

Afroasiatic Studies in Memory of Robert Hetzron

Afroasiatic Studies in Memory of Robert Hetzron:
Proceedings of the 35th Annual Meeting
of the North American Conference
on Afroasiatic Linguistics (NACAL 35)

Edited by

Charles G. Häberl

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-1002-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1002-9

Does it not look as if we men were thinking and talking out of an enormous antiquity as if we stood not in a coterie of prompters that filled a sitting room but in a circle of intelligences that reached through all thinkers, poets, inventors, and wits, men and women, English, German, Celt, Aryan, Ninevite, Copt, back to the first geometer, bard, mason, carpenter, planter, shepherd, back to the first negro, who with more health or better perception gave a shriller sound or name for the thing he saw and dealt with? Language is a city to the building of which every human being brought a stone.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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PREFACE

As Robert Hetzron initiated the North American Conference on Afroasiatic Linguistics (NACAL) in 1973 and passed away only six months after it had completed a quarter century of annual meetings, it was only fitting that its thirty-fifth annual meeting, held from the 15th to the 17th of March, 2007 in San Antonio, Texas, be dedicated to his memory. I'd like to believe that even today, in its fourth decade, the Conference continues to be a pillar of the community of scholars in the field to which he dedicated his life's work, true to the goals for which he established it.

Hetzron would undoubtedly have been pleased to know that NACAL is still going strong, and that ten years after his passing it attracted no fewer than thirty-six scholars from the United States, Canada, and eight other countries, who presented on topics near and dear to his heart such as phonology, morphology, syntax, language contact, classification, subgrouping, and the history of scholarship, in languages such as Amharic, Arabic, Aramaic, Egyptian, Hebrew, Omotic, and others, as well as the groups to which they pertain. Since its establishment, NACAL has served a unique role among the meetings of learned societies in North America. Only a handful of organizations worldwide hold annual meetings dedicated to Afroasiatic linguistics, and NACAL is one of a very small number of venues where linguists from all sub-disciplines and schools of thought meet to share their research. NACAL is also an academic nexus, a unique node at which graduate students at the beginning of their careers rub shoulders with the native speakers of the languages which they study and with the titans of their fields, men and women of an almost legendary stature such as Hetzron himself.

In this regard, NACAL continues to be distinguished by the regular attendance of a close group of the field's foremost scholars, including some who were present at that first meeting in 1973. Since 1983, one of these scholars has dignified the annual meeting by serving as its official "reminiscer" and delivering a paper on some aspect of their research on the night of the Conference dinner. These stalwarts are the core of the group, and their continued attendance gives the Conference a sense of unity, continuity, and purpose that other such meetings lack. In many cases, the annual meeting provides them with a dependable opportunity not only to present their research and discuss it with their colleagues, but also to interact with old friends whom they might not otherwise have the

opportunity to see. For these reasons, the passing of one always lies heavily upon the rest. The last few years have seen the loss of not one but three NACAL regulars: Wolf Leslau, Alan Kaye, and Lionel Bender.

Wolf Leslau, Hetzron's own mentor and one of the greatest Semiticists of the post-war generation, passed away on Nov. 18, 2006, having celebrated a century of lifetime only four days prior. Leslau was a frequent participant in NACAL's annual meetings, and had the unique distinction of serving as NACAL reminiscer not once but twice, first at NACAL 12 (1984) and then again, two decades later, at NACAL 32 (2004).

Alan S. Kaye, California State University at Fullerton's Professor of English, Comparative Literature and Linguistics, died at the age of 63 on May 31, 2007. Kaye, who was on scholarly leave from Fullerton and residing at the United Arab Emirates University at the time of his death, was one of NACAL's most active participants, having organized two annual meetings, NACAL 9 (1981) and NACAL 18 (1990), and having served as reminiscer at NACAL 23 (1995).

M. Lionel Bender, Professor emeritus at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, died at the age of 73 on February 19, 2008. Like Alan Kaye, Lionel Bender was one of NACAL's most active participants, having organized two annual meetings, NACAL 26 (1998) and NACAL 30 (2002), and having served as reminiscer at NACAL 27 (1999).

Each of these deaths was an immense loss not only to the field of Afroasiatic studies, but also to those who came to know them personally and who looked forward to seeing them at the annual meetings.

The present volume, then, is a product of this Conference, the germ of which was first planted by Hetzron and sustained over the decades by the assiduous efforts of men and women such as these. Its contents are a representative sample of the contributions that they have collectively made over the years to the annual meetings. After the keynote address, which takes pride of place at the front of the volume, I have arranged the contributions somewhat arbitrarily according to the genetic classification of the languages under consideration and the relative chronology of the data being presented. Thus, we begin with Egyptian and Coptic, proceed through two Northwest Semitic languages, which are followed in turn by Arabic, modern South Semitic languages such as Amharic and Mehri, and then finally Dasenach, a Cushitic language.

Gideon Goldenberg graciously agreed to serve as the reminiscer for the thirty-fifth annual meeting, and his contribution, "On Disagreement and Word Order: Robert Hetzron (1938–1997) in Memoriam", offers his personal reflections on his close colleague and friend, as well as a discussion of agreement asymmetries in verb-initial sentences, a subject

which interested Hetzron very much and about which he wrote on several occasions.

Leo Depuydt presents a compelling and original contribution to the philosophy of language with his analysis of “The Conjunctive in Egyptian and Coptic: Towards a Final Definition in Boolean Terms”. He redefines the conjunctive in terms that stand closer to the most fundamental properties of thought, through the application of Boolean logic, which has formerly been applied to algebra, electronics, and software.

Word order is the subject of **Ruth Kramer**’s “VSO and SVO Word Order in Middle Egyptian”, in which she derives these two word orders and additionally addresses the lack of agreement between subject and verb in the former and the correspondingly rich agreement in the latter.

Theresa Musacchio investigates grammatical, orthographical, and artistic regionalisms in First Intermediate Period texts from Dendera for evidence of dialects in her “Isolating Common Grammatical Forms in Egyptian Stelae from the First Intermediate Period and the Implications for Dialects”. She hypothesizes that these texts, which demonstrate considerable variety in artistic conventions, will also yield evidence for dialectal variety as well.

Our Egyptian offerings conclude with **Ariel Shisha-Halevy**’s “A Note on Converbs in Egyptian and Coptic”. In this short note, he succinctly but systematically inventories the morphological functions of the converb and considers its syntactic roles and frequency of use at various stages of the Egyptian language.

Much like Gideon Goldenberg’s contribution, **Robert Holmstedt**’s contribution, “So-Called “First Conjunct” Agreement in Biblical Hebrew”, discusses agreement asymmetries in Biblical Hebrew and Standard Arabic, with particular reference to the phenomenon of first conjunct agreement in the former, which he identifies as a perceived rather than a real syntactic phenomenon.

My own contribution, “The Production and Reception of a Mandaic Incantation”, which concludes the section on Northwest Semitic languages, argues that the bowl incantation texts from late Sasanian/early Islamic Mesopotamia were oral compositions on the basis of certain pragmatic structures within these texts. The act of writing these incantations was merely one aspect of a larger ritual indicated by the texts themselves, and perhaps not even an especially critical one.

In his contribution on “Determination Parameters in the Semitic diglossia”, **Abelkader Fassi-Fehri** establishes the preliminary lines of a computational history of determination in Semitic, in the hopes of accounting for the basic stages of its evolution through an analysis of computational features.

Benjamin Hary's "The Translation of Prepositions in Egyptian Judeo-Arabic *Šuruh*" catalogues the strategies used by Judeo-Arabic speaking exegetes when translating Hebrew texts into their own language, and their attempts to navigate between the Scylla of slavishly calquing the original text, word for word, in the target language, and the Charybdis of creating a new and idiomatic composition which does not sufficiently reflect the original.

The colloquial dialects of Palestinian Arabic are the primary concern of **Judith Rosenhouse**'s "Arabic Bedouin-Sedentary Dichotomy at the Beginning of the New Millennium Based on Linguistic and Literary Structures". She discusses the present status of sedentary and Bedouin dialects and the results of contact between the two groups, basing her analysis upon narratives from different genres collected from sedentary Christian Arabs and Muslim Arabs from both groups.

Ahmad Al-Jallad reconstructs the evolution of a feature of the Neo-Arabic verbal system from Old Arabic in his "The Etymology of the Indicative Augment *b-* in Some Neo-Arabic Dialects", thereby explaining the the loss of the original morphemes indicating negation and the restructuring of the syntax of mood.

Karine David's "The Formation of the Plural of Maltese Nouns: Experiments for a Synchronic Description" documents the preliminary results of an interesting and innovative experiment to examine the productivity of different types of pluralization in Maltese. Much like Arabic, Maltese forms "sound" plurals by means of suffixed plural morphemes, and "broken" or ablaut plurals. David has determined that both means of pluralization are productive, but pluralization by means of the loan morpheme *-i* (of Italian origin) is the most productive means of pluralization.

"On *wh*-words of Ethiopian Semitic Languages", which is a joint contribution from **Anna Maria Di Scullo** and **Degif Petros Banksira**, is an analysis of question words in three Ethiosemitic languages, Amharic, Chaha, and Ge'ez, within the framework of Asymmetry Theory. Di Scullo and Banksira note that complex *wh*-words in these three languages share many of the same properties as complex *wh*-words in the Romance languages, including a resistance to preposition stranding.

Laura Łykowska suggests that grammaticalization might be either the consequence or an instrument of suppletion in her contribution, "The Paradigm of the Verb 'To Be (LOC)' in Amharic as an Example of Interaction between Suppletion and Grammaticalization". In either case, she submits that suppletion provides the impetus or potential for grammaticalization to occur, supporting her case with data from an enormous corpus of Amharic data.

In his “New Finds on Word Formation Processes in Mehri of Qishn in Yemen”, **Hassan Alfadly** shares the results of his field work with speakers of Mehri from the port city of Qishn, particularly with regard to derivation, inflection, and other morphological processes related to word formation. The new data that he presents in this contribution cannot be found elsewhere in print.

Finally, **Sumiyo Nishiguchi** discusses derivation and inflection in a Cushitic language within the framework of Optimality Theory in her “The Prosodic Morpheme in Dasenach”. She notes that certain suprasegmental features such as the stress pattern and the number of syllables in Dasenach correspond to derivational and inflectional morphemes in other languages, and therefore a word-based OT approach to Dasenach morphology best explains the phenomena of inflection and derivation in that language.

This collection, as eclectic as NACAL itself, represents roughly half of the papers that were given in San Antonio. Individually, these papers offer an important contribution to the field, and their ensemble provides an opportunity to revisit the annual meetings, which are a lasting testament to Hetzron’s legacy.

—C.G. Häberl
Williamsburg, NY

ON DISAGREEMENT AND WORD ORDER
ROBERT HETZRON (1938–1997)
IN MEMORIAM

Gideon Goldenberg
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

In remembrance of Robert Hetzron ten years after his death I should not like to read before you an obituary memoir of him, but to say a few things about Robert the person and the scholar, then discuss a linguistic question closely connected with a subject that interested him very much and about which he has written more than once.

Robert did not talk very much about his earlier education in Budapest, but his religious schooling had provided him with good knowledge of Hebrew. His knowledge of German was based on common speech at home and in the community, but his whole *Bildung*, which included thorough familiarity with Hungarian, German and French literatures, with art, music and history, and with grammar &c. was mostly developed by himself. At the age of eighteen he was admitted to the Department of Semitic Philology and Arabic in the University of Budapest in a program majoring in Hungarian and Hebrew, the latter subject non-existent as major in the regular curriculum of the University. He hardly began his studies when the Hungarian revolution broke out in 1956 and he left for Vienna to study there and in various places in Italy and France. It was mostly by his natural talent, great grammatical acumen, intellectual creativity and enthusiasm for original research that Robert became a trained linguist, rather than by academic courses he took as a wandering student. In Paris he took some ordinary courses in General Linguistics (with André Martinet) and in Amharic (with Joseph Tubiana).

As a scholar, Robert Hetzron would define himself first and foremost as (1) a **linguist** in the most general sense of the term. The greatest intensive effort in research he made as a (2) **Semitist** (centring on Amharic, Ethio-Semitic, General Semitic). He further was (in the third circle) (3) an **Afroasiatic comparativist**, specializing in Agaw, Somali and comparative Cushitic. The Ethiopian area easily fascinated many a linguist and comparativist.

Historical Comparative Linguistics was not the first choice of Robert Hetzron; his main interest was in methodological and theoretical issues of the study of language, grammatical analysis and typological comparison.

Comparative Semitics and Afroasiatic studies attracted him for their intrinsic interest, but also, like many others, as a refuge from personal and academic loneliness. As a comparativist, one belongs to a family of scholars, and may find himself among people who appreciate his expertise. This was one of the motives that made Robert devote his studious efforts to contribute to this branch of linguistics, keep contact with many colleagues in strenuous editorial work, creating a community of scholars by the founding of journals like *Afroasiatic Linguistics* and the *Journal of Afroasiatic Languages*, and bring people together by organizing meetings like the *NACAL*. The contribution of Robert to the methodology of historical comparative linguistics was in my opinion more important than his classifications as such. Everyone now refers to the principle of common innovations, which he has propagated. I wish that his suspicion and cautiousness about phonetic and phonological isoglosses were equally commended; we might carry in mind Roman Jakobson's warning that "boundaries between different phonological features often do not coincide with the boundaries between languages or language families" (Jakobson, *Phoneme and Phonology*, 232).

For me personally Robert Hetzron was a close friend (with our ups and downs) for about 35 years, since he came to Jerusalem until the last week of his life. We would discuss with great enthusiasm many linguistic issues from general theoretical problems to some detail in a Gurage dialect, but also literature, poetry, cinema or music. In correspondence, and in lengthy discussions, sometimes during long night-walks along the streets of Jerusalem or London, the *grands boulevards* of Paris, the main streets of Addis Ababa or Budapest, we might even quarrel loudly about some scholarly matter.

For years he suffered from health problems, but it was especially painful to see him incapable of finding the human and intellectual milieu he needed so desperately. As he felt it, in Hungary he culturally fitted but did not belong, in Israel he belonged but did not fit. In America I am not certain. When he complained about various things that happened to him in Jerusalem in 1991 I asked him whether it was so much better in Santa Barbara. His answer was that in Santa Barbara he was a guest, had no expectations and simply did not care. In the evening when he first came to Santa Barbara he wrote to me a postcard saying: Today I arrived in Santa Barbara, in the telephone directory I found about seventy Hungarian names most of whom I have already contacted; now I am looking for a place where to move from here. He remained there for the rest of his life.

And still, though appointed (if I am not mistaken) at the Department of Slavic and Oriental languages, he immediately got in contact with the colleagues in the Department of Linguistics, co-operated with them in a few research works, and hoped to be involved with that department in one

way or another, since in all the languages he investigated, Hetzron was deeply interested in the general linguistic aspects. He had the advantage of thorough familiarity with the various languages that he researched, and his theoretical linguistic writings show great creativity and originality. He had, however, a feeling (as I have already mentioned elsewhere) that as a free-spirited critical scholar it would not be easy for him to get recognized and accepted in general linguistic circles of late-20th century, with their “mainstream” orthodoxies and herd mentality, which man has in common with sheep, and this caused him great frustration. With his colleagues in Linguistics at the UCSB the breach was rather fast. This notwithstanding, it was impossible to ignore his original contributions to the study of language and his active endeavours to make his ideas known and appreciated. Looking backward at his career he must have admitted that his contributions have widely been recognized and appreciated.

Hetzron’s desire to make impressive imprints on general and Hamito-Semitic linguistics have led him sometimes to come out with ideas or formulations that would not necessarily command universal assent, but what he wrote would always be interesting and significant, and represent fruitful original thinking.

An original aspect of sentence-structure and discourse-syntax was raised by Hetzron in more than one of his writings in connexion with the term “presentative” and the presumed process of “presentative movement”. “Presentative” is regarded as making one component of the sentence prominent, to be referred to in the sequel. Robert’s final paper on the subject was called “Presentative Movement or Why the Ideal Word Order is V.S.O.P.”. The assumption of such “Ideal Word Order” is not clearly explained in that paper, and does not come out consistently from the author’s argumentation, but the structure of verb-initial sentences is treated as connected in a way with the main processes of movement as there conceived. Looking at sentence-structure with special sensitivity to “presentative” function will be found offering pregnant insight into sentence and discourse syntax.

I would not discuss at present the idea of “presentative” in general, but should like to dwell upon the sense and structure of verb-initial sentences and especially on the problems of grammatical concord which they entail, mainly the agreement or disagreement between the verb and its nominative subject.

There are many problems of gender and number agreement in all languages that have gender and number distinctions. In some languages a comitative construction (A “*with*” B) may behave as a package of conjoined subjects (A “*and*” B) and attract a verb in the plural (“we go with my father to the market [sc. I and my father]”) as in French, or

Russian, or Amharic, or Neo-Aramaic.¹ Sometimes it may go the other way round (“I go and my friend [sc. I with my friend]”) as in Arabic with the so-called *wāw ma iyyah*.² Elsewhere it will be found that a package of conjoined subjects would be marked as plural even though they are different (“[one good child and one bad child]ren were there”) as in Amharic. Elsewhere, again, a verb preceding conjoined subjects would be in the singular by attraction (“says Moses and Aaron”) as in Biblical Hebrew. Other problems of agreement may occur in cases of *Constructio ad Sensum*.

A problem inherent in agreement as such concerns the very sense of the phenomenon, which is in essence a repetition.

My few comments here, however, will be restricted to the agreement of subject and predicate in verb initial sentences, and will mostly centre on the relation of the initial verb-form with the following nominative as it is represented in Classical and Standard Arabic. The relation in Arabic of the verb-form with a following nominative, because of the apparently complicated grammatical rules involved, is since the 1990s often discussed under the title “agreement asymmetries”, or “asymmetric(al) agreement”, terms which in this context may be found rather misleading.

The feature in question characterizing Standard Arabic is the compulsory absence of agreement in plural or dual number and the optional absence of agreement in feminine gender. We all know that another type of Arabic has also been in use, at the same time and later, where verb and the following related nominative were in full agreement. This other type has been regarded as sub-standard, but social status is irrelevant to linguistic analysis.

The basic syntactical rules of Classical and Standard Arabic may be regarded as common knowledge among learned scholars; it just had to be made clear that we are not speaking of general rules of grammatical agreement (which also involve the conception of nominals as collective nouns, or as *nomina unitatis*, or as human against non-human entities &c.), but only of the special rules depending on verb-initial position; e.g. *yakūnu l-riḡālu kamā turīdu l-nisā’u* “men are like what women want” (Qāsim Ḥamīn ap. Semenov; quoted from Rousseau)—where agreement in gender, but not in number, is preserved; or *yaḡtami’u l-mu’minūna yawma l-qiyāmati fa-yaqūlūna* “the believers will come together on the Day of Judgement and say”, with the verb-form preceding a plural subject is

¹ Exx.: French *nous chantions avec lui*, Amharic *wādā-gābāya kabbate gara ḁnnhedallān*, Neo-Aramaic *ki xəjəxvə egə bnoşən am mnəxə d əxunij*, cf. Turkish *sizinle başbaşa konuşmamız*, German *Wir gingen mit meiner Frau spazieren*.

² E.g. *ḡahabtu wa-bintī*.

singular, or **rather unmarked for number**, whereas the verb which follows the subject is in full agreement with it in number as in gender.

The initial verb-form preceding the subject will also be found **unmarked** not only for number but **also for gender**, e.g. *'idā gā`akumu l-mu`minātu muhāğīrātin* “when believing women seek refuge with you” (Q 60 [*Sūrat al-mumtaḥinah*]:10) [This option is better known as mostly exercised when the subject is separated from the preceding verb by some word(s).]³

The (rather humoristic) illustrative phrase *'akalūni l-barāğī* “the fleas ate me” marks the non-standard construction with full agreement of the verb to a following nominative as identified in the Arabic grammatical tradition. This usage deviates from the standard in two regards: first, the fleas being referred to in a verb-form in the plural are thus given a status which in standard usage is preserved for rational persons, regardless of whether the nominative precedes or follows; second, a verb-form in the plural in standard usage is debarred from initial position preceding its nominal subject. Arabic standard form of verb-initial sentences and the *'akalūni l-barāğī* structure are both of great interest, practical, theoretical and typological, but the main point I wish to make is that the difference between them is not just technical. Verb-initial sentences, or rather sentences in which the verb precedes the nominal subject, make a class basically different from that of sentences with an exposition of a topical subject, and the structure without grammatical concord between the verb and the following nominative expresses the basic sense of the Verb-Subject class with the greatest clarity. What I mean to say is that the Classical rule of leaving the initial verb-form unmarked for number and even gender, is inherent in the very constitution of *fi`l - fā`il* construction, and the most naturally expected.

This is precisely the essence of the *fi`l - fā`il* sentence-type, that it mostly makes a predicative construction without exposing a topical subject. I should like here to correct a definition of the function of that construction which I gave on another occasion. This is the syntactical construction mostly suitable not only (as might be understood from what I had said) for representing athetic statement with an indefinite actor, but also any narrative generally definable as centring on the “procès pour lui-même” (Fleisch, *Verbe arabe*, 163 [about the impersonal]). The connexion between “block predication” and verb-initial order is not new. The finite verb, in itself a predicative complex, makes a sentence, and a following specification of even the closest actant (or argument), viz *al-fā`il* or *nā`ib*

³ About the treatment of sentences like *qāma l-yawma Hindu(n)* in the Arab grammatical literature see, e.g., Sībawayh I P 202₃₋₄ = B 235₁₂₋₁₃; al-Mubarrad *Muqtaḍab* II 146₁₋₃, 337₁₋₂; al-Zağğāğ *l'rāb al-Qur`ān* II 612–615.

al-fā'il, will then be mentioned after the verb without being thematic. Ideally the sentence-initial verb-form could be expected to be “non-personal”, but an inflected verb is a nexus complex that requires a person-morpheme. The unmarked form identical to the 3rd masculine singular is the natural candidate for providing the required formal person-morpheme. In Arabic, this verb-form, unmarked for number and gender, is the default choice in sentence-initial position. How other verb-forms may come there we shall see presently. To say that Arabic is a typical VS language will only mean that this order is there when the S (or some other part) is not fronted to take the initial position, a process which is in my opinion the original sense of *ibtidā'* as conceived, e.g., by Sībawayh and the early grammarians. I think that in early Arabic grammar the notion of *ibtidā'* refers to the process of fronting, and *al-mubtada'* is the fronted term. In later syntactical theory the exposed theme was said to be *al-mubtada' bihī* “the (sc. term) by which (sc. the sentence) begins”, the “inchoative”, a conception rather different from the former.

For a deeper insight into the structure of verb-initial sentences in languages like Arabic it will be interesting to see how some languages commonly defined as being of the SV type make similar sentences placing the verb before its nominal subject without a topical exposition of the latter. Where verbs with analytic inflexion require some preceding nominal or pronominal subject, a construction not so different from the Arabic will be found with a semantically empty “dummy”, or “expletive” subject, or “Scheinsubjekt”, or “sujet apparent”. The formal function of such “sujet apparent” is similar to that of the personal morpheme in the Arabic verb-form of a *fi' - fā'il* sentence. Arab grammarians tried to define the function of that personal morpheme by denying its (pro)nominal status.⁴

To this type belong French sentences with *il* as a “sujet apparent” with the verb in its unmarked singular form, in principle with no agreement with the following “sujet réel”.

Examples: *Il est venu quelqu'un | Il part maintenant pour Grenoble plus de soixante charrettes | il est arrivé un malheur | il est venu beaucoup de visiteurs des vieux pays | Il vous arrivera mademoiselle Flore Brazier dans quatre heures d'ici | Alors l'Éternel envoya contre le peuple des serpents brûlants ; ils mordirent le peuple, et il mourut beaucoup de gens en Israël (Numb. xxi 6 [Segond]) | Il vint beaucoup d'invités | il est venu des dames | Il se produit des choses étranges dans ce village.*⁵

⁴ A concise account of this definition will be found in Levin 'Akalūni *l-barāgītu* 43–44 (§2.2).

⁵ Cf. Grevisse *Bon usage* §606, cf. §185

Il + verb in the singular is the rule in this construction of “ostension dispersive”,⁶ as it says in the grammar of the Academy:

Quand le sujet apparent est *il*, le verbe employé impersonnellement reste au singulier, même si le sujet réel est au pluriel : *Il y a des fruits. Il tombe de grosses gouttes. Il est venu deux personnes.* Quand le sujet apparent est *ce*, le verbe être se met ordinairement au pluriel si le sujet réel est un nom au pluriel ou un pronom de la 3e personne du pluriel, mais peut également se mettre au singulier : *Ce sont de vrais amis.*[...] (*Grammaire de l'Académie française* 186-187).⁷

But with *il* as well, attraction of the verb to the following “real subject” is not uncommon:

Ce samedi, il sont venus une cinquantaine tenter leur chance | Croies-tu vraiment qu'il arrivent des avions toutes les dix minutes ? | il arrivent des cars jusque là.

Such attraction is the rule in the parallel construction in German, where in the “Vorausnahme des eigentlichen Subjekts durch *es*” it has been well recognized that “ist damit ein Mittel gegeben im Behauptungssatze das Verbum dem Wesen nach an die erste Stelle zu rücken” (Paul *Grammatik* III [IV/1] 128, §108; cf. Curme *German* 457).

Examples: *Es zogen drei Burschen | Es kam ein Richter von ... nach ... | auf dieser Demonstration ... Es trugen zwei deutsche “Linke” ein Plakat ... | Pflingsten, das liebliche Fest, war gekommen: Es grünt und blühten Feld und Wald (Goethe, Reineke Fuchs: Erster Gesang) | Es kommen so viele Menschen, dass wir ständig neue Schulen errichten müssen (Berlin Online Dossier) | Der Angstschweiß läuft schon die Straße runter, und langsam wird der ganze Garten munter, Es schreien Kinder, es schreien Männer, es schreien Frauen ...*

⁶ This is the term defining sentences like *il viendra Louise* or *il viendra moi* in Damourette – Pichon *Grammaire* IV 464–465.

⁷ Compare the following citations from A. Meillet’s book-reviews: Il a visiblement été écrit vite, et il en résulte certains accidents intéressants à observer. Ainsi, on sait que *ce sont* suivi d’un pluriel est une forme savante, contraire aux tendances du français où l’on dit naturellement: *c’est eux*. M. M. écrit, “Au point de vue des congrégations, *ce sont* vers les plus orthodoxes que la faveur des milieux mystiques malais.” (Meillet *BSL* 26 (1923) c.-r. 219) | Si certains caractères linguistiques peuvent être rapprochés de faits de mentalité, *ce sont* des caractères généraux qu’il convient d’envisager, non des faits particuliers. (Meillet *BSL* 29 (1926) c.-r. 132) | Ce qu’il convient d’étudier, *ce sont* les problèmes eux-mêmes. (Meillet *ibid.* 135)

Such *es*-sentences are structurally, and to some extent functionally, close to Arabic VS constructions by having the unmarked “empty” *es* as formal subject, although the verb-form is made to agree by attraction to the following “real subject”. Such *es*-constructions have indeed been used for translating Arabic VS sentences, as in the following instances and elsewhere:

ğayyaba l-dāfinūna “(Es) verbargen die Begrabenden” | *taḥruḡu minha l-tuwālāt* “(Es) gehen heraus aus ihr die Langen” | *tanāzaʿani l-raḡulāni* “(es) stritten mit mir die beiden Männer” (Reckendorf *Verhältnisse* 69) | *qāla llawātī kunna yalumnanī* “es sagten die, die mich zu tadeln pflegten” (Reckendorf *Syntax* 28).

In German it is also possible to occupy the initial position with some presentative or other adverbial.

In English it is the weakened and emptied *there* that is employed as a prop-word where “the verb comes before its subject” (OED)—initially or not—even when an adverbial precedes. Here too, it all has to do with “block predication” with no exposition of a topical subject.

Examples: *There died an infinite number of people* | *There shall come a Star out of Jacob* | *There appeared to him, on the side of his bed, a man* | *There would no sword bite on him* | *There followed a very strange silence* | *Just for a second, there looked at her [in the looking-glass] a gray-white charming girl* | *There coude not be founde a more goodlyer man* | *Whilset the treasure is a digging, there must be read the psalmes*. Cf. Jespersen *Grammar* VII 111-114 (§3.2).

It is not difficult to notice that this construction is mainly employed where the fronting of the verb is called for to form sentences without an exposition of a thematic subject. Otto Jespersen says: [In such sentences] generally found in English with *there*, in Scandinavian with *der*, in Dutch with *er* [&c.], there seems everywhere to be a tendency to have the V before the S; in comparing the Authorized Version with the Greek original I was struck with the frequency of *there*, where the Greek had the word-order VS (Jespersen *ibid.* VII 114, § 3.26). In fact, one has no reason to be struck.

Syntagmatic (also paradigmatic) attraction is one of the natural and common linguistic processes. Agreement-by-attraction of the verb to a following subject may be found everywhere. Languages like French or German show clearly the tension between the underlying principle of empty person-morpheme of the verb-form and the power of attraction. The same tension may be recognized in Arabic between the classical standard

structure and the *ʾakalūni l-barāgīt* syntax. In the latter construction, as in other languages with verb-inflexion like the classical languages, Hebrew, Russian or Italian, the personal (“empty” or “impersonal”) morpheme in the inflected verb-form preceding its *fāʾil* is in full concord with that *fāʾil*, as if by attraction.⁸

VS order is found in many languages, not necessarily classifiable as “verb-initial languages”. Finite verbs being intrinsically nexus-complexes, we can probably say that the basic contrast is between (a) sentences centred on the “procès pour lui-même” (v. supra) without necessarily referring to a noun phrase indicating a thematic subject and (b) sentences formed of a topical subject noun-phrase and a predicate (whether verbal or not) said, asserted, affirmed or denied concerning that subject. Verbal predicative complexes, inflected or phrasal, which constitutionally incorporate a person morpheme, are involved in both types of sentences. In type (a) the personal morpheme will ideally be neutral and unmarked, since it is there just for filling the formal requirement of the verbal complex; in type (b) it represents the topical subject within the verbal complex. In Arabic, (a) seems to have been primarily regarded in the grammatical tradition as the plain construction, and (b) as the result of fronting and topicalization of S, if I well understand Sībawayhi’s original sense of *ibtidāʾ*. In French and some other “SV-languages”, (b) might be regarded as the plain construction, whereas (a) has been described as marking the detopicalization of S (v. e.g. Creissels *Syntaxe* I 334–337). The two approaches are in essence identical, since topical and topicalized are structurally equivalent, as can equally be said of non-topical and detopicalized.

In Arabic there is also the question of adjectival predicate preceding the nominal or pronominal subject, and how far such predicates can be regarded as analogous to finite verbs, but this is a special problem that needs to be examined separately.

⁸ A very clear and certain case of similar attraction will be found in Biblical Hebrew VS sentences where the verb is followed by conjoined subject-nominals. The verb is normally made to agree in gender and number with the immediately following first nominal, as in *wayyifqōd Mōdē wəʾAhārōn unšīʾē hāʾēdā...* “then Moses and Aaron and the chieftains of the congregation numbered [lit. “numbered (m.sg.) Moses and Aaron &c.”] | *ʾāšer pāqad Mōdē wəʾAhārōn* “whom Moses and Aaron numbered” [lit. “that numbered (m.sg.) Moses and Aaron”].

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THE CONJUNCTIVE IN EGYPTIAN AND COPTIC: TOWARDS A FINAL DEFINITION IN BOOLEAN TERMS

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Any complex combination of events can be contemplated as a single whole in thought.

—George Boole, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 152 (1862), p. 225

Much has been written about the ancient Egyptian and Coptic construction called the conjunctive. Several definitions have been proposed for its function. This writer has advanced his own. The purpose of this paper is to reformulate that definition in terms deemed final. The term “final” hardly implies that criticism is unwelcome or that the definition might not turn out to be erroneous. “Final” involves the undeniable fact that the laws of thought determine the absolute limitations of our mental faculties. There is no thinking beyond them. A definition that is reduced to this level has met an absolute limit and is in that sense final. The present investigation is part of a larger effort provisionally entitled *Boolean Essays in Language and Probability*. In the brain, something is either on or off. Ultimately, all definitions of linguistic concepts will need to be restated digitally.¹

The focus of the present investigation will be on a query about the conjunctive first raised by the eminent French Egyptologist Serge Sauneron in an article written 45 years ago. This article is one of the most perceptive ever written about the conjunctive. Sauneron is concerned with practical and philological matters. His business is with the basic purport of certain passages in which the conjunctive occurs. Certain practical questions arise from the contemplation of that purport. The present paper

¹ Presenting this paper at NACAL 35 in San Antonio, Texas, a meeting dedicated to Robert Hetzron, brought back memories of NACAL 24 held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1996, when as meeting convener I invited Professor Robert Hetzron to be that year’s reminiscer. It was he, after all, who founded NACAL in 1973. Since he unexpectedly died some months later, our acquaintance remained limited to that weekend in Philadelphia.

focuses on one of these questions: Why is a sentence containing a conjunctive so often so conveniently translated by a sentence containing a condition? Answering that question requires a definition of the conjunctive that is closer to the nature of thought. The design of the present treatise is to show that a conjunctive can be converted unfailingly into a condition, and back, by what George Boole would call the invariable laws of thought.

Some small measure of representations of the mathematical kind will be necessary in the following discourse. But hardly any knowledge of mathematics is required besides understanding what a simple equation means, including letter symbols as well as symbols such as =, +, ×, −, and (. It would not be easy to describe Boole's ideas completely without mathematical symbols. In a pencilled note on the back of the last page of a posthumously published manuscript (Boole 1952/2004: 211–29) deposited at the Royal Society in London, his wife Mary Boole writes, “Mr. Macmillan wished G.B. to write . . . a work [putting the principles of the Laws of Thought into non-mathematical language] and he often attempted it; but always failed” (Boole 1952/2004: 211 note *). And she identifies the manuscript in question as the beginning of such an attempt.

* * *

1. The Conjunctive as Marker of Combinations of Events as Single Wholes

As regards function, the Egyptian and Coptic “conjunctive” has nothing in common with its name-sakes in Latin and Greek and other languages. The verb form came into existence around the mid-second millennium B.C.E. and is used in the last three of the five stages of Egyptian, Late Egyptian, Demotic, and Coptic. A third of the history of Egyptian, the longest of any language's, had passed. That third encompasses the Old and Middle Egyptian stages, dating to about 2500–1500 B.C.E. There is much variation in the usage of the conjunctive at any time and much change in its usage over time. Yet, one likes to think that the conjunctive exists for some overarching reason transcending the many variations and shifts characterizing its usage. According to traditional definitions, the conjunctive—far from having a function of its own—derives its function in each instance from a preceding verb form, like some kind of grammatical chameleon or photocopier. In challenge to this traditional view, I proposed a definition for the conjunctive that assigns to it a single function all of its own. It exhibits this function in all its usages—excepting certain properties of the Coptic conjunctive owed to influence from Greek

verb forms it translates. The time has come to recast this definition in terms that stand closer to the nature of thought.

Why does the conjunctive exist? Language is a map of reality as we perceive it, as it were. The search is for the conjunctive's basic identity, its *Sitz-im-Leben*. Reality presents itself to the senses, not as a fog-like continuum, but mainly as a collection of discrete things and events. Furthermore, these discrete things and events do not stand in full isolation from one another. They cluster into groups of two or more. Such combinations of things and events may be called compound things or events. There are at least three ways of presenting combinations of events or actions as single wholes, that is, compound events or actions.

First is a single word. Consider "eat." "Eat" might include taking a spoon, dig into food, lift the spoon to one's mouth, put the food in one's mouth, and so on. There is no need to refer to all these components explicitly one by one because there is a word denoting all of them together—"eat." A second way is, I believe, the conjunctive in Egyptian and Coptic. The conjunctive combines events or actions for which there is no single one word in the language (for examples, see below). A third way is the significant absence of an element, as in English "Don't drink and drive," in which the absence of "don't" in front of "drive" has the effect of presenting drinking-plus-driving as a compound event. The absence in question is called gapping in linguistics, presumably because of the impression that a gap is left in front of "drive," as if "don't" has been omitted. I prefer to assume that "don't" has *not* been omitted because it was never there in the first place.

2. Proof that the Conjunctive Marks Combinations of Events as Single Wholes

One piece of evidence that proves that the conjunctive exists to mark compound events is as follows. Most verb forms consist of a conjugation base followed by an infinitive. But in rare instances, a single infinitive cannot combine with a conjugation base by itself. The infinitive in question can only enter the slot following the conjugation base in conjunction with another infinitive. The two infinitives are linked to one another by the conjunctive. Each infinitive denotes a single event. Together, the two infinitives linked by the conjunctive denote a compound event. If the conjunctive marks the two infinitives as a compound event in *this* instance, marking compound events would appear to be a defining property of the conjunctive in *all* instances. How could a verb form exhibit a striking characteristic in some instances but not in others, all else being the same?