

# Morpho-Phonology of Zay

## Vowel Epenthesis

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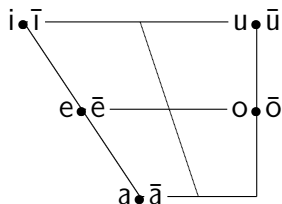
Seminar “Segmental Phonology of Ethiopian Semitic Languages”

# Summary

- Zay uses [ə] to break up consonant clusters
- [ə] is subject to assimilation
- [ə] tends to be inserted more to the right

# The Vowel System in Zay

## Underlying Vowels



(Meyer 2005: 44f)

## Notes

- /a/ is often realised as [ɛ]
- [ɛ] can be realised as [e] before palatals
- Meyer (2005) assumes [ə] to be purely epenthetic

# Possible Syllable Structure

## Possible Syllables

Maximal syllable: CV:CC

- |     |    |          |         |                   |                 |
|-----|----|----------|---------|-------------------|-----------------|
| (1) | a. | CV(:):   | [dɛ.lɛ] | 'he did not know' | (Meyer 2005:53) |
|     | b. | CV(:)C:  | [būz]   | 'crazy'           |                 |
|     | c. | CV(:)CC: | [bɛrt]  | 'stick'           |                 |

## Possible Syllable-Final Clusters

- Geminates
- Nasals + C
- Liquid + C
- /f/ + C
- Glide + C

→ Sonority has to decrease towards the edge of the syllable

# Epenthesis

## Vowel Quality

Epenthetic vowel: [ə]

→ Assimilates to [i]/[u] near high vowels

- (2)
- |    |         |              |            |                  |
|----|---------|--------------|------------|------------------|
| a. | /qmāy/  | → [qə.māy]   | ‘louse’    | (Meyer 2005: 46) |
| b. | /dru/   | → [du.ru]    | ‘earlier’  |                  |
| c. | /nfiṭi/ | → [ni.fi.ṭi] | ‘the nose’ |                  |

# Properties

## Sensitivity to Sonority

- (3) a. /trf/ → [tərf] ‘surplus’ (Meyer 2005: 54)  
 b. /ṭfr/ → [ṭə.fər] ‘finger nail, claw’

## Directionality

Clusters are broken up on the right side  
 → No syllable contact law effects

- (4) a. /ʔalɪŋqɛlh<sup>w</sup>u/ → [ʔa.l.nə.qɛ.lu.hu] / \*[ʔa.lən.qɛ.lu.hu]  
 b. /yɛnɛqlnā/ → [yə.nɛʔ.lə.nā] / \*[yə.nɛ.qəl.nā]

## Properties (ctd.)

### Feeding

Epenthesis can be fed by final [ɛ] deletion:

(5) /mikāʔēlnɛ/ → \*[mikāʔēln] → [mikāʔēlən]

### Optionality

Epenthesis may be optional at the end of nouns (6) or in some onset clusters of type consonant+liquid

(6) a. /bl/ → [bə.lə] ~ [bəl] 'work (N)' (Meyer 2005: 46)

b. /hr/ → [hə.rə] \*[hər] 'Dig a hole (2sm)'

(7) /brɛt/ → [brɛt] ~ [bə.rɛt] 'iron' (Meyer 2005: 54)

# Phonemic Status of [ə]

## Possible Evidence for a Phoneme

- Length contrast in (8)
- Redundant epenthesis in (9)

(8) [sər] 'root' vs. [sēr] 'grass' (Meyer 2005: 49)

(9) /bɛsri/ → [bɛ.sə.ri] (\*bɛs.ri) 'at the root' (Meyer 2005: 46)



# References

Meyer, Ronny. 2005. *Das Zay. Deskriptive Grammatik einer Ostguragesprache (Äthiosemitisch), Grammatical Analysis of African Languages*, vol. 25. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.