

Verb Innovation in Palestinian Arabic

Abstract category: oral/poster

This talk sheds light on the strategies speakers of Palestinian Arabic (PA) use in verb innovation. By verb innovation I refer to denominative verbs (e.g. *tmarkaz* ‘become central’, derived from *markaz* ‘center’) and verbs that are formed based on loan words (e.g. *tnarfaz* ‘become nervous’ derived from the English adjective *nervous*). The verbal system of PA consists of nine templatic configurations. Each template indicates the phonological shape of the verb, i.e. its vowels, its prosodic structure and its affixes (if any). The phonological shape of a verb is essential for determining the shape of other forms in the inflectional paradigm (Bat-El 1989, Aronoff 1994). A verb, which does not conform to one of the existing templates cannot enter the verbal system. This paper examines the criteria that play a role in the selection of a prosodic template for new verbs. I argue that the process of choosing a template involves the interaction of both thematic-syntactic and morpho-phonological criteria.

Morpho-phonological criteria are responsible for favoring two templates, *CaCCaC* and *tCaCCaC*, over others due to their prosodic structure. Both of them have four slots for consonants, where the medial two are usually occupied by a geminate, therefore allowing forms with more than three consonants (e.g. *talfan* ‘phone’, derived from *telephone*). When the base contains three consonants these templates are selected due to paradigm uniformity (Steriade 1988) within the derivational system; speakers aim for the same prosodic shape for new verbs. In case of three stem consonants, one mora slot remains empty. There are two main strategies for filling this slot: either by gemination of the second consonant or by insertion of a glide. For example, *šarraǰ* ‘charge’ is derived from the English verb *charge*, where the second consonant /r/ fills the empty mora slot. In contrast, the derived verb of *kolon* ‘cologne’ is *kalyan* ‘use cologne’ and not **kallan*. In this case, the // consonant does not fill the mora slot, but the glide consonant /y/ is inserted. The data I have examined demonstrates a use of these two strategies although the former is more common. I will account for the constraints responsible for using the two strategies.

Thematic-syntactic criteria concern the syntactic valence of verbs and their thematic grids. It is commonly assumed that different thematic realizations of the same concept (e.g. unaccusative, reflexive) are derived from the same basic entry via thematic valence changing operations. The division of labor between *CaCCaC* and *tCaCCaC* is based on the status of new verbs in the lexicon. Verbs that are basic entries are formed in *CaCCaC*. These are mainly transitive verbs, e.g. *ǰakkas* ‘put an X on somebody’ but also other non-transitive basic entries, e.g. *barrak* ‘apply breakes’. *tCaCCaC*, in contrast, is selected for verbs derived by thematic operations that reduce the syntactic valence of a verb (e.g. reflexivization and reciprocalization). Such verbs are formed in *tCaCCaC* even if they have no transitive counterpart in *CaCCaC*. For example, the reflexive verb *tšaxlal* ‘upgrade oneself’ is derived from the Hebrew verb *hištaxlel* ‘become upgraded’ and has no transitive alternate **šaxlal*. These data support the analysis of the division of labor between the two templates based on ‘base vs. derived form’ criteria.

The analysis reveals the interaction between morpho-phonological and thematic considerations, thereby supporting the interface between morpho-phonology and the lexicon. It also supports the view of the lexicon as an active component in the generation of words (Aronoff 1976). The choice of a prosodic template in coining new verbs provides evidence for knowledge of constraints that are taken into consideration in word formation processes.