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 \(?i+st\delta9ar > ?ist\delta9ar \) “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* [deQ], *sixth* [slksT], *sixths* [slksTs].

Phonological studies traditionally account for this fact by a particular apparatus: extrasyllabicity (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.

(1) \[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{CV} \\
\text{CVCV} \\
\text{\textbf{spor}}
\end{array} \]

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 immediately 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)s?wadad (form IX) and (?i)f?taxar (form VIII) are derived by identification of the initial CV-site by C₁; note that it is assumed that the t-infix of f?taxar (2b) is a non-derivational (reflexive) feature of the base. [For convenience, vocalic melodies are not represented in (2)].

(2)a.  

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{s} & \text{w} & \text{d} & \text{b} \\
\text{CV} & \text{C} & \text{V} & \text{CV} \\
\text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} \\
\end{array}
\]

(2)b.  

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{f} & \text{x} & \text{r} & \text{t} \\
\text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} \\
\end{array}
\]

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 ?i?byaDaD “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 f?taxar. 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, ŋ, ŝ, š, t, d, T). Thus, when C₁ is a coronal obstruent, C₁ identifies the site:

(3)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{s} & \text{9} & \text{r} & \text{t} \\
\text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} \\
\end{array}
\]

?i9ar “he has been visited”

But, when C₁ is not a coronal obstruent, C₁ cannot identify the site. Thus, the t-affix, that is a coronal obstruent, spread on the site and C₁ spread on the first non-derivational C position:

(4)

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{q} & \text{T} & \text{l} & \text{t} \\
\text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} & \text{CV} \\
\end{array}
\]

?i9ar “he has been killed”

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 C₁ 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: