

Segment sequences in diatopic variation of Kabyle Berber

The Borer-Chomsky conjecture (Baker 2008, Biberauer 2008, among others) holds that syntax has a uniform computational system across languages, and hence that parametric (or other) variation is exclusively due to distinctions in the lexicon. The present contribution shows that this may also be a valid research strategy in phonology.

In Kabyle Berber, the plural formation of nouns is a traditional topic of debate (Chaker 1983): while external plurals (formed by a suffix and without internal modification of the root) are more or less regular, internal plurals (formed by internal modification of the root, plus a suffix) appear to be idiosyncratic and arbitrarily distributed over a number of plural classes. I have shown in Ben Si Said (2010, 2011) that in Kabyle Berber there is only one plural template that accounts for all sg-pl variation. Its size restrictions cause either the inaudibility of segmental material that is expressed in the sg, or allows for segmental material that cannot be pronounced in the sg to be expressed. The table below illustrates the latter case.

Sg	pl	gloss
ijʃər	aʃʃar-n	nail
inʃəw	anʃiʃw-n	feather
iməçli	iməçliw-n	meal
imənyɪ	imənyɪθ-n	fight

Since the segmental material that appears only in the pl (in boldface in the table above) cannot be predicted, it must belong to the lexical representation of the root. In other words, there are restrictions, i.e. templates, on sg forms as well. Singular forms are in fact distributed over 22 distinct templates, which all neutralize to the one single pl template.

Plural formation appears to work in the same way in many, or all varieties of Berber. Data on diatopic variation that are reported below originate in fieldwork that I have conducted in seven points of inquiry that are distributed over so-called Grande Kabylie and Petite Kabylie (Basset (1929), <http://matoub.kabylie.free.fr/carte-geographique-kabylie.htm>) in June 2011.

The data below show typical variation where for a given root different dialects share a plural form, but have (two or three) diverging singulars.

singular		dialect 3	plural	gloss	identification of the dialects
dialect 1	dialect 2		all varieties		
ijəllil	ijlil	–	ijəllilən	poor	- dialect 1 = Ain El Hammam - dialect 2 = Azazga - dialect 3 = Tazmalt
aβuzəð	aβuzəði	–	iβuzəðijən	amateur	
ijʃəw	ijʃi	ijʃ	aʃʃiwən	corn	

I show that the variation regarding singular forms does not concern melody or the segmental identity of the root: for any given root, all dialects share the same lexical entry. Rather, diatopic, i.e. parametric variation is due to the association of invariable lexical entries to different singular templates. These are also the same over all dialects. Hence a given root will select sg template number 3 in dialect A, but sg template number 7 in dialect B, and the specification which template a root is mapped onto is of course also lexical.

The presentation shows that the generalizations mentioned, and namely the invariability of the plural template over singulars in a given dialect, and across dialects, can only be arrived at when adopting a number of premises that are developed in Government Phonology in general, and in CVCV in particular (Lowenstamm 1996, Scheer 2004). These include the hypothesis that peripheral vowels (i,a,u) are underlyingly long, and that melodic material associated to a single V-position surfaces as schwa or zero (Lowenstamm 1991, Bendjaballah 2005).

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