Studies in the Historical Syntax of Aramaic

Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Languages

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Studies in the Historical Syntax of Aramaic

Na'ama Pat-El

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGLA

Acc.	accusative		Int.	interrogative pronoun
Adj.	adjective		m	masculine
Adv.	adverb		N	noun
App.	apposition		Neg.	negation adverb
At.	attribute		NP	noun phrase
Aux.	auxiliary		O/Obj.	object
c.	circa		pl.	plural
C	causative, aphel		PN	personal name
Clit.	clitic		Prec.	precative
Cop.	copula		Pred.	marker of predication
Comp.	complementizer		Prep.	preposition
Conj.	conjunction		Pron.	pronoun
Cst.	construct state		Quot.	quotative particle
D	pa‛‛el		Refl.	reflexive
Def.	definite		Rel.	relative pronoun
Dem.	demonstrative		s	singular
DO	direct object		S	sentence
Dur.	durative		SP	speech
f	feminine		Temp.	temporal
G	*Grundform*, pe‛al		Top.	topic
Gen.	genitive construction		V	verb
Indef.	indefinite		Vnt.	ventive
Inf.	infinitive			

LANGUAGES

Ahw	Ahwāz (Neo-Mandaic)		Ḥat.	Ḥaṭran
Akk.	Akkadian		J-Azar	Jewish Azarbaijani
Arb.	Arabic			(Neo-Aramaic)
Bax.	Bax‛a		JBA	Jewish Babylonian
BH	Biblical Hebrew			Aramaic
CA	Classical Arabic		JPA	Jewish Palestinian
CPA	Christian Palestinian			Aramaic
	Aramaic		Khor.	Khorramshahr (Neo-
EgA	Egyptian Aramaic			Mandaic)
G.	Gə‛əz		Koy	Koy Sanjaq
Ǧub.	Ǧubb‛adīn		Kurd.	Kurdish

LateA	Late Aramaic		OSA	Old South Arabian
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew		OSyr.	Old Syriac
Maʿ.	Maʿlūla		Palm.	Palmyrene
Mand.	Mandaic		Ph.	Phoenician
MidA	Middle Aramaic		PsJ	Pseudo-Jonathan
MPer.	Middle Persian		QA	Qumran Aramaic
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew		Sam.	Samaritan Aramaic
Mlaḥ.	Mlaḥsô		SLA	Standard Literary Aramaic
MSA	Modern South Arabian		Syr.	Syriac
Nab.	Nabatean		TJ	Targum Jonathan
NENA	North-East Neo-Aramaic		TO	Targum Onkelos
Neof.	Neofiti		Ṭūr.	Ṭūrūyo
OA	Old Aramaic		Ug.	Ugaritic
OfA	Official Aramaic		WNA	Western Neo-Aramaic

TEXTS AND AUTHORS

AA	Acts of the Apostles (Wright 1990)		Gen.	Genesis
			Gen. R.	Genesis Rabba
Aḥ.	Aḥiqar		Giṭ.	Giṭṭin tractate
Aph.	Aphrahat		Gy.	Gynza
AZ	Avoda Zara tractate		Hag.	Ḥagiga tractate
BB	Baba Batra tractate		Hos.	Hosea
BD	Bar-Daisan		Hul.	Hullin tractate
BR	Bar-Rākib		Is.	Isaiah
Ber.	Berachot tractate		Jer.	Jeremiah
BHeb	Bar-Hebreus		Jg.	Judges
Bis.	The Bisitun Inscription		Josh.	Joshua
BM	Baba Meṣia tractate		K	Kraeling
BQ	Baba Qama tractate		KAI	Kanaanäische und
C	Cowley			Aramäische Inschriften
CAD	The Assyrian Dictionary			(Donner & Röllig 1962)
CAL	The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon		Ker.	Keritut tractate
			Ket.	Ketubot tractate
CIS	*Corpus inscriptionum Semiticarum*		Kg.	Kings
			KTU	Die Keilalphabetischen
Col.	Colossians			Texte aus Ugarit
D	Driver		Lev.	Leviticus
Dan.	Daniel		Lk.	Luke
Deut.	Deuteronomy		Mal.	Malachi
Eccl.	Ecclesiastes		Meʿ	Meʿila tractate
Eph.	Ephrem		Mt.	Matthew
Er.	Erubin tractate		Naz.	Nazir tractate
Ex.	Exodus		Ned.	Nedarim tractate
Ez.	Ezra		Num.	Numbers
Ezek.	Ezekiel		NT	New Testament

OT	Old Testament		Song	Song of Songs
Pes.	Pesahim tractate		SP	The Samaria Papyri
Prov.	Proverbs		Suk.	Sukka tractate
Psa.	Psalms		Taan.	Taanit tractate
Qid.	Qidushin tractate		TF	Tell Fekherye
Qur.	Qur'an		Thess.	Thessalonians
Sam.	Samuel		TM	Tibat Marqa
San.	Sanhedrin tractate		Yeb.	Yebamot tractate
Sef.	Sefire		Zeb.	Zebahim tractate
Shab.	Shabbat tractate		Zkr.	Zakkur

X > Y	X developed into Y, X is diachronically earlier than Y
X < Y	X is a derivation of Y
*x	X is a reconstructed form
**x	X is an impossible form
/x/	A phonemic transcription
<x>	A letter in a consonantal script
√xyz	xyz is a root

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1. METHODOLOGY[1]

Historical syntax is a relative newcomer in historical linguistics. In the past, historical syntax gained a certain notoriety for lack of rigor, mainly due to improper use in the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European. Many of the earlier scholars who dealt with syntax reconstruction based their conclusions on assumptions that had no factual basis, or generalized a proto-situation according to only one language. Generally, methods used in syntax were far less stringent than those employed in historical phonology and morphology. This approach was rejected by the Neogrammarians, and since then efforts at reconstruction have been mostly directed at phonology and morphology, where data are less controversial and can be adequately collected from even poorly documented languages. Syntax remained a matter for synchronic description; historical linguists for the most part avoided dealing with it.

Interest in historical syntax has been growing since the early 1970s, and many general and theoretical discussions are now available.[2] Many of these later studies rely on earlier works while utilizing a stricter and more cautious scientific approach, according to the principles laid down by the Neogrammarians and successfully used by historical linguists for decades. Much of the work done in the field is focused on word order (Lehmann 1974)[3] and verbal valency (Bauer 2000). These issues are also important today because of the prominence of typology in linguistic reconstruction and the particular interest typologists have in word order, but many more patterns are being discussed in other theoretical approaches. The growing body of work in historical syntax has also brought awareness to many problematic aspects and difficulties in applying methods used in historical phonology to syntax; for example,

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[1] For a comprehensive overview on the history of the field, see Campbell (1995).

[2] Lightfoot (1979), Faarlund (1990), Harris and Campbell (1995), to mention just a few.

[3] Lehmann's approach was criticized by Watkins (1976) for its flawed methodology. Whereas Lehmann took the most common word order in Homeric Greek to represent the Indo-European type, Watkins noted that in most early Indo-European languages the process of word order change is one of fronting; namely, movement of the subject to or near sentence initial position. Thus, the prevalent clause in Homeric Greek is not necessarily the original Proto-Indo-European one.

the notion of minimal pairs, correspondences and others.[4] Nevertheless, the crucial distinction between innovation and retention/loss put forward by Hetzron (1976) will be used throughout this book.

Because not all rules which operate in phonology and morphology to cause change are relevant for historical syntax, it is essential to outline the type of strategies which drive syntactic change and what methodological tools are available to unearth them. Although the methodology is still debated, major strides have been accomplished. The most substantial of them is the work by Harris and Campbell (1995). They attempt to find "commonalities of change" (ibid.,1) in order to isolate the mechanisms which cause them; in other words, they are trying to point to *types* of possible change in order to allow syntactic reconstruction. They isolate three mechanisms of syntactic change: reanalysis, extension, and borrowing. These mechanisms are not different from the mechanisms responsible for morphological and phonological change (except sound change in phonology, which does not have a similar correspondence in morphology and syntax).

• *Reanalysis* is a mechanism which causes a change in the underlying structure of the syntactic pattern (grammatical categories or grammatical relations) but not the surface manifestation (word order and any morphological markings that exist in a particular language). A Semitic example may be the reanalysis of nouns as prepositions, where the originally infinitival form still carries a suffix pronoun (2ms -*kā*) and has not lost its morphological features, despite having a different function:

BH
bō⁾-ăkā   *Ṣō⁽ar*
coming.inf.-your.2ms   PN
Toward Zoar. (Gen. 13:10)

• *Extension* is the opposite of reanalysis; it involves change of surface manifestation but not immediate modification of underlying structure. A Semitic example may be the replacement of the Semitic relative pronoun **dV*, inflected for gender-number-case in Canaanite with an uninflected, originally nominal form, *⁾ăšer* (Phoenician *⁾š*), which did not involve any subsequent changes in the internal syntax of relative clauses (Pat-El 2010).

• *Borrowing* syntax is now known to be a much more frequent and rule-governed process than was previously assumed, though the factors which condition or facilitate borrowing are sometimes extra-linguistic (Thomason 2001:76).[5] The

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[4] See Campbell and Mithun (1980) and Harris (2008) for a lengthy discussion of the most common problems in reconstructing syntax.

[5] Meillet (1982b:86–7), among others, believed that grammatical borrowing is not possible unless the whole system is borrowed. Indeed, many linguists who dealt with syntax were skeptical whether borrowing influences syntax at all (see references in Farrar 1998:89). In his classic work *Languages in Contact* (1968), Weinreich treated phonology, lexicon, and morphology, but there is no treatment of syntactic borrowing. The view that syntax is immune to borrowing used to be widely accepted and is still quite common (see, for example,

question of what in a language enables borrowing has been discussed extensively. The answer to this question is relevant to the correct analysis of potential instances of syntactic borrowing. One previously influential claim is that languages borrow patterns that are compatible with the borrowing language's own structure (Weinreich 1968:25, following Jakobson) or with possible modifications in that language. Harris and Campbell (1995:125) have argued that this is wrong, as Amharic shows by changing from VO to OV against its original typology (head first), as a result of Cushitic interference.[6] Indeed, one may also point to Akkadian, originally a VO language, which borrowed its OV word order from Sumerian.[7] Another claim is that borrowing is used for linguistic renewal; that is, instead of developing new categories, a morpheme is borrowed from other languages (Weinreich 1968:31–37; Thomason & Kaufman 1988:54). While the drive for renewal is agreed to be a very strong force in borrowing, it is by no means the only one.

Thomason (2001:76–7) lists three linguistic predictors of change due to contact: marked forms are less likely to be borrowed; similarly, features which are highly integrated, for example, inflectional morphology, are less likely to be borrowed; typologically similar systems are more prone to borrowing, even of marked and integrated features. Nevertheless, Thomason repeatedly emphasizes in her work that the strongest and most important factors in linguistic borrowing are social factors, and therefore solid prediction is impossible.[8]

The methodology used in this book is comparative historical linguistics. The comparative method in historical linguistics aims at identifying genetic relationships between languages. It rests on a basic principle: the regularity of sound change.

Gerritsten 1984:118). Farrar (ibid., 97–8) notes that syntactic borrowing seems to be rare, but that might be an outcome of the preconception that such a thing does not exist.

[6] Classical Ethiopic had N-Adj./Gen./Rel. and prepositions, which is an order typologically compatible with VO word order, while Amharic has Adj./Gen./Rel.-N and postpositions, which are a result of the change to OV.

[7] The Semitic examples quoted in Harris and Campbell do not actually contradict the claim for language compatibility in borrowing. V-final word order is a possible word order in Semitic, though it is not common. Thus, changing the word order in both Ethio-Semitic and Akkadian does not go against the range of possibilities in these languages; it simply shows a generalization of a less common word order due to interference. In fact, despite extensive contact, the Ethio-Semitic languages (as well as Akkadian) maintained most of their original morphology, both nominal and verbal, much better than some Neo-Arabic dialects. See also Deutscher (2000b) for sentential word order in Akkadian.

[8] Similarly, Farrar (1998) examined several constraints on syntactic borrowing and concluded that due partly to social factors, it is impossible to come up with universal constraints on syntactic borrowing: "It seems that neither the linguistic nor extralinguistic constraints proposed will provide us with the calculus we have sought. . . . Yet, there are common threads to the situation in which borrowings occur, and these predominantly concern the social situation rather than the internal structure of the language." (ibid., 97)

Regularity is a feature that is observed throughout a long period of time and has proven to be exception-less, or having all its exceptions fully explained systematically. In order to arrive at a reconstruction, a linguist needs to apply a strict methodology and to account for the entire data set. While cognates compared in morphology and phonology (phonemes and morphemes) are relatively easy to detect, in syntax it is not always clear what should be compared; that is, what a basic unit of syntax is. Therefore, in many cases, typology has been used to explain syntactic change, instead of the comparative method (Greenberg 1995; Rankin 2006:201).[9] Changes in syntax are often viewed as a result of a universal tendency— for example, SOV > SVO—and hence irrelevant for genetic subgrouping. However, typology, in its current stage, is an inaccurate tool, far less accurate than the comparative-historical method (Dunkel 1981).

While historical linguists ideally use all attested linguistic examples in order to arrive at a reconstruction, typologists use a selection of languages, on the basis of which a universal is generalized. In addition, typology is not concerned with mechanisms of change, but rather with a language's synchronic state. As such, it is ineffective in explaining change. In short, typology may be a helpful tool in determining the range of possibilities in human language, but it cannot override a reconstruction that was arrived at through rigorous comparative methods, simply because it has not been documented in languages which happen to be attested.

Following Watkins (1994 [1976]), I will insist on the application of strict comparative linguistic principles in syntax in this work as has been done in morphology and phonology. Both form and meaning should correspond and any deviation should be clearly explained. For any type of thorough syntactic study, long texts are needed in order to collect at least several examples of each pattern type. This makes it harder to analyze the syntax of a partially documented language. Unfortunately, from most Aramaic dialects we either have very short texts (such as Palmyrene) or too few texts to have a full view of the dialect's syntax (Old Aramaic). Therefore, the current study may be biased toward phenomena found in better documented dialects (Syriac); however, choosing Aramaic for a historical syntactic study has other advantages, as will be discussed below (p. 21).

1.2. HISTORICAL SYNTAX IN SEMITIC

Even though attempts at comparative historical syntax of Proto-Indo-European were already available at the end of the 19th century,[10] Semitists were always somewhat

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[9] The idea was originally suggested by Jakobson in a paper he gave in Oslo in 1958. The text was published in 1971 in his collected papers. Jakobson discussed sound changes in this context, and even for phonology there is disagreement whether typology trumps historical linguistics.

[10] Delbrück's work was originally published in 1893. Later works on different aspects of Proto-Indo-European syntax are: Lehmann (1974); Friedrich (1975); Watkins (1976, 1995), and Bauer (2000), to name a few.

skeptical and occasionally dismissive of the methodology. The chapters treating syntax in Brockelmann (1908–13), which are still important and accurate, are a collection of comparable patterns in various Semitic languages, with no attempt at reconstruction. This type of treatment is evident in several other works of early Semitists (Blake 1912; Eitan 1928–29). These works list patterns, but avoid statements regarding their origin, despite readily reconstructing morphological features.

Later, Semitists found syntactic reconstruction impossible for a number of reasons. Hetzron (1974) claimed that the syntax of Akkadian and Ethiopic underwent a total revision under the influence of non-Semitic languages. This led him to comment that the sentential syntax of these languages is a warning sign against using syntax in historical reconstruction. That is, since external pressure can cause such drastic changes in the syntax of Akkadian and Ethiopic, sorting original patterns from borrowed ones is impossible. Similarly, Khan (1988) claims that syntax, unlike morphology, can undergo radical change internally or through contact. Thus, given two related languages, it would not be feasible to determine which language is more conservative syntactically, unless we have documentation of the stage prior to their divergence. He claims that such documentation is not extant in the Semitic languages, and therefore comparative diachronic Semitic syntax is impossible. Khan's own 1988 work on syntax is similar to earlier work by Brockelmann in that it is comparative, but synchronic, and is not aimed at reconstructing proto-patterns. Like Brocklemann's, Khan's seminal study is an important and thorough work, and a cornerstone in the study of Semitic syntax. Another skeptic is Garr (1985) who claims that syntax is unreliable, while morphological and phonological features are easier to evaluate. This claim is also propagated by Owens (2004), who emphasizes that similar syntactical structures can arise in different languages with no contact or genetic relation between them.

The insistence of some Semitists on the significance of language contact in evaluating syntax and the obstacles it poses for reconstruction is surprising compared to the common approach in Indo-European historical linguistics, where borrowing syntactic patterns was considered unlikely or very rare.[11] The former view led to the rejection of syntax as a factor in subgrouping in Semitic and to a resistance to reconstruct syntax. Yet borrowing and contact are known to substantially affect various aspects of language, most notably the lexicon and phonology. For example, the consonantal system of Akkadian has gone through extreme revision, possibly under the influence of Sumerian. Akkadian has lost most of its guttural consonants and several others have merged; yet, despite having only 19 consonants out of the original 29 Proto-Semitic ones, we can show quite accurately what happened to the ten "missing" consonants. In Arabic, several important roots, such as √ktb 'write' and

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[11] Note also that in some recent studies about language contact among speakers of Neo-Semitic languages, their syntax did not seem to be significantly altered due to contact, unlike their phonology. See Arnold and Behnstedt (1993:64).

√ṣly 'pray,' are borrowed from Aramaic; despite being extremely common, the fact that they are borrowed is well established. No Semitist claims that these examples are "a warning sign" against reconstructing the phonology or lexicon of Akkadian and Arabic. The effects of borrowing can be neutralized with the help of the comparative method and an understanding of the mechanisms of change due to contact. Borrowing is by no means an impediment for historical linguistics.

There are, however, some Semitic scholars who consider historical syntax a worthwhile endeavor. Kutscher (1951) showed that Biblical Aramaic is an eastern dialect on the basis of its syntax. He published a short article containing a summary of his claims; however, he never finished his full-scale research, nor did he present a detailed, reasoned list of syntactical features that can be said to be clearly western or eastern. Nevertheless, Kutscher's short paper is the first attempt to use syntax for subgrouping.[12] Cook (1992) argues in his discussion of Aramaic Dialectology that syntactical features are less usable diagnostic criteria, not because they are without value, but rather because comparative Aramaic syntax is a non-existent discipline.[13] Recently, Huehnergard (1996:262) pointed to a deficiency in a comparative-historical grammar of Aramaic and a lack of syntactic treatises in Semitic in general (ibid., 267).[14] There have been sporadic serious attempts to describe Semitic syntax and its development from a historical linguistic point of view. In Arabic, Bloch (1986) has tracked the development of several Arabic patterns with some comparative Semitic discussion (comparison was made mostly to Biblical Hebrew). Bloch's attempt is especially commendable, given the relatively meager attestations of syntactic relics in Classical Arabic. Yet, based on relics, internal reconstruction and comparative linguistics, Bloch was able to trace the origins of several patterns. A more comparative work is D. Cohen (2003 [1984]), which explains the development of the verbal system in Semitic as the result of syntactic change.[15]

Old Aramaic texts are few and relatively short, and hence it is difficult to fully and accurately describe their syntax. The wealth of texts in Official Aramaic has

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[12] Note that Kutscher worked extensively on sentential word order, which is a problematic choice, especially considering the size of the corpus he worked with. Syntax is used also in Morgenstern (1999:139*), who discusses the object marker yāt in Nabatean Aramaic as a unique features compared to other contemporaneous Aramaic dialects. Note, however, that *yāt* is a retention, not an innovation.

[13] Another subsidiary problem related to the lack of good comparative dialectal studies is the issue of Aramaic influence on other languages, primarily on Hebrew, and how to date and categorize them. Hurvitz (1968) already pointed to the need to identify Aramaic features by their dialect, rather than in the general term 'Aramaisms'. See Wagner (1966) for an attempt to catalogue Aramaic features in Hebrew without categorizing their dialect of origin.

[14] Calls for such a treatise, however rare, go back to Blake (1912:135), but are mainly concerned with the need for comparative Semitic syntax.

[15] A similar process of change in the Semitic verbal system is described in Rundgren (1963) and Hodge (1975); both appealed to the process of renewal as a motivation for syntactic change.

rendered them a wonderful source of information for Aramaic syntax. Folmer's thorough work in 1995 on the Aramaic of the Achaemenid Empire is a great and much needed addition to the field, as she focuses on the syntax of a major dialect at a time when Aramaic is extensively attested, thus allowing a fruitful syntactic investigation. Folmer covers several important syntactic patterns, like the periphrastic genitive, order of modifier and noun, the use of the *nota objectivi l-*, conditional clauses, the use of the passive participle, and more. The work, however, is not comparative, and while it outlines the background for the development of the Middle Aramaic dialects and makes occasional comparisons to Old Aramaic, it does not discuss these changes as part of wider processes in Aramaic, and only rarely discusses the origin of or reason for these changes. Nevertheless, Folmer's work is a cornerstone in the field, and the current study would have been less representative without her linguistic insights.

The only work done so far on comparative Aramaic syntax is Vivian (1981), who compares Biblical Aramaic syntax to Syriac syntax. The Syriac text he chose is the Peshitta OT translation of the Biblical Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible. The source language from which the Peshitta was translated is discussed at length in Vivian (1981), but the problems a translated text poses for comparative study are not equally considered. Vivian chose a translated text in order to compare two identical texts, although the patterns presented in his study can be found in any Syriac text, not only in the Peshitta OT. Vivian deals with well-known and widely discussed syntactic features, such as the state of nouns, the genitive relation, and patterns with *kl* 'all, every.' His 59-page paper consists of many examples and some analysis but very little on the side of reconstruction. The work is mostly descriptive and offers little new information or explanation.

1.3. WHY ARAMAIC?

The current work has two main goals, one focusing on Aramaic and the other on Semitic in general. The first goal is to give a historical comparative account of several syntactic patterns in the Aramaic dialects in order to locate syntactic differences between these dialects and to explain them, if possible. The second goal is primarily methodological: to prove the advantage and validity of syntax to historical Semitic linguistics and dialectology. In order to show the merits of historical syntax for comparative Semitic linguistics, I have chosen Aramaic as the main source of data. This choice is not random.

The task of fully reconstructing Proto-Semitic syntax is not within reach at the moment, since we do not have thorough syntactic descriptions of all languages or of all branches. In order to have any chance of reconstructing Proto-Semitic syntax, we need first to reconstruct the syntax of each branch, which has not been done thus far, even for well-studied languages like Arabic and Hebrew, not to mention Akkadian. Huehnergard (1996:160) has pointed to a methodological flaw where Semitists tend to compare the "big five" languages (Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, Ethiopic, and Hebrew) to each other, instead of working upward, comparing closely related languages within a single branch:

> For the purpose of reconstruction, therefore, one should first compare not all attested languages, but rather only those that share an immediate common ancestor; then that intermediate ancestral language may be compared with a language or branching with which it shares an immediate ancestor still farther back. (Ibid.)

Huehnergard further notes that the starting point for comparative historical research should be the individual language and its different manifestations (dialects, geographical variants, and the like). In order to compare branches, we need to start with single nodes. The first step is to reconstruct a common language (ibid., 161–2). To that end, it is beneficial to have a language with a significant amount of variants and with a continuous and relatively long attestation. Languages with long attested history can give us a good idea of how syntax evolves.[16]

Aramaic has a large number of attested dialects spread over a vast geographical area. Unlike some other languages (Classical Arabic and Biblical Hebrew), texts in Aramaic were not harmonized to a point where their original features were blurred. Thus, this language is suitable for syntax reconstruction. It has a long documented history (circa 3,000 years), during which several splits have occurred; we have knowledge from early on of its material and geographical history; numerous texts are available in that language, and a large number of grammars can facilitate research. In addition, unlike other languages with similarly long history, such as Akkadian, we are in possession of a large amount of oral sources in most modern dialects of Aramaic. Another advantage for the use of Aramaic is the large number of languages it has been, and still is, in contact with. Studying both internal and external motivation for change may teach us much about the mechanisms of these processes and the way they operate together and independently.

This study may be able to connect features in the modern dialects to processes which had begun in previous stages, to find some line of development that will point to a possible, if not actual, origin of some of the patterns common in the modern dialects. Because there is a gap of around 500 years between the last native attested records of Late Aramaic and the first attested records of Neo-Aramaic,[17] a

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[16] See Depuydt (1997:21–2) about Egyptian: "It seems that a history of Egyptian would be a useful thing, partly though surely not solely, because of the length of time over which the language is attested in writing. . . . [T]he written sources of ancient Egyptian, which capture the Egyptian language at certain moments in its long history, freezing it in time, as it were, should allow students of language to postulate certain fluid paths." Egyptian is indeed a magnificent example of a long linguistic history; Aramaic has a shorter history, but among the Semitic languages it is the longest attested language. In addition, unlike Egyptian, for Aramaic we have attestations of spoken varieties.

[17] The last native texts in Syriac were written by Bar-Hebreus, a bilingual scholar, at the beginning of the 12th century A.D., though Arabic replaced Syriac as the regional language, probably by the 8th century (Beyer 1986:44–45; Sabar 2002:1). The earliest attestations of Modern Aramaic are dated to the early 17th century (Sabar 1970: xxii; Goldenberg 2000:70).

comprehensive investigation into the early dialects should show nascent or well-established patterns which may offer an explanation for some of the features found in the modern dialects. Historical syntax should be especially relevant for the Neo-Aramaic dialects, since so much of their structure and verbal morphology is a result of earlier syntax.

Thus, a comparative-historical study can contribute to our understanding of the development of Aramaic and its dialects, and the relationship between its different variants and diachronic phases. Research in syntax is essential, as scholars to date have used mainly phonology and morphology to characterize dialectal differences and to determine sub-grouping (Huehnergard, 1995). The following chapters are concentrated on the investigation of syntactic features that have not received enough attention thus far. This is not to say that much-discussed features were always properly analyzed or that there is nothing more to be said about them, but rather that the study of other features of Aramaic is long overdue. I have, however, avoided dealing with features that require large chunks of texts to illustrate, in order to include as many dialects as possible. Thus, such features as sentential word order and verbal aspect will not be addressed in this work.[18] The features discussed in this work are represented in almost all the dialects and thus may be considered representative of Aramaic syntax.

If this research could yield a list of unique Aramaic syntactical features, it would complete Huehnergard's 1995 seminal paper "What Is Aramaic?", which included only phonological and morphological features. This book aims to be a first, albeit modest, step toward a full comparative-historical syntax of Aramaic, and a starting point for a historical syntactic study of other Semitic languages. I hope that my findings will prove the value of syntax for aramaic dialectology, the subgrouping of the Semitic languages, and the reconstructing of Proto-Semitic syntax.

1.4. ARAMAIC DIALECTOLOGY

The exact dialectal subgrouping of Aramaic is still a matter of controversy and has been a perennial problem in the field. There is no consensus regarding the number of dialectal groups into which Aramaic should be divided, and even within each approach, opinions vary as to where dialectal lines run. Some of the extant Aramaic data are problematic. Not infrequently the dialects provide conflicting information, not only because the data are lacking and their analysis is sometimes open to interpretation, but also because some dialects are influenced by other adjacent dialects or languages (JPA and CPA), and some texts were written or used by speakers of a different dialect or a different language altogether (Nabatean). Moreover, the amount of texts in different dialects is uneven, and thus some dialects have rich attestations (Syriac) while others offer only clues (Biblical Aramaic).

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[18] Most of the work on these two issues has not been comparative, but some work is available (Buth 1987; Cook 1986; Hayes 1990; Li 2009; Muraoka 1984 to mention a few)

Several attempts have been made to divide Aramaic into well-defined dialectal groups; none of the divisions suggested has met with overall approval.[19] Currently, two main divisions are accepted by most scholars. These divisions represent different approaches to Aramaic Dialectology : one is concerned with the function and style of the texts (Greenfield 1974, 1978), and the other is concerned with chronological and geographical divisions (Fitzmyer 1979b). In addition, Beyer's (1986) approach, which is not generally accepted, represents a political division. The first main problem in the dialectology of Aramaic is the status of the texts from the Achaemenid Empire, namely, whether they belong with the earliest inscriptions from Syria or whether they stand as a separate dialect. The other problem is the chronological limits of Middle Aramaic, mainly whether Biblical Aramaic, Nabatean and Palmyrene belong with Middle Aramaic, or whether they belong with the texts from the Achaemenid Empire.

Greenfield (1978) separates the dialects of Aramaic into four groups:

- Early Aramaic (the earliest texts and the Aramaic documents from the Achaemenid Empire)
- Middle Aramaic
- Late Aramaic
- Neo-Aramaic

Greenfield claims that the dialectal split between East and West Aramaic is already discernible in Early Aramaic. For him, Official Aramaic and Old Aramaic have a close linguistic affinity and he treats them as one group: Official Aramaic was spoken in Persia and is therefore an eastern dialect, while the Old Aramaic texts are western. Greenfield mentions the following distinctive Official Aramaic features which mark it as an eastern dialect: The sentential word order is OV (see also Kutscher 1951); the emphatic state is often used without its determinative force (in other words, it does not mark definiteness); only G-infinitives have *m-* performative; two emphatic consonants in the same word do not dissimilate; *nun* is used for dissimilation; there are Akkadian and Persian loanwords, and some lexical items are unique to this dialect and are not used in West Aramaic. The grouping of Old Aramaic with texts from the Achaemenid Empire as one phase is also adopted in Segert (1975) and Hug (1993), who treat the Egyptian Aramaic documents of the Hermapolis correspondence under *Altaramäisch*.

The problem of Official Aramaic, a term coined by Ginsberg (1933) which is used alongside *Reichsaramäisch*, is quite complex. The extant texts in this phase originate from very different locales, like Persia, Egypt, and Palestine. Moreover, some texts, like the Assur letters, are dated to a time earlier than the Persian Empire and may need to be dealt with separately. Greenfield (1978) divided this dialect into west (Egyptian) and east (outside Egypt); however, this division is also problematic,

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[19] The earliest suggested divisions are reviewed at length in Fitzmyer (1979b) and will not be reviewed here.