

"Synharmonism in the Sārdā:rīd dialect"

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Sārdā:rīd, B° a:b° a:r° 1 and D° arb° a:r° 1 are three villages about 20 kms away from Urmia that were settled by Assyrians, Armenians and Turks.² The dialect spoken in Sārdā:rīd 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 Sārdā:rīd mainly used the Turkish language for traditional songs from the Turks. By 1970 the older generation hardly spoke any Persian in Sārdā:rīd,³ while the younger generation learned Persian at school as an official language.

The Assyrians from Sārdā:rīd 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 Sārdā:rīd 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 Sārdā:rīd dialect the acoustic effect of this phenomenon is the pronunciation of words with hard, middle or soft timbre⁴. 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 Sārdā:rīd 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

¹ These are the names of the villages in the Sārdā:rīd dialect (i. e. ° Sārdā:rīd). 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 Sārdā:rīd-Dialect, Davood Younansardaroud⁶.

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, ī, 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 as known from the Swedish °a (°a, °e, °ı, °o, °u):

front vowels: ä, ë, ī, ö, ü
 middle vowels: a, e, i, o, u
 back vowels: ° a, ° e, ° ı, ° 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:, ī:, ö:, ü:
 middle long vowels: a:, e:, i:, o:, u:
 back long vowels: ° a:, ° e:, ° ı:, ° o:, ° u:

1. Consonants

This paper treats only those consonants in the Sārdā:rīd 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 /s/ and /t/ have brought about the velar pronunciation of the whole word.⁹ The position of the velarized consonant is irrelevant.

^bt° a:m° a ܐܘܡܐ "taste"¹⁰
^bš° o:m° a ܐܘܡܐ "a fast"

⁵ See Tsereteli (1946, 1961, 1978).

⁶ Namely, the author's father.

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

⁸ This characterization was suggested by Prof. Dr. R. Voigt at Berlin Frei University.

⁹ Credit for this thesis goes to Tsereteli (1961), following his study of the phonetics of modern Assyrian dialects. The dialect of Sārdā:rīd 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).

^bm° amṡm° u:š° ۱ ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "suckle"

1. 2. The alveolar vibrant /r/

The alveolar vibrant /r/ is velarized when occurring in a word together with the consonants /t/, /s/ 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 /s/

^bš° ۱ šr° a ܠܫܪܫܘܢ "grasshopper"

^bš° a:ṡ° uṡp° a ܠܫܘܦܢ "pungent"

- /r/ in a word with /t/

^bṡr° a:ṡ° a ܠܬܪܝܒܘܢ "to drive"

^bqr° a:t° a ܠܩܬܘܢ "to bite"

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

^b° arṡ° a ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "earth"

^bt° arṡ° a ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "a door"

- /r/ in a word with other consonants

The alveolar vibrant /r/ is velarized in words without /s/, /t/ and /ʕ/:

^bn° ۱ mṡr° a ܠܡܫܪܝܒܘܢ "a tiger"

^bmṡr° a:ṡ° g° a ܠܡܫܪܝܒܘܢ "to press"

- /r/ in words with middle timbre

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

^mṛ ia:ma ܠܡܪܝܒܘܢ "to rise up"

^mča:mutra ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "a pear"

- /r/ in words with front timbre

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

^fārḥā ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "a guest"

^fbārdā ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "hail"

1. 3. The velar lateral /l/

The lateral /l/ has a velar pronunciation in combination with the consonants /s/ and /t/.

- /l/ in a word with /s/

^b° alḃ° u:š° ۱ ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "to glisten"

^bh° a:š° u:l° ۱ ܠܥܘܫܘܢ "give birth to"

back	^b ° a:h° 1 ځځځ "that he eats"
middle	^m hajjir ځځځ "that he helps"
front	^f lā:vīš ځځځ "that he dresses"

Active Participle	^b ° ah° 1 ځځځ	^m hajjir ځځځ	^f lā:vīš ځځځ
Infinitive	^b h° a:l° a ځځځ	^m ha:ju:ri ځځځځ	^f lvā:šā ځځځ
Passive Participle	^b h° 1 il° a ځځځ	^m hujjirra ځځځځ	^f lvī išā ځځځ
Noun Agent	^b ° ah ° a:n° a ځځځ	^m hajjira:na ځځځځ	^f lō:šā:nā ځځځ

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	^b t° ujr° a ځځځځ "mountain"	^b t° ujr° a:n° 1 ځځځځ
middle	^m rujša ځځځځ "shoulder"	^m rujša:ni ځځځځ
front	^f hāqlā ځځځ "field"	^f hāqlā:ni ځځځځ

5. Synharmonism in loan-words

In the course of time, the Sărdä:rîd 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:ğ° a ځځځ "lord", ^b° ahv° a | ځځځځ "condition", ^b° a:v° a:r° a ځځځځ "homeless".

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

<i>Loan-words</i>	vs.	<i>Syrian words</i>
^b ° 1 ĩm° an ځځځ "belief"	"	^f ĭmān ځځځ "when"
^b ° a:b° ad ځځځ "resident"	"	^f ā:bād ځځځ "eternity"
<i>Loan-words</i>	vs.	<i>Loan-words</i>
^b h° a:č° 1 m ځځځ "that he reigns to"	"	^f hā:čim ځځځ "physician"
^b h° a:r° a m ځځځ "forbidden"	"	^f hā:rām ځځځ "harem"

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