



**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
University of Diyala  
College of Education for Humanities  
Department of English**



# **Juncture in Arabic: An Optimality-Theoretic Approach**

A Thesis

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By

**Hadeel Majeed Hammood**

Supervised By

**Prof. Ali Abdullah Mahmood (Ph.D.)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present thesis takes the Optimality Theory (OT) as a model for the analysis of juncture in Arabic. The study focuses on Waqf (juncture)<sup>1</sup> in the Glorious Quran (GQ). To the best of our knowledge, this topic has never been dealt with from the optimality-theoretic approach. It is the first study of its type in the Arab homeland and in the world. It is special because of two reasons: first, the analysis of juncture is done in the Quranic texts with all its difficulties on the syntactic, morphological, semantic and phonological aspects. Second, such analysis has been executed within the light of modern linguistics, in general and OT, in particular. Most of the previous studies, if not all, have dealt with Waqf (juncture) in the GQ from either religious or traditional linguistic point of view. The latter has been achieved in terms of parsing and syntactic relations. This work is completely different from those studies in that it tackles Waqf (juncture) as a pure phonological process in relation to other components of language, particularly semantics.

The OT was first launched as a theory of phonology by Prince and Smolensky in 1993 and expanded by McCarthy in 1995. The theory introduces itself through Tableaux which offer good explanation to juncture in Arabic. They facilitate the problem of the optimal output through the interaction between several candidates and several constraints. According to this theory, juncture is analyzed in terms of markedness, faithfulness and alignment constraints. It also works within Hendriks and De Hoop's double-index semantic framework (2001) which claims that context does not have the only role of determining the realized explicit and implicit meaning expressed by the Ayas, but also the semantic function of fixing the most harmonic surface forms of these Ayas with all appropriate types of juncture in Arabic.

The thesis examines 30 Aayas, considered as a yardstick for the exploration of juncture in the language of the Glorious Quran (GQ). The overall results show that the hierarchy of the constraints is different from one Aaya to another due to the type and function of juncture. Moreover, the phonological, semantic and syntactic constraints differ in their selection of the optimal occurrence of juncture depending on the priority of these components. This finding confirms that the phonological constraints show their prevalence over the other constraints which affect the realized meaning of each Aaya. For the constraints themselves, the results indicate that the RM-JUNC constraint exceeds all other constraints, and it achieves the interaction of phonological and semantic factors of juncture in the GQ. Moreover, the results show that the principles and constraints of OT are applied to the analysis of Waqf in the GQ, and thus proved the main hypothesis of the thesis.

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter one presents statement of the problem, the hypothesis, the procedures, aims, limitation and significance of the study. Chapter two sketches out the theoretical background of juncture. It gives an explanation of 'juncture' as a phonological process and discusses its types along with a specific section for the traditional view of Arabic juncture.

In chapter three, there is a description of the phonemic inventory of Arabic which uncovers the phonological nature of Arabic segments, their functions and prosodic features. At the same time, the thesis questions a number of proposals related to juncture in Arabic, including prosodic structure, syllable typology, stress, foot, mora and minimality concept which supply empirical adequacy and formal correctness to the thesis proposal.

Chapter four explains the methodological framework employed in this study including the OT as the adopted phonological model, the directionality of its constraints application and the data. Also, there is a brief description of the fundamental principles of this theory and its advantages and disadvantages.

The central and foundational part of the thesis is chapter five. It presents an optimality-theoretic analysis of juncture in Arabic with all its linguistic, para- and extra-linguistic features which contribute a lot in the occurrence and types of this phonological process. A distinction is also made between religious-based juncture and its linguistic counterpart. This depends heavily on their analytical orientation and stance. This qualitative analysis has been carried out on how juncture displays its characteristics in relation to phonological, semantic and syntactic aspects of the Quranic texts. Moreover, the chapter includes the findings that the study has reached at and their discussion in order to answer the thesis questions and prove its hypotheses through empirical examples. The study ends up with a number of conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further studies in chapter six.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Juncture is a complicated phonological process which is difficult to mark its boundary features . In the language of the GQ, Waqf (juncture) is special on the level of its phonological, semantic and syntactic constraints and functions. It is problematic since it has the relationship between one sound and the sounds that immediately precede and follow it. It is a para-phonotactic unit which belongs to the boundaries between phonological items. Its difficulty lies in its morphophonemic function with double significance, i.e. it is phonemic because it changes the meaning of the utterance, and it is supra-segmental because it is used as a phonological process which breaks up the whole utterance into groups. As far as the language of the GQ is concerned, juncture represents boundary between phonetic or phonological units such as phonemes, syllables, morphemes and words. As such , it is not without difficulties since the misplacement of juncture leads to spoiling the phonological structure of the syllables and the meaning of the constituents of the utterance, as well. To be more specific, this study is supposed to answer the thesis questions: (1) Can Waqf be analyzed due to the optimality-theoretic approach? (2) What type of linguistic constraints do work in specifying the optimal candidate of Waqf in the Ayas of the GQ? (3)What type of phonological constraints is mostly used in the analysis of the Quranic texts? (4) For linguistic analysis, due to the principles and constraints of OT, how are the Ayas of the GQ which contain Waqf analyzed? (5) Is there some kind of interaction between religious-based and linguistic-based analyses?

## **1.2 The Hypothesis**

In this study, it is hypothesized that

1. the principles and constraints of OT can be used for the analysis of Waqf (juncture) in the Quranic texts.
2. the RM-JUNC constraint is more prevalent and frequent than any other constraints in identifying and distinguishing the meaning and the structures of the Ayas of the GQ.
3. the phonological constraints are the most frequent ones among the optimality-theoretic constraints used in the linguistic analysis of the Ayas of the GQ.
4. the constraints of phonology, semantics and syntax of Arabic play a great role in the occurrence of juncture in the Ayas of the GQ.
5. more than one interpretation of the Aya can be found according to the type, function and placement of juncture.
6. the faithfulness constraints are the most frequent constraints among the optimality-theoretic constraints in the analysis of the Ayas of the GQ.

## **1.3 The Procedures**

The procedures of this study consist of the following steps:

1. collecting, manually, data from the GQ for the purpose of investigation.
2. writing a theoretical background of juncture and OT.
3. presenting a detailed survey of the OT as it is the adopted model of the thesis.
4. analyzing the data according to the principles and constraints of OT.

5. drawing conclusions, setting recommendations and giving suggestions for further studies.

#### **1.4 Aims of the Study**

This study aims at

1. investigating the application of OT in analyzing juncture in the GQ.
2. discussing the selected Arabic data (Ayas) in the light of OT.
3. highlighting the influence of juncture on the phonological structure of the syllables ,words and sentences in Arabic context.
4. identifying the types of juncture due to the phonological, semantic and syntactic factors of the Quranic texts.

#### **1.5 Limitation of the Study**

This study is limited to the investigation of Waqf (juncture) in the GQ within an optimality-theoretic approach. Thus, the Ayas represent the raw material which will be undergone analytical steps of constraint-based investigation to mark the phonological, semantic and syntactic functions of juncture.

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study runs as follows:

1. this study fills the gaps which exist in the modern linguistic studies of juncture in Arabic; it is hoped that this study will enrich the optimality-theoretic research in Arabic language .
2. since this study is the first in Arabic phonology in the light of OT, it is expected to add new contribution to the modern Arabic linguistics which lacks such studies.

3. this study will be of a crucial value for those interested in the linguistic studies in general , and in the study of Arabic phonology in the light of new theories of linguistics.

4. it will also be of importance for non-native Arabic readers when they read the literary texts, in general and the GQ, in particular .

5. it discusses the different meanings that are resulted from the optimality-theoretic account of the Ayas of the GQ.

6. it helps graduate and post-graduate students to understand the Quranic texts in new direction and approach.