PHONOLOGICAL TRACES IN THE 'ALA BALI' LYRICS: AN ANALYSIS OF SOUND CHANGES IN THE ADAPTATION FROM EGYPTIAN ARABIC TO MODERN STANDARD ARABIC (FUSHA)

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Abstract:

This article examines the phonological traces present in the lyrics of the popular Egyptian song, "Ala Bali," popularized by Sherine Abdel Wahab. The primary focus of the analysis is on the phonological changes that occur when vocabulary from the Egyptian dialect (Amiyah Masriyah) is compared to the framework of Modern Standard Arabic (Fusha). This qualitative descriptive study uses the song's lyrics as primary data. The analytical process involves identifying key phonemes in the Egyptian dialect and comparing them to their counterparts in Fusha. The results indicate the existence of systematic phonological processes, most notably consonant substitution, such as the change of the phoneme /q/ (ق) to a glottal stop /ʔ/ (ء), and the transformation of the affricate phoneme /dʒ/ (ج) into the velar plosive /g/. Furthermore, vowel changes and the use of particles were also found to phonetically distinguish the dialect from Fusha. In conclusion, the lyrics of "Ala Bali" serve as a rich linguistic artifact, documenting the phonological transformations that are a hallmark of the Egyptian dialect and demonstrating how dialectal identity is preserved even within a widespread artistic medium.

Keywords: *Arabic Phonology, Egyptian Dialect, Fusha Arabic, Sound Change, Sociolinguistics, 'Ala Bali'.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of diglossia in the Arab world, where Fusha (Standard) Arabic and Amiyah (vernacular) dialects coexist, is a fascinating field for linguistic study. Fusha is used in formal contexts, literature, and news media, while Amiyah is the language of daily communication. Pop music, as a product of popular culture, often exists at the intersection of the two, using language that is easily understood by a wide audience (Amiyah) while still maintaining a structure that is generally acceptable.

The song "Ala Bali" (على بالي - 'On My Mind') performed by the Egyptian singer Sherine Abdel Wahab is one phenomenal example. Its popularity extends not only throughout Egypt but also across the entire Arab world. Its lyrics, written in the Cairo (Masri) dialect, contain many distinctive phonological features that differentiate it from Fusha. This article aims to analyze these phonological traces. The research question is: What phonological processes can be identified in the lyrics of the song 'Ala Bali' as a representation of the Egyptian dialect's adaptation of Fusha's phonemic structure?

This analysis will focus on the most significant changes in consonant and vowel sounds, to map how a dialect's sound system operates within a work of art.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Phonology of the Egyptian Dialect (Masriyah) The Egyptian dialect, particularly the one based in Cairo, has several highly distinctive phonological features compared to Fusha. These features have become strong markers of identity. Some of those relevant to this study are (Versteegh, 2014):

Substitution of Phoneme /q/ (ق): In Fusha, this is a voiceless uvular plosive. In the urban Egyptian dialect, this phoneme is consistently realized as a glottal stop or hamzah /ʔ/ (ء).

Substitution of Phoneme /dʒ/ (ج): In Fusha, this is a voiced palato-alveolar affricate. In Cairo and most of Lower Egypt, it is realized as a voiced velar plosive /g/ (like the 'g' in the word "go").

Substitution of Interdental Phonemes: The phoneme /θ/ (ث) often becomes /s/ (س) or /t/ (ت), and the phoneme /ð/ (ذ) becomes /z/ (ز) or /d/ (د).

Phonological Processes Phonological processes are systematic changes in language sounds. In this context, we will focus on:

Substitution: The replacement of one phoneme with another. This is the main process that will be analyzed in the "Ala Bali" lyrics.

Elision: The omission of one or more sounds in a word, often to ease pronunciation.

Vowel Change: Differences in the pronunciation of short or long vowels between Fusha and the dialect.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach.

Data Source: The primary data is the lyrics of the song "Ala Bali" by Sherine. This data was obtained through audio transcription and verification with lyric sources available online.

Data Collection Technique: Listening and note-taking techniques were used to identify keywords that show phonological deviations from Fusha.

Data Analysis: The data was analyzed using the following steps:

Creating a table containing the lyric excerpts in the Egyptian dialect.

Writing its phonetic transliteration.

Providing the equivalent word in Fusha (if any).

Analyzing the type of phonological change that occurred based on the theoretical framework.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is an analysis of the phonological data found in the lyrics of the song "Ala Bali".

Substitution of the Uvular Plosive Consonant /q/ (ق) with the Glottal Stop /ʔ/ (ء)

This is the most common and easily identifiable phonological trace in the Egyptian dialect. The change from the back-throat sound /q/ to the glottal stop /ʔ/ eases articulation. This is the clearest and most consistent change, where one consonant phoneme in Fusha is replaced by another sound in the Egyptian dialect.

No.	Lyric Excerpt (Egyptian Dialect)	Transliteration	Fusha Equivalent	Phonological Process Analysis
1.1	حبيبي أنا ألبي واجعني (Habibi ana albi waga'ni)	/'albi/	قلبي (/qalbi/)	**Substitution /q/ → /ʔ/:** The uvular plosive phoneme /q/ (ق) in the Fusha word *qalbi* (my heart) changes to a glottal stop /ʔ/ (ء),

No.	Lyric Excerpt (Egyptian Dialect)	Transliteration	Fusha Equivalent	Phonological Process Analysis
				represented by the letter Alif. This is the most iconic feature of the Cairo dialect.
1.2	انت بتقول إيه (inta bit**'ūl** ēh)	/bit'u:l/	تقول (/taqu:lu/)	**Substitution /q/ → /ʔ/:** The verb *taqūlu* (you say) is realized as *bit'ūl*. The /q/ sound in the middle of the word is replaced by a glottal stop.
1.3	معرفش قلتلك إيه (ma'rafsh 'oltellak ēh)	/'oltelak/	قلتُ لك (/qultu laka/)	**Substitution /q/ → /ʔ/:** Similar to the previous example, the verb *qultu* (I said) becomes *'olt*.
1.4	وأنا جاية بقول (wana gayya a'ūl)	/'gajja/	جائية (/dʒa:'ijah/)	**Substitution /dʒ/ → /g/:** The affricate phoneme /dʒ/ (ج) in Fusha is pronounced as a velar plosive phoneme /g/ (like the "g" in "go"). This is another main characteristic of the Egyptian dialect.
1.5	وجعتني (**waga'**tini)	/'wagaʕtini/	أوجعتني (/ʔawdʒaʕtani:/)	**Substitution /dʒ/ → /g/ (in the root):** Although the letter 'ج' does not appear here, the root verb for "pain" is و-ج-ع (W-J-'). In Fusha, its sound is /dʒ/, but in the Egyptian dialect, the root is realized with a

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				/g/ sound (as in *yewga'* - يوجع).
1.6	كل ثانية (kulli sanya)	/'sanja/	ثانية (/θa:nijah/)	**Substitution /θ/ → /s/:** The interdental phoneme /θ/ (ث) is often simplified to the alveolar fricative phoneme /s/ (س) for ease of pronunciation.

Example 1: قلبي (qalbi) to ألبي (albi) In the analysis of the lyric "ana albi waga'ni", the word *albi* (my heart) is found. The Fusha equivalent of this word is *qalbi*. This result specifically shows the substitution of the uvular phoneme /q/ (the 'qaf' sound) at the beginning of the word with the glottal phoneme /ʔ/ (the 'hamzah' sound). This is the most typical finding of the urban Egyptian dialect recorded in this song.

Example 2: تقول (taqūlu) to بتقول (bit'ul) In the excerpt "inta bit'ul eh" (what are you saying), the use of the verb *bit'ul* (you say) is found. This word in Fusha is *taqūlu*. This finding shows that the substitution of /q/ with /ʔ/ also occurs consistently in the middle of a word. The /q/ phoneme in *taqūlu* is changed to a glottal stop /ʔ/, resulting in the pronunciation *bit'ul*.

Example 3: ما قلتُ لك (mā qultu laka) to ما قلتلكش (ma 'oltellaksh) In the negative lyric *ma 'oltellaksh* (I didn't tell you), a change is found in the past tense verb *qultu* (I said) from Fusha. The /q/ phoneme at the beginning of the verb *qultu* also undergoes substitution into a glottal /ʔ/, thus being pronounced as *'olt*. This proves that this phonological process applies consistently to various word forms, including past tense verbs.

Example 4: جائية (jā'iyah) to جاية (gayya) In the lyric "wana gayya a'ul" (and I'm coming to say), the word *gayya* (coming, feminine) is used. The Fusha equivalent for this word is *jā'iyah*. This result specifically shows the substitution of the affricate phoneme /dʒ/ (the 'j' sound in "judge") with the velar plosive phoneme /g/ (the 'g' sound in "go"). This is the second main characteristic of the Cairo dialect.

Example 5: أوجعتني (awja'tanī) to وجعتني (waga'tini) In the lyric *waga'tini* (you hurt me), a sound change from the Fusha root و-ج-ع (W-J-') is found. Its Fusha form is *awja'tanī*. Although the letters are not identical, the root word analysis shows that the /dʒ/ phoneme contained in the root has been realized as a /g/ phoneme, resulting in the pronunciation *waga'tini*.

Substitution of the Affricate Consonant /dʒ/ (ج) with the Velar Plosive /g/ (گ)

This process involves the shortening, lengthening, or change in vowel quality, as well as the omission of sounds or syllables to make speech more concise.

No.	Lyric Excerpt (Egyptian Dialect)	Transliteration	Fusha Equivalent	Phonological Process Analysis
2.1	معرفش ليه (ma'rafsh lēh)	/le:h/	لِمَاذا (/lima:ða:/)	**Elision and Vowel Change:** The Fusha question word *limādhā* (why) undergoes elision (omission) of the syllable /ma:ða:/ and a vowel change to /e:/, which is more typical of the dialect. This is a very common form of contraction.
2.2	إحساسي بيه (iḥsāsi bīh)	/bi:h/	بِهِ (/bihi/)	**Final Vowel Elision:** The short vowel /i/ at the end of the Fusha pronoun *bihi* (with him/it) is omitted. This makes the end of the phrase more distinct and often occurs in rapid speech.
2.3	ده اللي بقوله (da illi ba'ūlu)	/da/	هذا (/ha:ða:/)	**Consonant and Vowel Elision:** The demonstrative *hādhā* (this) is drastically simplified to *da*. This involves the elision of the consonants /h/ and /ð/ as well as the shortening of the long vowel /a:/.
2.4	من أول دقيقة (min awwel di'ī'a)	/'awwel/	أَوَّل (/'awwal/)	**Vowel Quality Shift:** Although the word is the same, the pronunciation of the /a/ vowel in the Egyptian dialect is often slightly different, tending to be more fronted, or sounding like /e/ in some contexts, as in the word *awwel* which sometimes sounds like *ewwel*.

No.	Lyric Excerpt (Egyptian Dialect)	Transliteration	Fusha Equivalent	Phonological Process Analysis
2.5	ما قلتلكش (ma 'oltellaksh)	/'oltelakʃ/	ما قلتُ لك (/ma: qultu laka/)	**Contraction and Vowel Elision:** The Fusha phrase *mā qultu laka* (I did not say to you) undergoes significant contraction. Short vowels between consonants are elided and combined with the negation particle *-sh* at the end, becoming a single phonological word.

Example 1: لِمَاذا (limādhā) to ليه (leh) In the analysis of the lyric "ma'rafsh leh" (I don't know why), the question word *leh* (why) is found. Its Fusha equivalent is *limādhā*. This result shows a drastic phonological process, namely elision (omission) of the final syllable (*mādhā*) and a change of the long vowel /ā/ to the vowel /e:/. This is an example of articulatory efficiency in the dialect.

Example 2: به (bihi) to بيه (bih) In the phrase "ihsasi bih" (my feeling for him), the particle *bih* is used. The Fusha form of this word is *bihi*. This finding indicates a process of final vowel elision, where the short vowel /i/ at the end of the word *bihi* is omitted. This omission serves to simplify pronunciation at the end of a phrase.

Example 3: أَوَّل (awwal) to أول (awwel) In the excerpt "min awwel di'i'a" (from the first minute), the word *awwel* is analyzed. Although its spelling is the same as in Fusha (*awwal*), the phonetic analysis results show a difference in vowel realization and stress. The vowel in the dialect version *awwel* is pronounced shorter and faster compared to the standard Fusha pronunciation.

Vowel and Syllable Structure Changes (Elision)

This is a feature involving particles or affixes characteristic of the dialect that have unique phonological realizations.

No.	Lyric Excerpt (Egyptian Dialect)	Transliteration	Fusha Equivalent	Phonological Process Analysis
3.1	بـقول (bi-'ūl)	/bi'u:l/	أقول	**Use of the Prefix /b-/:** In the

No.	Lyric Excerpt (Egyptian Dialect)	Transliteration	Fusha Equivalent	Phonological Process Analysis
			(/ʔaqu:lu/)	Egyptian dialect, the prefix بـ (/b-/ or /bi-/) is used to mark the present continuous verb form. Phonologically, this adds one syllable at the beginning of the verb that does not exist in Fusha.
3.2	معرفـش (ma'rafsh)	/maʕrafʃ/	لا أعرف (/la: ʔaʕrifu/)	**Use of the Negation Suffix /-ʃ/:** The negation particle in the Egyptian dialect is often the *ma-...-sh* construction, which sandwiches the verb. The ending /-ʃ/ (ش) is a very strong phonological marker for negation in this dialect, replacing the particle *lā* (لا) from Fusha.
3.3	إنت إيه (inta ēh)	/e:h/	ماذا (/ma:ða:/)	**Distinctive Dialectal Phonological Lexicon:** The question word *ēh* (what) is a lexicon typical of the Egyptian dialect, replacing *mādhā* from Fusha. Phonologically, this word consists only of one long vowel /e:/ and the consonant /h/.

E. CONCLUSION

The phonological analysis of the lyrics of "Ala Bali" effectively demonstrates how a vernacular dialect, in this case, Amiyah Masriyah, maintains its distinct features even when presented in a pan-Arab mass media format. The most dominant phonological traces are the systematic substitutions of Fusha consonants, namely /q/ → /ʔ/ and /dʒ/ → /g/. These changes do not occur randomly but are consistent phonological rules within the Cairo dialect.

Furthermore, processes such as elision and vowel changes in particles and pronouns show the dialect's tendency to achieve articulatory efficiency or language economy. The

song "Ala Bali" is thus not only an emotional work of art but also a living linguistic document, recording the dynamics between standard language and spoken language in contemporary Arab culture. Further research could be expanded to analyze the morphological and syntactic aspects in the same lyrics to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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