

On the diachrony and development of the Universal PERFECT across Arabic

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As much as the Arabic vernaculars are important to linguistics (Comrie 1991), not much comparative or diachronic work has been done, which makes good use of them, let alone any work that considers a comparative method in order to account for diachronic changes, developments and grammaticalisations to reconstruct the rise of syntactic structures or morphosyntactic behaviours. A notable exception is the discussion of the development of the morphosyntax of sentential negation across the Arabic vernaculars in Lucas (2009). What we aim to present here is firstly the cross-dialectal attestation of a construction that expresses a Universal PERFECT and which has only been recently identified in Hallman (2016) for Syrian (1a) and Camilleri (2016) for Maltese (1b). These two accounts provide a different syntactic analysis for the construction in (1).

- (1) a. muna il-a ḥams iyyām bi-l-ḥabis
Muna to-3SGF.GEN five day.PL in-DEF-prison
Muna has been five days in prison Syrian: (Hallman, 2016, p. 77)
- b. Il-i žmien li mor-t hemm
to-1SG.GEN time COMP go.PFV-1SG there
It's been quite a while that I have been there Maltese: (Camilleri, 2016, p. 167)

At present, this is the current knowledge about this construction, where we have the provision of two syntactic analyses which seem both plausible, given the lack of synchronic evidence internal to each system that could be used to chose between one or the other. By having undertaken a cross-Arabic comparative quest in search for the construction, and by then working my way through vestiges of diachronic behaviour internal to the synchronic morphosyntax of individual systems, I am in a position to here account for the synchronic syntactic structure with confidence, enhancing my analysis by drawing further upon the diachronic trajectory that I hypothesise here for the first time, for this construction.

I entertain the hypothesis that across the Arabic vernaculars, the Universal PERFECT construction is a grammaticalisation of a very specific non-garden variety possessive construction, where the data in (1) is best analysed as a possessive perfect in Heine & Kuteva (2006)'s terminology. This will be the first time to posit a grammaticalisation trajectory that is specific to the Universal PERFECT, as opposed to a characterisation of a PERFECT grammaticalisation, more broadly, since the Existential counterpart in Arabic is expressed through the use of the perfective morphological form. It is therefore not merely the grammaticalisation of a PERFECT-expressing construction that we will be considering here, but specifically the construction that expresses the Universal reading. While in Irish (Pietsch, 2007) and Irish English (Hickey, 2013) one also finds that two distinct constructions have grammaticalised the two broad PERFECT readings, the possessive perfect construction crucially expresses the Existential reading, and not the Universal, unlike what is the case in Arabic. With the diachronic, synchronic and comparative evidence to back the proposed trajectory of diachronic change and grammaticalisation, issues are taken with claims that possessive perfect constructions are

very rare beyond Indo-European and further tend to define European languages as a *sprachbund*, more specifically (Haspelmath, 1998); as well as the claim that possessive perfects grammaticalised out of non-transitive (i.e. non-*have* type) possessive structures preserve the syntax of the original possessive structure, such that they never themselves develop a transitive structure (Heine & Nomachi, 2010).

To argue at face value that the data in (1) are constructions derived out of possessive constructions, which in Arabic essentially involve the use of prepositional predicates (turned into verbs), as demonstrated in (2), may take the reader by surprise, given that there is seemingly no (synchronic) morphological or syntactic relation between these two sets of data.

- (2) a. ʔan-na ɖyūf
 at-1PL.GEN guests
 we have guests Syrian
- b. ʔand-ek ʔafna xoyol
 at-2SG.GEN a.lot work
 You have a lot of work Maltese

It is however here that the comparative and diachronic reconstruction methods play a crucial role. If we add the Tunisian Universal PERFECT data in (3), in the mix, as an exemplification of yet another Universal PERFECT construction across the Arabic vernaculars, while *seemingly* different from the counterpart structures in (1), the connection with the possessive data in (2) becomes more apparent.

- (3) ʔref-t-ek ʔind-i ʔam
 know.PFV-1SG-2SG.ACC at-1SG.GEN year
 I have known you for a year Tunisian

By looking at the vestiges/reflexes of diachronic behaviour that one can hold on to in the synchronic (morpho)syntax of the individual vernaculars, given the non-literary tradition of the vernaculars, and given that the usual standard of comparison, i.e. Classical Arabic, has only scant data to offer, coupled with the strength of argument gained through comparative observations, the proposed analysis provides a hypothesis of the grammaticalised trajectory that has resulted in the emergence of a Universal PERFECT construction across the vernaculars; it will use the diachronic dimension to help guide the synchronic syntactic analysis, formalised in LFG, and taken to involve a PRED-taking auxiliary (Falk, 2008); and it will additionally account for the further changes that took place following the grammaticalisation, which have in turn resulted in the *seemingly* unrelated constructions across the different dialects (e.g. (1) and (3)).

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