

## **Kathrin Göransson – Israel, Easter 2014**

A Pembroke grant enabled me to spend two weeks in Israel to interview Jewish speakers of North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) dialects. NENA is a variety of Neo-Aramaic, a modern language that has been attested for around 3000 years. The topic of my PhD is causative-inchoative alternation in NENA dialects, which are spoken among both Assyrian Christians and Jews. I obtained data on Assyrian dialects from written sources and by working with a native speaker who lives in Cambridge. Regarding Jewish dialects, however, I had only been able to consult grammars, including glossaries and texts, on a number of dialects. While Assyrians can be found in most parts of the world, almost all Jewish NENA speakers live in Israel. Since I am not aware of any Jewish speakers in the UK, this trip to Israel to interview Jewish NENA speakers was crucial in order to obtain the data I need to be able to compare the expression of causative-inchoative alternation in Christian and Jewish dialects and to answer a number of questions that arose in the course of my research so far.

I therefore travelled to Israel between the end of April and the beginning of May 2014 to interview speakers of the dialects of Jewish Sanandaj and Jewish Urmi. I asked my informants to translate sentences from Hebrew (which was the language we communicated in) into their language in order to learn more about the alternation types of particular NENA verbs as well as about indirect causation. While translating my sentences from English into Hebrew had been quite a challenge – even perfectly bilingual (Hebrew-English) speaking friends, who corrected my Hebrew during my first days in Israel, occasionally despaired at the task – getting answers from the speakers went surprisingly well. There were only a few verbs for which they could not think of an equivalent in their language, and only very rarely were they unable to translate a word into their language because it was too modern (choosing my examples carefully seems to have paid off). Also, Hebrew loanwords were practically absent. This demonstrates that despite their advanced age and the fact that they had left their homelands and emigrated to Israel already in the 1950s, these speakers are still proficient in their native language. They were extremely kind and helpful, and apart from having received answers to most of my questions – some of which look extremely interesting! – I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to get to know some of the last speakers of this ancient language.

Apart from collecting data, I also used the opportunity of being in Israel to meet with academics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, whom I knew from a semester abroad a few years ago and who had also attended a conference on NENA in Jerusalem last year in June. Talking to them was very useful. They gave me a number of references of relevant books and articles, contact details of academics that might be able to answer some of my questions, as well as some interesting ideas that I am keen to pursue now that I am back in Cambridge.