



Approximant sounds in English and Arabic

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ABSTRACT

Approximants a class of consonant sounds that are found in English and Arabic. The common approximants are (l,r,w,j). These sounds are produced by the same organs of speech in both languages. The present study aims at shedding light on approximant sounds in two languages: English and Arabic to give an investigation of the phonetic features of approximants for Arabic and English speakers as well as the change of articulation for some approximant sounds in connected speech. The current study shows the distributions of Approximant sounds in English and Arabic and gives some information about the characteristics, points of articulation, variation of these sounds as well as differences in produces and classification of those sounds in addition to allophones of approximants in the English and Arabic languages Consequently, the study arrives at certain conclusions. It is found that there are similarities and differences between English approximant and Arabic approximant. In short this study tries to compare between English and Arabic approximants sounds.

1. Introduction

Arabic language has some consonant sounds that are existed in English language. The present study deals with the approximant sounds that are found in both languages English and Arabic. These sounds are produced by the same organs of speech in both languages. The current study includes six sections. The first section is an introductory while section two gives a historical background between Arabic and English that shows the differences in origin that makes the two languages have different sound system. Section three explains the term approximant as well as it describes approximant sounds [l,r,w,j] in the English language showing their manner of articulation, point of articulation and voicing. In addition, gives the different distribution of these sounds. Section four explains approximants in Arabic language [l,r,w,j,m,n,ʕ] showing their manner

of articulation, point of articulation and voicing. The focus will be directed towards the variation of these sounds. Section five is a conclusion which shows that there are some points of similarity and differences between English and Arabic approximants.

2.1. Historical Background Between Arabic and English

Owens (2006:2) states that "The fundamental object of any historical linguistics is the reconstruction of a proto-language. This is a well-known and established concept which will be familiar to most readers, and which is not dependent as a concept or as a method of application on the circumstances of any individual language or language family. The initial goal of a historical treatment of Arabic should be the reconstruction of a proto –language. Curiously, among the many terms in the Western Arabic tradition, proto-Arabic is one relatively rarely encountered, though for present purposes it is the key object of study". The relation between Arabic and other languages such as English, Hebrew and other European languages is a strong one. Arabic language originally belongs to Proto-Semitic family while other languages such as English comes from Proto-Germanic origin which is closely related to all the Proto –Germanic languages including Frisian, Dutch, German, Danish. These languages have almost the same sound system and grammatical structure (Lyons,1990:84-191). Arabic with its own phonetic and phonological system, has a real and close contact to other languages, especially English. Phonetics is the study of speech sounds emphasizing the description of speech sounds according to their production, transmission and perceptual features. Since each language has its own system, Arabic and English share common consonants sounds such as /l,r,w,j/. There are some similarities and differences between the two systems.



2.2. Sound System in English and Arabic: The Relation Between Phonetics and Phonology

The terms phonetics and phonology are commonly used in discussion of the sounds, they appear with some clear distinction, and sometimes more or less interchangeably. Actually there is an important and fundamental distinction, but at the same time there is an obvious and equally fundamental connection. Briefly speaking, one could say that phonetics and phonology are two ways of looking at the same thing. Crystal (2003:236) defines phonetics as the study of the sounds made by the human speech sounds. It is customary to recognize different branches of phonetics. Acoustic phonetics studies the transmission of speech sounds through the air from the speaker to the hearer and is thus concerned with measuring the movement and vibration of the air. This involves investigation within the framework of physics and an acoustic phonetician deals with speech wave forms and studies their frequency and amplitude in much the same way as a physicist or acoustic engineer. Auditory phonetics is the study of the hearing of speech sounds and deals with questions as how perceive and recognize different speech sounds. Such investigation takes place largely within the framework of psychology. Finally, articulatory phonetics is the study of the production of speech sounds by the human vocal apparatus, of how a speaker produces, by means of the organs of speech, the sounds people use in speech and how we can classify and describe such sounds. When talking about phonetics, articulatory phonetics is usually meant. (Crystal, 2003:236)

Phonetics, then deals with all speech sounds. It tries to describe how they are made, to classify them and to give some idea of their nature. Catford (1988:187) elaborates by saying that phonetic investigation shows that human beings are capable of producing an enormous number of speech sounds. The range of articulatory possibilities is vast. Yet we notice that each language uses

only some of the sounds that are available. Each language has its own particular selection from all the available sounds, so that no two languages have exactly the same set of speech sounds, each language organizes and makes use of sounds in its own particular way. The study of the selection that each language makes from the vast range of possible speech sounds and of how each language organizes and uses the selection it makes is called phonology. (ibid)

Al-Hamad (2002:24-25) says that western phoneticians take another turn in studying human sounds by studying patterns of speech sounds of a particular language without taking into consideration the articulatory mechanism in human being. He asserts that the study of sound system is not valid without knowing its articulatory properties therefore studying sounds as a physical phenomenon is useless without applying it to a specific language, so the two aspects should not be separated from each other since phonetics and phonology are complementary aspects in studying speech sounds in all languages. Thus Mahmood Al-Saaran says it is impossible to separate phonetics from phonology so it is preferable to put both of them under the same umbrella which is “the science of linguistic sounds”. Yule (2010:26) states that phonetics as the general study of the characteristics of speech sounds that can be classified into three branches: articulatory, acoustic and auditory. On the other hand he defines phonology as the study of the ways in which speech sound form systems and patterns. We see that both phonetics and phonology are concerned with the same subject matters, that is with speech sounds as produced by the human vocal apparatus, but they look at this subject matter from different points of view.

2.3. Classification of sounds in English and Arabic

English language has twenty four consonant sounds and twenty vowels sounds while Arabic has thirty consonants and six vowels; both of them are classified according to three criteria: point of articulation, manner of

articulation and voicing. English phoneticians have agreed upon classifying English into consonants and vowels then arranging the two categories into subdivision. So; consonants are classified into plosives, fricatives, affricates and approximants. This classification is well known and accepted by all, while Arabic classification of Arabic sounds is somehow controversial. Al-Hamad (2002:101) elaborates the reasons behind this one. Firstly, the closeness and overlap between the articulatory organs are considered to be produced by three different articulators by Sybawaihi while modern Arabic phonetician considered them as one articulator sounds. Secondly, the process of producing Arabic sounds has slightly changed nowadays from that of old standard Arabic.

He adds some modern Arabic phoneticians were highly influenced by western phoneticians. They adopted their classification of English sounds which is very misleading and confusing because Arabic sounds are well established classification as well as well-known phonetic terminology (ibid:101) So, at the time when English phonetics reached its highest point of assurance in classifying English sounds systems; Arabic phonetics is slightly lost between traditional classification of Arabic sounds and modern classification built upon wrong basis depending on English phonetics.

3.1. From frictionless continuant to approximants

O' Conner (1974:149) says that friction sounds are produced by two articulators touching each other firmly while sounds pronounced without direct contact are called frictionless continuant.

Approximant sounds are /l/,/r/,/j/,/w/ were classified into semi-vowels, those sounds are /j/,/w/ in which the two sounds are treated as vowel glides, while /l/,/r/ are classified as frictionless constituents because the two sounds have



neither the closure nor the noise component of consonantal articulation. (Gimson,1980:193).

Crystal (2003:190) declares that frictionless continuant is a term refers to a class of speech sound that function as consonant but it lack the closure of plosives and non- friction like all nasals, lateral, vowels and many varieties /r/.

Ladefoged (2015:17) defines approximants as a gesture in which two articulators are moved toward each other, but the vocal folds being narrowed to such point that a turbulent airstream is made.

3.2. Approximants in English

Crystal (2003:30) defines approximants as a general term used by phoneticians to refer to a class of speech sounds according to their manner of articulation. These sounds are produced by touching two articulators without causing noticeable friction.

Lorenzo (2005:32-33) states that the way of pronounced approximant sounds is similar to fricatives. Both articulators (upper and lower) touching each other but the space between them is wider than of fricatives and the air escapes through the mouth more or less causing friction such sounds /r/ post-alveolar.

Reetz and Jongman (2009:37) mention that the basic characteristics of approximant sounds is the total obstruction of oral passage and the articulators do not come close together.

"The term approximant is usually used only for consonants that it is an articulation in which the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a complete consonant such as a plosive, nasal or fricative". (Roach,2010:48)

3.2.1. Approximant /l/

"A lateral /l/ is a type of consonant sound produced by a stricture of complete closure in the center of the vocal tract, so that there is lateral passage of the air-stream, round the side or sides of the obstruction". (Abercrombie,1969:50)

"/l/ is articulated by means of partial closure, on one or both sides where the air stream is able to escape through the mouth. If the air escapes from one side (unilateral) a block will be made on one side between the tip of the tongue and the upper side teeth" (Gimson,1980:199).

MacCarthy (2009:120) describes /l/ as voiced-alveolar lateral. It is produced by raising the tip of the tongue towards the alveolaridge leaving the rest of the tongue down, permitting the air to escape laterally over the sides of the tongue. The vocal folds are vibrated slightly.

3.2.1.1. The distribution of /l/

Al-Hamash (1976:44) states that /l/ is found in different positions initially, medially and finally of words. It has two main variants clear /l/ and dark /l/ and the rule that governing their use:

1- Clear /l/ occurs before vowels and semi-vowels such as:

- a- Word- initial: lady, look,light

b-Word- medial: build

c-Word-final: kill

2- Dark /l/ occurs before consonants and at the ends of words such as:

a-Word- final after vowels: tall, kill

b-After vowel, before consonant: self, build

Cruttended (2014:217-2018) classifies /l/ into different forms as:

a- clear /l/ before vowels e.g. let, leave, glad, blow, yellow, collar

b- b- devoiced clear /l/

c- fully devoiced clear /l/ after voiceless plosives in a prominence syllables
e.g. play, please, plant

d- Partially devoiced [ɫ] after voiceless fricatives e.g sloppy, slink, slow

e- Dark /ɫ/: in final position after vowels: feel, fill, doll or Before
consonant, after vowel e.g. help, salt, cold

3 - Syllabic [ɫ] e.g. table, middle

a- Syllabic [ɫ] partially devoiced after voiceless consonants e.g. apple,
little, awful

b- b - Possible syllabic [ɫ] it occurs initially in accented syllable e.g.
believe, select

3.2.2. *Approximant /r/*

Singh and Singh (1976:190-191) present a general description for this sound by stating that the consonant /r/ is uniquely different from all others consonants in English . In terms of its relation with other consonants, it is considered closet to /w/ and /l/. In traditional phonetic terminology, the consonant /r/ is a member of a sound class comprising other consonants like /w,l,j/ and which is called glides because of their extreme flexibility in assuming the rule of either a consonant or a vowel.



3.2.2.1 The distribution of /r/

Gimson (1980:207) mentions that /r/ is a common approximant of English. Actually /r/ has several variants including:

- 1- frictionless continuant post-alveolar
- 2- Alveolar tap intervocalic position
- 3- A lingual roll in highly stylized speech

Roach (2009:50) shows that /r/ is articulated in which the tongue curled back words with the tip raised. There are two kinds of accent:

1. Rhotic accent (American accent) this kind has (r) at the end of words before pause and before consonantal words like car, ever, hard, verse
2. Non-rhotic accent (British accent) : in this kind of accent (r) occurs before vowels in words like red, arrive, hearing.

Cruttenden (2014:223-224) describes different allophones of r as follows:

- 1- GB /r/ when it is followed by vowel or when it preceded by voiced consonant except /d/:
 - a - At the beginning of words e.g. reed, raw, rude
 - b - At the end of words (linking r) e.g. poor old man, for all.
 - c - Fully voiced /ɹ/ after a voiced consonant e.g. dress, grey, bright.
- 2- Fricative /ɹ/ after /d/ e.g. drive, dry or in rapped speech e.g. bedroom, wide road, headrest.
- 3- A completely devoiced fricative /ɹ̥/ after accented /p,t,k/ e.g. prince, try, cream. A partially devoiced where /r/ precedes unaccented /p,t,k/ e.g. upright, acrobat, slight devoiced /r/ may occur after unaccented fricatives final in word or syllable e.g. birth right, surf riding.

- 4- The approximant variety /ɹ/ can be substituted by an alveolar tap /ɾ/ in the intervocalic position e.g. very, sorry, marry, forever where a single tap is made by the tip of the tongue on the alveolar ridge.

Trill [R] or fricative /ɹ/, produced by the tip of the tongue vibrating against the roof of the mouth. Retroflexed /r/ is usually used by American speakers, it is produced by curling the tip of the tongue back behind the alveolar ridge as in bird, farm, lord.

Syllabic /r/ when it occurs final position and preceded by a consonant .

3.2.3. *Semi-vowels*

Jones (1972:204) states that semi-vowels represented by the letters ‘w’ and ‘j’ these sounds are transitional produced with weak force or no obstruction. They are always followed or preceded directly by a vowel. The tongue moves rapidly either toward or away from a neighboring vowel.

Semi-vowels voiced on – glide that resemble weak vowels in articulation. English has two semi-vowels: /w/ and /j/ Actually, the major differences between a vowel and semi-vowel is one of position, i.e., semi-vowels occur before other vowel only. The phone [j] is a vowel or part of diphthong in *fine* while it is a semi-vowel in *yet*. The same is true of the phone [w] in *cow* and *we*. (Al- Hamash 1979:24-25)

Al-Hamash (1976:47-48) says that /w/ a voiced bilabial semi-vowel. It is found initially or medially of words. It must be followed by a vowel or a diphthong. E.g:

a-Word-initially: we, work, wet

b- Word-medially: queen, swim, twenty

He adds (1976:47) that /j/ voiced palatal semi-vowels. It can be found initially and medially of words. It must be followed by a vowel sound or diphthong, e.g:

a-Word-initially: you, yet, unity

b-Word-medially: new, few, pure

Roach (2009:) state that "semi-vowels has two sounds /j/ and /w/. phonologically their function as consonants but phonetically like vowels. The point of articulation of /j/ is the same that of a front close vowel such as /i:/ but it is very short. In the same way /w/ is produced by raising the back of the tongue toward the velum and rounding the lips".

Cruttended (2014:228) defines semi-vowels as “ A rapid vocalic glide onto a syllabic of greater steady duration. In English the semi-vowels /j/ and /w/ glide from position of approximately /i:/ (with spread or neutral lips) and /u:/ (with rounded lips) respectively”. The vocalic glide depends on the sounds that follow them e.g./j/ glides to /i:/ in *yeast* while it glides to /ɒ/ in *yacht*. /w/ on the other hand has a starting point that closer before /u:/ in *woo* than /ɒ/ in *what*. There function as consonants is illustrated by the fact that the articles have their consonantal form when they come before /j,w/ i.e. *the yard, a yacht, the west, a wasp*. (ibid)

3.2.3.1 Labio-velar /w/

MacCarthy (1969:145) describes the point of articulation of /w/ as the following:

- 1- The glide w is produced by raising the back of the tongue towards the velum and simultaneously rounding the lips.
- 2- /w/ is labio-velar or rounded velar. e.g: *sweet, quick*

Lorenzo (2005:32) says that /w/ is articulated by the tongue in position similar to that of back half-close to close vowel depending upon the degree of openness of the following sound.

3.2.3.2 The distribution of /w/

"If /w/ is preceded by /u:/, u/ it will be rounded than when it precedes other vowels compare *woo, wood, war* with *what, west, we*. /w/ is different from the vowel /u:/ in which the lip rounding in /w/ is closer and more energetic than that presented by /u:/ which is clearly shown in such pairs as *ooze, woos*. The raising of the soft palate takes place with vocal folds vibrate but when /w/ follows fortis consonants it is devoiced. When /w/ follows an accented /t,k/, it will be completely voiceless /w/ or /m/. Then it will be called voiceless labio-velar fricative. The phoneme; thus, will be bilabial friction rather than a glide. Notice the difference between *swoop, swoon- soup, soon* the two pairs are distinguished not only by the stronger lip action associated with /w/ but also by the partial devoicing friction". (Gimson, 1980:2015)

Bauman (2009:138) classifies /w/ from phonetic point of view into two allophones:

a- /w/ voiced labio-velar approximant or glide.

b- /m/ voiceless labio-velar fricative.

Both are characterized by lip – rounding, giving them the labial description. In addition, the tip of the tongue is lowered behind the incisors, the body of the tongue is raised towards the velum, similar to that of /u/ vowel. The velum is elevated during the articulation of /w/ with a simultaneous vocal folds vibration (ibid).

[w] occurs in different position either initially or medially, it doesn't occur at the end of words such as:

a- initial [w]: *weed, wet, wag, waspa*

b- After accented stops [t,k]: *twig, queen, twin, quell*

c- After /sk/, accented voiceless fricative or in unaccented syllable following /p,t,k/ slightly devoiced /w/ *square, thwart, swim*

d- Intervocalic or following voiced consonant e.g. *a way, in ward, always, dwindle* (Cruttended, 2014:232-233)

We can distinguish from [M] in that words begin with *wh* are pronounced with the voiceless labial-velar fricative [M] in opposition to other words in which the approximant [w] is pronounced such as *when, wine, whether, weather*. Sometimes a juncture [w] glide may be heard between /u:, u, au/ and the following equivalent to the [w] phoneme in which the vowel finishing point is neither prominent nor glide long enough as [w], examine the two pairs: *no air / /and no wear / /*.(ibid)

3.2.3.3 Unrounded palatal approximant /j/

MacCarthy (1965:146) describes the point of articulation of /j/ as the following:

- 1- The corner of the lips are moved away from each other and the front part of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate.
- 2- /j/ is produced by raising the soft palate.
- 3- /j/ is palatal sound. e.g: *yes, opinion*

Al-Hamash (1979:21) states that /j/ is the only English palatal consonant. It is articulated by the blade of the tongue is approaching the hard palate. Reetz & Jongman (2009:39) say the sound /j/ appears in two positions either at the beginning or in the middle of words, but not in final position like *you, bayou* and it appears between certain consonants in words like *few, pure, beautiful*. English British speakers also produce /j/ as a gliding sound between a vowel and alveolar plosive in word like *due*, GA speakers produce *do* and *due* a like.

Bauman (2009:139) shows two kinds of /j/, voiced mediopalatal approximant or glide. It is produced when the body of the tongue is in a position

approximating /i/. Yet, it is more flattened in the midsection of the roof of the mouth. There is a rapid gliding transition from /j/ to the following vowel. The velum is raised during the articulation and the vibration of the vocal folds.

The vocalic allophones of /j/ are articulated by the tongue reaches the position for the close-mid to close front vowel (according to the degree of openness of the following sound) and moving immediately to the position of the following sound, the lips are generally neutral or spread, it takes the shape of the following vowel as in *you, yawn*. (Cruttended,2014:229-231)

Ladefoged (2015:17) explains “in saying the first sound in yacht, the front of the tongue is raised toward the palatal area of the roof of the mouth, but it doesn’t come enough for articulation to take place”.

4. Arabic approximants

Al-Hamad (2002:110-111) says that Arabic consonant sounds are classified into tenses sounds (plosive) neither tense nor flabby are meddler sounds. He says that Sybawaihi defines tense sounds as sounds made with abstraction while flabby sounds made with friction; then he adds other sounds are neither tense nor flabby, then are in between (meddler). Ibn-Jini uses the phrase [l,m,j,r,ʕ,n,a] to refer to those sounds between tenseness and flabbiness.

But then [a] was excluded and considered as a vowel it is an airy sound. Since Arabic consonant sounds are classified into tense, flabby and middler sounds than are classified into:

- a- semi-vowels [w,j]
- b- Between tenseness and flabbiness [ʕ]
- c- Sounds that are tense in one place and flabby in another [l,r,m,n] (ibid)

There is a big controversial about considering [w,j] as middle sounds, since middle sounds are produced with some abstraction of air like tense (plosive) yet

the airflows as it flows for flabby (fricatives). So; [l,w] have a dual property, they are consonants if they are flabby (fricatives) rather than middle sounds; and they are vowels when there is a lack [l,r,m,n] while [ʕ] needs to be clarified (Al-Hamad,2002:115)

In conclusion, middle sounds in Arabic phonetics is one of the most controversial concepts because of the different interpretations for the concept between classical and modern phoneticians. In this research the two approximant will be used to define middle sounds since it talks about the same concept in which sounds are produced with articulators came close together without causing a friction.

4.1 Nasals [m,n]

Al-Hamad (2002:138) considers nasals to be approximant sounds because they are similar to vowel in which the air flows in the mouth without any obstruction while, air flows in the nose for nasals.

Omer (2006:115) emphasizes that nasal sounds have the same properties as vowels for the free passage of air through the nose, but there is a little stoppage in the mouth.

Sharqi (2015:149) mentions that /m/ is an approximant sound. /m/ in Arabic and English language can occur in different positions. It is called bilabial (the upper lip and lower lip are closed together the air doesn't pass through the mouth ,but it escapes through the nose with talking into consideration the complete closer that happens in the mouth. /n/ is called alveolar nasal consonant. It is produced the tip of the tongue in contact with the alveolar ridge closer to the upper front teeth the velum is lowered. It is found in both English and Arabic in all positions. initially [مكتب] medially [طماطم] finally [كم].

4.1.1 The distribution of /m/

Al-Aqrabawi (2003:63) states that the bilabial /m/ can occur in all positions:

- 1- Initially, before short vowels, long vowel and diphthong: man ‘who’ , min ‘a preposition’ murr ‘bitter’ ma: ‘ a negative form’ mi:l ‘mile’ mawt ‘death’ .
- 2- Medially, namla ‘ant’
- 3- Finally, karam ‘ generosity’

4.1.2 The distribution of /n/

Al-Aqrabawi (2003:149) points that the Arabic nasal /n/ can occur in all

- 1- Initially, before short vowels, long vowel and diphthong: /niba:l/ ‘arrows’ , /nalʕab/ ‘we play’ /ni:l/ ‘Nile’ /nala/ ‘ got’ /n
- 2- Medially, /ʕani:d/ ‘stubbon
- 3- Finally, /qarn/ ‘ horn’

Al-Hamad (2002:84-85) says that Sybawaihi put /n/ in two forms: original /n/ and light /n/; alveolar while light /n/ (when it is not marked by a vowel) sakinah is nasalized. He separated the two terms (alveolar-nasal) from each other, but this classification was denied by Ibn Tahan who considered both of them (original and light /n/) to be alveolar approximant.

4.2 Lateral /l/

Al-Hamad (2002:130) asserts that Sybawaihi is the first who used the term *lateral* to describe /l/. He says that this sound is produced.

Sharqi (2015:150) states that /l/ is produced when the tongue touches the alveolar ridge. It involves a structure of a partial closure. There is balk at some points in the mouth, so the air stream escapes on both sides of the contact. There

is a contact between the rim of the tongue and the upper side teeth. The consonant /l/ is found in all position in Arabic initially [لحم], medially [قلب] and finally [حبل].

Bishr (2000:408) points that /l/ originally light in the Arabic language, the only dark /l/ is pronounced in the holly name of Allah (الله) . Yet if it is preceded by kasrah /l/ then it will be light There is also two unfamiliar position for dark /l/ in the Arabic language:

1- Some Arabic produce dark /l/ if it falls between two dark sounds [اغلظ] yet most of phoneticians says that [l] should be light.

2- Some Quraan readers produce dark [l] when it falls after [ص، ط، ظ] which are maftwha (followed by / a/) or sakinah (not followed by a vowel) [الطلاق] otherwise it is light and should be produced as dark originally. (Al-Fuzan, 2007:30)

In (Altaareef) the sound /l/ is pronounced only if it is followed by (Al-Ahrof Al-Qamariyah) which are gathered in the phrase (قطب جد) otherwise /l/ is considered [shamsia] and omitted (not pronounced as in [الشمس]). (ibid:30)

4.3 Trill /r/

Bishr (2000:345-347) shows that trill is the most well-known property for /r/ where the tip of the tongue is trilled on alveolar two or more times. This happens when the tongue is relaxed in its right position vibrating by air-stream.

Al-Hamad (2002:130-132) points that Sybawhi describes trill /r/ where the tongue is moved rapidly and repeatedly more than once towards the alveolar. Trill /r/ is well-known by quraan readers.

Sharqi (2015:150) sees that /r/ is alveolar- tap where the tongue touches alveolar ridge and in the production of it, the tongue is moved towards alveolar

ridge, marks a momentary contact and immediately with draws to its position of rest, the tap /r/ is /r/ which is found in all positions in Arabic [rabeeʕ] [ربيع] [barq] [برق] [sayeer] [صغير].

Bishr (2000:406) describes trill /r/ as two articulators strike each other rapidly. He adds that /r/ in Arabic is originally dark. It has another form which is light /r/. So it is dark in all positions except:

- 1- If it is makssora (followed by /l/: [riqab رقاب, rihab رحاب, rijal رجال]
- 2- If it is (sakinah) preceded by kasrah /i/ followed high sound:[hurria حرية, farʕawn فرعون].
- 3- If it is sakinah preceded by /i:/ as in [qadeer, قدير].
- 4- In consonant cluster precede by /l/ (sakinah after sakin) [bishr بشر, fihir فيهر, biʔr بئر].

4.4 Semi-vowels [w,j]

Al-Hamad (2002:137-138) says that [w,j] [ي، و] are considered to be [harfa leen] [harfa leen] in which the literal translation would like to call them semi-vowels inflected by western phonetician, Abd Al-Wahab Al-Qurtobi states that [w,j] are vowel sounds when they are sakinah (not marked by a vowel) preceded by a vowel similar to them. While in other times when they are sakinah preceded by vowel differ from their nature, they are consonants, Nasser Al-Deen Al-Talbawi explains the same point as Al-Qurtobi when he says [w,j] are vowels if they are marked by any vowel but if they were sakinah preceded by vowel differ from their nature then they are vowel-like (semi-vowels) as in [alxawf] [الخوف], [albejt] [البيت].

Sharqi (2015:131) mentions that [w] is a labiovelar approximant which is produced when the back of the tongue is raised towards the velum while rounding the lips, it is produced by narrowing the vocal folds at the place of articulation but the enough to produce a turbulence. The type of approximant is

a glide or semi-vowel. The glide means the movement of [w] from [u] to the following vowel position. It is found in all positions in Arabic [وزن] [wəzən] , [دواء] [dəwə] and [هو] [huwa] . The palatal approximant [j] on the other hand is produced when the front of the tongue comes close to the hard palate (the roof of the mouth) , but the tongue is not close to the roof as in the case of fricative. The narrowing is lesser than in the fricatives.

The articulators do not come close together so that there is no friction in its production. This sound is called frictionless continuant or more often approximant as well as semi-vowels, it is rapid glide from or towards a neighboring vowel. It differs from both approximant and vowels because it has momentary nature, it cannot be lengthened. It occurs in initial and medial position only as in [يد] [jəd] [جيد] [dʒəjəd] (ibid:150)

4.5 Pharyngeal – frictionless continuant [ʕ]

Pharyngeal – frictionless continuant [ʕ] has unclear nature. When it is repeated it is kind of plosive [يدع] [jədəʕ], but it is the voiced pair for the voiceless [h] so its kind of fricative; because it is located between the two [plosive-fricative] it is an approximant sound. (Al-Hamad,2002:115-116)

Sharqi (2015:151) explains that [ʕ] has a manner of articulations that gather between approximants and fricative; which means; it is produced by narrowing the vocal folds at the place of articulation but generally not enough to produce much turbulence in the air-stream. It is pharyngeal which means, it is articulated with the tongue root against the back of the throat (the pharynx). This sound is not found in English ,but it is natural in Arabic.[ʕ] can be found in all position as in [علم] [ʕələm], [معلم] [muʕəllm] and [سمع] [səməʕ].



Conclusions

Since Arabic and English are two languages that come from two different families; a huge differences may be located in all linguistic aspects. Yet when talking about sounds there is a noticeable thing which all human being have the same organs of speech; thus, some similarities can be noted as well as some differences in production and classification of sounds in the two languages. When talking about approximants in particular. English and Arabic notion of such sounds are different. Although the two sets (in Arabic and English) are voiced with articulators come so close together without causing an audible friction. Yet, there are many things to be said here. The English approximant sound are [l,r,j,w] while the Arabic approximants are [l,r,w,j,m,n] and [ʕ]. The English lateral has two different allophones. Light and dark [l] while the Arabic [l] is always light except in the name of Allah. [r] has more than five different allophones in English which are always light while the Arabic trill [r] has two allophones dark and light one. Semi-vowels [j,w] are similar in both languages yet [w] can occur in final position which is not found in English. The pharyngeal-frictionless continuant [ʕ] is produced in Arabic only it is not found in Arabic. The nasals [m,n] are considered to be approximants in Arabic which is not the case for English.



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