

BOOK REVIEWS

LARCHER, Pierre. *Le système verbal de l'arabe classique* (2^e édition revue et corrigée). Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, Impr. de l'Université d'Aix-Marseille, 2012. 186 p. ISBN 978-2-85399-841-3.

The title of Larcher's book seems to introduce a current grammatical description of the Classical Arabic verbal paradigms with a reasonable deal of related syntactic and semantic data. Indeed, the reader will find all this in the book, but in addition he will be faced with a truly inspiring world of ideas touching the most fundamental roots of seemingly trivial grammatical facts. Larcher's book is a theory or perhaps a philosophy of the Classical Arabic verbal system and linguistic phenomena closely related to it.

The book consists of the following parts:

- Generalities: paradigms, basic morphology (pp. 9 – 32)
- Triliteral verbs: basic form: I; augmented basic forms: II, III, IV; augmented basic forms in *-t*: VIII, V, VI, X; form VII; denominative verbs; delocutive verbs; form IX and augmented forms XI to XV; forms XII, XIII, XIV (pp. 34 – 121)
- Quadriliteral verbs (pp. 124 – 128)
- Tenses, aspect, mode and modality (pp. 132 – 161)
- Bibliography (pp. 162 – 173)
- Index nominum (pp. 174 – 176)
- Index rerum (pp. 176 – 180).

One of the fundamental methodological premises of the book is formulated in the short annexe to Chapter 1: *Racine et forme* (pp. 32 – 33). However, here the frustrating problem of identifiability of the derivational basis in the Arabic word formation is discussed without arriving at a satisfactory solution. The bipolarity of 'root' and 'form', firmly established in the French Arabistic tradition, a continuation of Cantineau's duality of 'racines' et 'schèmes' (1950), is not an ideal match to the tripartition of the Arabic morpheme classes.

In the Chapter 1 paragraph dealing with paradigms, the structural terminology applied to the duality of *faʿal* (forme à suffixes) and *yafʿal* (forme à préfixes) (pp. 10 – 12) would have been perhaps more advantageously substituted by the traditional aspectual duality *accompli* (perfect) and *inaccompli* (imperfect) respectively. For sure, the prefixal paradigm contrasts with the suffixal one with the

set of prefixes, but the main *ʔrāb*-centered formatives are suffixes of the latter and their *ʔrāb*-governed variation.

It must be recognized that the aspectual classification is not an ideal solution, as it cannot safely be separated from temporal values and create a fully consistent temporal-aspectual duality. Nevertheless, in a descriptive work like the present one the simplicity of use offered by the aspectual terminology cannot be underestimated, as the author confirms himself by using it throughout the book.

The great merit of Larcher's treatment of derivation is his viewing the semantic unity of a root as a myth (p. 33). This innovative view, however, has to be completed by a more explicit statement about the anonymity of derivational basis in lexical units resulting from intra-root (pattern-marked) derivational processes. The anonymity of the derivational basis is indirectly confirmed by the author in a number of tentative attempts at solving the intricate question of identifiability (*Racine et forme*, pp. 32 – 33). The derivational basis in extra-root (affix-marked) word-formation is somewhat easier to be identified. Here is a short comparison:

Internal process:

KTb > *katab* > *maktab* > *maktaba* ? or

KTb > *katab* and *KTb* > *maktab* and *KTb* > *maktaba*?

Both options seem to be equally acceptable irrespective of the complexity of derivational sequence and the morphemic structure of the unit in question.

External process:

(*KTb*) *kitāb* + *ī* = *kitābī* (-*ā* adjectivizer, word-class defining function)

(*ʔLM*) *ʔallām* + *a* = *ʔallāma* (-*a* intensivizer in graded intensive stems:

ʔallām “very erudite” > *ʔallām-a* “most erudite /scholar/”)

Nevertheless, the identification of derivational basis without semantic clues may be problematic even here as may be attested by the example of the relative adjective *māddī*, possibly derived from *mādda* “matter” or from *māddīya* “materialism”:

(*MDD*) *mādda* + *ī* = *māddī* “material” (progressive, additive process), contrasting with

(*MDD*) *māddīya* – (*ī*)*ya* = *māddī* “materialistic, materialist” (regressive, subtractive process).

Here is another case of dubious basis:

(*BŠR*) *bašar* + *ī* = *bašarī* “human”, “human being”

(*BŠR*) *bašara* + *ī* = *bašarī* “skin (adj.), epidermal”

The *nisba*-suffix -*ī* in *bašarī* “human being”, in addition to being an adjectivizer, operates as a unit noun formative in opposition to the collective *bašar* “humanity, mankind”.

As a rule external derivational processes are of a denominative nature. Viewed from this angle, a word like *maktaba* cannot be said not to be derived from *maktab* because of different plurals, as is stated by the author (p. 33), because all the same it faces the general anonymity of derivational bases in intra-root processes. *Maktab* – *maktaba* and *manzil* – *manzila* share the same fate of unrelatability to any distinct derivational basis.

Hypothetically, however, we could revisit a word like *maktaba*, consisting of units from all basic morpheme classes of Arabic: roots (R), patterns (P) and affixes (A), and by way of intuition trace one of the possible successions of derivational events:

R: *k-t-b* > P1: *-a-a- /katab* > P2: *-zero-a-/ktab* > A1 (prefix): *ma- /maktab* > A2 (suffix): *-a /maktaba*

Various variants of the latter representation may be found in Arabic grammars, with a largely differing treatment of affixal formatives therein.

There is, of course, a considerable problem of defining the distinction between affixes operative in affix-marked processes (e.g. *-ī* in *kitābī* or *-a* in the unit noun *naḥl-a* “(one) bee” which co-functions as an inflectional (gender) marker) and those to be integrated in a unified intra-root word-formational process (as *-a* in *maktaba* or *madrasa*). On the whole, the affixal derivation tends to rely on affixes that apart from the basic derivational function of creating new autonomous words provide some other ways of application (co-functioning as adjectivizers, nominal intensity markers or some other derivational class markers). The latter class of multifunctional affixes defines at the same time denominative formations with identifiable derivational basis.

Multifunctionality in the denominative processes is most clearly observable at the borderline between derivation and inflection in some binary systems, e.g. in unit and collective nouns (respectively UN-CN), inflectionally restatable in terms of the singular and plural (respectively SG-PL):

The suffix *-a* in the UN-CN system:

UN-CN: *‘adas-a* “(one) lentil” – *‘adas* “lentil/s/”, as against

SG-PL: *‘adas-a* “objective /optics/” – *‘adas-āt* (plur.);

‘adas-ī “lentil (adj.), lenticular; objective (adj.).”

On the other hand, the suffix *-a* in *maktaba* creates merely a new word (basic derivational function) as part of a unified intra-root derivation.

The rejection of sharp distinction between factitiveness and causativeness is another step forward in enhancing the simplicity and clarity of grammatical description (pp. 64 – 65). A rather pragmatic distinction between the causative value of *fa‘ala* and that of *ʔafʔala* is instead proposed in the case that they co-occur in the same lexical entry. The former is said to adopt a somewhat special meaning while the latter tends to preserve the original stem meaning, as in:

nazala “to descend, come down”

nazzala “to make descend, to take, put down”, but also “to send down a revelation (of God, to a prophet), to reveal”

ʔanzala “to take down”

The example quoted (p. 66) is not so happily selected, since the *ʔafʔala* stem may display the same or slightly modified special meaning as well (Wehr/Cowan 1994 “to reveal /of God/”). Father Belot (1951) makes no semantic distinction between the two either: “faire descendre (sa parole) sur (un prophète: Dieu)”.

The *ʔafʔala* stem in Bustānī’s *Muḥīṭ* further specifies the *fāʔala* meaning:

nazzala . . . *wa-llāhu taʔālā kalāmahu ʔalā ʔaḥadi l-ʔanbiyāʔi ʔawḥā bihi ʔilayhi;*

wa-ʔanzala . . . *wa-qīla t-tanzīlu yakūnu tadrīḡiyan wa-marratan baʔda marra.*

However, when viewed statistically Larcher’s suggestion seems to be thoroughly valid. The morphological analysis in Larcher’s monograph is systematically paralleled by syntactic and semantic data, particularly in the paragraphs dealing with derived verbal forms and their nominal derivatives.

In the paragraphs dealing with causative forms (form II: pp. 47 – 55; form IV: pp. 63 – 73) it would have been worthwhile drawing attention to the alternative syntactic *bi*-causatives applied to the intransitive basic stem of verbs to be causativized, as in *ḍahaba* “to go away, to leave” > *ḍahaba bi* “to make to go away, to take away”, equalling the derived form IV *ʔaḍhaba* “to make to go away, make disappear; to remove, take away”. When applied to persons or other moving entities, the construction may display a *participative* orientation of causativity, as in: *ḍahaba bihi* “to lead, conduct, escort s.o. away”.

The connotation of participativeness is a mere potentiality, the main semantic value of *ḍahaba bi(hi)* in all chronological stages of Arabic is modelled by causativity alone: “to cause to go away, to make disappear, to remove”, as in *wa ḡalbu ʔaḥadi l-mutanāfiyayni yaḍhabu bi-l-munāfi l-ʔāḥari* (*Muqaddima.*, 337), “The victory of one of the two rivals causes the disappearance of the other” (Rosenthal, ii, p. 298) or *iʔlam ʔanna l-ʔudwāna ʔalā n-nāsi fī ʔamwālihim ḍāhibun bi-ʔāmālihim fī taḥṣīlihā wa-ktisābihā* (*Muq.*, 255) “It should be known that attacks on people’s property remove the incentive to acquire and gain any” (Ros., ii, p. 103).

The theory of reflexivity, as presented in Chapters V and VI (pp. 75 – 106), completed by semantic and syntactic notes, is undoubtedly one of the best ever written in the recent Arabistic literature. Derivational reflexivity markers used in combination with syntactic and lexical means may lead to unpredictable semantic results.

The general tendency towards redundant phrasing in Arabic leads to a number of pleonastic constructions where the derivational reflexivity combines with a lexical reflexivizer in syntactically transitivized (causativized) constructions, as in:

verb VII (reflexive) + *bi*-transitivizer + *nafs*-reflexivizer = verb (reflexive);
infaraḍa *bi-* *nafsihi* = *infarada*.

That is, the reflexive verb: *infarada* “to be alone, withdraw, segregate (‘an from)” is syntactically causativized to a lexically conveyed reflexivity which is the final value: *infarada bi-nafsihi* (‘*ani n-nāsi*) “he withdrew (from the people)” (see below).

The same holds for the corresponding *maṣdar*: *al-infirādu bi-nafsihi* (‘*ani n-nāsi*) “keeping away (from the people), being in seclusion (from the people)” (see below). *wa-ḥtāḡa (al-maliku) ‘ilā l-infirādi bi-nafsihi* ‘*ani n-nāsi li-l-ḥadīti ma‘a ‘awliyā’ihi fī ḥawāṣṣi šu’ūnihi* (*Muq.*, 259), “He (the king) needs to keep away from the people and to remain aloof with his friends in order to be able to talk with them about his special (private) affairs” (Rosenthal, ii, pp. 111 – 112).

Larcher’s contribution to the theory of the classical verbal system is not merely an addition to the long series of Arabistic works devoted to the subject; it is a serious work of theory inviting discussion. The reader may accept or reject some of the author’s views, but one will never cease to be inspired by the fresh innovative ideas that provoke thinking and rethinking. The book will be of help to advanced students of Arabic and researchers in this domain, quite particularly to those of them who could value the constant reference to the early Arab grammarians and their ground-setting work.

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