EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT ʿĀL, YĪʿūL ‘TO SAY’ IN EGYPTIAN ARABIC*

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1. Introduction

The idea of contributing to the Festschrift for our esteemed friend and colleague Kees Versteegh with an article on the verb ʿāl, yīʿūl (gāl, yigūl) ‘to say’ in Egyptian Arabic dialects and its various idiomatic uses, came to me when I was reading a draft of his lemma ‘Serial Verbs’, which he had written for the Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics.¹ In this lemma, he reconsidered my view of items like (01) as an originally paratactic but now grammaticalized construction in order to introduce a pseudo-complement,² and prefers to regard it as serialization, that is, as a serial verb construction, albeit not without hesitation.

(01)  huwwa raddi ʿalēk ʿallak ʾē?
      huwwa radd ʿalē-k ʿāl-l-ak ʾē
     he  answered to-you  said-to-you what
     “What did he answer you?” LAB 118,–8

Unfortunately, I do not share this view and I shall reaffirm my position in section 4 below. Since this pseudo-complementation is not the only case for ʿāl, yīʿūl to appear in contexts and functions that involve grammaticalization, it seemed appropriate to give an overview of several other cases where ʿāl, yīʿūl clearly has lost its original lexical meaning by a process known as ‘bleaching’ and acquired new meanings and developed into a function word. After making some brief remarks on the syntactic behaviour of ʿāl, yīʿūl as a lexical verb in section 2, several steps and ramifications in the history of ʿāl, yīʿūl will be described in

* I should like to thank Rudolf de Jong for going through an earlier draft of this article and giving me some valuable hints. Needless to say, any remaining errors are mine.
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section 3 based on data collected over the last 40 years mostly from written sources but also from some recordings of rural dialects. The starting point of these developments apparently is the use of 'āl, yīʿūl by the speaker to introduce reported speech\(^3\) on discourse level\(^4\) within a pragmatic strategy, namely introducing a direct or an indirect quote, be it the speaker's own words or the speech of somebody else, in order to show rejection and non-acceptance of an utterance, to give reasons for acting in a certain way, to explain intent, to make a comparison between two things or for other reasons. The final section—section 5—deals with a lexical aspect and gives some examples of the use of 'āl, yīʿūl with vocatives and in delocutive derivations.

2. On propositional level: direct vs. indirect speech

Here I will briefly describe a syntactical point, that is, the introduction of direct and indirect speech. Direct or quoted speech follows 'āl, yīʿūl as an asyndetic sentence without a complementizer:

(02) *ana mušʿaylālik ḥāti ṭaʿtūʿa*
“Did I not say to you, ‘bring an ashtray?’” RUH 112,-1;

(03) *ʿalilāha taʿāli uʿūdi maʿāya*
“She said to her, ‘sit down with me!’” FWQ 107,-7

(04) *nās kitīr baʿu yʿūlu f-nafṣuhum w ʿānā mālī*
“Many asked themselves, ‘what business is this of mine?’” BAHN 122,9

A sentence reporting indirectly what was said, however, may either be introduced by the complementizer *inn* (05, 06) or be connected asyndetically (07, 08):

(05) *iddakatra ʿālu inn aʿšābak taʿbāna šwayya*
“The doctors said that your nerves are a little bit off” HAM 95,7f

(06) *ʿāl innu ḥaynāmʿandina llēla diyyat wi bass*
“He said that he would sleep with us only that night” LAB 16,8

(07) *bhāba kkallim wiʿāl ḥaybāt barra*
“Daddy called and said that he would spend the night out of the house” LAY 113,3

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\(^3\) Following Güldemann et al. (2002, viii), I use the term ‘reported speech’ as a generic term for both direct and indirect speech.

\(^4\) In many languages, the verb ‘say’ constitutes a source of various pathways in grammaticalization that can lead to distinct types of function words, see Heine et al. (1993), and Heine et al. (2002, 261 ff).