



THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN DEVELOPING NEW MEANING IN ARABIC LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The development of information and communication technology, especially through social media such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, has brought significant influence on the Arabic language. This study aims to examine the role of social media in generating new meanings in Arabic through linguistic phenomena such as neologisms, word meaning changes, as well as the use of creative local dialects. Using a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach, data is collected from new terms that appear on social media and supported by related academic literature. The results showed that social media became an important medium in the birth of new vocabulary such as *hashtag*, *influencer*, and *selfie*, as well as meaning changes in traditional words such as *viral* and *visually appealing*. This phenomenon reflects the linguistic creativity of the younger generation, the influence of globalization, and the dynamics of Arabic language adaptation to digital culture. However, the massive influx of foreign terms also poses a challenge to the preservation of classical Arabic. This study confirms that social media acts as a major agent in the evolution of contemporary Arabic.

Keywords: Arabic Language Evolution, Social Media Linguistics, Linguistic Creativity, Language Adaptation, Globalization.

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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

The development of information and communication technology has had a significant impact on various aspects of life, including language. One of the most striking manifestations of the digital revolution is the emergence of social media as a major platform for global communication. Social media has not only changed the way humans interact, but also opened up new spaces for the evolution of languages, including Arabic, which is known to have a long history and is spoken by more than 400 million speakers around the world.(Albantani, 2019)

Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook have become important mediums for Arabic speakers to express ideas, share information and build communities. Interaction in these digital spaces encourages creative and dynamic language use, including the creation of new terms, shifts in meaning, and blending.(Anwar, 2017)

In this context, new linguistic phenomena have emerged such as Arabizi-i.e. the use of Latin letters and numbers to write Arabic on social media, as well as Arabish, which is a combination of Arabic and English in one sentence or discourse. On the other hand, terms such as mu'aththir (مؤثر), which traditionally means 'influencer' in a religious or cultural context, have expanded in meaning in the digital realm to refer to popular figures on social media who influence public opinion. These phenomena show that social media is a catalyst that accelerates the transformation of meaning and form in modern Arabic.

The influence of social media on Arabic can be identified in three main aspects: (1) the emergence of new vocabulary that represents digital phenomena, (2) the adaptation of foreign terms that do not yet have official equivalents in Arabic, and (3) the increased use of local dialects that enrich Arabic linguistic diversity in daily communication. (Munawwir, 2018)

Based on these phenomena, this study aims to examine in depth how social media plays a role in the formation and dissemination of new meanings in Arabic. Different from previous studies that tend to focus on linguistic changes in general or the influence of foreign languages on Arabic, this research offers a unique contribution through the approach of digital semiotic analysis and contemporary sociolinguistic studies. (Ali, A., & Muhdlor, 1996) By actually observing language practices on social media, this study is expected to provide new insights into how modern Arab society makes use of technology in shaping its linguistic identity, as well as how Arabic adapts to the challenges of globalisation and digitalisation.

METHOD

منهج

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. This approach is suitable for exploring language phenomena that emerge in digital communication, particularly the development of new meanings in Arabic as shaped by social media interaction. The goal is to understand how language adapts and evolves in virtual communities through in-depth analysis. (Amin, N. F., Garancang, S., & Abunawas, 2023)

The data in this research are categorized into two types first Primary Data is Arabic expressions, phrases, or terms that emerge on various social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook) and are used by native or fluent Arabic-speaking users and Secondary Data is Scholarly literature, articles, and academic journals that discuss the evolution of Arabic, semantic shifts, or the influence of digital media on language use.

Data were collected through the following techniques (1) Online Observation: Actively monitoring and documenting posts, hashtags, comments, and language usage trends by Arabic-speaking users on selected social media platforms (2) Documentation: Recording examples of linguistic expressions that reflect emerging meanings or usage patterns. (3) Semi-structured Interviews (if feasible): Conducted with selected Arabic speakers or language experts to gain additional perspectives and confirm interpretations. (Rafi, 1012)

Data were selected based on the following criteria The expression or term must be relatively new or show a shift from conventional Arabic meaning, it must appear in multiple user contexts or accounts, indicating widespread usage, Priority was given to posts with high engagement (likes, shares, comments) as indicators of relevance or popularity.

Three techniques were used to analyze the data (1) Content Analysis: Identifying and categorizing new terms and their frequency of use (2) Semantic Analysis: Examining the shift in

meaning of certain Arabic terms within specific social media contexts (3) Contextual Analysis: Interpreting the meaning of expressions within their digital interaction.

To ensure validity, a triangulation method was applied by Comparing findings across multiple platforms and user communities, cross-referencing with literature to confirm whether the identified expressions represent new developments or existing variants, Consulting Arabic language experts or native speakers, when possible, to validate interpretations.

The literature review serves as a fundamental method to Ground the analysis in existing theoretical and empirical research on Arabic language development and digital communication, provide a comparative framework for interpreting new terms within broader linguistic, semantic, and sociolinguistic contexts, ensure that the research contributes to and aligns with academic discussions on language evolution in the digital age. This methodology enables the researcher to capture both the empirical realities of Arabic as used online and the conceptual understanding offered by scholarly discourse. (H Tarigan., 2011)

RESULT | نتائج

This study found that the development of social media has encouraged the emergence of new vocabulary and phrases in Arabic. This phenomenon is the result of interactions between diverse social media users as well as language dynamics that continue to evolve along with changes in technology and popular culture. This adaptation process includes not only the creation of new words, but also phonetic transformations, changes in meaning, as well as the evolution of syntactic structures: first, the Invention of New Vocabulary and Expressions such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok platforms become the main space for the emergence of Arabic neologisms. These new words are often influenced by international terms that are phonetically Arabized, such as the use of the terms “ستوريات” (stories) or “فولو” (follow), which reflect sound adjustments without losing the original meaning. Second, Changes in Meaning in the Digital Context In addition to vocabulary additions, some traditional Arabic words have shifted in meaning. For example, the word “صاحب” (sahib, friend) which in a digital context can mean ‘follower’ on social media, shows the strong influence of virtual context on lexical semantics. (H, Saputra, MARSIAH M, 2001)

Social media plays a significant role in changing the way Arabic is spoken, both in lexical, phonological, and pragmatic terms. Language innovation in the digital space often encourages the simplification of word forms, the use of abbreviations, and the use of emojis as substitutes for verbal communication. This creativity reflects a new domain of language use that is more expressive and efficient.(Reflianto, 2018) The use of Arabic on social media shows adaptation to increasingly common global terms. This adaptation includes the process of loanwords, the formation of new affixes, and morphological transformations to make foreign terms more compatible with the Arabic grammatical system. This phenomenon shows the flexibility of Arabic in facing the challenges of linguistic globalization.

Some of the main factors causing changes in Arabic on social media include Digital globalization, which accelerates the influx of foreign terms, Cross-cultural interaction, which enriches users' socio-linguistic references, The need for short and fast expressions, which encourages simplification of language forms, The dominance of popular culture, which shifts traditional meanings towards contemporary contexts.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

The phenomenon of social media development has had a significant impact on linguistic dynamics, including in the realm of Arabic. In this study, it is found that platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are not only a medium of communication, but also a space for intense linguistic creation. The changes include the emergence of new vocabulary, changes in the meaning of traditional words, and the emergence of simpler and more creative forms of communication. This process reflects a new sociolinguistic reality in the Arab world that cannot be separated from the influence of globalization, the flow of popular culture, and the central role played by influencers and online celebrities.

One of the main strengths of these findings is their ability to link these dynamics with previous literature on language change in digital societies. Terms such as الميمات (mīmyāt), كاره (kārih), and المؤثر (al-mu'aththir) reflect the phonetic and semantic integration of global terms into Arabic structures. This process is in line with the concepts of "loanwords" and "code-mixing" that have been widely studied in contemporary linguistics, especially in the context of languages under dominant cultural pressure such as English.

From the perspective of neologism theory, this phenomenon reflects the natural tendency of a language to respond to the communicative needs of its society. Neologisms, as a form of linguistic adjustment to new social phenomena, have been an integral part of the growth of modern Arabic. In many cases, this process is done through two main approaches: phonetic transliteration, as in the case of the words سيلفي (selfie), هاشتاق (hashtag), or إيموجي (emoji); and semantic or cultural translation, although this second approach tends to be less popular. This shows that Arabic is undergoing a process of flexible adaptation, while at the same time facing the challenge of maintaining fidelity to its cultural roots. (Giantika., 2019)

The changing meanings of words in the digital context are also highlighted. Words such as طاش which previously meant 'soaring' are now used to express something viral. Meanwhile, the word نجم, which used to refer to stars in an astronomical context, has now shifted its meaning to become a symbol for social media celebrities. This reinforces the argument that language meaning is fluid and highly dependent on the socio-cultural context in which it is used. This phenomenon is known in semantic studies as semantic shift or meaning extension, where the meaning of a word develops as its social function changes. (Atabik Ali., n.d.)

Arabic in the digital space has also undergone a process of simplification, both in structure and message delivery. The use of Arabizi - a combination of Latin letters and numbers to represent Arabic letters - such as "omri" (عُمري) or "habibi" (حبيبي) demonstrates both linguistic efficiency and creativity. On the one hand, this phenomenon enables communication across technologies and devices; but on the other hand, it has the potential to erode the younger generation's ability to write and read Arabic formally. (John W. Creswell., 1994) Previous literature has also underscored that languages subjected to shortening and code-mixing risk losing their internal cohesion and formal structure in the long run.

One important aspect of this discussion is the central role that digital influencers and celebrities play in spreading new terms. They are not only public figures, but also agents of linguistic change. Through viral content, new terms are introduced, repeated, and then adopted by a wide digital community. This shows that language change in the digital age does not always come from official language institutions, but is instead driven by the participatory dynamics of virtual communities. Celebrities such as popular YouTube users or Arab TikTokers,

for example, have the power to make a phrase or jargon part of the everyday lexicon. Social media thus serves as an accelerator for the dissemination of new languages. (Azhar, 2007)

This dynamic cannot be separated from the context of globalization. In many cases, foreign terms are adopted directly without translation. This is evident in the dominance of technology terms or internet trends derived from English. Some scholars criticize that this creates a linguistic imbalance, where Arabic loses its terminological autonomy. However, others argue that language is inherently dynamic, and the success of a language lies in its ability to absorb and adapt foreign elements without losing its basic identity. This emphasizes the dichotomy between language purification versus pragmatic functionality.

In this context, there is also the term لغة هجينة (hybrid language), which is a form of language that combines local and global, formal and informal elements. Arabizi is the most striking example of this phenomenon. Arabizi allows users to express their Arabic identity while still participating in global discourse. However, the challenge at hand is how to balance the use of these modern linguistic forms with efforts to preserve standard Arabic as the cultural heritage and collective identity of the ummah.

Previous researchers such as Suleiman (2011) and Albirini (2016) have also highlighted that Arabic is in tension between modernization and preservation of tradition. (Ghazali, 2016) The findings in this study reinforce this view by adding a contemporary dimension, namely that linguistic transformations today are driven by digital technologies and disseminated through rapid social networks. In this regard, the social media phenomenon not only creates new vocabulary, but also redefines how Arab society understands and uses its language.

What is interesting to note is how this linguistic shift mirrors a larger social transformation. Changing lifestyles, cultural values, and instantaneous communication patterns are directly reflected in the language structures used. For example, the use of طفش (bored) in the context of memes showcases how expressions of emotion are packaged in an easily shareable, humorous format. This is concrete evidence that language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of expression of identity and emotion. (Fitriyah, 2020)

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However, there is an important caveat regarding the sustainability of these linguistic trends. Reliance on foreign terms and digitized forms of expression risks blurring the lines between standard and colloquial varieties of Arabic. As a result, there could be a generational disconnect in the acquisition of formal Arabic. An earlier study by Ryding (2006) showed that

the decline of modern standard Arabic (MSA) proficiency among young Arabs is largely due to the dominance of local dialects and media that do not favor formal forms. (Berkowski, 2016)

To address this challenge, a balanced educational approach is required. Educational institutions should be able to integrate the digital linguistic phenomenon into the Arabic learning curriculum wisely. In other words, the language used in social media should not be positioned as a threat, but rather as an opportunity to teach actual and relevant linguistic dynamics. This approach also opens up space for contextualized and digital culture-based language learning, which is certainly more attractive to the younger generation.

The point is changes in Arabic on social media are a reflection of the intersecting dynamics of globalization, digitalization and popular culture. The findings in this study make an important contribution to the understanding of how Arabic, as a language with a long tradition, is able to adapt to the challenges of the times without completely losing its identity. The role of influencers and content virality proved to be the main motors in this transformation. However, such changes must be accompanied by an awareness of the importance of formal language preservation and a critical effort in sorting out linguistic adaptations that enrich rather than damage the integrity of the Arabic language. Further studies that more explicitly compare these results with previous research are needed, so that their validity and contribution to the development of contemporary Arabic linguistics can be further strengthened. (Harahap, M.A., 2020)

CONCLUSSION | خاتمة

Based on the discussion that has been done, it can be concluded that Social media is the main driver of Arabic language change through the emergence of new terms and shifts in meaning, which reflects the flexibility of Arabic in responding to technological developments and global culture, The younger generation plays a central role in creating new linguistic trends as a form of expression of modern identity through social media, Emerging language innovations bring challenges to the preservation of classical Arabic, especially due to the dominance of foreign terms and shifts in traditional meanings, This phenomenon shows the interaction between globalization and local adaptation, where Arabic continues to undergo transformation without completely losing its cultural roots, The practical implication is that Arabic language learning needs to adjust its approach to remain relevant to the times, while maintaining the authenticity of the language. Thus, social media is not only a medium of communication, but also an important agent in the transformation of the Arabic language that demands innovation as well as awareness of the importance of preserving linguistic identity.

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