

FRANCISCO, Felipe Benjamin:
The Arabic Dialect of
Essaouira (Morocco):
Grammar and Texts.
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The Arabic dialects of Morocco are well studied, nevertheless we are still in need of comprehensive descriptions of many dialects of Morocco that could help us understand the complex linguistic situation of this country. The study of Moroccan Arabic dialects began with the arrival of colonial settlers and scholars from Europe, e.g.: Kampffmeyer (1912), a German researcher, and Loubignac (1952), an administrator of the French colonial rulers. The variety of Essaouira was described by the Swiss Orientalist, Albert Socin, in 1893, based on an interview with a single informant. Since then, a few short studies have been published on this dialect, but they have always focused on Jewish dialects, ignoring the Muslim variety due to the false idea that Essaouira was mainly ethnically Berber, or Amazigh (p. 14).

The study discussed here fills a gap that has long been waiting to be filled: The description of the Muslim variety of Essaouira. The publication was an updated version of the author's PhD dissertation, written originally in Portuguese, and defended at the University of São Paulo in 2019, as he mentions in the foreword. The monograph provides a concise description of the dialect of this city, including texts.

The Introduction, consisting of 39 pages, gives a historical overview of the city, which is located on the Atlantic coast to the north of Agadir and south of Casablanca. The author also pays attention to the social context of the city, which lies on the border between the Arabic dialects, which are of Bedouin origin (Hilali dialects) and a part of the country where Amazigh (Berber), more precisely Tachelhit, is the predominant language. During three fieldwork trips, the author collected almost 30 hours of free speech recordings and recorded questionnaires. Additionally, he provides comprehensive biographical and sociolinguistic information on seven key informants involved in his research. They are representative of different varieties (urban and rural; Muslim and Jewish), gender (male and female), generations (elder and young) and districts of the city (old medina and new neighbourhoods).

The second part of the book is devoted to the linguistic description of the Arabic varieties of the city and its surroundings. The study of Phonetics and Phonology, collectively occupies approximately 20 pages. This section is subdivided into three parts: vowels, consonants and syllabic structure. With regard to the vowel system, it is consistent with that of other Moroccan dialects, exhibiting the etymological long vowels of Classical Arabic as stable vowels and the short vowels ə and ŭ. A topic that is frequently discussed in the study of Moroccan Arabic is whether the ultra-short ŭ is an allophone of ə or a phoneme on its own. The author of this book provides minimal pairs which indicate that these

phonemes are distinct: *xrəḏ* 'he left' ≠ *xrūḏ* 'get out!' (p.41) demonstrates that the two phonemes are not identical. Furthermore, the author posits that the two ultra-short vowels exhibit a considerable number of allophones due to their consonantal environment. Regarding etymological long vowels, no distinctive changes are observed, and a considerable number of allophones are also evident, as documented in the referenced publication. It is noteworthy that the Essaouira dialect has preserved diphthongs in pharyngeal contexts, as evidenced by *bəyḏ* ~ *bīḏ* 'eggs', but also in plain contexts as in *mnəymta* 'a long time ago' (p. 46). The second subsection deals with consonants and is organized by their place of articulation. Noteworthy here is that, as in numerous Moroccan dialects with a significant influence of Amazigh, the affricated allophone of /t/ is found [tʃ], as in *inṭīwi* 'effeminate', although it remains marginal in many cases: *təmma* 'there' (p. 50). As expected, the author finds the realization of CA *q as g to be predominant in this dialect. Nevertheless, he also attests the change from /q / > [k] and even one occurrence of /q / > [ʔ], but only in the speech of Jewish informants as would be expected (p. 55).

The chapter on consonants concluded with a description of consonantal phenomena, such as labialization in the context of velars and uvulars, and the very interesting alternation between /l/ and /n/, which may be of Amazigh but also Jewish origin (p. 57). A fairly common phenomenon in this dialect is assimilation (e.g.: *kətt* < *kənt* 'I was'), which does not occur as a general rule (p.57), and the sibilant harmony also falls under this rule (example: *məššīd* 'mosque'). Regarding vocalic phenomena, it is noteworthy that there is a base alteration to avoid short vowels in open syllables: *bəgrətti* 'my cow', *mākləttək* 'your food' (p. 49). The last subsection of the Phonetics and Phonology chapter is about syllable structure, listing all the possible syllables in this dialect, which are not different from the majority of Moroccan Arabic dialects.

The next 60 pages are dedicated to morphology, which is divided into Verbal Morphology (p. 61-96) and Nominal Morphology (p. 97-124), which cover all the topics commonly dealt with in Arabic dialectology. With regard to verbal morphology, the following should be noted: There is no gender distinction in the perfective in the 2 SG, as in many Moroccan dialects. In the imperfective, however, the second person does differentiate between genders, unlike in the northern or Jewish dialects of Morocco. The chapter on verbal morphology goes on to list all the patterns of triliteral, hollow, defective and assimilated verb forms. The active participle is treated with the corresponding verb pattern. Interestingly, although the active participle mostly has the ending -in, it also occurs as a feminine plural with the ending -āt, e.g.: *xərḏāt* 'those coming out' (p. 64), which is rather rare in Morocco.

Regarding the conjugation of verbs, there are two points to be made which are covered in the book: First, the 1 and 2 SG of defective verbs may surface with *-āy*, e.g. *tebqāy* ‘you F stay’ (p.67). Second, defective verbs in the plural may end with *-u* instead of *-īw*, as in most Moroccan Arabic dialects, resulting in *ta-yišru* ‘they buy’ (p.68). The author identifies the ending on *-u* as a Bedouin variant (see Francisco, 2021).

This is also reflected in the conjugation of the verb *ža*, *yži*, which is mostly *ižiw* ‘they come’, but the variant *ižu* is also attested. The imperative of *ža* ‘to come’ may—only in the masculine form—be *tšāla*, which the author also identifies as a rural Bedouin expression. The next few pages are devoted to the derived forms of verbs, analysed from the perspective of the Arabist tradition, in the sense that it is organized in stems. The chapter on Verbal Morphology concludes with a brief but very informative analysis of verbal aspects and auxiliary verbs.

The chapter on Nominal Morphology begins with a thorough description of morphological patterns, very often with reference to Classical Arabic. It then proceeds to describe aspects of gender (p. 101) and number (p. 102) are described. In these aspects the dialect of Essaouira does not differ from most mainstream Moroccan Arabic dialects. A particular highlight is the assimilation of the definite article *l-* with traditionally lunar letters: *b-dūk əl-b^wqā x-xăḍrīn* “with those green spots” (p.111). This is followed by 20 pages of descriptions of all kinds of pronouns and particles. The use of *hăqqān* ‘perhaps’ as a variant to the predominant *wāqīla* (p.122). The book does not contain a glossary as many works do, but it presents the Lexicon in different sections and delves into the etymology of some lexical items in footnotes, such as the local word *qəždəṛ* ‘gecko’ (p.55). The last chapter of the book contains selected texts from the authors recording providing interesting information on anthropological and historical aspects of life in Essaouira now and then.

To sum up, this book is another very valuable publication on Moroccan Arabic dialects. The concise grammar contains all the important aspects for Arabic dialectologists to progress in their work. The author, Felipe Benjamin Francisco, has captured the dialect as it is today, as well as important aspects of life in this coastal town. With the rapid spread of Moroccan Koiné, this dialect could easily be forgotten. With his contribution, Francisco has saved a part of it for the future.

References

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