Review of Ahmed Moutaouakil, Pragmatic Functions in a Functional Grammar of Arabic

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books on Islamic subjects and the quantity of cross-referencing may seem excessive" [241], a little checking reveals major deficiencies. Only proper names in the translation, not those in the notes or introduction, are indexed, and there are many mistakes. "Salaut see Ḥizz al-Din Salaut" leads nowhere, since the latter entry does not exist. "Al-Ḥājib Yurunqush" ([142], but B.r.n.q.sh in the edition [209]) is not to be found under H, Y, or B. "Buqsh al-Khādim see Muwaffiq al-Daula" does lead to "Muwaffiq al-Daula Buqsh al-Khādim," but there are no page numbers. And if one attempts to track down Abu I-Ḥasan b. M.kh.ṭr (who appears in the translation and notes as Ibn Mukhtar or Ibn al-Mukhtar) and his son Karim al-Mulk through the various cross-references, one finds that these two people have become three, or possibly four, including a phantom Karim al-Mulk.

Less crucial, and usually easily correctable, are the numerous mistakes in transliteration and typographical errors in both the English and the Arabic. Typical of the former are mulāhīda for mulāhīda [81, 140], al-Muḥallimi for al-Muḥallimi [105, also in the index], and nūjum al-zāhirā for al-nūjum al-zāhirā [228]. In the Arabic we find s.h.r for sāḥ [161], al-khayf for al-hayf [159], rafaḍa for fawwaḍa [207], and li-bnīh for li-abīh [211], to cite some of the more egregious examples. Fortunately, in most cases the translation serves as a corrective to the edition or vice versa.

In sum, this edition and translation is badly marred by carelessness and more serious deficiencies, but not so much so as to vitiate its usefulness. This section of Ibn al-Azraq's chronicle is now available to scholars of Seljuq and Fatimid history in a form that is quite usable, if sufficient precautions are taken. With only a few and less than crucial exceptions, the readings of the manuscripts from which Hillenbrand has prepared her edition can be "reconstituted," and her extensive annotations to the translation, despite some errors, are unquestionably of great value.

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The framework for this study of aspects of the grammar of Modern Standard Arabic is Simon Dik’s (1978, 1980) Functional Grammar (FG). The book is written for theoreticians in the FG framework interested in seeing how well the theory fits Arabic rather than for Arabists interested in learning about a new perspective on the language. As a result, it will not be particularly easy going for most readers of this journal, most American-trained linguists not being conversant with FG. The book is, however, thought-provoking.

The central assumption of FG (and other functional theories) is that an adequate grammar must account for what native speakers know about the pragmatic status of constituents of a sentence. Specifically, such a grammar must account for speakers' knowledge about the following:

- Which element or elements express information the hearer is thought by the speaker not to possess. These elements are assigned the pragmatic function Focus. The underlined element in the following example has this function:

  ḋāyān ṣarība Khālidūn
  "It was tea that Khalid drank."

- Which element(s) specify the relevant universe of discourse for the predication (Theme):

  Zaydīn. ʿabāhū marīḍūn
  "Zayd, his father is ill."

- Which element(s) express what the predication is predicated of (Topic):

  a. man qābala Zaydīn?
  "Who met Zayd?"

  b. qābala Zaydīn Khālidūn
  "Khalid met Zayd."

- Which element(s) correct or modify the predication (Tail):

  waṣāla, d-ṭuyūfū
  "They have arrived, the guests."
And, for Arabic and some other languages, which element(s) specify the intended addressee (Vocative):

yā Khalīdu, nāwīni l-miṣaḥ
"Khalid, give me the salt."

The book’s longest chapter has to do with how Focus is assigned. Moutaoakil departs from previous formulations of FG in proposing two types of Focus. These are Contrastive Focus, for situations in which the speaker (S) thinks the addressee (A) possesses relevant information but S has to select from among it, correct it, or refute it, and New Focus, for situations in which S presents information he or she1 thinks is new to A or requests information new to S. This move is necessary because these two types of communicative situations are different, and thus represents a refinement of the theory that should apply to all languages. In Arabic (as in English), constituents with new focus have different structural properties than constituents with contrastive focus. So, for example, if someone asks a question with māa ḥe or she is requesting new information:

māa ʾakalū?
“What did you eat?”

The answer to this question cannot provide CONTRASTIVE FOCUS:

ʾakalū labāman lā khubzan
“I ate meat, not bread.”

Contrastively focused constituents in Arabic can appear preverbally,

Zaydān ʾašāḥatu
“It was Zayd I greeted.”

in pseudo-cleft constructions,

1-lāī ʾašāḥātuhu Zaydān
“The one I greeted was Zayd.”

or in “negative restrictive” constructions:

māa ʾašāḥātuhu
“I greeted only Zayd.”

The distinction between new and contrastive focus helps explain the difference between the interrogative particles hal and ʾa. If an entire question requests new information, hal is appropriate, but if only one constituent represents new focus, hal is blocked, as in

*hal Zaydān qābaltuhu
“Was it Zayd you met?”

The particle ʾa is not constrained in this way.

Chapters on other pragmatic functions are briefer. Moutaoakil defines each function, describes how it is assigned to sentence constituents, and discusses semantic and syntactic characteristics of such constituents.

The principal advantage claimed for a functional approach to grammar such as FG is that it accounts for the structure of language as being derived from its function as an instrument of communication. Marked word orders and other aspects of structure that encode the pragmatic status of constituents are too central, in this view, to the function of language to be handled by means of movement rules. But FG also makes some specific predictions. In some situations, for example, the pragmatic function of a constituent assigns its case. This occurs when a constituent is “predication-external,” in other words, when it has a pragmatic function other than Topic or Focus. One such constituent is Theme. Theme in Arabic assigns nominative case; thus in

Zaydān, qābaltuhu
“Zayd, I met him.”

the Theme is nominative. But there are constructions in which Theme constituents do not receive nominative case:

a. Zaydān, ʾašāḥātuhu
“Zayd (_acc), I greeted him.”

b. Zaydān, qaraʾtu kitābāhu
“Zayd (_acc), I read his book.”

c. ʾaqūlū ʾinna Zaydān raʾāhū ʿAmrūn
“I say that Zayd, Amr saw him.”

1Second- and third-person singular verbs in Moutaoakil’s examples are invariably masculine, and all proper names are names of males. This practice is becoming archaic in academic discourse and could easily have been avoided.
Moutouakil points out that the constructions represented in (a) and (b) are archaic, and that the accusative-case NPs may not be Themes after all. What they are instead is not clear, however. He accounts for (c) with reference to the subordinator ‘inna, which “marks(s) as accusative the noun that it ‘governs’” [112]. How this happens in FG is not discussed.

The example of Theme and case-marking is representative. On the whole, FG, as Moutouakil presents it, appears to account well for the general outline of Arabic word order and case-marking. On the whole, for example, in Arabic as in English and other languages, elements that serve the purposes of Theme and Topic appear early in a clause, and, on the whole, nominative is the default case. FG is an interesting way of thinking about these things. Because of the abstractness of FG, however, Moutouakil’s treatment deals less satisfactorily with details that differentiate Arabic from other languages. The “expression rules” that produce actual sentences from information about abstract semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic structure are only alluded to here. As a result, teachers and others involved in contrasting Arabic and English will probably continue to find that traditional textbook explanations based on descriptive grammars of Arabic and English are more useful, even if theoretically less coherent.

REFERENCES


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This volume is a collection of papers from the Fourth International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences held in Trier in August of 1987. The papers are wide-ranging and cover the history of the language sciences primarily in Europe from antiquity to the twentieth century. There is, however, a section devoted to Arabic grammar which would be of interest to readers of this journal. The four papers contained in this section cover a number of disparate topics, but are all interesting and useful in their individual ways.

The first of these papers, “New North Arabian Epigraphic Evidence for the History of the Decipherment of the Alphabet” by William Jobling, is actually not concerned directly with the history of the Arabic language sciences, but rather with the history of writing systems. More specifically, it reviews the contributions to the field of the recent *A’qaba-Maan survey of North Arabian-Thamudic inscriptions in southern Jordan. Jobling details two mutually reinforcing paths in the decipherment of certain letters found in the Khirbet Es-Samra’ North Arabian ostraca as analyzed by Knauf (1985). The first of these paths reassigns the value of certain graphemes based on the animal drawing found in the inscription. For example, if the drawing is clearly that of a camel, then the inscription should contain the graphemes “CML,” not “TML,” as predicted by previous analysis; if it contains a picture of a bull, the inscription should read “TR” not “DR.” The second path used for reanalyzing the grapheme is based on the order of the letters in the Semitic alphabet, as found in abecedarii ranging from that of the ancient Ugaritic, through Aramaic alphabet ostraca from Wadi Hammamat, to the order of the alphabet borrowed by Greek and Latin. The decipherment proposed above brings the order of the North Arabian-Thamudic alphabet in line with that of these other Semitic abecedarii. This is a very interesting and useful paper.

The second of these papers, “Al-Mubarrad’s Place in the History of Arabic Grammar,” by Janusz Danecki, is a kind of preliminary review of the scholarly transmission relationships between al-Mubarrad and his students. The main point is that while al-Mubarrad is not referred to directly very often in Arabic grammatical discussion, he nevertheless did have a good deal of influence indirectly by way of his students and their students. Danecki gives