

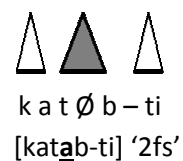
## Stress in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic (CEA)

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This presentation is an attempt to offer a new view of stress assignment in CEA, with special attention to the issue of vocalic length. The surface vocalic system of CEA displays an array of qualities including both short and long counterparts {i, ii, u, uu, a, aa, e, ee, o, oo, amongst other variants resulting from the vicinity of emphatic consonants and gutturals}. Most studies (Ammar and Morsi, 2006 for instance) concerned with the makeup of the vocalic system of CEA assume both short and long underlying vowels, viz. {i, ii, u, uu, a, aa, ee, oo}. I propose to put forth a fundamentally different view: there are but short underlying vowels; {i, u, a}. I claim that vocalic length in CEA is entirely manipulated by 1) stress, 2) templatic requirements, and 3) stem shape.

Stress in CEA has often been described in terms of syllabic structure, and interpreted in the light of a variety of theoretical frameworks (McCarthy, 1979a, b, amongst others). Stress assignment rules in CEA seem to handle every utterance, no matter how morphologically complex, as a single segmental chunk, hence the perception that stress ‘shifts’, much as with Level I affixes in English, as different affixes and clitics are added, e.g. ʔalam ‘pen’ > ʔalamha ‘her pen’, katabet ‘she wrote’ > katabethom ‘she wrote them’.

In this work, I propose that stress is consistently assigned to a heavy penultimate. Two strategies are mobilized by the morpho-phonological system to create suitable landing sites for stress; 1) identifying a coda: katabtu ‘you, pl. wrote’ > katabtolha ‘you, pl. wrote to her’, or, if none is available, 2) lengthening of the vowel of an open syllable: katabtu ‘you, pl. wrote’ > katabtuuli ‘you, pl. wrote to me’. However, this hypothesis is challenged by a verb form such as katab ‘he wrote’. Indeed, if vowels really lengthen under stress, the expected form should be kaatab. What could make katab viable as such, i.e. compatible with both penultimate stress and open syllable lengthening? Here, I first point out that hypothetical kaatab is inconceivable to begin with, as this would entail that the language can take liberties with its own templatic system, stretching the first vowel beyond its legitimate templatic position. In a search for an alternative I suggest revisiting the shape of the stem under discussion. I argue that the underlying stem for the verb katab ‘write’ is /katØb/, and that stress is assigned as follows:



My claim concerning stress assignment requires confronting several other challenges; katablena ‘he wrote to us’ and katabhomlaha ‘he wrote them for her’ (with no apparent lengthening) for instance. I shall provide an explanation for the fact that stress assignment to the penultimate syllable ‘seems’ not to result in either the formation of a closed syllable nor in vowel lengthening.

Conclusion:

My reconsideration of stress in CEA aims at unraveling the factors that conspire to dictate the placement of stress in CEA. I argue that it is consistently lodged on the penultimate syllable

of the utterance. This more restrictive construal leads to specific predictions (unavailable to the alternatives I reject) with respect to other aspects of the system, namely the source of length and where and in what form lengthening will be observed.

References:

- Ammar, W. and Morsi, R. (2006). Phonological Development and Disorders: Colloquial Egyptian Arabic. In Phonological development and disorders in children: a multilingual perspective. Multilingual Matters Limited.
- McCarthy, J. (1979a). Formal Problems in Semitic Phonology and Morphology. Doctoral dissertation. MIT.
- McCarthy, J. (1979b). On stress and syllabification. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 10, 443-466.