

POSTPOSED TOPIC SPECIFICATION IN BERBER. AN AREAL PHENOMENON.

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In many languages of the world, there are specific morphemes or expressions that mark the topic and add particular semantic and discursive values to its referent by specifying its general content or by creating more contrast between its properties and that of the previous topic. These particular markers are called here topic specifiers. Together with appropriate intonation markers, topic specifiers also distinguish the topic from its generally succeeding comment. Some Indo-European examples of such commonly used topic specifiers, which appear in a sentence-initial position, are the English *as regards, as for, concerning*; the French *quant à, pour ce qui est de, concernant*; the Italian *per quanto riguarda, riguardo a*; and the Dutch *wat betreft, and aangaande*.

Although topic specifiers are attested in Berber, they are not widespread, and they are mainly optional. In fact, most accounts of their regular usage come from Taqbaylit (aka Kabyle Berber, North Algeria), where they precede the topic, as in example (1), where the composite marker *ma d* ‘as for’ specifies the subsequent topic *aqcic* ‘boy’.

- (1) *ma d* [aqcic]_T *tebbwi-t* *yid-es*
 TS boy PROS take.away- PFV=3MSG with=3SG
 ‘As for the boy, she took him with her.’
 (Dallet 1982: 476)

The Tuareg languages (Sahara, North and Northwest Sahel) form an exception to this state of affairs, not only because they frequently employ topic specifiers but also because they employ them in postposed position primarily; the latter type being merely attested in Tuareg Berber. An example that accounts for this is given in (2):

- (2) [nāk]_T *-za* *wər-* *əleymäwta*
 me TS NEG have- PFV=1SG car
 ‘As for me, I do not have a car.’
 (Prasse, Ghubäyd ägg-Äläwjeli, and Ghabdouane 2003: 871)

This paper deals with postposed topic specification only, whereas preposed topic specification is dealt with in Lafkioui (2018). Both preposed and postposed topic specification are contact-induced phenomena: preposed specification results from contact with Arabic, while postposed specification is an areal phenomenon, involving various languages (mainly Hausa, Songhay, and Fula) from different language phyla, as will be demonstrated in this paper. The paper will focus on how both pattern replication from the Sahara, North and Northwest Sahel (mainly Hausa, Songhay, and Fula), as the model languages, into Berber, as the replica language, are at work with respect to postposed topic specification (replica and contact-induced grammaticalisation; Heine and Kuteva 2003). Accordingly, it will show how language change can be the result of a subtle interaction between system-external parameters (i.e. contact) and system-internal parameters (formal and functional factors).

References

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