ARABIC STRESS

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ABSTRACT

Arabic language has special roles for stress placement. Actually, there is no evidence for Arabic stress as it was in the initial Islamic ages because there is no ancient grammarian who has dealt with it. Anyhow, there is a special law for Arabic stress. Arabic stress is predictable on the lexical level; therefore, it is not phonemic. There are three levels of stress: primary (marked by), secondary (marked by) and weak (unmarked). To know the stress placement in the Arabic words, we have to focus on the last syllable. Its placement and distribution is influenced by the number and kinds of syllables involved in the word-syllable sequences.

KEYWORDS: Arabic Language, Word-Syllable Sequences, Pausal Forms

INTRODUCTION

Arabic Stress

When we articulate a stressed syllable, all the organs of speech activate considerably, for instance the lungs muscles activate, the vocal cords vibrate heavily and they approach together to allow less amount of air to pass and this air pushes them to make vibration stronger, the voiced sound is articulated loudly and clearly, while the voiceless sound in the stressed syllable is articulated when the vocal cords move away from each other more than their moving away in the voiceless unstressed sound. A larger amount of air passes. The soft palate, the tongue and the two lips are also active. In the articulation of the unstressed sound, the organs of speech are not so active.

The glottis expands with the voiced sounds relatively. Thus air pressure will be less during its passing, the vibrational capacity of the vocal cords is also less, the glottis does not expand enough to allow a larger amount of air to pass, and the soft palate does not block the nasal cavity tightly as it does with the stressed sounds. The lingual position is less precise. Consequently, this leads to inactivity in the muscles of organs of speech and the clarity of the sound reduces in the process of hearing. Every one tends to focus on a specific syllable of a word to make it more prominent. This focus is called stress. Arabic language has special roles for stress placement. Actually, there is no evidence for Arabic stress as it was in the initial Islamic ages because there is no ancient grammarian who has dealt with it. Anyhow, there is a special law for Arabic stress.

To know the stress placement in the Arabic words, we have to focus on the last syllable as follows: 1) if the last syllable is of CVVC or CVCC, it will be stressed in the pausal forms e.g. /nastālakīn/ ‘we appeal for aid’ or (الشهير) /al-šahīr/ ‘month’ where the syllables /kīn/ and /ahr/ are stressed, but if the last syllable is not of CVVC or CVCC kind, stress will be on the penultimate syllable on condition that it must not be short syllable CV and preceded by a short syllable CV. 2) Most of the words of the Arabic language have stress on the penultimate syllable such as (يُدَبِّرُ) /yada’/ he calls or (يُعَلِّمُ) /yakibu/ he writes. The three syllable verbs that are in the past tense have stress on the first syllable (the third from the last) e.g. (فَرَحَ) /farah/ he was happy. The third syllable from the last receives primary stress in some polysyllabic words e.g. (اجتمع) /idtamāḫu/ ‘foregathered’. 4) The fourth syllable from the last in some polysyllabic words receives
primary stress when the three syllables before the last are short syllables of CV kind, but this stress placement is rare in Arabic language e.g. حركة /harakatun/ a movement or عربي /arabatun/ carriage (Anis, 1971: 158-62).

Al-ANI (1970:87-8) demonstrates that the syllables of an utterance are not produced with the same degree of loudness. The term stress means the amount of power that is distributed over the syllables of each utterance. Arabic stress is predictable on the lexical level; therefore, it is not phonemic. There are three levels of stress: primary (marked by ’), secondary (marked by ’) and weak (unmarked). Every word has a ‘inherently-stressable syllable’1, potentially. This syllable has primary stress. Its placement and distribution is influenced by the number and kinds of syllables involved in the word-syllable sequences. A monosyllabic word, in isolation, has the primary stress. Disyllabic and polysyllabic words have secondary and weak stress in addition to the primary stress 2. The rules that control the lexical item stress are the following:

- When a word consists of a string of a consonant and a vowel CV type syllables, the first syllable will have the primary stress and the remaining syllables have weak stress as in دراسة/ darasa/ (he studied) CV CV CV.
- When a word contains only one long syllable, this long syllable has the primary stress and the rest of the syllables have weak stress as in كاتب /kaatib/ (writer) CVV CVC and معلمة /mü’allimahu/ (his teacher) CV CV CV CV.
- When a word contains two long syllables or more, the long syllable nearest to the end of the word (the very last syllable is not counted) receives the primary stress and, in most cases, the one closest to the beginning has the secondary stress3 such as in قريشين /ra’i, isa unhun/ (their chief, female plural) CV C, VV CV CV CV and in مستودعاتهم /must, awdāq aatuhum/ CVC C, VC CV CV CV CV CV (their deposits, male plural).

Watson (2002, 79-80) describes the Arabic language as the word stress language “although the classical grammarians do not mention word stress, it is generally accepted that classical Arabic had it. Proto-Semitic probably had free stress, however” (Hetzron, 1987). This means that one of the syllables in a content word is viewed as prominent and has primary stress. Al-Hamad (2002, 251-5) illustrates the agreement of the scholars about the lack of studies about stress by the modern Arabic grammarians and the scholars of Islamic studies. Some of those scholars justify that those grammarians are not aware of this phenomenon because it does not affect the meaning or they may explain it in different way. Ibin Al-Anbaary4 describes stress as the height of the sound or height in a word. The modern Arabic grammarians relate between the syllable and stress. They put rules or patterns of stress through their observation of a number of human languages. Abda has discussed these rules and he has suggested reformulating more accuracy and comprehensiveness. He has also observed that all these rules depend on the kind of syllable. He believes that it will be possible to formulate regulations and rules less complex if they depend on the phonetic structure of the word that consists of consonants and vowels not on the syllables. There following are some remarks about Arabic stress:

- The scholar may face difficulty to perceive stress because he lives in a homogeneous linguistic environment. He will observe a clear difference when he listens to another pronunciation other than his own. He may allude to effects of stress in the Arabic language when he articulates words or sentences in different compositions.
- The classic grammarians’ negligence of stress does not mean that they were unable to comprehend or recognize this phenomenon or it is not found in the Arabic language at all. The matter is that Arabic stress is non-discriminatory and it has no effect on meaning. Although Arabic stress is easy to hear and distinguish, it is difficult to determine by the scholars.
Al-Moosawy (2007: 128-33) states that Arab linguists differ about the existence of stress and its placement. He cites opinions of some Arabic linguists and orientalists such as: 1- Henry Flesh who indicates word stress as unknown by Arabic grammarians completely even they do not have the term stress because it does not play an important role in Arabic prosody that is based on the succession of a group of long and short specific syllables.

This means stress is quantitative; therefore, the authors of prosody have not explained it just as the grammarians have done and the authors of recitation (tajweed) follow them. 2- Abd Al_Tawwaab comments on Bergstrassen’s opinion about the lack of stress in the Arabic language. He refers to the linguistic development by time and the impact of other people on the Arabs since they transfer their linguistic habits to the Arabic language such as stress and its location in the word.

- Brockelman says that there is a music stress in the classical Arabic language overshadowed by music and it depends on the quantity of syllable. This stress moves from the end of the word towards its beginning and stops when another long syllable begins. If there is no long syllable in the word, stress will be on the first one. However expiratory stress has become prevalent everywhere in the modern dialects. Expiratory stress refers to the free stress which does not depend on the quantity of syllables and it is not restricted to certain location within the words. This kind of stress is common in the old Semitic language, but it does not represent all the characteristics of stress. It is considered a reference for some kinds of stress and its effect on the lengthened vowels that leads to change the performance and intonation.

Thus stress assignment is based on syllabic structure as follows:

- When a monosyllabic word has only one long syllable, stress will be on that long one e.g. (مَكَانُُ /makan/ ‘place’ or (فَريق /faric/ ‘team’ CV CVCC.

- When disyllabic words have two long syllables, the second syllable will receive primary stress and the first one receives secondary stress e.g. (رامِين /ramen/ ‘throwers’ or (رَيحَان /rayhan/ ‘sweet basil’ CVV CVVC.

- When disyllabic words have two short syllables (no long syllable), the first one will receive primary stress e.g. (مَنُُ /man/ ‘from’ or (هُمُُ /hum/ ‘they, male plural’ CV CV and in some words after shortening the final vowel as in (فَنَا /fana/ → /fana/ ‘here’ or (بَلِ /bal/ /bal/ →/bala/ ‘yes’.

- When disyllabic words have one long syllable, this one will receive stress e.g.: a-(مُكَانُُ /makan/ ‘place’ or (فَريق /faric/ ‘team’ CV CVCC.

b- (خَلَقُُ /alak/ ‘he created’ or (لَعْبُ /lajib/ ‘playing’ CV CV.

c- (كُنتُ /kantu/ ‘I was’ or (سَبَحَُ /sabah/ ‘he swimmmed’ or (رَسَمَُ /rasam/ ‘he painted’ CV CV CV.

- The medium syllable that has long vowel receives stress in some disyllabic words e.g. (طَالِبُ /talib/ ‘pupil’ or (رَشَخُ /rashax/ ‘wind’ CVV CV.

- The first syllable receives primary stress in the trisyllabic words which have three short syllables e.g. (سَنَحُ /sahah/ ‘he swimmmed’ or (قَاءِدَة /qaaidah/ ‘base’ CVV CV CV or (هُضَابُ /haskab/ ‘hills’ CV CV CV.

- If a trisyllabic word contains one long syllable, this syllable will receive primary stress e.g. (قَامَ /qama /‘standing’ CV CV CV or (بَعْضُ /baqas/ ‘some’ CV CV CV.
The last syllable receives primary stress in the trisyllabic words which contain two long syllables finally e.g. /ʔa,maʔanat/ ‘secretariats’ or /ʔa,raʔaʔat/ ‘readings’ CV CVV ČVVC.

Some trisyllabic words have primary stress on the penultimate syllable but not on the antepenultimate one though it is long and the penultimate is short. This is so because these words are formed by the long pattern CVCC in pausal utterance e.g. (زاوَلْتَُ) /zaa alta/ ‘you practiced, male singular’ or (قابَلْتَُ) /aab alta/ ‘you met, singular’. It is concluded that primary stress placement is not only restricted to vowel length and syllable quantity but by the syllabic structure of the words as well.

Some words of three or more syllables with the structure CV CVCC as their last two syllables have stress on the ante-penultimate syllables e.g. (سأَلتُْ) /saʔalt/ ‘she asked’, (قَريَة ُ) /aryat n/ a village, (مِنطَقَة ُ) /miṉaqatun/ region and (يَتَعَبَّدُُ) /yataaababdu/ he worships. Stress here is assigned due to the syllabic structure of the words.

If the polysyllabic words have more than one long syllable including the last syllable, the last one will receive primary stress e.g. (يَتَعَبَّدُُ) /yataaababdu/ ‘he worships’.

If the polysyllabic words contain long syllables and the last one is not a long syllable, the penultimate syllable will receive primary stress on condition that it must be long e.g. (إِستَقالَُ) /istaalala/ ‘resigned’ CVC CVV CV or (تَوجيهيه) /tawd̪g̪iihiyya/ ‘guided or educational’ CVC CVV ČVVC CV.

If the polysyllabic words have long syllables but the penultimate syllable is short, the antepenultimate syllable will receive primary stress on a condition that it must be long or medium CVC or CVV e.g. (جِبَلْتَُ) /jaibalt/ ‘she revives’ CVC ČVC CV CV.

If the polysyllabic words contain four or more syllables, the fourth syllable from the end receives primary stress when the last three syllables are short, of CV pattern, e.g. (أَستَغفِرُهُُ) /as taγfir h/ ‘I ask God for pardon’ CVC ČVC CV CV.

The penultimate or antepenultimate syllables receive primary stress when there is no long syllable in the last three syllables and the fourth syllable from the end will not receive primary stress even if it is long in some polysyllabic words e.g. (مَعَاهَدَتَانَامَغَة) /mu,aaʔadatun/ treaty, (مُدَرَّساتَهُنَُّ) /m darri saatah nna/ ‘their teachers, female plural’ or (طَّبيباتَهُنَُّ) /a,baʔi baatahunna/ ‘their doctors, female plural’ (Al-Sulaimaan, 1986:102-12) and (Al-Jubouri, 2005: 51-2).

Al-Sulaimaan (1986:112) points out that there is a relationship between the characteristic assignment of stress and intonation because pitch glide always coincides with primary stress in Arabic language.

NOTES

- The maximum number of syllables in a word is nine including affixes.
- The leftmost syllable is heavy and rightmost syllable is super heavy.
- Ibn Al-Anbaary. Lisan Al- Arab.7/39-40 (stress)
REFERENCES


