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AMORPHOUS AL-HĀ' IN ARABIC

Abstract

It is well known that in Arabic there is one group of consonants called weak (*hurūf^a l-‘illa^{ti}*). These phonemes, in addition to their phonetic characteristics (data of both vowels and consonants at the same time), stand out among other consonants by the ability to appear or disappear from the formal composition of the word as necessary, as well as the ability to replace each other. This is how *w*, *y*, and *hamza* behave: in *masdars* of $R_3 = w$ or $R_3 = y$ roots, *hamza* appears in all derivative forms with initial *‘alif*; $R_1 = w$ and $R_1 = y$ verbs lose the weak first root consonant in Imperfect and Imperative forms; *hamza* appears in some models of flexion plurals in nouns without a *hamza* in the root, etc. But in Arabic, there is another consonant characterized by similar traits. The article deals with guttural deaf fricative *h* (*al-hā[‘]*) which could be dropped out easily or appear (where its appearance is not caused by the clear grammatical or semantic reason), substitute some other consonants; at the same time, through the substitution, it can create a lexical pair with minimal/zero difference in semantics through neglecting its distinct function. Besides, the consonant reveals these, conditionally “amorphous”, features at the common Semitic scale, as well as within one language: diglossive vertical or bi-lingual flatness. Based on these characteristics, in the present article, it is qualified as “amorphous”. The issue is analyzed against the background of data of Semitic languages, more specifically – literary Arabic and Arabic dialects.

Keywords: Amorphous, *al-hā[‘]*, Arabic, language, phonetics, grammar.

Guttural, deaf fricative *h* (*al-hā[‘]*) in Arabic is a specific consonant to a certain extent: it could be dropped out easily or appear (where its appearance is not caused by the clear grammatical or semantic reason), substitute some other consonants; at the same time, through the substitution, it can create a lexical pair with minimal/zero difference in semantics through neglecting its distinct function. Besides, the consonant reveals these, conditionally “amorphous”, features at the common Semitic scale¹, as well as within one language: diglossive vertical or bi-lingual flatness.

1. Parallel roots. In Arabic, the roots of minimal difference are encountered (difference in one root consonant), where *al-hā[‘]* makes part of one of the roots, while there is another consonant in the similar position in the second root (often – *w*, *y*, *‘*, or *h*); besides the meanings of this lexical pair are identical, or differ minimally – remaining within the same semantic field. Such pairs could be realized within one language/one dialect, or within the diglossive frames (i.e., between literary and dialect forms of the given language), or on bilingual flatness (at the scale of Semitic languages).

Within one language

Literary Arabic

‘amiy^a – “to be blind”, root *‘ m y* — *‘amah^a* – “to wander about (as a blind)”, root *‘ m h*
nabba^{‘a} – “to notify, to inform”, root *n b ‘* — *nabbah^a* – “to call s.o.’s attention”, root *n b h*
‘azz^a – “to push (hard)”, root *‘ z z* — *hazz^a* – “to push (weak)”, root *h z z²*

¹ E.g., K. Tsereteli (Tsereteli 1964, 28) states that dropping of consonants is possible by dropping articulation in a weak position and that *‘* (the glottal stop) and *h* is easy to be lost in the languages related to Assyrian as well.

² It is implied that in this last example, the distribution of meanings is directly related to the phenomenon that *h* is a weak consonant compared to *hamza*. Cf., e.g., Koran, 19:25: *هُزِّي إِلَيْكِ بِجِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ*, the verb *huzzi* is understood as “shake lightly (palm tree branch)”, while in the quote *أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَا أُرْسَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ نُؤَزِّهِمْ أَرَا* (Koran, 19:83) the verb *ta’uzzuhum* is understood as “shaking hard (of sinners by the devils)”.

In Diglossive cut	
Literary language	Egyptian colloquial Arabic
<i>nadā</i> – “to call”, root <i>n d w</i>	— <i>nadah</i> – “to call”, root <i>n d h</i>
<i>faqīh^{um}</i> – “fakih”, root <i>f q h</i>	— <i>fi’i</i> – “fakih”, root <i>f’ < f q</i>

In Diglossive cut	
Literary language	Egyptian colloquial Arabic
<i>’amat^{um}</i> – “curvature”, root <i>’ m t</i>	— <i>’āmēh</i> – “curvature”, root <i>’ m h</i>

The Semitic root is characterized by the tendency of striving for “strengthening” the “weak” root. Under “weakness” the given context implies not only the cases when the root involves the weak consonants (*w*, *y*), but, besides, the cases when the root involves less than three consonants or contains three consonants, but one of them is relatively “weak” in comparison to others. For example, Grande states that *hamza* is often replaced in the root composition by more stable consonants, namely: ‘, *k*, *h*, *ḥ* (Grande 1963, 34). In the above-mentioned examples, the given phenomenon may be qualified as the tendency of the root to replace the weak root radicals by more stable consonants. In the given article, here and below, some of the examples discussed can be considered exactly as an illustration of the root tendency to strengthen (e.g.: lit. weak root *n d w* > Egypt. colloq. regular three radical root *n d h*).

2. Appearance of the consonant *al-hā’*

a) Appearance of consonant *al-hā’* may occur in certain (weak) roots, in plural forms of nouns:

Singular	Plural
<i>fam^{um}</i> (“mouth”, root <i>f m</i>)	— <i>’afwāh^{um}</i> (root <i>f w h</i>) / <i>’afmām^{um}</i>

As it is known, the word *fam^{um}* makes a part of a small specific group of names entitled “*al-asmā’ l-ḥamsa^{um}*” – “five nouns” (sometimes, here is considered the sixth noun as well: *hann^{um}* – “thing”) (Hamūda 1985, 108). When they turn up as first members of *al-’idāfa* construction, they show specificity during the declension: *-V > -V̄*. But the word *fam^{um}* is specific even between this group, as it loses the final *-m*: Nominative – *fū*, Accusative – *fā*, Genitive – *fī*. The point is that in the given word, final *-m* is considered a remnant of old Semitic *mimation* merged with the root (Grande 1963, 22). And *mimation*, similarly to *nunation*, is the morph, the connection of which with the root is not firm; its separation occurs easily; for example after adding the suffix *mimation/nunation* shifts to the following position of the added suffix, as it should assume the final position of the word; in modern Semitic, as it is well known, *nunation* is generally lost. We may presume that the root *f w h* (with its derivatives *fāh^a* – “to pronounce”, *fūha^{um}* – “mouth; crater”, etc.) is a three radicalized, “strengthened” version of the root *f m* (in its turn < *f*).

Other Examples:

Singular	Plural
<i>šāt^{um}</i> – “sheep; ewe”, root <i>š w ’</i>	— <i>šiyāh^{um}</i> , collect. <i>šā^{um}</i>
<i>mā^{um}</i> – “water”, root <i>m w h</i>	— <i>miyāh^{um}</i>
<i>šafat^{um}</i> – “lip”, root <i>š f w</i>	— <i>šifāh^{um}</i> / <i>šafawāt^{um}</i>
<i>ist^{um}</i> – “buttocks, backside”, root <i>st</i>	— <i>’astāh^{um}</i> / <i>’astāt^{um}</i> (cf. <i>afmām^{um}</i>)
<i>’umm^{um}</i> – “mother”, root <i>’ m m</i>	— <i>’ummahāt^{um}</i> / <i>’ummāt^{um}</i>

b) Appearance of *al-hā’* in the root may be caused by the diachronic processes. For example, in forms like *hajar^a*, *haṭal^a*, *haraq^a*, etc., initial *h-* is the remnant of the Semitic prefix *ha-* of causal meaning, having merged with the roots after undergoing neutralization (Grande 1963, 16, 53-54). Besides, quite often, these are the roots that require strengthening:

h j r (the root is connected with the meaning of relocation) < *j w r* (root meaning: “neighborhood”; cf. old Hebrew *gēr* – “foreigner, a person from another tribe”). The source root is weak, hollow, $R_2 = w$.

haṭal^a – “to flow in torrents” < *ṭall^a* – “to drizzle”. The source root is the so-called geminated root, which is not considered weak, as it does not include weak consonants. However, geminate, according to the Arabic tradition proper, is perceived not as a double consonant (in other words: two identical consonants in immediate neighborhood) but as one strengthened consonant (*mušaddad^{um}*); accordingly, with certain conventionality, it could be said that the source root included two consonants (one of which is strengthened: the articulation of the geminate implies an additional delay in pronouncing

the given consonant, pronunciation of one prolonged sound (Akhvlediani 2010, 18). Thus, merging of the neutralized semantics prefix with the root created the regular three-radical root.

c) Appearance of *al-hā'* in orthoepy. The appearance of *h* in orthoepy in certain cases occurs only orally; there is no grammatical reason for its appearance; it is not fixed graphically (even in dialects, where usually “orthography” follows orthoepy to a maximal extent):

lam yajzu(h) – “didn’t attack him”,
mal yara(h) – “didn’t see him”,
kayfa(h) – “how”, etc. (Lekiashvili 1977, 59).

The phenomenon when in spoken Arabic (dialects and the standard language) after the reduction of *tā marbūṭa*, it is sometimes considered that *-h* remains at the end of the word, should be included in the same item: *maktaba(h)* < *maktaba^{um}*. This *-h*, i.e. *-h*, that could be regarded as the secondary product of inflection reduction, is called “virtual *h*” by Ferguson (1997, 115).

d) *al-hā'* appears in Arabic also in cases when the loan word ending with the vowel is presented in a plural form (regular feminine plural is implied, which is often used with loanwords in Arabic):

sīdī – “compact disc, CD”, pl. *sidihāt*,
taksi – “taxi”, pl. *taksihāt*,
kabarē – “cabaret”, pl. *kabarehāt*,
bēbi – “baby”, pl. *bebihāt*, etc.

In some borrowings *al-hā'* appears in the graphic even in cases when the loanword in singular ends with the vowel (whether orthoepically or orthographically):

bālēh (باليه) – Fr. “ballet”,
bakalūriyah (بكالوريوس) – Fr. “bachelor”, etc.

(Cf. Georgian Family names ended with “-dze” which should be formed graphically as *ძე*, using the grapheme *ძ*).

e) Another case of the appearance of *al-hā'*: in literary Arabic, for the verb *ra'ā* (“to see”) in Imperative we have versions *ra* (ر) and *rah* (ره), the second version could be explained by the tendency of strengthening the doubly weak root (see above).

3. Dropping of *al-hā'*

a) Dropping of *al-hā'* occurs in orthoepy, when the *h* consonant just cannot be heard/hardly heard in the speech, for example, after the open vowel, although is graphically fixed:

mušā(h)idīn < *mušāhidūn^a* – “audience”,
ma(h)labēya < *mahlabiyya^{um}* – “mahlabia” (a kind of sweetness).

In this last case, the reduction of *h* may not be considered as a complete loss, since it is accompanied by lengthening of preceding *-a-*: *mālabēya*.

The other example: *āl^{um}* (آل) < *'ahl^{um}* (أهل) – “family”. The shorten version in regards to the source full version is established in the language by narrowed semantics: *'āl^{um}* corresponds mostly to Moḥammad’s family while *'ahl^{um}* – to the family in general. Therefore, *h* in this pair performs a certain distinct function (cf. *'ill^{um}* – “blood relationship; mutual protection pact”).

b) Full dropping of *al-hā'*, when it is entirely omitted from the word and is not present even in the graphic. Here, the following cases stand out:

• Dialectal forms of demonstrative pronouns *da* and *di* opposite the literary *hāḍā* and *hāḍihi*, where the prefix *hā-* serves the intensifying of the meaning (cf., e.g., data of Nabataean-Arabic period inscriptions, where appear the pronouns *tī* = *hāḍihi* (*an-namāra* – “inscription”, see: Bellamy 1985, 34), *da* (+ *nu*) = *hāḍā* (*'umm jimāl* – “inscription”, see: Littmann 1914, 37-38).

al-hā' is sometimes dropped in the words like: *'iḍah^{um}*, pl. *'iḍūna* – “a lie” (Grande 1963, 274). This example poses interest, also, due to the fact that the *-ūna* plural is represented with an inanimate noun, whereas, as usual in Arabic, the regular masculine plural is formed with nouns of real masculine gender; the given case is related to the version of plural, which is known as a Pseudo Dual (Blanc 1970, 42-57).

• *h* is often lost in dialects in cases of composition creation, e.g., in a word *ma'lēš* – “never mind” (< *mā 'alayhⁱ šay^{um}*), complex *-eh-*, which sometimes does occur in graphic (معلش), is dropped in

orthoepy and is replaced by a long stressed vowel $-ē-$; in a word *mafiš* – “there is no” ($< mā fīhī šay^{mn}$) h is also dropped.

- In the case of lexicalization of syntagm, h also may get lost; e.g., literary language: *mā lah^u* – “what belongs to him” $>$ *mal^{mn}* – “property” (as a result of composition creation, $m w l$ root is created);

way lah^u – “woe unto him” $>$ *wayl^{mn}*, *wayla^{mn}* – “calamity, affliction, woe”.

- In dialects, h is dropped regularly from pronominal suffixes; e.g.: *farašitlōn* $<$ *farašat lahum* – “she made them a bed”; $-hā$ feminine form of pronominal suffix gives $-ā$ with dropping $-h-$ (in Syria-Lebanese speech). The same occurs in Pausal forms with $hu-$ masculine pronominal suffix: *kasaru* $<$ *kasarahu* – “he broke it”; it is restored as a long vowel if it loses its final position: *kasarūlu* – “he broke it for him” (in Egyptian Arabic).

Ultimately, I believe that the analyzed material may be assessed as the argumentation of the statement postulated at the beginning of the article that $al-hā'$ in Arabic is a specific consonant showing traits that can be called amorphous.

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