

The Grammar of 'Aqidah

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I can't tell you how happy I was when I came across this entry by the publishers of the **Oxford English Dictionary**:

[Are there words that contain the letter 'q' without a 'u' following it?](#)

The answer is a resounding "Yes!" The reason I mention this is that a few years ago I noticed that several Muslim authors, book publishers and websites (mainly, if not exclusively, of the "Salafi" persuasion) had dispensed with the widely accepted spelling of 'aqidah (i.e. creed / doctrine / dogma) and instead were spelling it 'aqueedah. I was both dumbfounded and embarrassed! Now I had even more books that I had to hide from non-Muslims! Keep in mind that the issue here is not their use of the double "e" (which can have its benefits in pronunciation in spite of the fact that it's rather unsightly), nor the use of the terminal "h" to represent a *taa marbutah* (which I prefer simply for distinction's sake). Rather, the issue is their use of "qu" in lieu of a lone "q" to ostensibly represent the Arabic letter *qaf*.

It seems to me that anyone familiar with the basic rules of English pronunciation would immediately see the flaw in this newfangled spelling of 'aqueedah. Indeed, spelling the word this way renders a pronunciation of *akwida* - which comes nowhere near the original Arabic pronunciation. When the letters "qu" are used in English (a spelling and pronunciation inherited from Latin), they almost always produce the "kw" sound. A few obvious examples are quick (*kwik*), quit (*kwit*) and quart (*kwôrt*). The only exception to the "kw" pronunciation of "qu" that I'm aware of is the word "queue" (*kyü*). However, this is a rare exception and only proves what I mention below: that almost all rules of grammar are subject to exceptions.

I recall reading an article on a "Salafi" website, which I am now unable to locate, in which the author did his level best to explain why the letter "q" can only be used with a "u" immediately following. My guess is that some over zealous "Salafi" (who seem to have a knack for learning about a rule - real or alleged, understanding it simplistically, taking it absolutely and then trying to force it on others) was sitting in his **English Grammar 101** course when the professor happened to mention that in the English language the letter "q" is never used unless followed by a "u". This well-intentioned "Grammar Wahabi", in his self-righteous zeal, then decided to take it upon himself to demonstrate that everyone else was wrong, while he - with his newly found knowledge - was right. How many times have we seen this before?

Yes, it is true that in the English language the letter "q" is usually followed by a "u". However, this is a general rule which, like most general rules, has a few exceptions. Indeed, the mistake of the anonymous "Grammar Wahabi" who started using 'aqueedah was in assuming that there are no exceptions to the aforementioned rule of grammar. A wise man once said, "Assumption - the Mother of All Screw Ups." One of the most common exceptions to this rule of spelling is when foreign words are incorporated into the English language. According to the most authoritative sources (including the **Oxford English Dictionary** and the **Encyclopedia Britannica**) there are words in the English language in which a "u" does not follow a "q", all but one of

these words having reached English from another language (mainly Chinese or Arabic). Actually, my first thought when reading the article which tried to justify the use of the *'aqueedah* spelling was to surmise that the general rules of spelling simply don't apply when incorporating foreign words into the English language, since *Qatar*, *qadi* and *Qinq* can be found in any decent English dictionary or encyclopedia.

So it seems that our proverbial "Grammar Wahabi", after learning a rule of grammar, could no longer see the forest because of the trees. If he understood basic English pronunciation and had realized that the *sine qua non* of transliteration is to make a word written in a foreign script or language pronounceable in the English language, then he probably would not have fallen into this *'aqueedah* error. Well at least he's not just another Wahabi with *'aqueedah* problems, since this time they're of a different sort!

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