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"The Change Wind Blew": Diachronic and Synchronic Orientations of Sound Change in Basrah Arabic

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Abstract - The current treatise is an attempt to unveil the phonological nature of sound change and to trace the extent to which the sound change is patterned and functioned via the historical and contextual developments of Basrah Arabic. Language change is generally attributed to three major factors: "syntagmatic change", "paradigmatic or associative change" and "social change". The facts and factors that underline the sound change can possibly be accounted for as to which theories have been propped. The most prominent of which are performance theories and competence theories.

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I. Introduction

Language change is generally attributed to three major factors. In the first place, words and sounds may affect adjacent words and sounds. This, in some cases, drags into alternative pronunciations ranging from distortedly phonetic words to innovatively pronounced words. Such variations represent perfectly normal, though informal, pronunciations which result from the influence of one sound on another within the word. Accordingly, when nearby elements affect one another within the flow of speech, the result is known as "syntagmatic change". Secondly, words and sounds may be affected by others that are not immediately present but with which they are associated. Change of this type is termed as "paradigmatic or associative change". Thirdly, a language may become different in accordance with external factors including new inventions where new lexemes are required and through social contact with other persons who speak different languages or dialects. A change of this sort which may influence the pronunciation, the grammar and the vocabulary of the language is called "social change".

The present study is an attempt to highlight the phonological nature of sound change and to trace the extent to which the sound change is patterned and functioned via the historical and contextual developments of Basrah Arabic. Basrah Arabic is that variety of Arabic which is spoken in the city of Basrah, in the southern part of Iraq, by educated and uneducated speakers alike. To arrive at satisfactory findings, conversational speech of a native Basrahi speaker is transcribed phonemically and then translated in Appendix (2).

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II. Interpretation of Sound Change

The facts and factors that underline the sound change can possibly be accounted for as to which theories have been propped. The most prominent of which are performance theories and competence theories. The proponents of performance theories argue that sound change arises out of the linguistic system via modifications of pronunciation. According to them, many speakers of a language begin to pronounce some sounds weakly and in certain cases they entirely delete other sounds before any change had taken place in the grammar of that language. They note that when this "deviant pronunciation" became sufficiently common, it was considered standard usage and the grammar of the language itself was changed to incorporate such deviation (Kiparsky, 1970: 304).

The most important issue which the proponents of performance theories have failed to puzzle out satisfactorily is associated with the origin of performance deviations that supposedly lies behind sound change. It is believed that a growing tendency towards a greater ease of articulation is the most powerful element, i. e. sound changes are interpreted in terms of the tendency of a greater ease of articulation rather than incidental occurrence chance. This interpretation is reinforced by the view that the deletion of the outer consonant in cluster (the first consonant of an initial cluster and the last consonant of a final cluster), for example, is more frequent than the insertion of such a consonant. The alternative solution to the same problem is that sound change is simply the result of random vacillations and not of the tendency towards a greater ease of articulation as the general cause of this change (Kiparsky, ibid. :305).

The advocates of the competence theories of sound change uphold a reverse view. They remark that sound changes originate in the competence which is responsible for changes in performance. They admit the sound change occurs in the phonological part of the grammar. This assumption is formulated within the framework of generative grammar in a way that sound

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change involves the addition of new phonological rules to the grammar (Chomsky and Halle, 1968; Postal, 1968; Botha, 1971; Dell, 1980).

One great advantage of conceiving sound change in terms of new rules added to the phonological component of a grammar is that the types of changes and types of conditionings that occur are also displayed in the rules of a synchronic grammar. That is, a large portion of the work related to the characterization of the possible sound changes is independently done in the form of a characterization of the possible phonological rules that may figure in a phonological description.

The extreme justifications concerned with sound change imply that the factors which lie behind such a change are often unknown. It is argued that some of the major changes such as the "First Sound Shift" and the "Great Vowel Shift" are particularly mysterious. In point of fact, various reasons have been suggested in this regard. One of these reasons is that when people speaking different languages come into contact, one group learns the other language but does so imperfectly in that the native habits of pronunciation are carried over into the language of the other group. Such an interpretation is referred to as the "substratum" or "super-stratum theory" based on whether it is the language of the dominant group that is influenced (Robins, 1989 and Trudgill, 2000).

A quite divergent sort of interpretation for sound change is that languages tend to develop a balanced sound system, i. e, to make sounds as different from one another by distributing them in phonological space. Accordingly, it is common for languages to have two front vowels /i, e/, and three non-front ones /u, o, a/. It is mentioned that it would be very strange if a language had five front vowels and no back ones at all because such an unbalanced system would make poor use of its available resources. It is presumed that if, for some reasons, a language loses some of its sounds, there would be intra-systemic pressure to bridge the gap by changing some of the remaining sounds (Pyles and Algeo, 1993: 35).

Sound change like assimilation, dissimilation, elision and intrusion are often accounted for in terms of increasing the ease of articulation. It is reaffirmed that some sounds can be uttered together more smoothly if they are similar rather than different sounds. It is suggested that elision and assimilation both accelerate the rate of speech, therefore, the desire or the need to talk at rapid tempo would encourage both process. In addition to these mechanical explanations of sound change, some changes are attributed to the partial awareness of the speaker, that is, these changes are deliberately made. It is capitulated that as speakers use the language, they often change it, whether mechanically or deliberately. Those changes are supposed to become for the next generation, just as a part of the inherent system, available to use or vary over the years and centuries and they may, like English, eventually become quite a different system from what it was earlier (Trask, 1996).

Sound change has also been investigated by a number of scholars (Neu, 1980 and Phillips, 1983) in the light of the frequency of occurrence of lexical items and their word class. These scholars study the correlation between lexical diffusion of sound change and the frequency of grammatical words in English. They state that most works on the sound change occurring through lexical diffusion have concentrated on both the role of word frequency and the important role played by word class. It seems apparent that there are two features of grammatical words in English: their high word frequency and their low sentence stress; these features are examined in a review of the behavior of grammatical words in a number of sound changes. It has accordingly been noticed that low sentence stress is the main determining factor to decide whether grammatical words change first or last in the diffusion of a sound change: a result which indicates that weakening processes affect grammatical words first whereas strengthening processes affect these words last.

III. Sound Change Behaviour in Basrah Arabic

a) Preliminaries

It has been observed that the sounds of language are in a continuous change. Such a change is faster and of more types in comparison with the alternation that may involve the morphology and syntax of the language. This is so because the spoken form of the language shows more flexibility in usage than the written form. In addition, the sounds of language are used in contexts different from those of the written forms. The best evidence to this fact is the great differences that are noticed between the written and the spoken forms of the language. This, in turn, implies, in most cases, that the pronunciation is modified whereas the spelling of the language is stable. Sound changes often offer clues to relative strength of phonological elements by virtue of which a system of ranking of these elements can be justified (Foley, 1977: 203).

One of the basic properties of Arabic is the relative stability of its sound system. Arabic is not, indeed, subservient to the alternation of its sounds as is the case in many languages and dialects of the world (Al-Salih, 1960: 230). Nevertheless, Colloquial Arabic is deviated from the standard variety via simplifying articulation. Simplification as such takes various shapes and justifications. Broadly speaking, sound changes that take place in Colloquial Arabic can be categorized into diachronic and synchronic. The Diachronic phonological changes refer to those changes that affect certain sounds in the different dialects of Arabic within periods of time. These changes have been generalized

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in the course of time so that they have become part of the sound systems of modern Arabic dialects. Synchronic sound changes, on the other hand, represent those modifications exhibited by the various sound segments of Colloquial Arabic when they occur in certain contexts.

b) Types of Sound Change in Basrah Arabic

As a sub-dialect of Iraqi Arabic, Basrah Arabic has been subjected to many changes and diversions in comparison with Arabic. These changes influence the syntax, morphology and the phonology of this variety. Phonological modifications, which can be elicited in the citation form and connected speech alike, differ from morphological and syntactic ones in two major respects: First, they take place constantly and unintentionally due to the impact of the articulatory habits of the community in general. Secondly, they do not affect the meaning of the individual words or sentences where they occur as in the case of morphological and syntactic alternations. It is possible to scrutinize the essential sound changes of Basrah Arabic as follows:

1) Increasing the number of the original short vowels Arabic mainly via the alternation of the classical diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ into the long vowels /ee/ and /oo/ as in /ʕeen/ "eye", /ʤeeʃ/ "army", /koon/ "universe", /qoos/ "curve" instead of /ʕayn/, /ʤayʃ/, /kawn/ and/qaws/ respectively.
2) Simplifying the glottal plosive in different word-positions as in /sˁaab/ "he hit" instead of /ʔasˁaab/, /xitˁaʔ/ "he committed a mistake" for /ʔaxtˁaʔ/, /ruus/ "heads" as compared with /ruʔuus/, /fuus/ "axes" in copmparison with /fuʔuus/, /hawa/ "air" for /hawaaʔ/, /duwa/ "medicine" in variation with /dawaaʔ/.
3) Phonemic replacement where certain segments are substituted by others for simplification as in /ʧalib/ "dog" for /kalb/, /ʧam/ "how many" in variation with /kam/, /biʧa/ "he wept" in variation with /bakaa/, /ɡidir/ "pot" for /qidr/, / θigil / "a weight" in comparison with/ θuql /, ɡumar/ "moon" as compared with /qamar/.
4) Changing the original syllabic structures of classical words where the number of the original syllables is reduced in certain cases as in /kisar/ "he broke" in comparison with /kasara/, /hnaa/ "here" in variation with /hunaa/, /wara/ "behind" for /waraaʔ/.
5) Shift of stress location as in /sima/ "sky" as compared with /samaaʔ/, /ʕamya/ "blind" for /ʕamyaaʔ/, /baʧi/ "weep" in comparison with /bukaaʔ/, /ʕiʃa/ "supper" in variation with /ʕaʃaaʔ/.
6) The non-distinction between pausal and non-pausal forms where words are always spoken with a distinct pausal form whether they occur in isolation or within a phrasal context. Such a phenomenon has its great effect on the phonetic value of some consonants and vowels. This can be exemplified by words such as /diras/ "he studied" for /darasaa/, /baab/ "door" in comparison with /baabun/, /naðˁiif/ "clean" as compared with /naðˁiifun/, /nahar/ "river" in comparison with /nahrun/.
7) Simplification via acrology where a group of words are combined into a single word as in /ʃbiik/ "what is wrong with you?" for /ʔayya ʃayʔin fiika/, /ʃtriid/ "what do you want?" as compared with /ʔayya ʃayin turiid?", /fiimaanil laah/ "Good-bye" for /fii ʔamaanil laah/, /mneen/ "from where" as compared with /min ʔayna/.
8) Simplification through the reduction of a final cluster where this cluster is geminate or non-geminate as in /bit man/ "whose daughter is she?", where the final geminate cluster of /bitt/ "daughter" is reduced into a single /t/, / sit maryam/ "Madam Maryam", in which the final geminate cluster of /sitt/ "Madam" is degeminated into a single /t/.
9) Inserting an epenthetic vowel to break final two-element cluster changing the original syllabic structure of the word as in /tamur/ "dates" for /tamr/, /faʤir/ "dawn" for /faʤr/, /qadar/ "fate" in comparison with /qadr.

IV. Sound Change and Haplology in Basrah Arabic

a) Preliminaries

Like elision, haplology refers to the loss of one or more of the identical segments which occur in succession. It is mainly concerned with the deletion of similar sounds (including the reduction of the number of similar or identical syllables) which appear in sequence within one and the same word, and it can be extended to imply the loss of similar segments that occur in juxtaposition across word-boundary (Abdul-Tawwab, 1988 and Al-Khalil, 1994).

Haplology has been investigated in Arabic in relation to the tendency registered by Arabic speakers to avoid the articulation of one or more of the identical or similar segments that occur next to each other (Al-Qasim, 1993). As is the case in many other languages, haplology takes place in Arabic as a result of the difficulty inherent in articulating two or more adjacent sounds or syllables (not necessarily occurring immediately in succession) which are produced by the same organs of speech. In more technical terms, pronouncing such segments usually hinders the fluency and requires much more muscular effort on the part of the speaker. Consequently, native speakers of Arabic abandon uttering these sounds by means of advocating various strategies, the most common of which are: phonemic replacement, insertion, dissimilation, de-geminate and elision.

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Haplology within word-boundary in Arabic is mostly found in the context where a number of different affixes are dropped for simplification. This is so because these affixes create identical segments or syllables that follow each other. In such cases, one of the identical elements is elided for ease of articulation as in /taqaddamuun/ "you make progress", /yukrimuuni/ "they offer me something", /taktubanna/ "you write", /ʔinnii/ "it is me" in comparison with /tataqaddamuun/, /yakrumu-unani/, /taktubannanna/, / ʔinnani / respectively.

In other contexts, final geminate clusters are simplified in Arabic via eliding one of the identical consonants. This process mostly takes place when certain suffixes are attached to verbs terminating with a geminate consonant as in /ʔadˤlatu/ "I misled", /ʔaħsastu/ "I felt", /masastu/ "I talked badly against someone in his absence". Haplology through the reduction of the number of successive syllables in Arabic can be illustrated by words like /madda/ "he stretched" for /madada/, /wedda/ "he loved" as compared with /wadda/, /farra/ "he escaped" in variant with /farara/, /yaħmarru/ "to become red" instead of /yaħmariru/.

Across word-boundary, one or more of the identical successive element(s) is (are) lost in Arabic for economy of effort. The following examples are good points of evidence: /lam yuðˤhiril ʔiʤtihaad/ "he did not show diligence", /ʔal wiħdatu ʔawi littiħaad/ "unity or concord", /ʔimmal ħayaatu ʔawil mawt/ "either life or death", /yasuuʕu ʔayil masiiħ/ "Jesues, that is Christ", /hal aħmadu ʔabuuka/ "Is Ahmed your father?", /ʕanil ʔaxbaar/ "about the news", /ʕal maaʔi/ "on water", /ʕaʃ ʃams/ "on the sun" as compared with /lam yuðˤhir ʔal ʔiʤtihaad/, / ʔal wiħdatu ʔaw ʔal ʔittiħaad/, /ʔimmal ʔal ħayaat ʔaw ʔal mawt/, /yasuuʕu ʔay ʔal masiiħ/, /hal ʔaħmadu ʔabuuka/, /ʕanʔal ʔaxbaar/,etc.

b) Haplology Orientations in Basrah Arabic

Basrah Arabic displays both diachronic and synchronic haplology. The former implies the deletion of one or more of the identical or similar segments or syllables both within word boundary and in phrasal context. To put it in another way, diachronic haplology can be elicited in this variety in individual words whether these words are spoken in isolation or within a context. Such a type of deletion has become a part of the phonological system of this dialect where the various forms of diachronic haplology are transmitted from one generation to another. The latter represents the omission of one or more of the identical juxtaposed sounds or syllables due to rapid speech when such elements occur in a variety of environments.

Diachronic haplology in Basrah Arabic within word-boundary can be represented by certain lexemes of classical origin as in/ ʔaakil/ "I eat", /ʔaaxið / "I take", /ʔayimma/ " plural of Imam", /ɡitil/ "you told me", /ɡitla/ "I told him", /txawfiini/ " you frighten me", /tfihmiini/ "you understand me", /tsimʕiini/ "you hear me", /tluumuuni/ "you blame me", /tħisduuni/ "you envy me", /ʧʧaðbuuni/ "you do not trust me" in comparison with /ʔaʔkul/, /ʔaʔxuð /, /ʔaʔimma/, /ɡulta li/, /ɡulta laha/, /ʔatuxawwifiinani/, /ʔatafhamiinani/, /ʔatasmaʕiinani/, /ʔatalumuunani/, /ʔataħsiduunani/, / ʔatukaðð ibuuni /.

Historical haplology in Basrah Arabic may occur as a result of morphological or syntactic factors where a number of successive segments are dropped. This phenomenon can be found particularly in normal and phrasal formations in which two or more lexemes are combined with each other to form certain nominals and phrases as well as negation. To verify this point we may cite the following illustrative examples: /limtiħaan/ "the examination", /laħmar/ "the red", /laswad/ "the black", /laʕma/ "the blind", /lasʔila/ "the questions", /ʕal zuuliyya/ "on the carpet", / ʕal maaʃi/ "quickly", /xaywalli/ "do not care for him", /xay yʤiiba/ "tell him to bring it", /maasʔal/ "I do not ask", / maa ʔaaxið / "I do not take" as compared with /ʔil ʔimtiħaan/, /ʔilʔaħmar/, /ʔilʔaswad/, /ʔil ʔaʕma/, /ʔil ʔasʔila/, /ʕalal zuuliyya/, /ʕalal maaʃi/, /xalli ywalli/, /xalli yʤiiba/, /maa ʔasʔal/, /maa ʔaʔxuð /.

Another form of diachronic haplology in Basrah Arabic due to morphological process can be exemplified by the simplification of the final geminate cluster when certain suffixes are attached to lexemes terminating with a geminate consonant. The following examples are good cases in point: /sidd/ "close" and /sidha/ "close it",/ʃimm/ "smell" and /ʃimha/ "smell it", /ridd/ "return" and /ridha/ "return it", /xall/ "leave" and /xalha/ "leave it", / ðibb / "throw" and / ðibha / "throw it", /yamm/ "near" and /yamha/ "near to it", /bass/ "enough" and /basha/ "let her stop doing something".

Speakers of Basrah Arabic may drop one or more of the identical juxtaposed segments in rapid connected speech usually for ease of articulation. This is what is referred to as synchronic haplology that occurs within a context. Examples of such a type are /yoomil aħħad/ "on Sunday", /laħħad iʤʤaay/ "next Sunday", /bsˤaffil ittiħaad/ "beside the union", /maarid akalfa biiha/ "I do not like to bother him with it", /huwwa maa miħtaaʤil ʔay waaħid/ "he does not need the support of anybody", /laa ʕalbaal wlaaʕal xaatˤir/ "unexpectedly happening" in comparison with /yoom ʔil ʔaħħad/, /ʔil ʔaħħad ʔil ʤaay/, /bsˤaf ʔil ʔittiħaad/, /maa ʔariid ʔakalfa biiha/, /huwwa maa miħtaaʤ ʔil ʔay waaħid/, laa ʕalal baal walaa ʕalal xaatˤir/.

V. Conclusion

In this study, we have seen that Basrah Arabic sound change can often be understood either as a diachronic phenomenon affecting the sequences of speech sounds within periods of time or as a synchronchic point of view: that is , from the viewpoint of changes in the sequences of speech sounds making up the pronunciation of particular words. The majority of

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such sound changes are seen in terms of the movements of the vocal organs during speech, and more particularly in terms of a tendency to reduce articulatory efforts. Moreover, many sound changes have significant consequences for the phonological system of Basrah Arabic, and these can be accounted for by scrutinizing the system consonant and vowel segments arranged in phonological space.

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Appendix (1) : Basrah Segmental Symbols

a) The Vowels :

i as in ʔibin "son" ii as in bziim "buckle"
ee as in ween "where"
a as in matˤbax "kitchen" aa as in waasˤtˤa "medium"
oo as in xoof "fear"
u as in duʃbul "marbles" uu as in hduum "clothes"

b) The Consonants :

b as in bhaam "thumb" s as in sˤalʃa "blad"
w as in wlaaya "city"
t as in taʃbaan "tired" z as in zibid "butter"
j as in ynaam "he sleeps"
tˤ as in tˤ iin "mud" ʃ as in ʃaʃar "hair"
d as in dmuuʃ "tears" x as in xaadim "servant"
dˤ as in dˤaabutˤ "officer" ɣ as in ɣaali "expensive"
k as in kital "he killed" ħ as in ħilim "dream"
g as in gwaani "sacks" ʃ as in ʃgaal "headband"
q as in qamiisˤ "shirt" h as in hnaak "there"
ʔ as in ʔamal "hope" ʧ as in ʧaay "tea"
f as in fazʃa "effort" ʤ as in ʤibin "cheese"
θ as in θaani "second" m as in moot "death"
ð as in ðeel "tail" n as in nahar "river"
_ as in ðˤaruf "envelop" l as in liga "he found"
s as in sirdaab "cellar" r as in rubuʃ "quarter"

Appendix (2)

The text is part of a conversational speech with a young man called Saadun who worked at the University of Basrah in Basrah city:

a) Text

ʔana wuladit bil-basrah ʔana ʧinit ʔisˤɣiir ʃidd uxuuy uxuuyakbar min ʃiddi uxuuy iʤa hnaa ʃtaɣal bil-ʤaamiʃa ʔilħaasˤil galli lazim tiʤi ʃiddi hwa ʧaan ʃidda mara baʃad hwa ma mazawaʤ iʤa bil-ʤaamiʃa gaal lazim tigʃid tiqra daris agilla maa aʤi u haaʤ u ðˤalleet abʧi ʧinit ʔisˤɣiir ʔilħaasˤil maa ridit aʤi innoob ɣasˤab ʤaabni ʤaabni ʔidda u ħatˤtˤni bil-madrasa u haaʤ min ilsˤaf ilawwal u dirasit ħatta wasˤalit ilsˤaf ilsaadis u naʤaħit u ʔaxa it ʔilʃahada u tˤalaʃit min ilmadrasa min tˤalaʃit ʃtaɣalit hnaa bil-ʤaamiʃa ʧaan raatbi sittiin dinaar

b) Translation

I was born in Basrah. I was a child there with my brother, my brother who is older than me. My brother came here and worked at the university. Anyway, in the end he said to me "You must come to stay with me." He was married, but when he came to the university he was not married. He said "You should stay and study." I said: "I am not coming" and I kept crying. I was only a

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child. In the end, I did not want to come, then he brought me by force. He sent me to school from the first grade and I studied until I got to the sixth grade. I passed and got my certificate. I left the school. When I left I began to work here at the university. I was paid here sixty dinar a month.

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