

SYLLABIFICATION AND VOWEL DELETION IN TIHAMI YEMENI ARABIC

The present study aims at conducting a rule-based and an Optimality-Theoretic account on the processes of penult and initial vowel deletion in Tihami Yemeni Arabic (TYA, henceforth) comparing TYA to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA, henceforth). Tihami Yemeni Arabic is a dialect spoken by the people living in the coastal and lower parts of Yemen, namely in the Governorates of Hodaidah and Hajjah in the northern part of Yemen (Greenman, 1979).

Both MSA and TYA share the same major types of syllable which include: CV as in /**ka**.ta.ba/ ‘he wrote’, CVV as in /**kaa**.ta.ba/ ‘he corresponded’, CVC as in /min/ ‘from’, CVVC as in /**baab**/ ‘door’ and CVCC as in /**kalb**/ ‘dog’. TYA attests vowel deletion in the penult position. Penult Vowel Deletion (PVD) can affect tri-syllabic and quadric-syllabic nouns as seen below:

(1)

Noun in MSA	Noun in TYA	Form	Meaning
/ʃa.ja.ra.tuh/	/ʃa.jar.tuh/	[(CVCVC)CVC]	his tree
/Sa:. hi.bi/	/Sa: h.bi/	[(CVVCV) CV]	my friend
/Sa:.di.qun/	/S:d.qun/	[(CVVCV) CV]	truthful
/sa.la:.ma.tak/	/sa.la:m.tak/	[(CVCVVCVC) CV(C)]	your safety

Penult deletion occurs on the level of the phonological word after forming the phonological word and assigning primary stress. If the penult occurs outside the foot it deletes whereas it does not delete if it is inside the foot. According to (1) above, the phonological word gets a new syllabification resulting in the formation of either a heavy penult syllable or a non-final superheavy syllable which is not accepted in MSA.

TYA also attests complex onsets initially. This arises because of the deletion of the initial vowel, leading to the creation of an extrametrical consonant as in:

(2)

No	MSA	TYA	Form	Meaning
1	[ʃarib]uh	[ʃrib]uh	CVCVCVC	He drank it
2	[katab]	[ktab]uh	CVCVCVC	He wrote it
3	[kasar]na	[ksar]na	CCVCCV	We broke it

Initial vowel deletion occurs on the level of the ‘phonological phrase’ rather than the ‘phonological word’ in TYA. Therefore, its rule is a phrase level rule. Resulting from that, the phrase initial consonant sequences are resyllabified. When the process of resyllabification is blocked the strategies of vowel epenthesis and glottal insertion are used to avoid those extrametrical consonants.

As mentioned above, this study attempts to provide a rule-based and an Optimality-Theoretic account of these phenomena which show “homogeneity of processes but heterogeneity of target.”(Gouskova, 2003).

Key words:

Penult vowel deletion - Initial vowel deletion – Tihami Yemeni Arabic – Syncope – Optimality Theory.

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