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A Grammar of Negev Arabic

Comparative Studies, Texts and Glossary
in the Bedouin Dialect
of the ʿAzāzmih Tribe

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Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements.....	xv
Introduction	1
0. General.....	1
0.1 The Bedouin of the Negev – A Historical Overview.....	1
0.1.1 The Ottoman Period	1
0.1.2 The British Mandate Period (1917–1948).....	3
0.1.3 The Bedouin in Israel (1948 – Present).....	4
0.1.4 The Current Distribution of the Negev Bedouin	7
0.2 The Bedouin Dialects in the Negev	10
0.2.1 An Overview	10
0.2.2 Scope, Aim, Sources and Methodology	14
0.2.3 Surrounding Dialects	16
0.2.4 Spelling and Transliteration	20
0.2.5 List of Abbreviations.....	23
0.2.5.1 Acronyms	23
0.2.5.2 Surrounding Bedouin Dialects	24
0.2.5.3 Symbols.....	25
Chapter One: Phonology	27
1. Phonetics and Phonemics	27
1.0 Inventory of Consonants.....	27
1.1 Minimal Pairs.....	28
1.1.1 Voiced vs. voiceless	28
1.1.1.1 Voiced stops vs. voiceless stops.....	28
1.1.1.2 Voiced fricatives vs. voiceless fricatives	28
1.1.2 Stops vs. fricatives.....	29
1.1.3 Affricates vs. their components.....	32
1.1.4 Nasals vs. orals	32
1.1.5 Velarised vs. non-velarised	32
1.1.6 Stops among themselves.....	33
1.1.7 Fricatives among themselves.....	33
1.1.8 Sibilants among themselves.....	33
1.1.9 Liquids and nasals among themselves.....	33
1.1.10 Gutturals among themselves.....	34
1.1.11 Regular consonant vs. double consonant.....	34
1.2 Reflexes of OA Interdentals	34
1.3 Reflexes of OA <i>*qāf</i>	35
1.4 Reflex of OA <i>*ġīm</i>	36
1.5 Reflexes of OA <i>*hamza</i>	36
1.5.1 Initial <i>hamza</i>	36

1.5.2 Medial <i>hamza</i>	39
1.5.3 Final <i>hamza</i>	42
1.6 Assimilation	43
1.6.0 General	43
1.6.1 Regressive assimilation	43
1.6.1.1 Total assimilation: Obligatory cases	43
1.6.1.2 Total assimilation: Optional cases	46
1.6.1.3 Partial assimilation: Obligatory cases	47
1.6.1.4 Partial assimilation: Optional cases	48
1.6.2 Progressive assimilation	49
1.6.2.1 Total assimilation: Obligatory cases	49
1.6.2.2 Total assimilation: Optional cases	49
1.6.3 Mutual assimilation	50
1.7 Dissimilation	51
1.7.1 Dissimilation involving bilabials	51
1.7.2 Dissimilation involving <i>ṣ</i> and <i>ḡ</i>	51
1.7.3 Dissimilation involving liquids and nasals	51
1.7.4 Isolated cases	53
1.8 Nasalisation	53
1.9 Velarisation	54
1.9.1 Emphatic consonants	54
1.9.2 Velarisation spread	55
1.10 De-emphaticisation	59
1.11 Speech Pause Forms	60
1.12 Metathesis	61
2. Vowel System	63
2.0 General	63
2.1 Short Vowels	63
2.1.1 Minimal pairs	63
2.1.2 Shift of the OA <i>*a</i>	64
2.1.3 Shift of the OA <i>*u</i>	66
2.1.4 Shift of the OA <i>*i</i>	67
2.1.5 Quality of the high short vowels	67
2.1.6 Elision of short vowels	68
2.1.7 Lengthening of short vowels	69
2.2 Long Vowels and Diphthongs	71
2.2.1 Minimal pairs	71
2.2.2 Reflex of the OA <i>*ā</i>	71
2.2.3 Reflex of the OA <i>*ū</i>	72
2.2.4 Reflex of the OA <i>*ī</i>	73
2.2.5 Reflexes of OA <i>*ay</i> and <i>*aw</i>	73
2.2.6 Elision of long vowels	73

2.2.7 Shortening of long vowels.....	74
2.2.8 Prosodic lengthening of vowels.....	75
2.2.9 Diphthongs	76
2.2.10 Monophthongisation.....	77
2.2.11 Word-final diphthongisation.....	79
2.3 Semi-vowels	80
2.4 <i>Imāla</i>	81
2.4.0 General	81
2.4.1 Medial <i>imāla</i>	84
2.4.1.1 Nominal categories.....	84
2.4.1.2 Verbal categories.....	86
2.4.2 Final <i>imāla</i>	87
2.4.3 <i>Imāla</i> of the feminine ending.....	88
2.4.4 Reflex of the OA pronoun suffix <i>*-hā</i>	89
3. Syllable Structure	
3.1 Syllable Types	92
3.1.1 Open syllables	92
3.1.2 Closed syllables.....	92
3.2 Consonant Clusters and Anaptyxis.....	93
3.2.0 General	93
3.2.1 Types of consonant clusters.....	93
3.2.1.1 Word-initial clusters.....	93
3.2.1.2 Medial clusters	93
3.2.1.3 Word-final clusters.....	94
3.2.2 Anaptyxis in sandhi	96
3.3 The <i>gahawah</i> Syndrome	97
3.4 The <i>bukarah</i> Syndrome	101
4. Stress	101
Chapter Two: Morphology	107
5. Nominal Morphology.....	107
5.1 Pronouns	107
5.1.1 Personal pronouns	107
5.1.1.1 Independent pronouns	107
5.1.1.2 Pronominal suffixes	110
5.1.2 Demonstrative pronouns.....	112
5.1.2.1 Demonstratives in neighbouring Bedouin dialects.....	114
5.1.2.2 Use of demonstrative pronouns.....	115
5.1.3 Relative pronouns.....	117
5.1.4 Interrogative pronouns.....	118
5.2 The Noun	120
5.2.1 Derivation.....	120
5.2.1.1 Bilateral bases	120

5.2.1.2	Trilateral bases.....	120
5.2.1.3	Quadrilateral bases.....	126
5.2.1.4	Quinqueliteral bases.....	127
5.2.2	Gender of nouns.....	128
5.2.3	Definiteness and indefiniteness.....	130
5.2.3.1	Definiteness of nouns.....	130
5.2.3.2	Indefiniteness of nouns.....	131
5.2.4	Number of nouns.....	134
5.2.4.1	Singular.....	134
5.2.4.2	Dual and pseudo-dual.....	134
5.2.4.3	Plural.....	137
(a)	Sound plural.....	137
(b)	The <i>T</i> -plural.....	139
(c)	Broken plural.....	140
(d)	Plural of plural.....	146
(e)	Mixed plural forms.....	146
(f)	Collective nouns.....	147
5.2.4.4	Concord.....	148
5.2.5	Diminutive forms.....	150
5.2.6	The <i>tanwīn</i> and its residues.....	154
5.3	Numerals.....	158
5.3.1	Cardinal Numerals.....	158
5.3.1.1	The cardinal numeral '1'.....	158
5.3.1.2	The cardinal numeral '2'.....	159
5.3.1.3	Cardinal numerals 3 to 10.....	159
5.3.1.4	Cardinal numerals 11 to 19.....	161
5.3.1.5	Intervals of 10.....	163
5.3.1.6	Intervals of 100.....	163
5.3.1.7	Intervals of 1000.....	164
5.3.1.8	The millions.....	164
5.3.1.9	Compound numerals.....	165
5.3.1.10	Definiteness of numerals.....	165
5.3.2	Ordinal numerals.....	165
5.3.2.1	Ordinal numerals from 1 to 10.....	165
5.3.2.2	Ordinal Numerals from 11 upwards.....	167
5.3.3	Duplication.....	167
5.3.4	Fractions.....	168
5.4	Adjectives.....	169
5.4.0	General.....	169
5.4.1	Participles.....	170
5.4.2	Adjectives of pattern $aC^1C^2aC^3$	170
5.4.2.1	Comparative form.....	171

5.4.2.2 Superlative.....	171
5.4.2.3 Colour and defect.....	172
5.4.3 Verbal adjectives.....	172
5.4.4 Intensive adjectives.....	173
5.4.5 Relative adjectives.....	174
6. Adverbs.....	176
6.1 Adverbs of Place.....	176
6.2 Adverbs of Time.....	178
6.2.1 Point in time.....	178
6.2.1.1 Days.....	178
6.2.1.2 Months.....	179
6.2.1.3 Years and longer periods of time.....	180
6.2.1.4 Unspecified periods of time.....	181
6.2.2 Cyclical time.....	182
6.2.2.1 Time of day.....	182
6.2.2.2 Days of week.....	182
6.2.2.3 Months.....	183
6.2.2.4 Seasons.....	183
6.2.3 Frequency.....	184
6.2.4 Duration.....	184
6.2.5 Prepositional adverbs.....	185
6.2.6 Other adverbs.....	185
6.3 Adverbs of Manner.....	185
7. Verbal morphology.....	189
7.0 General.....	189
7.1 Inflectional Affixes of the Verb.....	190
7.2 Verbs with Pronominal Suffixes.....	192
7.2.1 Direct object pronominal suffixes.....	192
7.2.2 Indirect object pronominal suffixes.....	193
7.2.3 Two direct object pronominal suffixes.....	194
7.3 FORM I.....	195
7.3.1 Regular verbs.....	195
7.3.1.1 Perfect.....	195
7.3.1.2 Imperfect.....	198
7.3.1.3 Use of imperfect forms.....	201
7.3.1.4 Future markers.....	205
7.3.1.5 Imperative.....	206
7.3.1.6 Narrative imperative.....	207
7.3.1.7 Prohibition.....	209
7.3.1.8 Wish.....	209
7.3.2 Irregular verbs.....	211
7.3.2.1 Verbs $C^2=C^3$	211

7.3.2.2 Verbs $C^1\text{-}^2$	213
7.3.2.3 Verbs $C^2\text{-}^2$	215
7.3.2.4 Verbs $C^1\text{-}w/y$	215
7.3.2.5 Verbs $C^2\text{-}w/y$	218
7.3.2.6 Verbs $C^3\text{-}y$	221
7.3.2.7 Doubly weak verbs	225
7.3.2.8 Isolated verbs	227
7.3.2.9 Secondary root	229
7.4 Derived FORMs.....	231
7.4.1 FORM II	231
7.4.2 FORM III.....	233
7.4.3 FORM IV	235
7.4.4 FORM V	238
7.4.5 FORM VI.....	239
7.4.6 FORM VII	241
7.4.7 Form VIII	243
7.4.8 FORM IX.....	245
7.4.9 FORM X.....	246
7.5 Quadrilateral FORMs.....	248
7.5.1 FORM $C^1aC^2C^3aC$	248
7.5.2 FORM $taC^1aC^2C^3aC$	249
7.6 Participles.....	251
7.6.1 Active participles	251
7.6.1.1 Trilateral bases	251
7.6.1.2 Quadrilateral bases.....	256
7.6.2 Passive participles	257
7.6.2.1 Trilateral bases	257
7.6.2.2 Quadrilateral bases.....	260
7.6.3 Use of the active participle.....	260
7.6.4 Use of the passive participle	262
7.7 Passive Voice	263
7.8 Verbal Nouns.....	265
7.8.1 Trilateral bases	265
7.8.1.1 FORM I	265
7.8.1.2 Derived FORMs	266
7.8.2 Quadrilateral bases.....	268
7.8.2.1 FORM $C^1aC^2C^3aC$	268
7.8.2.2 FORM $taC^1aC^2C^3aC$	269
8. Particles.....	270
8.1 Prepositions	270
8.1.1 <i>b</i> -	270
8.1.2 <i>l(a)</i> -.....	272

8.1.3	<i>fi</i>	274
8.1.4	<i>‘ala</i>	275
8.1.5	<i>min</i>	277
8.1.6	<i>‘in</i>	279
8.1.7	<i>ma^c</i>	280
8.1.8	<i>hatta ~ hattiy</i>	281
8.1.9	<i>‘ind</i>	281
8.1.10	<i>zayy</i>	282
8.1.11	<i>fōg</i>	283
8.1.12	<i>taḥat</i>	283
8.1.13	<i>giddām</i>	283
8.1.14	<i>warā</i>	284
8.1.15	Additional prepositions	284
8.2	Coordinating Conjunctions	286
8.3	Affirmative Particles.....	293
8.4	Negative Particles	294
8.5	Causal and Final Particles.....	294
8.6	Vocative Particles	294
8.7	Genitive Markers	296
Appendices		299
I.	Sample Texts.....	301
	Text A. Three sincere pieces of advice.....	301
	Text B. Three wishes	307
	Text C. Hābbīn ar-rīḥ.....	310
	Text D. The man who has two stomachs	314
	Text E. The narrative of Ġdē ^c Ibīn Haddāl	318
	Text F. The narrative of Mġalliy	322
	Text G. Abu Ġabāyir	327
	Text H. Sheikh Ḥasan al-Maṭa‘ah.....	331
	Text I. The narrative of Baṛaṣ.....	336
	Text J. Types of camels	342
	Text K. The camel that deserves a half of a field	345
	Text L. Traditional life in days gone by	348
	Text M. Dangerous camels	352
	Text N. A festive celebration.....	358
II.	Glossary	361
	Hamza	361
	‘Ayn	364
	Bā [°]	371
	Dāl.....	375
	Ḍāl.....	379
	Ḍā [°]	380

Fā°	382
Gāf	385
Ġayn	391
Ġīm	394
Hā°	398
Ḥā°	400
Kāf	406
Lām	410
Mīm	412
Nūn	415
Rā°	419
Sīm	423
Ṣād	428
Ṣīm	430
Tā°	435
Ṭā°	436
Ṭā°	439
Wāw	440
Xā°	443
Yā°	447
Zāy	448
Ẓā°	450
Bibliography	451

Preface and Acknowledgements

The current study is the product of an intensive fieldwork carried out in the Negev (in southern Israel), Jerusalem and Germany in the course of the years 2009 to 2011, in the field of modern Arabic dialectology. It examines the major phonological and morphological features of the °Azāzmih Arabic (henceforth *Az*), a Bedouin variety that is spoken by the °Azāzmih, the tribal confederation that inhabits the Negev Highlands stretching from Beersheba southwards. This dialect has not been investigated to date. My acquaintance with the °Azāzmih tribes dates from 2002. I made the first recording, that transcribed in Text D in Appendix I, in May 2002, and the other recordings during 2008 and 2009.

The description of the °Azāzmih dialect, which comprises the main part of the present study, is based on rigorous analysis of a vast quantity of linguistic data collected among the °Azāzmih tribes. Alongside such a description, the dialect is also compared to those of tribes of other confederations in the Negev, where differences between the tribes can be said to exist, and to other Bedouin dialects spoken in the Negev, Sinai Peninsula and southern Jordan, which have been described in the academic literature. The aim of such a comparative analysis is to reveal the uniqueness of the dialect of the °Azāzmih as well as the linguistic features that it shares with other Bedouin dialects.

To place the dialect and my analysis thereof in context, historical, geographical and linguistic information on the Bedouin of the Negev and their dialects are provided in the introductory chapter, and a large number of references are made to publications on Bedouin dialects surrounding or otherwise geographically near that spoken by the °Azāzmih.

Supplementing the work are two relatively large-scale appendices: the first contains sample texts of the °Azāzmih dialect accompanied by their English translations, and the second comprises a glossary of words and expressions characteristic of the dialect.

Within the last six decades, the Negev Bedouin community has undergone a radical process of change, modernisation, and urbanisation. Given the transition from a pastoral, semi-nomadic to a semi-urbanised way of life, and the speed at which this lifestyle change is taking place, the present research had to be done as a matter of urgency, since this dialect, along with Bedouin culture as a whole, is likely to disappear within a few decades. Thus, this research constitutes a significant contribution to the knowledge base on modern Arab dialects, in general, and to the study of the Negev Bedouin dialect

of the °Azāzmih in particular. It will serve as a foothold for further research on the vast mosaic of dialects both inside and outside of the Negev.

I am myself from a Bedouin family, a member of the Tiyāha confederation, and a native speaker of the dialect of the Tiyāha. I was born and raised in a Tiyāha Arabic speaking family and environment, living mostly in Jerusalem, where I later obtained a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, all in Arabic Language and Linguistics (the latter degree summa cum laude). I am also member of the Arabic Language Academy in Haifa, Israel. Hence (due to both my heritage and training), in the present research, I have enjoyed the dual position of participant and observer. I am sufficiently rooted in Bedouin culture, customs and linguistic transformations to decode various meanings, which would pose great difficulty for an outsider.

I have large debt of gratitude to all informants from the °Azāzmih tribes who actively co-operated with me, for allowing me to record their stories and conduct interviews. Among them, special thanks go to *Šālīh al-Ḥamāmdih*, *Sallām al-°Azāzmih*, *Sālim Salmān al-Ḥamāmdih*, *Si°d Salmān al-Ḥamāmdih*, *Ġim°ih al-Ḥamāmdih*, *°Awdih Abū Kfīf*, *°Iliy Ibn °Yādh al-°Azāzmih*, all of whom belong to the Mas°ūdiyyīn sub-confederation of the °Azāzmih in Šgēb as-Salām; and *°Awwād Sallām ibn Ḥmayd*, *°Id Abū Si°diy* and *°Id at-Ṭūxiy* (Šubḥiyyīn of the °Azāzmih), and *°Awdih as-Sarāḥīn* from Bīr Haddāḡ. Without their help and patience, the present study would not have been possible. For reasons related to Bedouin tradition, I was asked not to mention the names of female speakers in this work.

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