

Note songs for handclapping games

Douar Ouaraben, Morocco, handclapping games, 3.2007, 2.50 minutes

1. « sub a a a, sub o o o » : 1.55 minute

2. « un deux tre » : 55 seconds

Recorded with a digital photo camera by Khalija Jariaa

1. sub a a a sub o o o :

The children who are playing belong to the very broad Amazigh group of populations to which also the Tuareg belong. Amazigh is the official name now used in Morocco but otherwise the name Berber was and is often used.

Amazigh is the name of the ethnic group in their own language(s) and Berber is seen as a pejorative name coming from the Barbarians and possibly taken over by the Arabs from the Greek and later Roman name for the indigenous people of Northern Africa. At home the children seen on the video speak Tachelhit, one of the three Amazigh languages in Morocco. Tachelhit is spoken in the region of Agadir (Souss) and in the Anti-Atlas.

The song itself is sung in Moroccan Arabic (called Darija). As soon as the children go to primary school they learn Arabic as this is the language of teaching. However, before that they certainly learn some of it on the street and with other Darija-speaking children living in the same village or quarter, especially in a village like Douar Ouaraben that is close to and actually being incorporated in the town of Tiznit. In towns both languages are heard most of the time. So a lot of children speaking Tachelhit at home quickly become more or less bilingual. I think it is nowadays only in somewhat isolated villages that Amazigh children have little (for example if there is television) or no contact with Moroccan Arabic before they go to primary school.

Khalija explains that there normally is first a game or a ‘tirage au sort’ (choosing by chance) to decide who will be the leaders for the game “sub aaa sub ooo” (I am giving this name to the handclapping game not the children). She mentions two examples:

1. A game of hide and seek is played. The one who has to be searching the others is indicated by for example a random counting to 10, the one who is indicated when arriving at the number 10 is the ‘it’. In the play area a stone is put on another stone, the players hide and then the search for them starts. The first two who can hit the two stones on one another before being taken or touched by the ‘it’ will be the leaders of the game “sub aaa sub ooo”.

2. The second way is to write the name of the players on a piece of paper and having a small child taking out of the heap two pieces of paper and those whose name is written on the paper are the two leaders. Similar ways exist based on using other supports e.g. each player choosing some object and pooling these together.

When making the translation with Khalija of the song « sub a a a, sub o o o » it became evident that this is only the beginning of the singing game. The song is sung in Moroccan Arabic.

The translation is as follows:

Who did open the frigidaire?

And who has stolen the apple?

Adila sirwala (no concrete meaning but could be the name of someone)

Sub a a a sub o o o - Sub a a a sub o o o (no concrete meaning)

The sign stop

This is not the end of the game. When “stop” has been said then all players must keep their mouth shut. If one opens the mouth or shows one’s teeth then this player must sit down on all fours. The other players put their hands one above the other on this girl or boy’s back who is then asked “who’s hand is on top” if she or he guesses wrong the players hit the kneeling one’s back and this player is excluded.

When there are only two players left a new phase in the game occurs as the other players are divided in two groups that will belong to the camp of one of these two players. This is done as follows: the two last players walk at some distance and decide what fruit (e.g. grapes and oranges) they choose but without the other players being able to hear them. The two players return to the group of waiting players, stand one in front of the other and join hands. Then each player being held between the two player’s arms must choose for example if she or he likes grapes or oranges and according to this choice must join the camp of the grapes or the camp of the oranges. Finally, a line is drawn on the ground and the grapes camp and the oranges camp try to pull the other group of players, holding each other by hands, over the line.