

Diachronic Development and Language Contact: The Case of the Syriac Verbless Clause

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In Syriac, the verbless clause can be constructed either without a copula, as in (1), or with a copula, as in (2):

- (1) Syriac Peshitta (latter half of the 2nd cent.)
wʿenā ʿaprā (ʿ)nā wqetmā
and+I dust I and+ash
'and I am dust and ash' (Gen. 18.27)
- (2) *Demonstration 7* by Aphrahat (fl. 337-345)
dʿenā ʿitay ʿaprā wqetmā
QUOT+I EX+mine dust and+ash
'I am dust and ash' (337.10-11)

Wertheimer (2002) has recently proposed that the distribution of these two patterns is at least partially determined by structural factors (the copula does not occur with participial predicates) and stylistic features (word order, clarity of expression, and Greek influence). Wertheimer's study did not, however, consider the history of these two patterns in Syriac. In this paper, I show that there is a significant diachronic difference in the attestation of the two patterns. In the earliest Syriac, the pattern with a copula was much less common than that without one. Throughout the history of Syriac, however, this distribution changed, and the verbless clause pattern with a copula became increasingly more common. It is argued that this increase in the use of the copula is to be attributed to contact with Greek. More specifically, the Syriac verbless clause pattern with a copula was extended from a minor use pattern to a major use pattern under the influence of the Greek verbal copula *einai* 'to be'. This development represents a type of contact-induced change termed GRAMMATICAL REPLICATION, which Heine and Kuteva (2006: 49) define as "a process whereby a language, called the replica language (R), creates a new grammatical structure (Rx) on the model of some structure (Mx) of another language, called the model language (M)." Other examples of GRAMMATICAL REPLICATION in Greek-Syriac language contact can be found in the development of the conjunctive particle *den* 'but, and then' from earlier Aramaic **ʾōdayn*, in the increase in the use of the adverbial ending *-āʾit*, and in the development of a resultative perfect from the **qattil* nominal pattern, to name only a few.

Bibliography

Heine, B. and T. Kuteva. 2005. *Language Contact and Grammatical Change*. Cambridge.
Wertheimer, A. 2002. "Syriac Nominal Sentences," *JSS* 47: 1-21.