

## **Phonological Features of Arabi-Malayalam**

**Dr. Saidalavi Cheerangote**

### **Abstract**

This paper intends to explore the phonological features of Arabi-Malayalam based on the Arabi-Malayalam prose and poetry. The study evaluates the peculiarities in the phonological treatment of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian loan words in this mixed language. It aims mainly at exploring the phonological modifications undergone in the loan words and the particular patterns, if any in such incorporation. The analysis reveals that the Arabi-Malayalam utilized and preserved several Proto-Dravidian phonological processes for the assimilation of loanwords. Highly Sanskritized modern standard Malayalam has given up several such features. The study concludes that the Arabi-Malayalam has devised its own de-clustering pattern in the incorporation of loan words. As a result of these processes, drastic changes have been made in the surface structure of loan words and the root forms of such words are difficult to be identified. The phonological features of these words and usages are analyzed in order to bring new lights in understanding linguistic features of this Arabi-Malayalam.

**Key words:** Arabi-Malayalam, Mappila dialect, loan words, Proto-Dravidian, Phonological process, Sanskritization.

### **Arabi-Malayalam**

Arabi-Malayalam (henceforth AM), a mixed language developed among Muslim Community in the Malabar region of Kerala is the linguistic outcome of the cultural contact between Kerala and Arabia. Basically the script used for AM is Arabic. To represent Malayalam phonemes alien to Arabic, some diacritic marks are added to the Arabic script. Various genres of prose and poetry attest the rich literary tradition of AM. A number of newspapers and periodicals were published in AM language. As a language emerged out of the contact situation, it has peculiar phonological, morphological, and semantic features. Based on the data collected from the literary text dated from 1607 AD to 1900 AD, the present study analyses the phonological peculiarities of AM of that period.

## **Fusion of Arabic with Local Languages – Development of Arabi Malayalam**

Fusion of Arabic with local languages, at least in terms of the development of script is found in most of the parts of the world where Islam was propagated. Russell Bernard (2000) proves that Arabic is among the most widely used alphabetic scripts, having spread with Islam. Since the ideologies and philosophies are largely the part of written tradition, it was natural for them to search for a script as medium to record and propagate their ideals. The uniform and standardized Malayalam script in its present form was not developed at the initial stage of propagation of Islam in Kerala. So Muslims might have found it difficult to record the Arabic phonemes in its purest form in the ‘Vattezhuthu’ or ‘Kolezhutthu’ script then prevailed. This situation made them record the things in Arabic script even though they adopted the native dialect as the undercurrent of their lingua franca. In due course, the Arabic scripts were modified to represent all the native phonemes alien to Arabic language and scripts. The effort to record the local words in Arabic, even if in a limited way, might have started even before the propagation of Islam, as part of recording the native name of local products for the purpose of trade. As V M Kutty (2006:26) attested, the language eventually developed into a full-fledged literary language along with the propagation of Islam and enormous works including prose and poetry have been come out in this language.

### **Phonological features of AM**

#### **Borrowing from Arabic Phonological System**

In contact language situation, where words are borrowed from a source language into a target language, leading to sounds and sound combinations, which did not previously exist in the source language. Often, such loanwords are assimilated into the existing phonological structure of the target language with certain modifications to fit into the phonological system of the recipient language. These modifications may result in either ‘adaptation’ (where the phonological composition of the loanword is modified) or ‘adoption’ (where loanwords are assimilated into the recipient language while preserving their original form and pronunciation in the donor language).

From the phonological analysis, it is found that the process of borrowing words from Arabic into AM had been accompanied by adoption of the Arabic phonological system into the native phonological system. The adopted phonemes are:-

/t<sup>ʃ</sup>/, /d<sup>ʃ</sup>/, /q/, /θ/, /ð/, /x/, /ɣ/, /ʕ/, /ħ/, /ð<sup>ʕ</sup>/, /s<sup>ʕ</sup>/, /z/, /f/

All these adopted phonemes except /f/ appear only with Arabic loan words, not with native words. The labio-dental fricative /f/ is largely used with native words as a substitution for labial plosive /p/, for /p/ is absent in Arabic phonemic system and /f/ is phonemically closer to it, with regard to the effort for pronunciation.

It is interesting to note that the phonological change like consonant and vowel epenthesis, consonant deletion, consonant substitution, vowel lowering, and vowel strengthening rarely occurs with Arabic loan words in the text analysed under this study. The social force behind this might be the notion of purity assigned to Arabic language as the language crept into the native dialect mainly through religious propagation.

### Phonological Variation in AM

Several phonemic deviation and adaptation is found in the earlier AM works, either due to the interference of Arabic language or with the errors committed, as in the cases of inter-language. The tendency to retain the dialect features and old Malayalam features are also noted in this study.

Scholars like John H. Schumann (1978) have tried to make a comparative analysis on the deviated forms in pidginization and second language acquisition. In the case of AM, phonemic variations are much complicated, it is very difficult to demarcate the contact-induced variations, and variations occurred as a result of the tendency to retain dialect features in the written literature.

Apart from the Arabic and Malayalam hybridization in this mixed register, many Sanskrit loan forms are found in AM. Unlike in Arabic loan forms, the Sanskrit loan words are found to be undergone regular phonological changes in line with the native phonological system of the then Malabar dialect of Malayalam and rarely with the Arabic phonological system. The phonemic variations in AM are compared with the standard Malayalam with the following examples followed by a detailed analysis.

### Examples for Phonemic Variations in Vowel Sounds

a/a:	(tappə-----ta:pə)	a/i	(a:dariccə --a:dirittə)
a/e	(e:kija—e:kije)	ə/i	(veccə---vecci)
i/u	(arikil—arukil)	i/e	(ila-ela)
u/e	(urumb-erumb)	u/o	(kuravə- koravə)

a-ai	(diʃa-tiʃai)	/e/-/ye/	(enaccal-yenaccal)
i-a	(kuʃirma- kuʃarma)		

### Examples for Phonemic Variations in Consonants

Sl. No	Phonemic Variation	Word Initial Position	Word Medial Position	Standard Malayalam Form and contextual meaning
1	k > v		[mutuvə]	[mutukə] sholder
2	k > c		[toʃiccal]	[tozikkal] kick
3	gh > k	[ko:ʃam]		[gho:ʃam] Festival
			[akilai]	[akhilam] Entire
		[ko:ra]		[kho:ra] terrifying
4	ŋ > nk		[ba:nki]	[va:ŋŋi] Bought
5	c > s	[salanam]		[calanam] Movement
			[arasan]	[aracan] King
6	c > ʃ		[vaʃanam]	[vacanam] Word
7	c > t		[taritta]	[dharicca] Worn
8	c > ʃ		[o:ʃa]	[occa] Sound
		[ʃanʃa]		[canʃa] Dispute
9	ʃ > t		[nitam]	[niʃam] sure
10	ŋ > nt		[aŋinta]	[aŋiŋna] Worn
11	ŋ > n	[na:ŋŋal]		[ŋaŋŋal] We
		[neri]		[neri] Folding of cloth
12	ŋ > n		[bannam]	[vaŋŋam] Thickness
13	t > d		[arudə]	[arutə]
			[cadi]	[cati] betrayal
14	t > ʃ		[paʃankam]	[patankam] butterfly
15	th > t		[ta:nam]	[stha:nam] Position
16	d > t	[te:vi]		[de:vi] Goddess
		[tu:dan]		[du:tan] Messenger
		[taraŋi]		[daraŋi] Earth

Sl. No	Phonemic Variation	Word Initial Position	Word Medial Position	Standard Malayalam Form and contextual meaning
		[tiʃai]		[diʃai] Direction
17	dh>t		[po:tam]	[bho:dham] Consciousness
		[taritt]		[dharicc] Worn
18	dh>d		[vidi]	[vidhi] Fate
			[adipadi]	[adhipati] Ruler
19	n>m		[timma:n]	[tinna:n] To eat
20	nn>nɳ		[enɳa}	[enna] (That) Relative Clause
21	p>f	[foli]		[poli] Lie
		[firake]		[pirake] Behind
22	p>v		[ko:vam]	[ko:pam] Anger
23	p>b		[di:bam]	[di:pam] Lamp
24	b>p		[saptam]	[ʃabdām] Sound
25	bh>p	[pa:kkiyam]		[bha:gjam] Fortune
		[pa:vi]		[bha:vi] Future
			[na:vi]	[na:bhi] Abdomen
26	bh>v		[a:varaṅgam]	[a:bharaṅgam] Ornament
27	bh>b	[bu:mi]		[bhu:mi] Earth
28	j>ʃ		[uʃaram]	[ujaram] height
29	r>l	[laavə]		[raavə] Night
30	v>b	[balli]		[valli] Firend (girl)
		[baʃi]		[vazi] Way
		[bi:ʃi]		[vi:ʃi] Blew
		[ban]		[van] Strong/big
		[ba:ṅgi]		[va:ṅgi] Bought
31	v>k		[cakam]	[ʃavam] Dead body
32	v>m	[ma:ṅgi]		[va:ṅgi] Bought
33			[cuvaɳə]	[cumaɳə] step/stride
34	s>ʃ		[ke:ʃari]	[ke:sari] Lion
35	ʃ>c	[cakam]		[ʃavam] Dead body

Sl. No	Phonemic Variation	Word Initial Position	Word Medial Position	Standard Malayalam Form and contextual meaning
		[caram]		[ʃaram] Arrow
36	ʃ>ʃ		[manuʃjan] [viʃajam] [ʃe:ʃam]	[manuʃjan] Human beings [viʃajam] Theme [ʃe:ʃam] After
37	ʃ>ʃ		[biʃe:ʃam]	[viʃe:ʃam] Special
38	h>k		[pakajan]	[pahajan] Arrogant man
39	z>j		[ta:zɛ]	[ta:je] Below
40	z>ʃ		[baʃi] [cuʃantu] [eʃuttu] [aʃaku]	[vazɪ] Way [cu:zɪnu] Surrounded [eʒuttu] Letter [aʒaku] Beauty
41	z>ʃ		[toʃutu] [moʃi] [miʃi] [piʃa] [ba:ʃum]	[tozutu] [moʒi] Say [mizi] Eye [piʒa] Penalty [va:zɪm] will rule
42	z>j		[tojil]	[toʒil] Job
43	ʃ>ɳ		[piɳarttu]	[piʃarttu] Splitted
44	rr>tt		[mattə]	[marrə] Other
45	/kʃ/>/ʃk/		[apeʃka] [laʃkaɳam]	[apekʃa] Appeal [lakʃaɳam] Symptom
46	nk>kk		[cokkar]	[ʃonkar] Handsome

### Analysis on Phonemic Variations in Consonants

The patterns furnished in the above table clearly indicate the phonemic variations from the standard Malayalam. The limitations to represent all loan phonemes, limitations in transliteration and tendency to find affinity with Arabic language might have been the reasons for these phonemic variations. The notable variations affirm that AM had used the phonemic pattern of the then Malabar dialect of Malayalam which still retains several proto-Dravidian phonological features (see Sreenathan, M : 2015). The features identified are given below:

- **Aspirated Sounds to Unaspirated Sounds**

There is a tendency to de-aspirated the aspirated

(E.g. kha>ka, dha>da, bha>ba) /ghoṣam/ (Festive) > /koṣam/ (Festive)

- **Absence of Clusters at the Word Initial Position**

The clusters are not used at word initial position. It might have been come up either as a conscious effort to maintain its affinity with Arabic or as a tendency to retain Proto-Dravidian feature found in most of the Malabar dialects. It is to be noted that the clusters are not used at the word initial position both in Arabic and Proto-Dravidian

/sthaanam/ (Place/Position) > /taanam/ (Place/Position)

/kṣaṇam/ > /ṣaṇam/ Abrupt

See the table for more examples.

- **Absence of Voiced Unaspirated at the Word Initial Position**

The Voiced Unaspirated does not occur at the word initial position. All the Voiced Unaspirated phonemes at the word initial position are found to be changed into Voiceless Unaspirated. (E.g. /diṣa/ > /tisa/ (Direction). However, in Arabic loan words the /d/ occurred at the word initial is retained. See the table for more details.

- **Absence of /h/ in Native Word Initial Position**

No Malayalam words begin with /h/ and in such cases /h/ at the word initial position is deleted (E.g. /hitam/>/itam/). However, Arabic loan words with /h/ at word initial position are retained. This may be due to the conscious effort to maintain the purity assigned to the classic Arabic language, for Arabic being the language of Quran is regarded by the speech community as a sacred language.

- **Absence of /r/ in Native Word Initial Position**

It is also noted that the words are not begun with /r/. In such cases the vowel /i/ is added before /r/ (E.g. /raṇam/ > /iraṇam/ (War)

- **Addition of /e/ at the Word Final Position**

There is a tendency to stop the words with /e/, where /a/ occurred in Standard Malayalam.

/tirudiyil/ >/tirudiyile/ (in a hurry)

/otta/>/otte/ (Suitable/Proper)

/urukunna/>/urukunne/ (Melting)

- **De-clustering of Sanskrit Loan Words**

There is a tendency to de-cluster the consonants at word initial and medial positions in all Sanskrit loan words by way of epenthesis. Epenthesis refers to the process of inserting a phoneme (either vowel or consonant) in a word to break the consonant cluster system. It is usually motivated by the need to meet the phonotactic constraints of a recipient language. Consonant epenthesis involves the insertion of a consonant between vowels. Furthermore, epenthesis also involves ‘Anaptyxis’, which refers to a process of inserting a vowel between consonants. The table below indicates the de-clustering patterns in AM.

<b>Word in Standard Malayalam</b>	<b>De-clustered &amp; De-Aspirated Forms in AM</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
/mukhjam/	/mukkijam/	Major
/marja:da/	/marija:da/	Manner
/antya/	/antiya/	The last
/vijwa:sam/	/visuva:sam/	Belief
/swapa:dam/	/supa:dam/	Ones own feet
/satwaram/	/sattu:ram/	Soon
/prata:pi/	/farada:vi/	Those who held high position
/cakram/	/cakkaram/	Wheel
/sraddha/	/sarada/	Attention
/pralo:bham/	/faralo:pam/	temptation
/stri/	/siri/	Woman

/stha:nam/	/ta:nam/	Position
/putri/	/puttiri/	Daughter
/drti/	/diruti/	Hasty
/drṣṭi/	/diruṣṭi/	Gaze
/hrdaya/	/iruda/	Heart
/patni/	/pattini/	Wife
/citram/	/cittiram/	Picture
/tantram/	/tantiram/	Tactics
/trdi:ja/	/tirudija/	The third

The de-clustered forms might have been preferred in order to make the loan words more easily pronounceable. The language of the commoners found place in AM, which was less sanskritized. It might have preferred the phonemes used only in the then Mappila dialect. This affirms the fact that the base of AM is the dialect of Mappilas of Malabar.

Normally Anaptyxis (vowels are added in between the clusters) is used to make de-clustered forms. A few patterns of Anaptyxis can be found in the examples from the Table.

- If the final consonant of the cluster is /y/, the de-clustering vowel would be /i/
- When the final consonant of the cluster is /v/, the de-clustering vowel would be /u/
- In the /r/ ending clusters, the immediate vowel that comes after the cluster is normally used for de-clustering (Eg. /sraddha-/sarada/, /putri--/puttiri/). However, exceptions is found in the clusters followed by /m/ sound, where either /i/ or /a/ is used as de-clustering vowels (E.g. /cakram-/cakkaram/, /tantram-/tantiram/)
- In the triple consonant clusters, where /r/ comes between first and third consonants, the de-clustering vowel for the first two is /i/ and for the second and third is /u/. (E.g. /trdiya/--/tirudiya/, /drti--/diruti/)
- If the clusters appear at the word initial one of the consonants is deleted. (E.g. /stri/ --/siri/--/sthaanam/--/taanam/, /kṣaṇam/ - /ṣaṇam/)). The exception is found with the word initial

cluster, where one of the consonants is /r/. In such cases, vowel is added for de-clustering.  
(E.g. /prata:pi/ --/farada:vi/)

## Conclusion

Among Arabic loan phonemes in AM, only /f/ crept in Malayalam word as a substitution of /p/. It is to be noted that the script to represent /p/ was absent in the earlier stages of AM as it was alien to Arabic script. A further exploration has to be made to confirm whether it was a phonological or orthographic constraint. Even though /h/, /ʃ/, /ɾ/, /l/, and /d/ are common to Malayalam and Arabic, they occur only with Arabic loan word at initial position. Among native phonemes /ŋ/, /ɲ/, / ɳ/, /l/, /ɽ/, /h/, /t/ and /r/ do not occur at word initial position. Unlike in Arabic loan forms, the Sanskrit loan words are found to be underwent regular phonological transformations in line with the native phonological system of the then Malabar dialect of Malayalam and rarely with the Arabic phonological system. The limitations to represent all loan phonemes, limitations in transliteration and tendency to find affinity with Arabic language might have the reasons for these phonemic variations. The phonemic variations identified in this study affirm that AM was more oriented towards the then Malabar dialect of Malayalam.

---

## References

- Abu, O. (1956). Arabi malayala sahithya charithram (Mal). Kottayam.: NBS.
- Bayley, Robert. (1994). Consonant cluster reduction in Tejano English. *Language Variation and Change* 6:303-326.
- Boretzky, Norbert. (1991). Contact-induced sound change. *Diachronica* 8: 1-16.
- Ioup, Georgette, and Steven Weinberger. (1987). *Interlanguage Phonology: the Acquisition of a Second Language Sound System*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- John H. Schumann (1978) *The Pidginization Process: A Model for Second Language Acquisition*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents
- Kareem, Muhammeed Abdul, K K and Aboobacker K, (2005) *Mahakavi Moyeen Kutty Vydharude Sampurna Kritikal (Mal and AM) Two Volumes*, Mahakavi Moyeen Kutty Vydhar Smaraka Committee, Kondotty
- Kutty, V M (2014), *Mappilappattinte Lokam (mal).Lipi*: Calicut
- Panikkar, G K. (1973). *A description of Ernad Dialect of Malayalam (Mal)*. Thiruvananthapuram. : DLA.

- Russell Bernard (2000). Language and Scripts in Contact: Historical Perspectives. In Literacy: An International Handbook (Ed. Daniel A Wagner et al). Colarado: Westview Press
- Thomason, Sarah G. (2001). Language contact: an introduction. Edinburgh & Washington DC: Edinburgh University Press - Georgetown University Press.
- Varrier, K M. Prabhakara. & Augustin, Santa. (1998). Adhunika Bhasha Shastram (Mal). Trivandrum : Kerala Bhasha Institute.
- Veera, S K., and Swami, N, Krishna. (1989). Modern linguistics: An introduction, New Delhi : Oxford University Press.
- Weinreich, Uriel. (1979). Language in Contact: Findings and Problems. New York: Mouton Publishers.
- 

Dr. Saidalavi Cheerangote  
Associate Professor  
Department of Linguistics  
Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University  
Vakkad 676502, Tirur  
Malappuram  
Kerala  
India  
[saidmuty@gmail.com](mailto:saidmuty@gmail.com)