Arabic Letters and Sounds

All languages have specific sounds that convey meaning when combined. Each sound has a specific place and manner of being produced in our mouths. The Arabic language has 28 specific phonemes, which are the building blocks of any Arabic word. In Arabic, unlike other languages such as English or French, each phoneme matches with a specific letter. This diagram displays all 28 consonant letters of Modern Standard Arabic and where they are produced in the mouth.

Sun and Moon Letters

Sun letters are the letters that are produced using the tip of your tongue. When using the Arabic definite article the, it morphs into the initial consonant of the following word, resulting in a doubled consonant. This is seen in the Arabic word for “sun”, ظُلُ، which is pronounced “as-sh-shams”.

In Moon letters, the article ظ remains the same and does not morph into the consonant that follows it. This is seen in the Arabic word for “moon”, نِجْل, which is pronounced “al-qamar”. Notice how the ظ is fully pronounced.

Pharyngealization

Pharyngealization is the process by which a sound is “swallowed” and pronounced deeper in the throat, closer to the pharynx. When producing any of these letters (ب،ت،ث)، your mouth goes through a two step process. The sound is made by first constricting the pharynx (where the غ and ج are), followed by a return to the primary production location. Try it by contrasting the two sounds.

Source: