New insights on infixed -an(n)- in Iraqi Arabic dialects

Qasim Hassan

In the few studies conducted so far on infixed -an(n)- in Iraqi Arabic, only a small area in southern Iraq was explored. Ingham, in his pioneer research on south Iraqi Arabic, considers it a characteristic feature of the dialects spoken by the dwellers of the marshy and rural areas in southern Iraq. This point of view has been widely adopted in subsequent research dealing with this infix. However, much is yet to be investigated concerning its possible presence in dialect areas other than the southern one. In this paper, I will first argue that infixed -an(n)- is not exclusive for the so-called southern continuum, to follow Ingham’s terminology, but is a regular idiosyncrasy throughout the šrūği-dialectal area; second, I will show that this infix has crept into the remote qältu- and gält-dialects outside the šrūği-area.

Keywords: Iraqi Arabic, šrūği-dialectal area, šrūği-Arabic, qältu/gält-dialects, infixed –an(n)-

1. Introduction

To date, there exists little research on infixed -an(n)- in Iraqi Arabic (INF, henceforth), and if existent, then, most often, only in connection with the geographic origin and distribution of the participial infix in Eastern Arabia (Wilmsen and Al Muhairi 2020; Holes 2016, 2011; Ingham 2000, among others). As regards its geographic distribution in Iraq, INF is characteristic for the šrūği-dialectal area, with the majority of population following the Shi‘i faith of Islam, and thereby being an isogloss separating their dialects from the other gält-dialects spoken overwhelmingly by Sunni-Muslims in the non-šrūği-dialectal area.¹

Although there is no certainty about the origin of INF in šrūği-Arabic (Wilmsen and Al Muhairi 2020: 287; Holes 2016: 22-23), the sectarian-based split of the gält-dialects just introduced may tell us

¹ The šrūği-dialectal area refers to all gält-dialects spoken in southern Iraq and the Middle Euphrates area, whereas the non-šrūği one includes only the gält-dialects in the northern and western parts of the country. For more details on the split of the gält-dialects into šrūği- and non-šrūği, see Hassan (2020; 2021).
something about it. One would consequently assume that INF may be a vestige of a long-standing historical and religious ties of the Shi’i population in Iraq with that in BahRAIN and in the eastern province in Saudi Arabia. It should also borne in mind the frequent migratory movements of the tribes from Eastern Arabia to southern Iraq (Holes 2016: 6; 2011: 86, 92). Nowadays, some whole Shi’i tribes and families in the šrūgi-area claim descent from Bahrain, and some others claim to be indigenous Iraqis who previously settled in Bahrain and returned to the šrūgi-area some centuries later, but some remained.

Putting aside the demographic and sectarian aspects, Ingham (2007: 575; 2000: 127) considers it a contraction of the first person pronoun typical for south Iraqi Arabic. Since then, this kind of infixes has been considered an exclusive characteristic feature of the dialects spoken in southern Iraq (Wilmsen and Al Muhairi 2020: 287; Holes 2016: 23, etc.) and nothing has been hazarded on its possible presence in the other parts of the šrūgi-dialectal area, and possibly elsewhere in Iraq. The present paper gives a contribution in this direction by providing new insights on its geographic distribution within the šrūgi-dialectal area; light will also be thrown on its introduction into dialects outside the šrūgi-area. The material used throughout this paper is mainly based on the author’s knowledge of his own speech communities in both šrūgi- and non-šrūgi-dialectal areas.

2. Characteristic features of INF in Iraqi Arabic

INF exhibits certain characteristic features that merit particular consideration. Below, I will briefly demonstrate these features through examples from the colloquial speech in the šrūgi-dialectal area. One of its most distinctive features is its occurrence with only imperfective hollow and geminated verbs:

1. mā-šū-f-an šī
   NEG-1 see-INF thing
   'I do not see anything,'

2. aḥībb-an-hum killīš
   1 love-INF-3PL.M a_lot
   'I love them a lot.'

3. arid-an ākil
   1 want-INF I eat
'I want to eat.'

4. abūs-ann-ič  ib-ḥalg-ič
   l_kiss-INF-2SG.F  in_mouth-2SG.F
   'I kiss you on your mouth.'

However, there is no complete paradigm of INF in Iraqi Arabic and it thereby occurs solely in the first person singular. It is also worthy of note that INF is not obligatory in 1.-4. and can be omitted without changing the semantic value of the sentences:

5. mā-šūf-an  ši
   NEG-l_see-INF  thing
   'I do not see anything.'

6. aḥibb-an-hum  killiš
   l_love-INF-3.PL.M  a_lot
   'I love them a lot.'

7. arid-an  ākil
   l_want-INF  l_eat
   'I want to eat.'

8. abūs-ann-ič  ib-ḥalg-ič
   l_kiss-INF-2SG.F. in_mouth-2SG.F
   'I kiss you on your mouth.'

Interestingly, INF may also occur in imperfective non-hollow and non-geminated verbs, but only if an object suffix comes directly afterward:

9. aṣīrb-*an)  aṣīrb-ann-ah
   l_drink-INF-3SG.M
   'I drink it.'
Qasim Hassan – New insights on infixed -an(n)- in Iraqi Arabic dialects

10. asim’-*(an) asim’-an-ha
   I_hear-INF-3SG.F
   ‘I hear her.’

11. akitl-*(an) akitl-ann-ah
    I_kill-INF-3SG.M
    ‘I kill him.’

12. aškr-*(an) aškr-ann-ah
    I_thank-INF-3SG.M
    ‘I thank him.’

Moreover, INF in 9.-12. is omitted in imperfective non-hollow and non-geminated verbs when the verb is negated by the circumfix mā-…-š, as in 13.-16. respectively, but it is allowed in negated geminated and hollow verbs, as in 17.-20. below:

13. mā-šrab-*(an)-hā-š
    NEG-I_drink-INF-3SG.F-NEG
    ‘I do not drink it.’

14. mā-sama’-*(an)-hū-š
    NEG-I_hear-INF-3SG.M-NEG
    ‘I do not hear it/him.’

15. mā-ktīl-*(an)-hū-š
    NEG-I_kill-INF-3SG.M-NEG
    ‘I do not kill him.’

16. mā-šikr-*(an)-hū-š
    NEG-I_thank-INF-3SG.M-NEG
    ‘I thank him.’
17. mā-ḏīl-ann-īš
   NEG-I_stay-INF-NEG
   'I do not stay.'

18. mā-šūf-an-hū-š
   NEG-I_see-INF-3SG.M-NEG
   'I do not see it/him.'

19. mā-ridd-an-hū-š
   NEG-I_send back-INF-3SG.M-NEG
   'I do not send it/him back.'

20. mā-zūr-an-hū-š
   NEG-I_visit-INF-3SG.M-NEG
   'I do not visit it/him.'

Notably, INF can also occur with or without an object suffix on more than one verb in a sentence (21., 22.):

21. arīd-an  aḡūl-an
    I_want-INF  I_say-INF
    'I would like to say.'

22. arīd-an  arūḥ-an  aḡīb-an  ēl-ḥalāl
    I_want-INF  I_go-INF  I_brain-INF  ART-cattle
    'I want to go to bring the cattle.'

3. The geographic distribution of INF in the šrūgī dialectal area

This section seeks to show that INF is an inherent feature in the šrūgī-dialectal area (Map 1), and can therefore be easily observed in the everyday speech of everyone in rural and urban areas alike. However, before an attempt is made to explain this, it should be noted that INF is generally considered a rural feature, but nevertheless still common in the speech of urban dwellers with rural backgrounds. Being rural and being thereby stigmatized as being a low and old-fashioned variety of speech, people
of rural origin avoid using it in towns. However, there are still numerous cases where INF is clearly recognizable in the speech of urban dwellers of rural origin despite every effort to switch to urban features.

Map 1. The distribution of INF in the šrūgi-dialectal area

Below are some selected lines of colloquial poems from different parts of the šrūgi-dialectal area, particularly from outside the southern continuum, in which the use of INF is easily observable. It must be emphasized once again, however, that the use of INF in the lines below is not to add a 'southern color' to the poem, but a common practice throughout the entire šrūgi-dialectal area. The first three examples (23.-25.) are taken from orally transmitted poetry from the western part of the šrūgi-dialectal area beyond Samāwa and Kūt, particularly from the Middle Euphrates area. The other five (26.-30.), on the other hand, from the very southern part of the area:

23. xāf  īmr-ṣgīl-ān  āh  tiṣṣammat  i’dā-y
    maybe when-1_say-INF ouch  rejoice  enemy-1SG
    'My enemy may rejoice my misfortune when I groan.'

---

2 According to Ingham (1994: 93), the so-called southern continuum ends by Kūt on the Tigris and Samāwa on the Euphrates. Hassan (2020, 2021) extended this continuum to include the šrūgi-dialects beyond Samāwa and Kūt as far as Baghdad.
24. ğēt ašūf-an salwit-i wi-tšūf ǧarh-i wēn-ah
   I_came I_see-INF beloved-1SG and-she_sees wound-1SG where-3SG.M
   ‘I came to see my beloved and she sees where my wound is.’

25. ašha w-amūt-an w-antišir
   I_wake_up and-I_die-INF and-I_get_up
   ‘I wake up, die, and get up again.’

26. gaļb-i mā’ afith-ann-ah
   heart-1SG NEG-I_open-INF-3SG.M
   ‘I do not open my heart.’

27. aših-an b-i wa-ṭird-ann-ah
   I_shout-INF at-3SG.M and-I_threw_out-INF-3SG.M
   ‘I shout at him and threw him out.’

28. xifit askit wa-ṭam’-ann-ah
   I_feared I_keep_silent and-make_greedy-INF-3SG.M
   ‘I thought I make him greedy when I keep silent.’

29. šāhib čān il-i wa-ḥibb-ann-ah
   friend he_was to-1SG and-I_love-INF-3SG.M
   ‘He was my friend and I liked him.’

30. yinām ib-nōmt-i wa-g’id wa-ga’d-ann-ah
   he_sleeps in_sleep-1SG and-I_wake_up and-I_wake_up-INF-3SG.M
   ‘He sleeps when I sleep, and I wake him up, when I wake up.’

Often enough, INF is used to an extent that it occurs repeatedly at the end of each line of a rhymed poem. The poem below\(^3\) is an example:

\(^3\) The poem is available (first 32 seconds) at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1-fxnWO_Tc.
31. mā-ṭaṣr il-ḥaṭi w-bi-ḥīf-i aḥimm-ann-ah
NEG-L.scatter ART-speech and-in-hands-1SG 1_collect-INF-3SG.M
‘... I do not scatter words, but I collect them with my hands.’

w-ṣidīg-i aʿāt-b-a w-marrāt aḍimm-ann-ah
and-friend-1SG 1_grumble-3SG.M and-sometimes 1_criticize-INF-3SG.M
‘... and I grumble my friend, and sometimes I criticize him.’

mūš ib-bāṭil ib-maʿrūf awalm-ann-ah
NEG in-untruth in-favor 1_agree-INF-3SG.M
‘... I agree with him in good things, not in bad things.’

kūn-ah bi-l-xašim ‘anbar wa-šimm-ann-ah
to_be-3SG.M in-ART-nose odor and-I_smell-INF-3SG.M
‘... May he be amber in the nose, so I can smell it.’

giddām iʿrub-ah w-ṣidgān-ah aṣaym-ann-ah
in_front_of relatives-3SG.M and-friends-3SG.M 1_praise-INF-3SG.M
‘... I praise him in presence of his relatives and friends.’

In the light of the above, it seems that INF is a regular idiosyncrasy in everyday and poetic speech throughout the entire šrūği-dialectal area, and that its use outside the so-called southern continuum is not an imitation of the poetic conventions of the šrūği poetry.

4. The geographic distribution of INF outside the šrūği-dialectal area
It is worthwhile to point out at the outset that the use of INF outside the šrūği-dialectal area is not new at all. However, unlike the case with the šrūği-area, its use in the non-šrūği one is exclusively limited to oral colloquial poetry.4 It is in general rather hard to find a colloquial poem without a ‘southern poetic

---

4 An exception to this is Wādī Ḥaḡar, a residential quarter on the right bank of the Tigris in Mosul. This quarter has been found in the seventies of the last century to be home to, among others, šrūği-soldiers at a nearby army-training center. Most soldiers and their families preserved their šrūği-features, including INF, and they choose to settle permanently in the quarter, forming
color’ outside the šrūgi-dialectal area, including the adoption of INF. The first four lines below are from Mosul, a qāltu-dialectal area in northern Iraq, the other two are from the non-šrūgi-dialectal area in Al-Anbār in western Iraq (Map 2):

32. *w-agīl-l-ak* bi-l-’aḥiss-an *w-inta* hamm *gil-l-i*
   and-I say-to-2SG.M in-ART-I feel-INF and-you.M too say-to-1SG
   ‘...and I tell you what I am feeling, and you tell me too.’

33. *w-iddā* b-gaḥb-ak a’īš-an faqat ya-l-maḥbūb
   and-if in-heart-2SG.M I live-INF only oh-ART-beloved
   ‘...and if only I live in your heart, oh my beloved.’

34. *w-yiḏḑāhar* arīd-amn-ah ʾla-rūḥ-ah
   and-he_accepts I want-INF-3SG.M against-soul-3SG.M
   ‘...and I want him to protest against himself.’

35. *gilīt-l-ak* rāḥ arāḥ-an
   I said-to-2SG.M he_went I leave-INF
   ‘...I said to you that I am leaving.’

36. *w-ʿal gāʾ* aḏill-an činit
   and-on ground I remain-INF I was
   ‘...and I remained on the ground.’

37. *amūt-an* lō šīfīt diḡla bilā māy
   I die-INF when I saw Tigris without water
   ‘...and I die when I see the Tigris without water.’

*Sprachinsel* surrounded by qāltu-communities. However, over time, INF has almost disappeared in this area for being socially stigmatized as a šrūgi-feature.
More than this, colloquial poets in the non-šrūgi dialectal area, be they galat- or qalṭu-speakers, have adopted the native šrūgi-poetic recitation forms and body movements, which are usually central to oral performance.

5. Conclusion

One purpose of this paper is to provide a clear picture of the geographic distribution of INF in Iraqi Arabic. As shown by the examples given in this paper, INF is not exclusive to the southern part of the šrūgi-dialectal area, as supposed by Ingham, but also to all areas where šrūgi-Arabic is spoken. A further purpose is to ascertain the use of this infix outside the šrūgi-dialectal area, namely in qalṭu- and galat-colloquial poetry in western and northern Iraq. It is in this regard worthwhile to note that, beside INF, a number of other šrūgi-features have recently been entered into the colloquial poetry outside the šrūgi-dialectal area. Among these features are the use of the discontinuous negation with mā-...-š, such as in mā-šifīthū-š ‘I did not see him’ and the employment of the palatal approximant /y/, which is usually pronounced as the voiced affricate /ǧ/ in this area.
Abbreviations

ART    Article
F      Feminine
INF    Infix
M      Masculine
NEG    Negative
PL     Plural
SG     Singular

References


Qasim Hassan holds PhD in General Linguistics from the University of Wuppertal/Germany. He is currently member of the College of Arts, University of Basra, Iraq. His major interests lay in Arabic linguistics and Iraqi Arabic dialectology. He published numerous papers in journals and conference proceedings. He can be reached at: q558288@gmail.com