

Karim Bensoukas (2014), *Featural Dissimilation in Tashlhit – Avoiding the Repetition of Labial and Round*, Publications of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Rabat, Serie: Theses and memoirs n° 72, 246 p.

The book *Featural Dissimilation in Tashlhit – Avoiding the Repetition of Labial and Round*, published in 2014 by Karim Bensoukas, may well be viewed as one of the rarest Amazigh phonology books that have tried to accommodate a specific phonological phenomenon on a thorough and comprehensive fashion. Crucially, the phenomenon of labial dissimilation in Amazigh, most notably in Tashlhit, has been contended with in a whole range of works such as (El Assri (1991), El Medlaoui (1992), Boukous (1987) and Selkirk (1993)). However, a thorough analysis of labial dissimilation along with the specification of its locus relative to the various dissimilation phenomena observed in Amazigh has never been achieved for a number of reasons. Foremost among these reasons is presumably the theoretical framework under which the previous works have been couched.

The book comprises an acknowledgement, an introduction, eight chapters, a conclusion, a comprehensive bibliography and an index. The first chapter of the book is devoted to a description of the dialect under study and its inventory, a sketch of the most important reasons underlying the writing of the book as well as the audience for which the work is headed. The second chapter sets out the core theoretical tenets adopted in the analysis together with a number of definitions of dissimilation. The third and fourth chapters draw heavily on the analysis of the domains [lab] and [round] trying to account for their behavior. Chapter five and six center around the salient phenomena that exhibit a resistance to the treatment adopted. The last chapter gets around some other types of dissimilation such as morphological, morpho-syntactic and diachronic dissimilation.

The central thrust of the book is to give a handle on the phenomenon of dissimilation of the two features [labial] and [round] in Tashlhit along the tenets of Optimality Theory developed in the putative works of McCarthy and Prince (1993) and Prince and Smolensky (1993). Foremost among the other theoretical underpinnings espoused in the explanation of the dissimilation of the two features [labial] and [round] in Tashlhit, there is the theory of identity avoidance, championed most influentially by Yip (1995, 2004), Alderete (1997) and Suzuki (1998) among others. In fact, the use of constraints banning the repetition of the features [labial] and [round] in the stem has been extensively made avail of to get around the different dissimilation phenomena addressed in the book. The writer has also deployed the theory of local conjunction as construed in (Smolensky (1993, 1995 and 1997)) in positing dissimilation-driving constraints that avoid two identical features.

Foremost among the theoretical grounds the author makes avail of to accommodate the dissimilation of [lab] and [round] in Tashlhit is identity avoidance as construed in Yip (1995, 2004), Alderete (1997) and Suzuki (1998) among others. Owing to the author's resort to identity avoidance, he has been able to contend with a composite of various dissimilation phenomena other than the putative dissimilation phenomena addressed by the traditional OCP constraint (Goldsmith (19976), McCarthy(1986) and others) reckoning only on phonological features and foiling the attempt to generalize over syllabic, morphological and syntactic units. The deployment of identity avoidance has enabled the author to get around a whole range of dissimilatory phenomena like bu-nouns, haplogy as well as the coexistence of the imperfective affix *tt-* with the passive and causative affixes. Furthermore, we may well contend that the author's accommodation of the phenomenon has brought about an important range of consequences not only in terms of attaining a better understanding of the features [lab] and [round] but also in terms of reifying the relationship that holds between all these phenomena.

The work also derives much of its appeal from the use of two other sub-theories, the first dubbed Local Conjunction of Constraints (Smolensky (1999, 1995, 1997) and others), the second labelled Positional Faithfulness (Beckman (1997, 1998, 2004) among others). The use of Local Conjunction of Constraints to get around the dissimilatory phenomena addressed has been of prime importance and utility. The superiority of Local Conjunction of Constraints in providing a successful account of the various dissimilatory phenomena treated is ascribed to the attribute of violability that characterizes locally conjoined constraints, a specificity by virtue of which local conjunction outperforms the traditional inviolable OCP constraint. Indeed, the non-violability of the traditional OCP constraint yields a number of consequences, most pernicious of which is presumably the fact that the constraints become more powerful, a situation that may stand in fundamental conflict with linguistic reality, and may bring about generalizations which are at odds with the functioning of the language. The author's use of Positional Faithfulness underpinnings has also been of paramount importance in reifying the locus of dissimilation. It has been argued in the course of accounting for the different dissimilatory and assimilatory phenomena that roots foils the attempt to be affected by change while affixes are readily altered. Furthermore, Positional Faithfulness constraints derive much of their appeal and explanatory power from their ability to predict the direction of assimilation or dissimilation phenomena, left or right or both.

With all the advantages ensuing from the use of positional faithfulness as background, we amount to the conclusion that OT outweighs other non-linear approaches, by being able to predict the orientation of the alteration without appealing to further rules to attend to the direction of assimilation and dissimilation phenomena.

Another theoretical tenet, namely consonant transparency, has been illuminatingly pursued to account for words such as *issgni*, which foil the attempt to abide by the requirements of round dissimilation, although they meet all the requirements for the dissimilation of the feature [round] to obtain. The author provides compelling evidence in favour of the transparency of consonants occurring between two identical front unrounded vowels, an idea influentially developed by Nichiosain and Padgett (1997) and others under a phonetics-based-phonology approach. The constraint, No gap, owing to its ranking at the top of the hierarchy, has been able to rule out forms where such dissimilation obtains. Previous accounts (El Assri (1991), Boukous (1987) and El Medlaoui (1992)) have emphatically failed to contend with words such as *issgni* without appealing to further rules or to co-occurrence restrictions.

Of paramount importance among the advantages observed in this work is the ability of the constraints ranking posited by the author to explain the fact that it is consonants that lose their roundness and not vowels. To achieve this end, the author devises a roundness hierarchy that discriminates between vowels and consonants, and further explains that it is the constraint that bans roundness in consonants that dominates the constraint that bans roundness in vowels. Of prime importance among Bensoukas's findings, there is, also, the ability of the constraints hierarchy, most notably place markedness hierarchy, to predict the outcome of nasal dissimilation in agentive morphemes where labial nasals consistently hold as coronal nasals. This prediction cannot be achieved in previous accounts without resorting to rules whose *raison d'être* cannot be motivated.

Another point deserves mention. It is the accommodation of the dissimilatory phenomena exhibited by [round] and [labial] in Standard Amazigh, which, along the author's standpoint, stands in fine accord with the accommodation of the same phenomena in Tashlhit, both in terms of the constraints that operate in the two languages and in terms of the ranking of these constraints.

Notwithstanding the efforts invested by the author to get around the dissimilation of [lab] and [round] in Tashlhit, a comprehensive treatment of such phenomena emphatically necessitates a comparative analysis between Tashlhit and the composite of various Amazighlects observed in Morocco. The comparative analysis should draw heavily not only on primary labials but also on secondary labials. The author, for instance, contends that labio-velarized consonants foil the attempt to interact with labial consonants in dissimilation-driving contexts. However, close scrutiny of Amazigh exhibits that there are words such as *anggaru* where dissimilation obtains despite the absence of a primary labial in the root. There are presumably compelling arguments to consider the underlyingly labio-velarized /gg^w/ to be the reason behind the dissimilatory mapping of *am* into *an*. Interestingly, there is a good number of similar words which have been

accommodated by former Amazigh phonologists along previous theoretical frameworks.

Among the limitations observed in the work, there is the lack of an account for some words whose underlying labio-velarization surfaces unscathed in the surface form, in total aversion with the requirements of the dissimilation-driving-vowel harmony. The author does not offer an explanation to words such as *tizkk^wi* “sparrow”, and *ttagg^wa* “he is watching” and *tirgg^win* “stream” (see El Medlaoui (1992)) where the labiovelar *kk^wandgg^w* surface unaltered, though intercalated between two identical non-round vowels. Vowel harmony should, in principle, blunt the force that preserves labio-velarisation in *kk^wandgg^w*.

Our review would not be complete if we do not address a whole range of other problematic verbs such as *aws*, *awD* and *awi*. These verbs, in my conjecture, have not been thoroughly contended with. The mapping of *awi* into *iwi* rather than *uwi* in the perfective form necessitates an exhaustive analysis of secondary labiality in round vowels and round glides on the one hand, and on the free cohabitation of round vowels and round glides in roots, stems and words on the other. One may wonder how the untolerated sequence *uw* is mapped into *iw* in the perfective form of the verb *awi* in Tashlhit while there are verbs in the South Eastern Amazigh varieties that freely tolerate the cluster *uw* (for instance, *ssdwuws* “shake”). With the above as background, comparative work is sorely needed to get a better sense of how dissimilation of the features [lab] and [round] operates in Amazigh.

In closing, we may well do to reckon that, notwithstanding the limitations laid out above, Bensoukas’s work has enriched Amazigh linguistics in general and Amazigh phonology in particular. The work may also be construed as unprecedented not only in terms of the methodology adopted but also in addressing dissimilation in Amazigh in a comprehensive and complete fashion.

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