

Hans Lagerqvist. 2020. *Four Essays on Semitic Grammar and Dialectology. Quatre Essais sur la grammaire et la dialectologie sémitiques*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. XII, 206 pages, 7 figures, 11 tables. Languages: English, French. Paperback 14.50 × 22.00 cm. € 38. ISBN: 978-3-447-11399-1.

The author, former full professor of French at the University of Aalborg in Denmark, has published four linguistic essays presented at the Semitic Seminar of Uppsala University. Two essays are written in English and two in French, while the abstracts are all in English. The Scandinavian character of the publication is confirmed by the choice to single out Scandinavian Arabists who contributed to the debate on the origin and use of the Arabic preverb *b(i)-*, which is the main topic of the second essay: “Parmi les arabisants... , il y lieu [sic] de mentionner les Scandinaves K. Eksell (2006), M. Persson (2008), [sic, with Oxford comma] et J. Retsö (2014(1) et 2014(2)).”

It is not stated whether the book or parts of it have been peer-reviewed. The dimensions of the first three essays exceed the average length of a paper or article, whereas the fourth could have been published in an academic journal. Despite the title, the author addresses four hot topics in Arabic rather than Semitic grammar and dialectology: 1. the relative clauses, 2. the construction *b(i)-* + prefix conjugation, 3. the nominal clause, 4. the literary use of dialects. If we exclude sparse references to secondary literature on Modern South-Arabian, Ethiopic and Akkadian, an in-depth comparison of Arabic with other Semitic languages is confined to the nominal clauses as attested in Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic (essay 3).

Lagerqvist presents and discusses the selected topics in a somewhat refreshing way by adopting a contrastive approach — with a comparison of Arabic with European languages such as English, French, Polish, Russian, Swedish, occasionally German and others — a sound corpus-driven methodology, a rich selection of examples, and a good taxonomy of relevant linguistic structures and forms. Examples are not glossed but accurately transliterated and translated, for the benefit of Arabic and Semitic scholars rather than general linguists.

Corpora are different for the four essays: 1. a selection of short stories and a novel by three Egyptian and a Syrian author of the second half of the twentieth century; 2. examples of various functions and meaning of *b(i)-* + prefix conjugation from grammars and secondary literature on dialects of Syria, Egypt, the Najd region of Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf; 3. examples of Slavic languages, Quranic Arabic, Biblical Hebrew, and Biblical Aramaic; 4. the novel *Yā Maryam* by the Iraqi author Sinān Anṭūn (2012).

In the first essay, Lagerqvist addresses Modern Standard Arabic relative clauses, with definite and indefinite antecedents, and classifies them according to the syntactic and semantic role that the pronominalized antecedent plays in the relative clause and therefore the various constructions with

(object, locative, instrumental...) or without (subject) a resumptive pronoun. As regards the relative clause with definite antecedent, he proposes to interpret the agreement of *allaḏī* etc. with the antecedent as progressive case attraction (morphologically expressed only in the dual), similar to what we find in the morpho-syntax of relative pronouns in many languages and in the so-called “indirect attribute” of Arabic, where the nominal predicate of the relative clause agrees with the antecedent in case and with the subject of the relative clause in gender: *raʿaytu mraʿatan ḥasanan wajhu-hā* ‘I saw a woman whose face was beautiful’ (lit. “I saw a woman<sub>feminine.accusative</sub> beautiful<sub>masculine.accusative</sub> her face<sub>masculine.nominative</sub>”).

Comparative studies on the Semitic languages, which have not been considered by the author (see, e.g., Pat-El 2008: 274-275, with discussion of relevant bibliography), help clarify the different natures and syntactic behaviors of the Semitic particles (Arabic *allaḏī*, Hebrew *ašer* or Aramaic *d-*, etc.) and the Indo-European relative pronouns.

Lagerqvist describes the logical – perhaps better: pragmatic – function of the relative clause as rhematic and argues that the relative clauses attached to indefinite antecedents are in fact to be analyzed, “in pure MSA perspective” (37), as rhematic attributive main (!) clauses. The reason is the absence of a relative marker in these Arabic constructions, which are indeed regularly asyndetic. They are comparable to embedded main clauses such as the parenthetic in *A friend – he is in Baghdad – will come to see me next week* and Lagerqvist compares them contrastively to the circumstantial clauses described in Arabic grammar as *ḥāl*, be they asyndetic or introduced by *wa-*. Precisely the parallel with Arabic *ḥāl* circumstantial clauses and the parenthetic imbedded clauses of any language as well as the identical syntax of all relative clauses in Arabic, attached to definite or indefinite antecedents, with or without a resumptive pronoun, suggest prudence in dubbing the relative clauses with indefinite antecedents as main clauses. The border between embedded and subordinate is moreover rather labile.

In the second essay, Lagerqvist expands on the conclusions of Retsö’s (2014) article on the origin and dialectal distribution of the construction *b(i)-* + imperfective, with a discussion on the modal rather than temporal nature of the future, the usual selection of good examples, and an excellent taxonomy of the functions in a number of dialects. In the bibliography and the discussion one misses, among others, Bruweleit 2015, Jarad 2013, Mion 2017, Mitchell and El-Hassan 1994, Ouhalla 2014, Taine-Cheikh 2004.

In the Avant-propos of the second essay as well as on the back cover of the book (“How can linguistics make research in Semitic advance?”), the author correctly stresses the importance of applying modern linguistic theory to Arabic. In the discussion about the origin of the preverb(s) *b(i)-*, however, he does not refer to grammaticalization (see, e.g., Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994) as a

theoretical framework to explain how a preposition or a verbal form develops into a preverb that marks tense, mood and/or aspect. As for the etymologies proposed for *b(i)-*, Lagerqvist fundamentally repeats Retsö's (2014: 70) position:

The *b-* imperfect in spoken Arabic has two different origins. One is from a verb meaning 'to want' etc. which we find well developed in the Gulf dialect and in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The other is from the locative preposition *bi-* thus indicating the 'being in or at the action' as many aspectologists explain the so-called imperfective aspect.

Be it as it may, I prefer to stick to Pennacchiotti's warnings on this matter. In an article from 1994 ("I preverbi del passato in semitico"), not used by Lagerqvist, Pennacchiotti (1994, 142) prudently avoids searching etymologies for a single consonant particle and, referring to two basic elements of grammaticalization, concludes:

it is highly questionable that a preposition or even an adverb could give rise to a temporal preverb, given that, in all the cases examined above of certain etymology, this type of particle derives from the crystallization [i.e., morphological reduction or decategorialization] and phonetic reduction [phonetic erosion] of the auxiliary of a periphrastic construction (translation and additions in square brackets are mine).

Lagerqvist's treatment of the nominal sentence, in the third essay, reflects the strength and weakness of the book in general. The broad comparative perspective, mainly focusing on Slavic languages, and the abundant examples from Quranic Arabic, Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic are not followed by a discussion of relevant bibliography on the subject. Explanations are generally to the point. However, in Genesis 4,2 ("Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil"), both sentences are verbal and have a past tense copula (*wa-yhī... hāyā...*): one cannot see how the first can be interpreted as an allomorph  $\emptyset$  and therefore atemporal (139). It is regrettable that other varieties of Aramaic are not considered: the choice of Biblical Aramaic is strongly limiting and the corpus in se rather limited. Above all, one misses Goldenberg's many pages on the nominal sentence in all Semitic languages (see, e.g., the chapter "12 Predicative Relation," in Goldenberg 2012).

The fourth essay is a reading of the novel *Yā Maryam* by the Iraqi author Sinān Anṭūn from a dialectological point of view. Lagerqvist describes phonetic, phonologic and morphosyntactic features characteristic of the Christian as opposed to the Muslim Baghdadi dialect, and used in the dialogic sections of the Modern Standard Arabic novel to reproduce the rich linguistic repertoire of Baghdad. "In addition to the Baghdadi dialects, a passage in Chaldean (p. 41) and another one in Lebanese dialect (p. 54) are to be found in the novel (182 n. 3)." I suppose that "Chaldean" is a variety of Sureth, Christian

Neo-Aramaic, or perhaps Syriac. The term “Chaldean” does not say much or, perhaps, says too much to a Semitist.

The literary use of dialects in contemporary Arabic literature is a relatively well-studied phenomenon: see, e.g., Rosenbaum’s publications, not mentioned by Lagerqvist, on the literary and fictional use of Egyptian Arabic. Lagerqvist correctly stresses that the alternation between standard and dialect cannot be overused and we must instead look for a fair compromise, a sort of conventional agreement between writer and reader: the author presents salient features of the dialect, s/he suggests diglossic conversations and narration rather than writing or describing the dialect. It is a fictionalization of diglossia and mixed varieties and reveals the sociolinguistic implications of the narrative pact. Similar analyses and conclusions would probably apply to the use of dialects and dialectal features in many literatures.

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