Prosodic Domains of Syllabification in Sudanese Arabic

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Nearly all contemporary dialects of Spoken Arabic exhibit patterns of syncope and epenthesis. Indeed, the prevalence of these patterns has made them the primary diagnostic tool for research on syllable-based typology of Arabic dialects (Selkirk 1981, Broselow 1992, Farwaneh 1995 and 2009, Kiparsky 2003, Watson 2007, Banakhramah 2009, among others). Dialects of Sudanese Arabic are among the most understudied in this regard. In this talk, I propose a prosodic account of the patterns of syncope, epenthesis, and consonant deletion in three varieties of Sudanese Arabic: Urban Central Sudanese Arabic (UCSA), Shukriiya, and Hamar.

Two contexts give rise to unsyllabified segments in these dialects, which observe a total ban on complex margins: 1) affixation of the homophonous first person singular and second person masculine singular subject suffixes to a stem ending in a consonant (e.g. /-akal-t/‘l/you ate’) and 2) the second member of a root-final CC cluster. In all three dialects this cluster may consist of a full or partial geminate (e.g. /ma˚all/ ‘place’, /¿ind/ ‘at’). In Shukriiya, it may also consist of heterorganic consonants (e.g., /darb/ ‘path’). The three dialects exhibit similarities as well as some significant differences with respect to the prosodic levels at which these unsyllabified segments are repaired. Specifically, while all segments are repaired at the level of phonological word in Hamar, they are repaired at the level of Intonational Phrase (I-Phrase) in Shukriiya. In UCSA, the second member of a geminate is repaired at the level of Phonological Phrase (P-Phrase) while unsyllabified segments arising from affixation are repaired at the word level. I argue that the prosodic level of repair follows directly from the degree of restriction that the dialects place on word-level and phrase-level syllabification.

In all three dialects syncope targets the underlined vowel in the sequence (VCVC). It occurs at the phrase level when this structural description is met across two words. In his description of Sudanese Colloquial Arabic, Hamid (1984) refers to this as Left-Hand-Syncope (LHS) when the target vowel is in the first word and right-Hand-Syncope (RHS) when it is in the second word. The three dialects display interesting variation with respect to the phrasal domain of syncope. In all three dialects, RHS applies up to the I-Phrase level and is blocked above it. LHS exhibits the same pattern in Shukriiya and Hamar but not in UCSA, where it is blocked beyond the P-Phrase level. The Shukriiya data in (1) below is representative of RHS whose target is the underlined vowel in mubaarak.

1. RHS blocked above the I-Phrase in all three dialects:
   "aal-l-u iṇ̃aza'm-t wadd aØ-Õamri mubaarak maa bi'-Ôi
   said-to-him if invite-you Wad Aj-Jamri Mubaarak neg will-come
   ‘He said to him: “If you invite Wad Aj-Jamri, Mubaarak will not come.”’
   a. Normal rate: ((‘aal-l-u iṇ̃aza'm wadd aØ-Õamri mbaarak maa bi'-Ôi)U)
   b. Narrative rate: ((‘aal-l-u iṇ̃aza'm wadd aØ-Õamri) (mubaarak maa bi'-Ôi))U

In normal rate of speech (1a), the utterance forms one intonation contour and is parsed in one I-Phrase. In a slower rate of speech used in story-telling (1b), the utterance forms two intonation contours and is parsed into two I-Phrases. The fact that RHS is blocked in the latter clearly indicates that its context may not straddle the I-Phrase boundary. Using similar data, I show that the context of RHS is blocked above the P-Phrase in UCSA. I argue that the prosodic domain of RHS and LHS is a reflex of the restriction dialects place on resyllabification.

In identifying the degrees of restriction dialects place on syllabification and resyllabification, the account provides a principled explanation for the levels of repair of unsyllabified segments as well as the domains of syncope.