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NOTES ON THE GENITIVE EXPONENTS
OF SOME MODERN ARABIC DIALECTS

This brief treatment is part of a larger study on the process of grammaticalization within the Semitic languages.¹ Grammaticalization is the change whereby lexical items and constructions come, in certain linguistic contexts, to lose their lexical meaning and serve grammatical functions.² As one of the two ways in which new grammatical forms arise – the other being analogy – grammaticalization is an important area of study. There has been a surge of interest in this subject in the last two decades – including a handful of works devoted to Semitic languages – yet, by and large, the field of Semitics has avoided the topic of grammaticalization. This article hopes to fill this lacuna in some small way by focusing on one particular type of this change, namely, the development of genitive exponents. This development is an interesting example of grammaticalization, and should be of interest to the general linguist. At the same time, for those focused on Semitics, looking at this development from this point of view provides new insight into the historical development of these languages.

1. Genitive Exponents

In Proto-Semitic, a genitival relationship between nouns was expressed by the construct phrase (*iḏāfa* construction); there was no special genitive particle like

¹ Rubin (2005). With many thanks to John Huehnergard, Wolfhart Heinrichs, Jeremy Hutton, and Rebecca Hasselbach for their comments, as well as to Prof. W. M. Thackston for his helpful expertise.

² For more specifically on grammaticalization, two excellent works are Hopper and Traugott (2003) and Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer (1991). Also see the introductory chapter to Rubin (2005).

English 'of'. This construction exists and remains widely used in most Semitic languages. In the languages that retain case (Akkadian and Arabic in the following examples), the genitive case marks the governed noun. Examples are:

- Akkadian: *bēl bītim* 'the owner of the house' (lit: owner house)³
 Hebrew: *bēt ham-melek* 'the house of the king' (lit: house the-king)
 Arabic: *kalbu r-rajuli* 'the man's dog' (lit: dog the-man)

In many languages a special genitive exponent developed, often probably as a result of the loss of case-marking. Modern Semitic languages show a wide variety of genitive exponents; Modern Arabic dialects particularly so. An excellent and thorough comparative study of the Arabic forms was made by Harning (1980), but her work, while it included brief individual discussions of historical development, was essentially focused on the comparative syntax of the genitive exponents.⁴

Regarding the historical development, it is remarkable that the various genitive exponents in both ancient and modern Semitic, while different in form, derive, via grammaticalization, from only two sources: a RELATIVE PRONOUN and a GRAMMATICALIZED NOUN. It is this point which I wish to emphasize.

For example, from a grammaticalized relative pronoun we find:

- Akkadian *ša*: *bēlum ša bītim* 'the owner of the house'⁵
 Ge'ez *za-*: *wangēl za-ʾəgzīʾəna* 'the gospel of our Lord'⁶
 Biblical Aramaic *dī*: *nəbiyyayyā dī ʾēlāhā* 'the prophets of God'⁷
 Mehri *ǝ*: *kīš ǝ-tōmər* 'sack of dates'⁸

The source relative pronouns for the genitive exponents in these examples are all etymologically related to one another, and the parallel development is obvious. This is not the case for the genitive exponents of the Arabic dialects, which show the greatest diversity of forms. For this reason, the Arabic forms will

³ One could also say that 'owner-of house' is a literal rendering, since *bēl*, with its lack of case ending, indicates that it is in a construct relationship. The same applies to the Hebrew and Arabic examples.

⁴ Harning's very fine work was made known to me only after I had completed the bulk of my research. Therefore, none of the forms quoted below are taken from her.

⁵ Von Soden (1995: §137). In Old Akkadian, the particle was declined, making its origin as a determinative pronoun clear. Evidence from elsewhere in Semitic also demonstrates this.

⁶ Tropper (2002: §52.44).

⁷ Ezra 5:2. Old Aramaic has <zy>, reflecting /ðī/ (Degen 1969: 60), while later Aramaic has simply *d-*.

⁸ Simeone-Senelle in Hetzron (1995: 412).

be the focus of this treatment, with the intention of demonstrating that the plethora of attested forms do indeed fall under the two above-mentioned source categories for genitive exponents.

2. The Prime Source

The most common source for the Arabic genitive exponents is a noun meaning 'property' or 'thing'. For example:⁹

Iraqi, Kuwaiti *māl* (f. *mālat*, pl. *mālōt*) (< 'property', cf. Classical Arabic *māl*): *il-jām'a māl baḡdād* 'the University of Baghdad'¹⁰

Yemeni *ḥagg* (f. *ḥaggat*, m.pl. *ḥaggūn*, f.pl. *ḥaggāt*) (< 'property, possession', cf. CA *ḥaqq*): *ḥizwiyih ḥagg walad* 'the story of a boy'; (Northern) *im-fars ḥagg im-dīwān* 'the furniture of the living-room'¹¹

Jewish Tunisian (*n*)*tā* (< CA *matā* 'property'): *əl-klām ntā ʾəḏ-ḥāžəl* 'the words of the man'; similar forms are also found in Algerian, Maltese, non-Jewish Tunisian, and some dialects of Moroccan.¹²

Damascus Syrian *šīt* (pl. *šyāt*), Palestinian *šēt* (pl. *šayyūt*) (< CA *šay* 'thing'): *l-mōtōr šīt ʾəs-sayyāra* 'the engine of the car'¹³

Chadian *hanā* (f. *hint*) (< 'thing', cf. CA *hana*): *bēt hanā Mūsa* 'Musa's house'¹⁴

This change, the grammaticalization of a noun 'property' or 'thing' into a genitive exponent, is actually not unusual. We even find it elsewhere in Semitic:

⁹ For an excellent discussion of the syntax of the Moroccan, Egyptian, Syrian, and Kuwaiti forms, along with many good examples, see Brustad (2000: 70-88). Also see Brockelmann (1908-13 II: §161) for a discussion of many of these forms.

¹⁰ Erwin (1963: 375ff), Abu-Haidar (1991: 104-6). Also see references in previous note.

¹¹ Watson (1993: 177, 220-24), Behnstedt (1987: 62-63). As Watson notes, the gender and number distinctions are only maintained in northern dialects, for which see Behnstedt.

¹² D. Cohen (1975: 252-53). Singer (1984: 441), on non-Jewish Tunisian, gives a form *mtā*. For *mtā/ntā* in Jewish Algerian Arabic, see M. Cohen (1912: 364). On Moroccan *ntā*, see Brustad (2000: 86 n. 20). On Maltese *ta*, see Ambros (1998: 76).

¹³ Cowell (1964: 490). Obler (1975: 68-70) and Lipiński (1997: §51.19) support this etymology, while Brockelmann (1908-13 II: §161aβ) is unsure. Grotzfeld (1965: 92) notes (already forty years ago) that this lexeme is dying out in Damascus.

¹⁴ Jullien de Pommerol (1999: 100-1).

Tigrinya and Tigré *nāy* (< 'property', cf. Ge'ez *nəwāy*): Tigrinya *maṣḥāf nāy mamhər* 'the teacher's book'; Tigré *nāy ʾətyopya ġewografi* 'geography of Ethiopia'.¹⁵

Non-Semitic languages attest this development as well:

Haitian Creole *pa* 'property' (< French *part*): *lažā pa-u* 'your (own) money' (lit: 'money of you')¹⁶

Thai *khǎw* 'thing': *bāan khǎw chán* 'my house' (lit: house of me); *khǎw chán* 'mine'.¹⁷

For other examples, see Heine and Kuteva (2002: 245-6, 296).

Returning to the Arabic forms, it is perhaps conspicuous that some of these forms decline for number and gender, while others do not. In fact, as some of the grammars note, the masculine singular can in many cases be used as an indeclinable generic form (see also notes 11, 19). This is a result of grammaticalization. As the nominal status of the source lexeme diminishes and the lexeme comes to be identified solely as a genitive exponent, it loses the categories associated with that nominal status, namely, gender and number.

3. On Syro-Lebanese *taba'*

In Syrian and Lebanese Arabic, a noun *taba'* (in CA, 'follower') has been grammaticalized. This noun most likely acquired the meaning of 'belonging, possession' under the influence of an earlier periphrastic construction *tābi' l-* 'belonging to'.¹⁸ Examples are:

Syrian *taba'* (pl. *taba'ūl*, *taba'āt*): *baṭṭāriyye taba' bīl* 'a flashlight battery'.¹⁹

¹⁵ Leslau (1941: 40-42), Raz (1983: 42). This derivation, with which Brockelmann (1908-13 II: §161b) and Leslau (1987: 410) agree, is against that of Rundgren (1955: 213), who sees a demonstrative origin.

¹⁶ Howe (1990: 16). This particle is a somewhat emphatic possessive.

¹⁷ Smyth (2002: 38, 50).

¹⁸ The basic meaning of *tābi'* is 'following'.

¹⁹ Cowell (1964: 460, 489), Grotzfeld (1965: 92), Brustad (2000: 70-88). In Lebanese *taba'* is indeclinable (W.M. Thackston, p.c.), and even in Syrian this is often the case (Grotzfeld 1965: 92, Fischer and Jastrow 1980: 91). On the peculiar plural form *taba'ūl*, see Cowell (1964: 489 n. 1).

The construction *X tābi' l- Y*, 'X belonging to Y', may have been replaced by a synonymous *X taba' l- Y*; this could then have been reinterpreted as 'X, a belonging/thing of Y', on analogy with a construction like *kalbun li-dārihim* 'a dog of (belonging to) their dwelling'. Once the noun *taba'* had the meaning of 'a belonging, thing, property', the grammaticalization to a genitive exponent would be parallel to the examples given above in Section 2.

For the grammaticalization of 'belonging to' into a genitive marker, we may also compare with interest the Tok Pisin use of *bilong* (< English *belong*), as in *buk bilong man* 'the man's book'.²⁰ For a parallel to the use of Syrian/Lebanese *taba'* in idiomatic expressions like *huwwe taba' niswān* 'he is a ladies man' (lit: 'he of women'), we might compare Tok Pisin *man bilong buk* 'a bookish man'.²¹

4. On Egyptian *bitā'*

The Egyptian Arabic genitive exponent *bitā'* (f. *bitā'it*, pl. *bitū'*)²² is traditionally derived from *matā'* 'property', and this would certainly be feasible given the above examples.²³ The use of *matā'* (or derivation thereof) as a possessive in North African dialects (including Maltese) supports this theory. If this is correct, the form as found in Egyptian can be explained as an irregular partial assimilation of *m(V)t > b(V)t*. This is unproblematic, given that grammaticalization often results in irregular phonetic changes. This derivation is probably correct, but it seems to me that a metathesis of the *taba'* root attested in the Levantine dialects to the east is perhaps also a legitimate possibility and cannot be ruled out. This irregular change can also be attributed to grammaticalization. Either way, we are dealing with an ultimate source which meant 'property'. It is also important to note that in current Egyptian, *bitā'* exists as a noun meaning 'thing'. Example are:

Egyptian: *il-kitāb bitā' il-ʾustāz* 'the professor's book'; *mal'ab it-tinis bitā' in-nādi* 'the tennis court of the club'

²⁰ Verhaar (1995: 194-95). Tok Pisin is an English-based Creole spoken in Papua New Guinea, where it is one of three official languages.

²¹ Brustad (2000: 82). Brustad notes that this use is also found in Egyptian. On Tok Pisin, see Verhaar (1995: 197).

²² Abdel-Massih et al. (1979: 15-19), Brustad (2000: 72). Abdel-Massih gives a f. sg. form *bitā'a*, as do Fischer and Jastrow (1980: 220); this is simply the isolated (i.e., non-construct) form of *bitā'it*.

²³ Brockelmann (1908-13 II: §161) and Lipiński (1997: §51.19).

5. On Moroccan Arabic *dyāl/d* and Parallels

Post-Biblical Hebrew and some Aramaic dialects (Biblical, Qumran, Targumic, Christian Palestinian, Samaritan, Mandaic, Syriac) combine the relative pronoun with the preposition *l-* to form possessive pronouns and adjectives. In Hebrew this produces *šel-* and in Aramaic *dīl-*.²⁴ Since the preposition *l-* is used for possession elsewhere (Hebrew *yēš lī*, Syriac *ʾīt lī* 'I have'), this essentially derives from a periphrastic construction: 'the X that is to me' > 'my X' (not uncommon in Biblical Hebrew, e.g., 1 Kings 4:2, *haš-šārīm ʾāšer lō* 'his officials'). Aramaic, as noted above, uses the simple relative *dī* (later *d-*) for non-pronominal genitival use, while Hebrew back-forms an independent *šel*, which is used for all genitives:

Modern Hebrew: *ha-bayit šel ha-melex* 'the king's house'; *ha-bayit shelī* 'my house'

Syriac: *ktābā dīl(y)* 'my own book'

Moroccan and at least some dialects of Algerian Arabic have a genitive exponent *dyāl* (variant *d*).²⁵ Some believe this particle to be a loan from Romance via Andalusian Arabic, but this seems extremely implausible and unlikely. It is almost certainly a combination of a relative plus *l-*, thus identical in construction to (though totally independent of) Hebrew *šel* and Aramaic *dīl-*. M. Cohen (1912: 363) notes its demonstrative origin, but does not elaborate. The form of the exponent itself, in particular the *-yā-*, is difficult to explain;²⁶ but then, as noted above, grammaticalization often causes irregular and bizarre sound changes. Examples of the Moroccan genitive exponent are:

Moroccan: *l-kās dyāli* 'my cup'; *l-wāld dyāl t-tažər* 'the son of the merchant'; *z-znaqi d-lā-mdina* 'the streets of the city'

Brustad (2000: 85 n. 19) notes that many grammars claim *dyāl* is always, or almost always, used with pronominal suffixes (i.e., to form possessive pronouns or adjectives, not as a simple genitive exponent relating two nouns). M. Cohen (1912: 324), in his discussion of Jewish Algerian, alleges the same thing. Brustad dismisses these other works as erroneous, but it is almost certainly the case that we are simply dealing with a diachronic change. The form *dyāl* was (like Aramaic *dīl-*)

²⁴ In Biblical and Qumran Aramaic, the relative *dī* is written separately from *l-*, while in other dialects they combine to form a single word.

²⁵ Moroccan: Harrell (1962: 202-3), Caubet (1993 I: 207-8); Algerian: M. Cohen (1912: 324, 363-64), Grand'hénry (1972: 121). See also Harning (1980: 112, 129).

²⁶ See Harning (1980: 112-13) for a discussion of this etymology.

indeed once only used with suffixes – strengthening the argument of the connection with the preposition *l-* – but has been reanalyzed (back-formed) in exactly the same way as Hebrew *šel*, and can now function independently. This connection is noted by Harning.

6. More on the Use of the Genitive Exponent

All of the Arabic genitive markers discussed above, as well as that of Tigré and Tigrinya, can be combined with pronominal suffixes to form possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns, like those we have already seen in Moroccan. For example:

Syrian: *iḏ-dābit taba'u* 'his officer', *hayy taba'na*. 'This is ours.'

Damascus Syrian: *šyāti hadōl*. 'These are mine.'

Iraqi: *it-talaḥḥōn mālak* 'your telephone'

Yemeni: *is-sayyārit ḥaggī* 'my car'

Egyptian: *il-mišwār bita'ha* 'its journey'

Chadian: *al kalib da hanāku*. 'This dog is yours.'

Tigré: *nāye ʾikon*. 'It is not mine.'

There are also examples of the genitive exponents being used with a partitive sense. In Moroccan we find *dyāl/d* used after the numbers two to ten (among others) and in certain partitive expressions:²⁷

Moroccan: *tlāta d-əl-ktūb* 'three books'; *bazzāf dyāl š-šqa* 'a lot of work'

Partitive use is not limited to Moroccan. We also find, for example, Chadian Arabic *litūr hanā dihin* 'a liter of oil'.²⁸ These are also examples of grammaticalization, the definition of which extends to grammatical items acquiring new grammatical functions. So, in this case, the grammaticalization can be broken into two stages. First a genitive exponent developed in Moroccan and Chadian Arabic (via a relative construction and a noun 'thing', respectively). Second there was a grammaticalization GENITIVE EXPONENT > PARTITIVE.²⁹

²⁷ Caubet (1993 I: 150), Brustad (2000: 86).

²⁸ Jullien de Pommerol (1999: 101)

²⁹ See Heine and Kuteva (2002: 241).

7. Conclusions

Thus far, except for some of the etymological discussion, there has not been much new information offered. We have seen compiled a greater number of forms than is to be found in the handbooks, and looked at comparative evidence from non-Semitic languages, but one might ask what knowledge can be gained from this compilation and comparison. The points I would like to make are the following:

a. As already stated, all of the Semitic genitive exponents can be traced back to a RELATIVE PRONOUN and a GRAMMATICALIZED NOUN.

b. All the Modern Arabic and North Ethiopian genitive exponents listed above, with the exception of Moroccan, can be derived from a word meaning 'property' or the closely related 'thing'. This point is nearly always overlooked. Note, for example, Versteegh (2001: 107), who lists nine different genitive exponents to illustrate the variety found in modern dialects. Yet instead of pointing out the differences, as he is doing, it should be highlighted that of Versteegh's nine forms, seven are from 'property' or 'thing' and two are from a relative.

c. While the developments we find for the Arabic genitives may seem odd upon first glance, they are not at all unusual cross-linguistically.

d. The fact that a wide variety of dialects share such a similar grammaticalization indicates one of two possible historical developments. One possibility is that one dialect was innovative and the construction spread to other dialects where it was calqued.³⁰ The other, more likely, possibility is that such a construction – i.e., a genitive exponent from a word 'property' – existed in vulgar Arabic of the Classical period. The construction has survived in many modern dialects, but as the dialects developed independently, each has differed as to which word for 'property' is used.

e. Moroccan, the remotest and perhaps most divergent dialect of Arabic, has gone its own way. Yet the construction it has chosen has parallels in Aramaic and Hebrew, and probably reflects an older Semitic syntactical construction of the type we see in Biblical Hebrew *haš-sārîm 'ăšer lô* 'his officials'. In Moroccan we also find the grammaticalization of the genitive exponent carried even further, as it is used in partitive expressions (much as English *of* and German *von*).

³⁰ The North Ethiopic (Tigrinya and Tigré) form may very well be an Arabic calque, though it need not be.

The list of genitive exponents discussed here is of course not exhaustive.³¹ But this treatment has attempted to show that there is indeed order and regularity to what seems like a wide variety of unrelated forms. These genitive exponents also provide very nice examples of grammaticalization. In addition to nouns losing their semantic value and acquiring a grammatical function – the basic definition of grammaticalization – we find that they have often lost their nominal attributes (i.e., declension for gender, and number) and are also subject to irregular sound changes (e.g., Maltese *mtä' > ta'*), features which are also common effects of grammaticalization.

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³¹ In addition to the study of Harning already mentioned, see, for example, Fischer and Jastrow (1980: 220) for other forms in Egyptian dialects, and Versteegh (2001: 107) for still others.

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ZUR SEMANTIK DES VERBS *NTN* G 'GEBEN' MIT DER PRÄPOSITION *ʔl* STATT *l-**

Das Verb *נתן* G ist im klassischen Hebräisch vielseitig verwendbar. Dies wird daran erkennbar, daß das Verb mehrere Valenzen aufweist. In allen belegten Valenzen ist das Verb dreiwertig.

Die vier Valenzen des Verbs *נתן* G sollen hier nach der Häufigkeit der Textbelege im alttestamentlichen Hebräisch syntaktisch kurz beschrieben werden:¹ In der Valenz 1 regiert das Verb in der Regel zwei Nominalergänzungen und eine Präpositionalergänzung mit *ל*. Die Präpositionalergänzung bezeichnet dabei den Rezipienten. Z.B. *לִזְרַעְךָ אֶתְּ אֶתְּ הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת* „deinen Nachkommen werde ich dieses Land geben“ (Gen 12,7).

In der Valenz 2 regiert das Verb zwei Nominalergänzungen sowie eine Lokalergrünzung, die als Präpositionalgruppe oder als Nominalgruppe erscheinen

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¹ Im Rahmen eines Valenzkonzeptes, das valenzbedingte Ergänzungen und nichtvalenzbedingte Angaben unterscheidet, wird hier von den folgenden Ergänzungstypen im einfachen Satz ausgegangen: 1. Nominalergänzung. Es handelt sich um eine Nominalgruppe. Nominalergänzungen werden weiter in erste, zweite und dritte Nominalergänzungen unterschieden (in der traditionellen Terminologie: Subjekt, direktes Objekt und zweites direktes Objekt), die sich syntaktisch jeweils anders verhalten; 2. Präpositionalergänzung; 3. Lokalergrünzung; 4. Prädikativergrünzung. Prädikativergrünzungen sind nichtreferentiell, sondern stellen eine Prädikation über eine Nominalergänzung dar (z.B. Gen 17,5ab.20b); 5. Infinitivergrünzung (z.B. *לִרְאוֹת* in 1 Sam 3,2b; *לִהְפֹּךְ* in 2 Sam 17,14b); 6. Komparativergrünzung (nur bei der Subklasse der Zustandsverben). Vgl. dazu Malessa (2003: 26-34). Andere Einteilungen von Ergänzungen finden sich in Richter (1980: 92-93) und Groß (1996: 29-38).