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Phonetic variations between vernacular and classical Arabic: Examples of Arabic dialects

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an investigation into the phonetic differences between the colloquial Arabic dialects and Classical Arabic using some chosen examples from different Arabic-speaking environments. It focuses on the phonetic part of language change. It explains basic processes such as vowel mutation, consonant replacement, devoicing, assimilation, deletion, and sound addition. The study then goes on to discuss specific examples from Iraqi, Levantine and Omani speech to demonstrate the separation of the vernacular from Classical Arabic, while retaining important lexical and semantic links. The study concludes that phonetic change is not uniform and does not stem from a single cause, but from articulatory facilitation, frequency of use, historical contact, social interaction, and the tendency of dialects to simplify certain structures while maintaining communicative clarity.

KEYWORDS: Arabic dialects, Classical Arabic, phonetic variation, vowel alternation, consonantal replacement, devoicing, assimilation

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INTRODUCTION

The spoken dialects across Arab countries are diverse, to the point that speakers of one dialect can hardly understand those of another. Numerous studies have enabled us to understand the emergence of these vernaculars among speakers of the same language; linguistic history provides evidence that the evolution of languages is driven by factors of linguistic isolation and diminished interaction between communities of the same linguistic origin, resulting from social or geographical circumstances. Furthermore, factors of linguistic conflict-stemming from invasions and migrations-have led to the branching of the unified language into dialects with distinct morpho-phonetic characteristics (Muhaisen, 2003). Nevertheless, the phonetic properties that distinguish various spoken vernaculars (Ammiya) from Classical Arabic (Fusha) share commonalities in the nature of sounds and their points of divergence. These differences manifest in the articulation (makharij) of certain letters between one vernacular and another, the phonetic scale of certain sounds-such as the glide sounds between short and long vowels-and variations in phonetic expression segments, such as stress (nabr) placement within a word, which sometimes extends to regional speech patterns (Abu-Rahme et al., 2025; Addowa et al., 2025; Al-Deaibes et al., 2025; Al-Hamzi, 2023; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021; Anis, 2003; Meqdad et al., 2022; Meqdad et al., 2024).

The linguistic levels for studying any language or dialect are: phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic. This study will be strictly confined to the phonetic level; tracking variations across the other levels-particularly the semantic level-would require extensive research (Al-Hamzi, 2023; Al-Deaibes et al., 2025).

Before proceeding to detail the phonetic characteristics that distinguish the vernacular (Ammiya) from the Classical (Fusha), it is necessary to pause briefly to consider the loss of desinential inflection (I'rab), specifically regarding the primary Diacritics (Harakat)Thalab, Abu al-Abbas(. Although inflection is categorized under syntactic characteristics, it possesses a profound phonetic impact. The abandonment of final-word inflection by Arab speakers was driven solely by the pursuit of articulatory speed. Crucially, the absence of inflectional marks does not compromise the core meaning of the word itself; nouns and imperfective verbs do not lose their semantic essence if left uninflected. Thus, the presence or absence of I'rab does not alter the fundamental indication of “noun-ness” or “verb-ness” (Al-Hawawsheh, 2021; Al-Zajjaji, 1979; Meqdad et al., 2025). Furthermore, even the fixed vowels of indeclinable words (Harakat al-Bina') have dropped away.

This phonetic erosion has stripped the vernaculars of the flexibility for permutation (word-order variation) within verbal sentences, thereby depriving them of a significant rhetorical and stylistic feature. Consequently, these dialects were forced to adhere to a rigid linguistic pattern-placing the subject before the object. Additionally, the loss of inflectional endings and indeclinable markers compelled certain vernaculars to insert sounds (epenthesis) within the word structure (Baalbaki, 1999). Words like Baḥrun (sea), Kalbun (dog), Bardun (cold), and Naḥnu (we) shifted to Baḥir, Kalib, Barid, and Niḥin. This phonetic shift was a strategy to avoid the cluster of two coda consonants (Ilṭiqa' al-Sakinayn) at the end of a word. This phenomenon may have roots in Classical Arabic. Sibawayh notes that some Arabs would add a vowel to a consonant occurring before the final letter in order to avoid the meeting of two consonants. He cites forms such as ḥādhā bakur and min bakir, as well as 'idil and fisil)(Addowa et al., 2025; Alfaifi & Qasem, 2024; Al-Hamzi, 2023; Sibawayh, 1982).

The dropping of desinential inflection (I'rab) has become a lived reality. Even specialists no longer feel that those who omit inflection in their speech are violating the core constants of the Arabic language-provided that this omission is the sole differentiator between the Classical (Fusha) and the Vernacular (Ammiya) in spoken discourse. Here, this reality must be handled with caution; it is impractical to demand that the general public master fully inflected Arabic. If a specific group of people masters it, that suffices for the rest-much like the acquisition of religious knowledge (Ilm Shar'i), which, if attained by a dedicated group, the obligation is lifted from the others. As Allah says: “Yet it is not right for all the believers to go out [to battle] together: out of each community, a group should go out to gain understanding of the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil” Quran 9:122 (Surat At-Tawbah, Verse 122). (Al-Hawawsheh, 2021).

Phonetic variation between Classical Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic) and vernacular Arabic dialects reflects the dynamic interaction between the standardized form of the language and its regional spoken varieties. These variations are evident in pronunciation patterns, phonological realizations, and dialect-specific speech features, illustrating the linguistic diversity of Arabic across different communities while maintaining a shared

linguistic foundation (Abulawi et al., 2022; Al-Salman & Haider, 2024; Farghal et al., 2023; Haider & Hussein, 2022; Haider et al., 2025; Jaradat et al., 2026; Jarrah et al., 2023; Saed et al., 2025; Shhaiber & Haider, 2023; Weld-Ali et al., 2023).

The study will answer the following questions:

- ✓ What are the differences in phonetics between Modern Standard Arabic and its dialects?
- ✓ What are the phonetic features of Arabic dialects regardless of the countries?
- ✓ What are the social and cultural determinants of phonetic variation?
- ✓ Does studying colloquial Arabic help in mastering Modern Standard Arabic?
- ✓ Are there phonetic features which are perceived as colloquial but are actually classical?

METHODOLOGY

The study will use descriptive, analytical and interpretive methodology. Data will be collected from audio recordings and from different colloquial literary and linguistic materials, with stable and consistent elements between Arab speakers of different dialects. The analysis will be phonetic. It will be a comparison between Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic. The effort will be to understand the use of some features of the colloquial Arabic. The research will use some of the historical and current audio sources, including those that have studied the ancient Arabic dialects that are known for their authenticity. It will also use recent studies and phonetic research.

THE OBJECTIVE OF STUDYING THE DIVERGENCES BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND VERNACULAR ARABIC

The Vernacular (Ammiya) is not a monolithic entity; rather, it consists of multitude of levels or variations. These levels range from the Classical (Fusha), to the actually eloquent, the potentially eloquent, the quasi-eloquent, the Intermediate, the diverse spoken dialects, and finally, hybrid discourse. Al-Musa, Nihad (2007)

Studying spoken dialects does not mean consolidating them and calling for replacing classical Arabic, but rather there are gains behind studying colloquial language and searching for eloquent structures equivalent to colloquial sentences, including: (Al-Hamzi, 2023) (Meqdad et al., 2024; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021).

First: An endeavor to master the Classical (Fusha); by narrowing the gap between the level of the Classical and the various Vernaculars. Indeed, “what we sincerely strive for today, for the benefit of our language and our nation, is to work diligently to bring the Classical and the Vernacular closer together, aiming ultimately for a shared standardized language that keeps pace with the modern era and evolves alongside its advancements.”) Hanna, Abdullah ((Meqdad et al., 2022).

Second: The Vernacular is the dialect of the general public. The public often perceives Classical Arabic as difficult and cumbersome to speak. Therefore, creating a common ground between the Vernacular and the Classical helps break this perception. It encourages those embarking on learning and mastering Arabic-in both speech and writing-to progress, improve, and become more motivated (Meqdad et al., 2024; Abu-Rahme et al., 2025).

Third: Illustrating the relationship between the Vernacular and the Classical, and illustrating that their shared commonalities outweigh their divergences. The core vocabulary remains the same; however, changes occur either in the vowels (Sawa’it), through consonantal substitution (Ibdal), by resorting to devoicing (the absence vowels/Sukun), or through deletion or addition, among other phonetic phenomena (Addowa et al., 2025; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021; Meqdad et al., 2024).

TYPES OF CHANGE

Change is a universal law that affects all things, and language is subject to change. The phonetic dimension is considered the most responsive and the fastest to react to factors of linguistic change (Omar, 1997). Phonetic changes are divided into two categories (Al-Antaki, 1969; Alfaifi & Qasem, 2024; Al-Hamzi, 2023).

A. Historical Changes

This type affects speech sounds as a result of the evolution they undergo over long periods of time. This category

of change cannot be governed by specific rules, nor can it be predicted; it occurs due to many intertwined factors, including psychological and geographical influences, frequency of usage (commonality), brevity, and the tendency toward ease of articulation (the principle of least effort), among other factors. Examples of these changes include the devoicing of the first letter influenced by Latin languages; the shift between vowels, such as the transition from fatha to kasra or vice versa; the transition from the alif to wāw or yā'; and the divergent pronunciation of certain letters, such as pronouncing thā' as tā' or seen, pronouncing qāf as a glottal stop (hamza) or a voiced velar plosive Cairene Gīm, and pronouncing dhāl as zāy or dāl, among others. (Al-Deaibes et al., 2025; Al-Hamzi, 2023; Szreder & Derrick, 2024).

B. Combinatory Changes

These are changes resulting from the adjacency and interaction of letters, because of a purely phonological cause. They include phenomena such as attenuation (tarqīq), emphatic articulation (tafkhīm), substitution (ibdāl), vowel modification (i'lāl), assimilation (idghām), metathesis (qalb), deletion (ḥadhf), and other phonetic processes (Alfaifi & Qasem, 2024; Alfaifi, 2025).

This may happen in colloquial language, but it happens later for another historical reason, such as the tendency to stillness in words. For example, the colloquial words maṣṣanna', mazzawwij, and majjawwiz derive from the Classical forms mutaṣanni' (by putting Kasra (/i/) or Faṭḥa (/a/) before the last letter) and mutazawwij, in which no assimilation occurs in Standard Arabic (Al-Fusha). However, colloquial Arabic tended to the stillness of the second letter (the ta), turning the soft consonant (tā') into a hard (Ṣād), becoming musdana'a, then assimilated into musna'i, and likewise turning the attenuated consonant (tā') into a hard zay muzzuj, then they assimilated into mazzouj, and this applies to mujouz, except that a spatial reversal occurred in it, so the Jīm came before the (zay), and both letters are voiced, which affected the silent (ta), turning it into a (zay) or a (Jīm) (Al-Hamzi, 2023).

PHONETIC VARIATIONS

A. Vowel Alternation

Colloquial dialects tend to substitute vowels (Interchange), often without a governing systematic rule. For instance, the fatha may shift to kasra, such as kayfa (how) becoming kīf, rajul (man) becoming rijil, khasirnā (we defeated) becoming khisirnā, and kadhā becoming kidhā. Furthermore, many Arabic dialects shift the vowel of the definite article (al-), whether solar or lunar, from fatha to kasra when initiated (at the beginning of an Articulation), resulting in pronunciations like illyom, ilssamak, and il-'ilm (Addowa et al., 2025; Al-Deaibes et al., 2025; Mashaqba et al., 2023).

Conversely, it may shift to ḍamma (u), as in waṣalnā (we arrived) becoming wuṣalnā. The ḍamma may also shift to fatha, such as the transformation of the ḍamma on the imperfective glottal stop (the hamza of the present tense) to a fatha; thus, arīdu (I want) is said instead of urīdu, arāhinu instead of urāhinu, and asāmiḥu instead of usāmiḥu. Moreover, ḍamma can shift to kasra, as seen in mistawā, sikkar, hinā, and kirsī... (Al-Deaibes et al., 2025).

As for long vowels (macrons), they also undergo interchange; for example, hunā becomes hinī, hān, hayn, or hūn, and hunāka becomes hunīk. Vowel changes are also prevalent in high-frequency words such as pronouns; anā (I) becomes ānī, ānā, or anī; naḥnu (we) becomes niḥna or naḥnā; anta/anti (you) becomes inta/inti; and hunna becomes hin (Addowa et al., 2025; Alfaifi, 2025; Al-Hamzi, 2023).

Additionally, short vowels may undergo lengthening (vowel prolongation), as observed in the Levantine dialect where the fatha in isma' (listen) becomes an alif (ismā'), and the ḍamma becomes a wāw, such as uḍrub (strike) becoming uḍrūb. Similarly, the fatha in ma'aka (with you) shifts to an alif becoming ma'āk. As for the kasra on the imperfective prefix (e.g., yisma', nisma', tisma'), this is an ancient linguistic variant (Teltala) and is considered acceptable for use. This is a language called Teltala Bahra, which adding kasra to the present tense letter, look:)Thalab, Abu al-Abbas. (Mashaqba et al., 2023; Addowa et al., 2025)

The rationale behind the substitution and alternation of vowels can perhaps be attributed to two primary factors: First, the high frequency and pervasive occurrence of vowels within the linguistic system Short vowels are more common than long vowels. In a statistical study of the sounds of the language conducted by Muhammad Ali Khuli, the frequency of the short vowels reached 15,096 compared to 4,149 for the long vowels.

The proportion of short vowels was 78.44% of all vowels, compared to 21.56% for long vowels. This means that the ratio between them is approximately 4:1. Look)Al-Khuli, (1984); for that which occurs frequently in speech is inherently susceptible to reduction and abbreviation. Second, the relative stability of meaning; the core meaning of a word is not significantly compromised when vowels undergo interchange, unlike the case with consonants.

B. Commutation Between Consonants and Vowels

Commutation may occur between vowels and consonants. For instance, the conversion of the “Alif” (in the negative particle mā) into the consonant “Shin,” resulting in (mish), or its conversion into the vowel “Waw,” resulting in (mū)-a common feature in many spoken dialects. In other dialects, it transforms into the vowel “Yā” if the word following (mā) is feminine; thus, they say: “Fulāna mi mawjūda” (she is not here), yet they would not say “Fulān mi mawjūd” for a male. Conversely, they say (mū mawjūda) and (mū mawjūd) interchangeably, as they do with (mish mawjūd) and (mish mawjūda) (Abu-Rahme et al., 2025; Al-Deaibes et al., 2025; Meqdad et al., 2022).

A similar phenomenon occurs with the plural “Mim” following the pronominal suffix Kāf (your): lakum becomes (lakū), samia’kum becomes (samia’kū), and antum (you) becomes (intū). Paradoxically, the “Alif” is the easiest of all letters to articulate; why then was it abandoned in favor of “Waw” and “Shin,” despite both being phonetically more demanding to pronounce than the “Alif”?!

C. Conversion of Short Vowels Into Sukun

This occurs frequently in the morphological weights (Awzan) of yatafa‘al and yatafā‘al and their derivatives. Due to the rapid succession of short vowels, speakers tend to vocalize the second letter with Sukun; thus, they say: yat-māyal, yat-‘ālaj, yat-qaddam, yat-‘allam, and yat-kallam, placing a Sukun on the letter “Tā.” A similar phenomenon is the omission of the vowel (de-vocalizing) on the penultimate letter in the feminine active participle (Ism al-Fā‘il) of triliteral roots, such as: Nād-rah, Ḥāf-ṣah, Jāh-zah, and Sāk-tah, whereas the standard rule (Fusha) dictates a Kasra (/i/) on that letter (Abu-Rahme et al., 2025; Alfaifi, 2025).

D. Conversion of Sukun Into a Vowel

For instance, the word Anta (you) becomes Init, and ‘Inda (at/with) becomes ‘Inid. This shift occurs because speakers pause at the end of these words, necessitating the vocalization of the preceding quiescent letter (the “Nūn”) to avoid the cluster of two coda consonants. Another example is the vocalization of the final radical of a past-tense verb when attached to the subject-pronoun “Tā” or “Nā”; they say: Qil-it, Simi‘-it, and Qa‘ad-it. Had they not vocalized the final letter in these instances, they would not have needed to de-vocalize the penultimate letter (Alfaifi, 2025; Mashaqba et al., 2023).

E. Variation in the Articulation of Certain Letters

Letters may be articulated differently from their original phonetic root. The transition in letter pronunciation can be categorized into three types: First: Pronunciations that were prevalent among ancient Arabs and widespread within specific tribes; these were recognized by grammarians and linguists. Sibawayh compiled these and classified them as “Approved” (Mustahsana) and “Disapproved” (Ghayr Mustahsana) letters (Sibawayh, 1982). Second: The commutation of specific letters in certain words without being a consistent linguistic rule (Non-systematic Phonetic Shift). An example is the shift of the letter “Jīm” into “Yā,” occurring in specific words such as Shajarah (tree) becoming Shīrah. Conversely, the “Yā” may shift into a “Jīm”)Al-Tayyib al-Lughawi, Abu (1960), a feature that has become common in many Gulf countries today. Another example is the ‘An‘anah of the Tamim tribe, which is the conversion of the “Hamza” into a “‘Ayn” in words like Inna and Su‘āl, turning them into ‘Inna and Su‘āl)Al-Farahidi, Al-Khalil bin Ahmad (Al-Hamzi, 2023; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021; Szreder & Derrick, 2024).

These two types -the first and second- have documented evidence in ancient Arabic poetry and prose. Thus, there is no prohibition against using them in educational or media contexts, although it is preferable to articulate the original sounds that were most prevalent during the “Period of Linguistic Protest” (Zaman al-Ihtijaj). Ibn Jinni remarked: “Since this is the case in the reliable language, their use should be minimized, and

one should select what is stronger and more common”)Ibn Jinni(. It is more appropriate in such situations to pronounce letters according to their origin, which is not an arduous task if the speaker so desires. Pronouncing “Jīm” as “Yā’,” or as the Cairene “Gīm,” is possible, as are the shifts in the letters “Qāf,” “Ḍād,” or “Zā’.” No weight should be given to the claim that “habit” compels such pronunciation; for those who do not articulate the “Jīm” correctly in Arabic often do so in English or other languages without difficulty-so why not in Classical Arabic? Furthermore, the shift in letter articulation is an ongoing and endless process; Arabs differed in their pronunciation of certain letters in the past, and they continue to do so today (Fadil, (1971).

Among these shifts in certain dialects is the substitution of the masculine third-person singular pronominal suffix (Hā’) with a “Wāw.” They say (Ilū) for the eloquent Ilayhi (to him), (Ma’ū) for Ma’ahu (with him), and (‘Alayū) for ‘Alayhi (upon him (Al-Deaibes et al., 2025; Al-Hamzi, 2023; Meqdad et al., 2024; Shatnawi & Al-Azamat, 2009; Szreder & Derrick, 2024).

Furthermore, it is imperative to adhere to the correct articulation of Arabic sounds and avoid being drawn into various dialectal forms; such divergence could lead to the unraveling of the linguistic bond that unites the nation)Al-Hamad, 2004). This category may also include phonetic shifts that became common after the “Period of Linguistic Protest,” such as the commutation of “Ghayn” into “Qāf” and vice versa, or the substitution of “Qāf” with “Kāf,” and the confusion between “Ḍād” and “Zā’.” These substitutions are numerous, and many treatises have been authored on the interchangeability of letters (Al-I’tiqāb), such as Al-Ibdal by Abu al-Tayyib al-Lughawi and Al-I’tiqāb by Abu Turab, to the extent that these shifts became consistent linguistic patterns in certain regions (Addowa et al., 2025).

Third: Pronunciations that have no root in the Arabic language. Examples include the conversion of the “Thā’,” “Dhāl,” and “Zā’” into “Zāy,” “Tā’,” “Sīn,” or “Dāl,” or into a sound between “Zāy” and “Sīn”-as heard in the pronunciation of the word Ḥazz (luck) by urban dwellers in Egypt and the Levant. Undoubtedly, this is attributed to the difficulty non-Arabs face in articulating these sounds, which in turn influenced Arabs to resort to sounds that are phonetically similar in point of articulation or attribute, yet easier to pronounce. Perhaps the influx of non-Arabs (Ajam) into the religion and their learning of Arabic across various stages-coupled with their inability to articulate letters not present in their native tongues-led them to alter these letters into other sounds. Through prolonged social interaction and the passage of time, Arabs were influenced by them, and these sounds became embedded in their dialects. Consequently, any articulation of the aforementioned Interdental consonants (Al-Huruf al-Asnaniyya) that deviates from their ancient Arabic sounds is considered a departure from the norm (Khalaf 1975). A further example is the pronunciation of “Qāf” as a “Hamza” (Glottal stop) among many urban inhabitants, which has been cited in several sources as a lisp (Luthgha) or a deprecated dialectal form (Alfaifi & Qasem, 2024; Al-Hamzi, 2023; Thahabi, 1985).

F. Insertion of Letters (Prefixes, Suffixes, and Infixes)

An example is the prefixing of the letter “Bā’” before an imperfective verb (Mudāri’); speakers say: bi-yqūl (he says), bi-yarja’ (he returns), and bi-yisawwī (he does). This phenomenon is prevalent in most Arabic dialects. The origin of this “Bā’” may stem from the verbs Abghī or Abtaghī (I desire/intend); it is as if they originally meant “I intend to say” (abghī aqūl), and through frequent usage, the “Hamza” and “Ghayn” were elided, leaving only the “Bā’.” It would have been better and simpler to suffice with the standard forms: yaqūl and yarja’. A similar case is the use of the prefix “Kāf” in Moroccan dialects, such as: ki-yghlib, ki-yfūz, ki-yitmannā, and ki-yghsil-meaning he triumphs, wins, hopes, and washes (Alfaifi, 2025; Meqdad et al., 2024).

Among the examples of suffixes is the letter “Shīn” used in negative sentences, such as: mā ‘araft-ish (I didn’t know) and mā sami’t-ish (I didn’t hear). This “Shīn” is apparently an abbreviation of the word Shay’ (thing); it is as if the original sentence was “I did not know or hear anything” (mā ‘araftu shay’an). It would have been better and simpler to suffice with the standard forms: mā ‘araftu or mā sami’tu (Meqdad et al., 2022; Abu-Rahme et al., 2025).

This also includes the gemination (doubling) of non-geminated sounds. For instance, the pronoun Huwa (he) becomes Huwwa or Huwwi, and the word ‘Anab (grapes) is pronounced ‘Anabb in some dialects. Similarly, the final letter of Luqam (morsels)-the plural of Luqmah-is doubled to become Luqamm, and Suwar (images)-the plural of Sūrah-becomes Suwarr. This phenomenon also extends to the gemination of the final letter in verbs, as seen in Moroccan and Algerian dialects, where they say: ukhrujj (go out) and idghat (press) (Alfaifi, 2025)

An example of infixes (Ḥashw) is the insertion of the letter “Yā” into the maqṣūr noun, such as: ‘Aṣāyah (stick), Ḥabbāyah (grain/pill), and Ḥaṣāyah (pebble).

G. Deletion of Letters

The Vernacular tends to elide certain letters for the sake of brevity. Examples include the elision of the letter “Lām” from the word Walad (boy), which becomes Al-Wad in the Egyptian dialect, or the elision of the “Dāl” to become Walā as heard in Levantine dialects. Similarly, in the word Bint (girl), the “Nūn” is elided by Egyptians, resulting in Bit. Another instance is the elision of both the “Lām” and “Alif” from the preposition ‘Alā (on/upon), sufficing with the letter “‘Ayn” alone in many Arabic dialects (Meqdad et al., 2024; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021).

This phenomenon also extends to Relative Pronouns (Al-Asmā’ al-Mawṣūla), where the letters “Dhāl” and “Tā” are elided. This has become a consistent rule across this category, where the singular form Illī is now used to denote the dual, plural, singular, masculine, and feminine. Speakers were encouraged to unify the term in all cases due to the absence of ambiguity; the relative clause (Silat al-Mawṣūl) following the pronoun guides the listener to the intended meaning. For instance, if one says: “I saw illī najah,” it is understood as singular masculine. If one says: “I saw illī najahat,” it is understood as singular feminine. Likewise, “I saw illī najahou” refers to the masculine plural, and “I saw illī najahn” refers to the feminine plural.

Regarding elision in verbs, some vernaculars exhibit this in verbs beginning with a Hamza, such as Akala (to eat) and Akhaḍa (to take). These verbs undergo the rule of Metathesis (Al-Qalb al-Makānī); the Hamza is moved to the end of the verb to avoid starting with it, as Arabs tended to facilitate its pronunciation (Tas-hīl). Since the Hamza is difficult to facilitate at the beginning of a word, they moved it to the coda (the tail of the word), becoming Khaḍ-a’ and Kal-a’, then facilitated them into Khaḍā and Kalā. Finally, when these verbs were suffixed with pronouns, the Hamza was elided entirely, leading them to say: Kaltu and Khaḍtu (I ate/took), and Kalnā and Khaḍnā (we ate/took) (Alfaifi & Qasem, 2024; Al-Hamzi, 2023).

Another justification, beyond the desire for brevity, can be added to explain this elision: the words prone to elision are those that occur most frequently in speech. What is frequent in discourse is generally easier for people to comprehend and allows the speaker’s intent to be readily grasped (Meqdad et al., 2022; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021).

This also includes the elision of the third-person pronominal suffix “Hā”: Baytu (his house), Baytā (her house), ‘Amalu (his work), and ‘Amalā (her work). Instead, speakers suffice with a “Wāw” or an “Alif,” saying: Baytū, Kalāmū, ‘Ilmū (masculine), or Baytā, Kalāmā, ‘Ilmā (feminine). All this appears to be an avoidance of the “Hā” at the end of the word; some dialects resorted to the “Wāw” while others opted for the “Alif.” Regarding the feminine form, certain dialects, such as the Levantine, elide the “Hā” entirely: Baytuhā, Kalāmuḥā, and Yāduḥā become Baytā, Kalāmā, and Īdā. Studies have shown that the “Hā” pronoun drops in some dialects; perhaps its lightness and voiceless (Mahmūs) quality cause speakers in some northern Jordanian dialects to drop the feminine singular suffix and end the word with a glottal stop (Tahmīz). They say Ishtarayt-a’ instead of Ishtaraytahā (I bought it) (Shatnawi & Al-Azamat, 2009).

Under this same category falls the de-gemination (reduction of doubled consonants). In some dialects, speakers tend to eliminate the doubled letter by pronouncing it without gemination. This occurs in the Tunisian dialect in words such as Muqaddimah (introduction) and Mu‘allimah (teacher), which become Amqad-mah and Am‘al-mah. Since gemination consists of two identical consonants-the first being quiescent and the second vocalized-it seems they found this succession too cumbersome and elided the second vocalized letter, leaving only the first quiescent one. Gemination is similarly elided in the feminine detached pronoun Hunna (they), and when it is attached to the particles Lāmun or Kāf (Lahumna and Lakunna), it becomes Hin, Al-hin, and Al-kun.

H. Initial Consonant Devoicing

It is a well-established rule that Arabs never begin a word with a devoiced consonant (Sākin). However, due to the interaction between Arabs and speakers of other languages that permit word-initial clusters-such as English-the phenomenon of de-vocalizing the first letter has begun to spread across vernaculars. This is achieved by introducing a Hamzat al-Wasl at the beginning of the word. This shift has affected nouns, such as Kitāb becoming Iktāb, Mu‘allim becoming Im‘allim, Jibāl becoming Ijbāl, and Mubārāh becoming Imbārāh. It also affects verbs, such as Nuqaddim becoming Inqaddim, Ya‘ubbur becoming Iy‘ubbur, and Yusallim becoming

Iysallim. Some dialects even devoicing the pronouns Huwa (he) and Hiya (she), turning them into Uhu and Ihi, as in the Kuwaiti dialect. Adverbs are also impacted, such as Hunā becoming Ihnā, Hunāka becoming Ihnāka, and Matā becoming Imtā. Even prepositions have been affected, such as Ib-ṣu'ūbah and Ib-ṣidārah, or Ilak instead of Laka (to you) (Alfaifi, 2025; Watson, 2002).

This devoicing occurs in words where the second letter is vocalized, such as: Kitāb, Ḥizām, Ḥibāl, Shubāt, Mu'allim, Muqaddim, At'allam, and At'ādal. It does not, however, occur in words where the second letter is already quiescent, such as Mal'ab (playground) or Makhzan (storehouse). This is because de-vocalizing the first letter in such cases would result in a cluster of two coda consonants at the start of the word—a phonetic sequence that Arabic strictly avoids, except at the end of a word during a pause (Waqf).

I. Assimilation and Non-Assimilation of the Definite Article

Certain Arabic dialects avoid the assimilation (Idghām) of the “Lām” of the definite article when it precedes Sun Letters (Al-Ḥurūf al-Shamsiyya). Consequently, they articulate the “Lām” clearly in words such as Al-Thalātha (the three), Al-Dunyā (the world), Al-Sab'a (the seven), and Al-Tis'a (the nine), as observed in the Iraqi dialect (Alfaifi, 2025).

Conversely, other dialects assimilate the “Lām” into the letters “Qāf,” “Kāf,” and “Jīm,” despite their classification as Moon Letters (Al-Ḥurūf al-Qamariyya). This is found in certain dialects of Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq, where the “Lām” is assimilated into the subsequent letter in words like Al-Jāmi'a (the university), Al-Qāhira (Cairo), Al-Qanāh (the canal), and Al-Kalām al-Kabīr (the big talk/serious words). A colleague also informed me that in a specific region in Jordan, the “Lām” of the definite article is entirely absent from their speech; instead, they assimilate it into all letters, saying: Ab-bāb for Al-Bāb (the door), Am-miftāḥ for Al-Miftāḥ (the key), and A'- 'Ayn for Al-'Ayn (the eye/spring).

J. Introduction of Non-Arabic Vowels

Furthermore, there are words widespread in the vernaculars that are frequently repeated, despite the existence of classical alternatives that could be utilized. The following table illustrates some of these:

TABLE I: COMMON VERNACULAR TERMS AND THEIR CLASSICAL EQUIVALENTS

Colloquial (Arabic)	Transliteration	Standard Arabic	Transliteration	English Meaning
ناشع	'ashān	بسبب / هنأل	li'annahu / bisabab	because / due to
اذك	kidā	اذكھ	hakadhā	thus / like this
سب	bas	نكل	lākin	but
احشم	mish ḥa	نل	lan	will not
ح/ر ح	ḥa / rah	س / فوس	sawfa / sa-	will / going to
فورع شم	mish ma'rūf	ريغ	ghayr	other / different
يلل	illī	يذلا	alladhī	who / which / that
شال ع / شيل / هيل	lēh / lēsh / 'alāsh	امل / اذامل	limādhā / lima	why
ده	da	اذھ	hādhā	this
يف ام	mā fī	دجوي ال	lā yūjad	there is no / there are no
دح يف ام	mā fī ḥadd	دحأ ال	lā aḥad	nobody / no one
ني دعب	ba'dēn	مث	thumma	then / afterwards
نامك	kamān	اضئ	ayḍan	also / too
كئھ	hēk	اذكھ	hakadhā	like this / thus
زواع / يدب	biddī / 'āwiz	دیرأ	urīd	I want
مھ	hom	اضئ	ayḍan	also
ونش / شئھ / شئیا / وش	shū / ēsh / hēsh / shinu	اذام	mādhā	what
اونش /	/ shinwa			
ينئلخ / ينئولخ / انولخ	khallūnā / khallūnī / khallīnī	ينئوعد / انئوعد	da'ūnā / da'ūnī	let us / let me
كالئذھ	hadhīlāk	كئولوأ	ulā'ika	those
الئذھ	hadhīlā	ءالؤھ	hā'ulā'i	these
نئف / نئو	wēn / fēn	نئ	ayna	where
ئلئد	dyālī	ئل	lī	mine / belonging to me

APPLIED EXAMPLES

Text One: A Mawwāl by the Iraqi artist Kazem Al-Saher: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ekgwi2bNxk&list=RD0ekgwi2bNxk&start_radio=1

'indak nās y'īshū bilā hamm - You have people who live without worry.

wēn mā trūḥ yiṣībak balāhum - Wherever you go, you are afflicted with their troubles.
wa 'indak nās mā tsawwa balāhum - And you have people who are not worth anything without them.
wa 'indak nās yā rētak balāhum - And you have people for whom you wish you could be without them.
aṣnām imḥarraka wa tilbiss athyāb - Moving idols wearing clothes.

In the preceding text, there are syntactic variances (Tabayunāt Naḥwiyya) that fall outside the scope of this research-such as the failure to mark the verb ya'īshū with the nominative “Nūn,” and the failure to mark thiyāb with the accusative case, in addition to the devoicing of words. Furthermore, the expression balā-hum (without them/with them not) pertains to the syntactic level; the Vernacular permits a attached pronoun to follow the negative particle lā and the preposition bā', a construction that is strictly prohibited in Classical Arabic. However, this is not the place for an exhaustive detail on this matter.

As for the phonetic shifts (Taḥawwulāt Ṣawtiyya) that occurred in certain words, they are represented by the change of vowels in balā; the preposition bā' was vocalized with a Fathā, whereas it originally should be vocalized with a Kasra. Other shifts include the initial devoicing in words like (it-rūḥ, iy-ṣībuk, im-ḥarrakah, ith-yāb) and the commutation of the “Lām” in laytaka into a “Rā'.” (Alfaifi, 2025; Meqdad et al., 2024).

If the speaker avoided these transformations and returned to the original forms, the text would read as follows:

'indaka nāsun ya'īshūna bilā hammin - You have people who live without worry.
wa ayna mā tarūḥu yuṣībuka balāhum - And wherever you go, their misfortune befalls you.
wa 'indaka nāsun mā taswā bilāhum - And you have people who are not worth anything without them.
wa 'indaka nāsun yā laytaka bilāhum - And you have people for whom you wish you could be without them.
aṣnāmun muḥarrakatun wa talbasu thiyāban - Moving idols that wear clothes.

Text Two: A Song by the Lebanese singer Fairuz: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Znlgc1OkCg&list=RD1Znlgc1OkCg&start_radio=1:

yā mursāl il-marāsīl 'aḍ-ḍay'a il-'arībe - O messenger of messengers to the nearby village.
khidli bi-darbak hal-mandīl wa a'ṭih la-ḥabībī - Take this handkerchief on your way and give it to my beloved.
'ad-dāyer ṭaraztō shwayy 'idī wil-iswāra - At the border of it, my hand embroidered a little bracelet.
ḥikitlō ismō 'alēh b-khiyṭān is-sannāra - I stitched his name on it with fishing-line threads.
b-khiyṭān iz-zuru' w ḥumar - With threads of blue and red.
wa ghannānī ṣ-ṣibyān is-sumar - And the dark-skinned boys sang to me.
katabtillō qīṣṣit 'umr bi-dumū'ī il-katībe - I wrote him a lifetime story with my flowing tears.
bētō bi-ākhir il-byūt quddāmō 'alēh - His house is at the end of the houses, right in front.
tūṣal 'al-bēt w btifūt w btsallim il-hadiyye - You arrive at the house, enter, and deliver the gift.
walaw 'annā qāl w katar - And if he speaks of us and talks much,
'ullō khallīh yitdhakkar - Tell him to remember.
'a hal-mandīl il-aṣfar bb'atillō makātībī - With this yellow handkerchief I send him my letters.

Phonetic Shifts in the Text: (Al-Hamzi, 2023; Szreder & Derrick, 2024)

First: Variation in the Articulation of Certain Letters. For instance, the “Qāf” in words such as (Al-Qarība, Al-Zarq, Qiṣṣa, Quddāmahu, Qāl, Qul-lahu) has been transformed into a glottal stop (Hamza). Additionally, the “Thā” in Kathur (many) has become a “Tā,” and the “Dhāl” in (Khuḍ-lī) and (Yatadhakkar) has become a “Dāl.”

Second: Exchange of Vowels. This is observed in the “Lām” of the preposition (Li-ḥabībī), which has been vocalized with a Fathā, whereas it is originally vocalized with a Kasra. Another example is the vocalization of the prosthetic Hamza (Hamzat al-Wasl) in the definite article (Al-) with a Kasra, as in (Il-marāsīl, Il-iswāra, Il-sinnāra, Il-ṣibyān al-sumr).

Third: deletion of Letters. Examples include the elision of the “Lām” and “Alif” from the preposition

‘Alā (on), and the elision of the disjunctive Hamza (Hamzat al-Qaṭ‘) in A‘ṭīhi (give him). This also includes the elision of the pronominal suffix “Hā” in (A‘ṭī-h, ‘alay-h, khallī-h), or its elision while retaining the Ḍamma with elongation (vocalization) in (Ḥayiktil-lū, Katabtil-lū, Ism-ū, Bayt-ū, Bib‘atil-lū). Furthermore, the prosthetic Hamza is elided in (Al-Katība, Al-Buyūt, Al-Hadiyya) due to the devoicing of the words; the Hamza was elided to avoid the cluster of two coda consonants.

Fourth: Initial Devoicing Consonant. The de-vocalizing of the first letter in words such as: (Ib-darbik, Īdī, I‘lay-h, Ib-khayṭān, Im-kātībī).

Addition of Letters: The insertion of prefixes as in: (bi-tfūt, bi-tisallim, bi-b‘atil-lū, bi-tibkī).

Text Three: A Poem by the Omani Poet Faisal Al-Farsi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1ayq4n9fNk>

simḥān ṭālī‘ min jidā ‘umān mursāl - Simḥān rises from the heart of Oman as a messenger.

yinṣā ḥifīt illī tizāyid ḥanīneh - Calling out to Ḥifīt whose longing keeps increasing.

min kathr mā shawguh ‘ala ṣ-ṣadr yinhāl - So much yearning pours upon his chest.

tisma‘ warā taqwīs ḍil‘ah wanīneh - You hear, behind the curve of his rib, his moaning.

ḥinnā jasad min misk māhū bi-ṣalṣāl - We are a body of musk, not of dry clay.

righnā il-hawārī wajma‘itnā safīneh - We wandered through the quarters, and one ship gathered us.

riyāl-nā dirham wa dirhamkum riyāl - Our riyal is a dirham, and your dirham is a riyal.

wa iḥsās-kum fī mahdnā rāḍī‘neh - And your feelings were nursed in our cradle.

wa idhā ṣamā fī-kum min al-qayṣ riyāl - And if thirst from the scorching heat afflicts you,

ḥattā tanūf yijaff ma‘nā ma‘īneh - Even Tanūf would see its springs dry with us.

ir-rīḥ ta‘ṣif, was-samā wabl hammāl - The wind rages, and the sky carries pouring rain.

wal-mawj yilṭim, wan-naṣr lis-safīneh - The waves strike, yet victory belongs to the ship.

Phonetic Shifts in the Text:

First: Variation in the Articulation of Certain Letters. The “Qāf” in words such as (Shawq-uḥu, Taqwīs, Al-Qayḍ) has been transformed into a Cairene Gīm (a voiced velar plosive /g/). Additionally, the “Jīm” in Rajjāl (man) has become a “Yā” (Rayyāl). (Szreder & Derrick, 2024; Al-Deaibes et al., 2025)

Second: Commutation of Vowels. This is observed in the vocalization of the letter “Ḥā” in Ḥafītu with a Kasra (vowel /i/), whereas it is originally vocalized with a Fatha (vowel /a/). Similarly, the “Tā” in Tazāyad is vocalized with a Kasra instead of the original Fatha. The “Rā” and “Kāf” in (Righnā, Kithur) are also vocalized with a Kasra, whereas their standard form dictates a Ḍamma (vowel /u/).

Third: Elision of Letters. Examples include the elision of the “Dhāl” from the relative pronoun Alladhī, and the elision of the disjunctive Hamza (Hamzat al-Qaṭ‘) in Iḥsāsikum (your feeling).

Fourth: Initial Consonant Quiescence. The de-vocalizing of the first letter in words such as: (I‘mān, Bi-ṣalṣāl, Ij-ma‘atnā, Yij-iff, Riyāl-nā).

As for the term Ḥannā (we), its origin is Naḥnu. First, the final letter was de-vocalized (quiescence), becoming Naḥn. Then, Metathesis (Al-Qalb al-Makānī) occurred by moving the first “Nūn” to the end of the word and assimilating it into the other “Nūn,” resulting in Ḥanna. Finally, the “Ḥā” was vocalized with a Kasra, resulting in (Ḥinnā).

CONCLUSION

Linguistic change intensifies as the lifespan of a language extends. If one were to track phonetic shifts across the historical eras of the Arabic language, they would find a gradual progression in these changes and an increasing divergence from the original root over time. There is no single explanation for these transformations; sometimes speakers resort to facilitation and brevity, while at other times they insert sounds and undertake additional articulatory effort. Occasionally, they incline toward the easiest sound for them, yet at other times, they adopt more rugged forms, shifting from the easy to the difficult. (Meqdad et al., 2022; Abu-Rahme et al., 2025)

The interchange of vowels is among the most prominent phonetic variances distinguishing the Vernacular from the Classical. There is no fixed rule governing this exchange; spoken dialects may shift from the Fatha-which is easier to articulate-to the Kasra and Ḍamma, which are phonetically more demanding, and sometimes the reverse occurs. Environmental factors are not a definitive measure in these phonetic shifts; some Bedouin

environments incline toward the Fatha in the definite article (Al-), while urban ones lean toward the Kasra, despite the claim by some that the Kasra is more suited to harsh, difficult environments. (Mashaqba et al., 2023; Alfaifi, 2025)

Another frequent variance in the vernaculars is the inclination toward devoicing (Sukun), whether on the first letter-influenced by languages that permit word-initial clusters-the last letter for the sake of ease and speed, or in the middle of a word. The need to resort to Sukun increases when there is a rapid succession of vowels, as seen in the morphological weights of tafā‘ala and tafa‘ala and their derivatives, which subsequently necessitates assimilation (Idghām). (Alfaifi, 2025; Al-Hamzi, 2023).

The following recommendations are proposed to facilitate the transition from vernacular to Classical Arabic:

- **Precise Vowelization of Words:** This requires practice and a commitment to using the eloquent form. For instance, instead of saying rijil, we say rajul (man); instead of ḥinīn, we say ḥanīn (longing); and instead of yu‘ruf, we say ya‘rif (he knows). (Meqdad et al., 2024; Al-Hawawsheh, 2021)
- **Eliminating Initial Devoicing:** Discarding the habit of de-vocalizing the first letter in words like: (Iktāb, Im‘allim, Imhandis, Imsalamnah, Ib-ṣilah, Ijbāl, Iḥbāl).
- **Correct Articulation of Letters:** Pronouncing letters like the Thā’, Ḍād, and Zā’ correctly, except for those proven to be rooted in ancient Arabic dialects. (Szreder & Derrick, 2024; Al-Deaibes et al., 2025)
- **Replacing Repetitive Vernacular Terms:** Utilizing eloquent alternatives for frequent dialectal words. For example: (mish ma‘rūf = ghayr); (illī = alladhī); (leyh = limādhā); (deh = hādhā); (māshī ‘ulūm = lā yūjad). (Meqdad et al., 2022; Meqdad et al., 2024)
- **Incorporating these and other recommendations into school and university curricula,** particularly within Arabic language programs, and presenting them in an engaging manner that aligns with students’ age groups and developmental characteristics.
- **Embedding these recommendations into various activities at schools and universities to empower** Classical Arabic, especially during events such as World Arabic Language Day celebrated by Arab nations

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