

OMAN-SPEECH: A Multi-Layer Annotated Speech Corpus for Omani Arabic Dialects

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Abstract

Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) has achieved strong performance in high-resource languages; however, Dialectal Arabic remains significantly under-resourced. This gap is particularly evident in Oman, where Arabic exhibits substantial sociolinguistic variation shaped by settlement patterns between sedentary (*Hadari*) and nomadic (*Badu*) communities, which are often overlooked by urban-centric or generalized Gulf Arabic datasets. We introduce OMAN-SPEECH, a sociolinguistically stratified spoken corpus for Omani Arabic comprising approximately 40 hours of spontaneous and semi-spontaneous speech from 32 speakers across 11 Wilayats (provinces). The corpus is balanced to capture regional and lifestyle variation and is annotated at the sentence level with Arabic transcription, English translation, and phonetic transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) through a human-in-the-loop annotation pipeline. OMAN-SPEECH provides a foundational resource for evaluating ASR and related speech technologies on Omani and Gulf Arabic varieties and supports more granular modeling of regional dialectal variation.

1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) has led to near-human performance in high-resource languages; however, dialectal Arabic remains a significant challenge due to its unique phonological and morphological complexities (Besdouri et al., 2024; Dhouib et al., 2022). The linguistic landscape of the Arab world is characterized by diglossia (Ferguson, 1959), where Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is used for formal contexts, while daily communication occurs in diverse regional vernaculars (Habash, 2010). While recent

efforts have produced datasets for Egyptian (MGB-3) (Ali et al., 2017), Levantine (Abu Kwaik et al., 2018), and North African varieties (Bougrine et al., 2017; Atouf et al., 2025), and have expanded dialect coverage across many Arabic-speaking countries (Djanibekov et al., 2025), Gulf Arabic, and specifically Omani Arabic, remain severely under-resourced. This scarcity is further compounded by the internal diversity of Omani Arabic, which exhibits distinct variation between sedentary (*Hadari*) and nomadic (*Badu*) communities (Holes, 1989; Al-Balushi, 2017). Existing generic models often fail to generalize to these local varieties, particularly the Bedouin dialects spoken in the country’s interior (Waheed et al., 2023; Djanibekov et al., 2025).

In this paper, we present OMAN-SPEECH, a novel, sociolinguistically stratified speech corpus designed to bridge this gap. Unlike crowd-sourced datasets that often lack metadata depth, our corpus was constructed with a rigorous focus on regional representation and ecological validity, capturing speech in natural environments to reflect real-world acoustic conditions. By systematically documenting Omani dialectal variations with this level of granularity, this corpus represents, to the best of our knowledge, the first dedicated resource of its kind explicitly segmented by both region and lifestyle (Hadari/Badu).

A key feature of this work is the multi-layered annotation schema. Beyond standard transcription, our corpus provides sentence-level translation and phonetic transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). This richness establishes the dataset as a critical benchmark for evaluating ASR performance in Gulf dialects and supports downstream tasks such as machine translation and sociolinguistic analysis. The dataset was processed

through a specialized human-in-the-loop pipeline developed for this study, ensuring high-fidelity, diarization-aware labels.

Our contributions are as follows:

- We introduce OMAN-SPEECH, a sociolinguistically stratified spoken corpus of Omani Arabic comprising ~ 40 hours of spontaneous and semi-spontaneous speech from 32 speakers across 11 Wilayats (provinces), balanced to reflect the Hadari/Badu distinction.
- We provide a multi-layer annotation schema aligned at the sentence level, including Arabic transcription, English translation, and IPA-based phonetic transcription.
- We describe a human-in-the-loop annotation pipeline developed in-house that supports diarization-aware Arabic transcription correction and sequential enrichment of segments with translation and IPA transcription.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related work on Arabic dialect resources and Omani dialectology. Section 3 details the data collection and annotation methodology, including the annotation pipeline. Section 4 presents corpus statistics and regional coverage. Appendix A provides representative annotated examples.

2 Related Works

The study of Arabic Dialect Identification (ADI) has grown substantially in recent years as research attention has shifted from Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) toward regional dialects used in everyday communication. A systematic survey by Elnagar et al. (2021) highlights the need to bridge the gap between formal written Arabic and the low-resource reality of dialectal varieties, which often lack standardized orthography and large-scale digital corpora. The survey further reveals uneven research coverage, with a bias toward text over speech, regional varieties over individual vernaculars, and Egyptian Arabic over other dialects, leaving many local varieties underrepresented.

A number of projects have integrated Omani dialectal data into multi-dialectal computational frameworks. A notable contribution is the MADAR corpus (Multi-Arabic Dialect Applications and Resources), which provides city-level dialect data using a parallel translation methodology to enable controlled comparisons across Arabic varieties, including Muscat as the representative city

for Oman (Bouamor et al., 2018). This emphasis on geographic labeling is further reflected in large-scale social media resources, most notably the *You Tweet What You Speak* corpus introduced by Abdul-Mageed et al. (2018), which leverages city-level location metadata to model urban vernacular variation across the Arab world.

More targeted computational studies have begun to focus explicitly on Omani Arabic. Al-Kharusi and AAlAbdulsalam (2023) present a text-based parallel dataset for machine translation, contributing valuable initial resources for this underrepresented variety. Their work demonstrates the potential of adapting computational models to Omani Arabic, particularly in text-based settings. Building on these efforts, further exploration of spoken Omani dialects and their regional variation is needed to expand dialect-specific resources.

A fundamental consideration in Omani dialectology concerns the treatment of Muscat, which cannot be regarded as a neutral dialectal representative due to its sociolinguistic heterogeneity. In his dialect-geographical study of Oman, Holes (1989) explicitly excludes Muscat for its “melting pot” characteristics of the Capital Area, noting that historical development and demographic change have resulted in extensive linguistic mixing. Holes instead demonstrates that Omani dialect variation is more accurately defined by settlement history and lifestyle patterns, primarily distinguishing between *Hadari* dialects spoken by settled populations in towns and villages, and *Badu* dialects associated with nomadic or semi-settled Bedouin communities. He identifies four primary macro-groups across North and Central Oman: two Bedouin-associated clusters and two sedentary (*Hadari*) clusters. However, this typology excludes several peripheral regions, including Dhofar, Musandam, and northern coastal areas such as Liwa and Shinas. More recently, Alkathiri (2024) expands the geographic scope to include these previously undocumented varieties, proposing a finer-grained classification of ten dialectal groups. This expanded typology offers a substantially broader geographic account of *Hadari* and *Badu* variation across Oman, moving beyond a simple binary representation to reflect linguistic diversity in both northern and southern regions.

Collectively, these studies underscore the limitations of treating Omani Arabic as a single homogeneous variety and highlight the necessity for regionally grounded spoken resources. Building on

these foundations, we introduce OMAN-SPEECH, a spoken corpus stratified to capture *Hadari* and *Badu* distinctions across diverse Wilayats, including regions emphasized in recent geographic classifications. This approach enables more granular modeling and evaluation of Omani dialect variation for speech technologies.

3 Methodology

To ensure a representative sample of Omani linguistic diversity, we employed a stratified sampling strategy targeting specific Wilayats (provinces) in the Sultanate of Oman. The primary objective was to capture the distinct phonological and morphological variations between the communities of the *Hadari* (Urban) and the *Badu* (Bedouin), which have been widely documented as a major axis of dialect differentiation in Oman (Holes, 1989; Al-Balushi, 2017; Alkathiri, 2024). Participants were recruited into small homogeneous groups of two to four individuals from the same Wilayat. This grouping strategy was critical to the study design; by pairing participants with peers in their own community, we minimized the ‘‘Observer’s Paradox’’ and reduced the likelihood of participants code-switching toward Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is crucial for training ASR models that generalize across local varieties (Waheed et al., 2023).

Data collection prioritized ecological validity over studio-quality isolation. Participants were instructed to record in quiet indoor environments using consumer-grade hardware. The recording protocol consisted of two distinct phases: a three-hour group conversational session to capture multi-speaker dynamics, and a one-hour individual monologue session. To stimulate natural speech without constraining the speakers to a script, participants selected discussion topics from a predefined list of culturally relevant categories. Table 2 outlines the thematic categories provided to participants.

The final corpus comprises approximately 40 hours of audio data, processed into sentence-level clips. Table 4 summarizes the high-level statistics of the dataset, including the split between group and individual recordings, the total vocabulary size, and the gender distribution of the speakers. This metadata confirms the suitability of the dataset for training robust acoustic models. We implemented a comprehensive, multi-stage annotation platform developed in-house specifically for this project. The platform streamlines the transition from raw audio

ID	Topic (English)	Topic (Arabic)
1	Daily life and customs	الحياة اليومية والعادات
2	Family and community	الأهل والناس
3	Food and traditional cuisine	الأكل والطعام
4	Travel and transportation	السفر والتنقل
5	University and work life	الجامعة والعمل
6	Technology and modern life	التقنية والحياة الحديثة
7	Stories and folklore	القصص والموروث الشعبي
8	Social, political, or cultural debates	مناظرات في قضايا اجتماعية أو سياسية أو ثقافية

Table 2: Categories of discussion topics provided to participants.

Metric	Value
Total audio duration	40.5 hours
Group sessions	22 hours
Individual sessions	18 hours
Number of groups	11
Number of speakers	32
Male	14
Female	18

Table 4: General corpus statistics.

to rich linguistic data through a linear sequence of Arabic transcription correction, translation, and IPA transcription.

Stage I: Transcription and Correction. Initial transcription was generated using an automated speech-to-text baseline ElevenLabs Scribe v1 model, which provided rough timestamps and text. The native Omani annotators then used the annotation interface to correct the transcription. The annotation interface allows for precise speaker diarization and real-time waveform navigation, ensuring that overlapping speech in group sessions is accurately attributed to the correct speaker (Speaker 1, Speaker 2, etc.).

Stage II: Translation and IPA Transcription. Unlike standard ASR datasets that often provide only the transcription, our dataset enriches the audio with two additional linguistic layers. Once the Arabic transcription was verified, annotators produced a sentence-level translation into English. Following this, a transcription step was performed to capture the phonetic reality of the dialect using The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). This is particularly vital for Omani dialects, where standard Arabic orthography may not capture unique vowel shifts or consonant pronunciations that are linked to region

	Wilayat (Ar)	Wilayat (En)	Lifestyle	Indiv. Hours	Group Hours	Total Hours
1	مسندم	Musandam	Mixed	3.0	2.0	5.0
2	شνας	Shinas	Mixed	3.0	2.0	5.0
3	السويق	Al Suwaiq	Hadari	1.0	1.0	2.0
4	عبري	Ibri	Hadari	1.0	2.0	3.0
5	الrustaq	Al Rustaq	Hadari	1.5	2.0	3.5
6	نزوى	Nizwa	Hadari	4.0	5.0	9.0
7	المصنعة	Al Musannah	Mixed	0.0	2.0	2.0
8	القابل	Al Qabil	Mixed	0.0	1.0	1.0
9	المضبيي	Al Mudhaibi	Mixed	3.0	2.0	5.0
10	الجازر	Al Jazer	Badu	0.5	1.0	1.5
11	صلالة	Salalah	Hadari	1.5	2.0	3.5
Total				18.5	22.0	40.5

Table 5: Distribution of recorded hours per Wilayat.

or lifestyle (e.g., the realization of /q/ as [g]) (Holes, 1989; Alkathiri, 2024; Al-Balushi, 2017). The annotation platform presents these tasks sequentially, ensuring that translation and IPA transcription are directly mapped to the corrected time-aligned segments.

4 Dataset Statistics

A defining feature of this dataset is its geographical coverage. We successfully collected data from multiple Wilayats, ensuring a balance between the interior Bedouin regions and the coastal Urban centers. Table 5 details the volume of audio data collected from each Wilayat. Following the geographic typology of Alkathiri (2024), each Wilayat is assigned a coarse lifestyle label (Hadari or Badu), with *Mixed* used for varieties treated as distinct regional groups.

To demonstrate the depth of the annotation, Appendix A provides a sample entry from the dataset. This example illustrates the triple-layer annotation schema (Transcription, Translation, IPA Transcription) and highlights specific dialectal features characteristic of the recorded Wilayat.

5 Conclusion and Future Work

In this work, we introduced a high-quality dialect-specific dataset for Omani Arabic, addressing a critical gap in the current landscape of Arabic speech technologies. By targeting the sociolinguistic divide between Urban and Bedouin communities, we have created a resource that challenges current ASR models to generalize across distinct phonological variances. Our data collection methodology, which

combined group conversational sessions with individual monologues, successfully captured a wide spectrum of speech styles, from argumentative debate to narrative storytelling.

The quality of the dataset is underpinned by our “Human-in-the-Loop” pipeline powered by the annotation platform developed for this study. This approach allowed us to move beyond raw audio to create a triply-annotated resource featuring transcription, translation, and IPA transcription. This richness makes the dataset valuable not only for training acoustic models but also for tasks such as dialect identification and speech-to-text translation.

Future work will focus on three main objectives: expanding the dataset volume to cover all remaining Wilayats in Oman and completing the multi-layer annotation of the current dataset, benchmarking state-of-the-art models (such as Whisper and Wav2Vec 2.0) on this data to establish baseline error rates, and publicly releasing the corpus to the research community. We believe this work serves as a foundational step toward building inclusive speech technologies that serve all Arabic speakers, regardless of their regional dialect.

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A Dataset Samples

Table A1: Representative annotation samples. Each entry illustrates the tri-layer annotation schema across the Wilayats.

Wilayat (En)	Wilayat (Ar)	Transcription (Arabic)	IPA Transcription	Translation
Musandam	مسندم	ما ناسيك كما قال لك ابن عمي، عمي، ابن خولي، ابن خولتي، لازم أزورهم لازم أظمن عليهم.	ma: na:si:k. kama qa:llik bin ʕammi:, ʕammi, bin xu:li, bin xu:liti la:zim azu:rhum. la:zim atʕʕam-man ʕli:hum.	I haven't forgotten about you at all. Just like he told you, my paternal cousin, my paternal uncle, my maternal cousin, and my cousins from my mother's side. I have to visit them and check in on how they are doing.
Shinas	شناصر	كان يعني المنظر وايد صراحة جميل. طبعا رحنا سوج مطرح اللي هو مكان تراثي.	kʕa:n jaʕni l-manʕar wa:ʕid sʕara:ha ʕami:l. tʕabʕan rihna su:g matʕrah l-li jaʕni hu: maka:n tura:ʕi.	The view was really amazing. Of course, we went to Mutrah Souq, which is a historic site.
Al Suwaiq	السويق	تذكر يوم كنا نلعب هناك عدال المسجد. أيوه، أنت كنت تلعب معني؟ عيل هيش تلعب؟	tiððakkar yo:m knni: nilʕab hna:k. ʕidda:l l-masgid? ajwah intih kint tilʕab maʕni? ʕabdallah la: ma: la:hi:g. ʕe:l he:ʕ tilʕab kint awwal?	Do you remember when we used to play near the mosque? Yes, were you playing with us? Then what were you playing?
Ibri	عبري	صاه ما عندهم ف غرفة قبل يدرسوا. لكن تو كا صاه عاد كلوه تغير صار قاعات. ما أدري مو فصول يعني صار ذا الشيء.	sʕa:h ma: ʕind-hum ða f-yorfa kʕabil jdorso. la:kin tow ke sʕa:h ʕa:d tʕillo taya-ʕar. sʕa:r kʕa:ʕa:t. sʕa:r ma: dri mu: fusʕul jaʕni sʕa:r ða ʕ-fej.	They didn't have a proper study room, but now everything has changed and it's all halls and classrooms. I'm not sure exactly what you would call them.
Al Rustaq	الرساق	حلو حلو فنان. عب أول تتريقوه، وتغذوبه، وتنعشوبه وترمسوبه.	helu: helu: fna:n. ʕab awwal titʕadu:buh w titʕaju:buh w trimsu:buh.	It was really good, excellent. You used to have breakfast, lunch, dinner, and spend the evenings there.
Nizwa	نزوى	وخرجوا لي عوين ماشي إزعاج، ماشي إزعاج، كيف ماشي إزعاج. هاو الكبت هنيه محلاي وسطه.	w-xargu:li ʕawe:n ma: ʕej ʕizʕa:g, ma: ʕej ʕizʕa:g, ke:f ma: ʕej ʕizʕa:g? w-hawa l-kebet hnijja mxalla:j wosʕtʕa.	They came out and told me, 'There's no disturbance, no disturbance.' I said, how is there no disturbance? That wardrobe is placed right in the middle of the room.
Al Musannah	المصنعة	لما أني أقول له دكتور أنا ما أبا أتكم أنا عارفة الإجابة بس ما أبا أتكم، يحترمني.	lma ani agu:lih dukto:r ani ma: aba atkalam ani ʕarfih il igabih. bas ma: aba atkallam. jehtirimni.	When I tell the professor I don't want to speak, even though I know the answer, he respects my wish.
Al Qabil	القابل	القبائل متعارفين يعني إذا بينا نحنا في المكان هناك القبيلة هاي ترحب فينا وإذا بينا في المكان هذا القبيلة هاي ترحب فينا.	l-qabajil mitʕa:rʕi:n. jaʕni iða: ji:na nihin fil-mika:n haða:k. l-qabi:lih ha:ʕi trahhib fi:na. w iða: ji:na fil-mika:n ha:ða l-qabi:lih hi trahhib fi:na.	Tribes are interconnected. If we make a stop at one place, the tribe there welcomes us, and if we go elsewhere; that tribe welcomes us too.
Al Mudhaiabi	المضبيبي	كانوا هلنا اللي قبل يقولونا أن هم قبل ف زمنهم في الثمانينات يدرسوا تحت الشجرة.	ka:nu halna l-li: qabi:l jqu:lu:lna innuh himmah qabil jaʕni fi zeman-hum fis-siti:- fiθ-θama:ni:na:t. jdarsu: taht ʕ-ʕidʕar.	Our elders used to tell us that back in the eighties, they would study under the trees.

Wilayat (En)	Wilayat (Ar)	Transcription (Arabic)	IPA Transcription	Translation
Al Jazer	الجازر	يعني عندك ناجة وحدة كنت تغطي لك ست صياني سبع صياني أما لو إنه هوش يعني الصينية الوحدة روحها ما تسدها ذبيحة.	jaʕni ʕindik na:ɡih wiħdih tʕyatʕi:lik sit sʕja:ni sabiʕ sʕja:ni. amma lo: inno ho:ʃ. jaʕni: sʕ-sʕenjjɑ l- wuħde ru:ħħa ma: tisddha ter. ɔabi:ha.	You see, one camel would easily fill 6 or 7 serving platters. As for small goats, one isn't even enough for a single platter.
Salalah	صلاة	مثل الحين أنا إذا حُبوبة بتتكلم أجلس أحرق في وجهها بالدقائق ما أفهم اش بتقول مرات.	miθil l-lhi:n ʔana ʔiðɑ: ħbo:ba b-titkallam ʔaɡlis ʔħzoq fi-wgeha bid-daqa:ʒq ma: ʔafham he:ʃ bi-tqu:l marrat.	Nowadays, when an elderly woman speaks, I'd stare at her face blankly for minutes, sometimes not understanding a word she is saying.