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BUCHBESPRECHUNG

BERLINCHES, CARMEN: *El dialecto árabe de Damasco (Siria): estudio gramatical y textos*. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2016 (Estudios de Dialectología Árabe 11). 505 pp. ISBN: 978-84-16515-41-7.

While most Spanish dialectologists tend to research North African dialects of the Arabic language associated with close geographical and historical contact, CARMEN BERLINCHES's (previously: CARMEN BERLINCHES RAMOS) book presents one of the most important Arabic dialects of the Middle East – Damascene Arabic. To my best knowledge, this is the first book in Spanish devoted to the dialect of the capital of Syria. Although Damascene Arabic is the most thoroughly researched dialect of Syria, most of the key publications were published in the 1960s and 70s.[1] That said, in recent years new scientific studies, mostly based on field research conducted in the Syrian capital before the outbreak of the Civil War, have been released.

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1   These include such publications as: AMBROS, A. (1977): *Damascus Arabic*. Afro-asiatic Dialects 3. Malibu: Undena Publications; BLOCH, A. – GROTZFELD, H. (1964): *Damaszenisch-arabische Texte mit Übersetzung, Anmerkungen und Glossar*. Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 35(2). Wiesbaden: Kommissions-verlag Franz Steiner GmbH; BLOCH, A. (1965): *Die Hypotaxe im Damaszenisch-Arabischen mit Vergleichen zur Hypotaxe im Klassisch-Arabischen*. Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 35(4). Wiesbaden: Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner GmbH; COWELL, M. W. (1964): *A Reference Grammar of Syrian Arabic (Based on the Dialect of Damascus)*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press; ÈL'-MASSARANI, M. – SEGAL' V. S. (1978): *Arabsko-russkij slovar' sirijskogo dialekta*. Moskva: Russkij Jazyk; FERGUSON, C. A. – MOUKHTAR, A. (1961): *Damascus Arabic*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Centre for Applied Linguistics of the Modern Language Association of America; GROTZFELD, H. (1964): *Laut- und Formenlehre des Damaszenisch-Arabischen*. Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 35(3). Wiesbaden: Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner GmbH; GROTZFELD, H. (1965): *Syrisch-Arabische Grammatik (Dialekt von Damaskus)*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz; STOWASSER, K. – MOUKHTAR, A. (1964): *A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic. English-Arabic*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

CARMEN BERLINCHES's book is one of them, and was prepared on the basis of her doctoral dissertation, defended in 2012.[2]

The publication is divided into two main parts: a grammatical description (*Estudio lingüístico*, 23–188) and dialectal texts with a glossary (*Textos*, 189–491). In this review, I will focus primarily on the shorter, first part, in which the author describes the grammatical system of Damascene Arabic, based mainly on the texts she collected, available in the second part of her work and in her earlier articles.[3]

The book begins with the usual preliminary information (*Prefacio, Agradecimientos, Signos y abreviaturas, Transcripción, Introducción, Metodología, Informantes*, 9–21), among which particularly interesting is the list of informants – 25 women and the same number of men. Most of them (46 people out of 50) were under the age of 32 and were highly educated (during the material gathering phase they were university students or had already graduated from university). They came from both older and newer neighbourhoods, as well as peripheral districts not considered by many Damascenes as part of the Syrian capital. It is also worth noting that the parents of some informants had not come from Damascus, which for some dialectologists would disqualify them as interviewees. From the methodological point of view, this work therefore differs from most of the previous grammar studies, in which material was collected primarily among older and uneducated people. However, I do not consider this a drawback, as personally I also see the need to conduct research among young people in the Arab world, if only because they can provide an entirely different perspective on Arabic dialects.

The first part of the book consists of four chapters: phonetics and phonology (*Fonética y fonología*, 25–50), morphology (*Morfología*, 51–130), syntax (*Sintaxis*, 131–170), and comments on vocabulary and loanwords (*Léxico*, 173–187).

In the description of the phonology, the author first discusses short and long vowels, followed by diphthongs. She addresses certain issues from the field of morphophonology, namely giving examples of substantives with pronominal suffixes or in a construct state, thanks to which changes in the structure of words can be shown. This is to illustrate the possible positions and changes of individual short vowels in a given syllable of the word. Consonantal phonemes are described on the basis of a

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2 RAMOS, C. B. (2012): *El dialecto árabe de los jóvenes de Damasco: estudio lingüístico y análisis de textos* [*The Arabic Dialect of Young People of Damascus: A Linguistic Study and Analysis of Texts*]. Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Ahmed Salem Ould Mohamed Baba. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Facultad de Filología, Departamento de Estudios Árabes e Islámicos.

3 RAMOS, C. B. (2011): Dos textos en árabe dialectal de Damasco. In: *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes* 22: 127–136; RAMOS, C. B. (2013): Texts Related to Cooking in the Arabic Dialect of Damascus. In: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 103: 25–48; RAMOS, C. B. (2014): Textos dialectales sobre la ciudad de Damasco. In: *Romano-Arabica* 14: 33–57.

comparison with Literary Arabic or borrowings from other languages. Minimal pairs are not listed. The section on phonology ends with information concerning phonological processes such as: assimilation, dissimilation, metathesis etc., as well as syllables and stress.

The section on morphology is divided into three main parts – following the rules of Arabic grammar theory – a nominal morphology, a verbal morphology and particles. At the beginning the author describes the individual nominal patterns, gender, and number. Subsequently, CARMEN BERLINCHES discusses the issue of collective nouns, *nisba* adjectives, and the definite article. This section also includes information on pronouns and numerals.

A small number of shortcomings can be found throughout the book. Nominal patterns such as: *buxār, kitābe, wilāde* etc. (54), with the vowel *i* or *u* in the first syllable, are borrowed from Literary Arabic; they also have their equivalents in Damascene Arabic: *bxār, ktābe, wlāde*. In dialectological studies, the researcher should be sensitive to cases when informants try to use certain dialectal words literally or use literary words instead of dialectal. This happens most often among educated people, who in this way try to emphasise, for example, their social status.

Moreover, this section of the book possesses a few flaws, which I would like to discuss briefly. Firstly, the pattern CaCaCiyye is discussed twice (52, 58), when it would be sufficient to just describe it with the suffix *-iyye* (58). The word *dəkkān* is not feminine (60), but there is also *dəkkāne,* a form with the feminine ending *-e* and this feminine form was used in the example quoted by the author (60). Some examples of irregular plural (65–71) have been noted as in Literary Arabic, although they also have dialectal equivalents, e.g. *ġani* pl. *ʔaġniyāʔ* (69), Damascene Arabic: *ʔaġniya, ġanāya*; *wali* pl. *ʔawliyāʔ* (69), Damascene Arabic: *ʔawlye, ʔūlye*; *nabi* pl. *ʔanbiyāʔ* (69), Damascene Arabic: *ʔəmbya*, etc.

Among the personal pronouns, noteworthy is the presence of some rarer forms of pronouns, such us: *ləḥna* 'we' (next to the more popular form *nəḥna*) and *ḥənnen* 'they' (the pronoun *ḥənne* is used definitely more often).[4] However, the 3rd person feminine singular and 3rd person plural pronominal suffixes that occur after vowels should be written as *-ha* and *-hon*, not as *-(h)a, -(h)on* (75). The consonant *h* in the 3rd person feminine singular and 3rd person plural pronominal suffixes after vowels always occurs in Damascene Arabic, e.g.: *ʔabūha* 'her father', *ʔabūhon* 'their father', *maṣārīha* 'her money', *maṣārīhon* 'their money', *dawāha* 'her medication', *dawāhon* 'their medication'. I do not know how true are forms such as: *ʕalēa, ʕalēon, ḥawālēa, ḥawālēon* (76), something that was also mentioned by MARK W. COWELL.[5] Such ex-

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4   JÉRÔME LENTIN mentions also these rare forms of personal pronouns in Damascene Arabic. See: LENTIN, J. (2006): Damascus Arabic. In: *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, I A-Ed. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 546–555.

5   COWELL, M.W. (1964): *A Reference Grammar of Syrian Arabic (Based on the Dialect of Damascus)*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 478.

ceptions are unlikely to occur since there are no similar cases in the phonological system of Damascene Arabic. Probably the consonant *h* is pronounced lightly or is almost silent.

The section on verbal morphology contains descriptions of individual verb paradigms, active and passive participles, and information on how to create the imperative form. Particularly interesting to me was the information on form IV of Damascene Arabic verbs, for all quoted examples (*ʔaẓhar – byəʕlen, ʔaʕlan – byəʕlen, ʔaṭʕab – byəṭʕeb, ʔaṣbaḥ – byəṣbeḥ, ʔaznab – byəzneb, ʔasbat – byəsbet, ʔarsal – byərsel, ʔazʕaž – byəzʕež*) are borrowed from Literary Arabic. The description of these verbs from the point of view of dialectology does not need to be made. However, incorporating them into the dialectal system is interesting, as exemplified by some irregular verbs; for instance, the verb *ʔāman – byʔāmen / byəʔmen* (form IV in Literary Arabic) in Damascene Arabic functions as form III. Furthermore, *ʔahda – byəhdi* occurs rather as form I: *hada – byəhdi*. It is also worth mentioning here that most of these verbs function as form I of quadriliteral verbs, e.g. *ʔaḍrab – byʔaḍreb, ʔablaġ – byʔableġ* (own examples from Damascene Arabic). In general, the presence of the above mentioned exceptions in the study is a result of the selection of the research group and the rejection of informants, who use too many borrowings from Literary Arabic in their statements.

In the section on particles, where no major flaws could be found, the following topics were described: fixed expressions and adverbs (123–124), prepositions (124–129), a vocative (129) and interjections (129–130).

The third chapter contains a description of the syntax of Damascene Arabic. The author discusses issues such as: noun phrases and agreement (131–132), construct state (132–134), analytic constructions with *tabaʕ* and *la-* (134–137), definiteness (137), nominal sentences (137–138), relative clauses (139–140), existential sentences (140), verbal sentences (140–147) and verb modifiers: *b-, ʕam, ʕamma, raḥ, ḥa-, laḥ* (147–150). It is worth pointing out that the verb modifier *ʕamma* is very rare in Damascene Arabic. In the material collected by CARMEN BERLINCHES, the modifier *ʕamma* was used by two people (150) and the parents of one of them came from Palestine. The modifiers *ḥa-* and *laḥ* are variants of *raḥ*; the occurrence of *laḥ* is the rarest. Subsequently the author discusses pseudoverbs: *bədd-, fī, ʕand-, ʔəl-, maʕ-* (150–153), auxiliary verbs: *kān – bykūn, ṣār – byṣīr, ḍall – byḍall, ʔām – byʔūm, mā ʕād, rəžeʕ – byəržaʕ, ballaš – byballeš, ʔaʕad – byəʔʕod, lāzem, baʔa* (153–157), and impersonal verbs: *yəmken / mumken, byžūz, ʔəža / žāye ʕala bāl-, mā byṣīr, mā btəfreʔ* (*maʕ*) (157–158). As can be seen, I did not mention conjunctions in the chapter on morphology, as their description can be found only in the chapter on syntax (158–164), which I personally found rather confusing. In the book, the conjunctions are ordered by type of sentences. This chapter ends with information on conditional sentences (165–166), subordinate clauses (167), negative sentences (168–170), interrogative sentences (171) and exclamatory sentences (171–172).

The last chapter of the part on Damascene Arabic grammar deals with vocabulary and loanwords. The author mentions and discusses borrowings from Literary

Arabic, as well as from Aramaic, Farsi, Greek, Latin, Turkish, Italian, French and English. An interesting subject, discussed in this chapter, is also the way of incorporating borrowings from other languages into Damascene Arabic (185–188).

As I mentioned at the beginning, the second part of the book contains texts (87 in total) – transcribed and translated into Spanish. They relate to various aspects of everyday life and have been ordered by informants rather than thematically. One text drew my particular attention due to the information contained in it. Let me quote a passage in slightly modified transcription: *w-fī kamāne dəktōr ʔaḷmāni ʔəža tʕallam w-ʔaʕad bi-maʕlūla yaʕni tarak ʔaḷmānya w-tarak kəll šī w-ʔəža ʔaʕad bi-maʕlūla šī səntēn ᵊtlāte taʔrīban w-tʕallam əl-ʔārāmi w-hallaʔ huwwe ʔəstāz luǧāt ʔadīme bi-žāmʕa bi-ʔaḷmānya* (273). The texts are followed by a glossary (437–490), arranged in the Arabic alphabet, an index of proper and place names (491–494), and a bibliography.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that, in my opinion, publishing grammatical descriptions of important Arabic dialects in native languages is a necessary scientific activity, and the book is a valuable addition to the dialectological literature, although – as it has already been pointed out – it is important to bear in mind while reading it the specificity of the research group used in the study.

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