

The apophonic passive in northern Oman: data from a Bedouin dialect

This paper explores the apophonic passive (AP) in a Bedouin dialect in Oman. The dialect is spoken in the coastal towns of al-Suwaiq and al-Miṣin‘a, a transitional area where sedentary and Bedouin dialect types are spoken. The AP (also referred to as the ‘internal passive’) has largely disappeared from modern Arabic dialects in favour of affixed passive forms (Holes 2004: 135), yet it still survives as a more-or-less productive category in a number of Arabian dialects, e.g. Northeast Arabian (Ingham 1982), Central Arabian (Ingham 1994), Yemeni (Watson 1993), and Omani (Holes 1998; Eades 2009). In Oman, the AP is considered one of the ‘conservative’ linguistic features shared by both sedentary and Bedouin Arabic dialects. Holes (1998: 348) argues that the AP is more productive in sedentary dialects in general; that it is also productive to some extent in Bedouin dialects of the hinterland; yet, Holes posits, this feature is virtually disappearing in the Bedouin dialects of the coastal and transitional areas, where the sporadic occurrence of the AP suggests a ‘formulaic’ or ‘clichéd’ usage.

The data for this paper comes from an hour-long group interview with four Bedouin women. In order to convey the passive voice, the speakers alternate between the use of the AP, and the use of verbs with unspecified subjects in favour of affixal passive forms. The analysis suggests that the AP is still widely productive, and quite robust in these speakers’ grammars, and is not limited to formulaic use. A total of 96 tokens of the AP were extracted for 35 different Form I and II verbs, expressing a number of morphosyntactic features, in contrast to only 11 tokens of affixal passive forms. The majority of the AP tokens are in the 3SG imperfective (89 tokens), and there are more tokens of weak verbs (56 tokens across 11 verbs), in line with the literature for the AP in Oman. The AP occurred across different types of weak verbs, albeit no tokens were recorded for initial weak verbs:

hollow verbs

yyāb ‘it is brought’

ṣītāt ‘it.F was stirred’

final weak

yīšra ‘it is bought’

ġiṭṭat ‘it.F was covered’

double weak

ysawwa ‘it is made’

siwwi ‘it was made’.

In addition, there is an abundance of strong verbs Form I, e.g. *yinxal* ‘it is sifted’, and Form II, e.g. *yxarras* ‘it is soaked’. There are 30 tokens across 21 different verbs, suggesting that the AP is quite productive for this category, although two tokens only occurred in the perfective. Geminated verbs also occurred (10 tokens across four different verbs), e.g. *iggat* ‘it.F was thrown’.

Furthermore, the fact that the AP is abundant in this dialect is not surprising since other dialectal archaic features are also retained. This speech community seems to have preserved their Bedouin linguistic identity to a large extent, even if they belong to a coastal transitional area.

References

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