

On the Origin and Inherent Meaning of the L-Stem

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Abstract

Verbs in the Semitic languages are unique amongst the corpus of languages, in that they have the ability to express different actions by inserting a three or four letter root into a certain pattern. Moreover, various aspects of a given action, such as those containing an iterative or causative sense, are shown through changes in verbal patterns from the basic verb to the derived forms. As such, there are many forms across the Semitic languages that comprise distinct meanings endemic to each pattern. Though most of these forms are well documented by many linguists, they sharply disagree as to the origin and core meaning of the L-Stem ('lengthened' stem). In order to wade through this controversy, I plan first to narrow the field of languages that utilize the L-Stem, so as to tell which of them necessitate further study. Then, a summary of the opinions debating the true origin and meaning of the L-Stem will be presented, along with my thoughts stating that the verb form is indeed derived from the basic verb. Lastly, through analysis of samples taken from classical texts, I can then determine that the contextual meaning of the L-Stem connotes actions that directly affect another person.

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Introduction

The Semitic languages are set apart from their Afro-Asiatic cousins in their use of a consonantal root system, which hold a lexical meaning in each set of three (or four) letters. Many of these root-letter sets can be placed in a variety of permutations, each altering the roots' meaning in different ways. Among these distinctions, made through pattern changes, are in the number or emphasis in nouns, and in the particular aspect, force, mutuality and emphasis of verbs.

Through the insertion of a root into various stems, Semitic languages communicate different nuances of a given action. The stems primarily used include the G-Stem, which is the basic (or 'ground', Arabic Form I: /faʕala/) form of the verb, and the N-Stem (with the '-n' prefix, as in Arabic Form VII: /infaʕala/), which is the stative-reflexive (and quasi-passive) form of the basic verb. Moreover, the D-Stem (where the second root letter is 'doubled'; Arabic Form II: /faʕʕala/) denotes causality in some circumstances, and is considered 'intensive' by many grammarians. Furthermore, the C-Stem is the purer causative form (to 'cause' someone to do something, Arabic Form IV: /ʔaʕʕala/) of the corresponding G-Stem verb. More verb stems are shared across the Semitic languages, though fewer languages agree on their contextual usage and meanings endemic to those forms.

The origin and inherent meaning of the L-Stem verb ('lengthened' stem, Arabic

Form III: /fāʕala/) may be the hardest to determine, for grammarians and Semiticists mainly dispute whether or not it is either related to the G-Stem or the D-Stem. I intend to argue that through analysis of their arguments and samples taken from classical texts, that not only is it a form derived directly from (or part of) the G-Stem, but that its meaning is largely shared across the Semitic languages.

The Origin of the L-Stem

Before discussion can begin on the use of the L-Stem, it is prudent to discuss this form within the context of languages that contain it. This is done by narrowing the scope of which languages must be studied, in order to determine the inherent meaning of the verb form.

Introduction to the Classification of the Semitic Languages

Semitic languages form a subset of a larger group of languages, which was classified by ethnolinguist Joseph Greenberg as 'Afro-Asiatic'.¹ In this category, the languages originated in a common area, but do not necessarily share linguistic characteristics across its subdivisions. As such, Egyptian, Cushitic (e.g., Oromo, Somali), Berber (e.g., Amazigh, Kabyle), Chadic (e.g., Hausa, Mandara) and Semitic languages were all collected under the auspice of Afro-Asiatic.² Yet even as some Berbers choose

¹Edward Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*, 2nd ed., Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2001; 21–2.

²Alice Faber, "Genetic Subgrouping of the Semitic Languages", pg. 3–15, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron, London: Routledge, 1997; 4–5.

to write Amazigh in the Arabic script commonly used in North Africa, their language *does not* consist of the traits endemic to Semitic languages, such as having a triliteral root system (as Arabic has). As such, Greenberg's classification does not take into account that languages close in proximity may have little or nothing in common with each other, such as how Egyptian and Berber languages have little to do with the way Semitic languages express meaning.

In order to appreciate the origins of the L-Stem, one must consider the taxonomy and classification of the Semitic Languages, which tend to be separated into two groups based on either cultural and geographical similarities, or linguistic similarities between languages. The first group categorizes Semitic languages culturally and geographically into East and West Semitic. East Semitic is composed of Akkadian, with its two major dialects (Assyrian and Babylonian). West Semitic is broken up into Northwest and South Semitic.³ Within West Semitic, Northwest (or North) Semitic includes Amorite, Aramaic (including Syriac, Mandaic and modern spoken variants), Biblical Hebrew, Phoenician and Ugaritic.⁴ Moreover, South Semitic includes the Arabic language, other South Arabian languages (Meḥrī, Sabʿean, etc.) and languages of Ethiopia (Amharic, Geʿez, etc.). Semiticist William Wright's classification differs from this schema, though his preference for division between Northern and Southern Semitic is

Lipiński, 24.

³Faber in Hetzron, 5.

⁴'Paleosyrian' is a term Lipiński gives to denote the Semitic languages newly discovered at Ebla, Tell Baydar and Mari (Northern Syria), and at Kish (Central Iraq).

Lipiński, 51–55, 59–74 passim.

only a modification of this particular taxonomy. He divided Northern Semitic into West and East, and Southern Semitic into a tripartite category of Arabic, Modern South Arabian and Ethiopic languages.⁵ Wright denotes Arabic as 'North Arabic' within Southern Semitic, so as to differentiate it from the Southern Arabian languages spoken on the southern rim of the Arabian Peninsula.⁶

The second school of thought divides Semitic languages on a linguistic basis, into East and West Semitic, with West Semitic partitioned further into Central and South Semitic.⁷ East Semitic includes Akkadian and Eblaite; within Western Semitic, Central Semitic is divided into Arabic, Hebrew, Phoenician and other Canaanite languages, and South Semitic is divided into Ethiopic and Modern South Arabian languages. Linguist Robert Hetzron classified Arabic with the other Canaanite languages, since he believed that it was linguistically (rather than culturally) closer to them than Arabic was to the other Southern Semitic languages.⁸ Noted linguists John Huehnergard and Edward Lipiński also place Arabic closer to these Canaanite languages, with Huehnergard preferring to group them into the Central Semitic category, and Lipiński grouping them into Western Semitic.⁹

As such, the positioning of Arabic within the Semitic languages is the main point of contention between both classifications, on whether Arabic should be grouped with

⁵William Wright, *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages*, 2nd ed., Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1966; 12–30 passim.

⁶Wright, 26–7.

⁷Faber in Hetzron, 6–7.

⁸Faber in Hetzron, 7.

⁹Faber in Hetzron, 9–10.

Lipiński, 59, 74–81 passim.

'Northwest' or 'South/Southeast' Semitic.¹⁰ The classification where Arabic is part of the South Semitic subset, is preferred, because both Arabic and Ethiopic languages have larger abjads in use than the Canaanite languages and their 22-letter abjads. More importantly, Arabic shares a vast array of verb stems (including the L-Stem) with the Ethiopic languages, showing that one can place Arabic with Ethiopic on a *linguistic* basis, rather than simply through cultural or geographical bases.

The Languages That Attest the L-Stem

The L-Stem primarily occurs in Southern Semitic languages, where only Arabic, and to a lesser extent, most languages in the Ethiopic classification (e.g., Amharic, Geʿez, Tigré, Tigrinya), indicate the verb form. Arabic considers this stem derived from either the G-Stem or the D-Stem, whereas Ethiopic languages utilize the L-Stem (denoted as Type C in grammars of Ethiopic languages) as part of the tripartite ground stem, with the G-Stem (Type A) and D-Stem (Type B) aggregated into one group. Some *spoken* South Arabian languages also display the L-Stem, although their use of it must be borrowed from either Arabic or Geʿez, given their relative youth to the aforementioned languages. Moreover, Biblical Hebrew rarely indicates the L-Stem (with the verb form /Pōʿēl/) at all, which many linguists figure must have the same form and meaning of the L-Stem found in other languages. Pōʿēl cannot be considered as a distinct verb form in Hebrew, however, since the form is really not considered to be

¹⁰Faber in Hetzron, 12–3.

apart from geminated-root verbs in Hebrew grammars.¹¹ Also, Syriac spoken in Maṣlūlah, Syria contains the L-Stem, though this form seems to be borrowed from Arabic and 'Syriacized' into a form agreeable to the conventions of the language. Linguist Otto Jastrow posited that Western 'Neo-Aramaic' spoken in Maṣlūlah, indicates the L-Stem in the pattern of /sōfar/ 'he traveled'. As such, this form was probably loaned from Arabic, given that the Arabic verb for 'he traveled' is /sāfara/.¹² Furthermore, the L-Stem has not been identified in Northern or Eastern Semitic languages, duly owing to its primary development in Western and Southern Semitic languages.¹³ Thus, it seems that the L-Stem is only shown in Arabic, Geʿez and languages derived from them.

Implications of These Findings

Given that both Arabic and Geʿez contained the L-Stem, the question arises: did Arabic borrow this verb form from Geʿez, or vice versa?

If Arabic borrowed the L-Stem from Geʿez, then it must have developed later than the other Semitic languages, since languages such as Akkadian, Aramaic and Hebrew are commonly considered to have a more ancient heritage than Geʿez. This notion was widely held until the 1970s, due to the fact that the earliest examples of

¹¹Wright, 203.

¹²Otto Jastrow, "The Neo-Aramaic Languages", pg. 334–377, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron. London: Routledge, 1997; 341–2.

¹³Lipiński, 394.

written Arabic date only to around the 2nd century AD.¹⁴ This idea is bolstered by the fact that Arabic still retains its system of case declension in its classical and 'koinic' (Modern Standard Arabic) versions. As older languages tend to lose declensions over time in formal writing (as Akkadian had few extant examples of declension by the 'Standard Babylonian' period),¹⁵ Arabic's retention of case endings must mean that it is younger than its counterparts, for otherwise its classical and koinic iterations would have lost most or all aspects of declension.

If Geʿez borrowed this form from Arabic, then Arabic must have had a longer lifespan than most or all of the Semitic languages. In affirming this concept, the Arabic language retained case declension and other old Semitic conventions (e.g., duality of number represented in nouns and verbs), while *concurrently altering* the colloquial forms in place of the classical language. For instance, Arabic dialects have all but removed case declension from use, though books and formal speeches are still made with an eye to proper declension. As such, William Wright gave a poignant quote alluding to Arabic's ancient origins, where he said that “if not the Sanskrit, Arabic is at least the Lithuanian among the Semitic tongues.”¹⁶ Furthermore, the Arabs (and consequently, their language) were kept isolated from the tumultuous wars of the area (e.g., the Egyptian state vs. the Assyrian and Persian Empires) by the barrenness of the

¹⁴Lipiński, 75.

¹⁵David Marcus, *A Manual of Akkadian*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1978; 64, 68.

¹⁶It is important to note that Sanskrit is considered the oldest Indo-European language, and Lithuanian is commonly noted as one of the oldest living Indo-European languages. Wright, 27.

desert and the lack of raw materials desired by these nations. Wright lists grammarian Archibald Sayce's comment about the home of Semitic-speaking peoples in his "Assyrian Grammar," to further the claim that Arabic may be older than the other Semitic languages:

"The Semitic traditions all point to Arabia as the original home of the race. It is the only part of the world which has remained exclusively Semite."¹⁷

Though it must be said that as widely known Semiticist Theodor Nöldeke figured that the 'Semitic people' originally came from Africa, this does not disprove that Arabia may have been another seat of Semiticism, for Wright stated that it "may yet be the centre from which they spread over other parts of Asia."¹⁸ Given that, Arabic can be dated back to at least the time of prolific Hebrew and Aramaic use (1000–500 BC), because even though there are no extant records of Arabic before 100 AD, the retention of 'proto-Semitic' and old Semitic conventions show that a younger language would probably not have included these facets of grammar to start. Arabic cannot reliably be dated back to the age of Akkadian predominance (2000–1000 BC), however, because Arabic does not attest the 'tan' verb stems (e.g., Akkadian Gtan-Stem: /iftaneʕal/) and ventive particle suffixes that connote an action 'here' rather than away from the subject's frame of reference.¹⁹

¹⁷Archibald Henry Sayce, from *An Elementary Grammar of the Assyrian Language*, in Wright, 7.

¹⁸Wright, 9.

¹⁹Marcus, 24, 42, 81.

The Meanings Inherent in the L-Stem Form

Before further discussion on the L-Stem continues, the aesthetic look of the verb stem must be noted with a cursory description of its meaning. The form of the L-Stem has a lengthened vowel after the first root letter of the perfect aspect verb (Amharic /faʕʕälä/, Arabic /fāʕala/), with the inclusion of short vowels between the other root letters. The imperfect aspect verb (Amharic /yəfaʕʕəl/, Arabic /yufāʕilu/) in the indicative mood has a lengthened vowel after the second root letter, with the subject prefixes and other root letters sandwiched between short vowels. The following chart shows the 3rd person masculine singular form in the Amharic and Arabic G-Stem, D-Stem and L-Stem, so as to contrast how the L-Stem looks, when compared with the verb forms it is said to be derived from.

Amharic			Arabic		
	Perfect Aspect	Impf. Indic. Mood		Perfect Aspect	Impf. Indic. Mood
(G) I-A	fäʕʕälä	yəfäʕʕəl	(G) I	faʕala/faʕula/faʕila	yafʕalu/yafʕulu/yafʕilu
(D) I-B	fäʕʕälä	yəfäʕʕəl	(D) II	faʕʕala	yufaʕʕilu
(L) I-C	faʕʕälä	yəfaʕʕəl	(L) III	fāʕala	yufāʕilu

The L-Stem connotes that the action of the verb affects someone else, which includes elements of reciprocity and shared experiences in their performance. Moreover,

foreign grammars of the Arabic language classify this verb as 'Form III', whereas grammars of Ethiopic languages denote it as Form I–Type C; the latter would seem to indicate that Ethiopic languages do not refer to this form as derived, but rather as part of the ground–stem.²⁰ Yet in order to understand how this form works in these languages, a brief description of the other verb stems must be given to contrast their usage with the L–Stem.

Introduction to the Other Verb Forms and Their Meanings

Verbs in Semitic languages differ from those in other families, for the core meaning of the triliteral root can change its aspect or quality of action, simply through the insertion of a different verbal stem. All of these forms hold inherently distinct meanings, though some of these have overlapped in common written and colloquial use. This is probably due to the fact that people tend to forego nuances of a particular form's meaning, in order to render more spontaneous communication.

The G–Stem is considered the ground form, from which most of the other verb forms are derived from. The form holds either an intransitive (e.g., Arabic /jalasa/ 'he sat down'), transitive (e.g., Arabic /kataba/ 'he wrote s.th.') or stative quality of action (e.g., Arabic /kabura/ 'he was big'), depending on what root letters are used in making the stem.²¹ The D–Stem is primarily derived from nouns (e.g., Arabic /khayyama/ 'he

²⁰Wolf Leslau, *Introductory Grammar of Amharic*, Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 2000; 101.

Lipiński, 393, 395.

²¹ S.th. and s.o. comprise the shortened forms of something and someone, which are used in

pitched a tent', from /khaymah/ 'tent'), but can also have a factitive sense that turns its intransitive G-Stem form into one that is transitive (e.g., Hebrew /shīmmaḥ/ 'he caused s.o. to rejoice', from /shāmaḥ/ 'he rejoiced'), and can hold an 'intensive' meaning toward its G-Stem form that many linguists attest (e.g., Arabic /kassara/ 'he shattered s.th.', from /kasara/ 'he broke s.th.'). The nature of the D-Stem's 'intensive' meaning, however, is disputed in my paper, "The Nature of 'Intensity' in the Northern Semitic D-Stem Verb." In this essay, I maintained that the D-Stem is primarily a metalinguistic device used by an author to make the reader notice something more carefully, rather than simply used to exaggerate or strengthen a given action.²² The C-Stem usually indicates the causative form of the G-Stem verb (e.g., Amharic /ʔaräqqäqä/ 'he made s.o. thin', from /räqqäqä/ [Type B] 'he was thin'), while the N-Stem is a stative-reflexive and quasi-passive form of the G-Stem (e.g., Hebrew /nōdaʕ/ 'it was made known', from /yádaʕ/ 'he knew s.th.'). The N-Stem is considered quasi-passive because it is used as the G-Stem's passive in several dialects of Arabic and Modern Hebrew.²³ Furthermore, most of these stems contain their own reflexive (Gt, Dt, Lt, Ct, Nt) and passive (GN, DN, LN, CN) forms as well. Lastly, Akkadian reveals its uniqueness amongst the Semitic languages in its use of the 'tan' stems, which signify the intensive or iterative reflexive of the G, D, C,

dictionaries and grammar books to denote the definitions of verbs.

²²Christopher Mullins, *The Nature of 'Intensity' in the Northern Semitic D-Stem Verb*, 2004, unpublished; 6.

²³Ruth A. Berman, "Modern Hebrew", pg. 312–333, in *The Semitic Languages*. Edited by Robert Hetzron, London: Routledge, 1997; 320.

Alan S. Kaye and Judith Rosenhouse, "Arabic Dialects and Maltese", pg. 263–311, in *The Semitic Languages*. Edited by Robert Hetzron, London: Routledge, 1997; 295.

John MacDonald, "The Arabic Derived Verb Themes: A Study in Form and Meaning", *Islamic Quarterly* 7 (1963): 114.

or N-Stem (e.g., Akkadian Ctan-Stem /ishtanakkan/ 'he continued placing s.th.', from /shakanu/ 'he placed s.th.').²⁴ The following chart summarizes the Semitic verb stems and the languages that attest them.²⁵

	G	D	L	C	N	Gt	Dt	Lt	Ct	Nt
Akkadian ²⁶	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Amharic ²⁷	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Arabic ²⁸	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Aramaic ²⁹	X	X		X		X	X		X	
Biblical ³⁰ Hebrew	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Ge'ez ³¹	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	

²⁴Marcus, 42.

²⁵The chart put forth herein, is an expanded and corrected version of the one presented in my previous paper on this subject.

Christopher Mullins, *An Analysis of the Sheer Similarities and Differences of Semitic Verbs*, 2004, unpublished; 8.

²⁶Marcus, 41–2.

Archibald Henry Sayce, *An Elementary Grammar of the Assyrian Language*, 2nd ed., London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd., 1943; 63–4, 72–3.

²⁷Note that the Gt/Dt/Lt/Ct-Stems in this language are used with a reflexive force, which also serve to indicate the passive voice (GN/DN/LN/CN-Stems).

Leslau, *Intro.*, 86, 94–106.

²⁸MacDonald, 114.

²⁹Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 6th ed., Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995; 46.

³⁰Biblical Hebrew and Phoenician use the same verb stem (/Hithpaʿel/) to indicate the Gt and Dt-Stems, and so the same word can either be derived from the G or D-Stem.

³¹Note that the Gt/Dt/Lt/Ct-Stems in this language are used with a reflexive force, which also serve to indicate the passive voice (GN/DN/LN/CN-Stems).

Gene Gragg, "Ge'ez (Ethiopic)", pg. 242–260, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron. London: Routledge, 1997; 251–4.

	G	D	L	C	N	Gt	Dt	Lt	Ct	Nt
Meḥrī ³²	X		X	X	X	X			X	
Phoenician ³³	X	X		X	X	X				
Syriac ³⁴	X	X		X		X	X		X	
Tigré ³⁵	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Tigrinya ³⁶	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	

	CD ³⁷	CDt	CL	CLt	GN	DN	LN	CN	Gtan	Dtan	Ctan	Ntan
Akkadian ³⁸					X	X		X	X	X	X	X

³²Marie-Claude Simeone-Sinelle, "The Modern South Arabian Languages", pg. 378–423, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron. London: Routledge, 1997; 397–401.

³³Stanislav Segert, *A Grammar of Phoenician and Punic*, Munchen: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1976; 124–5, 187–9.

³⁴Note that the Gt/Dt/Ct-Stems in this language are used with a reflexive force, which also serve to indicate the passive voice (GN/DN/CN-Stems).

Louis Costaz, *Grammaire Syriacque*, Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1955; 79.

³⁵Note that the Gt/Dt/Lt/Ct-Stems in this language are used with a reflexive force, which also serve to indicate the passive voice (GN/DN/LN/CN-Stems).

Shlomo Raz, "Tigré", pg. 446–456, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron. London: Routledge, 1997; 452–4.

³⁶Note that the Gt/Dt/Lt/Ct-Stems in this language are used with a reflexive force, which also serve to indicate the passive voice (GN/DN/LN/CN-Stems).

Leonid E. Kogan, "Tigrinya", pg. 424–445, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron. London: Routledge, 1997; 435–441.

³⁷The CD and CL-Stems refer to causative verb stems with a doubled second root letter and a lengthened vowel after the first root letter, respectively. Moreover, the CDt and CLt-Stems are reflexive versions of the CD/CL-Stems. These verb forms only appear in Ethiopic languages, as they attest the D and L-Stems within the ground form; this would then serve to render a plurality of verb stems derived from those forms.

³⁸Marcus, 35.

Sayce, 64.

	CD ³⁷	CDt	CL	CLt	GN	DN	LN	CN	Gtan	Dtan	Ctan	Ntan
Amharic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Arabic ³⁹					X	X	X	X				
Aramaic					X	X		X				
Biblical Hebrew						X		X				
Geʿez	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Meḥrī												
Phoenician					X	X		X				
Syriac					X	X		X				
Tigré	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Tigrinya	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				

The Meaning of the L-Stem

To put it succinctly, the meaning and use of the L-Stem in particular contexts tend to vary somewhat in Arabic and the Ethiopic languages. The Arabic L-Stem denotes an action that is done to, or attempted on someone.⁴⁰ Moreover, this verb usually takes either an explicit or implicit direct object, taking care to note that some L-Stem verbs may not directly indicate that they are conotative (re: reciprocal action directed towards

³⁹MacDonald, 100.

⁴⁰David Cowan, *An Introduction to Modern Literary Arabic*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1958; 142.

people), though they really are (e.g., Arabic /sāfara/, 'he traveled').⁴¹ Grammarian Wolfdietrich Fischer stated that the Arabic L-Stem is “a verbalization of the Arabic active participle /fāṣil/”, which would then render the stem as an attempt to perform an action towards someone.⁴² William Wright stated this more plainly, when he posited that the L-Stem represents an expression of effort with the implication of a counter-effort by someone.⁴³

Wright gave further intimations on the L-Stem's nuanced meaning in the Arabic language. He noted that when the G-Stem form of a given L-Stem verb is transitive, the L-Stem would then mean “the effort or attempt to perform that act upon the object”, with reciprocity added when the effort is mutual. When the G-Stem (or C-Stem) form of the said L-Stem verb is transitive by means of a preposition, then the L-Stem converts the indirect object into the direct object, with the notion of reciprocity (and/or shared experience) implied. Furthermore, when the G-Stem of the said L-Stem verb is stative, the L-Stem form would then be where “one person makes use of that quality towards another and affects him thereby, or brings him into that state”.⁴⁴ Thus, as it seems that the primary differences between the G-Stem and the L-Stem are made through syntax (e.g., Arabic /kataba/ 'he wrote s.th.', or /kātaba/ 'he wrote s.th. to someone'),⁴⁵ rather

⁴¹Cowan, 142.

⁴²Wolfdietrich Fischer, “Classical Arabic”, pg. 187–219, in *The Semitic Languages*, edited by Robert Hetzron. London: Routledge, 1997; 205.

⁴³Wright, 202.

⁴⁴Carl Paul Caspari, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, trans. and rev. by William Wright, 3rd ed., Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999; 32–3, 1st Book.

⁴⁵Gene M. Schramm, “An Outline of Classical Arabic Verb Structure”, *Language* 38 (1962): 361.

than through drastic changes in meaning, the L-Stem in Arabic would seem to be derived from the G-Stem.

Conversely, Ethiopic languages use the L-Stem in a relatively different manner than Arabic does, mainly due to the fact that it is considered part of the ground form (as Form I-Type C). As to the L-Stem's meaning in the Ethiopic languages, Ethiopic specialist Wolf Leslau states that the L-Stem can either act as a transitive, intransitive or stative verb in Amharic.⁴⁶ Linguists Leonid Kogan and Shlomo Raz then imply that verbs in Tigrinya and Tigré are classified in the same manner as they are in Amharic, further telling that the L-Stem is used in the same way in those languages.⁴⁷ Moreover, Leslau states that the Ethiopic languages consider the L-Stem as part of the ground stem, which holds true since there are permutations with the lengthened vowel used in almost every verb stem. This aspect is borne out by the existence of the CL and CLt-Stems, which respectively express the causative force of reciprocity and its reflexive.⁴⁸ Therefore, the L-Stem seems to be derived from (or part of) the ground-stem in both Arabic and the Ethiopic languages, despite some variance in meaning between the languages.

On the L-Stem's Possible Derivation From the D-Stem

Even though there is enough evidence to intimate that the L-Stem was derived

⁴⁶Leslau, *Intro.*, 58.

⁴⁷Kogan in Hetzron, 435–6.

Raz in Hetzron, 452–3.

⁴⁸Leslau, *Intro.*, 101.

from the G-Stem, there are many who believe that the L-Stem indeed had derived from the D-Stem. Semiticist John MacDonald believes that the L-Stem either developed out of the D-Stem, or was a later development in the schema of Semitic languages.⁴⁹ In MacDonald's article, "The Arabic Derived Verb Themes: A Study in Form and Meaning", noted grammarian D.L.E. O'Leary proposed that the L-Stem was formed where the doubling of the second root letter should have occurred, and yet subsequently "failed". Therefore, the L-Stem must have had some sort of connection to the D-Stem.⁵⁰ MacDonald agrees with O'Leary here, stating that the L-Stem should be considered as a subset of the D-Stem, having a connotative function not found in the D-Stem proper.⁵¹

Edward Lipiński continues this argument, stating that the L-Stem should be considered a secondary development in Western and Southern Semitic languages, primarily through the intensive meaning he feels that many L-Stem verbs have.⁵² He proffers that the reciprocal connotation of the L-Stem implies a repetitive or 'iterative' sense, which would be close to what the D-Stem signifies. Even Wright states that the L-Stem can sometimes derive from nouns (perhaps revealing its D-Stem roots), and may also be used in a few cases with the significance of the C-Stem, indicating that the form may have some causal qualities.⁵³ This implies that there was originally one stem

⁴⁹MacDonald, 100–1.

⁵⁰O'Leary in MacDonald, 102.

⁵¹MacDonald, 106, 108.

⁵²Lipiński, 394.

⁵³Caspari, 33–4, 1st Book.

beholden to both reciprocal and iterative aspects of an action.⁵⁴ Furthermore, several spoken South Arabian languages do not attest the D-Stem, and so the L-Stem replaces the meaning of that form.⁵⁵ Thus, adherents to this viewpoint choose to align the L-Stem with the D-Stem in origin and meaning, rather than with the ground-form.

This argument does not take into account the fact that the L-Stem is primarily used without an intensive or iterative sense, and is not usually derived from nouns as the D-Stem tends to be. Moreover, linguist Marie-Claude Simeone-Senelle is not sure if verbs with internal vowel modification (re: those derived from the L-Stem) are intensive or conotative in several South Arabian languages, such as Ḥarsusī, Meḥrī and Soqoṭrī.⁵⁶ She is divided as to whether or not the L-Stem is derived from the D-Stem (with an 'intensive' force) or is a form unto itself (hence the conotative state). Furthermore, Lipiński unknowingly counters his previous argument preferring the L-Stem's derivation from the D-Stem, however, in that he maintains early Arab grammarians saw the L-Stem as distinct from the D-Stem, being based on the fact that their use varied depending on the context.⁵⁷ Therefore, the L-Stem does not indicate the intense or iterative nature of the D-Stem, but rather functions as the conotative form of the G-Stem.

Sample Texts

In order to solidify the argument that the L-Stem is derived from (or part of) the

⁵⁴Lipiński, 395.

⁵⁵Lipiński, 393.

⁵⁶Simeone-Sinelle in Hetzron, 398–9.

⁵⁷Lipiński, 395.

G-Stem rather than the D-Stem, I will give several transliterated and translated passages from the New Testament and the Qur'ān. This will be done in order to represent the contextual use of the L-Stem in Amharic and Arabic, respectively, as well as to indicate whether the L-Stem has a conotative function, or an iterative sense that Lipiński and other grammarians insist upon.

Selections from the New Testament, Gospel of Mark (Amharic):

5:31; /däqqä mäzamurtumm ḥəzbu siyaggafuh əyayäh man dassäsänyə təlallähən? älut/

And His disciples [said]⁵⁸, “a crowd will be pushing You out, [so how] can You say, 'who touched Me?’”

dassäsänyə: 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect with 1st person common singular object suffix {-nyə}, root {d, s, s}
The context of this verb indicates direct action taken against someone.

6:23; /yämängəste əkkuleta sənkwə bihon yämmətəllämənyiwən hulu əsättəshallähu bəlo mallälat/

He entreated to her, saying: “Oh, in all that you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.

mallälat: 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect with 3rd person feminine singular object suffix {-at}, root {m, l, l}
The context here shows a direct action taken towards someone.

6:35; /bäzziyan gizemm bəzu säṣat kalläfä bəhwala däqqä mäzamurtu wädä ərsu qärrəbāw botaw mädərə bāda nāw əhunəmm mäshtoʔäll/

⁵⁸All words appearing in brackets are placed where extra words are needed in order to engender an effective literary translation, meaning that those portions are not literal translations of the actual texts.

When the time was snatched away, His disciples duly approached Him afterwards [and said]: “[this] place is a desolate land, and now it is late.”

kalläfä: 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect, root {k, l, f}

The context of this verb indicates an action done to an inanimate object ('time'), with the verb having an intransitive sense.

6:41; /ämməstunəmm ənjära hulättunəmm ʕasa yəzo wädä sämay əshshaqbo äyyänna barräkä ənjärawnəmm qerso əndiyaqqärrəbulachchäw lädäqqä mäzamurtu sättä/

Upon taking the five [loaves of] millet bread and two fish, He looked to the heavens, consecrating [them]; [and then] He blessed the remains of the bread, and gave them to His disciples so they could present them [before the people].

barräkä: 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect, root {b, r, k}

The context here shows an action taken towards an inanimate object, for the explicit purpose of those objects ('bread and fish') positively affecting other people.

8:12; /bämänfäsumm əjjəg qattätänna yəh təwlədd sələməən mələkkət yəfälləgall? əwnät əlachchəhwallähu läzih təwlədd mələkkət äyəsättäwəmm ällä/

He continued to sigh deeply in His spirit, [and said]: “why does this generation inquire [about] a portent? I truly beseech you, a sign will not be given to this generation.”

qattätänna: 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect with the particle of sequential action {-nna}, root {q, t, t}

The context here indicates an action done to oneself after performing another act previously, with the verb having an intransitive sense.

9:7; /dämmänamm mäṭto garrädachchäw kädämmänawəmm yämməwäddäw läje yəh näw ərsun səmut yämmil dəmz mäṭṭa/

[With] cloudiness having come, it obstructed them, [and] from a cloud a voice came, “this is My beloved Son, listen to Him!”

garrädachchäw: 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect with 3rd person masculine plural object suffix {-achchäw}, root {g, r, d}

The verb's context indicates an action taken towards someone.

Selections from the Qur'ān (Arabic):

2:9; /yukhādīſūna–llāha wal–ladhīna āmanū wa mā yakhdaſūna illā anfusahum wa mā yashſurūna/

They would attempt to deceive God and those who believe, yet they don't deceive but their [own] souls, and do not feel [it so].

yukhādīſūna: 3rd person masculine plural, imperfect aspect, indicative mood,
root {kh, d, ſ}
The verb's context here indicates the attempt to perform an action
on someone.

3:114; /yuʔminūna bil–llāhi wal–yawmil–akhiri wa yaʔmurūna bil–maſrūfi wa yanhawna
ſanil–munkari wa yuſārīſūna fīl–khayrāti wa ūlāika min aſ–ſāliḥīna/

They believe in God and the Last Day, they are charged with what is right, they
ban the abominable [things], they hasten to [perform] good deeds, and [as such]
they are of the virtuous people.

yuſārīſūna: 3rd person masculine plural, imperfect aspect, indicative mood, root
{s, r, ſ}
The context here describes an act's outcome expected to affect
humans, in that deeds can only be performed to other living things.

12:26; /qāla hiya rāwadatnī ſan nafsī wa shahida shāhidun min ahlihā in kāna qamīſuhu
qudda min qubulin faſadaqat wa huwa minal–kādhībīna/

He said: “She attempted to seduce me from myself.” And a witness from her
house saw [this] personally, [and so] “if his shirt is cut up from the front, then
she is truthful and he is of the liars.”

rāwadatnī: 3rd person feminine singular, perfect aspect, with 1st person common
singular object suffix {–nī}, root {r, w, d}
The context here describes an attempt to perform a particular action.

16:110; /thumma inna rabbaka lil–ladhīna hājarū min baſdi mā futinū thumma jāhadū
wa ſabarū inna rabbaka min baſdihā laghafūrun raḥīmun/

Then after that, indeed your Lord, to those who emigrate after what they were
tried [by], [and] then they strive and are patient; indeed your Lord, after these

[tribulations], is Much–Forgiving, Merciful.

hājarū: 3rd person masculine plural, perfect aspect, root {h, j, r}

The context of this verb indicates a group of people undertaking an action, revealing a shared perspective those people have in performing the said act.

jāhadū: 3rd person masculine plural, perfect aspect, root {j, h, d}

This verb's context shows a group of people undertaking an action, revealing a shared perspective those people have in performing the act.

48:16; /qul lil-mukhallafīna minal-aṣrābi satudṣawna ilā qawmin ūlī baṣsin shadīdin tuqātilūnahum aw yuslimūna faʿin tuṭīṣū yuṭtikumu-llāhu ajran ḥasanan wa in tatawallū kamā tawallaytum min qablu yuṣadhdhibkum ṣadhāban alīman/

Say to [those who] were left behind, of the Arabs: “you will be summoned against a tribe having tremendous fortitude. Then you [will] battle them, or they will submit. Then if you show obedience, God will give you a beautiful reward, but if you turn away just as you turned away from before, He will [then] punish you with terrible suffering.

tuqātilūnahum: 2nd person masculine plural, imperfect aspect, indicative mood, with 3rd person masculine plural object suffix {-hum}, root {q, t, l}
The context of this verb indicates reciprocity, in that it clearly shows an action taken by the subject, with the object undertaking the same act towards the subject.

57:21; /sābiqū ilā maghfiratin min rabbikum wa jannatin ṣarḍuhā kaṣarḍis-samāʿi wal-arḍi uṣiddat lil-ladhīna āmanū bil-llāhi wa rusulihi dhālika faḍlu-llāhi yuṭṭhi man yashāʾu wal-llāhu dhūl-faḍlil-azīmi/

Be ahead [of the others in seeking] forgiveness from your Lord, and a garden [of Heaven]; [moreover, the garden's] width is like the width of Heaven and Earth. It is prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers, [for] that is the grace of God that He gives to whom He wills [it upon], and [only] God is endowed with exalted grace.

sābiqū: masculine plural imperative verb, imperative mood, root {s, b, q}

The context here denotes an action taken in the purview of other people.

58:3; /wal-ladhīna yuzāhirūna min nisāʾihim thumma yaṣūdūna limā qālū fataḥrīru raqabatin min qabli an yatamāssā dhālikum tūṣaḥūna bihi wal-llāhu bimā taṣmalūna

khābīrun/

Yet those who repudiate their women [by Ṣihār], they would then [want to] return on what they said; then [for this to happen] one should free a slave before they touch each other. You are admonished to do this, and God is cognizant of what you do.

yuzāhirūna: 3rd person masculine plural, imperfect aspect, indicative mood, root {ṣ, h, r}
The verb's context indicates an action taken directly against someone.

58:12; /yā ayyuhāl-ladhīna āmanū idhā nājaytumur-rasūla faqaddimū bayna yadā najwākum ṣadaqatan dhālika khayrun lakum wa aṭharu faʿin lam tajidū faʿinna-llāha ghafūrun raḥīmūn/

Oh those who believe, when you confide privately to the Messenger, present something charitable before your private conversation [with him]. That would be excellent for you, and most pure; yet if you do not find [such initiative to do this], then God is Most-Forgiving, Merciful.

nājaytum: 2nd person masculine plural, perfect aspect, root {n, j, w}
The context of this verb shows direct action taken against someone.

Determination of the L-Stem's Meaning in Context

As demonstrated by the contextual use of the L-Stem in the previous examples, this verb form indeed produces actions done or attempted to someone, or describes actions in which the subject has a shared experience with others in undertaking them. There is less variance than thought in the core meanings between the Amharic and Arabic L-Stems, for despite the marked difference both languages have in classifying the L-Stem (i.e., Amharic Form I-Type C, Arabic Form III), they duly share most of the content inherent in the verb form. The following chart cross-references each Biblical and

Qur'ānic sample listed above, with the meanings that the Arabic L–Stem is known to have.⁵⁹

Actions Done to Someone		Actions Attempted on Someone		Actions Indicating a Shared Experience		Actions That Do Not Fit in the Arabic L–Stem Paradigm	
M5:31	Q58:3		Q2:9	M6:41	Q3:114	M6:35	
M6:23	Q58:12		Q12:26		Q16:110 (2)	M8:12	
M9:7					Q48:16		
					Q57:21		

It is shown from these verses that two of the three aspects of the Arabic L–Stem's meaning, are also attested in Amharic. It must be said, however, that in addition to the fact that the Amharic L–Stem tends not to connote actions attempted on someone, the examples from Mark 6:35 and 8:12 indicate basic actions that would probably be translated into Arabic verb forms other than the L–Stem. Hence, it is necessary to contrast the Amharic New Testament with the Arabic version for these two examples, in order to see how the Arabic language chooses to render these Amharic L–Stem verbs. In Mark 6:35, the verb indicating the passage of time shifts from the Amharic L–Stem to the Arabic G–Stem. Please note the following passages:

Amharic New Testament; /bäzziyan gizemm bəzu säʿat kalläfä.../

⁵⁹Abbreviations for this chart are M=The New Testament, Gospel of Mark and Q=The Holy Qur'ān.

When the time was snatched away...

kalläfä: L-Stem verb, 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect, root {k, l, f}
The context of this verb indicates an action done to an inanimate object ('time'), with the verb having an intransitive sense.

Arabic New Testament; /wa lammā maḍā juzʔun kabīrun minan-nahāri.../

When a large part of the day passed...

maḍā: G-Stem verb, 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect, root {m, ḍ, y}
The context of this verb indicates the passage of time, which makes the verb have an intransitive sense.

Moreover, the intransitive verb used in Mark 8:12 also changes its verb stem, as the Amharic L-Stem turns into an Arabic Dt-Stem verb indicating the act of sighing.

Note the passages below:

Amharic New Testament; /bämänfäsumm əjjäg qattätänna.../

He continued to sigh deeply in His spirit...

qattätänna: L-Stem verb, 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect with the particle of sequential action {-nna}, root {q, t, ṭ}
The context here indicates an action done to oneself after performing another act previously, with the verb having an intransitive sense.

Arabic New Testament; /fatanahhada mutaḍāyiqan.../

Then He sighed exasperatingly...

fatanahhada: Dt-Stem verb, 3rd person masculine singular, perfect aspect with the conjunctive particle {fa-}, root {n, h, d}
The context here indicates an action done to oneself, with the verb having an intransitive sense.

Though these two examples cannot be reconciled with the syntactic function that Arabic lends to the L-Stem, this condition probably has more to do with Amharic (and other Ethiopic languages) considering the L-Stem as part of the ground-stem form, rather than revealing obscure nuances that the verb form may or may not contain. The example taken from Mark 6:35 merely reaffirms that the L-Stem is derived from the G-Stem, since Arabic chose to render the passage of time with the common G-Stem verb /maḍā/. The latter example puts forth an interesting situation, though, in that the verb Arabic favors here (/tanahhada/) is the reflexive form of the D-Stem (Dt-Stem). Yet as the root {n, h, d} does not attest a regular D-Stem form in Arabic, the Dt-Stem verb used in Mark 8:12 cannot have an intensive or iterative meaning. This is because the Dt-Stem cannot serve as a reflexive to an intensive or iterative verb that does not exist. As such, none of the Biblical and Qur'ānic examples presented herein, fall in line with the argument positing that the L-Stem originally derived from the D-Stem.

Conclusion

Despite the attempts of most grammarians to derive the L-Stem from the D-Stem, it can safely be stated, through analysis of the samples given above, that the L-Stem is derived from the G-Stem in origin and meaning. Given that only two examples from the Amharic New Testament deviate from the meanings accorded to the Arabic L-Stem, however, the belief that the L-Stem was derived from the G-Stem and has somewhat coherent meanings between the Semitic languages still stands.

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