
Prosodic constituents are insufficient for the analysis of Semitic templates

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McCarthy (1981) famously proposed that biradical roots satisfy a tripositional template with three C slots. McCarthy & Prince (1990) then abandoned C and V slots in favor of “prosodic templates”, defined in terms feet, syllables and moras. I argue that such prosodic constituents are insufficient for the analysis of Semitic templates.

First, if a template is defined as disyllabic (Bat-El 1994), what motivates template satisfaction? A final moraic coda won't do, because template satisfaction occurs across long vowels two, and because final Cs are extrametrical, and therefore non-moraic; use of “Final-C” (e.g. Bat-El 2003) is also unacceptable because Semitic languages do not have any problem with final CV syllables.

Second, the internal gemination of the “intensive” is also a problem. The prosodic account, based on mora infixation ($/ktəb^{+u}/ \Rightarrow kəʔ^{u}təb$), needs to assume an internal moraic coda; yet in many Semitic languages codas are not moraic. In contrast, using C and V slots, the problem does not arise.

Finally, I discuss the issue of the unpredictability of syllabic structure. Modern Hebrew exhibits the nominal template QTuLa, for abstract or collective nouns (*kvuša* ‘group’), and the nominal template QuTLa (*jukra* ‘prestige’). Both templates carry the feminine suffix [-a], so the base has a single vowel /u/. It follows that the placement of this vowel is unpredictable and has to be specified in the input: QuTL- or QTuL-. This is not a problem for a skeletal approach to templates, but very much one for a “prosodic” approach. Given a root QTL, a single syllable and a vowel /u/, one cannot derive two templates.

To summarize, despite claims to the contrary, Semitic templates are fixed syllabic structures that cannot be reduced to the number of syllables and/or codas they involve.

References: • Bat-El, O. (1994). Stem modification and cluster transfer in Modern Hebrew. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 12, 571–596. • Bat-El, O. (2003). The fate of the consonantal root and the binyan in Optimality Theory. *Recherches Linguistiques de Vincennes* 32, 31–60. • McCarthy, J. (1981). A prosodic theory of nonconcatenative morphology. *Linguistic Inquiry* 12, 373–418. • McCarthy, J. & A. Prince. (1990). Prosodic Morphology and templatic morphology. In M. Eid & J. McCarthy (eds.) *Perspectives on Arabic linguistics* I. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1–54.