

Moroccan Arabic

L. van der Zijden-Holstvoogd en E. de Ruiter

1. Language description

Moroccan is a mostly spoken variant of the official language in Morocco: *Modern Standard Arabic* (MSA). Young children grow up with Moroccan Arabic and only learn MSA from the moment they start going to school at 6 years old.

Moroccan Arabic is spoken by approximately 20 million people and is used in the home and in informal conversation. Talks with the government and official bodies take place in standard Arabic. Documents are also written in standard Arabic. For the Moroccan language variant, there is not really a standard notation, which is why there are few documents written in Moroccan.

Moroccan Arabic also has regional differences. These differences may relate to both the pronunciation and the lexicon.

Consonant system

Table 1

Consonant system Moroccan Arabic

	Coronal					Dorsal							
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Faryngal	Glottal			
plosive	p ₁	b		t	d		k (g)	q ₂		ʔ ₃			
emphatic				t ^c	d ^c								
nasal	m			n			ŋ						
trill				r									
fricative		f	v ₁	s	z	ʃ	ʒ		χ	ʁ	ħ	ʕ	h
emphatic				s ^c	z ^c								
liquid				l ₄									
semi vowel	w	u				j							

1 only in loan words

2 q is often palatalized to g (allophones)

3 is common, even word-initial, but cannot be heard in practice. Officially, the subsequent vowel should be emphasised, but this often does not happen in spoken language.

4 pronunciation depends on phonological context. /l/ for front vowels /ʔ/ for back vowels

The emphatic consonants are difficult to hear, but DO create a difference in meaning. Context usually ensures that there is no ambiguity if there is no emphatic pronunciation.

Syllable structure

Contrary to standard Arabic, there are a relatively large number of consonant clusters at the beginning of a word in Moroccan Arabic. This means clusters are likely acquired early.

Stress

In Moroccan Arabic, standard stress is on the last syllable, provided this is a 'heavy' syllable (CVC). If a word does not end in a CVC syllable, stress is on the penultimate syllable.

In Moroccan, there is a phenomenon called 'shedda'. This is an emphasis on a particular consonant in the word. In IPA, this is indicated by a colon. This means you must pronounce this consonant 2x as long. Shedda not only influences the pronunciation of a word, but also its meaning, especially in verbs. This feature is acquired relatively late (3;6 years).

2. Phonological development

There are no publications to be found on the acquisitions of phonemes by young Moroccan Arabic children. Based on the frequency of occurrence and the articulatory complexity, several hypotheses can be formulated:

Sounds that are universally acquired early will likely be acquired even earlier in Moroccan Arabic (/b/, /m/, /d/, /n/, /t/). The back vowels (/q/, /ħ/, /χ/) are more articulatorily complex, but will nevertheless be acquired relatively early because they are highly frequent in the language, including in *child directed speech*.

The emphatic consonants are very articulatorily complex and will likely be acquired late, as also reported for other Arabic dialects (Ammar et al., 2006; Saleh et al., 2007)

Based on these considerations, Blumenthal et al. (2016, in press) arrive at the following acquisition order:

age	phonemes
< 2;6	d, t, n, b, m, ʔ
2;6 – 3;6	ʃ, f, k, l, s, w, z, h, g
3;6-4	q, ħ, χ, j
> 4	r, g, ʕ, ʁ

3. Common phonological processes

No data available.

4. Lexical variation

No data available.

5. Results of typically developing Moroccan toddlers

No data available.

6. Sources

Literature

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Dr Abderrahman El Aissati, Universitair docent, Tilburg School of Humanities, Department of Culture Studies

Dr P.H.F. Bos, universitair docent Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Expertise: Nederlands als tweede taal; Tweetaligheid; Taalverwerving; Marokkaans-Arabisch

Sarah Michiel, logopedist, Master de Traduction arabe - français bij Ecole Supérieure de Traduction Roi Fahd