Nouns

5.1 General Remarks

5.1.1 Formal Properties of Nouns
The formal properties of nouns in CDZ are the gender, i.e. masculine and feminine; and number, i.e. singular and plural. Gender distinction holds, however, for the sg. only, with both the masculine and feminine nouns taking the same maker of the pl. Although some suffixes of the plural number are attested only on nouns which are feminine in the sg., such as the substantivised participles with the pl. suffix -yate, derived from the earlier pl.f. *-yāṯā, such nouns can still be analysed on the synchronic level as a lexical sub-group taking a particular pl. suffix rather than a productive category of pl. feminine gender. In addition, taking the adjective as “the real exponent of gender” (Kuryłowicz 1972, 145), common gender of adjectives in the pl. in CDZ indicates that also nouns have in the pl. gender only.

5.1.2 Noun Endings
The majority of native words, as well as the adapted loans have in the sg. the ending -a, derived from the earlier Aramaic definite (or emphatic) state, e.g.: *kāṯāḇ (absolute state)→ *kṯāḇā (definite state)→ čtawa ‘book, letter’. Feminine singular nouns are usually marked for gender by the /t/ element preceding the ending, thus -ta, e.g.: taw̱erta ‘cow’. This ending can also be traced back to the definite state in earlier Aramaic, e.g.: *tawrā (absolute state)→ *tawrəṯā (definite state)→ taw̱erta. The marker of the plural number is -e, derived from the earlier Aramaic definite state pl.m. marker, e.g.: *kāṯē→ čtwe ‘books, letters’. Later on, this ending was extended to nouns which are feminine in the sg., e.g.: sg.f. taw̱erta→ pl. taw̱eryate ‘cows’ vs. Class. Syr. pl.f. taw̱eryāṯā. The ending -e is at the same time the plural suffix on many of the nouns, although the plural morpheme can be realised by a number of forms. The distribution of these forms is predictable to a variable extent, some being restricted to certain classes of nouns, like substantivised active participles or agent nouns. In other cases, the form of the plural suffix is lexicalised.
5.1.3 Loanwords

5.1.3.1 The Status of Loanwords

Next to the native Aramaic stock, the lexicon of CDZ encompasses numerous loanwords. These come mainly from Arabic, Azerbaijani Turkish and Kurdish/Persian. More recent loans appeared in CDZ due to contact with the languages spoken in the diaspora where the speakers live like English¹ or Swedish.

What is here regarded as a loan is a word which entered the language at an undocumented stage and which is not attested for the literary variants of earlier Aramaic, i.e. Classical Syriac or Jewish Babylonian Aramaic. In addition, loanwords often display characteristic features of foreign phonology and morphology. Thus, the presence of a phoneme otherwise not attested in CDZ renders the word a loan, e.g.: the pharyngeal /ʿ/ in ḏīfāʿ ‘defence’ clearly indicates the Arabic origin. Similarly, the formation of the plural not attested with native Aramaic lexical item also allows to classify the word as foreign, e.g.: kul-liyat pl. <Ar. kulliyāt ‘colleges’.

It has to be recognised that indicating the donor language for CDZ by no means determines the primary source of the word. Establishing with certainty the etymology of many loans is difficult, or indeed impossible, especially since between varieties of a language continuum, (and CDZ belongs to one, see Introduction), lexical items travel quite freely. The remarks about the source of the borrowing should, then, be treated as a suggestion only. As well as this, not all possible loanwords are marked as such in the present work, but only those for which the etymology can be identified with a degree of certainty.

5.1.3.2 Endings and Inflection of Loanwords

Loanwords in CDZ exhibit some peculiarities as to gender and inflection, depending on the degree of adaptation to native morphology and phonology. This degree is further related to the extent of exposure of a particular speaker to the surrounding languages. The fluctuation is most commonly instantiated by the varying gender and the plural form of the loan. For example, the speakers who are well conversant with Arabic treat the word mánṭaqa as feminine and provide two plurals, i.e. the broken Arabic plural manāṭiq> manatāq next to mánṭaqe, with the usual in CDZ plural suffix -e. Others treat mánṭaqa as masculine and employ only the plural in -e. This situation could be compared with the status the Arabic loanwords have in Kurdish, illustrated by fluctuations of gender (MacKenzie 1954, 530).

¹ Some English words appeared in CDZ also earlier through the contact with the British in the Leves and during the British mandate after WWI.