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Case and proto-Arabic, Part II

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In Part I of this paper,¹ the status of case in proto-Arabic was examined in the light of comparative Afroasiatic, comparative Semitic and the treatment of case among the earliest Arabic grammarians. The thesis was developed that a caseless variety of Arabic is prior to a case-based one. It was argued that there is comparatively little support for deriving a proto-Arabic case system from a pan-phylic or even a pan-family case system. Furthermore, various interpretive problems relating to case among the earliest grammarians were alluded to. These included the possibility that the earliest Arabic grammatical terminology for inflectional endings may imply the existence of caseless varieties of Arabic, and the difficulty of deriving the caseless forms such as are found in modern dialects from pausal forms of the classical language.

Having considered the issue from the perspective of the past, it is now time to look to the present, to the modern dialects, to see what light they shed on the thesis. In particular, to claim that the modern dialects descend from a caseless ancestor implies that the relevant forms are so distributed that they could not have descended from the Classical Arabic as described by Sibawaih. I will attempt to motivate this claim from two perspectives. In 4.1 I summarize the distribution of elements which possibly point to traces of case, and in 4.2 address aspects of the question of syllabic reorganization which is implied by the loss of the final short vowels.

4.1. Case traces?

Blau (1981: 167) identifies certain dialectal elements which he suggests are traces of a now defunct case system. It is appropriate to look at each in detail in order to determine to what extent it is necessary to derive them from old case markers. I summarize three cases here, though Blau considers the first two as possible vestiges of the same suffix.

The first of these is a suffix *-an* appearing on a small set of forms in many dialects, e.g. *ghaṣb-an* (*ghaṣbin* in some dialects) in *ghaṣb-an* 'ann-u 'he must (despite his wish to the contrary)', *taqrīb-an* 'almost'. This appears to go back to the adverbial usage of the accusative. However, these cases are so lexically restricted that no far-reaching conclusions can be drawn from them. Some may be borrowed from the standard language, and if they are relics of something old, it is hard to conclude from the isolated examples that they are survivals of a case system.

The second of these is a nominal suffix, again *-an* or *-in*, which appears in various dialects.² The suffix is dialectally more widespread than often assumed, occurring in Spanish Arabic (= *-an*, Corriente, 1977: 122), throughout the Sudanic Arabic dialects (= *-an*, Owens, 1993a: 111, 140, 144), in Najdi (central and eastern Saudi Arabia) Arabic (= *-in*, Ingham, 1994a: 47 ff.), Tihama Arabic in Yemen (= *-u*, *-un*, Behnstedt, 1985: 60), and in Uzbekistan/Afghani Arabic (= *-in* Ingham, 1994b: 47; Fischer, 1961 on Uzbeki).³ This suffix is formally

¹ Published in *BSOAS*, 61/1, 1998, 51–73, with bibliography.

² Most of Blau's examples (1981: 191–200) fall into this category.

³ Afghan Arabic is a nineteenth-century offshoot of Uzbekistan Arabic, and may thus be combined with it.

The explanation for the appearance of a low vowel *-an* or high vowel *-in/-u(n)* is not self-evident. In Sudanic Arabic the *-an* form seems to be linked to the consistent low-vowel

similar to the Classical Arabic indefinite suffix, but although in most studies it is referred to as an indefinite marker or *tanwīn* and is usually assumed to derive from an old case marker (Blau, 1981; Diem, 1991), it has in fact quite different properties and probably a different linguistic history. Differences relate both to form and function. First, the entire *-Vn* sequence is a single morpheme, appearing and disappearing as a unit. Secondly, the vowel has a single value, *-i*, *-u*, or *-a* according to the dialect. This is not a commutable case system. Thirdly, it is always optional. While it occurs only with indefinite nouns, it cannot be said to mark indefiniteness (as *-n* does in Classical Arabic) because indefiniteness is minimally indicated in all dialects by the lack of the definite article. Fourthly, its primary function appears to mark an adnominal relationship between an indefinite noun + modifier.⁴ This usage is attested consistently in all the dialects cited (though I have no text examples for the Tihama) and in fact is the only one common to all, as the following examples show.

(8a) Spanish Arabic (Corriente, 1977: 121)

muslim-in-an liṭāf
Muslim-pl.-n. bad
'bad Muslims'

(8b) Sudanic Arabic, Shukriyya in E. Sudan (Reichmuth, 1983: 190)

ba-jī-k wakt-an garīb
I-come-you time-n. near
'I'll come to you soon'

(8c) Najdi Arabic (Ingham, 1994a: 49)

kalmit-in rīmī-at
word-n. thrown-f.
'a word thrown down'

(8d) Afghani Arabic (Ingham, 1994b: 115)

hintit-in ḥamra
wheat-n. red
'red grains of wheat'

While the distribution of this suffix is not precisely the same in all dialects (in Spanish and Nigerian Arabic, for example, it may be suffixed only to a noun, in Najdi to noun and adjective), and its frequency of occurrence variable (it disappears from Spanish Arabic in later texts, for example, but in Najdi and Shukriyya Arabic it occurs frequently), its basic characteristics are common to all its dialectal occurrences. So-called nunation and mimation phenomena in Semitic languages do not have enough in common functionally and semantically to allow Moscati *et al.* (1980: 96) to reconstruct a common proto-Semitic indefinite form. The present data suggest that yet another function, namely nominal linkage (see n. 4) has to be added to the various ones served by Semitic final *-Vn* nasal suffixes.

It is reasonable to reconstruct the nominal linker **-Vn* into a form of Arabic predating the variety described by Sibawaih, i.e. as old as the 'Arabiyya

value of many formatives, verbal f.pl. suffixes *-an*, preformative vowels of verbs, and the definite article. In Najdi and Tihama Arabic, however, paradigms often occur with both high and low values, e.g. Najdi verbal f.pl. suffix appears as both *-in* and *-an* depending on the verb class to which it is suffixed.

⁴ Following Croft's (1990: 118) comparative typological terminology, it can be termed a 'linker' or 'ligature'.

itself, a point which will be returned to in the following discussion. This follows from the wide geographic distribution of a relatively uniform morpho-syntactic phenomenon. It appears in the earliest forms of Spanish Arabic, which means it was probably brought into Andalusia in the eighth century. Though Arabs first moved into the Sudanic area only after 1200, they derive essentially from tribes which migrated into Egypt in the seventh and eighth centuries, and were increasingly marginalized from the eighth century onwards and pushed ever further south. Arabic in Afghanistan is relatively recent, dating from the nineteenth century, its speakers having immigrated from Uzbekistan, where they have lived since at least 1600. Precisely when and from where they immigrated there is uncertain, though a relation with Arabic groups in Iran is not ruled out. There have been Arabs in central Saudi Arabia and parts of Yemen, of course, since time immemorial. It thus appears that this common feature existed in one variety of Arabic no later than the time of the Arabic diaspora at the beginning of the Islamic era. Within the context of the general discussion in this section, note that there is no necessity for deriving the *-Vn* forms from Classical Arabic case marker + indefinite marker.

Since my interpretation of the origin of these *-Vn* forms is at variance with Blau's, a digression comparing our views is in order. Blau (1969: 40) recognizes a possible explanation for the commonalities in terms of a single origin, though rejects it in favour of one based on independent parallel development. To be fair to Blau (1981, written originally in 1965), important sources on the distribution of the *-Vn* (Corriente, 1977; Reichmuth, 1983; Owens, 1993b) were not available to him (though Carbou, 1913 on Chadian Arabic is an older source) and so the current criticisms are based on a wider data base. In particular, Blau compared only three varieties, various Arabian peninsular varieties, Uzbekistan Arabic and Jewish Middle Arabic (see n. 19). None the less, on grounds of principle, doubts can be raised about Blau's aprioristic conclusion that 'It seems improbable that the dialects of Central Asia, at the beginning, shared in the linguistic development that affected the modern Bedouin dialects' (1969: 40). It is unclear what relevance the extra-linguistic category of 'Bedouin' should have for linguistic categories (see below), and the use of the term 'modern' prejudices and excludes the possibility that the *-Vn* feature under consideration is a 'relic', an older inherited trait, in all its distributions. Much more crucially, however, diffusionist theory would inform us that the widespread attestation of a *-Vn* suffix in a comparable function at all extremes of the Arabic-speaking world (Andalusia, the Sudanic region, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan), and also in its very centre (Arabian peninsula) renders the possibility that the form is innovative in each area virtually impossible. In passing I would note that only two of the groups using *-Vn*, Najdi (Central Arabia) and the various Sudanic area speakers are in some sense 'Bedouin', while three, Andalusia, Uzbekistan/Afghan and Tihama, are not.

A third set of forms which has been assumed to represent case relics are the vowels which appear with, or have become part of certain pronominal object suffixes, namely the following.

(9) *-ak* 2m.sg., *-ik* 2f.sg., *-u* 3m.sg.

Thus for Egyptian Arabic Birkeland (1952: 12, 19) sees the *a/i* in the second person forms as relics of the accusative and genitive suffixes, respectively, the *-u* a nominative. The matter is too complex for a definitive judgement here, though it may be asked why a different case suffix was chosen for each pronominal form. An equally plausible explanation can be phrased in terms of vowel harmony, **-aka*, **-iki*, **-uhu*, though this implies either a dysfunctional

case system (Diem, 1991: 302), or an epenthetic vowel between stem and pronominal suffix (see examples in n. 7). The final 3m.sg. *-a* is equally explicable in phonological terms, it being very common for a guttural sound to determine a low vowel either before or after it (*uhu*→*ahu*, cf. the *gahawa* syndrome, (11) below). The 2sg. forms, moreover, parallel similar (Samaritan) Aramaic ones, *-ak*, *-ek* (Macuch, 1982: 132), so such forms may have an older Semitic origin.

It has been shown in this section that various forms which potentially are interpretable as relics of the Classical Arabic case system have other equally plausible or even better explanations.

4.2. Epenthesis, short final vowels, stems

The loss of the final vocalic case markers, according to proponents of this theory, had consequences for syllable structure (Blau, 1981: 3, Fischer and Jastrow, 1980: 40). Coupled with a tendency of short high vowels to be deleted in open syllables (see 3.3.3), this led to a basic reorganization of syllable structure in Neo-Arabic in which the insertion of epenthetic vowels plays a significant role. This is because, like Classical Arabic, the majority of dialects have maintained a basic syllable structure constraint disallowing sequences of three consonants. Thus, assuming the Old→Neo-Arabic model for the moment, given a nominal form like **kalb-V-hā* (*V*=case) ‘her dog’, the loss of the case vowel in dialects leads to unacceptable *CC-ha*⁵ structures. As Fischer and Jastrow (1980: 41) point out, there are generally two solutions to this problem, both involving the insertion of an epenthetic vowel. In Eastern Libyan Arabic, for example, the epenthetic vowel (underlined) comes between the first two consonants, *kalib-ha*, in Nigerian Arabic between the last two, *kalba-ha*. Note that the first solution is comparable to that used in the Classical language, e.g. *radd-tu*→*radad-tu* ‘I returned’ (*Kitāb*, II: ch. 560).

In this section I would like to make a general overview of the phenomena of epenthesis and stem structure, as it bears directly on the question of the presumed origin of the modern dialects from old pausal forms. Two basic types of epenthesis can be distinguished in the dialects. The first, illustrated in the previous paragraph, is dependent on consonantal sequence. As mentioned, **CCC* sequences are not allowed in most dialects,⁶ the constraint being lifted in one of the two ways just illustrated. I will term this cluster epenthesis.

Cluster epenthesis

(10a) *CCC*→*CəCC* (ə=epenthetic vowel⁷)

(10b) *CCC*→*CCəC*

It should be noted here that in a few dialects, e.g. Najdi (Ingham, 1994a: 17) a sequence of *VVCC*- word internally induces the same epenthesis effect, *beet-hum*→*beeti-hum* ‘their house’, i.e. *CCC*~*VVCC*→*C/VVCəC*.

In very general terms—here and elsewhere I am summarizing the variants in broad strokes—the (10a) solution is found, *inter alia*, in Eastern Libyan Arabic,⁸ rural Iraqi, Horan (northern Jordan), most Egyptian dialects south

⁵ See also Part I of this paper, section 3.2.3 at n. 30.

⁶ The significant exceptions, like the dialects of Morocco and Algeria, do not affect the present discussion, since in them the lifting of the **CCC* constraint is either a secondary development or one which must also be included in the proto-language. In many dialects a final pause, #, has the same status as a C, inducing the same epenthetic effect, e.g. Eastern Libya *kabš#*→*kabiš#*.

⁷ The quality of the epenthetic vowel is always determined by a combination of vowel and consonantal harmony. In Nigerian Arabic, for example, the epenthetic vowel is *-a* before *-ha*, *darba-ha* ‘her path, road’, otherwise *i* or *u* following the vowel quality in the pronominal suffix, *darbi-ki* ‘your f sg path’, *darbu-ku* ‘your m pl path’.

⁸ I think it likely that all modern North African dialects employ a variant of this solution.

of Asyut and the eastern Nile delta (Woidich and Behnstedt, 1985: 56), and in the Shukriyya dialect of the Sudan (Reichmuth, 1983: 70). The (10b) solution is employed in most Egyptian dialects north of Asyut, Chadian and Nigerian Arabic, Najdi Arabic and in most Yemeni dialects.

A second type of epenthesis is dependent on the quality of consonants. This is less widespread than the first type, though is found in most parts of the Arabic-speaking world. Two main sub-types can be distinguished here. The first is what Blanc termed the 'gahawa syndrome', the eponymous *gahawa* 'coffee' having the prototypical trait of inserting a low vowel in the following sequence. It may be termed guttural epenthesis.

Guttural epenthesis

(11a) $C_{gut}C \rightarrow C_{gut}aC$ (gutturals = *h, h, ' , ' , kh, gh*, in some dialects (e.g. NA *q*)

(11b) **gahwa* → *gahawa* 'coffee'

This is found, *inter alia*, in Najdi Arabic, Sudanic Arabic, Eastern Libyan Arabic, Egyptian Arabic around Asyut and south (Woidich and Behnstedt, 1985: 45), and rural Iraqi dialects (but not other Egyptian dialects, Hijazi, most Yemeni dialects, and most *qeltu* dialects of Mesopotamia).

A quite different sub-type of environment is provided by the sequence:

Sonorant epenthesis

(12a) $CC_{sonorant} \rightarrow C\bar{a}C$ (sonorant = *l, r, n*, sometimes *w, y, m*)

(12b) *bajri* → *baj̄eri* 'I run' (Nigerian Arabic)

This has already been alluded to above in the discussion of pausal phenomena in Sibawaih, 3.2.3 above. Here an epenthetic vowel is inserted before a sonorant. This is attested in different realizations, *inter alia*, in Najdi Arabic, much of Egypt South of Cairo (Egypt, Woidich and Behnstedt 1985: 47 ff.), the Tihama region of Yemen (Behnstedt 1984: 49), Spanish Arabic (Corriente 1977: 72) and Chadian and Nigerian Arabic. Dialects such as Eastern Libyan, Cairene and most of the Nile delta, highland Yemeni, the Arabic of Afghanistan, and urban Baghdadi do not have it, or at least do not treat such clusters any differently from other consonant clusters.

Note that the disparate distribution of each of the epenthesis features, as well as those of the *-Vn* suffix discussed in 4.1 above, make it *a priori* difficult to classify the one or the other variant in terms of rural vs. urban or Bedouin vs. sedentary, what in any case are essentially socio-demographic categories, not linguistic ones.⁹

What is interesting to note is that the epenthetic vowels often come in precisely the position where case vowels occur in Classical Arabic. In fact, taking a broad reading of Sibawaih, the occurrence of pre-suffixal epenthesis in Najdi Arabic mirrors in surprising fashion the distribution of case vowels. This results from the following two epenthetic rules, outlined above in (10b, 12).

(13) $VV/CCC \rightarrow VV/CC\bar{a}C$, $CC_{sonorant} \rightarrow C\bar{a}C$ (note that sonorant epenthesis takes precedence if the 2 rules conflict)

been-ham → *beena-ham* 'between them', *rajl-ha* → *rajil-ha* 'her husband' (examples from Ingham, 1995).

⁹ I would not, of course, rule out the possibility of proving that certain linguistic features do tend to be associated with certain socio-demographic groups. For example, I think it fair to say that the guttural epenthesis of (11) is largely a rural phenomenon. Beyond this, however, easy generalizations are difficult. Not all rural dialects have it, it does not distinguish sedentary from Bedouin populations, and there may be significant exceptions to the overall generalization. Urban Maiduguri Arabs, for example, continue to have the trait, so that it can be said to be an urban norm among them.

The 'broad' reading of Sibawaih identifies the sonorant epenthesis rule with the case epenthesis rule discussed in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.

Looking at nominal forms with a C-initial pronominal suffix, the contexts where cluster epenthesis (10) will occur,¹⁰ it happens that in this dialect the only forms where epenthesis does not occur are those with an *a* as the final stem vowel, e.g. *ba'ad-hum* 'some of them'. Generally speaking it appears that a reasonably long stretch of speech will contain a majority of forms with one typical epenthetic vowel or another before C- initial pronominal suffixes. To verify this, I counted all forms of noun + C-initial pronominal suffix in the six Rwala (northern Najdi) texts of Ingham (1995). There are a total of 29 nouns with C-initial pronominal suffixes, 21 of these undergoing one of the two epenthesis rules,¹¹ only 8 lacking them. In other words, this dialect of Arabic tends to mimic Classical Arabic in the distribution of noun stem final vowel before C-initial consonantal suffixes: where Classical Arabic has a case vowel, this dialect tends to have an epenthetic one. The relatively frequent occurrence of the *-in* linker further imparts a 'classical' flavour to this variety.

I am not, I should perhaps emphasize, intimating that the case vowels of Classical Arabic are in reality epenthetic vowels. Besides the clear functional contrast between the two, the parallel only works before C-initial object pronoun suffixes. Looking at a wider comparative context, however, it is not unreasonable to relate these dialectal epenthetic vowels to similar phenomena found in other Semitic languages, e.g. in Gə'əz and Hebrew, where a connecting vowel may occur before pronominal suffixes (Weninger, 1993: 13, 35; e.g. *'asm-ə-ya* 'my bone', Blau, 1976: 67, *sūsə-ka* 'your m. horse'). While such vowels are often interpreted as relics of an old case system (Blau, 1976: 67), the present interpretation would suggest that they are the 'relic' of an ur-Semitic epenthesis system. What is probably less disputable is that proto-Semitic had at least a system of cluster epenthesis operating in the context $CC\# \rightarrow CəC\#$. This alternation is attested in each of the three Semitic branches, cf. the Akkadian possessed noun, *uzun* 'ear' (Von Soden, 1969: 18), the Aramaic and Hebrew segolates (Heb. *ozen* 'ear'), the Arabic dialects (Eastern Libyan *widhin* 'ear', see n. 6) as well as Classical Arabic (*lam yardud#*, and the case epenthesis discussed in 3.2.1). Though this is admittedly a sketchy overview, the attested universality of epenthesis rules in Semitic, as opposed to the only sporadic appearance of case systems, lends greater credence to my suggestion above that the Classical Arabic case system grew *in part* at least out of epenthetic phenomena.

Returning to the major theme of this section, looking at the distribution of epenthetic rules among the dialects, one is led to the same conclusion as with the linker **-Vn* discussed in 4.1, namely that each of the epenthetic rules is represented in such a spread of modern dialects that their origin, in their diverse guises, must be at least as old as the 'Arabiyya described by Sibawaih, that is, eighth century or older. For instance, the common guttural epenthesis rule of Spanish, Nigerian, Tihama and Najdi Arabic, but equally its lack in highland Yemen, Cairene, Eastern Libyan and urban Baghdadi points to both its presence and its lack, at the time of the original Islamic diaspora in the seventh/eighth centuries; and similarly, with cluster and sonorant epenthesis. If this is the case, however, one does not have to see the origin of the epenthetic rules as the result syllabification changes associated with the loss of final

¹⁰ V-initial pronominal suffixes, such as lsg. *-i* do not create the context for epenthesis.

¹¹ I included locative nouns like *been* 'between' in the count, but did not include active participles.

vowels, including final case vowels, in Old Arabic. Rather, epenthesis can be reconstructed as part of proto-Arabic.¹²

4.3 *Dialects vs. linguistic features*

As discussed in Part I, section 2, Blau (1981, 1988) has developed a model for the development of Arabic attractive for its linguistic simplicity and for its socio-historical plausibility. Pre-Islamic Old Arabic, spoken by Bedouin tribes, was transformed during the early Islamic period in an urban context where Arabs mixed with foreign learners of Arabic into a Middle Arabic. The linguistic reflex of this transformation was a shift from a synthetic-type language to an analytic type. It is important at this point to look at what is understood by these terms, concentrating on morphological and syntactic features.¹³ Blau's inventory of features includes the following (1981: 3–4):

TABLE 2

<i>Synthetic</i>	<i>Analytic</i>
cases and moods	no cases ¹⁴
VS, partial verb agreement	VS/SV, verb-subject agreement
<i>idāfa</i> , direct genitive	analytic genitive
comparative adjective	comparative expressed by 'more'
dual	decreasing use of dual
internal passive	no internal passive
<i>lam</i> + imperfect	negative only by <i>mā</i>

Leaving aside problems in the definition of syntheticity and analyticity (see Retsö, 1994: 335), the list is open to criticisms of two major types. On the one hand, some 'analytic' features are in fact well attested in Old Arabic, in the sense that they are described in some detail in Sibawaih. The full agreement in VS sentences, for instance, is in evidence in Sibawaih's stock example *akalū-nī il-barāghūth* 'The lice ate me up' (e.g. 1, 4.11). As Levin (1989) explains, Sibawaih does not condemn this as substandard usage, though Levin does suggest that it is a minority usage (1989: 60). In such a case it is hard to see the dialects as representing a radically new development. On the other hand, most of the other features establish a contrast only between Classical Arabic and some modern dialects. While Blau recognizes this, the methodological problems related to this have not been emphasized enough. Regarding the list in table 2, some of the features such as the comparative expressed by 'more' (e.g. in Chadian Arabic) are quite rare among the dialects. The analytic genitive may be given special attention, since it is a favourite distinguishing point between the Old and Neo-Arabic (e.g. Versteegh, 1993a: 69). Here, discussion of this feature in terms of analyticity or simplification often misses at least three points. First, Classical Arabic certainly does have an analytic genitive, namely in the form of the preposition *li*. Classical grammarians even regarded this as the '*aṣl*' of the direct genitive (Owens, 1990: 14 ff.), though this is a

¹² I would not, of course, argue that all phenomena of Arabic dialects go back to a pre-diaspora variety. Much is innovative in them. Nigerian Arabic, for instance, uses stress to distinguish comparative forms, *asmān* 'fatter', vs. colour/defect adjectives, *āsfar* 'yellow'. Since this is the only dialect where such a contrast is attested it can be assumed that it is an innovation peculiar to this variety.

¹³ Blau includes phonological features as well, though it is hard to see how, intuitively, the opposition analytic vs. synthetic is to be applied to them.

¹⁴ The question of verbal moods and tense is more difficult since dialects have various (non-analytic) ways of representing them (see e.g. Eksell, 1995).

theory-internal question bearing only indirectly on the linguistic function of the construction. Secondly, the so-called analytic genitive, marked by an independent morpheme is in nearly all dialects but an alternative to the direct genitive. The choice between the two is more a lexical, semantic and stylistic matter than a question of historical replacement of one by the other (e.g. Eksell, 1995: 66; Owens, 1993b: 65). Thirdly, in most dialects the analytic genitive can hardly be said to be a simplified form. To the contrary, it is usually marked by a morpheme agreeing in number and gender with the head noun, and hence is morphologically more 'complicated' than the Classical Arabic analytic genitive in *li*.

It is true that a few items on the list do distinguish Classical Arabic from the dialects. The dual in dialects is restricted exclusively to nouns, whereas in Classical Arabic it occurs on adjectives, pronouns, verbs, etc. as well. Whether they suffice to define to broad varieties of languages in terms of syntheticity vs. analyticity is doubtful, however. Blau's list is more striking for a fatal methodological shortcoming, and this is that his dichotomization is no dichotomization at all, or at best only a dichotomization based on the *a priori* abstraction, Classical Arabic vs. dialect. But what is the basis for making this abstraction, if not the synthetic/analytic traits he assigns to each group? Blau has no way to identify independently the very entities he is trying to distinguish. It is clear from the foregoing discussion that no such general criteria are to be found. Some of the criteria, e.g. the analytic genitive, have little basis in fact. Others do not distinguish two groups in the way Blau would want. Nigerian Arabic and Classical Arabic, for example, share the property of having comparative adjectives, Najdi Arabic and Classical Arabic the property of having internal passives, etc. I return to this point presently. It may then be asked whether the few features which genuinely do distinguish two varieties of language are sufficient to justify drawing far-reaching conclusions about their development. The problem becomes more acute when one considers arguments such as the one advanced in the present paper, that what is probably the key feature in the synthetic-analytic contrast, case vs. non-case, is a dichotomy which can be reconstructed into proto-Arabic, and hence did not arise as an urban trait in pre- or post-Islamic times.

Fischer and Jastrow (1980: 40 ff.) have developed a more extended list of traits contrasting Old and Neo-Arabic. On close inspection, however, it is clear that the list is perhaps useful as a typology of traits which *may* in any given instance distinguish the Classical language from the dialects, though the list as such does not justify the conceptions of Old and Neo-Arabic as historical concepts. To see this, consider the material which has been presented in 4.1 and 4.2. Assuming that there is a language entity which we may call Classical Arabic, and assuming that there are language entities (note the plural) which may be termed modern dialects, lists may be made assigning the various linguistic features to the various language entities. The lists appear as follows.

TABLE 3: *Distribution of linguistic features in language entities*

1. *-Vn*

- (a) nunation, indefinite *-n*: Classical Arabic
linker *-Vn*: Spanish Arabic, Nigerian Arabic, Najdi Arabic, etc.
- (b) none: Cairene Arabic, Eastern Libyan Arabic, etc.

2. *Cluster epenthesis*

CCC→CəCC: Classical Arabic,¹⁵ Eastern Libyan Arabic, Shukriyya Arabic, etc.

CCC→CCəC: Cairene Arabic, Najdi Arabic, Sudanic Arabic, etc.

3. *Guttural epenthesis*

present: Najdi Arabic, Eastern Libyan Arabic, Nigerian Arabic, etc.

not present: Classical Arabic, Cairene Arabic, Yemenic Arabic, etc.

4. *Sonorant epenthesis*

present: Classical Arabic, southern Egyptian Arabic, Najdi Arabic, etc.

not present: Classical Arabic, Cairene Arabic, Eastern Libyan, etc.

On the one hand, were one to contrast Classical Arabic with the dialects as a whole, then in points 1–3 it could (as in Blau and Fischer/Jastrow) be said to contrast with the dialects. On the other hand, if one classifies the entities in terms of linguistic features, there is only one feature, nunation, by which Classical Arabic is unequivocally distinguished. Note, however, that in this feature it is not distinguished from the dialects as a whole, but from two different language entities, both of which happen to be composed of dialects.¹⁶ There are in fact no linguistic features in this small set which uniquely distinguish the classical language from the modern dialects. From this perspective there is no basis for distinguishing an Old Arabic=Classical Arabic from Neo-Arabic.

A corollary of this way of presenting the comparative data is that the dialect entities may well turn out to be as different from one another as they are from Classical Arabic, a fact which further underlines the artificiality of contrasting them, on a typological basis at least, as a single entity against Classical Arabic.

Table 3 shows the rather unremarkable fact (Spitaler, 1953: 145) that the modern dialects as a whole are generally speaking more remarkable for the similarities which they show with the classical language than for their differences. The notion which I suggest ‘accounts’ for this observation, banal in itself though not for its comparative significance, is that Classical Arabic is, linguistically speaking,¹⁷ a variety of Arabic, no more and no less. Only when it is placed on the same linguistic level as other varieties of Arabic can its historical status be seriously measured. I now turn to this point.

5. *Case and caseless Arabic*

The suggestion that modern Arabic dialects are the descendents of a caseless variety is not entirely new. As early as Vollers¹⁸ it was proposed that pre-diaspora caseless varieties of Arabic existed, and that these represent the

¹⁵ As noted above, Classical Arabic has forms like *radad-tu* ‘I returned’. One may object that the dialects use this rule much more heavily than do the dialects. While such an observation may be valid, incorporating it into the present discussion is not straightforward. It may well turn out that there are dialects which use these rules to a greater or lesser extent as well.

¹⁶ Intuitively one might want to say that those linguistic entities with *-Vn*, i.e. Classical Arabic and Arabic dialects, are closer to each other than to those without it. For this reason I have classified the two *-Vn* varieties within the same general class, (1a).

¹⁷ Socially, culturally and politically, the matter is otherwise.

¹⁸ His highly original work was published in 1906. He made the unfortunate mistake of associating his caseless variety with one of the variant quranic readings. This probably unprovable suggestion made him an easy target for Nöldeke’s (1910) rejoinder.

The designation of the original proto-Semitic nominal as C-Ø means that it does not possess case. Whether it had suffixes marking other relational phenomena, like an *-a* (cf. *-a* as an adverbial marker, as in Hebrew and Classical Arabic, or *-a* as a genitive/object marker, as in Gə'əz) out of which the case system developed is an independent question. It is assumed that case marking in Semitic is a younger trait than nominals lacking case marking on the basis of the Afroasiatic evidence (2.1). Proto-Arabic had both the 'original' caseless nominals, and the case-marking of certain other Semitic languages (3.2). Proto-Arabic here is a reconstructed form which can be dated only in relative terms. Minimally it is older than the seventh/eighth centuries. The direct evidence that it has case appears only in the seventh and eighth centuries, particularly with Sibawaih's detailed grammar. At some point (the rightward pointing arrow in fig. 1 is not meant as pointing to a specific date), the case-variety of the spoken language 'remerged' with the caseless. The direct evidence that proto-Arabic does not have case, barring Diem's work (section 1.2) which defines a date of around 100 B.C., comes from the modern dialects. Since caseless forms can be comparatively reconstructed at least as early as the seventh/eighth centuries, from the time of the Arabic diaspora, they are minimally as old as the case-Arabic described by Sibawaih, and hence can be projected into proto-Arabic as well.

Note that fig. 1 represents one linguistic feature in two manifestations, case and non-case. It is not a model for the development of modern dialects as a whole. It is, it should be emphasized, no more than a rough working model for the development of Arabic. Only with the detailed analysis of bundles of traits will a generally valid picture emerge. Even then the model will fail to encode relevant aspects of the language development. In particular, it would be wrong, when one starts integrating further linguistic traits into the model, to expect automatically to find large bundles of features correlating with the case and caseless varieties respectively (see table 2). It will be difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct *linguistically* discrete entities, dialects, sociolects or whatever, where the magic speakers of Classical Arabic will be found; nor is it necessarily to be expected that the proto-Arabic split into case and caseless varieties will yield dialectal entities corresponding directly with the different modern dialects.²³

This, I think, follows from the nature of Classical Arabic, or more accurately, the nature of Sibawaih's linguistic thinking. The role of Sibawaih in defining Classical Arabic cannot, I believe, be overemphasized. But as seen above in 3.2, Classical Arabic for Sibawaih is as much a way of thinking about language as it is a language. It is as broad and flexible, containing as many sometimes conflicting (see 5, 6) linguistic features as Sibawaih's own linguistic

developed in the place of the vowelless forms. Postulating such a sequence of events could save case forms for all varieties of Old Arabic, though at the cost of suspending normal application of the comparative method.

²³ Even reconstructing the history of a very few modern dialectal features is a much more intractable undertaking that most Arabicists would probably care to admit. For example, Diem (1991) argues that those modern dialects with the linker *-Vn* suffix (see (8)) tend to be those with the guttural epenthesis rule (11), on the basis of which correspondence Diem draws various diachronic conclusions. In fact, only two of the *-Vn* dialects, Najdi and Sudanic Arabic (though Shukriyya is not completely clear), are also *gahawa* (guttural epenthesis) dialects, whereas three of the *-Vn* dialects are not (Andalusian, Tihama, Afghani, according to Ingham's text, 1994: 115). From the reverse angle, Eastern Libyan Arabic and some Upper Egyptian varieties around Asyut and Luxor have guttural epenthesis but no *-Vn*. Diem's use of cultural ('*Bedouin* dialects, *Nomadendialekte*') concepts in the description of linguistic constructs, unfortunately a sanctioned practice in Arabic linguistics, serves to make sound reconstruction even harder.

rationalizations, his own linguistic theory, allow him to incorporate.²⁴ It is thus in one sense inaccurate to speak, as in the discussion on table 3, of Classical Arabic as an entity defined by unique, mutually exclusive structures. It is, referring again to Baalbaki (1990), the means by which many entities were joined within a discrete, though flexible whole.

Before concluding this article I would like to expand on this point, since the suggestion that a language can simultaneously have both case and caseless varieties may strike many Semiticists as odd. However, the suggestion is plausible, if not indeed necessary, from two perspectives. First, if Diem (section 1.2) is correct that there existed caseless forms of Arabic as early as 100 B.C., it necessarily follows that at least between 100 B.C. and 800 A.D., a period of nearly an entire millennium, there coexisted case and caseless varieties of the language. Clearly one cannot put an absolute duration on how long the coexistence occurred, though if it lasted for 900 years it must have been of an extremely stable sort.

Secondly, it is useful to look at modern dialectal and sociolectal analogies to determine whether diametrically-opposed features can coexist. Of course many examples can be found, of which I will cite only two. Among modern dialects can be found quite striking differences coexisting along long geographical borders. Excellent examples of this are found in Behnstedt's atlas of Yemeni Arabic where, for instance, Tihama dialects lacking a morphological feminine plural and having the suffix *-t* as perfect subject marker in first and second person forms (*katab-t* 'I wrote', Behnstedt, 1985: 116, 125) sit next to central Yemeni forms possessing the feminine plural and marking the subject with *k* (*katab-k* 'I wrote'). Equally striking is the sociolinguistic coexistence of different varieties side by side in the same urban settings. Arabic-speaking neighbours, in the city of Maiduguri in north-east Nigeria, for example, use essentially two systems of marking verbal mode. A minority, originally migrants from western Chad, have no verbal mode markers, so that, for example, *gāl yamshi* means either 'he said that he was going' or 'he said to go'. More commonly indicative is marked by a *b-* prefix (familiar in many dialects), subjunctive by its lack, so that a morphological minimal pair exists between indicative *gāl bimshi* 'he said that he was going' and subjunctive *gāl yamshi* 'he said to go'. As might be expected, there is individual speaker variation, though there are no indications that one or the other variant is dying out (Owens 1995).²⁵

Looking at the postulation of two opposed coexisting linguistic features, case and caseless, in terms analogous to data which dialectologists of Arabic have been describing for years makes the co-existence of the two varieties over a very long period of time look less exotic and dramatic than it might be portrayed. Of course, at some point the case endings did die out, and it may well be that the acquisition of many new native speakers of Arabic in the period following the Islamic diaspora did play a role in tipping the advantage towards the caseless variety. Proving this in linguistic terms will be very difficult,

²⁴ It is an exaggeration, but not a misrepresentation, to compare Sibawaih's ideal Bedouin speaker of the 'Arabiyya with Chomsky's ideal speaker-hearer. Most linguistic theories require idealized objects in which the product of the theories can be placed.

²⁵ Mauro Tosco (p.c.) has pointed out that the *-t/-k* variation in the Yemen is of a qualitatively different sort from the presence/absence of a feature, which is what the case/caseless hypothesis assumes. The Nigerian Arabic indicative/subjunctive, however, is precisely analogous (and many more such cases could be cited, the occurrence of *-Vn* in 4.1 being another one), and the neutralization of *m./f.* contrast in the plural in Yemen is similar. What the *-t/-k* variants do show is that perceptually prominent variation among central morphological categories may be subject to a stable variation which has endured well over 1,000 years.

however.²⁶ In any case, a look at the striking mixtures of linguistic features which one finds in today's modern dialects suggests that it is unlikely in former times that there was a neat correlation between say, dialects with cases, retention of f.pl., retention of dual, etc. as opposed to those which lacked these features. It is more likely that these features, in their presence and absence, moved about somewhat independently of each other, as Rabin's (1951) study suggests. Indeed, Sibawaih's task can be seen partly as one of coralling these disparate elements into a single conceptual whole, with the case-variety given particular attention by him. In such a situation, however, for the average speaker of Arabic the disappearance of case endings did not necessarily imply anything other than the disappearance of case endings. A single linguistic feature was lost, not a complete dialect or variety, and certainly not the entire ediface of Old Arabic.

To conclude, I have attempted to expand on the caseless hypothesis of proto-Arabic by arguing that evidence from all stages of the language history, from Afroasiatic, into Semitic, through the 'Arabiyya, down to the modern dialects (and back), have to be integrated in a full account, and that when this is done, evidence for the hypothesis is quite strong. At the same time, it has been suggested that localizing the source of this caseless variety in one particular form of Old Arabic remains an open, perhaps impossible task. It has also, I hope, been shown that a more active incorporation of evidence from the modern Arabic dialects into comparative Semitic and comparative Afroasiatic will contribute to a fuller, more detailed understanding of Arabic and of the language branch and phylum it belongs to.

²⁶ It is commonly accepted, for example, that the Arabic culture of Chad and north-east Nigeria was strongly influenced by Fulani culture, and that it is likely that Fulani-Arab contact led in many instances to language shift to the advantage of Arabic (Braukämper, 1993). None the less, the Arabic of north-east Nigerian maintains many conservative traits, including a fully-functioning f.pl. morphological paradigm and the *-Vn* linker suffix summarized in 4.1. Intensive contact with foreigners alone does not imply simplification.