The Neo-Aramaic dialects are modern vernacular forms of Aramaic, which has a documented history in the Middle East of over 3,000 years. Due to upheavals in the Middle East over the last one hundred years, thousands of speakers of Neo-Aramaic dialects have been forced to migrate from their homes or have perished in massacres. As a result, the dialects are now highly endangered. The dialects exhibit a remarkable diversity of structures. Moreover, the considerable depth of attestation of Aramaic from earlier periods provides evidence for the pathways of change. For these reasons the research of Neo-Aramaic is of importance for more general fields of linguistics, in particular language typology and historical linguistics. The papers in this volume represent the full range of research that is currently being carried out on Neo-Aramaic dialects. They advance the field in numerous ways. In order to allow linguists who are not specialists in Neo-Aramaic to benefit from the papers, the examples are fully glossed.

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Cover image: Women in the village of Harbole, south-eastern Turkey (photograph taken by Brunot Poizat in 1978 before the village's destruction).

Cover design: Anna Gatti
1. Ṭūr ʿAbdin—The Language Situation

Before describing the state of Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo in the diaspora in Sweden, I shall give a brief account of the language situation in Ṭūr ʿAbdin (SE Turkey) by way of background.

Nowadays, there are only a few villages, where the population speak only Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo. These are Mīdən, Bsōrīno, Sāre (returning people from the diaspora), Bēqusyōno, Dayro du-ṣlibo (a few families), Kafro, Xarābāle and the villages around Xarābāle, namely Arbo, Eḥwo, Bādəbe, Kharabemiška.

The current inhabitants of Kafro, with its impressive newly built houses, consist of only returning people. It was previously completely uninhabited due to migrations to Europe. The same is more or less true of the aforementioned villages around Xarābāle. The only village in the area known as Rāyīte that has remained inhabited is Xarābāle, nowadays also known as Arkaḥ among Suryōye (i.e. the Christian speakers of Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo).

There are also a few villages that each have a few Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speaking families but where the majority of the population are Kurds. These are: Mzīhaḥ, Ḥwardo, Kfarze and Anḥəl. Finally, there is the chief town in the area, Məḏyaḥ (Midyat), where today the Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speakers are mixed. They consist of families who speak the original Məḏyaḥ dialect and Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speaking families who have moved to Məḏyaḥ from different villages around it.
2. Dialectal Differences

As is the case with any language, there were and are dialectal differences in Şūrayt/Tūrōyo. What is noteworthy about this dialectal diversity is that the Şūrayt/Tūrōyo language area is relatively small. Two villages only two kilometres apart from each other may have dialectal differences. The rural village dialects as a whole can, however, be classified together in a group that contrasts with the urban dialect of Maḏyaḏ.

Many of the dialectal differences in Şūrayt/Tūrōyo are due to influences from the neighbouring languages such as Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish. Geographically, Tūr ʿAbdīn is surrounded by the Mesopotamian Arabic dialect area and Kurdish-speaking villages. Among the Arabic dialects in the area the dialect of Mardin, the chief town, was and still is the most important one. Between Mardin and Tūr ʿAbdīn there are several Arabic-speaking centres, including, among others, Bnēbīl, Şawro, Maʿsarte and Qeleṭ. Around Tūr ʿAbdīn, especially near Maḏyaḏ, one finds the Mḥallami-Arabic dialects, which are spoken today only by Muslims. Beyond Mīdān eastwards there were three Arabic dialects, namely Āzəx, Espes and Bābake, whose original population consisted of Suryōye. There are also some Kurdish-speaking villages in Tūr ʿAbdīn, namely Kerburan, ʿArbāye, Ḥaḥ, Kafro ʿĒlayto and Yardo, all had Suryōye inhabitants. Today, among these villages only Ḥaḥ is populated by Suryōye, who today also speak Şūrayt/Tūrōyo alongside Kurdish.

We do not know with any certainty what the historical depth was of the aforementioned influence on Şūrayt/Tūrōyo. An interesting statement concerning this question is found in Ritter (1967, *19*). He refers to his informant Besim Akdemir speaking

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1 See Ritter (1967, *19*) writing:

to Ḥasyo Yuḥanon Dolabani saying that the influence from Arabic and Kurdish began during the 13\textsuperscript{th} century and, as a consequence of this, the Patriarch Aziz Bar Sabţo tried to forbid the people from speaking foreign languages (Arabic and Kurdish), but then it was too late since they had already lost many native words.

With this background, I shall now examine the current language situation in the diaspora. To the best of my knowledge, no systematic studies have been of this topic, so we cannot establish the full details. We can, however, obtain a general picture.

3. The Challenge of New Social and Cultural Terminology

The Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-lexicon in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn was characterised by agricultural, narrative and religious terms. During the 1960s and the 1970s the majority of Suryōye migrated from Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, mostly first to Istanbul and then to different countries in Western Europe. Previously, emigration from Ṭūr ʿAbdīn was mostly to the Arabic-speaking countries in the region, especially Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

The emigration after the 1950s was far more intense than the earlier trend of emigration. It took place during a short period and resulted in the emptying of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn of the majority of Suryōye. Furthermore, the migrants settled in countries that were far more advanced than Ṭūr ʿAbdīn and the neighbouring areas in terms of their economic, political, cultural, social, technological and educational development.

In their new countries of residence in Western Europe the Suryōyo community became familiar with the concept of ‘mother tongue education’ and for the first time in their history Syriac and Šūrayt/Ṭūrōyo were taught in official schools. This was an unexpected event in their history.

durchgedrungen. Man habe damals schon viele syrische Worte vergessen und statt dessen fremde gebraucht.
One serious challenge was the need to find linguistic equivalents to the social and cultural terminology of the Western European countries. This was difficult for a minority group from countries with very different social systems.²

4. Neologisms

During the period in which the Suryōyō community has been in the diaspora many neologisms have been formed. There was a need to create terms for the new cultural phenomena that the Suryōye encountered in Western European societies. These neologisms were formed almost entirely from lexical items of literary Western Syriac, which were given new meanings. As a result they were not considered as borrowings into Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo.

A situation of diglossia similar to that between Modern Standard Arabic and Arabic dialects exists between Western Syriac and Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo. The Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo speakers in general view Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo as the everyday language of communication, while they consider Western Syriac as the prestigious cultural and ecclesiastical language.

A large number of such neologisms are in use today in Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo. Most of these probably did not exist before the 1950s, judging by their absence in Ritter’s Ťūrōyo collection. They appear to have been first introduced at the beginning of the 1970s, when Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo-speakers began to emigrate to Sweden and other Western European countries. The formation of their own clubs and associations in these countries, and the publication of their own newsletters and magazines have played an important role. They did not have the freedom to engage in such communal activities to the same extent in their homeland. The exact number of neologisms and their diffusion among the Ṣūrayt/Ţūrōyo-speakers are not known. At any rate, it is clear that the neologisms are used by purists in clubs and associations, in television programs and in newspapers. They are disseminated

² Ehrnebo (2013, 174–175).
through these means. These neologisms in Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo have been created not only for describing new phenomena in society but also to replace foreign words.³

5. Language Loss

While the language has acquired many neologisms, the use of which is prestigious among the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers, the language has at the same time lost or is in the process of losing many native words.

5.1. Dialect Mixing and the Loss of Dialectal Diversity

The dialectal differences found in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn do not exist in a consistent manner in the diaspora. A Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speaking community in a Swedish or a German town consists of people from very different dialectal areas. Consequently, the children born in these circumstances learn and develop their mother tongue in a linguistically mixed environment.

The mixing of the dialects results in a more homogenous language, which is an advantage for the diaspora communities. It has, however, the regrettable consequence of the loss of much dialectal native vocabulary.

I present here a few examples demonstrating the dialectal differences pertaining to the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo lexicon in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn:

(1) ‘street’

There are four dialectal words for the word ‘street’, namely šūqo (Mīdən), bašqūqo (Bēqusyōno and Bsōrīno), basyōɡo (Rāyīte) and zābūqo. The last one is a borrowing from local Arabic into the dialect of Məḏyaḏ, while the others are native words found in the village dialects. Today šūqo has a new common meaning in the diaspora, namely ‘a market place, a shopping centre’. The

³ For details and treatment of a great numbers of these neologisms, see S. Tezel (2015, 100–109).
Şūrayt/Ťūrōyo-speakers in the diaspora use *darbo* for ‘street’, which used to refer to a road outside the villages in Ţūr ‘Abdin.

(2) ‘axe’

There are at least three words for ‘axe’, *nargo*, *ašfo* ~ *aḡfo* and *ma‘wōlo*. The last of these, which is derived from Arabic *mi‘wāl*, is used in the Rāyite-dialects.⁴

(3) ‘water-pitcher’

At least three dialectal words *gḏōno* (< *kaddōnō*), *mxōlo* (< Western Syriac *mḵōrō?*) and *ḡarra* (Arabic) denote a normal ‘water-pitcher’, a smaller one being termed *dgušto* (cf. NENA *gādušta* and Levantine Arabic *dakkūše*) in Məḏyaḏ and *kādūne* in villages.⁵

(4) ‘vineyard guard’

The word for ‘vineyard guard’ is *nötiro* in most dialects. Some dialects use the word *naḥtōr*, which is a loan from Kurdish. The Kurdish word is, in turn, a loan from Arabic *nātōr*, which itself is a loan from earlier Aramaic *nātōrā*.⁶ The form *naḥtōr* is in the process of disappearing in the diaspora.

(5) ‘to buy’

The verb for ‘to buy’, *zwənle*, which used to be common to all the village dialects in Ţūr ‘Abdin, is in the process of being replaced by *šqile*, which was and still is a typical Məḏyaḏ-word in Ţūr ‘Abdin. Nowadays *šqile* is the common word for ‘to buy’ among almost all Şūrayt/Ťūrōyo speakers in the diaspora.

(6) ‘hair’

In Ţūr ‘Abdin, the village dialects use(d) the word *ṣa‘ro* (< *sa‘rō*) for denoting ‘hair’, while Məḏyaḏ uses *sawko*. In the diaspora the

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⁴ For details, see A. Tezel (2003, 175).
⁵ For details, see A. Tezel (2003, 161–163).
⁶ For details, see A. Tezel (2003, 178).
use of ṣaʾro among the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers from the villages has decreased and they tend to use instead the Məḏyōyo word sawko.

(7) ‘good’

There is a similar situation with regard to the words for ‘good’, namely ṭōwo in the village dialects and kāyīso in the dialect of Məḏyaḏ. Though the word ṭōwo is native and kāyīso is foreign, the foreign word kāyīso is in the process of being adopted even among the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers from the villages.

5.2. The Loss of Original Lexemes and Semantics

(1) ‘to change’

The village dialects in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn used the native verb mḥālafle ‘to change’. Today in the diaspora this has almost entirely been replaced by three foreign verbs, namely mġāyarle, mbādēle and mdāgašle. The first two are of Arabic origin and the last one is of Turkish origin.

(2) ‘to flee’

Likewise, the native verb ‘to flee, run away’, ʿārəq, has been replaced by the foreign verb mahzamle, which is of Arabic origin. The use of the native word ʿārəq was restricted to a few dialects in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn and the foreign word mahzamle seems to have entered some varieties in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn at an early date.

(3) ‘to close’

The native verb for ‘to close’, ṣxərle, was a common word in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn. Today many Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers living in or coming from Turkey have replaced it with the Turkish foreign verb mqāpāṭle.
A common expression that used to be in wide use and can still be heard in the speech of the older generation is ‘al ū-mamro, ‘according to what I have heard/been informed’. Today, the expression in question has been replaced by two foreign words. Śūrayt/Ţūrōyo speakers from Turkey use gōya/gūya and those from Arabic-speaking countries use ‘ala bana.

The word expressing surprise, dūmōro, and its verb mdāmar (mostly used with first personal pronouns mdāmarno/mdlrmnō) has been replaced by the Arabic ‘əǧbo and its verb mʿāġabno/mמʿaġbōno.

Sometimes a word loses its original meaning and acquires a new meaning in the diaspora. A case in point is fulhōno. Today it usually denotes ‘activities’ in an association or ‘political activities’ in general in the diaspora. In Ṭūr ‘Abdīn the word denoted ‘an arable land’.

In some cases the semantic range of a word is restricted. For example, ḥāṣo had both the meaning ‘back’ and also the meaning ‘a belt of cloth’ in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn. In the diaspora, however, the younger generation is only aware of the meaning ‘back’.

5.3. Phraseology and Idioms

Each language contains cultural-specific metaphors, phrases alluding to historical events or religious and social phenomena. Such phraseology is conditioned by the physical, cultural and religious environment of the language community. This is best described by the following quote in an article by Fishman (1996) entitled ‘What do you lose when you lose your language?’, where he (ibid., 72) writes:
Take it [language] away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers.

In the case of Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo, the language has not entirely been extracted from its culture and religion, but it has been removed from its physical environment, which has influenced the language in different ways. I shall demonstrate this by a few illustrative examples.

In Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, for example, stones were a very important feature of life and constituted a crucial building material. This is evident from the phrases people formed with the word for ‘a stone’ kēfo, for instance:

(1) hāwən kēfo w-kalšo

became.they stone and-lime

‘They became inseparable friends.’ (Literally: ‘They became stone and lime.’)

The phrase is, of course, used figuratively. It is used when you are very good friends. The phrase dāʿīri hāwən kēfo w-kalšo can also be used when one is on bad terms with another person and then find their way back to each other, dāʿīri meaning literally ‘they returned’.

When one built houses, the most important components were stone and lime and then people experienced concretely how stone and lime were composed:

(2) mḥē-le kēfe mīn-e

threw-he stones at (from)-him

‘to insult someone in an indirect way’ (Literally: ‘He threw stones at him.’)
(3) *hawyō-no kēfo kamto lō səm-le b-diḏ-i*
became-I stone black not did-he in-my (mine)

‘Whatever I did, he did not do as I said.’ (Literally: ‘I became a black stone and he did not do in accordance with me.’)

(4) *ʾī-kēfo yāqurto b-dukt-ā tawtō = yo*
the-stone heavy in-place-its good = is

‘The value of a person lies in his serious-mindedness.’
(This was said of a person who does not laugh or smile, literally: ‘The heavy stone is good in its place.’)

In Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo body parts are used in the formation of metaphorical phrases. Many such phrases contain the words lēbo ‘heart’ and mēne (pl.) ‘hair’ (or manṯo ‘a single hair’). For example:

(5) *m-ū lēbo (kəmmət)*
from-the heart saying.you

‘Are you serious? (Literally: ‘[Are you saying] from the heart?’)’

(6) *twər-le lēb-e*
broke-he heart-his

‘He hurt his feelings.’ (Literally: ‘He broke his heart.’)

(7) *lat-le lēbo*
is.not-to.him a heart

‘He does not feel like it.’ (Literally: ‘He does not have a heart.’)
(8) *lēb-e qīṣ*
heart-his was.cut

‘He is suspicious.’ (literally: ‘His heart was cut.’)

(9) *ʾāṯi mēne b-lišōn-i*
came.he hair on-tongue-my

‘I am sick of saying it over and over again.’ (Literally: ‘Hair came on my tongue.’)

(10) *kō-ṣōləḥ ʾī-manṭo*
IND-he.splits the-hair

‘He is very clever.’ (Literally: ‘He splits the single hair.’)

Religion played and still plays an important part in the life of the Suryōye and there are many phrases relating to this, such as:

(11) *šubḥo l-ālo*
praise to-God

‘Oh my God!’ (Literally: ‘Praise be to God!’)

(12) *ʾālo ṭōrē-l-ux*
God keep-ACC-you

‘May God keep you!’

(13) *moryo w-aq-qādiše hōwən ʾaʿm-ux*
Lord and-the-saints be.they with-you

‘May the Lord and the saints be with you!’
(14) mhālaq-le ṛūhe qəm raql-e d-ū-qādišo
threw-he himself at feet-his of-the-saint

‘He sought protection or help from the saint by [visiting his tomb or church].’ (Literally: ‘He threw himself at the feet of the saint.’)

Many oaths of a religious content were used in the community, e.g. b-ālōho ‘[I swear] by God’; b-ә-mšihō ‘[I swear] by Jesus’; b-ū-mgalyun ‘[I swear] by the Bible’; b-aq-qādiše ‘[I swear] by the saints’; b-ū-šlībo ‘[I swear] by the Cross’; b-ū-qabro ‘[I swear] by the grave [of Jesus]’; b-indāṯ-ālo (< *yōldaṯ ʾalōhō) ‘[I swear] by the Virgin Mary’.

Except for the phrases b-ū-šlībo and b-ū-mgalyun all these expressions of oaths are in the process of disappearing among the younger generation of speakers. In Sweden, for instance, the younger generation frequently make use of the Swedish phrase Jag lovar ‘I promise’.

6. Language Attrition and Codeswitching

The fact that many original words and meanings are being lost in the diaspora is due to the imperfect learning of the language by younger speakers and the lack of planning on the part of the older generation as to how to pass on the language to the younger generation. I shall illustrate this by two concrete examples.

The native verb mtāwēle, which was used in many villages in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn with the sense of ‘to grill’, has been almost entirely replaced by the Arabic loanword mšāwēle in the diaspora or by the mixed Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo and Swedish phrase səmle grilla, which literally means ‘he did the grill’.

Another example is as follows. Once I was in a lift and somebody told me to press the button by saying səm trycka!, which consists of Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo səm ‘do, make’ and Swedish trycka ‘press’. The phrase could easily be expressed by the Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo phrase daš ‘al u-zraʿlo ‘press the button!’
The younger generation uses codeswitching, which is, of course, very common among bilinguals. They begin a conversation in Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo and then they suddenly switch over to Swedish for various reasons. This is partly because the words required in the conversation are lacking in Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo or they have not mastered them.

7. Phonology and Hypercorrection

The previous discussion concerned changes relating to the vocabulary of the language. There has also been an important change in phonology in the diaspora. Many of the children born in the diaspora pronounce the interdental /ṯ/ [θ] and /ḏ/ [ð] as [s] and [z]. For example, qrīṯo ‘a village’ is pronounced [qrīso], and ʿēḏo (m.) ‘a feast’ [ʕēzo]. The latter coincides with ʿėzo (f.) ‘a she-goat’.

A shift from interdental to sibilants is not a recent phenomenon among the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers. The dialects of two villages, namely Bēqusyōno and Dayro du-ṣlībo, had undergone this shift long ago. Interestingly, in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn today the shift in question has spread to the dialects of other villages. There is a phonetic motivation behind the changes ṣ > s and ź > z, in that it is easier to articulate s and z than the original interdental fricatives ṣ and ź. The phenomenon is also known from Mlaḥsō and some dialects in (NENA). The same is true in many Arabic dialects.

When some Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers try to correct their pronunciation, they create hypercorrections. They pronounce interdental where sibilants are correct. For example the correct word for ‘a bishop’, hasyo, becomes instead [haθyo].

8. Bilingualism, Multilingualism and the Future

Many among the younger generation grow up as bilingual or multilingual. The younger generation born in the diaspora are not normally familiar with a large part of the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo vocabulary that was originally used in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn. All the younger generation in the diaspora normally speak the national language
with each other. They speak Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo with their parents, relatives and elderly people.

Many of the younger Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo generation have difficulties in making themselves understood in Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo. This is a gradual process, but eventually the younger generation will lose so much of the language that they will inevitably shift entirely to the national language. This situation is, of course, a common phenomenon in minority groups, especially with minority groups of stateless immigrants.

Fishman (1996) writes about a story told by John MacNamara, who studied Irish all his childhood in school. He was scolded one day when he was buying sweets by the woman who ran the shop. He began speaking English to his sister and the woman asked him why he did not speak Irish with her. When they came out, his sister asked him: ‘Is Irish really for talking?’ It did not occur to them that Irish was for talking. They considered it rather to be a school subject. This is also what is happening among the Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo-speaking younger generation. It is no longer natural for them to speak Şūrayt/Ţūrōyo among each other, despite the efforts to teach the language in schools. This confirms the view of Fishman (1996, 79) that a real—not institutional—social space has to be created for a language to survive.

References


ABOUT THE PUBLISHING TEAM

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