Aleksandra Naddari

The Arabic Variety of Nefza (Northwest Tunisia): Phonology, Morphology and Texts

Colección ESTUDIOS DE DIALECTOLOGÍA ÁRABE
Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza

Colección Estudios de Dialectología Árabe

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First of all, I owe thanks to all *Nfāza* (people of Nefza), who gave me the warmest welcome in their homes and hearts, participated in the field research and contributed to this study with their priceless precious narratives and by patiently answering my endless linguistic questions. I thank my local helpers Arij and Rawend (and their families) for hosting me in Nefza and assisting me at the field research campaigns by accompanying me and helping me establish contact with the interview partners, both in the town of Nefza and in the rural surroundings of Nefza.

This publication, which is revised version of my PhD thesis, could definitely not have been possible without the exceptional mentoring, motivation and support of my supervisor Prof. Dr. Veronika Ritt-Benmimoun, who is a leading expert in Tunisian Bedouin-type Arabic varieties. She supported me through the ups and downs of my PhD journey and helped me expand my knowledge of Tunisian Arabic varieties through her precious feedback on my work in progress and assistance with occurring challenges I encountered over the four years of working on the PhD thesis. I owe you infinite thanks for your patience, endurance, energy and time you spent supervising my thesis!

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Aleksandra Naddari
St. Pölten

General remarks

i. Abbreviations

Eng.	English
Fr.	French
Ger.	German
Gr.	Greek
It.	Italian
Lat.	Latin
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
NA	Nefza Arabic
OA	Old Arabic
Sp.	Spanish
Tr.	Turkish
#	word boundary
|	syllable boundary
*	reconstructed non-existent form
~	Variants

ii. Glossing abbreviations

AP	active participle
DIM	diminutive
FEM	feminine
IMP	imperative
IPFV	imperfective
MASC	masculine
PEJ	pejorative
PFV	perfective

PL	plural
PP	passive participle
SG.F	singular feminine
SG.M	singular masculine

iii. Transcription

In this study a mainly phonemic transcription is used. The only exception is the vowel *ā̃*, whose phonemic status is not entirely clear (see 2.1.2.1.1 for possible minimal pairs). Both the vowels *ā* and *ā̃* are reflected in the transcription, as the raising of *ā* is an important distinguishing feature among Tunisian Arabic varieties (see 2.1.2.1.3 on the raising of *ā*).

A hyphen (-) is used in the transcription to distinguish the following parts of speech:

Part of speech	Example	Translation
Negation	*mā-nimšū-š.*	“We don’t go.”
Definite article	*id-dabbūza*	“the bottle”
One-letter prepositions	*b-mūs ḷām*	“with a shaving razor”
Indirect pronominal suffixes	*gā̃lū-li*	“they told me”

The following is a list of the used transcription symbols and their IPA equivalent:

Used symbol	IPA equivalent
b	[b]
ḅ	[bˤ]
t	[t]
t̲	[θ]
ž	[ʒ]
ḥ	[ħ]
x	[x]
d	[d]
d̲	[ð]
r	[r]
ṛ	[rˤ]
z	[z]
ẓ	[zˤ]
s	[z]
š	[ʃ]
ṣ	[sˤ]
ṭ	[tˤ]
ḏ	[ðˤ]
ʕ	[ʕ]
ġ	[ɣ]

f	[f]
g	[g]
q	[q]
k	[k]
l	[l]
ḷ	[lˤ]
m	[m]
ṃ	[mˤ]
n	[n]
h	[h]
w	[w]
y	[j]
ʔ	[ʔ]
a	[ä]
i	[i]
u	[u]
ā	[ä:]
ǟ	[æ:]
ī	[i:]
ē	[e:]
ū	[u:]
ō	[o̤:]

Note: The transcriptions from the following sources are taken over in a simplified version (i.e. without the additional diacritic signs of the vowels): Singer (1984), Boris (1958), Saada (1984), Bencheneb (1946), Marçais/Guîga (1958-61), Marçais/Viré (1981), Fischer (1959), Marçais/Jelloûli (1931-33), Guerrero/Abdessemed (2019) and Oueslati (2022).

iv. Terminology

In the following the important terms used in this study shall be defined.

Concerning NA speakers

Urban & rural speakers

In this study the terms "rural" and "urban" are used to distinguish the speech of the rural population of the Nefza region ("rural")[1] from the speech of the inhabitants of the town of Nefza ("urban"). Both of these varieties are Bedouin-type Arabic varieties, however the distinction between rural and

1 As spoken in five localities of the Nefza region listed in 1.3.2.

urban speakers is important for understanding the rapid language change in NA.

Young, middle-aged and old speakers

By these terms, speakers of the following age ranges are meant (based on the actual ages of the speakers)[2]:

- Young: 6-28
- Middle-aged: 40-55
- Old: 60-85

Identifier

Throughout this study, speakers' identifiers (which are used in the TUNOCENT project as well) are given to designate specific linguistic phenomena to the respective speaker for which this phenomenon is attested in my corpus. The speaker's identifier consists of the following information: the locality, the speaker's number within the locality, the speaker's gender and age. For instance, the speaker UmmLabid2/m/27 is the second (number '2') speaker I recorded in the locality Umm Labid, and he is male and 27 years old. Another example is the speaker Nefza1/f/50, which is the first speaker I recorded in the locality Nefza, female and 50 years old.

Concerning Arabic linguistics

Old Arabic (OA)

This term as it is used in this study implies all forms of Old Arabic (e.g. Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic) as opposed to New Arabic vernaculars. In this context, one can refer to the definition of Old Arabic made by Holes (2018), which for the most part corresponds to its use in this study:

> "**Old Arabic** (**OA**): a cover term, used in this book to refer to reconstructed varieties of pre- and early Islamic spoken Arabic of which we have little reliable direct knowledge and which were the ancestors of the modern dialects. Old Arabic forms are by no means always identical with the **Classical Arabic** (q.v.) forms described by the early Arab grammarians." (Holes 2018: 343)

Bedouin-type Arabic variety

This debatable classification term is used in this study to classify Arabic varieties (as opposed to their "sedentary" counterparts), as per the definition made by Holes (2018):

2 The given three age groups have these ranges because my corpus does not include data from speakers in the age groups 29-39 and 56-59.

"'**bedouin**' (**dialects**): a group of geographically widely dispersed Arabic dialects with certain common linguistic features, notably a voiced reflex, usually /g/, of OA /q/ and the interdental series of consonants /t̲, d̲, ḏ̲/. 'Bedouin' dialects, as the name suggests, are spoken by tribal communities from north-west Africa to the Arabian Peninsula which until the relatively recent past led a life of seasonal migrations and pastoral nomadism. However, virtually all such groups, wherever they live, are now fully sedentarized, though they often still retain their 'bedouin' dialects in modified form." (Holes 2018: 335f.)

Sedentary Arabic variety

The classification term "sedentary Arabic variety" is used in this study as the counterpart of "Bedouin-type" Arabic varieties, as defined by Holes (2018):

> "'**sedentary**' (**dialects**): cf. '**bedouin**' (Ar. *badawī*) (**dialects**), of which the 'sedentary' (Ar. *ḥaḍarī*) dialects are the antithesis – the dialects of city-dwellers and villagers who do not, and did not historically, ever pursue a life of pastoral nomadism. The 'sedentary' dialects are a very varied group but have certain basic shared characteristics; most notably, in contrast to the 'bedouin' dialects, a voiceless reflex of OA /q/, which may be /q/, /k/, or /ʔ/ […]." (Holes 2018: 339f.)

Leveling

The following definition of leveling is used in this study: "elimination of very localized dialectal features in favor of more regionally general ones." (Holes 1995: 39)

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Fig. 5	Neighborhoods in Nefza which the recorded speakers origin from

1. Introduction

The present publication is a revised version of the author's PhD thesis, which was written within the scope of the research project "Tunisia's Linguistic *terra incognita:* An Investigation into the Arabic Varieties of Northwestern and Central Tunisia (TUNOCENT)", whose objective is the investigation of the hitherto almost undocumented Northwest and Central Tunisian Arabic varieties of the Governorates of Jendouba, Béja, Kéf, Siliana, Kasserine, Sidi Bouzid and Gafsa.[3]

1.1. Aim and research questions

This study aims at giving a comprehensive linguistic description of the phonology and morphology of the Arabic variety spoken in the Northwest Tunisian Nefza region. Regarding phonological categories, the phonemic inventory, the syllable structure, the stress, phonotactics as well as the morphophonology will be treated. Moreover, morphological categories such as the pronouns, adverbs, particles, nouns and verbs will be included. The study is based on empirical data collected in the Nefza region.[4]

In the description of the phonology and morphology of the Arabic variety spoken in the Nefza region, the sociolinguistic variation concerning the age,

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3 The project "Tunisia's Linguistic *terra incognita*: An Investigation into the Arabic Varieties of Northwestern and Central Tunisia (TUNOCENT)" is a collaboration between the University of Vienna and the Austrian Center for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ACDH-CH-OeAW) and is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), project number P 31647-G. For a description of the project see https://tunocent.acdh.oeaw.ac.at and https://www.oeaw.ac.at/acdh/projects/tunocent/.

4 See 1.3 for the list of localities, more details on the speakers and the type and volume of data.

gender and origin of the speakers is considered to a certain extent. The inclusion of sociolinguistic differences appeared important, as the speech of young and urban middle-aged Nefza Arabic speakers shows a non-negligible degree of leveling towards the prestigious variety of Tunis (see 4.2 on the sociolinguistic variation). Nevertheless, this study is clearly descriptive in nature.

Moreover, comparisons are drawn with other geographically adjacent and linguistically cognate varieties, in order to put Nefza Arabic (henceforth NA) in a further context within Tunisian Arabic varieties, primarily with the sedentary variety of Tunis (cf. Singer 1984) and the South Tunisian Bedouin-type variety of Douz (cf. Ritt-Benmimoun 2014a). Besides, other geographically adjacent and linguistically cognate varieties such as for instance Mateur Arabic (cf. Mion 2014a), Takrouna Arabic (cf. Marçais/Jelloûli 1931-33) and Tozeur Arabic (cf. Saada 1984) are taken into account as well.

In addition to the grammar description, eight ethnographic transcribed and translated texts are attached to the dissertation. These texts shall give insight into my linguistic corpus.

The detailed grammatical description of NA will facilitate answering the following research questions:

1. Is the classification of NA as a Tunisian Bedouin-type variety valid (see W. Marçais 1950)? To what extent does NA contain linguistic features described by W. Marçais (1950) as typical of the Sulaym group of Tunisian Bedouin-type varieties?
2. To what extent does NA differ from the South Tunisian Arabic variety of the Maṛāzīg tribe in Douz (as a representative of the southern group of Sulaym-type Bedouin varieties)? Which features do they have in common? Can NA be considered equally conservative as the southern Sulaym-type varieties?
3. Does the examined variety contain any of the features typical of Tunisian Hilāl-type Bedouin varieties (listed by W. Marçais 1950)? If so, to which category of linguistic features do these belong (phonological, morphological, syntactic, or lexical)?
4. Is the Arabic variety spoken in the town of Nefza different from the varieties of its rural surroundings (variation regarding rural and urban distribution)? If so, what kind of features does it mainly affect (phonological, morphological, syntactic, or lexical)? What are the linguistic features all these varieties have in common?
5. Are there linguistic features in the speech of the middle-aged and older NA speakers which are given up in the speech of young NA speakers? If so, to which category of linguistic features do these belong (phonological, morphological, syntactic, or lexical), and from which variety are these

counterparts adopted (urban Tunisian varieties, Hilāl-type Bedouin varieties, Standard Arabic, etc.)?

1.2. Nefza region

1.2.1. Geography

The municipality (*muʕtamdīya*) of Nefza is located in Northwest Tunisia, in the very north of the Béja governorate, some 150km away from the capital Tunis, 40km from the city of Béja and 35km from the popular tourist destination Tabarka.

The Nefza region has access to the Mediterranean Sea (iz-Zwā̆raʕ beach) and is a mountainous and arboreous region.[5] The town of Nefza is located in a valley[6] between the mountain ranges of Kroumirie (Xmīr) and Mogods (MugʕudMugʕud). Furthermore, the river Oued Maden (Wā̆d Mā̆din) flows through

Fig. 1 Location of the Northwest Tunisian Béja governorate © Wikipedia

Nefza. Barhūmī (2010: 29) describes the Nefza plain as consisting of calcareous rock blocks and sand dunes. He also gives the information that the Kroumirie massif is at its highest at the Djebel Ghorra (Žbal il-Ġuṛṛa) at 1203 meters, and at its lowest in Nefza with a height of 600 meters (cf. Barhūmī 2010: 29). Pellat (1993a: 896) states about Nefza: “In contemporary Tunisia, to the east of the massif of Kroumirie […], there extends the country of the Nafzas, a fertile region fringed with woodlands abounding in game.”

5 See Despois (1950a: 26): “Les plus belles forêts sont celles du Nort-Ouest. Les sols siliceux fortement arrosés de Kroumirie et des Mogod sont couverts de bois de chênes-liège […].”

6 Attested by Despois (1950a: 12) as “la plaine des Nefza”.

Despois (1950a: xiii) includes a photograph of the tell landscape in the Nefza region (mentioning the Oued Maden and Jebel Abiod, which was the name of Nefza during the French colonial period):

Fig. 2 Landscape of the Nefza countryside in 1950 © Despois (1950a: xiii)

1.2.2. Demographics

According to the census of 2014 (cf. Statistiques Tunisie 2015: 70), the whole municipality of Nefza has a population of 48,100, whereas the town of Nefza has a population of 7,302, consisting of Eastern (2,913) and Western (4,389) part of the town, separated by the river Oued Maden. According to my NA speakers, the Western part of the town of Nefza is the more original one, whereas the Eastern part rather consists of recent settlers, which migrated from the rural surroundings.[7]

As for historical data, Barhūmī (2010: 71) quotes the registers of the National Archive of Tunisia, which give some 1,700 as the number of inhabitants of Nefza in the second half of the 19th century.[8]

Moreover, Barhūmī (2010: 67) quotes official statistics between 1911-1926, which give the number of a total of 15,000 for the population of the three tribes of al-Ǧilāǧila, Nafza and Huḍayl[9] and 2,000 for the Waštāta (nowadays a locality in the Nefza municipality).

The population of the Nefza region is homogenous regarding ethnicity and religion. All my interview partners identify as Arabs and Sunni Muslims. The

7 My data of the town of Nefza were exclusively recorded in the Western part of the town.

8 More precisely: 1,702 (in the register 643 from the year 1856), 1,618 (in the register 723 from the year 1856), 1,729 (in the register 805 from the year 1861), 1,787 (in the register 771 from the year 1863) and 952 (in the document 361 from the year 1877) (cf. Barhūmī 2010: 71).

9 Only the Nefza tribe is of relevance for this study, however Barhūmī (2010: 67) does not provide numbers for the Nefza tribe separately.

endonym of the inhabitants of the Nefza region is *Nifzi*[SG.M], *Nifzīya*[SG.F] and *Nfāza*[PL].

1.2.3. Economy

Nefza is located in Northwest Tunisia, which is a region characterized by poverty and high unemployment rates.

The fact that the region of the Kroumirie massif is characterized by poverty is attested in older sources already: "In fact, the massif of the Kroumirie, dependant on a silvo-pastoral economy, is impoverished. The standard of living of the inhabitants is the lowest in Tunisia." (Talbi 1986: 52).

In the World Bank annual report (2016) Northwest Tunisia is described as one of the poorest regions of the country: "les régions les plus pauvres du pays, notamment les régions du Nord Ouest, du centre Ouest et du Sud Ouest". According to data from the World bank (cf. World Bank 2016), in 2010 the poverty rate in Northwest Tunisia was 25.7%, in contrast to 9.1% in "Grand Tunis" and 8.0% in "Centre Est", i.e. the Sahel region.

Furthermore, Boughzala/Tlili Hamdi (2016: 339) remark the following on the regional income inequalities of the country: "As a result of low public and private investment in Tunisia's western regions, income and consumption levels there are significantly lower than in the northeast and mideast regions."

The unemployment rate among persons with a high level of education is significantly higher in Northwest and Central Tunisia than in Tunis and the Sahel region. Boughzala/Tlili Hamdi (2016: 342) quote 31.6% for Northwest Tunisia in contrast to 14.4% in Grand Tunis for the year 2010.

Regarding the main source of income of the Nefza population, it is the agricultural production, owing to its fertile soils.[10] The landmark of Nefza is the persimmon fruit, called *krīma* in the local variety. Another important economical factor in Nefza is the Sidi El Barrak dam. This embankment dam was constructed in the 1990s and is located on the outskirts of the town of Nefza. It is one of the most important water supply sources of the country. Rāziqī (2022: 153f.) notes that the Nefza region is marked by its mines (especially for zinc and lead) as well as its agricultural, hydrological, and forest sources. Barhūmī (2010: 123) highlights that the Nefza and Mogods regions are ideal for maize cultivation due to their clay soils and the high precipitation rate.

As concerns sources of income of the Kroumirie population, Talbi (1986: 52) states: "The most important source of income is provided by the extraction of cork. The cultivation of tobacco is also moderately profitable. The breeding of cattle, sheep and goats […] provides only a mediocre income."

10 Frankenberg (1981: 38) describes the Béja region, to which Nefza belongs, as a developed agricultural region.

1.2.4. History

1.2.4.1. Origin of the Nefza population

As for the origin of the population of the Kroumirie massif, Talbi (1986: 51) indicates:

> "Regarding the origins of the inhabitants of the massif, we have no precise and reliable information. The name Khumayr does not appear in any mediaeval text. In the period when Ibn Khaldūn was writing […], the region between Béja and the sea was inhabited by Hawwāra Berbers, by that time completely arabised, with whom there had been blended various elements of Arab descent, notably the Hudhayl […]."

In contrast to Talbi (1986: 51), who states that this region was populated by Hawwāra Berbers in the time of Ibn Khaldoun, Ben Jaafar (1985: 50) attests the Arabization of the Northwest Tunisian "Wishtēta" tribe for the same period (14th century). Ouechtata (*Wištāta*) today is a locality in the municipality of Nefza.

The map below provided by Despois (1950b: 137) suggests that the Nefza region (marked with a star symbol[11]) was populated by the tribes "Kroumir" and "Mogod". Moreover, concerning their lifestyle, one can gather from the provided map that Nefza was inhabited by "populations forestières", in contrast to "villages agglomérés" and "villes" in North Tunisia and in contrast to "semi-nomades des steppes" of Central Tunisia.

In addition, the origin of the population of the Northwest Tunisian mountainous area (including the Nefza region) is profoundly treated by Barhūmī (2010). He states that the Northwest Tunisian tribes like those of Kroumirie, Amdoun, Ouechteta and Nefza must have been rather small and new groups in those areas (attested by purchase contracts of land), which is visible by the fact that they have lost the prefix "Awlād" or "Banū" in their tribe name (cf. Barhūmī 2010: 44f.).

Barhūmī (2010: 45) proceeds by explaining that – according to French reports – those groups have immigrated to Northwest Tunisia from three sides: from Morocco and Algeria, from the South Tunisian desert as well as from the Arabian Peninsula.[12] He names the search for grazing areas and the higher precipitation as the reason for the migration of the South Tunisian tribes towards Northwest Tunisia. Moreover, Barhūmī (2010: 51) emphasizes that French sources (during the French colonial period) attest the movement of the South Tunisian tribes towards Northwest Tunisia, including the number of their livestock.

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11 The star symbol and the label "Nefza" are added by me.

12 Besides the French sources, Barhūmī (2010: 48) highlights that the tribes of Northwest Tunisia themselves insist on their origin from Morocco and Algeria and the South Tunisian desert.

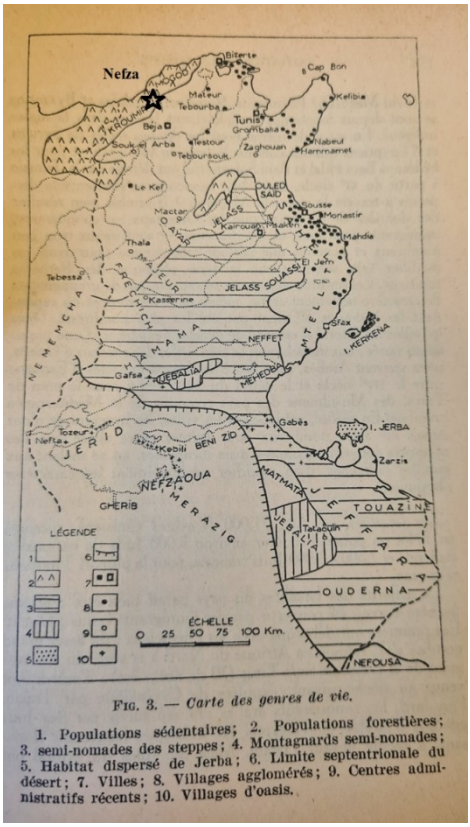

Fig. 3. — *Carte des genres de vie.*

1. Populations sédentaires; 2. Populations forestières; 3. semi-nomades des steppes; 4. Montagnards semi-nomades; 5. Habitat dispersé de Jerba; 6. Limite septentrionale du désert; 7. Villes; 8. Villages agglomérés; 9. Centres administratifs récents; 10. Villages d'oasis.

Fig. 3 Map of lifestyles and tribes of Tunisia © Despois (1950b: 137)

Referring to the origin of the Nefza population specifically, Barhūmī (2010: 46) reports that the elders of the Nefza tribe believe that their ancestor (*židd*) came from the Nefzaoua region and that his *nisba* was an-Nafzī an-Nifṭī some six centuries ago.[13] Furthermore, Barhūmī (2010: 46) lists names of subtribes of the Nefza region: Awlād Bū ʕAlī, which are considered to be among the oldest settlers: "*wa-ǧadduhum hūwa Mubārak bin ʕAlī n-Nifṭī l-Ǧarīdī ʔaṣīl Nafzāwa*" (Barhūmī 2010: 46). He continues by saying that the named founder Mubārak has had children, who on their part founded tribal

13 A more in-depth analysis including older Arabic sources would doubtlessly be desirable.

fractions: Qāsim, who founded Awlād Qāsim, Zāriʕ, who founded az-Zawāriʕ, Sālim, who founded Awlād Sālim and Ǧamīl, who founded al-Ǧamāylīya.[14]

Regarding the connection between Nefza and the above-mentioned South Tunisian Nefzaoua region with a strinkingly similar name, according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* both the "Berber tribe" Nafza and the Nafzāwa tribe belong "to the group which the mediaeval genealogists and historians mention under the name of Butr" (cf. Pellat 1993a: 896, Pellat 1993b: 896).

When asked about their tribal affiliation, my speakers denied any tribal affiliation (*ʕaṛ'š* "tribe"), however the concept of *gōm* is common in Nefza, which represents the (extended) family and seems to be the equivalent of the concept of *ʕaṛ'š*, which on the other hand is widespread in other Tunisian regions such as Central and South Tunisia.

1.2.4.2. Nefza during the time of the French colonial period

The town of Nefza is attested in historical sources under the name Djebel Abiod (al-Ǧabal al-Abyaḍ) during the time of the French colonial period, meaning "the white mountain" (cf. Barhūmī 2010: 62, Rāziqī 2022: 153), which – to the best of my knowledge – is a name not used anymore.

Rāziqī (2022: 153) emphasizes the strategically important position of the town of Nefza during the French colonial period, representing a basic transportation node linking the Northeast and the Northwest (the cities of Bizerte and Tabarka) on the one hand and the capital Tunis and the mountain ranges between Amdoun and the Kroumirie massif on the other hand.[15]

Furthermore, Djebel Abiod (i.e. the town of Nefza) is mentioned in historical sources in the context of the Run for Tunis in 1942 as part of the Tunisian campaign, which took place during the Second World War (cf. Anderson 1946: 5453).

1.3. Methodology and data

1.3.1. Fieldwork and methodology

The applied methodology consists of the collection of empirical linguistic data during my field research stays in the Nefza region and the subsequent transcription, translation and linguistic analysis of the collected data in a linguistic corpus.

14 I am also familiar with the listed tribal fractions as names of localities of the Nefza region (Ūlād Bū ʕAlī, Ūlād Gāsim, iz-Zwāraʕ and iž-Žmāylīya), in which I have either conducted field research or I have heard of people mentioning those localities during my field research stays.

15 Moreover, Rāziqī (2022) is a historical contribution on the institution of the caliphate in Nefza and the techniques for shaping social status and political affairs of the caliph between 1881 (the date of French colonial entry into Tunisia) and 1926 (the date of the removal of the caliph al-Ḥāǧǧ ʕAlī bin Muxtār).

Within the scope of the research project "Tunisia's Linguistic *terra incognita:* An Investigation into the Arabic Varieties of Northwestern and Central Tunisia (TUNOCENT)" I conducted two field research campaigns in the Nefza region in April and July 2019,[16] in which the majority of the data was collected. Due to the emergence of the COVID pandemics I had to cancel my planned field research campaign in 2020. However, in 2021 a Tunisian colleague (Nidhal Aloui) contributed to the present study by collecting additional data from male speakers from the localities Umm Labid and Zaga, making the data on which this study is based more representative concerning the quantity and diversity.

I am aware of the fact that the authenticity of the speakers' speech might be reduced when talking to a foreigner and non-native of Tunisian Arabic, as opposed to having a local Nefzi interlocutor. More precisely, I noticed that some speakers switched to a more "standard" Tunisian variant and used more MSA forms when talking to me.

For this reason, I aimed at reducing the risk of collecting not fully authentic speech by – among other text types – also recording dialogues between several Nefzi speakers, without my involvement. Furthermore, a comparison of the data collected by me with the data collected by the Tunisian colleague allows the verification of the authenticity of my data.

The collected data[17] were used for establishing a linguistic corpus of NA, with a volume of ~ 50,000 words. An insight into the corpus is provided by the attached texts (see chapter 5), which are transcribed[18], provided with linguistic and contextual notes, and translated into English utilizing the standard methods of Arabic dialectology and historical linguistics. Moreover, comparative methods establish differences and similarities between the examined varieties of the Nefza region.

1.3.2. Localities

With regard to localities included in this study, linguistic data was collected from the following localities of the municipality (*muʕtamdīya*) of Nefza during the field research campaigns: the town of Nefza as well as five the surrounding villages Zaga, Touila, Umm Labid, Ouled Bou Ali and Hbeba.

16 During these two fieldwork campaigns I also conducted field research in other localities of the Northwest Tunisian Governorates of Béja, Jendouba and Kéf apart from Nefza.

17 For the type and volume of the collected data see 1.3.3 and 1.3.4.

18 For details on the used transcription see chapter "General remarks".

Fig. 4 The localities of the Nefza region where fieldwork was conducted © Google Maps

The following table shows each locality's name in English as well as in the local variety (some localities have two names[19]). Moreover, the locality's distance from the town of Nefza and the geo-coordinates are given:

Locality name in English	Locality name in the local variety	Distance from Nefza[20]:	Geo-coordinates
Nefza	Nifza	/	36.976069861619536, 9.079733841785329
Umm Labid	Umm l-ᵃʕBīd, il-Mūmnīya[21]	3 km	36.98472462239971, 9.04457387239055
Touila	iṭ-Ṭwīla, il-Ḥāṛšīya	3 km	36.96810659562558, 9.053015586047398
Zaga	Zāga[22]	12 km	36.918047, 8.994748
Hbeba	Ḥbāba	3 km	36.968467, 9.104435

19 During my field research stays in Northwest Tunisia, I noticed that many localities in the Béja governorate (including the Nefza region) have two names, usually an official and an additional unofficial one.

20 Measured from the city center of Nefza, the starting point used for the measurement is the post office in Nefza with the geo-coordinates 36.9754922080286, 9.07577100589921.

21 The endonym il-Mūmnīya is derived from the surname (i.e. family) il-Mūmni.

22 More specifically, the data was collected in a part of Zaga called iḏ-Ḏṛābnīya.

Ouled Bou Ali	Ūlād Bū ʕLī	5 km	37.0033161005863, 9.0959446133478823

The map below shows neighborhoods within the town of Nefza, where most of the data was collected (marked with a star symbol):

Fig. 5 Neighborhoods in Nefza which the recorded speakers origin from © Google Maps

Unintentionally, all three neighborhoods are located in the Western part of Nefza (West from the river Oued Maden).

1.3.3. Type of data

The collected data in the form of audio recordings can be divided into two types: free speech texts and questionnaires. In addition to recorded questionnaires and free speech texts, linguistic notes taken by me during participant observation in the field research are also part of the NA linguistic corpus.

23 These are approximate geo-coordinates of this locality, as the data from the two old speakers from Ouled Bou Ali was not collected in Ouled Bou Ali itself, but in the eastern part of Nefza, where they live today. The speakers told me the village is located "behind the Alrawabi Hotel", i.e. somewhere on the main road exiting Nefza in the Northeast direction after the Alrawabi hotel, i.e. in the Northeast surroundings of Nefza.

Concerning free speech texts, a big part of them consists of ethnographic narrative texts, on topics like agriculture, traditions, folk medicine and food. Moreover, dialogues between several NA speakers were recorded.

The orally queried linguistic questionnaires have the purpose of systematically investigating specific phonological and morphological phenomena. I am aware of the fact that data collected through questionnaires does not always represent the spontaneous authentic speech of a speaker, however data collected through questionnaires is indispensable for creating a comprehensive grammatical description of a linguistic variety. Additionally, data collected through questionnaires is compared with free speech texts of the same speaker, for the sake of the verification of its authenticity.

As for the questionnaires used in the field research in the Nefza region as well as in other Northwest and Central Tunisian localities within the scope of the TUNOCENT project, four kinds of questionnaires were used.

Firstly, and most importantly, a comprehensive "TUNOCENT" questionnaire consisting of 74 pages, which was created by the project leader Veronika Ritt-Benmimoun for the TUNOCENT project, was used for the investigation of various phonological, morphological and syntactical features of the given variety. The "TUNOCENT" questionnaire includes, among others, full verb conjugations and features listed by Marçais (1950) as typical of Tunisian Sulaym- and Hilāl-type Bedouin varieties.

Furthermore, two types of questionnaires (or rather templates) were adopted from the project "Vienna Corpus of Arabic Varieties" (VICAV)[24], hosted by the Department of Near Eastern Studies of the University of Vienna and the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ACDH-CH): the so-called *feature list* and *sample text*. A *feature list* is a catalogue made up of sentences and phrases containing salient linguistic features of the respective variety, whereas a *sample text* means a short, standardized text containing linguistically significant words and phrases as well as morphological and morpho-syntactic peculiarities.

In contrast to the "TUNOCENT" questionnaire, where local Tunisian forms are given, the sentences from the *feature list* and *sample text* are given (read out loud to the speaker) in MSA, with the request of repeating the same sentence in his/her local variety. Hearing the MSA form might influence the authenticity of the forms given by the speaker.[25] Furthermore, the collection of

24 For further information on the VICAV project see https://vicav.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/#map=[biblMarkers,.*,geo]&l=[textQuery,vicavMission,MISSION,open].

25 However, it needs to be pointed out that next to the MSA sentences I also explained the sentences in Tunisian Arabic and asked further questions when a used form was unclear, or I had the feeling that the used form might be influenced by MSA or unauthentic.

feature lists and *sample texts* was not possible with old NA speakers, due to their insufficient knowledge of MSA.

Lastly, the extensive questionnaire adopted from the *Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* (WAD)[26] (cf. Behnstedt/Woidich 2011), was used for investigating lexical features, among them everyday items, animals, food as well as grammatical categories such as verbs and adverbs.

1.3.4. Volume of data

A total of about 31 hours of audio recordings was collected, including five hours of audio recordings made by Nidhal Aloui. This number includes all types of data: free speech texts as well as the questionnaires.

The linguistic corpus consists of fully transcribed and translated free speech texts on the one hand, and free speech recordings transcribed in excerpts (only the remarkable features) on the other. Additionally, all recorded questionnaires are fully transcribed and are part of the linguistic corpus. All transcribed data form a linguistic corpus of ~ 50,000 words.

The following table represents the total amount of speakers and volume of data for each examined locality, including both free speech recordings and questionnaires:

Locality	Number of speakers (m/f)	Collected Data (Free Speech + Questionnaires)
Nefza	37 (13/24)	18h
Zaga	3 (2/1)	4h
Umm Labid	10 (3/7)	4h
Touila	6 (1/5)	3h
Hbeba	6 (2/4)	1.5h
Ouled Bou Ali	2 (1/1)	0.5h
Total	64	~ 31h

Regarding the questionnaires, the table below offers an overview of the number of collected questionnaires in each examined locality as well as in total:

Locality	TUNOCENT	WAD	Feature List	Sample Text
Nefza	4	4	5	3
Zaga	2	1	1	/
Umm Labid	1	1	1	/
Touila	2	1	1	1

26 Provided to the TUNOCENT project by the authors Manfred Woidich and Peter Behnstedt.

Hbeba	/	/	/	/
Ouled Bou Ali	/	/	/	/
Total	9	7	8	4

As can be seen from the table, most data (a total of 18h) was collected in the town of Nefza. Moreover, both free speech texts and questionnaires were recorded in Nefza, Zaga, Umm Labid and Touila, whereas in Ouled Bou Ali and Hbeba only free speech texts were recorded.

1.3.5. Speakers

The present study is a differentiated description of the speech of NA speakers of different age groups and backgrounds. Both the speech of the old (both rural and urban) and rural middle-aged Nefza population on the one hand, and young (both rural and urban) and urban middle-aged NA speakers on the other, are taken into account. The first mentioned shows a higher number of remarkable and distinctive features, while the latter is characterized by a larger number of forms influenced by the sedentary variety of the capital Tunis (see 4.2 on the sociolinguistic differences). The large number of speakers (a total of over 60 speakers in all Nefza localities) facilitates a differentiated description of this Northwest Tunisian Bedouin-type variety.

With regard to the gender of the speakers, approximately 80% of the data was collected from female NA speakers. This can be explained by the fact that the interviewer (me) is female, and my local assistants were female as well, who took me to their female relatives and friends. Nefza is a quite conservative region (in comparison to Tunis and the Sahel), where the mixing of genders is not as socially accepted as in urban costal centers of the country. Due to this fact, an imbalance of genders in my collected data was created. However, this gender imbalance could luckily be partially offset by the data collected by Nidhal Aloui, who recorded male speakers only.

Concerning the age of the recorded speakers, their age range is wide: 6-85, with a focus on speakers above 18. Most free speech recordings were made with older speakers, while the questionnaires were mainly recorded with young and middle-aged speakers, due to the difficulty of asking for specific grammatical features from old speakers with no or very low level of education. In three families data from three generations of a single family were collected, which allows an analysis of the language change across the generations.

In reference to the education level of the speakers, many of the recorded old speakers were illiterate. Similarly, the recorded middle-aged rural speakers have no or low education level. In contrast, the education level of the recorded young (both rural and urban) and urban middle-aged speakers is middle school or high school.

The profession of the recorded urban middle-aged speakers is housewife for most female speakers, whereas their male counterparts work as traders, craftsmen or in the administration. As for the recorded rural middle-aged speakers, the female speakers work in agriculture, either as day laborers or in their own agricultural fields. Their male counterparts have the profession of minibus drivers or work in cafés or in agriculture as well. The recorded young speakers are either in training or education or are unemployed.

Finally, it shall be emphasized that even in a small region like Nefza migration and urbanization are a constant development taking place. The recorded middle-aged and old speakers from the town of Nefza (i.e. "urban" NA speakers) were born in the surrounding villages and migrated to Nefza in their childhood. Only the recorded young speakers (below the age of 25) were actually born in Nefza. Nevertheless, the urban middle-aged NA speakers differentiate their speech from rural NA speakers, identifying themselves as originating from the town of Nefza. As regards young NA speakers, they show an increasing mobility towards the capital Tunis.

1.4 State of the Art

To the best of my knowledge, the Arabic variety spoken in the Nefza region is hitherto undocumented and represents a research gap in Arabic dialectology. The same holds true for other Northwest Tunisian Arabic varieties. However, the investigation of Nefza Arabic – among other Northwest and Central Tunisian Arabic varieties – is one of the objectives of the research project "Tunisia's Linguistic *terra incognita:* An Investigation into the Arabic Varieties of Northwestern and Central Tunisia (TUNOCENT)", in the realm of which this study has come to existence. Nefza Arabic is briefly mentioned in Ritt-Benmimoun (2021), which is a paper based on empiric data of the TUNOCENT project.

Apart from this, a few recent publications on other Northwest Tunisian Arabic varieties exist, such as a dialectal text and grammar sketch of El Kef Arabic (cf. Ritt-Benmimoun 2022) as well as a study on language attitudes and leveling in the Northwest Tunisian varieties of the Jendouba and Siliana governorates (cf. Abdelfattah/Ritt-Benmimoun 2022). Moreover, Zarb (2023) treats the Arabic variety spoken in the town of Testour, whereas Oueslati (2022) gives an insight in the variety of Ouled Slama, which is located in the rural surroundings of Testour. Lastly, W. Marçais (1921) is a study on the *nomen unitatis* in Jendouba Arabic, while Dornier (2004) comprises a collection of politeness phrases used in certain situations in North Tunisian countryside.

As concerns other geographically adjacent Arabic varieties, there is a paper on the North Tunisian variety of Mateur (cf. Mion 2014a), which is located

some 71km from Nefza. Moreover, several studies have been done on the grammar of Tunis Arabic (cf. Singer 1984, Gibson 2009), which is both geographically near and sociolinguistically important, as the leveling among young Nefza Arabic speakers occurs towards the prestigious Tunis Arabic (see 4.2.1).

Prior to the TUNOCENT project, in the course of which significant empirical linguistic data of the Arabic varieties of the mentioned region was collected, the whole region of Northwest and Central Tunisia was a linguistically unknown region (*terra incognita*). In contrast to that region, previous linguistic studies on Tunisian Arabic are available for South Tunisian Bedouin-type varieties[27] as well as Tunisian varieties of the sedentary and "villageois" type.[28]

W. Marçais (1950) dedicates five pages to Tunisian Bedouin-type varieties, wherein a classification of these varieties into two main groups of the so-called Hilāl- und Sulaym-type varieties is made (including only brief basic information on the respective dialect group):

> "Dans cet ensemble bédouin, comme il a été dit plus haut, il semble légitime de distinguer deux groupes, dont on peut indiquer en gros la composition. Le premier que l'on désignera comme groupe H [Hilāl] comprend tout ce qui, sédentarisé ou vivant sous la tente, a pour habitat la Tunisie central, du Nord des Chott à la Méjerda : les Hamâmma, les Frâchîch, les Mâjeur, les Zlâs, les Ouled 'Ayyâr [sic], les Ouled Bou-Rhânem, les Drîd, etc. Les second qu'on désignera comme groupe S [Sulaym] occupe un territoire étendu, mais discontinu allant de la pointe du Sud tunisien que limitent de part et d'autre l'Algérie et la Tripolitaine, pour remonter le long du littoral sur une profondeur variable. Interrompu par les régions sédentaires du Sahel, du Cap Bon, de la grand banlieue de Tunis, et de celle de Bizerte, il réapparaît dans les massifs montagneux limités, par la vallée de la Méjerda au Sud, et au Nord par la mer. Il semble déborder sur deux régions algériennes : celle du Souf au Sud, celle de la Calle au Nord. On y rattachera en gros les Ouerghemma, les Marâzîg et les gens du Nefzâoua, les 'Akkâra [sic], les Hamârna, les Benî Zîd, les oasis de la région de Gabès, les Mhâdhba, les 'Agârba [sic], les Neffât, les Mthâlîth, les Souâsi, les Oulâd Sa'îd [sic], les Hdîl, les Mog'od [sic] et les groupes humains de la Kroumirie." (W. Marçais 1950: 214)

27 See, for instance, Boris (1958) and Ritt-Benmimoun (2011, 2014a) on the Arabic variety of the Maṛāzīg tribe, Behnstedt (1998-99) on different Arabic varieties of Djerba, Saada (1984) on Tozeur Arabic and Marçais/Jelloûli (1931-33) on El Hamma Arabic.

28 See, for instance, Singer (1984) on Tunis Arabic, Talmoudi (1980-81) on Sousse Arabic and Marçais/Guîga (1958-61) on Takrouna Arabic.

The above-mentioned tribes of the Mugʕud (“Mog’od”) and Xmīr (“Kroumirie”), which are supposed to be part of the so-called Sulaym-type varieties, coincide with the location of the Nefza region. Thus, according to the classification made by W. Marçais (1950), Nefza Arabic should belong to the northern group of Sulaym-type varieties. In the final part of this study (see 4.1) W. Marçais’ Sulaym – Hilāl division of Tunisian Bedouin-type varieties is reevaluated by investigating the degree of correspondence of the linguistic features listed by W. Marçais as typical for Sulaym-type varieties with actual Nefza Arabic features. Furthermore, the southern group of the Tunisian Sulaym-type Bedouin varieties is hitherto by far better investigated than the northern group and can thereby be used for the comparison with Nefza Arabic as a supposed representative of the northern group of Tunisian Sulaym-type Bedouin varieties.

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