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Bettina Leitner

1. Introduction and data

- 1 This paper presents first results of my doctoral thesis, which aims at a complete description of the grammar of Khuzestan Arabic, though its principal point of reference will be the dialect spoken in the province's capital Ahwaz.
- 2 Khuzestan is a southwestern Iranian province on the border with Iraq, with approximately four to five million inhabitants (Shabibi 2006: 12). The province's capital Ahwaz alone is home to more than a million people¹. Khuzestan Arabic is spoken by over 3 million people (Matras 2007: 134). The percentage of Arabs is very high throughout the region, in some villages and towns it reaches almost 100 per cent.²
- 3 The main contributions to the study of Khuzestan Arabic have been made by the British arabist Bruce Ingham in the 1970s. Since 2007 there is also an entry in EALL written by him.
- 4 I have carried out preliminary field work in September 2016 and stayed in Ahwaz for a month with the family of an informant who is now living in Vienna. Recordings of around 25 people have been made (amounting approximately 5 hours), mainly in Ahwaz, but also in other towns or villages, like Ĥamidiyye, Tustar (pers. Šūštar), Xafaġiyye (pers. Sūsangerd) and Muĥammara (pers. Ĥorramšahr). The recordings are mainly of elderly, less-educated people, many of them women. Furthermore, not all people who have been recorded in Ahwaz were originally from that town.
- 5 Of course, as an Arabic speaking enclave in a Persian dominated society, there is a rather strong influence from the Persian language, particularly on young and educated speakers, who have had more contact with Persian speakers at school, university, work or with Persian-speaking friends. However, since the data analysed for the present paper consists mainly of recordings of elderly, female – which unfortunately often means less educated – persons, Persian features or phenomena of language contact will

not be discussed in the present paper. But, of course, phenomena of contact-induced change present an important part of the study of the dialects of Khuzestan and will be discussed in another paper.

- 6 All the examples given throughout this paper are taken from my own data if not indicated otherwise.

2. Main features & typology

- 7 As a *gələt* dialect of the South-Mesopotamian group, Khuzestan Arabic has many Bedouin and conservative features, such as the preservation of fem. pl. forms in the 2nd and 3rd ps. in the verb domain as well as in pronouns (independent and suffixed ones), or the existence of the *gahawa*-syndrome, which is however limited to some items, such as colours, e.g. (a)*xəḍar*.³
- 8 Khuzestan Arabic is grouped and shares features with the *gələt* dialects of Iraq (e.g. Muslim Arabic of Baghdad) and the Bedouin dialects of Syria. Furthermore, it has strong dialectal links to the Gulf dialects, especially Bedouin Bahraini Arabic, i.e. the Arabic spoken by the Sunni Arab population, descendant from Najd.
- 9 A typically Mesopotamian characteristic, apart from lexical features,⁴ is the usage of the so-called indefinite article *farəd*, e.g. *farəd ləbnayye* ‘a girl’.⁵
- 10 Khuzestan Arabic shows some features that are only rarely documented in other Arabic varieties, e.g. the usage of the 1st ps. sg. imperfect suffix *-an*. This is an optional suffix for hollow and geminated verbs, e.g. *lʔaḍullan* ‘I stay’, *lʔarūḥan* ‘I go’ (Ingham 2000: 127). Ingham considers it a South-Mesopotamian feature and explains it as a contraction of the postponed 1st ps. sg. pronoun *āne* (Ingham 2000: 127). Ingham compares this feature to the suffixation of the 2nd ps. msc. sg. pronoun *ant* after perfect verb forms in the dialect of the Āl Murrah of Southern and Eastern Arabia, as in *šifhant* ‘did you see’ < *šift ant* (Ingham 2000: 127, fn. 4).⁶
- 11 A further characteristic feature of this dialect is the formation of the perfect tense suffixes with an inserted *-ē-*, e.g. *tərsēna* ‘we filled’ instead of *tarasna*, which Ingham lists as an urban feature (Ingham 1973: 544) and Bruno Meißner considers a mark of Miḥdān or Marsh Arab speech (Ingham 1973: 544). This second claim was confirmed by my main informant and additionally by its appearance in the recording of a woman born and raised in Ḥuwayza, now living in Ahwaz.
- 12 Another interesting feature are the different forms of diminutives in Khuzestan Arabic. The usual (internal) diminutive shows the patterns CCīC(e)/CCēC and CwayyaC, e.g. *lbīene* < *laban* ‘buttermilk’, *šwayyəb* < *šāyəb* ‘old man’, or *zəgayyar* < *šaḡīr* ‘small’. A further construction of the diminutive is formed with the combination: (internal) diminutive + *-ūn*⁷, e.g. *šwayyūn* ‘a little bit’. Further, we find a construction, which to my knowledge has not been described so far, i.e. the combination of the suffix *-ūn* and a diminutive form CēCiC/CayCiC before the suffix, e.g. *hēlisūn* ‘plucked’. The development of this diminutive morpheme remains unexplained. *hēlis* might derive from the participle *hālis*, which turned into a diminutive *hēlis* via *huwaylis*, and deletion of /uw/, but this remains only a speculative theory for the moment. Its usage in the given example is clearly for minimization or expressing affection, since the example text is a fairy tale and it is animals who are speaking.

Examples:

(1) ...*gāl ʔl-ġanam, hāčāt ʔš-šatt, gālat-le: hā šatt-na xēbətūn?*

‘...so, the sheep, they talked to the river and asked it: Our river, why are you **polluted?**’

(2) – *gāl-ha: šatt-na xēbətūn w sidrat-na haytitūn w twēr-na hēlisūn w gmayla biečičūn, ʔala brēġiš ʔāḥ b-ʔt-tannūr...*

‘– It answered: Our river is **polluted** and the Jujube tree **has no leaves** and our bird is **plucked** and Gmayla is crying because the brēġiš⁸ fell into the oven.’

(Informant: Umm Saʔad, 40 years, Ahwaz)

3. Comparison with Ingham’s data: An update

- 13 Though many aspects of its grammar seem not to have changed since Ingham’s descriptions, certain parts do require updating. One point that strongly diverged in my data concerns Ingham’s dialectal subdivision into *ʕarab* vs. *ḥaḍar*, and urban vs. rural dialects, especially in the case of the dialect spoken in the city Ahwaz. Ingham made this division into two groups mainly according to morphological, morpho-phonological, and lexical distinctions (Ingham 1973: 534).
- 14 Regarding the first analysis of my data, we have to question whether Ingham’s listing of the dialect of Ahwaz – among other newer towns – as *ʕarab* (Ingham 2007: 572) is still justifiable. The comparison of my recently gathered data with Ingham’s description indicates that the dialectal features of Ahwaz correspond to what Ingham describes as *ḥaḍar* in some respects, but in others again with *ʕarab*, and we can state just the same with his urban-rural distinction, which again demonstrates the dual characteristics of Ahwaz Arabic. In the following section, I will discuss some features that Ingham uses as distinguishing characteristics between the postulated dialectal groups and contrast his descriptions and the findings from my own data.

3.1. Morphological distinctions

a) 3rd ps. fem. sg. perfect form

- 15 One feature that Ingham classifies as typically *ʕarab* or rural – and with that as the form used in Ahwaz – is the syllabic structure CCvCat for the 3rd ps. fem. sg. perfect, e.g. *ktəbat* ‘she wrote’ (Ingham 2007: 573). However, in my data this form never appeared for Ahwaz. Instead we find the form that Ingham lists for *ḥaḍar* or urban dialects (CvCCat), which, according to Ingham, include the towns along the Shatt al-Arab and Lower Karun, like Muḥammara (Ingham 2007: 571-572). Examples of this (*ḥaḍar*/urban) form found in Ahwaz are *gəlbət* ‘she turned (around)’, *kətbət* ‘she wrote’, *šəbgət* ‘she hugged’.⁹ The rural/*ʕarab* form, according to informants, is nowadays rather typical of north-western towns and villages, like Xafaġiyye (Sūsangerd) or Huwayza.¹⁰

b) Msc. sg. imperative of weak verbs (3rd radical w/y)

- 16 Ingham describes the imperative form of final weak verbs which lacks the final vowel, e.g. *ʔəməš* ‘go!’, *ʔəḥəč* ‘speak!’, as rural and, conversely, the form which shows the final vowel, e.g. *ʔəməši*, *ʔəḥči*, as urban (Ingham 1973: 544 and Ingham 2007: 577). The dialect of Ahwaz uses both variants nowadays.¹¹

3.2. Lexical distinctions

- 17 The information on the lexical differences, which served as a basis for the following comparison with my Khuzestani/Ahwazi data, is taken from Ingham's list on variant vocabulary items of urban and rural Khuzestan Arabic (Ingham 1973: 538).
- a) Certain lexical features typically used in Ahwaz today are of the rural type, as classified by Ingham, e.g. *le-ġād* for 'there'. Its urban variant *hnāk* is not in use in Ahwaz.
 - b) On the other hand, certain lexical items, for instance *taḡadda* 'to pass on', belong to what Ingham classifies as urban. The rural form would be *məraq*, which has, so far, appeared only once in my data, in a recording from the outskirts of Ahwaz.
 - c) Sometimes items from both types are used, which in some cases leads to the co-existence of several forms. For example 'to see' can nowadays in Ahwaz be expressed by the verbs *ṣəba* (urban) as well as *bāwaf* or *fāyan* (both rural).
 - d) Finally, in some cases none of the lexemes Ingham mentions are still in use or known anymore, e.g. the word for 'meal' nowadays is neither *marag* (urban) nor *ydām* (rural), but *ʔakəl*.
- 18 According to these observations, we can assume a recent change of the dialectal mapping or subgrouping in Khuzestan, especially regarding the dialect of Ahwaz, for which we can postulate a levelling of (urban and rural) features. Thus, the dialect of Ahwaz cannot be classified along these dialectal categories anymore. Consequently, it appears necessary to test the usefulness of these categories in other towns or villages outside Ahwaz by analysing further recordings and data from these regions. The reasons for the observed mixture of dialectal features probably lie in the demographic changes that have occurred during recent years due to the Iran-Iraq war and socio-economic reasons such as job opportunities and better access to educational institutions in bigger towns, especially in Ahwaz.

4. Discourse particle *ča*

- 19 Finally, I will give a brief preliminary outline of the main features and usage of the discourse particle *ča*, illustrated by some examples taken from my data. A more detailed study on discourse particles in Khuzestan Arabic is planned.
- 20 In using the term discourse particle, I follow the definition of Kerstin Fischer, who, with the employment of this term, suggests a focus on "...small, uninflected words that are only loosely integrated into the sentence structure, if at all. The term *particle* is used in contrast to clitics, full words, and bound morphemes. Using the term *discourse particle* furthermore distinguishes discourse particles/markers from larger entities, such as phrasal idioms, that fulfil similar functions." (Fischer 2006: 4).
- 21 Regarding the frequently used Khuzestan Arabic discourse particle *ča*,¹² there are so far no in-depth studies of it or any other comparable particles in Khuzestan Arabic and its discussion has mainly been limited to footnotes. Ingham, for instance, states that "*ča*, *wilak*, *wilič*, *wilkum*, *wilčan*... are Mesopotamian and have no equivalent in Arabian dialects" and defines these particles as "expletives" (Ingham 1982: 87). In a later article however, *ča* or *čē*¹³ are referred to as characteristic for Marshland dialects (Ingham 2000: 128), a description which is too reductive, as I will demonstrate below. In a recent

paper Qasim Hassan mentions the particle *ča* in his list on South Iraqi modal particles (Hassan 2016: 47, 53).

- 22 As to the question of the origin of *ča*, there is still no clear answer. However, there are several indicators that point to a possible origin rooted in the deictic particle or element /k/. The following indicators appear to support this hypothesis:
- 1) The discourse particle *ča* could be related to the presentatives used in the Gulf region, e.g. *ka* in Bahrain, as in “*ka-hiyya yāya* ‘here she comes now’” (Holes 2001: 447), which is also known for Kuwait (Johnstone 1967: 92).
 - 2) In many other dialects of Syria and Anatolia, we find presentatives containing the deictic element /k/ or the deictic particle /ka/, e.g. *kwa/kō/kē* in N-Mesopotamia/Anatolia (Procházka forthcoming: chapter 4).
 - 3) We might even connect *ča* and its origins to the (origins of the) Mesopotamian existential particle *ʔaku* ‘there is’, with its negative form *māku* ‘there is not’, which might be related to the Aramaic deictic indicator *k*’ (Müller-Kessler 2003: 643, 645).¹⁴

4.1. Functions

- 23 The primary functions that the discourse particle *ča* can fulfil in sentences or utterances are the following: focus, attention, emphasis, astonishment (often in questions), urgency (cf. Ingham 1973: 550, fn. 38), affection, discontent (negative response to a question), objection, and deixis (with *ča* in this case being translated to ‘look, lo and behold’). It can express attitudes, feelings and evaluations (see e.g. example (4) below). It can also be used for explanation, justification or support for a position (Aijmer 2002: 36).

4.2. Linguistic features of *ča*

- 24 a) As with all discourse particles, it is often difficult to find an accurate translation, since every language has its very own discourse particles and clear equivalences across languages rarely exist (Aijmer 2002: 1).
- b) *ča* is not always optional or propositionally empty, since without it sentences can bear a different meaning, as in the example (4) given below.¹⁵
- c) Its usage is limited to oral speech and dialogues¹⁶ and is characteristic of informal conversation (Aijmer 2002: 33).
- d) It is often – but as example (9) shows not exclusively¹⁷ – used in sentence or utterance initial position, which is why we should rather describe it as sentence or utterance peripheral (Aijmer 2002: 18).¹⁸
- e) Like many discourse particles, *ča* itself holds no meaning, but can rather fulfil several functions (Aijmer 2002: 22), which can change according to the desired communication purpose (consider the functions listed above and in the examples below). Thus, it is polyfunctional¹⁹ and can obtain many different nuances of meaning according to its context.

Examples:

(3) *gāl-la xōš, gāl-le ča āne anse!*

‘He said alright, (and) he told him, but see, I (always) forget!’

(Informant: Umm Saʿād, 40 years, Ahwaz)

The function of *ča* in example (3) is to put a stress on the explanation (as to why the speaker always forgets to convey the bird’s message to his mother), as in ‘I really

always forget it'. Without *ča*, the sentence would simply mean 'I forget' and thus cause it to express an attenuated meaning.

(4) *yumma šlōn tāres hāda bieb-ek ətrāb? ča kūn əflūs yāyeb-li w hād əčfāb – lieš yumma?*
 'My beloved, how come you have filled up your pocket with earth? You should rather bring me money, and these bones – why, my dear?'

(Informant: Umm Saʿad, 40 years, Ahwaz)

In example (4), *ča* is apparently used to express the mother's astonishment but also her affection²⁰ towards her son, since without *ča* the sentence would be a stronger imperative.

(5) *xayye taʿāli, ča mšēna yā mōze! – xayye žāye ča āne hā hā²¹ arīd ažiḅ²² əl-manžal.*

'Sister, come here, we are already leaving, Mōze! – Sister, I'm coming, I just want to quickly get the sickle.'

(Informant: Hağgiyyet Mōze, 60 years, Huwayza)

In example (5), *ča* is used to stress the urgency of the situation.

(6) *yumma ča dīč əd-digge w hāy d-digge, hāy dāgge w hāy dāgg(e) – āne ham sawwal-li!*

'My dear, look at this tattoo and that tattoo, this tattooed woman and that one – (please) also make me one!'

(Informant: elderly woman, Hamidiyye)

Example (6) is a clear example for a deictic usage of *ča*.

Examples (7), (8) and (9) are created by an informant in Vienna, Majed Naseri, who is originally from Ahwaz:

(7) *ča lēš mā tğəli-li? arğū-č!*

'Why don't you tell me? I urge you!'

Function: Stress on plea, astonishment.

(8) *...ča lā tənsīn!*

'But don't forget (I urge you)!'

Function: Focus, emphasis, raising the importance of the utterance/imperative.

(9) *əš fandi, ġēr ləmyēmt-i ča!?*

'What do I have but my mother!?''

Function: Affection, attention. This example shows that the particle is not exclusively sentence-initial.

5. Conclusions and outlook

- 25 As for the grammar of Khuzestan Arabic, many aspects have not undergone significant changes since Ingham's description, which is probably due to its position as a linguistic enclave in a Persian-speaking society with almost no access to Modern Standard Arabic. Changes that have been noticed so far mainly concern Ingham's division into urban and rural (or *haḡdar* and *ʿarab*) dialects, which has lost some of its accuracy, especially for the dialect of Ahwaz. In Ahwaz, there has apparently occurred an interregional mixing of dialects, most probably as a consequence of migration movements.
- 26 As to the discourse particle *ča*, we can state that today it is not only characteristic for the Marshland dialects, but of more or less the whole region (though less common in southern towns, such as Fellaḡiyye), and it is certainly used frequently in Ahwaz and its surroundings, e.g. Xafaḡiyye and Huwayza.
- 27 My dissertation finally shall help to develop a dialect map of the region and to provide a detailed picture of the current distribution of – especially syntactic and morphological – features within the dialects of Khuzestan.

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NOTES

1. <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/iran-khuzestan.php> [access 23.08.17]. To my knowledge there are no reliable sources for the exact number of Arab people living in Iran.
2. For the distribution of the Arab population in the province Khuzestan see the map provided by CNRS: <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/record.php?q=AR-040537&f=local&l=en> [access 23.08.17].
3. Contrast e.g. *gahwa* in Ahwaz and not *ghawa*, which would be the common form in, for example, Huwayza, according to my informant.
4. E.g. *bazzūna* 'cat', *xōš* 'good' or the existential particle *ʔaku* 'there is' (Ingham 1973: 546). South-Mesopotamian lexical features are e.g. *farax* 'child', *dahruyye* 'egg', *rōba* 'yoghurt', *kadd* 'to grasp', *harfi* 'early', *hadər* 'under', *tāna* 'to await' (Ingham 1973: 547).
5. The form *fad*, as Ingham transcribes the indefinite article in the EALL (Ingham 2007: 575), never appeared in my data.
6. Similarly, Ori Shachmon also notes for the Jewish dialects of northern Yemen that 2nd ps. pronouns are suffixed to verbs, e.g. *katabtant*, probably for the disambiguation of 1st and 2nd ps. sg. perfect forms (Shachmon 2015: 261).
7. The diminutive suffix *-ūn* may be of Aramaic origin and is for example also found in Baḥrain, in all Baghdadi dialects, in Kuwait, Oman and Lebanon (Holes 2016: 127, fn. 54; Masliyah 1997: 72 and Fleisch 1961: 454, fn.2).
8. Diminutive of *barǧaš* 'small insect, midge'.
9. A rural feature in verbal forms that is still found in Ahwaz is the form CaCaC in the contiguity of gutturals, e.g. *xāḍa*, not *xəḍa*, *laḥab*, not *ləḥab*, etc. (Ingham 1973: 539-540).
10. More transcribed material on these towns will follow in future articles.
11. See also Jan Retsö, who states that the forms of the imperatives of IIIw/y without a final vowel in the msc. forms are further found in the North Yemen Highlands, the southern Ṣaṣir, Central Arabia, the Syrian desert, the Negev, and Eastern Arabia (Retsö 2005: 33).
12. Its usage is even considered one of the hallmarks of the more northern Khuzestan Arabic dialects by speakers themselves, who contrasted it to other towns' dialects, e.g. that of Fellahīyye (Shādegān), where instead of *ča* people would rather say *laḥad*, according to several informants.
13. There is no evidence for this form in my data.
14. There is still no common opinion about the origin of this Mesopotamian existential particle, but Müller-Kessler traces it back to the (central and southeastern Babylonian) Aramaic particle of existence *'yt* 'there is' (and *lyt* 'there is not'), which was, according to her, augmented by the Aramaic deictic element *k'*, with assimilation of *k'* to the final consonant *t* of the particle of existence *'yt* (Müller-Kessler 2003: 643, 645). Diem however, suggests that a possible origin for *ʔaku* may be the combination of the deictic element /k/ with the 3rd ps. sg. msc. pronoun (Müller-Kessler 2003: 644). Holes suggests that its origin lies in the Akkadian common verb and noun *makū*, meaning 'want, lack, need; to be absent, missing', with *aku* being a later reanalysis of *māku* as *mā* + *aku* (Holes 2016: 17).
15. Cf. Fraser and Alshamari, who also do not support the theory that discourse particles are necessarily optional but state that they can also be obligatory in some cases (Fraser 2006: 195; Alshamari 2015: 13).
16. Cf. Aijmer (2002: 34), who also mentions discourse particles appearing in monologues.
17. Ingham describes it as a particle appearing in sentence initial position (Ingham 1973: 550, fn. 38; Ingham 2000: 128).

18. Aijmer describes elements in sentence initial position as: “cognitively salient, i.e. hearers listen for them in conversation and use them as help to interpretation” (Aijmer 2002: 15).
19. Cf. Fischer (2006: 12) on the polyfunctionality of discourse particles.
20. Cf. Aijmer, who states that “discourse particles...have high scores on the dimensions of involvement and affect” (Aijmer 2002: 33).
21. The interjection *hā hā* means in this utterance ‘quickly’.
22. Note the usage of /ž/ as a reflex of /ğ/, typical for the Marshland dialects, instead of /y/ which is the common pronunciation for the rest of the area.

ABSTRACTS

The dialect of the southwestern Iranian province Khuzestan belongs to the *gələt*-subgroup of Mesopotamian Arabic. It also shows great affinity to other northeast-Arabian dialects such as the Arabic dialects of Bahrain – of the ʿAnaza type – or Najdi Arabic. The province’s vernacular language has been given little attention in the field of Arabic dialectology so far. Khuzestan Arabic is an Arabic enclave in a predominantly Persian-speaking environment. As such, it shows signs of stronger influence by Persian, the language of education and work, than by Modern Standard Arabic. For the same reason, this peripheral Arabic dialect also shows some interesting conservative features. The first part of this paper will present data collected in September 2016 during fieldwork in Khuzestan and compare it with the results of Bruce Ingham’s seminal studies on Khuzestan Arabic published in the 1970s. Furthermore, this paper will present a short discussion of the discourse particle *ča*, a topic, which has hitherto attracted the attention of Arabic dialectologists only marginally. The analysis of the particle will concentrate mainly on its syntactic and semantic characteristics.

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Keywords: *gələt* dialects; Khuzestan-Arabic; discourse particles; language contact; Arabic as a minority language.

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