

Elision of Consonants in Arabic: Regularity and Irregularity

Bahaa A. Muslim Al-Zobaidy

Lect., English Department, Faculty of Education, University of Kufa, Iraq
bahaa.habeeb@uokufa.edu.iq

Abstract

This paper analyzes phonological studies of elision in Arabic. Certain deletion cues are proposed to be articulatory effects that occur naturally and involuntarily during rapid speech. The linguistic phenomenon facilitates a reduction in the effort required for lengthy utterances.

Elision, which can be defined as "omission" or "deletion," is a unique idea that appears when people change quickly, such as when letters or sounds are cut out. This phenomenon can be described as an example of economic efficiency. In addition to addressing the issue of energy conservation, it simplifies the process of expressing oneself verbally and in writing.

The data presented herein are illustrated through various forms and examples intended for direct educational purposes. The information was gathered from reputable sources such as Google Scholar, Google Books, and other online platforms. This study addresses the phonological phenomenon of elision in classical Arabic, recognizing it as a linguistic event prevalent across diverse human societies. Through this research, the study seeks to explore the definition of the omission concept within the Arabic language, thereby illuminating several aspects of phonetics and phonology.

Keywords: Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Elision, Vowel, Proper Noun, Phonemes.

1. Introduction

This manuscript seeks to elucidate the concept of elision within the context of the Arabic language, thereby engaging both academic scholars and language learners. The discourse is structured around a series of thoughtful inquiries that will be thoroughly examined:

1. What are the triggers for elision?
2. What historical and linguistic elements have facilitated the emergence of elision within Arabic phonetics?
3. How can instances of elision in Arabic be systematically classified?

According to Crystal (2005), Elision is the "omission of sounds occurring in connected speech" (p. 158). Expanding on this concept, Underhill elucidates that "elision serves as a natural adaptation of the speech apparatus to facilitate pronunciation, especially at word boundaries" (Underhill, 2009:61).

Essentially, elision is emblematic of rapid, connected speech, serving as a mechanism for reducing vocal effort and enhancing the fluency of articulation. In the fields of phonetics and phonology, elision is identified as the selective omission of certain phonemes during speech production, affecting both vowel and consonant sounds and, at times, leading to the total omission of syllables. Within the context of the Arabic language, particular sounds often evade articulation when words are pronounced quickly in colloquial settings; notably, the vowels [a], [y], and [w] frequently undergo elision (Atiq, (1963-2000): 44). Moreover, similarities can be observed between elision in Arabic and its occurrences in English, as seen by the subsequent examples in which the /t/ sound is absent in both languages: mostly [moustli] ----- [mousli] استطاع [istata 'a] ----- استطاع [istaa 'a] (v.) (To be able, can) (Hasan, 2012).

2. Historical Background

The phonological aspects of Arabic have undergone significant evolution over the many centuries it has been used, marked by numerous linguistic, phonetic, and orthographic transformations that influence not only the articulation of both vowels but also the consonant sounds used in various dialects. These transformations can be categorized into either expected or unexpected changes (Magidow, 2021).

The anticipated changes that occur often stem from a variety of historical factors, including the influence of prior societies and political circumstances that impact contemporary communities. These influences can lead to a regression towards archaic elements that have long since been abandoned or an adaptation to new developments that reflect the dynamics of changing societies, cultures, and populations. This regularity can also be observed across both urban and rural demographics, as well as in the collective attitudes of the populace. Such attitudes can foster rigid perspectives regarding language use and, in some cases, occasionally incite unrest or even civil conflict. In societies characterized by more lenient or adaptable approaches to language, one might anticipate a more permissive sound system that favors sound elision, allowing certain sounds to be dropped or altered for ease of pronunciation (Walker, 2021).

Conversely, the irregular phonetic developments call for further investigation and analysis; for example, the emergence of entirely new phonetic phenomena that often defy straightforward explanations, frequently requiring psychological or physiological interpretations to fully understand why they occur. Additionally, certain irregularities within the phonological system manifest as pronounced hard sounds, which can be attributed to a range of dialectal variations that exist within the language (Zsiga, 2024). However, these occurrences are generally perceived as stable language phenomena, suggesting that they are fixed in nature rather than permitting free variation in usage. This contrasts significantly with the phenomenon

of elision, where easier sound substitutions might occur more frequently and fluidly among speakers.

3. Categories of Elision in Arabic Consonants

Within Arabic consonant systems, there are two primary categories of elision that are identified and studied extensively: regular and irregular. The first category of elision is intrinsically associated with the internal composition of words and their structures. This indicates that the manifestation of elision is predominantly a result of the various challenges and complexities encountered during the act of pronunciation. These challenges can arise from the interaction of sounds and the phonetic characteristics of the language (Al-Jarf, 2022).

Conversely, the second category of elision is notably different as it does not conform to any defined phonological or morphological rules that typically govern language structure. This specific form of elision is frequently designated as arbitrary elision (Atiq, (1963-2000): 44), and it particularly highlights the unpredictable nature of certain linguistic phenomena within the Arabic language.

3.1 Regular Elision in Arabic:

This form of elision can be exemplified through the following points:

1. The glottal stop [ʔ], which occurs frequently in the infinitive, present, and past participles of the verb, is often omitted. This explicit practice can be seen in the examples: أكرم [ʔu?krimu], مؤكرم [mu?krimu], or مؤكرم [mu?kramu]. As a direct result of this omission, this particular verb is simply transformed as أكرم [ʔukrimu], مكرم [mukrimu], or مكرم [mukramu]. In this case, the verb (v.) emphasizes "to glorify," which denotes the act of exalting or praising oneself, while the adjective (verse) denotes "glory," which describes any position raised or forced. This particular type of glottal stop in these words are omitted. It facilitates correct pronunciation. The beneficial effects of such intonation

- changes can be seen in everyday speech, where ease of pronunciation is of great advantage. Thus, the deletion not only serves a phonological purpose but also increases the speed and efficiency of communication in spoken language (Hasan, 2012) (Khalifa, 2020).
2. The sound [w] is similarly omitted from the present form of a verb that is derived from a three-consonant past form beginning with [w], as illustrated by the following instances: وعد [waʔada], يعيد [yawʔidu] (v.) meaning "promise, promised" and وصف [wasafa], يصف [yawsifu] (v.) meaning "describe, described." The present forms thus become: يعد [yaʔidu] and يصف [yasifu], respectively. Furthermore, when the nominal form المصدر [al-masdar] is derived from the past form of such verbs, the first sound is omitted, as demonstrated in the following examples: وعد [waʔada] leads to عدة [idatan] (n.) meaning "promises," and وصف [wasafa] results in صفة [sifatan] (n.) meaning "description." It is noteworthy that the sound [w] in the present form constitutes the first sound of the verb (Hasan, 2012).
 3. Elision also occurs with the second consonant [l] in verbs consisting of three consonants, where the second consonant is followed by the vowel sound [i], and the third consonant binds to the pronoun [t] ت, serving as the subject (first person singular) and is followed by [u] indicating grammatical case, as exemplified by (Al-Shaafi'i, 2000:405): ظلت [daliltu] transforms to ظلت [daltu] (v.) translating to "I stray or stay." It should be noted that if the second consonant is followed by the vowel sound [a], the verbs are maintained in their full forms without alteration, as indicated by (Al-Mawsili, 2001: 562): هزلت [halaltu], هزلت [hazaltu], and قصت [qasastu] (v.) meaning "I solve," (v.) meaning "I shake," and (v.) meaning "I cut," respectively.
 4. Furthermore, the second consonant [r] may be omitted in the present or imperative form of a verb when followed by the vowel sound [i] and the third

consonant is linked to [n] ن, which functions as the subject (third-person feminine plural) exemplified by: قر [qarra] and يقررن [yaqrīrn] turning into يقرن [yaqrīna] (v.) meaning "you decide" and (v.) meaning "they decide." The omission in this instance arises from the convergence of two identical consonants, specifically the repetition of [r], despite the presence of [i] between them. However, a complete form is preserved without elision: قر [qarra] يقررن [yaqrīrn] becomes اقررن [aqrīrna] (v.) translating to "you decide" and (v.) "They decide" respectively.

5. Lastly, the sound [d] may assimilate with a subsequent [d] in a verb associated with [t] ت, which acts as the subject (first person singular): رددت [radadtu] simplifies to ردت [radtu] (v.) corresponding to "I return." This instance exemplifies the occurrence of sound assimilation, whereby one of the assimilated sounds is omitted (Hilal, 2004: 222; Al-Istrabadhi, 2004: 901) (Hasan, 2012).

3.2 Irregular Elision in Arabic:

This specific phenomenon of elision is characteristically termed arbitrary, signifying that it is neither phonologically nor morphologically determined, as demonstrated by the following examples:

1. The phoneme [x] in the verb بخأ [baxxin] meaning 'to spray' is omitted, resulting in the form بخ [baxin] (Al-Yamani, 2002:606).
2. In the case of the word حر [harhun] meaning 'heat' (both verb and noun), the sound [h] is elided, leading to the formation of حر [harun].
3. The consonant [n] is omitted in the preposition منذ [munḏu] meaning 'since' and the conjunction أن [inna] meaning 'that', producing مذ [muḏ] and إن [in], respectively.
4. The phoneme [f] in the interjection أف [ʔuffin] meaning 'pshaw' and the auxiliary verb سوف [sawfa] meaning 'shall/will' is elided in the construction: سوف أفعل كذا [sawfaʔ f alu kaḏa], transforming it into اف [ʔufin] and كذا سوافعل [sawaʔf alu kaḏa].

5. The sound [h] is similarly omitted in the verbs شففه [ʃafhah] meaning 'to busy' and سنهه [sanhah] meaning 'to grow', resulting in the forms شفه [ʃafah] and سنه [sanah]. This phoneme is also elided from the pronoun هذا [haða] meaning 'this/that', giving rise to ذا [ða], as evidenced in the verse quoted in (Mohammed T., 2002): [man ð alla ð i ye] fa u indahu illa bi?ið nihi] (s.) - "Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth?"
6. The phoneme [t] present in the verb إستطاع [istataʕa] meaning 'to be able to/can' is omitted, resulting in the variations استطاع [istaaʕa] or استاع [istaaʕa] (Atiq, (1963-2000): 48; Al-Mawsili, 2001: 562).
7. The sound [b] in the noun رب [rubba] meaning 'God' is elided, producing the form رب [ruba] (Ibn Asfur, 1986:562).
8. The phoneme [y] in the noun يدي [yadyun] meaning 'hand' is omitted, resulting in the word يد [yadun] (Atiq, (1963-2000): 48).
9. The sound [w] in the noun غدو [qadwun] meaning 'tomorrow' is elided, changing to the form غد [qadun]. This elision also occurs when followed by [uu], as in: مقوول [maqwuul] and مقوود [maqwuud] (adjective) meaning 'said' and (noun) meaning 'steering wheel', respectively, which alter to مقوول [maquul] and مقوود [maquud] (Al-Yamani, 2002: 567).
10. The sound [w] in the nouns سمو [samwun] meaning 'highness' and بنو [banwu] meaning 'sons' is elided, resulting in the forms اسم [ʔsmun] and ابن [ʔbnu], respectively, with the note that [ʔ] is prefixed to both (Hasan, 2012).
11. The phoneme [w] in the verb شفو [ʃafawun] meaning 'to appear' is omitted and supplant with the feminine marker ت [t], resulting in the form شفة [ʃafatun].
12. The glottal stop [ʔ] in the noun الاله [ʔilaah] meaning 'God' is elided, leading to the formation الله [ʔllaah] due to its frequent occurrence in the Holy Quran (Al-Yamani, 2002:572).

13. The glottal stop [ʔ] is also elided in the verbs ترى [tarʔa] meaning 'to observe' and أشياء [ʔiʔaaʔ] meaning 'things', resulting in the forms ترى [tara] and أشياء [ʔiʔ yaaʔ], respectively. Additionally, the glottal stop [ʔ] is omitted in the imperative forms such as أوكل [ʔukul] meaning 'to authorize' and أوامر [ʔumur] meaning 'to command', transforming into كل [kul] and مر [mur] (Ibn Asfur, 1986:559) (Hasan, 2012).
14. The glottal stop [ʔ] in the noun ابن [ʔbn] meaning 'son' is often omitted, resulting in بن [bin] when the word is placed between:
- Two proper nouns, as in هو زيد بن علي [huwa zaydu bin a'li] (s.) meaning 'He is Zaid, son of Ali'.
 - Two surnames, as in هذا أبو جعفر بن أبي محمد [haaʔa abu ja'far bin abi muhammad] (s.) meaning 'This is Abo Jaafar, son of Abe Mohammed'.
 - A proper noun and a surname, as in هذا أبو عبد الله بن زيد [haaʔa Abu Abdullah bin Zayd] (s.) meaning 'This is Abo Abdul-Allah, son of Zaid' (Al-Batliyousi, 1980:338) (Hasan, 2012).

4. Evaluation of Consonant Elision Patterns: Regular and Irregular

From this analytical viewpoint, it is evident that consonant with vowel harmony serves not only a phonetic function but also enriches the expressive capabilities of the Arabic language.

Regular elision within the Arabic language takes place as a result of the inherent structure of words, during which specific sounds are omitted to facilitate smoother pronunciation. Notable instances include:

- Omission of the glottal stop [ʔ]: For example, in verbs and participles: أكرم [ʔuʔkrimu] is transformed into أكرم [ʔukrimu], and مؤكرم [muʔkramu] becomes مكرم [mukramu].

2. Elimination of [w] in initial consonants: This occurrence is prevalent in verbs commencing with [w], as seen in وعد [waʔada] transforming to يعد [yaʔidu] and وصف [wasafa] changing to يصف [yasifu].
3. Reduction of the second consonant [l] in certain verbs: An example being ظلت [ḍaliltu] changing to ظلت [ḍaltu].
4. Dropping of [r] in verbs with repeated consonants: For instance, يقرن [yaqrīrn] reduces to يقرن [yaqrīna].
5. Assimilation and omission in consonant clusters: As illustrated by رددت [radadtu] becoming ردت [radtu].

Irregular elision occurs without adherence to consistent phonological or morphological rules and encompasses:

1. Omission of [x]: An example is بخأ [baxxin] changing to يخ [baxin].
2. Omission of [h]: Such as in حرح [harhun], which converts to حر [harun].
3. Omission of [n]: For example, منذ [munḏu] modifies to مذ [muḏ].
4. Omission of [f]: As seen in أف [ʔuffin] becoming اف [ʔufin].
5. Removal of [h] in verb forms: For instance, شففه [ʔafhah] becomes شفه [ʔafah].
6. Deletion of glottal stops in religious texts: An example is الاله [ʔlʔilaah] changing to الله [ʔllaah].
7. Omission of consonants in proper nouns and phrases: For instance, ابن [ʔbn] converts to بن [bin] when adjacent to proper nouns.

5. Concluding Remarks and Prospective Research Avenues

Arabic shows evidence of both regular or irregular elision, with irregular elision being more common in different linguistic circumstances, according to the thorough research results. The difficulties that speakers may have when trying to communicate correctly in their speech are the root cause of regular elision. On the other hand,

irregular elision lacks a discernible phonological or morphological foundation, often presenting itself as arbitrary and difficult to categorize.

Prospective inquiries and analyses in the expansive realm of Arabic phonology may be immensely satisfied by a more in-depth examination of the intricate elements that collectively shape both regular and irregular elision patterns observed in this rich language system. As such, it can be conclusively noted that the following elided consonant phonemes are present in the Arabic language: the elision of the phoneme [ʔ] (notably both regular and irregular), the elision of the phoneme [w] (also appearing in both regular and irregular forms); the systematic elision of the phoneme [l] (characteristically regular); the noteworthy elision of the phoneme [r] (which is regular); the observable elision of the phoneme [d] (again, regular); the irregular elision of the phoneme [x]; the irregular elision of the phoneme [h]; the irregular elision of the phoneme [n]; the elision of the phoneme [f] (irregular); the elision of the phoneme [t] (irregular); the elision of the phoneme [b] (irregular); and finally, the elision of the phoneme [y] (irregular).

From the exhaustive and comprehensive data presented above, it becomes unmistakably clear that irregular elision significantly overshadows regular elision in a multitude of spoken and written examples of Arabic language usage across various contexts. Regular elision, on one hand, can be largely traced back to the complexities and challenges that come with accurately pronouncing various linguistic elements in real-time conversation, but it remains fundamentally distinct from irregular elision, which does not comply with any established phonological or morphological principles. Instead, irregular elision is merely an aspect considered arbitrary, and as a result, it poses unique challenges for both language learners and linguists alike who are striving to fully understand the intricate dynamics and nuances of this language. This multifaceted nature of both elision types in Arabic not only enriches the linguistic landscape but also compellingly calls for deeper investigations to uncover

the underlying mechanisms governing these phenomena in the pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

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