CHAPTER 25

The Oppositions in the Verbal System

All criteria that have been established for the identification of aspectual verb forms (cf. chapt. 7) are met: in order to express situations that are anterior or posterior to the speech time, the dialect of Beirut makes use of two different verb forms to indicate perfectivity and imperfectivity:

huwwe žǟb il-mašrūbǟt ‘al-maḥall
‘He brought the beverages to the shop’

as opposed to:

huwwe kǟn ‘ambyžīb il-mašrūbǟt ‘al-maḥall lamma zāru xayyu
‘He was just bringing the beverages to the shop when his brother visited him.’

huwwe raḥyžīb il-mašrūbǟt ‘al-maḥall
‘He will bring the beverages to the shop’

as opposed to:

huwwe bykūn ‘ambyžīb il-mašrūbǟt ‘al-maḥall lamma byzūru xayyu
‘He will be bringing the beverages to the shop when his brother visits him.’

The same holds true for subordinate clauses:

‘amby’ül ʿinnu žǟb / kǟn ‘ambyžīb il-mašrūbǟt ‘al-maḥall…. etc.

In sentences with while there are also used two verb forms if the situation of the superordinate clause is punctual or telic:

lamma kǟn ‘amyi’ra ž-žaridi iža xayyu
‘While he was reading the newspaper, his brother came.’

After verbs of perception the use of qatal is subject to certain restriction but not impossible. If qatal is employed, the situation of the object clause is conceived of as a completed whole, i.e. perfectively, while the imperfective aspect is denoted by ‘amyiqṭul:'
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šāf ḥada 'awwas ḥṣānu
‘He saw someone shoot his horse.’

šāf ḥada ‘amby’awwis ḥṣānu
‘He saw someone shooting his horse.’

Habitual and non-habitual situations with identical time reference are normally expressed by different verb forms, which suggests a classification of the verb form used for non-habitual situations as aspectual. As pointed out above (chapt. 7), a temporal verb form is likely to express both habitual and non-habitual situations. In Beirut, however, one says:

žāb il-mašrūbāt ‘al-maḥall
‘He brought the beverages to the shop’

as opposed to:

kān yžīb il-mašrūbāt ‘al-maḥall
‘He used to bring the beverages to the shop.’

‘ambyžīb il-mašrūbāt ‘al-maḥall
‘He is just bringing the beverages to the shop’

as opposed to:

byžīb il-mašrūbāt ‘al-maḥall
‘He (usually) brings the beverages to the shop.’

Another criterion for the differentiation between aspectual and temporal verb forms is their orientation in main clauses. While temporal verb forms can orientate themselves in main clauses only by the speech time, an aspectual verb form may choose the speech time or a second reference point as its point of orientation (cf. chapt. 7). Unfortunately, all main-clause verb forms orientate themselves by the speech time so that we cannot draw any conclusions from this point.

The dialect of Beirut has thus an aspectual system that consists of three signa:

a. qatal for anterior-perfectivity
b. ‘amyiqṭul for imperfectivity
c. raḥyiqtul for posterior-perfectivity