

Re: Vowel variations in Arabic

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Harlan Messinger wrote:

What "standard" Arabic vowel do the "e"s represent in the name of Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat? How about the "e"s in Fez, Yemen, and Benghazi? Do they reflect the pronunciation used in those locations?

How about the "o"s in our spelling and pronunciation of Oman and Oran? How about the one in Jordan? I know that that's a /u/ in Arabic; I thought it would be from the Hebrew, but isn't that a patax /a/? And while in English we write "Kuwait", why is it "Koweït" in French?

I should have listened to the CD that came with my Arabic primer before asking this. I can tell now that even within one person's speech /a/ comes out two different ways depending on what precedes it--that after /q/, for instances, it's [a], while after /k/ it's closer to [A]? (Is [A] the symbol used for French "quatre" [kAtr]? In any event, I can imagine why the French would have rendered "Fa:s" as "Fès", per Yusuf.) And in some cases /u/ sounds closer to [o] than in other cases.

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