The Arabic Language Today. By A.F.L. Beeston. 2006 (reprint in the Georgetown Classics in Arabic Language and Linguistics of the 1970 edition). Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. xiv,115 pp. Paper. $19.95.

This is a reprint of a most interesting treatise on aspects of Arabic linguistics penned by a superb Arabist very much in the very best of the British Orientalist tradition. It continues, in many ways, the author's well-known Written Arabic: An Approach to the Basic Structures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

"Freddie" Beeston (1911-1995), as he was known to friends and colleagues alike, was a delightful chap whom I met at several conferences over the years. He was first the Keeper of Oriental Books and Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University before being appointed to the prestigious Laudian Chair of Arabic at that institution in 1955. I quite agree with Oxford Arabist Clive Holes, who writes in the foreword (p. xii) that this book's "shortness is deceptive, for it is a demanding read for the seasoned Arabist and the comparative linguist alike ...". Not only was Beeston a seasoned Arabist, but he also was a leading authority in Epigraphic South Arabian studies.

Chapter 1, "Introduction and Historical Background" (pp. 1-5), refers to Arabic as a single language, and yet, quite oxymoronically, affirms that Moroccan Arabic and Iraqi Arabic "differ to the point of mutual unintelligibility" (p. 1). In my opinion, Arabic is not a single language, but rather is much like Chinese in that it has a relatively uniform written manifestation wherever it is used, but contains spoken varieties which are very much separate languages (e.g., Cantonese, Shanghainese, and Mandarin, e.g., are not mutually intelligible, and are thus distinct languages). Of course, many native speakers of both Chinese and Arabic (and some linguists) will deny the aforementioned statement that either one is not a single language, sometimes vociferously, and this is still yet another striking parallel between the pair.

In his discussion of Maltese, Beeston asserts that it “is unquestionably an Arabic vernacular” (p. 2). Presumably, what the author means by this is that it is an Arabic dialect from a historical point of view and should today be regarded as a new Semitic language in its own right. This perspective has also been my position for a good number of years now. He is quite right to observe that “S[tandard] A[rabic] is unused and unintelligible in Malta” (ibid.). Moreover, the Maltese do not consider themselves Arabs, nor is Malta ever considered to be a part of the Arab world per se.

Chapter 2 is devoted to phonology (pp. 6-13). The author considers the number of Arabic consonants to be 24 (rather than the usually cited 28), since he considers ʔiᵵbaaq (better known as tafxiim ‘emphasis’ or pharyngealization-velarization) as a common phonetic feature across four phonemes (p. 6). This analysis is possible. It is noteworthy, however, that Arabic colloquials have more than four emphatic phonemes, and even Classical Arabic has an emphatic /ɫ/.

Let me turn to a few phonetic details. The sound [n] is called a ‘nasalized’ stop (p. 8). This is incorrect; rather it is a nasal stop. Beeston mentions that [g] in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic is a survival of ancient Arabic (p. 8, fn. 2). Although */g/ is certainly Proto-Semitic, it cannot be reconstructed for Proto-Arabic nor for Proto-Colloquial Arabic. The reader is referred to my essay, “Arabic /žiim/: A Synchronic and Diachronic Study,” Linguistics 79 (1972:31-72) for the intricate details.

Chapter 3, “The Script” (pp. 14-19), presents historical details about the development of the Arabic alphabet. Beeston maintains that both Latin and Arabic scripts go back to “Old Phoenician” (p. 14, mentioned twice). Since there is no “Old” Phoenician language per se, "Phoenician" is the correct designation for the language which gave the alphabet in all of its varied manifestations to the world.

Chapter 4, "The Word" (pp. 20-23), explains the nature of root and pattern morphology. Beeston's position on this is quite clear: "All Arabic verbs can be analysed on the root + pattern principle" (p. 23). Recently, some linguists have challenged this perspective claiming that the root does not exist and that Arabic morphology is word-based. That root letters seem to be abstracted by the word-formation strategy of the language can even be shown by the loanwords mentioned (p. 23): – ʔasaaqifa 'bishops', hataalira 'Hitlers', and masaalina 'Mussolinis', as well as by evidence from aphasia and hypocoristics. There is now a sizeable body of literature on the latter two subjects.

Chapter 5, "Entity Terms: I" (pp. 24-33), offers some details pertaining to participles, definition, number and gender, pronouns, demonstratives, and certain aspects of derivational morphology. Beeston notes some little known facts with which I am in firm agreement, viz., that waaqiʕiyya translates both 'reality' and 'realism', and ʔimbaraaᵵuuriyya is both 'empire' and 'imperialism' (p. 26).

Chapter 6, "Amplification of Substantives" (pp. 34-40), deals with adjectives, the annexion structure (ʔiđaafa), and prepositional amplification. Concerning annexion, Beeston is correct in his observation that assikkatu lħadiid 'the railway' is gaining ground over the original coinage of sikkatu lħadiid, lit., 'the way of iron'.

Chapter 7, "Syntactic Markers of Nouns" (pp. 41-45), comments on the vowel endings or ʔiʕraab (glossed by the author as 'Arabicization', p. 43). The use of spoken Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) would make for an interesting monograph in its own right as the variation of deleted vowel endings is directly tied to colloquial influence. One should strive to set up some guidelines for the successful calibration of the extent of colloquial influence.

Chapter 8, “Entity Terms: II” (pp. 46-52), discusses colors and numerals, among other complicated topics. Every Arabist will certainly agree with the statement that the numeral system in MSA “is complicated” (p. 51). The term “polarity” has long been used in Semitic linguistics to explain this phenomenon, viz., masculine nouns take feminine-looking numbers and vice versa.

Chapter 9, “Theme and Predicate” (pp. 53-60), notes, among other common sentence types, the ubiquitous Arabic structure of the colloquial English type: “This guy, he ups and hits me,” and “This guy, I ups and hits him” (p. 53).

Chapter 10, “The Verb” (pp. 61-76), explains the ten common verbal forms. Lest the reader come away from this chapter with the impression that the system is a very neat package, Beeston notes that Form II ʕabbara ʕan ‘to express’ “bears no easily traceable relationship to the primary stem verb ʕabara ‘to cross’ (p. 65). I see no justification, however, for Beeston’s claim that the aforementioned Form II verb is “derived from the substantive ʕibaara ‘mode of expression’ (ibid.). Rather, I believe the correct formulation would be to posit a link or relationship between the verb ʕabbara and the noun ʕibaara in terms of the root and the various vocalic patterns associated with this particular root. Moreover, Beeston is quite right to emphasize the tremendous productivity of the verbal system by noting that, although there is no such verb as tajaasasa recorded in the dictionaries, nevertheless an Arab would instantaneously understand tajaasasuu to mean ‘they spied on each other’ (ibid.).

Beeston is very much the linguistic iconoclast in that he destroys (once and for all) the following myth – viz., that it is an inaccurate (he says “totally false” [p. 65, fn. 1], which might be hyperbolic) generalization to maintain that Form II is an intensive in that kassara ‘to smash’ and qattala 'to massacre' are "rarities with hardly any parallel in the whole lexicon" (ibid.).

Chapter 11, "Amplification of the Predicate" (pp. 77-81)," discusses so-called ħaal-clauses (circumstantial clauses), among other significant topics, such as prepositions, which Beeston says are "not a clearly defined word class" (p. 78). He is correct to maintain that "a good many concepts which in English receive expression by prepositions are rendered in Arabic by adverbially marked substantives ..." (ibid.).

Chapter 12, "Clause Conversion" (pp. 82-86), Chapter 13, "Functionals" (pp. 87-93), and Chapter 14, "Conditional Structures" (pp. 94-97) contain numerous examples explicating the syntactic structures of the language, while Chapter 15, Word Order" (p. 98-100), affirms that a defined entity "normally precedes an undefined one" (p. 99).

The final chapter, "Lexicon and Style" (pp. 101-106) shows Beeston at his best. Surely, his vast reading in Arabic is responsible for his profound linguistic intuition about the structure of the Arabic lexicon. One such insight is yet another iconoclastically penetrating remark, viz., that the language is famous for its exceptional richness of synonyms. He asserts that "most cases of alleged synonymy are at best partial, and this is a phenomenon of all languages" (p. 102). He, however, goes on to report: "What is unusual about Arabic is the extent to which this phenomenon is countered by the device of hendiadis: the use of two words with different but overlapping semantic spectra to denote the area of overlap" (ibid.). This point should be kept in mind when using Dilworth B. Parkinson's Using Arabic Synonyms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

The book ends with an appendix on the styles of Arabic script (pp. 107-109) followed by a brief bibliography (pp. 111-112) and index (pp. 113-115). There are two errors to report in the bibliography: The coauthor of the famous 1957 Arabic textbook (An Introduction to Modern

Arabic, Princeton: Princeton University Press) is R. B. Winder, and the editor of Hans Wehr's A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (numerous editions) is J Milton Cowan (p. 112). Also, the index lists 'aspirations' as occurring on p. 89 (p. 113). This is not the case.

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