Hawliyat is the official peer-reviewed journal of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Balamand. It publishes articles from the field of Humanities.

**Journal Name:** Hawliyat

**ISSN:** 1684-6605

**Title:** Bãq, an Inchoative Marker in Mardini Arabic

**Authors:** George Grigore

**To cite this document:**


**Permanent link to this document:** DOI: https://doi.org/10.31377/haw.v10i0.316

Hawliyat uses the Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-SA that lets you remix, transform, and build upon the material for non-commercial purposes. However, any derivative work must be licensed under the same license as the original.
Bāq, an inchoative marker in Mardini Arabic

George Grigore
Bucharest University, Romania

Mardini Arabic (spoken in Mardin, a vilayet in Southern Turkey) has a series of prefixes which, combined with the extratemporal forms of the verb (imperfective and perfective), create an astonishing number of tenses and modes, compared to the classic Arabic or other dialects.

There are:
- **ku** - for present: *ku-takal* (you are eating now);
- **bāq** - for inchoative: *bāq-takal* (you began to eat);
- **ta** - for the future: *ta-takal* (you will eat);
- **ka** - (with its variants *ken, ket, kal*) for perfect (ex.: *ka-akālt* - you ate) and past perfect (ex.: *ken-ket-akālt* - you had eaten).

The modalities of forming the two tenses are a lot more diverse and complicated and they are the subject of an extended study (Grigore, 1999)
- **ka** + **ta** - for conditional: *ka-ta-takal* (you would eat);

From all those verbal prefixes, I chose to present in this paper the results of my investigation on the development of this inchoative marker - *bāq*- in Mardini Arabic from the lexical item *bāqa* (to remain, to stay, to continue, to be; to keep on). This inquiry is based on texts in Mardini Arabic published by Otto Jastrow in 1969 (a and b) and by Hans-Jurgen Sasse in 1971, as well as on the recordings effected by me among the small Mardini Arabian community in the last ten years in Bucharest.

As we know, grammaticalization is usually thought of as that subset of linguistic changes through which a lexical item in certain uses becomes a grammatical item, or through which a grammatical item becomes more grammatical (Hopper-Traugott, 2).

We can see that, as this lexical item - *bāqa* - becomes grammaticalized, it loses its semantic content and simultaneously undergoes a phonetic reduction to *bāq* being later fused with the verb stem. Let us examine the following sentences:
1) äkťar man hâlqad ma Hâkât-l-mâra; bâqât exta, qat:
The woman did not say anything any longer; her sister remained, and said:
2) bâqa 'âlayya âroh lal-mâHkâme.
It remained (to me) to go to court.
3) Fatma bâqtabkay 'âla âbuwa
Fatma started to cry for her father.

In the first example, the verb bâqa/yabqay is used with its fully semantic value of "to remain". Consequently, in this situation, it is conjugated just like any other verb, having all the usual grammatical forms and persons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana bâqâyt</td>
<td>I remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ant Bâkâyt:</td>
<td>You (m) remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti bâqâytî:</td>
<td>You (f) remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huwe Bâqa:</td>
<td>He remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiye Bâkât:</td>
<td>She remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahne bâqâyna:</td>
<td>We remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antan Bâkâyet:</td>
<td>You (pl. m+f) remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanne Bâqâw</td>
<td>They (pl. m+f) remained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second example, bâqa is invariable. Its meaning is that of to be at one's charge to; to remain to do something, and as a matter of fact, this structure is to be found in many other languages (In English: it remains (remained) to...; in French: rester à quelqu'un de faire quelque chose; in literary Arabic: baqiya'ala fulan an ....; in Romanian: a-i râmâne cuiva sâ...etc). Also, in the Kurdish Kurmangi dialect, spoken in Mardini area, a similar construction with the verb ma (it remained) is frequently used:

\[ Li\ min\ ma\ biçîm. \]
It remained to me to go. = I must go.
\[ Li\ te\ ma\ biççe. \]
It remained to you to go. = You must go.

Perhaps, the ample use of bâq in Mardini Arabic is also related to the use of its synonym "ma" in the Kurmangi dialect, taking into consideration that almost all of Mardini Arabs speak also this Kurdish dialect.

Bâq, in the third example, is used as an inchoative marker: she started to...; she began to...
Taking into consideration the occurrence of change, it is interesting to point out that forms do not shift abruptly from one category to another, but they go through a series of transitions, namely cline (Hooper-Traugott, 6). For instance, the cline of grammaticalization of bāq in Mardini Arabic is the following in our opinion:

\[
\text{bāqa} \rightarrow \text{ā bāqa} \rightarrow \text{ā bāq}
\]

(content item) (clitic) (inflectional affix)

Bāqa, as a content item, appears in the first example, with its fully semantical meaning and it is also fully conjugable as any other verb as it was shown before.

Bāqa, as clitic - clitics may be thought of as forms that half-way between autonomous word and affixes (Hopper-Traugott,6) - appears in the second example. In my opinion, the affix bāq is derived from the clitic bāqa in terms of its meaning, as well. Bāqa ‘āla means to be incumbent on some body to do something, means that there remains nothing else to do but to perform the respective action and consequently the subject passes on to carry it out and thus resulting in the inchoative meaning of the verb bāqa.

This significant seems strange because of the basic meaning of the verb "to remain" which compels one to think of the possibility of expressing the durative, and not the inchoative, as it happens in classic Arabic.

When a form undergoes the process of grammaticalization from a lexical to a grammatical item, however, it tends to lose the morphological and syntactic properties that would identify it as a full member of a major grammatical category as such the verb bāqa(fully conjugable) which pass into minor grammatical category the clitic bāqa (inconjugable), and after that, becoming the inflectional affix bāq (in front of a phonetic group that does not start with two simultaneous consonants), with the variant bāqe (in front of a phonetic group that starts with two simultaneous consonants):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yakek (to eat)</th>
<th>yroH (to go)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bāaqakel</td>
<td>bāqāroH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqtakel</td>
<td>bāqetroH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqtakelin</td>
<td>bāqetroHin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqyakel</td>
<td>bāqeyroH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqtkel</td>
<td>bāqetroH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqnakel</td>
<td>bāqenroH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqtklun</td>
<td>bāqetroHun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāqyaklun</td>
<td>bāqeyroHun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The transformation of bāqa does not end here, but it goes on until it is reduced to a single phoneme. This phenomenon occurs in the subdialects in some localities in Savur such as Mxasniye (Muhasni / Yenilmmez), Rasdiye (Rasidi / Uckavak), Lemnayzel (Harisi / Kayatepe). Bāq drops the q phoneme and there remains only bā. Further more, bā is preserved only in front of a phonetic group that begins with a consonant-consonant such as: troH (you go): bātroH (you start to go).

In front of a phonetic group that begins with a consonant-vowel, bā can be reduced to b. For instance:

_Bnakal xbāyz w bāsāl_

We began to eat bread and onion.

The apparition of the bā form, and finally b form, is undoubtedly due to the erosion of bāq by way of its frequent use which led to its complete emptying of its semantic meaning and to its generalization. Within the frame of this natural process of forming and transforming of the language, any semantic change is paralleled by phonetic erosion (bybee, 230).

The use of the baq particle:
The most common value introduced by the bq particle is the inchoative:

a) _hal-maktub baqanqaray sarbast!_

This letter started reading by itself

b) _w git l-melle w bāqaysāwn qārā'balag kti..._

People came and started to make big fuss...

c) _Karim ma bāqyeroh l-māktāb_

Karim hasn’t begun to go to school yet.

Remark:
If we have a succession of verbs, all in the same tense which is introduced by the bāq particle, we may place it only at the first verb, its sense extending over the other verbs:

_Bāqtabkay we ddaqq ‘āla rasa..._
She started to cry and slam her head...
Evolution tendencies of the "bāq" particle

As far as I could notice in some localties in the Savur district, bāq was reduced to a minimum from a phonetic point of view: bā/b.

Besides, I noticed that the young Arabs coming from Mardin - from other districts than Savur - a tendency to use the short forms bā/b instead of the long ones, probably under the influence of the subdialects in Savur, as well as that of other Arabic dialects where the particle b (yet with different values) occurs frequently. Probably, not in the very far future, this particle b will be generalized in Mardini Arabic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Al-Samarra'i Ibrahim Ahmad, 1966, Al-fi'ilu zamanu-hu wa 'abniyatu-hu, bagdad.
Bybee, Joan L., 1985, Morphology; A study of the Relation between meaning and form, Amsterdam.
Cohen David, 1984, La phrase nominale et l'évolution du systeme verbal en semitique. Etudes de syntaxe historique, Paris
Grigore, George, 1999, "Ka a temporal prefix in Mardini Arabic derived from the verb kan (to be)", in Annals of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences - University of Balamand / Lebanon no. 9.
Pennacchietti, Fabrizio A., 1994, I preverbi del passato in semitico. Studi Camito-Semiticici 1- Sem Cam lafet (Atti della 7a Giornata di Studi Camito-Semiticici e Indoeuropei), Milano
Sasse, Hans-Jurgen, 1971, Linguistische Analyse des Arabischen Dialekts der Mhallamiye in der Provinz Mardin (Südosttürkei), Berlin