

Is There Case In Berber?

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Abstract

It has long been observed that Berber nouns surface under two different shapes, namely, one with a glide prefixed to the noun and another without the glide. In the previous literature, these two shapes have been called the 'states' of Berber nouns; the 'free' and 'construct' states. It has been claimed that the alternation between the two shapes can not be considered a case marking because it "does not seem synchronically to correspond with an identifiable case relationship". In this paper, it is instead suggested that the traditional 'states' of Berber nouns can be identified with two real 'cases' (nominative and oblique). While the evidence in favor of this hypothesis is not yet compelling, there are several clues and arguments which seem to support it. It is shown that a noun takes the oblique case when it is immediately preceded and governed by the head of its phrase; otherwise, the noun takes the nominative case.

1. The Problem

It is noticed that in all Berber dialects nouns vary in their surface forms according to the syntactic environment in which they occur. The alternation, which specifically affects the first syllable, appears to be similar to a case marking, "but because it does not seem synchronically to correspond with an identifiable case relationship it has been called in the literature a mark of 'state' (Penchoen (1973)). The two shapes, or states, of the Berber noun have been traditionally referred to as the "free" and "bound" states (French 'état libre' and 'état construit'). The free state (FS, henceforth) occurs in citation forms (1a), accusative environments (1b), topicalization (1c) ¹, and after certain prepositions (1d): ²

(1a) ataksi 'car (vehicle)'; amSiS 'cat'

(1b) yezzenz ataksi

he-sold car 'he sold the car'

(1c) argaz yezzenz ataksi

man he-sold car 'the man', he sold the car'

(1d) sasif (asif = 'river')

toward-river 'toward the river'

A noun is in the bound state (BS) when it occurs as the subject of a sentence (2a), the complement of most prepositions (2b), and the complement of a quantifier (2c):

(2a) ye zzenz wergaz ataksi (argaz = 'man')

he-sold man car 'the man sold the car'

(2b) iwegaz

to-man 'to the man'

amSiS et weq3un (aq3un - 'dog')

cat with dog 'the cat with the dog'

(2c) yiwen wergaz ; sin yergazen (irgazen - 'men')

one man 'one man' two men 'two men'

2. Methodology

The present study is based on concrete data taken from the speeches of Rachid Benkeddache and Rabah Amir, native speakers of the Kabyle dialect of Berber. The main informant, Rachid Benkeddache, comes from Ain El-Hammam (ex-Michelet), a small town of about 5.000 people located 50 kms. south - east of Tizzi-Ouzzou, in the region known as 'Grande Kabylie' to the east of Algiers. Rabah Amir also originates from a nearby even smaller town. Thus, we can say that their speeches represent the Kabyle dialect of Berber which is spoken in the rural areas of the Atlas Mountains in the east of Algeria. It is worth noticing that both informants were fluent in Algerian Arabic and French. They maintained, however, that Berber was their native language, i.e.. the language they always spoke at home since childhood.

The informants were interviewed for one hour daily (five days a week) over a period exceeding 18 months. Their speeches were recorded and carefully analyzed with the help of other linguists (Michael Kenstowicz and Ghassan Haddad of the University of Illinois, USA and Abdel - Halim Hamid of Khartoum University, Sudan). The data given as illustrations in this paper represent the closest transcriptions of the informants' speeches. Transliterations of the data are given in Appendix B.

In the remainder of this paper, I first briefly review the positions of previous Berberists on the issue of state in that African language and show that their analyses are inadequate in several respects (part 3). Then, I make the claim that what is traditionally called the state of the noun in Berber is best understood if it is considered a manifestation of case. Evidence is adduced to support this claim (part 4).

3. Traditional Analysis

In this section, a brief review of the previous approaches to the same issue of state is presented. To help the discussion, a table illustrating the various shapes of the noun in the FS and BS in the singular and the plural is given in (3a-3d). The forms given are abstracted away from their original contexts, i.e., the various sentences in which they originally occurred.

	singular		plural		gloss
	FS	BS	FS	BS	
(3a)	argaz	wergaz	irgazen	yergazen	'man' ³
	aq3un	weq3un	iq3an	Yeq3an	'dog'
(3b)	arumi	urumi	irumyen	irumyen	'Frenchman'
	ataksi	utaksi	itaksin	itaksin	'car'
(3c)	axxam	wexxam	ixxammen	yexxammen	'house'
(3d)	agur	wagur	aguren	waguren	'moon'
	ad3al	wad3al	ad3alen	wad3alen	'widower'
	imi	yimi	imawen	yimawan	'mouth'
	udan	wudan			'butter'

3.1 Glide Prefixation and Vowel Deletion

The first thing to notice about the forms in (3a-3d) is that a glide is prefixed to nouns in the BS. This glide is homorganic with the initial vowel, i.e., **w** before **a** and **u.y.** before **i.** For words like those in (3b), it is not clear on the surface if a glide is prefixed, but there is convincing evidence that for a word like **urumi** (BS), the underlying form is / wrumi / and a rule of

vocalization changes **w** into **u**. This rule operates on a word - initial glide followed by one consonant and a vowel (see Bader (1984) for more details). Hence, we can say that a glide homorganic with the initial vowel is prefixed to Berber nouns in the BS.

The second problem regarding the above forms concerns the reason why some initial vowels are deleted in the BS (3a-3c) and others are not (3d). This problem puzzled many Berberists and quite a few analyses were suggested. According to Basset (1945), whether a noun is affected or not (i.e., loses its initial vowel) depends on whether its initial vowel alternates in the plural or not (a — i, i — i). Thus, only nouns with alternating initial vowel undergo the change (cf. Basset (1945)).

This analysis was shown by Saib (1976) to be deficient and inadequate on empirical and principled grounds. Instead, he proposes an analysis based on syllable structure and "motivated by phonological conditioning" (Saib (1976: 169)). He states that the initial vowel of the noun undergoes changes in the BS if it occurs in an open syllable or in a syllable closed by a cluster of unlike consonants. Even though Saib's analysis seems to account for most of the data at hand, it does not account for quite a number of nouns (one of which is **axxam** 'house' (cf. 3c above)), and the author himself recognises that his analysis is not totally free of problems (Saib, 1976: 180).

3.2 Vowel Prefixation

Guerssel (1983) offers a new analysis based on the distinction between a prefixed vowel and one which is part of the stem. He maintains that if the initial vowel is subject to deletion in the BS it must be considered a prefix whereas if it fails to delete it will be considered part of the stem. This distinction may be represented as follows:

(4) V + X versus VX (where V + X = vowel + stem and VX = stem with initial vowel)

Several arguments are presented by the author in support of his analysis. He does not specify, however, the nature of the prefix involved. Many Berberists (Basset & Picard (1948) and Hanoteau (1976), among others) have indeed considered the initial vowel of nouns as a kind of prefix marking number. In a paper devoted to the historical origin of the BS, Pennacchietti (1979) indicates that this prefix was historically the definite article and was later cliticized to the noun now forming an indivisible unit with it. The author specifies that these articles were **a** for masculine singular, **ta** (Ø**a** in Kabyle and other spirantizing dialects)⁴ for

feminine singular, **i** for masculine plural, and **ti** (\emptyset i) for feminine plural. Given these observations and the fact that **t** (\emptyset) is a feminine marker in Berber; given also that some initial vowels do syncopate in the BS while others do not, the analysis given in Guerssel (1983) acquires strong support and will be adopted in the ensuing discussion. It seems quite natural to classify nouns in any language into those which begin with a vowel and those which begin with a consonant. Accordingly, we can claim that in Berber a noun which historically began with a consonant has retained this vowel which was the number of definiteness marker and has formed with it one single unit. As for those nouns which originally began with a vowel, they did not retain the prefix because of an independently motivated constraint of Berber phonology, namely, that two vowels can not occur next to each other in the language. There are no surface instances of two consecutive vowels in Berber. If two underlying vowels occur together across a word boundary, in phonetic representation one of the two vowels is deleted, as the examples in (5a-5c) demonstrate:

(5a) / BaBa uriruhara /---- BaBuriruhara 'my father did not leave'

(5b) / yebbi aqSiS /---- yebbaqSiS 'he pinched the boy'

(5c) / yebbi icerri /---- yebbicerri 'he pinched the lamb'

The data above clearly indicate that two vowels can not occur consecutively in Berber. A rule of elision like the one in (6) is commonly invoked in order to account for the deletion of one of the two vowels which occur in a sequence.

(6) V ---> \emptyset / v

Determining which vowel undergoes deletion is not of relevance to our present discussion, but it seems that it is usually the first vowel which is deleted except in a few syntactic environments where deletion appears to be based on vowel quality.

The rule in (6) permits us to draw an important conclusion. If two vowels can not occur in a sequence in Berber, then we can hypothesize and say that the definite article or number prefix was not retained before nouns originally beginning with vowels but was retained in those which began with a consonant.

The problem now arises as to how to tell whether the initial vowel is a true prefix or part of the stem. One way to solve this problem would be to try to reconstruct the history and etymology of the words or their derivatives in order to be able to determine whether the initial vowel forms part of the root or not. This can be done for some words in a

straightforward manner. If we take words like **arumi**, **ataksi**, **akursi**, **axxam**, and **astilu**, it can be easily shown that they are borrowings from Latin, French, and Arabic, and that they have undergone a process of nativization. These words are most probably taken from Latin /roman-us/, French (or English) /taxi/, Arabic/ Kursi/ 'chair' and /xaym-ah/ 'tent', and French /stylo/ 'pen'. We notice that the initial vowel in the Berber forms is an idiosyncrasy of the borrowing language. For these words at least, then, we can conclude that it is a prefix of some sort. Further study of Berber vocabulary (including historical reconstruction of proto-forms) is still needed in order to determine which nouns contain original initial vowels in their stems and which nouns do not. I leave this task for future researchers. The examples involving borrowing and given above meet the needs of this study. A second way to determine the origin and nature of the initial vowel would be to compare verb stems with the nouns derived from them (deverbal nouns). An example of a noun derived from a verb is **axeddam** 'worker', from the triconsonantal root /xtm/ 'to work'. Here, we observe that among other processes (that do not concern us here) entering in the derivation of the noun, the vowel **a** is prefixed to the triconsonantal stem. What we have to do at this point is to check whether the initial vowel of this noun syncopates in the BS or not; if it does, this means that our hypothesis, which stipulates that initial vowels which are prefixes syncopate in the BS, will be correct; if it does not, our hypothesis will be incorrect. But as (7a) clearly shows, the initial vowel of **axeddam** drops out in the BS, indicating that our hypothesis makes the correct prediction. The **u** that actually surfaces in (7a) is the vocalic reflection of the glide **w**, alluded to in 3.1 above and considered a BS marker. Another example with an initial vowel that is clearly a prefix is **amenti** 'battle', derived from /mmnʃ/ 'to kill each other'. This noun also undergoes vowel syncope as (7b) illustrates. Other examples confirming this same point are given in (7c-7f). The glide in **WehnuSse** fails to vocalize because the environment for vocalization is not satisfied (see 3.1 above).

- (7a) iruh uxeddam/ * waxeddam 'the worker left'
 (7b) muqquer umenʃi/ * wamenʃi 'the battle was big'
 (7c) yemme Ø u9ewwam/ * wa9ewwam 'the swimmer died'
 (/9wm/'swim')
 (7d) iruh umezʃaʃ/ * wamezʃaʃ 'the dweller left' (/zʃʃ/ 'dwell')
 (7e) yeBʃu usemmaʃ / * wasemmaʃ 'the cold started' (/smmʃ/ 'be cold')
 (7f) yeBtu wehnuSseʃ / * wahnusseʃ 'skiing started' (/hnuSSʃ/ 'ski')

4. New Analysis: Manifestation Of Case

At this stage, one might wonder why a definiteness or number marker is deleted in the BS and retained in what is called the FS, and why a glide is

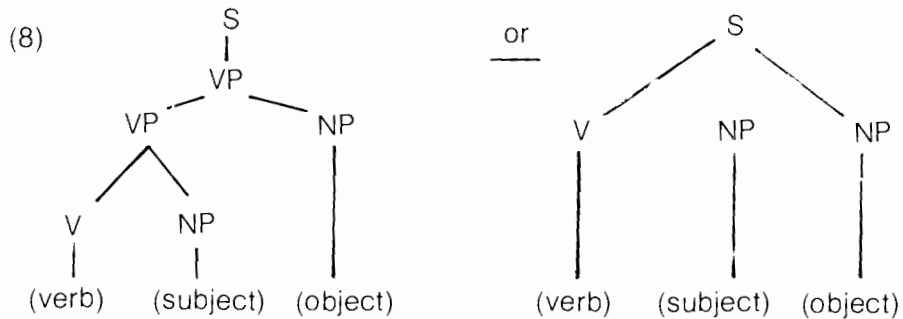
prefixed to the nouns in the BS. Is not it rather more common in the languages of the world to add or delete segments when case is involved? In addition, one might ask what is meant by 'state'. What is its syntactic status and role? Should not we rather talk about case in Berber? If we assume that case exists in Berber, we can say that there are two cases in this language: the 'nominative' (corresponding to the FS) and the 'oblique' (corresponding to the BS). The nominative case markers would be the vowels **a** for the singular and **i** for the plural. As for the oblique case markers, they would be the glides **w** and **y** for the singular and the plural, respectively.⁵ In the nouns whose stems begin with a vowel, both the glide and the initial vowel appear on the surface (cf. **wagur** and **wasif**). If the stem begins with a consonant, the glide is cliticized to the stem: in case the glide is followed by two consonants or a geminate cluster, it surfaces and the common rule of schwa epenthesis⁶ applies to break the consonant cluster (cf. **wergas**, **yergazen**, and **waxxam**); in case the glide is followed by one consonant, it vocalizes into the corresponding vowel (cf. **urumi** and **irumyen**).

Thus, we can say, for example, that the word for 'man' is lexically /rgaz/, i.e., consonant-initial. rgaz + nom. would be spelled out as /a+rgaz/; rgaz + obl. would be rendered as /w+rgaz/. On the other hand, the word for 'moon' is lexically /agur/, i.e., vowel-initial. agur + nom. is spelled out as /a+agur/, and agur + obl. as /w+agur/. Vowel-elision as formulated in (6) above applies to delete one of the two consecutive vowels in /a+agur/, yielding the correct **agur**.

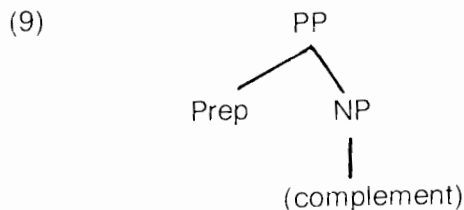
The advantage of this analysis is that it offers a rather satisfying answer to the question of why the initial vowel of many nouns is deleted in the BS. If we say that Berber has case, this vowel can be considered a nominative case marker which must be eliminated if the noun occurs in a syntactic environment which requires the other case, i.e., the oblique. If it were a prefix denoting number or definiteness, it would be very difficult to justify its deletion in the BS. But if we consider it a nominative case marker, it will be not only natural but also mandatory for it to disappear in the oblique case.

The problem now is to see if there is a principled syntactic account of the environments which require the nominative case and those that require the oblique case. We have already seen that the FS is used in citation forms, topicalized subject and direct object positions. The BS (corresponding to our oblique case) is mainly used when the noun is in subject position and after most prepositions. One might wonder what properties the subject of a sentence and the object of a preposition have in common that they require the same cases. In many languages, the

subject takes the nominative case whereas the object of a preposition takes a different case (accusative or ablative in Latin and genitive in Arabic, for example). What seems to be happening in Berber, though, is that the choice of the oblique case is determined by the verb and the preposition, which seem to affect in a special way the noun immediately following and which they govern. In other words, the subject is assigned the oblique case only if it is governed and immediately preceded by the verb. This predicts that if the subject precedes the verb (cases of topicalization), it will not carry the oblique case. This prediction proves to be correct, as (1b) above shows. Tree structures like those in (8) illustrate the way the verb always governs its subject:



The same thing can be said of the prepositional phrase. As the tree in (9) illustrates, the preposition precedes and governs its object (complement).



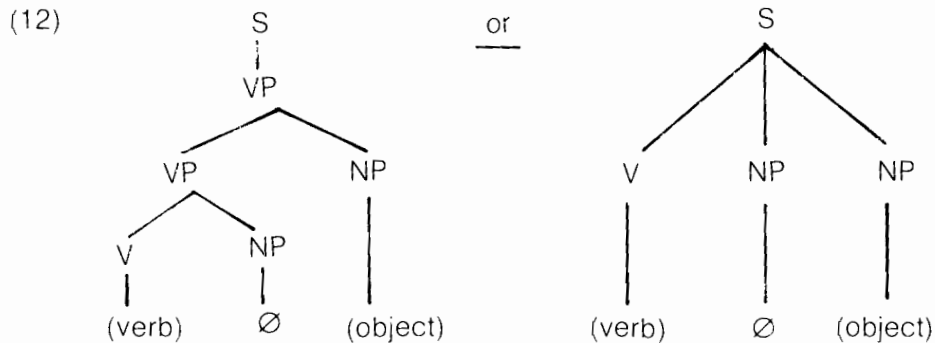
This analysis, in sum, assumes that the verbs and prepositions assign the oblique case to the nouns immediately following provided that these nouns are also governed by them. In other words, a noun is in the oblique case when it is immediately preceded and governed by the head of its phrase. The same thing applies to the complement of a quantifier, which also takes the oblique case (cf. (2c) above). If the noun which follows the verb is not its subject but its object, it takes the nominative case, as (10) illustrates.

- (10) Øebbi aqSiS/ + * weqSiS
 she-pinched boy 'she pinched the boy'

The failure of the word for 'boy' to be in the oblique case even though it immediately follows the verb can be explained by assuming the presence of an "empty category" between the verb and its object, represented as follows:

- (11) Øebbi (e) aqSiS

In terms of a tree structure, this can be presented by an empty node as follows:



The empty category or node would stand for a (*pro*) in case of the absence of an independent subject such as in the sentence in (11) or for a (*trace*) in case the subject is preposed to the verb, e.g., in the following example:

- (13) Ø aqSiS Ø Øebbi (e) aqSiS
 girl pinched boy 'the girl pinched the boy'

If the noun (subject of a verb, object of a preposition or complement of a quantifier) is modified by an adjective (the adjective obligatorily follows the noun in Berber), the adjective does not take the oblique case, as illustrated in (14a-14c). This means that either the adjective does not agree in case with the noun or that the governing element (verb, preposition, or quantifier) assigns case to the immediately following element only and which it governs.

- (14a) iruh weq3un ameqqran/ *umeqqran
 left dog big 'the big dog left'
- (14b) efkiṣ aḥsum iweq3un ameqqran/ * umeqqran

- gave-I meat to-dog big 'I gave meat to the big dog'
 (14c) *yiwen weq3un ameqqran/* umeqqran*
 one dog big 'one big dog'

However, if the adjective is used as a noun in any of the three environments above, it takes the oblique case:

- (15a) *iruh umeqqran/ * am eqqran* 'the big one left'
 (15b) *efki§ acsum iwmeqqran/ *iameqqran* 'I gave meat to the big one'
 (15c) *yiwen umeqqran/ * am eqqran* 'one big one'

There are at least two pieces of evidence which support our claim that what is traditionally called 'state' in Berber is actually a manifestation of case. In languages with case distinctions, case is characteristically manifested on each nominal in a conjoined noun phrase. If the BS is really a manifestation of case then one might expect it to be realized on each conjunct in a conjoined NP. Unfortunately, this potential source of evidence can not be fully utilized since the conjunction 'and' is expressed by the preposition § 'with' in Kabyle. Like other prepositions, § assigns the BS in any case: **aq3un** 'dog', **amSiS** 'cat', **amSiS** *af* **weq3un** 'the cat and the dog'. But fortunately the disjunctive **nef** 'or' is not a case assigner: **amSiS nef aq3un** 'the cat or the dog'. When a disjoined NP is placed in a position that calls for the imposition of the BS, both disjuncts receive the BS (oblique case), as shown in (16):

- (16) *yetSa weq3un ne§ wemSiS /* amSiS açsum*
 ate dog or cat meat
 'The dog or the cat ate the meat'

Assigning the BS to the second noun of the disjunction is exactly what we would expect if the BS is indeed a reflex of oblique case.

Another argument for considering the BS as a reflex of oblique case is provided by the rule of heavy-NP shift. In VSO structures, the subject NP may be shifted past the object if the subject is heavy in comparison to the object. If the BS is a manifestation of oblique case, we expect the shifted subject to still show the BS marker. This prediction proves to be correct, as (17a) and (17b) show, confirming our hypothesis that Berber's traditional 'state' should be considered a manifestation of case.

- (17a) *yetSa weq3un iggen§a rafid açsum*
 ate dog that-killed Rashid meat
 'The dog that Rashid killed ate the meat'
 (17b) *yetSa açsum weq3un iggen§a rafid*
 ate meat dog that-killed Rashid
 'Ate the meat, the dog that Rashid killed'

5. Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made in order to show that the traditional 'state' of Berber nouns is better accounted for if it is considered as a manifestation of case. In addition to morphological and historical evidence, at least two syntactic arguments have been presented to support our claim. It is to be acknowledged, however, that more research is still needed in order to determine with certitude the presence of case in Berber and whether case is/is not exhibited by the pronouns in that language.

APPENDIX A

Following are some unfamiliar symbols and descriptions of the Berber sounds they represent:

Symbol	Description of Sound
B	voiced bilabial fricative
∅	voiceless dental fricative
ʃ	voiced dental fricative
S	voiceless palatal fricative
ʒ	voiced palatal fricative
x	voiceless velar fricative
ɣ	voiced velar fricative
h	voiceless laryngeal fricative
ʁ	voiced laryngeal fricative
ç	voiceless prevelar fricative
ʝ	voiced prevelar fricative
tʃ	voiceless palatal affricate
dʒ	voiced palatal affricate
ts	voiceless palato-alveolar affricate
dz	voiced palato-alveolar affricate
q	voiceless uvular stop
a	low central vowel
ə	schwa

APPENDIX B

The reader will find here transliterations of all the data in the examples in the text in the order in which they occur.

(1a) "ataksi" car (vehicle); "amshish" cat

(1b) "yezzenz ataksi" he sold the car

(1c) "argaz yezzenz ataksi" the man. he sold the car

- (1d) "sasif" toward the river
- (2a) "yezzenz wergazataksi" the man sold the car; "argaz" man
- (2b) "iwegaz" to the man
"amshish eth weqjoon" the cat with the dog; "aqjoon" dog
- (2c) "yiwen wergaz" one man; "sin yergazen" two men; "irgazen" men
- (3a) "argaz" "wergaz" man; "irgazen" "wergazen" men
"aqjoon" "weqjoon" dog; "iqjan" "weqjan" dogs
- (3b) "aroomi" "ooroomi" Frenchman; "iroomyen" "iroomyen" Frenchmen
"ataksi" "ootaksi" car; "itaksin" "itaksin" cars
- (3c) "akhkham" "wekhkham" house; "ikhkhammen" "yekhkhammen" houses
- (3d) "agoor" "wagoor" moon; "agooren" "wagooren" moons
"adjal" "wadjaly" widower; "adjalen" "wadjalen" widowers
"imi" "yimi" mouth; "imawen" "yimawen" mouths
"oothan" "woothan" butter
- (5a) "vava ooriroohara" --- "vavooriroohara" my father did not leave
- (5b) "yebbi aqshish" --- "yebbaqshish" he pinched the boy
- (5c) "yebbi icherri" --- "yebbicherri" he pinched the lamb
- (7a) "irooh ookheddam/* wakheddam" the worker left
- (5b) "mooqqr oomenghi/* wamenghi" the battle was big
- (7c) "yemmeth oo'ewwam/* wa'ewwam" the swimmer died ("wm" swim)
- (7d) "irooh oomezthagh/* wamezthagh" the dweller left ("zthagh" dwell)
- (7e) "yevthoo oosemmath/* wasemmath" the cold started ("smmth" be cold)
- (7f) "yevthoo wehnooshsheth/* wahnnooshsheth" skiing started ("hnooshshth" ski)
- (10) "thebbi aqshish /* weqshish" she pinched the boy
- (11) "thebbi aqshish"
- (13) "thaqshishth thebbi aqshish" the girl pinched the boy
- (14a) "irooh weqjoon ameqqran/* oomeqqran" the big dog left
- (14b) "efkigh achsoom iweqjoon ameqqran/* oomeqqran" I gave meat to the big dog
- (14c) "yiwen weqjoon ameqqran/* oomeqqran" the big dog
- (15a) "irooh oomeqqran/* ameqqran" the big one left
- (15b) "e'kigh achsoom iwmeqqran/* iameqqran" I gave meat to the big one
- (15c) "yiwen oomeqqran/* ameqqran" one big one
- (16) "yetcha weqjoon negh wemshish/* amshish achsoom" the dog or the cat ate the meat
- (17a) "yetcha weqjoon iggengha Rashid achsoom" the dog that Rashid killed ate the meat
- (17b) "yetcha achsoom weqjoon iggengha Rashid" ate the meat, the dog that Rashid killed

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