

/ʈs/: A VOICELESS UNASPIRATED EMPHATIC ALVEOLAR AFFRICATE

Edward Y. Odisho, Al-Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq

As far as I can tell there is no mention in phonetic literature of a linguistic unit with the following description: a voiceless unaspirated emphatic alveolar affricate, to be transcribed, hereafter, as /ʈs/. This paper reports the existence of /ʈs/ in the Neo-Aramaic language spoken by the Assyrians in Iraq. It is pertinent to point out that the language has three other affricates namely /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ which represent aspirated, unaspirated and voiced palato-alveolar affricates, respectively.

It is worth mentioning that /ʈs/ has no plain counterpart in Neo-Aramaic, therefore one wonders how we have ascribed the features 'emphatic' and 'unaspirated' to the sound concerned. Spectrographic evidence shows that with /ʈs/, F<sub>1</sub> and F<sub>2</sub> behave exactly in the same manner as with other well-established emphatics both in Neo-Aramaic and Arabic, in that F<sub>1</sub> is raised while F<sub>2</sub> is lowered so as to achieve drastic approximation. In so far as the attribute 'unaspirated' is concerned, this is partly based on the auditory quality of /ʈs/ when compared with the German /ts/, and partly on a comparison with the Aramaic /tʃ/ and /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/<sup>1</sup> (for which the term 'aspiration' is broadly used to embrace both frication and aspiration occurring consecutively). The latter comparison shows that the aspiration phase of /ʈs/ is nearer in magnitude to that of /tʃ/ than to that of /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/. This phonetic similarity tempts one to envisage that /ʈs/ has possibly emerged in the system to function as the emphatic counterpart of /tʃ/, the shift in place of articulation being attributed to the availability of better chances for anchoring the tip/blade at the alveolar zone rather than at the palato-alveolar zone. Such anchoring is required to counter the tendency to tamper with the primary articulation under the pressure of the backing gesture, a manoeuvre that is necessary for the execution of the secondary articulation, i.e. pharyngealization.

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1) For the phonetic details on /tʃ/ and /tʃ<sup>h</sup>/, see my paper in Journal of the International Phonetic Association 7, 1977.