



EISENBRAUNS

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Talay, Sh. *Die neuaramäischen Dialekte der Khabur-Assyrer in Nordostsyrien: Einführung, Phonologie und Morphologie*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008. xxvii + 479 pp.

Prior to the appearance of the work under review, the Neo-Aramaic dialects of the Khabur river valley (northeastern Syria) had not been properly described. The first attempt to describe a Neo-Aramaic dialect in that area was made by Heidi Jacobi whose book was published more than 30 years ago (Jacobi 1973). H. Jacobi could not visit the area for political reasons, so all the material was recorded in Lebanon from the speakers who had moved there from the Khabur region. The undertaking of Shabo Talay is much more profound and extensive. The ultimate aim of his study is to create descriptions of all the Neo-Aramaic dialects spoken in the Khabur river valley. The book under review is a reworked dissertation (Habilitationsschrift) written under supervision of Prof. Otto Jastrow and submitted to Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg in 2006. It is the first part of the planned three-volume work which is the outcome of many years of field research (1997–2005); the preliminary results were published earlier by Sh. Talay in an article (Talay 1999).

The three-volume work includes:

1. The volume under review: Introduction, which is meant as an introduction to the whole work; Phonology; Morphology.
2. Texts in 23 dialects out of 25 described in the first volume, excluding Bnerumta and Čāl (Talay 2009).<sup>1</sup>
3. Glossary to these texts that is still to be published, as stated by the author in the Introduction (p. 4).

In the following I present notes which are partly critical, partly highlighting the most interesting points.

The Introduction (pp. 3–53) includes explanations of important ethnological and ethnolinguistic terms such as *aturaye* and *ašuraye*, *surat* and *lešana aturaya*. The wealth of sociological information about Assyrians in the Khabur valley given in the book is most welcome and integral to this study. It provides additional arguments for the author's statement (p. 49)

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<sup>1</sup> Only the introductory pages of this volume were available to me. I plan to review the work as a whole when all the three volumes are at hand.

that the twenty five Khabur-dialects mostly keep their distinctiveness as opposed to the linguistic situation in Northern Iraq, where a sort of Christian Neo-Aramaic koine had emerged.

Presently the need for a new classification of NENA is felt as never before because we have many new dialect descriptions. 25 Khabur-dialects are subdivided by the author into five groups or “clusters”: A. Tiyari, B. Txuma, C. Hakkari, D. Šamməsdin and E. External Dialects (“Äußere Dialekte”). The term “cluster” here must be taken with a grain of salt because this classification is a mixture of a) traditional ethno- and geographical boundaries, and b) a number of phonological, morphological and lexical features. Sh. Talay did his best to support this classification with linguistic features, but the general picture is complicated, since most of the features are not exclusive. Probably the most distinctive profile has Šamməsdin with its pronominal suffix 3 pl. *-u* and ergative suffix *-lu*; the other two features suggested—separate pronouns 3 ms *awən*, 3fs *ayən* and nominal plural ending *\*-ata* > *-ate*—are not unique, they are shared by some dialects in the Hakkari cluster. The Hakkari cluster includes eight dialects, each of them characterized by a number of specific features, but all of them have the derivational morpheme for abstract nouns *\*-uta* > *uwwa*, which is unique for Khabur-dialects. Txuma and Tiyari are not so easily definable: both clusters are characterized by the retention of interdental /t/ and /d/, but part of Tiyari (Upper Tiyari) dialects have */\*t/* > */š/* in the position after *\*ae* > *ε*. The fifth cluster (“external dialects”) which includes Halmun and Lewən is not a real cluster at all because these two dialects are different in many respects which is shown by the author himself (p. 53). Apparently this category of unclassifiable dialects was named “cluster” for the sake of terminological consistency.

**P. 58.** “Auch nach Konsonanten können die Affrikaten stehen.” The examples that follow (such as *kalwa*) demonstrate that the author meant “Frikative” or “spirantisierte Allophone.”

**P. 59.** Within the list of examples with /w/ as a realisation of old /b/² we have the form *šərwə* ‘soup’ which is a clear loanword, not recorded in CS dictionaries.³ It is a regional word, which is attested in Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Since its (Kurdish?) etymon most probably had /b/, it

² It would be more correct to write */\*b/*, */\*p/* etc. in this chapter, dedicated to “Realisierung der *alten* bəgədkəpəʔ-Phoneme” (italics are mine.—A. L.).

³ According to Tezel 2003:73 *šarbo* is “recorded already in Bar Ali Syro-Arabic Lexicon, p. 405, ed. Gottheil”; this loanword is etymologically related to *šərwə* but it has different meaning—‘a little jug, pitcher.’

is related to the discussion, but certainly has nothing to do with the realisation of /\*b/. In fact this example (*šəṛwa*) touches upon the rules of phonological adaptation of loanwords in NENA, an issue which deserves attention, but not discussed in the book.

**P. 60f.** As an appendix to the discussion of the realisation of /p̄/ the list of forms with /f/ is adduced. All of these forms are loanwords with only one exception<sup>4</sup> from Classical Syriac, *naxfuta*. In fact the list is not about the realisation of /p̄/, it is about /f/ in loanwords.

**P. 84f.** The phenomenon of emphatization, which is sometimes designated by the term “synharmonism,” is understood by the author as velarization rather than pharyngealization. The emphatization is present in Khabur-dialects “only partly” as opposed to Urmia-dialects where it is widespread. It is not told which dialects have it and which ones do not have it. The emphatization may affect a syllable, a word, or a group of words. There are 10 phonemes which may be secondary velarized: /p/, /b/, /d/, /č/, /z/, /ḍ/, /m/, /n/, /l/, /r/. Accordingly the phoneme inventory may be expanded by 10 new phonemes. Nevertheless the author lists 12 velarized phonemes, including /ṣ/ and /ṭ/: “dadurch erhöht sich der Phonembestand durch die Konsonanten /p̣/, /ḅ/, /ṭ/, /ḍ/, /č̣/, /ṣ/, /ẓ/, /ḍ̣/, /ṃ/, /ṇ/, /ḷ/, /ṛ/.” Indeed, some of the instances of /ṣ/ and /ṭ/ are born by emphatization, but these two phonemes are old insiders of the Aramaic phoneme inventory.

**P. 102.** The etymology of reflexive pronoun *gana/ḡana* is given in fn. 159: *gana/ḡana* < kurd. *can* / pers. *ḡān* ‘Seele, Geist; Selbst.’ On the other hand, on **p. 207** it is stated differently: *gana/ḡana* < kurd. *gan*. It is all the more important because it is stated (**p. 207**) that in Neo-Aramaic *gana* is original while *ḡana* is secondary. Following the author’s etymological reasoning, one may conclude that, on the other hand, *ḡana* is original, if it is true that it goes back to the Kurdish *can* (**p. 102**). According to Chyet’s dictionary, Kurmanji Kurdish has *can*, but Zaza Kurdish *gan* (Chyet 2003:82). Taking into account dialectal variety in Kurdish the question with the etymology of Neo-Aramaic *gana/ḡana* should be further clarified.

**P. 130.** Here among the examples of the present tense forms appears a form *tamər* translated ‘he says.’ Cf. **p. 113** *amər̄ra* ‘he says to her’; **p. 112** *amər* ‘(that) he says.’ To my mind the difference *tamər* vs. *amər* deserves

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<sup>4</sup> The other example with probable CS etymon, *friyya* (< \**prīyā*) ‘numerous’ is interesting, but problematic: there are no attestations of CS *prīyā* in dictionaries of CS; perhaps it was construed as a derivative from CS *pr* ‘to produce.’

explanation. On p. 308, fn. 359, the verb form *tate* is explained as follows: *t-ate* < \**d-ate* ‘that he comes.’ It probably contradicts translating *amər* ‘(that) he says.’ The lack of the explanation for the verb forms like *tamər* is related to the fact that the description of syntax is not included in the book under review. Apparently the absence of any discussion of particle \**d* is also related to that.

**P. 220.** Noteworthy is the fact that besides Infinitive KKaKa we have two more verbal nouns: KKaKTa (p. 365) and KuKaKa (p. 355f.). The functional distribution may be presented as follows: KKaKa is used in progressive tense forms (“Verlaufsform”); KKaKTa are mostly, but not only, *nomina vicis*; KuKaKa is *nomen actionis* (*buraxa* ‘Trauung,’ *ğuhada* ‘Anstrengung,’ *xuřawa* ‘Denken’). The further clarification would be possible only with sentence examples in the context of a syntactic description.

**P. 438.** The dialects Marbiřo and Sařa have the preposition *all-/l-* (< \**řal*) along with *al* (< \**řal*), which in my opinion may be explained only by the influence from adstrate dialects.

**P. 439–440.** I do not think it is correct to say that prepositions \**am* und *min* “fielen zusammen zu *m/mən*.” It is possible that \**am* > *m-*, but hardly \**am* > *mən*. It is more correct to state that *m/mən* assumed the meanings of \**am*.

**P. 443ff.** In the section 3.6.1, dedicated to prepositions, the author generally follows etymological principle of description: there are entries *b-*, *l-*, *m-*, etc. But in 3.6.1.8 (“Die Preposition ‘für, zu nach, hin’”) he substitutes etymological principle for functional principle.

Before concluding this review I would like to briefly compare the findings of Shabo Talay with the description by Heidi Jacobi whose work on Txuma was based on the material recorded from the informants from the Khabur region as well (Jacobi 1973). The problem with this comparison is that it is not clear to which variety of Txuma<sup>5</sup> belonged two of her five informants (three of them were from Tall Hurməz). As the following comparative table shows, there are significant differences for some items:

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<sup>5</sup> Now, thanks to the evidence in the present book of Sh. Talay, we see the distinctive character of five varieties of Txuma: Tall Hurməz (Txuma Gawayā), Mazřa, Gundək, Gəssa and Berəğnaye.

		Jacobi 1973 <sup>6</sup>	Talay 2008 <sup>7</sup>
Personal pronouns	2m 2f	<i>āt</i> ~ <i>āhat</i> <i>āṭ</i> ~ <i>āhit</i>	<i>ati</i> , <i>āt</i> , <i>aṭən</i> , <i>ayəṭ</i> <i>ati</i> , <i>aṭən</i> , <i>ati</i>
Copula	3ms 3fs 2ms 2fs 1ms 1fs 3pl 2pl 1pl	<i>hāwe</i> <i>hōya</i> <i>hāwəṭ</i> <i>hōyaṭ</i> <i>hāwən</i> <i>hōyan</i> <i>hāwe</i> <i>hāwītu(n)</i> <i>hāwax</i> ~ <i>hāwəx</i>	<i>hole</i> <i>hola</i> <i>holux</i> , <i>howəṭ</i> , <i>holəṭ</i> <i>holax</i> , <i>howəṭ</i> , <i>holəṭ</i> <i>holi</i> , <i>howi</i> , <i>howən</i> <i>holi</i> , <i>howi</i> , <i>howan</i> <i>holē</i> <i>hólöxu(n)</i> , <i>hoṭun</i> , <i>hoṭu</i> <i>holan</i> , <i>howan</i> , <i>howax</i>
Copula, negated	2ms 2fs 1ms 1fs 3pl 1pl	<i>lēwəṭ</i> ~ <i>lēṭ</i> <i>lēwəṭ</i> ~ <i>lēṭ</i> <i>lēwən</i> ~ <i>lēyən</i> ~ <i>lēn</i> <i>lēwan</i> ~ <i>lēyan</i> ~ <i>lēn</i> <i>lēle</i> , <i>lēlun/on</i> , <i>lēna</i> <i>lēwax</i> , <i>lēwəx</i> , <i>lēx</i>	<i>lewəṭ</i> , <i>leləṭ</i> <i>lewəṭ</i> , <i>leləṭ</i> <i>lewən</i> , <i>leli</i> <i>lewan</i> , <i>leli</i> <i>lele</i> <i>lewəx</i> , <i>lelax</i>

It is remarkable that some of the non-contracted forms (*ahat*, *ahit*; *hāwītu(n)*) are present in Jacobi's work but absent from Talay's. On the other hand, certain contracted forms of negated copula (*lēṭ*, *lēn*, *lēx*) are totally absent from Talay's description.

Summing up, the book of Sh. Talay conforms to high standards of quality. The linguistic evidence is presented with care and attention to minute but significant details. The book is a synchronic description of Khabur-dialects, but the author goes into diachronic analysis wherever he deems it relevant. Some of the dialects described in the book appear for the first time on the linguistic map not just as names, but as distinctive idioms whose linguistic profile is demonstrated by ample evidence. All this makes the book of Sh. Talay an important contribution to the research of Neo-Aramaic.

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<sup>6</sup> The transcription was harmonized with the system of transcription by Sh. Talay.

<sup>7</sup> I gathered the evidence for all Txuma varieties in the book of Sh. Talay.

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