

Conditional clauses in the Arabic dialect of Tunis

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As for the dialect of Tunis, conditional sentences have not attracted much scholarly attention during the last decades. Hitherto the most detailed study of this subject is Kumakiri 2013 who focuses on the use of the particle *řā-* in counterfactual conditionals.

Although our corpus is not representative enough to present a full picture of the very complex issue of conditional clauses, we can state that the linguistic dynamics show a clear trend towards reduction of variation. Particularly, the number and frequency of conjunctions used in conditional structures seems to have diminished significantly since the publication of Singer's grammar (1984) which is based on fieldwork carried out in the 1960s.

The conjunction *řa* which, according to Singer 1984:700, was very common in the speech of women and uneducated people, is not attested in our corpus and has probably disappeared completely. With regard to the particle *řū*, Gibson 2009:570 claims that it is the common conjunction to introduce counterfactual conditional clauses. However, it is not found in our corpus and also absent from Kumakiri's data (2013:159, fn.4). But also the compound conjunction *řū-kān* (variant *ř-kān*) that is mentioned in both Singer 1984:704 and Kumakiri 2013:159 appears only one single time. The following observations are all based on the data found in our TUNICO corpus which contains about 95,000 words. It is accessible on https://tunico.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/about_corpus.html.

řda and *řda kān*

Both forms are not frequently attested in our corpus, the compound conjunction being lesser used (3 times) than the single form (12 times). Gibson 2009:570 mentions only *řda kān* and states that it is mostly used together with a verb in the perfect form. The examples in our corpus include both factual (1-2) and counterfactual (3) conditionals:

(1) Medina Salesman:

řda muř řāsīd ynařřīm ykawwin.

'If he is not a bad person, he can create (something).'

(2) Two Friends in a Mall:

řda kān hakkāka

'If it is like this...'

(3) Medina Salesman:

āna řatta bnayya řda řđarbit řī-ya nqul-lha nuq°řdu řōmpl amī mā-nřibb-°ř.

'Even if a girl fell in love with me, I would tell her, "Let's stay simple friends. I don't want to..."'

kān

In contrast to other Maghrebi dialects (cf. Brustad 2000:262), the fossilized form of the verb *kān* (literally 'he was') is not necessarily associated with counterfactual or irrealis mood in Tunisian Arabic. The form *kān* is attested 106 times in the TUNICO corpus and hence is by far the most widely used conjunction for introducing the protasis of conditional clauses. Altogether 35 times the variant *kāna* appears, but this number includes 30 occurrences of a speaker from Djerba and only five by speakers of Tunis Arabic. Examples are:

(4) Talking to an Artist:

S: w-rīt kāna maṭalan *žö kǧē ö tǧūk*.

IG: ayy.

S: mā-naṣraš-š maṭalan *ö kolyē*.

IG: ayy.

S: baṣd ūn pägyöd nqūl s-ē kwā sā.

S: And I saw that when I create something, for example.

IG: Yes.

S: I don't know, a necklace, for example.

IG: Yes.

S: (Then) after a while, I say, "What is that!"

(5) Medina Salesman:

kāna bnā bī-hum dār xīr wal-lā?

'It would have been better, if he had built a house with it [the money].'

Forms of inflected *kān* combined with pronominal suffixes (i.e. *kāni*, *kānik*, *kānu*, *kāni*, *kāna*, *kānkum*, *kānhum*), for which Singer 1984:701 states that they are very frequent (especially *kānu*), are almost completely absent from our corpus. In the only example *kānu* (6) does not agree with its subject which may be seen as a hint that it develops towards an inflected form (one would expect here *kānhum* or *kāni*):

(6) Talking about Tunisia:

il-ā ḥāžāt festīvitē yuqṣdu ḥatta kānu b-ōtgē walla ḥāža yaṣni.

'The, ā, things, festivities, stay even if they are with admission or whatever.'

The conjunction *kān* introduces factual conditionals and is combined with both imperfect and perfect verbs. As the examples below show it is also found in clauses that do not contain a verb.

(7) Medina Salesman:

hāwka āžūtīw-ni kān t̥hibbu

'Add me (on Facebook) if you want to!'

(8) Two friends in a Mall:

kān ʕand-ik fāk uxra nāwya tibʕāt-ilha taww taww.

'If you intend to send (your files/records) to another university, (do it) immediately!'

kān žīʕāna kū!

'If you are hungry, eat!'

(9) Souq Salesman I:

kān ʕižbitt-u ḥāža nmidd-lu.

'If he likes something, I give (it) to him.'

(10) Souq Salesman III:

nhizz-ik lī-hum w-aḥki mʕā-hum w-uqʕud kān t̥hibb baḥdā-hum w-šūf-hum kifāh!

'I take you to them and speak to them and sit next to them, if you want. And look how (they live)!'

(11) Artist in Café I:

āna kān bāš ʔnžī ʔnqul-lik.

'I (will) let you know if I am going to come.'

(12) Artist in Café V:

mā-naʕraš-š kān intūma rītū-ha l-ēmisyō illi tʕaddīt fī-ha āna fī-wāb tīwī.

'I don't know if you saw the program in which I appeared on Web TV.'

(13) Two Friends in a Café:

kān mā-lqīt-š l-ōtōrizasyō niṭṭu b-il-aḥadd.

'If I don't get (lit. find) the permission, we (have to) go [to the countryside] on Sunday.'

kān + žā

There are nine occurrences where *kān* is followed by an inflected form of the verb *žā* 'to come' which in these sentences functions, however, as an auxiliary. According to our examples and to the findings of Kumakiri 2013, this construction seems to be restricted to counterfactual conditionals. Examples are:

(14) Artist in Café II:

māniš ā ... kān žīt xāyba mā-yaʕmlū-lī-š hakka.

'I am not ā ... if I was (a) bad (person), they would not do this for me.'

(15) Artist in Café IV:

kān žīt fi-mozayīk mā-nqaddmū-š il-kōsēpt hādāya (xāṭir ylawwḥū-h ʕlā wižh-i maʕnitha.)

'If I was at Mosaique FM [i.e. working for Mosaique FM], we would not present this concept.'

(16) Rapper:

xāṭir l-insān kān žā yaxlaq rūḥ-u walla kaḍ ... rā-h xlaq rūḥ-u ḥāža muš normāl žimla waḥda.

'Because man, if he created himself or someth[ing], he would create himself as something that is not normal anyway.'

The apodosis of counterfactual conditional clauses containing *kān + žā* may be introduced by the particle *rā-* if the sentence has past time reference (see Kumakiri 2013:166-168 and Dallaji & Procházka (forthcoming)).

(17) Rapper:

taww kān žāu hūma ḥāšit-hum bāš yquṣṣu z-zaṭla rā-hu qaṣṣū-ha rā-h.

'Now, if they were in need to cut off cannabis, they surely would have cut it off already.'

Since the auxiliary *žā* is not mentioned in Singer 1984 and since there are also no examples of its usage in his work, it can be assumed that this syntactic feature is an innovation. It is possible that it was introduced to Tunis Arabic by speakers of southern Tunisian dialects where it is rather frequent (see Ritt-Benmimoun (forthcoming) for South Tunisian Bedouin dialects).

lū-kān

This conjunction occurs only once, combined with *ḥatta* in the sense 'even if'.

(18) Rapper:

Ḥ: fassar-li tawwa āna mhabbiṭ āna ḡunnāya. ḥatta lū-kān habbaṭṭ ʕa-l-yūtūb.

IG: ayy.

Ḥ: škūn bāš yaʕraf-ni?

Ḥ: Explain (it) to me. I put a song (on the internet) now. Even if I put it on Youtube.

IG: Yes.

Ḥ: Who will know me?

Conclusion

When comparing the data taken from our contemporary TUNICO corpus, with the situation described by Singer for the 1960s it becomes obvious that there is much less variation. This could be seen as an indication for the koinization process the Arabic of Tunis has undergone during the last decades. Singer 1984:704 observed that in his time there was a tendency that all conjunctions of the conditional are mutually exchangeable. Fifty years later this development has led to a significant reduction of forms resulting in the dominance of *kān* 'if' at the expense of other conjunctions used for introducing conditional clauses. Another striking feature is the almost complete disappearance of the conjunction *lū-kān* that was mainly used for counterfactuals. It seems that its function has been replaced by an analytic construction containing the conjunction *kān* followed by a inflected form of the verb *ǧā* 'to come'. In counterfactuals that have past time reference the particle *ṛā-* is almost obligatory used to introduce the apodosis.

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