

Do you still love Feiruz? The modal *bə'i* in spoken Arabic from Syria

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Résumé: *Cet article examine les sens discursifs du verbe modal *bə'i* (significations générales: rester, demeurer, continuer à faire) en arabe parlé dans deux aires dialectales de Syrie: Damas et Alep. La majorité des exemples proviennent d'Alep et ses environs, où l'usage du modal en question est - dans notre perception - beaucoup plus fréquent que dans la région de Damas. Tout en analysant les sens véhiculés par ce modal dans le contexte discursif, nous abordons aussi certains aspects reliés au processus de grammaticalisation que ce verbe est en train de subir. Nous analysons ses couches morphosémantiques à partir du stage de verbe plein, en passant par le stage d'auxiliaire verbal qui exprime des modalités temporelles-aspectuelles et arrivant au stage de verbe dé-catégorialisé et particule. Occasionnellement, nous faisons référence au verbe synonyme *ba'a* en arabe du Caire en vue de comparer les sens discursifs de *bə'i* / *ba'a* dans deux variétés distinctes de l'arabe colloquial et mettre en évidence certaines différences sensibles.*

Mots-clés : *modalités, modalisateur, marqueur, décatégorialisation, couches sémantiques, actes illocutionnaire, grammaticalisation*

Abstract: *This paper examines the discursive meanings of the modal verb *bə'i* (general meanings: to stay, remain, keep doing) in Arabic spoken in two dialectal areas from Syria: Damascus and Aleppo. Most of the examples are related to Aleppo area, where the use of the modal in question is - in our perception - much more frequent than it is in Damascus area. Analyzing the meanings conveyed by this modal within the discursive context, we approach at the same time some aspects related to the grammaticalization process this verb undergoes. We analyze its morphological and semantic layers starting with the stage of full verb, continuing with that of verbal auxiliary conveying temporal-aspectual modalities, and arriving to the stage of de-categorized verb and particle. We sporadically refer to the synonym verb *ba'a* in Egyptian Arabic from Cairo in order to compare the discursive meanings of the modal *bə'i* / *ba'a* in two distinct varieties of colloquial Arabic and point out to some sensible differences.*

Key words: *modalities, modalizer, marker, de-categorialization, semantic layers, illocutionary acts, grammaticalization*

Introduction

This paper continues a series of articles (Firanescu: 2000, 2002, 2003, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c) devoted to modal verbs in colloquial Arabic; it examines the discursive meanings of the modal verb *bə'i* (general meanings: to stay, remain, keep doing) in Arabic spoken in two dialectal sub-areas from Syria, Damascus and Aleppo. In both of them the verb *baqiya-yabqā* from Standard Arabic is present in the phonetic shape *bə'i-(b)yəb'a*. While sometimes it is a full verb - meaning 'to stay', 'to remain' - other times it is a modal semi-auxiliary used in compound (serial) verbal structures where it conveys temporal-aspectual modal meanings such as 'to keep doing', 'to continue'. As noted by Lentin (2006: 553) referring to the dialect of Damascus, "*bə'i ~ba'a*, imperfect *byəb'a*, is used as verb of existence, and as continuative or inchoative auxiliary; it also appears in the apodosis of conditionals or along with imperatives, meaning 'well then'".

As we will show further, in both areas in question, there are also two particles (frozen forms) derived from the past and, respectively, the present form of the verb in question: *bə'a* and *(y)əb'a* (expressing various temporal-aspectual nuances from persistence to consequence and purpose).

Although the two concerned linguistic areas, Aleppo and Damascus, are treated in dialectology as 'distinct' (the first belonging to the North Syrian variety with Mesopotamian influence, the later to the North Levantine group), we have chosen to approach the modal *bə'i* in both areas within the frame of the present article, having in view that this is a discursive approach involving semantic and pragmatic aspects that obviously - as the examples demonstrate - are very similar in the two areas (unlike the phonetic aspects that may be considered as elements of distinctiveness), thus allowing us to treat them together. Lentin (1997) devotes to the values of this modal in spoken Arabic from the Middle East a part of the valuable chapter fourteen (on verbal auxiliaries) of his doctorate thesis; most of the values indicated by Lentin for the extended area of the Middle East may be identified as well in the Syrian areas that concern us. Also, the discursive values of the same modal signaled by Feghali (1928: 57-58; 103) for the Lebanese dialects are similar to those that we have identified for the Syrian area in question.

When generically referring to the verb discussed within this article, we adopt the simplified, conventional transcription *bə'i*. We should nevertheless indicate that, in the concerned areas, there are in fact sensibly different phonetic realizations (as showed below) of the phoneme that we symbolize by 'ə' (mid-central unrounded vowel). In the examples, however, we will use a phonetic transcription as close as possible to the effective phonetic realizations. The phonetic transcription for the present form is *(b)yəb'a*.

The term 'grammaticalization' is understood here in the sense defined by Hopper & Traugott (1993: 2) as a "subset of linguistic changes through which a lexical item in certain uses becomes a grammatical item, or through which a grammatical item becomes more grammatical". We are mainly interested in observing to which extent the general principles (Layering, Divergence, Specialization, Persistence and De-categorialization) of the grammaticalization process detailed by Hopper

(1991: 22) may apply to this specific verb in spoken Arabic from Syria. Some observations formulated here concern the various temporal-aspectual modalities expressed by the verb *bə'i* and the related particles *bə'a* and *(y)əb'a*, linked to the category of 'inchoative' in a large sense (cf. Anghelescu, 2000: 343).

Also, we shall sporadically refer here to *ba'a* in Egyptian Arabic from Cairo (without entering into details (as we have already analyzed them in an article included in the Proceedings of Aida 5th, see Firanescu, 2002) in order to compare the discursive meanings of the modal *bə'i*/*ba'a* in two distinct varieties of colloquial Arabic and point out to some sensible semantic differences.

The corpus is mostly formed by examples we collected and recorded (or tape-recorded) during our stay in both Aleppo and Damascus on several occasions; some examples are selected - for their peculiarity or for the necessity of comparing linguistic facts - from the dialectological literature. The examples recorded in Aleppo are indicated by (A) and those from Damascus by (D). For methodological purposes, the examples are grouped considering morphologic-syntactic criteria related to the status of the verb *bə'i* as: I. full verb (independent; linking verb); II. modal semi-auxiliary (we analyze separately past, present and imperative forms); III. de-categorized verb (modal temporal-aspectual marker; particle).

I. Full verb

Here are some phonetic considerations (the conjugation of the full verb is given below for each of the two areas):

- In Damascus and around it, the pronunciation of the verb is *bə'i* at the past form, and *(b)yəb'a* at the present. The particle *bə'a* is pronounced, in general, effectively *bə'a*, but sometimes *be'a* ('e' after 'b') or *ba'a*; in all situations the hamza (pronounced instead of *qāf* from Standard Arabic) is non-emphatic. The mid-central vowel symbolized by 'ə' inclines towards 'e'.
- In Aleppo and the neighborhood, the pronunciation of the verb is close to the Damascus form - *bə'i* - but the pronunciation of hamza being affected by emphasis, the vowel after 'b' has three effective realizations: close to the open-mid central unrounded vowel 'ɜ' (approximate phonetic transcription *bɜ'i*); as the close central unrounded vowel 'i' (*bi'i*); as the close-mid back rounded vowel 'o' (*bo'i*). Present: *yəb'a* (with the variant *yəb'ɜ*). As a specific phonetic trait of Aleppo area, the emphasis often affects the pronunciation of the vowels even in words which do not contain emphatic consonants. In the case of the particle *bə'a*, the pronunciation of hamza (replacing the emphatic *qāf*) is almost always emphatic; thus, the two vowels in the word are affected by emphasis. Especially the second one is realized in the speech close to the open-mid central unrounded vowel 'ɜ' (like in 'mother'): *ba'ɜ* or even *bɜ'ɜ*. In rural zones, however, hamza is often replaced by the consonant 'g', the pronunciation of the particle becoming 'bəga' or 'bəgə' (with 'ə' inclined towards 'e').
- In both cities and their neighborhoods, the sound *qāf* may be heard at some speakers, especially at those raised or living in villages. Our impression is that in villages *qāf* is more often kept in the pronunciation than it is in urban areas; not only that of the verb *bə'i* and its forms, but in general, in words containing *qāf*. This observation is available for Damascus area as well, but the fact seems to us more obvious in Aleppo area.

Conjugation (as it prevails in cities)

Aleppo (with emphasis affecting more or less the whole body of the word)

Past

'ana b'īt
'ente b'īt
'enti b'īti
huwe bə'i (bī'i, bo'i)
hiye bə'yet (b3'yet, bo'yet)
naḥne b'īna
'entu b'ītu
henne(n) bə'yu (b3'yu, bi'yu, bo'yu)

Damascus (no emphasis)

Past

'ana bə'ēt / b'ēt
'ente bə'ēt / b'ēt
'enti bə'ēti / b'ēti
huwe bə'i
hiye bə'yet
naḥne bə'ēna / b'ēna
'entu bə'ētu / b'ētu
henne bə'yu (or more rare variant bə'u).

Present

The present forms are phonetically very similar in Damascus and Aleppo with slight differences consisting in: 1. the emphasis that affects the realization of the sound hamza in the Aleppo pronunciation (unlike the Damascus pronunciation characterized by a light hamza) and 2. The forms corresponding to he/*huwe* and they/*henne* may be pronounced, more often than in Damascus (where this also may happen, but much rarely), without the vowel 'ə', as *b-yb'a* and respectively *b-yb'u*.

Damascus and Aleppo

'ana b-əb'a
'ente b-təb'a
'enti b-təb'i
huwe b-y(ə)b'a
hiye b-təb'a
naḥne b-nəb'a
entu b-təb'u
henne b-y(ə)b'u

1.1. Independent verb

As full verb used independently, *bə'i* means 'to remain', 'to stay' (as opposed to 'to leave a place') and has full conjugation. We should note that its use is parallel to that of the synonym verbs *qall* (used more in Damascus) and *tamm* (used in Aleppo - where seems to be interchangeable with *qall* - but only rarely met in Damascus).

1. *Bāba bə'i/ qall bə-l-bēt.* (D)

Māma bə'yet / qallet bə-l-bēt.

Bāba bə'i/ tamm bə-l- bēt. (A)

Māma bə'yet/ tammət bə-l-bēt.

(Daddy stayed/ remained home. Mom stayed/ remained home.)

2. *Naħne nəħla' 'a-ḡ-ḡay'a, henne b-y(ə)b'u taħət, bə-l-(ə)mdīne.* (D)

(We go to the village, they stay/ remain here [down], in town)

3. *'əmmi bas mawjūde halla' bə-l-kar(ə)m. Bāba w Maysūn w-əl-jamā'a kəlleyyāton bo'yu b-ħalab.* (A)

(Only my mother is now at the plantation. My father, Maysun and all the others remained in Aleppo.)

Active participles

The active participles would certainly deserve a larger room for discussion. We limit ourselves here to mentioning them. There are two parallel series of forms, both equally used in Aleppo and Damascus areas. The first series is formed by *bē'i* (masculine singular), *bē'ye* (feminine singular), and *bə'yīn* (dual and plural, regardless of the gender). The pronunciation of the vowel after 'b' as close-mid front unrounded vowel 'e' (long in the singular forms and short in the dual/plural form) prevails; but this vowel may be pronounced as well as a long mid-central 'ə', inclined towards 'e' in Damascus, and towards 'o' in Aleppo (as an effect of the emphasis affecting hamza). The second series is composed by forms ending in '-ān' (with a short 'a' in the plural form) which is common in the formation of the active participles in various dialects: *bə'yān*, *bə'yāne*, *bə'yanīn*.

The parallel forms from each series have in general similar meaning, and they are interchangeable in most of the communication situations; they usually may occur instead of the verb *bə'i* at the present or past tenses, conveying its literal meaning - to remain / stay in a place - as showed in the following example:

4. *Lā, əl-wulād b-yəb'u / bə'yīn / bə'yanīn bə-l-bēt.* (D, A)

The children [will] remain / stay home.

The formulation using either one of the two forms of the active participle or the verb is validated by the informants in a communication situation which would be: the wife announces the husband that the children would not accompany them in the visit that they, as adults, are preparing to go for.

In specific contexts, however, the preference goes for the forms of the second series, which seem to be related to a temporary 'remaining' in a place, with a nuance of 'waiting for', connected with an event that is expected to occur (as

the return of a person or a time scheduled for departure, etc). Consider the context: a person A. meets by chance a family of friends, accompanied by their children, in a public place; A. would like to have a longer conversation with them, but he /she is forced to first leave for a short while, with the intention to return to the meeting place within a reasonable time. In such specific situation, informants expressed their preference for the second series as in the examples:

5. *Ya ḥsāra, lāzim alḥa' šūf Marwān 'abəl ma ysakkir əl-maḥəll, bas ma bṭāwel, bəddi arja' la-'and-kon. Bə'yanīn šī noṣṣ sā'a? (D)*

(What a pity, I have to make it and see Marwan before he closes the store, but I will not stay with him long, I will come back to you. Are you remaining here for about half an hour? - discursive value in the context: are you remaining here 'waiting for me'?).

Example 6 (D)

'Ema ṭṭalla'-lik et-tallāje b-əl-ḡərfe ?

'Ayy wa'ət, bas 'abəl ma iju ṣḥābī yaḥdūnī ?

Laaa, lēš? Msāfra l-yōme ši ?!

Lā', bas jāyīn yaḥdūnī 'as-sab'a 'a ši maḥall net'aššā.

A. 'Aaah ! Bə'yāne 'enti ma'nātā ! Bə'a ma tsāfri l-yōm ! (D)

A. When [should I] carry the fridge up to your room?

B. At any time, but before my friends come to take me.

A. Noo, why? Are you leaving today?

B. No, but they are coming to pick me up to some place for dinner, around seven.

A. Aaah, that means you are going to stay! So, you are not leaving today!

Interestingly, a possible active participle derived from the synonym verb *ḡall* would not be appropriate in this situation: the active participle *ḡalyāne* was rejected by the majority of the speakers we asked about this word. Some of them infirmed its existence; however, some other informants did accept the existence of such a participle and its validity in the context. If the active participles of *bə'i* were indeed preferable to those of *ḡall* in specific contexts, that would prove the vitality of this morphologic form, which would have significant impact on questioning the de-categorialization process.

1.2. Linking verb or copula

We prefer to designate this function of *bə'i* by the term 'linking' verb (borrowed from Cowell, 2005: 452 - "verb complemented by a predicate which can be of any sort: verbal, adjectival nominal or prepositional"). When the complement of *bə'i* is expressed by an adjective or an adjectival structure, this modal preserves the full conjugation and the agreement verb-subject (see examples 7-9 below); this is not to surprise us, as other modals present a similar situation. However, when the complement of the linking verb is itself a verb, there is a manifest tendency that *bə'i* lose the agreement or, with other words, it may be replaced by a frozen form, fixed (*figé*) at the third person (v. Firanescu, 2010, p. 45 for the similar case of *ṣār*); the example 8 below illustrates such a situation.

7. *Šlōn šāyef ḥāl-o w b-yt'ālī 'alēnā?! Ma b-yəḥjal mən ḥāl-o?! Wlād-o kəlleyyāton bo'yu mən ḡer slāḥ b-ṭdon! (A).*

(How is he so infatuated and treats us with superiority?! Doesn't he feel ashamed?! All his children have remained with no gun in their hand! (i.e. they have not accomplished valuable studies, which in general means that they have not obtained a university diploma or certificate).

8. *La-halla' š-šarākēs bə'yu 'ala hay əs-səm'a: el-wafā' la-ḥadd əl-mōt. (D)*

Literal meaning: By now the Caucasian people have remained with (kept) this reputation: faithfulness/loyalty until death.

Contextual meaning: By now the Caucasian people continue to have/keep [still have] this reputation: loyalty until death.

The expression *bə'i 'ala* is conventionalized with the sense of continuing being somehow, keeping doing something or having the same position, opinion, etc.

9. *Laaa! Hāy feh māne kānet ṭūl 'əmr-a w hēk bə'yet. Hāy šāṭra, ma b-tehtār. B-təb'a 'awiyye 'əddām mīn mā kān. (D)*

(Nooo! This one has been intelligent all her life and she is still so [literally, 'she remained so']. This one is smart, never gets confused / intimidated, but stays / remains strong in front of whomever she faces).

10. *B'īti ṭhebbi Feirūz? (a) = Bə'a ṭhebbi Feirūz? (b) = Ba'd-ik ṭhebbi Feirūz? (c)*

Literal meanings:

- For (a): Have you kept / are you still loving Feiruz?
- For (b): Still remains [a fact that] you love Feiruz?
- For (c): Still you love Feiruz?

The three variants are valid and convey the meaning “Do you still love Feiruz?” The first structure - (a) - is the one we recorded in Aleppo; variants (b) and (c) were also validated then all three variants were verified and accepted as well in Damascus, where variant (c) seems to be preferred.

In (a) the verb *bə'i* is properly conjugated at the second person singular feminine ('*enti*). However, the complement of *bə'i* being a verb, the conjugated form *b'īti* is not the only one perceived as appropriate, but speakers do use as well the frozen form *bə'a* (as in b). Apparently, there is no semantic difference between these two structures; their co-existence and synonymy illustrate the principle of 'layering', but also the 'persistence' of the literal meaning of the full verb within the frozen form.

Would this type of structure - *bə'i* conjugated at the past form or the frozen form *bə'a* followed by a verb at the present - possibly express a future action or state? We find that yes, sometimes, the context may suggest or imply, with Lentin' words (1997, Chapter 14, 14.11.k) that the auxiliary *bə'a* may have “une valeur de future, mais plus modalisé, parfois vague ou incertain, et souvent avec valeur optative”. The examples he offers present this value of the concerned structure in assertive sentences. It seems to us that the interrogative sentences (as it is the case in the example 10) should be analyzed attentively.

Kassab (1970: 163) translates such a structure - frozen form *bə'a* or conjugated form of *bə'i* + verb at present, in interrogative sentence - by a future: *bə'a*

(*bə'ētu*) *tešrabu mayy šī?* is translated by “Boirez-vous encore de l'eau?” (Will you still drink/ keep drinking water?). The necessary context is not given, but a glimpse of it we can have if we consider the whole example which is *bə'a (bə'ētu) tešrabu mayy šī wallā bəḥallu l-mayy li-ḡ-ḡafādi'?*, translated by “Boirez-vous encore de l'eau? Ou bien vous laisserez l'eau aux grenouilles?” (Will you still drink/keep drinking water? Or you will leave the water to the frogs?» The second question presents in fact an implied alternative; the conversational implicature here is a polite, indirect invitation: ‘cease drinking water’ (and, possibly, by virtue of pragmatic deduction, ‘start drinking something else!»). It is important to seize that the nuance of future is implied, not directly expressed; in terms of speech acts, this is a directive illocutionary act where interrogation stands in fact for a mitigated imperative. The temporal modality of future may, indeed, be conveyed through the utterance of the analyzed structure, but in specific contexts that allow for such interpretation. A proof is that in the example 10, proposed above, the structure could not be understood as conveying the meaning of future. *B'īti tḥebbi Feirūz? (a) = Bə'a tḥebbi Feirūz? (b)* could not be understood in the sense of ‘Will you still love / continue loving Feiruz?»; the only possible understanding is the one made explicit in (c): *Ba'd-ik tḥebbi Feirūz?* (Do you still love Feiruz?). It would be probably appropriate to note that in Kassab's example the verb at the present tense that forms a complex verbal structure with *bə'i* expresses an ‘action’ (drinking) in progress at the utterance moment, while the verb in our similar example expresses a psychological state or process (loving) which is less liable to be subject to the temporal modalities that affect especially concrete actions in progress.

Continuing the discussion about *bə'i* as a linking verb, consider also the example:

11. *Bə'a (or bə'ēti) teḥki ma'-o t-telfōn šī, walla nsītu ba'ḡ?* (D)

If we admit the value of future of the structure in question, we should understand the sentence as:

‘Will you continue to speak / will you keep the habit of speaking with him at phone or you have forgotten one another?’

The problem with this way of understanding is that the ‘action’ expressed by the second verb in the sequence (*teḥki*, you speak), is not a ‘present’ action, or an action in progress at the utterance time, but obviously a ‘past’ action (actually ‘repeated’ in the past). The future is not necessarily implied. A more faithful translation would be: ‘Do you still use to / have you kept the habit to speak with him at phone or you have forgotten one another?’ Of course, ‘have you kept the habit’ implies that the person used to have such a habit in the past, at least until the ‘time being’ (utterance time), but nothing tell us that the habit would be supposed to be perpetuated in the future or that there is such an intention for the future, which would justify the formulation with future tense. It seems to us that this is a question about how things used to be in the past, and there is at most a subsidiary, acceptable nuance of possible continuity: a very subtle temporal-aspectual modality!

The previous examples 10 and 11 illustrate situations in which the conjugated forms of *bə'i* may be considered, in our view, rather copulas or linking verbs

than auxiliaries. It is true that the semantic nature of the verbs *tħebbi* (you love) - that does not express an 'action' but a psychological state - and *tħki* (you speak) - that do not refer to speaking as an effective action at the utterance moment, but to a habit in the past - contributes to this interpretation. The possible replacement of *bə'i* with the frozen form *bə'a* is related to the 'weak' status of this modal in the considered contexts.

II. Modal temporal-aspectual semi-auxiliary

II.A. The past form

II.A.1. Continuative auxiliary

The past form *bə'a* followed (in sequence with) by a verb at the present form (with which *bə'a* usually agrees), in assertive sentences, expresses the continuity, the fact of keeping doing something, the persistence, perseverance or habit in doing something. This is the function called by Lentin (2006: 553) 'continuative auxiliary'. The nuance conveyed is very similar to that expressed by the verb *qall*. Equivalents: still, encore.

12. *Faṭṭūm bə'yet testanni fāris 'aḥlām-a. Mən jəmə'tən əja-l-ha wēħed ktīr ḥelw w zandī'. Bəs(e) ṭele' manḥūš hedāk kamān, ma bə'a bədd-a yyiāh! (A)*

(Fattum/Fatma has kept waiting / is still waiting for the chevalier of her dreams. Two weeks ago someone very nice and rich presented to her. But this one as well turned unlucky, she doesn't want him anymore).

13. *'əḥt-o bo'yet ted'il-o leyl-nhār la-ḥattā yensa ha-l-bənət! Bəss(e) 'afrītee! Hāy ma ḥarġ ḥada yensā-hā. Ćarraket-lə l-wələd. (A)*

(His sister has been praying / kept praying for him all the time so that he would forget that girl. But she is a devil! This one, there is no way one can forget her. She has brought so much damage to my boy!)

II.A.2. Marker of the past conditional

In the apodosis of conditionals, it marks the past conditional as in the following example:

14. *'Eza 'ahl-a kān b-ye'el šī, b'īna [kənnā] nratteb l-o l-mašriyyāt. Abu Hasan, kərmāl-o, kān yšteri bə'a ša'fet 'arq ḥelwe b-Abu Ṭaṭṭal. (A)*

(Should her family [the family of the potential bride] have been wise, then we would have arranged the money for him [for the speaker's and Abu Hasan's son]. Abu Hasan, for his sake, would have bought then / in that case a nice area of land in Abu Taltal.)

In the previous example, *bə'i* appears twice: as auxiliary with conjugated form (*b'īna*) and in the frozen form *bə'a*. In both situations the meaning conveyed may be expressed by using - in a literal, demonstrative translation - the sentence connector 'then' that renders the resultative and consecutive meaning carried by the forms of *bə'i*.

II.A.3. Cessation modalizer (*ma* + *bə'i* conjugated + verb at present tense)

In negative sentences, placed between the negation *ma* and a verb at the present form, the modal *bə'i* (at the past, with inflected forms) adds modal

temporal-aspectual nuances to the negation of the action or state expressed by the second verb. In the absence of *bə'i*, there would be a simple negative sentence denying the occurrence of a fact in the present; *bə'i* introduces the meaning that something that used to happen in the past (that used to have continuity) is not available 'anymore' at the conversation time, thus emphasizing the contrast between the past and the present situation, the transformation, the modification that has occurred. It is *bə'i* (preceded by the negation *ma*, which in fact accompanies the second verb) that transforms the sense of simple 'non-occurrence' into the sense of 'cessation' since it is oriented towards the past similarly to specialized (for this meaning) adverbs in various languages: '(not)... anymore'; '(ne)...plus'; '(nicht)...mehr'. In many situations, the modal *bə'i* loses the capacity of inflection (conjugation) and becomes replaceable with the frozen form *bə'a* preceded by the negation *ma*, an aspect that will be analyzed below in the section dealing with *bə'a* as a de-categorized verb.

The verb after (in sequence with) *bə'i* appears almost without the prefix *b-*; but sometimes the speakers - for reasons that do not seem very clearly defined - do insert the prefix *b-*, and this not only at the first person of the singular (see examples 16, 17). We tend to believe that *b-* is present when the speaker aims at stressing upon the lack of 'effectiveness' or the cessation of the action in the present (at the conversation time), as opposed to the past.

15. *Huwe lessāt-o b-lṭāliya. Haydə, mart-o, w wlad-o kamān, ma bo'yu / bs'a yaṭī'u l-furā'. (A)*
(He is still in Italy. This woman - his wife - and his children too, do not [cannot] bear the separation anymore).

16. *Ma bə'yet / bə'a (b)ətrāsəl-ni ba'dma sāfaret le Canada. (D)*
(She has not been in correspondence with me since she traveled / left to Canada).

17. *Ma b'īt / bə'a (b)əḥkī ma'-o mən yōm mā thāšəmna (A)*
(I have not spoken with him since the day we had an argument).

18. *əš- šabāb ma bə'yu / bə'a ystannu, bədd-un yəballešu ḥayāt-un bakkīr. (D)*
(Young people do not wait anymore; they want to start their life early).

Asked about the formulation they prefer - with *bə'i* conjugated or with the frozen form *bə'a* - many informants indicated the formulation with the frozen form. One of them (a young man from Damascus) even stated: "Only old or old fashioned people use to say *bə'yu ystannu* ['they kept waiting', with conjugated form of *bə'i*] or *bə'yet testanni* ['she kept waiting', with conjugated form of *bə'i*], while young people like myself say *bə'a ystannu* or *bə'a testanni*" (*bəss əl-məsinnīn wəlla n-nās əl-mašyīn 'a-l-mōḍa l-'adīme b-y'ūlu 'bə'yu ystannu' wəlla 'bə'yet testanni' 'amma š-šabāb mitlī b-y'ūlu 'bə'a ystannu' w 'bə'a testanni' "*). The examples 15-18 above show the morphologic "weakness" of *bə'i* as modal auxiliary in negative sentences, consisting in losing (or the tendency to lose) the full conjugation, which evokes the concept of 'disempowered verb' (*fi'l ghayr mutamakkin*) versus 'powerful / full verb' (*fi'l mutamakkin* (launched by Sibawayhi) used in the Arabic Grammatical Tradition. Perhaps the statement quoted above regarding the tendency of the new generation to adopt the frozen form *bə'a* in general, not only in negative sentences, genuinely contains the suggestion (seized by the linguist) of a process of grammaticalization of *bə'i* taking place at the very moment we contemplate these

linguistic facts. As it will be noted below (when speaking about *bə'i* as cessation marker and the particle *bə'a*), this process is even more obvious in examples providing evidence of de-categorialization.

II.A.4. Prohibitive modalizer

Preceded by the negation *lā*, and followed by a verb at the present, the past form expresses the firm request addressed to the interlocutor to cease doing something that he used to be doing in the past or was doing at the conversation moment (prohibitive meaning). In this case as well, the frozen form may be used instead of the conjugated form.

19. *La bə'a / ba'ētu tensu! (D+A)*

(Do not forget, anymore!)

20. *La bə'a ʔayyaʔ, ha'?! 'əht-ak nayme. 'Um 'el'ab barra, bə'a ! (A)*

(Do not scream, understood?! Your sister is sleeping. Go play outside then!)

II.B. The Present form

II.B.1. Modalizer for expectation (open, indefinite, but expected future)

Followed by a verb at the present (normally without *b-*), and having itself the present form with *b-*, *bə'i* projects in the future the action expressed by the following verb; it is an open, indefinite, sometimes 'far' future suggested. The nuance introduced is that the action is supposed, expected to take place according to a previous agreement.

21. *Lā'al'Abdelkarīm ma rəğə' ʔawel mən yōm ma nezel 'a-š-Šām. Huwe Muḥammad elle raḥ l-u la-hnīke... Byb'u yerğa'u sawa lamma yḥallešu l-wrā'. (A)*

(Noo, Abdelkarim has not returned at all since he went to Damascus. It is Muhammad who went there to him... They would / will come together when they finish the papers.)

II.B.2. Modalizer for polite imperative

The previous structure, when both *bə'i* (without *b-*) and the following verb are at the second person, expresses a polite imperative:

22. *Təb'i tsallemī-l-na 'ala 'əmmik (e)ktīr ! (A)*

You would (be so kind to) greet your mother warmly from our part.

23. *Təb'i t'ulī-l-o, ḥayto, barki yesma' l-ik! (A)*

You would (be so kind) to tell him, hopefully he would listen to you!

24. *(ə)b'a rūḥi la-balad-ik w təb'i tiji mən əhnīke kəll səne la-'anna! (A)*

(Then go to your country and from there keep coming to us every year!)

The structure concerned here is *təb'i tiji* while *(ə)b'a* is to be analyzed as a conclusive particle (as showed below, III.C.2.b.)

II.C. The Imperative form

Followed by a verb at the present, the imperative form introduces the value of (requested) insistence, persistence, in doing something; it is rarely used since the modal *ħalla* ('to keep doing' seems to be specialized for this meaning. The imperative form agrees in gender and number with the following, modalized verb.

25. *əb'a ndah-l-o ta yesma' w-y'üm!(A)*

Keep calling him so that / until he hears and wakes up!

26. *əb'i ndahī-l-o, ħayto!*

Keep calling him, sister!

III. De-categorialized verb

III.A. Specialized in expressing the remaining time

A specific use of *bə'i* is as a part of the construction expressing the time remaining from a limited and defined period of time to be spent in a place. The modal loses conjugation and appears in a frozen form that forms a common phonetic body with the preposition *li* and the suffix pronoun indicating the person: *bə'i l-ak* (literally: 'remained to you') is pronounced in fact as *bə'ílak*. The meaning of *bə'i* is still 'remain', but more abstract, referring to time. Also, further to the agglutination process, the accent moves from the vowel 'ə' on the vowel 'i'.

27. *'adēš bə'ilo hōn? (D and A)*

(How longer will he stay / remain here?)

28. *Bə'ilon hōn səne kāmle ta-iji abō-hon yaħd-on la-amērka. (A)*

Literal meaning: It has remained for them a whole year until their father comes to take them to America.

They will still remain / stay here for a whole year until ...

There is a whole year in front of them until...

There is no agreement of *bə'i* with the feminine substantive *səne* (year). Also, as the translation makes more obvious, *bə'i* has the aspectual-temporal value of future, despite the fact that its morphologic form is that of past.

III.B. Modal temporal-aspectual marker

III.B.1. Specialized marker of surprise in pseudo-interrogation (as a part of a specific illocutionary directive act of invitation)

The frozen form *bə'a* followed by a verb at the present form (in general without the prefix *b-*) functions as a modal temporal-aspectual marker of surprise (along with attenuate disapproval) towards an action which - at the utterance moment - has been done, is still in progress, and is susceptible of being continued in the immediate future. By using the particle *bə'a* in such a complex pragmatic context of utterance, the speaker conveys the meaning of surprise and attenuate disapproval encoded in the particle; the particle is placed at the beginning of

the sentence. This value is expressed through pseudo-interrogative sentences, co-related - semantically - with a sentence through which an offer is made or an action is proposed as an alternative to the action already in progress.

30. *Bə'a taklu ġariinək?! ١١١١, lessa ma šbə'tū?! 'əmmi bət'ul tā'u la-ğowwa nət'sša! (A)*
 (Are you still eating [conversational implicature: do you intent to continue eating in the immediate future] mirabelles / plums?! Heyy, haven't you had enough of them yet?! Mom says come inside for dinner!)

In this specific context, *bə'a* may, indeed, be understood as implying the meaning of continuation in the future (see above, example 11). An acceptable translation of the first sentence could be "Will you keep eating plums?!". In terms of illocutionary acts, the three related sentences contribute to the performance of a complex illocutionary directive act (understood according to Searle & Vanderveken, 1985) with two components: 1. dissuasion: discouraging an action (through the first and second utterances, both pseudo-interrogative) and 2. persuasion: proposing an alternative (through the indirectly imperative third sentence). The interrelated sentences as a whole are interpretable as a mitigating, but firm, act of invitation to stop an action and start the one proposed as alternative. It seems that *bə'a* (significantly placed at the beginning of the first sequence) has tendency to be conventionalized for this specific complex illocutionary act.

In this specific example (30), we have treated *bə'a* as the frozen form of the de-categorized verb *bə'i* rather than as a particle for one reason: because the formulation using the conjugated form instead of the frozen form would be possible, acceptable: *Bə'ētu taklu ġariinək* may occur in parallel with *bə'a taklu ġariinək?!* This indicates an intermediate stage that *bə'a* goes through, the transition from auxiliary or modalizer to de-categorized verb or marker. At the semantic level, however, the larger continuative meaning conveyed by the auxiliary is obviously narrowed, reduced to just a trace of 'continuative' within the frozen form, as marker, while a specialized meaning immerses (marker of surprise in pseudo-interrogation).

III.B.2. Specialized cessation marker in negative compound verbal structures

Placed between the negation *ma* and a verb at the present, the frozen form *bə'a* often replaces the conjugated forms of *bə'i* as it has been already signaled (examples 15-18). The example 30 below illustrates such a case. The verb coming after the frozen form *bə'a* has in general tendency to appear without the prefix *b-*, which may indicate that a construction is in the making. However, the prefix *b-* may still be inserted by speakers. In more complex structures formed by more than two verbs (see example 31 below), *bə'a* works as second modalizer (in example 31 it follows *šār* with inchoative inceptive value).

30. *Walla heyto, kalleyyāton ġawwazu. Faṭṭūm kamāne, sante l-māḍiye. Daššarū-na la-ḥāl-na, ana w Abū Hasan. Ma bə'a (b)iġu ktīr la-'and el-ḥetyāriyye !... (A)*
 (Indeed, my sister, all of them got married. Fattum as well, the past year. They left us alone, me and Abu Hasan. They don't use to come anymore so often to 'the old people!...)

31. 'Ey, na'm, tlāte snīn la-wara kan b-təfrə' ma'o 'ennu ḥāl-o taḥd-o la-Amērka. Bəs[e] halla' šār ma bə'a təfrə' ma'o law waḥdā-ho 'in šāllah 'a-l-'amar! (A)

(Yes, indeed, three years ago it would have made a difference for him if his aunt took him to America. But now it doesn't make any difference for him anymore should she take him even to the Moon!)

The prefix *b-* in *(b)iǧu* in the previous example was initially not pronounced by the speaker (a senior lady), but it was introduced when we questioned her about it. It seemed to us that, when asked about this detail, she wanted to emphasize the cessation of the visits by introducing the prefix *b* which may appear in contradiction with the attenuation expressed by the adverb *ktīr* (often); or she simply found a way to manifest benevolence towards us by “embellishing” somehow the word that interested us so much.

III.C. Particles *bə'a* and *(b)əb'a*

Phonetically, the frozen form *bə'a* differs from the verb *bə'i* only by the final sound ('a' instead of 'i'). In general, verbal particles present a reduced phonetic body compared to that of the verb that engendered them; in the case of *bə'i*, however, a reduction would be difficult to imagine, since the verb's body is already restrained. The difference between the two layers - verb, and particle - is marked by the vocalic opposition *i > a*. The main differences are manifest at the semantic level.

The particle *(b)əb'a*, derived from the present form *(b)yəb'a*, presents a certain phonetic reduction by the loss of the prefix *y* that encodes the verbal person (indicates the agent as being 'he'). However, the prefix *b-*, that usually accompanies the verb *bə'i* when conjugated at the present form, is often preserved as a part of the phonetic body of the particle *(b)əb'a*. This is probably due to the vitality of this prefix and to its heavy semantic load as marker of an effective action, most of the times in progress at the utterance moment.

The two particles are either specialized as modal markers in specific structures or they convey subtle, contextual meanings, keeping only a trace of the literal meaning of the full and even auxiliary verb *bə'i* - *(b)yəb'a*. As suggested by the examples, the meanings conveyed are liable to be properly analyzed only in the pragmatic context of utterance, as these particles may be used creatively by speakers in that sense that convey not only conventionalized meanings, but as well the subjective intent or intentionality of the speaker.

III.C.1. The particle *bə'a*

III.C.1.a. Particle within structures expressing cessation or interruption

Cessation of existence (*ma bə'a fī*)

There are subtle modal nuances introduced by *bə'a* when inserted between the negation *ma* and the particle *fī* with verbal value (there is / there are); it expresses either the syncope (temporary interruption) or even the total cessation of the existence:

32.a. *Ma bə'a fī bonn (A)*

Literal meaning (word to word translation): Not anymore are coffee beans.
(There are no coffee beans anymore / We are short of coffee beans.)

The modal nuance that *bə'a* introduces is a complex temporal-aspectual modality: the speaker becomes aware of the non-existence (the lack of the coffee beans, in the context) at the present (conversation time) and realizes the change in the situation i.e. that something that used to be or exist in the past has ceased for the time being. The conversational implicature (at least in normal circumstances) is 'We need to buy coffee beans' which means that the abnormal situation would be modified in the near future and the 'normal' situation would be reinstalled:

something used to exist in the past → has ceased in the present → is supposed to be restored in the future

Bə'a introduces in the sentence the subtle nuance of syncope or the modality of the temporary cessation, which is rather interruption. Other two constructions are admitted and in use for the same meaning in both and Damascus and Aleppo:

32.b. *Ma ḡall fī bonn (A)*

32.c. *Ma 'ād fī bənn (D)*

However, *ma bə'a fī bonn* was preferred by the informants from Aleppo to *ma 'ād fī bənn* - more used in Damascus.

33. *Ma bə'a fī məškile (A)*

(There is no problem anymore).

This example is similar to the previous one. Still, in Damascus, informants preferred the use of the modal 'ād instead of *bə'a*.

Cessation or interruption of possession (*ma bə'a fī 'and / ma' + suffix pronoun*)

34. *Ma bə'a fī 'and-on əl-bēt ər-rīfī l-'adīm yalli 'ašī'tih zamān. (A)*

(They don't have anymore the old house that you once loved).

35. *Ma bə'a fī 'əndi wa'ət. (D)*

(I do not have time anymore).

36. *Ma bə'a fī yə'ajjel əs-safar. (D)*

(There is no [chance] for him anymore to postpone the travel).

There is ellipsis of the word 'chance' (or 'possibility') in the construction. The form *bə'a* is not interchangeable with *ḡall* here, which is explicable in a context related to time (where the modal *bə'i* is more specialized).

III.C.1.b. Particle with various temporal-aspectual values

Imminence (*ma bə'a 'əlla*)

The construction is conventionalized for expressing the imminence, with a possible contextual nuance of impossibility of avoidance. On a gradation scale, this would be the first level of necessity, while the syntactically similar construction *ma šār 'əlla* marks the obligation.

37. *Ma bə'a 'ella ysāfer. Bijūz ma 'ād fī wa't(e) tšūf-o. (D)*

(It won't take long until he travels / He should travel any time now. Maybe there is no time [for you] to see him anymore).

38. *Mbērha ma ḥsente nām fa-'omət ḥadet dawa. W-l-lēle ma bo'a 'ella nāmi, nāmi ya Badreyyia!*

Yesterday I couldn't sleep, so I took a pill. This night it won't take long until [I'll say] 'sleep, sleep, Badreyyia!' (...until I'll be in the same situation)

III.C.1.c. Conclusive-resultative particle with various contextual nuances

39. *'Eh šū bə'a ?! Huwe mā-o daktōr mət-l-a?! Wēn šāf-ha? Mū b-j-jām'a?! 'iḥ 'alē-na, šū ha-n-nās eṭ-ṭəšme?! (A)*

(What's the matter then / after all?! Isn't he a doctor, like her?! Where did he see her? Wasn't it at the university?! Woe unto us! What's the matter with these stupid people?!

40. *W šāru bə'a kill wāḥid yī'zimna (...)*

They started, you know, every one [started] inviting us (...)

(Brustad, 2000: 397, ex. 22; translation - 399)

Brustad interprets it as a discursive connector with resultative value.

- In the apodosis of conditional complex sentences, meaning 'so' (if so), 'then', 'well then':

41. *əza huwe ma bədd-u jji bə'a naḥne elli mənruḥ la-'əndo ! (D)*

(If he does not want to come, then we go to him!

If he does not want to come, well then, it is us who go to him!)

- At the beginning of a sentence expressing a conclusion / result that provokes surprise and indignation:

42. *'āl-lī "yābā, ma bḥebb el-'ərāye!". Bə'a ḥallīh yibruk 'a-d-dawšake mətle j-jidbān! (A)*

He told me "Father, I don't like studying!" If so, let him lay on the mattress [figurative meaning: stay home, with no work, doing nothing] like idiots!

43. *Bə'a min wa't il wšəlna, mū bā'te le-j-jīrān ha r-risāle?*

So, from the time we arrived, hadn't she sent the neighbors that letter?

(Brustad, 2000: 397, ex. 20; translation - 399)

III.C.2. The particle (b)əb'a

III.C.2.a. Subjunctive marker (preceded by 'ta')

It works as an additional marker of the subjunctive mode when following the specialized particle *ta*; it emphasizes the aim, the purpose.

44. *Mbērha rəḥte l-o bakkīr 'ala-maḥall-o, ta əb'a nlā'i l-'eyyāde fāḥa, mu mət l hadīke l-marra (A)*

(Yesterday I went to him early to his store, so that we find the clinic open, not (close) like the other day).

III.C.2.b. Conclusive particle expressing indecision (future orientated)

Placed before a verb at the present, it conveys indecision, hesitation, reticence, lack of hurry due to confusion, or even caution, with the nuance that the action of the verb would take place in an open, uncertain, rather 'far' future (it preserves this value conveyed by the auxiliary at the present form).

45. *Bəb'a nšūf əğ-ğum'a ġ-ğāye 'ēs (bəd)dnā nsāwi (A)*

(Literal meaning: it remains to see...)

Well then, we'll see next week what we shall do).

46. *Hay šağle bədd-a tafkīr w tašāwur. (B)eb'a b-ab'at l-o jawāb ši yōm.*

(This is a matter that needs reflection and counseling. Well, I'll send him an answer one of these days).

A final example

The main difference between the verb *bə'i* / *ba'a* in Syrian and Egyptian dialectal areas consists in the fact that in Syrian it is preponderantly a 'continuative auxiliary' (with Lentin's expression) while in Egyptian the main value remains that of an inchoative (inceptive and transformation marker). Let us re-consider the Example 10. Context: On my way back home from Egypt (where I had spent a long period) I was passing by Syria, precisely by Aleppo. By a wonderful morning, I was "fō", 'a-s-sūh', beginning the day listening to Feiruz, when Karim and Fattum came, bringing coffee and breakfast. Karim exclaimed:

47. *B'iti tħebbi Feirūz!?* (A)

(Do you still love Feiruz?!)

There was surprise and joy in his voice, but neither his tone, nor the context helped me to instantly get the correct message. Under the influence of my fresh contact with the Egyptian dialect, I understood the utterance 'à l'Egyptienne' as "Did you start loving Feiruz?" (inchoative inceptive meaning), which in Syria would be expressed by *širti tħebbi Feirūz?* or *ballašti tħebbi Feirūz?* For a moment, I felt disappointed by what I considered to be a memory lapse if not a sign of oblivion from the part of my friend: "He knows that I have always been in love with Feiruz; how can he ask me such a weird question?!" I told myself. Fortunately, my own linguistic sense recovered after the failure soon enough to save me from disappointment... This was the precise moment of my "prise de conscience", when I became aware of the completely different meanings that the auxiliary *bə'i* / *ba'a* may express in two different dialectal areas (and this was the start point of this article). By coincidence, at the very moment I was reflecting upon this linguistic aspects, Feiruz was singing:

Tā'a ta-nəthħabba' mən darb əl-'a'mār

W-əza hənne kəbru nahna ba'ēna šgār

(Far away from their aging path, let's hide;

Should they grow older, we 'remain' ever young)

Final notes

Full Verb

As independent and linking verb, *bə'i* has complete conjugation. However, as independent verb, its frequency is reduced by the parallel use of synonym verbs apparently preferred for conveying the meaning 'to remain/stay' in a place (*dall* and *tamm*). As linking verb (which is not a quite frequent use), it is complemented especially by adjectives or adjectival constructions; when complemented by a verb, it manifests a tendency to lose the full conjugation and be replaced by the frozen form, as it acquires a slight modal nuance of future ('Layering' and 'Divergence' principles). The literal meaning is not discarded, however ('Persistence' principle).

Semi-auxiliary

As auxiliary, *bə'i* keeps the full conjugation at both past and present, the main meaning becoming more abstract: 'to keep doing something' (continuative par excellence). A prominent tendency of specialization is manifest in its acquired temporal-aspectual values of the past form: cessation modalizer in negative constructions; prohibitive modalizer; marker of the past conditional. Moreover, the conjugated past form tends to be replaced by the frozen form *bə'a*. The present form (*b)yəb'a* acquires a preponderant value of indefinite future; it becomes a modalizer for expectation and 'mitigated request of a future action' or polite imperative. The imperative form specializes in expressing requested insistence in doing something and is undermined by the modal *ħalla* specialized as factitive and grammatical tool for imperative. As auxiliary, *bə'i* acquires more abstract modal meanings and grammatical functions ('Specialization' principle). In our view the inflection of *bə'i* as auxiliary is becoming very fragile; it is almost predictable that it will become fixed in a frozen form, as an auxiliary verbal morpheme *bə'a* (as it has already happened, for instance, in some Lebanese dialectal areas).

De-categorized verb

The analysis reveals a first stage of de-categorialization of *bə'i* as specialized verb in expressing the remaining time, in which case it loses independency and becomes a frozen form *bə'i*, a part of an agglutinant structure (De-categorialization). A frozen form *bə'a* derived from the past form of the verb immerses ('Layering' and 'Divergence'); this form works as a specialized marker for cessation in negative sentences or even specialized for a specific type of illocution: the indirect invitation (with two components: dissuasion and persuasion). The particles *bə'a*, and (*b)yəb'a* represent the most advanced stage of the grammaticalization process that this modal has reached. The first has become a component of structures expressing cessation and interruption (of existence and possession, among others), a marker of imminence, and a conclusive-resultative particle with conventionalized, but also contextual, subjective possible meanings, while the latter specializes as conclusive particle expressing indecision and supplemental subjunctive marker.

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