CHAPTER 20

Verbs of Perception

The topic of this chapter is the construction: šift / smiʿt + object + verb form ‘I saw / heard him do / doing.’ The verbs of perception may have past time (šift and smiʿt) or present time reference (šāyif and ‘ambisma’). The object governed by the verb of perception is identical with the subject of the object clause. With the verb of perception having past time reference, the verb of the object clause may orientate itself by the speech time or by the superordinate clause. After šāyif and ‘ambisma’, the situation of the subordinate clause is always imperfective and thus incompatible with punctuality and telicness (rule 1); after šift and smiʿt, however, it can be imperfective or perfective (cf. above, chapt. 3.9).

In order to investigate which verb forms are used after šāyif and ‘ambisma’, the informants were asked to imagine a boy who is standing at the window and informs his younger brother, who is not tall enough to look out of the window, about the things that are going on outside.

In the object clause ‘amyiqtul and, with states and verbs of motion, the AP are used:

punctual
a. šāyfu ‘amyaṭi xayyu l-miftâḥ
   ‘I can see him giving the key to his brother.’ (punctual > atelic)

telic
b. šāyfu nāzil ‘ala l-baḥr
   ‘I can see him going down to the sea.’ (telic > atelic)

c. ‘ambisma’u ‘amyiḥki iṣṣit ‘Anṭara
   ‘I can hear him telling the story of Antara.’ (telic > atelic)

atelic
d. šāyfu ‘amyištiġil biž-žnayni
   ‘I can see him working in the garden.’

1 ‘amšūf and sǟmiʿ are also possible, but šāyif and ‘ambisma’ are rated as more common.
155

Verbs of Perception

e. ʿambismaʾa ʿamtibki b-ʿūḏta
   ‘I can hear her weeping in her room.’

complex

f. ʿambismaʾu ʿambydiʾ ʿal-bǟb
   ‘I can hear him knocking at the door.’

stative

 g. šǟyfu nāṭir xayyu
    ‘I can see him waiting for his brother.’

Substitution Test

We have already seen that with most verbs of motion one can use ʿamyiqtul or the AP, the former describing the beginning of the movement, the latter one its middle phase. Thus, sentence b with nǟzil means that he is just on his way down to the sea; with ʿamyinzal he may still be at home and be busy with the preparations.

The difference between ʿamyiqtul and the AP as to resultative verbs has also been mentioned before: ʿamyiqtul refers to the event, the AP to the state:

h. šǟyfu nǟyim biž-žnayni
   ‘I can see him sleeping in the garden.’

i. šǟyfu ʿambynǟm biž-žnayni
   ‘I can see him falling asleep in the garden.’

j. šǟyfu ʾǟʿid ʾiddǟm baytu
   ‘I can see him sitting in front of his house.’

k. šǟyfu ʿamyiʾʿud ʾiddǟm baytu
   ‘I can see him sitting down in front of his house.’

With all other verbs, the AP is regarded as ungrammatical. The same holds true for qatal. byiqtul, however, is accepted:

l. šǟyfu byištigil biž-žnayni
   ‘I can see him working in the garden.’