

Rule of ‘*Qalqala*’ and Sound Change in Arabic

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Many Arabs and Muslims nowadays think that Arabic, as the language of their scripture (the Qur’an), is the same language, which the Prophet Mohamed used 14 centuries ago. They strongly refuse the idea of “language change” thinking that God has protected the language of His Book. In this paper I am going to use Qur’anic recitation rules, which have been transmitted orally from one generation to another to prove that some changes have already taken place and the only evidence we have is the very rules of recitation themselves. The paper focuses on the rule of ‘*Qalqala*’. Arabic plosive sounds, /q/, /t̤/, /b/, /dʒ/, and /d/, according to this rule, are followed by a schwa (an off-glide vowel) in syllable final position. The aim of the rule, as mentioned in recitation treatises, is to maintain the voicing feature of the plosive sounds involved because they may be subject in this particular position to devoicing. However, the phonetic realizations of some of these sounds as pronounced in Qur’anic recitation today as well as in modern standard Arabic (known as *fushā*) do not fit as *Qalqala* sounds; two of them the /q/ and the /t̤/ are no longer pronounced as voiced sounds and a third one, i.e. the /dʒ/, is no longer a plosive sound. The discrepancy between the target sounds of the rule of *Qalqala* and the way some of them are pronounced today indicates, as the paper suggests, that they may have been subject to certain phonetic changes that would not have been known to us without the knowledge of the rule of *Qalqala*.