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Towards a diachronic study of Moroccan Arabic:
On some vernacular dialectal features in the 16th-century Arabic materials
preserved in the National Archives of Torre do Tombo

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Abstract: The present paper intends to trawl through an early 16th-century epistolary corpus in order to obtain some linguistic data on the varieties of Arabic which were spoken in the geographic area of present-day western Morocco at that time. Furthermore, it attempts to shed light on the historical development of several dialectal features which may help us better understand the evolution of Arabic dialects in Morocco and the Maghreb area as a whole. The study is based on the linguistic analysis of some of the Luso-Moroccan letters preserved in the National Archives of Torre do Tombo (Lisbon).

Keywords: Historical linguistics, Moroccan Arabic, Middle Arabic, Torre do Tombo, digital archives.

Resumen: El presente artículo se propone hacer un rastreo a través de un corpus epistolar del siglo XVI, con el fin de obtener algunos datos lingüísticos acerca de las variedades árabes que se hablaban en esa época en la parte occidental de Marruecos. Asimismo, este estudio trata de arrojar luz acerca del desarrollo histórico de varios rasgos dialectales, los cuales pueden ayudarnos a comprender mejor la evolución de los dialectos árabes en Marruecos y en el Magreb. Nuestro estudio se basa en el análisis lingüístico de algunas de las cartas luso-marroquíes que se conservan en el Archivo nacional de la Torre do Tombo (Lisboa).

Palabras claves: Lingüística histórica, Árabe marroquí, Árabe medio, Torre do Tombo, archivos digitales.

1. Introduction¹

Understanding how language changes over time is the main concern of historical or diachronic linguistics. Change in sound, grammar and meaning is an inevitable fate for any living language. Different intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic forces such as drift, contact and convergence among others, push speakers to consciously or unconsciously operate changes in their speech. As a matter of fact, these changes are more noticeable in the long term and so, the study of earlier stages of a given linguistic variety can yield valuable data for explaining the way in which its current features developed over time. In this regard, historical records represent a priceless source for the linguist seeking to unearth the history of a language. As far as Arabic vernaculars are concerned, finding reliable sources can be a difficult task since diglossia evidently played an important role in the stylistic choices made by scribes, and so, standard variants were very often preferred in written productions at the expense of colloquial ones.

In spite of that, we have a considerable number of historical written sources where dialectal features combine with standard ones, giving rise to an intermediate mixed variety. This blend of Classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic is generally referred to in

¹ The present paper has been written under the auspices of XXX. I would like to express my gratitude to the National Archives of Torre do Tombo for granting me permission to reproduce the images in this article. I am also very grateful to XXX for his thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Please note that examples taken from works postdating 1800 appear in my own system of transcription and translated into English.

the literature as Middle Arabic². Along with narratives of European travellers and diplomats, as well as accounts of former captives³, Middle Arabic texts make up one of the main sources for documenting the history of Arabic dialects. Unfortunately, such written outputs are extremely scarce for early periods. This is particularly true for Maghrebi dialects, for which sources only become abundant after the 16th century⁴.

To the best of my knowledge, the earliest known text containing some linguistic features from Moroccan Arabic is a book on the history of the Almohad dynasty written

² The term Middle Arabic generally refers to any attested written Arabic sample predating the 19th century, that exhibits deviations from the Classical Arabic norm, and whose linguistic features cannot be easily ascribed either to Classical Arabic or to colloquial Arabic. Such a mixed variety reflects the interferences resulting from the diglossic situation that characterizes most Arabic-speaking societies, cf. Lentin, “Middle Arabic”, p. 216. On the ambiguity of the term Middle Arabic and the confusion which may ensue from its use, see Larcher, “Moyen arabe”, pp. 579-583.

³ As regards Moroccan Arabic, it is relevant to cite the following western sources: Moüette’s *Relation de la captivité du Sieur Moüette* is an ex-captive’s account that includes a French-Moroccan Arabic wordlist. Høst’s *Efterretninger* consists of a travel narrative written by the then Danish vice consul in Mogador (Essaouira). The book contains some linguistic notes that have been studied by Aguadé, “Texto danés”. Price’s “Dialogues in the vulgar Arabick of Morocco” is a short article where the author, a British orientalist, provides a few Moroccan Arabic words and phrases. A linguistic analysis of this work can be found in González Vázquez & Fernández Benítez, “William Price”. Finally, Dombay’s *Grammatica mauro arabicae* is considered to be the first descriptive grammar of Moroccan Arabic. This work also includes a Latin-Moroccan Arabic thematic vocabulary.

⁴ Cf. Aguadé, “Maghrebi dialects”, p. 32; Vicente, “Sur la piste de l’arabe marocain”, p. 115. The only exception is Andalusí Arabic, a peripheral Maghrebi variety whose linguistic documentation begins in the early 10th century, cf. Vicente, “Sur la piste de l’arabe marocain”, p. 104.

by someone named al-Baydaq, who lived in the 12th century⁵. Colin's linguistic analysis of this document yields a number of interesting colloquial traits, most of which are common to the majority of present-day Maghrebi dialects⁶. The same can be said, to some extent, for other 12th and 14th century sources, which mainly consist of treatises on *lahn al-`amma* 'errors of language made by the common people', hagiographies and epic poems⁷.

Further and much sounder linguistic evidence on Moroccan Arabic is provided by official and private correspondence between Morocco and European nations (mainly Portugal, Spain, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands). This epistolary category of documents becomes abundant from the 16th century onwards and a significant number of them can be found today in European national archives and libraries such as the

⁵ Cf. Vicente, "Sur la piste de l'arabe marocain", p. 104.

⁶ Cf. Colin, "Notes de dialectologie arabe", pp. 104-120.

⁷ See for instance: al-Laxmī, Ibn Hišām (second half of the 12th century), *Al-madḥal `ilā tqwīm al-lisān wa-ta`līm al-bayān*; al-Bādisī, `Abd al-Ḥaqq (beginnings of the 14th century), *Al-maqṣad aš-šarīf w-al-manza` al-laṭīf fī t-ta`rīf bi-ṣulaḥā` ar-Rīf*; az-Zarhūnī, al-Kafīf `Abd Allāh (14th century), *Mal`abat al-Kafīf az-Zarhūnī*. For an overview on the colloquial features to be found in these and other Moroccan medieval sources, see Vicente, "Sur la piste de l'arabe marocain".

*Archivo General de Simancas*⁸, the *Real Biblioteca del Escorial*, the *Nationaal Archief* (the Hague)⁹, and the Public Record Office (London)¹⁰.

The present study seeks to provide some clues on the historical development of several linguistic features that can be regarded as characteristic of the mainstream dialects of present-day Moroccan Arabic. In order to do so, we intend to examine and analyse, from a linguistic perspective, some of the Luso-Moroccan letters preserved in the *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo*. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides background information on the corpus of letters under study and examines the main topics dealt with. Section 3 presents a brief description of the historical context surrounding these documents. Section 4 consists of a linguistic analysis and the discussion of the findings. The following conspicuous features of Moroccan Arabic are addressed: 1) fricative harmony involving the word *žūž* ‘two’, 2) presentative *ṛā-*, 3) preverbal durative aspect markers *ta-* and *ka-*, 4) annexation particles *d-* and *dyāl*. Finally, section 5 provides some concluding remarks and the implications of this study for the diachrony of Moroccan Arabic and Maghrebi Arabic as a whole.

2. Corpus

⁸ Some of the Moroccan letters kept in the *Archivo General de Simancas* have been edited by Garcia Arenal et al., *Cartas marruecas*.

⁹ For some examples of the Moroccan letters preserved in this archives, see de Castries, *Archives et bibliothèques des Pays-Bas*, t. I, II, III, IV, and V.

¹⁰ A number of the Arabic documents emanating from Morocco and preserved in the Public Office Record can be found in Hopkins, *Letters from Barbary*, while others are reproduced in de Castries, *Archives et bibliothèques d'Angleterre*, t. I and II.

Digitization and digital archiving are wonderful research tools that make available to researchers large amounts of historical documents without paying a physical visit to the institutions where they are kept. Thousands are the archives, libraries and museums worldwide that have undertaken projects to digitise part of their collections and archives. This is for instance the case of the National Archives of Torre do Tombo (henceforth TDT) in Lisbon, which holds several remarkable collections of documents relating to various events in the history of the so-called Portuguese discoveries. Among these manuscripts, we find a Luso-Moroccan epistolary corpus classified under the rubrics *891.2 Documentos em caracteres árabes provenientes dos lugares de África* ‘Documents in Arabic script from the posts of Africa’¹¹, and *877 Cartas dos Governadores de África 1501/1642* ‘Letters from the governors of Africa’¹². Most of these letters are preserved in the fonds called *Núcleo antigo* (formerly known as *Documentos orientais*) and relate to the Portuguese presence in several harbour towns along the Atlantic coast of Morocco and in their respective hinterlands. On a north-to-south axis, these towns are Azemmour, Mazagan (region of Doukkala), Safi (region of Abda) and Massa (region of Massa).

Figure 1: Map showing the main Portuguese enclaves in central and southern Morocco

The corpus is made up of a total of seventy documents, mainly letters, but also a few treatises. Although the date of composition is not always specified, it can be estimated

¹¹ This collection is made up of a total of 68 documents, all of which are written in Arabic. It is worth mentioning that some of these letters are stored together with their respective 16th-century Portuguese translation.

¹² This collection comprises 459 documents, only two of which are written in Arabic: *Colecção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 877, n.º 2*; and *Colecção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 877, n.º 22*.

that they date back to the period going from 1502 (oldest dated document) to 1530 (latest dated document)¹³. Even the authors are not always mentioned, however we know that among the scribes there were different kinds of individuals who, thanks to their good command of foreign languages, could be requested to accomplish interpreting and translating tasks. Many of these *lymgoas*¹⁴ ‘interpreters’ were Jewish traders with a Sephardic background who were at the service of the Portuguese monarchs and Moroccan sultans. This is for instance the case of Musa Dardeiro¹⁵ and Yahya Adibe¹⁶, whose work as interpreters, messengers or even diplomats is sometimes mentioned in the TDT Arabic materials. But *alfaques* must also have played an important role in carrying out interpretation and translation tasks. These were officials specialized in redeeming captives and could earn large sums of money by speculating on the amount of the ransom. As arranging the payment involved negotiation with the kidnappers, these agents used to speak Arabic fluently¹⁷. More interesting and lesser known is the case of non-Jewish

¹³ Only one single letter has been dated back to 1488, cf. Guerrero, “Analyse linguistique”.

¹⁴ Also written as *lingoas*. For an overview on the different profiles of interpreters in the Portuguese seaborne empire during the 16th century, as well as on the functions they fulfilled, see Couto, *The role of interpreters*.

¹⁵ Dardeiro occupied the position of official interpreter in the city of Safi from 1511 to the end of 1512, when he was killed in Almedina (northeastern Safi) at Yahya u Ta‘füft’s behest. Dardeiro was succeeded by another Jew, João Cotrim, cf. de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 366-369.

¹⁶ Adibe was appointed as official interpreter of Azemmour on September 9th 1514. It seems that he also carried out intelligence and diplomatic missions, cf. de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 490, 605 (note 2), 609 (note 1).

¹⁷ On some of these *alfaques*, see Guerrero, “Analyse linguistique”.

official interpreters¹⁸ such as Inácio Nunes Gato¹⁹, Francisco de Lemos²⁰, and Francisco de Aguiar²¹. Where and how did they learn Arabic? Did they study this language in Portugal before being sent to Africa? If so, how did they manage to learn the local dialect? Perhaps they simply picked it up through interaction with native speakers? If so, in which

¹⁸ The assumption that they were neither Jewish nor Muslim is made on the basis of their Christian names. This does not mean that they could have been former Jews or Muslims who converted or forced to convert to Catholicism. Oddly enough, among all the identified non-Jewish official interpreters, only one had a Muslim name: Muḥammad bin Qāsim ar-Ru‘ayni. Ar-Ru‘ayni occupied the position of official interpreter at the Portuguese Royal Chancellery, and he was thus based in Portugal, cf. de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, p. 23. He is the author of three documents dated August 16th 1486, October 16th 1488, and April 22nd 1504, cf. de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 14, 26, 98. Another Muslim interpreter, though unofficial, was a man named Sulaymān. He was Yaḥya u Ta‘fūft’s interpreter and accompanied him on his journey to Portugal, cf. de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 607, 629.

¹⁹ Nunes Gato was appointed official interpreter on March 8th 1552. He was reputed to be so good at speaking Arabic that he could have long conversations with native speakers without raising suspicion of being a Portuguese, cf. Ricard, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. V, pp. 68-69.

²⁰ Francisco de Lemos held the position of King John III of Portugal’s interpreter. Some of the 16th century Portuguese translations of the TDT Luso-Moroccan letters include the mention *Francisco de Lemos a treladou* ‘translated by Francisco de Lemos’. He must have been a nobleman of the Royal House, since he is referred to with the title *fidalgo da casa d’el Rey* in a Portuguese letter by Inácio Nunes Gato, cf. Ricard, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. III, p. 441; de Cénival et al., *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. II (2), p. 597. Lemos is also the recipient of some of the analysed letters, see Guerrero, “Edición”.

²¹ Aguiar was a Portuguese knight and an Arabic interpreter based in Azemmour, cf. Ricard, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. V, p. 82, (notes 1, 120).

context? Maybe during captivity?²². Learning more about these characters biographies would certainly help us better interpret part of the linguistic data yielded by the Luso-Moroccan letters in Arabic script of the TDT archives.

The first thing that catches the researcher's eye when examining these documents is probably the variety of language in which they are written. Oddly enough, almost all of them exhibit varying degrees of deviation from the Classical Arabic norm, ranging from simple grammatical errors to a massive use of terms, expressions and syntactic constructions from the spoken language. It goes without saying that spelling practices also deviate sometimes from the standard orthography and may be shaped according to the phonetic and morphophonemic rules of colloquial Arabic²³. Thus, although observed influences of the vernacular are uneven and widely vary depending on the document, it can be safely stated that the overwhelming majority of the Moroccan letters preserved in the TDT archives belong to the category of Middle Arabic.

Regarding the contents of these documents, they cover a wide range of subjects from diplomacy and military affairs to complaints and requests. We have for instance two letters of complaint in which the inhabitants of Safi and Massa respectively tell King Manuel I about all the injustices they are suffering under the Portuguese rule. In other epistles, the sender (usually an allied chieftain) places an order for a given commodity

²² Among the former captives who served as interpreters, one can mention Antonio Barroso, a Portuguese man from Tangiers whom the Qaid of Ksar el Kebir captured and turned into his squire, cf. Ricard, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. III, p. 162, (note 1).

²³ On the spelling features exhibited by the TDT materials, see Guerrero, "Analyse linguistique".

(e.g. clothes) or asks the Portuguese for some money. One also finds a few documents where the recipient is requested to intercede in a dispute or to persuade the king to bestow a favour on someone. Several others consist of intelligence reports and accounts of enemy movements. One may also mention juridical acts such as the ratification of a treaty whereby the inhabitants of Azemmour recognise King John II's sovereignty over their city, and a set of legal ordinances issued by Yaḥya u Ta 'fūft for the tribe of al-Hāret.

Even if the TDT Arabic materials have already attracted a great deal of scholarly interest, they had never drawn, to the best of my knowledge, the attention of linguists interested in Arabic dialectology²⁴. Previous research on these documents has mainly focused on the value they have for unveiling the details of the Portuguese presence in North-western Africa and for enhancing our understanding of 16th-century Moroccan history. Thus, the first attempt to unearth the TDT Arabic materials was made as early as the last decade of the 18th century, when the Lisbon Royal Academy of Sciences, seeking to shed some light on the history of the Portuguese seaborne empire, entrusted Fr. João de Sousa - a Portuguese Franciscan brought up in Syria who occupied the position of royal interpreter - with the hard task of reading, editing and translating a selection of the Arabic documents preserved in the TDT archives²⁵. Thirty out of the fifty-eight documents edited by de Sousa originate from Morocco, while the remaining twenty-seven relate to various coastal areas of the Indian Ocean stretching west-to-east from Mozambique to the Gulf of Malacca. Unfortunately, de Sousa's reading of the originals

²⁴ A preliminary linguistic study of some of these letters is to appear shortly, cf. Guerrero, "Analyse linguistique".

²⁵ Cf. De Sousa, *Documentos arabicos*.

of these epistles is mostly false, and hence his edition is highly inaccurate and suffers from serious errors that make it useless for our research purposes²⁶. It was not until the first half of the 20th century that a more painstaking and satisfying edition of some of the Luso-Moroccan documents kept in the TDT archives was issued. Such an arduous task was accomplished by the authors of *Sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*²⁷, a colossal work of editing, translating and putting together thousands of historical documents that relate to Morocco and are currently guarded in several European national archives. This unique work includes the edition and translation into French of a total of thirty Luso-Moroccan documents belonging to the TDT Arabic materials. Besides that, five more letters have recently been the object of an edition and translation into Spanish²⁸. As can be seen, more than half of the corpus (thirty out of seventy documents) still awaits publication²⁹.

²⁶ De Sousa went as far as adding dates and phrases of his own invention, cf. Aubin, “Torre do Tombo”, p. 184.

²⁷ See de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, II (1), II (2).

²⁸ See Guerrero, “Edición”. For a detailed overview of the documents that have been edited and the ones that remain unedited, see Guerrero, “Analyse linguistique”.

²⁹ It is important to note that I could not identify 5 out of the 30 letters edited by de Cénival et al. If I am not mistaken, these 5 letters are not among the 70 digitized documents that are available on the TDT archives website.

3. Historical background³⁰

The present section serves to provide a brief overview of the historical context that lies behind and underneath the epistolary corpus at hand.

The conquest of Ceuta in 1415 marks the beginning of the Portuguese expansion in Africa. As this military operation was motivated by economic and geostrategic interests rather than by religious ones, the Portuguese quickly understood the importance of taking over other Moroccan ports west of Ceuta to flank Castile and ensure their hegemony in Atlantic Africa. Thus, they occupied Ksar es Seguir in 1458, and Tangiers and Asilah in 1471. By the end of the 15th century, the Wattasid Sultanate of Fes was not strong enough to exert effective control over the vassal kingdom of Marrakesh. Nor was it able to fend off the constant raids launched by Castilians and Portuguese against the Moroccan coast. In 1486, fearing to suffer the same fate as in Anfa³¹, the inhabitants of Azemmour offered John II of Portugal to become his vassals and tributaries in exchange for protection. All these signs of political instability and military weakness, along with commercial greed, led the Portuguese to set up trading-posts further south: Massa (1497), Santa Cruz do Cabo de Guer (1505), Mogador (1505), Agouz (1506). A few years later, they took possession of Safi (1508), occupied Azemmour (1513), and built a citadel in Mazagan (1514).

³⁰ For an introduction to the history of the Portuguese presence in Morocco, see de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. VII-XVI; 1-3. For an overview and the *alcaide* Yahya u Ta'fūft, see Racine, "Yahya-u-Ta'fūft and Portuguese noble culture", pp. 71-88.

³¹ Anfa (present-day Casablanca) was pillaged and razed to the ground by a Portuguese fleet in 1469.

The first half of the 16th century witnessed the peak of the Portuguese maritime discoveries in the world. Stretching from Brazil to the factory of Nagasaki (Japan), the Portuguese seaborne empire was probably one of the largest and most thriving of its time. The monopoly of the Portuguese crown on the spice trade was critical to such an economic success, which entailed an increasing need for gold and slaves, the main sources of funding for the costly commercial expeditions that were sent across the Indian Ocean. The *feitorias* of Mazagan, Safi, Massa, and Aguz among others, provided the Portuguese with cloths, rugs and horses, which they exchanged for enslaved people and gold in Arguin (Mauritania), as well as in other trading-stations on the west coast of Africa, such as São Jorge da Mina (Ghana). As can be seen, the aforementioned possessions in central and southern Morocco seem to have been an essential cog in the economic machine of early 16th-century Portugal, a fact that accounts for the Portuguese tenacity in keeping a foot in a land that was not easy to control. Added to that, alliances with indigenous tribes proved crucial in subduing the territory and preventing rebellions. The most important of these so-called “Moors of Peace” was by far Yahya u Ta‘fūft, a Berber leader who commanded local forces against hostile tribes and won King Manuel I’s confidence to the extent of being appointed *alcaide* of Doukkala. But envy and covetousness pushed some Portuguese city governors to accuse u Ta‘fūft of treason, which diminished his reputation among some tribe members and led to his assassination in 1518. U Ta‘fūft’s murder marked a turning point in the Portuguese presence in Morocco because it was to him, and not to the Portuguese crown, that many of the Doukkala tribes had submitted. As a consequence, they chose to switch sides and ally with the Saadi troops who chased the Portuguese out of Santa Cruz do Cabo de Guer in 1541, and, shortly after, made them evacuate Safi and Azemmour.

Such is the intercultural context of trade, war and alliances in which the Luso-Moroccan letters of the TDT archives were produced.

4. Linguistic analysis

4.1. Fricative harmony

A salient semantic innovation attested in most Maghrebi dialects is the use of reflexes of Old Arabic **zawǧ* ‘pair, spouse’ to express the numeral ‘two’ (Aguadé, “Maghrebi dialects”, p. 52). The stem of this lexical item includes a sequence of sibilant segments, i.e. a voiced alveolar fricative /z/ and, according to the dialect variety, either a voiced palato-alveolar affricate /ǧ/ or a voiced alveo-palatal fricative /ž/. Since the treatment of such a co-occurrence of homorganic consonants is subject to variation cross-dialectally, it can be taken as a phonetic variable to discriminate between one Maghrebi dialect and another. Roughly, **zawǧ* is subject to sibilant harmony in Tunisian and Libyan varieties (*zūz/zōz*), undergoes fricative harmony in the majority of the Moroccan ones (*žūž*), while it remains stable in (most but not all) Algerian vernaculars (*zūǧ/zūž*).

As is the case in other Middle Arabic samples emanating from the North African area, the use of **zawǧ* for ‘two’ is largely attested in the TDT materials³². As a matter of fact, this numeral is consistently spelled as زوج (*zawǧ*) across the corpus. Only on one occasion (1), we came across an occurrence where it is orthographically rendered by جوج (*ǧwǧ*), that is, with a *ǧīm* instead of the etymological *zāy*.

³² For some examples, see Guerrero, “Analyse linguistique”.

(1)

Figure 2: Letter from unknown author (32)³³

وَقَالَ لَنَا بَانَ جَوُّ جَوَّجٍ مَتَعَ الْفَرَسُنُ مِنْ عِنْدِ حَمْدِ بْنِ أَحْمَدَ هُوَ رَسَلَهُمْ						
<i>wqal</i>	<i>lnā</i>	<i>bān</i>	<i>ğaw</i>	<i>ğwğ</i>	<i>mt</i> ‘	<i>ālfrsan</i>
and.3MS	to-1PL	with.that	3MPL-	two	POSS	DEF-
G-say.PF			come.PF			horsemen
<i>mn</i>	<i>‘nd</i>	<i>Hmd(?)</i>	<i>ban</i>	<i>Āħmad</i>	<i>huw</i>	<i>rasalhum</i>
from	at	Hmed(?)	son	Āħmad	3MSG	3MSG-
						send.PF

‘He told us that two horsemen came on behalf of Hmed (?) ben Āħmad, he sent them’

Further evidence providing some clues on the antiquity of the assimilation of a historical */z/ to a subsequent */ğ/ can be found in the captivity narrative of Germain Moüette³⁴, a Frenchman kidnapped by Ottoman pirates in 1670 and forced into slavery upon his disembarkation in Sale. Moüette lived in this and other Moroccan cities and went through several masters over the course of about 11 years. It was during his long stay in Morocco that he learned to speak Arabic. The account of his captivity includes a 32-page *dictionnaire* where he lists a number of words and phrases in the vernacular language. Among these, we find on page 341 the sentence *Mejouge-inti ‘Eftu-marié’* (*mžuwwəž anti?* ‘are you married?’). The occurrence of forms such as *žūž* and *mžuwwəž* in the above-mentioned historical sources could imply that, by the 16th/17th century, some Moroccan varieties already displayed a fricative reflex of Old Arabic */ğ/. Evidence to this is

³³ *Carta de autor desconhecido. Coleção de cartas. Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 32. PT/TT/CART/891.2/32 (Unedited)*. A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908310>. It is worth noting that this letter is full of dialectalisms.

³⁴ Cf. Moüette, *Relation de la captivité du Sieur Moüette*.

adduced by the fact that, regressive assimilation of sibilant /z/ only occurs in dialects exhibiting a fricative reflex of Old Arabic */ǧ/³⁵.

4.2. The particle *ṛā-*

The vast majority of Maghrebi vernaculars make use of a discourse particle *ṛā-* which is believed to hark back ultimately to the imperative **ra* of the verb **ra`ā* ‘to see, to look’³⁶. As shown in (2), (3) and (4), the particle at hand mostly occurs with variable suffixed pronouns which usually refer to the subject of the utterance.

	SG	PL
1	<i>rāni</i>	<i>rāna</i>
2	<i>rāk</i>	<i>rākum</i>
3M	<i>rāh</i>	<i>rāham</i>
3F	<i>rāha</i>	

Table 1. Inflectional paradigm of the particle *ṛā-* in the dialect of Anjra, cf. Vicente, *Anjra*, p. 109.

(2) *ṛāni mxaṣṣma m`āk* ‘I am really angry with you’, cf. Caubet, “Deixis”.

(3) *ṛāh ma-ši ma`qūl!* ‘It is not really possible’, cf. Caubet, “Deixis”.

(4) *al-qarāwīyīn ṛāha f-Fās* ‘(the University of) al-Qarawiyyin is located in Fes’, cf. Caubet, “Deixis”.

Besides that, a fossilized form of the 3MSG *ṛāh* may also be used as an invariable particle whatever the gender and number of the subject is (5), (6).

(5) *ṛāh kāyna l-ḥufra!* ‘watch out! there is a hole!’, cf. Guerrero, *Larache*, p. 119.

³⁵ On this matter, see Guerrero, “Reflexes of Old Arabic */ǧ/”, pp. 148-149. On consonant harmony involving sibilants and fricatives in Moroccan Arabic, see Heath, *Jewish and Muslim dialects*, pp. 133-134.

³⁶ Cf. Marçais, “Les dialectes occidentaux”, p. 599; Fischer, *Die demonstrativen Bildungen*, p. 186.

(6) *ṛāh l'abt m'a ḥḥwāk* 'I played with your father', cf. Guerrero, *Larache*, p. 120.

As can be seen in the examples above and as far as Moroccan dialects are concerned, the particle *ṛā-* may function both as a presentative and as an expressive marker. Such a deictic value, in turn, gives rise to various modal functions like opposition or reassertion among others³⁷.

The use of the particle *ṛā-* is not attested outside the Maghreb area, a fact that has pushed some scholars to regard it as a conspicuous feature of present-day Maghrebi varieties³⁸. Nonetheless, the presence of similar grammaticalized uses of the verb **ra'ā* in several Middle Eastern varieties rather argues for a shared innovation or a common

³⁷ Cf. Caubet, "Deixis". The use of presentative *rāh* is already described by Dombay in his *Grammatica mauro arabicae* (p. 32), the first grammar of Moroccan Arabic. According to the famous Austro-Hungarian orientalist, *rāh* means *ecce* 'behold' and is employed with an active participle to indicate that an action is being done in the present moment or has already been completed.

³⁸ Cf. Marçais, "Les dialectes occidentaux", p. 599. Different usages of the particle *ṛā-* have been reported for the Arabic varieties spoken in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the discourse marker *ṛa* is not to be found in Maltese and Andalusī Arabic, the two only Maghrebi varieties which may be regarded as 'pure' pre-Hilali since they were spared from the wave of Arabicization triggered by the Hilali invasions.

inheritance³⁹. For instance, in some dialects of Oman (7) and the north-easternmost parts of Arabia (8), fossilized 2ndMSG imperfective *tarā* may serve as a presentative⁴⁰.

(7) *awwal tarāhum yita 'bo, yištəǧlu lākin yiḥaṣlu*

‘In the old days, they had a hard life, they’d work but they did get something’, cf.

Holes, “Šūr”, p. 92.

(8) *tarākom šāhedīn* ‘you are witnesses’, cf. Cantineau, “Parlers de nomades”, p. 199⁴¹.

Interestingly enough, numerous occurrences of an almost identical grammaticalized form of the verb **ra`ā* can be found in some of the Luso-Moroccan letters held in the TDT archives. As can be observed in the examples below (9), (10), (11), (12) and (13), the particle *ترا (trā)* usually appears at the beginning of the sentence, and has attached to it a suffixed pronoun which is co-referent with the subject of the sentence. Quite often, *ترا (trā)* is placed between an independent personal pronoun and the predicate (9), (11), (12).

³⁹ “Given that *ra(a)* is found throughout the Maghreb (and only there), one could consider it a characteristic trait of Northern African Arabic. However, the diverse manifestations of this trait in the Maghrebian dialects on the one hand, and the similarities between Maghrebian *ra(a)* and ‘Middle-Eastern’ *tara(a)* on the other hand, show that this trait is far from useful for purposes of distinction”, cf. Taine-Cheikh, “Grammaticalized uses of the verb *ra(a)*”, p. 154.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that the use of a cognate of *tarā*, i.e. *tra*, as a discourse particle has also been reported for some Tunisian dialects, cf. Taine-Cheikh, “Grammaticalized uses of the verb *ra(a)*”, p. 149.

⁴¹ Quoted in Taine-Cheikh, “Grammaticalized uses of the verb *ra(a)*”, p. 146.

As regards its meaning, the particle under study seems to be mainly used as a grammatical strategy for marking predicate focus. Moreover, as shown by the examples in (9) and (12), it may also act as a copula in clauses with non-verbal predicates.

(9)

Figure 3: Letter from Yaḥya u Taʿfūft to his uncle and the inhabitants of Sernou (2G)⁴²

ونحن ترانا بالحوز محضنين الواد

<i>wnḥn</i>	<i>trānā</i>	<i>bālhwz</i>	<i>mḥḍnyn</i>	<i>ālwād</i>
and-1PL	2SG-see.IPF-1PL	in-DEF-Haouz	embrace.AP-PL	DEF-river

‘We are in the Haouz⁴³ camping on the bank of the river’

(10)

Figure 4: Letter from unknown author (36)⁴⁴

وتراك انت تعرف بعلمهم

<i>wtrāk</i>	<i>ānt</i>	<i>tʿrf</i>	<i>fʿlhm</i>
and-2SG-see.IPF- 2SG	2MSG	2SG-know.IPF	misdeed-3PL

‘You already know their misdeed’

(11)

Figure 5: Letter from Yaḥya u Taʿfūft to Manuel I (45)⁴⁵

⁴² *Carta de Yheatáfu para um mouro de Serrnou, seu tio, em que lhe dizia que não tivesse medo das novas que havia do rei de Fez e o advertia do que deveria fazer no caso que ele passasse. Colecção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 877, n.º 2. PT/TT/CART/877/2. (Edited by de Cénival, Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal, t. I, pp. 514-517). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=4717035>*

⁴³ A plain south of Marrakesh.

⁴⁴ *Carta de autor desconhecido. Colecção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 36. PT/TT/CART/891.2/36. (Edited by Guerrero, “Edición”). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/viewer?id=3908314>*

⁴⁵ *Carta de Cide Iáhia ao rei de Portugal. Colecção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 45. PT/TT/CART/891.2/45. (Edited by de Cénival et al., Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal, t. II (1), pp.*

وان ترن نعش في زرع الادي خزن بالدر متوع

<i>wān</i>	<i>trn</i>	<i>nʿš</i>	<i>fy</i>	<i>zrʿ</i>	<i>āldy</i>	<i>hzn</i>	<i>fāldšr</i>	<i>mtwʿ</i>
and-1SG	2SG-see.IPF-1SG	1SG-live.IPF	on	seeds	REL	3MSG-store.PF	in-DEF-village	PL-POSS

‘I am surviving on the seeds that were stored in [their] village[s]’

(12)

Figure 6: Letter from Yahya u Taʿfüft to Manuel I (45)⁴⁶

ونحنين ترن في بلد الشرب

<i>wnhyn</i>	<i>trn</i>	<i>fy</i>	<i>bld</i>	<i>ālšryf</i>
and-1PL	2SG-see.IPF-1PL	in	town	DEF-Sharif

‘We are in the town of the Sharif’

(13)

Figure 7: Letter from the inhabitants of Safi to Manuel I (48)⁴⁷

وترانا نجمع لك ذلك كله في كتابنا هذا

<i>wtrānā</i>	<i>nġmʿ</i>	<i>lk</i>	<i>dālk</i>	<i>klh</i>	<i>fy</i>	<i>ktābnā</i>	<i>hāḏā</i>
and-2SG-see.IPF-1PL	1PL-gather.IPF	for-2SG	that	all-3MSG	in	letter-1PL	this

‘We are gathering for you all that [information] in this letter’

The utterances in (14) and (15) provide examples where *ترا* (*trā*) occurs on its own, that is, with no attached pronoun. In this case, the semantic meaning of the verb **raʿā* ‘to see’ is not fully blurred and so, the particle is used to draw the reader’s attention on what is said in the sentence that follows immediately. This use of *ترا* (*trā*) as a sort of

153-160). A digital version of the entire document is available on

<https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908323>

⁴⁶ On this letter, see note 45.

⁴⁷ *Carta dos moradores de Safim ao rei D. Manuel I apresentado queixa de Diogo de Azambuja. Coleção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 48. PT/TT/CART/891.2/48.* (Edited by de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 177-202). A digital version of the entire document is available on

<https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908326>

enunciative particle clearly reminds of the pragmatic properties exhibited by the fossilized *rā* in some Maghrebi vernaculars⁴⁸.

(14)

Figure 8: Letter from the inhabitants of Safi to Manuel I (48)⁴⁹

وترا ستة منهم يا مولانا باعهم لفايدك الذي اتا من جزيرة الخشب					
<i>wtrā</i>	<i>sth</i>	<i>mnhm</i>	<i>yā</i>	<i>mwlānā</i>	<i>b'hm</i>
and-2SG- see.IPF	six	of-3PL	voc	master-1PL	3MSG-sell.PF- 3PL
‘Behold, o our Master, he sold six of them’					
<i>lqāydk</i>	<i>āldy</i>	<i>ātā</i>	<i>mn</i>	<i>ǧzyrh</i>	<i>ālḥšb</i>
to-governor- 2SG	REL	3MSG- come.PF	from	island	DEF-wood
‘to your governor who came from the island of Madeira’					

(15)

Figure 9: Letter from the inhabitants of Safi to Manuel I (48)⁵⁰

وَصَوْمُوعَة جَامِعَنَا الْاَعْظَمُ الَّذِي هُوَ مَشْهُرٌ دِينِنَا تَرَا رَجَالَكَ فِيهَا اَيْضًا يَبْلُونُ وَيَغِيظُونُ						
<i>wšawmu'h</i>	<i>ǧām'nā</i>	<i>ālā'dm</i>	<i>āldy</i>	<i>hw</i>	<i>mašharu</i>	
and- minaret	mosque- 1PL	DEF- great	REL	3MSG	symbol	
<i>dynnā</i>	<i>trā</i>	<i>rǧālk</i>	<i>fyhā</i>	<i>āydā</i>	<i>yblwn</i>	<i>wygydwn</i>
religion- 1PL	2SG- see.IPF	men-2SG	in- 3FSG	also	3PL- urinate.IPF	3PL- defecate.IPF
‘Behold, your men also urinate and defecate in the minaret of our great mosque, which is the symbol of our religion’						

As a matter of fact, the behaviour of *trā* (ترا) in the analysed corpus of letters mimics quite well the syntactic functions of Maghrebi *rā*- and Middle Eastern *tarā*. Since phonetic reduction is a common phenomenon at the later stages of grammaticalization

⁴⁸ Cf. Procházka & Dallaji, “*rā*- in the Arabic dialect of Tunis”, p. 53.

⁴⁹ On this letter, see note 47.

⁵⁰ On this letter, see note 47.

processes⁵¹, it is not unrealistic to assume that the presentative *ɾā-* of modern Maghrebi dialects reflects an attrition of the first segment of 2MSG imperfective **tarā* ‘you see’⁵². Such an assumption challenges the traditional view whereby *ɾā-* derives ultimately from the imperative form **ra*. In this regard, it should be noted that the imperative of the verb *ra’ā*, though attested in grammatical treatises, is highly unusual.

1	2	3
Semantic bleaching	Phonetic reduction	Pharyngealization?
<i>*tarā</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>ɾa</i>

Table 2: Possible grammaticalization path of the presentative *ɾā-*

4.3. Durative aspect markers

The corpus of epistles under study also provides interesting data on one of the most conspicuous morphosyntactic features of Moroccan Arabic, i.e. preverbal *ta-* and *ka-*. It is a well-known fact that most Moroccan varieties make use of particles which are prefixed to the imperfective verb in order to convey different aspectual, modal and tense meanings. Among other functions, these preverbs (as they are generally referred to in the literature) are used to express the habitual and the progressive, or to talk about facts and general truths. The occurrence of these particles in the corpus is extremely rare, *ta-* occurs

⁵¹ Cf. Heine & Narrog, “Grammaticalization”, p. 413.

⁵² It is worth mentioning that this etymology has already been suggested by Grand’Henry: “[...] the linkage between the dialectal use of *rā* and the imperative of the Classical *ra’ā* should not, in my opinion, be taken for granted. The etymological form may well be the imperfect of the Classical *ra’ā*, i.e. *tarā* “you see””, cf. Grand’Henry, “The function of “ra’ā” in Spoken Arabic”, p. 62.

twice and *ka-* only once⁵³. Such a scarce number of examples admittedly requires caution in interpreting this data. However, the context of the utterances seems to indicate that what we are dealing with here is a durative aspect marker. In (16), *تا* (*tā-*) appears to denote iteration since it occurs in a sentence describing the frequency with which someone receives his wage. Interestingly enough, *تا يصرف* (*tāyṣrf*) is preceded by what seems to be the strikethrough of the bare imperfective verb form *يصرف* (*yṣrf*). Unless I am very much mistaken, this suggests that, on second thoughts, the scribe judged necessary to emphasize the monthly recurrence of the payment and consequently re-wrote the same verb form with a durative aspect marker attached to it.

(16)

Figure 10: Letter from someone named ‘Abd Allāh to John III (10)⁵⁴

أنا نَعْرِفُ أن مولاي يصرف تا يصرف الرّتب في كل شهر

'anā	na'raf	'an	mwly	tāyṣrf	ārratb	fy	kl	šhr
1SG	1SG-	that	master-	PREVB-	DEF-	in	every	month
	know.IPF		1SG	3MSG-	wage			
				spend.IPF				

'I know that my Master pays [my] wage every month'

The same particle appears in the utterance in (17), which corresponds to the exclamatory question asked by the servant of a man whose home is being searched by Portuguese security officers. Here *تا* (*tā-*) seems to be used to express the progressive.

⁵³ It is worth mentioning that *ta-* occurs in two letters bearing the signature of someone named ‘Abd Allāh, while *ka-* appears in a letter from John II of Portugal to the inhabitants of the city of Safi. For an inventory of the durative aspect markers of Moroccan Arabic, see Heath, *Jewish and Muslim dialects*, p. 210.

⁵⁴ *Carta do tio do Xarife, escrita ao rei D. João III. Coleção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mc. 2, n.º 10. PT/TT/CART/891.2/10. (Unedited). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitalq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908288>*

(17)

Figure 11: Letter from someone named ‘Abd Allāh to an unknown recipient (39)⁵⁵

عَلش تايوتشو هاد الناس

<i>ʾlš</i>	<i>tāyfišw</i>	<i>hād</i>	<i>ānnās</i>
on.what	PREVB-3PL- <i>seek</i> .IPF	this	DEF-people

‘What are these people looking for?’

The example in (18) is a statement of the fact that the whole city of Safi serves the King John II of Portugal. The value of the particle ك (*k-*) that is prefixed to the imperfective verb form يخدمنا (*yḥdmnā*) could then convey a gnomic or habitual value.

(18)

والمدينة المذكورة وناسها وجميع احوازها وجميع ما فيها كذا مجموع كيخدمنا⁵⁶

<i>wālmdynh</i>	<i>ālmdkwrh</i>	<i>wnāshā</i>	<i>wḡmy</i> ‘	<i>āḥwāzhā</i>	
and-DEF- city	DEF- mentioned	and-people- 3FSG	and-all	territories-3FSG	
<i>wbḡmy</i> ‘	<i>ma</i>	<i>fyhā</i>	<i>kdā</i>	<i>mḡmw</i> ‘	<i>kyḥdmnā</i>
and-with-all	what	in-3FSG	likewise	the.whole	PREVB- 3MSG- serve.IMP- 1PL

‘The aforementioned city, its people, its surrounding territories, and everything it contains is in our service’

4.4. Genitive particles *d-* and *dyāl*

Possessive and genitive relationships can be expressed in colloquial Arabic by means of different annexation particles that intervene between the two members of an analytic construction. In Moroccan Arabic, these genitive exponents are three: *ntā*‘, *dyāl*

⁵⁵ *Carta de autor desconhecido. Coleção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 39. PT/TT/CART/891.2/39. (Edited by Guerrero, “Edición”). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908317>*

⁵⁶ Letter from John II to the *alcaide* of Safi and its inhabitants. Unidentified document edited by de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 25-30.

and proclitic *d-*. The first one predominates in the dialects spoken in the far north-eastern region, although it appears spottily also in some Bedouin-type varieties of central and southern Morocco, as well as in the Jebala region. As regards *dyāl* and *d-*, they cover all Morocco down to Guelmim and can be seen as Moroccan “standard” forms, which explains why many Arabic speakers perceive them as being a hallmark of present-day Moroccan Arabic⁵⁷. More specifically, *dyāl* and *d-* are particularly common among speakers of the so-called pre-Hilali (henceforth first-layer) varieties, that is, the offshoots of the dialects brought into North Africa during the early Muslim conquests. Such a fact is consistent with what we know so far about the distribution of *d-* and *dyāl* outside Morocco. As a matter of fact, these two genitive exponents only occur patchily in several first-layer dialects spoken along the coastal strip of Northern Algeria. On a west-east axis, these vernaculars are: Ghazaouet (*di, dyāl*)⁵⁸, Nedroma (*di, dyal*)⁵⁹, Tlemcen (*dī, eddi, ddi, de*)⁶⁰, Cherchell (*dyāl*)⁶¹, Muslim Algiers (*dyāl*)⁶², Jewish Algiers (*di, de, dyāl*)⁶³,

⁵⁷ *ntā* ‘ may also surface as *tā* ‘ and, less frequently, *mtā* ‘. For more details on the geographic distribution of these genitive markers in Morocco, see Heath, *Jewish and Muslim dialects*, pp. 461-462.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hocini, *Ghazaouet*, p. 73.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ammour, *Nedroma*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ Cf. Marçais, *Tlemcen*, p. 172.

⁶¹ Cf. Grand’Henry, *Cherchell*, p. 121.

⁶² Cf. Marçais, “El-Milia”, p. 1055.

⁶³ Cf. Cohen, *Juifs d’Alger*, pp. 324-325.

Dellys (*dyāl*)⁶⁴, Jijel (*eddi, dyāl*)⁶⁵, El-Milia (*di, dīl, dyāl*)⁶⁶, Skikda (*di*)⁶⁷. There is some obscurity and controversy surrounding the historical origin of these annexation particles, which are undoubtedly genetically related to each other. Most scholars hold the view that *d-* and *dyāl* represent a development from the relative pronoun **alladī*, which displays two main reflexes in Maghrebi Arabic: *alli* and *addi*⁶⁸. In support of this hypothesis are the following facts:

- 1) The vast majority of Semitic languages possess genitive exponents that ultimately developed from a relative marker, e.g.: Hebrew *šel*, Assyrian *ša*, Aramaic *dī*, Ge'ez *za'enta'ella*, Harsusi *d*.
- 2) Unlike *dyāl*, *d-* can never receive a suffixed pronoun, a syntactic constraint that hints at a possible grammaticalization of **alladī li* ‘(the one) that is to/for’, i.e. a combination of a relative plus the preposition **li*: **alladī li > addi l > dīl*⁶⁹.
- 3) In some dialects (Jijel, Skikda), *addi/alli* may function both as a relative and as a possessive particle.

⁶⁴ Cf. Souag, “Dellys”, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Cf. Marçais, *Djidjelli*, pp. 418-421.

⁶⁶ Cf. Marçais, “El-Milia”, p. 1053.

⁶⁷ Ostoya-Delmas, “Philippeville”, p. 81.

⁶⁸ *addi* can be safely ascribed to Moroccan and Algerian first-layer varieties since it has never been recorded in Hilali dialects. The hypothesis that derives *d-* and *dyāl* from a relative pronoun was first put forth by Dombay (*Grammatica mauro arabicae*, pp. 27-28) and was later developed by Kampffmeyer (“Südarabisches”), Marçais (“El-Milia”) and Colin, “Notes de dialectologie arabe”. The aforementioned works are quoted in Heath, “D-possessives”.

⁶⁹ Such an analytical construction was not unknown in Andalusī Arabic, cf. Corriente, *Sketch*, p.125, 98f (quoted in Eksell, “D/L particles”, p. 38).

A major stumbling block in the way of such an etymology is the lack of compelling arguments to explain the shift from *dīl* to *dyāl*⁷⁰. This problematic *a*-vowel has led Heath and Ouhalla to propose an Arabic-external origin instead. These two authors argue for a morphological borrowing from Late Latin *dē* in constructions such as Spanish *de él* ‘of him’, a pronominal prepositional phrase that would have been borrowed as *dyāl* by speakers of early Moroccan Arabic⁷¹. Even if this hypothesis is not totally implausible and partially accounts for the geographic distribution of *d-* and *dyāl*, the development from a relative marker cannot be immediately dismissed. I acknowledge that desyllabification of *i*-vowel in *dīl* > *dyāl* is difficult to explain, but this does not mean the shift at hand is impossible. Sound changes can sometimes be fanciful enough as to bring about puzzling morphological forms. Moreover, I do not see why some speakers of early Moroccan Arabic should have borrowed a genitive exponent from another language, when they probably already had one. Evidence to this is adduced by the fact that cognates of **matā* ‘belongings’ are widely used as annexation particles in Andalusī Arabic, Siculo-Arabic and Maltese, all of them first-layer varieties that may reflect some features from an archaic stage of Maghrebi Arabic since they remained relatively impermeable to the influence of the Hilali wave of Arabicization⁷². On the other hand, Heath’s and Ouhalla’s claim that genitive markers *d-* and *dyāl* spread from Morocco or al-Andalus to as far eastward as the Algerian city of Skikda is not supported enough as to rule out that

⁷⁰ Cf. Aguadé, “Maghrebi dialects”, p. 54.

⁷¹ Cf. Heath, “D-possessives”; Ouhalla, “Andalusī-Moroccan Arabic”.

⁷² Cf. Aguadé, “Maghrebi dialects”, p. 34. Egyptian Arabic also displays a possessive marker (*bitā*) harking back to **matā*. This geographic spread across North Africa might hint at a common inheritance rather than a shared innovation.

what happened was rather the opposite, i.e. that this feature spread from the east to the west.

Whatever the case, the clear-cut connection between the genitive markers at hand and the relative pronoun **alladī* should not be overlooked. Further evidence to this link can be found in the Luso-Moroccan letters kept at the TDT archives. As a matter of fact, متاع (*mtā*) is the most usual annexation particle in these documents. It occurs in almost all letters and may even display plural inflection, متاوع (*mtāw*), a morphological property that indicates a high degree of grammaticalization⁷³. Yet, the epistolary corpus under study also yields a few instances of *dyāl* and proclitic *d-*. The latter appears as د (*d*) in the numeral phrase provided in (19), while it is written as ادي (*ādy*), with an *'alif* preceding the *dāl*, in the example in (20). Such a spelling likely suggests an attempt to render graphically the relative marker *addi*. This assumption is further corroborated by the shape that takes the relative marker in (21)⁷⁴.

(19)

⁷³ On the use of متاع (*mtā*) as a genitive marker in the TDT Arabic materials, see Guerrero, “Analyse linguistique”.

⁷⁴ Numerous instances of the use of ادي (*ādy*) as a genitive marker can be found in letter 32 (on this document, see note 33): سِتْ أَلْفِ الدِّي أَلْغَنَامْ، وَمَعَهُمْ شِي الدِّي الرُّعْيَانُ: ‘there were a few shepherds with them’, 6000 sheep’. Also worth mentioning is the following example taken from letter 25: فنريد من الله ومن كمال فضلكم ان: ‘I ask God and your worship to resolve the dispute [that exists] between me and these rebels with a letter from the king [John III] or from [his treasurer] Fernando Alvares’, cf. *Carta de João Álvares de Azevedo para o alcaide Cide Nasar (de Fez?)*. *Colecção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 25. PT/TT/CART/891.2/25*. (Unedited letter), <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908303>.

Figure 12: Letter from the inhabitants of Massa to Manuel I (43)⁷⁵

وزوج دالاصغار الكبار من كتب اليهود

wzwġ	<i>dlāṣfār</i>	<i>alkibār</i>	<i>mn</i>	<i>ktb</i>	<i>ālyhwd</i>
and-two	GEN-DEF- volumes	DEF-big-PL	of	books	DEF-Jews

‘And two big volumes of the books of the Jews’

(20)

Figure 13: Letter from Ben Lahsen Zanbak to the captain of Azemmour (52)⁷⁶

هرب بزوج لجوم ادي السلطان

<i>hrb</i>	<i>bzwġ</i>	<i>lġwm</i>	<i>ādy</i>	<i>alslṭān</i>
3MSG-run.PF	with-two	bridles	GEN	DEF-sultan

‘He ran away with two bridles belonging to the Sultan’

(21)

Figure 14: Letter from Muḥammad ‘Ali al-Qbayli? to Pero Correa⁷⁷

ووصلني اليوم ادي التلاته برات السلطان

<i>wṣlny</i>	<i>ālywm</i>	<i>ādy</i>	<i>ātlāth</i>	<i>brāt</i>	<i>āssulṭān</i>
and-3MSG-arrive.PF- 1SG	DEF-day	REL	Tuesday	letter	DEF-sultan

‘I have received today, Tuesday, the Sultan’s letter’

⁷⁵ Carta dos moradores de Messa a D. Manuel Ier. Coleção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 43. PT/TT/CART/891.2/43. (Edited by de Cénival, *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. I, pp. 233-247). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908321>

⁷⁶ Carta de Mohamed ben Lahsen Zanbak, secretário do Xarife de Fez, a António Leite, capitão de Azamor. Coleção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 52. PT/TT/CART/891.2/52. (Edited by de Cénival et al., *Archives et bibliothèques de Portugal*, t. II (2), pp. 500-505). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908331>

⁷⁷ Carta de Muhamed Aly Cataily a D. Pedro de Mascarenhas. Coleção de cartas, Núcleo Antigo 891, mç. 2, n.º 21. PT/TT/CART/891.2/21. (Unedited document). A digital version of the entire document is available on <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3908299>

The sentences in (22) and (23) contain occurrences of what seems to be an earlier form of present-day *dyāl*. Interestingly enough, this possessive marker is spelled in these examples with an *'alif* and, in the case of (23), a *šadda* on the *dāl*. Moreover, the instance in (22) includes a *lām* after the *'alif*. As shown above, this way of writing the two first segments of *dyāl* (i.e. *الذي, الذي*) recalls the graphic appearance of the relative pronoun **alladī* (*الذي*)⁷⁸.

(22)

Figure 15: Letter from Yaḥya u Ta' fūft to Manuel I (45)⁷⁹

ان كتبت بعد لطيف مع الخدم الديل

<i>ān</i>	<i>ktbt</i>	<i>b'd</i>	<i>ltyf</i>	<i>m'</i>	<i>ālḥdm</i>	<i>āldyl</i>
1SG	1SG-write.PF	then	to-guest- [1SG]	with	DEF- servant	GEN-[1SG]

‘Then I wrote (a letter) to [my] guest through [my] servant’

(23)

يحبس نفسه انه ادبانا⁸⁰

<i>yḥsb</i>	<i>nfsh</i>	<i>ānnh</i>	<i>āddyālnā</i>
3MSG-consider- IPF	REFL-3MSG	that-3MSG	GEN-1PL

‘He considers himself one of us’

Further evidence in support of the possible development of *d-* and *dyal* from a relative marker are to be found in later sources for the study of Moroccan Arabic. For instance, these two annexation particles are well attested in the Arabic words and phrases that appear throughout the captivity narrative of Germain Moüette⁸¹. Interestingly

⁷⁸ I came across further occurrences of a likely proto-form of *dyāl* in letter 25 (on this document, see note

74): *الخيال ادبيك* ‘your horses/horsemen’, *ارجل ادبيك* ‘your men’.

⁷⁹ On this letter, see note 45.

⁸⁰ On this letter, see note 56.

⁸¹ Cf. Moüette, *Relation de la captivité du Sieur Moüette*.

enough, in the examples given by Moüette *d-* only occurs before nouns (24), whereas *dyāl* is exclusively used with suffixed pronouns (25).

(24) *Demen-hadac* ‘whose is this?’ (p. 331)⁸², *Metecal-de déheb* ‘2 Ecu gold ducaton’ (p. 340), *Malē-del-benin* ‘master bricklayer’ (p. 349), *Soradel-boten* ‘belly button’ (p. 351), *Biot-del-marquē* ‘black pitch’ (p. 354), *Frac-delhamē* ‘pigeon chick (=squab)’ (p. 354), *Lemelay delbarot* ‘gunpowder salt (=salpêtre)’ (p. 357), *Serac-delma* ‘water thief (=syringe)’ (p. 358).

(25) *Ajay chouff Romain dienna* ‘come see our Christian!’ (p. 198), *Di ellum* ‘theirs’, *Di ella* ‘hers’ (p. 330), *Diello* ‘his’, *Dienna* ‘ours’, *Dielli* ‘mine’ (p. 331), *Diellec* ‘yours’, *Dielcum* ‘yours (pl.)’ (p. 332),

Examples in Dombay’s grammar also seem to hint at a similar syntactic constraint on the use of *d-* (26) and *dyāl* (27) in late 18th-century Moroccan Arabic⁸³.

(26) *sifr del-kitāb* ‘the volume of the book’, *elmitskāl ded-deheb* ‘gold coin’ (p. 25), *kermūs den-nasāra* ‘Barbary fig’ (p. 70), *chyzāna del-kutub* ‘book cupboard (=library)’ (p. 78), *mūmū del-āin* ‘pupil’ (p. 85).

(27) *kitāb dioelī* ‘my book’, *kitāb dioelkum* ‘your book’ (p. 28).

⁸² Emphasis in these examples is mine.

⁸³ Cf. Dombay, *Grammatica mauro arabicae*.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I intended to explore an early 16th-century epistolary corpus in order to obtain some data on the Arabic dialects of late medieval Morocco, thus, gaining a further insight into the historical development of four striking features of Moroccan Arabic. The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study:

5.1. The occurrence of حَوْج (ḡwǧ) ‘two’ in one of the letters of the corpus suggests that, by the beginnings of the 16th-century, some dialects of Moroccan Arabic must have known a phenomenon of consonant harmony involving sibilants. This feature, too, may be connected with the possible presence of a fricative reflex of */ǧ/ in these dialects, which is more likely to trigger assimilation of an adjacent sibilant.

5.2. Occurrences of a discourse particle ترا (*trā*) that harks back to the verb **raʾā* ‘to see’, are recurrent across the corpus. Thus, and contrary to common opinion, we have reasonable grounds to believe that the presentative *rā-* of modern Maghrebi dialects could have originated from 2ndMSG imperfective **tarā*, rather than imperative **ra*. Such a hypothesis is consistent with the discourse functions shown by *tarā* in some Middle Eastern varieties. In the light of these findings, the following sequence of events can be assumed: first, the expression **tarā* ‘you see’ bleached of its lexical meaning, then underwent phonological erosion of the 2nd p. verbal prefix *ta-*, and was eventually reduced to a discourse particle *rā-*.

5.3. The analysis of the TDT materials showed that the occurrence of durative aspect markers in these texts is extremely rare. Only two instances of *ta-* and one of *ka-* have been found. Despite this admittedly meagre evidence, it can be inferred that the use in

Moroccan Arabic of highly grammaticalized particles denoting some kind of aspectual value goes back at least to the beginning of the 16th-century.

5.4. The token frequency of the genitive markers *d-* and *dyāl* in the letters analysed is noticeably low as compared to that of **matā'*. The reasons for this are unclear. On one hand this fact could be taken as evidence of the greater diffusion of **matā'* at that time. On the other, **matā'* could simply reflect a stylistic tendency as it is very common in North-African Middle Arabic sources. In any case, the orthographic representations of *d-* and *dyāl* as ادي / الدي and اديال / الديل respectively, can lend support to the hypothesis whereby *d-* would ultimately derive from a relative marker, and *dyāl* from the fusion of a relative marker and a preposition.

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