

## ON SOME ARABIC DIALECTAL FEATURES PARALLELED BY HEBREW AND ARAMAIC

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IN JULY 19-23, 1965 the International Conference on Semitic Studies was held in Jerusalem. Among those who took part in the debates following each lecture (unfortunately not included in the proceedings)<sup>1</sup> was Moshe Held ל"ר. I lectured on the subject of "Some Problems of the Formation of the Old Semitic Languages in the Light of Arabic Dialects,"<sup>2</sup> in which, in the main, I argued that the gradual unfolding of the modern Arabic dialects, through mutual contact and parallel development, may well serve as a model for, e.g., the emergence of the Canaanite linguistic type. Moshe Held joined in the ensuing debate with his usual enthusiasm, as he was greatly intrigued by the fact that Arabic, although representing even in its earliest attested form a late type of Semitic language, may nevertheless, in its transition from Classical Arabic to Neo-Arabic, shed light on dark periods of the Old Semitic languages. It is in the wake of that debate that I dedicate to the memory of Moshe Held ל"ר the following small collection of Arabic dialectal features which may shed light on certain Hebrew and Aramaic phenomena. I shall especially rely on O. Jastrow's masterly study of the *q<sup>l</sup>tu* dialects.<sup>3</sup> Yet before beginning I am taking the liberty of citing the conclusions of my aforementioned paper,<sup>4</sup> which may serve as an introduction to what follows: "The Semitists who inquire into dead Semitic languages often expose themselves to the risk of excessive simplification and standardization of the facts, and so divorce themselves from reality. That being the case, Arabic dialects, being the most important *living*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Proceedings* (1969). As a matter of fact, Moshe Held delivered a lecture entitled "Some Remarks on the Position of Ugaritic within the Semitic Family of Languages." His lecture, however, was not included in the *Proceedings*, because it was not submitted.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Proceedings* (1969), pp. 38-44.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jastrow (1978-81).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Proceedings* (1969), p. 44.

Semitic idiom, may serve as a valuable corrective, restoring the study of the Semitic languages to actualities.”

1. Many scholars, correctly in my opinion, allow for paradigmatic resistance to sound change. According to this view, functionally significant sounds may be preserved, although “blindly operating” sound change should have changed them.

1,1. Cases in point are the morphemes of the second person singular of the perfect in Biblical Hebrew and in Aramaic.<sup>5</sup> In both languages, one of the two, masculine and feminine, morphemes terminates in a vowel, the other in a consonant (in Biblical Hebrew *-tā* as against *-t*, in Aramaic *-t* [alongside older *-tā*] as against *-tī*). Since it stands to reason that originally both endings terminated in long vowels,<sup>6</sup> one would have expected both endings to behave in the same way. Paradigmatic pressure has worked to preserve the functionally important difference between the genders and one final vowel has been preserved. This clash between “blindly operating” sound shift and paradigmatic pressure is indeed very neatly illustrated by various Arabic dialects adduced by Jastrow.<sup>7</sup> At one end of the spectrum stand dialects which have kept the opposition between the first person, the second person masculine, and the second person feminine singular of the perfect intact; at the other end of the spectrum are vernaculars in which all three forms have coalesced (i.e., sound shift has totally overcome paradigmatic pressure). Transitional stages are exhibited in dialects which retain the opposition between second person masculine and feminine, but not between the second person masculine and first person on the one hand, and those which have eliminated the gender opposition in the second person, yet have preserved the opposition between the second and the first person, on the other.

1,2. In Hebrew, in Aramaic, and in Arabic dialects there is a tendency to preserve the final vowels of pronominal suffixes more often after nouns terminating in vowels than after those ending in consonants,<sup>8</sup> the reason being that after consonants the suffixes were sufficiently differentiated, whereas after long vowels they

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Blau (1979), pp. 8–9.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Blau (1979), p. 9, n. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Jastrow (1978–81), I, 217–18.

<sup>8</sup> For particulars see Blau (1982), pp. 64–66.

differed only in their final vowel, which was accordingly preserved. As demonstrated by the Arabic dialects, this clash between sound shift and paradigmatic pressure is apt to produce somewhat erratic results, since sound change sometimes prevails, while in other cases paradigmatic pressure takes the upper hand.

2. The most famous instance of the disappearance of the determining force of the definite article in Semitic tongues is no doubt that of Eastern Aramaic. Various explanations have been proposed.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore not without interest to analyse similar features in modern Arabic and Aramaic dialects. In the following I shall treat the disappearance of the determining force of the definite article in the Arabic dialect of Daragözü<sup>10</sup> and in the modern West Aramaic dialects of the Anti-Lebanon.<sup>11</sup>

The most interesting feature common to Daragözü and the Aramaic dialects of the Anti-Lebanon is no doubt the fact that it is the subject, rather than the object, in which the determinate noun is not differentiated from the indeterminate one. Prima

<sup>9</sup> Cf., e.g., Blau (1974), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Based on Jastrow (1973), pp. 90–94. On the other hand, a *tentative* analysis of the majority of the texts from Ka<sup>c</sup>bīye (Jastrow [1978–81], pp. 316–71) has not yielded any results. My impression is that the definite article may be added to definite nouns or be absent from them in all syntactic positions. The definite article is especially frequent in prepositional phrases, yet even in them it may be absent, e.g., p. 316, 3; 318, 2; 336, 9. It may occur or not with definite subjects and objects alike. On the other hand, one must not lose sight of the fact that whenever the speaker deems it necessary, he can easily mark the object as such by referring to it with a pronominal suffix, and as we shall see, the differentiation of the definite object from the subject is the primary communicative need. I have the impression (which, however, is based on a tentative analysis) that the dialect of Ka<sup>c</sup>bīye exhibits a transitory stage, in which the use of the definite article is simply optional, no clear system of determination having yet emerged.

<sup>11</sup> Based on Correll (1978), pp. 3, 10–16. Correll (pp. 19–20) disagrees with my contention that in these dialects even the system of determination of adjectives has started weakening. He is, no doubt, correct as to the second instance (out of the five adduced); he may be right about examples 3, 4, 5 (which means that these instances do not prove my contention either), and thus only two instances of weakening remain: the first example, which, pace Correll, cannot be indefinite, i.e., *alō iz<sup>c</sup>ur* cannot denote “a small God,” since it refers to *the* sultan (and not to *a* sultan); and an additional instance adduced by him (which he interprets as being due to morphological constraint). Therefore, pending further examples, it is impossible to decide whether these two examples reflect *parole* only or have already penetrated the *langue*, thus reflecting the beginning of the weakening of the force of the definite article in the domain of the adjective as well.

facie, this is rather surprising, since<sup>12</sup> it is the subject for which the use of the definite article seems to be most natural. Yet since on the one hand, the determination of the subject is very often a given fact, and on the other hand, its determination and indetermination, respectively, as a rule depend entirely on its context, the use of the definite article with the subject (or its omission) is of little importance for communication.<sup>13</sup> However, distinction between subject and object is often crucial for proper understanding. Since subjects are naturally determinate, it is especially definite objects that are apt to be mistaken for subjects, and since subjects are naturally personal, personal objects may be even more easily mistaken for subjects.<sup>14</sup> The total disappearance of the definite article, without concomitant use of a special mark for the direct object (by prepositions, pronominal suffixes, or word order), makes the differentiation between subject and object more precarious, since in languages possessing a definite article, in the case of a transitive verb accompanied by one determinate and one indeterminate noun, the determinate noun is naturally (although not necessarily) understood as the subject and the indeterminate one as the object. In Daragözü this problem is solved by the preservation of the definite article with the determinate object,

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<sup>12</sup> Cf., e.g., Sommer (1931), p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Puşcariu (1943), p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> For the differentiation of determinate objects from subjects cf., e.g., the use of Hebrew *et* (as well as of Aramaic *l-*, for which see below). For the marking of personal objects cf. Spanish and Portuguese *á* (*a*) and Rumanian *pe*; see Jespersen (1937), p. 153, par. 35; Puşcariu (1943), p. 57, who rightly remarks that even Latin did not distinguish between neuter nominative and accusative.

As a matter of fact, determination versus indetermination and human versus nonhuman are not the only pertinent parameters. For a whole scale of pertinent features see Khan (1984), p. 470. On the other hand, I do not accept Kaye's (preprint) attempt to apply to Semitic languages T. Vennemann's theory that "in TVX (i.e., with the word order topicalized, nominal—verb—other parts of the sentence) languages, demonstrative adjectives (i.e., the future definite article) are increasingly used with topical nominals because they usually preserve S-O (i.e., subject-object) morphology longer than nouns, and thus indicate right away whether the nominal they topicalize is subject or object." In Indo-European languages, to be sure, the definite article is more apt to preserve declension than nouns; this, however, is not the case in Semitic tongues. Moreover, as a rule, in Semitic languages the topicalized object is referred to by an accusative pronominal suffix, in contradistinction to topicalized subject, which at the most is referred to by a nominative free pronoun.

whereas the indeterminate object as well as both the *determinate* and indeterminate subjects have no article. Thus the Arabic dialect of Daragözü is apt to distinguish the determinate object from the determinate subject: the former is accompanied by the article, the latter has none. In the Aramaic dialects of the Anti-Lebanon such a definite object is marked by special forms of the verb.<sup>15</sup>

The situation in Eastern Aramaic is, in principle, not different. Here too the definite direct object may<sup>16</sup> be marked by the preposition *la* and/or an anticipatory pronominal suffix. Therefore, the use of the emphatic state with both determinate and indeterminate nouns did not hamper communication.

3. Expressive doubling of consonants is attested in modern Arabic dialects (cf. Jastrow [1978–81], II, 14, n. 48). This *may* be the reason for the sporadic doubling of consonants in pause in Biblical Hebrew; cf., e.g., Bauer-Leander (1922), p. 218, par. 23c).

4.1. Brockelmann (1955), p. 44, rem. 3 interprets the long *â* in *âleph*, “thousand,” in Syriac as borrowed from a Canaanite pausal form. As a matter of fact, pretonic lengthening (in a closed syllable!) in numerals is attested in the dialect of Ka<sup>c</sup>bīye (Jastrow [1978–81], II, 330, n. 60: *ârb<sup>c</sup>în*, *xâmsîn*, *sâb<sup>c</sup>în*). It may well be that this lengthening in numerals is due to slow counting, especially when numbers are opposed to each other.

4.2. It is a moot question whether or not pretonic lengthening occurs in Aramaic.<sup>17</sup> For this presumptive pretonic lengthening

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<sup>15</sup> One need not be surprised by the frequent absence of this special conjugation from the imperative (pace Correll [1978], p. 12), since with the imperative, the subject of which is always the pronoun of the second person, there was less pressure to mark the (determinate) direct object.

<sup>16</sup> See Nöldeke (1898), p. 218. On the other hand, such a special mark is superfluous when, according to the context, the subject is clearly differentiated from the determinate direct object. Therefore, even in a case like John 1:18 *alāhā la ḥzā* (ʔ)*nāsh* it is quite clear that the preceding determinate noun is the object, whereas the following indeterminate (as far as a pronoun is regarded as indeterminate) noun is the subject, “nobody has seen God,” “God has not seen anybody” would be sacrilegious.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Sarauw (1939), p. 106 f.; Bauer-Leander (1927), p. 147; Brockelmann (1940), pp. 351 ff. Quite different is the situation in Biblical Hebrew, in which pretonic lengthening is a central feature. In Blau (1968), pp. 31–32, n. 13, I considered it a phonetic phenomenon, comparing it with a similar tendency in the Arabic dialect of Dōsiri. Now, however, I would prefer to interpret it as a reaction against Aramaic syllable structure, rather than a phonetic feature.

causative forms of verbs *II w/y* have also been adduced (as Dan. 2:44, *tâseph*, "it will annihilate"). I would, however, prefer to interpret this lengthening as due to rhythmical adaptation to the strong verb (as *taph<sup>c</sup>el*), just as in Maghrebine dialects<sup>18</sup> pretonic lengthening in forms like *yêlîbsû*, "they will dress," is presumably due to rhythmic adaptation to forms without anaptyctic vowel, as in *yilbsû*.

5. The replacement of <sup>ɔ</sup> by <sup>ɛ</sup> in loanwords is a well-known phenomenon; see the literature cited in Blau (1970), pp. 102–03, n. 309; and further Fraenkel (1878), p. 11. Cf. for it in Arabic dialects forms like *ʿalatrîk*, "electric torch" (Jastrow [1978–81], p. 152, n. 37); perhaps also *ja<sup>c</sup>da*, "road" (ibid., p. 164, n. 10); and in the Neo-Aramaic of Ṭûrôyo *ʿameriqan*, "American" (Ritter [1971], text 112, par. 347). This explains the use of <sup>ɛ</sup> in Judaeo-Aramaic *ʿyy<sup>ɛ</sup>*, "Arab," as against Arabic *hamza* (see Blau [1970], pp. 5–51).

6. According to A. Spitaler, only in the case of *b, p, d, t, g, k, q* can the occurrence of *n* plus simple *b*, etc., be considered the product of dissimilation proper from double *bb*,<sup>19</sup> etc. I would suggest that one interpret *n* preceding other consonants in verbs *In* (as *hanzâqat*, "to damage") as restored by analogy with those forms of the paradigm in which *n* had been preserved (as *nâziq*, "coming to grief"). Then, by analogy to *In* verbs in which forms with double consonants alternated with *n* plus simple consonant (as *yinten*, "he will give," as against *yittəninnah*), *n* was introduced also into verbs containing double consonants other than *In* (as *hansâqâ*, "to take up," alongside with *hassiqû*). Cf. the restoration of the *l* of the definite article *al-* preceding "sun" letters, by analogy to *al-* before "moon" letters in Arabic dialects (e.g., *əltaxt*, "the bed," Jastrow [1978–81], II, 320, n. 23; and further Jastrow [1973], p. 94, par. 6.2.4, end).

7. Exceptional shortening of frequent verbs, as reflected by Aramaic *yəhâkh*, "he will go," if indeed it is derived from *hlk*, is matched not only by classical Arabic *yaku*, "he will be" but also by many dialectal forms; cf. Jastrow (1978–81), p. 10, n. 32; p. 98, n. 1; p. 119; p. 210, n. 11; p. 264.

8. In Biblical Hebrew nouns sometimes stand in construct although followed by an adjectival attribute rather than by a

<sup>18</sup> See Fischer-Jastrow (1980), p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> For particulars see Blau (1970), pp. 126–28.

substantive (cf., e.g., Brockelmann [1956], p. 65, par. 70d; p. 70, par. 76e). This feature is attested in modern Arabic dialects as well; see Jastrow (1978–81), p. 218.

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