

Morphological Description of Passive Verbs in Najdi Qassimi Arabic

Raghad Alqweefl

Department of English Language and Translation, College of Arabic Language and Social Studies,
Qassim University

Abstract:

The main purpose of this study is to determine if passive constructions are still being used in the Najdi Qassimi Arabic (NQA), a sub-dialect of Najdi Arabic. In addition to that, there are the following two objectives: The first goal is to detect whether or not /ʔmfeʕal/ is an innovative pattern and whether it encodes a passive meaning. The second goal is to determine whether weak roots exhibit morphophonological (irregular) changes by describing the patterns of trilateral perfect passive weak verbs (TPPWVs) used by NQA speakers. The data for this study was extracted from 10 native NQA speakers who were born in four different generations (the 1970s – 1980s-1990- 2000s). The study shows that only the pattern /fʕel/ retains the passive voice, whereas the pattern /ʔmfeʕal/ is neither an innovative pattern nor does it encode a passive voice. Also, the results reveal that TPPWVs have certain irregularities that alter the root's elements to derive the passive verb. Moreover, the production of recent generations suggests that there is a possibility of morphological levelling in NQA. Passive voice has been replaced by morphologically more transparent alternatives such as active verbs with impersonal subjects.

Keywords: Passive Voice; Middle Voice; Najdi Qassimi Arabic; Morphological Levelling; Nonconcatenative Process

Introduction

Arabic has a root-based morphology, where verb stems are formed by combining the root consonants with set derivational patterns of vowels and consonants. Most roots contain three consonants, which in reference forms are represented by *fʕl* (Caspari et al., 1962). The root is classified into two categories, namely strong root and weak root. Weak trilateral roots are those which have one of the weak letters (ʔ [a] - ʕ [w] or ʕ [I]). The focus of this study would be on weak verbs. Based on the semiconsonants' positions, weak verbs can be divided into three types (Danks 2011):

1. Assimilated root: when the first letter is weak as in the verb /w-ʕ-d/ “promise”.
2. Hollow root: when the middle letter is weak as in /b-a-ʕ/ “to sell”.
3. Defective root: when the final letter is weak as in /r-m-a/ “to throw”.

Roots with weak morphophonological qualities are usually more vulnerable to morphological changes in MSA (Ratcliffe, 1997). Consider, for instance: The weak sound /a/, which occurs in the verb /q-a-l/ “he said”, appears as /q-I-l/ “it was said” in passive voice constructions. Unlike weak roots, strong roots' radicals remain phonologically stable, hence no phonologically motivated irregularity occurs (Holes, 2004 as cited in Alkhudair, n.d.).

The Nonconcatenative process is commonly observed in Arabic. Apophony is one of the nonconcatenative processes. Apophony is also referred to as “Ablaut”, “Morphological Modification or Replacement” in which verb stems undergo transformations (Klégr, 2015). Passive voice in MSA, for example, is expressed by apophony. For a perfective verb, the melody tier changes to (u, i) instead of (a, a) to form a passive form. For instance /kasara/ “broke” → [kusira] “it was broken”.

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 contains a succinct literature review which is a background of different discussions about passive verbs in Najdi dialects, specifically northern Najdi¹. Section 3 provides the theoretical background which explains “Root and Pattern” morphology and the middle voice. This is followed by section 4 which explains the methods used in this study. Then, section 5 discusses the results and links them with the previous studies. Finally, section 6 concludes and summarizes the investigated study along with suggesting future directions.

Review of Literature

This section has two purposes. First, it aims to give a brief overview of the only observation of weak verbs in NQA as conducted by Alkhudair (n.d.). Second, introduces previous studies about passive verbs in Najdi dialects and it focuses on the pattern /ʔinfəʕal/.

Many descriptive morphological studies on many languages throughout the world have been conducted, such as English by Jansen et.al (2020), Hungarian by Rebrus (2021) and Urdu by Qureshi (2020). The Arabic language and its dialects have also been the subject of several research investigations using descriptive linguistics techniques, such as Algerian Arabic (Farida, 2013), Abha Arabic (Al-azraqi, 2005) and Moroccan Arabic (Harrell, 1962). However, little research has been done on the Najdi Qassimi Arabic.

Weak Verbs in NQA

In Alkhudair’s (n.d.)² study of the trilateral perfect passive verbs in the Qassimi dialect which is a sub-dialect of Najdi Arabic. She noticed some phonological peculiarities have emerged with the glottalized or *hamza-* initial verbs. For example, /ʔakal/ “he ate” becomes /wkel/ “it was eaten” in passive voice. Based on her observation, this study focused on the weak verbs to see whether weak verbs with their different types exhibit morphophonological (irregular) changes as noted or not.

Passive Voice in Najdi Dialects and Pattern /ʔmfəʕal/

¹ There are three dialects of Najdi in Saudi Arabia: northern Najdi, spoken by the residents of Hail Region and Al Qassim Region, central Najdi (Urban Najdi), spoken by the inhabitants of Riyadh and surrounding towns and farming communities, and southern Najdi, spoken in Al-Kharj and its surrounding towns, as well as in the Rub' al-Khali.

² There is only one study of NQA in the literature which is done by Alkhudair (n.d.), so this paper focuses on it most of the time.

Ingham (1982) stated that Najdi Arabic dialects maintain certain “conservative” grammatical features (i.e., those with corresponding forms in MSA). One such feature is the apophonic passive whereby passives are produced by the vocalic melody /u-i/ or /i-i/ in the perfect and /u-a/ in the imperfect. The apophonic passive survives in the dialects of northern Arabia as a functioning morphological category only in the isolated Bedouin dialects of the Najd. While in Sedentary dialects the passive function is represented by productive affixational passives, which have emerged as compensation for the partial or complete abolition of the apophonic passive. Additionally, Ingham (1994) found Najdi Arabic to have one passive pattern, /fʕil/ “the apophonic passive pattern”.

Interestingly, In a study of the pattern of the trilateral perfect passive verbs in NQA, Alkhudair (n.d.) showed that apophonic passive survives as a functioning marker of the passive voice by older generations (the 1960s/70s). While younger generations (the 1980s/90s) occur a hybrid pattern, /ʔinfəʕal/, which does not exist in MSA. Alkhudair (n.d.) claimed that the passive voice survives in two patterns. These patterns are /fʕel/ and /ʔinfəʕal/. Moreover, she stated that the /fʕel/ pattern is used mostly by the older generation while the other one is by younger generations. Her findings imply that there is partial retention of the apophonic passive verb in an NQA.

On the other hand, according to Ajer (2014), a semantic study of the pattern /ʔinfəʕal/ in MSA, indicates that it does not encode a passive voice, but rather a middle voice. In this sense, Alkhudair’s (n.d.) claim of /ʔinfəʕal/ might not be accurate on a semantic level.

Based on the literature review, this study fills the gap in the literature by describing TPPWVs in NQA to test whether weak verbs are vulnerable to morphological change. As well as to determine if the pattern /ʔinfəʕal/ is passive as described by Alkhudair (n.d.) or not. Further, to find out whether passive constructions are still used in the Qassimi dialect.

Theoretical Background

Root and Pattern Morphology

McCarthy’s (1981) “Semitic Morphology” (along with phonology) rejects the notion that Arabic words have the same form as English words. He highlights the significance of vowel placement between root consonants as a morphological process. The current study does not apply McCarthy’s theory. Yet it endorses the model that it uses. According to both McCarthy’s theory and the model of the present study, vowel insertion (pattern principle), between the root consonants of the Arabic linguistic forms plays an important role to form the apophonic passive which NQA retains. Harrell (1962), in his book *A Short Reference Grammar of Moroccan Arabic*, teaches the phonology, morphology, and syntax of Moroccan Arabic to those who have a basic understanding of this dialect. The morphology of the Moroccan dialect in his book was presented by utilizing “Templatic” or “Root and Pattern” morphology in describing it. Following Harrell (1962) this study will employ the “Root and Pattern” morphology as the basis for the

Middle Voice

Since the focus is on the Morphology of the middle voice, the researcher will not deal in detail with the semantics of the middle voice in Arabic.

Under the notion of “low elaboration of events”, Kemmer (1993) sought to unify all “middle voice” phenomena across languages. Kemmer (1993) gives us a notion of the semantic range of the middle voice. She unifies the different categories of meaning associated with this voice by using the property of low elaboration of events. The reason for such low elaboration of events is because they perceive them as spontaneous. People tend to perceive some events as spontaneous, but events in the real world are actually provoked. Ajer (2014) followed Kemmer’s (1993) semantic analytic framework of the middle voice with some modifications. She provided an analysis of these constructions, which include spontaneous event constructions and reflexive-causative constructions in MSA. She provides the Form VII as an example of a spontaneous verb, for instance, the verb /ʔinʔakal/ “was eaten” (in Form VII) is a spontaneous verb. Additionally, she explained that low event elaboration in the Arabic middle reflects the fact that the verbs do not have prototypical initiators as subjects, either because the initiators are not initiators at all, or because they are both initiating the action and experiencing some change or mental involvement during it.

Methodology

The present study used a qualitative method by employing a structured online interview in collecting data. The data was extracted from 10 native NQA speakers individually. The participants were born in four different generations (the 1970s – 1980s-1990- 2000s) and all of them live in Al Qassim Region. None of the individuals had been lived outside Al Qassim Region before the experiment. More details of the participants are provided in the following table:

Table:1
Participants

Participants		Age Group	Male	Female
Total	10		4	6
2		60-45	1	1
5		31-22	1	4
3		15-19	2	1

The following list of five Arabic weak verbs led the interviews.

Table:2

The Weak Verbs (Roots)				
/ʔa-k-l/ “ate”	/w-ʕ-d/ “promised”	/q-a-l/ “said”	/r-m-a/ “threw”	/r-w-ʃ/ “Someone washed the other”

These verbs all have one thing in common: they are trilateral weak verbs. The two-sentence formulation approach was adapted from Alkhudair (n.d.). In general, the participants

were instructed to generate a sentence with a verb in the active voice first, then in the passive voice, and both phrases were produced in the speakers' NQA dialect. When the participants produce active voice, they should employ an overt agent, whereas when producing passive voice, they should not employ an overt agent. Further, it is expected that in producing passive voice participants may use the apophonic passive verbs, such as /gr:l/ "it was said" or its alternatives: 1- the passive participle, such as /maqjul/ "said" or 2- using strings of active verbs with impersonal subjects as means of avoiding mention of a specific agent. In addition, 3- the participants may use some middle voice patterns instead of passive voice, one example, /ʔɪŋgal/ "be said" instead of /gr:l/ "it was said". Afterwards, transcription is the method used for data recording and elicitation. The participants were identified by their generation and gender in case there are any effects based on these factors, yet they are not critical factors in this study. Additionally, Ajer's (2014) study served as a data collection tool and guide for categorizing and interpreting data.

Results and Discussion

As revealed by the data elicited from the 10 NQA participants, at first glance two passive verbs patterns emerge for NQA TPPWVs: /fʕel/ and /ʔɪnfɛʕal/. These findings are consistent with Alkhudair's (n.d.) finding. Further, this data shows the third pattern, but it is not a passive verb, rather it is a passive participle, /maʕʕul/. A passive participle is a form of a verb that can function independently as an adjective. The passive participle is beyond the scope of this work. Thus, this section morphophonologically addresses the patterns of the TPPWVs in NQA by describing each pattern in detail based on the participants' production.

Morphophonological Description of the Patterns of the TPPWVs in NQA

1- Pattern /fʕel/

The pattern /fʕel/ is derived from the pattern /faʕal/ by eliminating vowels and overwriting melodies in nonconcatenative processes. The vowel of the first syllable /a/ of the basic pattern /faʕal/ is deleted, yielding the pattern /fʕal/. Then, overwriting the vowel /a/ of the second syllable with /e/, results in the pattern /fʕel/ (Alkhudair, n.d.). The above is a description of the frozen passive pattern of strong verbs. The researcher will start by discussing the weak verbs in passive voice form that are produced under this pattern to determine whether there is any irregularity in their formation. As (Alkhudair, n.d.) noticed within this pattern, some phonological peculiarities have emerged with the glottalized or *hamza*- initial verbs. For example, /ʔakal/ "he ate" the first glottal stop, and the first vowel /a/ is deleted and replaced with the /w/, and the vowel of the second syllable is replaced with the vowel /e/, thereby yielding the verb /wkel/ "it was eaten". Also, in this study, several phonological alternations were noted among the NQA speakers who used the pattern /fʕel/ to indicate the passive voice with weak verbs. In the hollow verb /gal/ "he said", the vowel /a/ is replaced with the vowel /ɪ:/, as a result, the verb is produced /gr:l/ "it was said". Whereas, the hollow verb /rawaʕ/ "someone washed the other" does not have any phonological alternation in its root tier in producing the passive voice, /reweʕ/ "was washed". Furthermore, the verb /rema/ "he threw" was produced as /ʔɪrmi/ "it was thrown" by deleting the vowel /e/ of the first syllable and overwriting the vowel /a/ of the second syllable with the vowel /ɪ/. Then insert the vowel /ɪ/ with a glottal stop /ʔ/ in front of it. This insertion appeared only in one example and the researcher assumed it was done to avoid the prevented

cluster /rɪm/ that is not allowed in the phonology of the Qassimi dialect (Alrashed, 2018). Therefore, the insertion operation here is not related to the passive voice and its measure.

In this pattern, some variations in the production process were discovered as they appeared in the passive weak verbs /wkel/, /gr:l/ and /ʔirmɪ/ as /(f)ʕel/, /f(ʕ)l/ and /ʔifʕe(l)/³. Based on this, it is obvious that TPPWV has irregularity caused by phonological factors in their root tier. Yet, it isn't necessarily the case with all TPPWV, as can be seen with the weak verb /rawɔʃ/ “someone washed the other”. This finding support Alkhudair’s (n.d.) and Ratcliffe’s (1997) study.

Having thus described the first NQA passive pattern and how it formed with weak verbs. The following section analyzes the second observed pattern /ʔɪnfɛʕal/, which (Alkhudair, n.d.) claimed that it is a second passive pattern. Yet, from a semantic point of view, there is another assumption, /ʔɪnfɛʕal/ is a middle pattern and encodes a middle meaning, not a passive one.

2- Pattern /ʔɪnfɛʕal/

This pattern showed some variations in the production process as it was surfaced as /ʔɪnfɛʕal/, /ʔɪnfɛʕal/, /ɪnf(ʕ)l/ and with one weak verb as /ʔɪmfɛʕal/. Since these patterns perform the same function and have relatively small differences, these differences may be caused by phonological, not morphological factors. These patterns will be considered within the current analysis as a variation of the pattern /ʔɪnfɛʕal/ rather than separate patterns. Except for the last pattern, /ʔɪmfɛʕal/, it could be treated as a separate pattern, since it can be generalized as a basic causative middle pattern of TPPVs, as discussed below. The verb /ʔakal/ “he ate” came in two phonological forms. One maintains the glottal stop unaltered as in /ʔɪnʔakal/ “it was eaten”, while the other replaces the glottal stop with the /w/ sound to produce /ʔɪnwekal/ “it was eaten”. The verb /waʕad/ “he promised” produced as /ʔɪnwaʕad/ “was promised” by attaching the prefix /ʔɪn/. Similarly, the verbs /gal/ “he said” and /rema / “he threw” produced as /ʔɪngal/ “was said” and /ʔɪnrema/ “was thawed”, respectively.

Interestingly, the verb /rawwɔʃ/ “someone washed the other” produced differently as /ʔɪmrawwɔʃ/ “was washed”. This pattern is produced by attaching the prefix /ʔɪm/ to the past form /rawwɔʃ/. Currently, the pattern /ʔɪmfɛʕal/ is rare in the literature, to the best of my knowledge. However, it was evident in the current data. One may say that it is only a passive participle with a definite article. Yet, it differs from the passive participle in which the passive participle of the verb /rawwɔʃ/ would be /merawwɔʃ/ and if the definite prefix is added to it would be /ʔamrawwɔʃ/ not /ʔɪmrawwɔʃ/. As a native speaker of this dialect, the researcher observed this pattern occurred in other verbs such as /ʔɪmlabbas/ “a person puts clothes on someone else”, /ʔɪmrawwah/ “cause someone to go somewhere, /ʔɪmmaʃʃa/ “cause someone to walk” and /ʔɪmrɔdʒdʒaʕ/ “was returned”. All of these examples share the trait of being causative verbs. Thus, having described the observed patterns morphologically the researcher believes this pattern occurs when expressing causative verbs in perfect middle form. The next section will shed light on the pattern /ʔɪnfɛʕal/ from a semantic point of view.

³ Consonants with phonological peculiarities are indicated between brackets.

The Pattern /ʔɪnfeʕal/ from a Semantic Point of View

To demonstrate that the pattern /ʔɪnfeʕal/ is a middle voice, not a passive voice, this section is presented. As Alkhudair (n.d.) described this pattern, it is a way of expressing the passive voice, which does not exist in MSA. In fact, this pattern is existed and is used in MSA. It had been mentioned in several literatures on morphological forms of the verb and coded as Form VII (In NQA, form VII is derived from the form I⁴ by the prefixation of an initial mora that is filled with /ʔɪn/) (Danks, 2011; Ryding 2005; Kaye 2018).

Moreover, Badawi et al. (2013) argued that Form VII /ʔɪnfeʕal/ may encode the middle voice. In the same vein, Ajer (2014) stated that Form VII /ʔɪnfeʕal/ encodes middle meanings which are closer to the passive, in contrast to (Alkhudair, n.d.). Form VII verbs typically include no controller. Additionally, Ajer (2015) classified the Form VII verb as “spontaneous verbs”, which assign no initiator role. According to Kemmer (1993), spontaneous events include natural phenomena such as rotting and trembling, as well as involuntary movements such as trembling. For example, /ʔɪndafaʕ/ “be paid” is not consistent with interpretations that include a controller but is seen as occurring spontaneously. The affected entity is the subject, and there are no other participants in the event. Similarly, /ʔɪnʔakal/ “be eaten”, in NQA, is seen as a spontaneous process that does not involve a controller. In other words, /ʔɪnʔakal/ means the food is eaten by itself, even though it cannot eat itself. Based on this debate, the researcher assumed that Form VII in MSA is the pattern that appeared in current data. So, following Ajer (2015) rather than encoding a passive meaning, /ʔɪnfeʕal/ would encode a middle meaning.

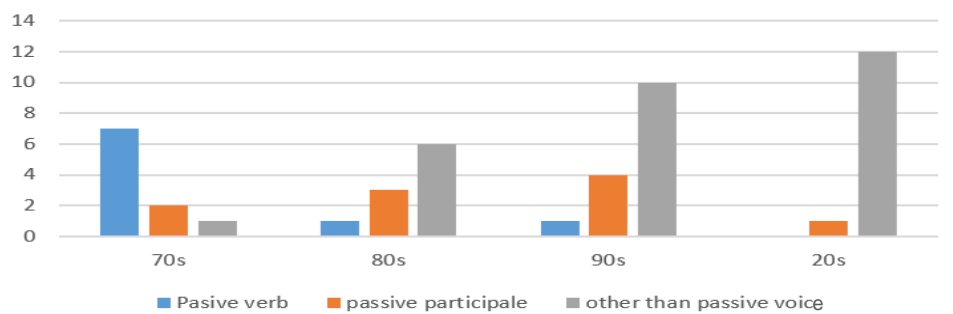
Having clarified the debate about the pattern /ʔɪnfeʕal/ and categorized it from a semantic perspective, the next section will raise the question of whether passive verbs are still a productive aspect of NQA.

The Productivity of Passive Verbs in NQA

In the interviews, most of the participants employed strings of active verbs with impersonal subjects as means of avoiding mention of a specific agent. As shown in the following figure (1), there is an implication that the passive voice and particularly passive verbs become rarely used by NQA speakers.

Figure: 1

⁴ Form I is the basic form of verb and it has the stem pattern CVCVC. As an example, /waʕad/ "promised".



Comparing the frequency of usage of Passive verbs, Passive participles and other voices other than Passive among age groups

Figure (1) shows that most of the participants' production, through different generations, expressed the passivity in ways or forms other than employing passive verbs. Only the older participants, whose generation in the 1970s, generated passive verbs in the majority of verbs. While other participants used passive verbs rarely or never. Instead, they produced the passive participle or the pattern /ʔmfeʕal/ which is stated in the previous section, it is not assumed as a passive verb pattern. As a result, there is a possibility of passive verbs almost disappearing from a normal speech in recent generations.

Conclusion

This paper investigates passive verbs generally and TPPWV particularly in NQA based on data collected from native NQA speakers. The results reveal that TPPWVs have certain irregularities that alter the root's elements to derive the passive verb. It confirms the findings of Alkhudair (n.d.) as well as Ratcliffe (1997). Furthermore, based on the results, the researcher assumed that in the Qassimi dialect, there is one pattern for passive verbs that code the basic passive function with the implied involvement of an agent, /fʕel/. This finding agrees with Ingham (1994). In contrast, the affixed forms emphasize the state of the patient, and the involvement of an agent is not implied, /ʔmfeʕal/ (thus it is a middle verb not a passive). This result contrasts Alkhudair's (n.d.) claim. However, through the production of recent generations, there is an observation that there is a possibility of existing a morphological levelling in NQA. Passive voice has been replaced by morphologically more transparent alternatives such as active verbs with impersonal subjects. This observation remains uncertain in terms of accuracy since it bases on a limited number of participants.

Suggestions and Recommendations

One of this study's limitations is that few verbs have been analyzed. Further analysis of more verbs could have uncovered more patterns and their variations, but the task was too big for the present study. The small number of participants was another limitation. Hence, the finding that there is a morphological levelling of passive construction in NQA remains unclear. It is therefore suggested that more research with more participants will be needed to confirm this finding.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: The Data

The above chart represents the used weak verbs (roots) along with the participants' actual

participants	The Weak Roots				
	/ʔa-k-l/	/w-ʕ-d/	/q-a-l/	/r-m-a/	/r-w-ʃ/
The used patterns (measures)					
1 (M,70s)	/wkel/	/mawʕud/!	/gr:l/	/ʔirmi/	—
2 (F,70s)	/wkel/	/mawʕud/!	/gr:l/	/ʔirmi/	/rweʃ/
3 (M,80s)	/ʔinwekal/	/mawʕud/!	/magjul/!	/ʔinrema/	/ʔimrwaʃ/
4 (F,80s)	/ʔinwekal/	/mawʕud/!	/gr:l/	/ʔinrema/	/ʔimrwaʃ/
5 (F,90s)	/ʔinwekal/	/mawʕud/!	/gr:l/	/ʔinrema/	/ʔimrwaʃ/
6 (F,90s)	/maʔkul/!	/mawʕud/!	/magjul/!	/ʔinrema/	/ʔimrwaʃ/
7 (F,90s)	/ʔinwekal/	/ʔinwaʕad/	/ʔingal/	/ʔinrema/	—
8 (F,20s)	/ʔinwekal/	/ʔinwaʕad/	/ʔingal/	/ʔinrema/	/ʔimrwaʃ/
9 (M,20s)	/ʔinwekal/	/mawʕud/!	/ʔingal/	/ʔinrema/	/ʔimrwaʃ/
10 (M,2s)	/ʔinʔakal/	/ʔinwaʕad/	/ʔingal/	/ʔinrema/	—
Patterns	/ʔinfeʕal/(7) /mafʕul/!(1) /ʕel/(2)	/ʔinfaʕal/(3) /mafʕul/!(7)	/ʔinfʕal/(4) /mafʕul/!(2) /f(ʕ)el/(4)	/ʔinfeʕal/(8) (2) /ʔiʕel/	(5) /ʔimʕal/ /ʕel/(1)

passive voice production for each verb. The exclamation mark shows that the participant produces the passive participle, while the underscore mark indicates that no passive verb was produced. The participants were also identified by their generation and gender to see if there were any effects based on these factors.

Appendix B: Abbreviation table

NQA	Najdi Qassimi Arabic
TPPWV	Triliteral perfect passive weak verb
TPPV	Triliteral perfect passive verb
70s	1970s (70 th century)
80s	1980s (80 th century)
90s	1990s (90 th century)
20s	2000s (20 th century)
M	Male
F	Female
Form VII	Reflexive or reciprocal, /ʔinfeʕal/