

VERNACULAR ARABIC AND ITS ROLE IN UNDERMINING STANDARD ARABIC: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The position of Standard Arabic as a unifying linguistic and cultural code has been increasingly undermined by the spread of vernacular varieties across Arab societies. This study explores the sociolinguistic factors driving this shift, drawing on classical philological sources, contemporary sociolinguistic theory, and recent empirical research. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the paper identifies key influences, including the gap between home and school language practices, the dominance of vernaculars in media and education, the accelerated borrowing of foreign terms, and the rise of hybridized communication in digital spaces. Despite the efforts of language academies, educators, and policymakers, responses have been fragmented and inconsistently applied. The study concludes that safeguarding the vitality of Standard Arabic requires integrated strategies that link education, media discourse, and digital policy, supported by strong political will. The implications extend to language planning and policy design, underscoring the urgency of coordinated interventions to preserve Standard Arabic in the context of globalization and technological disruption.

Keywords: Standard Arabic, vernacular varieties, diglossia, language ideology, digital communication, language policy, globalization

1. INTRODUCTION

The standard Arabic language is regarded as one of the oldest and most vibrant of the living languages, endowed with stability and richness through the Holy Qur'an, the language of classical Arabic literature, and the repository of scientific and philosophical thought across many centuries. This status has endowed Standard Arabic with a symbolic and cultural authority, making it a unifying standard for Arabs despite the diversity of their regions and dialects.

However, the Arab linguistic reality has for centuries been characterized by the phenomenon of diglossia, which Ferguson (1959) described as the coexistence of a high variety represented by Standard Arabic and a low variety embodied in the spoken vernaculars. This diglossia was not initially a direct threat to Standard Arabic; instead, the latter maintained its status and official functions. However, the historical, social, and cultural transformations experienced by Arab societies since the nineteenth century led to a redistribution of functions between the two linguistic levels. As a result, Vernacular Arabic emerged as a strong competitor in the fields of media, education, and the digital sphere, and even within discourses that had traditionally relied on Standard Arabic, such as religious and political discourses. Consequently, Vernacular Arabic has become an influential factor in the decline of Standard Arabic.

Vernacular Arabic also raises a profound problem that constitutes the main research question of the present study: How can Standard Arabic be sustained as a symbol of cultural identity and the primary medium of intellectual expression, in the face of the expansion and growing prevalence of the vernacular Arabic?

1.1 Research Questions

From this central research question emerge several sub-questions, as follows:

RQ1: What is the concept of diglossia from both historical and contemporary perspectives?

RQ2: What are the leading causes behind the spread and expansion of Vernacular Arabic?

RQ3: In what ways has Standard Arabic declined across different domains of life?

RQ4: What efforts have been made to protect and revive Standard Arabic?

RQ5: What strategies can be employed to strengthen Standard Arabic while contextualizing Vernacular Arabic within its proper functional domains?

1.2 Research Objectives

The aims of this study are:

1. To analyze the theoretical framework of diglossia in both the Arab linguistic heritage and modern studies.
2. To identify the historical, educational, social, media-related, and digital factors contributing to the expansion of Vernacular Arabic.
3. To examine the manifestations of the decline of Standard Arabic across various domains.
4. To review the efforts to protect Standard Arabic and to discuss their effectiveness.
5. To propose practical recommendations for enhancing the status of Standard Arabic and regulating its relationship with Vernacular Arabic.

1.3 Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on both classical and contemporary sources as well as recent sociolinguistic research on diglossia and language change, supported by documented records of diglossic practices.

2. An Analysis of the Concept of Linguistic Diglossia and Its Dimensions

2.1 The Concept of Diglossia in Contemporary Studies

Ferguson (1959) defined diglossia as the situation in which two varieties of the same language coexist: a high variety, represented by Standard Arabic, and a low variety, represented by the vernacular language. Although speakers are aware of the distinction between them, they alternate between the two levels according to social context and function. Later, Fishman (1972) expanded this concept to examine the interaction between different languages in multilingual societies. Nevertheless, the Arabic case remains the clearest illustration of this phenomenon.

2.2. Early References among Arab Philologists

Early Arab philologists acknowledged the distinction between Standard Arabic and the vernacular language. They recognized, from the outset, that language is not characterized by a single level of eloquence but by variation in usage among different social groups and regions.

Sibawayh (d. 180 AH) emphasized in his treatise "Al-Kitāb" that Standard Arabic should be derived from the most eloquent Arabs—that is, from the Bedouins whose speech had not been influenced by non-Arab tongues nor affected by waves of urban change. The emergence of the philological principle of linguistic authority (*Ihtijāj*) led early Arab grammarians to privilege the speech of certain tribes—most notably Tamīm, Qays, and Hudhayl—as the canonical model for Standard Arabic, while deliberately excluding other dialectal varieties regarded as innovative departures or intrusive borrowings (Suleiman, 2023). This early awareness laid the groundwork for the principle of the "canonical model," which scholars sought to safeguard against alteration and deviation (Hallberg, 2023; Hallberg & Niehorster, 2021).

Ibn Jinnī (d. 392 AH) advanced a deeper understanding of the nature of linguistic change in his treatise *al-Khaṣā'is* (The Characteristics), acknowledging that language is a living entity subject to development through usage and shifting social conditions. He distinguished between what he termed analogy as a regulatory instrument and usage as a transformative force, affirming that change is not an incidental occurrence but rather an inherent feature of all languages. Although he acknowledged the legitimacy of linguistic change, he continued to regard Vernacular Arabic as a departure from the Canonical Model, or as a deviation from the structure established by the grammarians for Standard Arabic (Owens, 2020; Weiss, 2017; Alrumhi, 2021).

Al-Jāhiz (d. 255 AH), in *al-Bayān wa-l-Tabyīn* (Eloquence and Exposition), reinforced this conception by observing that the decline of eloquence of speech results from interaction with non-Arabs and the influence of their languages. He observed that the major urban centers of the time—such as Baghdad and Basra—were more susceptible to a weakening of eloquence due to the mingling of different ethnic groups, whereas the desert preserved the purity of speech. In this way, al-Jāhiz articulated an early anthropological conception that linked language to its social and cultural environment.

Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 AH), in his *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena), formulated a more mature conception of the issue, approaching it with a sociolinguistic awareness, centuries ahead of his time. He argued that the Arabs' interaction with non-Arabs following the conquests led to the decline of eloquence, a deviation from the linguistic norm, and the emergence of new dialects distanced from the original. He situated this within the framework of his theory of human civilization, according to which language is a social phenomenon shaped by processes of urbanization, intercultural contact, and the gradual erosion of tribal cohesion as societies moved from a tribal order toward urban life. In this way, Ibn Khaldun identified the mechanisms behind the rise of Vernacular Arabic as a natural phenomenon within the dynamics of social change, thereby offering a conception that anticipates insights later articulated by modern sociolinguistics.

This accumulated awareness among the early scholars demonstrates that the dichotomy between Standard Arabic and Vernacular Arabic is not a modern discovery but a phenomenon observed since the earliest centuries, one that scholars approached in different ways: grammarians through codification and linguistic authority, rhetoricians through critique and analysis, and social historians through civilizational interpretation. Taken together, these perspectives provided a solid foundation for subsequent debates on diglossia in both classical and modern Arab thought (Hajjāj, 2024).

2.3 The Cultural and Symbolic Dimension of Standard Arabic

From the earliest centuries, the status of Standard Arabic has been inseparably tied to the sanctity of the Qur'anic text, for it was the medium chosen for divine revelation. This association has endowed it with absolute religious authority and has elevated it above all other modes of speech. Beyond this sacred dimension, Standard Arabic has also acquired literary and scholarly authority: it has become the language of eloquent poetry—regarded as the Arabs' cultural archive—the medium of rhetoric and criticism, and the language of jurisprudence, exegesis, Hadith, and the various rational and transmitted sciences. In this way, Standard Arabic has been transformed into a symbol of collective cultural identity, transcending tribal and regional boundaries and uniting Arabs under the banner of a single standardized language (Ibn Jinni, 1952; Ibn Khaldun, 1967).

By contrast, the vernacular language long remained at the margins of written culture, its roles confined to oral communication in daily life—in homes, markets, and social gatherings—without being codified or adopted in the higher domains of science and literature. The distinction between the two linguistic levels was clear: Standard Arabic was the language of religious, scholarly, and literary authority, while the vernacular language was restricted to popular exchange. Yet this dichotomy began to fracture in the early nineteenth century with the introduction of printing to the Arab world and the rise of the modern press. The printing press created a new space for the vernacular language: no longer confined to orality, it entered the realm of writing, publishing, and mass readership. Newspapers in some countries—such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria—began to use a register closer to the vernacular language in satirical articles and popular tales, while written forms of popular literature flourished, including *zajal* and colloquial plays (Husayn, 1938/2002; Anīs, 1978).

This transformation has marked a revolutionary shift in the trajectory of the vernacular language, moving it for the first time from the sphere of limited oral memory to the domain of printed writing. This shift has conferred upon it a new legitimacy and has opened the door to an expansion of its functions. With the spread of newspapers, commercial advertisements, and satirical magazines, the vernacular language has consolidated its presence in cultural life, thereby threatening Standard Arabic's monopoly over the writing and knowledge sphere. From this point, the downward trend of Standard Arabic has become evident—not because it has lost its internal resources, but because social and technological changes have provided the vernacular language with platforms it had never previously possessed (Anīs, 1978).

3. Factors Driving the Spread and Expansion of the Vernacular Language

The phenomenon of the spread and expansion of the vernacular language, resulting in the relative decline of Standard Arabic, is the outcome of interwoven historical, social, cultural, educational, and media-related factors. An analysis of these factors shows that the vernacular language has not spread through its intrinsic dynamics, but rather through objective contexts that have rendered it closer to the speakers' sensibilities and more present in the spaces of everyday interaction.

3.1 The Historical and Political Factor

The European colonial period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries played a pivotal role in reinforcing a new form of diglossia within Arab societies. The occupying authorities deliberately promoted the vernacular language at the expense of Standard Arabic, deploying it as an instrument for dismantling Arab cultural unity and facilitating administrative and educational control (Husayn, 1938/2002). In some cases, these authorities even encouraged the publication of newspapers in local dialects and, in certain Egyptian and Levantine experiments, advocated rendering them in Latin script. Following independence and the emergence of nation-states, Standard Arabic was not accorded sufficient priority in educational and media planning, a neglect that further entrenched the vernacular language across multiple spheres of social and cultural life.

3.2 The Social Factor

The vernacular language operates as the register of intimacy and social closeness, being deeply embedded in people's daily lives and reflective of their local identities. It is therefore particularly well suited to fulfilling functions of rapid and uncomplicated communication in homes, markets, and social gatherings. Rapid urbanization and internal migration have contributed to the consolidation of semi-standardized urban dialects—such as Cairene, Damascene, and Beirut vernaculars—that have transcended their local boundaries and become reference models within the broader Arab sphere. Exposure to these major urban centers has also made younger generations more inclined to adopt such dialects as symbols of modernity and social integration (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Anīs, 1978).

3.3 The Cultural and Intellectual Factor

At various historical junctures, certain intellectual elites unfortunately contributed to calls for the use of the vernacular language, arguing that it provided a more effective vehicle for simplifying science and disseminating culture. This was evident, for instance, in the movements for a so-called 'national language' in Egypt and Lebanon at the beginning of the twentieth century. The vernacular language was presented as closer to the people, while Standard Arabic was portrayed as complex and elitist. Although these movements ultimately failed to establish the vernacular language as an official written medium, they nonetheless created a form of cultural legitimacy for its use in both serious and light popular song, in folk literature, and in satirical journalism. As a result, they weakened the psychological barrier that had long separated the vernacular language from Standard Arabic.

3.4 The Educational Factor

The Arab educational system has been one of the most significant factors that has—albeit indirectly—contributed to the weakening of Standard Arabic. This arises from the reality that the wide gap between the language of the home (vernacular language) and the language of the school (Standard Arabic) renders the acquisition of reading and writing a demanding process, particularly in the early stages of education. As a result, teachers are frequently compelled to resort to the vernacular language in explanation and classroom interaction, to the extent that it has become the *de facto* medium of oral instruction, while Standard Arabic has remained confined to textbooks and examinations. Over time, this dynamic has entrenched diglossia in the learner's consciousness from an early age, positioning Standard Arabic as a 'compulsory' language rather than an authentic or lived one. Furthermore, this condition compromises the semantic integrity of numerous Standard Arabic words. While many vernacular terms, when considered in isolation, are deeply rooted in eloquence and may indeed have entries in classical dictionaries, once these terms are absorbed into vernacular syntactic structures, they often lose their canonical authenticity, either partially or entirely.

3.5 The Media and Technological Factor

With the advent of radio, television, and later cinema, the presence of the vernacular language in the public sphere expanded significantly, as mass media favored discourse that was closer to its audience. Consequently, songs, dialogues, and television series were predominantly presented in the vernacular language, thereby granting it broad legitimacy. This trend accelerated with the digital revolution at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the presence of the vernacular language reached its peak: it has since become the dominant medium on social media platforms, in text messaging, and across new digital content (Hijazi, 2021; Hāmid, 2025). More recently, artificial intelligence technologies and voice-translation applications have further consolidated this shift by supporting major vernaculars—such as Egyptian, Levantine, and Gulf varieties—and recognizing them as legitimate languages, a development that increasingly threatens the status of

Standard Arabic. More recently, artificial intelligence technologies and voice-translation applications have gone so far as to recognize major vernaculars (Egyptian, Levantine, and Gulf Arabic) as independent languages, a development that threatens the status of Standard Arabic ever more seriously.

3.6 The Economic and Commercial Factor

Commercial enterprises frequently employ the vernacular language in advertising and marketing, treating it as a medium with psychological impact and emotional appeal. This strategy stems from the fact that the vernacular language conveys affinity and warmth, offering consumers a sense of shared identity. Accordingly, major marketing campaigns across the Arab world often adopt slogans and promotional songs in the vernacular language rather than in Standard Arabic, thereby reinforcing its image as a contemporary language of everyday life associated with consumption and modernity (Hāmid, 2025).

3.7 The Psychological Factor

The psychological dimension in the spread of the vernacular language cannot be disregarded. Many young people perceive speaking in the vernacular language as an expression of authenticity and local belonging, whereas Standard Arabic is often viewed as formal or artificial, and those who employ it are sometimes dismissed as pretentious. This perception has entrenched a negative form of diglossia between a ‘language of life’ and a ‘language of the book,’ thereby weakening the emotional and affective attachment of younger generations to Standard Arabic.

4. Manifestations of the Undermining of Standard Arabic

The manifestations of the undermining of Standard Arabic appear across multiple levels of the linguistic system and in various domains of use. They can be observed in its lexical and syntactic structures, in different media outlets, in educational instructional materials, and in the ongoing interplay between Standard Arabic, the vernacular language, and foreign languages (Roushdy, 2023; Chakrani, 2025; “Language ideologies in new media,” 2025). Although these manifestations may seem dispersed, they ultimately converge on a single trajectory: the gradual erosion of the Canonical Authority of Standard Arabic under the pressure of vernacular language and spoken dialects (Hallberg, 2023).

4.1 Lexical Change

For centuries, the lexicon of Standard Arabic functioned as a repository of civilizational and scientific meanings, and it often served as the reference point to which vernacular words could be traced back to their origin in eloquent Arabic (Hallberg, 2023; Roushdy, 2023). In recent decades, however, foreign terms have increasingly infiltrated official writing and commercial advertising, and have unfortunately come to be treated as if they were vernacular usage—further undermining the presence of Standard Arabic, which had long held primacy in the Arabization of terminology. Thus, one encounters, for example, the use of ‘kash’ instead of ‘naqdan’ (‘cash payment’), ‘online’ instead of ‘abr al-shabaka’ or ‘alā al-khaṭṭ al-mubāshir’ (‘online’), tikīt instead of ‘tazkira’ (‘ticket’), or ‘ūfar’ instead of ‘arḍ’ (‘offer’) (Anīs, 1978; Hijazi, 2021). This tendency to adopt foreign words and circulate them as vernacular expressions reflects the erosion of Standard Arabic’s lexical authority in collective perception and illustrates the occasional inability of Arabization mechanisms to keep pace with the rapid influx of new terminological borrowings. Such a tendency to adopt and disseminate foreign words as if they were vernacular expressions reflects the declining lexical authority of Standard Arabic in public awareness and, at times, exposes the inadequacy of Arabization mechanisms in keeping pace with the accelerating flow of new terminologies (Hijāzī, 2021; Chakrani, 2025).

4.2 Syntactic Change

Syntax constitutes one of the most sensitive dimensions of language, given its intrinsic connection to standardization and grammatical regulation. Yet contemporary media discourse and everyday conversations increasingly exhibit hybrid constructions that blend vernacular language with Standard Arabic. Instead of the Standard Arabic expression *‘awaddu an aqūla* (‘I would like to say’), for example, one encounters the vernacular expression *‘baddī ‘a’ūl’* (‘I want to say’); and in place of *sawfa ‘adhab* (‘I will go’), the vernacular form *rah ‘arūh* (‘I will go’) is used. When such constructions are broadcast on radio and television or circulated through social media platforms, they disseminate syntactic patterns at variance with the standard authority of Standard Arabic (Suleiman, 2023). Over time, these forms evolve into what approximates an ‘alternative standard’ adopted by younger generations, leading to the gradual disintegration of the grammatical discipline that has historically characterized Standard Arabic.

4.3 The Decline of Standard Arabic in the Media

Building on the syntactic changes noted above, the media has further accelerated the erosion of Standard Arabic. There is no doubt that the media represents the most prominent mirror of linguistic change. Over the past decades, we have witnessed a gradual erosion of Standard Arabic across mass media platforms. While official news broadcasts continue, for the most part, to adhere to Standard Arabic, a number of local channels now rely on simplified dialects for their short news segments. The same trend applies to dubbing practices:

most animated films and dubbed productions are currently presented in Levantine or Egyptian vernacular, whereas earlier attempts at dubbing had employed simplified Standard Arabic. This phenomenon reshapes children's linguistic awareness from their earliest years, making the vernacular language their primary medium of reception, and leaving Standard Arabic confined to the classroom, if at all (Hallberg, 2023; Hamed & El Bolock, 2022; Language ideologies in new media, 2025).

4.4 The Weakness of Linguistic Competence among Learners

Beyond the media's role in reshaping linguistic habits, the educational sphere reveals an even more catastrophic dimension of this erosion: the decline in reading and linguistic competence among school students. In some Arab countries, more than half of primary school pupils fail to achieve the minimum level of comprehension when reading texts in Standard Arabic. This catastrophic reality does not primarily indicate deficiencies in learners' individual abilities; rather, it exposes a structural gap between the language of education (Standard Arabic) and the language of the home and the street (the vernacular language). As a result, this gap makes the acquisition of reading and writing skills considerably more challenging than expected, and it often produces cumulative setbacks that persist into later stages of education (Roushdy, 2023; Chakrani, 2025).

4.5 Linguistic Interference

Extending beyond formal education, the digital revolution has created another channel for the weakening of Standard Arabic: linguistic interference in youth communication. Everyday exchanges among younger speakers—whether face-to-face or in online spaces—now offer fertile ground for code blending. Text messages and social media posts frequently mix Standard Arabic, colloquial varieties, and foreign languages, sometimes even within the same sentence (e.g., *'anā mashghūl online hallā', ba'dēn nihkī* — “I am busy online now; we'll talk later”). Recent studies note that such hybridized patterns diminish the role of Standard Arabic as the unifying code of public discourse, reducing it to only one element within a shifting linguistic amalgam (Hallberg, 2023; Journal of Sociolinguistics, 2025). If this tendency continues unchecked, it risks producing a hybrid linguistic form that gradually distances itself from the canonical standard (Roushdy, 2023).

5. Efforts to Sustain Standard Arabic

The growing spread of local vernaculars and foreign languages has gradually weakened the position of Standard Arabic. Nevertheless, sustained efforts—both historical and contemporary—have sought to preserve its standing and shield it from decline. Scholars point to a spectrum of responses that may be grouped into complementary levels. At the classical level, philologists and grammarians established frameworks of linguistic authority to safeguard the canonical model. In the modern era, institutions and policymakers have launched projects to promote Arabic in education, media, and digital communication (Hallberg, 2023; Suleiman, 2023). Alongside these formal measures, communities and individuals continue to mobilize initiatives that reinforce Standard Arabic as a marker of identity and cultural continuity (Chakrani, 2025; Roushdy, 2023).

5.1 Classical Scholarly Efforts

From the earliest centuries of Islam, a vast scholarly movement emerged with the aim of systematizing the language and safeguarding its philological integrity. The primary impetus for Sībawayh's composition of his *Kitāb* (The Book) in the second Islamic century was the protection of Arabic from grammatical error after the expansion of Islam. Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī subsequently compiled *Kitāb al-'Ayn* (The Book of al-'Ayn), thereby laying the foundations of Arabic lexicography and establishing a framework for documenting eloquent vocabulary and regulating its usage. Building upon this legacy, Ibn Jinnī in *al-Khaṣā'is* (The Characteristics) underscored the conception of Arabic as a coherent linguistic system, insisting that the vernacular language represented nothing more than a deviation from this canonical standard (Ibn Jinnī, 1952; Hallberg, 2023; Suleiman, 2023; Owens, 2020). Later, Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddima* (The Introduction) recognized the phenomenon of diglossia, warning that the intermingling of eloquent Arabic with other languages and dialects signaled the weakening of civilization itself (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967/2005).

5.2 Efforts of the Language Academies

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Arabic language academies were established in Cairo (1932), Damascus (1919), Baghdad (1947), Amman (1976), and other cities. These academies assumed several key responsibilities, the most prominent of which were:

- Arabizing scientific disciplines and modern terminology by proposing eloquent alternatives to borrowed vocabulary.
- Codifying rules of usage through the publication of dictionaries and updated linguistic standards.
- Protecting Standard Arabic in education and the media through official recommendations and resolutions.

Collectively, these initiatives enriched the Arabic lexicon and facilitated the use of Standard Arabic in scientific fields. Nevertheless, they did not always succeed in keeping pace with the rapid circulation of vernacular expressions and foreign words in daily life, which rendered their impact on the broader Arab public relatively limited (Hallberg, 2023).

5.3 Educational Efforts

Education remains the most expansive domain for consolidating the use of Standard Arabic. Ministries of Education in Arab countries have attempted to integrate simplified Standard Arabic into early curricula and to train teachers to employ it in explanation and classroom interaction (Kurum, 2021). Initiatives have also emerged to produce accessible textbooks that account for the gap between the learner's home language and the school language. Nevertheless, inadequate teacher preparation and the frequent reliance on the vernacular language have perpetuated this gap between the language of schooling and that of society at large (Hāmid, 2025).

5.4 Media Efforts

Parallel to educational initiatives, the media has also witnessed notable attempts to maintain the presence of Standard Arabic. Despite the dominance of vernacular language usage across most entertainment programs, official televised news has remained a stable model of eloquent usage of Standard Arabic. In addition, some satellite channels have allocated cultural programs in Standard Arabic, while new digital platforms have begun to reproduce Arabic content in linguistically accurate forms—for example, certain educational channels on YouTube or open-access academic platforms. The challenge, however, lies in the comparatively weak entertainment appeal of this content when measured against that produced in the vernacular language.

5.5 Legislative Efforts and Language Policy

At the policy level, in parallel with educational and media domains, a number of Arab states have enacted laws mandating the use of Standard Arabic in official documents, signage, and advertisements. In addition, some universities have mandated that lecturers employ Standard Arabic as the medium of instruction, particularly in institutions that serve international cohorts of non-Arab students—for example, the International University of Africa in Sudan. At the regional level, organizations such as the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) have launched programs designed to strengthen the use of Standard Arabic in both education and technology. Yet, despite these initiatives, implementation remains inconsistent. Compliance mechanisms are often weak, which diminishes the effectiveness of such policies and limits their long-term impact (Chakrani, 2025; Suleiman, 2023).

5.6 Community and Individual Initiatives

At the societal and individual level, recent years have seen the rise of both youth-led and academic initiatives advocating for the continued use of Standard Arabic. Some of these efforts have taken the form of online campaigns that encourage young people to write in *fushā* on social media, while others have been organized through university symposia that address the enduring challenges of diglossia in Arab education and culture (Roushdy, 2023). In the literary sphere, writers and intellectuals have also contributed to this movement by deliberately producing novels and contemporary poetry in Standard Arabic. Such practices not only reinforce its symbolic value but also sustain its position as a language of refined literary creativity and cultural prestige (Suleiman, 2023; Journal of Sociolinguistics, 2025).

5.7 General Assessment of the Efforts

It may be argued that, despite their significance, these efforts remain fragmented and often uncoordinated, with little evidence of a comprehensive strategy that links education, media, and cultural policy. Scholars note that the most critical weakness lies in the absence of strong political will to frame the safeguarding of Standard Arabic as a matter of sovereignty and cultural identity (Hallberg, 2023; Suleiman, 2023). Without such commitment at the state level, the effectiveness of educational, institutional, and grassroots initiatives is severely restricted. As a result, Standard Arabic continues to occupy a constrained position—competing with vernaculars whose spread is reinforced by daily social practice, while also facing pressure from global cultural forces that accelerate its marginalization and weaken its intellectual heritage (Chakrani, 2025; Roushdy, 2023).

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

This study confirms that the presence of vernacular languages is a natural feature of Arab societies. Yet, when these varieties extend beyond their traditional functional boundaries and begin to rival Standard Arabic in domains such as education, media, and digital communication, they contribute directly to the erosion of a

unified linguistic standard (Hallberg, 2023; Roushdy, 2023). More significantly, Standard Arabic should not be viewed only as a vehicle for everyday communication. It functions as a repository of cultural identity and collective memory, and its weakening risks fragmenting the very cultural bond that unites Arab societies (Suleiman, 2023; Chakrani, 2025). Consequently, educational, media, and digital policies ought to prioritize constructing a balanced relationship between Standard Arabic and the vernacular language, whereby the former continues to serve as the language of science, thought, and culture, while the latter remains confined to its role as a vehicle of popular interaction and local expression.

6.2 Results

This study demonstrates its convergence with both classical and modern studies in showing that the vernacular language is not merely an arbitrary deviation from Standard Arabic, as some traditional linguists once described it, but rather a fully-fledged linguistic system, endowed with its own phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic structures, and capable of fulfilling integrated communicative functions within the speech community (Ibn Jinnī, 1952; Ferguson, 1959).

Building on this, the issue does not lie in the mere existence of vernacular language, since diglossia is a widespread linguistic phenomenon observable in most societies. Instead, the central problem lies in the expansion of its functional domains at the expense of Standard Arabic. What was once confined to everyday interaction and limited social relationships has now developed into a linguistic vessel with a wide-ranging presence in audio-visual media, the entertainment industry, and interactive digital content (Anīs, 1978; Suleiman, 2023).

In historical perspective, oral communication was once restricted to the vernacular language within the family, the marketplace, and small social circles, while Standard Arabic functioned as the dominant medium of religion, education, literature, and intellectual life. However, technological developments since the mid-twentieth century—especially with the rise of radio, followed by television, cinema, and, more recently, the digital sphere—have radically transformed the distribution of functions between the two linguistic levels. As a result, the vernacular language has entered major media platforms, becoming the vessel of expression in song, theatre, drama, and television series, and later consolidating its presence on social media and across new forms of digital content (Hijāzī, 2021).

This expansion has brought the vernacular language much closer to the awareness of younger generations. Consequently, Standard Arabic is increasingly perceived by wide segments of youth as an elitist, formal, and rigid language level, confined to examinations, official speeches, and news broadcasts. The outcome has been a decline in the status of Standard Arabic within the collective awareness, where it is at times viewed as a language ‘detached’ from everyday life. By contrast, the vernacular language has gained elevated status as a vessel of familiarity and communal warmth, and as a marker of local identity. Thus, the traditional equilibrium of diglossia has been fundamentally disrupted. It is no longer a natural distribution of functions; rather, the vernacular language now competes with Standard Arabic in domains once exclusively associated with it—a development that explains the manifestations of erosion observed by contemporary studies.

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