

## Morphosyntactic Evolution in the Moroccan Arabic Verb

In this investigation, we identify a potential case of inflectional debonding in Moroccan Arabic, whereby a previously bound verb stem and inflectional prefix complex undergo reanalysis and attain free status as morphosyntactically discrete elements.

This proposal is prompted by an emerging minority convention in Moroccan Arabic orthography. Consistent with accepted morphological analyses (Harrell, 1962), most speakers represent the imperfective verb as a single word:

- 1) <kaytmana> / <كيتمنى>  
*ka- j- tmanna*  
DUR-3M-wish  
'he wishes'

However, many instead represent the verb as two distinct units, placing a word boundary between prefix complex and verb stem:

- 2) <kay tmana> / <كي تمنى>  
*ka -j tmanna*  
DUR-3M wish  
'he wishes'

That this novel orthography reflects a linguistically demonstrable reanalysis for these speakers is supported both phonologically and syntactically. First, we present evidence that it is not a straightforward syllabic rendering and may affect the application of word-internal assimilation rules; moreover, the same juncture is a common locus of pause in oral production, typologically atypical of bound morpheme boundaries (Whaley, 1997). Additionally, we identify cases in which a single prefix complex is utilized to govern two distinct, uninflected verb stems in a coordinated structure, strongly arguing for the free syntactic status of the elements involved.

We propose this reanalysis to be facilitated by historical sound change affecting Moroccan Arabic (cf. Versteegh, 2001), resulting in homophony between the (free) perfective and (bound) imperfective stems in most underived verb classes. This homophony allows for coidentification of the two as a single, unbound element utilized in both aspectual contexts and consequently separable from the prefix complex. As such, this development provides a possible case study of phonologically-motivated shift in morphosyntactic type, a topic of particular relevance to Afro-Asiaticists working to diachronically reconcile the diverse morphological schemes attested by the phylum.

**N.B.: An earlier version of this work was accepted as a paper presentation for NACAL 45, but was not presented as logistical difficulties precluded the authors' attendance of the conference.**