

Egyptian Arabic

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1. Language description

Arabic is a Semitic language spoken by over 422 million people. Standard Arabic is the official language in most Arabian countries. This is the language that is taught in schools and used by officials. Egyptian children grow up with a (primarily only spoken) dialect of standard Arabic. Because of the size of the country, there are even more variants within this dialect. The differences between the northern and southern dialects can be quite serious.

The Egyptian dialect is understood by many people due to the great influence of Egyptian television and film in the Arabic world.

Consonant system

Tabel 1

Consonant system Egyptian Arabic

	Coronal					Dorsal				
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolir	Palaal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyneaal	Glottal
plosive	p ₁	b		t	d		k	g ₃	q ₂	ʔ
emphatic				t̤	d̤					
nasals	m			n						
trill				r						
fricatives		f	v ₁	s	z	ʃ (ʒ) ₁	x	χ _ʁ	ħ ʕ	h
emphatic				s ^c	z ^c					
liquids				l						
Semi vowels						j	w			

₁ In Egyptian Arabic, these sounds only occur in loan words.

₂ The q is very rare in Egyptian Arabic (as opposed to Moroccan Arabic). The sound is pronounced as a glottal stop in the north and as a /g/ in the south; The sound is only pronounced as a /q/ in Standard Arabic (formal language).

₃ The /g/ is pronounced as /dʒ/ in the south.

The emphatic sounds are separate phonemes, but the difference with the non-emphatic variants is difficult to hear. Apparently, the difference can mainly be heard between the vowels before and after the emphatic consonant. Because assessing vowels is not an objective of Speakaboo, the emphatic consonants have been left out of the test. The /p/, /v/, /ʒ/, and /q/ also do not occur in the test due to their low frequency in the language.

Syllable structure

Contrary to Moroccan Arabic, word-initial clusters are rare in Egyptian Arabic. Words preferably start with a single consonant, and not with a vocal. To a non-native speaker, it may seem that a word starts with a vocal, but it is more likely that the vocal is preceded by a /ʔ/ (glottal stop).

Final clusters of up to 2 consonants are very common and are therefore acquired early.

Stress

Stress is usually on the final syllable, if this is a CVC syllable. If not, then stress is on the penultimate syllable.

2. Phonological development

The consulted literature (Saleh et al. (2007) and Ammar et al. (2006) is ambiguous about the order of acquisition of consonants in Egyptian Arabic.

The main difference between the studies of Saleh et al. (2007) and Ammar et al. (2006) concerns the acquisition of the [b] and [d]. It is unlikely that these sounds, which are widespread in the languages of the world and are not articulatorily complex, would be acquired only after the 4th year, which is suggested in the study by Ammar et al. (2006). However, for emphatic sounds, it is known that they are acquired late and are only fully mastered by the 8th year. Based on the comparison with Dutch, Blumenthal, et al. (2016) provide the most likely acquisition order.

Table 2

Most likely acquisition order of consonants in Egyptian Arabic

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

3. Common phonological processes

Devoicing

/r/ deviation

Sibilant deviation

Cluster reduction

Syllable reduction

Omitting emphatic pronunciation

4. Lexical variation

No data available.

5. Performance of normally developing Egyptian toddlers

No data available.

6. Sources

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