

# A Brief Description of Uvular Consonant Phonemes in Classical Arabic

**Radwan El Naji M Ali**

(Faculty of Arts and Sciences Qameenis. University of Benghazi. Libya)

[radwan.ali@uob.edu.ly](mailto:radwan.ali@uob.edu.ly)

## Abstract.

This paper investigates the unique uvular consonant phoneme of Classical Arabic (Language of Quran) not the colloquial one, from point of view of the International Phonetic Association (IPA). These kinds of sound or phoneme are three in the Classical Arabic which has been classified into voiced and voiceless. The aim of our paper is to shed light on their other closer phonemes which they are called "emphatics" that use the uvula as secondary in their production, hence the name of "uvular" implemented, their voiceness, and their place and manner of articulation which are still debatable to the Arabic phoneticians.

**Keywords:** uvular, Classical Arabic, Quran, voiced.

## وصف موجز لمخارج للأصوات الصامتة اللهائية في اللغة العربية الفصحى

**أ. رضوان الناجي محمد علي**

( كلية الآداب والعلوم قمينس - جامعة بنغازي – ليبيا )

## الملخص:

يبحث هذا البحث في الفونيم الصوتي المجهور الفريد من نوعه في اللغة العربية الفصحى (لغة القرآن الكريم) وليس العامية، من وجهة نظر الجمعية الصوتية الدولية (IPA) هذه الأنواع من الأصوات أو الفونيمات ثلاثة في اللغة العربية الفصحى التي تم تصنيفها إلى مجهور وغير مجهور. والهدف من بحثنا هذا هو تسليط الضوء على الفونيمات الأخرى الأقرب منها والتي تسمى "المجهورة" التي تستخدم اللهة كجهاز ثانوي في إنتاجها، ومن هنا جاءت تسميتها "مجهورة" المنفذة، وصوتها المجهور، ومكان وطريقة نطقها التي لا تزال موضع جدل عند علماء الأصوات العربية.

**الكلمات الدلالية:** العربية الفصحى، العربية الفصحى، القرآن الكريم، الصوتية.

## Introduction.

This paper describes a physiological and phonetic study of the uvular sounds of Classical Arabic. The main assumption underlying this work is that the term "uvular" describes a linguistic (phonemic) feature, which its place of articulation occurs within the uvula as passive (not moveable organ), hence it is labeled by this term. Furthermore, the active articulator is predicted which is the back of the tongue that moves to the uvula. The Arabic language today is the mother tongue of over 200 million people across the Middle East and North Africa.

Its modern standard representation, whose form is ultimately derived from the Classical Arabic idiom, is officially adopted as the primary language of administration, education, and discourse in countries as diverse as Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian territories, Egypt, the Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, notwithstanding the significance of the language's official status in neighboring states such as Mauritania, Chad, Djibouti, and Somalia. (Shah, 2008). Traditional Islamic scholarship held that the Quran was revealed in the Meccan dialect of Quraysh, the tribe to which the Prophet Muh. Ammad belonged, notionally reflecting western Arabian dialectal influences. (Shah, 2008)

The dialect had seemingly assimilated and integrated all that was refined among the various vernaculars of the Arabs. It had supposedly developed into the distinguished lingua franca, serving as an elevated diction and the common medium of literary expression. During the early pre-Islamic periods, poetry and the formal discourse of the Arabs were said to have employed this elevated literary koine. The impression was that the prominence of Quraysh as the custodians of the Meccan sanctuary gave their native diction a unique seal of authority; that Quraysh were also influential merchants purportedly assisted the linguistic ascendancy of their dialect.

However, recent scholarship has questioned the traditional emphasis placed on the significance of Quraysh's dialect; reckoning that although western dialects were represented in the classical idiom, the eastern Arabian dialects associated with the tribes of Najd (Qays, Tamīm, and Asad) practically shaped the definitive form of the Arabs' literary koine. Scholars remarked that pre-Islamic poetry dated to the sixth century, which was transmitted orally and codified by philologists much later, had actually been written in this elevated koine. The Quran is viewed as being composed in a dialect which encapsulates this koine, although idiosyncratic phonological features associated with the H. ijazī dialects are likewise retained in its composition.

### 1.1 Research Questions.

1. Is it clearer the IPA analysis from the Arabic traditional way of analyzing consonant segments?
2. Is IPA analysis a good way for describing Classical Arabic uvular sound phonemes to first Arabic learner?

### 1.2 Objectives of Study.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the main articulatory (place of articulation) and phonetic attributes that correspond to this "uvular" feature in Arabic. Moreover, these three actual phonemes with their places of articulation that is primary (main) in their productions that is why they have been labeled "uvulars" in the IPA description. As for the Semitic languages.

Arabic, there are several theories about the realization of emphaticness. A small minority of investigators have claimed that the phonetic difference between an pharyngeal sound and its non-pharyngeal counterparts in the place of articulation. (See. for instance, Bergstrasser, 1972). Most dialects of Arabic and the Standard one contain a set of consonants known as emphatics, which are defined by a primary constriction in the oral cavity with a secondary constriction in the uvula. Some common examples are [xʔ, yʔ, qʔ, □□]. In the production of emphatics, (Laufer and Baer 1988). They have been described by "uvularized", it is secondary not main. 1.3 Method The method that paper followed is the descriptive approach, to describe the uvulars in Classical Arabic in IPA perspectives and ways of analyzing any consonant sound segments in any given language.

## 2.1 Voiceness.

As McMahon (2002, p26) describes "A major division among speech sounds which is relevant for all languages is the dichotomy of voiced and voiceless. If you put your fingers on your 'Adam's apple' or 'voice-box' (technically the larynx), and produce a very long [zzzzzz], you should feel vibration; this shows that [z] is a voiced sound. On the other hand, if you make a very long [ssssss], you will not feel the same sort of activity: [s] is a voiceless sound".

Voicelessness and voicing are the two main settings of phonation, or states of the glottis: for English at least, the only other relevant case, and again one which is used paralinguistic ally, is whisper. In whisper phonation, the vocal folds are close together but not closed; the reduced size of the glottis allows air to pass, but with some turbulence which is heard as the characteristic hiss of whisper (MaMahon 2002: p26). The voiceless phoneme, it is IPA symbol /h/ is the one that our vocal cords are not making any vibration in our larynx. When the space between the vocal cords which is named "glottis" in phonetic terms move apart to not make any vibration. However, the voiceless uvular in Arabic is the /x/ sound or phoneme. The only letter that presents this sound in Arabic is "خ", and found in words; e.g. خريف/xaelri: f/ (full), خال/xal/ (uncle). The second the voiceless uvular is plosive in Arabic is the letter Qāf (ق), which is pronounced as /q/. It is a "stop" sound because the air is completely blocked and "uvular because it is made by pressing the back of the tongue against the uvula at the very back of the throat.

The last uvular phoneme is the voiced one, the IPA symbol is /ɣ/. Voiced means that the space (glottis) of the vocal cords are making is closed or squeezed, making our larynx vibrate. That is presented only by one letter orthographically "غ", e.g. غلطة/ɣalta/ (mistake).

## 2.2 The place of articulation.

The location of the active and passive articulators determines the place of articulation for a consonant. In English, consonants are produced at eight places of articulation. Since we have now covered all the other articulatory parameters required to describe consonants, introducing and defining these places will allow us to build up a complete consonant phoneme system for English (MaMahon 2002: p30). The word place indicates "where", where the sound has been occurred, and to add, where indicates two articulators, one is moveable and the other is non. The latter is labeled in phonetic terms "the passive articulator" and the first is "the active articulator". The debatable part of these three phonemes in Classical Arabic is still on, some Arabic phoneticians say, it is emphatic which means produced by the throat, or by secondary production of the uvula, that the modern phoneticians call "uvularized" sounds. As H. Esling (1999) shows: The traditional uvulars can be identified as occurring at this location, particularly stop closure which is often identified in conjunction with glottal closure [19]. All of these

articulations are characterized by retraction of the tongue back towards the uvula. The "growling" and "throat clearing" sounds, occurring as properties of meaningful distinctive consonant or vowel sounds in some languages. However, as we elicited above, that when the passive organ or passive articulator, the active one will be predictable, this uvular phonemes, are being produced by the back of the tongue, as the passive articulator. As long as we show or know the passive, the active is known already, hence the active articulator is the uvula according to the modern phonetics.

### 2.3 Manner of Articulation.

However, (MaMahon 2002: p28) declares that to produce any consonant, an active articulator, usually located somewhere along the base of the vocal tract, moves towards a passive articulator, somewhere along the top. Where those articulators are, determines the consonant's place of articulation. How close the active and passive articulators get, determines the manner of articulation. There are three main manners of articulation, and one subsidiary case which in a sense is intermediate between the first two. To clarify the point of place of articulation, it refers to where the narrowing occurs -which active articulator gets close to which passive articulator. Constriction degree refers to how close they get. The main constriction degrees are (the studied ones are written in bold): **stop**: the active articulator touches the passive articulator and completely cuts off the airflow through the mouth. English stops include: [p], [d], [k], [m]. **Fricative**: the active articulator doesn't touch the passive articulator, but gets close enough that the airflow through the opening becomes turbulent. English fricatives include [f], [z].

However, the /x/ sound is fricative one the airflow squeezed between the back the tongue and the uvula approximant: the active articulator approaches the passive articulator, but doesn't even get close enough for the airflow to become turbulent. English approximants include [j], [w], and [l]. Thus, the /ɣ/ sound is fricative as shown above, hence, it is called voiced uvular fricative.

affricate: Affricates can be seen as a sequence of a stop and a fricative which have the same or similar places of articulation. They are transcribed using the symbols for the stop and the fricative. If one wants to emphasize the affricate as a "single" sound, a tie symbol can be used to join the stop and the fricative (sometimes the fricative is written as a superscript).

### 3. Conclusion and Findings.

This paper has investigated the phonetic properties of the Arabic uvular consonants. Hence, they are /x/ voiceless uvular fricative and voiceless uvular fricative /q/. /ɣ/ voiced uvular fricative. While some of our findings are in agreement with existing predictions, others need to be examined in light of further research. Arabic vocabulary is very large and uses a logical but difficult grammatical system, particularly in Literary Arabic. English is simpler than that of Arabic language. Achieving a correct pronunciation is not easy and without accent speaking is very difficult. Furthermore, the three phonemes are actually in restricting state according to their importance in the language of Quran.

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