Towards a Grammar of the (Non-)Use of Case Marking in Standard Arabic: implications for teching

Andreas Hallberg

# Abstract

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Inflection of words according to case is a vexing problem in the teaching of Standard Arabic. Case marking is traditionally regarded as a core part of Standard Arabic grammar and a primary feature of corrects speech and writing. In practice, however, case is morphologically marked only in a very limited set of situations, whether in speech or writing, but with considerable variation between registers. Such lack of case marking has traditionally been ignored ore downplayed in grammars and teaching materials, despite its high impact on the form of Standard Arabic sentences, much to the confusion of language learners. This article presents re-interpretation of morphologically marked in Arabic by regarding the (non)-use of case marking systematic and rule governed. These rules of case marking are derived from observed language use in six spoken and written registers in Standard Arabic. Implications of this interpretation of the case system for the teaching of the four language skills are discussed.

*Keywords:* Standard Arabic; case; registers; modality; morphology

# Introduction

Standard Arabic is commonly described as a language with morphologically marked case and mood. In authoritative grammars of Arabic we find detailed descriptions of how different classes of nominals are inflected in different syntactic positions. However, it takes only a brief look at some Arabic texts, or a quick listen to someone speaking Standard Arabic, to see that most of the time these endings are not there. In the range of contexts where Standard Arabic is used, written or oral, there is wide variation in the extent to which case inflection is employed. In news broadcasts, for example, the news anchor will often report a news story with diligent use of case markers on all words, and then turn to a guest in the studio to ask them a question, still in perfectly good Standard Arabic, but now with no or only sporadic use of case inflection. Most case markers are indicated only with diacritics in writing. In Arabic books commenting on classical poetry, the Quran, as well as in grammars, the passage that is explained or analyzed is typically printed with full diacritization and thus with all case and mood markers present. The accompanying text explaining the passage is printed without diacritics and therefore with case and mood being marked only sporadically, appearing on certain types of words and grammatical contexts.

The Standard Arabic system of case marking can thus be described as containing a double-layered system of grammatical rules: one first layer specifying whether case marking is to be applied on a particular word, and a second layer specifying the phonological and orthographic form of the case marker, that is, if it is to be applied according to the first layer of rules. Grammars of Arabic have focused almost exclusively on the second layer. This is for example the case in the two standard grammars of Arabic used in the Anglophone world, Badawi et al. (2004) and Ryding (2005). Both these grammars mention that most case markers take the form of short vowels and are therefore not represented in writing (Badawi et al. 2004:20; Ryding 2005:166), yet all examples are transcribed with consistent use of case markers on all nouns and adjectives, even though these are not present in the Arabic text. This reflects an assumption common in the field of Arabic studies that Standard Arabic in some underlying form features morphologically marked case on all words, and that this form is subject to omission of case marking by some secondary process. In Ryding (2005) we read that

The Arabic case-ending system consists primarily of short, word-final vowels, *which are invisible* in conventional written Arabic texts. […] The Arabic case system, then, remains mostly hidden from view in written text and is apparent only when the text is read out loud with complete pronunciation of all vowels (p. 166).

Both grammars mention in passing that case endings are often not used and that practices vary with individuals and situation (Badawi et al. 2004:33; Ryding 2005:167n51). The image thus presented is one of a morphological complexity working under the surface, obscured in writing by orthography and in speech by omission of endings that are either too variable to be be properly described or are otherwise uninteresting for the purposes of grammatical description.

This articles argues that the overwhelming lack of case marking in most forms of Standard Arabic is not the result of a process of omission from underlying case marked forms, but that Standard Arabic is best described as having a base without case inflection, to which inflectional endings are added in certain limited contexts determined by syntax and register. This has important implications for teaching in that it suggests that large chunks of the case system as it is traditionally described is for practical language skills irrelevant for most students.

Textbooks for the teaching of Arabic as second language that have taken this rout of reducing the role of case inflection have recently gained increased popularity, especially in the US (Brustad et al. 2011; Younes et al. 2014). This article can be seen as providing a theoretical basis for this approach. The traditional approach of presenting case inflection as an indispensable, core feature of Arabic is still very common in the non-Arab university context, and is represented in several textbooks (Alosh 2000; Frangieh 2012; Schulz et al. 2000). It is very much dominant in European universities. In the teaching of Arabic as a first language in the Arabic speaking world, this traditional approach is completely unchallenged (Haeri 1997; Uhlmann 2012), as is the case in non-Arabophone Islamic education (Versteegh 2018).

It is important for a discussion of case marking in Standard Arabic to make a theoretical distinction between the language as it appears in grammatical descriptions and the observed use of that language. For this we will draw on the distinction between *norm* and *codification*, as developed by the Prague school theoreticians (Havránek 1982; Jedlička 1982). The norm of a variety is the observed use of that variety, while the codification is a set of explicitly formulated rules of that variety, as found in grammars, lexicon, and school books. The codification is an attempt to describe a norm for purposes of teaching and regulation. All language varieties have a norm by definition, but codification is typically associated with standard varieties. A useful definition of a standard variety is that it is a variety provided with a codification enforced by authority (Ammon 1986). The privileged position of the standard variety (*vis á vis* the non-standard varieties) and its associated codification is backed by what has been termed *standard language ideology* (Milroy et al. 1991). In the case of the Arabic language community the standard language ideology is extremely conservative, as it draws on both nationalist and religious ideologies to combat variation and change (Al-Wer 1997; Suleiman 2003; Suleiman 1996). Case since the inception of the Arabic grammatical tradition been a focal point of the language ideology and codification efforts (Bohas et al. 1990; Chejne 1969; Versteegh 1983). The language situation of diglossia in Arabic (Ferguson 1959) where the standard variety is not spoken natively by any segment of the population serves to further cement the role of the codification as the sole reference point of correct usage. The grammatical description, the codification, is taken to be the language itself, in what Suleiman (1996) has called “*naïve-realist* orientation of the Arabic grammatical tradition” (p. 114). This situation has led to considerable differences between norm and codification in Standard Arabic. Such a situation is by no means uncommon and is typically dealt with in language communities by an ideological process that Irvine et al. (2001) has labeled *erasure*, the process by which “facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away” (p. 404). The problem of the large differences between norm and codification in Standard Arabic is especially problematic for language teaching, as has often been noted in the literature (Parkinson 1993; Maamouri 1998; Wahba 2006). It led the United Nations *Arab Human Development Report* of 2003 (Bennani et al. 2003) to call for linguistic research leading to “rationalisation of grammar” (p. 125). Case is one area where such rationalization is sorely needed.

The terminological pair of *codification* and *norm* is somewhat ambiguous in that the former can be interpreted as part of the latter, i.e. the codification is one element in a system of norms. In this article the terms *prescription* and *convention* will therefore be used to designate linguistic rules or regularities with different status in the language community. I take prescription to mean a linguistic rule that is explicitly formulated in grammar books or other works on language that are ascribed authority within the language community. I take convention to mean a linguistic rule that is deduced from empirically observed linguistic behavior.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, a general introduction to the Arabic case system is presented. Second, conventions of case marking in different registers of Standard Arabic is presented and schematically summarized. Six registers are identified, covering both written and spoken language. Thereafter, implications of these conventions of case marking for the teaching of Arabic are discussed, with reference to the four language skills. In the final section, the main points and conclusions of this article are summarized.

# The Arabic case system

Morphologically marked case is a highly salient Standard Arabic feature. None of the Arabic vernaculars have a similar grammatical system. The case system in Standard Arabic is syntactically simple as compared to those in many other languages, but morphologically complex. There are three cases, nominative, genitive and accusative. Nominative marks subjects and complements of the null-copula, genitive marks possessors and prepositional complements, and the accusative marks verbal complements. The form of the case marking suffix interacts with number in definiteness in different ways in eight nominal declensions (Ryding 2005:184ff). Most of the case markers take forms that are not graphically represented in the Arabic writing system, a point discussed in more detail later.

Since none of the Arabic vernaculars have a parallel system of case inflection, it is only learned by speakers of the language through formal education, and it is taught in a traditional, highly formulaic manner and often with convoluted forms of explanation (Baalbaki 1994; Uhlmann 2012; Younes 2007). Indeed, case is at the center of grammar instruction in the Arab world, to the extent that *grammar* is often equated with the case system (Ibrahim 1983; Haeri 2003; Uhlmann 2012). Comments on the low proficiency in applying the case system, even among educated speakers, are common in the literature (e.g. Beeston 1970:43; Chejne 1969:50; Kaye 1972) and has been most clearly demonstrated in Parkinson (1993). This should not be interpreted as indicating low literacy skills, since as a means of syntactic disambiguation case marking is almost completely superfluous (Corriente 1971; 1973; Holes 2004:173). The syntactic roles of constituents in the clause are determined by other means, primarily word order and verb agreement. Furthermore, case marking is in most forms of Standard Arabic largely absent anyway, as detailed later in this article. This mismatch between the importance traditionally ascribed to the case system and its near complete irrelevance for literacy skills is the cause of much confusion, particularly in education.

Standard Arabic also has a system of morphologically marked mood which in many respects is parallel to that of case: it has no parallel in the vernaculars, is imperfectly mastered by speakers, in most forms represented by diacritics and therefore often not present in writing, and that is syntactically superfluous. In traditional Arabic grammar, case and mood are regarded as one and the same grammatical system; *iʿraab*, straddling both nominal and verbal syntax and morphology. Much of what is said on case in the following is applicable also to mood, as they have much the same mechanisms of variation.

Before turning to the use of case marking in registers of Standard Arabic, there is one aspect of oral performance in Standard Arabic that need be addressed, namely the omission of word endings, including case markers, preceding a pause (Ar. *waqf*). This practice is carefully codified with regards to recitation of the Quran (Nelson 2001:19, 28–9), as well as for poetry in the traditional meters (Birkeland 1940, passim), but is for other types of text more vague. The classical Arab grammarians had much to say about the morphological effects of pause, much of which is obsolete in modern Standard Arabic (see Wright 2011:358, vol.II for details), but very little about where it is to be applied outside of the Duran and poetry. In the modern literature, pause is “defined (rather vaguely) as an audible break in delivery” (Holes 2004:63). Thus, whenever a person makes a breath pause, the final short vowel and nunation (word final /n/ following the case marking short vowel on indefinite nouns) of the preceding word is omitted. A person reading a text aloud, therefore, has some liberty in where to insert pauses and apply the associated prescriptively sanctioned omission of word endings. The end of a sentence is however an unequivocal pause position where word ending omission is prescriptively to be applied. For our present purposes, we will restrict our discussion of pause to sentence final position, while keeping in mind that pausal suffix omission is often more broadly applied.

# Case marking in registers of Standard Arabic

Most of the variation in the extent to which case marking is employed in Standard Arabic can be accounted for by positing a limited set of registers, each with its own set of conventions of how and where case is marked, unmarked, or where case marking is optional. The division of Standard Arabic registers presented was inspired by Walters (2003), where varieties of Arabic are mapped on a two-dimensional space with the vertical axis represents the diglossic continuum from vernacular to standard, and the vertical axis represents the “degree of planning” from *written* as the most highly planned through *recited* and *read aloud* to *spoken* as the least planned. Six registers with relevance for conventions of case marking are proposed here: diacritized and undiacritized writing, recitation, uninflected and inflected reading aloud, and extemporaneous speech. They can be categorized hierarchically in the two modes of speech and writing as follows:

* written
  + diacritized (1)
  + undiacritized (2)
* oral
  + reading aloud
    - inflected (3)
    - uninflected (4)
  + recitation (5)
  + extemporaneous speech (6)

These registers are to some extent archetypal embodiments of sets of conventions. As such it is not claimed here that each and every sample of Standard Arabic language fits neatly in one register. It is claimed, however, that the vast majority of samples does. Furthermore, since these registers are taken to embody linguistic conventions, examples of language use that do not fit in one of the registers are likely to be perceived as strange or odd.

In the following, these six registers of Standard Arabic are discussed in turn with regards to their respective conventions of case marking. The discussion relies on existing research on the specific register where available. For registers where research is lacking, the description is based on impressionistic observations, anecdotal evidence, and extrapolations from patterns of case marking in other registers. It is hoped that future research will fill these gaps and confirm or modify the descriptions presented here. Some of examples that do not fit the description developed here will also be discussed.

## The diacritized and the undiacritized written registers

In the Arabic writing system there are two layers of orthographic representation. The first is the layer of letters and punctuation. Letters represent consonants, long vowels and diphthongs. The second layer consists of optional diacritics representing short vowels (*fatḥa, ḍamma, kasra*), absence of a vowel between consonants (*sukūn*), lengthening of consonants (*šadda*), and nunation (*tanwīn*). In principle, the optionality of the layer of diacritics allows for virtually endless variability in which diacritics are used and how often. In practice, however, texts gravitate towards the two opposite poles of no and full use of diacritics. Undiacritized or diacritized text thus form the two main registers of written Standard Arabic.[[1]](#footnote-1) Pure examples of these two registers are rare; in undiacritized text there are often some diacritics added and in diacritized text there are often some potential diacritics missing. For the purposes of this discussion, we will nevertheless use this simplified binary categorization of text as diacritized or undiacritized.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The choice between the diacritized and the undiacritized register in writing is largely determined by genre. The diacritized register is used only in a limited set of text types, namely in (a) religious source texts, such as the Quran, *ḥadīṯ* (a corpus of sayings and deeds of the Prophet), and the Bible; (b) texts considered to be part of the literary heritage or canon, such as classical and much of modern poetry, as well as modern editions of classical prose texts; and (c) texts aimed at language learners, including children’s literature and schoolbooks. The domains of the undiacritized register are best described negatively: it is used for all writing that is none of the above. This includes everything from news articles and novels to mundane, every-day written material (receipts, signs, lists of contents on consumer products, instructions for technical appliances, forms, etc.). Standard Arabic is primarily a written variety, and written material is overwhelmingly in the undiacritized register. The undiacritized register is thus the bread and butter of Standard Arabic and quantitatively and functionally the most important of all six registers.

Case markers can be divided into two types depending on how they are written: *orthographic case markers* are represented by one or more letters and therefore appear in the undiacritized register, *diacritic case markers* are only represented by diacritics and therefore do not appear in the undiacritized register. This distinction is, while based purely on orthography, is of relevance also for the description of conventions of case marking in the oral registers, as shown later. Orthographic case markers appear only on certain specific combinations of declension, case, definiteness, and final letter of the stem. For example, a word in the triptote declension takes orthographically marked case only in the accusative, and only when the word is indefinite and the stem does not end in either of the letters *tāʾ marbūṭa* (ة) or the letter *hamza* preceded by a short or long vowel *a* (اء/أ). Table 1 lists all eight declensions and in what situations they take orthographically marked case. As can be seen in the table, there are only two declensions, sound masculine plural and the dual, where orthographically marked case is consistently present, but these only have a nominative/non-nominative morphological distinction. Three of the eight declensions (triptote, defective, and the five nouns) take an orthographic case marker only under certain conditions. The final three declensions (sound feminine plural, diptote and indeclinable) never take orthographically marked case. Furthermore, an orthographically marked three-part morphological case distinction is only present in the fairly infrequent situations where a word in the *five nouns* declension is in construct state, and when a noun in the triptote declension ends with the letter *hamza* and has an enclitic possessive pronoun. The latter is due to the fact that the latter *hamza* in word medial position, as when followed by a clitic, changes form depending on surrounding letters and vowels, including case markers. The rules concerning *hamza*’s shape are somewhat esoteric and there is a large degree of variation in actual practice (Buckwalter 2007; Parkinson 1990). It should be clear from this overview that case marking in undiacritized text is very limited. By one calculation, only around 6% of nouns and adjectives are inflected for case in the in undiacritized texts (Hallberg 2016:76n6).

As mentioned previously, it is common for undiacritized text to include some occasional diacritics. Diacritics, and the vowels they represent, can be either *lexical diacritics* or *morphosyntactic diacritics*. Lexical diacritics are diacritics specific to the lexeme and do not vary with syntactic context. Morphosyntactic diacritics, on the other hand, represent suffixes added to the word stem to mark a morphosyntactic feature, case on nouns and adjectives and mood on verbs. As such the morphosyntactic diacritics of a word vary with syntactic position(cf. Saiegh-Haddad et al. 2016:3). The few diacritics that are added to undiacritized text are normally normally lexical diacritics used to differentiate homographs, such as active and passive verbs (e.g. *ḍaraba* ضرب “hit (act.)” and *ḍuriba* ضُرب “hit (pass.)”, *cf.* Hermena et al. 2015), or verbs in forms I and II (e.g. *darasa* درس ‘study’ and *darrasa* درّس ‘teach’). These diacritics have no bearing on case marking. Adding diacritic case markers is normally not an option.

Orthographically marked case

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| declension | marked case | condition |  | example |  |  |  |
|  |  | *Syntactic* | *Final letter(s) in stem* | \*Nominativ | e\* \*Genitiv | e\* \*Accusativ | e\* |
| *Sound m.pl.* | Nom., Acc/Gen. |  |  | مدرسون | مدرسين | مدرسين | ‘teachers (m.)’ |
| *Dual* | Nom., Acc/Gen. |  |  | مدرسان | مدرسين | مدرسين | ‘two teachers’ |
| *Triptote* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| — condition a. | Acc. | Indefinite | Not <a/āʾ> اء/أ or <ah> [ة]{lang="a | r"} [مدرس]{lang= | “ar”} [مدرس]{lang= | “ar”} [مدرساً]{lang= | “ar”} ‘[a] teacher’ |
| — condition b. | Nom., Acc., Gen. | Enclitic pronoun | <ʾ> ء | أصدقاؤه | أصدقائه | أصدقاءه | ‘his firends’ |
| *Defective* | Acc. | Indefinite | Not <ah> ة | قاض | قاض | قاضياً | ‘[a] judge’ |
| *‘The five nouns’* | Nom., Acc., Gen. | Construct state |  | أبوه | أباه | أبيه | ‘his father’ |
| *Sound f.pl.* | *none* |  |  | مدرسات | مدرسات | مدرسات | ‘teachers (f.)’ |
| *Diptote* | *none* |  |  | مدارس | مدارس | مدارس | ‘schools’ |
| *Indeclinable* | *none* |  |  | فتى | فتى | فتى | ‘[a] boy’ |

In the diacritized register all or most potential diacritics, both lexical en morphosyntactic, are consistently supplied. This means that in the diacritized register case markers are present on virtually all nouns and adjectives. Here we have a full-fledged system of morphologically marked case comparable to that of Latin, German, or Russian for example. The diacritized register is thereby not only orthographically different from the undiacritized registers, it is also grammatically different in having a significantly more complex morphology.

A unique feature of the diacritized registers is the use of diacritic case markers in sentence final pause position. In the undiacritized register diacritic case endings in pause are of course not present, and in the oral registers, including recitation and the most careful forms of reading aloud they are not produced, as described later in this section. These case markers thus live only only paper, and only in diacritized text.

The two registers of undiacritized and diacritized text thus give the two options of only a very limited case marking or complete case marking. As a means of illustration, consider example (1), the headline of an article on the BBC Arabic news site at the time of writing.[[3]](#footnote-3) This sentences appeared on the news site in the undiacritized written register. None of the six nouns and adjectives in the sentence are marked for case. What is more, the author or editor does not have the option of marking case since this would entail using the diacritized register (2), or, conceivably, adding on only morphosyntactic diacritics (3), which for this domain would be highly unconventional.

1. أبرز الأرقام القياسية في تاريخ كأس العالم.  
   most.important DEF‑numbers DEF‑comparable in history cup DEF-world
2. أَبْرَزُ الأَرْقامِ الْقِياسِيّةِ فِي تَارِيخِ كَأْسِ الْعَالَمِ.  
   most.important‑NOM DEF‑numbers‑GEN DEF‑comparable‑GEN in history‑GEN cup‑GEN DEF‑world
3. أبرزُ الأرقامِ القياسيةِ في تاريخِ كأسِ العالمِ.  
   most.important‑NOM DEF‑numbers‑GEN DEF‑comparable‑GEN in history‑GEN cup‑GEN DEF‑world‑GEN
4. أَبْرَز الأَرْقام الْقِياسِيّة فِي تَارِيخ كَأْس الْعَالَم.  
   most.important DEF‑numbers DEF‑comparable in history cup DEF‑world  
      
   ‘The most important records in the history of the World Cup’

To take another example, professional letter or e-mail in Standard Arabic would normally be written in the undiacritized register in which diacritical case markers are absent. Adding diacritic case markers would entail using the diacritized register, in analogy with (2). The use of diacritic case markers in this context would not constitute a prescriptive error, but it would be very odd and highly unconventional. Thus, while failure to add one of the orthographic case markers listed in Table 1 would be considered an error, the register of diacritized writing is also governed by far reaching conventions of the non-use of case marking, which the author must likewise follow.

Intermediate forms where diacritization is only partially applied does occur, but is rare. Text with only morphosyntactic diacritics, analogous to (3), is attested in grammar books (al-Sharkawi 2016) and is used, albeit somewhat inconsistently, in some children’s books (e.g. in Lindgren 2008; al-Najjār et al. 2015). With regards to case marking, this is of course equivalent to the diacritized register in that all diacritic case markers are present. The inverse, text with only lexical diacritics, analogous to (4), is even more rare. The only example known by this author is in the first part of Badawī et al. (1973), an entry level Arabic textbook for second language learners.

## Inflected and uninflected reading aloud

Reading aloud is the oral reproduction of a written text based on the written visual input. Only reading aloud of undiacritized text will be discussed here. When reading an undiacritized text aloud, short vowels cannot be retrieved from the text via direct visual input but must be retrieved by other means. Lexical and morphosyntactic vowels are retrieved by very different processes. Lexical vowels are accessed through lexical retrieval and is often necessary to make the written word at all pronounceable. To add lexical vowels, the reader must identify the word from the undiacritized written form and produce the complete phonological form of this word as stored in the mental lexicon. Note that the lexical vowels supplied when reading a word aloud need not necessarily be the vowels prescribed in Standard Arabic. The proper name *muḥammad* (محمد <mḥmd>) could for example be stored in the mental lexicon and read aloud with a dialectal vowel pattern as *mḥammed*. Morphosyntactic vowels and nunation, on the other hand, need not be enunciated for a text to be read aloud. The presence or absence of morphosyntactic vowels and nunation is the main distinguishing feature between what is here identified as the two registers of reading aloud: *inflected* and *uninflected* reading aloud. In inflected reading aloud all or most diacritic case markers (that are not present in the text) are enunciated, in the uninflected register they are not. As with the diacritized and undiacritized written registers, the assumption here is that performances of reading aloud cluster around enunciating no or very few diacritic case markers on the one hand, or enunciating all or most diacritic case markers on the other, and that most performances of reading aloud can therefore be classifies as uninflected or inflected.

Uninflected reading aloud, where the reader only enunciates the orthographic case markers already present in the text, is the default, go-to form of reading aloud. It is the register used when a text is read aloud in informal situations where the focus is on the informational contents of the text rather than on linguistic correctness. This is for example the case when a person is reading a piece of an article to a friend or when two students review some text and read a part of it aloud. Lectures delivered from a prepared manuscript are often in this register. A lecturer speaking more freely will use the register of extemporaneous speech, described below. The register of undiacritized reading aloud is also sometimes used in more formal situations, for example in televised debate and discussion programs when participants read parts of documents aloud as part of their argument.[[4]](#footnote-4)

There are to the best of my knowledge no linguistic studies of uninflected reading aloud. This poses a problem for the purposes of this article in that we have very little direct empirical evidence of how case markers are produced in this register. While one might reasonably assume that orthographic case markers are enunciated, we do not have a good picture of which diacritic case markers are produced and two what extent. We know from studies of extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic, discussed presently, that diacritic case markers are systematically avoided on definite nouns and in sentence final pause position, and to the extent that diacritic case markers are used, they are used in words with enclitic pronouns. In both extemporaneous speech and inflected reading aloud the speaker/reader has to rely on their own proficiency in the grammatical system to compute and enunciate diacritic case markers, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that case marking in uninflected reading aloud plays out in similar ways as in extemporaneous speech.

Case marking on words with enclitic pronouns in uninflected reading aloud require some further comments. In words with enclitic pronouns the case marker appears between the noun stem and the enclitic pronoun, as in (5).

1. *fī bayt-i-nā/-ka*  
   in house-GEN-our/your.MS  
   ‘in our/your house’
2. *fī bayt-nā/-ak*  
   in house-our/your.MS  
   ‘in our/your house’

Here the noun is in genitive position as a prepositional complement and the case marker *-i* appears between the noun stem and the enclitic pronoun. The corresponding word unmarked for case (6) is often felt to be less acceptable than words without enclitic pronouns that are unmarked for case. Indeed, many teachers of Arabic would claim that such unmarked forms are purely vernacular and unacceptable in any form of Standard Arabic. Given that few people master the case system, the choice in these words is often between an unmarked form or risking incorrect case marking. In extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic, marked and unmarked forms are used in roughly equal proportions in words with enclitic pronoun (Hallberg 2016). This means that speakers freely use the unmarked forms in word with enclitic pronouns, in contrast to commonly held beliefs. Given our current situation with a lack of research into uninflected reading aloud, we will here extrapolate from our knowledge of extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic and make the preliminary assumption that case marking in uninflected reading aloud follow the same pattern.

Inflected reading aloud is the oral rendering of a text with consistent use of morphosyntactic vowels in a way that by and large conform with prescriptive rules of Standard Arabic. This entails adding case markers that are not present in the text. Inflected reading aloud is strongly associated with formal, official situations. This includes news broadcasts, speeches, and voice-overs, public readings of literary works. Movie series and film is generally in a non-standard, reflecting normal, every-day speech. A peculiar use of inflected reading aloud is in acting. Foreign animated movies are often dubbed in Standard Arabic, and then always with full case inflection in analogy with inflected reading aloud, presumably to expose children to what is considered correct language. Film and television series in historical settings are typically in Standard Arabic, also with full use of inflectional endings. Performances in these settings are, as acting, delivered to appear spontaneous and extemporaneous, yet are renderings of a written manuscript and in terms of the use of case marking map neatly in the register of uninflected reading aloud.

Given the limited set of situations in which the register of inflected reading aloud is used, it is a specialized form of oral language in which most users of the language are never required to perform. Reading a text in the register of inflected reading aloud is not only mere oral reproduction of its contents as is the register of uninflected reading aloud, but rather a way of “performing” the text (in the non-technical meaning of the word), a display of a certain type of linguistic skill that goes beyond common reading proficiency. Inflected reading aloud is the prescriptively correct form of reading aloud and is trained and promoted in Arabic classes in the Arab world, as well as in many Western universities. However, due to its limited use outside of Arabic classes, there is little incentive for speakers to develop and maintain proficiency in this register. The limited ability of even educated language users to perform in this register specifically has not been systematically studied but is quite obvious for anyone familiar with the Arabic language community, and anecdotal evidence abound (Beeston 1970:53; Ibrahim 1983:512; Kaye 1972:43; Saiegh-Haddad et al. 2016:3). When learning to read, students are then often trained to phonologically realize words in their case marked forms, and only later, and typically without explicit instruction, do they develop reading strategies characteristic of skilled readers in which diacritic word endings are not phonologically encoded and/or enunciated (Taouka et al. 2004).

While the register of inflected reading aloud is generally regarded as more correct than the uninflected reading aloud, it is generally inappropriate in informal situations. We can illustrate this by returning to the headline in (1). If a news anchor were to read this headline on television or radio, a highly formal, public situation where prescriptive correctness is expected, it would be read in the register of inflected reading aloud, with all case markers enunciated except in pause (7). In an informal situation, such as someone seeing this headline on their phone or in a newspaper and calling someones attention to it by reading it aloud, it would be read in the register of uninflected reading aloud, with diacritic case markers absent (8). The high-flown “performance” register of inflected reading aloud is uncalled for in this situation and would most likely be interpreted as done in jest.

1. *ʾabraz-u ʾarqām-in qiyāsiyyat-in fi tārīx-i kaʾs-i l-ʿālam*  
   most.important-NOM numbers-GEN comparable-GEN in history-GEN cup-GEN DEF-world
2. *ʾabraz ʾarqām qiyāsiyya fi tārīx kaʾs il-ʿālam*  
   most.important numbers comparable in history cup DEF-world  
      
   ‘The most important records in the history of the World Cup.’

An interesting example of inflected and uninflected reading aloud is found in Holes’ (1993) analysis of linguistic variation in speeches by the former Egyptian president Jamāl ʿAbd an‑Nāṣir (Gamal Abdel Nasser). In one of the analyzed speeches, ʿAbd an‑Nāṣir is speaking to the parliament “in the purest *fuṣħaa*” with all case and mood endings “in what might be described as ‘scriptural style’” (p. 29), i.e. what is here referred to as inflected reading aloud. On another occasion ʿAbd an‑Nāṣir gives a speech directed to the public where he takes the role of a teacher reading a text on socialism, interspersing it with explanations in Egyptian Arabic. Example (9) is an extract from the latter. Here he does not mark words for case except for the orthographic case marker *-an* in *ʿamal-an taqaddumiyy-an* ‘progressive action’, in accordance with the description of inflected reading aloud given earlier. The example is directly followed in the speech by *zayy maa ʾaal il-miṯāq* ‘as the charter says’, a commentary in Egyptian Arabic.

1. *l‑ištirākiyya hiya t‑targama as‑ṣaḥīḥa li‑kawn iṯ‑ṯawra ʿamal‑an taqaddumiyy‑an*  
   DEF‑socialism COP DEF‑translation DEF‑correct for‑being DEF‑revolution action‑ACC progressive‑ACC  
      
   ‘It is socialism which is the correct interpretation of the revolution in terms of progressive action.’ (Holes 1993:29)

Holes comments that

since what is being presented is one man’s exegesis rather than the ‘scripture’ itself (as was the case in SPE3 [the other speech]), prosodic features like *iʕraab* [case and mood inflection] which are important to the status of ‘scripture’ if it is to be accepted as such, but which carry no functional load, are unnecessary *and inappropriate*. (p. 31, emphasis here)

Both speeches are formal. However, in the latter speech ʿAbd an‑Nāṣir projects himself as taking the informal role of a teacher explaining the contents of a text, and in that role the register of inflected reading aloud, in which he is evidently highly proficient, is not appropriate.

## Recitation

Recitation is the verbatim, oral reproduction of a text from memory. Arabic texts that are memorized are typically those that are ascribed religious or cultural significance, most importantly the Quran, but also *ḥadīṯ*, prayers, poetry and song. The oral register of recitation is closely connected to the diacritized written register, in that texts that are committed to memory are printed in the diacritized register. In the register of recitation all case markers are produced, except preceding a pause. In terms of case marking, recitation is thus very similar to inflected reading aloud. It is nevertheless useful to keep the two apart due to the very different cognitive circumstances under which they are produced. In reading (undiacritized text) aloud the speaker must constantly be aware of the syntactic position and declension of each word in order to insert the correct endings. In recitation, the speaker does not need to be aware of the grammar, but need simply memorize the correct word forms. It is in other words quite possible to produce a grammatically impeccable recitation while having little or no proficiency in case as a grammatical system. It is common that sections of the Quran is memorized by children long before any knowledge of case as a grammatical system (Haeri 2003; Wagner et al. 1983). Such memorization is also common among non-Arabophone Muslims (Versteegh 2018). Recitation and inflected reading aloud are thus two distinctly different skills. Recitation also differs from inflected reading aloud in that it includes archaic forms of case inflection not normally found in inflected reading aloud, such as the pausal form *-ā* of the accusative ending *-an*, nunation on indefinite nouns with a third weak radical preceded by *a* (e.g. *hudan* هُدىً ‘guidance’) and case marking on proper names (Badawı̄ 1973; Badawi et al. 2004).

It was previously noted that texts in the undiacritized register can be read aloud in either the inflected and the uninflected register, depending on the situation. Texts associated with recitation do not show this variation when orally produced. Indeed, not producing case markers when reciting these texts or even when reading them aloud would strike many Arabic speakers as absurd. Consider (10), the first verse of Imruʾ l-Qays’ (d. 544 c.e.) *Muʿallaqa*, perhaps the most famous verse in all of classical Arabic poetry. This verse, as is the case for poetry at large, is read aloud or recited in this form, with case markers present wherever possible. Reading it instead in the uninflected register (11), which would be common for most other types of texts, is unheard of and would probably be considered very odd, even comical. The same goes for the Quran and *ḥadiṭ*. These texts are frozen, as it were, in a fully inflected surface form.

1. *qifā nabki min ḏikr-i ḥabīb-in wa-manzil-ī*  
   stop.DUA.IMP 1PL.weep of memory-GEN beloved-GEN and-lodging-GEN
2. *qifā nabki min ḏikr ḥabīb wa-manzil*  
   stop.DEA.IMP 1PL.weep of memory beloved and-lodging  
   ‘Halt, friends both! Let us weep, recalling a love and a lodging’ (translation from Arberry 2018)

There are two reasons why these texts are treated differently in terms of case marking. First, insisting on prescriptively correct renderings of these texts is an expression of reverence for the texts. Second, the syllabic structure and the associated rhythmic patterns are central aspects of memorization, and variation in case marking would alter these patterns. For some words this would also affect the position of word stress. Memorization therefore requires a fixed surface form, and the convention is for this fixed form to feature full case marking.

## Extemporaneous speech

Extemporaneous speech is unscripted oral language production. The registers discussed so far are based on written text, whether they represent the written text itself or an oral reproduction of it. There are, however, situations where a speaker is expected to use Standard Arabic but where they cannot rely on reproducing a preexisting written text and instead speak freely and extemporaneously. Such situations include lectures (where the lecturer does not strictly rely on a manuscript), panel discussions, and news interviews.

With extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic there is a problem of definition as to how much dialectal elements we accept while still calling it Standard Arabic, or conversely, how much salient Standard Arabic features it must contain. Some scholars have been of the opinion that speech that lacks case and mood markers is by definition not Standard Arabic, but rather another variety, typically referred to as Educated Spoken Arabic (Mitchell 1986). This distinction is predicated on the notion that case marking is a core, defining feature of Standard Arabic, and that if it is omitted, the result can therefore not be regarded as Standard Arabic. With this approach we could not classify text in the undiacritized register, or the reading aloud of these texts in the uninflected register, as Standard Arabic, since they also feature minimal case marking. This is clearly unsatisfactory. In this article, extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic is, following Hallberg (2016), defined as “the most formal register of Arabic extemporaneous speech by proficient, highly educated native speakers of Arabic” (p. 6). With *proficient* is here meant that it is the language as used by speakers who have experience in using Standard Arabic as a medium of oral interaction and who thereby have had the opportunity and the incentive to develop oral proficiency in this variety. Such speakers include TV and radio news reporters, news-anchors, politicians, and academics.

A number of studies have investigated the use of case markers in extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic, typically as one of a group of features (Hallberg 2016; Meiseles 1977; Parkinson 1994:@schulz\_diglossia\_1981). The material in these studies cover a time span of over fifty years and it is quite possible that linguistic norms have changed during this time, particularly with the introduction of satellite television in the nineties and the revolution of pan-Arabic news media (Hammond 2007). The studies by Meiseles and Schulz should therefore be interpreted with some caution.

What is clear from these studies is that there is a wide range of variation between individuals of how much they employ case marking in their speech. Of the 49 speakers in Schulz’s material, 17 did not use case or mood markers at all while 11 used them at least 5% of the time, pause positions excluded (Schulz 1981). Of the three educated speakers in Parkinson’s material, one made only scarce use of case marking, one used it more, and one used almost complete case marking (Parkinson 1994). These speakers were, however, handpicked from a larger pool of interviews precisely to illustrate the variation in oral performance of Standard Arabic. Hallberg (2016) found rates of case marking ranging from virtually zero case markers to almost half of all potential case markers being produced, with a mean of 7.5%, including pause positions.

From this variation, case marking in speech seems to be completely idiosyncratic. Closer inspection reveals common patterns of how the case markers that are used are distributed, with some positions being favored for case marking and others where case marking is systematically avoided. These patterns make it possible to describe the variation in case marking as being constrained by a set of rules. First, all four studies except Schulz (1981), who did not discuss this parameter, identified nouns with enclitic pronouns as being favored for case marking. Hallberg (2016) calculates the probability of a noun with an enclitic pronoun being marked for case to 43.9%, compared to the overall average of 7.5% in his corpus. Some speakers performed near or at sealing level of case marking in this position. Second, all studies except Meiseles (1977) note a strong preference to mark case where this would be orthographically represented in text, most clearly seen in the indefinite triptote accusatives (see Table 1). It should be noted that the use of orthographic case markers in speech is by no means consistent, it only stands out with higher rates of marking compared to the otherwise low rates. In fact, extemporaneous speech is the only register of Standard Arabic where orthographic case markers are not used systematically. (Clearly, this is because the speaker cannot rely on the visual input of the written text to produce them but has to rely on their own proficiency in active use of the case system.) Third, similar to the other oral Standard Arabic registers, diacritic case markers are not used in (sentence final) pause positions in extemporaneous speech. Fourth, for words with the definite article, diacritic case marking is almost completely absent. This has only been shown in Hallberg (2016), the only study to systematically compare case marking in different forms of definiteness, but there the pattern is rather striking. Diacritic case markers in positions not mentioned previously are used very sparingly, at rates far below orthographic case markers and markers on words with enclitic pronouns. These patterns together encompass the large range of inter-speaker variation in the use of case marking discussed previously, while at the same time setting a ceiling far below the prescriptive ideal. Note also that by these patterns, case inflection is in any given morphosyntactic position either not used or is optional.

As with the register of uninflected reading aloud, case marking in accordance with prescriptive grammar would be to “overdo” case marking and to break linguistic conventions. Parkinson (1994) gives a detailed description of an extemporaneous performance where the speaker uses consistent, prescriptively correct case marking on almost all nouns and adjectives that are not in pause. While this is certainly an impressive demonstration of a rare skill, it is also highly unconventional. As Parkinson (1994) notes, “this very performance could only come from someone who is somewhat withdrawn form an engaged role in the more day to day society around him” (p. 209). It is a performance by a person who either does not understand, or actively ignores, the constraints of the covert linguistic norms of registers in Standard Arabic. Even the interviewer, also an Egyptian, who had explicitly instructed the interviewee to use Standard Arabic, had to struggle to hide his annoyance.

## Overview

The previous discussion of where case marking is present in the various registers of Standard Arabic is schematically summarized in Table 2. Undiacritized writing, to the far left in the table, is undoubtedly the most important register of Standard Arabic, both quantitatively, as making up the majority of language produced in Standard Arabic, and functionally, as the register with which every literate user of the language must know to engage. Case marking in this register is very limited, being restricted to a few declensions in specific grammatical positions. The register of uninflected reading aloud can be seen as the oral manifestation of undiacritized writing, preserving the same structure of case marking, but with some optional additions of diacritic case markers, primarily in connection with enclitic pronouns. In very formal, public situations undiacritized writing is orally produced in the register of inflected reading aloud, where the reader also supplies all diacritic case markers except in sentence final pause, and to varying extents in sentence internal pause. Few persons are ever expected to perform in this register. Diacritized writing is used only in a small set of specialized text types. It is characterized by consistent use of all potential case markers and is the only register where diacritic case markers are used preceding a sentence final pause. Some texts that are written in the diacritized register are ascribed cultural and/or religious importance and are commonly committed to memory in order to be recited. All case markers that are present in the printed text are enunciated when the text is recited, except in pause. Extemporaneously spoken Standard Arabic, finally, shows the most variation in how case is marked. This is because there is no position in this register where case is systematically marked; case marking is optional where it has would be orthographically marked in writing and in connection with enclitic pronouns and is elsewhere very rare or not used at all.

Conventions of case marking in Standard Arabic. Orthographic case markers are those that in writing are representation with letters (ـاً, ـون/ـين, ـان/ـين) and diacritic case markers those that are represented only by diacritics (ـَ ـً ـُ ـٌ ـِ ـٍ). The mid section shows a more detailed set of conventions for diacritic case makers in various positions.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | writing |  | recitation | reading aloud |  | extemp |
|  | *Undiacritized* | *Diacritized* |  | *Inflected* | *Uninflected* |  |
| Orthographic | + | + | + | + | + | o |
| Diacritic | – | + | + | + | r | r |
| —*al-* | – | + | + | + | – | – |
| —encl. pron. | – | + | + | + | o | o |
| —pause | – | + | – | – | – | – |
| Domain | articles | Quran | Quran | news reports | lectures | panel disc. |
|  | fiction | *ḥadīṯ* | *ḥadīṯ* | voice-overs | informal | interviews |
|  | technical | Bible | poetry | speeches | lectures | speeches |
|  |  | child. lit. |  |  |  | lectures |
|  |  | poetry |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| + | = case is marked |
| – | = case is not marked |
| o | = case marking optional (0–100%) |
| r | = case marking rare () |

# Discussion

Several registers of Standard Arabic are governed by conventions that deviate from prescriptive grammar in prohibiting case marking in many morphosyntactic contexts. It may be argued that these conventions have arisen from the inability of most users of Standard Arabic to apply the prescriptive rules of case marking. That is, at some point Standard Arabic with full use of case marking may have been the target form, but few speakers were able to live up to this ideal and therefor had to revert to different patterns of non-use of case marking. This non-use of case marking gained legitimacy with repeated use and came to be established as a linguistic convention. Full use of case marking then seized to be the target form and came to be unsuitable for many domains and situations. Conventions of non-use of case marking thus arose as a compromise between prescriptivist ideas of linguistic correctness and the proficiency of the users of the language. This would explain the conventions whereby recitation maintains full case marking. In recitation, the speakers do not themselves apply the rules in online language production, but reproduce a memorized string of word forms. Lack of proficiency in the case system is therefore of little hindrance for use of prescriptively correct case marking in recitation. Whatever the historical background of these conventions, they are now firmly established in their own right and are, synchronically, an integral part of Standard Arabic.

The use of the appropriate register for a given situation and domain, with their respective conventions of case marking, is central to communicative competence (Hymes 1967) in Standard Arabic. In his classical article on diglossia, of which Arabic is the primary example, Ferguson (1959) emphasized the importance of knowing when to use the High and Low varieties, lest one be an “object of ridicule” (p. 239). The same could be said about the more granular level of registers of Standard Arabic. This includes knowing when to use case markers and, equally important, when not to use them. Several examples of this have been presented in this article. We may, with a measure of simplification, interpret prescriptive grammar as stating that all nouns and adjectives should be marked for case, and that diacritical case markers should not be enunciated in pause. This prescription aptly captures conventions of case marking in diacritized writing, recitation, and inflected reading aloud. These registers are therefore generally considered to represent “correct” language in the language community and are the forms trained and promoted in formal education. For the undiacritized written register, prescriptive grammar captures conventions of case marking only with the major caveat that diacritics are not used. This in effect prohibits case inflection on the vast majority of words. It is nevertheless usually considered to comply with prescriptive grammar since diacritic case marking is conceptualized as being “invisible”, not absent, as described in the introduction. For uninflected reading aloud and extemporaneous speech on the other hand, conventions of case marking are unmistakably in conflict with prescriptive grammar. They are both governed by wide-reaching negative conventions of case marking in highly frequent situations and they generate word forms that are impossible in prescriptively correct Standard Arabic. Complete use of case marking in these registers produces forms that are at odds with linguistic conventions. The interviewee described in Parkinson (1994), referred to previously, is a case in point.

The identification of registers of Standard Arabic and their different conventions of case marking is therefore of great importance in teaching. Given the morphological differences of registers, it is important that the registers that are the target form in language instruction are identified, that their selection as the target form is motivated, and that their characteristics are understood. Standard language ideology is an obstacle in this regard, especially with regard to the registers of uninflected reading aloud and extemporaneous speech. These two registers sharply deviate form prescriptive grammar and therefore generally regarded as sub-par Standard Arabic, in the Arabic language community, despite them being the socially excepted, and indeed the required form of Arabic in their respective domains and situations. By a process of erasure (Irvine et al. 2001) their status as independent registers go unnoticed, and if their existence is acknowledged they are explained away as bad language. This makes them them unavailable as target forms in language instruction.

In introductory language teaching the aim is typically for learners to acquire basic proficiency in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and for this the unavailability unavailability of commonly used registers of Standard Arabic is particularly problematic. In the acquisition of reading skills, reading aloud is a first and probably necessary step in acquiring phonological encoding skills that are then used in silent reading.[[5]](#footnote-5) Skilled reading of Arabic is generally assumed not to involve phonological encoding of vocalic case and mood markers (Stetkevych 2006; Bateson 1967; Saiegh-Haddad et al. 2016; Taouka et al. 2004). The register of uninflected reading aloud is therefor the natural target register when acquisition of reading proficiency is the aim, since it is a phonological form of the text that is reflected in skilled silent reading. It is also the form of reading aloud used in situations in which most persons will realistically find themselves. In school books from the first grade in the Arabic speaking world as well as in textbooks for entry-level Arabic courses at the university level in non-Arabic speaking countries, it is however the register of inflected reading aloud that is trained and promoted.[[6]](#footnote-6) Training beginning readers in inflected reading aloud risks establishing a cognitively costly habit of phonological computation of vocalic case markers that must later be inhibited for effective silent reading, as well as in most situations where reading aloud is called for. Inflected reading aloud with full case inflection is a specialist skill of extraordinary circumstances and is of little relevance for general reading proficiency.

Also in modern Arabic linguistics, uninflected reading aloud has generally not been regarded as its own register with its own set of norms and conventions, but rather as a sub-standard Arabic resulting from a failure to perform in the prescriptively correct register of inflected reading aloud. Failure to produce diacritic case markers have therefore often been considered a reading error indicative of lacking reading skills (Abu-Rabia 1998; Abu-Rabia 2001; Ibrahim et al. 2007). Ibrahim et al. (2007), for example, found that for Arab children there was an unexpectedly weak correlation between phonological ability and reading proficiency. They concluded from this that the Arabic script poses particular difficulties for the development of reading skills. However, the errors made by the Arabic speaking children in the reading task “were mostly inaccuracies related to using false affixes (diacritics or letters) that generally represent the syntactic roles in the sentence and not false identification of the word itself” (p. 312). Similarily, in a review of research on reading Arabic orthography (Abu-Rabia et al. 2006) we read that “reading accuracy in Arabic requires vowelizing word endings according to their grammatical function in the sentence, which requires advanced phonological and syntactical ability” (p. 321). The author further advises that reading aloud tests meant to asses reading skills should focus on reading accuracy rather than reading comprehension, since the do not correlate in Arabic. Reading proficiency, even for children, has in other words been measured in relation to the specialist “performance” register of inflected reading aloud, and not in relation to the functionally more relevant register of uninflected reading aloud. Taouka et al. (2004) and Saiegh-Haddad et al. (2016) are examples of experimental studies of reading proficiency where production of case markers did not effect proficiency scores.

Writing correct Standard Arabic requires skills in applying the case system, but only the small part of the case system that is orthographically represented. By and large, this involves being able to identify direct objects in the triptote and defective declensions, and subjects in the sound masculine plural and dual declensions. In writing this can of course be done while editing, so that the use of these endings need not necessarily me mastered in direct online language production. Other syntactic positions and declensions can simply be ignored in terms of case marking in the undiacritized register. Indeed, students (and teachers) should be made aware that the conventions of the undiacritized register prohibits the use of diacritic case markers. Adding them can be regarded as poor style, or even a grammatical error. The diacritized register, like inflected reading aloud, is a specialist skill with highly limited domains of application and is, again, quite of limited relevance for general writing skills.

Fully developed oral proficiency in Standard Arabic requires no or minimal use of case marking. There is room for stylistic variation by adding case markers in speech, but it is not something that all speakers employ. The fact that proficient speakers very rarely add prescriptively incorrect case markers in their speech (Hallberg 2016) indicates that they default to using words that are unmarked case. To this they add inflection only if they are comfortable doing so, which for most speakers is only rarely the case. Speech with no case inflection is therefore a suitable target form for Standard Arabic oral proficiency training. This includes uninfected forms of words with enclitic pronouns, as in (6), and use of the default *-īn*/*-ayn* endings for the sound masculine plural and the dual declensions respectively. To this unmarked base orthographic case markers (*-ān*, *-ūn*, and *-ayn*) and case markers in connection wit enclitic pronouns can optionally be added.

In listening, finally, proficiency in the case system is of little use. Since case markers are superfluous for syntactic disambiguation, comprehending the register of inflected reading aloud, for example in news reports or in recitation, is not reliant on identifying case markers. It does however require the listener to accommodate for the difference in word forms and the differences in intonation and word stress that the additional case marking morphemes entail. Listening comprehension in the fully inflected registers is therefore a matter of accommodating for variation in form, rather than identifying the grammatical properties of these forms.

# Conclusion

Case marking has traditionally been regarded as a core part of Standard Arabic grammar. The non-use of case marking has therefore been interpreted as an *ad-hoc* simplification of Standard Arabic and has not attracted much scholarly attention. When looking at Standard Arabic in actual use, spoken and written, one finds that in most context case inflection is limited to a few specific morphosyntactic situations. This article has argued that rather than conceptualized lack of case inflection resulting of a process of omission, uninflected forms are best seen as the default to which case inflection is then in certain situations added. Where case inflection is added differs between registers, and for a grammar of the (non)-use of case inflection we therefore need a typology of registers of Standard Arabic. A suggestion of such a typology was presented in this article. Regarding case inflection in Standard Arabic as an addition to an uninflected default makes for a grammatical descriptive system that (a) is theoretically and pedagogically economical; (b) reflects observed usage; and (c) is more in-line with cognitive processes involved in language processing and production.

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1. These registers are often referred to as “vowelled” and “unvowelled”. These designations are somewhat problematic in that the set of diacritics represent more than only vowels (consonant gemination and nunation) and that it conflates phonetic entities (vowels) with graphical entities (diacritics). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scholars have identified and documented a variety the of undiacritized register not covered in the system developed here: Informal Written Arabic, text that at its base is Standard Arabic but in which adherence to certain specifically Standard Arabic features, such as case marking, is relaxed (Meiseles 1979; Belnap et al. 2003). This register is described as being primarily used in personal written correspondence, the social function of which is today increasingly filled by electronic communication in social media and text messing written in the dialects. Orthographies for dialectal writing are becoming more and more conventionalized (Palfreyman et al. 2003) and dialectal writing is gradually gaining legitimacy in a number of domains (Doss et al. 2013; Kindt et al. 2016; Høigilt et al. 2017). There is thus an emerging binary division of labor where informal writing is in the dialects and thus unbound by prescriptive norms of Standard Arabic, whilst formal writing is in Standard Arabic with prescriptively correct language as the target form. In this system, Informal Written Arabic is marginalized. Informal writing in the dialect, which takes its place, is not a register of Standard Arabic and thus fall outside of the scope of this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.bbc.com/arabic/sports-44130063>. Accessed May 25, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See for instance around the three and a half minute mark in the episode of AlJazeera’s program *Al‑ittijāh al‑muʿākis*, broadcast 26 December 2017, available on AlJazeera’s YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9Yec92LOyo>). Here the speaker goes from speaking extemporaneously with Standard Arabic syntax and lexicon but no case markers, to reading aloud from a piece of paper, enunciating only case markers that are orthographically represented in the text and diacritic case markers on nouns with enclitic pronouns (some of the latter are hyper-correct). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On the role phonological encoding in silent reading, see Pollatsek (2015) and Rayner et al. (2012:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For schoolbooks in Arabic speaking countries, see for instant the Arabic textbook for first grade in Palestine (Ḥasan et al. 2004), Egypt (Farj et al. 2011), and Syria (Ḥūš et al. 2011). University-level textbooks in English using this approach include Frangieh (2012), Schulz et al. (2000), and Alosh (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)