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A Grammar of Ghomara Berber

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I Introduction

1.1. Berber in Morocco

Berber (also *Tamazight*¹) languages are spread all over North-Africa from the Atlantic coast as far as the Egyptian oasis Siwa in the east and Burkina Faso in the south (for general overviews, cf. Basset, 1952 Galand, 1988 and Kossmann, 2012). Morocco has the highest number of Berber speakers. The main Berber speaking areas are the Rif in the north-east where *Tarifit* (Riffian Berber) is spoken, the Middle Atlas where *Tamazight* (Central Moroccan Berber) is spoken and the High Atlas, the Anti-Atlas and the Sous valley where *Tashelhit* (Sous Berber) is spoken. According to the 2004 census about 28% of the Moroccans speak a Berber language, meaning that there are approximately 8,300,000 speakers of a Berber language². It can be safely assumed that most speakers of Berber also speak Moroccan Arabic (Moroccan Arabic is the *lingua franca* of Morocco) and, depending on the level of schooling, Standard Arabic and French.

The whole northern part of Morocco, with the Mediterranean in the north, and the Taza corridor and the river Loukous in the south, from roughly Tanger in the west until the mouth of the river Moulouya in the east, is geographically known as the Rif. The mountainous area can be divided in two linguistically different areas; in the East there is the Rif proper where *Tarifit* is spoken as the main language (cf. Lafkioui, 2007). The two main cities are Nador and Al Hoceima. The area to the west is known as the Jbala. Its major towns are Tanger, Tetouan and Chefchaouen. It is Arabic speaking, except for a small pocket of Berber speakers in the Ghomara area, which is the subject of the present study.

1.2. Previous studies

Ghomara Berber (referred to as *ššelḥa* by the speakers themselves, i.e. by the Moroccan Arabic name for Berber) has been the subject of few studies in the past. The first study is an article by Georges Séraphin Colin from the colonial period (Colin, 1929). In this article he attempted to give an explanation for the existence of this isolated Berber variant. According to him the major trade routes from Fes to the ports of Tangier in the west and Bades in the central Rif caused the spread of Arabic. Only the geographically most isolated area behind the major mountainous chain, the highest peak of which is the *Tidighine* (2452 meter),

¹ *Tamazight* is the recently introduced term used by Berbers to refer to Berber languages in general. Depending on the area the name is used by the speakers for their own language.

² This figure is based on the *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat 2004*. Some scholars put the number of Berber speakers considerably higher, such as Boukous (50%) and Ennaji (about 40%). For a discussion see Aissati, Karsmakers & Kurvers (2011).

remained Berber speaking. The main importance of the article for Berber linguistics are the five Ghomara Berber texts that are provided. The collection shows that the language has not essentially changed over the last ninety years. Present-day speakers understand the text completely (even though the texts are from a neighbouring dialect of the Beni Mensour). Other studies are a small article by Gaudio (1952) who counted 2,933 Berber-speakers. For years the status of the language was unknown until Peter Behnstedt published an article in 2002 confirming that the language was still spoken and passed on to children. In 2008 and 2010 Jamal El Hannouche wrote an MA Thesis at Leiden University about Ghomara Berber based on his own fieldwork, which he published online³.

1.3. General data

The Ghomara confederation consists of nine tribes which are located in the province of Chefchaouen. Ghomara Berber is spoken in two tribes, Beni Bouzra and an adjacent part of the Beni Mensour (the fraction of the Beni Eṛuṣ), while all other Ghomarans speak Arabic. The number of Ghomara Berber speakers is approximately 10,000 (El Hannouche, 2010:25). The main center is the Arabic-speaking town of Bou Ahmed, which is the administrative centre and commercial centre (the weekly market is held there). According to the 2004 census, almost nobody in Beni Bouzra had a degree in secondary education or higher, while only a quarter had a degree in primary education. The illiteracy rate was 63,7%. There are two primary schools in *Iṛaben*. For secondary education, pupils have to move to the town *Stiḥat* some 20 kilometers away.

1.4. Fieldwork and sociolinguistics

For the present study fieldwork was conducted between 2009 and 2013 in the sea-side village *Sidi Yaḥya Aṛab* (usually referred to as *Iṛaben* by the speakers themselves), the largest Berber speaking village in the area. It had about 800 inhabitants in 2004 (El Hannouche, 2010: 170). The village is named after the local saint *Sidi Yaḥya Aṛab*. The village can be divided in two parts; the mountains and the coast. The sea-side character of the village is a recent phenomenon, and all older people were born inland. This has to do with the development of fishing which, as a mode of living, is new in the area. Besides fishing, the main economic activity is farming, most importantly wheat and barley. In addition, some people have their own vegetable gardens and orchards. Another important

³ 2008: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/46042206/Ghomara-Berber-a-Brief-Grammatical-Survey-by-J-El-Hannouche>
2010: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/46039741/Arabic-Influence-in-Ghomara-Berber-by-J-El-Hannouche>

crop grown in the area is hemp. Besides farming some people herd goats.

In *Iṣṣaḥen*, people have different levels of proficiency in Berber, and different attitudes towards Berber. Everybody from about 10 years upwards knows Berber, but some do not like to speak it, or feel more comfortable speaking Arabic. There are also some families that only speak Arabic. This is partly due to migration (a number of people grew up in the city, often Tetouan or Berkane, and migrated back to the village) and partly due to intermarriage. For the youngest age-group there may be an ongoing shift to Arabic. People indicated that children who were born from 2000 onwards were not being spoken to in Berber. When asked why this was the case, the standard answer was that Arabic would help the children understand the teacher at school. However, in a small survey I conducted in the biggest of the two primary schools, about half of the pupils indicated that they speak Berber at home. There seems to be a difference between the lower and the higher part of the village. The lower part, which is close to the main road leading to Tetouan, seems to be shifting more generally to Arabic than the higher part which is further away from the road. When I asked a local about this matter he said: 'They consider themselves Tetouani's.', i.e., belonging to the big city.

Everybody, including old women, is perfectly bilingual, and therefore some remarks on language choice are necessary. As most of my fieldwork was conducted with men, the following applies only to their behaviour. I have often witnessed people switching between the languages in conversations among each other. The language of communication depends on the person or people spoken to. In small groups where everybody knows Berber, Berber is spoken. In the café on the beach where most men gather most often Arabic was used as the language of communication. Sometimes, however, I would hear people speaking Berber to each other in the café. Higher up in the village while performing daily activities, for example around the water source, in the fields, or at the small shops, most of the time Berber was spoken. To outsiders only Arabic is spoken. Although Arabic plays an important role in *Iṣṣaḥen* and is used very often, speakers with a good command of Berber can clearly indicate what is Berber and what is Arabic. As Ghomara Berber is influenced highly by Arabic we shall see this is an important point for deciding what is part of the language and what is not.

The attitude towards Berber is usually negative. I remember one of the first comments I got was: 'Why do you want to learn our language? We hate it.' This is related to the perception of the usefulness of the language, which can only be used in the small

surrounding area. In spite of this attitude, speakers are not at all ashamed of speaking Berber. They use it freely among each other in Arabophone environments, such as the market in Bou Ahmed or when they travel to Tetouan. Data were collected using both elicitation and recordings of spontaneous speech. In the beginning elicitation was carried out translating wordlists from Moroccan Arabic to Ghomara Berber, later on Ghomara Berber became the main language of communication. When my knowledge of the language was sufficient I could make up sentences and ask the speakers to judge the grammaticality. At the same time I recorded stories and spontaneous conversations. Most of the spoken material was later transcribed with the help of a speaker. Many people were consulted from different age groups (varying from about twelve years till about ninety years old). Seven people provided the bulk of the corpus, six of which were men. One older woman provided a number of fairy tales. In a later stage, I checked a number of pending questions by means of telephone calls to one informant.

1.5. Dialectal differences

The fieldwork was primarily conducted in *Iɛrabɛn*, but in addition some speakers from the village of *Amɛtiqan* who live in Bou Ahmed were consulted as well. Even though the Ghomara Berber area is very small and there is full mutual comprehensibility between variants, there are some dialectal differences which people are aware of. According to the speakers in *Iɛrabɛn* there are some lexical differences with the variant spoken in Beni Mensour (often they would refer to the variant spoken in *Isuka*, the biggest Berber speaking village in Beni Mensour). Such differences are **tawfikɛt** instead of **tafuɛt** ‘sun’ in *Iɛrabɛn*, **aɛfeɛ** instead of **ayeffeɛ** ‘cattle’, **niɛnam** instead of **nukna** ‘we’, **diha** ‘here’ instead of **dha** ‘here’, but also different lexemes such as **syeyyu** instead of **yewwet** ‘to scream’. Furthermore, there is a difference in the instrumental preposition with a pronominal suffix: **sis-** in Beni Mensour versus **id-** in *Iɛrabɛn*. The present study is essentially a grammar of the *Iɛrabɛn* dialect, but where I know of dialectal differences these have been indicated.

1.6. Arabic influence

Arabic has influenced Ghomara Berber to a great extent. The lexicon and the grammar are profoundly influenced by Arabic. In the Swadesh 100 wordlist, 34% is Arabic whereas 66% is Berber. Only very few languages in the world have this kind of extreme borrowing of basic lexicon (Kossmann, 2013: 108). Among others the following Arabic etyma have been borrowed: ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘not’, ‘all’, ‘two’, ‘skin’, ‘flesh’, ‘head’, ‘nose’, ‘liver’, ‘bite’, ‘night’, ‘star’, ‘rain’, ‘smoke’, ‘fire’, ‘red’, ‘green’, ‘yellow’, ‘hot’.

When studying the way they are put into line with native structures, there are two types of borrowing in Ghomara Berber. The first type is integrated borrowing: an element is taken over from (mainly) Arabic and integrated into the native morphology. An example of such a borrowing is the noun **æžin** ‘dough’ which has an Arabic origin but Berber morphology. The second type is non-integrated borrowing. Many elements are taken over in the language while keeping their original morphology. This type of borrowing is much less common across languages, although in European languages it exists. Examples of this are pairs such as *phenomenon* - *phenomena* and *cactus* - *cacti* in English, which keep their original Greek/Latin singular and plural morphology. In Ghomara Berber non-integrated borrowings are very frequent. This type of borrowing is quite common across Berber, especially with nouns (cf. Kossmann, 2010 and Kossmann, 2013: 208-215). Within Berber, however, Ghomara Berber is unique in that it also borrows verbs which keep their original Arabic morphology (cf. Adamou 2010 for similar cases in Romani dialects).

Berber-morphology verbs distinguish three aspectual forms; the Aorist, the Perfective and the Imperfective (cf. chapter IV.8.). Verbs have conjugational affixes which mark person, number and gender. Many Arabic verbs are borrowed and integrated according to Berber verbal patterns. An example is the following Arabic verb:

f̣req ‘to separate, to divide’

	Aorist	Perfective	Imperfective
1S	<i>f̣eq-ax</i>	<i>f̣eq-ax</i>	<i>f̣eqq-ax</i>
2S	<i>t-f̣eq-et</i>	<i>t-f̣eq-et</i>	<i>t-f̣eqq-et</i>
3MS	<i>i-f̣eq</i>	<i>i-f̣eq</i>	<i>i-f̣eqq</i>
3FS	<i>te-f̣eq</i>	<i>te-f̣eq</i>	<i>t-f̣eqq</i>
1PL	<i>ne-f̣eq</i>	<i>ne-f̣eq</i>	<i>n-f̣eqq</i>
2PL	<i>t-f̣eq-em</i>	<i>t-f̣eq-em</i>	<i>t-f̣eqq-em</i>
3PL	<i>f̣eq-en</i>	<i>f̣eq-en</i>	<i>f̣eqq-en</i>

There are also many Ghomara Berber verbs that retain their original Arabic morphology. They are not conjugated according to native morphology of the kind we have just seen, but rather keep their Arabic conjugational affixes. Arabic has two affix pairs to distinguish the Perfect and the Imperfect aspect. The example shows us that the same person, number and gender distinctions are made as in Berber.

ʃreq ‘to sweat’

	Perfect	Imperfect
1S	ʃreq-t	n-eʃreq
2S	ʃreq-t ~ti	d-eʃreq
3MS	ʃreq	y-eʃreq
3FS	ʃeq-eṭ	d-eʃreq
1PL	ʃreq-na	n-ʃeq-u
2PL	ʃreq-tum	d-ʃeq-u
3PL	ʃeq-u	i-ʃeq-u

Arabic non-integrated borrowings are also found in the adjectives and in the pronouns (cf. chapter III.9. and chapter III.11.).

1.7. Code-switching or borrowing?

The type of borrowing shown above looks a lot like code-switching and there are of course many clearly identifiable instances of code-switching in our Ghomara Berber corpus. However, there are a number of arguments not to consider non-integrated verbs (or similar elements) as code-switches.

First, the choice of paradigm (integrated or borrowed) is not free. The verb exemplified above, and many others (about 19% of the verbs in my corpus) can only be used with Arabic morphology, while other loan verbs are only accepted with Berber morphology. Native speakers have consistent judgments about which non-integrated forms belong to Ghomara Berber and which not. I have on several occasions tried to conjugate a non-integrated verb using native Berber conjugation, but such forms were considered errors by the speakers and they would correct them by using the Arabic form. Furthermore, while non-integrated elements are mostly indistinguishable from their Arabic equivalents, when asked, speakers clearly state that they do belong to their *ššelḥa* (Berber). I have often heard ‘That is how we say it.’ On one occasion, when I asked if the Arabic-morphology verb **kma** - **ikmi** ‘to smoke’ could be used instead of the equivalent Arabic-morphology verb **tkeyyef** ‘to smoke’, also an Arabic-morphology verb, the speaker answered that **kma** is Arabic while **tkeyyef** is *ššelḥa*. This indicates that the speaker has a clear idea about which lexemes belong to Ghomara Berber, irrespective of their origin or the type of morphology used. Secondly, many of non-integrated borrowings refer to basic items which are used in

everyday live. Non-integrated forms are in many cases the only possible expression for concepts of daily life, like **ɛreq** ‘to sweat’, **ɛteš** ‘to be thirsty’ **ḥšem** ‘to be ashamed’, **qra** ‘to learn, to read’ **tleb** ‘to ask for’ and **fleh** ‘to cultivate’. Third, there is a morphological distribution between integrated and non-integrated morphology with Arabic loan verbs. With underived Arabic-etymology stems the type of conjugation cannot be predicted, and it is a lexical choice whether the verb has Berber (integrated) morphology or Arabic (non-integrated) morphology. Derived stems, on the other hand, have a clear pattern of distribution, which is the following:

- geminating derivation (argument-adding): only Berber conjugation
- **t**-affixed derivations (reciprocal, passive): only Arabic conjugation
- **n**-prefixed derivation (passive): only Arabic conjugation

While it is difficult to see why this distribution is the way it is, it is incompatible with a code-switching analysis. A final argument is that Arabic-morphology verbs are already found in the text published by Colin (1929), showing the stability of the phenomenon over a long period. In example (1) an underived verb **slek** is used (the original transcription is adapted). In example (2) the **t**-derived verb **tferrež** ‘to watch’ is used. In the original text the next line has the same verb which again has Arabic morphology, shown in example (3). Both these verbs are non-integrated verbs in present day Ghomara Berber:

- (1) *nekk*_{in} *d* *a* *k* *ml-ax* *m*_k *a* *ka-te-slek* (p. 53)
 I CRT AD 2MS:DO show:A-1S how REL IMPP-2S:IMPF-survive
 ‘I will (certainly) show you how to survive.’
- (2) *i-bda* *ka-y-tferrež* (p. 53)
 3MS-begin:P IMPP-3MS:IMPF-watch
 ‘He began to watch.’
- (3) *ka-y-tferrž-u* *g* *ušnikkef* (p. 53)
 IMPP-3PL:IMPF-watch-3PL:IMPF in hedgehog:EA
 ‘They were watching the hedgehog.’

Other non-integrated elements in Colin’s text are the element **fḥanna** ‘our way’ (p. 52), and the Arabic active participles **saktin** ‘they are quiet’ **maši** ‘he is going’ (p. 54) found in present-day Ghomara as well.

There are some differences between old people and young people's speech which show ongoing lexical replacement of Berber terms by their Arabic equivalents. When I told people that I wanted to research Berber, many speakers confronted me with the phrase **isw = as, iyems = as** 'he covered the ground for him/her (for sleeping), he covered him/her (with a blanket)'. According to the speakers this is 'real' Berber as it was once used by previous generations. Nobody uses this anymore, instead the Arabic borrowed verbs **iferrš = as, iyetty = as** are used. Similarly, **azel** 'to run' was used up until recently by older speakers, but has now been replaced by **žerri** 'to run'. Another example of replacement is **šum** 'to fast' for **zum** 'to fast' which is still used by old people⁴. Another archaism is **mṭi** 'to eat lunch'. Many young and middle-aged people know this verb from the phrase **hala a mṭit** 'come to eat lunch'. I was given the conjugational paradigm by a speaker of over 70 years of age. The normal verb used now is Arabic-morphology **tyedda** 'to eat lunch'. Examples of nouns are **ayef** 'head' which is replaced by the borrowing **ḍḍmay** 'head', and **azru** 'mill', replaced by Arabic **rrḥa** 'mill'.

The elements discussed above form integral parts of Ghomara Berber and therefore belong to the grammar of the language. Some other elements that occur are genuine code-switches with Arabic, and therefore are not an integral part of Ghomara Berber grammar (although they are of course an integral part of *Iɛɛaben* discourse). The line between code-switching and borrowing is drawn by the criterion of obligatoriness; I consider a code-switch as an Arabic element which is inserted in a specific linguistic or sociolinguistic context, but which remains optional. On the other hand, a genuine borrowing is part of the Ghomara Berber grammar itself. There are a number of contexts where the use of Arabic is obligatory. For example, within story-telling, the use of Berber and code-switched Arabic is regulated by clear-cut conventions. Normally the narrative parts of the story are told in Berber, but most of the conversations (depending on the story) are in Arabic. An example of a conversation is the following; the code-switched parts in Arabic are underlined:

- (4) *i-dda ašnikef iy uḡḍi. i-nn = as: šenni ya*
 3MS-go:Phedgehog:EL and jackal:EA 3MS-say:P=3S:IO what FUT
 The hedgehog and the jackal went. He said: 'What are you going to take uncle
d-εebbi a εemmi ddib ka qlaεqlaε, ka herrefherref?
 2S:IMPF-take VOC uncle jackal Q roots Q leaves

⁴ Note that **zum** 'to fast' is also of Arabic origin, but a much older loanword (see Kossmann & van den Boogert, 1997).

jackal, the roots of the leaves?

a ye-nn = as: 'qayt- a fi-ya' i-nn = as: 'daba ya ne-ddi
 INTJ 3MS-say:P = 3S:IO do:AP-FS in-1S 3MS-say:P = 3S:IO now FUT 1S:IMPF-take
 He said: 'I was fooled'. He said: 'Now I am going to take
qlaεqlaε.'
 roots
 the roots.'

Another instance of conventionalised code-switching are negative oaths following **wella** 'by God'. An example is (in italics):

- (5) *i-nn = as: 'te-gga-t = tet ga-y merṛa t-ayet, amella wella fi-ya*
 3MS-say:P = 3S:IO 2S-do:P-2S = 3FS:DO in-1S time FS-other now:EL by.God in-1S
 He said: 'You fooled me last time, now I swear you will not
ma t-gewwez = a.'
 NEG 2S:IMPF-pass = 3FS
 fool me.'

The incidence of non-integrated borrowing in Ghomaran Berber is so high, and so pervasive in all realms of the grammar, that one regularly encounters utterances for which it is impossible to decide whether they are in Berber or in Arabic, as all the elements belong to both languages. When such sentences were embedded in Ghomaran Berber discourse, or, even more decisively, when they were produced while doing elicitation on Berber, I do not consider them code-switches. The following examples from texts are completely in Arabic and can not be uttered in any other way in Ghomara Berber.

- (6) *ka-y-dden u ka-y-ḡra*
 IMPP-3MS:IMPF-call.prayer and IMPP-3MS:IMPF-read
 'He calls for prayer and he reads.'
- (7) *ššelḥa ma εemmr-a de-nqteε, ššelḥa εemmr-a ma de-nqteε*
 Berber NEG never-3FS 3FS:IMPF-stop Berber never-3FS NEG 3FS:IMPF-stop
 'Berber will never die, Berber will never die.'

1.8. Is Ghomara Berber a mixed language?

It is clear that Ghomara Berber has undergone heavy lexical and grammatical influence from Arabic. The question then arises whether it can be classified as a mixed language (cf. Kossmann, 2013: 431). Mixed languages are the result of mixing of two languages to the extent where it is impossible to decide which language (family or group) it originated from. In other words, it is impossible to decide which is dominant language in the whole. For Ghomara, there are several criteria to classify it as a mixed language. As we saw earlier in the domain of the basic lexicon there is only slight dominance of Berber (2/3 vs. 1/3 in Swadesh 100); once a larger part of the lexicon is taken into account, Arabic is clearly dominant. There is strong convergence between Berber and local Arabic in phonology, which makes the two phonologies almost identical. Syntactically there is also strong convergence of Ghomara Berber and local Arabic. It is often impossible to decide which language has influenced the other on these levels. In the domain of the morphology the situation is more clear-cut; there are two parallel systems for all parts-of-speech : nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns (except for free and demonstrative pronouns, cf. chapter III.11.). Within the prepositional phrase (chapter III.13.), the verbal complex (chapter IV.3.) and the relative clause (chapter IV.5.) both systems appear side by side, depending on the etymology.

Only in the noun phrase it is impossible to use a borrowed structure. Noun phrases have a Berber structure, whatever the etymology and morphology of the head noun, so that it is impossible to use a borrowed determiner in the noun phrase. The structure in (8) is Arabic and unacceptable in Ghomara Berber, which only allows for the Berber structure in (9):

- (8) *haḍ l-mus*
 S:PRX DEF-knife
 ‘this knife’

- (9) *lmus = aḍ*
 knife = S:PRX
 ‘this knife’

An additional criterion which could argue against the mixed language hypothesis is that the morphological split is asymmetrical. As shown above, the distribution of the different

morphological systems is not strictly organised among etymological lines, in the sense that there are many words with Arabic etymology which have Berber morphology. On the other hand hardly any words with Berber etymology have Arabic morphology.

Taken together, Ghomara Berber qualifies as a language that shows strong similarities with mixed languages in that a large part of the lexicon and grammar have two different language sources. However, in the basic lexicon Berber is slightly more dominant and in the grammar the parallelism of the two languages is not complete. Taking into account the noun phrase, Berber is slightly more dominant. Ghomara Berber can therefore be qualified as a language that has undergone extreme borrowing resulting in mixing in multiple parts of the grammar.

1.9. The present grammar

This grammar follows the classical layout of a descriptive grammar. The phonology (chapter II), the morphology (chapter III) and syntax (chapter IV) are treated, followed by an appendix with three glossed and translated texts and an appendix with a Berber-English wordlist. As Ghomara Berber has been profoundly influenced by Arabic, Arabic grammar figures prominently in this book. Depending on the chapter, the borrowed Arabic component of the grammar is treated together with or separate from the Berber component.

