"Synharmonism in the Särdä:rïd dialect"

Helen Younansardaroud

Särdä:rïd, B˚a:b˚a:r̤˚ı and D˚arb˚a:r̤˚ı [1] are three villages about 20 kms away from Urmia that were settled by Assyrians, Armenians and Turks.[2] The dialect spoken in Särdä:rïd belongs to the Urmia language group of Neo-Aramaic.

Three languages (Assyrian, Armenian and Turkish) were spoken in great geographic proximity. This led to a strongly marked bilingualism and even multilingualism, not only of a few individuals, but of entire villages. The situation can be characterized roughly as follows:

The Turks who settled in these three villages were - with a few exceptions - exclusively monolingual. The Assyrians and the Armenians were either bilingual (Assyrian-Armenian) or trilingual (Assyrian-Armenian and Turkish). The Assyrians in Särdä:rïd mainly used the Turkish language for traditional songs from the Turks. By 1970 the older generation hardly spoke any Persian in Särdä:rïd,[3] while the younger generation learned Persian at school as an official language.

The Assyrians from Särdä:rïd and Urmia can easily communicate with one another. The entire grammatical structure of both dialects is nearly identical. But a few differences in pronunciation can be observed. In the Särdä:rïd dialect the vowel and consonant harmony (synharmonism) is of greatest importance. Nearly all vowels and consonants offer three different possibilities.

Synharmonism has developed as a result of velarized and pharyngalized consonants. In the Särdä:rïd dialect the acoustic effect of this phenomenon is the pronunciation of words with hard, middle or soft timbre[4]. As a result of the mutual adaptation of vowels and consonants, we find both vowel and consonant harmony in a word. The opposition between the hard, middle and soft pronunciation of words is phonologically relevant, as can be shown in minimal pairs.

To assess synharmonism in the Särdä:rïd dialect, we applied the following method: First, an alphabetical list of words was compiled bearing in mind their pronunciation. In keeping with Tsereteli´s analysis of the Urmia dialect, three

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[1] These are the names of the villages in the Särdä:rïd dialect (i. e. ᵛSärdä:rïd). Officially, i. e. in Persian, they are called Sard‾ar‾ud, B‾ab‾a-R‾ud und D‾arb‾a-R‾ud, respectively.

[2] Assyrians and Armenians alike abandoned the area following the Islamic Republic (1979).

[3] Based on accounts by the author´s father.

[4] This term has been taken over from the writings of Tsereteli (1961).

categories of words were distinguished with hard, middle and soft pronunciation.[5] After the first transcription, this analysis was tested with the help of another speaker of the Särdä:rïd-Dialect, Davood Younansardaroud[6].

In the transcription of the short vowels, we took over the punctuation marks of Tsereteli, except that we used a uniform marking for all three categories. Thus, the front row vowels appear as vowels with umlaut (ä, ë, ï, ö, ü), the middle row vowels do not have any diacritics (a, e, i, o, u), and the back row vowels are given with a small circle an known from the Swedish ˚a (˚a, ˚e, ˚ɪ, ˚o, ˚u):

front vowels: ä, ë, ï, ö, ü

middle vowels: a, e, i, o, u

back vowels: ˚a, ˚e, ˚ɪ, ˚o, ˚u

To describe vowel length, a colon was placed after the vowel instead of the crossbeam used by Tsereteli:

front long vowels: ä:, ë:, ï:, ö:, ü:

middle long vowels: a:, e:, i:, o:, u:

back long vowels: ˚a:, ˚e:, ˚ɪ:, ˚o: ˚u:

1. Consonants

This paper treats only those consonants in the Särdä:rïd dialect which have a bearing on synharmonism.[7] A word with front, middle or back timbre will be characterized by the letters [f], [m], [b].[8]

1. 1. Emphatic consonants

The emphatic consonants /ṣ/ and /ṭ/ have brought about the velar pronunciation of the whole word.[9] The position of the velarized consonant is irrelevant.

[b]ṭ˚a:ṃ˚a ܛܥܡܐ "taste"[10]

[b]ṣ˚o:ṃ˚a ܨܘܡܐ "a fast"

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[5] See Tsereteli (1946, 1961, 1978).

[6] Namely, the author´s father.

[7] The author is currently working on a grammar of the Särdä:rïd dialect, to include three possible variations of all vowels and consonants.

[8] This characterization was suggested by Prof. Dr. R. Voigt at Berlin Frei Uiversity.

[9] Credit for this thesis goes to Tsereteli (1961), following his study of the phonetics of modern Assyrian dialects. The dialect of Särdä:rïd belongs - as mentioned above - to the Urmia dialect group.

[10] In this paper, the Syriac script is used only for the synchronic presentation. And its spelling is based on the dictionary of Oraham (1943) and Maclean (1901).

ᵇṃˢ aṃṃˢ uːṣˢ ɪ ܡܚܡܝܐ "suckle"

1. 2. The alveolar vibrant /r/

The alveolar vibrant /r/ is velarized when occurring in a word together with the consonants /ṭ/, /ṣ/ and the pharyngal /ʕ/, which has been deleted in the modern language. The result will be words in which all segments belong to the back timbre.

- /r/ in a word with /ṣ/

ᵇṣˢ ɪ ṣṛˢ a ܨܪܨܐ "grasshopper"

ᵇṣˢ aːṛˢ uįpˢ a ܨܪܘܦܐ "pungent"

- /r/ in a word with /ṭ/

ᵇṭṛˢ aːįˢ a ܛܪܝܐ "to drive"

ᵇqṛˢ aːṭˢ a ܩܪܛܐ "to bite"

- /r/ in a word with /ʕ/ (as found in the Classical Syriac language)

ᵇˢ aṛṛˢ a ܐܪܥܐ "earth"

ᵇtˢ aṛṛˢ a ܬܪܥܐ "a door"

- /r/ in a word with other consonants

The alveolar vibrant /r/ is velarized in words without /ṣ/, /ṭ/ and /ʕ/:

ᵇnˢ ɪ ṃṛˢ a ܢܡܪܐ "a tiger"

ᵇṃṛˢ aː´ gˢ a ܡܪܓܐ "to press"

- /r/ in words with middle timbre

In a word with middle timbre, /r/ is not velarized.

ᵐr˵ iaːma ܪܝܡܐ "to rise up"

ᵐčaːmutra ܟܡܬܪܐ "a pear"

- /r/ in words with front timbre

In a word with front timbre, once again /r/ is not velarized.

ᶠärḫä ܐܪܚܐ "a guest"

ᶠbärdä ܒܪܕܐ "hail"

1. 3. The velar lateral /ḷ/

The lateral /ḷ/ has a velar pronunciation in combination with the consonants /ṣ/ and /ṭ/.

- /ḷ/ in a word with /ṣ/

ᵇbˢ aḷbˢ uːṣˢ ɪ ܒܠܒܘܨܝ "to glisten"

ᵇhˢ aːṣˢ uːḷˢ ɪ ܗܨܘܠܐ "give birth to"

- /l̤/ in a word with /ṭ/

    ᵇpl̤°a:ṭ°a ܦܠܛܐ "to go out"

    ᵇṭl̤°a:b°a ܛܠܒܐ "to demand"

- /l̤/ in a word with other consonants

      For the most part, /l̤/ has a hard pronunciation in a word with /ẖ/ and /´c̣/

    ᵇ°a:ẖ°u:l̤°a ܐܟܘܠܐ "a glutton"

    ᵇ´c̣l̤°a:p°a ܨܠܦܐ "to split"

1. 4. Pharyngals

    The pharyngal consonant /ʕ/ as found in the Classical Syriac language has sometimes triggered the hard pronunciation of a word:

    ᵇb°ızz°a ܒܙܥܐ "a hole"

    ᵇš°aṃṃ°ın ܫܡܥ "that I hear/listen to"

2. Minimal pairs

    The opposition between front and back vowels and consonants leads to a lexical differentiation as can be shown in minimal pairs. This differentiation occurs not only between words with back timbre (= emphatic), and words with front timbre (= non emphatic), such as ᵇṭ°a:v°a ܛܒܐ "good" compared to ᶠdä:vä ܕܗܒܐ "gold", but also between words with back and middle timbre such as ᵇṭ°a:ṃ°a ܛܥܡܐ "taste" compared to ᵐta:ma ܬܡܐ "there", as well as between words with middle and front timbre such as ᵐsadra ܣܕܪܐ "breast" compared to ᶠsädrä ܣܕܪܐ "that she tears". Note the following different examples:

Back timbre	vs.	Front timbre
ᵇd°u:ṟ ܕܘܪ "return"	"	ᶠdü:r ܕܝܪ "close"
ᵇ°ıṭṃ°a ܥܛܡܐ "thigh"	"	ᶠïdmä ܐܕܡܐ "son in law"
Back timbre	*vs.*	*Middle timbre*
ᵇṭ°a:ṃ°a ܛܥܡܐ "taste"	"	ᵐta:ma ܬܡܐ "there"
Middle timbre	*vs.*	*Front timbre*
ᵐsadra ܣܕܪܐ "breast"	"	ᶠsädrä ܣܕܪܐ "that she tears"
ᵐǧo:ra ܓܒܪܐ "husband"	"	ᶠǧö:rä ܓܒܪܐ "that she gets married"

3. Synharmonism in verbal conjugation

    Synharmonism is relevant too in all kind of verbal formations. Accordingly verbal forms may be classified into three categories - back, middle and front pronunciation - as illustrated by the following examples:

back	ᵇ°a:ḫ°ı] ܐܟܠܚ "that he eats"	
middle	ᵐhai̯i̯ir ܗܙ "that he helps"	
front	ᶠlä:vïš ܠܒܫ "that he dresses"	

Active Participle	ᵇ°aḫ°ı]ܐܟܠܚ	ᵐhai̯i̯ir ܗܙ	ᶠlä:vïš ܠܒܫ
Infinitive	ᵇḫ°a:]°a ܟܠܚܐ	ᵐha:i̯u:ri ܗܙܘܪܐ	ᶠlvä:šä ܠܒܫܐ
Passive Participle	ᵇḫ°ı ˌi]°a ܟܒܠܚܐ	ᵐhui̯i̯irra ܗܙܪܐ	ᶠlvï ˌišä ܠܒܫܟܐ
Noun Agent	ᵇ°aḫ]°a:n°a ܐܟܠܢܐ	ᵐhai̯i̯ira:na ܗܙܪܢܐ	ᶠlö:šä:nä ܠܒܫܢܐ

4. Synharmonism in Nouns

Synharmonism is extended to the whole word. When the singular of a word is characterized by a back, middle or front timbre, the same timbre does occur in the plural too. Therefore, there are three variants for each plural morphem, e. g.

- Plural morphem -a:ni for masculine nouns

	Singular	Plural
back	ᵇt°ui̯r°a ܛܘܪܐ "mountain"	ᵇt°ui̯r°a:n°ı ܛܘܪܢܐ
middle	ᵐrui̯ša ܪܘܫܐ "shoulder"	ᵐrui̯ša:ni ܪܘܫܢܐ
front	ᶠḫäqlä ܚܩܠܐ "field"	ᶠḫäqlä:nï ܚܩܠܢܐ

5. Synharmonism in loan-words

In the course of time, the Särdä:rïd dialect has acquired a number of loan-words, derived especially from Persian, Kurdish, Arabic and the Turkish dialects of Azerbaijan. Many of these loan words are treated by the language as inherited words showing a vocalisation according to the three timbres. For example, ᵇ°a:ġ°a ܐܓܐ "lord", ᵇ°ahv°a] ܐܗܘܠ "condition", ᵇ°a:v°a:ṛ°a ܐܘܪܐ "homeless".

Therefore, it is possible to find some minimal pairs even including loan-words, e. g.:

Loan-words	vs.	*Syrian words*
ᵇ°ı i̯m°an ܐܝܡܢ "belief" "		ᶠi̯i̯män ܐܝܡܢ "when"
ᵇ°a:b°ad ܐܒܕ "resident" "		ᶠä:bäd ܐܒܕ "eternity"

Loan-words	vs.	*Loan-words*
ᵇḫ°a:č°ım ܗܟܡ "that he reigns to" "		ᶠhä:čïm ܗܟܡ "physician
ᵇḫ°a:ṛ°am ܗܪܡ "forbidden" "		ᶠhä:räm ܗܪܡ "harem"

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