NEGATIONS IN THE DIALECT OF ES-SALT, JORDAN

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1. Introduction

1.1 Negations

Negations belong to the diachronically most dynamic areas of the linguistic structure of Arabic. Thus, the system of negations in Classical Arabic clearly mirrors a period of transition during which a major innovation, the use of the rhetorically used interrogative pronoun mā as a negative particle, was gaining ground at the expense of the older, common-Semitic lā. Classical Arabic negative particles such as lam and lan very early disappeared from living speech, and laysa soon followed, only leaving insignificant remnants to our time. Later on, the powerful progress of mā was followed by a development of parallel nature: as soon as the originally more or less emphatic, stylistically marked mā became unmarked, a new stylistically marked form, the split-morpheme negation using the affirmative -ṣ developed and probably in a relatively short time spread to a vast area between Morocco and the southern part of Greater Syria. As different negative constructions occur frequently, they in many areas are typologically prominent features. As a dynamic and complex system, they constitute an intriguing subject of linguistic study.¹

The negations in the dialect spoken in the town of es-Salṭ and its neighbourhood were not chosen as the subject of this article on the ¹ It is therefore small wonder that Anton Spitaler in the mid-1960s suggested them as the subject for Manfred Woidich's dissertation, to continue the comparative dialect studies successfully introduced by Wolfdietrich Fischer (Die demonstrativen Bildungen der neuarabischen Dialekte, Diss. Erlangen 1953/1959) and Hans-Rudolf Singer (Neuarabische Fragewörter, Diss. Erlangen 1958). It soon appeared that merely the Egyptian Arabic negations were a material big enough to fill the pages of Woidich's dissertation (Negation und negative Sätze im Ägyptisch-Arabischen, Diss. München 1968). In a recent publication the negation in Maghrebine Arabic is dealt with in six contributions (Chaker & Caubet 1996).
strength of some unusual traits or idiosyncratic developments. Rather, they constitute a system typical of a mixed dialect displaying both sedentary and Bedouin elements, as well as developments characteristic of a society living in a rapid urbanization process. Earlier on, I have published mainly narrative texts representing the bedouinizing variety of speech used in traditional narrative style in the area, and discussed the typological nature of this dialect (Palva 1992, 1994). However, no systematic description of the dialect has been published thus far. This article is based on my recordings and written notes taken during different periods of fieldwork and visits to the area in 1965, 1970, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1981, and 1992.

1.2 Es-Salt and its neighbourhood: historical background

The town of es-Salt lies in the Transjordanian mountains about 20 km east of the river Jordan and about 25 km northwest of ‘Ammān, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Es-Salt is the administrative centre of the governorate of al-Balqā’. In 1220, during the later Ayyubids, a fort was built on the hill overlooking the town, and Ḥesbān had to give way to es-Salt as the chief town of al-Balqā’ (Gaudefroy-Demombynes 1923:67; Peake 1958:77, n. 6). At the beginning of the Ottoman rule, the condition of the area east of the river Jordan was chaotic. Unprotected cultivated areas were freely raided by Bedouins, and only the largest villages were able to protect themselves. In the whole district of al-Balqā’, es-Salt was the only one that could look after itself; all the other villages were deserted (Peake 1958:86). According to the Ottoman assessment rolls from the year 1596/97, es-Salt was the only market centre in al-Balqā’. The number of inhabitants in the whole Transjordan area was not more than 51,000, the majority of which lived in ‘Aqlūn (Hütteroth 1978:22). In the same assessment rolls the names of two quarters in es-Salt, Mahallat al-‘Awāmila and Mahallat al-‘Akrād, are attested for the first time (Dā’ūd 1994:238 and references in n. 2), a piece of information of relevance for the history of the sedentary-type dialect of the town.

J.L. Burckhardt, who in June/July 1811 visited es-Salt, mentions the town as “the only inhabited place in the province of Belka”. According to him, the town was strong enough to defend itself, and it did not pay xūva tribute to Bedouin tribes, except to the powerful Bani Ṣaxar. With other neighbouring tribes the people of es-Salṭ