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A Grammar of Awjila Berber (Libya) : based on Umberto Paradisi's material

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Awjila¹ is a Berber language, spoken in the oasis of Awjila in eastern Libya, about 250 kilometers south of Ajdabiya, and 400 kilometers west of the Berber-speaking Egyptian oasis of Siwa. The oasis is known as *ašāl n awilān* in the Awjila language and as *awžila* (أوجلة) in local Arabic. It is already mentioned by the name Αὔγίλα by the classical Greek historian Herodotus (Histories 4.172).

Not much is known about the number of speakers of the Awjila language, which has been notoriously difficult to research due to the political situation in Libya in the past decades. A recent study says that there were 8,515 inhabitants in 2006². It is unknown how many of these inhabitants speak the Awjila language. Umberto Paradisi, who studied the language in the 1960s, makes no mention of the number of speakers. Recent information indicates that the language is still alive, although its sociolinguistics remain unclear. Adam Benkato, a researcher active at SOAS, has confirmed in personal correspondence that he has recently met speakers of the language in Benghazi. Moreover, after the fall of Gaddafi's regime, the present president of the Congrès Mondial Amazigh, Fathi N Khalifa, visited Awjila. According to him (p.c.), there are still people who speak the language in Awjila, but he expresses great concern about the vitality of the language, as all fluent speakers seem to be very old. Several years ago, Simone Mauri, another researcher at SOAS, went to Awjila in order to do fieldwork on the language. Due to issues with the local authorities, he was unable to continue this research project, but he also confirms that the language is still alive.

The political situation in Libya at the time of writing this book makes it impossible to do research on the spot. All data presented here is based on written sources.

This book aims to be a comprehensive study of the Awjila language, based on the published lexical and textual data. The grammatical part draws on a rich tradition of studying Berber languages, and much inspiration has been drawn from grammatical descriptions of other Berber languages such as Bentolila (1981), Penchoen (1973), Mitchell (2009), Souag (2010), Chaker (1983) and Kossmann (1997; 2000; 2011; 2013b). The grammar draws upon established terminology and well-established concepts within the Berberological tradition. For comprehensive overviews of Berber languages, the reader is referred to Basset (1952), Galand (2010) and Kossmann (2012).

¹Also written Awdjilah, Augila, Aoudjila, Ojila and Aujila.

²Taken from Wikipedia (<http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/أوجلة> accessed April 9 2013), which cites Al-Hajhāj (2008: 120).

The second part presents the Awjila texts published in two available text sources. These texts are given in their original form, provided with a phonemic analysis, glossed and translated.

The third part of the book presents what is known about the Awjila lexicon, drawing on the various sources available. Because Awjila retains some archaic features, and its internal development is not well understood, I also provide cursory notes on the etymology of the words.

1.1 Material

Not much has been published on the Awjila language, but its earliest attestation dates as far back as 1827. Müller (1827) is a lengthy word list of Awjila words, with a commentary by Joseph Élie Agoub (1795-1832), professor of Arabic at the Lycée Royal de Louis-Le-Grand in Paris (Pouillon 2008: 8). This earliest source of the language is a list of words in Arabic and Latin transcription, that spans over thirty pages. Sadly, the material is of very little use. As pointed out already by Agoub in his commentary, Müller does not adequately distinguish ت from ط, س from ص, ك from ق and ا from ع. This can be seen from numerous variant forms found throughout the word list, such as *Achever* عمّرت besides *Finir* امرت, both representing the same lexical item, but written alternately with ا and ع. It should be remarked, though, that Müller's transcription of Awjila *v* is highly consistent. While in the Arabic transcriptions *v* is not distinguished from *w* (both written with و), the Latin transcription distinguishes the two: *w* is written as <ou> and *v* is written as <w>. Examples of <w> include: *yéwella* يوله 'pleurer' for /ivallá/, *yétawer* يتور 'bouillir' for /itavər/, and *tewerquiat* تورقيات 'rêver' for /təvərgàt/ 'dream'.

Müller often did not hear the final consonants of words, which can be shown by comparing it to the much better material provided in later sources (especially Paradisi 1960a;b). For example: <alida> اليده 'butter', cf. Paradisi <alidâm> 'id.'; *téghardim*, *taghardim* تغرديم 'scorpion, reptile', cf. Paradisi <tgardímt> 'scorpion', *lahbou* لخبو 'date, fruit' cf. Paradisi <lahbûb> 'date (ripe)'.

Even though Müller was added to the expedition because of his knowledge of Arabic (Pacho 1827: v), this knowledge may have been rather restricted. He failed to recognize the Arabic origin of *alida* اليده and *lahbou* لخبو, as can readily be seen from the Arabic transcription. Lack of knowledge also shows in certain other words such as: *elakkenes* الكنس 'prix, valeur', which is clearly *al-ħaqq* cliticized with the Berber 3sg. possessive clitic =*ənn-əs*. This word is also attested in a later source (Paradisi 1960b), which confirms that the word exists in Awjila, and that it is pronounced *əlħàqq*, with a pharyngeal fricative and a uvular stop. Such a mistake would be unthinkable had he been really familiar with Arabic.

Müller's obvious lack of knowledge of Arabic makes it all the more remarkable that

some words in the list have a perfect Arabic spelling. Possibly Agoub not only marked Arabic loanwords with an asterisk (*), as he claims to have done, but also amended Müller's transcriptions when he was confident that he was dealing with an Arabic loanword. This is illustrated by his misinterpretation of the word 'head' (<tgîli, tĕgîli, tĕgîli> in Paradisi), which is written as the Classical Arabic word for 'heavy': *cerveau*; *tête taqileh* ثقيله; *cervelle taqileh* ثقيلة. The choice to represent *t* by ث does not occur elsewhere in the word list. It can only be understood if we assume that Agoub thought to recognize an Arabic loanword, and amended Müller's transcription to this effect.

Müller also produced demonstrably artificial verb forms, which cannot have come from a native speaker. For example, *yefkès* يفكس 'emprunter' is transparently *yafk-îs* 'he gave it to him'. While the translation is incorrect, the misunderstanding is understandable and the form no doubt comes from his informant. In addition to this, however, Müller lists another word, *miéfkes* ميفكس 'emprunt', which seems to be the word <yefkès> with the Arabic Passive Participle prefix *m-* placed in front of it. This form cannot come from his informant. Even if Awjila would have borrowed the passive participle prefix, for which there is no evidence whatsoever, it is inconceivable that it should be placed on a verb that has the 3sg.m. prefix *yə-* with the Indirect Object clitic =*is* still attached. Countless examples of such artificial passive participles can be found throughout Müller's word list.

Finally, Müller may have conducted part of his research with an informant that spoke Arabic rather than Awjila. While some words are clearly of Berber origin, and sometimes clearly loanwords from Arabic that went through a Berber mould, many words seem to represent Arabic rather than Berber.

This would explain the form of many of the non-Berberized Arabic 'loanwords' in the material. Arabic loanwords in Awjila, and Berber languages in general, are almost always borrowed with the Arabic article attached while the feminine ending *-a* appears as *-ət* (see section 3.3). In Müller's material we find many examples of Arabic 'loanwords' that lack the Arabic article, and feminine nouns that simply end in *-a*.

Müller and his informants apparently did not have a language in common in which they could communicate fluently. This is obvious from the many wrong translations of words. For example, Müller records *tement* تمننت 'bee', while this is in reality the well-attested Berber word for 'honey', recorded by Paradisi as: <tîmĕnt>.

There is some evidence that at least one of Müller's informants communicated with Müller in Italian. Müller records the word *teguibibi* تقيبيبي as 'peser', i.e. 'to weigh'. Paradisi has this same word with a completely different meaning: <tegbîbî> 'name of a sparrow'. We can understand this by assuming that Italian was the intermediary language. The Italian word for 'sparrow' is 'passero', which may have been misunderstood by Müller in the sense of French 'peser'.

Considering the amount of problems in Müller's material, one simply cannot draw *any* conclusions from the material, in terms of phonology and morphology, and one has to be extremely cautious when dealing with the lexicon. Only words that have very

obvious Berber cognates, or are also attested in Paradisi (1960a;b), have been included in the lexicon in part D.

Some other early data on the Awjila language are found in a letter by Moritz von Beurmann (1862), which contains ten words. The transcriptions are difficult to interpret, and some forms contradict what we find in later sources. The ten words are provided in the table below:

head	tignani
hair	schahr, suf
hand	fuss, fussum
water	imin
sun	itfukt
cattle	funas
mountain	loyum
date	tina
dried date	lachbub

tignani is perhaps *təgìli* ‘head’. If this word was transcribed from original Arabic, we may imagine that *l* and *n*, and final *ny* and *y* have gotten confused.

schahr, suf are clearly Arabic words: *šahr* ‘hair’ and *šuf* ‘wool’.

fuss, fussum ‘hand’ represents *afūs* and probably its plural *fissən*, note that the initial *a-* has been omitted.

imin ‘water’ is well known, and the form is unique to Awjila: *imìn*; all other Berber languages have *aman*.

itfukt ‘sun’ is unusual. Paradisi records a form *tafūt* without the final stem consonant *k* that is found in many other Berber languages. Perhaps this form was “corrected” by Beurmann on basis of the Siwa form that he also cites, with the same spelling.

funas ‘cattle’ is the common Berber word *afunas* ‘bull’, also attested in Awjila, once again without the initial *a*.

loyum is transcribed as <logum>, but is provided with a footnote of the editor that the original text had a *š* on top of the letter *g*. This word must certainly stand for *aləyəm* ‘camel’. The translation ‘mountain’ is probably the result of a confusion between Arabic *jamal* ‘camel’ and *jabal* ‘mountain’.

tina ‘date’ looks like the common Berber word for ‘date’ (not attested in the other sources on Awjila), but the form is unexpected in Awjila. From Tuareg and Ghadames attestations, we know that this word had a Proto-Berber **β* (Kossmann 1999; 2002), whose regular reflex in Awjila is *v*.

The final word, *lachbub* ‘dried date’ is easily recognisable as the plural of *alḥàbb* ‘date’: *ləḥbùb*.

The first professional linguist working on Awjila was the Italian berberologist Francesco Beguinot (1879-1953), who cites words collected by himself in three of his articles.

The first article (Beguïnot 1921) is an overview on Berber studies, in which he cites over fifty lexical items from Awjila. The transcriptions are of high quality, and largely agree with those found in our later source, Paradisi (1960a;b).

The second article (Beguïnot 1924) discusses *b*, *v* and *f* in Berber. It constitutes the first comprehensive analysis of Proto-Berber **β*. In this article, again, Beguïnot cites several Awjila words. Among others, it provides the perfective paradigm of the verb *urəv* ‘to write’, the only complete paradigm available to us in the language.

The third article (Beguïnot 1925) discusses the phonetic features of the Nefusi Berber dialect of Fassâto. In doing so, Beguïnot compares two Nefusi words with Awjila cognates, providing us with two more Awjila words.

The next source is an ethnographic article by Zanon (1932)³, which includes the transcription of 13 short songs and sayings in the Awjila language. The transcriptions are sometimes difficult to interpret, but considerably better than those of Müller and Beurmann. Zanon appears to not have been familiar with Berber grammar, and often wrongly translates the grammatical person of the sentence. Some translations are very free. Unexpected reflexes such as *q* where we expect *g* and *γ* where we expect *g* strongly suggest that his transcriptions are based on texts first transcribed in Arabic, probably by native speakers. Despite its problems, the data is very useful.

The main source on Awjila is at the same time the last information that we have on the language. It consists of two articles, published shortly one after the other, by the Italian scholar Umberto Paradisi (1925-1965). Paradisi graduated in oriental languages, literature and institutions at the Naples L'Orientale University in 1951. He worked as a diplomat in Tripoli and Benghazi for several years, while continuing to publish articles on Berber linguistics and prehistoric rock art. He died in a car accident on April 14, 1965 in Benghazi (Serra 1965). The first article is a word list (Paradisi 1960a), containing 600 entries, which make up the bulk of lexical information available to us on the language. Paradisi purposely left out almost all Arabic loanwords in this word list (Paradisi 1960a: 157). Considering the large amount of Arabic loanwords that occur in the texts, the initial corpus of words that Paradisi collected during his fieldwork may have been twice as large as the material presented in the word list.

The second article presents fifteen texts (Paradisi 1960b), amounting to about 1,800 words in total. They are essential for a deeper understanding of the grammar, but they also are a source of the many Arabic loanwords present in the language. Anything said about the the grammar in the present study, is based on these two sources unless explicitly mentioned otherwise. Paradisi's transcriptions are basically consistent, and inconsistencies seem to point to small variations in pronunciation which Paradisi has meticulously written down, rather than to mistakes or carelessness by the author.

The system of Paradisi's vowel transcriptions is complex. One gets the impression that they are of high accuracy, but only a careful study allows to get a deeper under-

³I wish to thank Vermondo Brugnatelli, who was so friendly to send me a copy of this article.

standing of the phonemics and phonetics that lie behind the transcriptions. The vowel transcription system is discussed in section 2.2.

The notations of the accent also require special attention. While many of the accents in Paradisi's transcriptions appear to be consistent, there is considerable variation in some forms. The reliability of the accents will be studied in more detail in section 2.5.3.1 and 2.5.3.2.

Based on the primary sources mentioned above, several other authors have done research on aspects of the Awjila language, but none constitute a comprehensive descriptive work. Prasse (1989) is a short encyclopaedia article, providing an overview of the language, highlighting some of the unusual aspects of the language. Basset (1935; 1936) and Brugnatelli (1985) discuss the resultative formation in Awjila and Siwa. Kossmann (2000) is a study on the future formation in Ghadames and correctly notes that also in Awjila the imperative and future formations are morphologically distinct. Awjila also plays a significant role in Kossmann's reconstruction of the Proto-Berber phoneme **β* (Kossmann 1999). Vycichl (2005: 64-65) examines the widespread development of Berber *a* to *i* in Awjila. Souag (2010) frequently compares Siwa to Awjila, comparing several of its morphological and lexical features. Naït-Zerrad includes Awjila in his root dictionary (Naït-Zerrad 1999; 2002 but not in Naït-Zerrad 1998). Most recently, Kossmann (2013a) pays special attention to several specific points of Awjila syntax, and to what extent this can be attributed to Arabic influence.

This book constitutes the first systematic study of the grammar of the Awjila language. It provides a detailed analysis of its phonology, morphology and syntax. The final part of the thesis is a collection of all words attested in Awjila, ordered by root, and compared to other languages. In this way, I hope that the highly interesting grammatical and lexical features of Awjila will be accessible for future studies on historical linguistics, Berber grammatical systems, and more generally on the Eastern Berber languages.

1.2 Linguistic variation

An issue still open to further research is the linguistic unity of Awjila. The different sources on the language often show slight differences in morphology which cannot be explained easily without assuming a certain amount of linguistic variation.

Zanon's texts display several forms that are different from what we find in Paradisi (1960a;b). The 1sg. possessive marker, which is *ənn-ùk* in Paradisi, is found as *ənn-ùx* in song II. The 1sg. PNG-marker *-x* is consistently *-x* in Paradisi, but is found once as *-y* in Zanon's song I. In all other songs, it is found as *-x*, as in Paradisi. Beguinot sites one example of a verb with a 1sg. PNG-marker. Also with Beguinot, this marker is *-y*. In Zanon's song I, we also find *<kàm>* for the 2sg.f. direct object marker *-kəm*, the transcription gives the impression that Zanon meant to describe */kam/* rather than

/kəm/.

Another instance of language internal variation is found when comparing Paradisi's independent pronouns to those recorded by Beguinot. cf. Beguinot <nettî, net-tîn>, Paradisi <nettîn>; Beguinot <nekkeni, nekkin>, Paradisi <nekkenî>; Beguinot <neh-nîn>, Paradisi <nehîn>; Beguinot <nehnînet>, Paradisi <nehînet>, see also section 6.1.1.

1.3 Notes on terminology of word structure

Awjila morphology uses vocalic patterns, affixation and cliticization to form words. We will use several terms in the description of word formation to clarify the morphological processes.

A *root*, in this book, refers to a consonantal scheme, into which vowels may be inserted. The term root is only used as a means to organize words in the lexicon. A root with derivational affixes will be called the *extended root*. Once a vocalic scheme has been applied to a root with derivational affixes, the result is called a *stem*. A stem with inflectional affixes is called a *word*. A word with clitics, relevant to accentuation, will be called an *accent unit*. This is equivalent with the phonological word.⁴

Derivational affixes that are part of the *extended root* are not glossed as separate morphemes. Inflectional affixes, such as PNG-marking are marked with a dash (-), while clitics are marked with an equals sign (=).

To adequately describe the verbal morphology, it is useful to speak of verb types and verb schemes. The formation of verbs and nouns from a root cannot be explained by simply taking a consonantal root, and applying a vowel scheme to it, cf. the following entirely unrelated words, which would have the same root if only the consonant (F) were taken into account:

uf 'to find'

af 'on'

tafût 'sun'

taft 'wool'

For verbal morphology, it is advantageous to abstract these words down to an abstract *verb structure*. Verbs that have a similar verb structure share similar patterns of stem derivation. For describing verb structure, the symbols *v*, *c*, *ĕ* and * are employed. *v* stands for any plain vowel, *c* stands for any consonant, *ĕ* stands for a long consonant and * stands for a variable final vowel that vacillates between *a*, *i*, *ø*. Schwa is not represented in these abstractions. Such verb structures can be supplied with a *scheme* to get the desired stem form. Schemes are marked with vertical bars |...|.

⁴This terminology has largely been based on the terminology used for Ayer Tuareg in Kossmann (2011).

For example, *vcc* verbs, have the scheme |acəc| in the imperative, |ucəc| in the perfective and |tacəc| in the imperfective, e.g. imp.sg. *arāv*; pf. 3sg.m. *y-urāv*; impf. 3sg.m. *i-tàrāv* ‘to write’.

1.3.1 The accent unit

The accent unit, or phonological word, is a complex of words and clitics, that share a single accent. Within this unit, it is not always easy to distinguish affixes from clitics, and the distinction that is made is somewhat arbitrary. All forms that represent inflection, such as PNG-marking, and pronominal suffixes to prepositions, i.e., elements that are necessary for having a well-formed word, are considered affixes, and marked with a dash (-).

The direct object and indirect object markers, that are part of the verbal accent unit, are considered clitics and are marked with an equals sign (=). The future marker *a=* and resultative marker *=a* are also considered clitics. In the case of the resultative marker this is because it follows object markers (which are considered to be clitics, too). In the case of the future marker, this is because it precedes the PNG prefixes, while the other markings of aspect are applied to the stem. For similar reasons, the preverbal negative marker *ur=*, is also considered a clitic. This is different from the more common negative particle *ká*, which comes after the verbal complex and has its own accent.

Within the nominal system, the possessive and deictic elements that follow the noun are considered clitics. Prepositions are also considered clitics to the noun as far as they form an accent unit with it.

The morphological processes that form the different TAM-stems and derivations of the verb, cannot be easily separated as affixes, and will not be marked in the glosses. In a similar vein, the prefixes of the noun, and its plural affixes—which are mostly lexically determined—are not separately glossed.

1.4 Notes on the transcription

This study is based on material that is transcribed according to various systems. In order to cope with this, the following conventions are used. Phonemic representations of Awjila words (i.e., my interpretation) are written in *italics*, while the transcription in the original source is given between <angular brackets>. In the phonemic representations, default accent is written with a grave accent, while lexical accent is written with an acute (see section 2.5).⁵ The vowels are written as *a, i, u, e, o, ə*.

Paradisi, Zanon and Beguinot follow the typical system of Arabic dialectological transcription of that period (an example of a recent description of this system by Aubert

⁵This method of transcription of the accent is inspired by the conventions in Heath (2005; 2006).

My transcription	Paradisi	Other common transcriptions
b	b	
č	č	tc
d	d	
ɖ	ɖ	
f	f	
g	g	
ɣ	ɣ	
h	h	
ħ	ħ	h
k	k	
l	l	
ɭ	ɭ	
m	m	
ɱ	m	
n	n	
ɲ	ɲ	
r	r	
ɾ	ɾ, r	
s	s	
ʃ	ʃ	
š	š	c
t	t	
ʈ	ʈ	
v	v	β, b, ʋ
w	w	
x	ħ	
y	y	
z	z	
ʒ	ʒ	
ž	ž	j
ʕ	ʕ	ʕ, ɛ, ʕ, ʕ