

# Challenges and Benefits of Writing a Polylectal Grammar: A look from Senhaja Berber

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## Outline of the presentation

1. Introduction: Why a polylectal grammar?
2. Senhaja Berber varieties  
*Examples from two language domains:*
3. Phonology
4. Morphology: Behavior of adjectives
5. (Bonus) Polylectal grammars and remote fieldwork

### 1. Introduction: Why a polylectal grammar?

- Undescribed languages usually have multiple distinct forms and no standard.
- Grammars often focus on one variety (presented/taken as the standard).
- Describing several varieties poses some challenges but also has advantages.
- There are very few polylectal grammars; a notable exception is Evans 2003.
- Little attention has been given to this topic in Ameika, Dench & Evans 2006, except a paper by Diller 2006; cf. also Diller 2011.
- Early paper: Weinreich 1954, treating Yiddish varieties as a 'system of systems'.

## Major questions/challenges

- How to organize the description in a lucid way?
- Should all varieties be given the same attention?
- How to make an informed choice of witness varieties to focus on (varieties with more speakers, with divergent or archaic features)?
- Should the varieties be presented simultaneously, or treated in succession?
- How to avoid the problem of 'not seeing the forest for the trees'?
- Function-to-from vs. form-to-function organization?
- What implications does a polylectal grammar have for typology?

## Benefits

- Polylectal grammars acknowledge language variation and deepen the analysis.
- Synchronic variation helps to reconstruct the original forms (diachrony).
- Each witness dialect brings its own evidence to the picture.
- Each dialect gives more insight into the structure of other dialects.
- The data from multiple varieties often help to explain divergent features.

This talk: a look from Senhaja Berber, northwestern Morocco (based on the thesis currently in preparation by the author).

## 2. Senhaja Berber varieties

- Senhaja Berber is spoken in northern Morocco; its neighbors are Ghomara Berber (spoken to its West) and Tarifiyt Berber (spoken to its East), see map 1.
- Senhaja includes ten distinct varieties, six of which are covered in my thesis (map 2).
- My thesis focuses on three varieties: Ketama (West), Hmed (Center), and Zerqet (East): geographically remote and linguistically distinct.
- My thesis describes the variation and establishes the common features.

### Sociolinguistic context

- Number of speakers: ca. 85,000 (HCP 2014).
- Bilingualism: Berber/dialectal Arabic.
- Contact linguistics: influence of Arabic.
- Lexical borrowing: ca. 30% in the basic lexicon (Leipzig-Jakarta list: Haspelmath & Tadmor 2009), with the percentage higher in Ketama (35%) than in Hmed and Zerqet (29% each).

Senhaja Berber varieties form a discontinuous dialect continuum with other Berber varieties spoken in northern Morocco. Western Senhaja (Ketama) shares more native vocabulary with Ghomara spoken to its West, and Eastern Senhaja (Zerqet) shares more native vocabulary with Tarifiyt spoken to its East.

## 3. Phonology

In my thesis, I present a chart of consonants ‘common to Senhaja varieties’, and then I deal with consonants that are found dialectally (e.g. spirantized *b* and *g̃*, a series of labialized velars and uvulars *kʷ*, *gʷ*, etc.). In Western Senhaja (Ketama), labialized velars are absent, but there are traces of lost labialization: the schwa that was adjacent to a labialized velar is realized as *u*, e.g. *seḡʷ* > *sug* ‘to buy’.

The fate of L and LL. Different Senhaja varieties have different realizations of the original L (*\*l*) and its long counterpart LL (*\*ll*).

- Most varieties: *\*l* > *y*. Taghzut: *\*l* > *ž*. Mezduy: *\*l* > *r* (as in Tarifiyt). Zerqet: *\*l* is preserved.
- Most varieties: *\*ll* > *ǧǧ*. Ketama/Taghzut/Hmed: *\*ll* is preserved.

The fate of L

Ketama/Seddat Hmed/Bunsar	Taghzut	Zerqet	Mezduy	Translation
y	ž	l	r	
asyi	asži	asli	asri	groom
uy	už	ul	ur	heart

The fate of LL

Ketama/Hmed/ Taghzut	Seddat/Bunsar/Zerqet/ Mezduy	Translation
ll	ğğ	
llubiya	ğğubiya	beans
lla-n	ğğa-n	they are/were
mellek	meğğek	Imperfective of 'to marry'

#### \*l – \*ll in Aorist-Imperfective pairs

The Imperfective is often formed based on the Aorist by lengthening the second consonant of the root. The following table shows how the original regular \*l – \*ll correspondence led to different correspondences in different varieties:

Ketama/Hmed	Taghzut	Seddat/Bunsar	Zerqet	Translation
y – ll	ž – žž	y – ğğ	l – ğğ	
myek – mellek	mžek – mežžek	myek – meğğek	mlek – meğğek	marry
ħyaq – ħellaq	ħžeq – ħežžeq	ħyaq – ħeğğaq	ħlaq – ħeğğaq	be born
hyek – hellek	hžek – hežžek	hyek – heğğek	hleq – heğğek	be sick

> Synchronic variation can help reconstruct diachronic developments, while the knowledge of diachronic developments helps to understand the synchronic variation.

#### 4. Morphology: Behavior of adjectives

##### Qualification in Berber

- “Quality words” = a semantic/comparative concept; “adjectives” = a syntactic/descriptive category (cf. Haspelmath 2010 on the comparative concepts used in typology vs. descriptive categories).
- Most Berber languages have no true adjectives.
- Instead, they use quality nouns and verbs.
- Quality words are a “hybrid class” (cf. Treis 2012).
  
- Quality words in Senhaja: nouns, verbs, adjectives.
- Two kinds of adjectives: borrowed Arabic adjectives (majority) and native Berber adjectives.
- Different markers, but the same function.
- Native adjectives might have developed from stative verbs.
- In some Senhaja varieties, adjectives are conjugated.
- Adjectives have no aspectual distinctions.

##### Adjectives in Senhaja

- Arabic adjectives preserve Arabic morphology.
- Berber adjectives: markers similar to the stative conjugation elsewhere.

Example: adjectives for ‘white’ in Hmed (Central Snh.)

	Arabic adjective		Berber adjective	
MS	...	byeḍ	...	melluy
FS	...-a	beyḍ-a	...-t	melluy-et
PL	...-in	beyḍ-in ~ buyeḍ	...-en	melluy-en

### Marking of Adjectives

- Different behavior in different varieties (there is no dialect continuum):
  - a) Special PNG marking: suffixes only, cf. stative verbs
  - b) Regular PNG marking: prefixes/suffixes, as regular verbs
  - c) Adjectives are not conjugated

Example:

- (a) (*keḡḡi*)    *mezzi-d*    (Taghzut)  
 (2MS)    small-2S
- (b) (*keḡḡi*)    *t-mezzi-d*    (Seddat)  
 (2MS)    2S-small-2S
- (c) *keḡḡi*    *mezzi*    (Ketama/Taghzut)  
 2MS    small:MS  
 ‘You are young/small.’

Marking of Berber adjectives in different Senhaja varieties

	Ketama	Taghzut, Bunsar	Seddat	Hmed	Zerqet
a) special conjugation		+			+
b) regular conjugation			+		+
c) non-conjugated	+	+		+	+

### Hypothesis: Emergence of Adjectives

- (a) The original situation: stative conjugation

Different developments:

- (b) Conjugation is regularized (Seddat), or
- (c) Conjugation ceases (influence of Arabic?) > native adjectives emerge.

Conjugated adjectives are quasi-verbs, but not verbs:

- have special marking
- have no aspectual distinctions.

> Dialectal variation helps to trace developmental paths towards adjectives as a word class in Senhaja.

## 5. Polylectal grammars and remote fieldwork

- Remote fieldwork poses some challenges but also has some advantages
- Disadvantage: no direct exposure to culture/ethnography of communication/language in use (but possible to overcome this difficulty)
- Advantage: working remotely gives you a possibility to work on multiple varieties
- Sometimes, fieldwork on site is impossible, and we have no choice.

### Challenges:

- Speakers need internet access.

### Benefits:

- Easier to collect more data (quantity and quality).
- Easier to discover dialectal differences.
- This in turn helps the analysis.
- Vast network of language consultants (when doing fieldwork on site, it is not always easy to work with multiple language consultants or change them freely).

### Two methods to gather data remotely:

- 1) record questions, send them to speakers, gather the answers
  - Disadvantage: no instant verification, possibility of mistakes, time-consuming if you receive many answers (but worth the effort).
  - Advantage: multitude of answers > more reliable and more diverse.
  - If speakers agree, you can forward their answers (and receive many comments!).
- 2) calls to individual speakers
  - advantage: easier to avoiding mistakes, no need for back-and-forth audios; works better for testing hypotheses ("Is this also possible?")
  - Disadvantage: one speaker (idiolect), less reliable if not verified with other speakers. But you can also call other speakers to verify, or record questions (method 1) based on the data collected with method 2.

### Best practice:

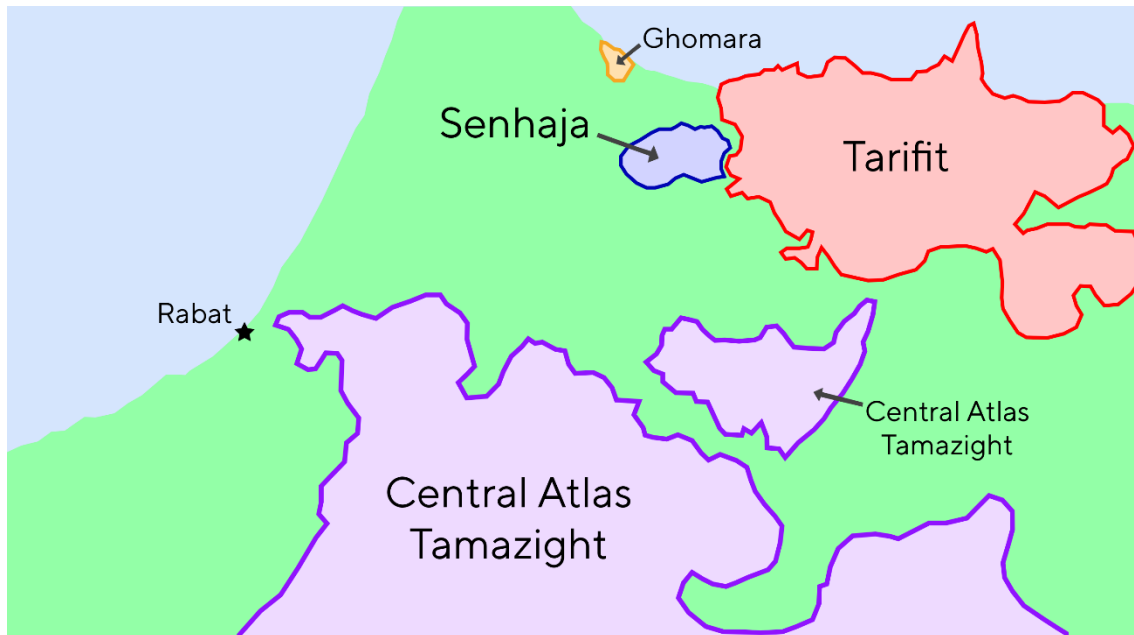
- Gather data with one speaker, verify with other speakers (same and other varieties)
- Are there any differences? > Check the reasons (idiosyncratic/shared variation, free/dialectal variation).
- Verify new/different data with the original speaker.
- The combination of both methods works best
- Ideally, remote fieldwork is combined with fieldwork on site
- Remote fieldwork is especially useful for covering a range of dialects.

### Things to think about:

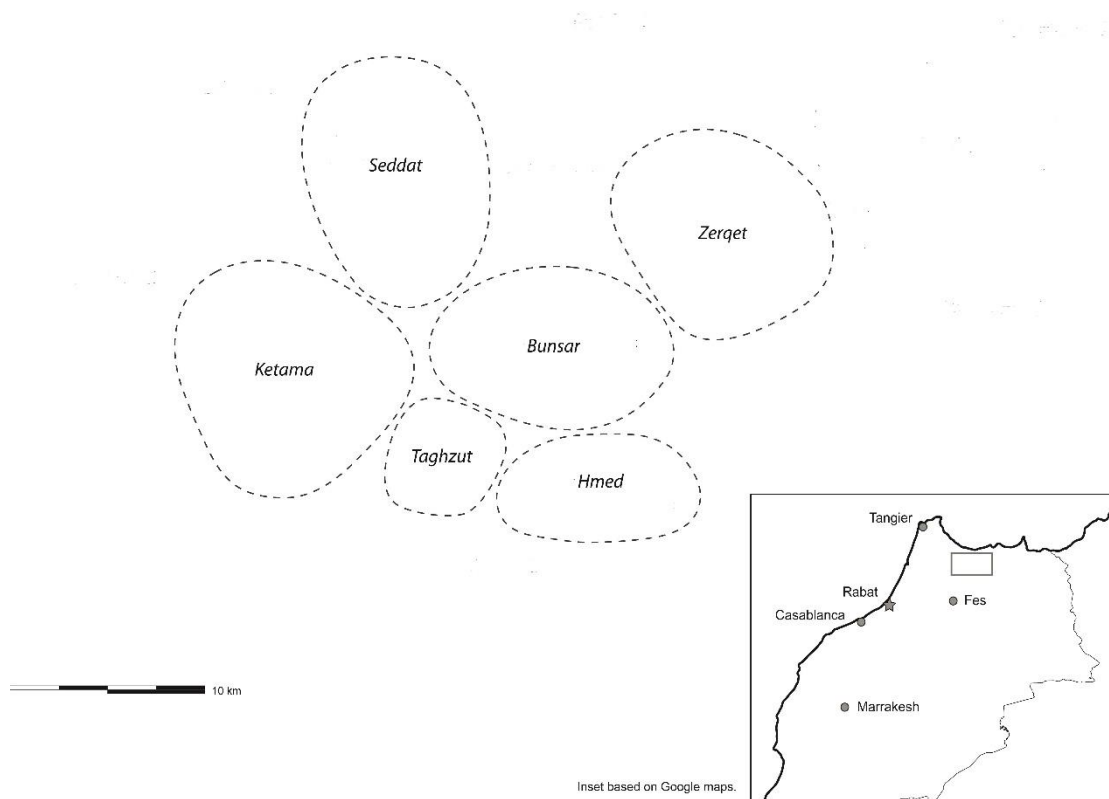
- Are there limitations of remote fieldwork?
- What kind of data can (or cannot) you obtain?
- Can you train the speakers remotely?
- Speakers can make recordings of spontaneous/natural language for you.
- These language data are often more natural than a linguist could record if present on site (diminishes the observer's paradox?).

## Maps

Map 1. Location of Senhaja Berber in northern Morocco



Map 2. Senhaja Berber varieties discussed in my thesis



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