

## Phonological Interference of Cirebon Language on the Pronunciation of *Hijaiyah* Letters

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### Abstract

This study investigates the phonological interference of the Cirebon language on the pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters (the Arabic alphabet) among students at Nahdlatul Ulama Islamic High School for Boys (*Madrasah 'Aliyah Nahdlatul Ulama Putra*), Buntet Cirebon. In multilingual Muslim communities such as Cirebon, Arabic is learned not only as a foreign language but also as a sacred language of worship and religious practice, making pronunciation accuracy both linguistically and spiritually significant. Based on phonetic observation and qualitative interviews, the research identifies systematic patterns of mispronunciation, particularly involving pharyngeal, uvular, and emphatic consonants, such as /h/, /ʕ/, /q/, and /s/. These patterns are documented through observations, audio recordings, and careful transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet, allowing for detailed phonological analysis. The errors are categorized into substitution, simplification, and omission, revealing consistent tendencies rather than incidental mistakes. These deviations arise from the absence of corresponding phonemes in the Cirebon language, resulting in substitution, simplification, and assimilation processes that alter the original Arabic sounds. Such processes illustrate negative language transfer, in which learners plot unfamiliar Arabic phonemes onto the closest sounds available in their native phonological inventory. The findings demonstrate how articulatory limitations, limited phonetic awareness, and insufficient explicit instruction interact to reinforce these patterns. It also reveals that the Cirebonese phonological system exerts a strong influence on the learners' production of Arabic phonemes, demonstrating how local linguistic structures mediate the acquisition of a non-native phonetic inventory. This influence is not merely technical but sociolinguistic in nature, as Arabic pronunciation practices in Cirebon are shaped by daily communication, religious discourse, and pesantren traditions that normalize localized articulations. This research highlights the Cirebon language's hybrid phonological features, shaped by influences from both Javanese and Sundanese, which reflect distinctive articulation patterns. This hybrid linguistic character makes Cirebon a unique and previously underexplored site for examining cross-linguistic phonological interaction in Indonesia. The study extends empirical evidence on how regional phonology affects Arabic sound realization in an Islamic sociolinguistic context. Beyond its descriptive contribution, the research offers a foundation for future work in interlanguage phonology, sociophonetics, and Arabic pedagogy, particularly in contexts where religious language learning intersects with strong local linguistic identities.

**Keywords:** Cirebon Language; *Hijaiyah* Letters; Phonological Interference; Second Language Acquisition.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Arabic language holds a particular privilege within Islam, as it is the language of revelation, worship, and knowledge. This privilege endows the use of Arabic within Islamic institutions with utmost sacredness, transcending its use as merely a means of communication. Among the various aspects of acquiring the Arabic language, learning the *hijaiyah* letters, that is, the Arabic alphabet, and their correct pronunciation is crucial. It is because the mispronunciation of letters in the Arabic language can lead to the misrepresentation of the meanings of particular words, sentences, or even entire chapters of the Qur'an and prayers, as highlighted by Sa'dudin & Safitri (2019).

In Indonesia, the acquisition of the Arabic language is influenced by the learner's native language, which may be either their native language or the local language of the area in which they reside. One particular example of this phenomenon is when a regional language influences the pronunciation of the Arabic language being used. This phenomenon is referred to as phonological interference. As Sekarsari et al. (2024) explain, such interference warrants further study because it hinders the pronunciation of phonemes that exist in the Arabic language but are not present in the learner's local or native language.

The Cirebon area has a distinct dialect of its own, which differs from other Cirebon regions. People in Cirebon have a unique way of speaking Cirebonese, a dialect of the Javanese language. However, people from Cirebon speak in Full Sundanese and have many Sundanese and Arabic words in their vocabulary. Gloriani et al. (2021) state that many people from Cirebon speak Arabic in their daily lives. These words include terms with Islamic meanings, such as *sholat*, *puasa*, *zakat*, *do'a*, and *kitab*. People from Cirebon pronounce these words and have adapted their speech to accommodate the Arabic words. They have altered the words and letters of the Arabic language.

Although the assimilation of Arabic words in the Cirebon language has been documented, the surrounding phonological issues have yet to be addressed. Variations of language interference in Indonesia have been documented in the Javanese and Madurese speech communities, leaving the Cirebon language, influenced by Javanese, Sundanese, and Islamic elements, in a hybrid form with a phonological system and Islamic language interference, essentially untouched. Phonologically, Cirebonese have no /ʿ/ ('ain), /ħ/, /ʃ/, /ð/, or /t/, key Arabic letters, and members of the community have systematic pronunciation problems as they learn Arabic. For instance, /q/ is generally realized as /k/, and /ʿ/ is often dropped, while /ħ/ is replaced with /h/. It suggests that students and teachers, as community members, experience systematic phonological interference in Arabic speech, as evidenced by impact streams and silent gaps, at levels that are possibly beyond their conscious awareness. Therefore, the process of Arabic and Cirebon phonetics and their interaction merit further research.

Many scholars have discussed this topic in the literature. Among them, Mulyono (2019) noted that pupils in Java Islamic schools have issues pronouncing the sounds of /ʃ/, /ʿ/, and /q/, given that these sounds do not exist in the students' vernacular. Wahid (2020) noted that the pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters is often erroneous due to insufficient phonetic awareness, as well as the influence of learners' first languages. Findings of Mahbubah and Muflihah (2021) on the Madurese dialect in which /dzal/ is replaced with /d/, and /qaf/ with /k/, testify to the insufficient intervention designed to bridge the gap between the speech organs and the phonemes of the Arabic language. Ngatipan (2023) also discussed this influence, albeit from a different angle. He pointed out that the absence of specific phonetic training in teaching Arabic was the foremost cause of inadequate pronunciation (Ngatipan, 2023). Due to a lack of proper phonetic training, most Indonesian speakers tend to adhere to the phonetic structure of their native language when pronouncing words. Novel (2024) further classified phonological errors as substitution, distortion, and omission, which also added a methodological aspect to the study. Omission of the /ʿ/ sound, which is not easy to articulate, and distortion of the emphatic sound /t/, which can be pronounced as a plain /t/, exemplify these errors.

These results have important implications for learning, indicating that, in addition to native language interference, the source of pronunciation errors may include articulatory constraints or inadequate phonemic perception of the target language. Kosim's (2024) study mentioned the teaching of Arabic letter articulation from their correct points of articulation, which is often overlooked in teaching this subject. It also noted that errors of *makhraj* were not solely the result of phonological interference but rather a lack of understanding of the geography of the articulation of

the *hijaiyah* letters, which results in the defects of pronunciation that deteriorate the quality of letters fusion, especially letters that have particular makhraj such as /s/, /d/, and /ʿ/.

It is worth noting that regarding the *hijaiyah* letters, the interference of the use of the regional language is not only limited to the *hijaiyah* letters, but also encompasses wider sociolinguistic attributes. Miskiyyah (2024) particularly focuses on the use of Cirebon language in the context of da'wah (Islamic preaching) to illustrate that the use of Cirebon in da'wah is often accompanied by the local language and Arabic, which subsequently leads to da'wah with incorrect pronunciation. She further notes that, regarding the use of Cirebon in the Islamic preaching, preachers tend to soften the Arabic pronunciations to make it easier for listeners to comprehend. While this makes it easier for listeners to understand, it also causes pronunciation problems, which is contrary to what is accepted within the Arabic language. It indicates that the intermingling of the use of the Cirebon language and Arabic in da'wah suggests that, besides phonological factors, other socio-cultural factors also influence pronunciation.

What stands out in Cirebon is the aforementioned paradox. Many Arabic words have been incorporated into the local language. At the same time, the Arabic words have been modified in their pronunciation to deviate from their original forms, and this has been reflected in formal classroom settings where Arabic is taught. Thus, a close relationship in terms of language does not mean a close relationship in terms of pronunciation. For example, the word is *ṣalat*, but its pronunciation has been modified to the original absent forms of *sholat* and *solat*, and this is, in fact, a classroom pronunciation practice.

The site of this research is Madrasah 'Aliyah Nahdlatul Ulama Putra (abbreviated to MA NU Putra), Buntet Cirebon, which has been one of the prominent educational institutions in Cirebon for the teaching of Religion and Arabic. MA NU Putra Cirebon teaches Arabic, not just as a foreign language, but also as the language of the religion, which is also part of the students' daily practice. However, students of this institution still face challenges in Arabic language phonology, primarily due to the Arabic language teaching and learning process in schools. This problem is compounded by the students' first language, which is the local language. There have been few, if any, studies focused on the influence of the Cirebon language on phonology as it relates to students in Islamic Education institutions, as well as the historical and cultural connections between the Cirebon language, Islam, and Arabic. This study aims to describe and explain phonological deviations in *hijaiyah* letters, particularly in the area of cross-linguistic sound transfer, and examine the missing phonemes and/or articulatory characteristics in the Cirebon phonological system. Besides, it aims to describe the relationship of Arabic and Cirebon phonology and the language contact in the context of Cirebon's multilingual and Islam-oriented society.

## METHOD

Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, this investigation focused on one of the MA NU Putra Buntet Cirebon, an Islamic high school located in the Buntet Pesantren area of Cirebon Regency. This Buntet Islamic Boarding School, located in Cirebon Regency, is an educational institution, specifically an Islamic School, characterized by an environment rich in the practice of using the Arabic language, both in formal classroom settings and informal settings during the school's religious activities. Additionally, the majority of students in this school have Cirebon as their mother tongue; therefore, the school is a relevant site for studying the Arabic language acquisition process, particularly in terms of phonological interference.

The participants in the study consisted of 20 students in the 10th and 11th grades who had been instructed in the Arabic language and had received training in reading the Qur'an. It is to ensure that they are the target population in which phonological interference is likely to be evident, especially in Arabic phonemes. Additionally, in the Arabic language, one of the teachers and one of the teachers of Tahsin (Qur'anic recitation) are included as additional informants to enhance the triangulation and the interpretation of the data.

In his work, Yin (2009) outlines how data were gathered through various means. Initially, there was participatory monitoring of classroom activities and Qur'anic reading sessions to observe how students pronounce *hijaiyah* letters. Following this, students were recorded reading verses or words that contained critical Arabic phonemes, notably /q/, /ʿ/, /h/, and /s/. Once recorded, the

International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was used to transcribe the audio, allowing for the analysis of the phonemes. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and teachers to gather their perceptions about Arabic pronunciation and the impact of their first language. Documentation of the students' Learning materials was also done to ground the findings in literature relevant to Arabic phonology and language contact.

The analysis was conducted in two interconnected ways, outlined as the phonological and sociolinguistic approaches. As for the phonological approach, loss of substance and/or clarity in pronunciation was identified as an error and was classified as a substitution or distortion (Novel, 2024; Kosim, 2024) in phonology. Regarding the sociolinguistic approach, the Cirebon language and local pesantren culture were observed to have an impact on students' pronunciation of Arabic sounds, as discussed by Miskiyyah (2024) in terms of phonological adaptation in discourse related to religion.

To ensure research validity, the study employed source triangulation (students, Arabic teacher, and Tahsin teacher). Also, the study employed triangulation techniques (recording, observation, and interviews) and member validation, confirming transcripts and interpretations with some key research participants. Furthermore, the study also adopted peer debriefing with a Phonology expert who voluntarily reviewed the analysis to ensure accuracy. The combination of design methodologies serves to reinforce the trustworthiness and richness of the study's findings, particularly in relation to the Cirebonese Phonological Interference affecting the pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters.

## ANALYSIS

### Factors Contributing to Pronunciation Errors of *Hijaiyah* Letters

In the field of linguistics, particularly in the context of language contact, the term 'interference' is commonly used (Weinreich, 1979). Interference describes the situation in which two (or more) languages come into contact and affect one another due to the speaking practices of the communities using those languages. This situation is directly attributed to the presence of multilingual and/or bilingual speakers in these contexts. Interference, therefore, is the result of the contact phenomenon (in this case, due to bilingualism). Interference can take various forms, including phonology, word forms (morphology), syntax (sentence structure), semantics (meaning of words), and vocabulary (lexicon) (Mahbubah & Mufliah, 2021). It refers to the divergence from the expected system of one or more of the languages in question, due to contact between languages (Weinreich, 1979). It is, of course, from the sociolinguistics perspective, not a mistake but the result of the natural process of the evolution of language and culture.

Bilingualism, strong cultural and/or religious connections, the social dominance of one or more languages, inadequate proficiency in one of the languages, and a favorable orientation (or attitude) towards a specific language are some of the reasons that can cause interference (Alifah, 2024). These reasons have a significant influence on the linguistic situation of a society, which, in this case, is the Cirebon society.

The mispronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters by students does not happen in a vacuum. Fitrianingrum and Aminingsih (2024) report several internal and external issues that influence this phenomenon. The aforementioned factors are as follows:

#### 1. Perception of difficulty in learning Arabic

Perhaps the most significant factor contributing to the problem of mispronunciation is the perception that learning the Arabic language is a challenging endeavor. It is because the *hijaiyah* letters have distinct graphemic forms and a phonological system that differs from the Latin letters. Their pronunciation is not congruent with the languages that students use regularly, such as Indonesian or the local and regional language, Cirebon. The discrepancy in the system of sounds is subsumed within and forms the dominant cause of the students' phonetic errors.

Arabic is known to have an exclusive range of consonants and vowels that do not exist in several other languages. Among these are uvular and pharyngeal consonants (e.g., /q/ and /ʕ/), which highly tend to be misarticulated by non-native speakers. For instance, Indonesian students tend to replace the phoneme /q/ with /k/, which represents the absence of uvular consonants in their L1 (Al-Nabhani & Madiseh, 2025). This is what is referred to as phonological transfer which takes place

when learners attempt to use foreign sounds based on the closest alternative to their L1. Such phenomenon is highly likely to cause learners to systematically mispronounce words when they do not recognize some of the phonemes are distinct from each other in the target language, thus, altering the message they are trying to convey in Arabic.

## 2. Low interest in reading Arabic texts

An additional barrier preventing interest in reading *hijaiyah* letters contributes to the phenomenon of digital device overuse, such as smartphones and tablets, which provide visual interactivity far more captivating than reading Arabic texts (Agustiani et al., 2025; Begum & Ahmad, 2025). As a result, there are more digital distractions than opportunities to learn the Arabic language formally. In this sense, the teaching of reading Arabic texts to *hijaiyah* letters positively motivates the students, and coupled with the support by parents, teachers, and learners in a pedagogically meaningful and constructive environment.

Mohd Rifain et al. (2024) emphasize that effective spelling techniques require more than simply teaching the letters and sounds of a word. Instructional techniques are needed which focus on the articulatory phonetics of the correct positioning of the tongue, lips, and throat someone in the correct posture to pronounce the sound. Instructional techniques should include paired with visual and, kinesthetic, and phonetic activities, such as mirrors and videos, and minimal pairs to help learners to differentiate sounds (i.e., /q/ – /k/; /ʕ/ – /ʔ/). Targeted feedback on the phonetic and contrastive analysis should align with and explain the specific, phonetic gaps students possess with their native language and Arabic. By systematically and methodically addressing the challenges with higher frequency of practice, the students' pronunciation of the *hijaiyah* letters will be improved, enabling them to better the language, and more fully participate in it through Qur'anic recitation.

## 3. Low self-confidence in learning

Pronunciation mistakes can come from a variety of psychological issues, such as lack of confidence. Supriyadi et. al. (2019) noted that students from a Javanese cultural background demonstrated a profound lack of confidence when it came to phonological waves of mistakes in the recitation of the Quran. This lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, and anxiety toward pronouncing words incorrectly leads students to refrain from speaking Arabic, which subsequently, stunts their development in the subject. This largely agrees with previous studies that identified the presence of language anxiety and identity issues as significant barriers to second language acquisition. These studies found that learner's perceptions regarding their linguistic identity emerged as the predominant determinant of their spoken practice (Schoonmaker-Gates, 2022). Thus, to mitigate these issues, it is paramount to create an environment that encourages students to make mistakes and try new things, particularly with respect to their pronunciation.

Understanding Arabic sounds require time and effort which is obtained thru motivation. Astari et al. (2024) elucidated that the more motivated the student are the more time and effort they are willing to put to phonetics, as are *hijaiyah* letters (difficult sounds). It is also noted that this is especially applicable to students whose practices involve the Qur'an, as they are more likely to be motivated to learn correct pronunciation. Arabic is also highly valued in the Islamic culture which also drives students' motivation. This however, may not be the case for students who don't understand its value. This makes it important for teachers to be aware of the cultural and religious context of the variety of pronunciation they may be teaching.

## 4. Influence of the native language and social environment

This native language will significantly impact the acquisition of a second language. Cirebon-speaking students tend to exhibit interference in their daily conversations in the native language when learning the phonology of Arabic. This is the case because not all Arabic phonemes are available in their native language, and hence, a more complicated phonetic articulation adjustment is required. Additionally, there are foreign phonemes that are not easily acquired, especially in home and school learning settings that lack optimal support. Hence, both the school and the family need to be in a closer partnership, as a strong, supportive learning environment is necessary to help children learn the phonological aspects of the Arabic language.

In addition, the culture and geography where students come from affects the way they pronounce Arabic. In places like Cirebon, where the Arabic language became part of the local culture due to the spread of Islamic education, there is a strong presence of lexical and phonological interference from

local languages. For example, there is a Cirebon Arabic word with a modified pronunciation of the consonant /q/ to /k/, and /ʕ/ to /ʔ/ (Farihin et al., 2019). Such modification of the Arabic consonants to fit the local phonological system can be problematic to learners who only know the modified versions as the standard. Thus, the social and historical within which Arabic is taught is of utmost importance, as the local language can help increase or decrease the chances of the learner acquiring the Arabic phonology. The teachers need to be conscious of these factors and adapt their teaching to the particular circumstances of the learners to make sure the students' needs are met.

Besides cultural aspects, learners' social identity, and attitudes toward the language being learned, are other determinants of Arabic pronunciation learning. Wulandari and Noor (2020) explain that the way students perceive the Arabic language and the place it holds in their religious and cultural identity impacts the learning experience. In Islamic societies, where Arabic is considered the language of the Qur'an and a major component of the religious identity, students may take pride in and feel a responsibility to get the pronunciation of the language correct. This pronunciation mastery may be the motivation that sustains students in overcoming other challenges posed by the language. In contrast, students who perceive the language of Arabic as a foreign language and solely as a means to an academic end may not find it valuable to expend the effort in mastering the phonetic intricacies of the language. In the latter situation, it is important for educators to stimulate an understanding of the language used in its cultural and religious context, in order for students to see the pronunciation of the language as a spiritual achievement rather than solely a linguistic one.

Therefore, addressing pronunciation errors in *hijaiyah* letters requires a multi-dimensional approach that combines linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural strategies. Teachers must consider the interference from students' first languages, and their psychological barriers. Additionally, cultural context and motivation must be taken into account to foster a deeper connection between the learners and the language. By integrating these factors into a comprehensive pedagogical framework, educators can help students overcome pronunciation challenges and achieve greater fluency in Arabic, particularly in the context of Qur'anic recitation.

As one of the variants of the Javanese language family in the northern coastal area of West Java, the Cirebon language shows considerable evidence of Arabic influence. This influence primarily manifests in the context of religion, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) education, and the daily lives of the Muslim community in Cirebon (Farihin et al., 2019). Arabic elements incorporated in the Cirebon language are the result of a historically, socially, and culturally driven process of interference.

The influence of Arabic began to pervade Cirebon in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, coinciding with the spread of Islam throughout the archipelago. Cirebon is known as one of the early centers of Islamization in Java, particularly through the role of the *Wali Songo*, like Sunan Gunung Jati. In this process of Islamization, Arabic was introduced not only as the language of worship, but as the language of knowledge and a scholarly symbol within *pesantren* (Rosidin, 2018).

Using Arabic in the Cirebon language can be viewed as an outcome of cultural assimilation. Encouraging religious instruction, preaching, and traditional *pesantrens*, the Arabic lexicon has been assimilated and incorporated into the local language system (Kartini et al., 2022). In most instances, the imported Arabic lexicon has undergone various phonological, semantic, and morphological changes to conform to the patterns of the Cirebon language.

The incorporation of Arabic elements into the Cirebon language has, for the most part, been in the form of lexical interference. Within the community, Arabic words such as *shalat* (prayer), *wudhu* (ablution), *zakat* (charity), *puasa* (fasting), *kitab* (book), *imam* (religious leader), *ustadz* (teacher), *do'a* (prayer), and *adzan* (call to prayer) are part of the everyday Cirebon vocabularies. These words are common in Cirebon and can be used in sentences in an everyday context, as in "Ustadzé ngajak ngaji bareng sésa maghrib" (Translation: The ustadz (teacher) invites (us) to do 'ngaji' (a Qur'an recital) together after the maghrib [prayer]). In this sentence, the words *ustadzé* (teacher) and *ngaji* (Qur'an recital) are Arabic borrowings assimilated into the Cirebon language.

Besides, due to semantic interference, the meanings of certain Arabic words may broaden or narrow. For instance, while the Arabic word *kitab* generally means /book/ in Cirebon, it refers explicitly to religious books in Arabic used in *pesantren*. Regarding phonological interference, the Arabic vocabulary is often adjusted in pronunciation to conform to Cirebon's phonology. For

instance, *dhuhur* (afternoon prayer) is pronounced *duhur*, *adzan* is *adan*, and *mu'adhin* (the one calling for prayer) is *modin*. Such phonological adaptations evidence the process of accommodation to the pronunciation of the local speakers. Regarding morphological interference, there are also cases of Arabic plural forms, such as *-in* in *muslimin* (Muslims), *mu'minin* (believers), and *ustadzin*, which is sometimes used without knowledge of Arabic grammar, but rather as religious markers or indicators of respect.

As a result, Arabic words also acquire cultural significance. The use of Arabic loans suggests a Muslim affiliation, religious educational background, and knowledge of the pesantren culture (Alfarini & Sadat, 2025). The use of Arabicization is linked to a social perception in the Cirebon context, where the speaker is perceived as a more *alim* (knowledgeable) or a more religious figure. Consequently, Arabicization in Cirebon is not only a language-related phenomenon, but it also encompasses social and cultural aspects.

The incorporation of Arabic components in the Cirebon language is a prime example of a well-ordered and genuine type of language interference. This process is a result of close cultural contact at a given point in time between the indigenous speakers and the Islamic culture represented through the Arabic language. Concerning Islam, its components have undergone semantic changes, phonological and/or morphological alterations, and have fully integrated into the Cirebon language system. Such interference reveals not just the language interaction, but also the complex social, historical, and religious aspects that have influenced and contributed to the language's social identity in Cirebon.

### Phonetic Analysis of *Hijaiyah* Letter Pronunciation

As the writing and sound system of the Arabic language, *hijaiyah* letters possess unique and intricate phonological features, reflecting the Arabic style and sound system (Robbani & Zaini, 2022). In the case of teaching Arabic in Indonesia and studying the Qur'an, non-native students face difficulties articulating certain letters (Susilawati, 2022). These didactic errors pertain to phonetics and can alter the meaning of a word as well as the proper reading of a religious text. This study aimed to describe the *hijaiyah* letters and the errors in pronunciation within the framework of articulatory phonology.

A phonological perspective of the *hijaiyah* letters (the Arabic alphabet) centers the discussion on the phonemes and the hierarchy of the Arabic language sound system (Amatullah & Aziza, 2020). In this phonological system, letters are more than abstract written symbols; they are sound representatives that, together, delineate meaning in a language.

Table 1. Phonetic Analysis of *Hijaiyah* Letter Pronunciation by Students

No	Arabic Word	Target Letter	Ideal Pronunciation (IPA)	Student Pronunciation (IPA)	Type of Error	Phonetic Analysis	Notes on Local Influence
1	قَدْ	/q/	[qad]	[kad]	Substitution	/q/ → /k/	No uvular plosive /q/ in local phonology
2	عَفُورٌ	/ɣ/	[ɣafu:r]	[gafu:r]	Substitution	/ɣ/ → /g/	Substitution due to articulatory similarity
3	إِنَّ	/ʔ/	[ʔinna]	[inna]	Omission	Glottal stop /ʔ/ omitted	Lack of familiarity with glottal stops
4	خَلَقَ	/x/	[xalaqa]	[halaqa]	Substitution	/x/ → /h/	No uvular fricative /x/ in native language
5	عَالِمٌ	/ʕ/	[ʕa:limun]	[a:limun]	Omission	/ʕ/ omitted	No pharyngeal consonant /ʕ/ in L1
6	طَيِّبٌ	/t/	[tʰajjibun]	[tajjibun]	Substitution	/t/ → /t/	Emphatic consonants not present in L1

7	صَلَاةٌ	/s/	[sʰala:tun]	[sala:tun]	Substitution	/sʰ/	→	Inability	to
						/s/		distinguish	/s/
								and /sʰ/	

## قَدْ

With reference to the word قَدْ, the letter *qaf* (/q/) is, phonetically, a voiced uvular plosive, inactive, while closing off the airflow stream within the mouth, entirely, to the back of the articulation, toward the uvular region (Mustafawi, 2017). Voiced uvular plosives, when pronounced, should carry a deeply pronounced emphatic plosive quality. If we were to observe a classroom, however, we would supposedly see that most (if not all) students pronounce it as /k/, a voiceless velar plosive, produced equally, within a more anterior position (within the oral cavity). This supersegmental feature is not random and will continue to appear within speech events, where /q/ is present.

Interviews that were conducted with students would indicate that they hold a perception of silence when it comes to the existence of a (practical) difference between /q/ and /k/. Some students had reported (to the interviewer) a lack of contrastive education, and had also had the perception that voiced uvular plosives /q/ had previously never been, or would be taught. It brings concern of a gap, when it comes to the absence of adequate, phonics-based, contrastive scripted education, to students, within that of the Arabic consonant systems, especially when it comes to consonants that lack a direct equivalent in the students' native language systems.

When it comes to the language of this type of error, it can be explained in reference to the theory of phonological transfer, where students, in this case, do not adopt, or more accurately, are unable to form and utilize unfamiliar phonemes within the systems of their first language. Here, it can be noted that as students from Cirebon, Indonesia, do not possess, (at least a voiceless) uvular consonant, or more specifically, the voiced, and plosive consonants of a /k/ type, that Simplified (is), the articulation is done, within, of the nearest of an (familiar) uvular, i.e. That would be termed as voiceless. The term, perceptive, should here be substituted with the term unmarked, instead of saying nearly, I am sorry, instead of saying with the term a perceptive. It can also widely be (understood) as perceiving a uvular consonant, as a plosive. Pseudod (is to phoneme), used, in this case, instead of saying term, can also be used widely, or be understood as substituting unmarked with losing, their plosive quality, to the articulatory system of a consonant. This type of process should be clearly referred to as unmarked, where complexity is simplified in relation to the articulatory system. In this sense, it should be clearly explained that it is entitled to unmarked, which should, here too, be clearly articulated with unmarked, within the Arabic system of consonants. It has also been widely understood that consonants lacking voicing are perceived as unmarked. It describes the language of this error.

It also highlights the lack of targeted phonetic training in Qur'anic recitation and Arabic pronunciation. The emphasis on quick recitation and memorization, rather than phonemic detail, leads to the omission of important contrasts, such as the distinction between /q/ and /k/. In Arabic, such mispronunciations are not only problematic; thus, the replacement of /q/ with /k/ illustrates a phonological issue that stems from the absence of systematic phonetic training rooted in local Islamic educational pedagogy.

## غَفُورٌ

Within the term غَفُورٌ (ghafūr), the letter غ (ghain) is pronounced as a voiced uvular fricative. It involves creating a sound by allowing air to pass through the uvula while vibrating the vocal cords (Mustafawi, 2017). It is a deep, rough sound, not to be confused with the plosive character present in familiar sounds such as /g/. However, it has been observed that a majority of students pronounce /ɣ/ as /g/, arguing that it is a voiced velar plosive enunciated from a more forward position, and it is more prevalent in Cirebonese and Indonesian.

Some of the students, as explained in the conducted interviews, pronounced it as ghain /g/ because they sound alike. Some even confused ghain with gaf and hence did not recognize that they



differ in letter value. The students did not receive phonetic training to develop the muscles of the tongue and throat necessary to produce these sounds, which may be a result of a lack of competence in the area of phonetics regarding such sounds.

Phonologically speaking, the replacement of /y/ with /g/ is an adjustment that is expected from Cirebonese and Indonesian learners of a second language. The languages, Cirebonese and Indonesian, lack voiced uvular fricatives, and because of that, students tend to choose a sound that is most familiar and used often; in this case, it is /g/. It indicates the naturalization of foreign phonemes as articulated sounds based on the concept of familiarity.

This specific mistake illustrates how difficulties in producing foreign sounds arise not only from the articulatory side but also from a lack of instruction and exposure to the sounds in question. If Arabic teaching, mainly in the art of tajweed, does not explicitly teach students to articulate phonemes such as /y/, students will perform substitutions that relate to their phonetic perception and thus distort meanings in sensitive religious contexts. This fact highlights the need for educational measures that emphasize systematic articulatory phonetics. To help students not only visualize the sounds but also articulate them, students need to be exposed to the sounds and taught how to produce them, such as the /y/sound.

إِنَّ

The first phoneme of the word إِنَّ is commonly reported as being omitted by students and refers to the glottal stop /ʔ/ (Mustafawi, 2017). It is a closure of the glottis, briefly seizing the airflow, and releasing it after a snap (glottal plosive). In the Arabic language, this occurs as a phoneme, allowing the larynx to switch between meanings when pronouncing the words. However, the glottal onset is absent, and the students tend to pronounce the first vowel of the word as an initial vowel.

The interviewed students also attest to these findings. Several students claimed they had never before pronounced a glottal stop. A glottal stop is typically described in more abstract terms, and it can be "unnatural" or "awkward." Moreover, students claimed that teachers rarely discuss the articulation of a hamzah and its relevance. It confirms the inadequate phonetic pedagogy for certain Arabic sounds, particularly those that do not exist in a student's native language.

A language transfer phenomenon can be observed in the above explanation. In the Cirebonese language and also in spoken Indonesian, there is an absence of the glottal stop. Closures of the glottis do not function as phonemes; that is, from a specific language, students are not likely to have any phonemic awareness of /ʔ/, and it is likely that it will be omitted from their pronunciation. A glottal stop is crucial in Arabic for both semantic and phonological accuracy, and this phenomenon is a result of negative language transfer.

It also applies to 'أَمَّةٌ', 'إِنَّ', and 'وَاللَّهِ', which demonstrates that this problem is more systemic. The under-awareness of /ʔ/ indicates an even greater risk of misunderstanding and misreading Qur'anic or formal Arabic. As a result, there is a need for more thorough teaching designs that include training on articulatory awareness. Teachers need to teach and demonstrate the production of the glottal stop, providing appropriate exercises for practice, and emphasizing that the hamzah is more than a marker in the text, but a genuine element of the Arabic sound structure.

خَلَقَ

In the Arabic word خَلَقَ, the first letter, kha, which represents the voiceless uvular fricative sound /x/, should be pronounced as a voiceless fricative sound produced through the back of the tongue and the uvula (Mustafawi, 2017). This sound is considered to be one of the most prominent and rough sounds in Arabic phonology. The first letter kha is very often pronounced, however, quite significantly as /h/, a voiceless glottal fricative made in a glottal position that is far more easily articulated and is overall a gentler sound.

What is occurring in this case is an obvious phonetic substitution where a sound that has a higher place of articulation in the vocal tract is replaced by a sound that has a lower place of articulation. Most students, as well as interviewers, perceive kha and ha as if they are the same sound and that kha is just a fatter one, showing that they clearly do not have an accurate understanding of how to articulate the sounds. It clearly is an example of how students attempt to incorporate phonetic systems from one language into their native language systems and their interlanguage phonology.

The reason for the most common substitution of kha into ha is that /x/ does not occur in either Cirebonese or Indonesian and is a fricative that is produced with almost the same articulation.

The mistakes also indicate low phonological competence in relation to Arabic letters, which can appear the same in script yet have significant disparities in pronunciation. It is essential in the recitation of the Qur'an, such as in the cases of khalāqa (he created) and halaqa (he shaved) versus one another, as they are contrarily different. Hence, to address students' uptake of kha, a phonetics-centered teaching method is most appropriate. It should encompass visual representation of the required tongue and throat positions, audio samples of the target elocution to which learners can juxtapose, and sustained focused practice of uttering the phoneme /x/ in order to consolidate accurate enactment.

### عَالِمٌ

The Arabic letter 'ain (in عَالِمٌ) is an example of a voiced pharyngeal consonant and is represented by the IPA symbol /ʕ/. It means that it is made by pushing airflow through the pharynx while the vocal cords are engaged (Mustafawi, 2017). It sounds heavy and deep, and it is unlike any other letter in the entire Arabic language. However, it has been observed that students almost always omit the pharyngeal consonant and instead pronounce it as ʕa:limun, rather than a:limun.

The fact that students pronounce ʕa:limun as a:limun shows that students do not recognize /ʕ/ or that they cannot pronounce it. In an interview, one student stated that he believes the letter 'ain is silent and serves as a decorative letter that can be omitted. /ʕ/ is also not common in either Cirebonese or Indonesian, which further complicates the issue. It can make it challenging to produce the sounds, especially when one lacks sufficient instruction on how to produce them. Students usually end up replacing a complex sound or a string of sounds (in this case, simply pausing) with an easier sound or omitting it altogether.

This matter especially demonstrates the phenomenon of perceptual assimilation, which is the ability to understand, through the lens of those phonemes, the unfamiliar sounds. Students do not perceive or produce /ʕ/ since it is not included in their phonetic repertoire. The ramifications are dire; 'alim (عالم, "scholar") becomes alim, which could make the word possibly ambiguous or meaningless. In Qur'anic recitation, the absence of 'ain is a distortion in meaning, and in addition, it undermines the sanctity of the text. The matter at hand, however, is primarily the need for a specific form of phonetic instruction, and this can be accomplished through a methodical and structured program that integrates and employs the use of visual and motor methods to teach students, through the use of mirrors, native audio recordings, and graduated chaining articulation practice, to produce and comprehend /ʕ/ phoneme.

### طَيِّبٌ

The letter ṭa in the word طَيِّبٌ /ṭa/y/ɪb/ is transcribed as /ṭ/ (emphatic voiced alveolar plosive). It involves secondary articulation, such as velarization, meaning that the back of the tongue is raised, and it is pronounced deeper and heavier than the alveolar plosive /t/ (Mustafawi, 2017). However, field data demonstrates that students pronounce ṭa as /t/ and, therefore, ṭayyibun is pronounced as tayyibun without depth of articulation.

Based on the interviews, it appears that students do not perceive any difference between ṭa and ta, believing it is solely a matter of spelling. The majority state that they received no specific teaching or training on the unit of emphatic consonants. This substitution is phonological and suprasegmental-based, meaning that the phoneme /t/ is used to replace the emphatic consonant /ṭ/. Both the Cirebonese and Indonesian languages lack emphatic consonants, which is why these students perceive the two consonant sounds as the same. The lack of emphatic consonant teaching further exacerbates the situation.

It is an example of negative language transfer, where learners fail to distinguish between contrast sounds in an L2 due to a lack of similar phonemic sounds in their L1. The consonants /ṭ/, /ṣ/, and /ḍ/ are absent within the native phonology of the learners, which also explains the lack of perception or articulation of these sounds. The mispronunciation is not neutral and can lead to problematic consequences in the area of semantics and religious practice. For example, the term

ṭaiyyib (طَيِّب, which means “good” or “halal”) is not to be confused with the erroneous and substandard *taiyyib*, which is entirely different. It is for this reason that the teaching of emphatic consonants is a matter of urgency. It must comprise aural contrastive listening, tongue posture visualization, and focused, constant articulation. Such training is more likely to lead to improvement in phonological processing and articulatory precision.

#### صَلَاة (ṣalātun)

In the word ṣalātun (صَلَاة), the letter ṣād (/ṣ/) is a voiceless alveolar fricative consonant characterized as emphatic, meaning it is produced with a retracted tongue root and increased tongue tension toward the back of the oral cavity (Mustafawi, 2017). This production results in a larger and darker sound in comparison to its non-emphatic counterpart. In this standard Arabic pronunciation, this phoneme is produced with special force, which is what distinguishes it from the plain sound of /s/.

In articulation practice, witness accounts describe students’ production of the segment ṣād uniformly as the non-emphatic, non-retracted variant /s/. It follows that students produce the word ṣalātu as salātu. This observation fits the description of a substitution, a type of substitution in which a nasal consonant is replaced by another consonant, in this case, following a vowel of the emphatic consonant /ṣ/. This substitution pattern may be attributed to a relative lack of exposure to the phonetics of emphatic consonants within their L1 systems—Cirebonese and Indonesian—where such phonemes are absent. Students’ qualitative response to the presence of a phonetic and graphemic difference within the Arabic alphabet between ṣād and sīn suggested a lack of even superficial awareness of a phonetic difference. Other students even described the sequence as simply “S, but the other is a larger font,” for which they identified both of them.

Sound confusion in a language may be seen to reflect a lack of phonetic understanding of the language, and errors are assumed to be systemic, thus applicable to all students. In this case, students demonstrated a lack of phonemic perception of Arabic’s unique phonemes. In such students’ neighborhoods, the Arabic phonetic system is non-existent, and the erosion of a language’s phonetic features results in a lack of phonemic perception training, leading to the simplification of a language’s features. In this case, students demonstrated a lack of phonemic perception of Arabic’s unique phonemes; in such students’ neighborhoods, the Arabic phonetic system is non-existent. In addition to the erosion of a language’s phonetic features, a lack of phonemic perception training results in the simplification of a language’s features. In this case, students demonstrated a lack of phonemic perception of Arabic’s unique phonemes; in such students’ neighborhoods, the Arabic phonetic system is non-existent.

Within interlanguage phonology, this substitution is indicative of learners’ growing simplification of the target language’s phonological system. Since this distinction of emphasis (emphaticness) is neutral in their L1, the learners do not achieve cognitive awareness of articulatory sensitivity surrounding emphatic sounds such as /ṣ/. It is evident that the pronunciation of ṣād as /s/ is not simply a technical flaw but also an indication of the disengagement of novel phonemes from the learner’s cognitive phonological model.

The extent of this mispronunciation is particularly pronounced in Islamic contexts, where the word ṣalāh (صَلَاة) is the basic term for prayer. The phonological rendering of this word in Islamic contexts is also highly problematic, as the word salāh, using /s/ rather than /ṣ/, is not the correct pronunciation in Arabic. In the context of prayer, which is a highly ritualized act of worship, such errors in pronunciation of the word are significant. It indicates that the mispronunciation is not only a linguistic deficiency but also one that has a standing phonological and ritualistic deficiency within Islamic practices for the students.

Thus, phonetic instruction related to the letter ṣād should begin with the articulation of the sounds the letter represents, emphasizing the difference between emphatic and non-emphatic sounds. Teachers may use contrastive listening, articulation exercises that involve retracting the tongue toward the velum, and minimal pair drills, such as ṣabr vs. sabr, to enhance students’ phonemic awareness. With appropriate instructional strategies, students can be taught to discern greater levels of difference and articulation in the emphatic sounds /ṣ/.

## CONCLUSION

The phonological interference of the Cirebon language shows an impact on students' pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters, especially while pronouncing Arabic phonemes that are not present in the Cirebon and Indonesian languages. As students are not picking certain Arabic sounds, some are replaced, while others are dropped. Examples of these systematic deviations include replacing /q/ with /k/, omitting /ʕ/, replacing /x/ with /h/, and neutralizing /s/ with /s/. These adaptations show simplification and perceptive assimilation. Thus, the mispronunciations, or the uncorrected pronunciation of the Arabic letters, reveal evidence of deeper cross-linguistic phonological constraints that are not adjusted to the Cirebon students' level of Arabic language proficiency.

The study also addresses the contact of Arabic with Cirebon, which other studies have documented as the interference of Arabic with only Javanese or Madurese languages. It further provides evidence of how regional linguistic systems impact the phonological acquisition of Arabic by students within the religious context of pesantren education. It demonstrates the impact of local phonetic realities that students face on the acquisition of multilingual Arabic phonology education in Indonesia.

The pedagogical implications of these findings are closely tied to an understanding of interlanguage phonology and other similar phenomena related to language contact. The effect of local phonological structures on the phenomena of the Arabic language and its pronunciation raises concerns about the theoretical models of second language acquisition and sound. It also provides a linguistic foundation to which contextual and varied teaching methods can be tailored for effectiveness. Future research should suggest a broader analysis to include the interferences of other regional Indo-Austronesian languages, specifically Cirebonese. Acoustic phonetic methodologies can be implemented to gain a better understanding of the desired sound. Finally, the research can be applied to sociolinguistics to study the possible contact phonology in the acquisition of Arabic on a level that addresses variables of exposure, language attitude, and Qur'anic literacy.

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