

The diminutive template in Classical Arabic

Christian Huber

Phonogrammarchiv, Austrian Academy of Sciences

The Semitic languages are known for their root-and-pattern morphology, which, however, is mostly studied in the verbal system. I argue that diminutivization in Classical Arabic involves a CV syllable similar to Guerssel & Lowenstamm's Derivational Syllable in Arabic verbal morphology, which is part of a dynamic template of minimally four up to maximally six CV syllables. This template and its properties and effects are investigated in a number of contexts. Based on their behaviour in diminutive and (possessive) cliticization contexts I suggest that there are two types of biradical nouns. I argue that the uniform vowel pattern found in diminutivized nouns is created by apophony, raising questions about the role of the vowels in the source items. This suggests that the vowels in the source items carry no lexical load and that their role lies rather in contributing to interpretability at PF, the actual carriers of meaningful information being consonants or more abstract objects that are not left behind in mapping a source item onto the diminutive template. Data from internal and paucal plurals and hidden-gender nouns suggest that the diminutive template is compatible with derivational morphology but does not tolerate inflectional morphology. Derivational features in diminutivizable items are exposed by consonantal segments or bare CVs only (or otherwise by the CV template) but not by vowels.