
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Non-Conventional Spelling in Informal, Colloquial Arabic Writing on Facebook

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| ABSTRACT

Arabic has a standard form used in formal situations and print materials and a non-standard, colloquial form used in daily conversation. Each Arab country has its own dialect. Before social media, educated Arabs used to use Standard Arabic when they communicated in writing. But with the advent of social media, people started to use non-standard Arabic, i.e., their own dialects, when they communicate in writing on social media. A corpus of spelling errors in Arabic was collected from Facebooks posts and analyzed to find out the types of errors made, the strategies Arab Facebook spellers use, why educated Arabs make those errors and their effect on decoding ability and communication. It was found that Facebook users completely ignore Standard Arabic spelling rules. They spell words the way they pronounce them in their local dialects. They delete vowels, substitute long vowels by short ones and vice versa and confuse consonants with the same sound. Some graphemes are no longer used. They connect several words together as one word, ignoring the pauses between them. The same word or phrase, in the same dialect, is spelled differently by different users. Sometimes it is difficult to understand what some users are trying to say. It seems that the non-standard Arabic spelling used on Facebook is undergoing a simplification process. Users do not seem to recognize word boundaries, cannot connect phonemes with the graphemes they represent and cannot distinguish vowel length in their spoken dialect. A detailed classification of spelling anomalies, the faulty spelling strategies used and reasons for those spelling weaknesses detected are reported.

| KEYWORDS

Arabic spelling, spelling errors, spelling anomalies, spelling deviations, Colloquial Arabic spelling, educated Arabs, non-standard spelling, social media Arabic spelling, social media spelling variations, Arabic spelling strategies.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The Arabic language is diglossic, i.e., it has a Standard form (SA) and a Colloquial, non-Standard spoken form (CA). The Standard form is the language of instruction at National Public schools. It is commonly used by educated Arabs in formal settings such as conferences, lectures and interviews. It is the language of print media and news T.V. stations such as BBC Arabic, Almayadeen, Aljazeera and so on. On the contrary, the Colloquial, non-Standard form is used in informal settings such as informal conversations with friends and relatives about daily life issues, when shopping, at the restaurant and others. Each Arab country has its own local dialect and several sub-dialects existing in the different regions of the country. Phonological, syntactic, and lexical differences exist between the SA and CA forms. From infancy to school age, children in all Arab countries are exposed to CA at home, and to SA on T.V. cartoon films, children's stories and school textbooks (Al-Jarf, 2020; Al-Jarf, 2019).

Before social media, educated Arabs used SA to communicate with others in writing. But with the emergence of SMS on mobile phones, online discussion forums and social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, a new linguistic phenomenon has emerged among Arabs regardless of their age, gender and educational level. People started to use new forms and styles of communication such as slang, and Colloquial, Non-Standard Arabic, i.e., using their own dialects, when they communicate with their friends and followers in writing (Al-Jarf, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2020). In this respect, Buri (2017)

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indicated that due to social media, language is transforming. The standard forms and grammatical rules have been deteriorating in many languages because of the new communication forms that are being used such as neglecting punctuation marks, using emojis, emoticons, and pictures instead of words.

Since these new communication/linguistic forms used on social media are common in many languages, their use by native and non-native speakers has been the focus of numerous studies around the world. Some studies in the literature investigated the effects of social media on the use of English. A study by Roua, Yunusb and Sulimanc (2019) has shown the positive effects of social media on the writing skills of elementary school students learning ESL in Malaysia. In particular, social media were found to have a positive influence on students' spelling skills. Students who embraced digital communication utilised social media positively. Elementary school students who frequently use social media sites as a medium of communication are exposed to the overuse of slang and abbreviations. The researchers concluded that technology helps to improve students' writing and communication skills and in the informal acquisition of language. Social media also provide a practical platform for students to learn English.

To test the hypothesis that young people in Belgium have the multi-skills required to switch between formal and informal communication, samples of the written products of students across different media and communication situations were collected by Coughon, Maskens, Roekhaut and Fairon (2017). Data analysis indicated that the students' level of spontaneous writing and dictation was relatively low. The majority of students' errors were grammatical. All the students used traditional spelling in at least one of them.

At the college level, a study by Oko-Epelle and Fajoye (2022) examined the effect of social media English on the spelling ability of students from eight faculties at Redeemer's University in Nigeria, the extent to which abridged spellings are used and students' attitude towards using social media English for communication. Results revealed that social media English was common among undergraduate students in Nigeria. The students preferred to use social media English for communication and were using social media English even in formal settings. Those who do not know how to spell correctly, even in formal settings, showed some improvement.

In another study in Nigeria, Wilson (2018) investigated the number of hours spent daily on social networking activities by students at the Federal College of Education Yola and the effect of social media on their spelling skill. The researcher found that use of social media had a negative effect on college students' spelling ability and the conventional way of writing especially in examinations and letters.

Some of the weaknesses found in Malay social media texts were spelling variations, and vowel-less words, Malay-English mix in sentences, loan words/phrases, and slang-based words (Maskat & Rahman, 2020).

Further spelling variation patterns that exist on Twitter and Reddit Word were embeddings that encode spelling variation patterns of various types and use of pairs of word forms covering seven types of spelling variation in English. A link was found between the intentionality of the variation and the distance between their non-conventional and conventional spellings (Nguyen, Grieve, Scott, Bel & Zong, 2020).

To find out whether the spelling of past participle verbs is affected by the frequency of whole words, bigram and paradigmatic support for correct spelling and the token frequency of past participle verbs' morphological family, Surkyn, Vandekerckhove and Sandra (2021) analyzed unintentional/informal spelling errors in past participle forms produced by Flemish 15-to-20-year-old teenagers in private online writing on Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. The past participle forms were partially homophonous with other forms in the inflectional paradigm. The researchers concluded that the error rates reflected the effect of both bigram and paradigmatic support, and affected all social variables (Age, Educational track, and Gender). Nevertheless, the social variables did not interact with bigram and paradigmatic support.

Regarding the impact of social media on the Dutch verb spelling system, Schmitz, Chamalaun and Ernestus (2018) analyzed a Twitter corpus containing 17,432 tweets with homophonous verb forms and reported that many spelling errors are made by both children and adults, although the verb spelling system in Dutch seems to be very straightforward. These spelling errors mainly took place in verbs with two or more homophonous forms in their inflectional paradigms. The subjects clearly preferred the suffix *-<d>* compared to *-<dt>* and *-<t>*. Frequency resulted in fewer errors for more frequent word forms. Users with more followers made fewer errors and more errors were made in the evening and at night.

As it is the case in other languages, the Arabic language that is used on social media is changing especially in the spelling of Arabic slang words and colloquial speech. A review of the literature has shown few studies that investigated the effect of social media and online communication on the Arabic language used. In Morocco, Tachicart and Bouzoubaa (2021) investigated online written

texts generated by Moroccan users on social media with an emphasis on Moroccan Arabic. It was noted that social media users use code-switching, multi-script and a small number of words in the Moroccan user-generated texts.

Furthermore, analysis of a sample of posts and photo comments on Facebook showed that Arab Facebook users extensively use CA written in Arabic script or transliterated in Roman script. SA is less commonly used. Facebook discourse is also characterized by invented spelling with a stretch of punctuation marks and long vowels. The Arabic numerals 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 are used to substitute the Arabic phonemes (أ ح خ ط ظ ع غ) for which no equivalent graphemes exist in English script. The linguistic forms used on social media networks by Arab adults are similar to those used by young adults in other languages such as Chinese and Japanese (Al-Jarf, 2011; Al-Jarf, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2020).

The prior studies reported above show lack of studies that explore specific Arabic spelling errors and weaknesses in spontaneous online communication on social media, vis Facebook. Therefore, the present study aims to show how spelling in written Arabic is changing due to social media. A corpus of spelling deviations (faulty phoneme-grapheme correspondences) in Arabic Facebook Colloquial discourse will be examined to find out the following: (i) the types of errors made (changes in word constituents); (ii) the phoneme and grapheme changes and alteration processes exhibited; (iii) whether the spelling errors are made in discourse written in Standard Arabic or in Colloquial Arabic; (iv) why educated Arabs make those spelling errors when communicating or responding in CA, and whether spelling errors affect decoding, comprehension and communication by educated Arabs who speak different dialects.

Findings of the present study will be based on a content analysis of a sample of Facebook posts, comments, and photo captions written in different Arabic local dialects (CA). A sample of adult Arab Facebook users will be surveyed to find out the reasons for this new Facebook spelling phenomenon and whether it affects the decoding, comprehension and communication by Facebook users speaking other Arabic local dialects.

Results about the negative effects of Facebook on CA spelling are especially important, as they will help Arab Facebook users of all ages, in all Arab countries, discern how the different linguistic behaviours in Facebook communication are leading to Arabic language deterioration, decoding, comprehension and communication problems. Findings of the current study will also draw the attention of educators, policymakers, and linguists to an alarming reality, i.e., grave spelling errors in CA and will provide evidence concerning the current status of SA and CA on social media that shows the need for setting educational policies for enhancing Arabic spelling, usage and proficiency.

The study is significant because it will unveil the negative effects of social media on the spelling abilities of Arab Facebook users and find out the nature of these negative effects that social media have on Arab Facebook users' spelling ability.

2. The Arabic Writing System

Orthographically, Arabic has 25 consonants, 3 long vowel letters and 14 diacritical marks that include three short vowels and the glottal stop (hamza) diacritic (ء) (See Table 1 and Image 1). Each Arabic consonant has a detached form and one or more attached forms in word initial, medial, and final positions. Arabic diacritics are placed over or underneath a consonant letter whether it is in the initial, medial or final position in the word. In general, words in Arabic books, magazines, newspapers, T.V., social media and street signs are normally shown without any diacritics. Arabic speakers can read, write, and spell words without using any diacritics. Arabic speakers have no difficulty in decoding, pronouncing, and spelling words consisting of the same set of consonants but differ in the diacritics on top of each consonant. From context, they can figure out how a word without diacritics is pronounced with different short vowel sounds. Phonetically, Arabic has three short vowels /a/, /u/, and /i/ which contrast phonemically with their long counterparts /aa/, /uw/ and /iy/. /i/ as in 'tibb'; /u/ as in /kutub/; /a/ as in /katab/; /ii/ as in /fiil/; /uu/ as in /?uud/; and /aa/ as in /maal/. It has 2 diphthong sounds: /ay/ as in ليلي /Layla/ and /aw/ as in صوت /SawT/ (Al-Jarf, 2023a; Al-Jarf, 2022; Al-Jarf, 2018b; Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2007a; Al-Jarf, 1955; Al-Jarf, 1992).

Table 1: The Arabic Alphabet in Arabic Script and Phonetic Alphabet

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|----|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|
| ء | ي | و | ه | ن | م | ل | ك | ق | ف | غ | ع | ظ | ط | ض | ص | ش | س | ز | ر | ذ | د | خ | ح | ج | ث | ت | ب | ا |
| ' | y | w | h | n | m | l | k | q | f | gh | ' | z | t | d | s | sh | s | z | r | dh | d | kh | h | j | th | t | b | ' |

The Arabic glottal stop or Hamza¹ [ʔ] همزة (ء) is not one of the 28 "full" letters in the Arabic alphabet. It appears in word initial, medial and final positions. The vowels before and after hamza determine the seat of hamza. The strongest vowels in Arabic are the [i] vowels (kasta كسرة), then [u] vowels (dhamma ضمة) then the [a] vowel (fat-ha فتحة). Initial hamza is always placed over or

¹ Hamza

underneath the long vowel [a:] (Alif ألف) and is pronounced [a] as in *Amal* أعمل; أيمن أنس أم; or [u] as in *Umayya* أمية; أمامة; *Osama* أسامة, or under [a:] and is pronounced [i-] as in *Enas* ايناس; *Ikram* إكرام; *Ehab* إيهاب; *Eyad* إياد. Medial hamza can be written on the long vowel [u:] ؤ, can have a seat or be written on the line alone depending on the preceding and/or following vowels and whether they are long or short as in رؤى فؤاد مؤيد رؤى (نشأت رأفت سموأل, مروة براءة لؤلؤة رؤوف فائزة رئيسة رئيفة وثام وائل نائلة سائد رائد مؤنس فؤاد مؤيد رؤى). Final hamza is either written on the line or on the long vowel [i:] in امرؤ القيس رجاء براء زهراء (Al-Jarf, 2018b; Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2007; Al-Jarf, 1995; Al-Jarf, 1992).

Image 1: Arabic Diacritics with Examples²

| Diacritical Marks التشكيل | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Tanween with Shaddah | Tanween تنوين | Short vowels with Shaddah شدة | Short vowels | |
| ـَـ | ـَـ | ـَـ | ـَـ | fatHah فَتْحَة |
| ـِـ | ـِـ | ـِـ | ـِـ | kasrah كَسْرَة |
| ـُـ | ـُـ | ـُـ | ـُـ | DHamamah ضَمَة |
| | | ـْـ | ـْـ | sukuum سُكُون |

There is a difference between how words are pronounced in isolation and how they are pronounced in connected speech. In the flow of speech, Arabic phonemes go through assimilation and elision processes. Pause and juncture affect how strings of Arabic words in a sentence are pronounced. Vowel length is affected by stress (Al-Jarf, 1990; Al-Jarf, 1994).

Regarding the syllable structure, Modern Standard Arabic has the syllable types shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The Syllable Structure in Standard Arabic

| Syllable Types | Examples | Phonetic Transcription |
|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| CV (light) | ل (for) | /li/ |
| CVV (heavy) | في (in) | /fi:/ |
| CVC (heavy) | كم (how much) | /kam/ |
| CVVC (super-heavy) | مات (died) | /ma:t/ |
| CVCC (super-heavy) | كبت (suppression; sadd (dam) | /Kabt/; /sadd/ |
| CVVCC | سام (poisonous) | /sa:mm/ |

3. Methodology

3.1 Samples

3.1.1 Facebook Spelling Error Sample

A sample of 1180 spelling errors was collected from Facebook timeline posts, comments, and photo captions, written in Colloquial Arabic. All the spelling errors were written in Arabic script, not Romanised Arabic. To make sure that the spelling errors extracted from Facebook are valid (incorrect), the sample selected was verified by a panel of four Arabic language professors.

The majority of Arab spellers on the Facebook who made the errors have a college degree in different specialties: Education, computer science, languages and translation, business, science, law, agriculture, engineering, medicine and others. Some Arab spellers are even university professors and students majoring in Arabic language and literature and some graduated from Shariah colleges such as Al-Azhar. Duplicate spelling errors in the sample were included once only.

² <https://blogs.transparent.com/arabic/basic-arabic-diacritical-marks/>

3.1.2 Samples of Facebook Users

A random sample of 100 male and female Facebook users who are native speakers of Arabic was randomly selected for the surveys. The sample included Facebook users coming from different Arab countries: Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. They speak a variety of Arabic dialects. They represent different age groups: 18 to 60+ years old. These Facebook users answered an open-ended questionnaire-survey.

In addition, another sample of 55 Arab Facebook users for the decoding test to find out whether they can decode, pronounce, and comprehend a sample of Facebook posts written in different Arabic dialects, i.e., CA.

3.2 Questionnaire-Surveys

The questionnaire surveys consisted of open-ended questions about the reasons for using CA when communicating in Arabic script on social media, especially Facebook, and for using invented spelling and making spelling mistakes in their Arabic Facebook posts.

3.3 The Decoding and Comprehension Test

A sample of Facebook posts and comments written in Jordanian, Tunisian, Egyptian, Algerian and Sudanese Colloquial Arabic was selected. In each vernacular, certain words and phrases were underlined (See Table 3). Each subject was asked to read the excerpts and underlined words out loud and give their meanings.

Table 3: The Decoding and Comprehension Test

| |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • البعد الي بييجي من غير زعل زي <u>الم ونذال</u> في لحظه ☺ • الله <u>يخربت</u> التكنولوجيا فين الناس فين الحب <u>والسويل</u> • الله يرحمك يا أبي الأرض <u>خصرت</u> رجل لكن السماء كسبت <u>نجماء</u>. • <u>حزبالة، حتشاي، شورايبه، الهايكو، شدعوة، الطولة، يولاد، فمان، فسرك، الشخسامي</u> • خويا راه مريض <u>إدعيولو</u> بالشفاء لعلها ساعة استجابة ☺☺ • اقل حاجة احتراماً للذات البشرية موش <u>كرذونة</u> لا و يزيد يقولولهم خلصوا <u>معاليم الصبيطار</u> • المرة دي نلاقي نسيبنا <u>الما شفتاهو</u> ☺سلامنا لاحمد و عمر <u>إكون هسانى زاتو</u> ☺و <u>عضى</u> سلمى لمن تبكي عشان تتزكرني • صغيرات ماتو من <u>حرة</u> اهمال طبي، دواء مقطوع، معدات طبية مفقودة... لواحد يحب يقدم <u>بيركوه و بندموه و بعفوه و يتقروه</u> و يكرهوه <u>فروجو</u>. عليه ياقف وحدو لتونس • حكاية عادية انا حماتي و <u>حمويا هوما</u> يحبونا نجيبولهم <u>الجلبانة و الخضرة الاوراق</u> باش يفصوها و ينضفوها كي نقولو <u>لا يتغشو يحيو</u> • <u>يوسعو باها بالهم</u> نهار طويل <u>معندو علاش نراوها بالخاب</u> علاقل يوسعو بالهم |
|---|

3.4 Data Analysis

Phrases in the spelling error sample were broken down into words and words/phrases were broken down into words + initial particles; initial prepositions, attached prepositions, clitic pronouns, relative pronouns, and definite articles.

The spelling error locations were classified into single words, one-word, two-word and three-word phrases. They were also classified into vowels, consonants, clitic pronouns, definite article, particles, prepositions, and typographical errors. Percentages of words in each category were computed.

Moreover, spelling errors were analyzed according to the following strategies: Deletion, addition/insertion (of vowels and consonants), confusion/substitution, reversal, conversion, combining (words and/or morphemes), detachment of prep and other word parts, reduction (lengthening of vowels), faulty hamza, of vowels, consonants, and graphemes. Percentages of errors in each category were computed.

The spelling error data analysis was double-checked by two professors of Arabic and was compared with the author's analysis. Disagreements were resolved by discussion. There was a 96% agreement among all the raters.

Finally, responses to the decoding and comprehension test of misspellings were recorded. Likewise, responses to the questionnaire-surveys were compiled, analyzed and reported qualitatively.

4. Results

4.1 The Spelling Error Distribution and Gravity

Analysis of the spelling error data has shown that 64% of the errors were in single words, 34% were in two-word phrases and 2% were in three-word phrases. As for the spelling error gravity, i.e., the number of errors in deviant units, 76% had 1 error, 20% contained 2 errors, 2% had 3 errors and another 2% contained 4 errors.

In addition, the spelling error data analysis in the current study has revealed the following types of errors: Vowel errors (38%), consonant errors (7.6%), pronoun errors (19%), particle errors (17.6%), attached preposition errors (12%), pause and juncture errors (8%), همزة الوصل والقطع (8%), definite article errors (8%), double /l/ + relative pronouns + Allah (8), hamza errors, i.e., glottal stop errors (7.6), and silent grapheme errors (6%).

An important observation in the current study is that Facebook has a negative impact on Adult Arab users' spelling when they write in their local dialect (CA) but they spell words and phrases correctly when they write in Standard Arabic (SA). However, since local dialects are a mixture of SA and slang words, Arab Facebook users spell SA words and phrases used in their local dialects incorrectly as *ما شاء الله، اللهم*. They do not seem to connect SA with CA, and thus spell the words when they use CA the way they pronounce them in their local dialect (vernacular), but spell the same words and phrases when they write their social media posts in SA correctly as they have learnt them in school. They do not learn how to spell CA in school.

The same negative effect of social media on spelling in some languages was found in some prior studies in the literature such as Schmitz, Chamalaun and Ernestus (2018) who found that both children and adults made spelling errors in homophonous verb forms on Twitter. In Coughon, Maskens, Roekhaut and Fairon's (2017) study, the students' level of spontaneous writing and dictation was relatively low. The majority of students' errors were grammatical. All the students used traditional spelling in at least one of them. In Nigeria, use of social media had a negative effect on college students' spelling ability and the conventional way of writing in examinations and letters (Wilson, 2018). In Malaysia, some of the weaknesses found in Malay social media texts were spelling variations, and vowel-less words (Maskat & Rahman, 2020). Use of pairs of word forms covering seven types of spelling variation in English was found on Twitter and Reddit (Nguyen, Grieve, Scott, Bel & Zong, 2020). In Surkyn, Vandekerckhove and Sandra's (2021) study, the error rates reflected the effect of both paradigmatic and bigram support, and they affected gender, major and age.

Moreover, adult Arab Facebook users' spelling weaknesses in CA are consistent with findings of prior studies conducted with Arabic native speaking students. The most frequent errors among students in grades 1–9 were phonological (Abu-Rabia & Taha, 2006). Arab students between the age of 6 and 11 made errors in reading and spelling that persisted throughout the elementary grades, pointing to the difficulties involved in mastering the Arabic written language. Decoding errors mainly involved diacritics whereas misspellings were related to context sensitive rules, additions and omissions of letters, and to handwriting problems (Azzam, 1993). In a third study with dyslexic and normal students, the dominant type of error was mostly phonetic due to the limited orthographic lexicon. The Arabic orthographic system also contributed to these types of errors as many spelling errors resulted from poor knowledge of Arabic spelling rules (Abu-Rabia, & Taha, 2004). Similarly, Arabic-native-speaking children in grades 1 to 3 in Saudi Arabia made errors in letter recognition, sight word recognition, word recognition in context, sound-symbol association, and structural analysis sub-skills to identify the difficulties that students have in word identification (Al-Jarf, 2018b).

Unlike the current study which showed the negative effects of Facebook on adult Arab users' spelling in CA, some prior studies such as Roua, Yunusb and Sulimanc's (2019) detected positive effects of social media on the writing skills of primary school students learning ESL in Malaysia. In Nigeria, students *who do not know how to spell correctly even in formal settings showed some improvement* (Okon-Epelle & Fajoye, 2022). Likewise, Verheijen (2017) reported that use of WhatsApp had a direct and positive impact on Dutch teenagers' spelling in their written schoolwork. Dutch teenagers made fewer spelling mistakes in their written schoolwork. There was a positive connection among people with a lower educational level than among people with a higher educational level.

4.2 Strategies Used in Misspellings

Analysis of the spelling error data indicated that Arab Facebook spellers completely ignore spelling rules in SA. They spell words phonetically, i.e., the way they pronounce them in their own dialects, especially in cases of juncture within phrases. The same word or phrase, in the same dialect, is spelled differently by different users and two different words are sometimes spelled the same. Analysis of the Arab adult misspellings (deviations) on Facebook revealed the following faulty spelling strategies. Some examples may appear under more than one strategy as they might contain 2 or more spelling errors:

- 1) Deletion of graphemes (35%) such as the definite article {-al}, vowels, vowels from particles and prepositions, the hamza, *كانو (كانوا)، وبليل (وبالليل)، بشام (بالشام)، وشوف (وأشوف)، يسطي (يا اسطى)، ع صف (عم بينادوا ع الصف)، عبينادو (ايش دعوة)، لشايفينو (اللي شايفينه)، شدةوة) وميتحركش (وما بيتحركش)، ياخونا (يا إخواننا)، يولاد (يا أولاد)، فمان (في أمان)، فسرك (في سرك)، ف المكتب (في المكتب)، يخلصو (يخلصوا)، والديكتور (والدكتور)، الذكر (الذكر).*

2) Combining two or three words, a word and a detached particle, a word and a clitic pronoun, a word + clitic pronoun + prepositional phrase, initial particle and or a preposition (28%) and blending them together as one word without blanks as in:

- Two and three words: (شاهالالة ايش هالالة); ولادايقي (ولا تضايقي)
- Word + Clitic: ((يكتب له) يكتبو- بقالو (بقى له) - قاللي (قال لي));
- Word + PP: (ببوتهم (في بيوتهم)، (بضمملك (بأضمن لك) ، تسلميلي (تسلمي لي)، بدعيلك (بأدعي لك))
- Word + clitic + PP: (بيعتلوه) (قالها له) (قالها له)
- Initial particle + word + PP: (بضمملك (يضمن لك))
- Initial particle + word: (متقلقيش (ما تقلقش)، مبيحصلش (ما يبحصلش)، مجاش (ما جاش ياهلاترى (يا هل ترى)، ندعيولهم (ندعيولهم);
- (ندعي لهم)، (يدكتور (يا دكتور)، (يسطي (يا اسطي)، (مواركش (ما وراكش) مبعرفش
- (من عنده)، (من الخداع) (من الخداع) منعندو; (عن جد)، (منجد (من جد)، (فمان (في أمان): (Initial prep + word);
- (شورائيه (شو رأييه)، (النهار ده) (النهار ده)، (السنة دي)، (الشخسامي (الشيخ سامي)، (حدشاييف (حدشاييف)، (عيبينادو (عم بينادو)، (مسا الفل)، (مسالفل هوذا (هو دا)، (الولادعاملين (الأولاد عاملين)،
- (اللي (اللي في)، (البلقظوا (اللي لفظوه)، (البشحدوا (اللي يبشحدوا)، (ببطلعلك (ببطلع لك)، (اللي + word: (Relative pronoun (اللي شايفينو (اللي شافينه)، (الهايكلو (اللي هايكلوا) (اللي افتكرو)،

3) Confusing vowel and consonant graphemes and substituting them with others (46%), especially in the case of graphemes which phonemically contrast with their long counterparts as in /t/ and /T/, /k/ and /q/, /D/ and /z/, التوين والنون، الفتحة ،الباء والتاء المربوطة، الهاء والتاء المربوطة، الألف المقصورة، والتاء المربوطة والهاء، التاء المفتوحة والمربوطة، الألف والتاء المربوط، الألف والهاء، الألف المقصورة والهاء الواو والهاء، المدة والهمزة، ألف المد والألف المقصورة، والياء الفتحة والهاء، الباء والهاء،

The following are some examples:
 اوي (قوي)، تربيتج (تربيتك)، ذهبت (ذهبت)، دهري (ظهري)، ذبادي (زبادي)، ضروف (ظروف)، العضم (العظيم)، فطبعة (فطبعة)، مضبوطة (مضبوطة)، نضيف (نظيف)، وضهرج (وظهرج)، هيروض عليا (هيرد علي)، استعملتو (استعملته)، انو (إنه)، اهلو (أهله)، ح اقراهو (ح أقراه)، لاحقتو (لحقته)، لروحو (لوحه)، لشايفينو (اللي شايفينه)، منعندو (من عنده)، الهايكلو (اللي هايكلوا)، دايمن (دائماً)، كشافن، (البلدان اللي بلادهن)، شكران (شكرأ)، شوكرن (شكرأ)، حقيقتا (حقيقة)، فئات (فتاة)، مصرياة (مصريات)، وخلصت (وخلصت)، ردة (ردت)، لقلت، لوفات (لوفاة)، وقدمت (وقدمت)، بقة (بقى)، بقا (بقى)، مسمه (مسمى)، اشاعه (إشاعة)، حرجه (حرجة)، احلا (أحلى)، بتمنا (باتمنى)، ومرضى (ومرضى)، ويتامي (ويتامى)، سبته (سابتة)، وبطنوا (وبطنه)، وعمله (وعملوا)، يتكلمه (يتكلموا)، بكر (بكرة)، فكريا (فكرة)، للدرجادي (للدرجة دي)، معانه (معانا)، وربنه (وربنا)، ويحكلنه (ويحكى لنا)، كلنه (كلنا)، عليه (علي)، عمرو (عمره)، بيعتلوه (بيعت له)، لوفات (لوفاة)، الثانوية (السنوية).

4) Addition of vowels where a short vowel should be used, (16%) as in:

فا بالله (فبالله)، كا نوع (كنوع)، فا برضو (فبرضه)، با النص (بالنص)، بأمتياز (بامتياز)، ماماتك (مامتك)، خلانتي (خلنتي)، رباتني (ربنتي)، زوعما (زوعما)، المنخفيض (المنخفض)، قومت (قمت)، ح اقراهو (ح اقراه)، ابوكوا (ابوكم)، عليكوا (عليكو/عليكم)، انتي (انت)، لكي (لك)، اشتقتي (اشتقت)، انتا (انت)، تكبرو (تكبروا).

No silent "ا" should be used after و, i.e., ألف in word final position. Silent "ا" is only used in masculine plural verbs.

5) Reduction of phrases and graphemes especially the definite article after moon letters as only the /l/ is pronounced in spoken Arabic (10%) as in:

لبنات (البنات)، لجديد (الجديد)، لخارجيه (الخارجية)، لخرة الأخرى، لكبير (الكبير)، لمناصب (المناصب)، لولاد (الأولاد)، الولاد (الأولاد)، ملوا لساحات (الساحات)، مسالفل (مسالفل/مسالفل)، وقاللي (وقال لي)، الليل (الليل)، بلا (بالله)، فاي (في أي)، فخراب (في خراب)، الهايكلو (اللي هايكلوا)، الفي (اللي في)، لشايفينو (اللي شايفينه)، اليفتكرو (اللي يفتكرو).

6) Shortening of long vowels in initial attached particles (11%) as in:

البيهم (اللي بيههم)، بتنجان (بيتنجان)، بذنجان (بذنجان)، برحتك (براحتك)، بضمملك (بأضمن لك)، جعنين (جعانين)، حبيتي (حبييتي)، حبين (حابين)، داکترة (داكترة)، ديمة (دائماً)، ساعات (ساعات)، الشخسامي (الشيخ سامي)، الشخسعد (الشيخ سعد)، شورمه (شاورما)، الطوله (الطولة)، عوز (عاوز)، عيزه (عايزة)، فلحين (فالحين)، موضيع (مواضيع)، يتولنا (يتولانا) يسحك (يسامحك)، ي مدام (يا مدام)، ياخونا (يا إخواننا)، يولاد (يا أولاد)، مبلحقش (ما يلحقش)، معترف (ما اعترفت)، محدش (ما حدش)، وميتحركش (وما يتحركش)، ام اشوف (أما اشوف)، يحافظ (يا حافظ)، جلابية (جلابية)، شدة (أيش دعوة).

7) Lengthening of short vowels in medial and final position with a long vow, especially with feminine clitic pronouns, when words are preceded by an attached particle, (9%) as in: إلكي (إلكي)، انتقتي (انتقلت)، أنتي (أنت)، قرأتي (قرأت)، قلتي (قلت)، كنتي (كنت)، لكي (لك)، يجزيكي (يجزيك)، منك (منك)، تسعومية (تسعمية)، يوظفوكي (يوظفوك)، سوا (سوف)، عينيا (عيني)، فيا (في)، عليه (عليه)، معاي (معاي)، معي، مندو (مند)، هيروض عليا (هيرد علي)، بي سلام (لسلام)، توفوا (توفوا)، رائس (رئيس)، رائيك (رأيك)، شوكرن (شكرأ)، فا احنا (فاحنا)، فخوت (فخفت)، لا يسماح (لا يسمح)، مودرس (مدرس)، فا أكيد (فأكيد).

The difficulties that adult Arabs have in decoding the deviant spelling in CA on Facebook are similar to the difficulties that Arab students and faculty had in decoding the Arabic transliterations of shop names in Saudi Arabia. Students and faculty had difficulty decoding, *دولس قوستو، أذفتورا، جارليشوز لاونج، أميركان إيجل أوتفترز، أكسسوريز، بايليس، باربكيوتونايت، لولو سلبريت، ذا تشيلدرنز بليس* and others because they are not familiar with those shop name in the foreign language, and because of the absence of short vowels (diacritics) in the Arabic spelling (transliteration) and misrepresentations of the vowels and some consonants (Al-Jarf, 2022a). Likewise, adult Arabs in the current study could not decode words and understand posts from Arabic dialects other than their own because they are not familiar with them and because of the spelling anomalies of words and phrases.

In another study by Al-Jarf (2005), EFL freshman students misspelled 41.5% of the words on the dictation, and 48% faulty responses on the decoding test. The students' spelling errors and decoding responses revealed strong correlations between spelling ability, and decoding skills. This means that good spelling ability in EFL is related to good decoding skills. The better the decoding abilities, the fewer the spelling errors. When decoding skills are poor, spelling ability is also poor.

4.4 Why Facebook Arab Users Use Unconventional Spelling

Users feel they are speaking (conversing with others), not writing. Therefore, they write the way they speak. Some stated that It is more suitable to use CA, their vernacular or local dialect than SA. They like to write the way they speak and prefer to express their opinions in the spoken language. They do not think about spelling and grammar while writing their posts or commenting on their Facebook friends' posts. They think it is easier for them to express themselves in slang and CA than SA, which is more formal and inappropriate for casual communication. They feel they are talking with each other, not writing. Some believe that using the colloquial form is effortless, whereas use of SA requires attention to structure, spelling and formal use of the language. Others expressed their inability to use SA as they have difficulty figuring out the correct spelling and grammar, despite the fact that they had used SA in schools for 12 years and studied math, science, geography, history, social studies, religion, and poetry, grammar, reading, and composition in SA.

The participants added that when they write something on Facebook, they are in a hurry, they write posts on their mobile phone casually, and they do not think about spelling and grammar. Many Arab Facebook spellers do not revise or edit what they write on Facebook neither before nor after they post it, as they feel that nobody checks what they write, nor picks on their spelling or grammatical errors.

Some Facebook Arab users are specialists, such as medical doctors or preachers, and think that they would reach a wider audience when they deliver their message and information in CA and write the way most Arabs in the Facebook community write. They think CA is easier to comprehend by people from different backgrounds and educational levels.

Few participants added that they write their posts and comments in CA because when they use SA, their friends mock them and think they use SA to show off.

Some young Arabs in some prior studies reported that the unconventional Arabic spelling forms are trendy in Internet communication which is informal and casual. Some have difficulty expressing themselves in Standard Arabic. New educational and linguistic policies for reinforcing the use of Standard Arabic among the young generation need to be established (Al-Jarf, 2021; Al-Jarf, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2018a; Al-Jarf, 2011).

The subjects' views in the current study are confirmed by Buri (2017) who indicated that when texting, most people do not pay attention to correctness. The amount of errors she found in her data is evidence that language deterioration can be pointed out in the online communication of the residents of Miskolc. She concluded that some errors originated from the person's poor grammatical knowledge. Respondents in Buri's study stated that electronic writing usually includes mistakes, and people hardly ever proofread their messages before sending or posting them on social media.

5. Recommendations

Arabic dialects that are commonly spoken across the Arab world are not the standard variety of the Arabic language that is usually taught at schools and used in textbooks, print media and used in formal settings. The different Arabic dialects are increasingly used in written communication on social media. Such spoken dialects do not have standard orthographies, i.e., phoneme-grapheme correspondences, because they are not taught at school and the colloquial forms of the words are not linked to the Standard Arabic word forms. To minimize the spelling errors that Arabic Facebook users make when they write posts and comments in their local dialect, this study recommends the following:

- 1) Since Arab Facebook users spell words and phrases correctly and accurately when they write their posts in SA, they need to maintain the habit of clarity in their written communication especially correct spelling on social media. Whether they

write in SA or CA, they should practice metalinguistic skills, think about words and phrases and at least spell words and phrases shared by SA and CA correctly.

- 2) Schools and universities should develop students' multi-skills to be able to switch between formal (SA) and informal communication (CA) across different media and communication situations. School teachers and college instructors should draw students' attention to the spelling errors they make on social media when they communicate in CA and what the correct forms are. Social media users who are competent in SA grammar and spelling should post corrections to the common spelling errors.
- 3) More time should be channelled and spent on productive academic engagement and institutions should come up with ways of combatting such virtual platforms academically to enhance students' spelling ability since they are so addicted to social media (Wilson, 2018).
- 4) Adding a spelling error detection and correction application to social media. This application is typically based on a dictionary (or reference word list), an error model and a language model (Attia, Pecina, Samih, Shaalan & Van Genabith, (2016); Attia, Pecina, Samih, Shaalan & Van Genabith (2012).
- 5) Creating a spelling correction corpus for multiple Arabic dialects such as the MADAR CODA Corpus, which is comprised of a collection of 10,000 sentences from five Arabic city dialects (Cairo, Beirut, Doha, Tunis and Rabat) represented in the Conventional Orthography for Dialectal Arabic (CODA) in parallel with their raw original form. Such a corpus should be a publicly available resource to support spelling correction and text normalization for Arabic dialects (Eryani, Habash, Bouamor & Khalifa, 2020).
- 6) Utilizing the new corpus provided by QALB (Qatar Arabic Language Bank) project which is an annotated corpus of sentences with errors and their corrections. The corpus contains some tools that include edit, add before, add after, merge, split, move and others (Hassan, Aly & Atiya, 2014).
- 7) A data-driven spelling normalization system can be embedded in social media for user-generated text. This system is comprised of an orthographic variants lexicon of Moroccan words that utilize an unsupervised approach and character neural embedding. This lexicon can be useful for several natural language processing tasks such as spelling normalization (Tachicart & Bouzoubaa, 2021)

Finally, the impact of different types of social media on Arabic-speaking students' reading, and writing skill development, and their impact on the students' spelling and language use in written schoolwork is still open for further investigation in the future.

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Appendix: Screenshots of Informal Facebook Posts and Comments with Spelling Errors

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Ahmed Algarf Dec 28, 2015 at 10:01 • الذكر الثانويه لوفات والدي 1 / 28 / ٢٨ الهم اغفرله وارحمه</p> | <p>لا قهوة لا عصير لا حتشاي، انزيد 50 دينار و نمشي في اي خطوط جوية اخرى... Tunisair رالك وليت ما تنطاقش... التبرير بناعهم: مشكلة في التموين على خاطر</p> | <p>Monia Monia لا حول.. ولا قواة.. الا.. باله. القدير... الله يرحمهم ويجعل.. متواهم.. الجنات.. النعرم. ربي يرزقق.. الصبر.</p> |
| <p>Omla Asad الله يبعتلو ضربة تقرف عمرو لهلابن الحرام Mon at 3:02 PM • Like • 2 • Reply محمد السولق وفاء شكلك اخده محل اديس بدنا نعرف اديس شورائيه الله يحميكن انتو التنين</p> | <p>الجيش والشعب أيد واحده... طب مينفعش نبقي ميزانيه واحده. مستشفيات واحده!! نوادي واحده مرتبات واحده مساكن واحده طب أنتو واحده واحنا واحده</p> | <p>البطاطس البوريه مفيش اسهل منها هتسلوقى البطاطس وتهرسها وتحطى ٢١ كوب لبن وهى بتتهرس وتحطى كل التوابل اللى بتحبها وتقربها فى صينيه مدهونه سمهه وتحطى على اللوش جنبه رومى مبشوره وبيضه بجد طعمها يهبل</p> |
| <p>كل يوم يصحى فيه بكير عشغل بيجيني ٣ افكار : اترك الشغل و أقعد بلبيت ، اترك البيت و أقعد بشغل ، اترك الشغل و البيت و أقعد بشارع 😊</p> | <p>محمود الضامر اضحكو يعارب هودا التتو فلحين في</p> | <p>ثابت نعمان جاد مش الله صاير شب الله يخلي و تقرحو في</p> |
| <p>يارب لو فيه ذنب مانع دُعايا يوصلك وماخر فرحتي وملغبط حياتي، اغفره واهديني ليك.</p> | <p>Monia Monia لا حول.. ولا قواة.. الا.. باله. القدير... الله يرحمهم ويجعل.. متواهم.. الجنات.. النعرم. ربي يرزقق.. الصبر.</p> | <p>حصل منذ لحظات: هيذا لشايفينو وزير التربية بلبان ايه ايه ما هان عليه يشوف طفلتين سوربيتين عم يدرسو ع جانب الطريق نزل ليشوف وجعن و يقدملن المساعدة اللازمة كرمال يتعلمو .. و صورتو بلمخفي 🙈</p> |
| <p>بهل سهولة تغيب عني.... بحبك ياخي يا نور عيني كمال رحل عني شهيد بلجنة ترك لدني وسافر ع جنتو وهاجر مابسا ضحكاتك ياخي رجاءع رجاءع او خدني لعندك 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊</p> | <p>مفاجأة حلوة اووووي الاقى شوشو جيبالى احلى بوكيه ورردو ع الصبح... كل سنه وانتي طيبه يا حبيبتي ربنا يسعدك</p> | <p>سواح بين الطرقات وفي الطريق الي ليبيا يارب استرنا علينا وبتوب علينا ربنا</p> |
| <p>رحمة الله عليكم يا امي 28 سنة على فراقك الله اما ارحمها وارحم اموات المسلمين جميعا</p> | <p>في ناس مهما تستجدع معاهم ما بيظمرش فيهم تحس انهم راضعين ندالة او مفطومين على قلة أصل</p> | <p>الداردشة موعطلا نظرن لضعف لتترنت اعتذر شكرن</p> |
| <p>انا واحد من الناس الي متابع حضرتك ونفسي تسطضيقي الكاتب اسلام محمود هو من طنطا بيكتب روايات جميله جدا فلو بعد ازن حضرتك طلعيه مع حضرتك في البرنامج وهو نفسو اوي يطلع مع حضرتك فا هييقا سعيد اوي لو حضرتك اصطضفتيه</p> | <p>الله انا ما ابتعد عن رؤية ما توفدموه لنا ابدأ ولاكن ليا عزري نظراً لما أعانيه من ضعف الإنترنت و البضء شديد في تحميل الصفحة على الفيس بوك وشكراً لكم جميعاً على إلا اهتمام البالغ من قبلكم إلينا</p> | <p>البشائر تهل .. اليوم تظمنتة من تحليلي السي تي الاخير وبحمد الله الرم فقط في الرئهووبازن الله علاجه سهل وايضا وصول اساترتي واختي الغالية الستازة ام راند . فدائما الاخبار .. تاتي مع الاناس الغاليين .</p> |
| <p>النهارده الذكرى السنوية لبويه الله يرحمه ويغفر له</p> | <p>والله مسوط اني اشتغلت حفلة زي دي معاكم 😊 .. تسلم العده والايادي والاضنين والنعناع والكوكا الكانت للركب 🍷🍷🍷 .. ربنا يحقق لي الفي بالي بس ويمنع العوارض</p> | <p>ابراهيم اندونيه شوكرن انا ما بحب اطراقبني اش بعمل قيمني من صفحتك شوكرن الي جهودك ما اترقبني واله بقدم شكوه</p> |
| <p>هل يوعقل يا سيدى الفاضل يا مدير المدرس ان الطلاب لها عشان للاسزا الحين لم يستلمو الكتب لهذا الحين عشان ابو الولد على المعاش ولم يوجد معة فلوس والله لشكيكو للوزير</p> | <p>بل نسبة الله انتي دخلتي قلوبنا ❤️ 🇮🇶 #العراق #سوريه ربي تفرجهه عله امت محمد (ص) عله جميع الناس وترجع الى دورهم 🙏 سالمين 🙏</p> | <p>والله مسوط اني اشتغلت حفلة زي دي معاكم 😊 .. تسلم العده والايادي والاضنين والنعناع والكوكا الكانت للركب 🍷🍷🍷 .. ربنا يحقق لي الفي بالي بس ويمنع العوارض</p> |
| <p>كي تصادفك ليام لأتمنها خفيفات في الدورات رد بالك منها.</p> | <p>اجدعان محدش عنده مركب سلف أروح عليه الكليه الكهربيه قطعاه هم امطر علينا كشافن اصل انامعشني شايف حاجه #algarf#</p> | <p>كل يوم يصحى فيه بكير عشغل بيجيني ٣ افكار : اترك الشغل و أقعد بلبيت ، اترك البيت و أقعد بشغل ، اترك الشغل و البيت و أقعد بشارع 😊</p> |

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| <p>انك تتجنى معلقين دقيق بالمياه لحد ما تبقى زي الطحينه وتحط عليهم بيضتين وتقليبها في بعض وبعد بن تقطعط طماطميه وللفتن خضر ولو عندك جزر حتى ولو عندك جنبه حطي ولو معندكيش عادي متحطيش ولو ف زيتون حطى اي خضار عندك</p> | <p>هذا الحساب سبني سب كبير لاعلم لماذا لكن انا اعرف كيف اخذ حقي بنضام والقانون طبعن الاخ هذا حوثي وفي المملكة عايش لاهداف تمس امن الدوله وانا اليوم ذهبت بتقديم شكوا للمباحث العامه وحولوني على مكافحة الجرائم المعلوماتيه ورحت وطلعت محضر بثلاث قضايا الاوله حوثي والثانيه انتحال شخصيه وهميه والثالثه قذف والشتيم ومس اعراض الاخرين طبعن بعد مابحثو عليه طلع يقيم في المملكة</p> | <p>الذكري السنويه الثالثه الله يرحمك يا ابي ان الارض خصرت رجلا ولكن السماء كسبت نجماء اللهم اني اسالك بكل اسم هولك سميت به نفسك واوزلته في كتابك او استاشرت به علي العلم احدا من خلقك ان تغفرله وترحمه وان تجعل القرآن الكريم شفيعا له وان تخدله الفردوس الاعلي برحمتك وان تسقه من حوض نبيك وان تمتعه بلنظر لوجهك الكريم وان تجعل قبره</p> |
| <p>والله وحشتني يا محمد اخويا وابني وكل حاجة حلوة انك اخويا وسندي بارب يظلم الاي ظلمك وحسبي الله ونعمة الوكيل</p> | <p>إخواني بدي إعتذر منكن ماعم يصرلي وقت رد ع التعليقات بتمنا محد يزعل</p> | <p>ثابت نعمان جاد مش الله صاير شب الله يخلي و تفرحو في</p> |
| <p>شيلي أمير يقول يا الله سنة خير علجميع</p> | <p>فطيعة حته الوردة الصفرا.... يويو وردتي الجميلة ربنا يحفظها ماشالله</p> | <p>الله يرحمك يا ستي ويجعل مئاكي الجنه لا حولا ولا قوة الا بالله</p> |