

PETER JOHN GLANVILLE

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THE LEXICAL
SEMANTICS

of the

ARABIC VERB

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The Lexical Semantics of the Arabic Verb

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For Chelsea

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List of abbreviations and symbols

(a) Transcription

In transliterating data from Modern Standard Arabic I use the following symbols:

Arabic Character	Transliteration Symbol	Articulatory Features
ء	ʔ	Glottal stop
أ, إ	aa	Long open front vowel
ب	b	Voiced labial stop
ت	t	Voiceless dental stop
ث	θ	Voiceless interdental fricative
ج	ɟ	Voiced alveolar fricative
ح	ħ	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative
خ	x	Voiceless velar fricative
د	d	Voiced dental stop
ذ	ð	Voiced interdental fricative
ر	r	Alveolar liquid
ز	z	Voiced dental fricative
س	s	Voiceless dental fricative
ش	ʃ	Voiceless alveolar fricative
ص	ʂ	Voiceless emphatic dental fricative
ض	ɟ̤	Voiced emphatic dental stop
ط	ʈ	Voiceless emphatic dental stop
ظ	ʈ̤	Voiced emphatic interdental fricative
ع	ʕ	Voiced pharyngeal fricative
غ	ɡ̤	Voiced velar fricative
ف	f	Voiceless labiodental fricative
ق	q	Voiceless uvular stop
ك	k	Voiceless velar stop
ل	l	Dental liquid
م	m	Labial nasal
ن	n	Alveolar nasal
ه	h	Voiceless glottal fricative
و	w, uu	Voiced labial fricative, long close back vowel
ي	y, ii	Voiced palatal fricative, long close front vowel
ا	a	Open front vowel
أ	u	Close back vowel
إ	i	Close front vowel

The Arabic character ّ appears on the end of feminine nouns and is transcribed as /a/ unless the noun is a non-final noun in a possessive construction, when it is transcribed as /at/.

In giving the citation form of verbs, in naming verb patterns, and in transcribing examples, I do not transcribe *hamzat al-waṣl*, the glottal stop that is added at the beginning of a word to avoid having a vowel as an onset.

(b) Glossing and translation

Following established convention, the citation form of a verb is the third masculine singular perfective. In word lists this is translated using an English infinitive. For example: *ḍaḥika* ‘to laugh’.

Grammatical labels in word lists indicate whether or not the verb takes an object. They are abbreviated as shown:

- trns Transitive. The verb takes a direct object. For example: *kasara* ‘to break’_{trns}
int Intransitive. The verb does not take an object. For example: *rakaḍa* ‘to run’_{int}
obl Oblique. The verb is followed by a preposition, then an object. For example:
iṣṭamada ‘to depend’_{obl}
ditrns Ditransitive. The verb takes two direct objects. For example: *ʔaṣṭaa* ‘to give’_{ditrns}

In the interests of space, word lists are only provided in transcription and translation. Contextualized data appear in Arabic text with a transcription, a gloss, and a translation. The abbreviations used are as follows:

- 1 first person
2 second person
3 third person
ACC accusative
COLL collective
DEF definite
DUAL dual
F feminine
GEN genitive
IND indicative mood
M masculine
NEG negative
NOM nominative
PL plural
SG singular
SUB subjunctive mood

(c) **Highlighting**

Arabic words are in italics; translations are in single quotes. For example: *kabiir* 'big'.

The vowels, affixes, or consonants of an Arabic word may be highlighted in bold depending on the point being made. The text will state what is highlighted in a given example.

Semantic notions are in small capitals. For example: the action HIT; the notion of HEIGHT.

A note on primary sources

Unless otherwise stated, data in word lists are found in Hans Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, edited by J. M. Cowan, 4th edition (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), or Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*, originally published in 1863 (Beirut: Librairie du Liban). Contextualized examples of modern usage are drawn from the Brigham Young University Online Arabic Corpus. This is a 30-million-word corpus consisting of texts from newspapers published in Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Kuwait, Jordan, and the United Kingdom, novels by writers from Egypt, Algeria, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Lebanon, and non-fiction works found on the Internet or in print, some of which consist of religious or political commentary. The corpus also contains premodern works, including the Quran, and some Egyptian colloquial texts. When I use data from this corpus, the footnote identifies it as coming from Brigham Young University (BYU), and includes a reference used in the corpus to identify the specific text. For example, BYU: SPO1997:27940. Other contemporary data are taken from the novel *mudun al-milh* 'Cities of Salt' by Abdul Rahman Munif (10th edition, 2003). These data are identified in footnotes using the author's last name and the page number. Contextualized examples of older usage are from Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān Al-Arab* (Cairo: Dar El-Hadith, 2003). This comprehensive documentation of Arabic usage draws from a number of older sources, and is dated around the year 1300.

Introduction and overview

1.1 Introduction

This book is about the mental construction and linguistic construal of meaning. My primary focus is the verb patterns of Arabic: recurring phonological material interlaced with what is traditionally referred to as a consonantal root. While there is a great deal of scholarship problematizing the status of roots, the verb patterns in which they are arranged have received markedly less attention. Standard grammars of Arabic label patterns as ‘intensive’, ‘causative’, ‘middle’, ‘reflexive’, ‘reciprocal’, and so on, with little further explanation of these terms. In many cases a given pattern is assigned several semantic functions in order to account for a variety of seemingly unrelated verb types that nevertheless all receive the same linguistic marking. Hence *tahaadaθa* ‘to converse’ and *tafaakasa* ‘to quarrel’ are held to have the same phonological shape because they are both reciprocal, but in order to explain *tamaaraḏa* ‘to feign sickness’, a different function must be attributed to this ‘reciprocal’ verb pattern. Similarly, *ʔanzala* ‘to lower’ and *ʔadxala* ‘to insert’, from *nazala* ‘to descend’ and *daxala* ‘to enter’ respectively, are supposedly formed in a causative verb pattern, and non-causative verbs like *ʔabḥara* ‘to go to sea’ or *ʔataaʔa* ‘to obey’ are either overlooked or treated separately. Reflexive verbs like intransitive *iḡtasala* ‘to wash’, from *ḡasala* ‘to wash (something)’, are explained as ‘middle’, but reflexive marking on a verb like *iḥtaadḏa* ‘to need’, which does not alternate with a transitive base, is not addressed.

The analysis presented in the coming chapters examines what is shared by all verbs bearing the same marking, arriving at a single semantic typology for each verb pattern. My working hypothesis is that each pattern began, most likely in some ancestor of Arabic, as a collection of independent words, and that over time these became phonetically reduced and merged in a process of grammaticalization. An important consequence of this process is that a pattern becomes an independent lexical unit that marks a certain semantic feature, and is no longer exactly equivalent to the meaning of the once-independent words that comprise it. As such, the verb patterns of Arabic now represent a set of semantic structures, and are iconic (Haiman 1983, 1985), bearing a direct relation to the types of participant involved in a situation and their relationships to each other.

This argument rests on a word-to-word account of derivation in which the Semitic root functions as a proxy for a base word and is never itself a semantic base. The fact that multiple verbs sharing the same root offer different presentations of a shared meaning has led to the frequent claim that roots and patterns are discontinuous morphemes, one encoding lexical meaning, the other grammatical. While verb patterns have certainly become morphemic however, the idea that a root contributes an abstract meaning to a derived word is problematic, since it cannot account for relationships between words. If all words are derived semantically from a root, they should all present variations of a single abstraction, and it should not be the case that there are layers of derivation in which some words clearly incorporate the meaning of others. In illustrating numerous word-to-word relationships, a secondary aim of the book is to establish the root as a consonantal string that may be extracted from more than one source word, and which may therefore have multiple meanings.

1.2 Overview

The book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 establishes a distinction between core meaning on the one hand, and the way in which it is viewed or framed on the other. It illustrates that a meaning component recurs in a given set of words, and that each word presents this component slightly differently. It also situates the current work within the debate over the status of the consonantal root in derivational processes. Chapter 3 begins the analysis of the verb patterns, focusing on three ground form variants distinguished only by a single vowel. I propose a prototypical ordering of participant roles in an event or situation, and argue that a ground form verb represents the structuring of semantic content in a way that either matches this order or that deviates from it. Deviations from the prototype are semantically marked, and the Arabic verbs that construe them are therefore marked morphologically. Chapter 4 turns to reflexive marking. I argue that the affixation of reflexive morphemes to base verbs has created a grammaticalized structure: a morpheme paired with a certain semantic feature. I show that this morpheme now appears on verbs whose action terminates at the subject, and is no longer dependent on a non-reflexive base verb to modify. In Chapter 5 I argue that two verb patterns characterized by a long vowel denote a symmetric semantic structure in which two participant roles are oriented relative to each other. Recognizing the function of these patterns allows for a single treatment of a great range of verbs that bear the same linguistic marking but which otherwise appear to have nothing in common. I illustrate that symmetry is a conceptual category that incorporates but is much larger than reciprocity, discernable in a variety of events and situations, and show that it is marked on verbs crosslinguistically. Chapter 6 examines verbs that causativize simple spontaneous actions, and those that turn static concepts into activities. Two verb patterns and their reflexive counterparts are addressed, each denoting the presence of an agent

that is typically not found in the base concept. Chapter 7 treats two verb patterns that signal repetitive action with repetition of linguistic form, either through reduplication of the second consonant, or of the first syllable. The chapter investigates the types of repeated action construed by verbs formed in each pattern, distinguishing between derived verbs that double up the action of the base verb, and non-derived verbs that encode a sound or rhythm noticed in the environment. In the concluding chapter I consider how the derivational system of Arabic may have come into existence, presenting evidence from studies of grammaticalization and analogy in other languages to strengthen my claim that Arabic verb patterns are the result of these same processes.

Words, roots, and patterns

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the semantic make-up of word meaning in general. My aim is to establish that all word meaning is comprised of two elements: a semantic structure and conceptual content that fleshes out that structure with specific detail (Langacker 1987, 1990, 1999; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998; Levin 2009). Every word frames conceptual content, and the derivation of one word from another produces a set of words in which this content is framed slightly differently.

Section 2.2 familiarizes the reader with the idea of roots and patterns, illustrating that Arabic words form families either because they share a consonantal string or because their overall shape is the same. Section 2.3 provides an overview of the current debate regarding the status of roots and patterns as lexical units, and situates the current work within this debate, outlining my approach to word-to-word derivation and the role of roots and patterns within it. The analysis of word meaning begins in Section 2.4, where I illustrate the distinction between conceptual content and semantic structure with a variety of Arabic data. The following two sections establish a direction of derivation. Section 2.5 treats words derived from verbs, and Section 2.6 illustrates that verbs may be derived from a variety of nouns, adjectives, and other verbs. I summarize the main points of the chapter in Section 2.7 and conclude by considering the implications of the analysis so far for the treatment of the verb patterns in the coming chapters, and for the development of a coherent theory of the Arabic verb.

2.2 Roots, patterns, and word families

Standard analyses of Arabic morphology typically state that, with the exception of a closed class of grammatical function words, every Arabic word consists of two components: a consonantal root and some type of pattern with which it combines (see for example Fischer 2002; Watson 2002; Holes 2004a; Ryding 2005, 2014). A root most commonly consists of three ordered consonants, although roots with two and four consonants are also attested. Following a convention developed by

Pesetsky (1995), I will preface a root with the symbol $\sqrt{\text{ }}$. As an example, the words in (1) form a word family whose members all contain the triconsonantal root $\sqrt{\text{h}\text{d}\text{r}}$, highlighted in bold.

- (1) *ḥaḍara* 'to attend, be present' _{int/trns}
ḥaḍaara 'sedentariness; civilization'
ḥaḍar 'a civilized region'
ḥaḍara 'to lecture' _{trns}
ḥaḍra 'presence'
istaḥaḍara 'to summon' _{trns}

The verb *ḥaḍara*, glossed in (1) as 'to attend', literally means 'he attended', but the third masculine singular perfective of a given verb is traditionally also its citation form, and is used in grammars in the way that the infinitive is used in English. I maintain this convention throughout this book.

As you looked over the words in (1), you probably searched for a semantic connection between them. This suggests that when the same three-letter string is repeated we recognize it as a discrete extractable element, and a number of studies by Boudelaa and Marslen-Wilson (2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2011) have shown that native speakers of Arabic recognize roots in this way too (although see Bohas 2002). Consonantal strings are also maintained when foreign words are imported into Arabic, where they come to represent the meaning of the source word. The examples in (2) are from Ryding (2014: 86).

- (2) *talfana* 'to telephone'
talfaza 'to televize'
balʃafa 'to Bolshevize'
taʔamraka 'to become Americanized'

Zeroing in on a root involves backgrounding the remainder of the word, and what is left over is a linguistic pattern that recurs to produce a different type of word family. These word patterns consist of vowels, non-root consonants (sometimes), and slots for the root consonants to fill. They occur with different roots resulting in sets of words that share the same shape. For example, the word *ḥaḍaara* 'civilization' exhibits a common pattern characteristic of nouns describing abstract entities or states. This pattern, not the root, is highlighted in (3).

- (3) *ḥaḍaara* 'sedentariness; civilization'
ḥadaaʔa 'modernity'
ʔaqaafa 'culture'
kaʔaafa 'density'
baraaʔa 'innocence'
badaana 'obesity'