

estudios de dialectología
norteafricana y andalusí
8 (2004), pp. 89-97

TANWĪN IN THE ARABIC DIALECTS OF EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN ARABIA

CLIVE HOLES

The modern Arabic dialects of eastern Arabia show several morphological features, usually labelled ‘conservative’, which are absent from the dialects of the eastern Mediterranean area, and which apparently hark back, as the label suggests, to Classical Arabic. This paper describes the incidence of one of these features, *tanwīn*, in the dialects of Bahrain as spoken by a sample of around one hundred middle-aged or elderly illiterate speakers (in a data base of c. 500,000 words) recorded in the mid-1970s. Comparative data for younger, educated speakers of the next two generations, recorded at the same time, showed little or no trace of this feature.

In Bahrain, virtually all the instances of ‘dialectal *tanwīn*’ (henceforth DT for short) which I recorded occurred in one of four types of structure: on unmodified nouns; on nouns with some form of modification, most frequently adjectival; on nouns functioning as adverbial adjuncts; and, more speculatively, on the noun in certain compound conjunctions. The form of DT within each of these categories was the same, but differed from one category to another. There were also differences in the distribution of these categories of DT in the various Bahraini communities, as defined by sectarian allegiance and degree of urbanisation. In what follows each contextualised example is marked A (= dialect of the ^cArab, Sunnīs), UB (= dialect of the urban Baḥārna, Ši^ca), VB (= dialects of the village Baḥārna, Ši^ca).

I will present the facts as they occurred in the data before making some comparative observations on the incidence of DT in the neighbouring dialects of central, eastern, and southeastern Arabia.

1. Unmodified nouns

In this category, which did not occur very often, the form of DT, if it occurs, is always *-in*, whether the noun to which it is attached is the sentence subject, object, or governed by a preposition. Contextually, it often indicates emphasis or contrast of some kind: in example (1), the embarrassed speaker was exasperatedly telling an interlocutor who seemed determined to remain silent to say at least ‘*something*’ (for the benefit of me, the researcher). In example (2), by contrast, the female speaker was describing a typical scene from her youth, when young girls would playfully steal small items from each other when doing their chores at the village well. Here the *-in* functions with weak contrastive emphasis rather like the English ‘a

certain X', or 'a special X'. Examples (3) and (4) illustrate the use of DT in a formulaic template which is often employed when two alternative or contrasting situations or scenes are being described.

Communally, DT in these kinds of example was almost entirely confined, in spontaneous speech, to VB dialect speakers (though not in dialect poetry, where it occurred in A speakers' compositions too):

- (1) *takallam, wallah, gōlat-in!*
'Say something, for goodness sake!' (VB)
- (2) *kil wāḥid, lēn ḡāz lēha šay 'ind raḥgat-in...*
'Every girl, whenever something belonging to some friend of hers took her fancy...' (VB)
- (3) *yōm-in čidi, yōm-in čidi*
'One day (my husband was) like this, another day (he was) like that.' (VB)
- (4) *marr-in ḥalu, marr-in murr¹*
'Sometimes (life was) sweet, sometimes (it was) bitter' (VB)

The single commonest unmodified nominal form found with DT, however, was *kill-in* 'every (single) person'. Examples (5)-(11) are typical.

- (5) *kill-in u šimtəh*
'Everyone (gave a dowry) according to his status' (A)
- (6) *kill-in u karaməh*
'Everyone (contributed) according to the extent of their generosity' (A)
- (7) *kill-in b əqdarəh*
'Everyone (gave) according to his means' (A)
- (8) *kill-in 'ala kēfha*
'Everyone did as she wanted' (A)
- (9) *kill-in šibā'a*
'Everyone was full-up (with food)' (A)
- (10) *iyliṣaw, kill-in maḥallah*
'They sat down, everyone sat in his place' (A)
- (11) *kill-in biyi ḥagg haləh*
'Everyone was going (home) to see his family' (A)

¹ In examples (3) and (4), *čidi* and *murr* are not epithets of *yōm* and *marr*, but the speaker's elliptical description of what her husband, and life in general was like.

This usage appeared to be confined entirely to the A dialect speakers. B speakers, whether UB or VB, used *kil wāḥid* or *il-kil* in similar constructions instead, as in *kil wāḥid minxašš fi bētāh* ‘everyone would hide away at home’, and *il-kil xāf, wugaf ‘ala s-sīf* ‘everyone was afraid, and just stood there on the beach’. In many cases noted, as in examples (5)-(6) which contain the locution *kill-in u. . .* (noun), there is the flavour of a ready-made piece of ‘home-spun wisdom’ concerning proper social conduct in such matters as dowry- or present-giving. In all the examples recorded, *kill-in* was always the grammatical subject of the phrase in which it occurred.

A negative analogue of *kill-in*, *ḥad-in* ‘no-one, not a single person’, which was not recorded in speech, occurs in the written modern colloquial poetry of Bahraini poets such as Abdurrahman Rafī^c, e.g.

ḥad-in yinsa balad l-ašdāf
ḥad-in yinsa naḍar ‘ēnah
 ‘Can anyone ever forget the country of pearl-shells?
 Can anyone ever forget what he’s seen with his own eyes?’²

In such examples DT is sometimes marked as in CLA with a double subscript *kasra*, sometimes (as here) written with an orthographic *nūn*.

2. Modified nouns

By far the commonest type of structure in which DT occurred, and again almost always with the *-in* form, was on the noun in noun-adjective phrases. Easily the commonest adjective in such phrases was *zēn* ‘good, nice’, as in *raḡḡāl-in zēn* ‘a good man’, *bint-in zēna* ‘a nice girl (for marriage)’, *gudū‘-in zēn* ‘a nice snack’, *rwēd-in zēn* ‘good radishes’, *samād-in zēn* ‘good manure’, *rāḥat-in zēna* ‘a good rest’, etc. Some examples in which other adjectives were recorded are given in (12)-(16):

(12) *yigūl il-‘arab wa š-šī‘a ḥizb-in wāḥid*
 ‘He says the Sunnis and Shi‘a are all one party’. (VB)

(13) *ṭamāt-in sahil*
 ‘Poor quality tomatoes’ (VB)

(14) *ndaxil māy-in bārda*
 ‘We put in some cold water’ (UB)

(15) *arāḍī-n³ šādda*
 ‘Stronger soils’ (VB)

² *Qaṣā‘id Ša‘biyya*, Beirut, 1970, p. 24.

³ It would seem that this is a VB example of DT on a common dialectal plural *arāḍī/arāḍi* (which are the corresponding A and UB forms), rather than a dialectal reflex of the oblique form of CLA *araḍūn*.

- (16) *mā-n tayyiba*
 ‘Sweet water’ (VB)

Whilst DT is by no means obligatory for uneducated VB speakers on nouns in this type of phrase, it is relatively common, and especially so, as with the use of *kill-in* among the A speakers, where there is a ‘formulaic’ flavour to what is being said, as in adages, greetings and other kinds of phatic communion, e.g.

- (17) *kalīl-in maxdūm wilā kaṭīr-in əmhammal*
 ‘Better a little done well than a lot done badly’ (= adage) (VB)

- (18) *‘āfyat-in wāfyā!*
 ‘Be in good health!’ (= greeting) (VB)

- (19) *ax-un ‘azīz*
 ‘(you’re a) dear brother!’ (= form of thanks for a favour) (VB)

All examples of DT in this category were produced by VB speakers, with only one example from a UB speaker ((14)), and one ((20) below) from a female A speaker:

- (20) *čūf ḥagg wildi mara, bint, bint-in zēna*
 ‘Find my son a wife, a girl, a nice girl’. (A)

Among the A speakers, the only other examples recorded of DT of this kind were in quotations from dialect poetry and in riddles, ‘frozen’ forms of spoken language which, as has been noted in other studies of Arabian and contiguous Bedouin dialects, tend to show a much higher incidence of DT than does spontaneous speech⁴. Examples of DT in poetry, riddles and other kinds of word play that cropped up spontaneously in the course of conversation were:

- (21) *wallah lō kunt fī gaṣr-in gālīğ u ‘āl*
banxa r-rifāga u ba‘alliğ fīk sullamna
 ‘By God, if you were (imprisoned) in a lofty fortress, bolted and barred,
 I would call out for my friends to help, and attach a ladder for you (to
 escape)’ (poetry, A)

- (22) *lō ‘indi šāt-in samīna dībaḥtkum liha*
 ‘If I had a fat sheep, I’d kill you for it’ (word-play, A)

It seems likely that DT in the noun-adjective construction is a remnant of CLA *tanwīn*. The reason why it should have survived in this position, as Blau has pointed out⁵, was probably originally phonological: regular pause, and the attendant dropping of final vowels, was never likely to occur *between* a noun and its

⁴ See Palva 1992, 140-142 for comments on the high frequency of DT in Jordanian Bedouin poetry, compared with oral narrative or conversation.

⁵ Blau 1981, 173.

modifying adjective. What we see in this type of DT is the fossilised morphological remnant of this syntactic-prosodic relation.

DT in other types of noun modification was relatively rare. Where it did occur, DT seemed, as in the case of the unmodified noun ((1)-(4)), to betoken some form of emphasis or contrast. In (23) below, for example, the speaker was rhetorically asking, in a sarcastic tone of voice, if any of his listeners had ever heard tell of a single Shi‘i divine who had been generous enough to offer the ritual meal (lit ‘so much as a glass of water’) on the birth of a son of his own, having just before observed how these same divines, who all had large numbers of children, enjoined on their congregation a standard of generosity which they fell short of themselves:

- (23) *aku ‘indhim al-ḥīn iṣ-ṣyūx čil wāḥid falāfīn walad... sam‘ān min wāḥid sāk-in wāḥid ma?*
 ‘Now these divines, every one of them has got thirty kids... but have you ever heard tell of a single one of them giving anyone (so much as) a glass of water?!’ (VB)

In (24), the DT marks a distributive contrast, as it does in the similar structure exemplified in (3) and (4) above:

- (24) *nās-in rāḥaw, nās-in inzilaw*
 ‘Some (of the Dawasir) left (Saudi Arabia), others stayed put.’ (A)

3. Adverbial adjuncts

The third type of structure in which DT occurred was adverbial adjuncts. Here, unlike the other two types, the form of DT was normally *-an*. This type of DT was not uncommon but was restricted to a few nouns, e.g. *lazm-an* ‘inevitably’, *ba‘d-an* (especially in the locution *ba‘d-an tāli*) ‘afterwards, then’, and *abd-an* ‘ever, never, at all’. In one case, *gaṣb-in* ‘*ala*’ ‘in spite of, willy-nilly’, DT was always *-in*, e.g.

- (25) *lō šift raqam laz-m-an agra, laz-m-an abba agra*
 ‘Whenever I see a number, I have to read it, I want to read it, I have to’ (VB)
- (26) *ba‘d-an tāli iyūn*
 ‘Then they come home’. (VB)
- (27) *ana māši wiyyāk qabṭ-an*⁶
 ‘I’m completely with you on that’. (VB)
- (28) *čāy awwal abd-an mā miš fil-baḥrēn*
 ‘In the old days, tea was completely unknown in Bahrain’. (A)
- (29) *gaṣb-in ‘alēna... n‘ayiz, lākin š-insawī?*

⁶ Cf CLA *qabaṭa* ‘to collect things together’.

‘Whether we liked or not... we couldn’t (walk), but what else could we do (but walk)?’ (A)

As with the DT in the noun-adjective construction, this type was largely confined to VB speech. The distribution of the examples suggested that DT *-an* is part of the VB ‘core dialect’, since the examples occurred quite commonly in uneducated, but not in educated speech. Conversely, certain other adverbial adjuncts with *tanwīn -an* like *maṭal-an* and *ṭabʿ-an*, which are part of the general educated Arabic spoken koine, hardly occurred at all in the speech of the uneducated. *Tanwīn* in this latter kind of example would thus, unlike *lazm-an*, *baʿad-an*, *abd-an*, appear not to have an old dialectal origin, but to be a recent influence from dialects from outside the area, and/or from Modern Standard Arabic.

A number of other adverbial adjuncts, also in *-an*, occurred sporadically in VB speech. These peculiar forms appear to be local innovations, as they do not, indeed could not, occur in normative CLA. For example, three speakers from different locations were recorded using *aqallat-an* ‘at least’, where the DT has been added to an elative form *aqall* to which a *tā marbūṭa* has also been added, both processes being transgressions against normative CLA. A different transgression against CLA rules was recorded in the example:

- (30) *nxallīh bi l-ʿamd-an*
 ‘We leave it deliberately’. (VB)

where DT is added to a grammatically definite noun. It may be that such forms started life as individuals’ hypercorrect attempts at speaking in accordance with CLA rules, and spread within the relatively closed VB communities.

4. Conjunctions

There was a wide-spread tendency in the VB communities to affix what might arguably be DT to the head-noun in certain compound conjunctions, e.g. in the following sentences and clauses, all VB:

- (31) *mīfl-im mā inta taʿzimni u hāy yaʿzimni*
 ‘Just like you invite me, and he invites me’ (VB)
- (32) *awwal-im mā axadtəh. . .*
 ‘When I first got married to him...’ (VB)
- (33) *wakt-im mā tībḅēn ḡilla. . .*
 ‘Whenever you want a *ḡilla* (= a 56 lb sack of dates)...(VB)
- (34) *xalf-im mā ṣallēt. . .*
 ‘After I’d prayed....’(VB)
- (35) *baʿad-im mā nrūḡ l-ḡyūn. . .*
 ‘After we went to the wells...’(VB)

Like some of the adverbial adjuncts just discussed, these VB forms are also aberrant and difficult to explain if viewed as direct descendants of the superficially equivalent CLA forms such as *miṭlamā*, *awwalamā*, and *waqtamā* which did not have *tanwīn*. Two possible explanations suggest themselves. In some cases, the predecessor of the dialectal form may have started life as an adverbial phrase of the type *waqt-an mā* ‘at some time’, *yawm-an mā* ‘on some day’, and been reinterpreted as a noun-plus-relative *mā* (= ‘on a day that...’, ‘at a time that...’), in which the CLA *tanwīn* was analogically reduced to DT *-in* and the *n* assimilated to the following *m* to produce *wakt-im mā*, *yōm-im mā* etc. An alternative explanation for the *-im* is phonological: in some forms, such as *miṭl + mā*, *wakt + mā*, *xalḥ + mā*, ‘*ukb + mā* a potential three-consonant cluster is avoided by *-i* epenthesis after the second consonant, and the *m* of *mā* is then ‘strengthened’ by doubling. Where they share conjunctions of a similar construction, the A dialects solve the problem in a different way, by inserting a vowel between the first and second consonants, viz *miṭilmā*, *wakitmā*, ‘*ugubmā* rather than *miṭl-im mā*, *wakt-im mā*, ‘*ukb-im mā*. Although it cannot be excluded that we have here another case of dialectal innovation in the use of *tanwīn*, the phonological explanation -that *-im* is a junctural phenomenon- seems more likely, since, in the VB dialects where it occurs, one routinely also encounters verb phrases like *yiṣubb imminha* < *yiṣubb + minha* ‘he pours from it’ where a similar three-consonant cluster is broken up in exactly the same way, and where *tanwīn* cannot be the source of the *-im*.

5. DT and dialectal geography

Now a few comparative remarks, based on the central Najdi dialects as they are described in Ingham 1994, the southern Najdi dialects as described in the same author’s article of 1986 on the dialect of the *Āl-Murra*, and on the dialects of Oman based on my own, still largely unpublished materials collected in the 1980s.

(a) Within Najd itself, there are some differences in the distribution of DT, the main one being that in the southern Najdi dialects even proper names often carry it. As Ingham comments in his 1986 article, the northerners are aware of this difference, saying that the southerners *yinawwinūn il-asmā* ‘they put n on names’. This local difference aside, the Najdi dialects as a group show a much heavier use of DT in a wider variety of syntactic contexts than is true of any of the dialects of Bahrain, or, for that matter of other Gulf coastal dialects. The differences between Najd and Bahrain can be summarised as follows:

(b) Where a noun is modified by an adjective, it is not uncommon in the Najdi dialects for the adjective as well as the noun to carry DT, as in Ingham’s examples *wlid-in ḥarbiyy-in ṭūwīl* ‘a tall Ḥarbi lad’ (central Najd) and *š‘ēbit-in ḍayyigat-in* ‘a narrow pass’ (southern Najd) and for such constructions even to occur, in the case of the southern Najdi dialects, in pause position. In Bahrain, I failed to record a single instance of such double DT usage in noun-adjective phrases, in any A or B dialect, despite the common occurrence of examples of the *bint-in zēna* type in the VB dialects.

(c) Ingham’s Najdi materials also show that DT is common with other types of noun modification apart from adjectival, e.g. with prepositional phrases such as *uxw-in lī* ‘a brother of mine’, *wāḥd-in min ar-rabu* ‘one of the group’; with a

following modifying clause, e.g. *kalimat-in gālōha lī* ‘a word they said to me’, *fōd-an ma lih taraf* ‘chaos without end’; and also where the nominal is a present participle followed by an object which is not a pronominal suffix, e.g. *ana ġāyb-in hāda* ‘I have brought this’. In Bahrain, examples of these types do occur, but only, in my data, in the fixed phraseology of proverbs and poems, and not, as far as I could see, in unprepared speech of either A or B groups (although example (3) might be an exception).

In Najd, adverbial adjuncts with DT similar to those which occur in Bahrain, but with *-in* rather than *-an*, and with a wider range of nouns e.g. Najdi *‘ugb-in* ‘afterwards’, *nōb-in* ‘one time’, *yōm-in* ‘one day’, *labd-in* (< *la abd-in*) ‘not at all’, *hagwit-in* ‘seemingly’, *hirwit-in* ‘approximately’, *xifyit-in* ‘secretly’ and others.

The A dialects of Bahrain, that is those spoken by the so-called ‘Arab Sunnis, are known to be historically descended from those of central Najd, which were ‘exported’ to the coast via tribal migrations 250 years ago. If the Bahraini A dialect which I recorded is compared with the dialects spoken by the descendants of their distant Najdi ancestors, it can be seen that on this ‘conservative’ dialectal feature (as on others) there has been considerable attrition in the A dialect: DT has disappeared completely from several syntactic environments in which it still often occurs in Najd, and is now heard with any frequency only in a very limited subset of those contexts in which the parent dialects retain it. It is now confined to a few lexical items, notably *kill-in*, and phrase types, though in poetry and other forms of ‘artistic’ speech it is commoner. The VB dialects of Bahrain, on the other hand, retain DT to a much greater degree than the A dialects in ordinary speech, though too less in absolute terms than in Najd, and in a narrower range of construction types.

The historical relationship of the VB dialects and those of Najd is unclear, but it appears from the large number of important phonological and morphological differences that the relationship is not one of direct descent, as it is with the A dialects. In fact, many features link the VB dialects with those of the sedentary populations of inner Oman, including the distribution of DT. Examples of the type *nāqt-in zēna* ‘a good she-camel’ and *raġġāl-in ‘āqil* ‘a wise man’ occur frequently in both the VB and the Omani *haḍari* dialects. The latter also follow the VB dialects in having adverbial adjuncts like *lazm-an* ‘inevitably’, with *-an* rather than the central Najdi, and Bahraini A dialect *-in*. In so far as I have been able to observe, the frequency of DT use in the Bedouin dialects of Oman is also similar to that in the VB dialects - that is, less than in central and southern Najd, but more than in the A dialects of Bahrain.

To briefly sum up this last section:

(a) The Bahraini A dialect, in common with other Najd-descended Gulf coastal dialects, has lost DT in many of the phrase types in which it is still common in Najd. This is probably due to the greater contact and mixing of the A population of Bahrain with speakers of dialects external to the area.

(b) There is a similarity between the incidence and type of DT in the VB dialects, that is, in the dialects of the Shi‘i cultivators of Bahrain, and DT in the

settled, cultivators' dialects of the northern mountainous regions and Bāṭīna coast of Oman. This, when taken along with many other shared linguistic features⁷, suggests a (probably ancient) common historical origin for these dialects, different from that of the Bedouin and Bedouin-descended dialects of Najd, the Gulf, and south-eastern Arabia.

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⁷ Holes 1996, Holes forthcoming 2006.