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Compare to reconstruct

This talk presents a case study from Berber whereby comparatistic evidence (comparing different Berber languages and different dialects of a given Berber language, Kabyle) fills a gap in the synchronic analysis of Kabyle, bringing back to regularity a seemingly irregular pattern.

Internal plural in Kabyle Berber (dialect of Ain El Hammam, Dallet 1982) as under (1) is characterized by the fact that V1 undergoes apophony, whereby the last vowel is always A. Apophonic alternations (in the sense of Guerssel & Lowenstamm 1996, found in a number of languages) follow the apophonic path $\emptyset \rightarrow i \rightarrow a \rightarrow u \rightarrow u$.

(1)

masc. sg.	masc. pl.	V1 sg - pl	gloss
jazið	juzað	a ~ u	« chicken »
βaçur	βuçar	a ~ u	« fig »
βuʃiʃ	βuʃaʃ	u ~ u	« ash »
βuðəʃ	βuðaʃ	u ~ u	« anthrax »

But some plural forms appear to disobey the apophonic regularity, producing u instead of the expected a in the plural:

(2)

singular	internal plural	V1 sg - pl	gloss
ziçər	zuçar	i - u	« cord »
ðiçəl	ðuçal	i - u	« hand »
ħiqəl	ħuqal	i - u	« partridge (male) »
ziðuð	zuðað	i - u	« wood pigeon »

In other Berber languages, however, the plural of the same roots follows the apophonic path as predicted (Taine-cheikh 2008, Destaing 1914):

(3)

language	singular	V1 sg - pl	plural	gloss
Zenaga (Mauritania)	ziʔgər	i - a	zaʔgar	« cord »
	ziðuð	i - a	zaðað	« bird of prey »
Beni Snous (Ouest of Algeria)	ħaqul	a - u	ħuqal	« partridge (male) »
	zaðuð	a - u	zuðað	« wood pigeon »

We can therefore assume that the Kabyle plurals under (2) have once borne the expected a which for some reason in diachronic evolution was altered and became u. This is confirmed by variation found within Kabyle dialects.

(4)

dialects	singular	V1 sg-pl	plural
El Kseur, Akbou and Tazmalt	hiqul	i – a	haqal
Maatka	ziçər	i – a	zaçar
Zoubga and Maatka	ðiçal	i – a	ðaçal
El Kseur and Akbou	jiðər	i – a	jaðar
El Kseur	ziðuð	i – a	zaðað