

## Expressing Modality in Moroccan Arabic: From Auxiliation to Overauxiliation

**Mohamed ZNIBER**

Faculty of Letters and Humanities  
University Ibn Zohr, Morocco

### Abstract:

Moroccan Arabic Auxiliaries (M.A. Aux) constitute one of the grammatical categories in which the action of the dynamic synchrony is actively at work, renovating the collocational patterns and lexical stock of Moroccan Arabic (MA). The M.A. Aux are not directly involved in the making of "compound tenses" as this is the case in English with 'be' and 'have' or French with 'être' and 'avoir'. Referred to sometimes as Semi- auxiliaries (S-Aux) -and again, unlike English or French in which the number of Auxiliaries is fixed and their syntactic and semantic patterning clearly set, MA candidate forms outnumber their English and French counterparts and are involved actively in expressing modality in MA. In this paper, we will seek to explore how M.A. Aux express a multitude of semantic values, how they are identified; and mostly, how MA tolerate that more than a S-Aux may occur within the same sentence.

**Keywords:** Modality, Auxiliation, Overauxiliation, Moroccan Arabic

**Cite as:** ZNIBER, M. (2015). Expressing Modality in Moroccan Arabic: From Auxiliation to Overauxiliation. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (1).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no2.7>

## Introduction

This paper seeks to look into the category of verbs in Moroccan Arabic. More specifically, it investigates the combinations made with semi auxiliaries within the same sentence. Unlike English sentences in which only one modal verb is used, Moroccan Vernacular Arabic (MVA) sentences can amalgamate up to three semi auxiliaries before the head verb. This paper is organized as follows: First, it highlights morphological issues such as the inventory and typology in which these forms are delimited and classified. Later, the analysis focuses on how a succession of semi auxiliaries can generate syntactically and semantically correct sentences in MVA.

## Typology of Semi-auxiliaries in M.V.A.

The collected forms have been grouped on the basis of two principles. First, they are distinguished in terms of their class membership i.e. verbal or participial. The former, being the attested forms as in English or French, need to fulfil some requirements as order and aspect. Participles may also stand for semi-auxiliaries in some of their occurrences. In addition, there exist certain semi-auxiliaries which are said to be frozen. They are also categorized in the light of their semantic content. We count more than 70 forms that make up the inventory.

## Types and sub-categories

Verbal semi-auxiliaries have not been recognized in terms of their canonical structures in view of the fact that the listed forms are of miscellaneous types : atypical *ji*: “to come”, bi-consonantal *nuD*: “to rise” or tri-consonantal *Htaj*: “to need”. That’s why the subcategorization of these forms is based on semantic terms..

As to the participial forms, they are basically of two types either active or passive depending on the phonematic structure of the verb. Sometimes, only one form is available, while in others, the participle is even inexistent. *jay*: “coming”, bi-consonantal *nayeD*: “rising” or tri-consonantal *meHtaj*: “needing”. Finally, there are the so-called frozen forms and which are limited in number. The most salient candidate forms are *yemken* and *yeqDer*.

In broad terms, semi-auxiliaries have been categorized in a six-scale inventory. The subcategories include: verbs of volition (as in *b&i*: to want), verbs of possibility (as in *yamken*: can), necessity (as in *XeSS*: must), and ability (as in *yamken*: it is possible), verbs of cognition (as in *Xemmem*: to think), verbs expressing time (*ji*: to come) and forms expressing diverse attitudes, and frozen structures. However, M.V.A. is specifically characterized by some idiosyncratic properties. Verbs of movement are endowed with different meanings (polysemy). *m\$ i*: ‘to go’, for example, is identified as a verb of movement, but it may also designate an action which was on the verge to happen but did not. The following example is a case in point :

1- *m\$ a-t t-dir ksid-a dak n-nhar*

go (perf.) she she do (imperf.) accident a that the day.

The other day, she nearly had an accident.

2- *b&a i-mut meskin*

like (perf.) he he die (imperf.) poor

The poor! he is about to die.

### Delimitation tests

Following Youssi (1992: 73-75), the suggested tests have successfully allowed us to make such a distinction possible.

With respect to the topic of auxiliation in M.V.A., the forms collected as semi-auxiliaries occur in two-verb constructions. That's to say, the semi-auxiliary + head verb occur one next to the other. However, M.V.A. displays the same order to express a multitude of syntactic relations: coordination, subordination, relativization, etc. The following examples illustrate the multi-functions that the use of two-verb constructions underlie:

3- *m\$ā L-L-xarij ç\$er Snin hadi*

go (perf.) he to the abroad ten years now

He went abroad ten years ago.

(cont.) *qra # tzewwej # dar d-drari çad rjeç l-blad-u*

study (perf.) he marry (perf.) he do (perf) he the children then return (perf.) he to country his

He studied, married, and had children before he returned to his country.

The absence of the relator in M.V.A. has rendered the situation ambiguous as to whether the relation involved in two-verb constructions is really auxiliation or other types of verbal expansion.

In an attempt to solve this problem, (whether it is auxiliation or parataxis), three tests have been resorted to:

- **First, there is the principle of co-referentiality.** The need for a commonly-shared personal index between the two verb forms sets apart auxiliation from any other type of verbal expansion. (It fails in the treatment of participial semi-auxiliaries due to their quasi-nominal nature).
- **The second step will study the aspectual considerations** involved in the relation of auxiliation. It will deal, in particular, with the aspectual arrangements that each segment in two-verb constructions tolerates.
- **Finally, the elision test** has been conceived to determine the status of semi-auxiliaries and ultimately to distinguish them from main verbs.

Appended to this three-step examination will be a semantic factor. It consists of investigating the semantic constraints on the use of semi-auxiliaries. Prosodic features are sometimes of a paramount importance in the identification of the relation involved.

### Auxiliation and over-auxiliation

The phrase “over-auxiliation” is borrowed from Béneveniste (1974, 190), and it simply means that within the same Verb Phrase more than one S-Aux may occur, resulting thus in syntactic accretion and semantic complexity; as the French, e.g: *IL peut avoir chanté* “He could have sung”. In MA, it is possible to have more than one Semi-auxiliary(S-Aux) clauses. The question, however, is that of the maximal expansion and, correlatively, that of the semantic constraints underlying the patterning of the over-auxiliated forms in MA. Consider the following examples:

4- *bi-t n-bda n-Hki li-h ma jra fs-suq*  
 like (perf.) I start (imperf.) I tell (imperf.) to him what happen (perf.) it in the market  
 I wanted to start telling him what (had) happened at the market

5- *kan xeSS-ni n-T-TaSel bi-ha men qbel*  
 be (perf.) I need (perf.) I I contact (imperf.) with her from before  
 I should have contacted her before.

6- *Hetta l-iSanS well-at ta-tuHel t-dir-u*  
 Even the petrol become (perf.) she (rep.mod.) has difficulty (perf.) she she do (imperf.) it  
 She has difficulty (now) meeting even the cost of petrol.

The following formula sums up the ordinary syntactic relation involving more than one S-Aux:

$$F \# I = S\text{-Aux } 1 + S\text{-Aux } 2 + HV$$

On the other hand, there are, in addition to *kun*, certain S-Aux that are characterized by various degrees of freezing and by the substantial shift in their semantic contents such as *bda* “begin” (+Imperf)> “start”, “set out to”; *fut* “pass”, (+Pert); *m\$î* “go” (+Imperf.)> “be about to, be on the verge of”; *ji* “come” (+Imperf)> “decide, set off to do s.th.”; *nuD* “stand up” (+Imperf)> “determine”; *welli* “return” (+Perf./Imperf)> “become, be used to”; *çawed* “repeat” (+Perf) > “redo”, etc. The general pattern, therefore, is that of the use of the Imperf., with or without *ta*, after the first S-Aux,

7- *wellef-t n-çi\$ buHd-i*  
 be accustomed (perf.) I live (imperf.) alone  
 I have become used to living by myself.

Therefore, it is possible to expand the same sentence by introducing one or more S-Aux provided that the initial S-Aux conveys a continued or habit forming process. In the example (4), the S-Aux expresses an attitude. *wellef* is sub-categorized as a verb denoting a habitual and/or recurrent process.

$$F\# II = S\text{-Aux}1 + S\text{-Aux } 2 + HV(\text{ Imperf})$$

These patterns would be exemplified respectively as follows:

8- *welli-t wellef-t n-çi\$ buHd-i*  
 become (perf.) I be accustomed (perf.) I live (imperf.) alone  
 I have (eventually) become used to living by myself.

9- *xeSS-ni n-wellef n-çi\$ huHd-i*  
 need (perf.) I I be accustomed (imperf.) I live (imperf.) alone  
 I need to get accustomed to living by myself.

Even at this stage, the same sentences would accept further accretion if the added form were a true Aux such as: *kun* or any of the frozen forms:

10- *ken-t welli-t wellef-t n-çi\$ buHd-i*  
 be (perf.) I become (perf.) I be accustomed (perf.) I I live (imperf.) alone  
 I had become accustomed to living alone.

11- *yemken n-welli n- wellef n-çi\$ buHd-i*  
 Perhaps become (imperf) I be accustomed (imperf) I live (imperf) alone  
 Perhaps, I got accustomed to living alone.

The formula being

F# III = S-Aux 1 (perf) + S-Aux 2 (Imperf)+S-Aux 3 (imperf) + HV (imperf)

All in all, it can be stated that over-auxiliation is a current process in MA. It patterns temporal and modal phenomena into hierarchically ordered and related events vis-à-vis the pivotal HV. In addition to this dichotomy, there is the famous true Aux *kun* “be” and the frozen forms *yemken* and *yeqder* “it is possible”. Cases of over-auxiliation consist of the amalgamation of up to three verbal semi-auxiliaries plus the head verb (HV). The ordering of such a structure comes as follows:

<i>S-Aux.1</i>	<i>S-Aux.2</i>	<i>S-Aux.3</i>	<i>HV</i>
<i>kun</i>	<i>çawed</i>	(different attitudes)	
<i>yemken</i>	<i>welli</i>	<i>b&amp;i</i>	
<i>yeqder</i>	<i>bqa</i>	<i>xeSS</i>	
<i>etc.</i>	<i>bda</i>	<i>xemmem</i>	
	<i>nuD</i>	<i>etc.</i>	
	<i>etc.</i>		

Eventually, it ought to be noted that the participial form of the S-Aux may occur in any of the three positions above.

### Conclusion

Based on the evidence shown above, the category of semi auxiliaries expresses a multitude of modal values, as it is the case in English or to a lesser degree French. The difference; however, amounts to the degree of frozenness achieved in English. English modals are frozen structures in terms of syntactic and semantic features. Their MVA counterparts, on the other hand, are in the process of becoming frozen and; therefore, allow a more flexible patterning. They operate both as semi auxiliaries and verbs. Equally, MVA sentences may include up to three semi-auxiliaries. This specific feature has been referred to as overauxiliation.

**About the Author:**

Mohamed ZNIBER is a professor of Linguistics, Faculty of Letters and Humanities at University Ibn Zohr, Morocco. His research interests include: Sociolinguistics, Dialectology, applied linguistics, computational linguistics and Testing (English international certificates). He is a member of the association Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Moroccan Association of Teachers of English (MATE )

**References**

- Benvéniste, E. (1966/74). *Problèmes de linguistique générale 112*. Paris:Gualimard.
- Boyd, J. & Thome, J. (1969). The Semantics of Modal Auxiliaries . *Journal of Linguistics*, 5 : 57-75.
- Caubet D. (1993) *L'arabe marocain T.2 : Syntaxe et catégories* Paris-Louvain: Editions Peeters
- Chapin, P. (1973). "Quasi-Modals" *Journal of linguistics*, 9 : 1-9.
- Chatar Moumni N. (2012) "Negation in Moroccan Arabic: Scope and Focus". *Arabic Language and Linguistics*: 3-16
- Coates J. (1983).The Semantics of Modal Auxiliaries. London: Croom.Helm.
- Edmondson, J.& Flank, F., (1976). "Auxiliaries as Main Verbs Reconstdered". *Lingua*, 38: 109-123.
- Hakutani, Y. (1972). "English Modal Auxiliaries: Reconsideration *linguistics*, 90: 11-19.
- Hakutani, Y. (1978). "The Features of Modals in English". *Linguistics*, 209:59-69.
- Hakutani, Y & Hargis C. H.(1972). "The Syntax of Modal Constructions in English". *Lingua*, 38: 301-332.
- Harrel , R.S. (1962). *A Short Reference Grammar of Moroccan Arabic*. Washington: Georgetown University Press
- Kossuth, K. (1982). "Historical Implications of the Co-Occurence on Auxiliaries". *Lingua*, 56: 283-295.
- Marino, M. (1973). "A Feature Analysis of the Modal System of English". *Lingua*, 32: 309-323
- Mimouni, Z. (1997). *Noun and verb forms in Algerian Arabic: A Neuropsychological Study*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. University of Montreal.
- Ouhalla, J. (1993). " Verb movement and word order in Arabic" In Lightfoot, D. & Horstein, N. (eds.) *Verb Movement*, 41-72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Palmer, F.R. (1977). "Modals and Actuality" . *Journal of Linguistics*, 13: 1-23.
- Palmer, F.R. (1979a). "Why Auxiliaries are not Main Verbs". *Lingua*, 47: 1-25.
- Palmer, F.R. (1979b). *Modality and the English Modals*. London, Longman.
- Palmer, F.R. (1986). *Mood and Modality* . London: Cambridge University Press.
- Quirk R., Greenbaum S., Leech G. & Svartvic J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English language* . London: Longman.
- Ross, J. (1969). "Auxiliaries as Main Verbs" . *Studies in Philosophical Linguistics* 1: 77-102.
- Weinrich, H. (1989) .*Grammaire textuelle de Français* Paris: Didier
- Youssi, A. (1992). *Grammaire et lexique de l'arabe marocain moderne* Casablanca: Wallada
- Zniber, M. (2001). *Verb Phrase Modification in Moroccan Arabic*. Unpublished Doctorat national thesis. Rabat: Dept. of English