

A FESTSCHRIFT FOR NADIA ANGHELESCU

Edited by

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OPEN QUESTIONS ON STRESS IN ARABIC: SOME SOCIOPHONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

GIULIANO MION

1. Introduction

If one looks at the literature in the Arabic language, one gets the impression that the accent often represents a problem mainly for Italian, Spanish and English researchers, the latter particularly in the light of generative analysis, and it is usually underestimated by the French ones.

Moreover, according to Roth (1994: 208): “les théoriciens de l’accentuation récusent généralement les considérations qui touchent à la substance de l’accent [...] Dans la comparaison diachronique et dans l’étude des contacts, il semble que la nature de l’accent ne soit pas un facteur à négliger, pour la compréhension du fonctionnement dynamique des systèmes linguistiques et de leur évolution”.

Modern studies on stress in Arabic begin with the classic work of Mitchell (1960), which acted as a base for further research mainly in phonological theories.

This paper does not address the application of particular phonological theories. First, a brief overview of the stress systems in some varieties of Arabic will be provided. Additionally, the paper will recommend some diachronic reflections. These reflections, here only outlined since still embryonic, are part of a broader research project on the history of genetic and typological division between Eastern and North African Arabic dialects.

2. Stress in *fushā*

For Arabic grammar, the syllabic structure of *fushā* consists mainly of three types of syllables: the syllable is open if $C\bar{v}$ or Cv , and closed if $CvC(C)$ ¹. Theoretically, a closed syllable with a long vowel nucleus would not be permitted,

¹ It is often subjected to resyllabification after the intervention of nominal declension: e.g. *tamr CvCC* → *tam.ru(n) CvC.Cv(C)* ‘dates’.

but $C\bar{v}C$ and $C\bar{v}CC$ types may appear in several phonotactic positions, as for example *yamšī l-walad* → *yam.šīl.wa.lad* $CvC.C\bar{v}C.Cv.CvC$ ‘the boy walks’, *mārratāni* → *mār.ra.tā.ni* $C\bar{v}C.Cv.C\bar{v}.Cv$ ‘two passers-by’, *mārr* → *mārr* $C\bar{v}CC$ ‘passer-by’; however, this last one is traditionally syllabified again *mār.ru(n)* by the intervention of nominal declension.

It is well known that the Arabic linguistic tradition, beginning by Sībawayhi, has ignored the question of lexical stress, perhaps because the same tradition does not even seem to have worked on the concept of syllable². This lack of interest in the syllable and the lexical stress has two reasons: (i) an excessive attention paid by the grammarians to the written forms and, consequently, to the correct pronunciation of consonants³; (ii) in *fushā* a phonological value is given to vowel quantity, that is distinctive, and not to accent.

Western grammars of *fushā*, for Lambert (1897), have neglected or underestimated the problem at least until the seventeenth century. Most of the grammars that contain information on stress present general rules that we can summarize using the words of J. Cantineau: “L’accent se place sur la première syllabe longue à compter de la fin du mot; si le mot ne comporte pas de syllabe longue, l’accent se place sur la première syllabe du mot; les longues finales ne reçoivent pas l’accent”⁴.

More specifically, we can illustrate this rule in the following three principles⁵:

- (i) if a word is formed only by Cv or $_Cv.C\bar{v}\#$ types (final $C\bar{v}$ is never stressed), stress is assigned to the first syllable: *xāraġa* ‘to go out’ (syllabified *xa.ra.ġa*, and then $'Cv.Cv.Cv$);
- (ii) if a word contains a long syllable, $C\bar{v}$ or CvC , stress is assigned to this one: *ġurfā* ‘room’ (syllabified *ġur.fa*, and then $'CvC.Cv$); *mādrasa* ‘school’ (syllabified *mad.ra.sa*, and then $'CvC.Cv.Cv$);
- (iii) if a word contains two or more long syllables, $C\bar{v}$ and/or CvC , stress is assigned to the long syllable closer to the end of the word: *šaḍīquhūnna* ‘their F friend’ (syllabified *ša.ḍī.qu.hun.na*, and then $Cv.C\bar{v}.Cv.'CvC.Cv$).

These three principles can be further summarized with the following rule: stress is assigned to the first sequence (not syllable) $-v\bar{C}-$ or $-vCC-$ from the end of the word; in the absence of these sequences, stress is assigned to the first vowel, but does not go back beyond the antepenultimate vowel⁶. Therefore, a $C\bar{v}$ syllable is not subjected to this rule.

² Anyway, we must remember that for some scholars the terminology of *ḥarf mutaharrik*, that is a consonant (*ḥarf*) with a vowel (*ḥaraka*), hides the intuition of a theory for the syllable (cf. Bohas et al. 2006: 95).

³ See also Mitchell (1960: 369–370).

⁴ See Cantineau (1960: 119–120).

⁵ See Holes (2004: 63), Mion (2007: 83; and with slight modifications 2010: 64).

⁶ Durand (2009: 275–276).

But it is well known that the stress rules of the native dialect of the speaker are very often transplanted in *fushā*.

With tri-syllabic simple structures, in most cases (except for *fushā* as spoken by Cairenes), the rules just mentioned are applied. With tri-syllabic structures ending in $-C\bar{v}$ and especially with structures with more than three syllables, the system begins to report a greater degree of interference with the dialect. Thus, with words like 'antumā 'you DU' (with syllabic structure $CvC.Cv.C\bar{v}$), or *daxalatā* 'they DU F entered' (with syllabic structure $Cv.Cv.Cv.C\bar{v}$), the system reveals its crisis and the variation in the stress depends on the origin of the speaker. The latter word, for example, will be pronounced *dáxalatā* by an Iraqi, *daxálatā* by an Arab of the Peninsula, *daxalátā* by an Egyptian, or *daxalatā* by a Lebanese.

The stress may be therefore considered partially free, but it retains its culminative function and must be intended as a property defined by the phonetic structure of the word that can be assigned to any syllable. However, the fact that in *fushā* stress is not phonemic does not imply, as suggested by someone in the past, that it did not exist at all in ancient Arabic, since it is a concrete phonetic property of the word.

It should be quickly remembered that with "lexical stress" one refers to the prominence of one of the syllables constituting the word⁷, since "c'est l'insistance sur une syllabe en augmentant, soit la hauteur musicale, soit l'intensité, soit la durée, soit plusieurs de ces éléments à la fois"⁸. This prominence is realized on the nuclear vowel of the syllable through interaction and different gradation of the three so-called "acoustic correlates": fundamental frequency (henceforth F_0)⁹, duration¹⁰, and intensity¹¹. If a syllable is more highlighted than the others mainly by an increment of the F_0 values, stress is "musical"; instead, if a syllable is more highlighted than the others by an increment in the duration of its vowel and/or the intensity, stress is "dynamic".

The majority of Arabic dialects seem to have a musical stress type, i.e. a stress in which the syllabic prominence is given by an increment of F_0 increases on the nuclear vowel. Compared to a language like Italian, stress in Arabic tends not to lengthen the duration of the vowel but it increases the tonal height and/or the intensity.

⁷ We mean here by "word" the phonological word, that is an accentual unit.

⁸ Cantineau (1960: 119, original emphasis).

⁹ Fundamental frequency, more technically symbolized by F_0 , is the correlate that defines the pitch of the voice, but not its timbre.

¹⁰ Duration is the correlate that defines the length of a vowel which is measured in milliseconds.

¹¹ Intensity is the correlate that is dependent on the amplitude of the sound wave and on the perceptive side is responsible of the loudness of the sound.

For Cantineau: "en réalité, dans la plupart des dialectes arabes, l'accent de mot est faible, et il n'est nullement prouvé que sa place dans le mot soit stable. On à plutôt l'impression d'un accent de phrase que d'un accent de mot"¹².

The following will be an overview of the fundamental features of the stress systems of the main dialect areas.

3. Stress in the Arabic dialects

From Iraq to Algeria stress falls on the first long vowel or the first sequence -vCC- from the end of the word (principle i). If the word contains no long vowel or no -vCC- sequence, the accent falls on the first syllable (principle 2). In most varieties stress never goes beyond the antepenultimate.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>darasū-ha</i> | Cv.Cv.Cv̄.Cv | 'they studied it' |
| | b. | <i>darasū</i> | Cv.Cv.Cv̄ | 'they studied it' |
| | c. | <i>darást</i> | Cv.CvCC | 'I studied' |
| | d. | <i>darásna</i> | Cv.CvC.Cv | 'we studied' |
| | e. | <i>dárrasu</i> | CvC.Cv.Cv | 'they taught' |
| | f. | <i>sāfaru</i> | Cv̄.Cv.Cv | 'they left' |
| (2) | a. | <i>dáras</i> | Cv.CvC | 'he studied' |
| | b. | <i>dárasu</i> | Cv.Cv.Cv | 'they studied' |

We can give to these rules the conventional name of 'Eastern model'.

3.1. An Egyptian-Yemeni isogloss

Varieties of Cairo¹³ and Lower Egypt, as well as Ġiblah (Yemen), apply the same stress rules of the Eastern model, but in sequences like Cv.CvC.Cv.Cv or CvC.Cv.Cv(C), and for borrowings from *fushā* also in Cv̄.Cv.Cv(C), stress is systematically assigned to the penultimate (3).

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------|--------------|-------------|
| (3) | a. | <i>madrása</i> | CvC.Cv.Cv | 'school' |
| | b. | <i>yiftāhu</i> | CvC.Cv.Cv | 'they open' |
| | c. | <i>mudarrísa</i> | Cv.CvC.Cv.Cv | 'teacher F' |
| | d. | <i>kātábat</i> | Cv̄.Cv.CvC | 'she wrote' |

¹² Cantineau (1960: 120, original emphasis), who goes on and says that "les seuls parlers qui aient un accent de mot *fort*, mélange de hauteur musicale et d'intensité, comparable en somme à l'accent italien, sont les parlers de nomades nordarabiques". On this latter statement, one could also disagree with Cantineau's point of view.

¹³ See Mitchell (1960). Recent studies on Cairene stress are numerous, since they have played an important role on the development of metrical theory. For a review of these studies, see Watson (2002: 79–80; 93–98).

Compare examples (3) from Cairo, with Damascus *mádrase*, *yáftaḥu*, *mudárrise*, *kātabet*, and classical Arabic *mádrasa*, *yáftaḥū*, *mudárrisa*, *kātabat*.

Note that the last example exhibits an application of the rule although the length of *ā* is only etymological, since in Cairene pre-tonic long vowels are shortened (see 2.3): in fact, *kātábat* is simply realized [kæ'tæbæt] and not *[kæ:'tæbæt]¹⁴, so preserving a distinction with *kátabat* 'she wrote' of the first verbal form.

For examples like *yidarrisu* 'they teach', characterized by a Cv.CvC.Cv.Cv syllabic structure, one could also suspect sociophonological reasons at the basis of the historical process. The Egyptian realization, in fact, helps to avoid both the Eastern and the Maghrebi realizations that lack the short vowel *i* and tend to a rissyllabification of the word, since they have (*b-*)*yidárrsu*. So, as far as an interpretation of the history of the Egyptian stress is concerned, how likely could the hypothesis of an effort to preserve the short vowel (like the Classical Arabic model) be?

3.2. Another Yemeni peculiarity

The Yemeni dialects have the same stress rules typically valid for the Eastern and Peninsular area¹⁵. In particular, the variety of Sanaa exhibits a typical Eastern model (4) but, at the same time, has a notable exception (5) if the penultimate or the last syllable is C \bar{v} or if the penultimate syllable ends with a tail that is part of geminate consonant.

(4)	<i>maktúb</i>	CvC.C \bar{v} C	'letter'
	<i>mádrasih</i>	CvC.Cv.CvC	'school'
	<i>sáfarat</i>	C \bar{v} .Cv.CvC	'she travelled'
	<i>libisat</i>	Cv.Cv.CvC	'she got dressed'
(5)	<i>šábūn</i>	C \bar{v} .C \bar{v} C	'soap'
	<i>xúttātt</i>	CvC.C \bar{v} C	'clasp'

It is worth noting that also in the Chadian and Sudanese areas one can find stress types like C \bar{v} CC \bar{v} C and CvCC \bar{v} C, as *šállūfa* 'hare'¹⁶.

In Sanaa, as in many other Yemeni dialects, there are occurrences of stress fluctuation with alternations like *xášab* ~ *xašáb* 'wood', *al-ḥimár* ~ *al-ḥimār* 'the donkey', etc. The fluctuation seems to be determined by the style of speech, the position of the word, the pre- and post-pause positions, and emotional factors.

¹⁴ If not in a highly formal level of language.

¹⁵ Rossi (1939), Diem (1973), Na'im-Sanbar (1994), Watson (2002).

¹⁶ Roth (1994: 211).

3.3. Morpho-phonological consequences

In the eastern sedentary dialects, pretonic long vowels are shortened, i.e. */Cv̄Cv̄/ > /Cv̄Cv̄/: Cairo **fanāgīn* > *fanagīn* 'cups'. Exceptions to this rule are the *qaltu* dialects, some Bedouin dialects from Arabia, and some rural Palestinian and Sudanese dialects. In North Africa, instead, many pre-hilalian Muslim dialects show a different solution in which */Cv̄Cv̄/ > /'Cv̄Cə/: Tunis and Rabat **šabābīk* > *šbābak* 'windows'.

In many dialects, post-tonic long vowels are shortened, so */-Cv̄#/ > /-Cv̄#/: Amman **áeṣū* > *áeṣu* 'they gave', Cairo **biyiktībū* > *biyiktību* 'they write'. But in these varieties, post-tonic long vowels restore their original length if stress falls on them after the addition of elements or desinential suffixes that begin with a consonant: Amman *áeṣu* 'they gave' → *aeṣú-ni* 'they gave me', Cairo *biyiktībū* 'they write' → *biyiktibú-ha* 'they write it'.

One notable exception is again represented by the Yemeni dialects, in which vowel length in post-tonic position is always maintained, even without suffixes: Sanaa *katābnā* 'we wrote', *túktubī* 'you F write'.

In the themes ending in closed unstressed syllable (so /-CvC#/), the addition of a suffix beginning with a consonant determines a stress shift: Damascus *máktab* 'office' → *máktab-ak* 'your- S M office', but *maktáb-kon* 'your PL office'; Tunis *yúmkun* 'it is possible' → *yumkún-li* 'it is possible for me (= I can)'.

In several dialects, we can observe a process in which stress seems sometimes to have a distinctive role. In the areas that document this process, one can find minimal pairs mostly morphologically motivated: Damascus *šāfu* 'they saw' ≠ *šafú(h)* 'they saw him', Cairo *máska* 'one F who takes' ≠ *maská(h)* 'one F who takes it', *Mardin* *ṭálabu* 'they asked' ≠ *ṭaláb-u* 'they asked it'.

3.4. Stress in Moroccan Arabic

In Moroccan Arabic the question of stress still remains largely shrouded in obscurity.

So far, western scholars have presented no significant research on this domain¹⁷. Aguadé (2003) notes that the difficulties in the analysis of the Moroccan stress reside in the difference between word stress and sentence stress. But Aguadé argues that in polysyllables with one long syllable, the accent falls on it. Durand (2004) attempts to provide some general rules, though admitting that they are not absolutes, and shows that for a word like *sarut-i* 'my key' a Spanish and an Italian can hear [særuti], [sæ'ruti] or [særu'ti], while a French tends to hear

¹⁷ For example, two recent grammars of Moroccan Arabic, one published by R. S. Harrell in English in 1962, and the other by D. Caubet in French in 1993, simply omit the question of stress.

[særu'ti]. Several Moroccan researchers have tried to identify the different rules of stress, but they often arrived to dissimilar and conflicting results¹⁸.

Roughly speaking, one can conclude that the prominence is received by one of the last two syllables of the word. In principle, a CvC syllable, i.e. with a full nuclear vowel, is more prominent than a syllable containing an ə. On the phonetic side, instead, instrumental studies agree that in Moroccan Arabic the most important acoustic correlate for the realization of the prominence is F0.

At the level of single words, the syllabic prominence for Benkirane (1998) is determined by the bottom-down movement of F0: in a bisyllabic word as *bala* 'crefty' the peak of the tonal curve would be reached before the end of the first syllable, the fall would begin before the lateral consonant and end on the final vowel; in a monosyllabic word as *bāl* 'look out' the maximum and the minimum of the curve would be both situated on the only vowel.

At the level of sentence, when the word is not in final (i.e. prepausal) position, the presence of the pitch accent would be less evident, and intensity and/or duration would realize prepausal secondary prominences. Sentence accent, then, both on the acoustic and perceptive side, seems to fall on the rightmost word of phrase of the utterance¹⁹, as shown by the examples (6)²⁰:

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| (6) | a. | <i>žāb-u lī-h</i> | [ʒæbu'li:h] | 'he brought it to him' |
| | b. | <i>žāb-u lī-ha</i> | [ʒæbu'li:ha] | 'he brought it to her' |
| | c. | <i>žāb-u-lha</i> | [ʒæ'bulha] | 'he brought it to her' |
| | d. | <i>žāb-u-lha l-magāna</i> | [ʒæbulhalma'gæna] | 'they brought her the watch' |

In Moroccan Arabic, the acoustic correlate mainly responsible for the realization of the prominence in isolated words is the fundamental frequency and one must remember that, besides lexical stress, the same correlate determines also the intonation of the sentence. In addition, we must remember that lexical stress has to be intended as an abstract quality, namely the potentiality of a single syllable of the word to receive the stress when the word is located within a sentence²¹.

According to Benkirane (1998), the Moroccan intonation is characterized by a melodic curve generally poor of peaks and hills, contrary to other Neo-Arabic varieties²², because the tonal movements which are phonemically relevant are situated primarily on the last tonic syllable and on the post-tonic syllables.

¹⁸ For a review of these studies, see Mion (2010: 127–130).

¹⁹ The directionality is meant here in a non-Arabic sense.

²⁰ Benkirane (1998: 349).

²¹ Lehiste (1970: 150).

²² For Egyptian intonation, see Mitchell (1990 and 1993). For the intonation of Damascus Arabic, see Kulk et al. (2003) that however seems to describe, without specifying it, in particular the so-called *haky mbōza* (untranslatable expression) of the old people in the Old City.

The unmarked declarative sentence has a tonal curve initially flat and with no significant pitch movement in all pretonic syllables, after a sharp rising movement on the prominent syllable that supports the sentential stress, and finally a fall to the bottom²³. Phonemically, the structure of the declarative sentence is a sequence of tones [(L)LHL], the same one that seems to be found even in central Moroccan Berber with a falling-rising-falling movement²⁴.

If the main tonal peaks are aligned to the right border and to the extreme limit of the sentence, the prominence will be placed basically at the penultimate or last syllable, in accordance with various studies on Moroccan Arabic stress. However, this interpretation suggests that the prominence is assigned to one of the last two syllables of an utterance or, more technically, of a "phonological word" or also, in strict phonetic terms, of a "breath group". The prominent syllable, situated on the right of the utterance, can refer firstly to the sentence and finally the word; the flat pattern to the left of the tonal curve, in pretonic position, implies a de-accentuation of the syllables that in isolated context would carry potentially the stress.

Therefore, in Moroccan Arabic one should seek a sentence stress, and not a lexical one.

4. Remarks on stress from a historical point of view

The pioneering article by Lambert (1897) shows that the rules of accentuation of *fushā* are not based on a genuine tradition, since they were formulated in the seventeenth century by Erpenius who was influenced by the Syro-Lebanese pronunciation. Lambert advances the hypothesis that North African stress system is more ancient than the Levantine one, i.e. that the *katāb* type is oldest than the *kātab* type. Additionally, Kampffmeyer (1908) and Saraw (1939) hold the same opinion of Lambert.

Aside from Moscati (1964), who wrote that the original system (if not even Proto-Semitic) would be the eastern one, other studies agree to view a greater antiquity in the Maghrebi accentual system. Both Birkeland (1954) and Grotzfeld (1969) consider that the oldest Arabic accentual system is the Maghrebi and that the Eastern system, i.e. the *šāmi*, has spread beyond its original confines coming up to the Maghreb and to different areas of the Arabian Peninsula.

According to Steiger (1932), who made a comparative study of Andalusí and Maghrebi Arabic, the original stress was first on the last syllable, like in

²³ In open interrogatives the peak is situated on the interrogative element that is followed by a falling movement and finally a flat curve. In total questions, intonational structure is similar to that of the declaratives, but with higher average values of F0.

²⁴ Durand (1995).

ḍahabūn, then on the penultimate, like in *ḍahábun*, but after the fall of final vowels it would be remained simply on the last, like in the *ḍaháb* model; then, the Syro-Lebanese area would have innovated by anticipating the stress on the penultimate, like in the *ḍáhab* model. Steiger's hypothesis is seductive, but one must accept the postulate that the varieties of Arabic spoken in the Middle Age would have had short final vowels, which is a questionable statement. This working model was taken again by Birkeland (1940) who viewed the loss of nominal declension as a product of the weakening of short final vowels: the weakening, in his view, occurred through five diachronic phases that gradually would have turned out the pausal forms: so, *kātib-u*, *kātib-a*, *kātib-i* > *kātib-Ø*. It is worth remembering that several recent studies consider the reverse process more likely²⁵.

Blau (1972) lists a number of examples of Palestinian Christian Middle Arabic of the ninth and the tenth century in which some terms with a Maghrebi accent type seem to appear: 'aenā 'he intended', interpretable from **enā* < *eanā*; 'ašhadū 'they witnessed' < **šhadū* interpretable from *šhadū*; 'ažhar interpretable from **žhar* < *zahar* 'he appeared'; *had* 'one' from 'aḥad.

Even the bilingual Greek and Arabic psalm lviii of Syrian origin, published by Violet (1902), dating from the eighth century, exhibits suspected factors that Blau explains like occasional Maghrebi accent types, as for example 'afsál 'he abhorred'. Although these facts are marginal, they agree with previous statements (*katáb* stress type) and suggest that words of the psalm without long vowels (or with them only in the last syllable) were stressed perhaps on the last syllable.

4.1. Hypothesis on the development of the Maghrebi stress system

After the French school²⁶, the discipline has interpreted the situation of Arabic in North Africa as the result of a diachronic phonomorphological process:

$$(7) \quad *Cv' Cv Cv > *Cv' Cv C > *Cv Cv' C > CCvC$$

and for *CvCC* patterns:

$$(8) \quad *CvCC > *Cv' Cv C > *Cv Cv' C > CCvC$$

The process, known in the literature as "ruine du bref vocalisme", was explained quite simply: the stress has shifted and unstressed vowels have fallen,

²⁵ See, among them, Owens (2006).

²⁶ See, for example, Marçais (1977).

as well as it happens in many languages of the world. The reasons why this process would take place have divided scholars and created fundamentally two currents of thought:

- (i) the process was spontaneous and independent;
- (ii) the process was caused by interference with the Berber substrate.

In a stimulating paper on koineization in Arabic, Retsö (2000) isolates eight features that, in his point of view, are common both to North African Arabic and Aramaic:

- (i) stressed last syllable;
- (ii) phonomorphological rearrangement *CaCáC# > CCaC#;
- (iii) imperfective pl. 3 p.m. suffix in *-īw* for verbs of III y;
- (iv) perfective pl. 3 p.m. suffix in *-āw* for verbs of III y;
- (v) *t(t)*- analytical passive;
- (vi) *CCāC* pattern²⁷;
- (vii) *nisba* in *-āy*²⁸;
- (viii) genitival prepositions in *d*-²⁹.

In Retsö's view, these features give evidence of a linguistic continuum that includes both a form of (Proto-Maghrebi) Arabic and a form of Aramaic. For Retsö, the center of a variety of Arabic close to Aramaic should be located in an area of linguistic compromise both Arameophone and Arabophone, i.e. an area between Syria and Northwestern Arabia. This variety, once transplanted in North Africa through military conquests during the Islamic campaigns, would be subjected to a levelling process and lost many of its distinctive features under the increasing influence of (*fushā*?) Arabic. As a result, one can infer that a form of Proto-Maghrebi Arabic has had an original location in the eastern area identified by Retsö³⁰, contrary to who consider Egypt a center of irradiation of North African type linguistic waves³¹.

Now, the Aramaic *CCaC* pattern coincides with the Berber and the Maghrebi Arabic *CCāC* pattern, so that both can be summarized as *CCvC*. The analogy between the patterns of Aramaic, Berber, and Maghrebi Arabic finds mainly two possible explanations:

- (i) it is a coincidence between languages;
- (ii) Berber and Aramaic have the same pattern independently, but in North Africa Berber influences Arabic and the latter adopts this pattern.

²⁷ Very questionable feature.

²⁸ Very questionable feature.

²⁹ This feature can be found only in Western Maghrebi dialects, i.e. Algeria and especially Morocco.

³⁰ For further arguments in favour of the oriental origin of a Proto-Maghrebi Arabic, see also Durand (2007) who, however, doesn't take into consideration the Aramaic hypothesis.

³¹ See, for example, the analysis on the origins of Maghrebi Arabic of Owens (2003) that takes into consideration exclusively the isogloss of the imperfective in *n*- and, like other previous scholars, considers Egypt as the historical center of this phenomenon.

The first explanation may seem convincing if one only considers the great internal cohesion among the Semitic morphological systems, but in our case one should consider also the diachronic changes that have characterized the western area through the centuries.

The second explanation involves the application of the theory of the "ruine du vocalisme bref", acknowledging the role of interference of Berber in the vocalism of Maghrebi Arabic. In this view, Arabic arrived in North Africa, was transformed by Berberophones, and lost its short vowels.

A third potential explanation, derived from the second, is: Berber and Aramaic have the same pattern independently, and Berber influences a variety of Arabic that adopts this pattern because it is already predisposed to accept it. This third explanation is based on the assumption that the Aramaic *CCaC* pattern (i.e. the Aramaic accentual system that stress the last syllable) could have been the same of some Neoarabic variety formed in the East and subsequently arrived to the West. The reverse migration, instead, seems historically more onerous³².

If this variety had remained in the East, it might have retained a greater number of Aramaic features, but it was transplanted in North Africa and met with Berber which has two characteristics that may have heavily influenced this Neo-Arabic variety: 1) a nominal and verbal *CCəC* pattern that coincides with the Aramaic *CCaC* pattern, 2) an accent phonetically constructed essentially on the movements of F0, as it still happens in Moroccan Arabic³³. If so, this eastern Arabic variety with Aramaic features found a suitable ground in North Africa to accelerate the adoption of a strong accent, just based on F0, which in turn has accelerated the adoption of the *CCvC* pattern shared by both Aramaic and Berber.

With this explanation, one should remember that previously the nature of accent was also taken into consideration to explain some other phenomena, like for example the spirantization in the Semitic languages³⁴.

Moreover, the Andalusi *katáb* type has a *CvCvC* pattern, with stress on the last syllable and the conservation of the pretonic short vowel in an open syllable. This pattern is found at the present in Cyrenaica³⁵ and in the Chadian and Sudanese area³⁶, and has also precedents in some Arabian dialects, while historically the conservation of the short vowel in an open syllable is well

³² Although it is not impossible: we must remember that some of the Maghrebi features that the Egyptian western oases exhibit may have been introduced after the eleventh century in the course of the migrations back east of the Banū Sulaym.

³³ Now, read again par. 2.4 of this paper.

³⁴ See Corriente (1969).

³⁵ Owens (1984).

³⁶ Roth (1994: 211).

documented in Maltese, Siculo-Arabic and Maghrebi Middle Arabic³⁷. But in Andalus, the stress position finds no explanation in the Berber substrate simply because there was no Berber substrate in al-Andalus and, consequently, it should be based on a typology originally not North African (and thus Eastern?) transplanted there in distant ages and which already had an oxytone accent.

The presence of short vowels in unstressed open syllables in the $CvCvC$ pattern, at least in al-Andalus and Sicily, also represents another historical problem. The presence of pretonic short vowels in open syllable can be viewed as a phenomenon of conservation due to the Romance substrate but, if considered only in relation to the stress position, it could be also viewed as the resistance of these vowels after a stress shift. If so, the Andalus system would exhibit then the passage $*CvCvC > CvCvC$, without final $CCvC$. As an alternative to this last explanation, one could question whether the $CvCvC$ type is not the result of a historical process, but rather the simple preservation of a ready pattern that arrived in a Romance substrate ground.

So, the question could be how likely the following reconstruction is:

- (i) there are originally two accentual systems for Arabic both born in the Mashreq: one is the $CvCvC$ type and the other the $CvCvC$ type, the last of which represents a type closer to Aramaic;
- (ii) the $CvCvC$ type is transplanted to North Africa by migration, and the $CvCvC$ type remains in the Mashreq;
- (iii) the $CvCvC$ type in Andalus and Sicily finds a Romance substrate that facilitates the preservation of the short vowel in open syllable, but in North Africa it meets a Berber substrate that has an accentual system which favors the corrosion of short vowels;
- (iv) the $CvCvC$ type extends to all eastern areas because of the prestige exercised by its major center (Syria in particular) and starts to intrude into North Africa;
- (v) in Egypt the $CvCvC$ type and the $CvCvC$ type intersect and create a mixed accentual system, with a predominance of the first type;
- (vi) Cyrenaica exhibits a $CvCvC$ type where the short vowel in open syllable is maintained because of the great influence of the eastern models;
- (vii) in North Africa the $CvCvC$ type changes gradually, after the fall of the short vowels, into the $CCvC$ pattern.

Phase (i) is obviously the most difficult to defend but, however, one could wonder to what extent the hypothesis of an original $CvCvC$ system, so often aprioristically accepted as the sole one in ancient Arabic, is likely to be valid.

³⁷ Grand'Henry (1994).

After all, is it not well known, on the other hand, that the same Hijazi variety has been received as a linguistic model to imitate, to the detriment of other linguistic types?³⁸

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³⁸ Let us reflect again on Corriente (1969: 165–166): “The general rejection of spirantization by Arab tradition [...] very probably reflects the impact of Koran on socio-linguistic behaviour, since the ḥiǧāzī Arabian dialect, supposedly light stressed (consequently non-spirantized, if our theory is exact) was adopted [...] as the most correct language pattern: until now, the dialects of Eastern towns (unlike those of North Africa and many bedouin tribes) are characterized by light stress and no spirantization”.

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