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COMPLEXITY OF LINGUISTIC CHANGE AS REFLECTED IN ARABIC DIALECTS

Language is always presented to us as an act of speech, or as a text, produced by a speaker or a writer in a given situational context. It must be performed before it can be analyzed. Language as speech operates on several levels, including a psychological one, and is constantly submitted to the process of change.

The organic character of language implies a) that a linguistic description should be based on empirical data, and b) that there shall be available as much field work as possible, because only in the authentic setting do we get complete information about the language, the text being naturally linguistically and socially integrated. Having collected the appropriate material, and not before, we may proceed to the postulation of theories.

However, polarization should not be made between theory and practice but between a mechanistic approach to language and one of "dynamic interpretation", in which as many clues as possible are collected from the speech/text and each conceptual entity defined and registered before the analysis proper.

For the description of the history of any language, it is essential to remember that language is a social behaviour. The development of the language is not mechanical, but a dynamic interaction between the telos, the temporarily arrested structure, interferences and performance behaviour (cf. SHAPIRO 1991, p. 4ff.)

Compared with the number of field studies focusing on one separate Arabic dialect and mostly limited to phonology and morphology, studies in the history of Arabic language and factors underlying linguistic change are few, especially syntactic ones.

For the study of change in Arabic, modern field research is indispensable, since written sources for Arabic in change are almost exclusively indirect, due to the frozen grammar of Standard Arabic. The importance of milieu in general as far as Arabic is concerned can hardly be overrated. The differences between Jahiliyya Arabic and New Arabic appear to a great extent as a historical shift from a tribal/semi-nomadic society to a settled society with ethnic plurality. Since the period of the Islamic conquests, basic structural linguistic differences are to be found between the settled (urban, rural) communities and the nomadic communities. Secondly, there is the diglossia situation, socially conditioned, between the static high language variant and the productive low variant. Modern field investigations reveal an ever increasing number of operation principles behind socio-geographical and elitistic code switching.

An early investigation based on textual analysis is PALVA (1969), showing the mixture of high and low language variety in spontaneous speech. PALVA (1982), by examining contemporary texts from the Syro-Palestine area, throws light on the ongoing process of change in Arabic: how provincial features become obsolete in competition with the prestigious urban dialects, from which single isoglosses spread in waves, and how dialectal features identified with the urban centres tend to be more attractive than the elitistic alternatives from Standard Arabic; the combined result of the factors being a certain koineization, a set of features different from the local dialects and also from Standard Arabic. Contemporary relations between the intricate distribution of isoglosses and population movements among the nomadic tribes of Saudi Arabia and Iraq facilitates the understanding of teleological and socially conditioned change in Old Arabic (INGHAM 1982). (For the present result of population movements and dialect levelling generally in Palestine and Jordan, see PALVA 1984; for Bahrain, see HOLES 1983; for the effect on a Jordanian village community, see PALVA 1994; also CADORA 1992.)

A mechanical view of the development of language and a lack of understanding of the complexity of language have sometimes led to confusion concerning the question of the emergence of New Arabic. Several lists have been presented which show points in common for New Arabic but lacking in Old Arabic. FERGUSON's idea of a military koine as a basis for New Arabic (FERGUSON 1959) has attracted much attention and also met with much opposition. A similar reception was bestowed on the attempt by VERSTEEGH (1984) to explain New Arabic as a result of pidginization and creolization. Notwithstanding the value of these highly stimulating ideas, they defined the material to be studied as a set of features occurring in New Arabic but not in Old Arabic and, since they preferred to view these features without any time dimension and as somehow belonging together, they ended up by having to invent fictive language strata such as the koine and the pidgin variant. Nobody has been able to prove that such strata ever existed. BLAU (1965) and BLOCH (1992) warn against the ready assumption of similar developments as being related to each other and point out the possibility of parallel developments occurring independently of each other in the dialects. FERGUSON (1989, p. 8), arguing against the creolization theory of VERSTEEGH, now maintains that "the only satisfactory procedure is to investigate particular sets of phenomena on their own merits, piecing together the fragmentary evidence and calling upon general principles of language change when relevant".

Thirty-four features are indiscriminately put together as typical neologisms not occurring in Jahiliyya Arabic (VERSTEEGH 1984, p. 20f.). Those features must be adequately regrouped according to different structural levels and periods of time: nomadic / sedentary (urban); written / oral; high variety / low variety; the time factor, before vs. after the Islamic conquests, and change over time, from the Islamic conquest to modern times.

One important group of these features are those known or suspected to have appeared already in the Jahiliyya period. They are phonetic or morphophonetic: the loss of the glottal stop and the assimilation of the feminine endings into *-a* (evident from Qur'anic spelling); the reduction of the opposition *i - u*: frequent double representations in the lexicon of Classical Arabic between *i*, *u*, and \emptyset indicate that the opposition was weak

from early times but lexicalized by the ambitious philologists (DIEM 1978, p. 130). In this connection it may be mentioned that stress patterns show the diversity of Arabic because, since stress shifts from place to place in modern Arabic, the vowels reduced differ and new vowels, even full ones able to take stress, are inserted. This is the result either of re-shuffling over time and/or of a basic vagueness of prosodic stress in Old Arabic. The tendency to re-analyze two-radical nouns as three-radicals must be a process over time; this process is known to have been productive from the time of proto-Semitic.

"The partial or complete disappearance of the *-h* in the pronominal suffix of the 3rd person masc. after consonants" (nr. 16 in VERSTEEGH 1984, p. 20f.): this statement must be rephrased. Today, we have a number of morphemes for the 3 MS suffix, especially among the nomads of the Arabian Peninsula and the Syrian Desert. The phenomenon is in all probability inherited from Old Arabic. In any case, it is not a sign of the unity of New Arabic and certainly not a sedentary feature but a feature showing the diversity of both nomadic and sedentary dialects.

For Old Arabic, we now claim to know that a large number of regional dialects or subdialects existed prior to the written evidence of the establishment of Old Arabic in its pseudo-classical form (BEESTON 1981): this continuum of dialects with its fluctuations and shifts we should courageously admit to be the origin of Old Arabic, instead of looking for the miraculous missing dialect or koine form.

A group of features indicate reduction of morphological forms, reduction of the marking of verbs and pronouns for gender or plural (the dual, the feminine marking in plural), reduction of the number of verb forms, reduction of agreement rules, towards economy and away from redundancy. The development has gone further among sedentary dialects than among nomadic ones. Only the disappearance of the dual from verbs and pronouns is a completed process, the other features fluctuate according to insufficiently known variables. These types of reductions and restrictions are typical of Semitic languages in general and thus reflect the general drift of the language. The present fluctuation makes it improbable that the change should be the outcome of the conquest period; it looks more like a slow change over time. The syntactic rules of Classical Arabic may never have been rigorously applied. It is quite probable that what we see reflected is the difference between written and spoken language, the dialects, of course, always reflecting only the spoken language. FERGUSON (1989) shows that number and agreement are submitted to a reduction of form in accordance with general drift but also to a restructuring according to a complex combination of semantic and syntactic patterning partially explained by conceptual universals.

A typologically important set of features are those syntactic innovations marked not by reduction but by lexical extension, by the addition of particles carrying different syntactic functions. They, too, are usually regarded as examples of general drift and of the analytic trend in New Arabic. However, it may be that we should distinguish between the telos of Arabic and the general drift of Semitic languages (SHAPIRO 1991, p. 49f.).

One such feature is the analytic expression of the genitive with the help of particular genitive exponents. My investigation of the modern dialectal texts (EKSELL HARNING 1980)

showed the choice between analytic and synthetic genitive to be operative on several levels of the text, dependent on phonetic, syntactic, semantic and stylistic factors, the choice influenced by the socio-geographical and social surrounding, by a teleological ambition towards economy, and by an otherwise little noted semantic structuring, altogether a complex net of coactive and competing factors. The AG is able to expand semantically into different sorts of relations with genitive exponents etymologically derived from relative particles but semantically restricted with exponents derived from nouns meaning "belonging" (EKSELL 1984).

In most dialects, the choice between the analytic and synthetic genitive is ultimately a subjective one on behalf of the speaker in the actual situation, within the given constraints imposed by the language structure. The analytic genitive is often used for rhetoric emphasis (MUNZEL 1949). Its use cannot be understood without interpreting the total act of speech. I believe the origin of the substantival genitive exponents to be a pidgin feature, but the total development of the genitive is a complex process. It is certainly insufficient to regard it simply as a drift phenomenon (FERGUSON 1989, p. 7), or as being merely a function of the variables alienable-inalienable (DIEM 1986). The investigation showed the demand for text recordings carefully organized with regard to the contextual situation.

Another feature, not mentioned by VERSTEEGH, is the introduction of an object with the help of an anticipatory pronoun suffix + the object marker *l-*. This feature is known from Iraq, especially qəltu dialects and from parts of the Syrian territory. It is often assumed to be an Aramaic substrate. The construction is not very common and, in general, we do not know what are the criteria for choosing it. However, LEVIN (1987) shows that in Galilee, the construction is preferred by the speaker for reasons of emphasis or for expressing an emotion. We note again the subjective component in the (ongoing) process of typological change.

The remaining part of this article concerns the verbal system. The following features are listed as innovations in the dialects: 1) the introduction of a verbal particle for the present durative, 2) the use of serial verbs, *qa 'ad, qām* etc., 3) the expansion of modal expressions through the use of pseudo-verbs (*lazim, bidd-*). Such particles may be typical pidgin features. As for the development of the temporal and modal possibilities of the verbal system, it is not restricted to pidgin. In the case of Arabic, these innovations fill out an empty space in the verbal system. Also, it is clear from the existing evidence that this is a partially developed and probably ongoing process.

Again, the development reflects an intricate and complicated pattern, dominated on the one hand by the general drift of innovating the verbal system in Semitic and, on the other hand, by local divergences. The general drift is primarily reflected in the renewal of the prefix conjugation. This renewal is defined as a "renewal of the cursive aspect" according to RUNDGREN (1963, e.g. p. 78), and according to COHEN (1984, e.g. pp. 281, 587), as an innovation of the prefix conjugation as shifting from the basic significance of "inaccompli" to that of "concomitance", allowing for further differentiation of tense and mode. (For a presentation of the appropriate linguistic properties in Semitic within this theoretical frame, see ISAKSSON 1987, pp. 11-38.)

Although this development does have starting points in OA, especially concerning the differentiation between the indicative and the subordinated moods, and the more or less grammaticalized use of serial verbs (WRIGHT 1971, II, p. 106ff., esp. p. 108D), we would do well to concentrate on the present situation in the dialects. It is briefly summarized in FISCHER/JASTROW (1980, pp. 74ff.): the perfect indicates "abgeschlossener Sachverhalt" (as aspect) and "Vergangenheit" (as tense), the imperfect indicates "nicht abgeschlossenes Geschehen" and "Gegenwart" and "Zukunft". The active participle belongs partly to the verbal system (to some degree dependent on *Aktionsarten*). All dialects make use of auxiliaries and verbal modifiers "wenn auch in unterschiedlichen Umfang ... um eine weitere Differenzierung des Tempussystems zu erreichen".

Already at this point questions accumulate: what are the actual representations of the cursive aspect / concomitance? Are perfect and imperfect aspect or tense or both, in which case, is one or the other predominant? Where do the *Aktionsarten* come in? Is the main function of the auxiliaries and modifiers to differentiate the tense system? And how does the system vary between the dialects; apart from lexical differences, what are the typological ones?

Faced with the present state of research and the existing textual evidence, we find the general problems expected: few investigations concentrate on syntactical theorizing and even fewer on a diachronical perspective. The comprehensive study by MARCEL COHEN, often used as a handbook, is no longer reliable with regard to the material from the Arabic dialects (COHEN 1924, pp. 62-74). Furthermore, the texts are far from satisfying. Many of them are dictated tales, with unavoidable limitations with regard to spontaneity and variation of discourse patterns.

The Paris school of modern Arabic linguistics, following DAVID COHEN, has advanced the state of research by combining theory and field study: see e.g. SIMEONE-SENELLE/TAUZIN/CAUBET (1985) on the verbal system in Northwest Africa. (Single studies focusing on separate subdialects are those of PIAMENTA 1966 for Jerusalem, and DENZ 1971 for Kwayriš, South Iraq). I believe the findings of this research to be sound, but I would like to single out a few other characteristics of the dialectal verbal system which seem to emerge from a general comparative/diachronic perspective.

In an attempt to present a summarized and yet workable survey aimed at being typologically representative, I have chosen the followings areas and studies: the Palestinian village of Bir Zeit (BLAU 1960, pp. 66-153), Lebanese dialects (FEGHALI 1928, pp. 3-83); the dialect of Hama (LEWIN 1966, pp. *38*-42*), the Muslim dialect of Baghdad (BLANC 1964, p. 115f.), the Christian dialect of Baghdad (ABU-HAIDAR 1991, pp. 88-93), the qøltu-dialects of Mesopotamia (JASTROW 1978, pp. 299-310), Cypriot Arabic (BORG 1985, p. 76), the dialect of Djidjelli in Algeria (MARÇAIS 1956, pp. 147-155), and Morocco (CAUBET 1985, pp. 97-127).

Comparative survey

(The characterizations in the right column are based on the above-mentioned grammars):

particle	place	function
<i>b-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Syria, Egypt Cyprus	general present, actual present, historical present, progressive
ʿ <i>am</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Syria, Egypt	actual present, progressive
<i>qa-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Christ. Bagh.	actual present, progressive
<i>gāʿed</i> , <i>da-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Mu. Baghd.	actual present, progressive
<i>kū-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Iraq	actual present, progressive
<i>ka-/ta-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Morocco	general present, actual present, progressive
<i>ka-/ku-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Djidj. Alger.	general present, actual present, durative/habitual/progressive
<i>rāḥ</i> , <i>rāyih</i> , <i>ḥa-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Syria et al.	/imminent/ future
<i>yibḡi</i> , <i>ba-</i> , <i>b-</i> + <i>yiktob</i>	Bed. dial.	imminent future
<i>ta-/da-</i>	Iraq	/imminent?/ future
<i>kān</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i>	Syria et al.	past, durative
<i>baqā</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i>	»	past, durative
<i>raḡaʿ</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i> .	»	iterative
<i>qām</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i>	»	past, ingressive
<i>ṣār</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i>	»	ingressive(/durative/perfective)
<i>dār</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i>	»	ingressive(/durative/perfective)
<i>qaʿad</i> + <i>yiktob</i> , <i>katab</i>	»	ingressive(/durative/perfective)
<i>kū-</i> , <i>kūt-</i> , <i>kl //</i> -+ <i>katab</i>	Iraq	perfective

OA *yiktob* without prefixes is still used for the general and actual present and for any kind of durative action in most dialects, especially in nomadic ones.

The active participle has a resultative function, perfective action + present state; depending on the *Aktionsart*, the focus may seem to be either on perfective action or on the resulting state (see especially WOIDICH 1975, WILD 1964).

It is obvious that the grammatical descriptions use different systems of classification. Some emphasize the tense, others the aspect, others again the *Aktionsart*. This confusion is paralleled by the very real mixture of the three categories in the actual linguistic

structures. There is a sort of impressionistic consensus which might be summarized thus: The suffix conjugation denotes the perfective action in the past time. The *b*-imperfect in Syria denotes the durative action mainly in the present time, or the concomitance, or the cursive aspect, in narratives also in the past time; it also distinguishes the indicative from the subjunctive *y*-imperfect. The function is paralleled by the *ka*-imperfect in Morocco. The *y*-imperfect occupies a similar position in the other dialects. There are modifiers connected with *Aktionsarten*: particles denoting progressive action, such as *'ammāl*, and an infinite number of particles denoting ingressive action, such as *qām*, *šār*, etc.

Several grammars recognize a diachronic movement affecting the significance of some, if not most, of the particles; *'ammāl* is a late innovation: for the development of the *b*-imperfect and *'am/māll*, see LENTIN (1994) (and less methodically BAUER 1913, p. 107, FEGHALI 1928, p. 44). The *b*-imperfect is supposed to have originated as an actual present or durative/progressive action and then gradually come to invade also the domain of the general present/general durative. Several modifiers, originally ingressive, have lost most of their significance, being used either indiscriminately also as duratives or even as punctual perfectives, or simply as an announcement of the appearance of an immediately following (perfect) verb. Sometimes there is evidence of the replacement of a modifier by another, such as OA *kān*, still often used as in CA, being replaced in Syrian dialects by the extensively used *baqā*, denoting durative action in the past.

One main typologically significant change may be the renewal of the prefix conjugation. However, looking at the actual system of modifiers, and considering what we know of the historical development, there is certainly much to be added in order to make the information complete and realistic, such as, for example, the following:

- The great majority of changes, and almost all, if we agree that the *b*-imperfect originally marked only actual present/progressive action, affects the *Aktionsarten* and not the tenses or the aspects. There is not one huge renewal but a **dual** development: the punctual *Aktionsarten*, usually the ingressive, are differentiated (mainly) in the perfect, and the durative *Aktionsarten*, usually the progressive, are marked in the imperfective (see LEWIN 1966, p. *41*). Even *rāḥ* and similar modifiers, commonly defined as marking the future, usually mark only the imminent action.

- This evolution may, in brief, be termed a renewal of the verbal force. The addition of a punctual particle to the perfect, or a durative particle to the present/imperfect, does not change the meaning of the verb but enhances its verbality.

- There is also a strengthening of the tenses. The suffix conjugation may denote the perfective but it is also true that it can only be used for the past (if not extra-temporal). The prefix conjugation may denote the imperfective or any other similar aspect but it is mainly used for the present time. The conjugations are thus no longer primarily aspectual and then applied to different tenses; they are primarily temporal, with residues of the aspects secondarily inherent in the total function.

- The system in some qāltu dialects differs from the general trend of the language: the same particle *kū* may be used both for the present and for the perfect (in the present, it is

restricted to the actual present, but that is part of the asymmetry noted above), and, equally unusual, the *k*- set of particles occurring with the perfect are used simply to emphasize the perfective significance of the suffix form.

- The polarization of the *b*-imperfect vs. the *y*-imperfect is incomplete. It can not be a recent development, incited by the introduction of *‘ammāl*, because it exists already in Cypriot Arabic. Furthermore, this polarization is crystal clear only in theory. In practice, the *y*-imperfect is sometimes used for the indicative (BLAU 1960, p. 79f., LEWIN 1966, p. *38*), and the *b*-imperfect occurs, not infrequently, in hypotactic positions (BLAU 1960, p. 85). Our knowledge is insufficient concerning the fluctuations of these functions. It is often difficult to discern whether a degree of modality is present in the actual speech or not.

- One particular function of the *y*-imperfect in the Syro-Palestinian area may be stressed: it serves as an iterative-durative in the past. Both BLAU (1960, p. 96f.) and LEWIN (1966, p. *39*) ascribe the use as originating from an old *ḥāl*- imperfective after a preterite. (The *b*-imperfect may also be used in this function but this is hardly surprising.) The *y*-imperfect may also be used as a narrative present (BLAU 1960, p. 82). It may be argued that those functions are "atypical" of the "normal" tense system, since they combine a concept of the present with a concept of the past and at least one of the two times indicated must have an unreal point of reference (KLEIN 1994, p. 133ff.). Thus, there may have been reluctance or uncertainty as how to incorporate those particular functions in the development of the *b*-imperfect.

- Generally, there is an asymmetry in the differentiation of the imperfect system: the polarization *b*-imperfect vs. *y*-imperfect is limited to Syria and Morocco. In Syria, there is a special particle, *‘ammāl*, for the progressive action. The particle *ka-*, *ta-* in Morocco is supposed to fill the same function as the Syrian *b-* (although this may not always have been the case, cf. FEGHALI 1928, p. 40, note 1). The situation in Djidjelli, Algeria, and in Iraq is different. Here, the particles *ka-/ku-*, *qa-*, and *da-* respectively are reported to be durative-progressive and to be arbitrarily imposed in the speech according to the personal or situational preference of each speaker. Consequently, those systems differ from that of Syria and Morocco in a double respect: the function of the particles seems to cover only partly the same domain as that of the *b-* and *ka-* imperfects, i.e., they have not penetrated into the area of the general present, and they occur more seldom than the *b-* and *ka-* imperfects, being dependent on a subjective choice and not on a fixed structure.

- For the punctual modifiers, we note that they seem to be spent rapidly and continuously, being replaced by new ones, and that most of them have a weak semantic load (*qām*, *ṣār*, *‘ād* ...).

- New Aramaic and Arabic have for centuries lived side by side, so that there may be a question both of substrates (from Syriac/Neoaramaic to Arabic), and of adstrates, or rather, of superstrates (from Arabic to Aramaic). In the dialect of *Ma‘lūla*, *Bax‘a* and *Ġubb‘adīn*, the system is very similar to that of Syrian Arabic, with the active participle corresponding to the *b*-imperfect, a special progressive particle *‘am* + participle = individual durative-progressive and modifiers for punctual and durative *Aktionsarten*

(*qwm* + perfect = ingressive; *q'y* + participle = ingressive + progressive; *dll* i.a. + participle = durative). There is also the pseudo-verb *batt* corresponding to Syrian Arabic *bidd-*, both in form and significance. When the conceptual similarity is also followed by a lexical identity (as in *'am* and *batt*) and a common socio-geographical background, it makes sense to accept an interference (CORRELL 1978, pp. 43-92).

The many dialects together constituting Modern Eastern Aramaic show considerable diversity as to choice of verbal particles. Some dialects use particles similar in form and function to those of the *qəltu*-dialects: cf. for example, *Tūrōyō*, where *k/o-* is used for the present durative and also with the perfect (JASTROW 1985, pp. 145f., 153f.). Others, e.g. that of Hertevin in Siirt, use the particles *bed*, *b-* and zero for the present and the future without distinction (JASTROW 1988, p. 54f.; see also COHEN 1924, p. 60, for etymological and functional parallels with Arabic, especially *ba*-particles in nomadic dialects).

Although the possibility of substrates for the development of New Arabic is usually and sensibly viewed with suspicion (PALVA 1970, DIEM 1979), it should be taken into serious consideration for the Syro-Iraqi area. For this area, it may also be wise to consider the evidence of Cypriot Arabic (BORG 1985, pp. 154-159), the genetic links of which indicate that the Syrian and the Iraqi dialects at an early stage may have been more closely related than they appear today.

Finally, we must admit that the lexical etymology of many particles, especially those denoting the present durative, is obscure. Only a dynamic approach including both theory and extensive material from field studies can contribute to the understanding of the complex development of the verbal system in the Arabic dialects.

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