On the biconsonantal roots of Lebanese Arabic

Mohamad Ali Khalil

Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE)

Keywords: biconsonantal roots, final-weak roots, Lebanese Arabic, morphophonology, glides

Biconsonantal roots in Lebanese Arabic (Lebanese henceforth) conjugated for the first and second persons in form I show a palatal glide in the last consonantal slot of their patterns. This glide is epenthetic/excrescent and does not belong to the root itself. It is a direct result of a diphthongization process of a long vowel, which in turns results from lengthening an epenthetic vowel. This paper details the mechanisms by which this glide appears. The appearance of this glide in conjugated biconsonantal verbs exhibits a pattern which looks exactly like a final-weak root, in which the glide is part of the root of the latter (the third root radical C_3). The analysis's significance lies in providing a distinction between final-weak roots and biconsonantal roots.

Biconsonantal Roots

Biconsonantal roots consist of two consonants, as opposed to the 'regular' triliteral roots (triconsonantal). The unmarked 'default' form I pattern is 'CvCvC', found in verbs of a triliteral root and biconsonantal roots in Classical Arabic (see examples 1 and 2).

However, in Lebanese, biconsonantal roots are found to exhibit a '$CvCCvGC_s$' pattern, where G is the glide 'y' and C_s is the inflectional suffix for the first and second persons. This pattern is typical of final-weak triliteral roots, which are called final-weak precisely because their final root radical is a glide (example 4).

The similarity between examples 3 and 4 cannot be due to their inherent semantic properties or a semblance in their roots, but rather must be due to a morphophonological process that morphed biconsonantal-root verbs into the '$CvCCvGC_s$' pattern. That is to say that the glide appearing in biconsonantal root formations is not part of the root itself (cf. example 4, where the final glide is an original part of the root).

In Other Varieties of Arabic

Syrian and Egyptian Arabic show an important alternation where this glide appears in Lebanese (examples 5,6 and 7).

The data makes possible the analysis that the epenthetic vowel's length depends on segmental properties, and that it is prone to diphthongization whenever found as a long vowel in Lebanese. As a result, the underlying representation for biconsonantal-root verbs in form I in Lebanese is '$C_1aC_2C_2(V_eC_s)$'. This analysis allows for a proper representation of biconsonantal roots and their verbal manifestations in Lebanese, contributing to the understanding and description of the morphosyntactic system. This aids our knowledge about non-concatenative templatic morphologies as well as the status of glides as semivowels, and how we should approach them as vowels and/or consonants.

Examples:

(1) Root: k-t-b 'related to writing' katab 'he wrote' (Lebanese)

(2) Root: m-d-d 'related to extension' madad-t(u) 'I extended' (Classical)

(3) Root: m-d-d 'related to extension' madday-t 'I extended' (Lebanese)

(4) Root: ɣ-n-y ‘related to songs’ ɣannay-t ‘I sang’ (Lebanese)

(5) Root: q-ṣ-ṣ ‘related to cutting’ Syrian: qaṣṣēt
(6) Root: q-ṣ-ṣ Lebanese: ʔaṣṣayt/ʔaṣṣēt
(7) Root: q-ṣ-ṣ ‘related to cutting’ Masc.: ʔaṣṣēto Fem.: ʔaṣṣetha (Egyptian)

References

El Zarka, D. (2005). On the borderline of reduplication: gemination and other consonant doubling in Arabic morphology. *Studies on Reduplication Y*, *369*, 393.
Haddad, Ghassan F. “Problems and Issues in the Phonology of Lebanese Arabic.” University Microfilms International, 1986. Print.