

PREFACE

The aim of this enterprise is to assemble together in one volume works on various syntactic aspects of Arabic and Hebrew, in the hope that it will spur further comparative work within the Semitic family at the level of richness achieved in other language families such as Germanic and Romance. Although a substantial amount of work on the syntax of Arabic and Hebrew already exists in various forms, volumes of the type we have attempted are still practically non-existent. Moreover, apart from some notable exceptions, existing studies rarely take a systematic within-family comparative stance towards the phenomena they discuss, although cross-references between studies on Arabic and Hebrew are not uncommon. Obviously, we would ideally have preferred the volume to include papers on numerous other Semitic languages, including the languages of the Ethio-Semitic branch as well as numerous spoken varieties of Arabic that have yet to be explored. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to circumstances beyond our control. We very much hope that the existence of this volume will make more inclusive volumes on the syntax of the Semitic languages only a matter of time.

The twelve chapters of this book deal with different empirical topics in the syntax of Arabic and Hebrew. What binds these chapters together is not only common interest in a language family, but a shared theoretical interest in tracing the structure and understanding the functioning of Universal Grammar. Within Chomsky's *Principles and Parameters* model and the more recent *Minimalist Program*, empirical phenomena are studied from the perspective of a universal set of principles allowing limited variation or parameterization. Through the study of related languages (the Arabic dialects, Hebrew and Arabic, etc.) linguists in this school of thought attempt to define and refine grammatical principles by studying minimal variation in their parametric settings.

The Introduction to the volume presents, in a rather terse manner, the state of the art of Semitic syntax from a generative perspective. We must apologize in advance for the superficiality of our exposé; we cannot hope to cover the terrain of an introductory textbook to the field. Our references and bibliography are also restricted and do not do justice to the wealth of recent research. Some references are missing due to lack of space, our wish to retain a 'Semitic' orientation, oversight and ignorance.