

The diachronic stability of uninflectedness in Berber

Workshop “Uninflectedness”
DGfS 2023 (Köln, 10 March)



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Introduction: Uninflectedness

Definition (Baerman et al. 2005:33):

- “There is, in certain lexemes only, a loss of all values of a particular feature F found elsewhere in the language. This loss may depend on the presence of a particular combination of values of one or more other features (the context).
- Other syntactic objects distinguish values of feature F, either generally or in the given context, and feature F is therefore syntactically relevant.”

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
NOM	muzeum	muzea
ACC	muzeum	muzea
GEN	muzeum	muzeów
DAT	muzeum	muzeom
LOC	muzeum	muzeach
INS	muzeum	muzeami

Laskowski (1990)
(< Corbett 2011)

Introduction: Berber (Amazigh)

A family of closely related languages (like Romance), within the Afroasiatic phylum

- Shilha (Taclɣiyt ⵜⴰⵎⴰⵛⵉⵔⵉⵜ)
- Kabyle (Taqbaylit)
- Tuareg (Tamašəq ⵜⴰⵎⴰⵛⵉⵔⵉⵜ)
- ...

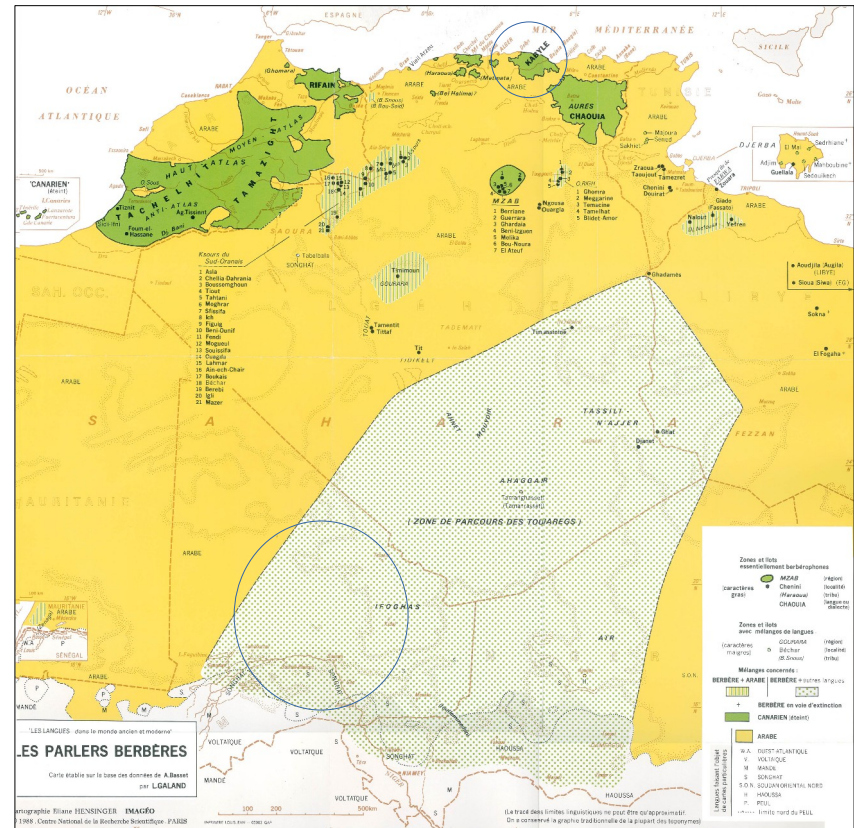
Indigenous to North Africa

~30 million speakers

- mostly Morocco, Algeria

Sg/pl number in all varieties – agreement feature

Bivalent case/“state” system in most varieties (lost in small peripheral ones) – no agreement, appears only on 1st word of NP



Canonical Berber paradigms

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
man	a-rgaz	we-rgaz
men	i-rgaz-en	ye-rgaz-en

Kabyle f.	free	annexed
land	t-a-mur-t	t-mur-t
lands	t-i-mura	t-mura

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
boy	a-lyad	ǎ-lyad
boys	i-lyad-ǎn	ə-lyad-ǎn

Tamasheq f.	free	annexed
bush	t-a-sǎyto-tt	t-ǎ-sǎyto-tt
bushes	t-i-sǎyta	t-sǎyta

Number marked on stem and prefix; case, only on prefix

Case (?) marking in Kabyle

“Free state”

citation

d argaz “it’s a man”

direct object

yezṛa argaz “he saw a man”

(preverbal S/DO)

argaz **yenna-as** “The man said to him...”

“Annexed state”

object of core (not all) prepositions

yenna-as **i** wergaz “He said to a man...”

postverbal subject

yezṛa-t wergaz “a man saw him”

(right-dislocated, even DO)

d amcic **i-t** **izedyen**, wexxam-nni “it was a cat that inhabited it, that house.”

(cf. Mettouchi & Frajzyngier 2013)

Is this even case?

Yes (Arkadiev 2015, Felice 2020):

- clause-internally conditioned by syntactic role
- suffices alone to disambiguate S from DO

No (Mettouchi & Frajzyngier 2013):

- interacts with information structure in Kabyle, such that:
- either case can mark S, DO, or PO

But elsewhere, no such ambiguity...

(cf. Mettouchi & Fleisch 2010)

Case marking in Figuig

“Free state”

citation

d amezwar “it’s a man”

direct object

yezra argaz “he saw a man”

(preverbal S/DO)

argaz **izeddem=dd** “the man gathered wood”

“Annexed state”

object of core (not all) prepositions

tenna-as **i** teydet “she said to the dog...”

postverbal subject

tekks-ent=ten tzednan “women are picking them”

(*not* in right-dislocated)

iwa yawy=it yah ann **n tmeṭṭut** “he married her, this woman”

=> Marked nominative

(cf. Kossmann 1997, 2016)

Case marking in Taznatit

“Free state”

citation

d tameɛtɛt “it’s a woman”

direct object

ad agjay tamuɛt “I would leave the land”

(preverbal S/DO)

tameɛtɛt-ns **tɛaɗ tisent** “his wife
checked the salt”

“Annexed state”

object of (core) prepositions

inda-tent i tmeɛtɛt-ns “He gave them to
his wife”

not subject

tella ya-s tameɛtɛt “a woman was at him”

presumably, not right-dislocated
(no examples found)

=> Marked oblique

(examples from Bellil 2006)

Case (state) uninflectedness

- **For phonological reasons**
 - ...

Vowel-initial stems

North: Only feminine syncretic

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
wind	aḍu	w-aḍu
-	-	-

Kabyle f.	free	annexed
lung	t-ur-ett	t-ur-ett
lungs	t-ur-in	t-ur-in

Tuareg: Both syncretic

(V > Ø / _\$V)

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
wind	aḍu	aḍu
winds	aḍu-t-ǎn	aḍu-t-ǎn

Tamasheq f.	free	annexed
boat	t-orǎf-t	t-orǎf-t
boats	t-orf-en	t-orf-en

CV-initial stem with masc. i-prefix

Northern only, variable across varieties

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
share	a -mur	u -mur
shares	i -mur-en	i -mur-en

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
hedgehog	i -nisi	i -nisi
hedgehogs	i -nis-an	i -nis-an

$y\text{ə} > i / _CV$

Tamazight m.	free	annexed
share	a -mur	u -mur
shares	i -mur-n	i -mur-n

Tamazight m.	free	annexed
eagle	i -gidr	i -gidr
eagles	i -gidr-n	i -gidr-n

Reduced prefixes (Tuareg, sg. only)

Secondarily neutralised by a sound change:

a > ă / _\$CV

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
pubic hair	ă(-)šinšăḍ	ă(-)šinšăḍ
-	-	-

Tamasheq f.	free	annexed
health	t-ă(-)ssoxe-t	t-ă(-)ssoxe-t
-	-	-

Case (state) uninflectedness

- For phonological reasons
 - vowel-initial (feminine) stems ($V > \emptyset / _ \$V$)
 - stems with reduced prefix (Tuareg: $a > \check{a} / _ \$CV$)
 - CV-initial masculine stems with i- (Northern: $y\check{a} > i / _ CV$)
- For morphological reasons
 - **No prefix**

Certain kinship terms

Bare forms interpreted as 1SgPoss

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
father	baba	baba
fathers	i-baba-t-en	i-baba-t-en

Kabyle f.	free	annexed
sister	weltma	weltma
sisters	yessetma	yessetma

Tamajeq m.	free	annexed
son of	ṛur	ṛur
sons of	măddan	măddan

Tamajeq f.	free	annexed
sister	wălătma	wălătma
sisters	šătma	šătma

Certain (de)verbal nouns

Either gender in Tuareg, m. (only?) elsewhere

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
thirst	fad	fad
-		

Figuig m.	free	annexed
beginning	beddu	beddu
-		

Tamajeq m.	free	annexed
thirst	fad	fad
-	-	-

Tamasheq f.	free	annexed
knowledge	mă-şn-ăt	mă-şn-ăt
knowledges	mă-şnăt-en	mă-şn-ăt-en

Pronouns

Free personal pronouns are never case-inflectable
(bound forms are a different story)

Kabyle	sg.	pl.
1m	nekk	nukni
1f	nekk	nukenti
2m	kečč	kunwi
2f	kemm	kunnemti
3m	netta	nutni
3f	nettat	nutenti

Tamasheq	sg.	pl.
1m	năkk	năkkăneḍ
1f	năkk	năkkănăteḍ
2m	kăyy	kăwăneḍ
2f	kămm	kămăteḍ
3m	ənta	əntăneḍ
3f	ənta	əntănăteḍ

Numerals

Numerals are never inflected for case

...except for the few that have the prefix; contrast:

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
three	kăraḍ	kăraḍ
-	-	-

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
hundred	t-e-meḍe	t-ă-meḍe
hundreds	t-i-maḍ	t-ə-maḍ

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
ten	măraw	măraw
-	-	-

Tamasheq f.	free	annexed
ten-some (dizaine)	t-a-mara	t-ă-mara
ten-somes	t-i-mərw-en	t-ə-mərw-en

Baby talk nouns

Usually take no morphology, lack prefix, reduplicated; e.g. Tashelhiyt:

- **buwwa** ‘water’
- **mummu** ‘child’
- **diddi** ‘pain’
- **psupsu** ‘cat’

(Bynon 1968, Gutova 2015...)

Bare loans

Includes loans from Sub-Saharan African languages, Spanish, ...

Tarifit m.	free	annexed
electricity	kwarinti	kwarinti
-	-	-

Tamasheq m.	free	annexed
stalk	koɣəri	koɣəri
stalks	koɣəri-t-ǎn	koɣəri-t-ǎn

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- For morphological reasons
 - No prefix: kinship terms, some verbal nouns, some onomatopoeic/baby talk forms, most proper nouns, personal pronouns, many loanwords...
 - **Uninflectable prefix**

Loanwords

Arabic loans borrowed with reflexes of *al-*

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
calculation	l-ḥisab	l-ḥisab
calculations	l-ḥisab-at	l-ḥisab-at

Kabyle f.	free	annexed
carrion	l-ḡif-a	l-ḡif-a
carrions	l-ḡif-at	l-ḡif-at

Tamasheq f.	free	annexed
usefulness	ǎl-fayd-a	ǎl-fayd-a
"es	ǎl-fayd-at-ǎn	ǎl-fayd-at-ǎn

W-initial prefixes (North, masc. only)

Argued to be retentions

Usually flora/fauna

Cf. **wa** DemMSg

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
plant sp.	wa(-)jdim	wa(-)jdim
-	-	-

Kabyle m.	free	annexed
broomrape (<i>Orobanche</i>)	wa-zduz	wa-zduz
-	-	-

cf. Brugnatelli 1997 etc.

Case (state) uninflectedness

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 - uninflectable prefix: many Arabic loanwords; inherited w-initial prefixes
- **For semantic reasons?**

Proper nouns

Personal names and place names can be inflected for case if they start with the prefix...

A: It is gotten in the north. A place that we call "Amajon." On the far side of Tadghaqq (a place), in the north. (It's) what is called "the saltlick of Amajon." It [focus] is what the whole country (=region) of Timbuktu goes to (to get saltlick).
D: You (there) now she-camels. What is best for them, saltlick or salt,

A: i-t-éjraw [s a-félla], é-dægg-\əs nə-jánna
 a-mæjon, i-lla-\hín e 't-æ-draq-q [s a-félla],
 a-\hə-s i-tæw-ænnə-n ə-hara w-a n æ-mæjon,
 ənta [à i-t-ákk [æ-kall w-á-dæy fúkk ən
 tɪmbətku]

(Tamasheq: Heath 2005:40)

But even when they do, they may not be...

Proper nouns

(cf. Abrous 2023)

ye-qqim Arezqi di lḥebs

3MSG-stay.PFV Arezki in jail

“Arezki stayed in jail”

Lyaqut t-enna=as i Arezqi

PN 3FSG-say.PFV=3SG.DAT to Arezki

“Yakout said to Arezki”

ten-jemɛn. Lyaqut tenna-as i **Arezqi** "ur truḥu ara acku ad aken-awwin." Asmi i yesla **Urezqi** belli at uxxam-nɛn iwwin-ten, yerwel ur yezri sanitaire. Yerra yer tesga, armi i yesla i sut n uqejun,

(Saadi & Landri 2020)

sawalen-asen « arraw n **Caɛban** », ur zriy ayyer. Nutni deg wasmi d-kkren d igujilen, ladya baba ur d-issawed ara jeddi, werḡin t-yessin. Limmer kan sen-sawalen « arraw n **Tasaɛdit** » yef setti. Laɛmum

(Kabyle, Feraoun/Ould Taleb 2004:9)

yesla Urezqi belli...

3MSG-hear.PFV Arezki.ANN COMP...

“Arezki heard that...”

lehdur n Urezqi

speech of Arezki.ANN

“the speech of Arezki”

Yiwwas deg wussan n cɛetwa, truḥ seg At Ziri, yer Yigawawen i wakken ad d-tawi ayen ara ččen warraw-is. Deg ubrid n tuyalin i d-bedden **Tasaɛdit** d terbaɛt-is yer iseyli gar Yilulen d Ssaḥel n At Yeḡḡer, ylint-d rrublanat d tiyita fell-asen s rraṣaṣ, dya dinna temmut yiwet n telwest n **Tsaɛdit** i umi qqaren Fatima izewḡen yer taddart n Ssaḥel.

(Kabyle, Hamadouche 2007:18)

Diachronic attestations

- Ibn Tunart (Morocco, 12th c.):
 - prefixless nouns, e.g. **mṭṭid-ulli** “goat-sucker”, **ḍikkuk** “Alcor (= cuckoo?)”
unambiguously uninflected in:
tibi n Mṣr ‘mallow of Egypt (Mṣr)’
 - wa- nouns: **wabiba** ‘mosquito’, **waylellu** ‘henbane’
- Al-Kutami (Morocco, 13th c.):
 - uninflected vowel-initial stems attested:
tabzzuyt n tili ‘ear of the ewe (t-ili)’
- Leiden fragment (Morocco, 14th c.): Arabic <'l-> written identically in all case contexts, suggesting case uninflectability
- Kitāb al-Barbariyya (Tunisia/Libya, ca. 14th c.??): ditto? (work in progress...)

Leiden MS Or. 23.306 (the ‘Leiden fragment’, possibly 14th century):
one leaf containing 18 lines of continuous Berber text on ethics.



Courtesy of E. Gutova

(cf. van den Boogert 1997, 2000, Brugnatelli 2011, Amennou 2022, Gutova ms...)

Reconstructing case-uninflectedness

Proto-Berber noun class prefix < article
("demonstrative cycle", Greenberg 1978)

Case was marked only on the article, primarily
through "annexed" vowel shortening

=> No article (or wrong article), no case inflection

Proto-Berber m. def.	free	annexed
sg.	*∅-a	*w-ǎ
pl.	*∅-i	*y-ə (<**w-ǐ?)

Proto-Berber f. def.	free	annexed
sg.	*t-a	*t-ǎ
pl.	*t-i	*t-ə (<**t-ǐ?)

Reconstructing case-uninflectedness

All varieties have reconstructible case-uninflected personal pronouns, numerals, demonstratives...

Prefixless nouns consistent enough to reconstruct:

	Zenaga	Tashelhiyt	Figuiq	Kabyle	Tahaggart	Awjila	proto-Berber
hunger	āžārīh	ḷaz	laz	laz	laz	təlazat	*laz
thirst	fād	fud	fad	fad	fad	təfadat	*fad
sister	yādmāh	ultma	wətna	wəltma	wālātma	wərtna	*wālāt-ma
sisters	tyšādmāh	istma	yessma, taw	yəssətma	šetma	sətma	*ysāt-ma
daughter	togžəT	illi	yəlli	yəlli	yäll	wəlli	*yälle
daughters	tugžäyn	isti	yəssi	yəssi	əšš		*yāste
thing > something	kārāh	kra	crā	kra	hārāt	kəra	*kāhra?
things	əḍkārūn			-	hārātān		
pupil/iris	ārābī-n-tuḌ		mummu	mummu	məmma	amimi	*mVmmV
pupils/irises			id mummu	-	məmmatān		

Conclusion

- Case uninflectedness in Berber is:
 - diachronically stable for specific words, classes
 - pronouns, numerals
 - core kin terms, some verbal nouns
 - synchronically largely predictable from form alone
 - conditioned primarily by morphological and secondarily by phonological factors
 - minimal semantic effects, only indirect etymological effects
- Broader implications:
 - (Partial) uninflectedness need neither be transitional nor marginal

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