

Quality Expression in Senhaja Berber (and beyond)

Evgeniya GUTOVA
jeniaa@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper discusses the descriptive terms that express quality (in other words, that denote properties) in Berber languages, with a focus on Senhaja Berber (Northern Morocco). It is observed that in most Berber languages, quality expression is usually carried out by two word classes – verbs and nouns – that are morphologically not distinct from the regular verbs and nouns. Some Berber languages have a distinct class of stative verbs that can be used to express quality. In Senhaja, there is no distinct class of stative verbs. However, stative verbs found in other Berber languages correspond to adjectives in Senhaja, that form a distinct word class (different from verbs and nouns). These native Berber adjectives most likely developed in Senhaja from old stative verbs due to intense contact with Arabic, from which Senhaja borrowed a large number of adjectives. Arabic adjectives function as Berber adjectives, but differ in morphological marking. The paper demonstrates that Senhaja and Berber languages in general are not homogeneous when it comes to the quality expression. Berber languages present evidence for the fluidity of borders between word classes (verbs, nouns, adjective).

Keywords: quality expression, property concepts, attributive modification, adjectives, word classes, language change, language contact, Berber, Senhaja.

Structure of the talk

1. Introduction (Berber languages, qualification)
2. Qualification in (Senhaja) Berber
3. Adjectives in Senhaja
4. Survey: qualification in Senhaja Berber (and beyond)
5. Conclusions

1. Introduction

Berber

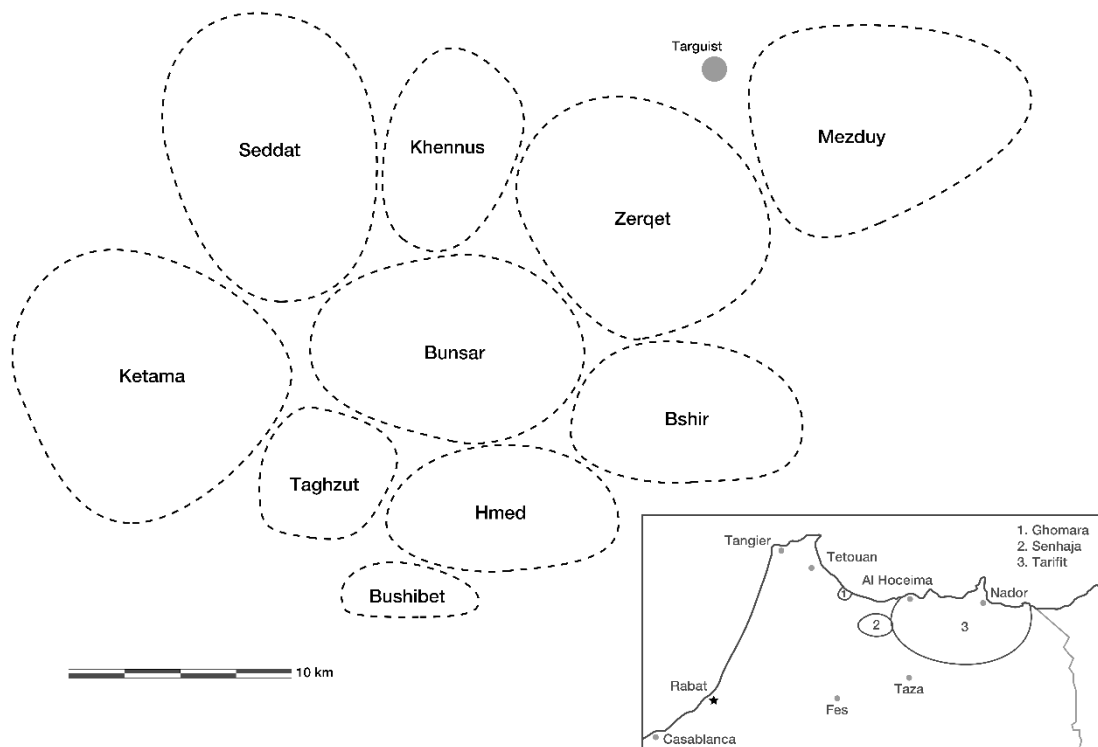
- Berber languages: Afroasiatic phylum;
- North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt)
- Also (small populations) in Mauritania (Zenaga Berber), Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger (Tuareg), not discussed in this paper;¹
- This paper focuses on Northern Berber > Senhaja Berber (Northern Morocco).

¹ On Zenaga, see Taine-Cheikh 2003, 2009. For grammars of Tuareg, see Heath 2005, Prasse 2010, and Kossmann 2011. Specifically on qualification, cf. Benítez-Torres (*forthcoming*).

Senhaja Berber

- Northern Morocco, Western Rif mountains;
- Neighbors: Riffian Berber (Tarifit) and Ghomara; distinct from both languages;
- Underdescribed: Renisio 1932; dictionary: Ibáñez 1959; linguistic atlas: Lafkioui 2007; article by Kossmann 2017; PhD thesis by Gutova 2021;
- Number of speakers: ca. 85,000;
- Bilingualism: Berber/dialectal Arabic;
- Present talk is based on fieldwork data.

Map of Senhaja Berber varieties



Qualification

- Comparative concepts vs. descriptive categories (Haspelmath 2010). “An adjective is a lexeme that denotes a descriptive property and that can be used to narrow the reference of a noun.”
- The paper discusses the descriptive terms that express quality (that denote properties) in Senhaja and other Berber languages;
- We can distinguish between “quality words” (a comparative concept) and “true adjectives” (a descriptive category: a word class).
- Most Berber languages: no true adjectives (Guerssel 1986);
- Qualification: quality nouns or verbs, morphologically not distinct from other nouns or verbs (Chaker 1985; Galand 2002, 2010; Lafkioui 2007; Taine-Cheikh 2009, 2014);
- Some Berber languages have stative verbs that can be used to express quality.

Qualification in Senhaja

- Senhaja: quality expression can be carried out by verbs and nouns; no stative verbs; stative verbs found in other Berber languages correspond to (native) adjectives (a distinct word class; few in number);
- Adjectives probably developed in Senhaja from stative verbs under the influence of Arabic, from which Senhaja borrowed a large number of adjectives, as well as participles.²

Flexibility

- Qualification in Senhaja and other Berber languages is expressed by different means;
- Quality words are a *hybrid class* (cf. Oomen *fc.* on Tarifit; Treis 2012 on Kambaata);
- Quality words in Senhaja are even more hybrid: nouns, verbs, but also true adjectives (native and borrowed);
- Many concepts can be expressed by different word classes (“flexible” lexemes), and borders between word classes are fluid (verbs, nouns, adjectives).

2. Qualification in Berber

Quality nouns

- Refer to things, can function as Subjects (as other nouns), can be used attributively;
- Distinguish two genders and two numbers (have 4 forms): MS, FS, MP, and FP (distinction expressed in affixes: prefixes and suffixes);
- Example: ‘white one’ (n.) in Senhaja (Hmed, Zerqet) and Goulmima (Central Atlas):

MS	FS	MP	FP	Variety
a-melluy	ṭ-a-melluy-ṭ	i-melluy-en	ṭ-i-melluy-in	Senhaja-Hmed
a-meḡḡul	ṭ-a-meḡḡul-ṭ	i-meḡḡul-en	ṭ-i-meḡḡul-in	Senhaja-Zerqet
a-mellal	t-a-mellal-t	i-mellal-n	t-i-mellal-in	Goulmima

When an attribute noun functions as a predicate, there is a predicative particle *d* in some Berber varieties (e.g. Central/Eastern Senhaja, Tarifit, Kabyle, Chaouia), but not in Western Senhaja, Goulmima, Siwa, etc. Compare Central Senhaja (Hmed) and Goulmima:

- (1) (a) *ayyuy* *d* *amelluy* (Senhaja-Hmed)
 ayyul *d* *amellal* (Kabyle)
 (b) *ayyul* - *amellal* (Goulmima)
 donkey:MS PRED white:one:MS
 ‘The donkey is white.’

² Participles (“verbal adjectives”) are discussed with adjectives in this paper (cf. Crystal 1985, Haspelmath 1994).

Quality verbs

- Express events, function as predicates, but at the same time describe properties;
- Take subject indexes, marking person (1, 2, 3), number (sg./pl.), and gender (m/f); inflect by means of affixes (prefixes and suffixes);
- Three aspects: Aorist (AOR), Perfective (PFV), Imperfective (IPFV);
- Perfective of quality verbs = state/result; IPF = inchoative;
- Example: Eastern Senhaja (Zerqet) and Goulmima:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(2) <i>i-mžul</i> (Snh.-Zerqet)
 <i>i-mlul</i> (Goulmima)
 3MS-be:white:PFV
 'It is white.'</p> | <p>(3) - <i>i-temžulay</i> (Snh.-Zerqet)
 <i>da y-ttmlil</i> (Goulmima)
 IPFV 3MS-be:white:IPFV
 'It is becoming white.'</p> |
|--|--|

The Relative Form

- Rel. form = verb form used in subject relative clauses;
- Most Berber varieties (including Senhaja) have one relative form invariable for gender and number, with the scheme: *i-...-n*;
- The relative form can function attributively, e.g. (Hmed Senhaja and Goulmima)

- | |
|--|
| <p>(4) <i>tafullust</i> <i>na</i> <i>y-eqya-n</i> (Senhaja-Hmed)
 <i>tafullust</i> - <i>i-qla-n</i> (Goulmima)
 chicken:FS RM RF-fry:PFV-RF
 'a fried chicken'</p> |
|--|

Stative verbs

- Some Berber languages have regularly conjugated quality verbs vs. stative verbs;
- Stative verbs are conjugated by suffixes only, e.g. (Kabyle, Algeria) (Dallet 1982):

Regular PNG		Stative PNG	
		'gather'	'be clean'
3MS	y-...	y-egmer	... zeddig
3FS	t-...	t-egmer	...-t zeddig-et
3P	...-en	gemr-en	...-it zeddig-it

- Senhaja: only remnants of the stative conjugation (> native adjectives);
- Native Berber adjectives in Senhaja correspond to stative verbs elsewhere;
- In some Senhaja varieties, adjectives can be conjugated (> "conjugated adjectives")
- They have no aspectual distinctions.

3. Adjectives in Senhaja

- Senhaja has (true) adjectives. Adjectives express properties, function as modifiers, agree with the noun in gender and number;
- Two sub-classes: borrowed Arabic adjectives (majority) and native Berber adjectives;
- Different markers, but the same function;
- Similar situation in Ghomara (Mourigh 2016);
- Arabic adjectives are borrowed with their morphology (incl. apophonic plurals);
- Berber adjectives have markers similar to the stative conjugation. E.g. (Hmed):

	Arabic ADJ			Berber ADJ	
		‘good’	‘white’		‘white’
MS	...	mezyan	byed _ɛ	...	melluy
FS	...-a	mezyan-a	beyd _ɛ -a	...-t	melluy-et
PL	...-in	mezyan-in	beyd _ɛ -in ~ buyed _ɛ	...-en	melluy-en

Adjective phrases can function as predicates (without predicative *d*). E.g. (Hmed):

- (5) (a) *ayyuy inu d amelluy*
donkey:MS of:1S PRED white:one:MS
- (b) *ayyuy inu melluy*
donkey:MS of:1S white:MS (<B)
- (c) *ayyuy inu byed_ɛ*
donkey:MS of:1S white:MS (<Ar.)
‘My donkey is white.’

Marking of Adjectives

- Different behavior in different dialects;
- In some dialects, adjectives can be conjugated (cf. Taine-Cheikh 2003 for Zenaga)
- Conjugation can be regular, as found with verbs (prefixes + suffixes), or special (suffixes only, cf. stative conjugation);
- Difference in borrowed vs. native adjectives.

Berber Adjectives

- Different types of behavior:
 - a) Special PNG marking (Taghzut, Bunsar, Zerqet)
 - b) Regular PNG marking (Seddat, parts of Zerqet);
 - c) Adjectives are not conjugated (Ketama, Hmed; Taghzut, Bunsar, Zerqet)
- Types (a) and (c) can co-occur;
- There is no real dialect continuum.

- | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| (6) | (a) | <i>(keǵǵi)</i>
(2MS) | <i>mezzi-d</i>
small-2S | (Taghzut) |
| | (b) | <i>(keǵǵi)</i>
(2MS) | <i>t-mezzi-d</i>
2S-small-2S | (Seddat) |
| | (c) | <i>keǵǵi</i>
2MS | <i>mezzi</i>
small:MS | (Ketama, Taghzut) |
| | | 'You are small/young.' | | |

	Ketama	Taghzut	Seddat	Hmed	Bunsar	Zerqet
a) special conjugation	---	mezzi- <u>d</u>	---	---	mezziy- <u>ed</u>	mezziy- <u>ed</u>
b) regular conjugation	---	---	<u>t</u> -mezzi- <u>d</u>	---	---	<u>t</u> -mezziy- <u>ed</u>
c) non-conjugated	mezzi	mezzi	---	meččik	mezzi	mezzi

- (a) The original situation: stative conjugation (remnants in Taghzut, Bunsar, Zerqet); Different developments:
- (b) Conjugation is regularized (Seddat); or
- (c) Conjugation ceases (following an Arabic model) > native adjectives emerge (the only option in Ketama, Hmed; a possibility in Taghzut, Bunsar, Zerqet).

- Conjugated in parts of Senhaja (e.g. Taghzut);
- Special markers, similar to Berber adjectives (< stative verbs), e.g. (Taghzut):

Conjugated and non-conjugated adjectives are found in the same context, e.g. (Taghzut)

Conjugated adjectives are a distinct class from normally conjugated verbs, although they can be cognate, e.g. Taghzut:

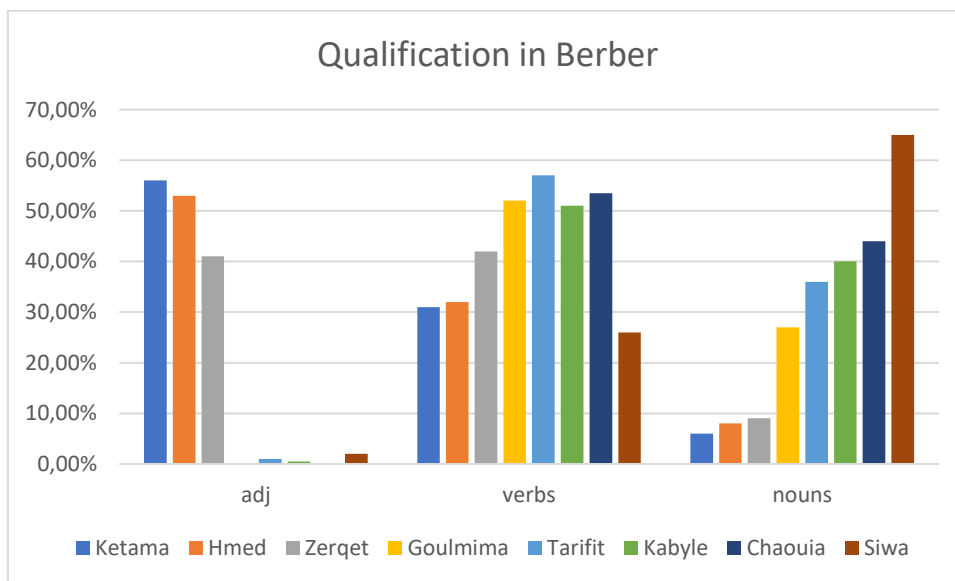
(9) (a) *meqqur-ay*
big-1S
'I am big/old.'

(b) *myur-ay*
gow:PERF-1S
'I grew up.', 'I became big.'

4. Survey: Qualification in Senhaja Berber (and beyond)

- Questionnaire based on Tröbs, Rothmaler & Winkelmann 2008 = *Qualification in African Languages* (113 concepts);
- Survey carried out for three Senhaja varieties (West, Center, East), and a few other Berber languages, from Senhaja and Goulmima Berber in the West (Morocco), to the Siwa oasis in Egypt (see <https://academia.li/gutova/property-concepts> for the data);
- Preliminary results (Ketama=West, Hmed = Center, Zerqet=East Senhaja):³

	Ketama	Hmed	Zerqet	Goulmima	Tarifit	Kabyle	Chaouia	Siwa
Adj.	56 %	53%	41%	0%	1%	0,5%	0%	2%
Verbs	31%	32%	42%	52%	57%	51%	53,5%	26%
Nouns	6%	8%	9%	27%	36%	40%	44%	65%



Adjectives

- Within Senhaja, the number of adjectives grows from East to West;
- Outside Senhaja (whether in the neighboring Tarifit or in the distant Siwa), adjectives are a marginal category, represented by a couple of Arabic loans;
NB: There are no native Berber adjectives in the surveyed Berber languages outside Senhaja (where they were counted together with the borrowed Arabic adjectives).

³ In the following table and chart, only the main word classes (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) are represented. Some qualities are expressed by adverbs, pseudo-verbs (particles that can take verbal clitics), or phrases. These together constitute from 2% to 20% of the surveyed quality expressions, depending on the variety.

Verbs

- Contrary to adjectives, quality verbs grow in number in Senhaja from West to East;
- The number of quality verbs grows further and peaks in the neighboring Tarifit (where it is the most frequent quality word), and then diminishes further to the East.

Nouns

- The number of quality nouns within Senhaja grows from West to East (as quality verbs and contrary to adjectives);
- Quality nouns are not as frequent as quality verbs or adjectives in Senhaja;
- The number of quality nouns in Senhaja is not as high as in other Berber languages;
- In Siwa (Easternmost Berber language), quality nouns are the most frequent part of speech to express qualities;
- Across Berber, the number of quality nouns progresses Eastwards, peaking in Siwa.

Other observations regarding the survey (not represented in the chart):

- Some properties are expressed by other parts of speech, e.g. adverbs or pseudo-verbs (particles that can take verbal clitics), usually ca. 2-3%;
- Some concepts from the questionnaire do not have a single-word equivalent in Berber, and are expressed by phrases (nominal, verbal, prepositional), from 2% to 18%, depending on the variety. Nominal phrases could be based on the classifier *bu* ('having the characteristics of', 'the owner of', cf. Bensoukas 2015), or could include the negative element (e.g. Goulmima *war* 'without': 'brave' > lit. 'without fear'); verbal phrases also include negated forms, e.g. 'to be brave' > 'not to fear'; 'to be naked' > 'to be not dressed', and so on;
- The same concept can be expressed by different word classes; such lexemes (roots) may be called "flexible", e.g. (Zerqet): adjective *qšir* 'short' and verb *qšir* 'to be short';
- In Goulmima Berber, 29% of quality words are flexible i.e. can be expressed by different parts of speech (most typically, nouns and verbs);
- In Western Senhaja, adjectives may have cognate verbs that express a change of state, e.g. *qšir* 'short' vs. *qšar* 'become short', but are usually not exactly equivalent.

Additional examples

The quality 'insipid'

	Adj. Ar. (Ketama/Hmed)	Adj. Berber (Hmed)		Verb (Zerqet)
MS	messus	messus	3MS	i-messus
FS	messus-a	messus-et	3FS	t-messus
PL	messus-in	messus-en	3P	messus-en

The quality 'white'

	Adj. Ar. (Ketama)	Adj. Berber (Hmed)		Noun (Hmed)	Noun (Zerqet)		Verb (Zerqet)
MS	byeḍ	melluy	MS	a-melluy	a-meḡḡul	3MS	i-mžul
FS	beyḍ-a	melluy-et	FS	ta-melluy-t	ta-meḡḡul-t	3FS	te-mžul
PL	buyaḍ	melluy-en	MP	i-melluy-en	i-meḡḡul-en	3P	mžul-en

5. Conclusions

Hybrid class

- Quality words are a hybrid class in Berber in general, and esp. in Senhaja;
- Most Berber languages: quality nouns and quality verbs;
- Senhaja: quality nouns, quality verbs, but also adjectives, with two sub-classes: borrowed and native, with different morphological markers.

Adjectives in Senhaja

- Adjectives are an innovation in Senhaja: Arabic adjectives are a result of borrowing, while Berber adjectives evolved from stative verbs;
- Synchronically, Berber and Arabic adjectives constitute one word class;
- Some Senhaja varieties have conjugated (Berber or Berber + Ar.) adjectives;
- Conjugated adjectives are not verbs:
 - they have a special marking (except Seddat);
 - they have no aspectual distinctions.

Continuum

- Conjugated adjectives = quasi-verbs: a category between adjectives and verbs;
- Continuum: non-verbs <----> verbs:
 - Adjectives mark only gender and number;
 - Conjugated adjectives also mark the person, but lack aspectual distinctions.

Variation

- Fluidity of borders between word classes (verbs, nouns, adjectives);
- The role of language change and language contact in the emergence of a word class;
- Variability across dialects and different quality words allows one to trace possible developmental paths towards adjectives as a word class in Senhaja.

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