

Aramaic & Hebrew Metathesis  
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**0. Goal.** The aim of this paper is to offer an analysis of the well-know metathesis process of the sibilant+dental stops clusters in Ancient Aramaic and Ancient Hebrew passive/reflexive verbal forms, e.g. Aramaic *?it+sð9ar > ?istð9ar* (\**?itsð9ar*) “he has been visited”. This process will not be considered as a proper feature of the Aramaic and Hebrew languages: it will be integrated to the more general discussion on extrasyllabicity and on the related special status of the coronal obstruents at word edges.

**1. Coronal obstruents and word edges.** The special status of the coronal obstruents at the margin of words is notorious. Languages as English, German exhibit constraints on word-initial and word-final consonantal clusters: they must display increasing sonority and decreasing sonority respectively, e.g. English *brick* vs. \**rbick*, *hemp* vs. \**hepm*. However, exceptions occur :

i) when the first consonant of initial clusters is a coronal fricative (viz. *s*, *š*, *z*), e.g. English *spoke*, *smell*, *spleen*.

ii) when the last consonant(s) of final clusters is (are) a coronal obstruent(s) (viz. *s*, *z*, *š*, *d*, *t*, *T*), e.g. English *act*, *depth* [depT], *sixth* [slksT], *sixths* [slksTs].

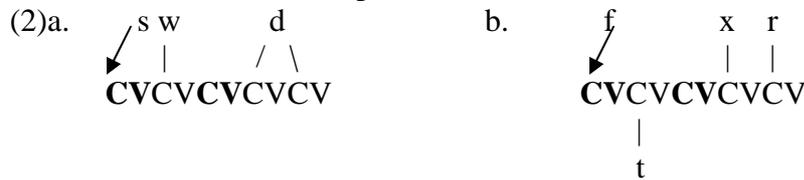
Phonological studies traditionally account for this fact by a particular apparatus: extra-syllabicity (Kenstowicz 1994), “magic” licencing (Kaye 1992), appendix (Fudge 1969), etc. Another look at this problem has been recently proposed by Lowenstamm 2002. The word-initial consonant *s/š/z* is represented as the propagation of a lexical segment on an initial CV-site located on the left word-edge of every major lexical category (for independent arguments supporting the existence of this initial CV-site, see Lowenstamm 1999). For instance, the representation of the french word [spor] “sport” is given in (1), where the initial CV-site is in bold.



The fundamental distinction between the traditional approach and the Lowenstamm’s one is the following. In extrasyllabicity, the segment *s/š/z* is attached to a skeletal slot. Apart from the fact that this slot can be linked to a syllabic constituent (onset, coda) or immediatly to the prosodic word (in the extrasyllabicity case *stricto sensu*), this slot is not different from the other slots. On the contrary, Guerssel & Lowenstamm 1990, Guerssel 1992, Lahrouchi 2001 and Lowenstamm 1999, 2002 argue that the initial CV-site is a **morphological domain**: cliticization, prefixation, reduplication take place in it. Certainly, in languages as English or German the association of *s/š/z* is not morphological but lexical. Nevertheless, if the restriction on the type of consonants allowed in the initial CV is lexically determined in some languages, it is not excluded that a similar restriction can at once exist and be determined morphologically in other languages. In other words, we can expect that a language performs a selection between the coronal fricatives or the coronal obstruents (fricatives and stops at once) and the other consonants during their association to the initial CV-site. The aim of this paper is precisely to show **i**) that Aramaic and Hebrew exhibit a selection between the coronal obstruents (fricatives and stops at once) and the other consonants during the derivation of the reflexive/passive verbal forms **ii**) that this selection can explain the metathesis occurring in this verbal forms.

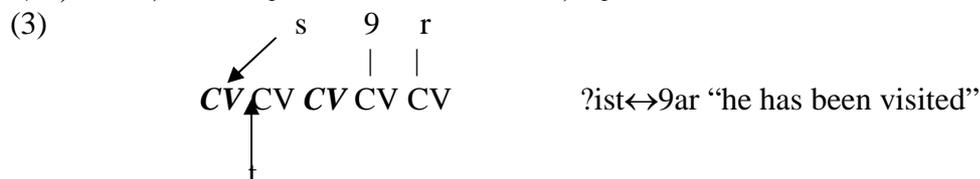
**2. Semitic morphology and Aramaic/Hebrew metathesis.** Guerssel & Lowenstamm 1990 have proposed a model in which, for a same morphological category, the template consists of a fixed number of skeletal slots. The assignation of grammatical categories is performed by the association of segments to specific positions called “head positions”. There are two head

positions: an initial CV-site and a medial CV-site. Let's look more closely at the initial CV-site. Classical Arabic Verbal forms such as (?i)swadad (form IX) and (?i)ftaxar (form VIII) are derived by identification of the initial CV-site by C<sub>1</sub>; note that it is assumed that the *t*-infix of *ftaxar* (2b) is a non-derivational (reflexive) feature of the base. [For convenience, vocalic melodies are not represented in (2)].

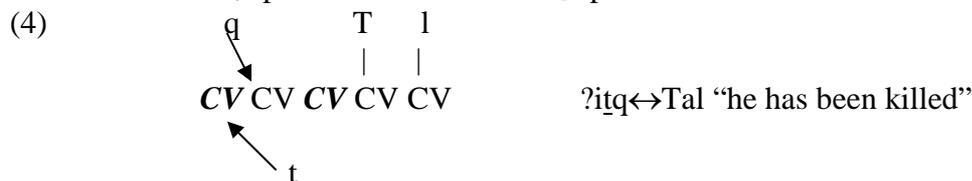


In Classical Arabic, there are no restrictions on the identification of the initial CV-site: it can be occupied by any consonant, e.g. forms IX ?*ibyaDaD* “to become white”, ?*ixDarar* “to become green”, ?*iHmarar* “to become red”.

I will argue that the Aramaic and Hebrew reflexive/passive verbal forms are built the same way as the Arabic reflexive form VIII *ftaxar*. In order to explain the metathesis process, I will assume that the initial CV-site can be identified only by coronal obstruents (viz. *s*, *z*, *S*, *š*, *ś*, *t*, *d*, *T*). Thus, when C<sub>1</sub> is a coronal obstruent, C<sub>1</sub> identifies the site:



But, when C<sub>1</sub> is not a coronal obstruent, C<sub>1</sub> cannot identify the site. Thus, the *t*-affix, that is a coronal obstruent, spread on the site and C<sub>1</sub> spread on the first non-derivational C position:



**3. Conclusion.** In order to support my analysis, other data will be discussed. Firstly, the Classical Arabic verbal form IX e.g. ?*iswadad* “he is/become black” does not exist in the Aramaic and Hebrew verbal system. The reason will be exposed, according to my hypothesis. Secondly, the complete assimilation of the lateral consonant *l* of the Classical Arabic definite article ?*al*- takes place only when C<sub>1</sub> is a coronal (including sonorant *r*, *n*): a draft of an analysis will be offered, showing again the link between word edges and coronal consonants.

*References:*

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