

- (b) Ghadu l-wited ġhali (The peg is still high and the
u l-ġharbiel ġdid. sieve still new.)

The latter saying refers to two parties who cannot see eye to eye with one another.

Wited, n.m. pl. *utied*. Peg Cp. Ar. *أوتيد* plural of *وتيد* or *وتيد* meaning 'stake, tent-peg' (Hava).

THE VOWELS OF VERBS WITH THIRD WEAK RADICAL

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The first point that strikes the attention is that the first vowel in the perfect of many of these verbs long ago definitely established itself as *e*. Thus *beda*, *beka*, *bena*, *feda*, *fela*, *gera*, *heba*, *hela*, *hema*, *kera*, *lewa*, *mexa*, *nesa*, *ġhewa*, *qeda*, *qela*, *reħa*. These words are all so written to-day as they are to be found already in the dictionaries of Caruana and Falzon. On the other hand, verbs whose third radical letter is *ġhajn*, have not attained the same stability. In the dictionaries just mentioned we find the spellings *bala'*, *baža'*, *ġama'*, *naža'*, *sama'*, *tafa'*, *zara'*. Now Dun P P. Saydon lays it down as a rule that in all these words the first vowel should be *e*. 'Fi f'it kliem nistġhu nġhidu li meta l-aħħar konsonanti hi *ġħ* il-vokali tal-verb huma *e-a'*, and then mentions the verbs cited, *Il-Malti* (1939)98. At the same time he admits that usage varies at the present day: 'Izda nistqarru li aħna u niħaddtu l-vokali *a* u *a* f'ħafna verbi jinbidlu, u ġhalhekk min iġhid *sema'* u min iġhid *sama'*'. Similarly Dun Karm writes: 'Jiena sibt xi drabi min kiteb *sama'* (to hear) u xi drabi min kiteb *sema'*; xi drabi *tela'* u xi drabi *tala'*; xi waqt *ġema'* u xi waqt *ġema'* u *reħa'* u *raħa'*, u bosta oħrajn', *Il-Malti* (1938)67. These facts show that the present is a period of transition in regard to these verbs whose third radical is *ġhajn*. Some writers still retain the original *a* of the first syllable, others substitute for it the vowel *e*. These latter would seem to be influenced by the vowel *e* that, as we have seen, has long been established as the first vowel of many verbs with third weak radical. But can a rule be laid down? Can it be said that the one way of speaking and writing is correct and the other wrong? Those who use the vowel *a*, can plead for their usage the form of the words previously current and the fact that this form is supported by Semitic analogy. They cannot be said to be in error. The worst that can be said of them is that they are conservative, if, indeed, it is bad at all to keep to the old ways. On the other hand, neither can those who follow tradition accuse of blundering those who write these words with *e*. And the reason is that language is not something for which immutable laws can be laid down for all time. Language is something living that cannot be restricted by the rules of a book. Only time can show whether the change will become universally adopted.

The original vowel of the first syllable of the perfect was *a* both in verbs with *ghajn* as their third radical and in verbs with a weak letter in this position. The change to *e* has been much slower in coming in the case of the *ghajn* verbs than with the others. What is the reason of this? I suggest that the reason is to be found in the influence of other persons of the perfect tense. Verbs with weak third radical have the forms, e.g., *bdejt, bdew, bdejtu, bdejna; krejt, krew, krejtu, krejna; rmejt, mew, rmejtu, rmejna*. On the other hand, the *ghajn* verbs have such forms as *tfajt, tfajtu, tfajna; rfajt, rfajtu, rfajna*. The first *e* in *tefghet, refghet* is due to assimilation to the second. This feminine form influenced the third person plural *tefghu, refghu*, where the first vowel also, as in the feminine singular, falls in a closed syllable.

The original *a* of the first syllable has been preserved in a certain number of verbs with third weak radical, *dagħa, dara, ħara, qara, ragħa*. In these cases the retaining influence is principally from the second radical. The first seems to have little effect. It is clear in the case of the first two words that the first consonant is not the influence at work. And with *ħara* contrast *ħeba, ħeja, ħela, ħema*. With *qara* contrast *qeda, qela*, and with *ragħa* contrast *rema*. *Hata* in this type of verb is exceptional.

Dun Karm lays down a rule, *Il-Malti* (1938) 67, on which he invites criticism. The rule is that if the imperative consists of two consonants between two vowels and the second vowel is *a*, then the first vowel of the perfect 3rd person masculine singular is also *a*. This rule certainly works out correctly in a number of cases, but it breaks down in the case of *beda* the imperative of which is *ibda*, and in the case of *mela* the imperative of which is *imla*. The rule may none the less be a handy rule of thumb to which certain exceptions must be remembered, but it does not rest on any scientific principle. And besides it cannot be accepted by those who, like Dun P. P. Saydon, assert that *sema'* and not *sama'* is correct, and so with other *ghajn* verbs. We have seen, however, that it is going beyond the facts to condemn *sema'* as incorrect, though usage may be winning for *sema'* also its right to recognition.

To sum up our results so far, it may be said that whereas the original first vowel of verbs with *ghajn* as first radical has been retained till modern times and is still only in danger of being superseded by *e*, verbs with third weak radical have long since substituted *e* for *a*, except in the case of verbs which have a restraining influence in one of their radicals.

If we turn to the imperfect, we find that in words beginning with a consonant other than a guttural or *r* the first vowel has been thinned to *i*. In this Maltese has followed the same path as Hebrew. Examples are *jibni, jidra, jidi, jigni, jikri, jilwi, jimxi, jinsa, jiswa, jitni, jixwi*. With the

gutturals the original *a* has been retained. Examples are *jabbi, jagħwi, jaqdi*. The letter *r* is distinctly eclectic in its tastes. Thus *jarmi, jerħi, jirgha*.

Lastly we come to the second vowel of the imperfect. This is sometimes *a* and sometimes *i*. It would be convenient if some simple rule could be laid down by which it would be possible to tell what class of verbs would take which vowel. From a study of Maltese alone it is not possible to formulate any such rule. The reason is that Maltese has made great strides towards the goal of simplification, which I call a goal because a language is more perfect in proportion as it expresses thought with equal clarity and force but with less expenditure of sound and effort. But simplification of forms tends to hide origins and, therefore, it is by comparison with cognate languages that the earlier forms of words must often be sought.

It will be found that verbs with *a* as second vowel of the imperfect belong to one of three classes. Some belong to the class that had hamza, corresponding to Hebrew aleph, as third radical. Thus *jibda* from original *bada'a*, similarly *jimla* and *jaqra*. *Jabra* is from original *ħari'a*. Others, with which *jabra* could also be classed, had *i* as second vowel of the perfect. Thus *jidra* from original *darija*, *jinsa* from *nasija*, and *jiswa* from *sawija*. The third class, which is the least numerous, is characterised by having a guttural as second radical accompanied by *a* in the perfect. Thus *jirgha* from original *ragħaja*.

Verbs with *i* as second vowel of the imperfect had originally in the perfect *a* as second vowel and *j* as third radical. Thus *jibni* from original *banaja*, which became *bana* and finally *bena*. Similarly *jibki* from *bakaja*, *jimxi* from *majaxa*, and so on. There are of course apparent exceptions; but they are only apparent. Thus to *ħeba, jabbi*, corresponds in classical Arabic *ħaba'a*, whence it might be argued that the form of the imperfect to be expected is *jaħba*. But actually in addition to the form with hamza there is also a form of the same word with *j* as third radical. *ħema, jabmi*, may be similarly explained. And though I have not actually found it, there must be or have been a similar parallel form to explain *ħata, jabti*.