The English Transliteration of Place Names in

Oman

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Abstract

An especially challenging aspect of transliteration is adopting an adequate system that can be used by an average person who may be unable to interpret diacritics or all the character and character combinations used in traditional and contemporary systems. Also, significant phonological differences between two languages such as those between Arabic and English, and the absence of a consistently used universal system, may result in numerous variations in the spelling of a name. This paper, part of a larger study that the authors are conducting, proposes a simplified system for the English transliteration of Oman's place names written in the Arabic script. The system is meant to be used on tourist maps, at tourist sites, on signposts, and in marketing and public relations material.

Considering the importance of toponyms in conveying the historical and cultural heritage of a people, the extended project will examine the linguistic aspects of all Oman's toponyms, such as their morpho-syntactic and semantic properties and also their lexical-source domains.   The research will further illustrate how cross-cultural influences on place name phonology may serve as narratives of identity and symbolic resistance to the dominant majority.

 Keywords: Arabic; Oman; place name; toponym; transliteration

I. Introduction

A. *The Study*

In an increasingly globalized world, where economies are interdependent and language

barriers are constantly encountered, there is a need for a reliable medium of communication to

avoid misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Oman, on the eastern coast of the Arabian

Peninsula, is an Arabic-speaking country with a population of approximately 2.3 million people,

according to the 2003 census, of whom 22% are expatriates, mostly from non-Arabic-speaking countries in South Asia. Eighty percent of Oman's economy depends on oil and oil-related industries. In order to diversify its economy and income generation, the country is also actively developing its tourism sector.

The presence of a large expatriate workforce mostly comprising of non-Arabic speakers, and an increase in tourist numbers from Europe and Asia, have necessitated a reliable representation in English of Arabic place names to be used on tourist maps and signposts. The problems encountered in trying to locate places are often due to the great variation evident in the English spelling of a particular name. To illustrate, the name الخوض /ʔalxaˆʊdˠ / in Oman is written on signposts in six different ways within a radius of two kilometers---thus al Khaud, AL-Khawd, AL Khawd, Al Khoud, Al Khuwd, Al-Khowd. This variation appears even in local newspapers, magazines and official documents. As a result, the government requested the present writers to produce an agreed English form for all the country's place names.

This article, then, is a report on the framework and methodology used to produce a simplified system for transliterating Omani place names into English for people who do not read or speak Arabic. The system is especially aimed at those individuals who may not necessarily have a college education or an understanding of diacritics. The article is also part of an ongoing research project being conducted by the authors on the linguistic analysis of the toponyms of Oman.

B. Transliteration Systems

Transliteration is the representation of a word or phrase written in a script different from the source language achieved by using the characters or letters of the target language. Ideally, one would hope for a one-to-one mapping of the graphemes, though this is not possible in Arabic-English transliteration due to the absence of consonantal equivalences in one of the two languages. The problem is compounded by the fact that short vowels are not represented by letters in Arabic but by vocalization diacritics, which are rarely used except in the Quran. Transliteration is also a challenging task due to the great variation possible in the pronunciation of a particular Arabic word arising from a speaker's dialect. These problems may result in variant representations of a name for example قاسم /qaːsɪm/ as Jasim, Gasim, Qasim and Kasim.

Orthographic variation in Arabic due to frequently-occurring errors also contributes to variation in the English spelling. An example arises in deciding among the different spellings of *alif* ا , whether it occurs with or without *hamza* ء: ا , أ , إ ; also between word-final *haa* ه , ه and *taa marbuta* ة , ة , and between *dhaa* ظ and *daad* ض .

Correct Arabic form:	الإعمار	/ʔalʔɪʕmaːr/	al **I**mar
Wrong Arabic form:	الأعمار	/ʔalʔaʕmaːr/	al **A**mar
Correct Arabic form:	الأنصب	/ʔalʔansˠab/	al **A**nsab
Wrong Arabic form:	الإنصب	/ʔalʔɪnsˠab/	al **I**nsab
Correct Arabic form:	المنتزه	/ʔalmʊntazah/	al Muntaza**h**
Wrong Arabic form:	المنتزة	/ʔalmʊntaza/	al Muntaza**a**
Correct Arabic form:	الحمضي	/ʔalHɪmdˠi/	al Him**d**i

Wrong Arabic form:　　　　الحمظي　　　/ʔalʜɪmðɣ i/　　　al Him**dh**i

A lack of uniformity in the English rendering of Arabic names may also be attributed to the existence of a number of traditional and contemporary transliteration systems, none of which is universally applied in spite of agreements between countries to adopt a common system (UNGEGN 2003).

Under the auspices of the League of Arab States, the Third Arab Conference on Geographical Names (ACGN) was held in May 2007 in Beirut, during which a common system for the Romanization of Arabic names was approved by the members of the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names (ADEGN) (Khraish, 2008, 2009). The system illustrated in Table I has come to be known by its moniker the Beirut System.

This system has been adopted by the National Survey Authority (NSA) of Oman's Ministry of Defense. Adopting it, however, has not proved to be universal or consistent. Where it is applied, an average person often faces the difficulty of interpreting the diacritical marks and some of the characters and their combinations.

TABLE I

ADEGN TRANSLITERATION ALPHABET

Arabic Character	Example-Oman Place Name	Romanization
همزة ء (glottal stop)	الخضراء Al Kha<u>d</u> rā'	'

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ا	مزهرات Muzhirāt	ā
ب	محيضيب Muḥayd̲ īb	b
ت	البستان Al Bustān	t
ث	الثريمدي Al Thuraymidī	th
ج	الجصة Al Jiṣṣah	j
ح	الحمرية Al Ḥamriyyah	ḥ
خ	الخورات Al Khawrāt	kh
د	الدويحة Al Duwayḥah	d
ذ	العذيبة Al ʿUdhaybah	dh
ر	المرازح Al Marāziḥ	r
ز	المزارع Al Mazāriʿ	z
س	المخيسرات Al Mukhaysirāt	s
ش	الحشاʾ Al Ḥashāʾ	sh
ص	الصريمة Al Ṣarīmah	ṣ
ض	الضبعاني Al Ḍabʿ ānī	ḍ
ط	القويطع Al Quwayṭiʿ	ṭ
ظ	الظويهر Al Ḍhuwayhir	ḍh
ع	العينين Alʿ Aynayn	ʿ
غ	الغويغية Al Ghuwayghiyyah	gh
ف	الغظيفة Al Ghuḍhayfah	f

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ق	Muqay<u>h</u>ifah مقيحفة	q
ك	Mukayrik مكيرك	k
ل	Al Salīl السليل	l
م	Al Marāzi<u>h</u> المرازح	m
ن	Gha<u>d</u>fān غضفان	n
هـ والتاء المربوطة في نهاية الكلمة	Al Shahbārī الشهباري Al Shujayjiyyah الشجيجية	h
و	Al Wāsi<u>t</u> الواسط Al Hubūbiyyah الهبوبية	w, ū
ي	Al Ma<u>h</u>yūl المحيول <u>T</u>īwī طيوي	y, ī
فتحة قصيرة	Al <u>S</u>arfānah الصرفانة	a
فتحة طويلة	Al <u>T</u>āli' ā الطالعي	ā
ألف ممدودة (آ)	Āthār آثار	ā
ألف مقصورة (ى)	Al Multaqa´ الملتقى	a´
ضمّة قصيرة	Al Wu<u>t</u>ayyah الوطية	u
ضمّة طويلة	Al Sūdiyyīn السوديين	ū
كسرة قصيرة	Al Mazāri' المزارع	i
كسرة طويلة	Al Ghadīr الغدير	ī
شدّة	Al Lammā' اللماع	Doubling the letter

II. Method

A. Data

The initial data of almost 5,600 names was provided by the National Survey Authority (NSA) at Oman's Ministry of Defense. The data consisted of Arabic and non-Arabic names with vocalization diacritics indicating the dialectal pronunciation of the names by the inhabitants of the particular region in which they occur, together with their English transliteration. The dialectal pronunciation of an Arabic name may or may not reflect how the form is pronounced in Modern Standard Arabic. The transliteration system adopted by NSA is based on the Beirut System (Khraish 2008, 2009) and is used on official defense maps of the country.

These lists were subsequently sent to Oman's Ministry of the Interior which then disseminated them to the sixty-one *wilayas* or governorates, located in the various regions of the country. The governors were asked to verify the names, add any missing ones and indicate the local pronunciation of the names using vocalization diacritics. With additional information from the governorates, the final list grew to 6,176 names.

It should be noted that in the southern regions of Oman there are other indigenous languages spoken besides Arabic. These are Modern South Arabian languages such as Mehri, Jibbali (or Shehri) and Harsusi: they are not mutually intelligible with Arabic and include sounds absent in Arabic, such as the lateral-alveolar fricative /ś/ (Simeone-Senelle, 1997). Thus, verification of a name's pronunciation by a governorate was important.

B. Procedure

In reaching a simplified transliteration system, the strategy adopted by the authors was based on the following principles:

That the reader of the place names

- is a non-Arabic speaker

- has minimal reading skills in the English language

- has no background in the principles of linguistics

Also that

- the English form will not necessarily be a perfect equivalent of the Arabic form

- the English form should be reasonably readable

- the non-Arabic speaker should be able to pronounce the name with relative ease

- the Arabic listener should find it reasonably easy to recognize the spoken version produced by the non-Arabic speaker

For Arabic place names, the decision was taken to base the English form on the Modern Standard Arabic pronunciation of the name, rather than on the local or regional pronunciation which may vary considerably from one region to the next, especially with respect to vowels. This variation can be illustrated by the example of the Omani place name الفرفارة /ʔalfarfaːra/ which is spelt as Al Farfarah, Al Furfarah and Al Firfarah, depending on who writes the name. The authors also considered that the Omanis whom tourists or expatriates generally encounter are literate and thus, very likely, will have been exposed to at least some education in Modern Standard Arabic and so able to recognize the spoken standard form of the name.

With respect to the non-Arabic place names, particularly found in the country's southern region, the English form is based on the Arabic spelling of the name provided by the NSA, the pronunciation of which is indicated by vocalization diacritics. The decision to use the NSA's forms as a reference point was influenced by the fact that these are the ones officially endorsed by the government. However, there are some exceptions to be noted later in the paper.

Six subjects were used to test the proposed system and they ranged in education from those with only seven years of schooling up to those with a doctorate. Two were from the United Kingdom and one each from the United States, Finland, India and Pakistan. The purpose for using the subjects was to determine readability by a non-Arabic speaker and to assess clarity in his or her production of the name to the extent that a native speaker of the language would be able to recognize it with ease.

The procedure adopted is as follows:

1. If it is an Arabic name, the standard form is identified using the *al Maktaba al Shamela* program, Version 3.28, which consists of over 5,300 Arabic books and 170 dictionaries and books on language. However, there may be several standard forms----shown below----which have the same consonants in the same order but may vary in their short vowels, in which case step 2 is applied:

الجرف (الجَرْف)	/ʔaldʒarf/	al Jarf
(الجُرُف)	/ʔaldʒʊrʊf/	al Juruf
(الجِرَف)	/ʔaldʒɪraf/	al Jiraf

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2. If there is more than one standard form, as noted above, then the NSA's pronunciation of the word is adopted, as long as it represents one of the standard forms. The pronunciation is determined by the vocalic diacritics that the NSA included.

بدح : (بَدْح)	/badн/	Badh
(بُدْح)	/bʊdн/	Budh
(بِدْح)	/bɪdн/	Bidh
(بُدُح)	/bʊdʊн/	Buduh
(بَدَح)	/badaн/	Badah

According to NSA's vocalic diacritics, the pronunciation adopted is بَدَح /badaн/.

3. If the NSA form is clearly contradicted by the governorate's form, then we revert to the governorate's as long as both represent possible standard forms.

NSA form:	الملحة	/ʔalmalнa/	al Malha
Governorate form:	المليحة	/ʔalmʊla͡ɪнa/	al Mulaiha

NSA form:	السليلة	/ʔalsalila/	al Salila
Governorate form:	السليسلة	/ʔalsʊla͡ɪsɪla/	al Sulaisila

4. If both the NSA's form and the governorate's are dialectal varieties, then neither is adopted. A standard form of the word is adopted which best represents a meaning for that region. For example, if one form represents a relevant meaning for a region and another one is meaningless or is a taboo word, then the authors opt for the former. For example, فيفي is presented as /fifi/ (Fifi) by NSA and the governorate; however, since this form

does not exist in the standard Arabic language, the form adopted is فَيْفِي /faˆɪfi/ (Faifi),

which refers to the topographical features of a place.

5. In cases where there are significant consonantal differences influenced by the local dialect
   and there is discrepancy between the NSA and the governorate, then both forms are
   retained in order to avoid misunderstandings:

NSA form:	ثقبة عليقم	/Ө ʊqbat ʕʊlaˆɪqɪm/	Thuqbat Ulaiqim
Governorate form:	ثقبة عليجم	/Ө ʊqbat ʕʊlaˆɪdʒɪm/	Thuqbat Ulaijim
NSA form:	شقة الراكة	/ʃaqqat alra:ka/	Shaqqat al Raka
Governorate form:	شجة الراكة	/ʃadʒdʒat alra:ka/	Shajjat al Raka

6. In a limited number of cases when only dialect forms occur in both the NSA lists and the
   governorate, and if the standard forms would significantly change the form of the name in
   terms of its consonants, the dialect form is retained so as to avoid confusion. For
   example:

Standard form:	سارق هرجة	/sa:rɪq hardʒa/	Sariq Harja
Dialectal form:	سارج هرية	/sa:rɪdʒ harja/	Sarij Harya
Standard form:	أبو جونة	/ʔabu dʒuna/	Abu Juna
Dialectal form:	أبو يونة	/ʔabu juna/	Abu Yuna

7. In the case of non-Arabic names, the transliteration is based on the NSA form. If a
   consonant in the NSA form is clearly contradicted by the governorate's, then the
   governorate's form is retained. For example:

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NSA form:	طاهاف	/tˤa:ha:f/	Tahaf
Governorate form:	كاهاف	/ka:ha:f/	Kahaf
NSA form:	صفغ	/sˤafaɣ/	Safagh
Governorate form:	صفق	/sˤafaq/	Safaq

III. Results and Analysis

As mentioned above, the intended readers for the simplified system (Table II) proposed in this paper comprise tourists, business people, and an expatriate workforce which does not necessarily have a college education. In essence, it is aimed at readers who may be unable to interpret diacritical marks and some characters and character combinations that are typical of most transliteration systems.

The main distinguishing features of the proposed system are the absence of:

- any diacritics and hyphens

- double letters to represent long vowels

- assimilation of the definite article with the actual name

It is also distinguished by the use of only three letters to represent all the vowels of standard Arabic and lower case letters to represent the definite article.

TABLE II

SIMPLIFIED ARABIC TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM

Arabic Character	Example Oman Place Name	Transliteration
ا (حرف المد)	مزهرات Muzhirat	a
آ، أ	آثار Athar الأنصب al Ansab	a
ب	محيضيب Muhaidib	b
ت	البستان al Bustan	t
ث	الثريمدي al Thuraimidi	th
ج	الجصة al Jissa	j
ح	الحمرية al Hamriyya	h
خ	الخورات al Khaurat	kh
د	الدويحة al Duwaiha	d
ذ	العذيبة al Udhaiba	dh
ر	المرازح al Marazih	r
ز	المزارع al Mazari	z
س	المخيسرات al Mukhaisirat	s
ش	الحشاء al Hasha	sh
ص	الصريمة al Sarima	s
ض	الضبعاني al Dabani	d
ط	القويطع al Quwaiti	t
ظ	الظويهر al Dhuwaihir	dh
ع	العينين al Ainain	Dropped except in few

	al Mayaqil المعاقل Hail al Bawud حيل البعوض	cases where "y" or "w" is used to represent it
غ	al Ghuwaighiyya الغويغية	gh
ف	al Ghudhaifa الغظيفة	f
ق	Muqaihifa مقيحفة	q
ك	Mukairik مكيرك	k
ل	al Salil السليل	l
م	al Marazih المرازح	m
ن	Ghadfan غضفان	n
هـ	al Shahbari الشهباري	h
و (حرف المد)	al Sudiyyin السوديين	u
و (غير ممدودة)	al Wasit الواسط	w
ي (حرف المد)	Tiwi طيوي	i
ي (غير ممدودة)	al Mahyul المحيول	y
ء	al Khadra الخضراء al Zamayim الزمائم	Dropped except in few cases where "y" is used to represent it
الفتحة َ	al Sarfana الصرفانة	a
الضمة ُ	al Wutayya الوطية	u
الكسرة ِ	Al Mazari المزارع	i

The features of the system are as follows:

1. **Phonemic Representation:** the English form is based on the phonemic transcription of the word. This aids in limiting the number of vowels used:

    الرحبة /ʔalraħba/ al Rahba

    البير /ʔalbir/ al Bir

    الجفرة /ʔaldʒʊfra/ al Jufra

    الجوف /ʔaldʒa͡ʊf/ al Jauf

2. **Definite Article:** The ال pronounced phonemically as /ʔal/ is written in lower case letters **al**, followed by a space not a hyphen, and then followed by a capital letter for the initial segment of the name. This allows for ease of readability, a focus on the actual name without a prefix and storage of the names in databases according to the alphabetical order of the actual name without the prefix.

    Also, assimilation of the prefix and the name is not represented in English:

    السوادي: As Sawādī (Transliteration with assimilation in the ADEGN system)

    al Sawadi (Transliteration without assimilation in the simplified system)

    الشهباري: Ash Shahbārī (Transliteration with assimilation in the ADEGN system)

    al Shahbari (Transliteration without assimilation in the simplified system)

    الزمائم: Az Zamā'im (Transliteration with assimilation in the ADEGN system)

    al Zamayim (Transliteration without assimilation in the simplified system)

3. **Singular Feminine Suffix:** Given the fact that the suffix ta marbuta ة , ﺔ is usually not

pronounced, it is not represented in English. When the suffix is pronounced, it is done so

as /t/ when the name is followed by another word, such as in compound names, and

represented by the letter **t** in transliteration:

الغبيرة	/ʔalɣʊba͡ɪra/	al Ghubaira
الحجرة	/ʔalʜʊdʒra/	al Hujra
حلة البرج	/ʜɪllat ʔalbʊrdʒ /	Hillat al Burj
قصبية الحواسنة	/qasɣ bɪjjat ʔalʜawa:sɪna/	Qasbiyyat al Hawasina

4. **Monophthongs:** The system does not distinguish between short and long vowels in

rendering words into English. When tested, subjects did not make a distinction in their

production of a word containing a long vowel, whether the segment is represented by a

single or double letters. Also, they all reported that the single letter was easier to read.

And since it is based on standard Arabic, which has only three short vowel phonemes /a,

ɪ, ʊ/, the system uses only three letters to represent both the short and long vowels **a**, **i**

and **u.** The letters **o** and **e** are not used except in a few exceptions noted in (17):

البادة	/ʔalba:da/	al Bada
المنديل	/ʔalmɪndil/	al Mindil
سرور	/sʊrur/	Surur

5. **Diphthongs:** There are only two diphthongs in standard Arabic /a͡ɪ/ and /a͡ʊ/ and the

   system represents them as **ai** and **au**, respectively:

الحميضة	/ʔalнʊma͡ɪdɤa/	al Humaida
الخورات	/ʔalxa͡ʊra:t/	al Khaurat

6. **Digraphs:** The sounds /θ, ð, ʃ, x, ɣ/ are represented as digraphs: **th**, **dh**, **sh**, **kh** and **gh,**

   respectively:

الثرمدية	/ʔalθarmadɪjja/	al Tharmadiyya
الذيالات	/ʔalðɪja:la:t/	al Dhiyalat
الشجيجية	/ʔalʃʊdʒa͡ɪdʒɪjja/	al Shujaijiyya
الخوير	/ʔalxʊwa͡ɪr/	al Khuwair
غلا	/ɣala:/	Ghala

7. **Epenthetic Vowel:** If a digraph is followed by an /h/ then an epenthetic vowel is added.

   In testing for clarity, the epenthetic vowel has not been found to cause difficulty in

   recognizing the name:

أدحلقوم	/ʔaðнalqum/: Adhhalqum (Transliteration without epenthetic vowel)
	Adhahalqum (Transliteration with epenthetic vowel)

أثحيكنوت	/ʔaθнi:knut/: Athhiknut (Transliteration without epenthetic vowel)
	Athahiknut (Transliteration with epenthetic vowel)

Also, to avoid ambiguity, two letter sequences that are not digraphs are generally

separated by a vowel:

تدهو /tadhu/: Tadhu (Transliteration without epenthetic vowel)

Tadahu (Transliteration with epenthetic vowel)

دار أصحور /daːr ʔasɣ нur/:   Dar Ashur (Transliteration without epenthetic

vowel)

Dar Asahur (Transliteration with epenthetic vowel)

8. **Consonantal Geminates:** The Arabic *shadda* is represented as double letters, except if

the sound is represented by a digraph, then it is not duplicated:

الدنانة	/ʔaldannaːna/	al Dannana
الركة	/ʔalrɪkka/	al Rikka
الخشة	/ʔalxaʃʃa/	al Khasha

9. **Emphatic Consonants:** The system uses the same letters **t**, **d**, and **s** to represent both

emphatic consonants /tɣ , dɣ , sɣ / and their non-emphatic counterparts /t, d, s/. This

avoids the use of diacritics or sub-macrons which some systems typically use to represent

emphatics. Furthermore, non-Arabic speakers cannot produce the difference between the

two sets of sounds, thus, it is deemed unnecessary to distinguish them in writing:

السرين	/ʔalsɪrin/	al Sirin
الصريمة	/ʔalsɤʊra͡ɪma/	al Suraima
الداسر	/ʔalda:sɪr/	al Dasir
الضبكة	/ʔaldɤabka/	al Dabka
التبيبة	/ʔaltʊba͡ɪba/	al Tubaiba
الطف	/ʔaltɤaf/	al Taf

The emphatic /ðɤ / is also represented by the digraph **dh** as the phoneme /ð/.

| الذيالات | /ʔalðɪja:la:t/ | al Dhiyalat |
| الظاهر | /ʔalðɤa:hɪr/ | al Dhahir |

10. **Voiceless Epiglottal Fricative**: The *haa* ح or /ʜ/[1] is represented by the letter **h**, the

same as *haa* ﻫ or /h/. Non-Arabic speakers cannot produce the difference, thus, the

system does not represent it in writing. Also, it avoids the use of cedillas or sub-macrons

used in other systems and which an average reader may not be able to interpret:

| الهبوبية | /ʔalhʊbubɪjja/ | al Hububiyya |
| الحمرية | /ʔalʜamrɪjja/ | al Hamriyya |

11. **Voiced Epiglottal Fricative:** The *ain* ع or /ʢ/ is treated as follows:

- In initial position of the name after the definite article, and in final position, the

  ain is omitted and not represented in English:

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[1] The voiceless and voiced epiglottal fricatives were traditionally considered as pharyngeal and were represented as /ħ/and /ʕ/, respectively (IPA Symbols)

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العافية	/ʔalʕaːfɪja/	al Afiya
العقبة	/ʔalʕaqaba/	al Aqaba
الجعجاع	/ʔaldʒaʕdʒaːʕ/	al Jaja

- In medial position of a name, it is omitted, unless this produces a change in the number of syllables in English. If it is not omitted, then medially, the fricative is replaced by the letter **y** if it is preceded or followed by an open vowel and by the letter **w** if preceded by a closed vowel. This allows for:

  − the same number of syllables in English as in Arabic, which aids the Arabic speaker to recognize the name

البلقعة	/ʔalbalqaʕa/	al Balqaya
البلعقة	/ʔalbalʕaqa/	al Balaqa
الفراعة	/ʔalfarraːʕa/	al Farraya
الجعجاع	/ʔaldʒaʕdʒaːʕ/	al Jaja
الجعجعة	/ʔaldʒaʕdʒaʕa/	al Jajaya

  − ease in reading by avoiding three vowel sequences

| الشعيبة | /ʔalʃʊʕa͡ɪba/ | al Shuwaiba |
| الشعيبات | /ʔalʃʊʕa͡ɪbaːt/ | al Shuwaibat |

  − avoidance of ambiguity with a diphthong which is pronounced differently

| فعوت أطساح | /faʕut atɣ saːн/ | Fawut Atsah |

غليل المساعيد /ɣalil ʔalmasaːʕiːd/   Ghalil al Masayid

12. **The Glottal Stop:** The *hamza* ء or /ʔ/is treated as follows:

Intervocally between unrounded vowels, it is represented by a glide or the letter **y** so as to avoid

ambiguity with the diphthong /a͡ɪ/, elsewhere it is dropped. The insertion of the letter **y** also

better approximates the Arabic pronunciation:

الخزائن   /ʔalxazaːʔɪn/   al Khazayin
الزمائم   /ʔalzamaːʔɪm/   al Zamayim
شارع فؤاد   /ʃaːrɪʕ fʊʔaːd/   Fuad Street
حيضاء   /ha͡ɪdɣ aːʔ/   Haida
شارع الشاطيء /ʃaːrɪʕ ʔalʃaːtɣ ɪʔ/   al Shati Street
الأنصب   /ʔalʔansɣ ab/   al Ansab
شارع الإعمار /ʃaːrɪʕ ʔalʔɪʕmaːr/   al Imar Street

13. **The Alif:** There are three: the *alif al mad* or *alif mamduda* ا , آ is phonemically a low

front unrounded vowel /aː/ and is represented in English by the letter **a**:

البستان   /ʔalbʊstaːn/   al Bustan
مخاضة   /maxaːdɣ a/   Makhada
اللآجال   /ʔal laʔaːdʒ aːl/   al Lajal

The second is the *alif maqsura* ى and phonemically has the sound /aː/. It is also

represented in English as **a**:

| الملتقى | /ʔalmʊltaqa:/ | al Multaqa |
| الوسطى | /ʔalɰʊstɤ a:/ | al Wusta |

And the third is the *alif ghair mamduda* أ which phonemically has the sound /ʔa/. It is

represented in English as **a**:

| الأفراض | /ʔalʔafra:dɤ / | al Afrad |
| الأبطح | /ʔalʔabtɤ aн/ | al Abtah |

14. **The Ya:**   There are two: the *yaa almad* ي   is phonemically a high front unrounded

vowel /i/ and is represented in English by the letter **i**:

| الخيران | /ʔalxira:n/ | al Khiran |
| حقمي | /нaqmi/ | Haqmi |

The other is the *yaa ghair mamduda* ي and phonemically pronounced as the palatal

glide /j/. It is represented in English as **y**:

| شارع زولية | /ʃa:rɪʕ zulɪjja/ | Zuliyya Street |
| شارع يتي | /ʃa:rɪʕ jɪti/ | Yiti Street |

15. **The Wauw:** There are two: the *wauw almad* و is phonemically a high back rounded

vowel /u/ and is represented in English by the letter **u**:

| الرجوع | /ʔalrʊdʒ uʕ/ | al Ruju |
| المحيول | /ʔalmaнjul/ | al Mahyul |

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The other is the *wauw ghair mamduda* و and phonemically is the velar glide /ɰ/. It is

represented in English as **w**:

الوادي الكبير	/ʔalɰa:di ʔalkabir/	al Wadi al Kabir
الوسطى	/ʔalɰʊstɣ a:/	al Wusta

16.**Diacritcs:** The three diacritics---*fatha* (◌َ) *, kasra* (◌ِ) *and damma* (◌ُ)----are the

short vowels /a/, /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ and are represented in English by the letters **a, i** and **u**,

respectively:

سَل	/sal/	Sal
صِنب	/sɣ ɪnb/	Sinb
الغُبرة	/ʔalɣʊbra/	al Ghubra

17.The system does not use the letters **o** or **e** nor uses double letters to represent a vowel

unless the name has been traditionally or historically written with such a letter or with

double letters, such as:

السيب	/ʔalsib/	al Seeb
مدينة السلطان قابوس	/madinat ʔalsʊltɣ a:n qa:bus/	Madinat al Sultan Qaboos
بوشر	/bɔʃar/	Boshar

Also, when a name in English may be construed as obscene or taboo, then a slight

variation of spelling is applied:

شات	/ʃa:t/	Shaat

فق	/faq/	Faqq

18. If the system produces two identical forms within the same governorate, then one form is slightly modified in English to distinguish it from the other. They are only a few of these cases:

القلع	/ʔalqalʕ/	al Qali
القلعة	/ʔalqalʕa/	al Qala
القلعي	/ʔalqalʕi/	al Qalayi
الجعجاع	/ʔaldʒaʕdʒaːʕ/	al Jaja
الجعجعة	/ʔaldʒaʕdʒaʕa/	al Jajaya
الفرع	/ʔalfarʕ/	al Fara
الفرعة	/ʔalfarʕa/	al Farya

19. Another exception to the phonemic representation in transliteration is when a common name has a frequently occurring spelling, for example Abdullah and Ahmed

20. **Bin** and **bint:** They are part of personal names and mean "son of" and "daughter of" respectively. They are not capitalized and represented as *bin* and *bint*

طوي مبروك بن سعيد /tɤ aɰi mabruk bɪn saʕid/ Tawi Mabruk bin Sayid

رق عامر بن علي الحجري /rɪq ʕaːmɪr bɪn ʕali ʔalʜadʒri/ Riq Amir bin Ali al Hajri

IV. Conclusion

With tourism becoming an increasingly significant source of income in Oman, and an overall economy that is highly dependent on a large work-force that is non-Arabic-speaking, it is important that the English rendering of Oman place names is consistent, reliable, clear and readable. Place names function as information markers and how they appear on signposts, at tourist sites, on tourist maps, in the media and in various marketing and public relations documents, will play an important role in the development of the tourism sector---hence the economy--- and in fostering a positive image of the country overseas. Furthermore, with the World Wide Web being the largest international repository of knowledge, and with information sharing over the Internet rapidly growing, it is essential to have a consistent English representation of Oman's place names so as to encourage tourists and those seeking business opportunities during visits to the country.

Finally, place names may convey the historical and cultural heritage of a community, as well as offer insights into the people's perception of the geo-political and socio-cultural contexts in which they live. This study is part of a larger project which the authors are presently conducting in which they will present a linguistic analysis of all the place names of Oman. Morpho-syntactic and semantic properties of the place names will be described and lexical source domains identified. Place names representing geomorphic features have been found to be the most prevalent in the data; hence their taxonomic relations will be investigated and described. In addition to the linguistic analysis, the intricate interplay between language, the physical environment, settlement patterns and subsistence activities will be examined. The research will further illustrate how cross-cultural influences on the pronunciation of names in certain ethno-

linguistic communities within Oman may serve as narratives of identity and symbolic resistance

to the dominant majority.

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