

ORTHOGRAPHIC CHARACTERS

The Arabic-based script for Modern South Arabian was developed on the basis of minimal use of additional characters to facilitate the writing of texts. The choice of particular characters was adopted in part by observation of the use of Arabic in SMS-messaging and emails. Of the six MSAL, Šherēt has the largest consonant inventory. We therefore developed a script for Šherēt from which Mehri, Harsusi, Hobyot and Bathari take a subset. The symbols used for particular sounds, several of which are not found in Arabic, are listed below. The rationale for the choice of particular symbols is described beneath each symbol:

Šherēt

ḍ ظ

ḍ is the cognate of Arabic ظ

ž چ

ž is expressed by the symbol most commonly used to express ž in Arabic script

ś پ

ś is represented most commonly by Arabic ث in SMS messaging and email. We therefore chose an upside-down ث.

ṣ ض

ṣ is the cognate of Arabic ض, which continues to be realised in several southern Arabic dialects as a lateral emphatic fricative.

š̃ ش

š̃ in Šherēt corresponds to š in the other MSAL, and is significantly more common than the non-labialised palato-alveolar fricative š. For Šherēt, š̃ is therefore represented as ش. For all other MSAL, which do not distinguish š from š̃, š is represented as ش.

ṣ̌ ض

The emphatic correspondent of ش is represented as ض with three dots above, just as the emphatic correspondent of س, which has no dots above, is represented by ص.

ẓ̌ ذ

Šherēt ẓ̌ is an allophone of /l/ in most cases, and is most commonly represented as ذ in the unaugmented Arabic script used in SMS messaging. This sound is not found in the other MSAL.

ṣ̌ پ

š in Šherēt is far less common than the labialised palato-alveolar fricative ʃ. Therefore we adopted ش with an additional three dots beneath.

ũ / õ ُو

ã / ĕ َّا

ĩ / ě ِا

Nasalisation of long vowels is very common in Šherēt. Nasalisation is not always expressed in the Arabic transcriptions, because it can be predicted in context in most words. Where it is expressed we adopt a superscript ن.

The MSAL have more vowels than Arabic; however, we decided on maximum economy of symbols and realised that context is sufficient to establish which vowel sound is meant on any one occasion. As in Arabic, short vowels are not represented. In terms of the long vowels, the Arabic long vowel و represents ũ and õ; the Arabic long vowel ا represents ã and ĕ; and the Arabic long vowel ي represents ĩ and ě.