FORM X OF THE VERB IN THE ARABIC DIALECTS OF EASTERN ARABIA

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In Classical Arabic (CLA), the main semantic values of Form X of the verb are as follows:1

(a) reflexive, in which the subject of the verb acts directly on itself, e.g. istaslama ‘to give oneself up’, ista’adda ‘to prepare oneself’, ista’gala ‘to hurry’ (sc. ‘to make oneself go quickly’)
(b) benefactive,2 in which the subject benefits as an indirect result of its action, e.g. istaxbara ‘to inform oneself’ (sc. ‘seek information for oneself’), ista’mala ‘to use’ (sc. ‘cause something to work for oneself’)
(c) petal,3 in which the subject seeks or demands something, e.g. ista’ta ‘to ask for a gift’, istanğada ‘to seek help’;
(d) ascriptive, in which the subject ascribes a quality to something, e.g. istaqada ‘to deem something to be good’, istawğaba ‘to judge something to be necessary’;
(e) transformative, in which the subject changes its state either (i) by its own actions, e.g. istawlā ‘to conquer’ (sc. ‘make oneself master (wali) of something’), or (ii) because of external causes, e.g. istahğara ‘to become like stone’.4

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1 Fleisch (1979: 319-21, 328), Wright (1896-98: 44-46).
2 Fleisch (1979: 319) terms this réfléchi indirect: le moyen.
3 The term is borrowed from Ingham (1994: 86). This value is closely related to the ‘benefactive’, since what is asked for is usually in relation to the subject, e.g. istaqfara ‘to ask for a pardon (for oneself)’.
4 X forms that have this ‘transformative’ sense are almost invariably denominatives. In case (i) they may be reflexives but are not necessarily so, e.g. ista’mala ‘to appoint someone a governor (‘amil)’. Contrast this with ista’mala ‘to use’, which in this ‘benefactive’ sense is not a denominative.
The 12th/13th century grammarian Ibn Yaṣṣṣūṣṣ5 regarded what are termed here the benefactive, petal, and ascriptive values of Form X as the dominant ones (al-ġālib) in CLA; the others he saw as variations on a 'change of state' (al-tahawwul min ḥāl ilā ḥāl) sense (i.e. (a) and (e) above) and these could not in his view be the basis for further analogical derivation (qiyās).

Unlike Form IV, of which values (a)-(c) of CLA Form X above are supposed, historically speaking, to be a reflexive development, Form X has survived and prospered in the Arabic dialects. In this paper, I shall examine how the semantics of Form X has evolved in the modern dialects of the Gulf littoral, as evidenced by a large database of Bahraini Arabic (BA). The question to be answered is how far the form-meaning relationship in this class of verbs has remained the same in BA as in CLA (that is, with categories (b)-(d) 'dominant') and if it has changed, in what directions. The standard CLA dictionaries—the Līsān al-ʿArab (= LA), Lane, Dozy, Hava,—provide the basis of the comparison. Comparisons with the use of Form X in the neighbouring dialects of central and southeastern Arabia and southern Iraq are also made, in so far as these are known and sufficiently well documented.6

Some 60 different Form X verbs occurred in the data.7 On the basis of the sentences in which they occurred, they can be roughly classified into the same semantic categories as above. Of these 60 verbs, almost half, 25, are not attested in CLA/MSA at all, or are attested but with a different meaning entirely. The categories in which most innovation appears to have occurred in BA are the (a) 'reflexive' and (e) 'transformative', categories regarded as marginal by Ibn Yaṣṣūṣṣ, both from the point of view of their frequency and acceptability as models for qiyās.

A large number of verbs in category (e), the commonest in the data (29), describe changes in human mental or emotional states. Here are

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5 Quoted in Fleisch (1979: 321).
6 The main references are Johnstone's general survey of the dialects of eastern Arabia done in the late 1950s (Johnstone 1967 = EADS); Brockett's study of the farming terminology of the Batinah coast of Oman of 1985 (Brockett 1985 = BRO); Woodhead and Been's dictionary of Baghdadi Arabic done in the 1960s (Woodhead and Been 1967 = W&B); and Ingham's study of central Najdi Arabic of 1994 (Ingham 1994 = ING).
7 The data are taken from conversations between c. 100 native speakers aged 40-70, illiterate or with little education, recorded and transcribed in situ in the mid 1970s. Data from educated speakers, which contained a number of other 'literary' Form X verbs not found in the uneducated data, have been left out of account here.