

REVIEW OF / RESEÑA DE: GĘBSKI, Wiktor. *A Grammar of the Jewish Arabic Dialect of Gabes*. Semitic Languages and Cultures 23. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, 2024.– ISBN: 978-1-80511-251-8 (paperback).– xviii+510 pp.

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Wiktor Gębski, a linguist specialising in Arabic dialectology and Hebrew, brings a rare combination of empirical rigour and comparative breadth to the study of Judeo-Arabic. Having completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Warsaw, he went on to earn his PhD from the University of Cambridge, where his doctoral dissertation focused on documenting the endangered Jewish Arabic dialect of Gabes, a coastal city in southern Tunisia. This volume is the outcome of that research and is based on extensive fieldwork with the remaining native speakers in France and Israel. In recognition of his contributions to Jewish linguistics and endangered language documentation, Gębski was awarded the 2022 Oliver Cromwell Prize in Jewish Studies. He is currently a Rothschild Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Cambridge, where he teaches Modern Hebrew and continues his research into both Jewish and Muslim varieties of Maghrebi Arabic. His scholarly interests include language endangerment, spoken Arabic syntax and the influence of Modern Hebrew on Jewish Arabic dialects.

Gębski's work contributes to a field that, although growing, remains unevenly covered. While North African Judeo-Arabic has attracted increasing academic interest, much of the literature remains centered on Moroccan varieties thanks to the pioneering work of Chetrit, Zafrani, Lévy, Tedghi, Bar-Asher, Heath, Stillman, Sibony and Francisco. In contrast, Tunisian and Algerian Jewish dialects remain underrepresented. Key studies by D. Cohen, Saada and Behnstedt offer initial contributions for Tunisia, while M. Cohen, Tirosh-Becker, Yoda and D'anna have made rare forays into Algerian and Libyan Jewish Arabic, respectively. Within this underexplored landscape, Gębski's research is especially valuable. As well as the Gabes dialect, his publications analyse the Jewish Arabic dialects of Wadi Souf and Ghardaïa in Algeria, and provide linguistic commentary on oral traditions from Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. His work therefore enriches not only Judeo-Arabic studies, but also advances Maghrebi Arabic dialectology more broadly, with notable contributions on grammatical change, tense, and aspect in contact settings.

This volume provides the first comprehensive grammatical analysis of Jewish Gabes Arabic, a critically endangered dialect reflecting centuries of continuous Jewish settlement in Tunisia. With roots dating back to the 7th century, the Jewish community of Gabes developed a sedentary, urban variety of Maghrebi Arabic, shaped by early Arab settlement, following the arrival of Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. Now nearly extinct, this dialect is typologically distinct from the surrounding Bedouin-type Muslim dialects. Gębski pays particular attention to these

typological divergences, examining phonological comparisons between Jewish and Muslim dialects in Tunisia, Algeria and Libya. The study is driven by descriptive and preservationist goals in response to the urgent need to document a variety whose last fluent speakers, most of whom emigrated after 1946, are now elderly. Based on 42 hours of recorded interviews with eight speakers conducted between 2018 and 2022 in Israel and France, the corpus focuses on oral folktales and is supplemented by elicited material to ensure full grammatical coverage. Special care was taken to exclude data from speakers whose Arabic had been significantly influenced by Hebrew, thereby preserving the integrity of the dialect under study.

In his introduction (pp. 1–22), Gębski sets out the theoretical and contextual framework for the study, providing a review of the latest research that contextualises Jewish Gabes Arabic within the broader field of Judeo-Arabic linguistics. Drawing attention to the disproportionate focus on Moroccan varieties at the expense of their Tunisian and Algerian counterparts, he identifies a significant lack of syntactic research in Judeo-Arabic studies, a gap that this volume aims to fill. The book's originality lies in the unusually large place given to syntactic analysis, which reflects both the author's research priorities and the under-representation of this area in previous studies of North African Jewish Arabic. Although the structure adheres to the standard linguistic progression from phonology to morphology to syntax, the depth of analysis, particularly in the syntactic section, sets this work apart from existing literature. A significant part of the introduction (pp. 7–17) critically engages with academic literature on the influence of pre-Arabic languages such as Berber, Late Punic and African Latin on the linguistic substrate of Maghrebi Arabic. This diachronic perspective informs the analysis of phonology, morphology and syntax and broadens the study's relevance, extending it beyond Arabic dialectology to include scholars of historical linguistics and language contact. The book is divided into three main sections: a phonological analysis (pp. 25–88); a detailed morphological examination (pp. 88–202) of verbal and nominal forms; and a comprehensive syntactic section (pp. 203–400) addressing noun syntax, verbal and clausal structures, and demonstrative usage. This final section constitutes the core of the volume. The book ends with a conclusion (pp. 401–406), an appendix presenting transcriptions and English translations of seven folktales (pp. 407–461), a bibliography (pp. 463–489), and a detailed index (pp. 491–508). The preface and introduction together position the Jewish Arabic dialect of Gabes as a crucial yet endangered component of the Maghrebi linguistic heritage, establishing the volume as a vital documentation of a vanishing tradition and a significant contribution to Semitic linguistics, Arabic dialectology and Jewish language studies.

Although the study's most original contribution may be its focus on syntax, the phonological section stands out for its analytical depth and cross-dialectal relevance. Gębski begins with a detailed presentation of the consonant inventory, followed by a nuanced section titled 'Remarks on Realisation of Consonants', which explores how phonetic variation can result in phonemic differentiation. For instance, the distinction between /b/ and an emphatic /b/ is phonemic, whereas /m/ exhibits allophonic variation ([m] and [m̐]). Particular attention is given to sibilants and alveolar-postalveolar consonants, whose complex status in North African Judeo-Arabic dialects is illustrated through comparative tables of Jewish and Muslim varieties. The analysis reveals the consistent preservation of Classical Arabic phonemes, such as /q/ and /h/, distinguishing Jewish Gabes Arabic from neighbouring dialects. Acoustic measurements further enhance the discussion, particularly in the examination of emphasis spread, where subtle yet systematic phonetic processes are revealed. The analysis of vowels reveals a three-way distinction in both long (/ā/, /ī/, /ū/) and short (/a/, /o/, /ə/) vowels, a finding that is corroborated by instrumental phonetic data. Phonotactic considerations include syllable structure, harmony and stress assignment. Each subsection concludes with comparative discussions that situate Jewish Gabes Arabic consistently within the

wider landscape of Arabic phonological systems, thereby reinforcing the importance of the dialect for Arabic dialectology and the broader field of Semitic linguistics.

The morphology section is divided into verbal (pp. 91–137) and nominal (pp. 139–202) subsections. It offers a detailed, comparative analysis of Jewish Gabes Arabic within the broader Maghrebi linguistic context. In his analysis of verbal morphology, Gębski identifies eight productive patterns and two residual forms. He notes that the verbal system reflects typical features of sedentary Maghrebi dialects but also exhibits notable innovations. Similarities with other Jewish North African varieties include the absence of mood distinctions, internal passives and dual verb forms. While the distinction between the second-person plural gender has disappeared, the dialect retains a distinction between the second-person masculine and feminine singular forms, an archaism that is no longer found in many neighbouring dialects. Forms IV and IX have disappeared, with their functions being absorbed into form II or replaced by periphrastic constructions. Of particular interest is the passive system: while the Classical ‘n-’ prefix is rarely used, the productive ‘t-’ prefix has emerged as a distinctive feature, potentially influenced by Berber or developed through analogical extension from stems V and VI. Verbal morphology also reveals the reduction of short vowels to /ə/ or /a/, which affects the distinction between the perfect and imperative forms. Prefix and suffix conjugations remain productive, and regular morphological behaviour is observed across strong, geminate and weak root types. Gębski contextualises these findings through extensive comparisons with other Maghrebi varieties, illustrating conservative retention and dialect-specific developments. The section on nominal morphology continues this comparative approach, offering an integrated treatment of nouns, adjectives, numerals and lexical items that challenges traditional root-and-pattern frameworks. Noteworthy features include morphologically marked feminine forms, the phonological assimilation of the definite article and the gradual loss of the construct state, often supplanted by analytic constructions. Plural formation relies on both internal and external strategies, while the use of collective nouns often obscures the distinction between singular and plural. The analysis also traces diachronic shifts in gender marking and highlights the lexicalisation of certain plural forms. This further demonstrates the dialect’s morphological system is dynamic and evolving.

Gębski’s Grammar of the Jewish Arabic Dialect of Gabes is notable for its innovative and substantial syntactic analysis, spanning nearly 200 pages and offering an important treatment of definiteness, clause structure, agreement and word order. Primarily drawing on a corpus of oral folktales, Gębski challenges the binary model of definiteness traditionally employed in Arabic grammars. Influenced by the works of Brustad and Caubet, he proposes a continuum model in which definiteness interacts with parameters such as salience, specificity and discourse relevance. A key discovery is the use of *wāḥad* (‘someone’) as a marker of specific indefiniteness. This is frequently employed to introduce new referents in narrative contexts and is often followed by definite or demonstrative noun forms. This analysis integrates insights from Comrie’s animacy hierarchy and Hopper and Thompson’s transitivity framework, demonstrating that human and animate entities are more likely to be marked as definite, particularly in agentive roles. However, speaker perception frequently overrides grammatical regularities. The discussion of associative anaphora further demonstrates that definiteness marking can shift according to the shared knowledge of the speaker and listener. A comparative perspective with Moroccan Arabic reveals that Jewish Gabes is more conservative in its use of definiteness, adhering more closely to classical expectations.

Genitive constructions are also treated with great nuance, with a distinction being made between synthetic (annexation) and analytic (with *ntāʿ*) forms. The analytic form is more prevalent. The choice between the two is governed by morphological and phonological constraints, with Hebrew

loanwords consistently requiring the analytic form. These constructions fulfil various syntactic and semantic functions, including possession, attribution, location and temporal reference, and reflect broader discourse and sociolinguistic dynamics. Agreement and concord also receive detailed attention. Jewish Gabes exhibits strict agreement patterns across syntactic domains, a feature which Gębski attributes to analogical levelling and potential contact with Modern Hebrew. He further hypothesises that there is a deeper substrate influence from Northwest Semitic languages, where strict agreement likewise occurs, thereby offering support for theories of substratal influence in North African Jewish Arabic.

The syntax of verbs and clauses is explored through comprehensive analyses of subordination (relative, adverbial and complement clauses), tense and aspect, and word order. Relative clauses are introduced using *li* or *alli* and typically include resumptive pronouns in accordance with the Accessibility Hierarchy proposed by Keenan and Comrie. Non-attributive relative clauses, which are often formed with interrogatives such as *škūn* ('who'), allow for general or indefinite reference. Although adverbial clauses are relatively infrequent in spoken discourse, they retain semantically rich functions, such as expressing time, causality or purpose. They are syntactically flat and are often built with full verb forms. They are also historically linked to relative clause structures. Gębski argues that, rather than formal subordination, semantic integration often governs the relationship between clauses. Tense and aspect are not expressed through inflectional morphology, but rather through lexical and contextual cues. The suffix conjugation usually marks completed actions in the past, whereas the prefix conjugation is temporally and aspectually ambiguous. Pre-verbal particles such as *ka-* and *qāṣad-* express progressivity and durativity, which is consistent with Maghrebi norms. Notably, the *fāʿil* participial form is used to express present states, which is an atypical feature in Muslim dialects and may reflect Aramaic influence.

The word order and topicalisation are also thoroughly examined. Jewish Gabes employs both subject–predicate (S–P) and topic–comment (T–C) structures, each of which serves a distinct discourse function. VSO order usually occurs in foregrounded narrative contexts, whereas SVO is used in backgrounded or descriptive clauses. Topic-fronting is common in dialogue and is often accompanied by an intonational pause. Comparisons with Neo-Aramaic, especially Telkepe, reveal similar topicalisation strategies, which likely emerged independently. Demonstratives are examined through historical, comparative and pragmatic lenses. Jewish Gabes enforces strict syntactic constraints on demonstrative placement, which vary depending on deixis, discourse structure, and referent salience. Of particular note is the unstressed distal form *hāk*, which serves a pragmatic function in sustaining discourse continuity and highlighting narrative prominence. Cross-dialectal comparisons demonstrate that Jewish Gabes preserves phonological features, such as fuller demonstrative forms, that have been reduced in other Judeo-Arabic dialects, such as Jewish Tunis and Moroccan Arabic. This suggests that there have been divergent evolutionary trajectories within the broader Judeo-Arabic continuum.

The conclusion synthesises the grammar's key findings, highlighting its significance for the diachronic and comparative study of Maghrebi Arabic, particularly regarding confessional variation and syntactic change. Jewish Gabes is identified as a pre-Hilali, sedentary dialect that is now rare in Tunisia and which preserves both archaic features and contact-induced innovations.

This study therefore provides the first comprehensive grammatical analysis of Jewish Gabes, affirming its importance in understanding the linguistic diversity and historical development of Judeo-Arabic, it makes a significant contribution to Arabic dialectology and related fields. As well as being well-structured and up to date with current research, the book stands out due to the originality and depth of its syntactic analysis. Gębski's focus on syntax is not only rare in studies of Maghrebi Arabic dialects, but also remarkably insightful. It sheds light on the internal structure

of Jewish Gabes Arabic, offering broader implications for understanding Maghrebi Arabic syntax as a whole. The comparative dimension, both within Maghrebi dialects and with more distantly related Semitic languages, further enriches the analysis and enhances its relevance. Furthermore, the detailed documentation of a lesser-known dialect contributes significantly to the descriptive landscape of Arabic dialectology. This work will undoubtedly be of interest to scholars of Arabic and Semitic linguistics, Jewish languages, dialectology, and Jewish studies.