Variable Shape templates in purely concatenative systems (Somali, Czech)

The goal of this presentation is to introduce the notion of variable shape templates, and to provide relevant illustration, which will come from Somali and Czech. Templates are a linguistic object that is known from the analysis of Semitic languages, and which is commonly understood as going hand in hand with non-concatenative morphology. It has been demonstrated, though, that templatic restrictions also occur in systems with purely concatenative morphology. A definition of templaticity must thus be sought that is able to cover expressions both in non-concatenative and concatenative systems.

Beyond this, the empirical picture that emerges as templatic data from purely concatenative languages become available is that templatic is associated to affixal activity, a pattern that is unknown from Semitic. That is, a templatic restriction is associated to an item that is made of a root and (an) affix(es). Also, affix-sensitive templates can be satisfied by a number of processes, which may include vowel lengthening, vowel shortening and gemination: only the overall size of the item matters. This is what we call variable shapes, which are unheard of in Semitic, where the templatic restriction is always satisfied by the same process (either vowel lengthening or consonant gemination).

Our working hypothesis is that variable shape templates cannot occur in Semitic-type languages because of their non-concatenative morphology.