Since the middle of the 17th century, there has been a thriving Muslim community in South Africa. The first Muslims to arrive in the Cape Colony were free people from Malaysia and the Indonesian archipelago, the so-called Mardijckers; they were joined by deportees and political exiles from the Dutch East Indies. At a later stage, larger numbers of Muslims were brought in as slaves and labourers from India and South Asia. In addition, many members of the Black community in South Africa converted to Islam. Collectively, the Muslims in the Cape were sometimes called ‘Cape-Malays,’ although the majority of them had no connection with Malaysia at all. By the 19th century a rich scholarly tradition had been established in the Muslim communities, initially based on texts written in Arabic and/or Malay. In the second half of the 19th century, however, many scholars started to write their treatises in Afrikaans, often transcribed in Arabic script.

Afrikaans is a variety of the Dutch language that was brought by the colonists who founded the Cape Colony in 1652. Their language was taken over in creolized form by some of the inhabitants, who spoke Khoisan or Bantu languages. Although Afrikaans was the language variety spoken by the White and part of the Black population, Dutch remained the standard language of the Cape Colony until 1925, when Afrikaans was recognized as an official language. There is a fierce controversy, fuelled by ideological considerations, about the extent to which this standard form of Afrikaans is based on the creolized variety or represents a somewhat modified version of the Dutch language.

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1 I wish to thank my former student Iris Hoedemaekers, who collected a large number of photocopies of Arabic-Afrikaans literature during her stay in South Africa in 2005, among them the text of the grammar analyzed in the present article. In her M.A. thesis, Hoedemaekers (2006) presented an analysis of the writing system and the language of these works, see also Hoedemaekers and Versteegh (2009). I also thank my former colleague Abdulkader Tayob, now professor at University of Cape Town for helping me to procure some of the literature for this article and for his enthusiastic support of this research.

2 On the use of this label in the Cape Colony, see Stell (2007: 90, 93); Stell et al. (2007: 291–293).

3 Davids (1980).

4 Valkhoff (1972); Van Rensburg (1989).
In the Muslim communities in South Africa, various languages were used, depending on the group. Indian Muslims spoke Urdu or one of the other Indian languages, such as Gujarati, while the ‘Malays’ used Malay. These languages remained in use for some time within the family. But when the members of these communities started to use Afrikaans outside their homes, it soon became the first language for many Muslims. By the end of the 19th century, Malay was no longer used in the schools and mosques and had been replaced by Afrikaans as the main language of instruction in the Muslim communities. When the ban on Islamic teaching was lifted in the Cape Colony in 1804, with the granting of religious freedom to all communities, local sheikhs started to organize public instruction for Muslims and wrote treatises for the school curriculum. Arabic, of course, had a special position as the holy language of Islam, which it has retained till today. But it was a language learnt in the schools, where teaching took place in Afrikaans, the language that the various groups of Muslims had in common.

The Muslim authors who started to write Afrikaans may have been the first to write this language, using Arabic script. The Afrikaans spoken by Muslims had characteristics that set it apart from the Afrikaans of the non-Muslim population of the Cape. While for the other speakers of Afrikaans Dutch remained a target, for the Muslims Afrikaans became their new language, without any ties with Dutch. The use of Afrikaans as the lingua franca of the Muslim communities may have been instrumental in developing a new Afrikaans standard, especially so after the use of the Arabic script was discontinued and the language was written with the Latin alphabet.

The Arabic alphabet as used in the Muslim Afrikaans literature (often called Arabic-Afrikaans) exhibits various special features, the most conspicuous of which is the presence of additional consonants and the consistent notation of all vowels. For the Afrikaans consonants \( p, \ ng, \ tj, \ v \) new letters were added to the alphabet, borrowed either from the Jawi script that was used to write Malay, or, at a later stage, from Ottoman Turkish. The influence of the Ottoman Turkish script, visible for instance in the transcription of Afrikaans \( p \) with \( bāʾ \) with three subscript dots, rather than \( fāʾ \) with three superscript dots, may be explained by the fact that one of the first writers of Arabic-Afrikaans literature, Abu Bakr Effendi (ca. 1835–1880), was an Ottoman emissary to the Cape Colony, and that some of the Arabic-Afrikaans books had been printed in Istanbul.