

Language Contact In Anatolia: The Case Of Sason Arabic

Throughout history the land where present-day Turkey lies on has been the home of diverse peoples with different cultural backgrounds, speaking their own language. Thus, the linguistic diversity observed in this geographical area has created fertile grounds for all kinds of linguistic investigation. This presentation aims to introduce Sason Arabic spoken in Sason, a town in the province of Batman (south-east Turkey) and raise questions as to how contact with other languages has influenced it. Sason Arabic (SA) is spoken in a multi linguistic environment where the other languages are Armenian, Zazaki and Turkish.

The discussion on SA is based on our experience of data elicitation and the data collected in a field methods class at Bogazici University in the spring of 2013. Data were supplied through two informants; a middle aged informant who was an illiterate polyglot and a younger bilingual informant who was a student in Istanbul University. Our work on such a spoken language heavily influenced by the different languages spoken in the same context has brought out some other significant issues to be considered while investigating the linguistic properties of SA. The questions we raise below regarding SA are believed to be relevant to the study of any language under similar conditions.

- a) Sason Arabic speakers don't fully understand the other dialects of Arabic spoken in the area, so is SA a dialect of Arabic or is it a distinct language?
- b) If it is a separate dialect of Arabic, could the original variety of Arabic SA developed from be different from that which the other dialects developed from? Is this earlier variety of Arabic traceable at all?
- b) If SA is not another dialect of Arabic, then it must be a separate language, but then why do native speakers call their language 'Sason Arabic'?
- c) In general terms, how is SA similar to Arabic (standard Arabic) and how is it different?
- d) Is it possible that historical and economic factors together with extensive language contact with three different languages have led to the development of a creole?