

Lexical and Syntactic Passivization: Morphological Evidence from Arabic

This talk examines the formation of passive verbs and its distribution and productivity in Modern Standard Arabic and Palestinian Arabic (hereafter MSA and PA, respectively). I will account for the differences between the morphology of passivization in both languages, arguing that it results from the component of the grammar, the lexicon or the syntax, where the formation takes place. In addition, I will show that a word-based derivation captures the generalizations about passive formation in these languages and therefore should be favored.

It is commonly assumed that different thematic realization of the same concept (e.g. active and passive) is derived by valence changing operations. Passivization applies productively in MSA. It is possible to form a passive counterpart to each transitive verb, regardless of its prosodic template. This is performed by melodic overwriting, in which the vocalic pattern of a transitive verb changes into *u-i* and *u-a* in the perfective and imperfective form respectively (1).

- (1) ʔarsal - ʔursil ‘sent’ - ‘was sent’
yursil - yursal ‘(will) send’ - ‘is/will be sent’

The formation of MSA passive verbs is exception free and regarded as syntactic (Horvath and Siloni 2005, Laks 2007). Passive formation is different with regard to PA, where melodic overwriting does not apply and hence PA passive verbs are indeed rare. Such formation does not exist in other dialects of Arabic as well (see Hallman 2002, for example for the discussion of Lebanese Arabic). Nonetheless, there are passive forms in PA that are formed in two main templates: *inCaCaC* and *tCaCCaC* (see also Younes 2000). I argue that PA passivization is lexical and that morpho-phonological criteria restrict its application. Specifically, I will show that passive formation is possible only when the input transitive verb is formed in certain template, *CaCaC* and *CaCCaC*. The former is used as a base for *inCaCaC* passive verbs, while the latter is used for the formation of *tCaCCaC* passive verbs (2). In both cases the morphological process that applies is relatively simple as it involves only adding a prefix *in-* or *t-* to the active verb form.

- (2) baʕa - inbaʕa ‘sold’ - ‘was sold’
s'allah - ts'allah ‘fixed’ - ‘was fixed’

There are verbs in other templates such as *iCtaCaC* (e.g. *iqtarah* ‘suggested’) and *istaCCaC* (e.g. *istaqrad* ‘borrowed’), which have no passive alternates.

Which factors prevent the formation of such passive verbs?

There seem to be no thematic, syntactic or pragmatic reason for this blockage of valence changing. Furthermore, passive counterparts of such verbs exist in other languages cross-linguistically (e.g. MSA and English). I contend that the reason is morpho-phonological. Forming such passive verb in one of the passive templates would involve a rather complex morpho-phonology. Non-existing (but theoretically possible) forms such as **inqarah* (‘be suggested’) or **tqarrad* (‘be borrowed’) cannot be derived directly from transitive alternates by adding a prefix (*iqtarah* ‘suggested’ and *istaqrad* ‘borrowed’ respectively). The morphological component cannot handle such formations and therefore they are entirely blocked. Such a restriction is typical to derivations that apply in the lexicon and therefore PA passivization should be regarded as lexical.

The data provide further support for a word based view, according to which the lexicon consists of existing words with a full phonological representation. Specifically, the analysis provides support for the superiority of stem modification over root extraction (McCarthy Prince 1990, Bat-El 1994, Ussishkin 1999, 2005). If verbs in PA were formed by extracting a consonantal root,

there would be no reason for these gaps in passive verb formation. A consonantal root could be extracted from any transitive verb, regardless of its template. However, the data show that this does not take place. Passive verbs are derived directly from their active alternates by applying word formation rules on existing words, when such application is possible. The analysis supports the claim that morpho-phonology is an independent component that interacts with the lexicon (Aronoff 1976, Anderson 1977, Scalise 1984, Borer 1991 among others).

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