ON THE PROBLEM OF THE SYNTHETIC CHARACTER OF CLASSICAL ARABIC AS AGAINST JUDAEO-ARABIC (MIDDLE ARABIC)

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PROFESSOR FEDERICO C. CORRIENTE published a stimulating article entitled "On The Functional Yield of Some Synthetic Devices in Arabic and Semitic Morphology" in *JQR*, N.S., 62 (1971), pp. 20-50. The main issues of this closely-reasoned article, as far as we shall deal with them, are:

1. The structure of the spoken language in the early days of Islam was, in respect to noun inflection, almost as analytical as, for instance, Biblical Hebrew, and logemes were expressed almost exclusively by word-order, morph-words, and the like (Corriente, p. 38), i.e., by analytical expression (*ibid.*, p. 31).

2. This is demonstrated by the insignificant functional yield of the noun-*I'râb* in the Qur'ân and in Abbasid and later prose (*ibid.*, e.g., p. 38). The principle of the functional yield here applied is that of morpho-syntactical oppositions (*ibid.*, p. 25): only if the case morphemes are commutable, do they have functional yield (*ibid.*, e.g., p. 36, n. 25).

3. Yet not in Arabic only is noun inflection a redundant feature: in the Semitic languages in general, in historically documented periods and in the earlier stage for which the evidence provided by the available material is still conclusive, noun flexion was not an autonomous synthetic device for logemic expression, as in Indo-European, but a secondary redundant set of morphs (*ibid.*, p. 44).

In the following discussion we shall try to deal with the problems mentioned:

a) Logemes expressed by word-order do not reflect analytic traits. According to both mentalistic approach (see e.g., P. Kretschmer, *Sprache*, in 'Einleitung in die Altertums-

wissenschaft,' edited by A. Gercke—E. Norden, Leipzig-Berlin 1923, p. 32: "Synthesis (is) the inclusion of several... concepts in one word... The analytic type...splits up one word, according to the concepts contained in it, into several words") and behaviorist conception (see e.g., L. Bloomfield, *Language*, New York 1933, p. 207: "Analytic languages...use few bound forms...synthetic (ones)...use many"),[1] word-order as such, determining the functions of the constituents of an utterance, is neither synthetic nor analytic. Accordingly, one should not rush to the conclusion that languages which mark logemes by word-order automatically belong to the analytic type.

On the other hand, one will readily admit that analytical languages evince a marked tendency to distinguish, for example, between subject and direct object by means of fixed word order.[2] Therefore, the difference between Corriente's conception and that proposed here is, in many respects, one of wording alone. Nevertheless, the interdependence between analytical lingual type and fixed word order is by no means automatic. Analytical languages, which mark the direct object by morph words (as does Hebrew, for instance), often preserve quite a free word-order.

b) Much more decisive is the exaggerated importance that Corriente attributes to the insignificant functional yield of the case system in Arabic. As a matter of fact, it is functional yield upon which Corriente's reasoning is pivoting. Since the

[1] Yet not always are both approaches identical. Thus, it seems that a word like Classical Arabic *zanama*, "a piece cut and left hanging from the ear of a camel or sheep" (Corriente, p. 28, n. 13) is synthetic according to Kretchmer's approach, since several concepts are included in one word; yet not according to Bloomfield's definition, since, like its paraphrase (quoted from L. Maʿlûf's *al-Munjid*[9], Beirut 1937, s.v.) *mâ yuqṭaʿu min ʾuḏni -l-baʿîri ʾawi -sh-shâti fa-yutraku muʿallaqan*" it does not contain many bound forms either. By the way, I do not understand why Corriente, *ibid.*, considers the Old Arabic vocabulary analytical.

[2] See e.g., J. Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*, Oxford 1965, p. 79.

commutation of case endings generates ungrammatical or indifferent utterances, he regards the case endings as at best a mere secondary set of morphs, at worst a linguistically irrelevant legacy of the past (Corriente, p. 32). One can hardly consent to this analysis. Redundancy[3] is a widespread phenomenon in language, and one must not consider redundant features as such a secondary set or even a mere *survival.* Accordingly, the insignificant functional yield of Arabic case endings does not demonstrate that in the underlying spoken language case endings had been dropped.

c) That nothing can be inferred from the redundancy of case endings in classical Arabic is also demonstrated by the insignificant functional yield of noun inflection even in the oldest Semitic languages. Just as their redundancy in the Semitic languages in general does not prove that in the spoken languages which underlied the literary documents extant in the Old Semitic languages case inflection had already ceased to exist, so nothing must be inferred from this redundancy in classical Arabic for the underlying spoken language. As a matter of fact, this redundancy is, in the main, an integral part of the triptotic (or, at least, mainly triptotic) Semitic case system. Moreover, one of the three cases, *viz.* the genitive, is almost totally redundant. It is always so after prepositions and as a rule so after a noun in construct. Accordingly, the possibility of commutation is almost exclusively limited to nominative and accusative. One is, therefore, not surprised that the percentage of functionally relevant case endings in Russian is higher than that in Semitic in general and in Arabic in particular (Corriente, p. 46, n. 40). Nevertheless, even in Russian, according to Corriente's statistics, 71.2% of the occurrences of case endings are functionally irrelevant, thus demonstrating again that redundancy is an integral part of the linguistic system in general and of the case system in particular.

[3] See e.g., C. F. Hocket, *A Course in Modern Linguistics,* New York 1958, pp. 87 ff.

d) Corriente claims (pp. 28-9) that the prevailing structure of Old Arabic "was rather analytical, as Middle Arabic shows clearly after it had gone one step further by dropping the secondary morphs (i.e., the case endings; J.B.) which have now become completely idle, thus substituting not a new structure for an older one, but just one linguistic form for another, *within the same structural frame*" (emphasized by me; J.B.). This claim is, it seems, somewhat overstated. There are clear cases of analytical expressions in Middle Arabic outside the field of the case and mood systems, in contrast with more synthetic structure in classical Arabic. Thus the feminine plural of the pronoun, the verb, and the adjective has been superseded by the masculine (see J. Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic*, Louvain 1966-67, p. 206); the dual, in general, has been greatly limited (*ibid.*, p. 209); the comparative is sometimes expressed by the positive with an adverb meaning "more" (*ibid.*, p. 234); separate personal pronouns are added to the finite forms of the verb (*ibid.*, p. 389); determinate [4]

[4] In Judaeo-Arabic, however, I have come across some (admittedly few) cases of indeterminate direct objects marked by *li*: J. Mann, *Texts and Studies*, I, Cincinnati 1931, p. 215, n. 29 (here and in the following I mainly transliterate unvocalized Middle Arabic texts as if they were literary Arabic devoid of final short vowels), *fastaḥaqq ʿezrâ al-maḏkûr bi-fiʿlathû hâḏihî li-ʾib ʿâd mishshaʿar ha-yshîḇâ*, "and by doing this, the above-mentioned Ezra deserved to be expelled from the academy"; p. 567, line 18, *ʾinn-ar-ra[bbânîn] nahaw ʾan yastaftî rajul li-ʿâlimayn*, "the sages have interdicted that a man should ask two scholars." In some other cases the use of *li* may be due to the pronominal use of the following noun: I. Friedlaender, *Selections from the Arabic Writings of Maimonides*, Leiden 1909, p. 15, lines 2-3, *wa-kayf tulâʾim ʾal-ʾaḡḏiya . . . li-shakhṣ qad ʾiʿtâd*, "and how does food . . . suit a person (i.e., someone) who has become accustomed?"; *Tanḥûm Yerûshalmî, Al-murshid al-kâfî*, s.v. *tḥt*: *ḡaṭṭâ shay li-shay ʾâkhar*, "something covered another thing (i.e., something else)"; Abraham Maimuni, *Responsa*, ed. A. H. Freimann-S. D. Goitein, Jerusalem 1937, p. 36, line 15, *ʾazwajhâ ʾas-sayyid Shâʾûl li-rajul ʾâkhar*, "our lord Saul married her off to another person (i.e., to someone else)." As a rule, however, in Judaeo-Arabic too *li* marks a determinate direct object; see the overwhelming majority of examples adduced in my *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1961, pp. 179-80.

direct objects are marked by *li* (*ibid.*, p. 413); and *'alladî* has become invariable and ceased to agree with its antecedent in number, gender, and case (*ibid.*, p. 549, § 431). Cf. also the phenomena dealt with *ibid.*, p. 244, § 144; p. 422, § 305.5; p. 423, § 306.1; and p. 432, § 314. Accordingly, one should refrain from simply equating the linguistic structure of Middle Arabic with that of classical Arabic.

e) The different structure of classical Arabic is also exhibited by the freer word-order in classical Arabic (*pace* Corriente, p. 38). As A. Bloch has demonstrated (see the summary in his *Vers und Sprache im Altarabischen*, Basel 1946, pp. 154-55), a determinate object is often inserted in Old Arabic prose between verb and indeterminate subject. In modern dialects, on the other hand, there is a marked tendency not to insert the object between verb and subject, except when verb and object constitute an inseparable expression. This is, at any rate, the case in the peasant stories of Bîr Zêt; see J. Blau, *Syntax des palästinensischen Bauerndialekts von Bîr-Zêt*, Walldorf-Hessen 1960, p. 161, rem. 1. Even more important is the different treatment of direct objects preceding the verb. In Old Arabic, a pronominal direct object often precedes the governing verb (yet in this case, the subject cannot precede the verb as well; see Bloch, *ibid.*), whereas the use of a substantival direct object in this position is more limited (for details see *ibid.*). In Middle Arabic and in modern Arabic dialects there is a marked tendency to refer back to the preceding object by means of a pronominal suffix; in other words, the "object" functions as an isolated natural subject. This is the case in the peasant dialect of Bîr Zêt (*op. cit.*, pp. 161-62, § 96c), in which the absence of the pronominal suffix is almost exclusively limited to preceding pronominal objects (interrogative pronouns and indefinitive pronouns derived from interrogative ones; see *ibid.*, p. 162, § 96d). In Ancient South-Palestinian Christian Arabic I have noted additional cases of preceding objects not referred to by a pronominal suffix (see *A Grammar of Christian Arabic*, pp.

609-11, § 517.2). Nevertheless, since the use of such a pronominal suffix occurs in translations even when the original does not contain the pronominal suffix, it apparently exhibits a living feature. Cf. e.g., Ms. British Museum Or. 4950, p. 84, -7 *kâramatî wa-majdî lâ ʾuʿṭîhâ siwây* "I will not give my honour and glory unto another," where the Greek *Vorlage*, LXX Isa. 42:8, 48:11, lacks the pronominal suffix referring back to the preceding object. For additional cases, see *ibid.*, p. 609, § 517.1. Even more conspicuous is this feature, in Saadiah Gaon's Pentateuch translation (I am quoting it according to the *Tâj*, Jerusalem 1964): when translating a verse with preceding direct object, Saadiah, as a rule, employs a pronominal suffix referring back to it, contrary to the Hebrew *Vorlage*. Some examples: Exod. 15:1 *sûs wᵊ-rōḵᵊḇô râmâ ḇa-y-yâm*, "the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea," is translated by *ʾal-khayl wa-rukkâbhâ ramâ bihim* (indirect object) *fi -l-baḥr*. Exod. 20, 21 *mizbaḥ ʾᵃdâmâ taʿᵃśê lî*, "an altar of earth you shall make unto Me," is translated by *maḏbaḥ ʿala -l- ʾarḍ* (i.e. "upon the earth") *taṣnaʿhû lî*. Exod. 22, 27. is especially interesting: in Hebrew both halves of this verse exhibit preceding direct objects *ʾᵉlôhîm lô tᵊqallel wᵊ-nâśî bᵊʿammᵊḵâ lô tâʾor*, "you shall not revile the gods nor curse the ruler of your people"; Saadiah translates the first half by putting the verb before the object: *lâ tashtuman ḥâkiman*, in which case, of course, he does not utilize a pronoun; in the second half, however, he did not change the word-order of the original; accordingly he, automatically as it seems, added a pronominal suffix: *wa-sharîf fî qawmka lâ talʿanhû*! See also Exod. 22:28 (*bis*), 23:7, 11, 15; 24:3, 6, 7; 28:39, 29:14, 36; 34:18; Lev. 4:19, 25, 30, 34; 7:24, 32; 9:9. Lev. 9, 10 *wəʾet ha-ḥeleḇ...hiqṭîr* "and the fat...he burnt," is translated by *wa-ṯ-ṯirb...qattar ḏâlik*, exhibiting a demonstrative pronoun rather than a pronominal suffix. See also Lev. 14:18, 29; Num. 13:28, 15:5, 18:19, 28:2, 31:17, 18; 31:23 (where the Targum as well utilizes a pronominal suffix), 34:18; Deut. 3:12 (exhibiting a demonstrative pronoun, again

referring back to an object of considerable length), 3, 13. Deut. 8:1 *kol-ha-m-miṣwâ . . . tishmᵊrûn laʿᵃśôt,* "all the commandments...shall you observe to do," is translated by *wa-jamiʿ ʾal-waṣâyâ . . . ʾiḥfaẓûhâ wa-ʿmalû bihâ,* exhibiting the preceding "object" both as a direct object and an indirect one. 12:3; 12:31 *kî ḵol-toʿᵃḇaṯ YHWH ᵃʾsher śânê ʿâśû,* "for every abomination to the Lord, which He hates, have they done," is translated by *fa-ʾinnahû kaṯîran mimmâ yakrahhû ʾallâh wa-yashnaʾhû ṣanaʿûhu,* exhibiting the preceding object (isolated natural subject) in the accusative.

Cases of preceding direct objects without pronouns referring back to them are relatively rare. I have noted Exod. 23:13, 34:13, *in fine,* 17; Lev. 19:28, 23:25, 28, 31, 35; Num. 17:18, 28:18, 25; 32:31 (where the verb is a participle). Lev. 11:26 *wa-tafrîq lays-hâ mufarriqa wa-jtirâr lays-hâ muṣʿida,* "which is not clovenfooted nor chews the cud," the preceding object is an internal one, thus belonging to a different category. The only frequent use of a preceding object lacking a pronoun referring to it occurs in the *Tâj* when the object is followed by a verb expressing command, preceded by *fa.* This construction, however, is a mere imitation of classical Arabic. I have noted Exod. 34:13 *bal maḏâbiḥhum fanquḍû wa-dikâkhum fa-kassirû* (continued by *wa-sawârîhum tujaddiʿûn,* without *fa,* see *supra*), "yet you shall destroy their altars, break their images (and cut down their columns)." Lev. 18:4 (*bis*), 18:17 (where in the second half both *fa* and the pronominal suffix are missing). Deut. 7:5 exhibits all possible forms of construction, including *fa* and pronominal suffix: *bal ka-ḏâ fa-ṣnaʿû lahum maḏâbiḥhum fa-nquḍû wa-dikâkhum fa-kassirû wa-sawârîhum tajdaʿû* (!) *wa-fusûlhum fa-ʾaḥriqûhâ* (!) *bi-n-nâr,* "but thus shall you deal with them, you shall destroy their altars and break down their images and cut down their columns and burn down their idols with fire."

The use of a pronominal suffix to refer back to a preceding direct object is, of course, attested in Judaeo-Arabic outside of the *Tâj* as well. Thus I have noted J. Obermann, *Studies in*

Islam and Judaism..., New Haven 1933, p. 27, 5-6 *qudrati -l-ʿaẓîma ʾassasat ʾal- ʾarḍ wa-s-samâ maddathû* (translation of Isa. 48:13) "My great power has laid the foundations of the earth and spanned the heaven" (in this case, the verb in the Hebrew *Vorlage* precedes the object). At any rate, the freer word-order in classical Arabic clearly exhibits a structure different from that of Middle Arabic and modern dialects.

f) Finally, I would like to deal with the practical problem of determining the functional yield of cases in various languages. It seems to me that this is by no means as simple as it would appear at first glance. First, the commutation of cases often gives rise to a sentence which is perfectly grammatical, yet insofar as its meaning is concerned, rather ill-adjusted for the context. Where is the limit beyond which such a commutation must be considered impossible? Second, the commutation sometimes gives rise to a different construction, which is, however, almost identical in sense with the first one. Thus, in some cases the change involving the commutation of an attribute to an adverb of circumstance and vice versa entails quite an insignificant alteration in sense. Again, where is the limit? Corriente states that in Sura 12, verses 1-30 there is an absolute lack of functional case morphemes (see e.g., p. 37), yet it is possible to consider several of the occurrences as functional. Thus verse 2 *ʾinnâ ʾanzalnâhu qurʾânan ʿarabiyyan*, "we have sent it down as an Arabic Koran," may be commuted into *qurʾânun ʿarabiyyun*,' '(it is) an Arabic Koran;" the semantic difference is, however, admittedly quite small. Verse 3 *bi-mâ ʾawḥaynâ ʾilayka hâḏa -l -qurʾâna*, "in that we have revealed to you this Koran," may be changed into *hâḏa -l-qurʾânu*, "this is the Koran" (for the absence of the copula *huwa* see H. Reckendorf, *Arabische Syntax*, Heidelberg 1921, p. 282, § 141.2); in this case the semantic difference seems to be more conspicuous. In Verse 5 the attribute *mubînun* may be changed into an adverbial of circumstance *mubînan*, "clearly"; the semantic difference is insignificant. Verse 6 *wa-yutimmu niʿmatahû...kamâ ʾatammahâ ʿalâ ʾabawayka min qablu ʾIbrâhîma wa-ʾIsḥâqa*, "He will perfect His blessing...as He had

perfected it formerly on your fathers Abraham and Isaac," may be changed into *Ibrâhîmu wa- ʾIsḥâqu*, "as Ibraham and Isaac perfected it"; yet admittedly this interpretation does not fit the context too well. Similar commutations of case endings are possible in the following verses as well, though they either do not fit the context very well or do not change the meaning substantially. Accordingly, one should be very cautious as to the proportion of functionally necessary cases. Therefore, I personally prefer to speak of overall impressions rather than of accurate numbers.

My impression is, of course, that the rate of functionally necessary case endings in Arabic is quite insignificant, just as Corriente put it. However, I have the impression that in many an Indo-European language the proportion of similar cases is almost as insignificant. I have tried to determine the functionally necessary cases in the Latin translation of the Koran by L. Marraci, as well as in the German one by L. Ullman ([1]Bielefeld und Leipzig 1881) of the first thirty verses of Sura 12. Similarly, I have analyzed the first 22 verses of the Muʿallaqa of Imraʾu -l- Qays in the Latin translation of E. G. Hengstenberg (*Amrulkeisi Moallakah*, Bonn 1823) and in the German verse translation of F. Rückert (Amrilkais[2], Hannover 1924) and prose translation of S. Gandz (*Die Muʿallaqa des Imrulqais*, Wien 1913). My impression is that the rate of functionally relevant case morphs is quite insignificant not only in the German translations, exhibiting a language not highly synthetic, but also in the Latin translations, although Latin is quite a synthetic language.[5] The most conspicuous cases of functionally relevant case morphs stem from the fact that Latin like German possesses a dative, a case absent from the Semitic languages. Thus Latin *Sura* 12, 10/11 *dixit dicens*, "he who said spoke," may be changed into *dixit dicenti*, "he said to him who spoke"; yet this does not fit the context very

[5] One should not attach too great importance to the fact that these Latin translations were written by people who spoke much more analytical languages, although this might have in some cases promoted the use of prepositional phrases instead of case morphs.

well. Latin Imraʾu -l- Qays, verse 8, *nullus similis illi*, "none is similar to that," may be changed to *nulli similis ille*, "that is similar to none"; yet the difference in meaning in the given context is rather negligible; verse 12, *dixit illa*, "she said" may be commuted into *dixit illi*, "she said to him"; yet the actual difference is insignificant.

I would also have liked to compare a Hungarian translation of the Koran, since Hungarian is a highly synthetic language. I could not, however, obtain possession of it. Accordingly, I contended myself with comparing the first ten verses of Genesis in Arabic translation by Smith-Van Dyck and in Hungarian by G. Károli. Again, the basis of comparison was, of course, much too small. Nevertheless, my impression was again that even in Hungarian the occurrence of functionally relevant case morphs is rather restricted. Among the more conspicuous cases I noted verse 2, *a mélység szinén*, "upon the face of the deep," which may be changed to *szinével*, i.e., "with the face"; verse 9, *gyüljenek...egy helyre*, "let them be gathered...unto one place", may be altered into *helyröl* "from one place."

To sum up: the redundancy of the case system in classical Arabic does not justify the assumption that it was a mere trace, and that in the underlying spoken language case endings had already been dropped. Redundancy is a widespread phenomenon in language in general, and is inherent, according to Corriente himself, to the Semitic case system as a whole. Moreover, redundancy also is characteristic of case systems outside the Semitic languages, including highly synthetic languages, though it may be less conspicuous in some of them than in Semitic tongues (because of the frequency of borderline cases it is not easy to state the exact rate of functionally relevant cases in different languages). At any rate, one should not regard classical Arabic as exhibiting the same analytical structural frame as does Middle Arabic. Classical Arabic was much more synthetic, even if one does not take into account case and mood systems, and also had a freer word-order.