An International Phonetic Arabic Alphabet

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I. Need for a Phonetic Script:

The Arabic alphabet fulfills the needs of the Arabic language quite adequately. Even many Arabic dialects can be written in it. The Arabic script has a way of transcribing all the Arabic consonants as well as long vowels. Most long vowels are to be interpreted as a short vowel followed by a glide. Short vowels very often are not written since they are fairly easy to predict for someone familiar with the language. However, for the benefit of the student beginning to learn to write they are sometimes written. The short vowels are also used in the Scriptures to preserve their accuracy as well as in other works where exactness is desirable as in dictionaries.

As is the case in many other languages, the Arabic script is good for the Arabic language only. Some other

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languages like Persian, Urdu, etc. use it, but they either need additional symbols or do not specify certain sounds, especially vowels, because of their dearth in the parent language of the script, **i.e. Arabic. Thus in Urdu or Persian جور can be read as either 'jəwr', 'jɔr', 'jor', 'juwr', 'jəvər', 'jəvvər', 'jivər', 'juvər', etc.** When it comes to transcribing foreign names, it is almost impossible to transcribe them in a way to allow the original pronunciation to be reproduced. Also for transcribing foreign languages in the Arabic script, there are no symbols available that will allow the transcription of the sounds not found in Arabic. In what remains of the following paper, an attempt will be made to introduce certain symbols so that a transcription of foreign languages, especially European, may become feasible. The same system may be used to transcribe foreign names in the Arabic texts.

II. Phonetic Script Proposed:

a)   Arabic Consonants.

The Arabic consonant sounds are given below. Approximations from European languages are also given. The underlined sound corresponds to the Arabic sound.

Orthographic Symbol	Sound	Example
ب	b	as in English 'bib'
ت	t	as in French 'toute'
د	d	as in French 'donner'
ط	ṭ	emphatic 't': EFELNA[1]
ض	ḍ	emphatic 'd': EFELNA

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ج	j	as in English 'judge'
ك	k	as in English 'kick'
ق	q	voiceless uvular stop: EFELNA
ء	?	glottal stop as in Cockney 'bottle'
ف	f	as in English 'fine'
ث	θ	as in English 'thin'
ذ	ð	as in English 'then'
ظ	ẓ̱	emphatic ' ð ': EFELNA
س	s	as in English 'sin'
ص	ṣ	emphatic 's': EFELNA
ز	z	as in English 'zeal'
ش	š	as in English 'ship'
خ	x	as in German 'Bach'
غ	ɣ	as in French 'Robert'
ح	ḥ	voiceless pharyngeal 'h': EFELNA
ع	ʕ	voiced pharyngeal fricative: EFELNA
ه	h	as in English 'height'
ل	l	as in English 'like'
ر	r	as in British English 'river'
م	m	as in English 'man'
ن	n	as in English 'nine'
و	w	as in English 'wet'
ي	y	as in English 'yes'

(b) Modified Consonants:

The following symbols, based on modifications of the Arabic alphabet, may be conveniently added to the existing inventory of Arabic orthographic symbols.

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Sound	Description of the Sound	Proposed Symbol	Examples
p	voiceless bilabial stop	پ	English 'wipe'
t	voiceless alveolar stop	ت	English 'bit'
d	voiced alveolar stop	ج	English 'did'
ṭ	voiceless retroflex stop	ط	Urdu ṭaṭ (mat)
ḍ	voied retroflex stop	ڈ	Urdu ḍal'' (pour)
ṛ	voiced retroflex flap	ڑ	Urdu 'baṛ' (fence)
c	voiceless alveopalatal affricate	چ	English 'peach'
g	voiced velar stop	گ	English 'get'
v	voiced labiodental fricative	ث	English 'five'
z	voiced alveopalatal fricative	ژ	French 'jour'
			Persian 'žal'
ŋ	velar nasal	ڻ	English 'singing'

It may be noted that an addition of the above symbols will enrich the phonetic inventory of Arabic orthographic symbols facilitating a more accurate and efficient transcription of foreign languages. For instance the above inventory coupled with the existing Arabic orthography contains almost all the consonants found in languages of Western Europe.

(c) Arabic Vowels:

i. Short Vowels:

Arabic has three short and three long vowels. The short vowels are as follows:

Symbol	Vowel	Example
ٌ	u	as in English 'g<u>oo</u>d', 'p<u>u</u>t'
َ	ə	as in English 'c<u>u</u>t', '<u>a</u>b<u>o</u>ve'
ِ	i	as in English 'b<u>i</u>t', 'k<u>i</u>d'

ii. long Vowels:

the long vowels are short vowels followed by some kind of a homorganic glide which is only an orthographic artifact and does not have to be phonetically realized in the same way. Thus the long vowels are as follows:

Symbol	Vowel	Example
و ٌ	ū	as in English 'f<u>oo</u>d', 'fl<u>u</u>te'
ا َ	ā	as in the American English 'h<u>o</u>t'
ي ِ	ī	as in English 'm<u>ee</u>t', 'mach<u>i</u>ne'[1]

iii. Diphthongs:

In addition to the long vowels the following diphthongs are found in Arabic. The diphthongs are essentially a short (mid central) vowel followed by a glide (**y or w**).

Symbol	Vowel	Example
يْ َ	əy	as in Arabic 'b<u>ə</u>yt' ('house')
وْ َ	əw	as in Arabic 'm<u>ə</u>wt' ('death')

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(d) Proposed Vowels :

Since for a transcription of a large number of the world's languages many more vowels are needed, the following few are proposed as guidelines. The task of inventing symbols for more vowels can be accomplished by inverting the short vowels. Inversion can be used to represent the lower vowels. Thus rather than كِيْل "kiyl" an inverted 'i' will give us كِيْل "kel" and rather than سُوْق "suwq" an inverted 'u' will give us سُوْق "soq". If one wanted length on these vowels, one could add ~ 'meddəh' — over them to prolong them. Thus we would have كِيْل "ke:l" and سُوْق "so: q". If one wanted them real short, one could use simply the inverted short vowels without the following glides. Thus we may have كَل "kĕl" and سُق "sŏq". For æ and ɔ sounds one may have the inverted ə followed by the glides. Thus the English 'bat' may be transcribed as بِنْت "bæ t" side by side with the Arabic بَيْت "bəyt" and the English "sɔt" may be transcribed as سُوْط side by side with the Arabic سَوْط "səwt". For the English diphthongs "ey" and "ow" one may have to write an extra glide after the vowels "e' and "o". Thus the English 'bait' may be transcribed as بَيْبِنْت or بِنْت "beyt" and the English 'boat' may be transcribed as بُوْوْت "bowt'. The newly introduced symbols may be summarized like this :

sound	Symbol
e	ـَ ىْ
o	ـُ و

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ey	ـَيْ يْ
ow	ـُ وْ وْ
æ	ـَ يٌ
ɔ	ـَ فْ

(e) Orthography:

In orthography پ (p), ٹ (t), ڈ (d), ط (ṭ), ڑ (ḍ), ڑ (ṛ), چ (č), گ (g), ڤ (v), ژ (z), and ڬ (ŋ) may be treated like ب (b), ت (t), د (d), ت (ṭ), د (ḍ), ر (r), ج (j), ک (k), ف (f), ز (z), and ن (n) respectively. In cursive writing the dots, +, and ŋ may be placed on the letters to which they belong as is the case with any other letter. Thus the English 'peach' may be written as پیچ, the English 'date' may be written as دْيْتْ or دْيْتْ the English 'singing' as سِطْنْ, etc. If needed the stress may be marked by underlining the stressed syllable — twice for the primary stress and once for the secondary stress — while leaving the unstressed syllable without any underlining. Thus 'orthographic' may be transcribed as اۆرْثۆگْرَنِفِكْ: Nasalization may be expressed by putting a dot and a crescent (Bengali čandra bindu) over a nasalized vowel and alternatively by a ں 'n' (without a dot in it, Urdu nūn ɣunneh) at the end of the word. Thus the French 'Maintenant' may be transcribed as مَنْتِنَاں. the aspiration may be expressed by putting an 'h' right after the aspirated consonant or rather combining the two sounds as is done in

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Urdu. For example the English narrow (phonetic) transcription for 'pen' will be پہْبْن or پھن . Two short vowels placed on a sound may represent a coarticulation like in French 'une' اُنْ . Consonant clusters may be shown by juxtaposing them in the order of their occurrence and by putting the 'sukuwn' (ْ) sign on top of them. Thus the English 'sprout' may be written like this: سْپْرَاوْٹ. it is preferable if each syllable is written separately and more space is left between words to distinguish them from syllables.

III. Conclusion:

By exploiting the present system of writing Arabic, additional symbols may be created that will be helpful in transcribing languages other than Arabic. This will be an asset to one who uses the Arabic script. **Any material written in the Arabic script with additional symbols representing foreign sounds may be accurately reproduced and adequately disambiguated. The symbols given above may not be enough but the principles involved may be helpful in dealing with comparable situations and where necessary new symbols can be created.**