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# Arabic Letters between Ancient Enumeration and Contemporary Developments: Exploring the Added Value of Additional (Added) Letters

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**Abstract:**
This research paper examines a significant linguistic phenomenon in contemporary Arabic studies: the invention and inclusion of new letters, akin to those documented by ancient scholars (ا، ب، ت، ث، ج ....), with various arrangements. Titled "Arabic Letters: Between Ancient Enumeration and Contemporary Developments," our study explores the added value of these additional letters, their rationale, and significance in enriching the Arabic language. We delve into concepts, types, characteristics, and distinctions of Arabic letters, alongside ancient Arab scholars' enumeration and reasons for including new letters. Our objective is to highlight the Arabic language's dynamism and adaptability, evidenced by its capacity for expansion and integration with diverse linguistic contexts.
**Keywords:** Derived Letters, Arabic Letter, Arrangement, Characteristics
**Résumé:**
Ce document de recherche examine un phénomène linguistique important dans les études arabes contemporaines : l'invention et l'inclusion de nouvelles lettres, similaires à celles documentées par les anciens érudits (ا، ب، ت، ث، ج) ،selon divers arrangements. Intitulée « Les lettres arabes : entre la numération ancienne et les développements contemporains », notre étude explore la valeur ajoutée de ces lettres supplémentaires, leur justification et leur importance dans l'enrichissement de la langue arabe. Nous approfondissons les concepts, les types, les caractéristiques et les distinctions des lettres arabes, ainsi que la numération des anciens érudits arabes et les raisons de l'inclusion de nouvelles lettres. Notre objectif est de mettre en valeur le dynamisme et l'adaptabilité de la langue arabe, attestés par sa capacité d'expansion et d'intégration avec divers contextes linguistiques.
**Mots-clés :** Lettres dérivées, Lettre arabe, Arrangement, Caractéristiques.

## INTRODUCTION:

The letter is considered the smallest linguistic unit that combines with others to form words in their different categories: nouns, verbs, and particles, as defined by Ibn Malik in the opening lines of his famous Alfiyyah: "Our speech is beneficial, straight * * * It consists of nouns, verbs, and particles." This primary function of the letter is characteristic of various languages, including the Arabic language, in which the Holy Quran was revealed and which has been used to record the Arabic linguistic, literary, and especially poetic heritage. This is

exemplified in the poetry of the suspended poems (Al-Mu'allaqat), which was the first Arabic poetic collection that revealed the beauty, authenticity, and nobility of the Arabic language, which was further enhanced by the revelation of the Quran. The Arabic language is one of the Semitic languages in the Arabian Peninsula, and its group of letters can be traced back to the Aramaic alphabet. Therefore, the first arrangement of letters in Arabic appeared in what is known as the alphabetical order:

(أ، ب، ج، د، ه، و، ز، ح، ط، ي، ك، ل، م، ن، س، ع، ف، ص، ق، ر، ش، ت، ث، خ، ض، ذ، ظ، غ)

This was the first set of Arabic letters in this arrangement, but scholars later invented new arrangements, especially among the ancient scholars. As for contemporary scholars, they have added new letters to Arabic that were neither used nor specified before. This forms the basis of our research, as formulated in the following title: "Arabic Letters: Between Ancient Enumeration and Contemporary Developments - Exploring the Added Value of Additional Letters."

Based on this, we raise the following questions: What are the Arabic letters added by contemporary Arabs, similar to the known ancient Arabic letters? And what are the additions, value, and qualitative benefits of these added letters?

We will attempt to address these questions by delving into the Arabic letter: its nature, types, and characteristics, followed by the newly invented Arabic letters: their types and characteristics. Then we will explore the qualitative value added by derived letters in the Arabic language. In our research, we will adopt a descriptive and analytical approach, as well as employing comparison and examination as required by the nature of the subject.

## 1. ARABIC LETTER: ITS NATURE, CHARACTERISTICS, AND TYPES OF ARRANGEMENTS

### 1.1. The Nature of the Arabic Letter

A letter or sound, in general, is an auditory effect produced voluntarily and selectively by the organs of the vocal apparatus. It refers to the components of a word, such as a noun, verb, or particle, and its plural form is letters. As for Arabic letters, they are the ones from which the Arabic language is formed. They are the letters that have been pronounced by Arabic-speaking peoples from ancient times until today, and from them, its vocabulary, texts, and linguistic heritage in all its forms have emerged.

Some refer to them as letters, while others commonly refer to them as sounds, considering them as one entity. "Arabic linguists and other scholars have not distinguished between sound and letter, or between what is material and perceptible and what is conceptually meaningful, or between a mere phonetic unit and a melodious phonetic unit..." (Waly Dada Abdul Hakeem, Lectures on Phonetics, p. 04). This means that what is represented in the mental image of a specific sound is a letter, and when it is pronounced according to its articulation in the vocal apparatus, it becomes a sound. Therefore, the term "sound of the letter" is used, referring to the vocal configuration produced by the letter.

However, we find that Ibn Jinni (d. 392 AH) presented another concept of sound and letter in his book "Sirr Sana'at al-I'rab" (The Secret of the Art of Arabic Grammar). He says, "Know that sound is a length that comes out with the breath, straight and connected until it

encounters in the throat, mouth, and lips segments that interrupt its extension and elongation. Each segment encountered by a letter is called a 'manner of articulation,' and the articulations of the letters differ according to the differences in their segments" (Ibn Jinni, Sirr Sana'at al-I'rab, p. 6). From here, we may adopt Ibn Jinni's view on the distinction between the letter and the sound, despite the common usage even in the early stages of education, where beginners are taught a set of letters rather than sounds.

**1.2. Characteristics of the Arabic Letter**

The Arabic phonemes have distinguishing characteristics that vary between being voiced or whispered, strong or weak, and emphasized or softened. "The voiced letters are fully dependent on their position, and the breath does not flow with them until the dependency on them is exhausted. On the other hand, the voiceless letters are the weakest in terms of dependency on their position, and the breath flows with them." (Refer to: Sibawayh, Al-Kitab, p. 434.) Al-Sirafi explains these two characteristics by saying, "To understand the voiced letters, one does not need to enter the sound that comes out of the chest. All the voiced letters produce their sound from the chest, and the throat is involved, but the letters Meem and Noon produce their sounds from the chest and flow through the chest and nasal cavity, mixing with what occurred in the throat. As for the voiceless letters, they produce their sounds from their articulation points, which is what is released weakly from the mouth." (Al-Sirafi, Sharh Kitab Sibawayh, p. 88.)

The voiced letters include: Baa, Jeem, Daal, Thaal, Raa, Zayn, Daad, Dhaad, 'Ayn, Ghayn, Laam, Meem, Noon, Yaa, Waw. While the voiceless letters include: Taa, Thaa, Haa, Khaa, Seen, Sheen, Saad, Taa', Faa, Qaaf, Kaaf, Haa.

Regarding emphasis and softness, they can be observed through the pronunciation of sounds and their articulation from the vocal apparatus. When the lips close tightly and momentarily obstruct the airflow from the lungs, then suddenly separate, creating a burst of sound, these types of sounds are known to the ancients as "strong" sounds or explosively pronounced sounds (plosives), while modern linguists refer to them as "plosives." The common feature among them is the trapping of air at their articulation points, which is not allowed to pass until the organs suddenly separate, producing an explosive sound. Soft sounds, on the other hand, do not tightly trap the air but rather have a narrow passage, resulting in a fricative or a faint sound (fricatives). (Refer to: Ibrahim Anis, Al-Aswat Al-Lughawiyya, p. 25.)

In Arabic phonetics, the following sounds are classified as strong: Hamzah, Baa, Taa, Daal, Taa', Kaf, and Qaf. Conversely, the sounds of Seen, Zayn, Saad, Sheen, Thaal, Thaa, Dhaad, Daad, Faa, Haa, Haa, Khaa, and Ghayn are considered soft. The letter Jeem varies between being pronounced with emphasis or softness.

As for the attributes of Arabic letters, they include emphasis (tafkheem) and softness (tarqeeq). Ancient Arab scholars deduced the characteristics of emphasis and softness in letters through their composition and their position within words. Ibn Jinni provided numerous examples in this regard, such as: "The letter Qaf possesses firmness, while the letter Khaa is soft." This is true, but then he adds: "The letter Haa is gentle, while the letter Khaa is harsh. It is said that a small amount of water 'nadah' means a light sprinkle, while 'nadhakh' for water

means its forceful eruption from a spring. So how can the letter Khaa possess both softness and harshness, which are contradictory?" (Hassan Abbas, Khasais Al-Huruf Al-Arabiyya wa Ma'aniha, p. 40.) This is because the same letter may be pronounced with emphasis in one word and with softness in another.

There are also silent letters and pronounced letters: The pronounced letters are Alif, Waw, and Yaa (ا، و، ي), which can be vocalized or vowelized according to the vowel marks (fatha, damma, kasra). The silent consonant letters are Baa, Jeem, Daal, Thaal, Raa, Zayn, Daad, Dhaad, 'Ayn, Ghayn, Laam, Meem, Noon, Taa, Thaa, Haa, Khaa, Seen, Sheen, Saad, Taa', Faa, Qaaf, Kaaf, Haa.

### 1.3. Types of Arabic Letter Arrangements

Among the most important arrangements witnessed by Arabic letters are:

#### *1.3.1. Alphabetical Arrangement*

Arabic letters are a set of characters on which the early Arabic speakers based their speech, communication, and literature. Ancient scholars enumerated them as twenty-eight (28) letters. Some refer to them as the authentic letters that formed the Arabic alphabet, influenced by the Aramaic alphabet. They were divided into groups for easier memorization: Abjad, Hawwaz, Hutti, Kalaman, Sa'fas, Qarashat, Thakhadh, Dathagh. One of their important characteristics (examples) is that according to the ancient view, all Arabic language words do not go beyond these letters. Additionally, they are characterized by whispering and enunciation, consonant doubling and softening, vibration, expansion, and elongation.

#### *1.3.2. Phonological Arrangement*

The phonological arrangement was introduced by Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi (died 170 AH) based on the articulation of the letters from the vocal apparatus. Thus, Al-Khalil "uniquely, in a very early period of human civilization, had a conscious and profound understanding of the nature of linguistic sounds. This enabled him to produce the first Arabic dictionary that established the arrangement of letters according to the articulation of sounds" (Mohammed Al-Ameesh, The Articulation of Sounds in Al-Khalil's Theory and his Students, Jussor Al-Ma'arifa Magazine, Issue 04, p. 98). He categorized the letters into groups based on their articulation as follows: Halaqiyah (A, H, Ha, Kha, Ghayn), Shajariyah (Jeem, Sheen, Dad), Uslayyah (Sad, Seen, Zain), Nati'iyah (Ta, Dal, Taa), Lathwiyyah (Tha, Thal, Dha), Dhalqiyah (Ra, Lam, Noon), Shafwiyyah (Fa, Ba, Meem), Hawwiyyah (Waw, Alef, Ya), and then the Hamzah (Hamzah). This arrangement formed an independent theory by Al-Khalil at that time, without relying on any phonetic devices.

#### *1.3.3. Alphabetic Arrangement*

In the past, Arabic letters witnessed another arrangement known as the alphabetic arrangement based on the letter's shape. They were grouped as follows: (Alif, Ba, Ta, Tha), (Jeem, Ha, Kha, Dal, Thal), (Ra, Zain, Seen, Sheen, Sad), (Dad, Taa, Thaa, Ain, Ghain), (Fa, Qaf, Kaf, Lam, Meem), (Noon, Ha, Waw, Ya). Although the phonological arrangement is closer to the logic of letter pronunciation and sequence, the alphabetic arrangement was more commonly used and relied upon than the alphabetical and phonological arrangements. Ibn

Manzur (died 711 AH) followed this arrangement in organizing the material of his dictionary: Lisan al-Arab.

## 2. NEWLY INNOVATED ARABIC LETTERS: TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The additional letters added to the Arabic language are letters that are visually derived from the original Arabic letters mentioned earlier, except for differences in diacritics and some additions to the vowel marks. Some refer to them as derived letters, while others refer to them as newly introduced letters in the Arabic language, and they are also called symbols. These letters have adopted their shapes from the original Arabic letters and have been circulated and transmitted. Their derivation from the original letters was done through methods such as shape, the addition of a Hamzah (glottal stop), or dots.

One of the main reasons for inventing and introducing these letters in the Arabic language is the necessity of using them to convey and adapt foreign words that do not contain certain letters in the Arabic alphabetical and phonetic system. This applies to the names of figures, scientific, literary, and intellectual terms.

Undoubtedly, the fundamental value of these new and innovative letters lies in their ability to demonstrate the expansiveness of the Arabic language and its capacity to accommodate various foreign names (figures) and terms, thereby enriching its vocabulary and widening its scope. They also enhance its affinity with other languages.

- List of Derived Letters (Additions in Arabic)

**Table 1.** Examples of derived letters in the Arabic language

| Letter | Equivalent in Latin | Derivation in Arabic | Correct use in Arabic | Equivalent in Latin | Wrong use in Arabic | Type of usage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ڤ | V | Derived from the letter "ف" by adding two dots because it resembles it in shape and pronunciation. | ڤِكْتُور مارِي هِيـگُو | Victor Marie Hugo | فِيكْتُور ماري هُوغُو | This letter is frequently used. |
| گ | G | Derived from the letter "ك", because it resembles it in shape. | جَمْهُورِيَة الْـگَابُون | Gabonaise République | اَلْجَمْهُورِيَة اَلْغَابُونِيَة | This letter is frequently used. |
| پ | P | Derived from the letter "ب", because it resembles it in shape. | اَلْمُعْجَم الطُّبُونِيمِي | Toponymy Lexcon | اَلْمُعْجَم الطُبُونِيمِي | This letter is frequently used. |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **چ** | **DJ** | **Derived from the letter "ج", because it resembles it in shape** | **چـَانَت (مدينة جزائرية)** | Djanet | **جَانَت** | This letter is rarely used. |
| **ژ** | **ZH** | **Derived from the letter "ز" by adding two dots because it resembles it pronunciation** | **ژَنْـگـژْهُو** | Zhengzhou | **زَنْكْزْهُو** | This letter is rarely used. |

## 3. THE ADDED QUALITATIVE VALUE OF DERIVED LETTERS IN THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

Through our analysis of the table (in Figure 01), we can highlight two fundamental points regarding the role of derived letters in the Arabic language: linguistic refinement and Arabization.

### 3.1. The Importance of Derived Letters in Translation and Arabization

Every language has its own sounds, vocabulary, and style. Despite the diversity of languages in the world, these languages share common terms for the same concepts. Translation thus becomes the closest and most effective means of conveying the meaning of a word from one language to another when the original concepts of linguistic reference are similar (Hamed Qunibi, Dictionaries and Terminologies, p. 136). As for translation into the Arabic language, it involves "transferring the foreign term into Arabic according to its meaning, not its wording, so the translator selects Arabic words that correspond to the meaning of the foreign term" (Introduction to Terminology, p. 101).

However, translation sometimes fails to serve its purpose in conveying meaning, especially in translating place names, flags, and some scientific terms. Therefore, researchers resort to Arabization, which is "one of the most important means we resort to for enriching the language and adapting it to new scientific terms" (Wajeeha Al-Sattal, The Human Body in Dictionaries of Meanings, p. 328). Thus, it contributes significantly to enriching the language both externally and internally.

One of the fundamental concepts of Arabization, perhaps its most comprehensive, is that it imparts an Arabic hue to the word when transferring it from its foreign form to Arabic, considering the resulting word as Arabic in terms of usage, according to Al-Jawaliqi's expression (see: Yusuf and Ghalisi, The Problem of Arabizing Modern Critical and Linguistic Terms, p. 44).

Another importance of Arabization, as seen by Yusuf and Ghalisi in the views of some researchers, including Rabie Mubarak and Raymond Tahan, is that "there is no fear for Arabic from foreign intrusions, but rather, the language becomes more vibrant with the influx of

foreign elements. The language can represent them, leading to the expansion of the language's vocabulary and the development of the conceptual content of its fields" (quoted from Yusuf and Ghalisi, The Problem of Terminology in New Arabic Literary Criticism, p. 89).

Although Arabization was the most appropriate solution for transferring some words into Arabic, as we have discussed in this section, it did not always use the most suitable and closest letters in the transfer (as seen in Figure 01), and there are many examples. For instance, the Latin letter (G) could be transferred in Arabization to (غ) or, according to derived letters, to (ڤ), while this letter corresponds to (V). Thus, there is a significant confusion in perceiving the names and even in pronouncing the original and derived letters. Therefore, it was necessary to correct the transfer and Arabization, which we will address in the following section.

**3.2. The significance of letters in linguistic correction**

Before delving into the value of added letters in the Arabic language for achieving linguistic correction, we must first address the concept of linguistic correction, which linguistically traces back to the root verb "صَوَّب" meaning "to correct." It is said: "He corrected his speech or action: he considered it correct, and corrected the mistake: he rectified it. He corrected so-and-so: he told him: You are right, hence the phrases 'If I err, correct me' and 'If I am correct, guide me'" (Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet, Arabic Language Academy in Cairo, Article: "Sab", p. 52).

From this standpoint, the concept of linguistic correction becomes clear as the rectification of errors without surpassing the correctness. In terminology, linguistic correction is defined as "the process of tracing errors and attempting to limit their scope by searching for the means to ensure linguistic accuracy" (Al-Arabi Dean, The Issue of Linguistic Correction in Arabic Between Ancients and Moderns, p. 18). Therefore, linguistic correction is a practical procedural process aimed at tracking linguistic errors of various levels and types, diagnosing them, and then correcting and rectifying them according to agreed-upon linguistic rules and procedures.

Salah Belaid argues that "error, in general, is deviation from what is acceptable in the language according to the standards followed by speakers" (Salah Belaid, Lessons in Applied Linguistics, p. 132). From this perspective, error is when the speaker deviates from the norms of language accepted by the linguistic community. Belaid categorizes error into two types:

4. Systemic error: This is the weakness of linguistic competence or the deterioration of the linguistic system of a particular language. It is one of the most damaging types of errors to a language as its negative impact extends to all linguistic levels upon which the system of a language relies.
5. Non-systemic error: This refers to errors made by speakers when practicing their speaking and communication skills. Here, the error is performance-based and is less damaging compared to systemic error.

Engaging in linguistic correction is prompted by the imperative to preserve the Arabic language after the interaction of Arabs with non-Arabs, and the influx of non-Arabs into Arab territories under the banner of the new religion. However, it seems that this cultural and social transition imposed by the new religious reality had a negative impact on the Arabic language.

Given that language is a living organism reflecting influences and effects, Arabic has also been subject to the law of evolution. Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali was the first to realize the corruption and decline afflicting the Arabic tongue. He recognized, through his linguistic intuition, the necessity of taking action to establish rules and laws to protect the Arabic language from the dangers it faced.

As for contemporary challenges, Arabic encounters linguistic challenges in a reality dominated by the language of technological and scientific development in various fields. This has directly impacted Arabic negatively, as evidenced by the diminishing pace of scientific and technological advancements among Arabs in various domains.

One of the manifestations of this onslaught was the issue of linguistic bias against the Arabic language, favoring other languages over it and considering it not among the prestigious languages. It was deemed unsuitable for the modern era due to its deficiencies and rigidity, which led to what is known as racism or populism towards the Arabic language and its speakers.

The prevalence and diversity of linguistic errors in various linguistic works related to the Arabic language and various sciences, particularly in the correct translation of names of figures, personalities, places, and some scientific terms, despite their availability in Arabic, have exacerbated the situation.

Linguists have continued to defend the Arabic language to this day despite all the challenges it faces from every direction. However, it is worth noting that the approach to linguistic advocacy has changed according to the era and its nature, especially in the age of globalization and its implications such as linguistic pluralism, interference, and linguistic duality. Some even advocate for replacing Classical Arabic with colloquial Arabic to the extent that Arabic is threatened in its own domain.

As the changes of the era have imposed on the linguist who is proud of his language to change the way of thinking and the adopted style to protect his language, and thus protect his identity and national symbol.

Therefore, the process of correction is a diligent effort that should be carefully undertaken in correcting various words that should be written with derived letters. What the Higher Council of the Arabic Language in Algeria, under the management of Professor Saleh Belaid, has called for is a good indication of this. In his directives in writing and participating in various works of the council, especially events and linguistic publications in general, there is a call for the necessity of employing phonetic symbols (derived letters) in writing, which are available in Word software and also in smartphones.

The most accurate way, as we have seen (in Figure 01), is to write the names of places, figures, and scientific terms with the appropriate derived letters. For example, the term "المعجم الطّوپونيمي" (the toponymic dictionary), although it has been translated to "معجم الأماكنية" or "معجم المواقعية" (indicating place names), a new Arabized term has been added, written with the letter "پ" instead of "ب". There are many examples, especially those found on social media platforms and websites, which are countless. In them, the Arabic language is lost, and with it, the identity, if there is no concerted effort to strive for accurate Arabization and correction. This research may be one of them.

## CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, this study on "Arabic Letters Between the Enumeration of the Ancients and the Development of the Moderns - A Study on the Added Value of Derived Letters" clearly demonstrates that derived and added letters play a fundamental role in enhancing the flexibility of the Arabic language and its capacity to accommodate contemporary scientific terms and foreign names without compromising their original pronunciation. Furthermore, modern digital technological advancements have proven highly efficient in standardizing the use of these letter symbols across various smart devices, thereby facilitating the language's wider spread and global presence.

Consequently, safeguarding this authentic and evolved linguistic heritage serves as a vital safeguard for the nation's identity and culture, as protecting Arabic letters and sounds simultaneously preserves its intellectual and literary achievements. Therefore, it remains imperative for academic and technical institutions to join forces in unifying digital standards, integrating these findings into educational curricula, and opening new research horizons that anticipate the future of Arabic typography and orthography in light of artificial intelligence and automated language processing.

Through our exploration of the topic "Arabic Letters Between the Enumeration of the Ancients and the Development of the Moderns - A Study on the Added Value of Derived Letters," we have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Derived or added letters to the Arabic language alphabet contribute significantly to expanding its scope, revealing its exceptional flexibility and ability to accommodate foreign scientific terms, proper names, and new vocabulary, particularly in the fields of Arabization and correction. Instead of distorting foreign words, these letters successfully preserve their phonetic integrity.
2. Modern information technology, including computers and smartphones, has successfully standardized the use of derived letter symbols, facilitating their precise placement within words and enhancing the global digital spread of the Arabic language while maintaining its authenticity.
3. Preserving both original and derived Arabic letters is vital for safeguarding Arab identity. Since the Arabic language is a cornerstone of this identity, protecting its letters and sounds simultaneously preserves the linguistic, literary, intellectual, and cultural heritage built upon them.

**Recommendations:**

1. Encourage software developers and digital content creators to adopt unified typographic standards for derived Arabic letters across all operating systems and digital platforms.
2. Incorporate the history, phonetic value, and usage rules of derived and added letters into educational programs to enhance linguistic awareness among students.
3. Support specialized academic research focusing on the phonetic and morphological development of the Arabic alphabet in response to contemporary technological and scientific demands.

4. Urge Arab standardization organizations to establish clear guidelines for utilizing derived letters in digital publishing and translation to prevent graphic corruption and maintain linguistic accuracy.

**Horizons and Prospects of the Study:**

Looking forward, future research should explore the impact of Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies on the recognition and processing of derived Arabic letters. Additionally, upcoming studies could investigate the socio-linguistic dimensions of adopting these letters in cross-cultural digital communication and their role in modern lexicography.

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