

Silent articulations in Mehri, a Modern South Arabian language

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Silent articulations have only rarely been reported as occurring systematically in the phonologies of languages. Lawson et al. (2015) found Scottish English speakers executing /r/-articulations such that maximum displacement was reached after the phonatory source had ceased, rendering the articulation inaudible, and Gick et al. (2012) investigated utterance-final silent vowels in Oneida and Blackfoot. We report a comparable phenomenon in Mehri concerning utterance-final silent sonorant consonants. Mehri has two laryngeal classes of consonants, ‘open’ (voiceless obstruents) and ‘closed’ (voiced and/or emphatic consonants) (Watson & Heselwood 2016). Both classes exhibit preglottalization utterance-finally, an areal feature of languages in the south west of the Arabian Peninsula (Watson & Bellem 2011), manifesting as creak at the end of a preceding vowel. In ‘open’ consonants it is followed by glottal opening to provide airflow for voiceless fricatives and aspirated stops. In ‘closed’ consonants it is followed, in the case of oral stops and sonorants, by a complete maintained glottal closure during which a delayed articulation is executed. Oral stops are released as ejectives but the sonorants /m, n, l, r/ remain silent (see fig.1). Sometimes the silent articulation is as full as a sounded articulation, sometimes it involves less extensive articulatory contact. We have also found sonorants that begin sounded but continue silently, and ones in which the glottal closure is released before the articulation, resulting in a whispered realization. We present examples of all these kinds of utterance-final realizations taken from acoustic and electropalatographic recordings of two adult male speakers, focussing mainly on silent articulations because of their presumed uniqueness.

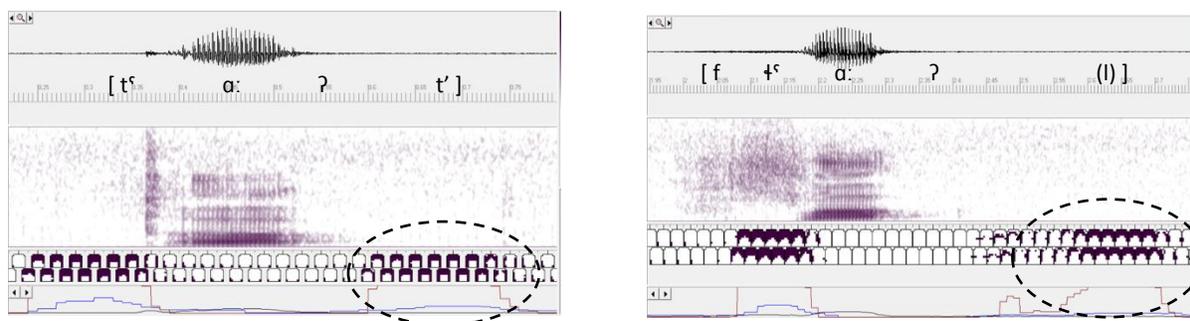


Figure 1. Left: EPG and spectrogram of *tād* ‘one’ with final ejective [tʰ] (circled); right: *fšāl* ‘plenty’ with silent final [(l)] (circled).

References

- Gick, B., Bliss, H., Michelson, K. & Radanov, B. (2012) Articulation without acoustics: ‘Soundless’ vowels in Oneida and Blackfoot. *J Phon* 40, 46–53.
- Lawson, E., Scobbie, J. & Stuart-Smith, J. (2015) The role of anterior lingual gesture delay in coda /r/ lenition: an ultrasound tongue imaging study. *Proceedings of the 18th ICPhS*, Glasgow (0332).
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Publication of EPG data in study silent articulations. The methodology was not very clear to me, maybe consider as a poster presentation.