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337

Foreword

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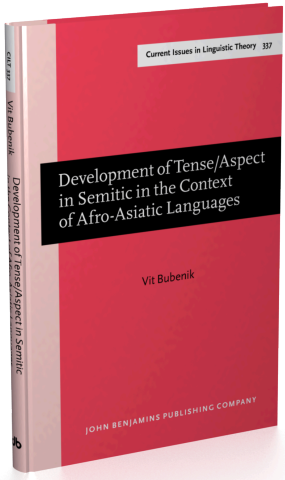

Pages xvii–xx of
Development of Tense/Aspect in Semitic in the Context of Afro-Asiatic Languages
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Foreword

It has been said that one of the most fascinating issues in comparative Afro-Asiatic linguistics is to find out "to what extent features of ancient languages … have possibly survived and live on in contemporary Afrasian languages" (Jungraithmayr 2003: 317). Along the same lines, Voigt (2002: 285–866) recommends the study of the morphological similarities between archaic Afro-Asiatic and the development of the innovative Afro-Asiatic languages "in more detail and with more linguistic argument". Truly, in its documentation from over five millennia the Afro-Asiatic phylum presents us with unique opportunities to explore the trajectories between the archaic Afro-Asiatic languages (Ancient Stage) and their innovative descendants of the Middle and Modern/Late Stages.

There are hundreds of excellent philological and linguistic studies of individual Semitic and Afro-Asiatic languages written by specialists in various branches over centuries. The emergence of the discipline of comparative Semitic (paralleling efforts of the Indo-European comparative linguistics) is linked with Brockelmann's monumental *Grundriss* 'Outline' (1908–1913). In the later decades of the 20th c. several comprehensive monographs in German and other languages appeared. Among earlier works suffice it to mention M. Cohen's *Le système verbal sémitique et l'expression du temps* (1924); Bergsträsser's *Einführung in die semitischen Sprachen* (1928, English translation 1983); Moscati's *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*(1964); Diakonoff's *Afrasian Languages*(1988); D. Cohen's *Les langues chamito-sémitiques*(1988); Petráček's *Úvod do hamitosemitské (afrasijské) jazykovědy II. (Introduction to Hamito-Semitic (Afrasian) Linguistics*(1989); Diakonoff & Sharbatov's *Afroaziyskiye Yaziki – Semitskiye Yaziki*(1991); Hetzron's *The Semitic Languages* (1997). The growing field of Afro-Asiatic comparative and historical linguistics in the first two decades of the 21st c. is represented by several comprehensive works: *Semitic Languages. Outline of a Comparative Grammar* (Lipiński 2001); *Yaziki Mira – Semitskiye Yaziki: Akkadskiy Yazik, Severozapadnosemitskiye Yaziki* (Belova et al. 2009); *The Afroasiatic Languages* (Frayzyngier & Shay 2012); *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities* (Edzard 2012); culminating in *The Semitic Languages – An International Handbook* (Weninger et al. 2011) "a comprehensive, unbiased description of the state of the art in Semitics" (p. 1).

Compared with the state of affairs in Indo-European linguistics what is missing is "an effort at reconstruction". "Why do Semitists not engage in reconstruction (unlike Indo-Europeanists)?" (to quote Huehnergard (2002: 130–131)). The situation changed during the last decade when several Semitists/Afroasianists focused on problems surrounding the diachrony of morphological categories of tense, aspect and mood. Voigt (2004) studied the development of the aspectual system of Hebrew from Proto-Semitic. Zaborski published several articles on the crucial theoretical issues of tense vs. aspect, grammatical aspect vs. lexical aspect (2002), and on the traces of the synthetic perfect *iptaras* "he has decided, separated" in Arabic as documented in Akkadian where it is formed by the infix *-t-* (2004). In 2005b he challenged the *communis opinio* that the rise of the North-West Semitic and Arabic 'Imperfect' is the result of an expansion of the original 'Subjunctive' (preserved as Akkadian 'Subordinative') pinpointing that a shift of the original Present (= 'Imperfect') to dependent clauses is a universal process (whereas the opposite trajectory is extremely rare). Most recently, Kouwenberg in his massive study *The Akkadian Verb and Its Semitic Background* (2010) reconstructed the prehistory of the Akkadian verbal system on the basis of internal evidence of Akkadian and comparative evidence of other Semitic languages, and proposed significant revisions in our understanding of the ancestral Proto-Semitic verbal system. I will be referring to this significant study in Chapters Two and Four of my monograph.

In the field of Indo-European (IE) historical and comparative linguistics a deeper insight into Mycenaean Greek (of the 14th–12th c.) can be gained by its study in the IE context of Hittite and Sanskrit, and the same should apparently be true of the study of Akkadian in its Afro-Asiatic (AA) context of Egyptian, Berber and Cushitic. But the dilemma of this approach is immediately obvious: while those three IE languages possess documents from the 2nd millennium, the latest documents of Akkadian are separated from those available for Berber and Cushitic by more than two thousand years. Here we face the proverbial dilemma of synchronic juxtaposition of patterns with a different time depth. Thus it would seem that the 'legitimate' comparative work ('synchrony within diachrony') should only be done among contemporary languages (Akkadian, Eblaite, Ugaritic, Egyptian), or, among their earliest reconstructable stages (Proto-Semitic, Proto-Berber, Proto-Cushitic, Proto-Chadic). The synchronic study of Cushitic and Chadic superfamilies is a major desideratum before the reconstruction of their earlier stages can be elaborated in all the necessary details. For all these reasons the currently available results on the reconstruction of Proto-Afro-Asiatic phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics are much less impressive than those currently at hand in parallel domains of Proto-Indo-European (PIE). While normally Indo-Europeanists normally think of PIE as a 'single' dialectally diversified (proto)-proto-language

(with pre-PIE ancestry and reconstructable trajectories towards individual branches during its disintegration), Afroasianists think of Proto-Afro-Asiatic (PAA) more in terms of a 'macrofamily'(or 'phylum'); under this assumption one is faced with the issue of parallel developments and various replacements/retentions of earlier (not necessarily) common forms. To start with our primary evidence we have to acknowledge that the degree of kinship among individual families/branches of AA is much more remote than among the branches of IE. This has to do with the much earlier break-up of PAA (ca. 10th–8th Mill) as compared with PIE (3rd–2nd Mill) which allowed individual branches (esp. Chadic and Cushitic) to become 'superfamilies' consisting of several 'families'. One of the (many) challenges in this respect is to determine the relative chronology of the rise of particular linguistic phenomena as belonging to several or only to a single branch of AA. Unlike the traditional model of historical and comparative linguistics (supported by sound 'laws' *Lautgesetze* for the reconstruction of PIE phonology and by a typological approach used for the reconstruction of morphology), the AA macrofamily can profitably be studied by means of "an extended typological approach" (*typologische Betrachtungsweise*, Loprieno 1986: 188) necessitated by numerous comparisons between two AA languages belonging to different historical stages. To avoid "unjustifiable comparisons" Diakonoff (1988: 17), following the example of Indo-Iranian linguistics, introduced the notions of the Ancient, Middle and Modern/Late Stages into AA linguistics. While this diachronic 'trichotomy' proved to be of fundamental importance for the diachronic study of Akkadian, Aramaic and Hebrew, the term 'Middle Arabic' is somewhat problematic given its sociolinguistic/stylistic dimensions (it is seen in medieval texts written by Muslims and Arabic speaking Christians and Jews). Most recently, Khan (2011: 817–818) explained it as an 'intermediate' variety between Classical Arabic and 'spoken vernacular Arabic'. Modern Literary Arabic differs from the Classical language above all in its lexicon and to a lesser degree in its grammar (the most fundamental difference being the absence of desinential inflection and the further development of analytic morphosyntax).

It was argued most recently by Edzard in the edited volume on *Semitic and Afroasiatic: Challenges and Opportunities* (2012: 12):

> Within this volume, we shall present some of the challenges and opportunities that present themselves for scholars who want to gain a better understanding of certain notorious problems in Semitic linguistics. Some of these problems deserve and need to be investigated in their wider Afroasiatic context. At least it may turn out to be rewarding to investigate parallels to peculiar phenomena in Semitic in (some of the) other branches of Afroasiatic.

Arguably, one of the major 'challenges' in Semitic linguistics is a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the development of the aspectual and diathetic

(voice) systems of individual Semitic languages. As argued above, the Semitic family cannot be studied in isolation from its closest relatives – the Berber and Cushitic families. More specifically in this monograph I focus on the structure and internal dynamics of the verb systems of the well documented Semitic languages in their Ancient (Akkadian, Eblaite, Ugaritic) and Middle Stages (Old Aramaic, Biblical Hebrew, Classical Arabic and Gəʕəz). The central issues will be the role of 'ablaut' ('apophony') in the formation of their aspectual and diathetic systems, and working 'downstream', their trajectories to the later state of affairs which witnessed the reduction of the role of ablaut (see Bubenik 2001, 2003). The AA context will be provided in chapters devoted to the Berber, (North) Cushitic, Egyptian and Chadic families with an emphasis on the commonalities and differences in their aspectual and diathetic systems. On the basis of the systemic presentation of these matters, working 'upstream', it is possible to reconstruct the Proto-Semitic verbal system and certain sections of its ancestral Proto-Semito-Berbero-Cushitic Stage.

On the whole, AA examples are rarely quoted in various textbooks on historical linguistics. To judge by the twenty-two international conferences on historical linguistics this field is dominated by the scholars working in the time honored realm of IE historical and comparative linguistics (*Indogermanistik*). The state of the art in the field of tense and aspect, *The Oxford Handbook of Tense and Aspect* (Binnick 2012) shows that Semitic and AA languages are badly under-represented in comparison with IE languages (Hellenic, Germanic, Romance and Slavic). Among Semitic languages we find only Hebrew, Akkadian and Arabic with very limited coverage (mentioning the stative-to-perfect shift in Semitic); the only other AA language with more extensive coverage is Somali (under the heading of 'Nominal tense').