

THE ROLE OF PHONEMIC ORTHOGRAPHY IN PRESERVING THE QURAN FROM BEING LOST

دور الـارتوـغرافيا الصوتية في حفظ القرآن الكريم من الضياع

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Abstract:

This paper explores the role of phonemic orthography in preserving the Quran's linguistic integrity amidst the ongoing fragmentation of Arabic due to the presence of diglossia, rise of nationalism, and natural language change. It examines how the divergence between Classical Arabic (CA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and vernacular dialects creates challenges for Quranic comprehension . This paper also argues that the phonemic consistency of Arabic writing ensures the accurate transmission of Quranic recitation. Drawing on historical parallels with Bible translations, the study highlights the resistance to translating the Quran into vernaculars, emphasizing the theological and phonological factors that safeguard its original form. The research also considers the emergence of Educated Standard Arabic (ESA) as a potential future direction for Arabic, the linguistic risks that nationalistic sentiments wreaks and the implications of language evolution for future

Quranic accessibility. Ultimately, it argues that while the pronunciation of the Quran is likely to remain stable, its comprehension may necessitate alternative strategies, such as vernacular-based interpretations in order to maintain its meaning across generations.

key words: Phonemic Orthography; Arabic Diglossia ;Classical Arabic (CA) ;Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) ;Educated Standard Arabic (ESA) ;
;Language Evolution ;Quranic Comprehension

ملخص باللغة العربية:

تتطرق هذه الدراسة الى دور الأرثوغرافيا الصوتية - والتي تعني الاتساق الصوتي-الكتابي الذي يميز اللغة العربية- في الحفاظ على سلامة النص القرآني. كثير من التغيرات تشهدها اللغة العربية اليوم نتيجةً للازدواجية اللغوية وتصاعد النزعة القومية، وكذا التحولات اللغوية الطبيعية التي تطرأ على أي لغة كانت. إن التباعد اللغوي بين العربية الكلاسيكية التي هي لغة القرآن الكريم والعربية الفصحى المعيارية المعاصرة وكذا اللهجات العامية المتحدثة في العالم العربي يفرض تحديات كبرى أمام فهم النص القرآني مستقبلاً، خاصة عند مقارنة ذلك مع الترجمات المسيحية للكتاب المقدس التي حدثت كنتيجة لصعوبة الفهم باللاتينية، ويستعرض هذا البحث العوامل الدينية وكذا الفونولوجية التي تحافظ على أصالة القرآن ويناقش المخاطر التي قد تفرضها النزعة الوطنية المتصاعدة على تطور اللغة العربية، ويخلص البحث إلى أن نطق القرآن سيظل مستقرًا إلى حد كبير نظراً للاتساق الصوتي الكتابي ، إلا أن ضمان فهم معانيه قد يستلزم استراتيجيات بديلة مثل التفسيرات المستندة إلى اللهجات للحفاظ على رسالته عبر الأجيال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأرثوغرافيا الصوتية ;الازدواجية اللغوية ;العربية الكلاسيكية ; العربية الفصحى المعاصرة ;العربية الفصحى المتعلمة ; تطور اللغة ; فهم النص القرآني.

“It is We who sent down the Qur’an and indeed, We will be its guardian”

Holy Quran , sura Al-Hijr 15:9

“انا نحن نزلنا الذكر وانا له لحافظون” القرآن الكريم، الحجر 15:9

Introduction

It’s a well-known fact today that Arabic exists in a state of diglossia, with Classical Arabic serving formal and religious functions, Modern Standard Arabic used in education and media, and numerous regional dialects dominating everyday speech. Nationalist movements and the growth of local media have further strengthened these dialects, making it harder for many speakers to fully understand Classical Arabic texts. At the same time, the Quran’s preservation depends not only on its written form but also on consistent oral recitation across generations.

One feature that may counterbalance this fragmentation is Arabic’s highly phonemic orthography, in which letters and diacritics map closely to sounds. This consistency could help maintain accurate pronunciation of the Quran even when speakers no longer use Classical forms in daily life. However, while phonemic spelling may secure recitation, it does not guarantee that listeners grasp the meaning of each verse.

Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How effectively does Arabic’s near-perfect phonemic orthography ensure accurate oral recitation of the Quran across speakers of diverse regional dialects?
2. To what extent do diglossia and the rise of nationally-inflected vernaculars compromise semantic comprehension of the Quran among those same speaker groups?

Background of the study :

Arabic is spoken in many regional varieties that differ significantly from the formal Classical Arabic used in the Quran. However, these dialects have grown stronger through local media and education, making some old Quranic language structures harder to understand. At the same time, Arabic’s spelling closely matches its sounds, which may help preserve correct recitation despite these differences. In this light , the following is a

quick review of literature that will help in building the argument stated above.

Diglossia in the Arab World

It's neither the deliberate effort of the Anglo or Francophone minorities sprawling throughout the Arab world , nor a top-down malign effort aimed specifically at undermining Arabic language . The most serious threat to the flourishing of Standard Arabic is the continuous ,often well-intentioned , use and entrenchment of the different Arabic vernaculars specific to each country. This danger is further exacerbated by rising nationalistic sentiments. In other words, the real challenge lies in the continuous fragmentation of the Arab world . The above statements summarizes the general position of the paper.

Arabic language stands out among other major world languages in that it is severely diglossic. The latter defined by Charles Ferguson (1959) , the first to coin the term, as a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal `education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation”

Two forms, high and low, characterize a diglossia situation. The high variety is usually reserved for formal situations, such as religious occasions, political speeches and the media. On the other hand, the low variety is used in casual day to day speech and in low stakes, informal situations. Part of the reason Ferguson singled out Arabic as an example of a diglossia situation is because the phenomenon within the Arab world is quite salient. Across the Arab speaking countries, from Lebanon to Morocco and from Sudan to Iraq, each country has its own distinct variety; the low one. Yet when it comes to formal situation, virtually all of these countries resort to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The latter is no one's mother language. In Arab speaking countries, the first serious exposure to the high variety starts only in their first years of formal education. It's a verity of Arabic that is used heavily in education and formal occasions. A diglossia situation is thus observed between Modern Standard Arabic and other regional vernacular

dialects in the Arab world. A notable thing to mention about the high variety is that it is usually imbued with prestige compared to the low variety. As noted by Wardhaugh and Fuller (2006) “there may be so little prestige attached to the Low variety that people may even deny that they know it although they may be observed to use it far more frequently than the High variety”. However, due to the long presence of colonial powers in the Arab world, instead of associating prestige with the high variety (MSA), it is rather linked to the occasional code-switch and reference to the language of the more powerful, more-technologically-advanced colonizer.

Triglossia and polyglossia

In some cases of diglossia, a language can exist in three distinct varieties, each serving a specific societal function. This phenomenon is exemplified by the Javanese language in Indonesia, where there are not just two, but three identifiable forms: a high (Krama), low (Ngoko), and a middle variety (Madya). The high and low varieties of Javanese are significantly different from one another, each used in different social contexts—high for formal or prestigious settings, and low for casual or intimate interactions. The middle variety emerges as a bridge, facilitating communication between speakers by narrowing the linguistic and cultural gap between the high and low forms (Ntou, 2024). This tripartite linguistic structure shows the complex nature of language use in diglossia societies, where multiple varieties or even different languages are employed based on context, social hierarchy in some cases, or the need for linguistic accommodation. Projecting this to the situation of Arabic, the so called Darja (vernacular) is now being heavily used in day-to-day speech. Only in rare cases, if ever, does one actually find themselves in need to use the Standard Arabic form in their lives, especially in its spoken form.

In linguistics, use is synonymous with change (Freeman, 1997). More use of the vernacular subjects it to change and that will inevitably result in a wider and wider gap between the MSA and its associated vernacular in the Arab world. Divergence keeps building as people continue their heavy use of the vernacular. Little by little, the gulf will grow so much until a necessary bridge connecting the two is called for, exactly as happened with the Javanese language.

Al Khatami (1997), in this regard, observed that a distinct linguistic variety; triglossia, is emerging in Arabic-speaking societies. The significant gap between Standard Arabic and the colloquial varieties spoken across the Arab world has led to the development of an intermediary form, referred to as

Educated Standard Arabic (ESA). ESA is essentially a blend of Standard Arabic and the local dialects, acting as a linguistic bridge between the formal and colloquial forms of the language. This emergence of ESA suggests a shift from the traditional diglossia situation—where only two varieties of a language coexist—to a more complex diglossia scenario, where three distinct forms serve different roles within the same society. It's still unclear what role does ESA play exactly. It seems that it is used in any formal situation where; a) The intention is to reach an audience specific to one's own nation. b) the speaker cannot sustain speaking MSA for prolonged periods, and it's inconvenient to use the vernacular due to the "educated" situation they are in. Also, it is much less used in writing and hasn't yet been a subject to the top-down process of standardization. The MSA remains dominant over ESA until, this paper suggests, a critical moment appears where MSA is so alien and incomprehensible that ESA takes over its role and replace it.

Example of ESA, where the vernacular base is Algerian Arabic;

”شكرا جزيلًا ولو انو صعب جدا انك تجد للحق مكان ... يصبح القانون عائق يصبح ماعندوش معنى، ويصبح الناس ربما مايقبلوش احكام القانون كانت صحيحة او لم تكن صحيحة فهذا امر اخر ، المهم ما هو مكتوب المفروض يطبق ويقبل به الجميع“

Source : EnnaharTv (2020)

Example of ESA where the vernacular base is Lebanese Arabic ;

"وتجي تحكي أي واحد فيهم انت رأيك الصبح ، هون انت ارتكبت مغالطة واستعملت العامل المشترك بينهم لي هوما يحاولو يوصفو كيف ايجات الدنيا واعتبرتو انو كافي عشان يكونو الموضوعين متكافئين ونقدر نقارن بينهم وواحد فيهم يفوز ، وثاني غلط ممكن نوقع فيه هو .."

Source : Katanani(2018)

Note here the incorporation of language structures from the vernacular into the ESA specific to each region.

It does not end there. A situation with more than three varieties each serving a distinct function is called polyglossia. Polyglossia refers to a sociolinguistic situation where multiple languages or varieties of a language coexist within a single speech community, often fulfilling different social roles or functions (Ferguson, 1959). If one is to be more delicate in their description, we can talk rather about polyglossia characterizing the Arab world. The four varieties concerned are:

MSA: a high variety used in formal situations as in education, the media, politics and official documents.

Vernaculars: Across the Arab world, each region came to gradually develop its own distinct vernacular variety. This is the low variety used in day to day matters and in casual situations.

Educated Standard Arab: As the gulf between standard Arabic and the vernaculars widened, a middle rung variety appeared to fill up this gap. It's characterized by being a simplified form of Standard Arabic achieved by blending vernacular words and expressions into it.

Classical Arabic: The language of the Quran and the classics. It is mainly used in religious/historical situations. Classical Arabic is the variety in which the Quran was coded, along with the compilation of Hadiths and virtually everything written in Arabic down to the so-called Modernization wave (starting with Napoleons campaign into Egypt in 1798). After that , exacerbated by the contact with the west and the effect of translation (Berque,2012) , this variety slowly morphed into what is now known as Standard Modern Arabic .Again , and given the difficulty of mastering this variety (MSA is itself a simplified form of CA) , it is the case that in religious situations we often notice an occasional retreat to MSA and to ESA, rather than sustaining , for example, a whole sermon in Classical Arabic.

Rise of Nationalism and its impact on the linguistic verities of Arabic

According to Smith (2010), Nationalism is a political ideology or movement that emphasizes the interests, culture, and identity of a nation, often in opposition to foreign influence or control. It advocates for the self-determination and sovereignty of a nation or group, promoting a strong sense of national identity and unity among its members. Nationalistic sentiments are on the rise in recent years all over the globe (Monk, 2018). Allegiance to one's nation is being slowly elevated over other interests and allegiances, such as the sense of belonging to a specific religion or a region. Monk (2018) argues that this surge in nationalistic sentiments all over the world is due to people's frustration with globalization and its failure to deliver its promises. Hence, people have turned in-ward towards nationalism and populist leaders who could alleviate their grievances.

Nationalism and nationalistic movements could have a profound impact on language and how it changes. Of course, efforts of central planners can be directed to work for the promotion of a national dialect or language, but

that's not what we are interested in here. In this analysis, it is not conceivable, at least as yet, for governments in the Arabic speaking world to make an effort to standardize their regional vernaculars. It's rather more important to think of the grassroots change happening there. Language do change when people, especially younger ones, introduce novel forms and phrases into the language based on cultural preferences and trends (Eble, 1996). When such changes happen within the confines of a single nation state, little by little, that will lead to having the variety become more and more differentiated and distinct compared to the varieties of neighboring regions. In the absence of a pan-Arab political unity, it's hard to maintain strict linguistic unity throughout the Arab world.

Language change is a zero-force dynamic, to borrow from McShea and Brandon's (2010) book "Biology's first law". Even in the absence of external forces, diversity and complexity tend to increase in dynamic systems. Accidents accumulate and variation increases within the language, causing it to keep changing and differentiating itself from other languages. Therefore, one does not to invoke the power of nationalism to explain change per se, but the latter confines such change geographically.

Overview of bible translations

It is also relevant here to talk about bible translations for the sake of making comparisons. The bible was originally written in three languages, Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew. The Old Testament, which make up part of the bible, was originally written in Hebrew, and served as the religious text of the Jewish people around the third century BCE. Then it was translated into Greek, producing the so-called Septuagint during Hellenistic times. Likewise, the New Testament was also written in Greek, which was a common language of scholarship at the time.

One of the earliest translations (circa 400 CE) of the bible was into Latin and was dubbed "the Vulgate". It has been one of the most influential translations and served as the standard bible of the catholic church for many centuries to come. It was not that there were absolutely no translations of the bible during the medieval ages. There have been some translations into old English and old High German, but they were mostly frowned upon and restricted by the Catholic church (Horsley, 2008).

In the 16th century, bible translations took on another course as it was translated into the vernaculars of Europe. At the dawn of the reformation, and driven by the belief that the masses should all have access to the word

of God, Martin Luther proceeded to translate the bible into German (1524-1532). It was a monumental step not only in bringing the bible close to people, but also in both standardizing the German language and making it accessible to the masses. Another influential translation was the one by William Tyndale (1526) into English. Other translations appeared in French, Dutch and other languages. This period concerns us the most here.

A century later, another landmark translation appeared, that of King James bible (1611). It remained in operation for centuries and had an extreme influence on English language. Today, there are numerous modern translations, such as the NIV (New International Version), ESV (English Standard Version), and NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), which aim for accuracy in language and for accessibility.

Translation theory, Formal equivalence and Dynamic equivalence.

According to Monday (2016), equivalence refers to the relationship that arises between the original text and the translated one, wherein the produced text resembles the original in terms of style, meaning, tone, and the overall impact. Therefore, equivalence is concerned with the degree of similarity achieved across all these spheres, ensuring that the translation faithfully conveys the intent and essence of the source material. This concept is central to translation studies, as it highlights the challenges of balancing fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience.

An important dichotomy arises in this context: that of formal versus dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence emphasizes the preservation of the literal word, grammaticality, and stylistic features of the original text. It aims to retain the structural and lexical integrity of the source, creating a translation that mirrors the form as closely as possible (Nida, 1964). This approach is often associated with a high degree of textual fidelity but may pose difficulties for readers unfamiliar with the source language's structure or idiomatic expressions.

Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, prioritizes the comprehension and readability of the translated text for the target audience. It focuses on conveying the meaning and intent of the original, even if this requires departing from its literal wording or formal structure (Nida, 1964). The goal is to produce a translation that evokes the same response and understanding in the target audience as the original text would in its native readers.

Each of these approaches has distinct merits and drawbacks. Formal equivalence, while maintaining the authenticity of the source text, risks

alienating readers by presenting a translation that feels rigid or inaccessible. Dynamic equivalence, in contrast, fosters comprehension and reader engagement but may sacrifice nuances of meaning or stylistic subtleties inherent in the original. Consequently, the choice between these approaches often depends on the specific goals of the translation and the intended audience's needs.

2.Methodology

In the present paper ,which departs away from empiricism and rests on an interpretive paradigm, we rather employ a qualitative, comparative–historical methodology built on three interconnected steps. First, The paper presents a comprehensive literature survey of classical and recent sociolinguistic studies on Arabic diglossia, Educated Standard Arabic, and the principles of phonemic orthography to establish the theoretical foundation. Second, the paper investigates a comparative case study of sacred-text transmission by juxtaposing the history of Bible translations , from the Latin Vulgate through Luther's German and Tyndale's English versions,to the Islamic tradition of Quranic recitation and its resistance to translation; this comparison illuminates how Arabic's consistent grapheme–phoneme mapping operates more rigidly than other orthographies in preserving the oral form. Finally, and based on all of the above , we advance an analytic argument that traces the logical consequences of the near-perfect phonemic spelling of Arabic .The paper thus shows how script and diacritics correct dialectal shifts, secure accurate oral transmission, and project future trends in comprehension versus recitation amid the diglossia happening in the Arab world and the nationalist fragmentation.

Arabic being a highly orthographic language.

A notable characteristic of many languages, including English, is the wide divergence observed between pronunciation and orthography. George Bernard Show satirically proclaims that he could write the word fish as
“ghost “, where;

“gh” stands for an /f/ as in rough.

“O” stands for an /i/ as in women

“Ti” represents the /f/ sound as in nation. (Pinker, 1994)

This phenomenon contrasts with languages that exhibit phonemic orthography, where spelling aligns closely with pronunciation. Languages

with this feature, often described as “say-it-as-you-read-it,” include Arabic and Italian. The reason for the occurrence of this phenomenon is the continuous change of language at the level of sounds. Written systems tend to remain relatively stable over time, whereas spoken language evolves more rapidly. This temporal mismatch often results in discrepancies between pronunciation and spelling, as the writing system does not immediately adapt to changes in spoken language. This divergence sometimes necessitates intervention by a central authority to address and rectify inconsistencies (Baugh & Cable, 2002).

In the case of Arabic, although there are minor exceptions, the language remains highly orthographic. Pronunciation and spelling are in general accordance. More importantly, all the diglossia varieties discussed earlier generally adhere to phonemic orthography. Even the very vernaculars spoken across the Arab world maintain this characteristic, ensuring that spelling remains highly consistent with pronunciation. In a situation like this, historical texts, as well as the Quran itself, can be read in relatively the same way as its contemporaries did. Had the current written forms of Arabic language started showing inconsistencies with pronunciation, one would then have to worry about losing connection with ancient word pronunciations. Of course it's impossible to predict the future of Arabic, but the presence of phonemic orthography ensures, to a high degree, that the original text of the Quran in its correct historic pronunciation will remain as such for many generations to come. If the pronunciation aligns with the spelling, one can be confident that future generations are pronouncing the text in the same as did its contemporaries, even if they don't understand the underlying meaning.

As noted already, even in their use of the vernacular, most people keep a fairly strict and coherent grapheme-to-morpheme correspondence. Absence that, the Arabic letters would stand for different sounds every time, and that will make it hard to know what those sounds used to stand for in the past. One of the marking characteristics of Arabic is the presence of very few vowel sounds, and a relatively simple vowel system. (Peterson, 2015). It has only 3 vowels Namely, the short frontal /i/, the /u/ back sound as well as the /ae/ central vowel sound, along with their longer versions. By comparison, English has approximately 20, and French has 15 (FluentU,2023).

Vowels are a major source of confusion as far as pronunciation goes. Consider that in English for example, only 5 vowel letters (u, i,e,o,a), together with the semi-vowel “y” are supposed to represent all 20 vowels in

use , depending on the variety concerned. By contrast, consonants are much more easily marked, easily distinguished and easily represented in writing.

Note here that reading the Quran in its literal wording is rewarded in the hereafter under Islam, and this is further reason to compel believers to recite In this regard, the prophet of Islam the Quran exactly as it was revealed. Muhammed said, "The one who is proficient in the recitation of the Quran will be with the honorable and obedient scribes (angels) and he who recites the Quran and finds it difficult to recite, doing his best to recite it in the best way possible, will have two rewards." (An-Nawawi, 1993)

The problem now remains with the understanding of the word of God. If the pronunciation is relatively stable and static, what about the threat of losing the original intended meaning?

Nationalism and the rise of the vernaculars.

As already noted, nationalism is on a rising slope over most of the Arabic speaking world. This rising tide of nationalistic sentiments might accelerate the shift away from MSA and pave the way to local regional dialects which are many times more comprehensible for its speakers. Local dialects could therefore be seen as symbols for expressing national pride and identity. This happens at the expense of the more global standard form of Arabic. In Morocco, for example, there are already rising voices that call for the inclusion of the vernacular into the schooling system. Bassinet (2009) discussed these calls for including Moroccan Arabic into the schooling system as an alternative to MSA. But even without these rising voices, it's not difficult to notice that many teachers already shun away from using Standard Arabic in the classrooms. It's hard for teachers of math, physics or biology to sustain a whole lesson in Standard Arabic without resorting to the vernacular. When doing so, that is, use MSA, they risk diminishing students' comprehension of the material. Indeed, the success of many YouTube channels featuring star teachers is in part due to their daring step to use the vernacular when explaining their materials. In a similar vein, we notice also the appearance of a Wikipedia page that is specific to Egyptian Arabic, and another for Moroccan Arabic (Alshahrani et al., 2023)

Again, all of these is exacerbated and exaggerated by nationalistic sentiments. They are on the rise, and positive feedback loops (nationalism generating more of itself) only strengthens that. The forces that work in the direction of unifying the Arab world together, and therefore mandate the use

of MSA, is weaker than the forces that operate within the boundaries of each Arab country. To put it in other terms, each Arab country has so far developed its own political system, legal system, educational system, media landscape, their own national events, gatherings and more. These are all much more powerful on a national level than on a pan-Arab level. As the use of the vernaculars continue, innovations, many accidental, in each regional language will also continue to accumulate. Then, slowly but surely, a new proto language starts to emerge and take shape. A process like this can be thought of as being analogous to the rise of nationalism in Europe and the emergence of romantic languages, which all broke away from Latin. This is exactly why Polish scholar Tomas Kamusella, who works extensively on issues related to language and nationalism had entitled his article Arabic language , a Latin of Modernity ?(Kamusella, 2017) .Despite that , one can be surprised to know that, as long as phonemic orthography keeps holding in the Arab world , and as long as the Abjad system of writing is established , we can trust that future generations will still be able to recite the word of God exactly as it was read by the prophet , companions , Salafs and their descendants down to the modern age.

Difficulty in understanding Classical Arabic

Turing to the question of meaning now, the Quran is coded in classical Arabic, and CA is slowly eroding in the Arab world. The threat of it being reduced to the statue of an archaic language is mounting because of the rare contexts in which it is used. In the previous pages, we have seen that modern standard Arabic is becoming hard to understand and use. CA, in turn, is even harder to understand and use (Versteegh, 2014), and that's reason why it might gradually be confined to old libraries and bookshelves. For the record, the vernaculars employed across the Arab world are even more simplified than MSA. For example, in most dialects in the Arab world, when addressing two males or two females directly, different affixes are required each time, but this complication is dispensed with in the dialects of the Arab world today. Instead, the word "انتم" is used for all plural addresses. It looks as if we are heading towards more and more simplification of Arabic language with the passing of time. MSA differs from CA in that the former has a reduced system of case endings compared to CA, and tends to avoid certain complex structures, making it more accessible for contemporary use in formal communication (Versteegh, 2014).

Language keeps changing at all levels, including the level of semantics and language pragmatics. While it's easy to notice the appearance of a new word

or language structure in a language, their disappearance usually goes unnoticed. That's the case with many words and language structures in CA. They kept (and keep) disappearing slowly from MSA with the passing of time. It is important to track the development and changes that happened to CA through time and see how it slowly morphed into the Modern standard version that is under use today, for this aids the effort of preserving the original message of the Quran. The following are some of the ways that CA came to change.

a. Sound change: As far as sounds go, CA and the modern standard make use of the same repertoire of individual sounds. However, the vernaculars used across the Arab world incorporate sounds borrowed from the language of the colonizer, such as the /v/ and the /p/ sounds. However, luckily perhaps, these are confined to loan words only.

b. Changes at a morphological level: These are the changes that occur at the level of individual words. In the modern standard, the word “تم” often precedes a verb in the passive voice construction, as in “تم القبض عليه”. In Classical Arabic the verb itself conveys the passive voice “قبض عليه”.

This is probably due to the difficulty and tediousness of having to mark case endings using the keyboard, so it was better to precede the word with “تم” which was not in common use in CA.

As a side note, the rise of Artificial Intelligence tools, with their attention to linguistic context, will help automate the markings of case endings when writing, and that can bring back many language structures from CA which were sacrificed for the sake of dispensing away with case endings.

c. Changes at a syntactic level: in CA it was more common to find the structure VSO (verb-subject-object), but now both in standard Arabic and in our day-to-day vernaculars we use the SVO order more often. This underscores the enormous impact of translation from English where it is a lot more common to find the latter arrangement. Also, in Classical Arabic, addressing exactly two people or groups of females come with its own grammatical markers. Modern vernaculars dispense away with that in an attempt to simplify, although MSA still retains that.

d. Lexical change also took its toll and drove the departure from CA. There was, and still, an ongoing large scale borrowing of new words from English and other Western languages, especially in science and technology. In addition, existing words tend to change their meanings in one way or another. This includes broadening, where a word becomes more

encompassing in its meaning, or it's opposite, narrowing. In addition to that, there is what is called amelioration and pejoration, where a word acquires a more positive or negative connotations respectively.

e. Pragmatic and contextual changes. This kind of change is more subtle and nuanced. It involves how people make changes beyond the literal meaning of words. This includes discourse markers, politeness markers, speech acts and context. This dimension reflects the broader societal change in how people structure their conversations, express politeness and their emotions. When it comes to politeness, English used to have *thee* and *thou* which are more formal ways of expressing politeness, but both coalesced into *you*. Also, in CA, requests used to be more direct and at times were preceded by “هلا ناولتني السيف” as in “هلا”

Now, following the example of English, both MSA and many vernaculars use the equivalents of “can” to ask for something. These examples show that people have departed significantly from the norms of communication characterizing classical Arabic, which is the language of the Quran.

Relationship to the bible

As mentioned earlier, the “vulgate” remained as the standard Latin bible for centuries. the catholic church maintained a strong hold over its translation, exegesis, commentaries and interpretations. The Quran, on the other hand, is recited in the language in which it was revealed and is accessible in its original form to hundreds of millions of Muslims across the world. Muslims are rewarded for reciting the Quran in its original form, and this is further reason to maintain its readability and accessibility. There has been significant scholarly debate regarding the translation of the Quran, particularly concerning the extent to which a literal translation may compromise its sacred nature. This concern has historically contributed to resistance against fully rendering the Quranic text into other languages. As a result, scholars often emphasize translating the meanings of the Quran rather than the text itself, recognizing the linguistic and theological complexities involved in conveying its message (Mohammed, 2005).

Unlike the Quran though, the bible resisted translation not for reasons related to the text and its interpretation solely. The Catholic church saw its monopoly over the bible as a way to maintain power and control. By translating the bible into the vernacular and bringing it closer to the masses,

Luther and Tyndale threatened to undermine the very institution of the catholic church.

Given the gradual departure from CA, Should the Quran be translated into the vernaculars in the future, similar to what happened with the bible? Our answer is, very unlikely. As far as sound change goes, the main reason for not wanting to translate the Quran is the near perfect correspondence between the Arab script and its pronunciation. Even without understanding the message, Arab speaking people can, albeit hardly sometimes, read the holy book almost exactly as it was revealed to the prophet many centuries ago. Case endings might disappear one day, and indeed their use is in decline as explained above, but, for one, much of Arabic language reading in general already goes without them and second, learning how to use them isn't that much hard for an adult. A quick appendix at the beginning of the holy book suffices to show the three short vowels in Arabic language.

The bible was translated into the vernacular because the bible in its Latin version was not the direct word of God, unlike the Quran where one is rewarded for reciting it as it is. It's a question of meanings from the very beginning. Further reason is the phonemic orthography nature of Arabic. As long as Arab speaking nations continue their writing in the Arab script, and as long as grapheme-morpheme correspondence is maintained, there is, to our view, little reason for translating the sacred word of the Quran into the vernacular.

What is possible to see in the future is a translation of the meanings of the Quran into the vernaculars specific to each Arab country. This is not farfetched. It's becoming hard to understand CA for many common people in the Arab world. However, the presence of many standard translations of the Quran threatens doctrinal unity and opens the floodgates to many different interpretations. Also, as CA is gradually lost, the Quran is then recited as an archaic ancient language, deprived of its literary spirit.

Conclusion

To wrap up, as long as CA is maintained and comprehended- although evidence points otherwise- there is little need to translate the meanings of the Quran into the vernaculars specific to each Arab country. Readability is also maintained due to the high consistency between orthography and phonemes in the Arabic language. This consistency is observed also in people's use of their day-to-day vernaculars. However, the continuous fragmentation of the Arab world, driven by nationalistic sentiments,

threatens the integrity of the interpretation of the text. This, of course, is just a future speculation. It could be the case that many generations from now, CA is still understood by the masses, or at least by a large educated class, or it could be the case that a central authority interferes and saves the situation, but the change of language is spontaneous and inevitable. Until a central authority decides to revive CA, similar to the way Hebrew was resurrected from the dead, Classical Arabic, the esteemed language of the Quran, is on its way to perish. If that happened, we will be translating the meanings of the Quran not to other languages, but back to Arabic itself!

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