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Circumstantial Qualifiers: Adverbial expressions at different language levels in Gulf Arabic Dialects

This paper aims at shedding light on one aspect of Gulf Arabic syntax viz. the dialect's use of circumstantial qualifiers. The results presented draw from a project on circumstantial qualifiers in Semitic languages where Gulf Arabic is one of the varieties of Arabic under study.¹ This study of circumstantial qualifiers subsumes adverbial qualifiers on phrase, clause and discourse levels and is thus concerned with a broader concept than what is traditionally understood by circumstantial (so called *haal*) clauses in Arabic.² The aim in adopting a broader perspective on circumstantial (adverbial) qualifiers is to find more general principles governing adverbial qualifiers above the level of simple phrases in Semitic languages in general. As for the Arabic dialect part of the study, the goal is to determine what expressions adverbial qualifiers at all levels assume in Gulf Arabic dialects.

The survey of circumstantial qualifiers in Semitic languages in general has proved to be a case study of context dependent semantics. It is the study of how adverbial qualifiers are created by simply appending a phrase/clause/text to another phrase/clause/text. The clause can be appended syndetically or asyndetically and the quality of the adverbial qualification – its specific value or interpretation, its semantic content – has to be inferred from context. This phenomenon also seems to be characteristic of Gulf Arabic in general in that these dialects have comparatively few syntactic markers. Hence, the interpretation of a proposition's specific semantic content often - and to a large extent - depends on context. At the same time, and working in polarity with this principle of semantics from context, the semantics of the governing elements in the sentence also seem to be influenced by or maybe put restraints on the syntactic expressions of the circumstantial qualifiers. The study on circumstantial qualifiers in Gulf Arabic is based mainly on large parts of an unprecedented database comprising 30 hours of speech and representing 100 informants from 25 different towns and villages in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, (eastern) Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The interviews took place mostly in people's homes during the years of 2006-2008 and were recorded by myself and by local staff.³

¹ Circumstantial qualifiers in Semitic. A comparative investigation of adjuncts expressions in Arabic and Hebrew - Bo Isaksson, Helene Kammensjö, Maria Persson, Sven-Olof Dahlberg, funded by the Swedish Research Council.

² See for example Isaksson, Bo. 2007. "Circumstantial qualifiers in Arabic. A comparative Semitic approach to some uses of adjuncts in Classical Arabic based on the story of Ta'abbata Šarrā." in Bo Isaksson, Mats Eskhult, Gail Ramsay (eds.) *The professorship of Semitic languages at Uppsala University 400 years : jubilee volume from a symposium held at the University Hall, 21-23 September 2005* Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis More in-depth studies on this and other aspects of circumstantial qualifiers in Semitic languages were presented by Bo Isaksson, Sven-Olof Dahlgren, Helene Kammensjö and Maria Persson at Nordiska semitistsymposiet , Kivik, Sweden, 13-16/8 2008

³ The corpus was collected a part of a larger project on the typology of verb syntax and TMA morphology in Gulf Arabic, "Verb syntax in Gulf Arabic dialects", funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. I wish to thank this organization for granting the permission to use the data in the present project. I'm also grateful to my Omani colleagues at the Gulf Arabic Programme in Buraimi, Oman for assisting me in the process of recording data and for willingly answering various questions along the road.