On Templatic Mapping in the Arabic Comparative

One of the main issues in Arabic morphology concerns whether Arabic morphology is root-based or stem-(or word-)based. McCarthy (1981) offers an analysis of Arabic nonconcatenative verbal morphology that is root-based. As a specific example, *katab* is considered the base form to mean 'write' and a CVVCVC template is associated with reciprocal meaning. A verbal form *kaatab* 'corresponded with' is formed on the basis of the reciprocal template, CVVCVC, with the consonantal root consisting of *k-t-b* giving the meaning of 'write' represented on its own tier. In the derivation of the word *kaatab* the root consonants map onto the C-slots of the CVVCVC template. Benmamoun (1999) has argued against this view of Arabic verbal morphology. He provides strong evidence that Arabic verb formation processes are based on a CCVC stem and not an independent consonantal root. In this regard, it should be noted that McCarthy (1993) takes a stem-based approach to Arabic verbal morphology. Thus, an emerging viewpoint in the more recent literature is that Arabic verbal morphology is not based on a consonantal root.

While Arabic verbal morphology has been much discussed, there is much less discussion on the templatic morphology characterizing Arabic nonverbal morphology. One exception is the analysis of the broken plural in McCarthy & Prince (1990) who convincingly show that the Arabic broken plural is templatic (having an iambic template) and that the plural word formation is word-based since the consonants that map onto the iambic template of the plural can include prefixal consonants (i.e. non-root consonants) and the plural can show transfer effects from the singular word. These points are illustrated by Standard Arabic singular-plural pairs like *maktab – makaatib* 'office' and *taqdiir – taqaadiir* 'calculation' where the vowel length difference in the final syllable of the plural in these words reflects the vowel length that occurs in the last syllable of the singular counterpart. The question then arises as to whether there are any clear cases in Arabic morphology where templatic mapping is root-based, especially given the position of Ratcliffe (1997, 2013) that Arabic morphology is word-based. Here I argue, based on Egyptian Arabic, that the templatic comparative of Arabic is root-based rather that word-based

In probably all dialects of Arabic the comparative of an adjective seems to be formed by taking the base adjective and mapping it to the templatic shape aCCaC where the C-slots represent the three root consonants that comprise many Arabic words. For example, the adjective [kibiir] 'big' has the comparative form [akbar]. If the last two root consonants are identical then the templatic shape is aCaCC as exemplified by [axaff] for the comparative of [xafiif] 'light'. In this paper I present three pieces of evidence based on Egyptian Arabic supporting the view that the templatic mapping involved in the Arabic comparative is root-based. The first piece of evidence for the root-based view of the comparative comes from the observation that the consonants, which map onto the aCCaC template, must be the three consonants that comprise the Arabic root; affixal elements do not map onto the template. For example, [mu-naasib] 'appropriate' with a prefixal consonant has the comparative [ansab]. Second, adjectives whose apparent base has undergone phonological change affecting a root consonant, such as [mu-fiid] 'beneficial' from underlying /mu-fyid/ where the root /y/ assimilates to [i], the underlying root consonant resurfaces in the comparative, [afyad]. Third, there are comparatives lacking clear corresponding adjectival base forms such as [azwaʔ] 'politer' or [aħaʔʔ] 'more entitled'. Such phenomena provide strong evidence that the (Egyptian) Arabic comparative is root-based. While I argue for the root-based view, some problematic data are discussed such as [agdad] for the comparative of [gidiid] 'new' where [agadd] is expected. I suggest that this may reflect avoidance of homophony with [agadd] 'more serious'. I also briefly discuss the typological implication posited by Grano (2012) that a morphologically marked comparative should be derived from an occurring base adjective.

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