

A diachronic and comparative analysis of spirantization in the Amazigh language

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Spirantization is a process that takes place in many languages of the world. Some fairly well known languages belonging to the Germanic, Romance, Hellenic groups of Indo-European, as well as to Finno-Ugric (Viz. Finnish) and Semitic families (Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew) exhibit the process. The process is also found in the Amazigh language.

The aim of this paper is to provide a diachronic and comparative analysis of the process in Amazigh in general and in the Beni Iznassen variety in particular. This is mainly done within the theory of Transformational Generative Phonology and its offshoots. The investigation will also take into consideration the sociolinguistic factors namely bilingualism and language contact and its impact on the Amazigh community and its language. A brief account of the process is also given for the Amazigh language in general. Reference is also made to Spanish, Aramaic, and Hebrew as they compare well to the Amazigh case.

The discussion of the process in these languages will, indeed, provide the background for the discussion of the phenomenon in Amazigh.

The questions addressed are:

- (i) what are the segments undergoing the process in Amazigh?*
- (ii) What are the conditioning factors for the process?*
- (iii) What are the different degrees of change?*
- (iv) What are the inhibiting factors for the process in Amazigh?*
- (v) What is the motivation for the process?*
- (vi) Is the process still productive in Amazigh?*

The answers to all these questions will surely shed light on the Amazigh phonology. The question about the productivity of the process will, indeed, help solve an important issue in the Amazigh spirantizing lects, which concerns the positing of the underlying phonemes. They will also reveal that despite the particularities of the Amazigh language, the process is motivated by the same tendency that exists in the other languages of the world, namely weakening. The comparison with the other spirantizing languages will allow us to establish a conditioning environment for the process in Amazigh.