

*Arabic / Berber Interferences in the Speech  
of the Kabylia Community of Oran*

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The present paper is not meant to be an exhaustive study of the interference of other languages in Berber. It is rather a series of preliminary observations on what is recognized as “language dynamics in Algeria”. I should mention that the community under study is that of Kabylia dwellers of Oran. This community is in contact with four languages, namely: Berber / Algerian Arabic / Classical Arabic / French. However, not all Berbers master the four languages. Some old speakers (especially the women) master only Berber; some others (especially the men) master, in addition to Berber, AA and Fr. The younger ones master the four languages for some of them or just AA / Ber for some others. For the purpose of this survey we limit will ourselves to the interferences between Berber and Arabic.

If the older generations of Kabylia who came to Oran succeeded in keeping Berber as it was spoken in the mountains of the Djurdjura, the younger generations seem to be more subjected to the influence of Oran spoken Arabic (ORSA). This influence can be noticed at different levels of language.

The following are some syntactic examples:

(1) /ʔaadi aḏ ruḥay azəkka/<sup>1</sup> → “I will go tomorrow”

where we can spot the insertion of the ORSA future particle /ʔaadi/<sup>2</sup>. What is striking in the above example is the use of /ʔaadi/ besides / aḏ/<sup>3</sup> which is the Berber future particle. This a case of what can be called “redundant interference”.

(2) /wallah la rwiiʔ/ → compared to /wallah aar rwiiʔ/  
“I swear that I am full”

The insertion of the ORSA particle /la/ instead of the Berber /aar/ is another case of syntactic interference.

It is quite interesting to mention that the two-above examples from my corpus are uttered both young people and older ones. As to young speakers, this can be explained by their acquaintance with ORSA forms,

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<sup>1</sup> . Long vowels are represented here as geminates V<sub>1</sub>V<sub>1</sub> for a phonological parallelism between long vowels / V<sub>1</sub>V<sub>1</sub>/ and long consonants /C<sub>1</sub>C<sub>1</sub>/ so that the sequence \*\$ V<sub>1</sub>V<sub>1</sub> C<sub>1</sub>C<sub>1</sub>\$ stands as a phonotactic constraint. At the same time, this prevents the violation of geminate integrity.

<sup>2</sup> . /ʔaadi/ is phonetically assimilated here to the following Berber future / present particle /aḏ/

<sup>3</sup> . /aḏ/ is the present / future Berber particle for 1<sup>st</sup> person singular

which in some cases is more important than their acquaintance with kabylian ones. Old speakers are in this case influenced by the repeated forms used by their children.

A third instance which has been noticed in the speech of a schoolchild is:

(3) /ala tʃiiʔ/ → “I didn’t eat”

while the Berber form is /uratʃiʔara/ - the negation being expressed here by the use of {ur.....ara}-, the child uses the form {ala}+ verb. Our belief is that such a combination comes from the influence of Classical Arabic where such a sentence is /lam ʔaakul/

On the other hand, the opposite process may occur. Consider the following example:

(4) /lma wəllaaw/ → “Is the water back?”

The influence of Berber on Arabic resides here in the fact that the Berber word for “water” /ʔæmææn/, even if uncountable, is used with a plural verb as in: /ʔuʔaland wamææn//

while in AA, as in ORSA, /lma/ is used with a singular verb /lma walla/. We thus see that in example (4) the AA word /lma/ is followed by a plural verb /wallaw/.

At the lexical level a number of ORSA words seem to gain ground – some of them have even become

part of – in the speech of the Kabylia community of Oran. We do not intend to give any specific list of such lexemes because this need a more profound research, but we are going to give some which are the most frequently used.

(5) [jəkθəv] instead of [ju:ra] “he wrote”

(6) [θəkθəv]<sup>4</sup> instead of [θatsaftsarθ] “a book”

Even if the two words retain the Berber morphological structure i.e., in (5) {ja} which is a marker for third person singular, past tense, and in (6) {θa.....θ} which indicates the feminine, the forms / kθəv/ and / kθææv/ come respectively from /ktab/ and /ktaab/.

(7) [bo:la] instead of [θiʃirəts] “a ball”

(8) /ʔarwaaħ/<sup>5</sup> instead of [ʔajja] “let’s ...”

(9) /ʔla baali/ instead of /zriiʔ/ “I know”

As to code switching, some brief remarks can be made. It is not possible, for the time being, to assert for sure that the topic is a determining factor in switching between Berber and AA because it has not become systematic. However, it has been noticed, mainly with young speakers, that topics like religion and sport are discussed

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<sup>4</sup> . It should be said that [jəkθəv] and [θəkθəv] represent forms that are part of the lexical inventory of the variety spoken in Small Kabylia while they are not in that of Great Kabylia

<sup>5</sup> . This word is also found in the variety spoken in Small Kabylia.

in AA while family affairs are discussed in Berber. what can be said is that the younger generation is more inclined to use Arabic words and switch between Arabic and Berber than the older generation, probably because the former are more in contact with AA in their everyday life than the latter.

More can be said on the subject of Berber / Arabic interference and we hope to deal more in detail with these interferences on the light of language dynamics in Algeria in the future.

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