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PRONOMINAL STATE IN COLLOQUIAL ARABIC: A DIACHRONIC ATTEMPT

The concept of state

The term *status* or state has been used in Semitic studies for a long time to describe certain phenomena in the nominal inflection. For Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian, and Ancient South Arabian the term is well established although a clearcut definition of it in general linguistic terms is lacking. For Arabic, the term construct state is sometimes used as a designation for words in the *ʔidāfa*-construction, but this usage remains strangely isolated in descriptive Arabic grammar and constitutes one of the many idiosyncrasies of that subject.

The following definition of state is the basis for this study: state is a kind of allomorphic variation affecting bound morphemes marking gender, number and case.¹ By this definition the connection between semantic oppositions and different states is dissolved. The morphemes in question are the carriers of semantic-syntactic information which can be realised differently according to rules of distribution. The resulting variation has no impact on meaning. E.g. the so-called masculine plural in Hebrew is a morpheme {MASC+PLUR} that is realized as two allomorphs: *-im* and *-e*: *šīrīm yaqīm* 'beautiful songs' vs. *šīrē dawīd* 'the songs of David'. These are traditionally designated absolute and construct state respectively. The semantic content of the two *-e/-im* elements is identical, viz plural, and in adjectives also masculine gender. The choice between different realisations is due to morphological and/or syntactic environment.²

It might be objected that there is after all a kind of semantic difference between e.g. the Hebrew *-e* and *-im* suffixes. Even if both have the semantic content {MASK+PLUR} they function as markers of different syntactic constructions which could be seen as representing a kind of semantic distinction.

The answer to this is that since morphological state marking is not obligatory in order to distinguish the syntagms in question, the different forms of state cannot be ascribed morphemic status. If we take the *ʔidāfa/smīxūt* syntagm as an example, it is obvious that this syntagm is constituted by applying a rule of syntactic ordering linking two or more nouns so as to behave syntactically as if they were one. The annexion of nouns in an *ʔidāfa* has special properties distinguishing it from e.g. attributive and appositional

¹ This definition has been presented in Retsö, *State*.

² For a definition of state in similar terms see Reiner, *Analysis* 57.

constructions but, if general characterisations of the Semitic *'idāfa* are sought, state marking is not one of them. State marking is an additional, redundant morphological marking generated by certain syntagms. It is easy to show this. In colloquial Arabic (CA), *malik* may be construct or absolute state. The same holds for the {FEM+PLUR} morpheme *-āt* which shows no state variation. In spite of the lack of morphological marking, there is usually no problem in identifying the syntagms in which nouns of this class appear.

Hebrew and Aramaic show state variation in suffixes marking number and gender. In some languages like Akkadian, Geez and the Arabiyya we find state variation also with the case-marking suffixes. In fact, when a Semitic language employs case-marking with suffixes, these always show state variation.

State in Colloquial Arabic

In colloquial Arabic we should expect to find a system similar to the one found in Hebrew, since there are no case endings in these languages in contrast to Geez, Akkadian and the Arabiyya, and no emphatic or determinate state as in Aramaic.

As far as the gender suffix is concerned, we find the two allomorphs: *-at* and *-a* from the morpheme {FEM+SING}, just like in Hebrew and Aramaic. Already here we see a striking difference not only from Geez and Akkadian which only have *-(a)t* without any variation, but also from the Arabiyya, which has an alternation between *-at* and *-a*, which, however, was not regulated by state but by context-pause rules.³ As far as this morpheme is concerned, Semitic can be divided in two groups, one without state variation, showing *-(a)t* throughout, and one with *-(a)t* in the construct and *-a* in the absolute state. Almost the entire CA complex belongs to the latter group together with Hebrew and Aramaic, whereas all other Semitic languages belong to the former.⁴ In one CA dialect, the Shammari in Central Arabia, we find the *t*-suffix throughout even in the absolute state, thus following the Arabiyya.⁵

The feminine plural *-āt* is also invariable in almost all CA-forms. The Shammari has the feminine plural suffix *-āy*. Unfortunately, we do not know the construct form.⁶

The masculine plural *-īn* is also invariable in most documented forms of CA. This is thus a major deviation from the Arabiyya, where the masculine plural morpheme shows both state and case variation (construct *-ūl-ī*, absolute *-ūnal-īna*).⁷ Thus, Damascene

³ See Retsö, *Treatment*.

⁴ Apart from Akkadian and Geez, Ancient South Arabian, Ugaritic, probably Amoritic, Phoenician, the Proto-Arabic language(s) (Thamudic, Lihyanitic, Safaitic), and Modern South Arabian: Mehri, Shkhawri. Soqotri has vowel-suffix in the absolute (Johnstone, *Languages* 20).

⁵ Ingham, *Dialects* 70. The pausal form of the feminine suffix is *-eih* (ibid. 69).

⁶ Ingham, *Dialects* 70. The *-āy* is not consistently used. In the texts we find forms like *Ḥwēṭāt* together with *Ḥwēṭāy* (Ingham, op. cit., text 6 p. 131, ll. 1-2). Abboud, *Syntax* (p. 11), says that in the Ḥāyel dialect the adjective takes *āy* in pause and before a word beginning with a consonant; elsewhere *-āt* is used.

⁷ For a survey of the state system in the Arabiyya, see Retsö, *State*.

fallāḥīn aḍ-ḍē 'a 'the farmers of the village' and *fallāḥīnkon* 'your farmers' are representative of most of the CA complex.⁸

Pronominal state in Colloquial Arabic

There are, however, a few examples deviating from the general pattern. The Gulf dialects are said to have the invariable form in *ʿidāfa*-constructions like *mufattišīn il-baladiyye* 'the local inspectors' or *muwaddāfīn il-ḥakūma* 'the government officials', like most of the colloquials.⁹ With pronominal suffixes, however, alternating forms are documented: *mudarrisīk/mudarrisīnik* 'your (f., m.?) teachers'.¹⁰ A similar alternation is found in Muslim Baghdad: *muʿallimīha/muʿallimīnha* 'her teachers'.¹¹ In some dialects, suffixation of the *-īn* is avoided altogether by periphrastic constructions.¹²

In these last examples we have traces of a distinct pronominal state in CA. The existence of such a category then appears clearly in the handling of the so-called dual-suffix. In a classic study, H. Blanc pointed out the importance of distinguishing between the dual morpheme carrying the semantic load {TWO} attachable to any noun, and the pseudo-dual indicating {PLURAL} restricted to certain classes of nouns, being only one of the many devices for plural-marking in Arabic. In CA, the dual is marked by the morpheme *-ayn*. According to Blanc, the dual does not show any state variation, thus following the *-īn* suffix.¹³ The pronominal suffixes are either attached to the dual morpheme (*bētēnkon* etc.) or periphrastic constructions are preferred.¹⁴

The pseudo-dual suffix behaves in a remarkably different way from the ones mentioned earlier (plural *-āt*, *-īn*, dual *-ayn*). In general, it appears very irregular compared to the dual. There are all kinds of idiosyncrasies in the morphology.¹⁵ There is often a clear morphological difference between the dual and the pseudo-dual. The former is invariably *-ayn* whereas the pseudo-dual appears as *-ayn*, *-ān* (Negev Bedouin), *-īn* (most parts of Maghreb), *-ihīn* (Central Asia). Noteworthy is the widespread Maghrebinian dual *-ayn* (with the diphthong) which is not the expected result of a development from an older *-ayn*.¹⁶ Thus *šharayn* 'two months' but *ʿīnīn* 'eyes' (two

⁸ Cowell, *Grammar* 165. The *ʿidāfa*-construction is relatively rare with masculine plurals in most dialects, not only because of the dominance of broken plurals in Arabic but also because the wide employment of the so-called analytic genitive, see Eksell-Harning, *Genitive*. Unfortunately, documentation of this suffix is uneven in Arabic dialectology due to its relatively low frequency. In Blau's Christian Arabic, the *-n* is sometimes preserved in the construct state but he does not mention any cases with *-n* before pronominal suffixes (Blau, *Grammar* 226-227).

⁹ Al-Tajir, *Language* 95; Johnstone, *Studies* 63.

¹⁰ Holes, *Gulf Arabic* 150.

¹¹ Erwin, *Grammar* 278.

¹² Jastrow, *Daragözü* 95.

¹³ Blanc, *Dual* 4.3 (p. 49). In the descriptions of different CA forms made after Blanc's article no cases of state variation in the dual suffix are mentioned.

¹⁴ Jastrow, *Daragözü* 95.

¹⁵ For a survey see Blanc, *Dual* 4.2 (p. 48).

¹⁶ The Jewish dialects of Algiers and Tunis have *-ayn* or *-īn* in both dual and pseudo-dual (M. Cohen, *Parler* 289-290, 293 sqq.; D. Cohen, *Parler* 186). This also holds for the dialect of Ḥassāniya (D.

or more). Also the Central Asian pseudo-dual suffix is remarkable, looking very much like the modern Soqotri masculine plural *-(i)hin/-(i)hon*.¹⁷

As far as state variation is concerned, the pseudo-dual is strikingly different from the other suffixes. According to most descriptions, the pseudo-dual shows *n*-less forms with pronominal suffixes. In some areas there seems to be a choice between *-n*- and $-\emptyset$, in others the *-n* is found in all positions. According to Blanc, no dialect lacks the *n*-less form of the pseudo-dual. We would thus have here a clear case of the existence of a pronominal state with this suffix. However, we now have information from some areas which seems to indicate the existence of dialects with only *-n*- forms as well as *n*-less forms as in the Arabiyya. A tentative typology can be set up in spite of the still incomplete documentation:¹⁸

1. Obligatory *n*-less forms with pronominal suffixes.

This type seems to be the most widespread, dominating in the Maghreb, Malta, Libya (Tripolis), Syria-Palestine, Kormakiti (Cyprus), Anatolia, Baghdad, some tribes in North Arabia (the 'Umūr, Hāyel), and the 'Asīr.¹⁹

2. Option between *n*- and *n*-less forms with pronominal suffixes.

This type is documented from Damascus, the Gulf area, and the Anaza-dialects of North and eastern Arabia, and the Hijaz.²⁰

3. *n*-forms only.

This is found in eastern Libya, Abbéché in the Tchad and also among the Slūt bedouin in North Arabia and in Oman.²¹

Cohen, *Dialecte* 197 sqq.). In the dialect of Wlād Brahīm in Morocco, the pseudo-dual is alternately *-eyn/-in* (Marçais, *Dialecte* 123) which indicates optional neutralisation between the two categories.

¹⁷ Johnstone, *Languages* 20. In Ancient/Epigraphic South Arabian, the dual, determinate state was *-(y)n(y)n* (Beeston, *Sabaic Grammar* 31). In his earlier grammar, Beeston mentions a Sabaean dual *-hn* (Beeston, *Descriptive Grammar* 32) which looks very much like the Soqotri form.

¹⁸ This sketch is based on Blanc's study and the descriptions of Arabic dialects that have appeared after that. For well-documented areas, like Syria and North Africa, only sample works or surveys are referred to. Texts have not been scrutinized for this investigation.

¹⁹ Blanc, *Dual*; Maghreb in general: Durand, *Profilo* 51; Marçais, *Esquisse* 116; Malta: Schabert, *Formenlehre* 183; Libya Tripolis: Fitoury, *Grammar* 97, cf. Blanc, op. cit. note 29; Kormakiti: Borg, *Cypriot Arabic* 122; Anatolia: Sasse, *Analyse* 89, 91; Jastrow, *Daragözü* 95; 'Asīr: Prochazka, *Dialects* 202, 205; North and Central Arabia: Cantineau, *Études* I 99, II 200; Palva, *Sketch* 289; idem, *Characteristics* 135.

²⁰ Cowell, *Grammar*; Prochazka, *Dialects* 202, 205; Omar, *Saudi Arabic* 184, 213; Holes, *Gulf Arabic* 150. Type 1 and 2 (with *n*- in the 'iḏāfa and possible dropping of the *-n* before pronouns) is reflected in Blau's Christian Arabic, cf. Blau, *Grammar* 222-223.

²¹ Roth, *Abbéché* 119, 123, 161; Owens, *Grammar* 59; Cantineau, *Études* II 200; Reinhardt, *Dialekt* 25. Brockelmann quotes cases of *-ay* also in the absolute state dual and pseudo-dual from Stumme's texts from Malta. These are not mentioned by modern investigators. Such forms with invariable dual *-ay* are also found in medieval texts (Brockelmann, *Grundriss* I, 456).

4. *n*-less forms both with pronominal suffixes and in *ʔidāfa*.

This is documented from the Shukriyya in the Sudan.²²

Thus, the dialects in group 1 have a clearcut pronominal state with the pseudo-dual morpheme. In group 2 pronominal state is optional. Group 3 has no state variation and in group 4 we have a construct state of the morpheme possibly contrasting with an absolute state.

Among the dialects of type 1, Djidjelli stands out as especially interesting. The pseudo-dual absolute is *-īn* like in most Maghreb-dialects, whereas the dual is *-īn* or *-āyen*. In the pronominal state of the pseudo-dual there are several variations. In one group of words the pseudo-dual morpheme appears as *-ā* in the pronominal state: *yāddīn—yāddāk* 'hands', *ʔīnīn—ʔīnāk* 'eyes'. Others retain the *-ī*: *xoddīn—xoddīk* 'cheek', *kāʔfīn—kāʔfīk* 'shoulders', *šādqīn—šādqīk/šādāqīk* 'corners of the mouth'. The last example shows a change in the stem: the *-ī* is added to the broken plural. This is found in several words and not only words denoting pairs: *qrūn—qrānīhām* 'horns', *šwābo—šwāb ʔīhām* 'fingers', *rēsān—rwāsīhām* 'heads', *lsānāt—lsānīna* 'tongues'.²³ The question is if this *-ī* is the masculine plural or the old dual (*-ay-*). This cannot be decided, but the result is strikingly similar to the pronominal state with broken plurals in Geez. The *-ī* is actually found in a similar context in other dialects. From al-Qauz in the southern Saudi-Arabian Tihama we have forms like *ʔādānīk*, *ʔādānīka* 'your ears'.²⁴ In Ḥesbān, prepositions with pronominal suffixes take the *ī*: *taḥīha*, *qablīha*, *fōgīha*.²⁵

In several colloquial forms of Arabic, especially in the Sudan, the Bedouin dialects on the Peninsula, and Daragözü in Anatolia the suffix *-ān* seems to be amply used as a plural together with *-īn*.²⁶ Like the latter, *-ān* has no state variation preserving the *-n* even with pronominal suffixes.

The problem and a suggested solution

The distribution of the dual and masculine plural suffixes in Colloquial Arabic raises several interesting questions:

1. From where comes the differentiation between dual and pseudo-dual which is unknown to the Arabiyya?
2. Why is a special pronominal state found as a rule with the pseudo-dual and rarely with the dual and plural?

²² Reichmut, *Dialekt* 182. Also Yemen may belong to this group since *n*-less forms are not documented there, cf. Qafisheh, *Yemeni Arabic* 190.

²³ Marçais, *Djidjelli* 345 sqq., 452 sqq.

²⁴ Prochazka, *Dialects* 207.

²⁵ Palva, *Narrative* 67 note 144. Forms like *tāhətha*, *gābəlha*, *fōgha* are also found, cf. Palva, *Studies*, vocabulary s.v. *tahta*.

²⁶ Reichmut, *Dialekt* 160; Jastrow, *Daragözü* 84.

3. How should the difference between masculine plural/pseudo-dual *-īn* and the dual *-ayn* in Maghribi Arabic be explained?

If we compare the system in the Arabiyya with those found in the colloquials, we can state that the main structural difference is between the symmetrical system of the Arabiyya with a consistent differentiation of states in the masculine plural/dual morphemes by presence or absence of *-n* on the one hand, and the asymmetrical system in most of the colloquials on the other. In the latter we have in fact three plural categories (apart from the *-āt*): masculine plural, dual, and pseudo-dual, contrasting with only two in the Arabiyya. We find state variation only in that category which is absent from the Arabiyya. The state distinctions are also different from that of the Arabiyya which does not show any trace of a pronominal state.

The absence of state variation with the plural suffixes in the colloquials could be explained by assuming an Arabiyya system as input where the *-n* has spread to the construct forms abolishing state distinction, thus making the suffixes similar to the *-āt*. In that case, the construct forms with pronominal suffixes would perhaps be the last ones to let the *-n* intrude. But this scenario does not quite explain why the distinction has been preserved in the pseudo-dual and not in the others. Why do not the plural and the dual have the pronominal state like the pseudo-dual? Or why does the pseudo-dual have it but the others not?

It might be wise to take a look at the state systems with the number suffixes in other Semitic languages before attempting an explanation. From the Arabiyya it is natural to go to Akkadian which has a set of plural morphemes resembling, if not identical to, that of the Arabiyya. An important difference is, however, that the Akkadian system is asymmetrical. Plural ends in *-ū/-ī* (or *-āt*) with no state variation.²⁷ A special pseudo-dual category seems to be absent, but the dual has *constructus -ā/-ay* and *absolutus -ān/-ayn*, thus a state system identical to the one in the Arabiyya.

There is no doubt that the Akkadian system is archaic.²⁸ A development in such a system abolishing its asymmetry could very well lead to the Arabiyya system, i.e. consistent employment of *-n* as marker of the absolute state in the dual and plural. This makes it very likely that the Arabiyya system in fact is a development from a system identical to the Akkadian one. The symmetry of the state marking system in the number suffixes in the Arabiyya is the result of a development from a more asymmetrical system.

If this is true, it follows that state variation in the plural suffixes originates with the *-ā(n)/-ay(n)* suffix, marking dual in Akkadian and the Arabiyya.

A closer look at the so-called dual in Akkadian reveals that it contains several morphological and semantic complexities.²⁹ It turns out that it does not designate a number of two so much as "eine zahlenmässig genau begrenzte Mehrheit". For certain nouns it is

²⁷ The *-āt* suffix has added case and state marking suffixes which most likely are a secondary assimilation to the general case-marking system in Akkadian and the Arabiyya. The important point here is that the *-āt* suffix itself is invariable.

²⁸ A similar system obviously existed in the language of Ya'udi in Syria, see Dion, *Langue* 143 sqq.

²⁹ For the following, see von Soden, *Grundriss* § 61 a-d, i, h.

the normal plural.³⁰ Already in Middle Babylonian and Assyrian the case distinction is absent, the *-ān* being used all through. On the other hand, the dual is said in later language to occur mostly in the construct only, the absolute being represented by *-āt(u)*. To this comes the plural suffix *-ānū/-ānī* designating a countable number whereas the *-ū/-ī* suffix is a neutral plural. There is no reasonable doubt that *-ānū/-ānī* is a combination of *-ān* and *-ū/-ī*.

From the Akkadian evidence it seems clear that the suffixes *-ān*, *-ayn* etc. cannot be designated as dual. They are plural suffixes employed for countable plurals and plural of paucity. In the latter category dual is included as a special case.³¹ This is confirmed by Arabic and Geez, where we also find the suffix *-ān* as a plural indicator.³² A conclusion from the Akkadian evidence is that *-ān* and *-ay(n)* could very well be two originally different suffixes which have been united in a paradigm.³³ This is indicated by the invariability of the *-ān* suffix in Arabic and Geez and, partly, also in Akkadian.³⁴ This supports the assumption that the state variation marked with the absence or presence of *-n* originally belongs to the *-ay* suffix and not to *-ān*.

We are then left with a plural system which had two suffixes for plural marking: *-āt* and *-ay/-ayn*. Beside these, we had formations with *-ī* (and possibly also *-ū* and *-ān*) designating different kinds of abstracts or collectives. This system, which would then be the basis for those later found in Akkadian and the Arabiyya, did have state variation in the *-ay/-ayn* suffix only. The others were invariable.

The development of this system was characterised by the introduction of *-ī* as a plural marker competing with the old *-ay/-ayn*, thus resulting in the Akkadian system.³⁵ This implied the reduction of the employment of *-ay/-ayn*. When the asymmetry had been established, the language tried to level it in different ways. One way was to introduce state variation with *-n* also in the new plural *-ī* in analogy with the *-ay/-ayn* variation. We then end up with a system where both *-ī* and *-ay* have the same type of state variation as we find in the Arabiyya.³⁶

Another way of handling the asymmetry was to preserve invariability in the masculine plural suffix but at the same time adopting the *-n* in analogy with the *-ān* and *-ayn* suffixes. This was the road taken by most of the forebears of the modern Arabic

³⁰ Like *išdum*, plur. *išdān* 'basis', 'fundament,' perhaps originally a designation of a part of the body.

³¹ Cf. Reiner, *Analysis* 59.

³² In the Arabiyya in the plurals *fī'lān* and *fu'lān*, see Fleisch, *Traité* I 450 sq., 478 sq., 481 sq.

³³ The controversial point is, of course, that we assume that case marking was developed only in certain Semitic languages. Since all Semitic languages have state variation but only a few have case marking and that category is always integrated in the state system it is probable that state is the older category.

³⁴ It is worth pointing out that even the dual suffix *-ān* in the oldest form of the Arabiyya can occur in oblique cases, see Wright, *Grammar* I 236; Vollers, *Volkssprache* 159-161, cf. the Quranic passage 20:63 according to a widespread reading tradition.

³⁵ The use of abstracts and collectives as plurals is a widespread phenomenon in Semitic and explains e.g. the so-called broken plurals, see Fischer, *Pluralbildung*.

³⁶ In both the Arabiyya and Akkadian, the *-ū* and *-ān* suffixes were introduced as markers of the nominative case which resulted in the back-formation of a construct form *-ā* from *-ān* in analogy with the *-ay/-ayn*.

colloquials. As we have seen, some of them have now introduced the *-n* in all plurals abolishing state variation completely (type 3). Most of them, however, have kept the original *n*-less forms of the *ay*-suffix, and, sporadically also with the *-ī* suffix with pronominal suffixes (type 1), thus creating a pronominal state. Some still stand between these two types (type 2). Some peripheral dialects have preserved the construct-absolute opposition in the old plural suffix *-ay/-ayn* but not in the *-īn* (type 4). Structurally (not morphologically) this last type would be the most archaic among the Arabic colloquials.

The morphological complexities of the so-called pseudo-dual in CA thus arises from the fact that this morpheme is the oldest plural marker in the language apart from the *-āt* suffix which is probably the oldest.³⁷ It is no coincidence that state variation has survived in it, although in a reduced scope. From the irregularities in Djidjelli as well as those in Central Asia and some Bedouin dialects we can discern traces of other ways of levelling the asymmetries of the plural marking system.

The dual in the Arabiyya as well as in CA stands out as an innovation, not a survival. It has probably developed out of the semantic category 'a few', 'a pair of' which was included in the semantic field of the *-ay/-ayn* suffix. This semantic differentiation is quite old as we can see from Hebrew and Imperial Aramaic, where it is found in a still rudimentary form. In CA it is more developed, but from the evidence of the Maghrebinian dialects it is clear that it constitutes a semantic and also, in several dialects, a morphological innovation. In some Maghrebinian dialects it looks like a morphological borrowing.

In words with the suffix {FEM+SING}, the dual-morpheme is always added to the *t*-allomorph in CA and Hebrew: *mdīne* 'town' / *mdīntēn* 'two towns' (Damascus). From a synchronic viewpoint it can be said the preceding noun appears in the construct state. The dual morpheme could thus be seen as a kind of pseudo-numeral in the absolute state. If analysed in this way, the behaviour of the dual suffix can be explained by it having assumed noun-like qualities and no longer being understood as a suffix.

The Arabiyya constitutes a final stage in the development of the dual, remarkable through its morphological consistency and also by the annihilation of the "pseudo-dual" altogether. The disappearance of this latter category is the completion of a long development in Semitic where the old plural *-ay/-ayn* is ousted by the *-ī*-suffix.

The pseudo-dual thus belongs to the oldest morphological layers of the Arabic colloquials. It is not a development from an Arabiyya system. Instead, CA and the Arabiyya show a diverging development from a common base which was practically identical to the system found in Akkadian.

³⁷ This suffix is the only plural marker found in all Semitic languages which indicates its age.

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