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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## A Descriptive Phonological Account of Metathesis in The Holly Quran

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| ABSTRACT

Metathesis is the phenomenon in which sounds seems to switch positions with one another under certain conditions. In linguistics, this term refers to an alteration or change in the usual linearity or string of elements within a sentence – mostly of sounds, but occasionally of syllables, words, or other units. Thus, the current paper aims to answer questions like what is the purpose of such linguistic phenomenon?, how did phonology treat such phenomenon?. The investigation is achieved through adopting a model to analyze the data. The model is applied in a descriptive qualitative method of analysis. The paper finds that metathesis is represented phonologically in a very simple way but with deep effect that keeps many purposes.

| KEYWORDS

Metathesis, types, phonological approaches, Quranic text.

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### 1. Introduction

Metathesis is a process where two sounds exchange their positions within the same word. Hence, in a string of sounds where we would expect the linear ordering of them to be ...xy..., we find instead ...yx... . Richards and Schmidt (2010: 392) reveal that metathesis "is a change in the order of two sounds in a word, e.g. /flm/ for /flm/ film. Metathesis sometimes occurs in the speech of the learners of a language though it may also occur in native speakers' language.

Though it is a phonological phenomenon, Chomsky and Halle (1956), affirm that metathesis is considered as a marginal phenomenon outside the realm of phonological grammars. Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate how this phenomenon is represented and analyzed within phonology in general and within the data collected in particular. To achieve such aim it is hypothesized that metathesis is not just a matter of slips of the tongue but it is a linguistic phenomenon that achieves many linguistic purposes. To test the validity of the hypothesis, an eclectic model is adopted to achieve a descriptive analysis for different verses in the Holly Quran to investigate such phenomenon.

Consequently, the paper is divided into four sections: Introduction, theoretical part, analysis and conclusions.

### 2. The Concept of Metathesis

As a word, metathesis is went back to the late Latin word "metatithenia" means to phrase. The word has two parts: "meta" meaning "beyond over" and "tethenia " meaning" to change" ( Thompson & Thompson 1969:35). In earlier investigation, however, the term "inversion" is used instead of "metathesis" when two adjacent segments changed place, whereas the term "metathesis" is used for longer distance movement and later be equal for that of inversion, (Blevins & Garrett, 1998). "hyperthesis" is a unique reference for metathesis refers to the "replacement in a line of verse of a metrical foot by a mirror-image foot, as of an iamb by a trochee". (Trask, 1996 :174).

Many agree on the definition that metathesis is "a term used in linguistics to refer to the transposition of elements in a word or sentence" (Hume ,1998:148). For example: *revelent* for *relevant*, and *brid* for *bird*.

### **2.1 Types of Metathesis**

Metathesis is divided into four categories according to Blevins and Garrett (2004). This division is based on its historical causes. They are:

1. Perceptual metathesis is that type which is distinguished by having elongated phonetic cues. It is caused by phonetic features that are larger than the segments such as syllables with CV or VC sequence, or a string of syllables. Such features do not necessarily cover a supra segmental domain, but in languages where metathesis is observed they display this behavior. (Blevins & Garrett 2004: 123).
2. Compensatory Metathesis which is characterized by stress-induced as temporal shifts through a foot phrase-final. This kind is best represented in weak vowel loss or shift, a commonly observed process in various languages (Campbell 2004). Unstressed syllables might lose their vowel articulation gradually; then they start life as complete vowels, go through a stage of weakened pronunciation and finally lose their existence at all.
3. Coarticulatory Metathesis in which coarticulation adjacent stop consonants may be metathesized. This third type also requires temporal shifts; gestures involved in speech production. They are liable to interfere as a result of gestural retiming. Browman & Goldstein (1989) show that retiming of gestures can lead to processes as deletion, epenthesis and assimilation.
4. Auditory metathesis which is related to "Auditory-stream" as in gathering adjacent stops like: *ask, aks*. According to Bregman (1990), the aperiodic noise demanded in the producing of sibilants somehow distracts the listener, leading to high confusion rates of the relative order of the stop---sibilant cluster, which makes such a sequence liable to perceptual confusion and subsequent metathesis. Blevins & Garrett (2004) speculate that language specific variation in directionality could be due to differences in the prosodic systems of languages.

### **2.2 Reviewing Literature**

There is a popular understanding of metathesis as being sporadic and irregular process which is restricted to errors performance, child speech or sound change (Hume, 2001: 1). This view is regularly expressed in the linguistic literature.

Moreover, this view was evident in Spencer's work who states that "metathesis frequently occurs in all languages as a type of speech error and is a common feature of child phonology." (1996: 68). Crystal (2003:240) presents his idea on metathesis and again putting in mind the same idea of its appearance often in the performance of errors, in tongue-slips or in the phenomenon of 'spoonerisms'.

Powell (1985: 106) also believes that "metathesis has generally been treated as a minor sound change. Sporadic and irregular, examples of metathesis are often treated as if labeling it were explaining it."

Also, metathesis is recurrently studied in West and South Slavic languages since there is liquids for regular metathesis *vis-à-vis* Proto Slavic, cf. PSlav. \**berza* 'birch' with Church Slavic. *brěza*, Serb, (Bussman, 1999: 746).

Additionally, special attention is paid to the study of metathesis in some Arabic accents mainly because it occurs more frequently in the colloquial contexts of Arabic; moreover, it studies child language basically the type produced as a result of their short memory during their early stage of acquiring language.

### **2. 3 Phonological Account of Metathesis**

Two directions have been utilized to investigate the phenomenon of metathesis: linear and non-linear phonology. The linear phonology is represented by Chomsky and Halle's (1968) seminal work in generative phonology where metathesis is best highlighted by means of transformational notation :

S k                      k s  
1 2    becomes    2 1  
Input                      output

On the other hand, non-linear phonology, gives no particular formula for showing metathesis as a based rule-type. In this field, 'metathesis' has been derived by a variety of means like applying the rules of sounds deletion, insertion , single feature spreading , and vowel epenthesis. (Belvins and Garrett 1998, Hume 2001). Although both these directions regard metathesis as a prominent phonological process of segment reversal, they do not put direct steps to interpret such phenomenon. Therefore, the current paper focuses more on other phonological approaches like corresponding theory and optimality theory.

Optimality theory a "constraint-based theory" in phonology that provides good approach to the analysis of metathesis as it sheds light on not only segment reversals between an input and output in the theory but also from a mismatch in the linear ordering of sounds between input and output. This mismatch is analyzed as a violation of the constraints linearity. Thus, this theory dismisses ideas that oppose the existence of metathesis (Hume 2000: 78).

Current OT mostly makes use of Correspondence Theory by (McCarthy & Prince 1995). In Correspondence Theory, (CT) there is a correspondent relationship between the lexical input "string of sounds" (S1) and the various generated phonetic outputs "string of sounds" (S2). The ranking of a set of universal constraints decides the grammar of each individual language; these constraints can be divided into two categories: **markedness** constraints and **faithfulness** constraints. The former's role is to reduce the complexity of output forms, prohibiting or requiring certain output configurations. The latter's role is to keep correspondence between input and output structures; optimal faithfulness constraints are maximality, which demands full correspondence between input and output, and contiguity, (McCarthy & Prince 1995). Contiguity is explained by Crystal (2003, 135) as an element that "evaluates, along with linearity, the preservation of adjacency ordering of segments between two forms. If two segments are adjacent in the input form, the corresponding segments should be adjacent in the output form, and vice versa. The metathesis of two segments preserves their adjacency but not their linearity.

## 2.4 Adopted Model

In line with the abovementioned phonological approaches to metathesis and according to what has been mentioned in the literature, the current paper adopts the following eclectic model to analyze texts or verses from the Holy Quran chosen randomly depending on the sound change. This model is based on the division mentioned by Belvine and Garrett (2004) as types of forms of metathesis and on linearity of markedness and maximality as well as contiguity of faithfulness from McCarthy and Prince's (1995) Corresponding Theory. Below is figure(1) that shows this model:

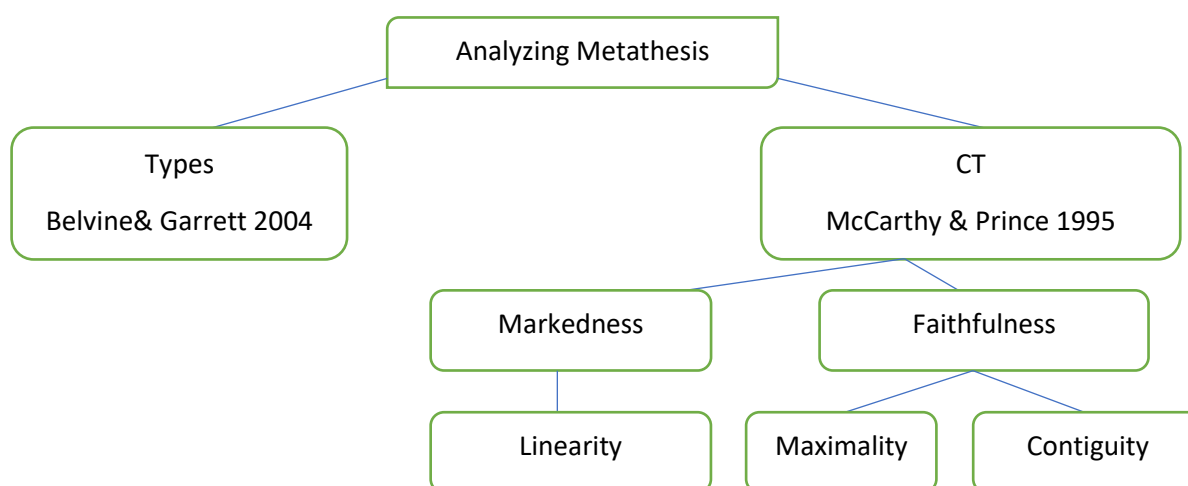


Figure (1): Adopted Model

## 3. The Analysis

(1) "ان اول بيت وضع للناس للذي ببكة مباركا", سورة ال عمران (اية 96)

The type of metathesis in this verse is co-articulatory one in which /m/ is replaced by /b/ because the former has smoother qualities than the latter. That is, although both are voiced but /b/ is explosive stop consonant. Such quality use metathesis to indicate the heaviness not only in pronunciation but also in meaning. Thus, /b/ is more suitable to the indication that this place is more crow, intimidation and magnification. It constitute with its juxtaposed sound a coherent clear image. Also this metathesized sound is marked by its simplicity for its correspondence with the adjacent segments. This achieves the maximality and contiguity of the appealed word.

(2) "قل انفقوا طوعا او كرها لن يتقبل منكم انكم كنتم قوما فاسقين" (التوبة 53), " ووصينا الانسان بوالديه حملته امه كرها و وضعته كرها". (الاحقاف 15).

This kind of metathesis represents both co-articulatory and compensatory ones since it reflects a shift or change in the vowel sound from a weak one into a strong one. In this verse, however, such shift of vowel is used intentionally for reflecting a particular meaning and message. The first verse, contains the weak vowel "kerhen" to refer to an abstract sense of hurt like undesirable things, while the second verse contains the strong vowel "kurhen" to emphasize both an abstract and a concrete hurts as this accompanies the pregnancy and giving birth. Hence, the Arabic clitic (fatha), which equals the short vowel /e/, marks natural harmony with its linguistic context, leading to ease in pronunciation represented in the first word "kerhen". The same is

for clitic "dhama", equals to /u/, that achieves its purpose with a complete congruent between input and overall output. This reflects the rhetoric faithfulness of the verse.

(3) "لست عليهم بمصيطر" (الغاشية 22).

This verse has co-articulation metathesis in the word "musayter" in which /s/ is changed to be read as stronger with extra stress and aspiration. This change has the indication of enlargement which means that the prophet (PBUH) is not responsible for those huge crowd of unbelievers and their choice of religion. This metathesized sound keeps the contiguity of the word since it keeps the adjacency order of the segments without any other change except for the linear of /s/ to mark its own message and keep its correspondence and faithfulness.

(4) "فيهما عينان نضاختان", (الرحمن 66)

The type of metathesis in this verse is co-articulatory one in which /خ/ or /kh/ is a substitute for /ح/ or /h/. Such metathesis is produced because the former segment has wider qualities than the latter. That is, the first one is voiceless while the second one is voiced, continuous consonant. Such quality indicates the continuity not only in pronunciation but also in meaning. Thus, /خ/ is more suitable to the meaning that this place has springs in which water has never stopped or diminished. It constitute with its juxtaposed sound a coherent clear image of springs as the word is marked as having the same rhyme as "فعال" indicating multiplicity of things. Also this metathesized sound is marked by its similar correspondence with the original segment /ح/ , the case that keeps the faithfulness of this verse particularly when maximality and contiguity maintain the same order of both input and output of representative word.

#### **4. Findings**

It has been found that the sequence of segments can be changed in a process called metathesis causes different issues some of them are exploited for humorous effects while others used for rhetoric ones as the data showed. This term itself was identified from different points of views. Traditionally, metathesis has been treated as a minor sound change and it has been considered as irregular process. Phonologically, some theorists shed light on this phenomenon a fund gave it more vital turn to be a phonological process. Therefore, the investigation of metathesis has been done in both a linear and non-linear phonology.

As the types of metathesis, mostly co-articulation and compensatory metathesis are used more the other types. That is, they sound more frequent than the others in this selected data.

Metathesis does not exist as performance errors only as it has been expected but it is used intentionally for specific purposes just like the data being analyzed. This actually verifies the hypothesis of this paper. Also, this shows that the adopted model is valid to deal with this phenomenon phonologically.

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