A MORPHOLOGICAL STUDY OF
EGYPTIAN COLLOQUIAL ARABIC

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by

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PREFACE

This study of the Morphology of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic is a revision of a doctoral dissertation presented to the University of Texas in 1961. It presents one more step toward a complete analysis of the dialect. I should like to acknowledge previous contributions in the field of Arabic linguistics and wish to express my thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation and the Institute of International Education for their grant which made the study possible.

I am deeply indebted to Professor W. P. Lehmann, who was my thesis director, to Professor A. A. Hill and to Dr. W. Lehn of the University of Texas for their guided patience and illuminating suggestions. Without their kind help this would never have been done. I am specially thankful to Professor W. F. Twaddell of Brown University for his unfailing encouragement.

Cairo, U.A.R.,   H. M. ABOUL-FETOUH

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I.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

1.1 AIM AND SCOPE OF STUDY

This paper is a study of the morphology of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (henceforth referred to as ECA).[1] Morphology is taken here in its narrower sense, the study of morphemes, their phonemic shapes, classification and internal distribution. It is understood that morphology and syntax overlap in more than one area of the structure of a language. In this study syntactical criteria are kept to a minimum.

1.2 NATURE OF THE DIALECT

Arabic is a composite of linguistic systems which are so closely related that a satisfactory treatment of them has to take into consideration a multiple of geographical and cultural factors. This is beyond the scope of this paper; but a brief statement is not out of place. My speech embraces the following types of Arabic.

1. The "Fuṣha" (classical) conforms with the rules set by the Arab grammarians.

2. The "Semi-Fuṣha" has as its general feature the use of pausal forms.

3. Educated colloquial is elevated through the use of classicisms; its lexicon is larger and wider than "plain colloquial".[2]

4. "Plain colloquial" is the kind of speech I use when talking with uneducated people. This may be sub-classified as "urban" and "rural" colloquial.

This is the complex situation which one has to cope with. It is not an easy task to confine a description to the structure of one level, especially when most of the data are elicited introspectively; but on the whole I intend to limit myself to the

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[1] This does not imply that Egypt is a unified dialect area. On the contrary, the dialect situation is diverse. It might have been more appropriate to refer to the dialect under study as Cairene Arabic but for the already established tradition of broad classification of modern Arabic dialects. A detailed definition of the dialect will be given later in this chapter.

[2] The term is used by Haim Blanc in his "Style Variations in Spoken Arabic", *Contribution to Arabic Linguistics (Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs,* III*)* (Harvard University Press, 1960). Pp. 81-85 deal with the dialect situation in Arabic. Also see Hilmi M. Aboul-Fetouh, "The Plural Morpheme of Egyptian Arabic Nouns". M.A. thesis presented to the University of Texas (1959).

third and fourth types in an attempt to keep to a minimum problems that may arise of a broader mixture of dialect.

1.3 SOURCES OF STUDY

The material on which this study is based comes from the speech of my wife and myself. Culturally we share the same dialect, and geographically the gap is narrow. Her linguistic background is that of Cairo with traits of the North-Eastern region of the Delta; mine is that of the central area of the Delta and of Cairo, in which I have lived since the beginning of my higher education. The only difference between us is the limitation of her vocabulary when it comes to village life.

It is a sound assumption that these two idiolects have the characteristics of an educated Cairene dialect.

The data are mainly that of a personal dialect of a single speaker, myself. They were checked against the speech of my wife, especially in the area of paradigmatic behaviour. Variants of occurrences were not excluded from the description since in a general dialect diversity is to be expected.

1.4 NOTATION[3]

1.41   *Segmentals*

1.411   *Vowels*[4]

Short: i,   u,   a
Long[5]:   i:,   e:,   u:,   o:,   a:

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[3] The notation used in this paper is mainly based on the works of a) Richard S. Harrell, *The Phonology of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic* (New York, American Council of Learned Societies, 1957). b) Albert George Abdalla, "An Instrumental Study of the Intonation of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic", a dissertation submitted to the University of Michigan (1960).

[4] Harrell's two epenthetic vowel phonemes, /e/ and /o/ and his voiceless intercostal syllable pulse, /-/ are not included in the inventory. The argument against the phonemic status of the epenthetic vowels is clearly stated by Haim Blanc, Review of R. S. Harrell, *The Phonology of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic*, in *Word*, Vol. 15 (1959), pp. 539-543. The phonemic status of /-/ was not insisted on by Harrell. I quote from Harrell's p. 52: "This syllable pulse is audible as the voiceless release or closure of pre-pause or post-pause consonants. It occurs in alternation with pre-stress /i/ and /u/ and with post-stress /e/ and /o/. Its status as a separate phoneme may be disputed."

[5] It is the choice here to transcribe long vowels with a colon after the vowel. The argument whether long vowels are best analysed as geminate vowels or vowel plus a phoneme of length reflects the analyst's views rather than the structure of the language. For a detailed discussion see Harrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 and 67-68 and T. F. Mitchell, *Introduction to Egyptian Colloquial Arabic* (London, Oxford University Press, 1956).

1.412 Consonants[6]

		Labial	Dental	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Laryngeal
Stops:	Voiced	b	d		g			
	Voiceless		t		k	q		ʔ
Fricatives:	Voiced		z	ž		ġ	ʕ	
	Voiceless	f	s	š		x	ħ	h
Trill			r					
Lateral			l					
Nasal		m	n					
Semivowels		w		y				

1.413 Emphasis

There is more than one analysis[7] for the phenomenon of emphasis. Its phonemic status is extensively demonstrated but no effective notation has been devised. It is the choice here, for a morphological description, to analyse emphasis as co-occurring with the consonants and marked by underlining the pertinent segments.

1.42 Supra-segmentals

1.421 Stress

The phonemic status of stress may be illustrated by the following contrasts (given without pitch morphemes)

1) /síkit/   "he was silent"
2) /sikít/   "I was silent"

A lexical item, such as /síkit/, has one prominent stress marked /'/ while the other syllables, if the word is polysyllabic, carry a less prominent stress, marked /ˇ/. If we examine a longer stretch such as:

3) /hûwwǎ + síkĭt/   "he was silent"

which may occur under a different stress pattern

4) /húwwǎ + síkĭt/

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[6] /q/ and /ž/ are marginal phonemes. The first occurs in literary forms and the second in borrowed words.

[7] Harrell, op. cit., pp. 69-82 gives a comprehensive statement of the situation: Different analyses include positing a set of emphatic and non emphatic phonemes (consonants or vowels) or treating it as a prosodic feature which occurs over segments of variable length. The domain of emphasis has never been satisfactorily defined because of the complexity of its phonetic features.

we notice that the syllables marked /^/ are of medium prominence when compared with the primary /'/ and the weak /ˇ/. It is observed that the contrast primary-secondary occur on the phrase level but their position is not predictable by phonological criteria.

We are then to recognize three degrees of stress: primary, secondary, weak.

In spite of its phonemic status, stress is highly predictable on the word level.[8]

1.422   *Pitch*[9]

There are four contrastive pitch levels, to be referred to by the numerals: 1 2 3 4.

[8]   Stress is highly predictable in terms of the syllabic patterns and quality of the vowels within a microsegment. These are the rules.
1. Stress falls on the last syllable if it is of the patterns:
    -CvCC   katábt   "I wrote"
    -Cv:C   kitá:b   "book"
2. Stress falls on the ante penult if the last three syllables are of the pattern Cv and:
    a) if the last three vowels are identical, e.g.
        a a a   šágara   "tree"
        u u u   kútubu   "his books"
    b) if the penult vowel is an /a/, e.g.
        a a i   ʕárabi
        a a u   ḍárabu
        i a a   díbaba
        i a i   ʕínabi
        u a a   šúraka
        u a i   šúḍaḷi
    c) if the penult vowel is an /i/ and the form is a noun, e.g.
        a i a   málika
3. Otherwise it falls on the penult, e.g.
        CCvCv   ʔitmála
        CCvCvC   ʔistálaf
        CvCCv   sikíttu
        CvCCvC   káttib
        Cv:Cv   šalú:ha
        ..CCv:Cv   šayyá:lu
    (long vowels do not precede the penult)
        CvCvCv   e.g.
        a i a   šalítak
        a i u   šalítu
        i i a   ḥisíṇa
        i u a   rimúša
        u u a   šubúba
Notice that the penult vowel in these patterns is either /i/ or /u/. The only overlap in the above patterns and the patterns listed under 2.b occurs with
        a i a   The distribution is morphological:
        á i a   in noun forms
        a í a   in verb forms
4. Two lexical items are stressed differently:
        ʔahú
        ʔahí
[9]   These are based on Abdalla, *op. cit.*

1.423   *Juncture*[10]

Internal juncture /+/
Terminals /|/ /||/ /#/.

In the following chapters supra-segmentals will not be marked unless relevant to the specific discussion. However, transcription will be phonemic. The slant lines will be removed for convenience and a non-linguistic space will be left at word boundary when clarification of the discussion necessitates it.

1.5   MORPHOPHONOLOGICAL ALTERNATIONS

The subject was previously dealt with,[11] but it is useful to restate some of the general morphophonemic rules for the convenience of reference in the following chapters. Morphophonemic alternations which are relevant to a certain form class will be discussed separately under their respective chapters.

1.51   *The morphophonological word*

Stems in ECA have the structural characteristic of accepting as outer layers a succession of bound forms in the shape of prefixes and suffixes. e.g.

    ma⁀ha⁀yi⁀ktib⁀hum⁀š

This morphological structure will be referred to as a morphological word.

The domain of the morphophonemic alternations is the morphological word or the immediate boundaries of two morphological words when in close transition.

1.52   *The shortening of long vowels*

Changes of this type follow the limitations on the syllabic patterns of a morphological word:
   a) a long vowel does not precede the penult;
   b) a long vowel must carry a major stress ' ^;
   c) syllables of the patterns Cv:C and CvCC stand in final position only;
   d) a word has one long vowel only;
   e) a syllable with a long vowel can be closed by one consonant only.

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[10]   See Harrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-13.
[11]   Morphophonological alternations were treated by: a) Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-116. b) Harrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-88. c) Saad M. Gamal-Eldin, *Morphophonemics of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic* (The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1966).

The shortening of the vowels occurs in this manner:

i:		u:				
	> i		> u	a:	> a	
e:		o:				

in the following environments:

1.1	....Cv:C⌒C	→	CvCC	
	ma⌒ša:l⌒š	→	mašalš	"He did not carry"
1.2	....Cv:C⌒v:C	→	....CvCv:C	
	ša:l⌒u:h	→	šalu:h	"They carried him"
1.3	....Cv:C⌒Cv(C)	→	....CvCCv(C)	
	ša:l⌒ni	→	šalni	"He carried me"
	ša:l⌒hum	→	šalhum	"He carried them"
1.4	....Cv:CvC⌒CvC	→	CvCvCCvC	
	kana:yis⌒hum	→	kanayishum	"Their churches"

1.53 Elision of short vowels

A short vowel may be elided in the following environments: (J = major juncture)

a)	J Cv⌒C$_u^i$Cv́(:)(C)(:C)(CC)...	→	CvCC'...	
	ħa⌒tiʕa:mil	→	ħatʕa:mil	
b)	J Ca:CiC⌒v(C)...	→	CaCCa(C)	
	ṣa:ḫib⌒ak	→	ṣaḫbak	

1.54 Lengthening of short vowels

A short vowel (i u a) alternates with a long vowel (i:, u:, a:) in the following environment

....Cv⌒C(v)(C)

rama	⎤		rama:hum
ʔirmi	⎬⌒hum →		ʔirmi:hum
ʔirmu	⎦		ʔirhu:hum

1.55 Elision of the glottal stop

Not all glottal stops are elided in combination. Phonological differentiation between the elidable and non-elidable glottal stop is not possible. However, they are mor-