

# Introduction

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Pages viii–xii of

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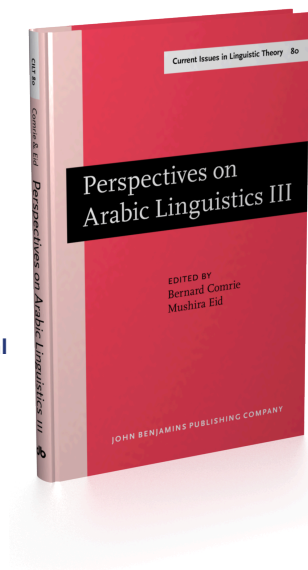
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## INTRODUCTION

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The papers in the first section of the volume are responses to the theme “Arabic in relation to other languages”, and it is interesting to see how different authors have interpreted this theme in quite different, but all equally valid, ways. Comrie examines ways in which particular properties of Arabic — including properties that show small but significant differences in different varieties of Arabic — can contribute to the sharpening of ideas in general grammatical theory. For instance, Arabic has a tense-aspect-mood system remarkably similar to that of creoles, although Arabic is in no sense a creole; he suggests that this is in keeping with the view that the formal means used to express tense-aspect-mood is closely linked to the semantic categories expressed (cf. Dahl 1985:184-187), rather than a particular tense-aspect-mood system being a specific property of creoles, as argued in Bickerton’s bioprogram approach (Bickerton 1981:58-59). Another paper showing how Arabic and other Semitic languages can contribute to general linguistic theory is McCarthy’s paper on the need to recognize a category of ‘guttural’ consonants in phonology. A number of synchronic and diachronic processes in various Semitic languages provide evidence for the like behavior of consonants with uvular, pharyngeal, and glottal places of articulation, yet current theories of distinctive features, deriving from the system proposed in Chomsky & Halle (1968), provide no way of capturing the similarities among these different places of articulations, thus failing to capture a particularly salient significant generalization.

The comparison of genetically closely-related languages, such as the Romance languages, has played an important role in the recent history of linguistics, and Eid's contribution shows that results of equal import can be obtained from the study of the closely related Semitic languages, in this case Arabic and Hebrew. The particular phenomenon that Eid investigates is the occurrence of personal pronouns in copular sentences of the type *Nadia is the doctor*. While the two languages show striking similarities, there are also significant differences; and Eid argues that a comprehensive account of the phenomenon requires a combination of formal grammatical and functional considerations.

Given the extent to which English is studied in Arabic-speaking countries and the smaller but still not insignificant extent to which Arabic is studied in English-speaking countries, contrastive studies of Arabic and English grammar are important pedagogically as well as theoretically, and one such contrast between Arabic and English is the topic of Mahmoud's paper. He demonstrates that while one type of English intransitive construction, namely, unaccusative constructions (e.g., *the butter melted*), has direct correspondents with similar properties in Arabic, there is no direct correspondent in Arabic for the superficially similar English middle constructions (e.g., *the new car drives well*).

One of the ways in which Arabic has interacted with other languages has been through the spread of Islam and the subsequent borrowing of Arabic words into the languages of other Islamic peoples. Al-Harbi examines the phonology of Arabic loans in Acehnese, the language of one of the most strongly Islamic communities of Indonesia. He argues that the phonetic adaptation of Arabic loans to conform to Acehnese phonological patterns can be accounted for in terms of surface phonetic conditions, i.e., segments are assimilated in terms of the phonetically closest segment chosen from the set of positionally admissible segments constrained by the surface phonetic constraints of the borrowing language, essentially the position of Shibatani (1973), as opposed to approaches like Hyman's

(1970), which argue for adaptation to the native phonological system in terms of underlying forms.

The papers in the second section of the volume deal with different aspects of Arabic structure — its phonology, morphology, and syntax. Abu-Mansour's paper examines epenthesis in Makkan Arabic. She identifies three types of epenthesis (medial, prepausal and postpausal) and argues that epenthesis be analyzed as a rule triggered by the presence of unsyllabified consonants. Abu-Mansour also considers the degenerate syllable analysis (Selkirk 1981) in which epenthesis fills in an empty nucleus. But she rejects it on the basis that it creates unnecessary complications for two of the three types of epenthesis identified. Beesley's paper addresses problems raised by the nonconcatenative morphological system of Arabic and other Semitic languages for computer implementation of the two-level morphological theory, which has been successful in the analysis of a variety of languages (e.g., Finnish, Japanese, and German). Beesley describes a computer program that performs morphological analysis and dictionary lookup for written Arabic words, thus providing rough translations for them. Benmamoun's paper provides an analysis of morphologically-derived causative verbs and causativized adjectives in Moroccan Arabic, based on Government Binding theory (Chomsky 1981 and subsequent work) and on Baker's (1988) theory of Incorporation. He proposes that they be derived syntactically, rather than lexically. His analysis derives them from a biclausal structure in which the verb and the causative affix are generated as separate morphemes. By Incorporation, the verb is adjoined to the affix as an instance of move alpha.

Despite their differences, the papers in this section all address issues that Arabic raises for linguistic theory, or for certain theoretical positions taken in the literature. From this perspective, they would be related to points made in Comrie's paper regarding the importance of Arabic for linguistic theory.

The papers in the third section of the volume deal with issues in linguistics that have only recently been addressed (if addressed at all) in relation to Arabic. Walters' paper is a quantitative study of sex-

differentiated sociolinguistic behavior in Korba, a small town in Tunisia. He examines three phonological variables in the speech of 23 male and female interviewees and their interviewers, and their interaction with non-linguistic variables (sex, education, age). The discussion is couched in terms of Le Page & Tabouret-Keller's (1985) model of linguistic acts of identity — or, the sociolinguistic options available to members of cultures as they create and perpetuate their individual and collective identities. Abu-Melhim's paper also makes use of Le Page & Tabouret-Keller's model, but it is based on data of a different type: conversations between speakers of different Arabic dialects. On the basis of informal conversations recorded between a Jordanian and an Egyptian couple, Abu-Melhim challenges the position advocated in the literature that when speakers of different Arabic dialects converse with one another, they resort to Classical or Modern Standard Arabic to overcome dialect barriers. He shows that in cross-dialectal conversations speakers of Arabic resort to a number of accommodation strategies involving code-switching to another dialect, to Standard Arabic, and to English as well (if the participants in the conversation are bilingual). Safi-Stagni's paper is a study of agrammatic Aphasia in two speakers of Hijazi Arabic (Saudi Arabia). Because of the highly inflectional nature of Arabic, as opposed to English, and the absence of certain types of function words (e.g., present tense copula), the data she examines challenge the classical definition of agrammatism as being the omission of function words

The papers in this last section, then, provide data and materials which, for the most part, have not been studied before in relation to Arabic. The authors use the materials to question some accepted positions in their respective fields; and in doing so, they provide us with a better understanding of the issues involved and with more evidence in support of the importance of Arabic to other areas of linguistics.

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