

## The Influence of Canaanite and Aramaic Languages on the Recent Palestinian Dialects

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### Abstract

Palestine, an Arab country, was part of the Aramaic civilization as well as Canaanites who lived in Palestine for thousands of years. Canaanites remained up to the arrival of the Arab conquerors from the Arabian Peninsula. After that People converted into Islam and learned the Arabic language as it became the official language. Even though Arabic was the official language since that period, Aramaic language remained. Many of the recently used colloquial words aren't Arabic in their origins and their roots can be found in Aramaic dictionaries. Aramaic language is present up to the day in the recent Palestinian dialects. This study sheds lights on a very interesting topic and points to the origins of the recent Palestinian dialects. The study also justifies the presence of non- Arabic words in the recent Palestinian dialects. While, most scholars focus on the phonetics side of Arabian dialects, this study focuses on the origins of the recent dialects. One of the main results the research comes up with is that Aramaic civilization didn't disappear completely. Their culture and language remained in Palestine especially in the Palestinian dialects. The mixture in the recent spoken dialects is a result of civilizations' diversity in the past.

**Keywords:** Canaanite Languages, Aramaic Languages, Palestinian Dialects.

### Introduction

Palestine is a small country with diversity of civilizations and this diversity influences the pronunciation among Palestinians and establishes many different dialects with different pronunciations of alphabets and words.

A recent dialect didn't appear suddenly or in few years but goes back to thousands of years of several civilizations, so a scholar of any dialect would definitely study the history of a dialect, its origins and the main civilizations influenced it.

Scientists view the modern Arabic dialects in different ways. While some scientists consider these dialects as a negative progress of the language and should be neglected, others

find them interesting phenomena and deserve studying due to their history. Scientists who decided to study these dialects tackled them phonetically by referring to the dialects of Arab tribes and their phonetics' phenomena (e.g.: ālkškšh, ālšnšnh, āl'n'nh, ....etc). Only few scientists and researchers study the modern Arabic dialects in light of the ancient civilizations that lived thousands of years in the Levant, Iraq and North Africa, and their lingual effects in the dialects of those countries' populations. This study is meant to clarify the relation between the sematic civilizations and Palestinian dialects and justify the presence of Aramaic poetical phenomena and thousands of Aramaic words in the Palestinian dialects.

### **Borrowing in linguistic**

Borrowing means to adapt a word from an origin language to be used according to the target language rules. Borrowing is a natural phenomenon in human languages as no language exists without being influenced by other languages. Borrowing and lending are a result of this phenomenon and there are a lot of examples in all the languages (Anis 1965).

Palestinian dialects borrowed enormous number of vocabulary from other languages and gave them Arabic pronunciation with the arrival of Arabic to Palestine in the seventh century AD. These borrowed vocabularies had synonyms in the formal Arabic but Palestinians adopted them gave them Arabic pronunciation.

Despite the usage of thousands of Aramaic words by Palestinians, few people know their origins. Most people believe they are originally Arabic because they have been given Arabic alphabets and tones while being translated. Some alphabets in Arabic language don't exist in Canaan's language alphabets (e.g.: the Arabic alphabet *ḥ* *doesn't exist in the Canaanite alphabets*. The word "lḥm" has been borrowed from the word "lhmw" which is originally Canaanite's word (Selbia 2007). Arabic language has a lot of borrowed words form Canaanite and Aramaic languages not only in the colloquial dialects but also in the formal language. Aramaic and Canaanite words reached the Palestinian dialects in two ways:

1- Directly; the borrowed words were used in the colloquial Arabic only. For example, the word "šbṭw" which is February in the Western calendar has been modified into "šbāt" to become Arabic. "šbāt" is used only in Syria and Iraq which were the home of Aramaic civilization (Eisa 2002).

2- Indirectly; many borrowed words were used in the formal Arabic language. These words were used before Islam and have been conveyed by the Arab conquerors. Some of these words were used in the Palestinian dialects while others were not used so some Aramaic words replaced others.

### **Sematic Civilization and their influence on the Palestinian Dialects**

Much ancient civilization lived on the Palestinian land. The first civilization was the Canaanite's which extended in the eastern coast of the Levant. The Canaanites established many kingdoms in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and western Syria. Their civilization reached the western Mediterranean in Tunisia and Spain (Hamedah 1994). The Phoenicians, who established kingdoms in Tunisia and the Mediterranean islands, are considered as a part of the Canaanite civilization (Aboody 1991).

The Ugaritic alphabet is the first alphabet in the human history. Ugarit is located on the Syrian coast and is a part of the Canaanite civilization, from which the writing moved to the

Mediterranean coasts of North Africa, Spain, Italy and Greece. The Canaanite language is the first spoken language known to the inhabitants of Palestine since the dawn of history (Hamedah 1994).

The Canaanites continued to exist in Palestine for thousands of years, and then the Aramaic kingdoms started in Syria, Iraq and extended to Palestine in addition to the arrival of the Hebrews to Palestine, so the Canaanite presence in Palestine ended politically, but their civilization did not die. The Aramaic civilization lived in Palestine for a long time. Palestinians took the alphabet from Armenians who learned the writing from the Canaanites. The Canaanite language remained strongly in Palestine for a long period of time and after that it was replaced by the Aramaic language.

Scientists agree that Aramaic and Canaanite languages are both sematic languages (Wilkinson 1929) as they have the same linguistic origins. Canaanite language was more advanced as it was written and human learned the writing system from them. Canaanite language affected the Aramaic language strongly as they copied their alphabets (AboHab 2009). Aramaic writing's system developed after that to become the well-known Nabataean writing system. The Nabataean writing system was very common during the Prophetic mission period.

The Canaanite language was very common during the revelation of Torah, and then Aramaic language replaced the Canaanite's language in Palestine. When Jesus, the son of Mary, peace be upon him came Aramaic was the main language in Palestine, which Jesus spoke. The first version of the Bible was written in Aramaic and later had been translated into the Latin language so; Aramaic language became the predominant language in the Syria and Iraq during that period.

Palestinians learned the Canaanite's language and culture. Palestinians learned how to build villages and cities from them. The names which Palestinians gave to their cities remained up to the present days. For example, a'ryhā which is Jericho was known as "yryhw", it means the moon. "Yāfā" which is Jaffa was known as "yāfy", it means beautiful view."kā" which is Acre was known as "kw", it means the hot sand. "ğnyn" which is Jenin was named after "yn ğnym", it means a rich Well. "ālbyrh" which is Al-Bira was known as "byron", it means Wells. "Mğdw" which is Megiddo means the Fort. "Slfy" which is Salfit town means land of good and blessing. Many city names begin with "kfr" which means village like Kafr'Ana city (AL-Zoubi 1996). The word "kfr" in the formal Arabic is used as "kfār". Many Jewish settlements in the West Bank start with "kfār ", such as the "kfār 'šywn" settlement in the southern of Bethlehem.

Tens of city and village's names begin with the word "byt like *byt šān* which is Beisan, *byt lhm* which is Bethlehem, means the house of the Canaanite God (lhmw), *byt 'Ēl* which is Bethel was named after the great Canaanite Gods ('Ēl)," 'Ēlat" which is Eilat city is derived from the word ('Ēl). Many city names haven't any known meanings are of Canaanite origins like *qra ğmzw* which is Jimzu village (AL-Zoubi 1996). *Nābls* which is Nablus has been named after a strong snake's fang that lived in the city according to a Canaanite's legend. "zr'yn" which is Zerib was "yzr'yl" in the Canaanite language, means land of farmers." 'rqh "is a village to the west of Jenin and its name is derived from a Canaanite's word that means woods as the village was an area of exporting forest woods at that time (AL-Dabbag 1991).

Many cities and villages has the word ('Ēl), the great God for Canaan. Jerusalem in the Pact of Umar was known as 'Ēl yā'. "byt 'Ēl" is the name of town located north of Ramallah where there was a large temple. "Ēlāt" is a city in the north of Palestine to the opposite of the Red sea (Sharab 2000). Some proper nouns are affected by this word ('Ēl) like Israel, Jebrail, Michael and many others. This Canaanite word ('Ēl) has been moved to the Hebrew language too.

Palestinians, in their general life use colloquial words thinking they are Arabic, but the fact is that they are originally Canaanite or Aramaic words. For example, the word "b'l" is used to describe agriculture irrigated with rainwater. "b'l" in the Canaanite language is the God of rain. Another example is the word "'šyr'" which is used to refer to a big family. "'šyr'" in Canaanite language is the wife of ('Ēl), the great God of Canaanites, (Haddad 1993).

In Palestine, names of the months go back to the Aramaic civilization. "kāwn āl'wl" and "kāwn āl'tāny" are originally Aramaic and refers to the Fireplace, used to give warmth. "kāwn āl'wl" is December, the last month in the Gregorian year, where winter usually begins. "kāwn āl'tāny" is January and usually winter where people use the Fireplace to get warmth during it too. "šbāt" is February. "šbāt" means windy due to the strong winds people receive during this month (Selbia 2007).

"ādār" is March and means severe wind. "Nysān" is April and means spring and warmth beginning. "yār" is May and means bloom of flowers. "hzyrān" is June and refers to the season of harvesting wheat. "tmwz" is July and refers to the death of the Canaanite's God "tmwz" who is Adonis according to the Phoenicians. "āb" is August and refers to the season of harvesting crops. "ylwl" is September and means to shed tears on the remembrance of "tmwz" after the end of the mourning's period (40 days). The word "tšryn" in "tšryn āl'wl", October, and "tšryn āl'tāny", November, is derived from the Syriac word "tyšry" that refers to the beginning of a Syriac year as it begins usually in October (Selbia 2007).

The word "dğn" is still used in Palestine to refer to all types of wheat (flour, barley, corn, ...ect)( Al-Dabbag 1991). The word "dğn" refers to the name of wheat God (dāğwn or dāğwn). Many of the recent words in the Palestinian dialects end with the Syriac alphabet "w" don't exist in the formal Arabic and are only used in the colloquial language like the word "brđw". Some words end with the alphabet "ā" coming after the Syriac alphabet "w". For example "ğwā" and "brā" are two colloquial words of Sumerian origins, the first means inside and the second means outside, Canaanite's language borrowed these words later from their origins (Slebia 2007).

The colloquial word "kn" is used as a command verb, means calm down and is originally Canaanite word was used to give the same meaning. kāwn month names might be derived or related to the word "kōn" as farmers during this month don't work but stay calm without work. The word "krt" in the Canaanite language means strong and nowadays, it's used in the colloquial Arabic as "zkr" to mean a strong man.

The word "'fyr" is originally Canaanites, means soil and nowadays is used to refer to the dry soil. The word "ynty" is originally Canaanites "ynty", means to give and was used in the Levant area at the beginnings, then moved to the formal Arabic. The word "ynty" has been

considered in the Qurann and was mentioned in AL-Kawther paragraph (‘nā āṭynāk ālkwṭr). The word “rḥḍ” is a past tense Canaanite verb means “to wash”. Nowadays the word “mrḥāḍ” which is derived from the word “rḥḍ” is used to refer to the place of washing things and this means that the word is still used to give the same meaning in the formal Arabic. The word “šrš” is originally Canaanites and is used when referring to the roots of things especially roots of plants. In the Canaanite’s language the word “šrš” was used in referring to the parentage of someone. Arabs when describing a strange man will use the combined words “mā lw šrš” which means that he doesn’t belong to them or isn’t from their village (Agnatyous 1969).

The word “šwb” is a borrowed word used nowadays to refer to extreme hot weathers. Originally it was used in referring to the God of weather of all cases in different Syrian civilizations. The word is still used in the colloquial language but it doesn’t reach the formal Arabic. The word “tlmyḍ” has no roots in Arabic language as it was borrowed from the sematic languages (Slebia 2007).

Many of the names of body parts in Palestinian dialects have Canaanite and Aramaic origins such as the word “bwz” means chin, “ḡbyn” means brow, “ḥnk” means mouth (Agnatyous 1969), “ḍqn” means chin, “yd” means hand, “bz” means breast, “ḡdwlh” means hair braid, and “qr” means head skin.

Many of the names of house items are originally Canaanites, for example “ṭblyh” means table, “fānws” means a lamp, “zrfyn” means door handle, “ḥrām” means a blanket or bed sheet, “ṭāsh” means a metal cup, “qnynh” means a flask, “sāṭwr” means a meat knife, “myh” means water, “l bā” means the colostrum, “bqbq” means the rumbling sound of water while boiling, and “ṭrṭš” means to sprinkle water (Esa 2002).

In the agriculture fields, many of the used words go back to Canaanite or Aramaic origins. For example, the word “ṭbn” means wheat, “rfs” is tool used while planting, “myh” means water, “zrāḥ b’lyh” is derived from the word “b’l” the great God and means planting without watering the plants and depend on the rainwater instead, “nāṭwr” means the guardian, “ālḥrḡ” is the basket over an animal, “bḥš” means to dig the ground, “ṭmr” means to inter, and “fr” is when you throw soil on someone (Agnatyous 1969).

Some of the words that are used to describe strength and violence are originally not Arabic too. For example, the word “rfs” means kicking someone to the back by leg, “b’ḡ” means to open an overfilled item, “nṭḥ” means hitting someone by using the front of the head, “ḥzz” means to mark something, “ḡzz” means to cut something, “ḥmš” means to hit someone by using nails, “ḥzq” means to make a hole in something, “b’ṭ” means to hit someone’s stomach with a metal tool, “ntf” means plucking hair, “nhš” means to take something by force, and “ḥm” means to hide something (Slebia 2007).

Many of the used verbs nowadays are Aramaic. The followings are some examples of the used verbs among Palestinians nowadays: “atšqlb” is used to describe someone who falls on his face, “atfrḡ” is a command verb means to look at something, “atḡndr” is to swing while walking, “atrb” is when someone bend his legs under him to set on them, “atqḥmš” means burned completely, “atšms” is when you set under the sunlight, “tšḥm” means lack of luck, “ḥbt” means to hit, “ṭfš” means went out angrily, “mṭmṭ” means to lay down or to work in a

lazy way, “fhğ” means to walk with wide legs, “hbş” means to mix something, “btl” means to change your mind, “mz” means to tear something, “ntf” means to pluck hair, “kšr” means to show anger on someone, “hmš” means to scratch by nails, “fq” means exploded, “lhm” means to hit someone, “lš” means to steal something or to hit someone, “hzz” means to cut someone’s head, “anbğ” means his stomach had been cut, “anhm” and “anš” means to shut your mouth (Eisa 2002).

Pronouns also were affected by the Aramaic language. Aramaic words are known with the alphabet “w” at the end. Palestinians copy this “w” and used it instead of the third-person pronouns in their dialects. For example, the word “ktabh” in the formal Arabic which means his book is pronounced as “ktabw” in the Palestinian dialects. Another example is “qlmh” which is his pencil is pronounced “qlmw”.

### Results of the Research

The above investigation of the used words in the recent Palestinian dialects shows that these words are originally Aramaic or Canaanites, consequently the study comes up with:

1- Sematic languages especially the Canaanite and Aramaic ones are still strongly available in the Palestinian dialects. Palestinians nowadays are using Aramaic and Canaanite words with Arabic pronunciation instead of many similar formal Arabic words.

2- The Canaanite and Aramaic remained words are used by Palestinians while referring to:

- a. Violence and cruelty like: “rfs”, “bğ”, “nḥ”, “hzz”, “ğzz”, “hmš”, “bṭ”, “ntf”, “nhš”, and “hm”.
- b. Verbs related to the use of toilet like: “rdd”, “šh”, and “šlh”.
- c. Names of body parts like: “ğbyn”, “bwz”, “hmk”, and the genitals of the male and women.
- d. Names of house furniture like: “ṭblyh”, “fānws”, “zrfyn”, “ḥrām”, “ṭāsh”, “rb’yh”, “qnynh”, and “sāṭwr”.
- e. Keywords related to agriculture fields: “tbn”, “rfš”, “smyd”, “lbā”, “nāṭwr”, “ālḥrğ”, “blwṭ”, “bṭyh”, and “twṭ”.

3- Aramaic language use the alphabet “n” instead of the alphabet “m” in Arabic and Palestinians in their dialects copied this phenomena as they are saying “lkn” to mean “lkm”, “ḥkālhn” to mean “ḥkā lhm”, “ḍrbhn” to mean “ḍrbhm”, and “lmkn” to mean “lmkm”.

4- Most of the Aramaic words end with the Alphabet “w” and Palestinians copied this phenomenon as they used this alphabet to replace the alphabet “h” which refers to the third-person pronoun at the end of nouns in Arabic like “ktabw” instead of “ktabh”, and “qlmw” instead of “qlmh”. The syriac alphabet “š” is replaced with the letter “s” in the Palestinian dialects as in the word “rfs” which is originally “rf š”.

5- Most of the past tense verbs in the Aramaic language start with the alphabets “at” like: “atšms”, “atšqlb”, “atğndr”, “atqḥmš”, “atshḥm”, “atrb”, and “atfrğ”. This phenomenon is common in the Levant area especially in Palestine where Palestinians use them always as they help them using fewer words in conveying a message. For example: the word “atšms” is one word used to mean that he sat under the sun lights, and the verb “atğndr” is one word used to mean that he swung while walking.

6- Most of the Aramaic words are stressed (double consonants or vowels after each other) especially the past tense verbs and the stress is meant also for using fewer words. For example, “yydd” replaces he celebrated Eid, “lṭṭh” replaces painted an ugly picture on the wall, “ngğš” replaces he ruined someone’s life, “tskk” replaces he walked carelessly or



without any purpose, “nwwḥ” means he cried loudly, and “šmms” means he put something under the sun lights.

7- The Aramaic phenomena of pronouncing the first alphabet in a word without any intonations is common in the Palestinian dialects like: “kbyr”, “šgyr”, “nrwḥ,” and “nmr”.

8- The phenomena of pronouncing the subject or object pronoun coming at the end of words without any intonation or stop is also common in the Palestinian dialects like “klt w šrbt w rḥt w šft w drst w ktbṭ”

9- Pronouncing the word without any intonations at the beginning or the end is another common phenomenon in Palestinian dialects like: “ktāb”, “bryq”, “kbyr”, “šgyr”, and “bhāṭrk”.

10- Pronouncing two consonants at the middle of a word without any intonations is common in the Palestinian dialects like: “ktāb”, “bryq”, “kbyr”, “šgyr”, and “bhāṭrk”.

11- Palestinians pronounce the alphabet “q” as “”” like: pronouncing “qlb” as “”lb”, pronouncing “mrqh” as “mr’h”, pronouncing “”rq” as “”r”, and pronouncing “qryb” as “”ryb”. This phenomena is Aramaic originally as they pronounce the alphabet “q” as “””.

### Summary

Even though, Palestine is a small country in size, it has diversity of dialects. This research work is meant to shed lights on the historical origins of these dialects. The well-known modern words used in Palestine nowadays and the way people pronouncing them worth wider investigations and scholars should do more research works on this hot modern topic.

In this research, scholars while gathering data about the recent dialects examined relevant books of history and language, and dictionaries of Aramaic and Arabic. The examination showed that recent Palestinian dialects are mainly influenced by languages of the ancient civilizations that lived on Palestine thousands of years ago. Canaanite language, one of the Aramaic dialects, lived in Palestine for thousands of years and influenced the recent Palestinian dialects. Many of the daily used words, names, and verbs in Palestine nowadays are originally Canaanites and Aramaic.

When Arabic civilization came to Palestine, Arabic became the official language but the Aramaic language didn’t disappear completely by the arrival of Arabic as people were used to its words which they used for thousands of years. It wasn’t easy for Palestinians to replace the Canaanites words with Arabic and this resulted in borrowing as they rephrased the Aramaic words to sound Arabic and suit the Arabic tongue.

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