

Conference Paper

The Characteristics of the Letter of *Dād* and the Miracle of Al-Qur'an

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Abstract

Since ancient times, Arabic has been an actively used language. Arabic language is also renowned as the language of Al-Qur'an (Muslim's holy book). However, it is important to notice that the Arabic language used for communication is certainly different from that used in the Qur'an, which is also called the classical Arabic language (*qodîmah*). This Qur'anic Arabic has various unique characteristics. This paper elaborates some specificities and uniqueness of Arabic letter *Dād* that no other languages in this world bear similarities. Thus, it cannot be denied if this language is used to represent the verses of the Qur'an. Although some challenges were later found in pronouncing this letter after the Qur'an is read by all Muslims throughout the world. The letter *Dād*, found in the 15th order of the *Hijaiyah* alphabet has a very close relation to the uniqueness of the Qur'anic Arabic. In fact, the existence of this letter seems to answer the mystery of why the al-Qur'an was revealed by using clear Arabic (*bi lisânin 'arobiyyin mubînin*). This paper will also discuss the characteristics of *Dād* and its uniqueness which make the proof of the authenticity of the language, which also explains why the language, among all other languages in the world is chosen to be the language of Al-Qur'an.

Keywords: Arabic, al-qur'an, Hijaiyah, qodîmah, quranic language

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1. Introduction

All Muslim scholars believe that the Holy Quran was revealed in the spoken language of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and the dialect of the Quraysh which was known as classical Arabic and it is notable that the dialect of the Quraysh has been used in poetry since earlier than the era of the Prophet. The aforementioned statement is endorsed by the verse of Quran (surah 14 verse 4) as it says:

“ *Wamâ arsalâka min raûlin illâ bilisâni qoumihi*”

Translation: We do not send any messenger except in the language of his own people.

From that quoted verse, it can be understood that Arabic language as the mother tongue of the Prophet becomes the chosen language for presenting the Holy Quran.

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Besides being the language of the Holy Quran, Arabic also became the means of communication in preaching Islamic teachings, the rules of Islam, and Islamic foundation to Arabs people at that time. Since the spread of Islam all over the world was brought by the Arabs using the Arabic language, consequently, the main languages of many tribes and nations were changed from their mother tongues into Arabic language in order to understand Quran and follow the rules of Islam. When many of non-Arabs became Muslims, they also learned Arabic language and started to teach this language to others, thus all of their sciences were recorded in Arabic. In a period of time, Arabic language was the biggest in the world. However, despite the effort of learning the language, non-Arab peoples found it difficult to recite the Holy Quran with the perfect pronunciation and right articulation which is called *tartîlan* as instructed in surah 73 verse 4 “*And recite the Quran with measured recitation (rhythmic tones).*”

The word ‘*tartîl*’ means harmony and order. Thus, the term *tartîl* can be used to show a consecutive or well-ordered articulation of words. Since the words stated here refer to those of the Qur’an, it could also be associated with other concepts such as good talks, slow recitation, and recitation in a well-articulated way. *Tartîl* which literally means to arrange and put things in order technically means to recite the Quranic verses with reflection and order with the proper pronunciation of its letters, clear articulation of its words, and reflection on the meanings of its verses and their implications.

Arab people proudly claim Arabic as “the language of *dād*” since no other languages on the world have the letter ‘*dād*’ in their alphabet. It implies that ‘*dād*’ is an extremely unusual sound. It also became the reason why early Arabic grammarians described Arabic as the *lughat ad-dād* (the language of the *dād*) because the sound was thought to be unique to Arabic (Versteegh, 2003). The emphatic lateral nature of this sound is possibly inherited from Proto-Semitic, and is compared to a phoneme in South Semitic languages such as Mehri. The corresponding letter in the South Arabian alphabet is [s̥], and in Ge’ez alphabet [s̥appa], although in Ge’ez it merged early on with [s]. The reconstruction of Proto-Semitic phonology includes an emphatic voiceless alveolar lateral fricative [s̥] or affricate [t̪s̥] for /s̥/. This sound is considered to be the direct ancestor of Arabic *dād*, while merging with *ṣād* in most other Semitic languages.

At least, there are two reasons of this condition, *firstly* the existence of the letter *dād* in determining the reliability of a *qāree* [the person reciting Quran] in reciting the Holy Quran is closely related, because this letter is very difficult in pronunciation and it requires intensive training to pronounce the exact articulation. That is why this letter has changed in its pronunciation in some other languages like France, India, Hebrew,

Syrian and Roman. *Secondly* only Arab people can pronounce this difficult letter with a perfect place of articulation.

As people know Arabic language has alphabet called *hijaiyyah* in which every letter has a characteristic to pronounce with a specific articulation and one of them is the letter *Dād*. These unique characteristics of its letters may be the reason why Arabic is chosen as the language of the holy Quran. The Arabic sound *dād* is popularly believed to be a unique sound that gives Arabic a 'special status' among other languages. *luġat aḍ-ḍād* meaning 'the language of *dād*', is a cliché that is often used to refer to Arabic. As a consequence, the implication being that only Arabic has this sound, and especially in non-academic circles, it is assumed that the reference in this cliché is to the emphatic dental/denti-alveolar plosive that is found in the standard variety and represented by the grapheme ض.

It is clear that both assumptions are erroneous. Firstly, the phonetic property of modern Arabic *dād* is an innovation; the reference in the statement above must have been to the original sound, most probably a voiced lateral fricative (Steiner, 1976). Secondly, Arabic is not alone among world languages to contain the sound, or similar sounds, e.g. among the languages of the Caucasus, Adyghe and Kabardian have voiced laterals. The Proto sound, from which Arabic *dād* descends, was thought to be obsolete (Steiner, 1976).

2. The Characteristics of Dād in Modern Literature

In Steiner's (1976) discussion of the history of the laterals' theory, he pointed out that Lepsius (1861) was the first scholar to adopt the theory that the Arabic *dād* which was originally "an emphatic assibilated l" in the post Islamic period (Steiner, 1976). This theory was then supported by a number of researchers who were able to find an emphatic lateral realization of *dād* in South Arabian dialects, such as ḥadramī Arabic (van den Berg 1886:239), and in Mehri (von Maltzan 1873:259). Additionally, Růžička (1909) was the first researcher to discuss the Arabic loanwords in Spanish in which *dād* was realized as *ld*, which further supports the description of Arabic *dād* as a lateral feature (all cited in Steiner 1976: 3). Citing the argument made by Brockelmann (1908), Vilenčik (1930) and Magee (1950) Steiner agrees that the lateral *dād* in Arabic and Modern South Arabic (MSA) is probably the result of a sound shift from an interdental to a lateral sound, as stated in the following quotation: "...there are no grounds for brushing aside the possibility that the lateral *dād* of Arabic and MSA developed from an earlier (unlaterlized) *ḍ* [ʔ̤]" (Steiner, 1976, p. 5). He goes on to give analogies for this assumption, citing the

work of Vilenčik (1930), for example the /ð/ which has changed to /l/ in Afghan dialects, and the /d/ that has changed to /l/ in different languages including Latin and the Jewish Neo-Aramaic dialect of Azerbaijan.

Voiced fricative-lateral sounds are less common in world languages than voiceless fricative-laterals /ɬ/. According to Steiner, voiced fricative-laterals are found only in Modern South Arabic languages (MSA), Ubykh, the Circassian languages and some African languages such as Sandawe, Bura, Margi and the southern Bantu languages. Fricative-laterals are found in MSA (Modern South Arabic), a term that was used to describe a group of Semitic languages spoken on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula (Steiner 1976). One of these languages is Shahari, which is spoken in Zūfār in Oman. Mehri is one of these languages spoken in Zūfār and in the Mahra county, which is located between Zūfār and ḥaḍramawt, and also in Socotra island. Furthermore, the Botahari and Harsusi dialects are both similar to Mehri and are also spoken in Zūfār (Steiner 1976:12). One remarkable difference between MSA and the Arabic language is the presence of phonological innovations in the latter that are used in most Arabic dialects. These innovations include the unconditional merger of /d^h/ and /ð^h/, and the unconditional merger of /ɬ/ and /s/ as a result of the chain shift ś>š > s²³. Another difference is that in Arabic the emphatics are velarized while in MSA they are glottalized, as in Ethiopian Semitic languages (Steiner 1976: 12).

Another important piece of information given by Steiner is that the distinction between *dād* and *dā'* is "secondarily" maintained in the same way as the distinction between *ḍ/d* and *ṭ/t* is secondarily maintained (Steiner, 1976, p. 37). This distinction is preserved by producing one of the two sounds as an interdental and the other as a dental stop. According to Steiner this would mean that there was a time in which the distinction between *d^h/ð^h*, *ḍ/d* and *ṭ/t* ceased to exist in urban reading traditions. The disappearance of the interdental sounds has encouraged old orthoepists to create this distinction in order to preserve the traditional recitation of the Qur'an. This is an indication that the distinction between *dād* and *dā'* is in fact an 'artificial' distinction. The data presented in this study will lend further explanation to this argument, as we find that the lateral sound and the interdental sound are available in the phonetic inventory of the dialect but there is no 'phonemic' distinction between the two sounds (See section 4.2 for further details).

3. Findings (The Distinction of Dād)

Steiner (1976) gives examples of Arabic loanwords from a number of languages such as Malay, Mindano and Sulu to support the lateral theory of Arabic *dād*. In the Malay language, for instance, the realization of *dād* in Arabic loanwords is either [d] or [l]. In the Philippine Island Mindano *dād* is realized as [L] (Vollers, 1893 cited in Steiner 1976). Arabic loanwords such as *rela/riḍā* (consent) and *lohor/Zuhr* (noon) are believed to be found in Malay because they were spread by traders from south Arabia who used to work in Sumatra during the Middle Age.

Steiner attributes the existence of the lateral realization for *dād* and *dā'* in Arabic loanwords in modern Malay to the influence of the ḥadramī dialect which was spoken in the Arab colony in Malay's Archipelago within the last two centuries. Another explanation is that the realization of *dād* in Arabic loanwords that was found in dictionaries in the seventeenth century existed due to the early contact between the Arabic dialects of South Arabia and Malay. Nowadays, the lateral realization is hardly found in Malay also.

The phonetic articulation of these consonants basically focuses on two points of articulation. The primary front articulation occurs at the dental/alveolar region and a back secondary articulation that involves the constriction of the upper pharynx. In the process of acoustic analysis of the emphatic consonants it has been found that the lowering of formant two (F2) is an indication of the enlargement of the oral cavity which is caused by the configuration associated with the specific articulation of the emphatics. This phenomenon of *tafkhīm* has attracted the attention of Arab grammarians since the 8th century from the time of al-Khalil and Sibawayh and it is being investigated by modern and western linguists today. The Arabic sound /د ض / was described by Sibawayh (1988) as '*makhraj al-dhād min baina awwali ḥāfat al-lisān wamā yalīhi min al-adhrās*' which is translated to 'pronunciation of dhād from the front part of the side edge of the tongue and the molars next to it is the outlet of the dād'

The place and manner of articulation of the Arabic *dād* were discussed by a number of ancient Arabic grammarians, specifically the 9th century grammarian Sibawayhi (1988) who gave the following description for the place of articulation of the Arabic *dād* in his book *al-kitāb*: "...min bayna 'awwal ḥāfat al-lisān wa-mā yalīhi mina al-'adrās ..." which means "...between the front edge of the tongue and the adjacent molars." Sibawayhi also grouped *dād* with *majhūr* 'voiced', *rixwa* 'fricative' and *muṭbaq* 'emphatic' sounds. Based on this description, it can be concluded inferentially that Arabic *dād* is an emphatic voiced fricative sound [d̪]. It is important to note that the description above does not

explicitly point to the lateral nature of *dād*; however, Sībawayhi's (1988) comments on the 'emphatic' nature of the sound can lead us to conclude that this sound is lateral.

Ibn Jinnī (1957), in his book *Sirr ṣinā'at al-i'rāb*, to Sībawayhi's description of the Arabic *dād* that the sound could be produced either from the left or right side of the tongue. He also cited the existence of *dād da'īfa* (weak *dād*) as a sound that belongs to an 'unaccepted' type of speech. Ibn Ya'īš described 'weak *dād*' as a sound that can be pronounced as *tā'* /t̤/ or a sound that has a place of articulation between *dād* /d̤/ and *dā'* /ð̤/. These sounds are most probably different allophones of *dād*, which is believed to be the first stage of a merger between *dād* and *dā'*.

The Egyptian linguist Anīs (1947) is one of a group of scholars who point out the difference between the original and modern *dād*. In his book *al- Aṣwāt al-Luġawiyya*, Anīs (1947) states that the old Arabic *dād* has undergone a series of developments since the 8th century up to its modern realization. He mentions that the modern realization of *dād* that is used in Egypt is similar in its place of articulation to the Arabic sound *dāl* /d/, which is in all probability an emphatic stop sound /d̤/. Anīs (1952) also adds that Arabic *dād* is rendered among some Bedouin and Iraqi speakers with a pronunciation similar to *dā'* and to the old form of *dād*. He adds that both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers alike find the lateral *dād* difficult to produce in speech.

El-Gindi (1983) also mentions the existence of seven different recitations of the Qur'an in which the graphemes *dād* and *dā'* are used interchangeably to represent both the interdental and the lateral sounds. This description was used by the majority of scholars who followed him with the exception of Ibn Sina who deviated from the Sībawayh tradition.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the importance knowledge of the characteristic of *dād* as the unique letter of hijaiyyah alphabet can be seen from some different perspectives as listed below:

1. Viewing from the difficult level of pronunciation of this letter and unique characteristics that exist in this letter, moreover it is not found in other languages such as French, Hindi, Hebrew, Syrian and Roman.
2. One distinction of the letter of *dād* is because only Arab people can pronounce with the perfect pronunciation and articulation. For this reason, this letter becomes the name of Arabic language which is popularly known as 'the language of *dād*'.

3. The letter *dād* is one of the determinant of proficiency in reciting the holy Quran and to be a standard of fluency assessment on one's pronunciation in reciting Quran.

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