Templatic Mapping in Arabic with a Focus on the Comparative

Stuart Davis
Indiana University
davis@indiana.edu

The comparative in Arabic seems to be a quintessential case of templatic morphology. In probably all or most dialects of Arabic the comparative of an adjective is formed by taking the base adjective and matching 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]. However, when one starts to consider the details of comparative formation a number of interesting issues arise ranging from cases of templatic allomorphy to adjective types that resist having a templatic comparative form to the actual nature of the consonants that appear in the template. In this talk we present some of these issues of comparative formation based on Cairene Arabic. We then focus on the issue of what consonants actually map onto a template in Arabic. The issue comes up because different types of templatic morphology do not seem to be uniform in their templatic mapping. As an example, in the comparative, underlying root consonants that fail to surface in the base adjective can re-emerge in the comparative. Two examples based on Cairene Arabic are the adjectives [baayix] ‘unpleasant’ with the comparative [abwax] and [mufiida] ‘beneficial’ with the comparative [afyad]. Here we see that root glides that do not surface in the base adjective because of phonological change can appear in the templatic comparative. On the other hand, in the common templatic hypocoristic that has the shape CaCCuuC (e.g. [basma] – [bassuum]), the personal name [mufiida] has the hypocoristic [fadfuud-a] and not *[fayyuud], thus showing that a nonsurffacing root consonant cannot appear in the templatic hypocoristic. We then compare templatic mapping in the comparative and hypocoristic with that found in the broken plural and diminutive. One difference between these is that a prefixal element of the base can map onto the broken plural or diminutive template whereas prefixal elements are usually ignored in the mapping from the base to the comparative and hypocoristic templates. Implications will be discussed for Arabic word formation.