

Diatopic variation in Kabyle Berber: the case of noun formation

My paper deals with noun formation and morpho-phonological variation in dialects of Kabyle Berber (spoken in northern Algeria), focusing on number formation. Kabyle dialects, like other Berber languages, follow a concatenative morphology since no semantic or morpho-syntactic information is attached to vowels/consonants or templates. Furthermore, they can be considered to be templatic, as I (Ben Si Said 2014) demonstrated based on the constant size of plurals. Consonants and vowels are stored together in the root (vocalized) while templates are stored independently in the lexicon. Contrary to Semitic languages, which distinguish three lexical ‘ingredients’ for a word — consonant root, vowel and template — Berber has only two: root (vocalized) and template.

Based on a corpus composed of tokens from Dallet (1982)’s dictionary of AEH Kabyle and data collected from other Kabyle dialects, I propose the following:

1. In AEH
 - a. Plural melodic items which do not occur in the singular are unpredictable and are part of the lexical root ingredients
 - b. Plurals have a constant size of 5 CV units.
2. 1a and 1b can in fact be generalized to all Kabyle dialects.

In this templatic but perfectly concatenative environment, I develop a theory of diatopic variation with two loci. First, I show that the association between a given root and a corresponding template varies across dialects. Second, melodically identical roots may contain segments which carry different lexical information as to their behaviour at the time of association, in different dialects. Given that work on diatopic variation in Afro-Asiatic is sparse, it would be interesting to see if the variation in other languages works in the same way.

References:

- Ben Si Said, Samir. 2014. De la nature de la variation diatopique en kabyle: étude de la formation des singulier et pluriel nominaux. Ph.D dissertation, Nice University.
- Dallet, J.-M. 1982. Dictionnaire français-kabyle. Paris, Selaf.