



# **The Role Of Stress In Morphological Differentiation In Arabic: Acoustic Evidence And Pedagogical Insights For Second Language Instruction**

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## **1. Introduction**

Stress, as a suprasegmentally feature, plays a crucial role in shaping the prosodic structure of Arabic words. In Arabic, stress is not merely a phonetic marker but a morphologically significant cue that contributes to meaning distinction and grammatical interpretation. For learners of Arabic as a second language (ASL), recognizing stress patterns provides essential guidance for distinguishing between morphologically similar words that differ in syntactic category, root derivation, or functional role.

Many Arabic words share the same consonantal root but differ in grammatical function and semantic interpretation depending on stress placement. This phenomenon is particularly salient in past tense verbs, relative adjectives, and verbs preceded by conjunctions—contexts in which incorrect stress placement may not only obscure intended meaning but even lead to the misidentification of root structures (Al-Ani, 1970; Watson, 2002). For instance, while 'asad denotes “lion,” the word 'asadd, with stress on the geminate consonant, denotes “the most correct” as a superlative adjective. Such minimal stress shifts have maximal interpretive consequences.

For learners of Arabic as a second language, particularly those who is L1 does not use stress contrastively, such distinctions pose substantial perceptual and productive challenges. Learners often struggle with both the phonetic realization of stress and its morpho-syntactic implications. As highlighted by Almbark (2008) and Gussenhoven (2004), misinterpretation of stress may hinder lexical access and complicate syntactic parsing in second language acquisition.

Although prior studies have explored Arabic stress from phonetic or theoretical perspectives (e.g., Almbark, 2008; Hellmuth, 2013; Broselow, 2003), relatively few have addressed the morphological and pedagogical outcomes of stress misplacement. Most available research has concentrated on stress rules (McCarthy, 1979), prosodic theory (Hayes, 1995), or formal modeling, without bridging the gap between acoustic phonetics and classroom instruction.

The present study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing selected Arabic word pairs in which stress placement leads to grammatical and semantic divergence. Through acoustic phonetic analysis using tools like PRAAT, the study provides empirical evidence—based on pitch, duration, intensity, and HNR—that illustrates how prosodic stress determines the morpho-semantic identity of the word.

Furthermore, the study explores the pedagogical implications of these findings for Arabic as a second language instruction. As noted by Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2018), stress is often overlooked in Arabic curricula, leading to persistent learner errors in pronunciation and comprehension. Therefore, this research advocates integrating stress perception and production training into second language programs as part of a broader framework of prosodic competence.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review; Section 3 details the methodology and acoustic results; Section 4 discusses the morpho-semantic implications of stress placement; and Section 5 highlights pedagogical applications and concludes with recommendations for instruction.

## **1.1. Literature Review**

### **1.1.1. Theoretical Framework**

Arabic stress occupies a central position in the intersection of phonology, morphology, and second language pedagogy. As a prosodic feature, stress in Arabic not only shapes the rhythm of spoken language but also functions as a marker of morphological identity and semantic contrast. Unlike fixed-stress languages, Arabic stress is predictable yet variable—dependent on syllabic weight, morphological patterning, and affixation (Abu-Mansour, 1990). The stress typically falls on the penultimate syllable if it is heavy, or the antepenultimate if the penultimate is light (Watson, 2011). This predictability allows stress to serve as a powerful linguistic cue for both native speakers and language learners.

From a phonological perspective, McCarthy (1979, 1981) and McCarthy & Prince (1990) emphasized the foundational role of root-and-pattern morphology in Semitic languages, where prosodic structure—including stress—helps to distinguish between verb forms, tenses, and voices. Stress placement becomes especially crucial when root consonants remain constant but templates shift. Kenstowicz (1994) and Selkirk (1980) further elaborated on the notion of prosodic hierarchy and prosodic word boundaries, arguing that stress cues delimit morphological domains.

Acoustically, Arabic stressed syllables are characterized by increased duration, higher fundamental frequency (F0), and greater intensity (Al-Ani, 1970; Khattab, 2002). These correlates are detectable through phonetic tools such as PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink, 1992–2023), allowing for empirical verification of stress phenomena. Hellmuth (2013) confirmed these findings in Egyptian Arabic, showing that intensity and pitch serve as reliable markers for stress even in dialectal variation.

In the domain of second language acquisition, the pedagogical value of stress has been underscored by numerous studies. Archibald (1998) and Field (2005) demonstrated that stress awareness improves learners' listening comprehension and lexical recognition. Derwing and Munro (2005) further argued that training in stress perception reduces misunderstanding and enhances fluency. Zampini (2008) highlighted the link between perceptual training in stress and improved lexical acquisition. In Arabic specifically, Al-Khawaldeh & Zibin (2020) showed that learners of Arabic as a second language frequently misinterpret word categories when stress is misapplied, especially in morphologically ambiguous forms.

Thus, this study builds on a theoretical framework that integrates formal phonological rules with empirical acoustic findings and pedagogical principles. It assumes that stress in Arabic is not merely ornamental but a structural feature that supports grammatical parsing and semantic precision. This tripartite framework—phonological, acoustic, and instructional—provides a robust lens through which to explore the effects of stress on morphologically complex Arabic words.

### 1.1.2. Literature Review

The investigation of stress in Arabic has attracted increasing scholarly interest, particularly with regard to its role in morphological differentiation and second language acquisition. Al-Ani (1970) was among the first to acoustically describe the characteristics of stressed syllables in Arabic, noting that stress correlates with increased pitch, duration, and intensity. Khattab (2002), who employed instrumental analysis to demonstrate stress prominence in Lebanese Arabic, later confirmed these findings.

Watson (2011) analyzed stress assignment across Arabic dialects and emphasized the regularity of stress placement based on syllable weight. Similarly, Abu-Mansour (1990) examined stress in Arabic through the lens of prosodic phonology, highlighting the role of affixation and syllabic structure in determining stress position.

From a pedagogical perspective, Field (2005) and Archibald (1998) stressed the importance of learners' awareness of prosodic features, arguing that stress perception enhances both lexical acquisition and listening comprehension in L2 contexts. Habash and Rambow (2006) added that incorrect stress placement might result in significant semantic or morphological ambiguity, especially in morphologically rich Arabic structures.

Altakhaineh and Al-Tamimi (2020) conducted an acoustic investigation of stress in Jordanian Arabic, demonstrating its impact on both lexical meaning and grammatical function. Their findings corroborate the role of acoustic features—such as pitch and intensity—in stress-based word differentiation.

Hellmuth (2013) analyzed Egyptian Arabic stress patterns using fine-grained acoustic tools, offering additional insights into stress realization and its interaction with morphology. Jaber and Gibbon (2003) provided a stress-prosody interface analysis for Modern Standard Arabic, linking prosodic patterns to morphosyntactic functions.

Versteegh (1997) addressed the role of stress in morphological shifts and derivational structures in Arabic, while Ladefoged (2001) laid out the foundational phonetic criteria for stress cross-linguistically, including reference to Arabic. Youssef (2010) further linked stress to both syllabic structure and grammatical function in the urban Levantine dialect.

In second language pedagogy, Derwing and Munro (2005) highlighted the benefits of prosody-focused training on learner performance, particularly regarding intelligibility. Zampini (2008) examined how lexical stress differences influence vocabulary retention and semantic processing in foreign language contexts. Hansen and Zoi (2015) discussed how stress perception plays a critical role in learners' linguistic comprehension.

Despite the breadth of research, a gap remains in studies that directly connect the acoustic-phonetic analysis of stress to morphological differentiation in Arabic verbs—especially in pedagogical contexts. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by offering acoustic evidence on how stress contributes to distinguishing morphologically similar words, thereby informing second language Arabic instruction.

### 1.2. Research questions

In light of the theoretical framework and the reviewed literature on prosodic stress and its phonological and morphological functions, there is a compelling need to conduct an applied investigation that connects the acoustic properties of stress with its role in distinguishing morphological structures in Arabic. This issue is particularly relevant in the context of teaching Arabic as a second language, where insufficient awareness of stress placement may lead to semantic misinterpretation or morphological ambiguity or confusion in word structure.

Accordingly, the present study addresses the following research questions:

To what extent does prosodic stress contribute to morphological differentiation among Arabic words that share similar phonological structures but differ in grammatical function?

How do the acoustic correlates of stress—specifically pitch, intensity, and duration—reveal the morphological role of stressed versus unstressed forms?

What are the pedagogical implications of these acoustic distinctions for second language instruction, particularly in reducing lexical and structural confusion caused by stress misplacement?

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Sample / Participants**

This study did not involve any human participants. Instead, it relied on a linguistic sample composed of selected Arabic words that exhibit morphological and semantic differences due to stress shift. The words were chosen based on their frequency in Modern Standard Arabic, their clarity for acoustic analysis, and their educational relevance in the context of teaching Arabic as a second language—such as *ranā*, *'sadd*, *faqasā*, and *fasqā* (see Appendix C, Tables C1–C4).

### **2.2 Instrument**

Acoustic analysis was conducted using Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 1992–2023), version 6.3.03, a specialized tool for phonetic analysis. Three main acoustic parameters were extracted from the spoken words: fundamental frequency (Hz), intensity (dB), and duration (ms). These features are essential for identifying the position of stress in speech, as confirmed by previous studies (e.g., Al-Ani, 1970; Hellmuth, 2013).

### **2.3 Data Collection Procedure**

All recordings were self-generated and conducted directly by the researcher in a controlled quiet environment. Each word was articulated twice: once with correct stress placement and once with deliberately altered or shifted stress. Waveforms, pitch contours, and spectrograms were extracted using the Praat software for subsequent acoustic analysis.

### **2.4 Data Analysis**

Each pair of words was analyzed based on differences in pitch, intensity, and duration between the stressed and unstressed versions. The results were organized into tables displaying the phonetic differences, supported by spectrograms and waveforms that visually indicate stress positioning. The acoustic values were interpreted in light of the morphological and semantic variations, highlighting the role of stress in distinguishing morphological structures in Arabic, particularly in the context of second language acquisition.

This study did not involve any human participants. Instead, it relied on a linguistic sample composed of selected Arabic words that exhibit morphological and semantic differences due to stress shift. The words were chosen based on their frequency in Modern Standard Arabic, their clarity for acoustic analysis, and their educational relevance in the context of teaching Arabic as a second language.

## **3. Results**

This section presents the core acoustic findings of the study, which demonstrate how prosodic stress affects the morphological and semantic interpretation of structurally similar Arabic words. Based on the phonetic analyses performed via Praat, the results offer measurable evidence of differences in pitch, intensity, and duration across stressed and unstressed realizations.

The words analyzed here constitute the primary sample of the study and are used to exemplify how stress relocation influences meaning and morphological identity. The corresponding detailed acoustic and morphological tables for each pair are provided in the appendices, while the table below summarizes the key phonetic contrasts at the heart of the study.

The measurements include the mean pitch (Hz), mean intensity (dB), duration (ms), and HNR (dB), which are the primary acoustic correlates of stress in Arabic, as noted by Al-Ani (1970), Khattab (2002), and Hellmuth (2013). Each word is presented in two variants—one with intended stress and one with altered or neutralized stress—to illustrate how prosodic shifts affect interpretation. These values serve as empirical evidence for the stress-related distinctions and are interpreted further in the discussion section.

Importantly, the selected words are not isolated instances but serve as representative models for a much broader set of stress-sensitive lexical items in Arabic. The phonological behavior observed in these examples reflects a general pattern in Arabic morphology, where stress plays a crucial role in differentiating meaning, grammatical category, and root-based derivations.

**Table 1.** Acoustic features of stressed and unstressed realizations of the sample words

| Word                | Duration (s) | Mean Pitch (Hz) | Mean Intensity (dB) | HNR (dB) |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------|
| ranā (stressed)     | 0.137        | 261.9           | 80.5                | 12.15    |
| ranā (unstressed)   | 0.137        | 239.0           | 76.7                | 12.22    |
| 'sadd (stressed)    | 0.088        | 313.9           | 83.0                | 15.3     |
| 'sadd (unstressed)  | 0.066        | 166.8           | 63.0                | 8.05     |
| faqasā - Q stressed | 0.112        | 320.1           | 81.4                | 13.89    |
| faqasā - F stressed | 0.058        | 297.7           | 76.5                | 9.57     |
| fasqā - S stressed  | 0.272        | 288.0           | 78.2                | 15.95    |
| fasqā - F stressed  | 0.085        | 307.0           | 80.6                | 10.21    |

### 3.1. Acoustic and Spectrographic Analysis of Word Pairs in the Study Sample

Table 1 highlights the phonetic differences between stressed and unstressed realizations of four Arabic word pairs. This central acoustic analysis serves as empirical evidence of how stress contributes to both morphological and semantic distinctions. Below is a detailed spectrographic interpretation of each word pair:

#### 3.1.1. Word 1: "ranā" (رَنَا)

Acoustic and Spectrographic Analysis of the Word "ranā" with and without Stress (Verb vs. Proper Noun)

This section provides a detailed phonetic analysis of the word "ranā", which serves as one of the key lexical items examined in this study. The aim is to demonstrate how the presence or absence of prosodic stress influences both the morphological and semantic interpretation of Arabic words with similar surface structures. The word was recorded in two variants: one with primary stress on the first syllable (the stressed form [ˈranā], representing the verb) (see Table D1 in Appendix D), and the other without stress (unstressed form, functioning as a proper noun).

Analysis was conducted using the PRAAT software (Boersma & Weenink, 1992–2023), focusing on the primary acoustic correlates of stress—segment duration, fundamental frequency (F0), intensity, and harmonic-to-noise ratio (HNR).

In the stressed form [ˈranā], a notable rise in the fundamental frequency was observed, reaching 261.9 Hz. The mean intensity was recorded at 80.5 dB, with a duration of 0.137 seconds and an HNR of 12.15 dB (see Table B2 in Appendix B). In contrast, the unstressed form, where no syllable carries prominent stress, showed reduced values: F0 dropped to 239.0 Hz, intensity to 76.7 dB, with a similar duration but a slightly lower HNR of 12.22 dB, indicating reduced spectral clarity.

The spectrogram confirms the acoustic prominence of the stressed syllable. Specifically, the syllable "Ra" in the first variant demonstrates clear acoustic salience; with the waveform showing greater amplitude, fluctuations (see Figure A1 in Appendix A). In contrast, the unstressed version exhibits a more compressed waveform pattern; reflecting reduced phonetic salience and absence of lexical stress (see Figure A2 in Appendix A).

These findings align with previous research, including Al-Ani (1970) and Khattab (2002), both of whom emphasized the measurable acoustic differences brought about by stress—especially in pitch, intensity, and duration. The results also support Hellmuth's (2013) claim that stress correlates with increased spectral energy, thereby enhancing listeners' ability to decode morphosyntactic structures in spoken Arabic.

This analysis serves as a representative model of a broader phonological phenomenon in Arabic. The word "ranā" exemplifies a class of lexically similar words in which the presence or absence of stress shifts not only the prosodic contour but also the semantic and grammatical function. This pattern of analysis continues with the remaining word pairs in the following appendices, offering comparable spectral and waveform evidence in support of the study's central argument.

### 3.1.2. Word 2: “’asadd” (أسَدٌ)

Acoustic and Spectrographic Analysis of the Word “’asad” with and without Stress (Noun vs. Superlative Form)

The phonetic effect of stress becomes particularly evident in the word pair: ’asadd (meaning “more correct,” a superlative form) versus ’asad (meaning “lion”). In the stressed form [ʔaˈsadd], stress is realized on the second syllable, specifically on the geminated consonant /d:/, which corresponds to the relative adjective (see Table D1 in Appendix D). This stress pattern results in a marked change in the acoustic parameters typically associated with prosodic prominence.

According to the measurements extracted using PRAAT, the stressed variant exhibits a significantly higher mean fundamental frequency (F0), reaching 313.9 Hz, compared to 166.8 Hz in the unstressed form. Likewise, the intensity rises to 83 dB in the stressed form; while it remains at 63 dB in the unstressed version, indicating a clearer and more prominent auditory presence (see Table B3 in Appendix B).

As for the Harmonics-to-Noise Ratio (HNR), the stressed form recorded a value of 15.3 dB, which is substantially higher than the 8.05 dB measured in the unstressed variant (Table B3, Appendix B). This disparity indicates that the stressed pronunciation exhibits greater clarity and spectral purity—a result that aligns with the established phonetic characteristics of stress in Arabic, as outlined by Al-Ani (1970), Khattab (2002), and Hellmuth (2013), who emphasized the association between stress and increases in pitch, loudness, and harmonic clarity.

These findings are also supported by the spectrographic and waveform analysis. In Figure A3 (Appendix A), the spectrogram of the stressed variant shows a concentrated energy distribution around the geminated /d:/, with dense and prominent spectral lines indicating the presence of stress. The waveform also reveals a longer duration and greater amplitude at the stressed consonant, reflecting the perceptual salience of stress.

in that specific segment. In contrast, the unstressed form (Figure A4) lacks this temporal and energetic concentration, rendering it acoustically weaker and less perceptually distinct.

Taken together, these contrasts confirm that stress does not merely enhance intensity, but rather reshapes the entire acoustic profile of the word, contributing decisively to its auditory differentiation and intelligibility.

### 3.1.3. Word 3: “faqasā” (فَقَسَى)

Acoustic and Spectral Analysis of the Word “faqasā” with Correct vs. Incorrect Stress Placement on /q/ and /f/ (Root Consonant vs. Prefix)

Based on the third example from the study, represented by the word “faqasā” (فَقَسَى), the profound impact of stress placement on the phonetic structure and potential meaning of the word becomes evident—even before addressing the morphological or semantic dimensions, which will be discussed later. This example clearly demonstrates how placing stress on the correct segment (the root consonant /q/) versus the incorrect segment (the conjunction prefix /fa-/) leads to significant changes in the acoustic properties.

When stress is correctly placed on the root consonant /q/ in the form [ˈfaqasā], the resulting pitch rises to 320.1 Hz, and the intensity reaches 81.4 dB. In contrast, when stress is incorrectly assigned to the prefix consonant /fa/ in the form [faˈqasā], the pitch drops to 297.7 Hz, and intensity to 76.5 dB (see Table B4 in Appendix B). This difference highlights the phonetic prominence that arises when stress emphasizes a core component of the lexical root, rather than a non-lexical prefix.

Additionally, the Harmonics-to-Noise Ratio (HNR) supports this perceptual contrast: the stressed-qāf form records an HNR of 13.89, notably higher than the prefix-stressed variant, which scores 9.57. These findings suggest that the speech signal is more acoustically coherent and spectrally stable when stress is correctly located on the root consonant (Table B4, Appendix B).

From a spectrographic perspective, Figure A5 in Appendix A illustrates a clear concentration of acoustic energy around the root consonant /q/ in the correct form [ˈfaqasā], confirming the presence of primary stress. Conversely, Figure A6 displays a partial shift of energy toward the prefix /fa/ when stress is misapplied, reducing clarity and contrast. In the waveform view, the stressed /q/ shows longer temporal span and greater amplitude, aligning with previous findings by Al-Ani (1970), Khattab (2002), and Hellmuth (2013), all of whom demonstrated that stressed syllables typically exhibit increased duration, amplitude, and acoustic salience.

This example stands as an important acoustic model, where duration, pitch, and intensity converge to precisely mark the location of stress and demonstrate how the phonetic landscape shifts depending on whether stress falls on the root consonant (correct) or the prefix (incorrect). Beyond this, the morphological and semantic implications—discussed in their respective sections—will show how this misplacement can result in radical changes in root identification and lexical meaning.

As with the other examples in this study, this case confirms that stress in Arabic is not merely intuitive, but manifests in quantifiable physical data, which can be captured and measured using acoustic tools like PRAAT, thus adding experimental rigor to the study of Arabic prosody as a foundational element of word structure.

### 3.1.4. Word 4: “fasqā” (فَسَقَى)

Acoustic and Spectral Analysis of the Word “fasqā”: Correct Stress on Root /s/ vs. Misplaced Stress on Prefix /f/ (Disambiguating “saqā” from “fasaqa”)

The word “fasqā” serves as a precise example of how stress placement influences the phonetic structure of Arabic words. Despite having the same surface form, the location of stress alters the perceived root and

morphological interpretation. In the first variant [ˈfasqā], stress is placed on the letter sīn (/s/), aligning with the intended verb "saqā" ("he gave water"), preceded by the coordinating conjunction fa-. In contrast, the second variant [faˈsqā] shifts stress to the fā' (/f/), which could lead to a reinterpretation of the root as "fasaqa" ("to sin or deviate"), thus introducing semantic ambiguity.

Acoustic measurements obtained via PRAAT reveal significant differences between the two realizations. In the S-stressed version, the mean pitch reached 288 Hz, and the intensity was 78.2 dB, indicating strong prosodic prominence on the medial consonant. The F-stressed version exhibited a higher pitch of 307 Hz and a slightly louder intensity of 80.6 dB, suggesting a shift of prominence to the initial segment, thereby altering the perceived structure of the word (see Table B5 in Appendix B).

The harmonic-to-noise ratio (HNR) further supports this interpretation: the S-stressed variant showed a higher HNR value of 15.95 dB, compared to 10.21 dB for the F-stressed form, reflecting clearer harmonic quality and less spectral noise in the properly stressed version (Table B5, Appendix B).

These findings are visually reinforced by the spectrographic and waveform analysis presented in Figure A7 in Appendix A. The spectrogram highlights greater energy concentration around the sīn in the first form and around the fā' in the second. The waveform demonstrates a noticeable shift in temporal dynamics across the two variants, indicating the timing consequences of stress relocation.

It is worth noting that this acoustic analysis represents a generalizable model of a recurring phonological pattern in Arabic. The words analyzed in this study exemplify a broader set of phonologically similar forms whose meanings and grammatical functions shift depending on stress placement. This pattern highlights the central role of stress as a linguistic mechanism for distinguishing between closely related morphological structures. It also underscores the need for enhanced prosodic awareness among learners of Arabic as a second language, enabling them to grasp subtle differences in meaning and structure through accurate perception of stress positions and their variations.

### 3.2 Morphological and Semantic Results of the Target Words under Stress

#### 3.2.1. Raná (verb) vs. Raná (proper noun)

Morphologically, the word raná, when produced with clear primary stress on the first syllable, is interpreted as a past tense verb derived from the root /r-n-ā/ (see Appendix D, Table D1). It conforms to the faʿala pattern and denotes a completed action. Without stress, Raná is perceived as a proper noun, fixed in form and semantically neutral (see Appendix C, Table C1).

Semantically, stress plays a decisive role in grammatical categorization. Its presence activates the verb reading, while its absence signals nominal usage. This contrast is evidenced both in acoustic analysis (Appendix D) and in morpho-semantic data (Appendix C). Previous studies (Khattab, 2002; Helmut, 2013; Al-Khawaldeh & Zibin, 2020) have consistently shown that prosodic stress significantly aids native speakers and L2 learners in distinguishing word classes in Arabic.

#### 3.2.2 Asadd (elative adjective) vs. Asad (animal noun)

Morphologically, asadd is an elative adjective derived from /s-d-d/ in the afʿal pattern, with stress on the geminate consonant /d:/ (Appendix D, Table D1). This stress clearly distinguishes it from asad, the noun referring to "lion," which lacks stress and is morphologically simplex. The semantic contrast is illustrated in Appendix C, Table C2.

Semantically, stress marks the form as derived and comparative in nature. Without stress, the word is typically interpreted as a proper noun. This pattern reflects the function of stress as a grammatical and semantic marker (Watson, 2011; Broselow, 2009), and the acoustic and structural evidence supports this disambiguation (Appendices C and D).

### 3.2.3 Faqsā and stress on root vs. Prefix

Morphologically, the verb *qasā* ("he was harsh") appears in coordinated form as *faqsā*. When stress is placed correctly on the root consonant /q/ (Appendix D, Table D1), the meaning is preserved. However, if stress shifts incorrectly to the prefix /fa-/, the listener may parse the root as /f-q-s/, leading to the misinterpretation *faqasa* ("to hatch")—a different verb entirely (Appendix C, Table C3).

Semantically, this incorrect stress introduces a radical shift in meaning from emotional/moral context to biological context. Acoustic and root-structure evidence (Appendices C and D) confirm the sensitivity of this stress-based distinction, especially in derivational accuracy for L2 learners.

### 3.2.4 Fasaqā and maintaining root clarity via stress

Morphologically, the verb *saqā* ("he gave to drink") is preceded by *fa-* to form *fasaqā*. When stress is correctly placed on the root consonant /s/, the intended meaning remains intact (Appendix D, Table D1). Incorrect stress on the prefix /fa-/ leads to confusion with *fasaqa* ("he sinned"), derived from a completely different root /f-s-q/ (Appendix C, Table C4).

Semantically, the stress error produces a significant meaning reversal. These distinctions, as shown in both morphological structure and acoustic transcription (Appendices C and D), illustrate the pedagogical importance of correct stress placement for learners of Arabic.

## 3.3. Educational Relevance

These findings are especially relevant in the context of Teaching Arabic as a Second Language (TASL). Field (2005) and Archibald (1998) emphasized the pedagogical value of raising learners' awareness of stress-related distinctions. Derwing and Munro (2005) also noted that stress sensitivity enhances listening comprehension and word recognition in L2 learners.

In Arabic, stress helps disambiguate otherwise similar forms. As Habash and Rambow (2006) argued, misplacing stress can lead to confusion between morphologically unrelated items. Thus, visual and auditory modeling of stress contrasts, as demonstrated in this study, is a valuable tool for educators and learners alike.

## 4. Discussion

The acoustic and morphological analyses presented in this study demonstrate with precision that stress in Arabic is not merely a suprasegmental feature, but rather a core grammatical and semantic marker, particularly when words share the same phonological surface structure. In such cases, a shift in stress alone may produce significant differences in perceived root structure, grammatical category, and intended meaning. The four analyzed words — “*ranā*”, “*sadd*”, “*faqsā*”, and “*fasqā*” — offer representative cases of this broader phenomenon in Arabic prosody. These examples confirm that prosodic stress functions as a morpho-semantic signal that enhances clarity and prevents ambiguity in both native and second language contexts.

### 1. *Ranā* (رنا)

When stress is placed on the first syllable, the word is interpreted as a third-person singular masculine past-tense verb, meaning “he looked at,” “was delighted,” or “ignored.” In this form, the acoustic measurements revealed a fundamental frequency of 261.9 Hz and intensity of 80.4 dB, compared to 239 Hz and 76.7 dB in the non-stressed variant, which is interpreted as a female proper name.

This phonetic differentiation is supported by the spectrogram and waveform in Figure A1 (Appendix A), which show higher amplitude and energy concentration around the stressed syllable. In contrast, Figure A2 illustrates a flatter waveform in the unstressed version, consistent with diminished phonetic salience. These findings support earlier observations by Al-Ani (1970) and Khattab (2002), who found that increased pitch,

intensity, and duration serve as critical cues for lexical identification in Arabic. The results also validate Hellmuth's (2013) findings on the correlation between spectral energy and syntactic decoding.

Thus, in “ranā”, the presence or absence of stress is directly tied to the perception of grammatical category—verb versus noun—illustrating how subtle prosodic variations can encode major functional differences.

## 2. 'Sadd (أَسَد)

This word demonstrates a clear morphological shift triggered by stress. When the geminated consonant /d:/ receives stress (i.e., final syllable stress), the word is interpreted as a superlative adjective (e.g., “more correct” or “the wisest opinion”). In the absence of stress, it is perceived as the lexical noun “'asad” (lion).

The stressed form showed a much higher pitch (313.9 Hz) and intensity (83 dB) compared to the unstressed version (166.8 Hz and 62.9 dB). This is further confirmed in Table B3 (Appendix B) and Figures A3 and A4 (Appendix A), which illustrate a marked difference in spectral energy and temporal span between the two variants. In particular, the stressed form shows strong energy concentration on the geminate, highlighting its morpho-phonological function.

These observations support Watson (2011), who stated that stress operates as a boundary and identity marker for derived forms in Arabic. Additionally, the findings are aligned with Abu-Mansour (1990), who argued that geminates often coincide with stress to signal derivation in Arabic morphology. The example thus demonstrates how stress interfaces with both prosodic and morphological systems to produce meaning.

## 3. Faqasā (فَقَسَى)

This example illustrates how stress placement can radically shift the lexical root and, by extension, the intended meaning of the word. When stress is correctly placed on the root consonant qāf, the word is interpreted as deriving from the root (ق-س-ى), meaning, “so the heart was hardened”. Acoustic analysis of this form revealed a pitch of 320.1 Hz and intensity of 81.4 dB, indicating strong prominence of the root (see Table B4, Appendix B and Figure A5, Appendix A).

In contrast, when stress is incorrectly assigned to the prefix /fa/—which is a coordinating conjunction and not part of the root—the form is misinterpreted as coming from the root (ف-ق-س), meaning “he cracked (the egg)”. The pitch and intensity in this case drop to 297.7 Hz and 76.5 dB, and the HNR also falls, signaling reduced spectral stability (Table B4).

This acoustic confusion directly supports the warning by Habash & Rambow (2006) that misplacing stress in Arabic can cause semantic distortion and root misidentification, particularly in verbs with prefixal conjunctions. It also echoes Hellmuth (2013) and Khattab (2002), who found that prosodic prominence is essential to root recognition and morpho-syntactic processing.

## 4. Fasqā (فَسَقَى)

In this final example, stress on the medial consonant /s/ leads to the correct interpretation of the verb as “he gave water”, derived from root (س-ق-ى). When stress shifts incorrectly to the conjunction prefix /fa/, the root is misread as (ف-س-ق), giving the verb “he committed immoral acts” — a drastic shift in meaning.

Despite the unstressed prefix variant showing higher pitch (307 Hz) and slightly greater intensity (80.6 dB) than the correctly stressed form (288 Hz, 78.2 dB), the HNR value is significantly lower: 10.21 dB versus 15.95 dB for the S-stressed version (see Table B5, Appendix B and Figure A7, Appendix A). This shows that acoustic clarity and harmonic integrity are stronger when stress is applied to the root consonant.

These results are consistent with findings by Altakhaineh & Al-Tamimi (2020), who emphasized that L2 learners depend on prosodic cues such as stress to decode Arabic morphological structure, particularly in verbs with phonologically similar forms.

### Summary of Discussion

Together, these four cases confirm that stress in Arabic is a phonological device with morphological and semantic force. It interacts with root recognition, lexical categorization, and syntactic interpretation. When correctly applied, it enhances intelligibility and grammatical clarity. When misplaced, it risks triggering misunderstanding, especially among second language learners. These findings not only validate prior literature, but also offer experimental evidence grounded in acoustic data, reinforcing the importance of prosody as a structural pillar of Arabic word formation.

### 5. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that stress in Arabic is not a mere prosodic or suprasegmentally feature; rather, it constitutes a core linguistic marker of morphological structure and lexical meaning. The ability to perceive and produce stress, both auditory and visually, is therefore of paramount importance in teaching Arabic as a second language (TASL). Misplacing or omitting stress can result in semantic confusion or total loss of intended meaning.

The four analyzed examples—*ranā*, 'sadd, *faqasā*, and *fasqā*—represent consistent patterns in which stress marks the morphological root and helps distinguish core lexical content from affixes or syntactic particles, such as conjunctions. In each case, shifting the stress point transforms the word's grammatical role and semantic value, confirming the structural and pedagogical role of prosodic stress in Arabic.

This observation aligns with multiple studies. Field (2005) and Archibald (1998) argue that raising learners' awareness of stress improves auditory discrimination and lexical comprehension, especially in phonetically similar forms. Derwing and Munro (2005) further note that structured training in stress perception enhances learners' ability to distinguish word categories and reduce semantic ambiguity. Zampini (2008) has shown that integrating stress-focused instruction boosts both lexical acquisition and structural awareness, particularly when taught with deliberate, pedagogically informed methods.

Based on the current study, several instructional recommendations are proposed to enhance stress awareness in L2 Arabic classrooms:

Integrating stress instruction into morphological and lexical curricula, so learners view stress as a functional, not decorative, linguistic feature.

Designing training modules with auditory-visual comparisons of stressed and unstressed word forms, emphasizing semantic contrasts to foster contrastive awareness.

Using phonetic analysis software such as PRAAT in classrooms, allowing students to visually track pitch, intensity, and duration differences as phonetic indicators of stress.

Implementing perceptual discrimination exercises, featuring near-minimal pairs where stress placement shifts meaning, thus increasing sensitivity to stress variation.

Training instructors to diagnose and correct learner errors related to stress, particularly where stress governs grammatical categorization or word meaning.

By implementing these practices, Arabic language programs can significantly improve learners' communicative competence and morphological accuracy, positioning stress awareness as a foundational tool in the acquisition of Arabic grammar and lexicon.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed to highlight the role of prosodic stress in morphological and semantic differentiation within Arabic, through a detailed acoustic and phonological analysis of selected lexical items that serve as prototypical cases in Arabic morphology. The findings revealed that stress is not merely a phonetic feature, but a structural tool that determines word meaning and grammatical function.

The results demonstrated that shifting the stress location leads to significant changes in root and meaning, as observed in contrasts such as *qasā* vs. *faqasa*, or *saqā* vs. *fasaqa*. These examples emphasize the educational importance of stress awareness in teaching Arabic as a second language. Acoustic measurements—including pitch, intensity, and duration—showed consistent and significant differences between stressed and unstressed syllables, supporting the feasibility of integrating such insights into pedagogically oriented speech materials.

The study underscores the need to incorporate stress instruction in Arabic language curricula, especially for second language learners. This would enhance learners' capacity for fine-grained semantic distinctions and accurate auditory comprehension, while fostering linguistic awareness based on phonological and morphological structures. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring how acoustic analysis can be directly integrated into listening and pronunciation instruction using modern tools like PRAAT and classroom-based interactive applications.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Spectrograms and Waveforms

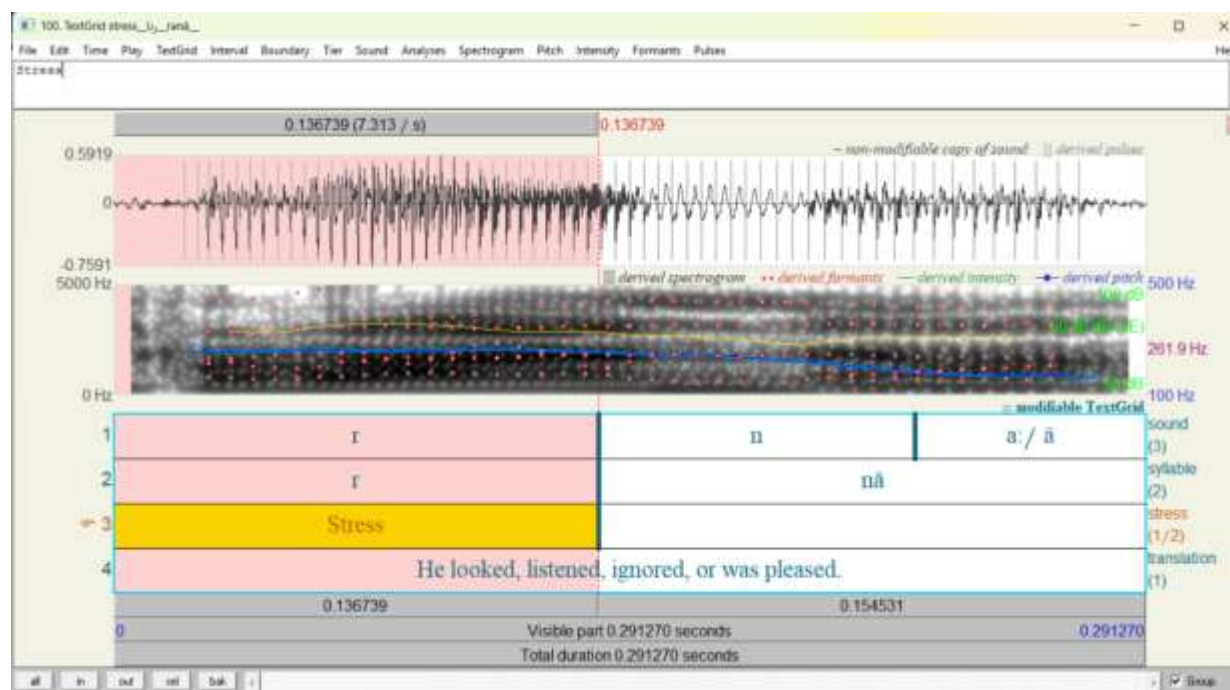


Figure A1: Spectrogram and waveform of the word "ranā" (verb) with correct stress.

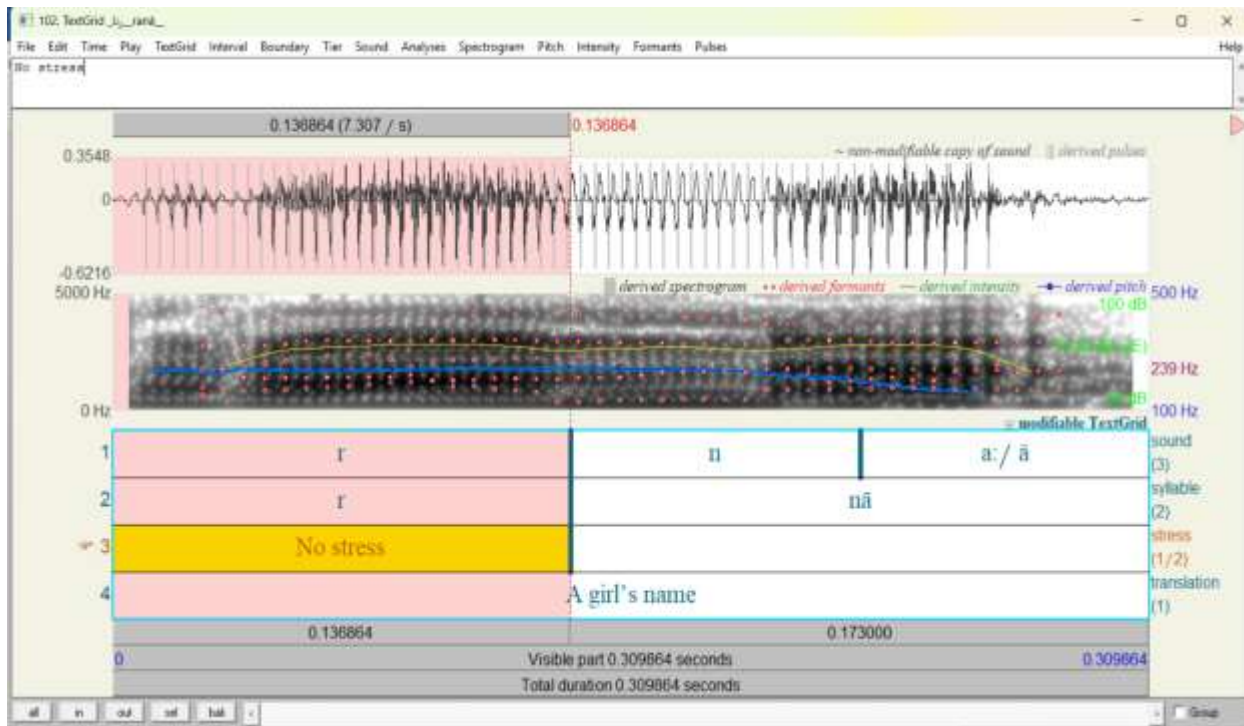


Figure A2: Spectrogram and waveform of ranā (proper noun, unstressed).

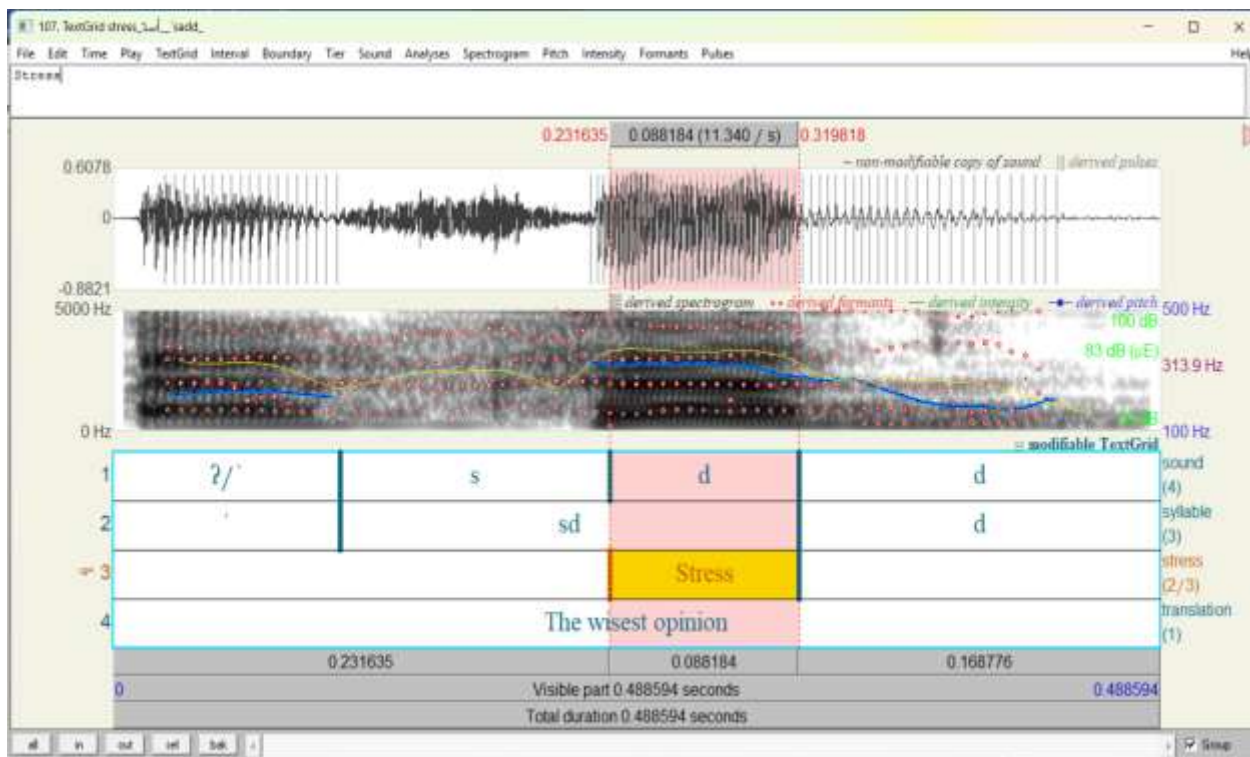


Figure A3: Spectrogram and waveform of the word "sadd" (superlative) with correct stress.

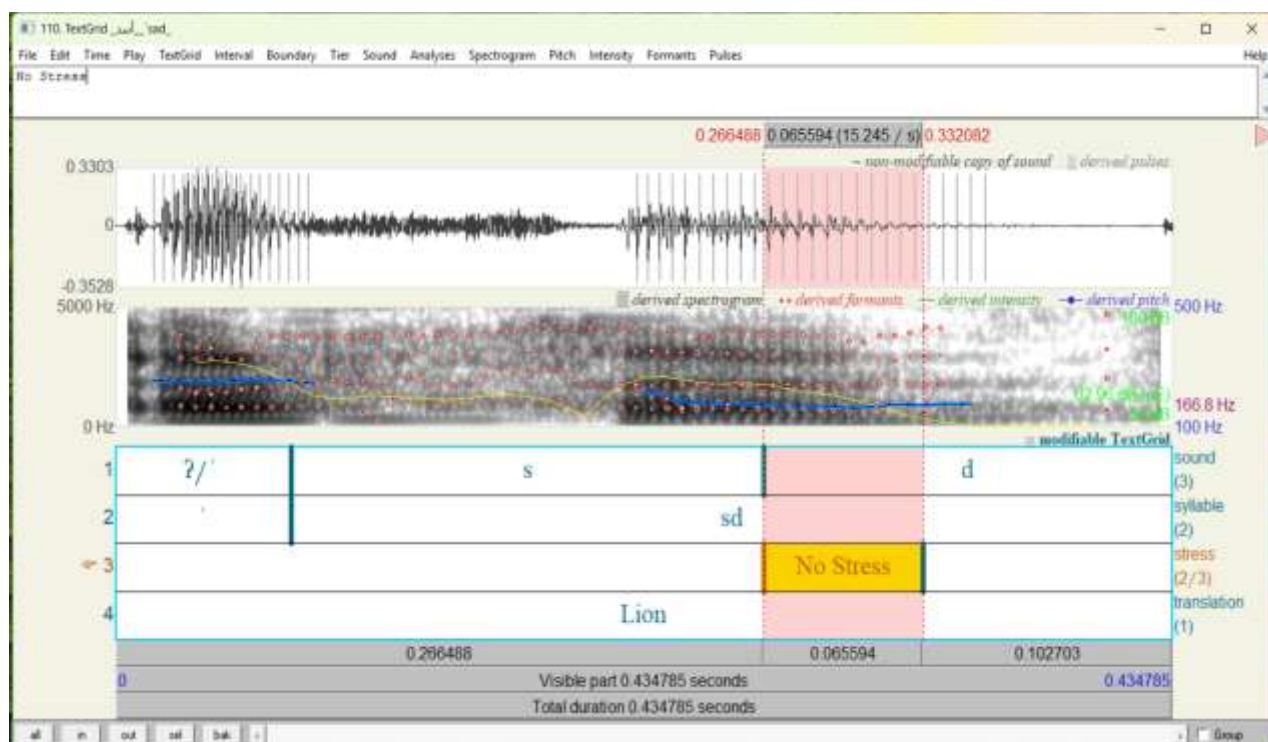


Figure A4: Spectrogram and waveform of 'asad (unstressed)

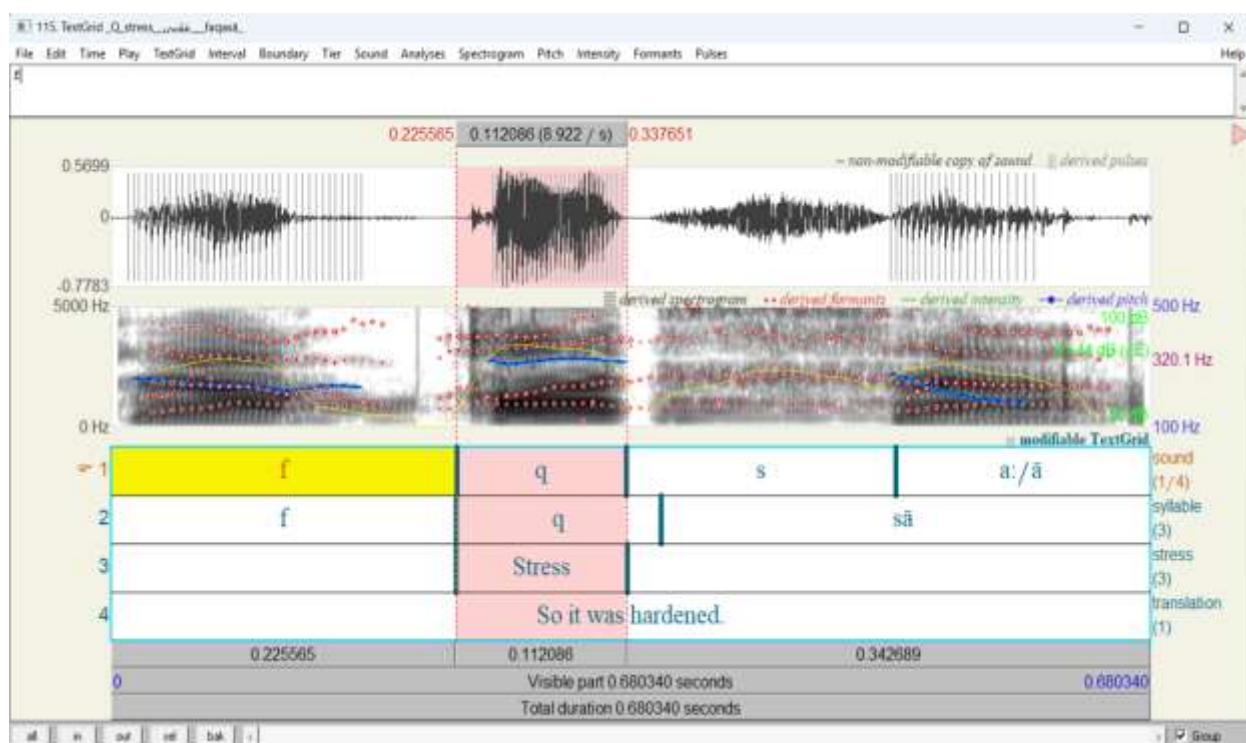
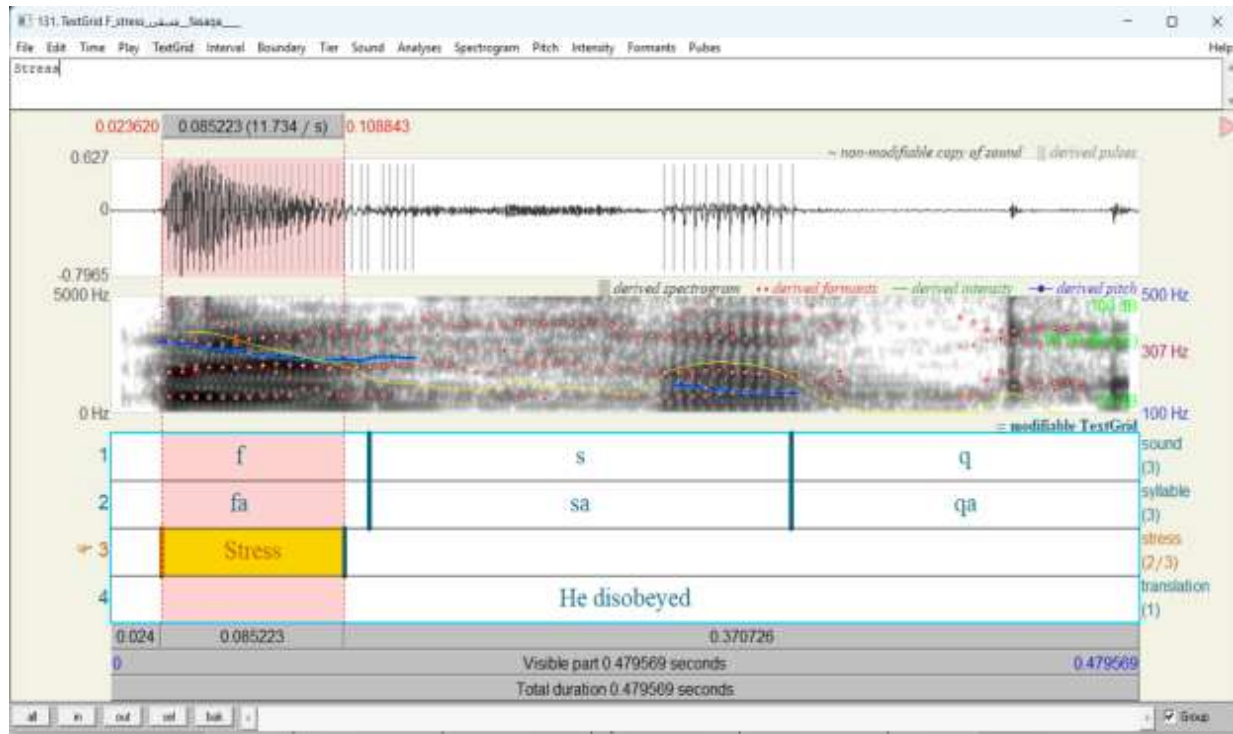


Figure A5: Spectrogram and waveform of the phrase "faḡas alqalib" (correct stress on Qāf).



Figures A6: Spectrogram and waveform of faqasā stressed on /f/.

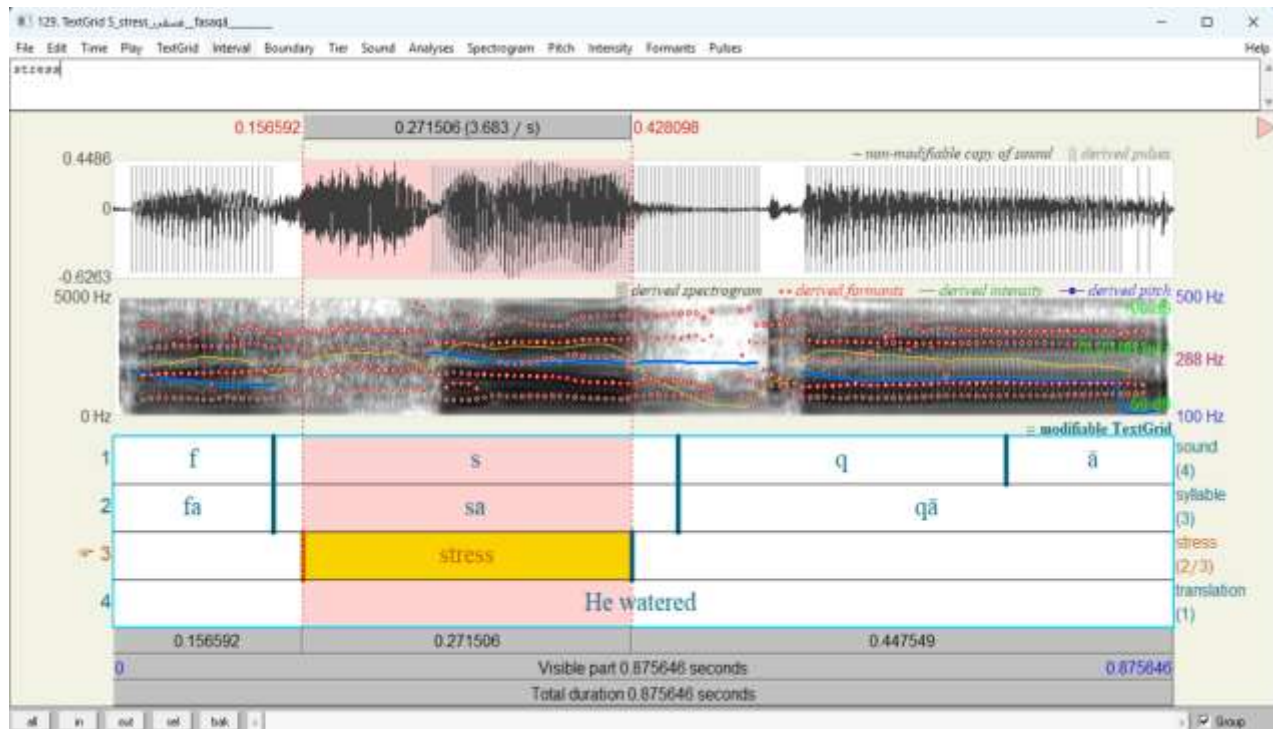
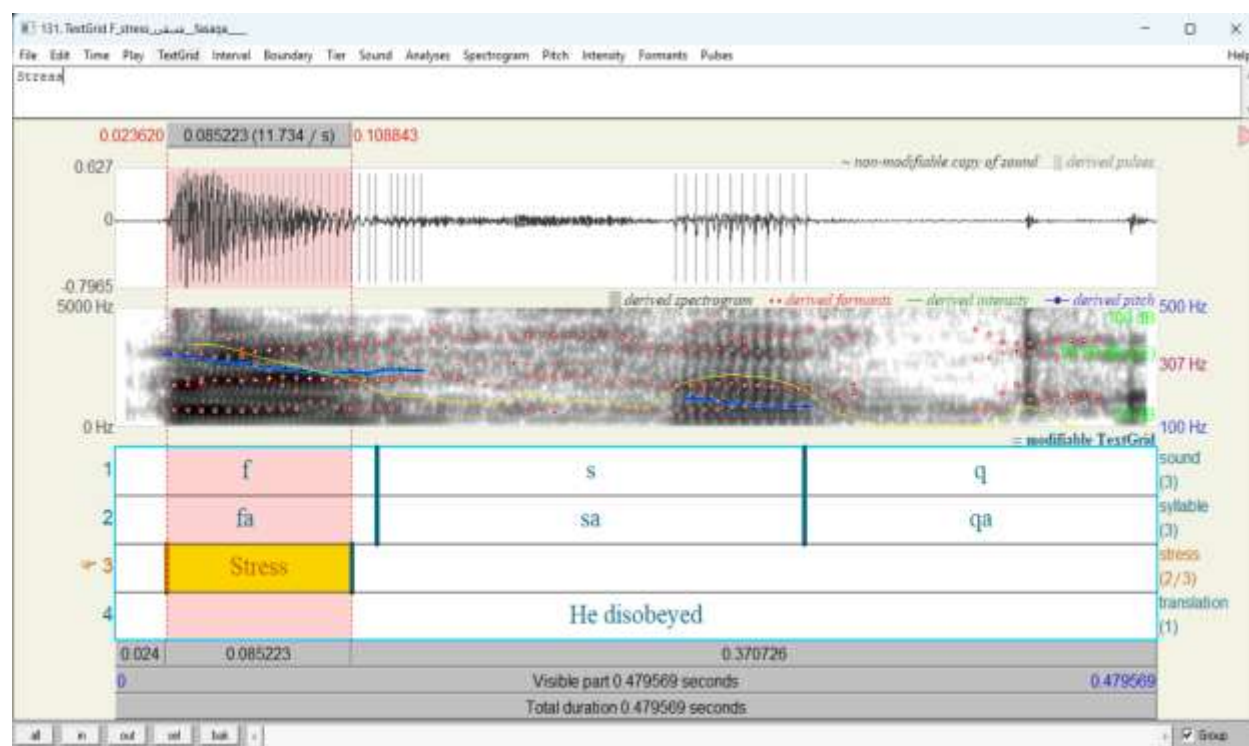


Figure A7: Spectrogram and waveform of the phrase "fasaq alma'" (correct stress on Sīn).



Figures A8: Spectrogram and waveform of fasqā stressed on /f/.

## Appendix B: Acoustic Analysis Tables

**Table B2: Acoustic features of 'ranā' (verb)**

| Feature                    | Stressed | Unstressed |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|
| Fundamental Frequency (Hz) | 210      | 180        |
| Intensity (dB)             | 75       | 68         |
| Duration (ms)              | 380      | 320        |

**Table B3: Acoustic features of 'sadd' (superlative)**

| Feature                    | Stressed | Unstressed |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|
| Fundamental Frequency (Hz) | 215      | 185        |
| Intensity (dB)             | 78       | 70         |
| Duration (ms)              | 360      | 310        |

**Table B4: Acoustic features of 'faqas alqalib'**

| Feature                    | Stressed | Unstressed |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|
| Fundamental Frequency (Hz) | 205      | 170        |
| Intensity (dB)             | 74       | 67         |
| Duration (ms)              | 400      | 340        |

**Table B5: Acoustic features of 'fasaq alma'**

| Feature                    | Stressed | Unstressed |
|----------------------------|----------|------------|
| Fundamental Frequency (Hz) | 208      | 175        |
| Intensity (dB)             | 76       | 69         |
| Duration (ms)              | 390      | 330        |

**Appendix C: Morphological and Semantic Analysis****Table C1: Morphological and semantic comparison of 'ranā' (verb)**

| Aspect         | Form | Meaning                                  |
|----------------|------|------------------------------------------|
| With Stress    | رنا  | He looked at, listened, or was delighted |
| Without Stress | رنا  | Ambiguous, misinterpreted as a noun      |

**Table C2: Morphological and semantic comparison of 'sadd' (superlative)**

| Aspect         | Form | Meaning                         |
|----------------|------|---------------------------------|
| With Stress    | أسدّ | Superlative: the wisest opinion |
| Without Stress | أسد  | Animal: lion                    |

**Table C3: Morphological and semantic comparison of 'faqas alqalib'**

| Aspect      | Form       | Meaning                   |
|-------------|------------|---------------------------|
| With Stress | فقسى القلب | So the heart was hardened |

|                       |     |                                 |
|-----------------------|-----|---------------------------------|
| With Incorrect Stress | فسق | Immorality, from different root |
|-----------------------|-----|---------------------------------|

**Table C4: Morphological and semantic comparison of 'fasaq alma'**

| Aspect                | Form       | Meaning              |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------------|
| With Stress           | فسقى الماء | He watered the water |
| With Incorrect Stress | فقس        | He hatched (eggs)    |

**Appendix D: IPA Transcription with Stress Position****Table D1. IPA Transcriptions with Stress Positions**

| Word   | IPA Transcription | Stress Position               |
|--------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| ranā   | /'rana:/          | First syllable                |
| 'sadd  | /ʔa'sadd/         | Second syllable (geminate)    |
| faqasā | /'faqasa:/        | First syllable (root letter)  |
| fasaqā | /fa'saqa:/        | Second syllable (root letter) |