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Circumstantial Qualifiers in Semitic

The case of Arabic and Hebrew

Edited by Bo Isaksson

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Preface

If this book is successful in communicating the fundamental role of circumstantial clause combining in Arabic and Hebrew, the credit largely belongs to my linguist co-authors and Arabists Heléne Kammensjö and Maria Persson. From the beginning of the project they took charge of the productive parts of my research proposal, criticized my murky conceptions, and never ceased asking for more precise linguistic terminology. In three workshops, a number of e-meetings and endless e-mail discussions, they have sharpened and advanced my understanding of the phenomenon of circumstantial clause combining. Their suggestions were often more fruitful than my own. I came to learn what a team can accomplish.

Our fundamental supposition was that "circumstantial qualifiers (CQ) involve a wider group of linguistic constructions than what are commonly called *ḥāl*-expressions in Arabic grammars. A linguistic investigation must therefore abandon the Arabic concept of *ḥāl* and enter upon a broad analysis of circumstantial qualifiers wherever they occur in the language – on the syntactic level of a phrase, of a sentence, or as part of discourse (text). Both Arabic and Hebrew possess circumstantial constructions that are hitherto only mentioned sporadically or not at all in the academic discussion" (Project Proposal, 2006). I could not have wished for a more sharp-eyed defender of this research goal than Maria. When we were in danger of diverging from the main path she always brought us back to the basics. "It is true that the Arabian grammatical tradition observed a category of circumstantial clauses and tried to put them together in one group. But the starting point of our investigation is the hypothesis that they did not hit the target perfectly, and caught only a part of the phenomenon. And it was never unanimously defined" (Maria, Jan. 2008).

We spent a great deal of time discussing the definition of *ḥāl* and felt like modern followers of the great Arab grammarians. Some *ḥāl* consist of only one word, others are full-fledged sentences. What could they have in common? One of Heléne's reflections was, "I still feel that the reasons behind the discovery of the Arab grammarians are interesting. What did they see? How did they argue when they made

their delineation of the (*ḥāl*) phenomenon? It's the same process we're going through now, isn't it?" (Sept. 2008). How do we accurately and in a cross-linguistic perspective define different levels of CQ? If a CQ is only one word, is it correct to regard it as a constituent of the head clause? If so, when does a CQ clause acquire a separate status, not just filling a 'slot' in the head? After two years we had at least a tentative answer, thanks to Maria's and Heléne's persistent quest for accuracy. In that connection we also discovered "conjoined CQs, that is, a chain of CQ clauses each referring back to a common head clause" (Maria, Sept. 2008), and nested CQs of the type *head+[CQ+[CQ]]*, where one CQ is the head of another CQ.

Maria was the first of us to demand a purely semantic definition of circumstantial qualifiers. I remember her comment – one of many: "I still hope that we will be able to formulate an overall general definition – with general parameters – which we can use when deciding whether a specific syntactic construction in our respective textual materials should be listed as a CQ. It is in this sense I presume that a 'definition' to a great extent must be semantic, since it must suit all our different linguistic varieties" (June 2007). In this connection Heléne contributed a serious criticism that led to a sharpening of our tentative semantic definitions: "I often find that my CQs can have more than one function." (June 2007). We discovered the unmarked character of circumstantial qualifiers: "I do not regard the CQ group as an alternative to the Arabic *ḥīna*-clauses, but as an alternative to the whole group of particle-marked adverbial clauses. CQ constructions are unmarked as to the adverbial meaning (when, where, how, and why). Therefore they should not be classified among the traditional adverbial clauses. They constitute a separate group of the same importance as all the adverbial subordinate clauses together, and have a more general marking" (Heléne, June 2007).

Heléne was the first of us to question the concept of redundancy. We had started the project thinking of CQs as adverbial expressions, and accordingly expected them to be 'redundant' in some sense, but Heléne's comment was, "I am doubtful about the requirement of redundancy which we have taken over from the Arabic grammatical tradition (see Addeweesh). It is not very enlightening. I can see several cases when the CQ function seems to be central, especially in cases

when the grammaticalization process (to a serial verb construction) has started, for example after *taraka* as in *taraktu-hu [yanāmu]* ('I left him [sleeping]') … It seems that the CQ is a more easily accessible construction for the writer than the marked temporal clause. It is perhaps produced with less effort and the receiver has no difficulty in accessing the signal of simultaneity [with the head]. What characterizes the CQ seems to be its lack of unambiguous marking" (Heléne, June 2007). CQ clauses are alternative resources. So we discovered the importance of inference in relation to circumstantial qualifiers, and Heléne was once again the first to write it down for the project discussions, "In traditional grammar, 'circumstance' involves the subcategories cause, reason, condition, consequence, purpose, admission, comparison, etc. And now, when the *ḥāl* clauses by nature are unmarked as to e.g. finality, it is something that the receiver of the message infers" (Heléne, April 2007); "In my view CQ clauses have mainly implicit meanings, i.e. the receiver is to conclude from the context the semantic relation between head and CQ" (Heléne, June 2007).

We worked with databases that had the same structure, but studied different textual materials. I had never before compiled a linguistic database based on corpus material. It was Heléne and Maria who taught me how to do it. I discovered the importance of selecting pertinent categories and productive values for each category. We calibrated the concepts (fields) and the values as our understanding developed. Structuring a database means striving to find the most productive concepts – to continuously refine your linguistic terminology. What you ask for, what you register, will be part of your answer. This takes time and we had to reconsider our texts again and again. As Heléne put it in November 2007, "Sometimes it takes a long time to become as uncertain as you realize you should have been from the beginning".

It is my pleasant duty to also thank Professor Jan Retsö in Göteborg who continuously followed our project discussions and attended our workshops. We benefited a great deal from his comments and support. While we may not have followed every suggestion, his advice was always stimulating and productive.

The present book is the outcome of the research project "Circumstantial qualifiers in Semitic: A comparative investigation of adjunct expressions in Arabic and Hebrew" 2007-2008. I would finally like to

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The editor