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BRUWELEIT, STEFAN: *Aspect, Tense and Action in the Arabic Dialect of Beirut.* Brill: Leiden-Boston 2015 (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 79). 271 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-28753-2.

Beirut Arabic (henceforth BA) is an urban dialect belonging to the group of Syro-Palestinian dialects, subgroup Lebanese dialects.[1] Although BA, being the language of the country's capital, is probably the most important dialect in Lebanon, it has not been as widely studied as e.g. Damascene Arabic. One of the latest publications is a dissertation *Der Arabische Dialekt von Beirut* (*The Arabic Dialect of Beirut*) written by GEORGETTE SCHUKRO.[2] In her dissertation SCHUKRO characterises briefly the phonological and morphological system of BA und underpins it with a selection of recorded texts; three of these have been used in the work discussed here. Neither the dissertation nor any part of it has been published so far. Pioneering studies of BA include publications of SAMIA NAÏM, such as her review article 'Beirut Arabic' in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* and a book entitled *Le parler arabe de Rās-Beyrouth, ʿAyn al Muraysa : la diversité phonologique; étude socio-linguistique* (both publications have been omitted by BRUWELEIT).[3]

Field research, analysis of collected material and subsequent transcription of registered texts are an integral part of the dialectologist's work. In the German school of Arabic dialectology (as I allow myself to call it), it is also said that it is not possible to be a dialectologist without transcribing. This is one of the many difficulties faced by young researchers in particular at the beginning of their research work. In the case of some dialects, corpora of texts recorded thus far are so wide that certain grammatical issues can be described on the basis of recordings without the need to stay in the place where the language data was collected. However, this is not the case with BA. The number of registered and elaborated texts so far has been very limited. Apart from the above-mentioned SCHUKRO's dissertation, further texts can be found in BRUWELEIT's book. At this point, I skip all the literature in 'Lebanese Arabic', which is as much a question of literary studies as possible, not dialectology. It is good

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1   FISCHER, W. – JASTROW, O. (1980): *Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte.* Porta linguarum orientalium. Neue Serie 16. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 28.

2   SCHUKRO, G. (2004): *Der Arabische Dialekt von Beirut.* PhD thesis. Wien: Institut für Orientalistik, Universität Wien. I would like to thank STEPHAN PROCHÁZKA and ANNA TELIČ for lending me SCHUKRO's dissertation from the Library of the Department of Oriental Studies, University of Vienna.

3   NAÏM, S. (2006): 'Beirut Arabic'. In: *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Vol. I A-Ed. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 274–286, NAÏM-SANBAR, S. (1985): *Le parler arabe de Rās-Beyrouth, ʿAyn al Muraysa : la diversité phonologique; étude socio-linguistique.* Comptes rendus du Groupe Linguistique d'Études Chamito-Sémitiques. Supplément 14. Paris: Geuthner. See also SRAGE, N. (1997): *Etude sociolinguistique du parler arabe de Moussaytbé (Beyrouth).* Publications de l'Université Libanaise. Section des Études Linguistiques 2. Beyrouth: Université Libanaise.

that the author did not reach for literary texts. These are not spontaneous, but elaborate texts, mostly corrected many times, often with specifically literary vocabulary that is not being used in everyday situations. All other written statements formulated in the dialect (e.g. on Internet forums) are not a reliable source either. Usually, authors of such texts are anonymous which makes it difficult to find out exactly which dialect they use. However, BRUWELEIT collected the material for his book on his own, conducting his research in Germany. It is not entirely clear why he did not go to Beirut for field research. Lebanon remains one of the most accessible Arab countries. The cases of conducting research outside of the studied area—I have known so far—resulted from the inability, for example, to obtain a visa or a research permit.[4]

The structure of the book is as follows: *Preface* (ix–x), *List of Figures* (xi), *List of Abbreviations* (xii), *Part 1: The Theoretical Basis* (1–59), *Part 2: The Arabic Dialect of Beirut* (61–163), *Part 3: Summary and Analysis* (165–239), and *Appendices: Texts in the Dialect of Beirut* (243–266), *Bibliography* (267–269), *Index* (270–271).

In the *Preface* the author focuses only on the information about his informants. Other introductory remarks can be found in individual chapters. As I mentioned earlier, the research was carried out in Germany and the collected material comes from six consultants. All of them are Shiites. BRUWELEIT asserts that '[Beirut] Arabic is spoken by members of different sects and religions—most of them being Shiites, Sunnites and Christians—whose language differs slightly at a phonological level […]. At a grammatical level, however, no differences can be found between Shiites, Sunnites and Christians' (ix). In addition to eight texts available in *Appendices*, the author used in his study three texts from SCHUKRO's dissertation.[5] The main source of material for the work were questionnaires, similar to those used by ÖSTEN DAHL, carried out with six informants.[6] The author also mentions languages he used to conduct the research: '[e]xcept for the verb forms, questions and answers were given in German or English in order not to influence the informants' (64). In order to confirm the findings of his work, BRUWELEIT also used a substitution test, which I will mention later.

As we can see from the content mentioned above, BRUWELEIT's book contains three main parts. In the first part, entitled *The Theoretical Basis*, there is a comprehensive introduction, primarily methodological, which aims to familiarise readers with such categories as tense, aspect and action. This part begins with *General Reflections on Universal Grammar* (3–9) and then discusses the three categories (*Tense* 10–14, *Aspect* 15–23, *Action* 24–32), followed by *The Categorial Interplay* (33–46), *Negation* (47–49), and *The Reference Point in Aspectual and Tense Languages* (50–59). I do not know what led the author to write such an extensive methodological introduction. Perhaps he wanted to introduce these issues to Semitic dialectologists in first place, who rarely use these analytical terms in their work. I also have the impression that BRUWELEIT aims to stimulate interest in Arabic dialects among general linguists, who might find most of dialectological studies of Arabic dialects

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4   For example, W. ARNOLD had to conduct his research on Antiochia Arabic in Germany. See ARNOLD, W. (1998): *Die arabischen Dialekte Antiochiens*. Semitica Viva 19. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 3–5, ARNOLD, W. (2019): 'Fieldwork in Germany'. In W. ARNOLD, M. KLIMIUK (eds.), *Arabic Dialectology: Methodology and Field Research*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 17–22, as well as other texts in this book.

5   SCHUKRO 2004: 209–234.

6   DAHL, Ö. (1985): *Tense and Aspect Systems*. Oxford – New York: Basil Blackwell, 198–206.

inaccessible due to the quite specific descriptive tradition of the discipline. The author deals mainly with the theory of aspect, tense and action in English and German. However, I think it might have been worthwhile to reach for other language families as e.g. Slavic, in which aspect plays a key role. With this in mind, the author would probably have another perspective on the three categories in BA listed above. I have experienced this as a deficiency reading this book because I looked at it through the prism of my first language. I am also surprised by the (probably intentional) rather insignificant use of the existing studies on aspect and tense in Semitic languages.

The second part entitled *The Arabic Dialect of Beirut,* is partly the application of the theory of the first part on concrete examples in BA. BRUWELEIT begins this part of his study with a few remarks about the transcription used. As he stresses himself: '[…] it does not seem necessary to me to give a detailed description of the Beirutian phonetic and phonological system' (65). He names a few minimal pairs with vowels, mostly focusing on the realisation of a short vowel *i*, which in some cases is pronounced as a short vowel *ə*. I do not think that it is necessary to deal with a phonetic variant here at all, if—as he writes himself—he does not intend to give a detailed description. He then goes on to discuss verb forms in BA, among which he distinguishes six basic forms: *qatal*, active participle, *ʿamyiqtul, byiqtul, yiqtul, raḥyiqtul* (67–68). The detailed use of these verb forms in specific situations is described in the following chapters: *Anteriority to the Speech Time* (72–88), *Plural Situations* (89–90), *Simultaneity with a Reference Point in the Past* (91–101), *Anteriority to a Reference Point in the Past* (102–115), *Posteriority to a Reference Point in the Past* (116–119), *The Speech Time* (120–133), *Extratemporality* (134), *Posteriority to the Speech Time* (135–145), *Simultaneity with a Reference Point in the Future* (146–148), *Anteriority to a Reference Point in the Future* (149–153), *Verbs of Perception* (154–157), *Circumstantial Clauses* (158–160) and *Conditional Clauses* (161–163).

In the third part, as its title *Summary and Analysis* suggests, there is a summary of individual chapters from the second part as well as a summary arranged according to the six verb forms. In this part the author also includes two short articles, in which he refers to other Arabic dialects: *Some Remarks on the Evolution of the Arabic Verbal System* (206–218), *Aspects or Discussed and Narrated World?* (219–224). Especially noteworthy is the chapter in which BRUWELEIT shows how his findings can be checked by a substitution test. For this purpose, he employs a piece of text in which he replaces selected verbs with various verb forms, and asks his informant to comment on the individual uses (225–237). The study closes with a very short chapter *The Results of this Work* (238-239), in which the author summarises his research on aspect, tense and action in BA.

I would also like to point out that it would have been better to write all words and sentences taken from the dialect and languages other than English in italics. The author uses two notations (with and without italics), which makes the text incoherent graphically.

BRUWELEIT's work is an interesting contribution to the study of the aspect, tense and action in Syro-Palestinian dialects, or in Arabic dialects in general. It is just a pity that we have not yet seen a published grammatical study of BA or a larger text collection in this important and influential dialect. We also do not know much about the language of Beirut's youth, although the Lebanese capital is considered to be the most progressive, artistic, and trendsetting city in the Arab world. I hope that we will make up for these shortcomings in the near future.

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