

MULTIGLOSSIA AND PHONETICS IN A MEDIEVAL JUDEO-ARABIC WORK¹

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1. Judeo-Arabic

Judeo-Arabic (JA) is usually defined as that particular form of Arabic used by Jewish minority populations in Arab lands. It shows certain features which make it different from the Arabic spoken and written by their Muslim and Christian neighbors, notably the use of the Hebrew alphabet and the influence of Hebrew and Aramaic in different linguistic areas, mainly the lexicon³. Although from a strictly linguistic point of view, these differences become nearly insignificant in some periods and geographic regions, from a sociological and cultural perspective the differentiation of this language variety from other forms of Arabic is substantial.

Culturally, Judeo-Arabic belongs to the domain of Jewish languages, such as Yiddish (Judeo-German) or Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). Such languages share the two linguistic components mentioned above, which arise as a result of the influence of the Jewish religious tradition⁴. Taking into consideration this Jewish component, B. Hary has posited the more specific denomination of ethnolect for Judeo-Arabic⁵.

This study focuses on a concrete variety of Judeo-Arabic: Medieval or Classical Judeo-Arabic⁶. This Judeo-Arabic can be considered from a linguistic perspective as Middle Arabic, *i. e.*, Classical Arabic in general which shows a considerable influence of the spoken language or Neo-Arabic, as well as pseudocorrections and standardised pseudocorrections⁷. Some scholars have claimed that these deviations of Classical Arabic are due to the inability of writers to master the intricacies of the grammar of the normative language. This explanation would fit for Muslim authors using Middle Arabic, but does not adequately explain the practices of Judeo-Arabic

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³See Blau (1981).

⁴See Birnbaum (1971), Fishman (1987), Rabin (1979) and Wexler (1981).

⁵See Hary (1996:727).

⁶See Hary (1992:76 and 79) for terminology concerning medieval JA.

⁷See Hary (1992:67-68).

authors. For the latter group we have to consider as well the existence of an independent linguistic tradition.

It has to be noted that the evolution of Arabic from the old analytic type to various synthetic dialects has not been reflected in the written language. This latter has remained as a prestigious standard variety, as the language of the Koran. Therefore, as J. Blau has pointed out, Middle Arabic constitutes an essential source for the study of the history of Arabic⁸. The non-normative features reflected in these texts help trace the evolution of Arabic from its old form (Old Arabic) into the modern dialects. This is why Blau has referred to Middle Arabic as the "missing link"⁹.

Medieval Judeo-Arabic texts may be considered a special corpus within Middle Arabic. The amount of dialectological features is greater than in works written by Muslim authors, primarily because Jewish authors are free of the ideal of *ṣarabiyya* that applies to Muslim writers. For them, the ideal language is not Arabic, the sacred language of Islam, but Hebrew and, to a lesser extent, Aramaic, the language in which the Torah was originally written¹⁰.

2. Jonah ibn Janāḥ

Abū al-Walīd Jonah ibn Janāḥ is undoubtedly one of the greatest Hebrew grammarians. Born in al-Andalus at the end of the tenth century, he was active during the eleventh century, but his exact dates are not known. His best known works, a grammar (*Kitāb al-lumaʿ*) and a dictionary of biblical Hebrew (*Kitāb al-uṣūl*), represented one of the most important developments of the Middle Ages in the knowledge of Hebrew¹¹. In addition, he wrote several other grammatical works, including the *Kitāb al-taswiʿa* discussed below. His works deeply influenced later grammatical works. His grammatical analysis follows that of Arab grammarians, specially Sībawayhi and Mubarrad. All of his extant works are written in Judeo-Arabic. This is the case of a Judeo-Arabic author whose knowledge of Classical Arabic is beyond question. His analysis of Hebrew shows not only his mastery of this language but also his knowledge of the principles governing both Semitic languages. Among other indications of his grammatical expertise, we may note his use the principle of triconsonantal roots, his explanations of the existence and behavior of weak letters and so forth.

3. The *Kitāb al-taswiʿa* (KT), a Judeo-Arabic Work

The *Kitāb al-taswiʿa* (Book of Reprobation) is a grammatical treatise which he composed as a response to critics of his earlier work *Kitāb al-mustalḥaq*. A linguistic analysis of the language of the KT confirms two facts. On the one hand, the author's command of Classical Arabic and, on the other, his adherence to the standards of Medieval Judeo-Arabic.

Ibn Janāḥ's grammatical analysis in and of itself gives evidence of his knowledge of the grammar of Classical Arabic. In addition, his knowledge of this prestigious variety of Arabic is shown as well in the use of forms "especially classical" as in the following examples:

⁸ See Blau (1988).

⁹ See Blau (1981:114ff.).

¹⁰ See Gallego (1997).

¹¹ See Sáenz-Badillos and Targarona (1988).

(1) The elative *xayr* (the usual form in Middle Arabic would be *axyar*¹², resulting from symmetry in grammar): *kawnu-h mā lā yusammā fāṣiluh xayr min kawni-h fiṣlan dātiyan* (260v19)¹³ "It is preferable to consider it a passive form rather than reflexive".

(2) The conservative use of the dual (supplanted by the feminine in most Middle Arabic texts): *qāla fa-ktub-humā wa-qaṭṭiṣ-humā fa-badart ʔilā dālik wa-katabt l-kalimatayn* (255v8) "He said: "write both of them and divide them!" I hurried to do it and wrote the two words".

(3) The use of the internal passive (supplanted by the seventh form in MA): *afṣāl al-laḍī(sic) lam yuxaṣṣ bi-hā al-maʔmūr* (256r8) "Verbal forms which do not specify (the person) who receives the command".

With respect to the use of the linguistic patterns of Judeo-Arabic in the KT, I am going to limit my comments to a few phonetic and orthographic features.

It is precisely in this area where one of the most peculiar features of this variety occurs: the use of the Hebrew script. Among the different orthographic traditions of JA¹⁴, the orthography of the KT is of the Arabicized type, *i.e.*, it closely reproduces the orthography of Classical Arabic. Since there are more phonemes in Arabic than letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the scribes add diacritical points to Hebrew characters to distinguish different Arabic letters.

4. Hamza

In JA texts, the glottal stop is commonly elided or changed into *wāw* or *yā*¹⁵. In the KT, however, we find traces of *hamza* in the use of *aleph*, such as in the following examples:

(1) *yāʔayn*¹⁶ (259r17, 259r5 and 260r12): יאאין "the two yods". We notice the use of two *alephs*, one to mark long *ā* and the second to mark *hamza*.

(2) *mayʔūs* (*min ʔiqnāṣi-h*) (263v10): מיאוס "hard to satisfy". *Aleph* marks *hamza*, and it is followed by its support *wāw*.

(3) *li-l-muʔmira* (256r9): ללמאמרה "of the imperative". In this case, *wāw* is substituted for another *aleph*.

It can also be completely elided as in:

(1) *qirāʔati-h* (252r7): קראתה "his reading"

(2) *awliyāʔi-h* (262r3): אוליה "His friends (of God)"

(3) *wa-sʔal* (251r7): ואסל "ask!"

(4) *al-masʔala* (257r7): אלמסלה "the question"

(5) *yā ayyatuhā* (*al-ṣiṣāba al-karīma*) (251r3): יאיתהא "oh you, venerable group!"

The disappearance of *hamza*, which forms part of the general drift in the evolution of Neo Arabic from Old Arabic, is attested in this text. We have to point out,

¹² Blau (1980:110)

¹³ There exist two complete manuscripts of this work: ms. 4587 of the Firkowitch collection, kept in the Public Library of Saint Petersburg, dated in 1126 (ms. P.) and ms. 1453, kept in the Bodleian Library, dated in 1316 (ms. O.). I will refer to folios and lines, according to the Oxford manuscript.

¹⁴ See Hary (1992:82-85).

¹⁵ See Blau (1980:27-34).

¹⁶ The phonetic transcription given in the examples follows Classical Arabic spelling, in order to show the difference with JA spelling.

however, the frequent use of the fourth form of the verb, although there is evidence that it was barely used in Colloquial Arabic¹⁷.

- (1) *ʔajāz* (253r11): אגאז "he allowed"
- (2) *ʔaʕān* (*Allāh*) (261v1): אעאן "May God help (me)"
- (3) *ʔarādū* (262v6): אראדוא "they wanted"
- (4) *ʔankarū* (263v7): אנכרוא "they denied"

5. Stress

Another phonetic phenomenon reflected in the KT is a shift in stress patterns in the verb.

We can observe it in the use of a prosthetic *aleph* for the first form of the verb¹⁸:

- (1) *ḏahabt* (263r6): אדהבת "I went"
- (2) *zaʕamt* (256v7): אזעמת "I claimed"

Or in the use of *matres lectionis* for short and (presumably) stressed vowels¹⁹:

- (1) *haraq*: הראק "he shed"
- (2) *wa-yasquṭ* (254v11, ms. P)²⁰: ויסקוט "it fell"
- (3) *sir* (256r15): סיר "go!"
- (4) *qum* (256r16): קום "get up!"

6. Shift $\bar{a} > \check{a} > \emptyset$

I would like to comment too on a phonetic feature which is of special relevance since it rarely appears in other MA or JA works: the loss of *tanwīn -an*. The phonetic shift reflected in this work is, on the one hand, the pronunciation of *tanwīn -an* (marked with final *aleph*) as long \bar{a} . It is attested in the alternation between *tanwīn -an* and *tāʔ marbūʕa* (marked with final *heʔ*)²¹. On the other hand, we can also see that this final *a* has shortened and dropped in certain cases.

In the predicate of the verb *kāna*

- (1) *yakūn... maʔmūran* (256r10), ms. P. and ms. O. *maʔmūr*: מאמור "it is the commanded thing"
- (2) *wa-in kuntu qāṭiʕan* (257v12), ms. P. *qāṭiʕa*: קאטעה ms. O. *qāṭiʕ*: קאטע "even if I seem abrupt"
- (3) *bi-anna mā lā yusamma fāʕīlu-hu lā yakūn illā maḏmūman* (261r2). ms. P. *maḏmūma*: מצמומה "that the passive verb can only take the vowel u"

¹⁷ See Corriente (1992:102) and Fischer and Jastrow (1980:39).

¹⁸ Blau (1972:479): "It stands to reason that at least some of these examples do not exhibit a genuine fourth form, but rather the perfect of the first form with a prosthetic *alif*, thus proving that the perfect 3rd pers. masc. was stressed on its last syllable (like *ʔazhar < zhar < zahār*"). Blau (1980: 17,75).

¹⁹ See Corriente (1992:102).

²⁰ Ms. O: *wa-suqūṭ*. It can be observed here that the copyist of ms. O. has tried to "correct" the text.

²¹ See Blau (1980: 152 n. 22 and add. p. 152) and Brockelmann (1908: 48). That final *heʔ* was pronounced as long *a* is corroborated in a phonetic text of the Cairo Genizah, in which adverbs are marked with *aleph*: "The interpretation of this final *aleph* as marking *-an* as in the literary language contravenes the basic nature of the orthography of these papyri, which [...] is a phonetically based system totally free from the influence of classical Arabic. Accordingly, one must regard the final *aleph* of these adverbs (corresponding to *tanwīn -an* in classical Arabic) as functionally equivalent to any other final *aleph*, i. e., as marking *-a*. (see Blau and Hopkins 1982: 149, 150 and n. 88).

In adverbs:

(1) *mā qad bayyant kaṭīran* (261r4), ms. P. *kaṭīra*: כתירה ms. O. *kaṭīr*: כתיר
“something I have already explained a lot”

(2) *innahā tabqā dāʿīman maftūḥa* (263r1), ms. P. and ms. O. *dāʿīma*: דאימה “it
always keeps the vowel a”

We find other evidence of the merging of *tāʾ marbūṭa* and *tanwīn -an* in the hypocorrect substitution of *tāʾ marbūṭa* for *tanwīn -an*: *la-kāna al-alif min-hu maftūḥa*²² (256v12), ms. P and ms. O. *maftūḥan*: מפתוחא “the *aleph* had the vowel a”.

7. *Alif mamdūda* and *alif maqṣūra*

Another typical JA feature reflected in this work is the merging of *alif maqṣūra* and *alif mamdūda*:

Alif maqṣūra instead of *alif mamdūda*:

(1) *a-lā tarā anna ...* (256r16 and 256v2): אלי “don’t you see that...?”

Alif mamdūda instead of *alif maqṣūra*:

(1) *abā* (251r18): אבא “he refused”.

(2) *tabqā* (262v8) ms. P.: תבקה “it remained”

(3) *in qaḏā Allāh* (263r9): קצא “if that were God’s decision”.

8. The definite article

Finally, another curious orthographic use occurs in ms. P. of the KT, namely the spelling of the article *al-*. As corresponds to a text that imitates the orthography of Classical Arabic, the definite article is always spelled morphophonemically. In other words, it remains *al-* regardless of the consonant which follows it.

There are, however, at least two clear examples of the article joined to the word that precedes it and not to the noun that it determines. Curiously enough, the last letter before *al-* adopts the final and not the middle form:

(1) *min al-infīṣāl* (252v12): מן אל אנפיעאל “of the pattern *nifṣal*”.

(2) *dālik al-majlis* (252v18): דלך אל מגלס “that session”.

It is clear, thus, that the author is conscious of the grammatical norm.

Conclusion:

Concerning the phonetic and orthographic description of the manuscripts of this work, I have indicated here only the most relevant features. In general, we can include all of them in the patterns of Classical Judeo-Arabic Spelling.

One may draw, however, other more general conclusions from the information that the KT provides. I would like to point here to the apparent contradiction between some linguistic traits. This is the case of the general elision of *hamza* in the spelling, but the maintenance and use of the fourth verbal form, which was no longer employed in the spoken language. The coexistence of forms strictly associated with Classical Arabic such as the internal passive, and non-normative forms, such as lacking the *tanwīn -an* ending also seems strange. This last phenomenon rarely occurs in a text that belongs to a high register like this. There is evidence in the characteristics discussed here of the blurred boundaries between what we in academia dub Classical, Middle or Dialectal Arabic. The most accurate

²² Although the gender of the name of the letters of the alphabet can be ambiguous, in this text they are treated as feminine. Therefore, the use of the ending *-an* is due to the confusion between *-an* and *-ah*.

explanation for this phenomenon is, in my view, the linguistic definition that B. Hary posits for Medieval or Classical JA as a linguistic variety in a state of permanent multiglossia²³. In other words, linguistically, JA should be considered as occurring on a continuum between Standard and Colloquial Arabic, without a fixed place between the two, and as being subject to the influence of two external elements, Hebrew and Aramaic.

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²³ See Hary (1997:203-208).