HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN ARABIC*
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INTRODUCTION

In an interesting paper published several years ago, Givón (1976:180) makes the claim "that verb agreement paradigms always arise from anaphoric pronoun paradigms." According to this view, subject-verb agreement affixes result from a process of "de-marking," in which a topicalized subject NP loses its "marked" status and becomes re-analyzed as simply the subject, while the anaphoric pronominal copy left behind by topicalization is re-analyzed as subject agreement and is clefted to the verb. A related claim in this analysis is that verb agreement morphology in any language reflects basic word order at some earlier stage of that language.

While verb agreement morphology may indeed derive from anaphoric pronominal forms in some languages, it seems not to be the case that they always do so (Moravcsik 1978:366ff., Russell 1977:69ff.). Nor is verb agreement morphology necessarily always an accurate reflection of earlier basic word order in a language (Comrie 1980). The first part of this paper will briefly discuss problems with the anaphoric pronoun analysis as applied to Arabic and Semitic.

The balance of the paper will show that, although the claim of a specific etymological relationship between the verb agreement affixes and the anaphoric pronouns of Arabic and the other major Semitic languages seems untenable, it is nevertheless true that the synchronic process of subject-verb agreement at earlier stages of Arabic was indeed conditioned by the occurrence of a topicalized subject NP. As the modern dialects of Arabic have generally become more predominantly SVO in their surface syntax, however, the process of subject-verb agreement has been generalized to nontopic as well as topicalized subject NPs, without regard to the relative order of subject and verb (with some interesting exceptions). It will also be seen that, while agreement in both number and gender were conditioned by the topichood of the subject NP, and while both underwent similar processes of generalization to nontopic subject NPs, the rate at which this process occurred was apparently different in each case.

AGREEMENT AFFIXATION IN ARABIC, SEMITIC, AND EGYPTIAN

Givón's analysis entails the specific claim that, in Arabic for example, the agreement suffixes of the perfect conjugation (-a, -u, -at, -na, etc., in Table 2 below) must have originated in the forms underlying the anaphoric pronominal series (hūwā', hum, hiyā', hunna, etc., in Table 1), or at least in some such series of anaphoric pronouns, reflecting an earlier verb-initial syntax. Likewise, according to this analysis, the prefixes of the imperfect conjugation must also have originated as anaphoric pronouns, suggesting an earlier subject-initial syntax, contrary to the tradi-
tional reconstruction of Proto-Semitic as predominantly VSO. Givón attempts to account for the presence of both prefixal and suffixal paradigms in Semitic by hypothesizing that "Proto-Semitic was... SOV..., like Akkadian" and that "the classical Semitic languages changed to VSO later on." Noting that "the imperfect prefixal agreement bears regular etymological relationship to the anaphoric pronoun series of Semitic," he argues further that "the suffixal conjugation of the perfect, while bearing some unmistakable relationship to some pronominal series, does not bear that relation to the same pronominal series as the imperfect." The suffixal perfect, he argues, "developed first in Akkadian, as a participial-nominal conjugation, and was only later generalized to the entire active verb paradigm," and the suffixes themselves developed from the pronominal subjects of the verb "be" in S(O)V main clauses having an embedded participial-nominal complement (1976:183-4).

While space does not permit a detailed treatment, we will now discuss briefly the principal difficulties with each of the above points (further detail is found in Russell 1977:69ff.).

Givón's claim that Proto-Semitic was an SOV language seems based largely on the word order facts of Akkadian and on the existence in South and East Semitic of case marking in stem-final position. Of the major, historically attested Semitic languages, however, Akkadian alone is predominantly surface SOV. All of the others were predominantly verb-initial. The exceptionality of Akkadian in this respect is, of course, generally attributed by Semiticists to the influence of non-Semitic, SOV Sumerian.

Also, in spite of the common SOV order of its major constituents, Akkadian has none of the other primary features of SOV languages noted by Greenberg (1963)—namely, postpositions, genitive-noun and adjective-noun constituent order. It might conceivably be claimed that Akkadian had merely followed all of the other Semitic languages in a change towards verb-initial syntax, but had not yet gone the last step, from VO to OV in main clauses. That is, Akkad- dian would have to have changed from a postpositional to a prepositional language, with no change in major word order to prompt it. While there is no a priori reason to believe that a change in major word order must always precede a change from prepositional to postpositional (or vice-versa), Amharic at least provides an example of a modern Semitic language which first underwent a change in major word order, under influence from Cushitic, from VO to OV, but which has yet to change from prepositional to postpositional.

Looking beyond Semitic, the language most closely related to Semitic within the larger group of Afroasiatic languages—namely, Egyptian—was a rigidly VSO language. Whatever the predominant surface syntax of an earlier common ancestor may have been, there is little evidence to suggest that, as late as Proto-Semitic times, Semitic was anything other than predominantly VO.

Let us consider the assumption of a regular etymological relationship between the prefixes of the imperfect and the anaphoric pronoun series of Semitic. The pronominal series to which Givón presumably refers is that which may be reconstructed on the basis
of the third person independent (or nominative case) pronouns, the Arabic, Proto-Semitic, and (for comparison) Egyptian forms of which are listed in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic pers.</th>
<th>*P-Semitic pers. pron's.</th>
<th>Egypt. pers. pron's. suffix/indep./depend.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.sg.m. huwa</td>
<td>huwa/šuwa</td>
<td>-f / nt£ / sw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. hiya</td>
<td>hiya/šiya</td>
<td>-s / nts / sy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.m. hum(ū)</td>
<td>humu/šumu</td>
<td>-sn / ntsn / sn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. hunna</td>
<td>hina/šina</td>
<td>-sn / ntsn / sn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.sg.m. 'anta</td>
<td>'anta</td>
<td>-k / ntk / tw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. 'anti</td>
<td>'anti</td>
<td>-t / ntt / tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.m. 'antum(ū)</td>
<td>'antumu</td>
<td>-tn / ntnn / tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. 'antunna</td>
<td>'antina</td>
<td>-tn / ntnn / tn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.sg.m/f. 'anā</td>
<td>'anā(ku)</td>
<td>-ī / īnk / wī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.m/f. nahnu</td>
<td>nahnu</td>
<td>-n / īnn / n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Allowing for analogical replacements and normal phonological developments within individual languages, the first and second person independent personal pronouns within Semitic derive from the formative 'an- plus inflectional suffixes corresponding essentially to those of the Semitic perfect conjugation shown in Table 2 below. The same (historically) suffixal elements of the first and second person pronouns also seem to be related to the corresponding imperfect prefixes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.sg.m. ya-</td>
<td>ya-</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-Ø (-y,-w)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. ta-</td>
<td>ta-</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-t (-ty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.m. ya..ū</td>
<td>ya..ū</td>
<td>-ū</td>
<td>-w (-yw)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. ya..na</td>
<td>ya..ā</td>
<td>-na</td>
<td>-t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.sg.m. ta-</td>
<td>ta-</td>
<td>-t</td>
<td>-t (-ty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. ta..i</td>
<td>ta..i</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>-t (-ty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.m. ta..ū</td>
<td>ta..ū</td>
<td>-tum</td>
<td>-tywn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. ta..na</td>
<td>ta..ā</td>
<td>-tunna</td>
<td>-tywn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.sg.m/f. 'a-</td>
<td>'a-</td>
<td>-tu</td>
<td>-k (-kw(y))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl.m/f. na-</td>
<td>na-</td>
<td>-ku</td>
<td>-w</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any relationship that may exist, however, between the third person, anaphoric pronouns (in Table 1) and the corresponding im-
perfect prefixes (in Table 2) is not at all clear. While the third
person prefixes may yet prove, through some creative reconstruction,
to be related to some pronominal series, the "regular etymological
relationship" claimed to exist between these prefixes and "the
anaphoric prounoun series of Semitic" seems doubtful.

With respect to the suffixal conjugation of the perfect, the
first and second person forms are again clearly related to the
pronominal forms. Once again, however, the third person suffixes
are problematic. Their relationship to "some pronominal series"
is not as "unmistakable" as we might be encouraged to believe. As
in the case of the imperfect prefixes, the third person perfect
suffixes bear no clear relationship to the corresponding anaphoric
pronouns in Table 1, nor to any other attested or reconstructed
pronominal series in Semitic. They seem, rather, to have their
origins in the systems of nominal inflection and modification.

Let us consider finally the claim that the suffixal conjugation
of the perfect "developed first in Akkadian, as a participial-
pronominal conjugation, and was only later generalized to the entire
active verb paradigm." It is true that the generalization of the
perfect stem form as an active, narrative verb form seems to have
been a comparatively late development within Semitic. It is prob-
ably not true, however, that the suffixal perfect conjugation
itself "developed first in Akkadian." The perfect conjugation is
attested everywhere in Semitic and is certainly to be reconstructed
for Proto-Semitic. The facts of Egyptian, however, are also
interesting in this connection.

In contrast with the situation in Semitic, most verbs in
ancient Egyptian are not inflected for person, number, and gender.
The one conspicuous exception to this generalization is the "old
perfective." This exception is especially interesting since both
the stem form of the old perfective and its agreement suffixes
(Table 2) are widely held to be related to the Semitic perfect

The Egyptian old perfective, with its own set of agreement
suffixes, differs syntactically from all other narrative verb forms
in Egyptian in at least two important respects: whenever an old
perfective occurs with a nominal subject, (1) the appropriate
agreement suffix must also occur with the verb, and (2) the nominal
subject must immediately precede the old perfective verb. As
Thacker (1954:107-8) observes, "this order is so invariable, even
in the most ancient texts, that it must be regarded as primitive
and original...The old perfective is the one narrative verb-form
where such an order is the rule. With all others a nominal subject
follows the verb."

Given the comparatively rigid VSO word order of Egyptian, one
is tempted to conjecture that SVO old perfective constructions were
also underlyingly VSO, and that the nominal subject was preposed
and in the process left a pronominal copy (i.e., ultimately, the
old perfective suffix) to mark its synchronically "original" posi-
tion in the sentence. Once again, however, even granting the ety-
mological relationship of the first and second person suffixes to
the corresponding pronouns (cf. Tables 1 and 2 above), the third
person suffixes are not related to the corresponding pronominal
forms. Rather, the third person old perfective suffixes seem
clearly related to the adjectival agreement suffixes (cf. Table 2).
Indeed, the old perfective was used primarily with a stative or
adjectival interpretation. Even transitive verbs in the old per-
factive most often require a passive interpretation (cf. Gardiner
1957:238).
If, as seems to be the case, the Semitic perfect suffixes are
related to those of the Egyptian old perfective, the development of
subject-verb agreement in the Semitic permissive-perfect would thus
have begun much earlier than was assumed by Givón, earlier even
than Proto-Semitic, let alone Akkadian.
The fact that subject-verb agreement became increasingly
general in Semitic may be explained in part by the fact that the
perfect verb stem itself became much more general in usage, as did
SVO main clauses in general. From its primarily stative character
in Proto-Semitic, the perfect stem form was extended in West and
South Semitic eventually to verbs of motion and active transitive
verbs as well and, in the process, became the basic form represent-
ing past punctual meaning, largely replacing the jussive in that
function. The perfect stem thus became the basic past tense nar-
rative form in all the Semitic languages (except Akkadian).
The fact that subject-verb agreement failed to become a gene-
ral feature of Egyptian, on the other hand, is due in part to the
fact that, instead of expanding its range of usages, the old per-
factive became increasingly limited in occurrence, to the extent
that it was no longer used as an active narrative verb form as
early as Middle Egyptian. Thus, even in later Coptic, where the
nominal subject normally precedes the main verb, there is, strictly
speaking, no agreement between subject and verb.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN ARABIC

Although, as argued above, the claim of a specific etymologi-
cal relationship between the third person verbal agreement affixes
and the anaphoric pronouns of Semitic seems untenable, it is never-
theless true of these languages that facts relating to topicaliza-
tion have played a central role in the development and application
of subject-verb agreement. The remainder of this paper will exam-
ine certain aspects of that development within Arabic.
It is a well-known fact of Arabic that verbs in that language
are inflected to agree with their subjects in person, number, and
gender, subject to certain conditions. Verb agreement with first
and second person subject NPs is quite regular and presents no
particular difficulties. In the third person, however, there are
essentially two different kinds of agreement irregularities: those
that are lexically and/or morphologically conditioned and those
that are syntactically conditioned. It is the latter, syntacti-
cally-conditioned variety of irregularity that will concern us
here.5 Consider, for example, the sentences in (1) and (2):

1. [Subject] x [Verb] 
2. [Subject] y [Verb] 
3. [Subject] z [Verb] 
4. [Subject] a [Verb] 
5. [Subject] b [Verb] 
6. [Subject] c [Verb] 
7. [Subject] d [Verb] 
8. [Subject] e [Verb]
(1) a. kataba / *katabū 1-wuzarā'u t-taqrīra
   wrote(3m.sg.)/(3m.pl.) the-ministers the-report
   'The ministers wrote the report.'

   b. 'al-wuzarā'u katabu / *kataba t-taqrīra
   'As for' the ministers, (they) wrote the report.'

(2) a. sa - tadxulu / *-yadxulna 1-banātu buyūta-hunna
   fut.-enter (3f.sg.)/(3f.pl.) the-girls houses-their(f.pl.)
   'The girls will enter their houses.'

   b. 'al-banātu sa -yadxulna/*-tadxulu buyūta-hunna
   'As for' the girls, (they) will enter their houses.'

In predominantly VSO Classical (as well as Modern Standard) Arabic, verbs generally agree with following subject NPs only in person and (usually) also in gender, as in the (a) sentences of (1) and (2) above, whereas in the corresponding (b) sentences, in which the subject has been topicalized and precedes the verb, the verb agrees also in number.6

In Classical Arabic, then, subject-verb agreement in number, at least, is conditioned by the occurrence of a preceding topic-subject NP, in contrast with the failure of such agreement to occur in the more neutral verb-initial structures with untopicalized subject NPs.

Notwithstanding the general suspension of number agreement in VSO structures of Classical Arabic, a number of examples are recorded in which, exceptionally, the verb does agree with a following plural subject in number as well as in gender and person, an "error" repeatedly condemned by the medieval Arab grammarians, who generally appear to have regarded this as an aberrant feature of one or another dialect (the so-called "lūgat 'akalū-nī l-barāghi'ūnu": cf. Rabin 1951:168, Wright 1898:294c). Of this variation, Rabin notes that "the strict observance of the rule that the verb of a verbal [i.e., verb-initial] sentence must be in the singular was a peculiarity of those dialects that formed the base of Classical Arabic." (1951:168)

It is interesting to observe, however, that those examples of VSO with number agreement that do occur are, virtually without exception, ones in which the subject NP is definite or exhibits other topic-like properties (i.e., is anaphoric, generic, etc.). Consider, for example, the following sentences (cf. Wright 1898:294, Reckendorf 1921:25, etc.):

(3) 'akal - ū - nī l-barāghi'ūnu
   ate-3m.pl.-me the-fleas
   'The fleas devoured me.'
(4) turīk - na nisā'u-kum
forsaken(pass.)-3f.pl. women-your(m.pl.)
'Your women have been forsaken.'

(5) lā ya-bqa - w 'ūlā'iqa
neg. 3rd-remain-m.pl. those
'Those will not remain.'

(6) 'aṣbaḥ - ū kullu-hum xulī'ā
became-3m.pl. all-them(m.) removed, freed
'They all became freed.'

Although data on the dialects in question is scanty, the conspicuous absence of examples of number agreement in VSO structures with indefinite, nontopic subject NPs leads us to assume, at least, that in those dialects such agreement was, as in Classical Arabic, not grammatical.

The facts of number agreement in Modern Egyptian Arabic are also interesting in this connection. Unlike Classical Arabic, Modern Egyptian Arabic has become predominantly SVO in surface structure, regardless of the definiteness or specificity of the subject NP, while VSO structures have survived as a secondary, relatively marked pattern. Furthermore, the verb in Egyptian Arabic generally agrees in number with its subject whether the latter precedes the verb (as in the (a) sentences of (7) and (8) below) or follows the verb (as in the corresponding (b) sentences):

(7) a. il-wuzara katabu / *katab (1) t-ta'rīf
the-ministers wrote(3c.pl.)/(3m.sg.) the-report
'The ministers wrote the report.'

b. katabu / *katab (1) l-wuzara t-ta'rīf
'The ministers wrote the report.'

(8) a. il-mudarrisīn dōl gum / *geh
the-teachers these came(3c.pl.)/(3m.sg.)
'These teachers came.'

b. gum / *geh il-mudarrisīn dōl
'These teachers came.'

Moreover, number agreement generally occurs whether the subject NP is definite, as in the examples just cited, or indefinite and non-theematic, as in (9) and (10):
(9) a. talat awlād xaragu / *xarag
   three boys went out (3c.pl.)/ *(3m.sg.)
   'Three boys went out.'

b. xaragu / xarag talat awlād.
   'Three boys went out.' or 'There went out three boys.'

(10) a. mudarrisīn kitīr gum / *geh
    teachers many came (3c.pl.)/ *(3m.sg.)
    'Many teachers came.'

b. gum / geh mudarrisīn kitīr
   'Many teachers came.' or 'There came many teachers.'

For most speakers of Egyptian Arabic, however, singular verbal agreement with plural subject NPs is acceptable, but only if the subject is indefinite and the verb precedes the subject, as in the (b) sentences of (9) and (10) above.

From all of the foregoing, the historical "drift" of number agreement between subject and verb in Arabic begins to suggest itself. At some early, pre-Classical stage of Arabic, number agreement seems to have been restricted to sentences with a topic-subject in pre-verbal position, as was true of Classical Arabic and also of ancient Egyptian. In addition to its obligatory occurrence in SVO structures, number agreement in some dialects at least appears to have become optional in VSO structures as well, provided the subject was definite, anaphoric, etc.

At some point, number agreement must then have become obligatory for all definite subjects, whether in SVO or VSO sentences, and, eventually, optional even for indefinite subjects in VSO structures. In dialects (such as Egyptian Arabic) which have become predominantly SVO in surface structure, number agreement has become generalized to both SVO and VSO sentences, regardless of whether their subjects are topic or non-topic, definite or indefinite. The occasional suspension of number agreement that occurs optionally in such dialects seems limited to the indefinite subjects of verb-initial sentences. The process is summarized below:

(11) Stages in Generalization of Subject-Verb Agreement in Arabic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SVO</th>
<th>VSO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Obligatory</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Obligatory</td>
<td>[N/A]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Optional]</td>
<td>/[Definite] Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Obligatory</td>
<td>[Optional]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Definite]</td>
<td>Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Obligatory</td>
<td>[Optional]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Definite]</td>
<td>Subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of number agreement, then, the dialects upon which Classical Arabic was based were essentially at Stage I of the process hypothesized in (11); the aberrant dialects to which the medieval grammarians referred (the lust 'akalüni l-barügiyu) might have been somewhere between Stages II and III; and dialects like Modern Egyptian Arabic are clearly at Stage III or beyond.

The word-order-related facts of gender agreement in Classical Arabic also lend some support to the characterization in (11). As was mentioned above, while number agreement in Classical Arabic generally does not occur in VSO sentences, gender agreement between subject and verb usually does. However, in some verb-initial sentences, masculine singular agreement may optionally occur with grammatically feminine subject NPs (as in (12)-(15) below), although feminine agreement is "preferable," especially if the subject NP refers to humans (Wright 1898:288ff.):

(12) ḥadar - a 1-qādiya ('i)mra'atun
came(before)-3m.sg. the-judge woman
'A woman came before the judge.'

(13) ...walad - a 1-'uxayṭila 'ummu saw'in
gave birth(to)-3m.sg. 'al-'Axtal mother(of) evil
'A bad mother gave birth to that poor 'al-'Axtal.'

(14) ...'imra'any ḡarr - a - huṣ min - kunna waḥidatun
manι deceived-3m.sg.-himι of-you(f.pl.) one(f.)
'...a man, whom one of you has deceived.'

(15) qāl - a nisватum fi l-madinati
said-3m.sg. women in the-city
'(Some) women in the city said...'

In sentences like (16) and (17), on the other hand, gender agreement must occur between the verb and its feminine subject NP:

(16) jā - at hindun
came-3f.sg. Hind (feminine proper noun)
'Hind came.'

(17) qāl - at ('i)mra'atun 1-'azīzi
said-3f.sg. wife(of) 'al-'Azīz
'The wife of 'al-'Aziz said...'

The sentences in (12)-(15) above differ from those in (16) and (17) in that the subject NPs of the former are all indefinite NPs. Those of (16) and (17), on the other hand, are "definite" NPs (though not preposed). Actually, examples may be found in which definite, feminine subject NPs take masculine verbal agreement in
VSO sentences, but "such instances...are comparatively rare."  
(Wright 1898:291)

It is clear, then, from the above examples that when the  
suspension of gender agreement does occur optionally in VSO sentences, it is generally in sentences with indefinite, nontopic  
subject NPs. Meanwhile, gender agreement in VSO sentences with  
definite subject NPs (as well as, of course, in SVO sentences) is  
largely obligatory.

On the reasonable assumption that verbal agreement in both  
gender and number was originally conditioned only by an immediately  
predicating topic-subject NP, the subsequent generalization of third  
person subject-verb agreement to VSO structures in Arabic would  
appear to have begun (in some dialects at least) with gender agree-  
ment. While number agreement in Classical Arabic was still at  
Stage 1 of the process hypothesized in (11), gender agreement had  
apparently already progressed as far as Stage III.

CONCLUSION

To summarize briefly, we have seen that, contrary to what has  
been claimed, a regular etymological relationship does not appear  
to exist between the verb agreement affixes and the anaphoric pro-  
nouns of Arabic or any of the other major, historically attested  
languages of Semitic. The perfect suffixes, at least, seem instead  
to have originated in the system of nominal and adjectival inflec-  
tion.

We have also seen, however, that properties normally associated  
with discourse topic NPs have indeed played an important role in  
the development and generalization of subject-verb agreement within  
Arabic at least. Thus, while the more restrictive claim of formal  
identity or relationship between verbal agreement affixes and ana-  
phoric pronouns has been shown to have less than universal validity,  
the facts of both Arabic and Semitic in general are at least not  
inconsistent with the somewhat weaker hypothesis that the develop-  
ment of verbal agreement in languages is generally (if not always)  
associated with topological, borrowing (in some cases at least)  
morphology from other agreement paradigms in the language (and not  
necessarily only from the anaphoric pronoun paradigms).

Finally, the tentative nature of the "reconstruction" offered  
in (11) must be emphasized. It is offered merely as a hypothetical  
framework within which to view the development of subject-verb  
agreement in Arabic and perhaps other languages, and to stimulate  
further research, both comparatively as well as internally to the  
varying dialects of Arabic--research which will hopefully address  
many of the important questions that remain unanswered, or even  
unmasked, in this brief paper.

FOOTNOTES

* This paper presents research accomplished in part with the gene-  
rous support of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs,
U.S. Department of State, in the form of a grant administered by the American Research Center in Egypt.

1. The "major, historically attested Semitic languages" include Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Ethiopic, and Akkadian. "Ethiopic" here refers to the classical language, Geez, and not to Amharic, a modern Semitic language spoken in Ethiopia which has clearly been influenced in the direction of SOV through contact with Cushitic languages spoken in the area.

2. The forms in Table 1 are based largely on Moscati, ed. (1969: 102), but also upon Brockelmann (1910), and for Egyptian, upon Gardiner (1957). The dependent (or oblique case) pronouns of Arabic and Semitic are related to the independent pronouns and have not been included. The dual pronouns have also been excluded, as they are attested only in Arabic and Ugaritic and, in any case, add nothing of importance to the discussion. There is also some controversy as to whether there were, in Proto-Semitic, two separate series of third person pronouns (an h-series and an s-series) or an original distinction between h- (mas.) and s- (fem.) which was regularized in different directions in the attested languages. Egyptian shows both -f (corresponding to Semitic h) and -s in the singular forms.

3. The forms in Table 2 are again based largely on Moscati, ed. (1969), Brockelmann (1908), and Gardiner (1957). The imperfect affixes are those of the active, jussive paradigm. Once again, the dual forms have been omitted.

4. The origin of the 3.m.sg. -u is unclear; that of 3.f.sg. -at is probably to be found in its identity with one of the nominal suffixes of the same phonological shape, one of which is the normal marker of feminine gender. The 3.m.pl. -u is identical with the external masculine plural suffix of nominal and adjectival forms, and 3.f.pl. -a also coincides with a feminine plural suffix -a found in the nominal systems of Semitic. The 3.f.pl. -na of Arabic is attributable to analogy with the imperfect (Thacker 1954:96).

5. Lexically or morphologically conditioned irregularities have received relatively more attention in the literature than have the so-called syntactically conditioned irregularities. For details of subject-verb concord in Classical Arabic, see Wright (1898:288ff.), and for certain aspects of gender-number concord in Modern Literary Arabic, see Killean (1968). See also Wise (1972, 1975:171ff.) and Mitchell (1973) for treatments of the corresponding facts of Modern Egyptian Arabic.

6. The pre-verbal NP position in Classical Arabic is, of course, reserved for the discourse topic, and SVO (as well as OVS, etc.) sentences in Arabic have accordingly been described as "topic-comment" constructions (cf., e.g., Anshen and Schreiber 1968 and Lówko1icz 1971). It must be emphasized that only topicalized subject NPs trigger verbal agreement in Classical Arabic; neither object nor other nonsubject topic NPs trigger verbal agreement.
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