

SIFT-ing the evidence: Adaptation of a Berber loan for ‘send’ in Moroccan Arabic.

Jeffrey Heath

appeared in: Salem Chaker, ed.. 2000. *Études berbères et chamito-sémitiques: Mélanges offerts à Karl-G. Prasse*, pp. 223-231. Paris/Louvain: Peeters.

Introduction

The common Moroccan Arabic (“MA”) verb for ‘send’ has primary variants *šif(ə)t*, *šaf(ə)t*, and *šayf(ə)t*. This set, for which SIFT is a useful informal abbreviation, extends into Algeria and perhaps farther east. It has been variously analysed as a native Arabic form or a Berber loan. Without taking sides, Marçais (1911: 363) commented that *šaf(ə)t* could be plausibly attributed to Classical Arabic *istawfad* (form X of the root \sqrt{wfd}), but that the other variants of SIFT are problematic (“font difficile”) for this approach. The alternative is to take SIFT as borrowed from a prefixal derivative of the Berber stem *afud*, perhaps reflecting multiple local borrowings from different Berber languages (and dialects). By mid-century the consensus among specialists was in favor of the Berber-loan analysis. Brunot, summarizing the literature since Marçais, concluded that “... on doit penser que le mot vient du berbère *afod* ‘aller’ qui donne la forme factitive *sifed*” (1952: 445). Pellat (1950) catalogued a wide range of source forms for SIFT in various local Berber varieties.

I assume the Berber-loan analysis, though it is somewhat orthogonal to my main concern here, which is to document the range of MA forms and consider how they function within larger morphological systems. The main problem is that SIFT is a CVCC quadrilateral in form but seems to have ablaut features of CVC (hollow trilateral) verbs.

Here, as in the larger MA dialectology project I am now in the process of preparing for publication, I use schematic “maps” for easy visual reference. Muslim (“M”) and Jewish (“J”) maps are distinct, and represent partially distinct sets of communities. Each variant (i.e., one of several responses or response types) for a given variable has its own map. A grey scale (with seven values from white to black) is used, showing the density of usage of that variant in my data from each community. Broad geographical patterns are apparent from eyeballing, though finer details are not. A total of 53 communities appear in the M and/or J maps. The fieldwork was done in Morocco, mainly in 1986, and with ex-Moroccan Jews who left for Israel around 1951.¹

Consonantism

Variation in the form of SIFT applies both to the consonants and to the vowel(s). The consonantal variation is less significant. In the M dialects, the consonantal sequence *š...ft*, sometimes with the *f* and *t* separated by a vowel, is regular. This sequence was recorded for all informants from M communities consulted, as shown in Map I. This map also indicates the full set of M dialects for which some variant or other of SIFT was recorded. The one blank triangle in the far south represents an oasis town (M’hamid)

south of Zagora, where SIFT seems not to be used. Map 2 shows the J dialects for which SIFT was recorded.² The communities showing up in Map 2 as blanks should be disregarded throughout this paper.

For J speakers, the final consonant is often realized as voiced *d*, rather than as *t*. Map 3 shows the combined distribution of the two relevant variants, *ʃ...fɔd* and *ʃ...vɔd*, while Map 4 shows the distribution of *ʃ...ft*. The *...d* variants are absent from the northeast (Oudja, Debdou, etc.) and from the Tafilalt area in the southeast (Ar Rachidia, Rich, etc.). On the other hand, these variants are dominant in the west, particularly the southwest including Marrakesh (the only large square in the lower part of the maps). While data are spotty from some rural communities, for Marrakesh itself all five informants checked used *...d* variants. The scattered occurrences of *...t* variants in smaller J communities in the west probably reflect the influence of local M dialects (including Arabic spoken as a second language by Berbers).

A subset of the J *...d* varieties also voice the preceding labial, giving *ʃ...vɔd*. These are shown in Map 5. The data (admittedly somewhat limited) suggest that this double voicing is most common in the area northeast and northwest of Marrakesh, including the Atlantic coast towns from Essaouira to Casablanca. There are also a number of attestations of *ʃ...vɔd* farther north, and one in the far south (Beni Sbih, near the Algerian border).

Even in native Arabic vocabulary, J dialects sometimes reflect historically secondary voicing or devoicing of obstruents, as in *xʂəl* ‘wash’ < **ʃsəl* (with voicing assimilation) and *fdəʂ* ‘search (for)’ < **ftəʂ* (apparently a spontaneous voicing). The Berber sources for ‘send’ are often transcribed with “...d” (as in Pellat 1950), but this may be phonetically misleading, and Berber *d* is often Arabized as *t* rather than *d*. It is not fully clear whether *...d* in J dialects in SIFT reflects a variant Arabization of the Berber sound, or a more recent spontaneous voicing of an older **t*.

Most of the Berber source forms begin with plain *s*. However, in MA, if one stem consonant is pharyngealized, another coronal consonant in the same stem is normally pharyngealized by a harmonic process.

Marçais (1911: 363) observed infrequent voicing of the initial sibilant in Tangiers (and some Algerian dialects), resulting in *zift*.

Vocalism

The variation in vocalism is more considerable, cutting across M as well as J dialects. It is not simply a matter of low-level phonetic processes or of first-order phonological adaptation of foreign words. It also reflects attempts by speakers to integrate SIFT into the MA morphological system. In addition to dialects where SIFT has a single, invariant form, there are dialects which show stem-internal alternations depending on stem aspect and suffixal inflections.

Invariant *ay* (or *e* in some oasis and Atlantic M dialects where *e* reflects an older **ay* diphthong and is phonemically distinct from *i*) is shown in Maps 6 (M) and 7 (J), a typical form being *ʂayfət* or *ʂefət*.³ The sole J attestation of *ay* is from Rabat (Map 7), but the diphthong was recorded for three of three informants checked for that city and is clearly valid.⁴ The distribution of {*ay*, *e*} in the M communities (Map 6) is, at first sight, trimodal. There is one cluster in the far north (the two dark squares at the top are Tangiers and Tetuan, and the nearby dark triangle is the closely related dialect of Chaouen). A second cluster is located in the string of Atlantic coast towns from Casablanca⁵ through El Jadida and Azemmour (the “Doukkala”) south to Safi. These are represented as three circles in a column plus one

adjoining triangle in the center-left of the map. A third cluster is in the far southwest, where the two dark triangles represent the oasis towns of Goulimine (=Guelmime) and Tata. Marrakesh, which is located between the Atlantic coast towns and the oases, lacks {*ay, e*} vocalism in SIFT (five M informants were checked). However, the Atlantic coast towns have a number of affinities to the oasis dialects, probably reflecting ancient tribal movements (loyal Saharan tribes were sometimes relocated by the Moroccan sultan into the zones south of the capital Rabat). Assuming that the Atlantic coast and oasis clusters in Map 6 have a common origin, this still leaves us with a striking bimodal pattern, notably excluding the majority dialect type in the center (and east).

The most common M pattern outside of the {*ay, e*} zones is that with invariant *i*, as in *šif(ə)t* (Map 8). It is particularly dominant in Marrakesh (lowermost large square), in the belt of central urban varieties (three adjacent squares) and the rural dialects just to their north, in the far southeast (Tafilalt), and to some extent in Oujda (rightmost large square). The J counterparts are shown in Map 9. Nearly all of the attestations are in minor J communities in the south, but the scatter suggests the influence of local M dialects on these small groups of Jews. It is particularly notable that Marrakesh-J, a much larger Jewish community, lacks the invariant *i* that is regular in Marrakesh-M.

The remaining cases of invariant vocalism have *a*, as in *šaf(ə)t*. Among Muslims (Map 10), this is nowhere completely dominant, but it has a certain relative density centering on Taza (the fourth large square from the left in the five-square row).⁶ It is also recorded in Azemmour (Atlantic). Invariant *a* is somewhat more common overall in the J dialects (Map 11). It is preponderant in Meknes (the darkest large square), and attested in Fes (just to the right of Meknes), Marrakesh, the Atlantic coast towns, and some towns in the Atlas mountains south of Meknes.

The dialects with variable vocalism are of the type *a/i/i* (M or J), *ay/i/i* (J), or *a/i/a* (J). The first vowel is that of the third person perfective, whose suffixes (specifying the pronominal category of the subject) are *-∅* (third masculine singular), *-at* or *-ət* (third feminine singular), and *-u* (third plural). Note that these suffixes do not begin with a consonant. The second vowel is that of the first and second persons perfective, whose suffixes all begin with consonants in M dialects (as in the Classical language): first singular *-t*, first plural *-na*, and so forth.⁷ The third vowel is that of the imperfective stem. The *a/i/i* type therefore has forms like *šaf(ə)t* ‘he sent’, *šifət-t* ‘I sent’, and *y-šifət* ‘he sends’.

Map 12 (M) shows the *a/i/i* pattern, which competes with invariant *a* in Taza, is fairly common in Sefrou (circle just south of Fes), and is attested in Fes and Oujda. The pattern is rather more common among J speakers (Map 13), where we see a strong presence in the northeast (including Oujda), substantial representation in the cities Fes and Marrakesh, and scattered but frequent attestations through the south. A single case of *ay/i/i* is included in Map 13, for Casablanca-J. The unusual pattern *a/i/a*, with *i* confined to the perfective paradigm before consonantal-initial subject-marking suffixes, is found in a few J dialects of the far southwest and is recorded for one speaker in Sefrou (Map 14).

Historical interpretation of vocalic patterns

The Berber source forms themselves can begin with either *sa...* or *si...*, and in many varieties the two occur in different stem-forms in the same dialect (Pellat 1950). The coexistence of *ša...* and *ši...* in MA paradigms could therefore reflect a complex borrowing of both shapes from a single Berber variety, or multiple borrowings from Berber into local Arabic dialects. Our concern here, however, is to explore the

function of these alternative vocalisms within MA.

- (1) a. CaC(ə)C, t-CaC(ə)C
 b. CawC(ə)C, t-CawC(ə)C
 c. CaC

CaC(ə)C (1a) reflects the Classical Arabic form III of verbs, type *faaʕal*, the original core sense of which was ‘engage in an interactive process’ — a kind of reciprocal from the viewpoint of one agent. MA verb stems that show this formal shape, and that are roughly consistent with the original sense, include *ʕay(ə)n* ‘wait’ and *ʕaw(ə)d* ‘repeat, retell’. CaC(ə)C is especially productive in the (true) reciprocal formation t-CaC(ə)C, as in *d-darʕ* ‘hit each other’ from simple stem < *dɾ(ə)b* ‘hit’. ‘Send’ is not intrinsically reciprocal, but has a certain transactional value, and the existence of a highly visible (t-)CaC(ə)C pattern may have influenced the initial formation of the variant *ʕaf[a]* f.

Pattern (1b) generally has *aw* (or *o* in oasis dialects, reflecting *āw), and corresponds to (t-)CuC(ə)C in the central dialects (which have monophthongized most former diphthongs). This pattern is used typically in denominative verbs of the general sense ‘act like an X’; see Brunot (1983). Its productivity is shown by its application to borrowings from French and Spanish (Heath 1989: 116-17). A CayCəC verb does not exactly fit the CawCəC model, and CayCəC (in central Moroccan dialects, CiCC) is somewhat rare. However, given the close relationship between the two semivowels in MA ablaut phonology, the existence of a CawCəC pattern may have played some role in the origin of the variant *ʕayf(ə)t*.

The most intriguing connection is with (1c), the “hollow” triliteral verb pattern. “CaC” is really a cover term for (at least) three paradigms, since verbs with CaC(-) third person perfective have unpredictable (i.e. lexical) vowels elsewhere in their conjugation. The common imperfective types are -CuC and -CiC, as in *ʕuf* ‘see’ (cf. *ʕaf* ‘he saw’) and *biʕ* ‘sell’ (*baʕ* ‘he sold’). MA dialects differ as to the vocalism of the perfective stem before consonant-initial subject-marking suffixes (for first and second persons). The dialects of the north and the fringe of the Rif mountains have e.g. *ʕuf-t* and *biʕ-t*, using exactly the same stem as in the imperfective, and this paradigm (or a variant thereof, e.g. *biʕ-ət*) is the basic J pattern throughout the country. However, the bulk of central, western, and southern M dialects have a reduced schwa, as in *ʕəf-t* (or *ʕət-t*) ‘I saw’ and *bəʕ-t* ‘I sold’.

The hollow pattern *baʕ*, imperfective *-biʕ* is likely to have been the model for the alternating type *ʕaf(ə)t*, imperfective *-ʕif(ə)t* for ‘send’. It is probable that, in areas where both *ʕaf(ə)t* and *-ʕif(ə)t* occurred, some MA speakers re-organized the two variants into a paradigm on the only available model for a/i alternations, namely the hollow triliteral verb. It is less likely that an earlier invariant form, either **ʕaf(ə)t* or **ʕif(ə)t*, grew an a/i alternation by analogy to the hollow triliteral pattern, since all other CVC[ə]C verbs are treated as quadrilaterals and therefore have invariant stem vocalism across their paradigms.

Dialects with *ʕaf(ə)t* ‘he sent’, imperfective *-ʕif(ə)t* have a preconsonantal perfective with *i*, as in *ʕif(ə)t-t* ‘I sent’. The *i* is never reduced to schwa, although most of the M dialects with alternating vocalism for ‘send’ do have schwa in corresponding forms of hollow trilaterals (*bəʕ-t* ‘I sold’). The avoidance of schwa in the first syllable of *ʕif(ə)t-t* in M dialects probably has to do with the syllabification of the stem as a whole as [ʕi] [f...], if not (always) phonetically then at least virtually. By contrast, the reduction of *i* to schwa in e.g. *bəʕ-t* ‘I sold’ occurs in a closed syllable, since (in M dialects) the initial consonant of first and second person perfective suffixes is always tightly fused to the stem-final

consonant. In most J dialects, even hollow trilaterals have full vowels in these forms (*biʕ-t* or *biʕ-at*), so there is no analogical basis whatever for reducing the first vowel of *ʕif(ə)t-t* (or *ʕift-ət*) to schwa.

References

- Brunot, Louis. 1952. *Textes arabes de Rabat*, vol. 2, *Glossaire*. Paris: Geuthner.
- . 1983. Sur le schème verbal *fūʕəl* dans les dialectes arabes du Maroc. In: *Homenaje a Millas-Vallicros*, vol. 1, 215-23. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
- Heath, Jeffrey. 1989. *From code-switching to borrowing: Case study of Moroccan Arabic*. London: Kegan Paul International.
- Kampffmeyer, Georg. 1912. *Marokkanisch-Arabische Gespräche im Dialekt von Casablanca*. Lehrbücher des Seminars für orientalische Sprachen. Berlin: Reimer.
- Marçais, William. 1911. *Textes arabes de Tanger: Transcription, traduction annotée, glossaire*. Paris: Leroux.
- Pellat, Charles. 1950. Sur deux emprunts au berbère par l'arabe dialectal nord-africain. In: *Melanges offerts a William Marçais*, pp. 277-288. Paris: Maisonneuve.

Notes

¹ Fieldwork on Jewish dialects, carried out in Israel, was supported by a National Science Foundation grant in 1983-85. Fieldwork in Morocco on Muslim dialects was carried out primarily during a Fulbright fellowship in 1986. I am especially indebted to Moshe Bar-Asher, Yosi Shitrit (Joseph Chetrit), and Yehuda Lancri (then major of Shlomi near the Lebanese border) for assistance in the Israeli part of my research.

² My dialectological elicitation list was in two parts, and for some J communities it was not possible to complete the second part (which included forms of 'send'). The blanks in the J maps for this item do not indicate that other lexical items for 'send' are in use there, rather that no form for 'send' was elicited. J data are available for all the major cities and for a representative set of smaller communities in each region.

³ It is possible that a few Muslim informants in the south were misdiagnosed as having *e* instead of phonemic *i*, which approaches [e] phonetically in the presence of pharyngealized consonants like *ʕ*.

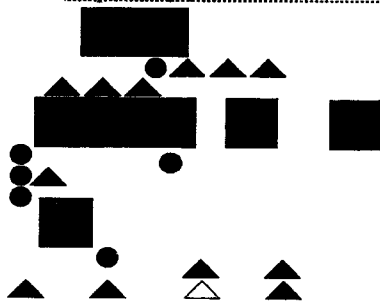
⁴ In the J material, "Rabat" includes data from the sister city Salé.

⁵ Because Casablanca has gone in one century from being a fishing village to the largest city in the country, my data on its M dialect were collected only from older speakers who belong to old families in the medina. A present-day visitor to Casablanca would hear a heavily koine-ized speech with little similarity to the original dialect. The data in Kampffmeyer (1912) show that the original Casablanca dialect had considerable affinities to northern Moroccan dialects (e.g. Tangiers). This koine-ization has also been very extensive in Rabat.

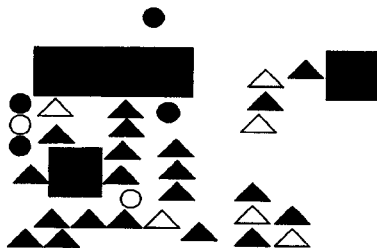
⁶ Taza is not shown on the J maps, since I have no Jewish data from this city.

⁷ In many J dialects, an undifferentiated *-t ~ -ət* is used for third feminine singular and for first and second person singular in the perfective, so the differential treatment of stem shapes in third person versus first and second persons can no longer be analysed in terms of the phonological shapes of the suffixes.

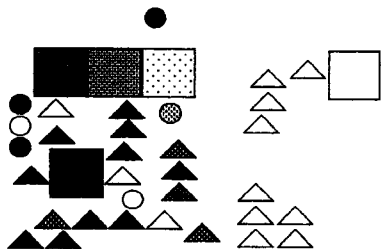
Map 1: *s...f* (M).....



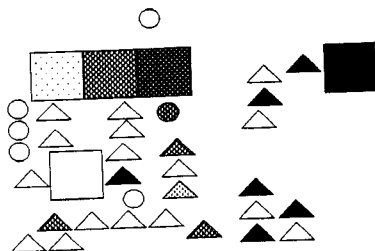
Map 2: SIFT data for J dialects.....



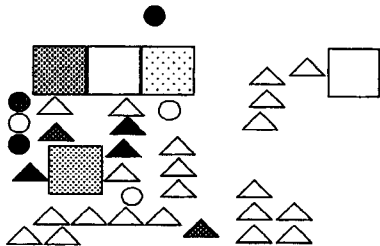
Map 3: *s...fd* - *s...vd* (D).....



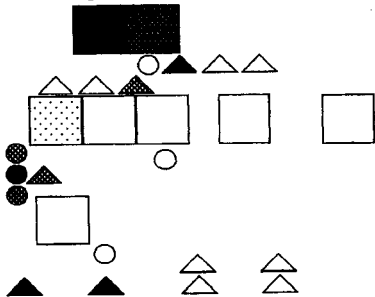
Map 4: *s...ff* (J).....



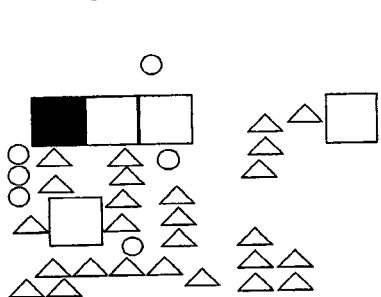
Map 5: s...yd (D).....



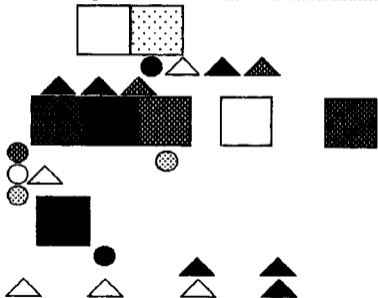
Map 6: ay/ay/ay or e/e/e (M).....



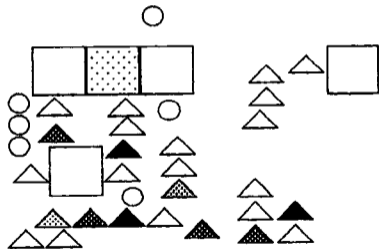
Map 7: ay/ay/ay (J).....



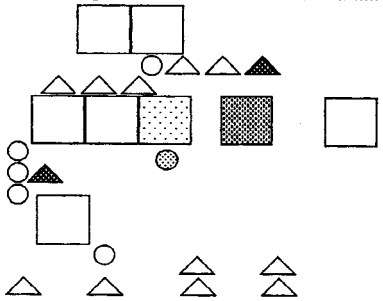
Map 8: *i/i/i* (M)



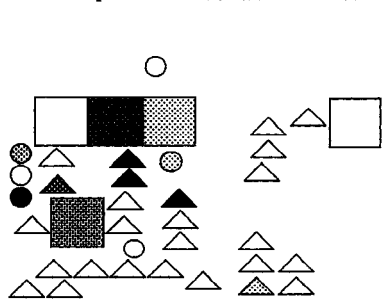
Map 9: *i/i/i* (J)



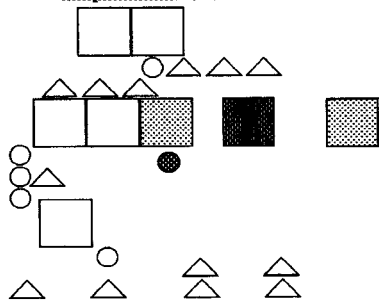
Map 10: a/a/a (M)



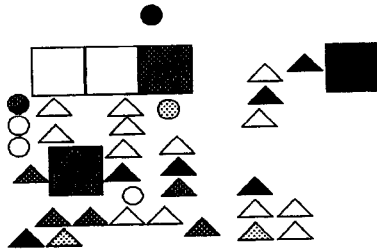
Map 11: a/a/a (J)



Map 12: a/i/i. (M).....



Map 13: a/i/i. (and ay/i/i.) (I).....



Map 14: a/i/a. (I).....

