CHAPTER 10

Anteriority to the Speech Time

10.1 Non-habitual Anteriority to the Speech Time

Introductory Remarks

The topic of this chapter are situations that are simply anterior to the speech time and thus have past time reference without a second reference point being involved. According to rules 3 and 7, such situations are incompatible with imperfectivity and complexity which, however, does not mean that they are necessarily perfective. Situations that are neutral with respect to perfectivity, i.e. non-actional situations, will remain neutral even if they are anterior to the speech time (cf. chapt. 5.2.1). The reference point of both main and subordinate clauses is the speech time; as to subordinate clauses, this means that their superordinate clause can only have present time reference. If the verb form that designates the intentum of this chapter is aspectual, it has to be specified as anterior-perfective, if it is temporal, it is specified as simply anterior.

The category under investigation may be combined with adverbs of time like yesterday: He shot him at six o’clock yesterday. These adverbs, however, are no reference points as the situations are not described as perfective / imperfective or anterior / posterior with respect to this adverbs as is the case in sentences like Yesterday at six o’clock he had already read the newspaper (cf. above, chapt. 7). Here, with an absolute tense, the adverb just determines the time reference.

10.1.1 Main Clauses

The usual verb form applied to designate anteriority to the speech time in both the questionnaires and the texts is qatal. The evidence is so ample that I will cite one example for each actional category only:

punctual
a. waṣṣal ʿa-madīni ḥilwi (Schu. vi, 7)
   ‘He came to a lovely town.’

telic
b. rāḥ ʿal-baḥr la-ḥatta yitṣayyad (Schu. vi, 2)
   ‘He went to the sea in order to cast for fish.’
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atelic
c. ḍiḥkit is-samke b-ṣawt ‘āli w ’alitlu (Schu. vi, 4)
‘The fish let out a guffaw and said to him.’

complex
d. da’’ al-bǟb is-sǟʿa sitti
‘He knocked at the door at six o’clock.’ (complex > punctual)

stative
e. ’inta l-layli lli fǟtit ma nimt mnīḥ (Schu. vi, 5)
‘You did not sleep well last night.’

According to my informants, the focus in da’’ al-bǟb (d) is clearly on the overall situation that is hardly conceived of as consisting of individual knocking sounds, and one is well advised to regard the situation as punctual.

Substitution Test

A replacement of qatal by kān qatal is rated as ungrammatical regardless of the actional category (type II). kān AP, on the other hand, is possible but denotes anteriority to a second reference point in the past if the participle indicates completed situations. To a question, as for instance: šu ‘imil mbǟriḥ ?, one could reply:

f. huwwe ’awwas il-kalb mbǟriḥ
‘He shot the dog yesterday.’

kǟn mǟwwis means that he had already shot the dog and would not be used as an answer to the above question but rather in contexts that are to be discussed in chapter 13. See also:

g. ’Āḥmad wuṣil mbǟriḥ is-sǟʿa sitti ‘al-bêt
‘Ahmad came home at six o’clock yesterday.’

h. ’Āḥmad kǟn wǟṣil mbǟriḥ is-sǟʿa sitti ‘al-bêt
‘Ahmad had already come home at six o’clock yesterday.’

With resultative verbs one has to distinguish if qatal can designate both the event and the resulting state such as libis ‘to put on; to wear’ or just the event, as for example ḥifiẓ ‘to learn by heart.’ In the former case, the event is designated