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Evaluation of PhD thesis entitled  
 Valenční slovník arabských sloves/Valency Dictionary of Arabic Verbs  
 prepared by PhDr. Viktor Bielický from Charles University in Prague  
 under the supervision of doc. PhDr. Petr Zemánek, CSc. and consulted by  
 RNDr. Otakar Smrž, Ph.D.

The project underlying this dissertation is multifarious to say the least. Firstly, it is a study of valency of Arabic verbs shown on a broad background of Arabic verb grammar. Clearly, part of it is designed for general linguists, since for Arabists much of the general introductory notes on verbal derivation are commonplace knowledge. Is it then superfluous, unnecessary? After some reflection, however, I realised that this overview logically justifies the Author's aim: and it is to describe the valency of Arabic verbs and to show how the valency changes with the change of the so-called verbal pattern.

Secondly, Dr Bielický applies his theoretical considerations to a large sample of lexical units. The dictionary annexed to the dissertation contains some 4,000 verbs with detailed description of their valency and copious examples.

Easy work, one might surmise. Well, not at all, since it the problem of choosing a theoretical framework and then applying it in practice to Arabic is not an easy task. In dictionaries of Arabic produced in the West, verbal valency is indicated at random. Lane, Steingass follow classical Arabic approach and do not systematically note verbal valency. With Baranov's and Wehr's dictionaries verbal valency is regularly noted, but examples of usage are rare.

With Lucien Tesnière's "Éléments de syntaxe structurale" (1959) the problem of valency began to be regularly studied and special dictionaries devoted solely verbal valency appeared. No wonder that Arabic verbal valency was treated rather intuitively by the authors of dictionaries. At present, almost all major languages use electronic means to create vocabularies and have special data bases valency (cf. for instance "Das elektronische Wörterbuch deutscher Verben" by Institut für Deutsche Sprache). My own experience with valency started with the German dictionary *Wörterbuch zur Valenz und Distribution der deutscher Verben* by G. Helbig and W. Schenkel published in

1969. Since that time enormous work had been done on valency done. The results are summed up in the two-volume publication *Dependenz und Valenz/Dependency and Valency within the series Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* (HSK 25.1 and 25.2) edited by Vilmos Ágel, Ludwig M. Eichinger, Hans-Werner Eroms, Peter Hellwig, Hans Jürgen Heringer, Henning Lobin (Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter 2003). But as far as Arabic is concerned, nothing or rather little—as I learn from Dr Bielický's thesis—has been achieved so far. It seems that most of the research done is based on principles of case grammar. So, the method used by Dr Bielický is quite novel, and—what is equally important—represents an original Czech contribution to modern research of Arabic lexical system.

Classical dictionaries of Arabic tend to ignore the problem of valency leaving it to the students. They gain their knowledge by reading texts and finding out how the given verb is used. Since the problem concerns syntax, valency is essential in teaching and learning the language. But again: syntax is hardly researched as far as Arabic is concerned. And valency is not a trifle matter, especially for students of Arabic. Prepositions, as in many other languages, influence sometimes radically the meaning of the verb, as for instance (with acc.) أغنى means 'to enrich', but أغنى عن —'not to need' or 'render superfluous'.

Valency dictionaries serve first of all the purpose of defining current usage. From the work of Dr Bielický the student of Arabic will learn how to use the described 4,000 verbs of Modern Literary Arabic. But not only students should profit from the work. Also it will be useful for lexicographers in preparing dictionaries: they will have a ready blueprint for their work. As far as Classical Arabic is concerned, the essential types of valency and collocations are provided for by most dictionaries (Lane, Steingass, Hava). But the case Modern Literary Arabic is quite different: it is a well known fact that verbal syntax (i.e. verbal valency) in the living language is frequently modified. For instance, in Classical Arabic the verb *a'tā* should be used with two accusatives, but in the modern language the second may be introduced by the preposition *li-*, as shown in the example quoted on p. 47: *a'taytu t-tuffaḥata li-l-waladi*.

No wonder then that an initiative such as this undertaken by Dr Bielický is most welcome. On the one hand, it gives us a theoretical framework for his research, on the other—practical instrument to create an electronic dictionary of Arabic which would be permanently growing.

Dr V. Bielický decided to undertake a practical task of defining the system of verbal collocation in MLA. On the first glance, an easy task: to check how Arabic verbs are used syntactically. But only at the first glance. If we start

to study the matter quite a number of questions arise. First of all, it is the method of defining the collocations. Second, there is the choice of language: it could be Classical Arabic, it could be a dialect, Modern Literary Arabic and also the so called mixed language. The logical choice is MLA, since all the other varieties of Arabic influence it to a certain degree. Thirdly, there is the problem of the sources from which the quotations should be taken.

All these problems are discussed in detail and substantiated in Dr Bielický's thesis. His method is based on functional generative description which was applied in two Czech valency dictionaries: VALLEX a PDT-Vallex. This original approach had been elaborated by Czech linguists since 1970's and applied to research of valency. This approach to language continues the traditions of the Prague School. Valency is understood here as an inherent characteristic trait of a lexical entity. Dr Bielický duly describes both systems. This description hardly could be called it a strictly scientific work, but it is necessary for the outside reader who—as I—does not know the system. Really novel is his way of applying the system to Arabic. Again, one could argue that it is a purely mechanical work. But the whole idea is novel and its practical side is of paramount importance.

Within the system of verbal valency two types of elements are distinguished: actants and free circumstantials. This very much reminds similar elements in treating collocations which have either permanent elements or freely attached elements.

An interesting experiment is to compare from the point of valency between different derivational patterns of Arabic. The general assumption is that the patterns have larger number of actants, i.e. their valency is more developed. This seems to be rather obvious and describing it only to put in the categories of valency the derivational roots of Arabic (sometimes called "patterns") is not very novel.

In presenting the morphological structure of the Arabic verb (pp.17ff) it could be useful to apply the classification of affixes proposed by I. Mel'čuk way back in 1963, namely into prefixes, suffixes, infixes, transfixes and circumfixes.<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, when applying this system to Arabic, one notices that there are no prefixes in Arabic: all the 'i-, 'u- and 'a- elements in derivational patterns ('*indafa'a*, '*istamta'a*) or in imperative ('*idrib*, '*uskut*) are just prostheses appearing as a result of phonetical—not morphological—laws. Also in verbs of the type *takattab*- there is no *ta*- prefix, but the *ta-a- -a*-transfix. It is worth while considering such an interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> И.А. Мельчук, О «внутренней флексии» в индоевропейских и семитских языках, "Вопросы языкознания", №4, 1963, стр. 27-40.

The pattern VII (together with VIII) is interesting since the passive voice is a relatively new phenomenon. Mainly it is reflexive, as stated by Dr Bielický, but also it could render middle voice: *inḥalla* may be passive (to be dissolved by someone), but also middle (to dissolve itself). Cf. Russian: *дом строится*, definitely is neither passive nor reflexive. In the quoted example, a parliament cannot dissolve itself, since it is dissolved, but there is no active subject. The same applies to the quoted examples: *inqasama*, *in'aqada*, *inḡalaqa*, *inṭafa'a* etc.

Material base for the dictionary prepared by Dr Bielický (full description of 3707 verbs!) was provided by the existing large corpora of Arabic: ArabiCorpus, Corpus Linguae Arabicae (CLARA) and the Czech Prague Arabic Dependency Treebank. All cover Modern Literary Arabic, which of course is influenced by Classical Literary Arabic. They are really representative and reflect the present state of Arabic Literary Language.

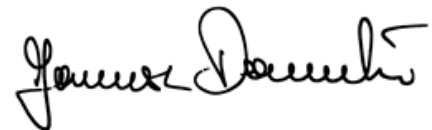
The author uses quite a vast literature (mainly English, but also German, and of course Czech) and there are only few omissions one would dare to point out to, as for instance quite an essential study of valency by Susen Faulhaber: *Verb Valency Pattern: A Challenge for Semantics-Based Accounts* (though applied to English only) Berlin/New York 2011. I would also strongly advise to use *Mu'ğam al-luḡa al-'arabiyya al-mu'āšira* (Cairo 2007) edited by the eminent Egyptian linguist Aḥmad Muḥtār 'Umar. I have compared the item *تَبَلَّغَ* in Bielický's dictionary and in Muḥtār's. Muḥtār notes the use of the preposition *بـ* with it (*تَبَلَّغَ بِالْخَبَرِ، تَبَلَّغَ بِالْقَلِيلِ*), which is not noted by Bielický. Apparently this does not appear in the corpora. In other words: the work done by Bielický is just the nucleus which can be developed and enlarged. Another useful dictionary, containing collocations is *Mu'ğam al-'arabiyya al-klāsikiyya wa-al-mu'āšira* by Yūsuf Muḥammad Riḍā (Beirut 2006). There is an interesting Internet dictionary of Arabic *Al-Ma'ānī* (almaany.com) but verbal valency is not systematically indicated. Of course, the essential dictionaries presenting verbal conjugation (and especially irregular verbs in Arabic (such as) are quoted in the dissertation. But the best of them all: Э. В. Яковленко *Неправильные глаголы арабского языка. Грамматический справочник* (Moscow 2000), is missing. Well the young generation!

The work done by Dr Victor Bielický is enormous, and the effort is worthy of the results: an instrument for preparing a viable and functional dictionaries of Arabic and Arabic-foreign dictionaries was created and can be applied in practice with success. The advantage of the system lies in the fact that the it is open: the person using it chooses the lexemes and examples, which easily are provided automatically.

The four goals set by Dr Bielický (1. theoretical bases for analysing Arabic verbal valency, 2. applying the system of functional generative description to Arabic, 3. methodology of preparing a valency dictionary, 4. describing the structure of the dictionary) are attained and realized with utmost care (I have been able to spot one misspelled word: p. 6 بدبوس instead of بدبوس). I repeat: we have a powerful instrument of analysing Arabic verbs and creating dictionaries of Arabic (not only valency dictionaries). It will most certainly serve lexicographers in the first place. They will be able to built up-to-date dictionaries of different content, according to the goal set by the author. The material can be easily adapted to such dictionaries. Moreover, the use of multiple examples renders bilingual dictionaries much more reliable, since a chance of committing a mistake are minimal.

Personally, as a co-author of a traditional Arabic-Polish dictionary and a grammar of modern literary Arabic I would consider using Dr Bielecký's dictionary and the examples analysed by him as a base for rewriting my own work: the data provided by him and potentially present in the system devised by him provide a viable basis for such a reconsideration of Arabic grammatical system.

Therefore I would like to state that the doctoral dissertation presented by Dr Viktor Bielický deserves the highest appreciation: summa cum laude.



Warsaw, June the 8th 2015