the North-African modern Arab dialects innovated in the morphological expression of the opposition between réel and the 'irréel' in order to specify the temporal and/or aspectual value expressed by the verb (Colin 1935). North African dialectal Arabic thus developed a series of verb particles and auxiliaries (prefixed verbs), which, at the end of a process of grammaticalization (Heine 1992, 1993; Simeone-Senelle/Vanhove 1997), make it possible to express time by integration in the verbal system of a verbo-nominal form. This may occur with an active participle, or by the use of periphrastic forms such as a prefix, particle, or auxiliary + conjugated form (Simeone-Senelle/Tauzin/Cauchet 1985–1986, 60). This phenomenon seems to be due, according to Colin (1935, 135), to the Berber substrate which experiences these developments and which often enable him to specify aspectual and temporal nuances like iterativity, duration, possibility or the imperfective in general.

5.1. The prefix ka-

One of the most important instruments of dialectical Arabic is the introduction of the preverbal particle ka- and certain variants, particularly in Morocco and in some towns in Algeria (Kempfmyer 1899; Cohen 1924; Marquès 1952 and 1977; Grand’Henry 1976, 1977 and 1978; Fischer/Jastrow 1980, Caubet 1985–1986 and 1993; Durand 1991).

Nevertheless, although the structure of sentences and the use of the prefixed particle ka-is similar to that of Berber, it has not been proven beyond doubt that it is due, in all cases, to a direct influence of the Berber. The principal counter-argument seems to lie in the fact that this innovation can be found in the majority of Arabic languages. The differences, in fact, concern only the choice of the particle (b-, be-, ta-, ka-). The fact that traces remain of the use in Tunisia (Saada 1963–1966) - in the same functions and conditions - of the particle b- confirms that, as specialists such as Cohen (1986), Caubet (1993) or Durand (1991) have already expressed, circumstantial evidence is not necessary.

5.2. La/illa and qa (aqqâ)

However, if innovation in itself is not necessary due to the influence of Berber, it is probable that this language is decisive in the choice and the usage of certain preverbal particles. This is the case of the variants ia- and qa (aqqâ) which appear to derive respectively from Berber ilîlla 'to be/occur' and from aqqâ. The latter is used in almost all Rifian dialects with personal pronoun suffixes used flexionally in order to express a kind of 'presentation' giving the sense of 'me here, here that I,... here that you...'.

According to Colin (1935, 134), the speech of Beni Snûs uses the same prefix qa + habîtûdo stem (continuous or repeated action) with an invariable variant. This is indicative of a grammaticalization process involving the formation of an auxiliary (flexional) function to a prefix (fixed and invariable) statute.

In addition, the close relation between the Riffian prefix qa (or auxiliary, depending on the degree of evolution) and the Kabyle form aqîlî (aqîlî-îyi, used in a similar way, seems to be corroborated by the fact that Iznasen of Riff and the Senhadj make parallel usage of the two forms aqîlî and aqîylî (Renisi 1932, 264).

The extension of the use of the verbal prefix qa is not limited, however, to the Moroccan or Algerian Berberophone areas, as we also find it at the other end of
Berberia, in the dialect of Siouah, in Egypt: *imanu qa trabat* "where do you go?" (Basset 1900, 19). This use is parallel, according to the author, with the particle *at* (= *ad*) or, more exactly, with their interrogative variant in the Rif: *manu ghā trabed*? "Where are you going?"

From this point of view, one could even argue that in North Africa proximity exists between the forms *la* and *qa* and could consider to what extent the two forms have the same etymology, *qa* and *la*: being probably an alteration of the long form *aqq* - (iyi).

In any case, and as Colin (1933, 135, note 1) rightly reminds us, this usage corresponds perfectly in the Arabic dialects of North Africa to the general use, and in similar conditions, of another variant, which comes from the archaic Arabic imperative *ra* *see*, *ra'ni nakul* 'I am eating'. We could add that the nearness, even the identity of the original semantic fields from these two prefixes *qa* and *ra'ni*, whose two consonant bases have the sense of 'to see/look at'.

6. Noun phrase

6.1. Construct state and annexation state (analytic state)

The relation of possession can be expressed in dialectal Arabic using a synthetic construction or by the means of an analytical construction, which uses for example the particle *dyaak*, its short form *d* or its variants like *mi'a*, *ni'a*, *ai'd*, *i'di*, *i'di*, etc. Berber has both types of construction (Galand 1963–66; 1969; Basset 1952). The construction of the analytical type requires the insertion of the preposition *n* between the name and the suffix *e* between the first and the second terms of the construct, e.g. *aaxam n bba'aa*; *aaxam awwer*; *munis n tnuor* 'the house of your father; your house; son of the country'.

These constructions are generally the same in Arabic and Berber. The assumption of Berber influence is certainly tempting; however, as this analytical construction is a very common evolution in the majority of the languages, caution should be exercised. Nevertheless, it would be difficult not to see the influence of the North-African substrate in the case of the following construction which uses the variant *d* as particle of the genitive.

In the dialect of Djiidjelli and northern Constantine, as well as in northern Morocco and Oran, we observe the obligatory addition of the personal suffix, with the corresponding concord in gender and number, to the name indicating a degree of relationship, when connected to another: "the sister of Muhammed" thus gives 'his sister of him of Muhammed': *ba-n d Ma'mered*.

This form corresponds to the Berber analytical construction phrase with intercalation of preposition *n*: *weltma-s n Ma'hend*. An Arabic-speaking person from Algiers would, in this case, realize: *yu Muhammed* (P. Marçais 1952, 413d and 421e; 1977, 170f; Fischer/Jastrow 1980, 259). In certain dialects of the Algerian North-West, in Nedroma and the north of Taza one even finds hybrid constructions such as: *bwwac n fatima* 'father of Fatima' or *zemma-in lqa: id [yemna n lqayid* 'the mother of the cai'd' (Fischer/Jastrow 1980, 259).

6.2. The predicative particle *d*

The use in Djiidjelli of the predicative particle *d* (annonceeive* for Marçais*) in almost all cases, as in Berber, leaves no room for doubt: *hu' ma d lewma* 'those over there' are brothers'; *d fatima* 'this is Fatima'; *d errbi* 'it is spring', etc.

6.3. The indefinite *wahed* and its variation

Among the innovations of the Arabic dialect, worthy of note is the use of the numeral *wahed* as an indefinite article. This article has several variants such as *wahid*, *wahed* (Algiers-Jewish) or, depending on the context, shorter forms such as *ha* or *h* in the masculine singular (P. Marçais 1952, 400f.) and *wadhin, wahed* in the plural (P. Marçais 1977, 206ff.).

This use is well-known in the Berber language which from the numeral 'one' makes an indefinite article - a tendency which is widespread amongst both Arabic dialects as well as in Berber. North African Arabic makes it an invariable article in the plural: 'certain type) of men', thus in the Algerian Arabic dialect: *wahed er-ragul*.

A different use distinguishes, however, the two languages in the singular. Berber, unlike the Arabic dialect, can carry out concord *o* gender, as in the following examples (Algiers Arabic): *wahed er-ra'gul*; *wahed l-lelma* 'a man; a woman', but Berber Kabyle: *ywen wergaz; ywen n innef* 'a man; a woman'.

This difference seems, however, neither sufficient, nor important enough to indicate a structural opposition: the Arabic dialect could have lost the agreement of gender. In this sense, evidence can be seen in the proper use in Berber where precisely this same agreement is being lost. We already know the example quoted by Marçais (1952, 403) of the Kabyle dialect of Guergour (Algeria): *ywen n ijj 'an arm', ywen n tnef 'a woman'. But it is not the only one. The majority of the Rif dialects no longer distinguish gender: *ijj n wergaz* 'a man', *ijj n temjar* 'a woman'. What is more, the realization of agreement is not limited to the Berber dialects since we also find it in the Maltese dialect: *wiebed ragel* (ujel, zqass etc.) 'a certain man (servant boy, priest, etc)', but *wahed mara* (sinjura, etc.) 'a woman (lady, etc)' (Aquilina 1965, 35). The situation is thus similar in Berber and Arabic. The only true difference is limited to the use of *wahed* in the plural in certain north-African dialects, which is probably a later development, following a process of grammaticalization.

6.4. Comparison

The use of the comparative and the superlative in Classical Arabic follow specific schemes and synthetic constructions, which survive in certain North-African conservative Arabic dialects (Taine-Chelk 2008, 122). They have, however, disappeared in the Northern dialects, which use specific constructions, of an analytical type, connected by a preposition like *'anni* in the Egyptian variety, possibly due to the influence of the Coptic substrate on Egyptian Arabic (Littman 1902), or *'la* in the North-African Arabic dialects in such sentences as: *sīgīr la xuch* 'he is smaller than his brother'.
Vicente (1997) use the same example which confirms the existence of the same type of structures in Berber as in dialectical Arabic: Kabyle ifa fe-li-i, Algerian Arabic ifa ’liy-a ‘he remembers me’.

7. The lexicon: some syntactic and semantic calques

Many studies already exist on this subject (Colin 1926, 1927, 1945–49, 1963–66; Kuntze 1955; Taifi ’979; Boukous 1988; Corrente 1997, 1981 and more generally see bibliographic notes in Bougchiche 1997 and Tilmatine 2008). The influence of Berber on dialectal Arabic may be important in certain specific areas such as agriculture or botany (Tilmatine/Bustamante 2001), but is less present in the religious, technical or scientific vocabulary in general.

Numerous examples, widespread in the cases of language contact, illustrate the work in these fields:

- Calques of structures from the kind men sab, ‘to find, find the means of’ < (a) wi-yasfar, ‘if somebody found/…’; made up also by an exclamatory interrogative indefinite pronoun wi and the verb af ‘to find’

- The verbs mel, dat, idir (from the Classical Arabic ‘making, turning, turn’) used in dialectical Arabic in the senses ‘to put, place’; mel hwayeke? ‘Put on your clothes! Get dressed’, or ‘to be’ (e.g. in Oran, in questions such as kif dayra ‘how is it?’, ki: da: yra? ‘How is that? (= How are you?)’. A use, which refers to Berber eggigga: ‘to make, put, place’ Colin (1963–66).

- According to Colin, the verbal auxiliary ra- is reminiscent of the traditional (antiquated) imperative Arabic ra- ‘to see’. Its use as an auxiliary verb is unknown in Hispanic and Maltese varieties, but is well known by them in the sense of ‘to see’. This reminds us of the use made in similar conditions by the majority of Berber dialects of the verb qaf, imqafel, ismaqal or iqbal ‘to become’ (cf. 4.2). Furthermore, idiomatic expressions often revolve around local cultural references. Thus, in Morocco and in several other areas of North Africa ru: sa le-mjar refers to a ritual of obtaining rain (Camps 1989), which involves a doll symbolising a fiancée of the rain ‘to render the Berber phrase tasli wenzar with the same meaning’.

One of the effects of the coexistence of two languages and their simultaneous use is the tendency to substitute genders, nouns or certain segments of the semantic field of a given lexeme. These substitutions are carried out due to an attraction towards the old language-substrate and applied to the current language:

- Changes of the nominal gender in the case of certain substantives rjel, ‘leg, foot’, formerly feminine has become masculine, influenced by the fact that the Berber equivalent, adar, is masculine. The same occurs for words like them, suf, bch, ‘meat’, ‘wool’ and ‘door’ which have remained masculine in the majority of the North-African Arabic dialects, but which have become feminine in Djidjelli, under the sway of Berber where tif, tadif and tafurt are feminine.

- Changes of number, as grammatical category, in words, especially in Djidjelli, which, while being indisputable plurals (syntactic agreement) do not take however, the corresponding morphological mark. Originally singular Arabic nouns thus take a

plural value. P. Marçais (1952, 340–341) cites a dozen cases including oman, buj, bhu, riq, qom, s’ir, ful etc. respectively ‘water’, ‘urine’, ‘shit’, ‘saliva’, ‘wheat’, ‘barley’, ‘broad beans’. The corresponding plurals and collectives in Berber are: ibezzaden, ibeccen, ixxan, illufaz, irden, timzin, ibawen. After a period of concomitant use, only one of the two words will survive, the dominant one, with the other being left with just the gender or the number. Kossmann (2008) points out a similar influence in the opposition of collective/unity noun distinction in Berber and the Arabic dialect.

Sometimes, the analogy is a semantic one. A word takes a new semantic segment which is absent in its original field: in Arabic, the term (a) xder does not have the sense of ‘green/uncooked/not ripe’. However, in dialectal Arabic it can have this meaning e.g. iben xder ‘green flesh’. Berber, however, provides the key with its corresponding idiomatic expression: akoum azegzaw ‘green meat’ (in sense of ‘raw’).

8. Conclusion

This short outline and the data that we have on the linguistic contacts between the Berber and Arabic are, of course, incomplete. Nevertheless, beyond a simple relational dimension substrate/adstratum or monostratum superstratum, there are indications to suggest a likely hypothesis that there is a convergent evolution of the two North-African native languages. In certain cases, it is clear that formal or semantic analogy determines similarity or even identity of the implemented phonetic, morphological, lexical or syntactical variants during the process of innovation in both mother tongues. It seems clear that the diffusion of these usages in dialectal Arabic has probably been strong facilitated and accelerated by the impulsion of the surrounding Berberphone language.

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