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Recent developments in Semitic and Afroasiatic linguistics
Five teaching modules at Addis Ababa University, March 10–14, 2014
4. Guttural phonology and the Hebrew forms *primae ḥēt*
Discussion: Further issues in guttural phonology
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Lutz Edzard, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg and University of Oslo

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(1)   Ablaut in Arabic

As is well known, Classical Arabic displays five different ablaut classes (a/u, a/i, i/a, a/a, and u/u), of which the u/u class is semantically determined (stative verbs), as is the i/a class (mostly in-transitive/stative verbs). Looking at the total of Arabic verbal roots, it is evident that the a/a ablaut class is phonologically conditioned (a/u or a/i ablaut is not attested with roots containing a guttural). Based on a root count in Wehr's dictionary, 411 of 436 a/a verbs (i.e. ca. 94%) have a guttural as second or third radical. The a/u ablaut class in Arabic, however, is not affected by vowel lowering, nor are the passive perfect (always *u–i–a*) or vowels in any other morphological context. The following chart provides an illustration:

a/a	**Perfect**		**Imperfect**		**Gloss**
	صَعَقَ	ṣaʿaqa	يَصْعَقُ	yaṣʿaqu	'strike by lightning'
	قَطَعَ	qaṭaʿa	يَقْطَعُ	yaqṭaʿu	'cut off'
	فَحَصَ	faḥaṣa	يَفْحَصُ	yafḥaṣu	'scratch up, examine'
	سَمَحَ	samaḥa	يَسْمَحُ	yasmaḥu	'grant'
	سَأَلَ	saʾala	يَسْأَلُ	yasʾalu	'ask'
	بَدَأَ	badaʾa	يَبْدَأُ	yabdaʾu	'begin'

a/u	**Perfect**		**Imperfect**		**Gloss**
	صَعُبَ	ṣaʿuba	يَصْعُبُ	yaṣʿubu	'be difficult'
	سَمُحَ	samuḥa	يَسْمُحُ	yasmuḥu	'be generous'

Pass.	**Perfect**		**Imperfect**		**Gloss**
	قُطِعَ	quṭiʿa	يُقْطَعُ	yuqṭaʿu	'was cut off'
	سُمِحَ	sumiḥa	يُسْمَحُ	yusmaḥu	'was granted'

(2)   Hebrew segolates containing a guttural in second or third position

Guttural in second position			**Guttural in third position**		
רַעַשׁ	*ráʿaš*	'noise'	בֶּלַע	*bélaʿ*	'swallowing'
נַחַל	*náḥal*	'valley'	בֶּטַח	*béṭaḥ*	'security'
בַּהַט	*báhaṭ*	'alabaster'	**but:**		
דַּאַב	*dáʾaḇ*	'pain'	דֶּשֶׁא	*déšeʾ*	'grass'

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A further phenomenon, which clearly establishes the set of gutturals as a natural class, is cross-guttural vowel assimilation as occurring in Classical Ethiopic (Gəᶜəz). In the case of verbs *I gutturalis* the prefix-vowel in the imperfect is *a* instead of *ə*. In the case of verbs *II gutturalis*, the sequence **aGGə* in the verb stem turns *əGGə* in the imperfect and the sequence **əGa* turns *aGa* in the imperative. In other words, by way of regressive assimilation of the feature [high] across gutturals, but not across other consonants, one arrives at the following forms:

(7)   Vocalic cross-guttural assimilation in Gəᶜəz

Non-guttural C$_1$	**Guttural C$_1$**
yənabbər 'he sits'	*yaʾammən* 'he believes'
	yaḥannəṣ 'he builds'
	yaxabbər 'he connects'
	yaᶜaqqəb 'he guards'

Non-guttural C$_2$	**Guttural C$_2$**
yənabbər 'he sits'	*yaləʾʾək* 'he sends'
	yaləhhəq 'he grows up'
	yəsəḥḥət 'he gets lost'
	yəbaᶜᶜəl 'he is rich'
nəbar 'sit!'	*laʾak* 'send!'
	lahaq 'grow up!'
	saḥat 'get lost'
	baᶜal 'be rich!'

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