

Gemination in English Loanwords in Jordanian Arabic

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This paper attempts to find out why words like 'Toyota', 'balloon', and 'ace' are adapted into Arabic with geminate consonants while other words like 'million', 'dollar' and 'chiffon' are rendered with single consonants. Couched within an optimality theoretic approach, the study tries to identify the constraints that account for the gemination and ungemination of consonants in English loanwords in Jordanian Arabic. The data is collected over a period of two years from many oral and written resources. More than 3000 English loanwords are identified and transcribed phonetically as they are pronounced by Arab native speakers in Jordan. About forty words are pronounced with geminate consonants. The words are analyzed phonologically and categorized into two types according to the constraints that govern them. The words in the first list are geminated to satisfy an undominated constraint in Arabic, namely bimoracity, which stipulates that the minimal lexical Arabic word be bimoraic. For example, words like “boss, full, and nag” are pronounced with a geminate final consonant although none of them is geminated in the source language. It is worth mentioning that all the words in this list are all monosyllabic and are pronounced with short vowels i.e., they are monomoraic in the target language if pronounced with a singleton. Jordanian Arabic opts here for gemination to improve the prosodic structure of the words in question. Gemination in the second list of words can be accounted for by an interaction of constraints namely, Onset, Stress-to-Weight Principle and Foot Binarity. The second list is further subdivided into two sets. The words in the first set are geminated to satisfy Onset and Foot-Binarity. For example, ‘l’ and ‘t’ in ‘balloon’ and ‘battery’ respectively are geminated in Jordanian Arabic to satisfy both Foot Binarity and Stress-to-Weight Principle simultaneously as a singleton would satisfy only one of them. Stress-to-Weight Principle and Onset accounted for gemination in the second set. For instance, the ‘l’ sound in ‘milli, trolley and vanilla’ is geminated to render a stressed syllable heavy and at the same time provide onset to the following syllable. These results show that germination in loanwords is output oriented to improve prosodic structure of the borrowed words. The study also suggests a new constraint, or at least a striking tendency, that triggers consonant germination not only in loanwords but also in native Arabic words, a completely neglected area by Arab phonologists. This tendency requires all pretonic syllables to construct a bimoraic foot. Ungemination is accounted for by the fact that the prosodic structure of the words in question already satisfies the above mentioned constraints. Also, it is confirmed that orthography has no role in the phonological adaptation as some words that are spelled with double consonants are not geminated on one hand and some words that are spelled with a singleton are geminated on the other hand.

Key words: gemination- phonological adaptation- loanwords- Arabic language