

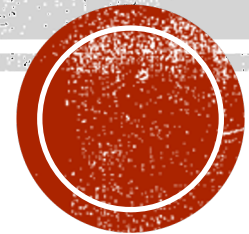
# HETEROPHONIC HOMOGRAPHY IN AFRICAN AND SEMITIC: COMPARING THE FUNCTIONS OF TONES AND VOWELS

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14th conference of the *Association of Written Language and Literacy*

Rome, 10-12 November 2023

Funded by the Foundation for the Advancement of Humanities and Social Sciences, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities



# HETEROPHONIC HOMOGRAPHS

- Words with dissimilar pronunciations but identical spellings
- English <read> /ri:d/ vs /rɛd/
- Extremely frequent in Hebrew, Arabic and African languages
- Semitic orthographies under-represent vowels
- Vowel diacritics only used for beginners, L2 learners and in religious texts
- Roman script African orthographies under-represent tone
- Tone diacritics only used in some languages, and often only partially



# OTHER PARALLELS BETWEEN AFRICAN & SEMITIC

- **Afro-Asiatic phylum:** Semitic, Chadic, Cushitic, Omotic
- **Autosegmental phonology** (Goldsmith 1976): applied to African (e.g. Clements & Goldsmith 1984) and Semitic (e.g. McCarthy 1979)
- **Bible translation:** Hebrew source text, African target text
- **Ajami scripts:** Disglossic literacy programs and publications (Tem, Togo)
- **Linguistic functions:** Lexical, grammatical, lexico-grammatical



# LEXICAL PAIRS

vu	/vú/	'carry'	Izi (Nigeria)
	/vù/	'grow'	
ספר	/ˈsefeʔ/	'book'	Hebrew
	/sapax/	'hair-dresser'	
بركة	/birka/	'swimming pool'	Arabic
	/baraka/	'blessing'	



# PERSON

a	/à/	'we'	Neyo (Côte d'Ivoire)
	/ā/	'you (PL.)'	
	/á/	'they (human)'	
احببت	/aħbābtu/	'I loved'	Arabic
	/aħbābta/	'you (M. SG.) loved'	



# NUMBER

mbu	/m̄bú/	'mat'	Mada (Nigeria)
	/m̄bũ/	'mats'	
ابني	/ibnii/	'my son'	Arabic
	/ibnayy/	'my two sons'	



# GENDER

inan	/ínan/	'boy'	Somali (Somalia)
	/inán/	'girl'	
רוצה	/rotse/	'want(s) (M. SG.)'	Hebrew
	/rotsa/	'want(s) (F. SG.)'	
انت	/anta/	'you (M. SG.)'	Arabic
	/anti/	'you (F. SG.)'	



# DETERMINERS

kããrɔ	/kààrɔ́/	‘corn’	Viemon (Burkina Faso)
	/káárɔ́/	‘the corn’	
במלון	/bemalon/	‘in a hotel’	Hebrew
	/bamalon/	‘in the hotel’	





# VOICE

gex'	/géccʔ/	'to laugh'	Bench (Ethiopia)
	/gèccʔ/	'to be laughed at'	
תפתח	/tiftax/	'will open (F. SG.)'	Hebrew
	/tipatax/	'will be opened (F. SG.)'	
تركت	/taraka/	'left (m. sg.)'	Arabic
	/turika/	'was left (m. sg.)'	



# TAM CATEGORIES

Ada vumu eseni.	/ádâ vūmū ēsēnī/	'Ada dried the fish'	Engenni (Nigeria)
	/àdá vùmū êsèni/	'Ada is drying the fish'	
	/àdá vūmū ēsèni/	'Ada should dry the fish'	
	/àdá vùmù èsèni/	'Ada did not dry the fish'	



# TAM CATEGORIES

נשאר	/niʃʔaʁ/	'remain(s) (M. SG.)'	Hebrew
	/niʃʔaʁ/	'remained (M. SG.)'	
	/niʃaʔeʁ/	'we will remain'	
جمع	/ʒammiʃ/	'collect! (M. SG.)'	Arabic
	/ʒammaʃ/	'collected (M. SG.)'	



# NOMINALISATIONS

סכנ	/sɔ̃n/	'to be wise'	Mushere (Nigeria)
	/sɔ̃n/	'wisdom'	
רכב	/raχav/	'rode (M. SG.)'	Hebrew
	/reχev/	'vehicle'	
درس	/daras/	'studied (M. SG.)'	Arabic
	/dars/	'lesson'	



# OTHER DERIVATIONS

- Agentives: Hausa (Nigeria), Hebrew, Arabic
- Causatives: Bench (Ethiopia), Hebrew, Arabic
- Inchoatives: Bench (Ethiopia), Hebrew
- Intensives: Igo (Togo), Arabic
- Gerunds: Berta (Sudan), Arabic



# LEXICAL / GRAMMATICAL INTERACTION

ya	/yà/	'buy-IMP'	Kabiye (Togo)
	/yá/	'buy-AOR; call-BP; explode-IMP; explode-AOR; explode-BP'	
yay	/yàà/	'mark out-IMP'	
	/yáà/	'mark out-AOR; call-IPF; explode-IPF'	
	/yàá/	'mark out-BP'	
yayv	/yàáù/	'mark-out-INF; mark out-DP'	
	/yààú/	'call-DI; explode-DI'	



# LEXICAL / GRAMMATICAL INTERACTION

מצוות	/metsavot/	'order (3 <sup>RD</sup> PL. F.)'	Hebrew
	/metsuvot/	'are ordered to (3 <sup>RD</sup> PL. F.)'	
	/metsavet/	'assigns (M. SG.)'	
	/metsuvat/	'to be assigned to'	
	/mitsvot/	'laws (in the Torah)'	
	/mitsvat/	'the law of X'	
	/mitsevet/	'from the team'	



# DISSIMILARITIES BETWEEN AFRICAN & SEMITIC

- Case (Rendille, Kenya)
- Demonstratives (Lama, Togo)
- Negation (Aboh, Nigeria)
- Focus (Mushere, Nigeria)
- Relative clauses (Lugwere, Uganda)
- Copula VPs vs genitive NPs (Sandawe, Kenya)
- Predicate nominals (Shona, Zimbabwe)
- Singulative derivations (Wapan Jukun, Nigeria)
- Augmentative derivations (Igo, Togo)

“Grammatical functions of [African] tone are as varied as grammar itself.”  
Hyman & Leben (2017: 192)





# CONCLUSIONS: LINGUISTICS

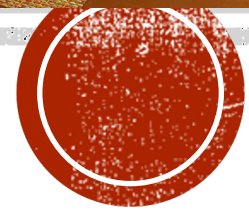
- Functions of African tone and Semitic vowels are similar in the linguistic detail
- No quantitative comparison possible: 20 African languages, 2 Semitic languages
- Functions not limited to heterophonic homography (correct reading vs nonsense)
- No evidence of Afro-Asiatic African languages being more similar to Semitic than are Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan.



# CONCLUSIONS: LITERACY

- Hebrew and Arabic readers, given massive exposure to print, can learn to read with partial phonological representations.
- Morphosyntactic and semantic contexts provide the necessary clues.
- Africanists developing orthographies for previously unwritten languages need to pay more attention to the abundant research on Hebrew and Arabic literacy acquisition.





**THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!**