



The Metadiscursive Construction of Computer-mediated Discourse in Arabic Newspaper Articles

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Received:7-11-2023 Revised:18-12-2023 Accepted: 4-4-2024
Published: 20-4-2024

DOI: 10.21608/jssa.2024.247201.1571

Volume 25 Issue 3 (2024) Pp.74-102

Abstract

The language of Computer-mediated Discourse (CMD) can deviate from standard language in many ways. With the spread of the Internet in the Arab world, Arab speakers, especially purists have come to view this deviation as a threat to Arabic language, culture and identity. Arab newspapers and other media have thus long tended to portray CMD in a negative light. This metadiscourse (discourse about discourse) is worthy of research since it is a tool not only for reflecting attitudes and beliefs, but also for shaping ideologies. In this study, a number of articles discussing the effect of the Internet on Arabic language were gathered from online Arabic newspapers from 2016 till 2022. Drawing upon methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992, 1995), the sample articles are analyzed with the aim of investigating how traditional media portrays CMD. By examining this metadiscourse, the study seeks to find out the main themes in the discursive representation of the language of CMD in Arab newspaper articles. A number of salient themes were detected including primarily those that portray CMD as a threat to Arabic language and link it to the deterioration of linguistic proficiency among young people and their loss of identity. The study points, however, to a number of counter voices which acknowledge the advantages of CMD as an innovative form of communication. Therefore, the metadiscursive representation of CMD reveals a relationship between this discourse and a number of conflicting ideologies and points to a significant sociocultural change in the Arab world.

Keywords: Arabic language ; Arabic newspapers ; Computer-mediated discourse (CMD) ; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) ; Ideology; Internet language ; metadiscourse ; metadiscursive construction

1. Introduction

Computer-mediated discourse (henceforth CMD) is defined as “the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers” (Herring, 2001, p. 612). Several terms have emerged that refer to this register such as ‘Netspeak’, ‘Netlingo’, ‘textese’ and ‘weblish’ (Thurlow, 2006). It could be in the form of emails, chats, discussion groups, blogs, etc. The features of CMD usually deviate from standard language due to the need for brevity, speed and creativity in this medium (Verheijen, 2015). Crystal (2001) describes the language of the Internet as “a distinctive variety of language, with characteristics closely related to the properties of its technological context as well as to the intentions, activities, and (to some extent) personalities of the users” (p. 225). Some positive attitudes have emerged towards CMD acknowledging its usefulness and practicality as a simplified language rendering communication more efficient and promoting creative and innovative language adaptation. According to Crystal (2001), “people have learned so quickly to adapt their language to meet the demands of the new situations, and exploit the potentials of the new medium so creatively to form new areas of expression” (p. 242).

On the other hand, more conservative views have started accusing this new medium of communication of degrading the language. For these, “it is language in general, and individual languages, in particular, which are going to end up as Internet casualties” (Crystal, 2001, p. 1-2). This has led to a generally negative portrayal of CMD particularly in traditional media. This wave of criticism was also accompanied by metadiscursively linking it to the communicative and linguistic ineptitude of young people (Thurlow, 2006).

Technological development has impacted every field in our lives and the Arab world is no exception. With the rise of the Internet, several critical accounts have emerged blaming the Internet for the so-called deterioration of Arabic language. This has led a host of Arab linguists especially purists to warn against the dangers to standard Arabic, particularly due to the replacement by English language by younger generations. Some have even warned against threats posed by this phenomenon to Arab identity and Islamic civilization in its entirety (Taha, 2015). However, a few positive counter-voices can be detected that view CMD as a practical and innovative means of communication and an inevitable form of language change that should be harnessed in order to promote Arabic language and modernize it.

Given the increasing ubiquity of CMD and the recurrent complaints about its impact on Arabic language in particular, this study examines a selected sample of Arabic newspaper articles published in a number of Arab countries and tackling the effect of the Internet on Arabic language over a six-year period (2016-2022). Using methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992, 1995), the aim of the research is to point out the most recurrent metadiscursive themes in this metadiscourse about Arabic CMD in order to find out how it is portrayed in traditional media.

2. Review of the literature

Thurlow (2006) maintains that “the study of metalanguage is concerned with investigating what people know and say about their own and other people’s language practices” (p. 669). He argues that studying this metalanguage is of great importance not only for guiding people’s linguistic practices, but also for offering insights about how people view the role of language and communication in their lives. Thurlow (2006), therefore studied the popular framing of CMD by examining an international corpus of print media accounts of language-use online using a combined folk linguistics and CDA approach. His findings point to a misrepresentations and exaggerations in the metadiscursive media depiction of CMD.

Hyland (2017) argues that “language not only refers to the world, concerned with exchanging information of various kinds, but also to itself” (p. 1). The term ‘metadiscourse’ has thus emerged to counterbalance the focus on texts as conveying mere propositional content, emphasizing the function of features in a text that help organize it and make it intelligible to a given audience (Hyland, 2022). According to Hyland (2017), metadiscourse usually focuses on a corpus of written language, in particular specialized varieties. It is more reader-oriented rather than bearing propositional content, with features varying according to genre and across different languages. To study discourse, researchers should adopt a discourse-analytic approach that examines potential metadiscourse items in context. A large corpus of texts is often preferable to yield results that can relatively be generalized (Hyland, 2017).

Linguistic scholarship on CMD dates back to the early years of the internet and was spurred by linguists being intrigued by this new medium of communication. Several scholars have attempted to examine the metadiscourse about Internet language in

various languages in an attempt to characterize public opinion towards this emerging genre.

The first wave of CMD research tended to portray it as ‘anonymous’, ‘fragmented’ and ‘spoken-like’ (Herring, 2001, p. 2). The popular conception of CMD as ‘less correct’ and coherent than standard language due to limitations imposed by the medium continued to prevail till the 90s. Squires (2010), however, points out that accounts about CMD as a register have always been based on standard language ideology and have tended to overestimate the distinctive features of internet language including acronyms, abbreviations, and respellings. Whereas Crystal (2001) had referred to CMD as ‘Netspeak’ implying that language use online has a unified form, he later acknowledged that language use on the internet is diverse (Crystal, 2011).

Some pioneering studies focused on the ways CMD compensates for cues present in face-to-face interactions (Reid, 1991), while others studied the effects of this medium on language change over time (Herring, 1999). Later studies argued against the popular assumption that CMD causes language deterioration and provided evidence that it promotes linguistic creativity and innovation (Segerstad, 2002).

Relatively few studies have tackled Arabic CMD, as opposed to other European languages, particularly English. According to Daoudi (2017), “as far as Arabic is concerned, research on CMC or CMD has barely begun and the number of studies is very limited” (p. 12). Unfortunately, most of the literature in this respect is in the form of articles mainly based on critical accounts or subjective speculations and opinions rather than actual academic research with sufficient data and sound theoretical foundations. Several authors who tackled the topic also tended to establish a strong link between CMD and Western war on Islam in general and the Quran in particular (Sajady & Amidwar, 2011).

A number of studies were devoted to studying the effect of the Internet on Arabic language. Hayasat (2008) pointed out the challenges posed by the growing use of the Internet to the Arabic language including the deterioration of the language among younger generations and the lack of Arabic content online. He thus suggested taking action through language planning, as well as developing the language to serve technology. Similarly, Al-Jarf (2019) concluded with several recommendations to help maintain Arabic language amid the growing impact of social media use.

Taha (2015), on the other hand, used three focus groups to investigate attitudes of Arab college students to Arabizi, a mixture of Arabic and English usually used online with Arabic words typed in Roman characters. The study revealed that most respondents preferred Arabizi for being more expressive and trendy than standard Arabic. Rashid (2020) also attempted to identify the challenges faced by Arabic language on social media and recommended taking concerted action from language assemblies and research centres to Arabicize social networks and create audiovisual Arabic content.

A similar study was conducted by Darwish (2017) who used a questionnaire to investigate the type of language used by Arab youth on social media and their reasons for preference. His findings revealed that Arab youth prefer Arabizi for more practicality and better self-expression. The researcher warned against the so-called 'Language Attrition' (LA) undergone by Arabic due to the use of CMD by Arab youth and drew attention to the urgent need for awareness campaigns against the potential harms to language.

Tala (2023) also investigated this phenomenon and concluded by recommending that several measures must be taken to protect Arabic language by educational, media and academic institutions in order to raise awareness, promote Arabic language online and protect it against the invasion of Western culture.

Very few studies in the Arab world have acknowledged CMD as a form of language change that should be normalized. For instance, Edam (2019) studied the effect of social media platforms, especially Facebook on everyday language use by Iraqi youth using qualitative methods. The findings point to a strong connection between the daily interactions of young people and the innovative language used on social media which was found to reflect the political, social and economic atmosphere of the community in question.

Using a corpus of Arabic CMD, Daoudi (2017) suggested a new term, *e-Arabic* to refer to a newly emerging variety which is created and maintained by Arab internet users as a speech community. This new variety is meant as a departure from the traditional dichotomy of standard versus colloquial Arabic. She argues that "the widespread use of CMC in the dialect as well as in e-Arabic, despite resistance to it, shows [...] a transformation that has happened in the Arab World at various levels" (Daoudi, 2017, p. 21). She recommended that Arabic sociolinguistics must take into

account the changes entailed by the Internet revolution and reconsider expanding their scope to encompass this new variety.

Given the concerns voiced by the above studies, and the highly controversial nature of the yet under-researched Arabic CMD, the present study thus attempts to examine how Arabic CMD is portrayed in newspaper articles and identify the main themes contributing to its metadiscursive construction by applying CDA to a sample of selected newspaper articles.

3. Data and Methodology

This section describes the data of the research and the theoretical framework employed.

3.1 Data

The data for the present research was collected from online Arabic newspapers using the search terms *لغة الإنترنت – لغة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي – تأثير الإنترنت على اللغة – اللغة العربية والإنترنت* (*Internet language, social media language, effect on Internet on language and Arabic language and Internet*). Results were filtered to include only newspaper articles in particular, rather than other genres. The articles yielded by the search were closely examined and irrelevant ones were subsequently discarded. The dataset includes a number of 20 articles published over a six-year period between 2016 and 2022 covering the representation of CMD and its effect on Arabic language. The total corpus word count is 18,099. Table 1 includes a detailed account of the selected articles.

Table 1

Detailed Data Description

No.	Title	Newspaper	Country	Date
1.	عربي "لغة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تهدد عرش العربية" https://rb.gy/159pq	AlSharq	Qatar	4 Feb, 2016
2.	«العربي» أخطر ما يهدد العربية https://rb.gy/dj5ty	AlIthad	UAE	23 March, 2016
3.	وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.. مـرآة تعكس عقود اللغة الأم https://rb.gy/098z4	AlBayan	UAE	25 April, 2016
4.	لغة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تهدد عرش العربية	AlBilad	Bahrain	5 June, 2016

Journal of Scientific Research in Arts

(Language & Literature) volume 25 issue 3 (2024)

	https://albiladpress.com/news/2016/2789/spaces/336229.html			
5.	اللغة العربية والإنترنت https://rb.gy/grqar	AlRai	Kuwait	1 March, 2017
6.	«عربيزي» الشباب.. حروف لاتينية شوّهت اللغة https://rb.gy/ka4ig	AlKhaleej	UAE	7 Feb, 2017
7.	دعوات للنهوض بلغة المتواصلين على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي https://rb.gy/u9jc0	AIDustour	Jordan	29 Oct, 2017
8.	هل وضعت وسائل الإعلام لغة الضاد في مهب الريح؟! https://t.ly/rq6aO	Aafaq	KSA	8 Feb, 2018
9.	اللغة العربية ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي الفرص والتحديات https://www.albayan.co.uk/MGZarticle2.aspx?id=6308	AlBayan	KSA	1 July, 2018
10.	في اليوم العالمي لـ"العربية".. كيف نحميها بالتواصل الاجتماعي؟ https://tinyurl.com/2c55ck9y	Arabi21	London	18 Dec, 2018
11.	هل تقتل شبكة الإنترنت اللغة أم تحافظ عليها؟ https://t.ly/4nhVu	AlJazeera	Qatar	14 Aug, 2019
12.	لغة جديدة في «السوشيال ميديا» https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4020356	AlWatan	Egypt	24 Feb, 2019
13.	اللغة العربية ولغة الانترنت https://t.ly/nFcQC	Aliwaa	Lebanon	27 Feb, 2019
14.	هل تسهم مواقع التواصل في ضعف مستوى اللغة العربية بين الشباب؟ https://t.ly/YDmKA	BBC Arabic	London	19 Dec, 2019
15.	في زمن "التواصل الاجتماعي"... تقطعت سبل العربية https://t.ly/ethq8	Independent Arabia	London	17 Dec, 2019
16.	اللغة العربية في العالم الافتراضي https://tinyurl.com/2dtzp6kt	Lusail News	Qatar	9 Jan, 2020

17.	«آرابيش» وابتكارات أخرى ماذا يتكلم أولادنا؟ https://tinyurl.com/3sc3mbda	Arabic Language	Lebanon	9 June, 2020
18.	حول واقع اللغة العربية فى الفضاء الرقمى.. سؤال الهوية والمستقبل https://tinyurl.com/yb9x243f	AlShorouk	Egypt	9 Dec, 2022
19.	مواقع التواصل الاجتماعى والتأثير السلبى على اللغة https://tinyurl.com/4dhnmw9	Mawdoo3	Jordan	24 May, 2022
20.	ظاهرة العربيزي.. هجين الموت اللغوي https://tinyurl.com/bdcncxdk	AlThawra	Syria	8 Aug, 2022

The newspapers in which the selected articles were published belong to nine different Arab countries, namely Egypt, KSA, UAE, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, in addition to three issued in London in Arabic. This variation was meant to provide a wider scope and avoid bias in the data.

3.2 Methodology

CDA investigates the linguistic items used to describe an entity, whether a person, event or action and how they contribute in reproducing or resisting certain ideologies and social power. According to Fairclough (1995), CDA focuses “at different levels of abstraction from the particular event: it may involve its more immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices the event is embedded within, or the yet wider frame of the society and culture” (p. 62). By examining the form and function of the text, the analysis aims to uncover the way the text relates to how it is produced and consumed as well as to establish a link with its wider social context (Richardson, 2007).

Faircough (1992) regards discourse as a discursive social practice which is manifested in linguistic forms. He describes discourse analysis as a three-dimensional process. While any discursive event is a text, it is also an instance of discursive or social practice. The 'text' dimension refers to the linguistic analysis of a text, whereas the 'discursive practice' dimension examines the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation. The 'social practice' dimension, on

the other hand, is concerned with the social analysis of the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event and how these affect the discursive practice.

Assumptions about social relations underlying interactional practices are naturalized without people being aware of them, thus resulting in social reproductions of relations of domination. Fairclough (1995) explains the struggle for dominance among different ideologies as follows:

Opposition and struggle are built into the view of the ‘orders of discourse’ of social institutions as ‘pluralistic’, each involving a configuration of potentially antagonistic ‘ideological-discursive formations’ (IDFs), which are ordered in dominance. The dominance of one IDF over others within an order of discourse results in the naturalization of its (ideological) meanings and practices. Resistance is most likely to come from subjects whose positioning within *other* institutions and orders of discourse provides them with the resources to resist. (p. 25)

Fairclough (1992) argues that “discursive practices are ideologically invested in so far as they incorporate significations which contribute to sustaining or restructuring power relations” (p. 91). That is, the relationship between language and ideology should be viewed within the context of sociocultural change and that texts are considered ideological based on how they affect power relations. He maintains that change in discursive events involves innovation and creativity that depart from conventions and expectations. It may also involve the co-occurrence of contradictory aspects, such as formal and informal style or written and spoken forms.

(CDA) is thus interested in examining language about language or communication about communication as an integral component of social life. It is meant to reveal how metadiscourse not only reflects attitudes and beliefs, but is also a powerful tool in shaping ideologies and indicating sociocultural change (Fairclough, 2003).

The data analysis follows a quantitative interpretive approach that attempts to distinguish recurrent themes in order to track the popular framing of social media language. Rather than claiming to be quantitatively representative, the analysis seeks to focus on the metadiscursive construction of social processes in the corpus (Fairclough, 2003). The aim is thus to “examine the broad semantic and evaluative fields that are established linguistically and to identify those recurrent narrative resources ‘threaded’” throughout the corpus (Thrulow, 2016, p. 672).

In the next section the selected articles will be examined in order to determine the dominant themes in the metadiscursive construction of Arabic CMD. Some themes will be further divided into subthemes. Extracts from the corpus will be cited for illustration.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section is devoted to a thorough analysis of the data. To start with, several terms were used in the selected articles to refer to CMD. Some of them were quite usual such as *لغة الإنترنت – اللغة الفيسبوكية* (*Internet language – Facebook language*), whereas some were strange-sounding, including the following:

الفرانكو آراب – الأرابيش – الظاهرة العربايزية – العربيزي – العربزي – العربتيني

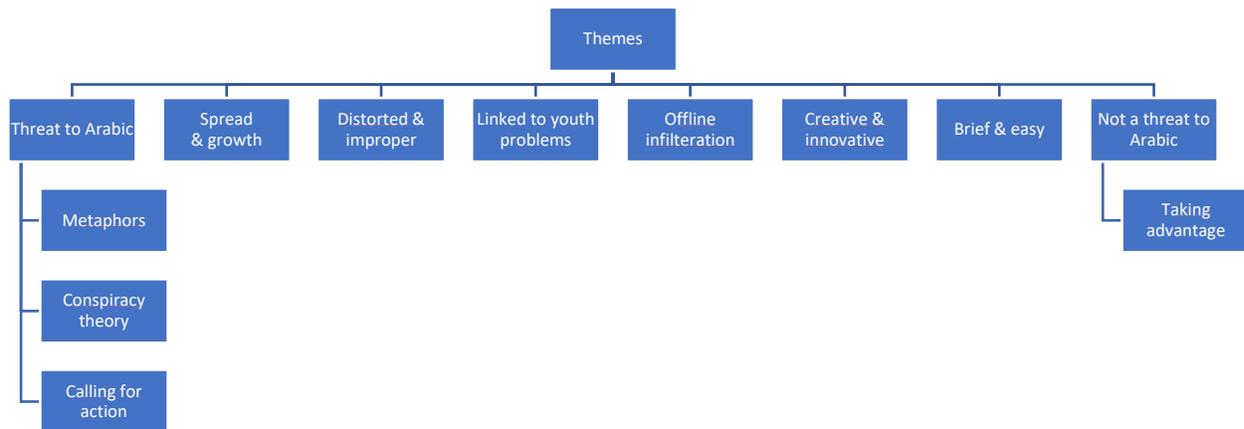
Franco-Arabic – Arabish – The Arabizi phenomenon – Arabizi – Arabzi – Arabtini

The above terms all reflect the use of hybrid script online to write Arabic in Roman characters. The bizarreness of the names also suggests the bizarreness of this new language.

The following eight main themes were distinguished in relation to the metadiscursive construction of CMD in the selected articles, with a number of relevant subthemes as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1

Themes Distinguished in the Data



The following sections provide a detailed account on the detected themes along with examples from the data with their translation (provided by the researcher).

4.1 CMD is a Threat to Arabic Language

The most salient theme in the data was representing CMD as a serious threat to Arabic language. In the following examples, CMD was portrayed as being responsible for the deterioration and marginalization of Arabic which may even lead to its extinction. Several metaphors were used in the articles to portray this threat. CMD was portrayed as an *invasion*, a *disease* and a *disobedient son*, whereas Arabic was depicted as a miserable *mom* who has turned into a helpless *infant* and a *queen* being *dethroned*. It is also worth mentioning that CMD was recurrently depicted as a *war* and a western *conspiracy* against Arabic language. Some even linked it to terrorist plots against Muslims and the entire Islamic identity (see table 2).

Table 2

Examples of CMD as a Threat to Arabic

Threatening Arabic	Using metaphors	Conspiracy theory
-اللغة العربية أصبحت مهددة وعلى المحك <i>The Arabic language has become threatened and at stake.</i>	-فان اللغة الفصيحة تقف على شفا جرف هار، قد يهوي بها الى هوة سحيقة لا قرار لها <i>Standard language stands on the brink of collapsing into a bottomless abyss.</i>	-حربا على الهوية الجامعة لشعث العالم الإسلامي <i>A war on the collective identity of the Islamic world.</i>
-تلك الهجينة التي أصبحت تشكّل خطراً على مستقبل اللغة العربية <i>This hybrid that has come to threaten the future of the Arabic language.</i>	-لإنقاذها من براثن هذا الغزو <i>To rescue it from the clutches of this invasion.</i>	-نواجه حرباً تهدد اللغة العربية وترزع ألسنة المتكلمين بها <i>We are facing a war that threatens the Arabic language and shakes the tongues of its speakers.</i>
-لدى ناقوس الخطر الذي يهدد اللغة العربية. <i>To sound the alarm for threatens to the Arabic language.</i>	-غزو اللغة المسخ <i>The invasion of this monstrous language.</i>	-اللغة العربية تتعرض لحملات منظمة لتشوويه قدرتها على استيعاب مستحدثات العصر <i>The Arabic language is subjected to organized campaigns to distort its ability to adapt to the latest developments.</i>
-ظهور «لغة موازية» يستخدمها الشباب العربي في محادثاتهم عبر الإنترنت، تهدد مصير اللغة العربية في الحياة اليومية	-انتهاك لغتنا والعصف بأسسها وقيمتها <i>Violating our language and attacking its foundations and value.</i>	-المؤامرة علينا حق

<p><i>The emergence of a “parallel language” used by Arab youth in their online conversations that threatens the future of the Arabic language in everyday life.</i></p> <p>-تضعف اللغة العربية وتطمس خصوصيتها</p> <p><i>Weakens the Arabic language and blurs its peculiarity.</i></p> <p>-تعمل على محو اللغة العربية</p> <p><i>Works to obliterate the Arabic language.</i></p> <p>-تهميش اللغة العربية</p> <p><i>Marginalizing the Arabic language.</i></p> <p>-وسط اعتراض الآباء والخبراء التربويين، الذين يؤكدون خوفهم من اندثار اللغة العربية</p> <p><i>Amidst the objection of parents and educational experts, who confirm their fear of the extinction of the Arabic language.</i></p>	<p>-لغة وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي تهدد عرش العربية</p> <p><i>The language of social media threatens the throne of the Arabic language.</i></p> <p>-تسيء إلى اللغة العربية وتهدد عرشها</p> <p><i>Harms the Arabic language and threatens its throne.</i></p> <p>-مراة تعكس عقود اللغة</p> <p><i>A mirror reflecting the disobedience of the mother tongue.</i></p> <p>-اللغة العربية بمثابة أم تحولت في هذا الزمان إلى رضيع يحتاج الى الرعاية والدعم</p> <p><i>It is as if the Arabic language in this era has turned into an infant who needs care and support.</i></p>	<p><i>Conspiracy is a right to us.</i></p> <p>-المؤامرة التي تحاك للنيل من اللغة والعرب، التي لا تنفصل عن المخططات الإرهابية والتخطيط للقضاء على اللغة</p> <p><i>The conspiracy against the language and the Arabs, which is inseparable from terrorist plots and plans to undermine the language.</i></p> <p>-أكواد الكتابة المبتكرة على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي ... هي مؤامرات غربية تقوض الأمة العربية وتنال من الدين الإسلامي والمسلمين</p> <p><i>Innovative writing codes on social media sites...are Western conspiracies that undermine the Arab nation and harm the Islamic religion and Muslims.</i></p>
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Since CMD was frequently represented in the articles as a threat to Arabic language, several instances were encountered in the corpus of people calling for action to protect Arabic. Suggestions included carrying out *language reform, revival, implementing language policy and planning*, as well as adapting Arabic to technological advances. Some even called for complete linguistic, social,

educational and judicial reform. These considered it a matter of ‘national security’ that should be a top priority for the government (see table 3).

Table 3

Examples of Calling for Action to Protect Arabic Language

Protecting Arabic	Language reform	Revival	Language policy and planning	Adaptation to technology
<p>-يستدعي تكاتف الجهود لإنقاذها <i>It calls for concerted efforts to save it</i> -قرع جرس الإنذار لحماية اللغة العربية <i>Sound the alarm to protect the Arabic language</i></p>	<p>-عمليات إصلاحية لإيقاظ اللغة العربية <i>Processes of reform to revive the Arabic language</i> -مطلوب إصلاح لغوي عربي يواكبه إصلاح تعليمي وسياسي وتشريعي <i>An Arabic linguistic reform is required, accompanied by educational, political and legislative reform</i></p>	<p>-المطلوب لتخرج اللغة العربية من مأزقها، هو القيام بعمليات إنعاش وتجديد مكثفة لاستعادة التوازن <i>What is required for the Arabic language to recover from its predicament carrying out intensive reviving and renovation processes to restore balance</i> -استنهاض اللغة العربية وإعادتها للتداول <i>Reviving the Arabic language and bringing it back to everyday use.</i> -إعادة إحياء اللغة العربية، وتحديث أساليب تعليمها <i>Reviving the Arabic language and modernizing its teaching methods</i></p>	<p>-أن تتبنى الدولة القضية وتعتبرها مسألة "أمن قومي" <i>The state should adopt the issue and consider it a matter of "national security".</i> -يجب أن تكون هناك جهود مخططة لإيقاف تراجع اللغة الفصحى <i>There must be planned efforts to stop the decline of standard language.</i></p>	<p>-نجاح مشاريع حوسبة اللغة العربية والذكاء الاصطناعي <i>Success of projects for Arabic language computing and artificial intelligence</i> -ومن الضروري أن يكون للعرب محرك البحث الخاص بهم كالصينيين <i>Arabs must have their own search engine just like the Chinese.</i> -ضرورة تأسيس هيئة عليا تشرف على اللغة التكنولوجية <i>A higher authority must be established to supervise the language of technology</i></p>

		<p>-كيفية إنعاش اللغة العربية عبر مواقع التواصل</p> <p><i>How to revive the Arabic language through social networks</i></p>	
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4.2 Spread and growth of CMD

Most of the selected articles referred to the fast growth and spread of the Internet together with CMD. Sometimes this was represented in a negative light as some kind of *dangerous invasion* or *unwanted upsurge*. Several statistics were also used to prove this rapid growth but very few of which were documented using sources (only the last two examples in table 4), thus detracting from their credibility.

Table 4

Examples of Spread and Growth of CMD

Spread and growth of CMD	Statistics
<p>-هذا الانجراف السريع والمخيف</p> <p><i>This fast and frightening drift</i></p> <p>-نقف شبه عاجزين أمام هذا المد التكنولوجي</p> <p><i>We stand almost helpless in the face of this technological upsurge</i></p> <p>-هذا الزحف المتنامي</p> <p><i>This increasing encroachment</i></p> <p>-فينقلها آخر، ويتبادلها مئات، ثم يتشاركها آلاف وملايين</p> <p><i>Another transmits it, hundreds exchange it, then thousands and millions share it</i></p> <p>-هذه الظاهرة استفحلت</p> <p><i>This phenomenon has been aggravated</i></p>	<p>-هناك ١٨ مليون عربي مستهلك للتقنية وغير منتج (الترتيب ١٤ عالمياً)</p> <p><i>There are 18 million Arabs who are technology consumers rather than producers (ranking 14th globally)</i></p> <p>-أكثر من ٨١٪ من المؤسسات في السعودية تمتلك صفحة على فيسبوك، و ٥٢٪ منها تمتلك حساباً على تويتر</p> <p><i>Over 81% of Saudi institutions have a Facebook page, and 52% of them have a Twitter account.</i></p> <p>-لا تزيد نسبة المحتوى الرقمي المُنتج باللغة العربية على ١,٢ في المائة</p> <p><i>Arabic digital content does not exceed 1.2 percent.</i></p> <p>-أصبح عدد مستخدمي الإنترنت أكثر ٢٥ مرة من المتصلين العرب بالإنترنت عام ١٩٩٦</p> <p><i>The number of Arab Internet users has grown 25 times folds than the that in 1996.</i></p> <p>-عندما بدأت الإنترنت في دخول المجال العام، كان أكثر من ٨٠٪ من مستخدمي الإنترنت من الناطقين بالإنجليزية، وبحلول ٢٠١٠، انخفضت هذه النسبة إلى ٢٧,٣ %</p> <p><i>When the Internet began to become available to the public, more than 80% of Internet users were English speakers, but by 2010, this percentage had fallen to 27.3%.</i></p> <p>-تساعد الإنترنت على القضاء على ٩٥٪ من اللغات الحية بحسب دراسة نشرتها مجلة بلوس ون</p> <p><i>The Internet helps eradicate 95% of living languages, according to a study published by Plus One magazine.</i></p>

	<p>-وفقاً لإحصائيات الاتحاد الدولي للاتصالات لعام ٢٠٢١، بلغ عدد مستخدمي شبكة الإنترنت في الدول العربية ٢٩١ مليوناً</p> <p><i>According to 2021 International Telecommunication Union statistics, the number of Internet users in Arab countries has reached 291 million.</i></p>
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4.3 CMD is improper, distorted and deformed

Internet discourse was frequently described in the corpus as distorted and deformed. It was often placed in opposition to ‘proper’ language, thus deviating from linguistic rules and standards. Since it combines both Arabic and English script, there were several references to CMD as ‘*hybrid*’ but in a negative sense, implying that it is unoriginal and impure. As illustrated in table 5, while some described CMD as bizarre and ‘*monstrous*’, others likened it to an *illegitimate child* of unknown origins, whereas others considered it a kind of ‘*linguistic pollution*’.

Table 5

Examples of CMD Being Improper, Distorted and Deformed

CMD is improper	CMD is distorted and deformed
-ظهور لغة جديدة لا تلتزم بقواعد العربية <i>The appearance of a new language that does not abide by the rules of Arabic</i>	-ظاهرة العربيزي. هجين الموت اللغوي <i>The Arabizi phenomenon, the hybrid of language death</i>
-لغة غير رسمية وليس فيها قواعد <i>An informal language that has no rules</i>	-ظهور لغة هجينة بين العربية والإنجليزية <i>The emergence of a hybrid language combining Arabic and English</i>
-لغة سطحية وظاهرة سيئة <i>A superficial language and an unfavorable phenomenon</i>	-اللغة المسخ الهجينة الغريبة العجيبة <i>The strange monstrous hybrid language</i>
-أما على الانترنت فالمصيبة أعظم، حيث لا رقيب ولا مقيم ولا معيارية بكتابة <i>On the Internet, the disaster is more grave, as there is no censorship, evaluation, or writing standards</i>	-ولدت «العربيزي» قبل ١٥ عاماً مجهولة مكان الولادة والأبوين <i>Arabize was born 15 years ago for unknown parents at an unknown place</i>
-ممارسات مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي اللغوية تهشم قواعد لغوية مستقرة تتصل بإدامة الفصحى وصيانة وجودها	-غزو اللغة المسخ

<p><i>The linguistic practices of social media users undermine well-established linguistic rules related to the maintenance of standard Arabic and the its very existence</i> -ضاربة عرض الحائط بقواعد اللغة وأسس الضاد <i>Disregarding the rules of the language and the foundations of Arabic</i></p>	<p><i>The invasion of the monstrous language</i> -تلوث لغويّ <i>Linguistic pollution</i></p>
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4.4 Linking CMD to youth problems

It was found that CMD was repeatedly linked in the data to youth problems. This primarily included the fact that young people like to imitate each other blindly, lack proper culture and education and have been ‘*spoilt by technology*’. The popular conception is that young people are fond of CMD for its speed and brevity as they are always in a hurry. They also prefer CMD since it is *trendy* and can be used to *show off*. The use of CMD is also recurrently linked to an *identity crisis* suffered by youth who have lost their loyalty to Arabic culture and are tempted to embrace *everything that is western or foreign*. Table 6 illustrates some of the most relevant examples in this respect.

Table 6
Examples of Linking CMD to Youth Problems

Imitation and lack of culture	Young people are always in a hurry	Trendiness and change	Identity crisis
<p>-اعتماد شبابنا على التقليد العشوائي <i>Our youth are copy cats</i> -جيل اليوم غير مثقف، لا يقرأ، وأفسدته التكنولوجيا <i>Today's generation is uncultured, does not read, and has been spoilt by technology</i> -الجيل مأخوذ بالكامل نحو - مصطلحات ومفردات جديدة عبر الشات</p>	<p>-جيل اليوم هو جيل «zapping»؛ يريد كل شيء وفي هذه اللحظة <i>Today's "zapping" generation who want everything on the spot.</i></p>	<p>-الموضة اللغوية <i>Trendy language</i> -يتم التواصل بها للتباهي بين مستخدميها <i>People use it to show off</i></p>	<p>-فقدان الشعور لدى العديد من الشباب بأن اللغة العربية تشكل هوية له، حيث لا يشعر بانتمائه الحقيقي لها <i>The loss of the feeling among many young people that the Arabic language constitutes their identity, as they do not feel a true</i></p>

<p><i>The generation is completely attracted to new chatting terms and vocabulary</i> -مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي أسهمت بنشر الجهل باللغة العربية وحببته لدى المستخدمين الشباب <i>Social networking sites contributed to spreading ignorance of the Arabic language and made young users actually enjoy this.</i></p>			<p><i>sense of belonging to it</i> -الشباب المراد تنقيفه واستعادته من أنفاق الهروب التي تاه فيها إلى كل ما هو غربي وأجنبي <i>The youth that needs to be cultured and rescued from escaping to everything western and foreign</i></p>
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4.5 Infiltrating into the offline world

Several voices in the data complained that the use of CMD was not restricted to the online world anymore since it has started infiltrating into our everyday language. The following extracts offer some examples.

١. لم تعد لغة الإنترنت تقتصر على الرسائل القصيرة عبر الهاتف أو الإنترنت، إنما دخلت في صلب حياة الشباب اليومية

The language of the Internet is no longer confined to short messages via phone or the Internet, but has entered the core of young people's daily lives.

٢. خرج أسلوب هذه الكتابة من إطار الهواتف والكمبيوترات ليُدخل إلى الشوارع والأحياء، إذ يصادف المرء أفراناً ومطاعم ومحالاً تجارية أو حتى برامج تلفزيونية تتبع الأسلوب نفسه

The style of this writing has gone beyond phones and computers to enter the streets and neighborhoods, as one encounters bakeries, restaurants, shops, or even television programs that follow the same style.

٣. حَرَجْتُ مِنْ عَالَمِ الْإِنْتَرْنِتِ وَانْتَقَلْتُ إِلَى عَالَمِ الْإِمْتِحَانَاتِ

It has surpassed the Internet world and infiltrated into that of exams.

٤. هذه الظاهرة استغلقت، وغزت البيوت والمدارس والحياة العامة

This phenomenon has become more aggravated and invaded homes, schools, and public life.

4.6 Counter-voices

Despite the above negative representation of CMD in the corpus, several positive counter-voices were found that praise CMD as a new innovative form of language

that facilitates fast communication and does not pose a threat to Arabic language. Some acknowledged that CMD promotes language creativity and innovation as it has allowed introducing new linguistic forms and coining new terms. It is also brief and easy to use since it saves time and meets the needs of youth in expressing themselves in a more up-to-date way. Those opinions seem to recognize this kind of discourse as a form of language change which is ‘smart’, ‘modern’ and ‘innovative’ (see table 7).

Table 7

Examples of Positive Counter-voices

Creative	Brief	Easy to use	Up-to-date
<p>-ابتداع صيغ لغوية جديدة، ونحت تعبيرات، وابتداع مصطلحات</p> <p><i>Creating new linguistic forms, coining expressions, and creating terminology</i></p> <p>-الأنساق اللغوية المستخدمة في هذه الوسائط تتميز وتنفرد وتتطور وتتغير بصورة مذهلة</p> <p><i>The linguistic patterns used in these media are distinguished, unique, evolving, and changing in an amazing way</i></p> <p>-بزوغ لغة جديدة مكتوبة صار لها أسلوب ومعايير وصفة تختلف عن اللغة الأم</p> <p><i>The emergence of a new written language that has a style, standards, and characteristics different from the mother tongue</i></p> <p>-شعب التواصل الاجتماعي الغارق في ابتداع أشكال جديدة والمطلق العنان لابتكار ألفاظ ومسميات حديثة</p> <p><i>The people of social media who are absorbed in the creation of new forms and have free rein to invent modern words and terms</i></p> <p>-تتميز هذه اللغة الشبابية بأنها ذكية ومبتكرة</p>	<p>-المفردات السريعة والمختصرة</p> <p><i>Quick and short vocabulary</i></p> <p>-هي لغة سهلة من شأنها أن توصل الرسالة بأسرع طريقة</p> <p><i>It is an easy language that conveys the message in the fastest way</i></p> <p>-تعتبر لغة الإنترنت أكثر اختصاراً</p> <p><i>Internet language is more concise</i></p>	<p>-لغة سهلة ومواكبة للتطور والحداثة</p> <p><i>An easy language that keeps up with development and modernity</i></p> <p>-لغة الإنترنت تركز على السهولة والعملية</p> <p><i>The language of the Internet is based on facilitation and practicality</i></p> <p>-فهي أسهل وأسرع في الكتابة</p> <p><i>Since it is easier and faster to write</i></p>	<p>-لغة عصرية ومحبية للتواصل</p> <p><i>A modern and favorable language for communication</i></p> <p>-لغة الإنترنت ما هي إلا انعكاس للغة الشباب في الواقع</p> <p><i>The language of the Internet is only a reflection of the language of young people in real life.</i></p> <p>-تتأقلم مع زمن التطور والسرعة</p> <p><i>Adapts to the era of development and fast-paced world</i></p>

<i>This youth language is characterized by being smart and innovative</i>		
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While most of the opinions represented in the corpus warn of the threat CMD poses to Arabic language as discussed above, a few counter voices, on the other hand, provide reassurance that Arabic cannot be affected by CMD. Some even acknowledged a *positive impact* of CMD in promoting literacy and enriching Arabic content on the Internet. Those who regard CMD in a positive light consider it a double-edged weapon. In other words, CMD is ‘not intrinsically defective’ or harmful to Arabic, since it can give us the ‘*opportunity*’ to explore ‘*new linguistic perspectives*’ and conduct further research into the use of Arabic on social media (see table 8).

Table 8

Examples of Acknowledging the Positive Effect of CMD

CMD not a threat to Arabic	Positive effect	Taking advantage
<p>-لا أتخيل للحظة أن اللغة العربية التي يتحدث بها نحو ٣٠٠ مليون نسمة ستؤثر عليها لغة «الأرابيش» بأي بشكل أو تلغيها</p> <p><i>I cannot imagine for a single moment that the Arabic language, which is spoken by about 300 million people, will be affected or eliminated by “Arabish” in any way.</i></p> <p>-لغتنا لغة القرآن وهذه الكلمات دخيلة ومجرد موضة جديدة لن تؤثر فيها</p> <p><i>Our language is the language of the Qur’an, and these words are an intrusion and</i></p>	<p>-بالرغم من التأثير الإيجابي "المحدود" الذي أحدثته هذه المواقع في تحفيز القراءة والكتابة</p> <p><i>Despite the “limited” positive impact that these sites have had in encouraging reading and writing</i></p> <p>-تحفل (مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي) بألاف الصفحات والتغريدات والتدوينات والصور والفيديوهات المحتفية باللغة العربية والداعية إلى الحفاظ عليها</p> <p><i>Social networking sites are full of thousands of pages, tweets, blogs, photos and videos proudly displaying</i></p>	<p>-أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي الحديثة أداة كالسكين؛ والعيب ليس فيها وإنما في طريقة استخدامها</p> <p><i>Modern social media is a tool like a weapon; it is not intrinsically defective but it depends on the way we use it</i></p> <p>-لا يجب النظر إلى المشكلات الناجمة عن الاستخدامات اللغوية الجديدة في «السوشيال ميديا» باعتبارها شراً مستظيراً خالصاً، فربما ينطوى الأمر على فرصة</p> <p><i>The problems resulting from the new linguistic forms in “social media” should not be viewed as pure evil. Rather, it may offer an opportunity.</i></p>

<p><i>just a new fad that will not affect it</i> -سهولة تكيف العربية مع ثقافة الإنترنت يمكن أن تكون مؤشراً على كون العربية بعيدة عن الإنقراض في عصر الإنترنت <i>The ease of how Arabic is adapting to Internet culture could be an indication that Arabic is far from becoming extinct in the Internet era</i></p>	<p><i>Arabic language and calling for its preservation.</i> -ولعل أهم إيجابية لهذه المواقع أن عدداً من منصات التواصل الاجتماعي دعمت اللغة العربية، وهذا أدى إلى تواجد كبير للمحتوى العربي على الإنترنت <i>Perhaps the most important positive aspect of these sites is that a number of social media platforms have started supporting the Arabic language, which has led to the spread of Arabic content on the Internet.</i></p>	<p>-تمنحنا فرصة أيضاً لاكتشاف آفاق لغوية جديدة، وهو أمر يتطلب إجراء بحوث معمّقة بخصوص الاستخدامات اللغوية للمتحدثين بالعربية على «السوشيال ميديا» <i>It also offers us an opportunity to uncover new linguistic perspectives, which requires conducting in-depth research on the linguistic practices of Arabic speakers on “social media.”</i></p>
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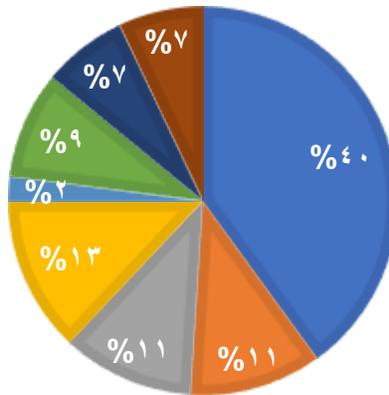
5. Discussion

The following chart shows the distribution of themes related to the metadiscursive construction of CMD in the corpus (figure 2). It is noticed that threatening Arabic was by far the most predominant theme in the corpus (40%), whereas linking CMD to youth problems came in the second place (13%). This is followed by highlighting the distorted and improper nature of CMD, which is equally discussed as its rapid growth (11%). The more positive opinions expressing counter-voices which are more optimistic about the future of CMD, on the other hand, appeared more scarcely in the corpus, including its creativity (9%), brevity (7%) and ways we can benefit from it (7%). Finally, the infiltration of CMD into everyday language was the least mentioned theme in the data (2%).

Figure 2

Distribution of Themes in the Data

- Threatening Arabic
- Spread & growth
- Distorted & improper
- Linked to youth problems
- Offline infiltration
- Creative & innovative
- Brief & easy
- Taking advantage



Whereas the data cannot be claimed to be representative, it still points to a rather negative metadiscursive representation of CMD in newspaper articles. It is worth noting that most of those who were apprehensive and critical of CMD were Arabic teachers, professors or people working in the education profession. This explains their concern about the deterioration of Arabic language among young people, as well as the change in their values in general. Moreover, it was noticed that those who called for taking serious action to protect the Arabic language were Arabic teachers and professors in particular.

The more positive opinions, on the other hand, came from young people and internet users who think that CMD saves time and serves their needs to express themselves easily. However, the more objective opinions or rational voices belonged to sociologists and psychiatrists who acknowledged the youth's need for change and self-expression. Not surprisingly, scholars, writers and journalists contributed the rest of the more optimistic counter-voices that provided reassurance about the future of language and suggested benefiting from the potential offered by CMD for linguistic scholarship, as well as for promoting the Arabic language itself.

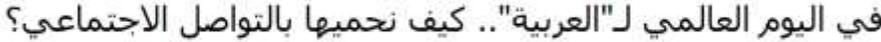
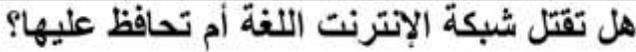
A possible shift in attitudes towards CMD may be detected in the data. It was noticed that the older articles reflected relatively more negative attitudes, whereas the more

positive counter-voices appeared in more recent articles (starting 2018). This is reflected in the use of the more strange-sounding terms in earlier articles to refer to CMD, including الظاهرة العربيزية – العربيزي - العربيني – العربيتيني (Arabtini – Arabizi – Arabzi – the Arabizi phenomenon) implying its novelty and bizarreness.

This is also suggested by the choice of headlines which were extremely negative in earlier articles, unlike more recent ones which started to feature headlines wondering about the potential of CMD or acknowledging the possibility of advantages. Nevertheless, that is not to say that the later articles ceased to reflect the same negative metadiscursive representation of the earlier ones. In table 9, for instance, the first three headlines reveal extremely negative representations, as opposed to the last three headlines which are more neutral and highlight the controversial status of CMD.

Table 9

Variation in Headlines Over Time

Title	Date
 <p>“Arabizi”, the language of social media, threatens the throne of Arabic</p>	2016
 <p>Social media ...a mirror reflecting the disobedience of the mother tongue</p>	2016
 <p>The language of social media threatens the throne of Arabic language</p>	2016
 <p>Arabic language and social media websites: Opportunities and challenges</p>	2018
 <p>On the International Day of Arabic language ..how to protect it by social media?</p>	2018
 <p>2019</p>	2019

Will the Internet kill the language or preserve it?	
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The metadiscursive representation of CMD in newspaper articles can be seen in the light of the relationships between discourse, power, ideology and sociocultural change discussed by Fairclough (1992, 1995). The above findings points to a struggle for power and dominance between different ideologies along with a significant sociocultural change.

The new trend represented by Internet users, particularly young people, is departing from traditional linguistic norms and embracing a more hybrid identity that caters for globalization in a fast-paced world. Those are increasingly favoring this new variety for fast and easy communication. The change has not been confined to the online world but is also extending to encompass different aspects of everyday life. Moreover, this generation of Internet users are getting increasingly affected by western languages and cultures, which is resulting in an identity shift. With the fast-growing body of CMD and its evolving features, these interactional and linguistic practices of this revolutionary ideology affected by technology and western culture are coming to be naturalized. It may hence be posited that this is coming to constitute a dominant ideological discursive formation (IDF) which is gaining more and more power in Arab societies.

On the other hand, traditional conservative users of language with their classical ideology are rejecting the new phenomenon of CMD and view it as a form of intrusion to our Arab culture and identity. These language purists represent a contrary IDF or opposition and struggle to maintain their ideology and sustain control over linguistic practices and standards. They even seek to delegitimize CMD by discursively portraying it in an evil light as a war or a conspiracy not only on Arabic language but also on identity and religion.

On the other hand, the counter-voices which are starting to acknowledge the positive aspects of CMD constitute yet another emerging IDF pointing to a further trend of sociocultural change. These scholars, writers and people from academia form a more open-minded group who acknowledge the necessity of change and regard CMD from a more objective perspective.

6. Conclusion

The present study has attempted to analyze the metadiscursive construction of CMD using a manageable sample of Arabic newspaper articles collected online over a six-year period from 2016 till 2022. Drawing upon CDA techniques (Fairclough, 1002, 1995), the selected articles were analyzed in order to uncover the metadiscursive themes in the representation of this metadiscourse in traditional media.

A number of salient themes were found including primarily those that portray CMD in a negative light on the basis of threatening Arabic language. It was often referred to as a distorted and improper variety of language which is spreading very rapidly to the extent of infiltrating into our everyday life. The language of online communication was also often linked to common complaints about the deterioration of youth language proficiency and their loss of identity. On the other hand, a number of counter-voices were detected in the corpus, especially in more recent articles, which point to the advantages of CMD as a creative form of communication which is fast and easy to use and may even be used to promote Arabic language and contribute to its modernization rather than extinction.

The findings reveal a relationship between CMD and a number of conflicting ideologies in the Arab world. The first ideology which is increasingly gaining dominance is represented by Internet users, particularly the youth, who are affected by western culture. The second is language purists who are fighting to maintain traditional language standards and Arab identity and the third is represented by more neutral voices from the academia. The findings also point to a significant sociocultural change towards favoring faster, more innovative and practical forms of communication that do not adhere to traditional linguistic norms or even to the mother tongue. This change is not only observed in the online environment but has started infiltrating to other aspects of everyday life in the Arab world.

While purists may be concerned about the future of Arabic language, it must be admitted that language change is inevitable. Language is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic being which is bound to change and develop in order to cater for the needs of a given era. A language that fails to do so may otherwise become extinct or fall out of use, as was the case with many extinct languages.

As linguists, we must, therefore, seize the unmatched opportunity of benefiting from the vast amount of linguistic data available online in machine-readable form. This can undoubtedly serve to unravel new trends in language use and enlighten us on

innovative language use in this emerging virtual medium. This is particularly true of Arabic CMD which has so far been under-researched and is still an extremely fertile area of study. This in turn may contribute to the long debated and indispensable process of adapting Arabic language to technological needs, as well as promoting Arabic content online.

The study may also point to the need of devoting more attention to language policy and planning in the Arab world. While acknowledging the inevitability of language change, it is of particular importance to consider the diglossic situation in the Arab world. With colloquial Arabic being the mother tongue of most Arabs used for everyday purposes, and standard Arabic only learned at schools and restricted to formal and official interactions, it may be advisable to consider ways for preserving this language variety if we wish for it to survive in today's fast-changing world. Perhaps concerted efforts should be exerted by Arab states, scholars, educational institutions and the media in this respect.

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Note: all Arabic references have been translated and the Arabic titles transliterated according to ALA-LC Arabic Romanization Table transliteration, *Library of Congress*

البنية الخطابية للغة الإنترنت في المقالات المنشورة في الصحف العربية

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المستخلص:

مع انتشار الإنترنت واستخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي انتشرت لغة خاصة تختلف في خواصها عن اللغة العادية، وقد بدأ بعض الكتاب وخاصة المتشددون لغويا بتوجيه الانتقادات لهذه اللغة بزعم أنها تهدد اللغة العربية الأصيلة كما أنها تهدد ثقافتنا وهويتنا. ولذا اعتادت العديد من الصحف العربية تقديم صورة سلبية للغة المستخدمة على الإنترنت وعادة ما تكون تلك الانتقادات مصحوبة بالتذمر من تدهور مستوى اللغة لدى الشباب. ولما كان من الأهمية دراسة الخطاب المكتوب عن تلك اللغة الجديدة للتعرف على الاتجاهات والآراء فإن هذه الدراسة تعنى بتحليل عدد من المقالات المنشورة في الصحف العربية منذ عام ٢٠١٦ وحتى ٢٠٢٢ من أجل التعرف على كيفية تصوير المقالات لتلك اللغة وذلك من خلال استخدام منهج التحليل النقدي للخطاب (فيركلوف ١٩٩٢، ١٩٩٥) من أجل التعرف على المفاهيم والأفكار الرئيسية التي تشكل البنية الخطابية للغة الإنترنت في المقالات المختارة. وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن معظم المقالات تصور لغة الإنترنت بوصفها تمثل تهديدا للغة والهوية العربية خاصة لدى الشباب، وذلك رغم ظهور بعض الآراء التي تنثني على تلك اللغة الجديدة لانسامها بالابتكار والحداثة. ولذا توضح الدراسة أن البنية الخطابية للغة الإنترنت في المقالات محل البحث تشير إل وجود عدد من الأيديولوجيات المتصارعة في الوطن العربي كما تشير إلى حدوث تغيرات ثقافية ملحوظة في المجتمعات العربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة العربية، الصحف العربية، لغة الإنترنت، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، الأيديولوجيا، البنية الخطابية