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Retention of the passive verb in a Bedouin dialect of northern Oman*

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Abstract

The present contribution examines the form and function of the apophonic ("internal") passive (AP) in an Arabic dialect of northern Oman. The AP is one of several features common to all the dialects of Oman, having been retained in dialects of both the "Bedouin" (B) and "sedentary" (S) types. In a study of the AP in dialects of Oman and eastern Arabia, CLIVE HOLES (1998) showed that this category survives as a functioning marker of the passive voice in Omani S dialects mostly in the historically isolated interior of the country, albeit in verbs belonging to a restricted set of syntactic and lexicosemantic categories. The purpose of the present study is to determine whether the same process of recession has taken place in a B dialect of the Omani interior. Results of the study reveal that in the B dialect of the Hidyīwī tribe, whose *dīra* is located in the hinterland of Muḏaybi in northern Oman, the AP is significantly more productive than in the S dialects described by HOLES. This contrast corresponds with certain socio-historical factors which distinguish the different speech communities of the interior. In particular, the Hidyīwī community is significantly more isolated from outsider contact and maintains a more homogeneous, tight-knit social structure than towns in which the S dialects are spoken.

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Introduction

A major classificatory division of the vernaculars spoken throughout much of the Arab world is that of the socially-based Bedouin (B) versus sedentary (S) dichotomy. A characteristic of this split often emphasised in the literature is the retention in the former of certain "conservative" grammatical features (i.e. those with corresponding forms in Classical Arabic (henceforth: CLA)) which have disappeared from the latter. One such feature, the "apophonic" (or "internal") passive (AP), survives in the dialects of northern Arabia as a functioning morphological category only in the isolated B dialects of the Najd, while in S dialects the passive function is coded by productive affixational passives, which have emerged in compensation for the partial or complete recession of the AP (INGHAM 1982). In Oman, however, the AP category remains extant in dialects of both the B and S types. In a study of the AP in dialects of Oman and eastern Arabia, CLIVE HOLES (1998) showed that the AP category survives as a productive marker of the passive voice in B and S dialects of the historically isolated interior of Oman. However, in the (B and S) dialects of many coastal communities, outsider contact sustained through the coastal maritime trade has resulted in significant morphological levelling. In many coastal dialects, AP verbs have virtually disappeared from all but clichéd phrases and proverbial usages (HOLES 1998: 352).

The retention of productive AP morphology in the Omani interior across the B/S division of dialects brings Oman into striking contrast with northern Arabia, where productive AP morphology occurs only in dialects of the B type. HOLES (1996) suggests that the homogeneity of the Omani dialects in terms of retained conservative features is due to the unique social circumstances in which these dialects developed, remarking that "the socio-economic developments which produced and maintained the B/S split in the north did not occur in the same form in the south" (p. 37). Previous studies have shown that the AP is also a productive category in Omani B dialects (cf. BROCKETT 1985; HOLES 1996; WEBSTER 1991), although the extent of this productivity in comparison with the interior S dialects has not been addressed in the literature in any detail to date. The present study is a contribution to filling this gap.

Here we describe the form and function of the AP in the previously undescribed B dialect of the Hidyīwīn (or Āl Bū Hdai) of Taṣāwīr, a remote semi-desert region in the hinterland of Muḍaybi, located in the interior of northern Oman. The corpus for this study was compiled over a period of five months during frequent trips to Taṣāwīr, and consists of five separate

transcribed interviews totalling approximately 3,300 words, with two elderly male speakers of a single extended family. Both were born and raised in Taṣāwīr, and lived semi-nomadic lives until the 1970s. The first speaker, Ḥamīd bin Muḥammad Al-Hidyīwī (henceforth: HM), is in his late forties; the second, Muḥammad bin Rāshid Al-Hidyīwī (henceforth: MR), is in his late seventies. Examples which are not referenced are drawn from notes recorded in informal interactions during stays with various members of the Hidyīwī tribe. The Hidyīwī dialect data is compared and contrasted in the following discussion with the Omani dialects described by HOLES (1998) and with additional Omani data collected during the course of the present study.

1. Form of AP verbs and distribution

The transcribed interviews of Hidyīwī speakers were rich in passive verbs, the 3,300 word corpus containing a total of fifty-six tokens of the AP. This high rate of passive use was no doubt influenced by the types of questions asked in the interviews. Questions often drew responses which included descriptions of processes in which the identity of the agent was irrelevant, and as such passive use was probably more frequent than usual (cf. HOLES 1998: 350). AP tokens belonged to a wide range of syntactic and morpho-lexical categories, and had the following distributions:

(a) Hidyīwī B dialect

1. Most tokens of AP verbs were imperfects (forty-three of fifty-six tokens); thirteen were perfect verbs representing six separate lexemes.
2. AP verbs showed singular and plural agreement.
3. AP tokens were theme I, theme II, and two theme III verbs.
4. The AP occurred in theme I strong verbs.

Example (1) contains an explanation of the process by which *harīs* (a kind of wheat porridge) is made. Of the six tokens of AP verbs (in bold), five are imperfect and one is perfect; represented in this example are theme I and II verbs of various morphological form-classes:

(1) *al-harīs min al-bərr, min aṭ-ṭaḥīn. al-ḥabb, ḥabb hādī ṭaḥīn mā maṭḥūn. yaxarraṣ bi l-mai. yaxarraṣ bi l-mai ḥattē yibāt fi l-lēl, wa yin'am šwē. yiṣall al-mai minnəḥ, wa yiyāb al-lḥam. al-gidr hāda kabīr, ṣafariya səm-hē. ṭabaxaw lḥam fi lgidr, al-lḥam wa l-bərr, aṭ-ṭaḥīn... mā 'indək ṭaḥīn, yibt əl-'iṣ, tiṭbax l-'iṣ, ər-rəz hādī, tiṭbax ar-rəz ma' al-lḥam. yisawwā gidr kabīr.*

tagrib xamsin kilō, sittin kilō, tāmānin kilō... wə ʔabaxaw-h... wa dibhat al-ḡanama, walla ʔantiān. (HM)

Haris is from wheat, from meal. The grain, the grain is not ground down. It is *soaked* in water, *soaked* in water and it rests throughout the night, and softens a little. The water is *removed* from it, and the meat is *taken*. The pot is big; it is called a 'Safariya'. They cooked meat in a cooking pot; the meat, the meat and the wheat... If you didn't have wheat then you got some rice, you cooked rice with the meat. A big pot *was made*, about fifty kilos, sixty kilos, eighty kilos... They cooked it... a goat was *slaughtered*, or two.

Example (2) contains an explanation of how the material for constructing irrigation channels was prepared before the introduction of cement:

(2) *yišillūn al-ḡayar min al-wādi, ḡaṣa, mā kān šē smīt. wa yigma'ūn ribā'a. tsawwā kamayya kabira, yiwaṭṭūnəh bi n-nār, ʔat. yiṭayyinūn 'alē-h... yisawwā lah aṭ-ṭīn, min al-mai wa t-trāb, wa yiṭayyan 'alēh, wa yisawwā aṭ-ṭarig min hni; wa yiwarrā 'alē-h bi nār. yəḏū' an-naxal, ʔat, yišabb bi nār, wa yaxallā maddə 'ašara ayyām, ḡattā tikmil an-nār, taḡaṣṣal al-ḡaṣā na'im na'im. lamma yidagg əl-ḡaṣā, takassar.* (HM)

They [would] take the stones from the wadi, pebbles, there wasn't any cement [in those days], and they collected them together. A big pile is *made*. They softened them in a fire, underneath, and they daubed clay onto them. Clay is *made* from water and dirt, and was *daubed* onto it, and the channel is *made* from it. Then it is *baked* with a fire... The trunks of date palms *are burnt* in a fire, and *are left* for a period of ten days until the fire burns out, and the stones come out very smooth. When the stones are *struck*, they break.

In the Omani S dialects described by HOLES, the AP was relatively lower in productivity and discourse frequency than in the Hidyīwī dialect. In his corpus of 5,000 words of the S dialects of three separate locations, HOLES reported a total of fifty-seven tokens of AP verbs. The distribution of AP tokens was restricted to a limited set of syntactic and lexico-semantic categories:

(a) S dialects (HOLES 1998: 349)

1. Most were imperfects, with a few perfect forms occurring in frozen expressions.

2. The majority of tokens were weak stems; theme I strong stems were restricted to certain frozen forms.
3. Subject agreement was exclusively singular.
4. AP tokens were restricted to theme I and II stems.

In compensation for the recession of the AP in verbs of certain morphological categories, active verbs with impersonal subjects represented by the pronouns 'you' (= 'one'), 'they' or 'we' were employed (HOLLES 1998: 351). Partial recession of the AP is widespread in the dialects of towns in the interior. For example, in an interview conducted during the present study with an elderly speaker of the S dialect of *Khadrā Banī Daffā*^c, a town located at the edge of the *Hidyīwī dīra*, use of the AP was restricted to a small set of weak stems. Strings of active verbs with impersonal subjects were generally employed as a means of avoiding mention of a specific agent. These active forms were also regularly employed in free variation with stems which still have AP alternants. Example (3) is illustrative of the general lack of AP use in the S dialects. Here the speaker describes the process by which house bricks are made. The only passive token is the weak stem *yisawwā* 'it's made'; all others are active:

(3) *ṭīn hādāk yisawwā la-h mai... wa ya' aqqūh fi dda'na 'alēn yibis, wa yišillūh yišaffūh wa 'ād, gābū al-ḥaṣā fōquh. ḥaraqqōh bi nār... wa yidiqqūh* (*Khadrā Banī Daffā*^c – S type)

The clay is *made* with water, and they *spread* it on the ground until it dries. They *take* it, and *clean it up*, and they *put* stones on top of it. They *baked* it in a fire... and they *break it up*.

Despite the greater productivity of the AP in the *Hidyīwī* dialect, like the S dialects the highest distribution of AP tokens was skewed toward those categories in which the distinction between the passive verb and its active alternant was most phonetically salient. The most frequently occurring tokens of the AP were number of weak stems in which the active-passive distinction is signalled by the alternation of a stressed long vowel. Examples include the hollow verbs *yibī* 'he sells' ~ *yibā* 'it's sold', and *yiṣīb* 'he brings' ~ *yiṣāb* 'it's brought', and the weak final stems *yisammī* 'he calls' ~ *yisammā* 'it's called' and *yisawwī* 'he does' ~ *yisawwā* 'it's done'. However, in striking contrast with the S dialects, the *Hidyīwī* dialect retains strong AP verbs in both perfect and imperfect inflections, in spite of the minimal formal distinction between the passive form and its active alternant which has emerged as a result of phonological changes in the dialect. The

alternation between active and passive is signalled by the height of single unstressed *v*2, e.g. *yiktīb* 'he writes' ~ *yiktab* 'it is written', *yīḍrib* 'he hits' ~ *yīḍrab* 'it is hit'. In other stems, the active and passive forms are homophonous, e.g. *yīṣrab* 'he drinks/it is drunk', *yīḍbaḥ* 'he slaughters/it is slaughtered', and so the passive status of the verb is retrievable only through the context and collocation of the AP verb. The same phenomenon was noted for some Najdi B dialects by INGHAM (1982: 45). For example, the passive status of the verbs in example (4) is evident by the fact that each lacks a grammatical object:

(4) *ma' duyūf, ma' dēf, tiḍbaḥ li ḍ-dēf, tiḍbaḥ la-h.* (HM)

With guests, with a guest, [a goat] is *slaughtered* for the guest, *slaughtered* for him.

The retention of AP verbs in strong stems occurs in other B dialects of the interior, such as that of the Durū^c (HOLES 1996: 47):

(5) *il-jimāl yitlagan is-sabāḥ u yadḥaban aynamā yirīdan.* (Durū^c)

The camels are *set loose* in the morning and they go where they like.

Strings of active verbs with impersonal subjects are also common in Hidyīwī discourse as a functionally equivalent alternative to the AP, particularly with regard to strong stems.² In example (6), the speaker describes some ways in which date palms are used:

(6) *yāxadūn min-hē yidūf... yidammūn, masākin... al-masākin. yīšaḡḡūn al-naxla kiḍi, yirab'ūn rab'a qit'at, badal min mārabbā', wa zōr sa'f hādī, yisawwā minnāḥ 'aršān. wa l-karb, kəll šē 'an-hā, yōxad minn-əh. wa l-karb ya'ni yidfūn 'alēh yīšibbūn bi-h an-nār. fi š-šti fi l-bard... (HM)*

They take trunks from them [i.e. palm trees]... They build rooves, houses, the houses. *They split* the palm-tree like this, then cut it into four parts, [and is used] instead of wooden beams... The palm branches, huts were made from them... and these leaf stubs, everything is taken from it. The leaf stubs, they warm themselves with them. *They light* a fire with them in the winter, in the cold.

This active voice strategy is often employed even when the reference of the grammatical subject is not recoverable. This is evident in example (7), which is part of a discussion on the uses of the fleece from sheep. The

² This strategy was also pervasive in WEBSTER's (1991: 480–482) transcribed interview with a speaker of the B dialect of the Āl Wahība.

speaker initially employs an active verb with masculine plural agreement when the agent is not identified. However, he then goes on to specify the agent, stating that it is only women who spin fleece. Accordingly all subsequent verbs are inflected for feminine plural subject agreement. This example demonstrates the preference for the active strategy even in cases where the reference to the grammatical subject is very general:

(7) *yağazlūn-əh... yağazlan-əh kaṭīr. ḥarīm hādə yağazlan-əh, yisawwan-əh...* (HM)

They [3.m.pl.] spin it... They [3.f.pl.] spin a lot of it. The women spin it, make it...

2. AP verbs by syntactic and lexico-semantic form class

A major distinction between the Hidyīwī B dialect and the S dialects of the Omani interior is the retention of functioning AP morphology in strong stems, which is marked by a contrast in the height of v2 in both the perfect and imperfect. Table 1 shows the full inflectional paradigm for the strong verb *gital* 'to kill'. Even though AP verbs only ever occurred in the third person in unelicited discourse, Hidyīwī speakers remarked that unelicited AP verbs inflected for first and second person agreement do occur in the dialect. INGHAM (1982) notes the restriction on the AP to the third person in many Najdi B dialects, with first and second person passive forms occurring only in certain set phrases and poetry, a phenomenon he ascribes to universal pragmatic considerations. Hidyīwī speakers readily provided examples of first and second person AP forms in spite of the absence of these forms from unelicited speech. Their familiarity with these forms is probably due to their use in more ritualised contexts.

	PERFECT		IMPERFECT	
3 m.s.	<i>gital</i> 'he killed'	<i>gitil</i> 'he was killed'	<i>yigitil</i> 'he kills'	<i>yigtal</i> 'he is killed'
3 f.s.	<i>gitlat</i>	<i>gitlat</i>	<i>tigitil</i>	<i>tigtal</i>
3 m.pl.	<i>gitlaw</i>	<i>gitlaw</i>	<i>yigitlūn</i>	<i>yigitlūn</i>
3 f.pl.	<i>gitlan</i>	<i>gitlan</i>	<i>yigitlan</i>	<i>yigitlan</i>
2 m.s.	<i>gitalt</i>	<i>gitilt</i>	<i>tigitil</i>	<i>tigtal</i>
2 f.s.	<i>gitalti</i>	<i>gitilti</i>	<i>tigitlīn</i>	<i>tigitlīn</i>

2 m.pl.	<i>gitaltu</i>	<i>gitiltu</i>	<i>tigitlūn</i>	<i>tigitlūn</i>
2 f.pl.	<i>gitaltan</i>	<i>gitiltan</i>	<i>tigitlan</i>	<i>tigitlan</i>
1 c.pl.	<i>gitalna</i>	<i>gitilna</i>	<i>nigitl</i>	<i>nigtal</i>
1 c.s.	<i>gitalt</i>	<i>gitilt</i>	<i>agtil</i>	<i>agtal</i>

Table 1: The strong verb in the Hidyīwī dialect

2.1 Perfect

The passive perfect is contrasted from the active by the height of the stem vowel /i/ for both v1 and v2. Examples (8) to (10) show the AP in non-augmented stems:

(8) *gitil ar-rayyāl*. (*gital* 'to kill')

The man was killed.

(9) [*an-naxla*] ...*sawwat karb, zōr yābis... širtat*. (*šarat* 'to cut') (MR)

[The date palm...] it produced leaf stubs, dry branches... It was cut.

(10) *al-hōš wa l-bōš, kall-han dibhan*.³ (*dabaḥ* 'to slaughter')

The goats and camels, all of them were slaughtered.

Examples (11) and (12) contain AP verbs of the theme II augmentation. In contrast with theme I verbs, the AP alternation is marked in both v1 and v2 with these stems.

(11) *hō liggib bi-rabī*. (*laggab* 'to give [someone] a nickname')

He was given the nickname "Rabī".

(12) *awwal, nabbatnā-h, nibbit, wa tamm, tamm sənīn. ba'd ḥaddarnā-h... taḥdīr. wa ba'd gaššēnā-h*. (*nabbat* 'to pollinate') (MR)

First, we pollinated it. [It] was pollinated, and that's done, done for a while. Then we lowered its leaf-branches... lowering. And after that we cut it.

The occurrence of the passive perfect verbs in the Hidyīwī corpus brings this dialect into significant contrast with the S dialects of the interior. HOLES (1998: 352) noted that passive perfects were restricted in the S dialects to

3 This form of the verb (= CLA feminine plural inflection) indicates inanimate plural agreement in the dialect.

the frozen forms *wilidt* or *xiliqt* 'I was born', and *ribbēt* 'I was raised'. These forms were the only examples of AP verbs inflected for first person agreement in the S dialects. Nevertheless, in the Hidyīwī dialect these meanings were conveyed by passive participles:

(13) ...*mōlūd makān yisammā dariz... mārabbai hni.* (MR)

I was born in a place called Dariz... [I was] raised here.

In addition to theme I and II stems, two instances of theme III verbs in the AP occurred in the corpus: *gībil* 'he was met' (*gābil* 'meet') (compare Najdi: *gībil*; *gīblaw* 'he was met; they were met' (PROCHAZKA 1991: 116)); *nīšid* 'to be greeted, asked' (*nāšad* 'ask after, greet'). In (14), speaker A encourages speaker B to utter a lengthy ritualised greeting whereby the addressee is asked about their health, news of their family, etc.:

(14) A: *nāšid-həm!*

B: *kəll-həm nīšdaw.* (*nāšad* 'to ask after, greet')

A: Greet them!

B: They have all *been greeted* already.

Of the various categories of weak stems, only hollow verbs showed passive perfect alternants; verbs with weak initial and/or final radicals did not have passive forms. Examples (15) and (16) contain passivised hollow verbs:

(15) *daxxalnā-h fi l-ḥira, aš-šihḥ; šē bī... bī fi s-sūg.* (*bā* 'to buy') (MR)

We put them in the store room, the dates; some of them were *sold*... *sold* in the market.

(16) *gīl hō rayyāl zian.* (*gāl* 'to say')

It was *said* that he was a good man.

2.2 Imperfect

Tokens of imperfect strong verbs were less frequent than those in the perfect. Consider examples (17) and (18):

(17) *yiknaz aš-šahḥ dāxal yirāb.* (*yikniz* 'he stores')

The dates are *stored* in a sack.

(18) *idē rāḥ hnāk ba-yigtal!* (*yigtal* 'he kills')

If he goes there, he'll *be killed*!

In stems in which v2 in the active voice is represented by /a/, the passive verb is homophonous with its corresponding active form. The passive status of the verbs in examples (19) and (20) is retrievable from the context in which they occur:

(19) *yōb xidmat əl-ghawa yiṭbax*. (*yiṭbax* 'he cooks') (MR)

Approximately [in the time it takes to] prepare coffee ['mabsli' dates] are cooked.

(20) *hāḍi l-ḡanama ba-tiḍbaḥ* (*tiḍbaḥ* 'she slaughters')

This goat will be slaughtered.

In example (21), which is taken from a description of how palm trees are cultivated, many verbs can be interpreted as either passive verbs with feminine singular agreement or active verbs with second person masculine agreement, i.e. 'you do this...' Only the two final tokens (i.e. *tīmašši* 'you let flow', *tisgī* 'you water') can be interpreted unambiguously as active forms, as they take object arguments. The unambiguously active reading of some verbs (e.g. *tahfar* 'you plant'; *tisgī-hən* 'you water them') suggests that the second person active was most likely the intended reading for all verbs in this segment of discourse:

(21) *lamma tizra' an-naxla, tsawwī l-hē olād saḡār, ṭat. tikbir an-naxlā 'ala fōg taḡla' ən-naxla min ṭat hāḍi bi l-ḥadīd, wa tahfar ḥafra⁴, tagrīb mitrēn. wa tizra' an-naxla hāḍi, tšūf al-məsāfə biən-hən tagrīb xamsa mitir, wa tizra' tānia. tšūf al-məsāfə biənə-hən tagrīb xamsə mitər, wə tizra' tānia. tīmašši lə-hən mai... wa ba'd təlātə ayyām, tisgī-hən...* (HM)

When you plant a palm-tree, it produces little palm-trees, underneath. When the palm-tree grows tall, you pull it out from below with a metal implement. You dig a hole about two metres deep. You replant the palm-tree. Watch that the distance between them is about five metres, and replant it. You run the water onto them... and after three days you water them.

Tokens of imperfect passives in the corpus were overwhelmingly of the weak conjugation. This is illustrated in example (22) with a passivised hollow verb:

4 *ḥafar* 'dig' is an intransitive verb, and cannot be interpreted as a passive form.

(22) ... *ba'diān habaṭnā sūg sinaw... yibā', yirāb xamsa.* (*yibī'* 'he sells') (MR)

... Then we went down to the Sinaw market... it is *sold*, five [rials] a sack.

Weak stems in which the initial or final radical is weak have passive forms only in the imperfect, and not the perfect. Examples of passives with weak final radicals include *banā* 'he built' (*yibnā* '(it) is built') and *mašā* 'he walked, went' (*yimšā* '(it) is walked'). Example (23) contains a passivised intransitive verb, forming a 'subjectless passive clause' (cf. RETSÖ 1982-83: 77):

(23) *dāk blād, mā yimšā šōb-hē.* (*yimši* 'he walks, goes')

That region is never *gone* to. [lit. 'That region, [it] is not gone to it.']

In stems with an initial weak radical represented by hamza, the weak radical alternates with /ō/ in the passive. Examples include *yōkal* 'it is eaten' (*yākil* 'he eats'), *yōxaḍ* 'it is taken' (*yāxaḍ* 'he takes'):

(24) *tamm sā'a, yōkal 'inda ghawa.* (*yākil* 'he eats') (MR)

After an hour, it is *eaten* with coffee.

3. The AP and affixational passives in Omani coastal dialects

Both B and S dialects of the Omani interior are distinguished from many dialects of the coast (and eastern Arabia) by the preservation with many stems of a semantic contrast between the AP and verbs of the augmented patterns *infā'ala*, *tafa'ala*, and *ifta'ala* which is similar to that of CLA (HOLES 1998: 354). In many coastal dialects in which the AP is no longer a functioning morphological category, the affixed forms have assumed the role of passive marker in compensation for the loss of the AP, and have as a result been drained of much of their original semantic value. In the Hidyīwī dialect, AP verbs code the basic passive function with the implied involvement of an agent. In contrast, the affixed forms emphasise state of the patient, and the involvement of an agent is not necessarily implied (cf. HOLES 1998: 354). This is illustrated in examples (25) and (26), which contain affixed verbs of the theme VII augmentation:

(25) *al-ghawa inkabbat min ad-dalla.* (*kabb* 'spill')

The coffee *spiled out* of the pot.

(26) *wāyid ḥar! ba-yinṭabax* *that aš-šams!* (*ṭabax* 'cook')

It's very hot. He [i.e. his body] *will cook* under the sun!

The clause in example (27) was uttered in response to the speaker observing people walking on sharp stones with bare feet. Although the verb specifies an event involving an (inanimate) external actor, i.e. sharp stones, the involvement of a human agent would require AP morphology and not the affixed form:

(27) *ba-yingaṣṣan ruyūl-həm.* (*gaṣṣ* 'to split/ to cut' (VT))

Their feet *will get cut*.

However, with a limited number of stems the affixed form does not necessarily preclude the involvement of an agent, thus marking the passive function:

(28) *al-bāb infataḥ.* (*fataḥ* 'open')

The door *opened/was opened*.

In many dialects of coastal Oman, the AP is no longer a productive category, and the *infa'ala* form is employed productively as a marker of the passive voice. Example (29) shows that in the B dialect of Shināṣ, in the coastal Bāṭinah region of northern Oman, the form *yindibḥan* 'is slaughtered' denotes an event which unambiguously involves an agent:

(29) *in-nūg bi-yindibḥan bākir.* (Shināṣ)

The camels *will be slaughtered* tomorrow.

These prefixed forms also specify other related meanings, one of which is the 'potential passive' function, i.e. 'it can be done or performed' or 'it is possible to do...' (cf. Retsö 1983: 155):

(30) *hāda l-laḥm mā yinnakal.* (Shināṣ)

This meat *cannot be eaten/is inedible*.

Like the coastal dialects, in the Hidyīwī dialect (and the interior dialects in general) the *infa'ala* pattern has undergone a massive increase in productivity and generalisation in its semantics. This is in spite of the retention of functioning AP morphology in the dialect. In contrast with the same pattern in CLA, which forms verbs from a restricted number of transitive stems, the pattern applies to all transitive stems in the Hidyīwī dialect to form potential passives. Consider examples (31) and (32):

(31) *hāḍi r-risāla mā tigrē*. (*tigrē* 'she reads')⁵ (Hidyīwī)

This letter *can't be read/ is unreadable*.

(32) *lamma wāyida, badū, mā yinḥasbūn, yōb miātēn*. (*yinḥasbūn* 'they count') (MR)

[There was] a large group, Bedouins, (so many) they couldn't *be counted*, approximately two hundred

The increased productivity of the *infa'ala* pattern is illustrated by the fact that the formation of verbs with the meanings illustrated in examples (25) to (28) above, the pattern is highly selective. However, with the potential passive meaning the pattern can be applied to all transitive stems. For example, with the transitive stem *sakkar* 'close', intransitive verbs with no implied agent are formed with the *tafa'ala* augmentation, and not the *infa'ala*:

(33) *tsakkar al-bāb*.

'The door *closed/was closed*.'

However, the *infa'ala* pattern can be applied to the same stem to form verbs with the potential passive meaning:

(34) *hāḍi d-dariša mā tinsikkir*.

This window *can't be closed*.

The affixed stems are contrasted with the AP forms of the Hidyīwī dialect by the fact that AP forms may only mark the passive function. In example (35), the AP verb does not convey the same notion of ability or possibility as affixed forms do:

(35) *laḥm al-ḥmār mā yōkal hni*.

Donkey meat is not *eaten* here.

The above facts show that the theme VII morphological pattern *infa'ala* has undergone a substantial increase in productivity and extension of its semantic value in spite of the retention of fully productive AP morphology in the Hidyīwī dialect. However, unlike those dialects in which the AP is no longer a functioning category, affixation does not productively form passive

5 *tigrē* and *tigrā* are the more common pronunciations of *tingrā* and *tigrā*; the raising of final /ā/ to /ē/ (*imāla*) is a distinctive characteristic of B dialects throughout northern Oman.

verbs in the Hidyīwī dialect. The gradual replacement of AP verbs in the S dialects of the interior with the use of active verbs with impersonal subjects appears to be the first stage in a process which results in the disappearance of the AP system and its eventual replacement by productive affixing strategies. Thus, in spite of the contrasting degrees to which the AP remains productive in the dialects of the Omani interior, the absence of productive affixational passives is one of several major typological parameters by which they are distinguished from dialects of the coast and eastern Arabia.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the extent to which the AP is retained as a functioning morphological category in a B dialect of the Omani interior, and to place the findings within the broader context of the Omani dialect area. The results of the study showed that like the S dialects of the interior described by HOLES (1998), the distribution of AP tokens in the Hidyīwī B dialect was skewed towards those stems in which the morphological relationship between the passive function and its formal coding is most formally transparent. That is, the forms which occurred most frequently in discourse were those in which the active-passive distinction is signalled by the alternation of a stressed long vowel. Furthermore, the Hidyīwī dialect and the interior S dialects are distinguished from many coastal dialects by the preservation in the interior dialects of a semantic distinction between the AP and the affixed forms. These forms have developed into productive markers of the passive in many coastal dialects, in compensation for their reduced AP systems.

The survival of functioning AP morphology in the interior dialects corresponds with the particular socio-historical circumstances in which these dialects developed in contrast with those of the coastal regions. Prior to the unification of Oman in 1970, the interior of the country was effectively separated politically, culturally and economically from the coastal Sultanate centred in and around Muscat, and was geographically isolated from surrounding regions by extensive deserts and mountain ranges. The socio-economic structure of the interior populace had remained until 1970 virtually unchanged for centuries. Isolation from outsider contact and the homogeneity of both B and S sections of the interior populace allowed the preservation in the dialects of conservative structural features which had disappeared centuries earlier in the dialects spoken elsewhere in Arabia (HOLES 1996: 52). Within the interior, the similar degrees to which the AP and other conservative morphological features have been preserved

in both S and B dialects reflects the fact that fewer socio-cultural distinctions characterise the S/B division than in other parts of peninsular Arabia. Tribal affiliation has traditionally been as important aspect of social identity for the S populations of the towns as for the Bedouins of the hinterland regions. Furthermore, a single tribe may consist of both sedentary and Bedouin sections, with intermarriage being common between the different sub-sections of the tribe (HOLES 1996: 51).

Nevertheless, in spite of the conservatism of the interior dialects, the results of the present study show a more productive AP system in the Hidyīwī B dialect than in the S dialects of the interior. AP forms are retained in the S dialects in verbs of a limited set of syntactic and morpho-semantic categories, typically where the active-passive distinction is signalled by alternation of a stressed long vowel (HOLES 1998: 353). In contrast, the active-passive distinction is retained in the Hidyīwī dialect in strong stems, where the formal contrast between the active and passive forms is minimal. The partial recession of the AP in the S dialects is most probably due to the greater degree of inter-dialect contact that has taken place in the towns than in many Bedouin communities. The populations of towns in the interior such as Muḍaybi and Khaḍrā' banī Daffā' typically comprise a diversity of tribes alongside a majority tribe. The towns have traditionally served as points of contact for trade among the populace of a wide geographical area encompassing different dialect groups. Furthermore, many larger towns in the interior have historically been the focus of migration from other regions, in particular by Bedouins from the hinterland regions. The urban focus that has taken place in light of the ongoing economic development of Oman and the establishment of centralised administration since 1970 has also resulted in significant increase in inter-group contact in the towns. As a result of this, the S dialects of many towns are generally used as a means of communication for a linguistically and socially more diverse populace than those of the B populations of the hinterland areas.

The social context in which the Hidyīwī B dialect is spoken is characterised by a greater degree of isolation and homogeneity than the contexts in which S dialects are spoken. This fact probably explains the greater degree to which the AP has been retained as a marker of the passive function. In addition, the Hidyīwī dialect remains a crucial means by which mutual solidarity relations are emphasised within the tribe; the dialect is a vehicle for the creation and conservation of a rich oral poetic tradition. In general terms, 'symbolic' functions such as these typically facilitate the

preservation in dialects of archaic forms and the opaque coding of morphological information (KUSTERS 2003: 39–40).

In contrast, the dialects of the towns are spoken by a more diverse population comprising many different tribes. The towns have traditionally served as points of contact for trade among the populace of a wide geographical area comprising different dialect groups. Furthermore, many larger towns in the interior have historically been the focus of migration from other regions, particularly by Bedouin families from the hinterland regions. The ongoing urban focus that has taken place in the light of the rapid economic development of Oman since 1970 and the introduction of universal education and more centralised administration have also resulted in a significant increase in inter-group contact in the towns. These socio-historical factors most likely explain the fact that the AP category is in partial recession in the S dialects spoken there. In contact situations, speakers are motivated by the need for as clear and efficient transmission of information as possible, and thus more morphologically transparent strategies are chosen over those which may lead to ambiguity or a lack of clarity (cf. KUSTERS 2003: 40–41).

Whether the trend towards greater retention of the AP in the B dialects is general across the interior dialects will require further investigation. However, BROCKETT (1985) reports AP morphology with a similar degree of productivity in various B and S dialects of the Khabūrā region of Bāṭina, and REINHARDT (1884) noted productive AP morphology without any of the restrictions noted in the dialects described by HOLES in his description of the interior S dialect of the Banī Kharūṣ. Nevertheless, in the S dialects of many larger towns throughout the interior, the AP is in recession, although none has developed productive affixational passive systems as seen in many dialects of the coast. These factors suggest that the recession seen in the S dialects may be a relatively recent occurrence.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the Hidyiwī dialect retains a functioning AP system with a similar degree of productivity as the conservative B dialects of the Najd region of northern Arabia. This is in contrast with previously described dialects spoken by S communities in the Omani interior. In the S dialects, the AP is in partial recession, but has not been replaced by affixational passives as has occurred in the speech of many Omani coastal communities. This retention in the Hidyiwī B dialect of AP verbs belonging to a variety of syntactic and morpho-lexical subcategories is

most likely due to the isolation of the community and therefore the absence of long-term contact with outsider groups speaking other dialects. The greater degree of contact between different tribal groups in the towns of the interior, which has become more pronounced in recent years, has been accompanied by the partial recession of the AP system in the dialects spoken there, and its replacement by the use of morphologically more transparent alternatives such as active verbs with impersonal subjects.

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