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## Does/Did the Arab Spring Influence the Arabic Language? Methodological Issues and Critical Observations

### Abstract

The Arab Spring is the result of long term aspirations for political change. Parallel to the political revolution a technological revolution in media and communication has taken place. Both political and technological changes have in turn influenced the use of Arabic. This article is about observable changes in Arabic.

**Keywords:** Arabic, political change, technological change, linguistic change, Arab spring, social media

### Introduction

It is clear to everybody that on several levels serious changes have taken place in most Arab societies over the last few years. The issue we are dealing with in this paper is whether the *change of climate* in the Arab world also had its repercussions on the Arabic language. In order to conduct an investigation on the Arab spring and language change as objectively as possible we have to deal with many different aspects. In what follows we will deal with the following topics: first of all, we rely on the existing knowledge of *general linguistics* for the description of what we currently know about the circumstances and elements that lead to language change. In the second place we will apply the general principles about language change, which have been distracted from recorded data (and hence empirically confirmed for several languages), to the specific turmoil that has occurred in recent years in the Arab world. In a way, we will limit the possible causes, such as they have been described for many languages in general, and investigate which of the described elements can be applied to the situation of the Arabic language.

We also take a closer look at a similar event in history and relate the observations made by scientists on this event. The case we take into consideration is an experience from the recent past, namely the changes in the German language that have been observed after the fall of the Berlin wall. We will pinpoint the difference of the German situation with the Arabic language. The central question we will try to answer will be: where did or might language change occur in the Arab world? Another issue we will tackle is why the Arabic language might remain conducive to change. Further on we will examine the important methodological implications that are specific for the investigation of language change during and even before the transition period of the Arab spring. The importance of the technological communication revolution has been stressed very often, an element we will question by examining its precise characteristics. On the methodological level, we will also propose some suggestions on how we might proceed to screen the Arabic language and follow up its evolution. Finally we will relate some of our own observations during the period of 'intifada' which we date between the years 2004 and 2012. We also give a glimpse into research in this field that might be valuable for the future.

### 1. How does language change?

We base this paragraph on knowledge from *general linguistics* that is common to all linguists.<sup>1</sup> We examine first the general characteristics of language change such as it has been recorded and observed over a large period of time in different countries and under different circumstances. We also take a look at the possible causes of language change. Further on, we will give a short overview of language elements in which change has been observed. In this respect it is important to assert that there are universal principles of language change valid for all languages. Researchers in all parts of the world, however, are often confronted with the practical problem of the lack of sources, which for the greater part is due to the fact that we deal with diachronical investigations, which means that important or useful sources might be lost. We do not have at our disposal, for example, enough recorded material of spoken utterances of the Arabic language for the period of the *Nahḍa*, which was undoubtedly a period in which language change took place on a large scale. In the following paragraph we will further examine those characteristics described in *general linguistics* that might be applied to the Arabic language situation.

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<sup>1</sup> For specific information on mechanisms of linguistic change in Arabic see R. Stempel, *Mechanisms of Linguistic Change*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Brill Online, Leiden 2012.

## 2. The general characteristics of language change and its application to Arabic

First of all, we want to stress that language change can occur on every level of the organization of language. Specific changes, however, occur in most cases on only one level, for example on the level of phonology, morphology or the lexicon. There is a wide variation as far as language change is concerned. The change can operate on a very wide scale, but changes can also be very limited; even minor changes can occur. Some changes can be thorough and become definitive while others can be superficial and vanish after a while. It also has been attested that every specific form of language change is limited in time and space. Hence, it is not at all sure that language changes observed in a certain period of time and space become definitive changes. This is abundantly clear in the case of the lexicon, where some words appear for a while and then disappear, whereas others remain stable *innovations*.

The collocation *millennium bug* is one of those that were very frequently used in the year 1999 and the beginning of the new millennium, but that disappeared (also in Arabic) due to the fact that it had to do with a temporary problem which was ultimately solved. Some changes take a long time before they are firmly rooted in a language. Examples are the sound changes in German that took a period of four centuries before they became completely common. It is obvious that language changes also occur within a certain geographical area. These observations are self-evident, as all languages are subject to geographical delimitations. But the size of the community where language change occurs can also vary. Changes can occur on the level of the Standard Language, in most cases due to the language policy of certain countries, but also on a lower level, due to decision-making on the level of language instructors both on the university level as well as on the school level.

To my astonishment I recently heard from young people that their teachers advised against the use of several Dutch words and expressions I use on a regular basis because they seem to be outdated. Although I still consider these words and expressions to be normal language use, as did these young students, consulting a Dutch teaching university colleague confirmed that indeed, also on the university level, the use of certain words is advised against because they are considered (by their professional group) to be outmoded. In this recent case we have to do with a small group of professionals trying to influence language change on a limited level. Other limited language levels are, of course, the level of the sociolect and also the different dialects. Another characteristic of language change, which is very common in Arabic and which also occurs in other languages, is a shift in language use from one domain to another. In Arabic this is in most cases realized on the level of the interchange of elements between dialects and standard language. One such example is the connective *fa* and even *wa* that sometimes occur in dialects. Personally, I have witnessed a shift in Morocco from the connective *u* (and), which was commonly used a few decades ago, to the connective *wa*, which can clearly be marked as an influence from the Standard language on the dialect. To conclude, we have to stress that language change in different respects almost always takes place by means of a gradual process.

### 3. Causes of language change

As far as language change is concerned, we have to make a distinction between external causes and internal ones. External causes concern elements that in principle have nothing to do with the language itself. In that case we have to do with events, such as the Arab spring or a technological revolution, that lead to language changes but that in turn can also exert an influence on the event itself. Internal causes concern changes that occur in the language itself, through internal mechanisms, such as we have demonstrated in our study on the complementary particles.<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that both elements can overlap.

#### 3a. External causes of language change

The external causes of language changes for Arabic are generally known. In the first place there has been the period of colonization in which the Arab world was confronted with the influence of Western powers which also led to the occupation of their territories. This has led, among other elements, to the inclusion of words of foreign origin in Arab dialects. Not only French, English and Italian words, but also many Turkish words have gradually been incorporated in several dialects (the latter rather being due to the period of the Turkish occupation in many Arab countries).

The contact with Western countries also brought about the influence of modernity, which led to the emergence of translation institutes, such as the one under the leadership of *Ṭaṭṭāwī*. These scholars had the task of coining new Arabic words not only for concrete objects but also for abstract principles that were new to their cultures. This situation led to, among other things, the introduction of loanwords into Arabic,<sup>3</sup> new word compositions and derivations, semantic extension of existing words, as well as the disappearance of older words. The latter is not accepted by everyone because according to most Arabs, Arabic words are a part of the Arabic heritage, the so-called *turāt* in which the disappearance of words is not accepted. Another important result of the Western influence has been the establishment of Arab academies in different Arab countries that have attempted to exert an influence on language policy. Sometimes Arab Academies were successful in their proposition of new words, but in most cases they seem to have had no lasting influence. One clear case of the influence of language policy was the decision by the Saudi government to replace the word *bāy* (an English loanword) at every bus station in the kingdom by *ḥāfilat*, a new Arabic word derived from an Arabic stem meaning ‘to gather’.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mark Van Mol, A. Marogy, K. Vanpee, *لامفر La mafarr, Volume 1: Learners' grammar*, Leuven, Peeters, Leuven 2007, 449 pp. A. Marogy, K. Vanpee Mark Van Mol, *لامفر La mafarr, Volume 2: exercises*, Peeters, Leuven 2007, 638 pp.

<sup>3</sup> For the influence of English loanwords in Arabic, see A. Atawneh, *English loanwords*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> This particular case has been examined by C. Holes, *Modern Arabic, Structures, Functions and Varieties*, Georgetown University Press, Washington 2004. For an overview of the different methods of coining new words

A recent phenomenon that can be seen as an external cause of language change with regard to Arabic is so-called globalization. Due to the increase of contacts between people on all levels of society there has been a renewed influence of foreign languages on Arabic. Stimulating elements in this respect are the emergence of supranational broadcasting services by means of satellite channels. Especially channels such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al 'Arabiya* have played an essential role in the evolution of the use of Arabic language. Most satellite channels reach a local public and hence broadcast in one of the different dialects. But because the focus of *Al Jazeera* was and is the whole (Arab) world, they started to stress the importance of using default Standard Arabic in order to reach the largest possible number of spectators. Thanks to the efforts made in the instruction of the Standard language in all Arab countries, all educated Arab speakers were able to tune in to these satellite channels because they did not encounter any difficulty understanding them. Previously, the policy of using Standard Language has almost only been applied by the Palestinian people and broadcasts because they wanted their message to be heard all over the Arab world. In a certain sense, one might claim that the Palestinians were the first to use Standard Arabic for this specific goal. Not even the Egyptian president Nasser or Sadat conveyed their messages by means of Standard Arabic because the public they wanted to reach was more limited, namely the citizens of their own countries. Meanwhile, the world has changed because we also have to recognize that a few decades ago, the only means to reach Arabic speaking people outside their own frontiers was to make use of long wave radio channels, the broadcasts of which were of a very low quality and difficult to listen to.

Other important impetuses for language change are changes that occur in the environmental society. Altered social relations can feed the need to express hidden feelings and frustrations that have arisen in society, but for which there exist no means to ventilate them. Apparently the changes in these cases occur mostly on the lexical level. It is also possible that many of these elements were alive in the minds and hearts of the people, but due to circumstances, could hardly be uttered. Researchers, for example, who examined the evolution of the German language after the fall of the Berlin wall, revealed that one of these utterances was the Eastern German collocation '*empty shops*',<sup>5</sup> a collocation that was well alive in the peoples' minds, but impossible to express in newspapers or

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based on the existing Arabic language, see J. Stetkevych, J., *The modern Arabic literary language, lexical and stylistical developments*, Georgetown University Press, Chicago-London 2006, and on the use of analogy to create new words, R. Ratcliffe, *Analogy*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong RE (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> See for more detail: U. Bredel and N. Dittmar, *Die Sprachmauer. Die Verarbeitung der Wende und Ihrer Folgen in Gesprächen mit Ost- und Westberlinern*, Weidler, Berlin 1988. M. Hellmann, *Durch die gemeinsame Sprache getrennt – Zu Sprache und Kommunikation in Deutschland seit der Wende 1989/90*, „Das Wort. Germanischer Jahrbuch“ 1998, pp. 51–69. M. Hellmann, *Thema erledigt – oder doch noch nicht? Was bleibt zu tun bei der Erforschung des DDR-Sprachgebrauchs?*, in: R. Reiher and A. Baumann (eds.), *Vorwärts und nichts vergessen. Sprache in der DDR – was war, was ist, was bleibt*, Aufbau Taschenbuch, Berlin 2004, pp. 17–26. P. Porsch, *Alltag – Alltagsbewusstsein – Sprache*, in: L. Gotthard (ed.) *Sprachgebrauch im Wandel. Anmerkungen zur Kommunikationskultur in der DDR vor und nach der Wende*, Peter Lang, Berlin 1992, 332 pp. H. Stenger, 1997. *Gleiche Sprache, fremder Sinn. Zum Konzept kultureller Fremdheit im Ost-West-Kontext*, in: D. Naguschewski

public writings before the fall of the wall. This fact shows that in certain circumstances, collocations and other lexical items can exist in a society long before they are traceable in public documents.

### 3b. Internal causes of language change

As far as the internal causes of language changes are concerned, we will limit ourselves to two elements: the process of grammaticalization and the (natural) evolution of language by means of shifts in use, which we might also classify as semantic extension or narrowing.

It is clear that one of the apparent grammaticalization processes that have taken place in the Arabic language is the evolution from synthetic structures to analytic structures.<sup>6</sup> This is in line with evolutions that have been observed for other languages as well. In many Arabic dialects an analytic genitive has emerged – probably because of economic reasons. The particles used in these cases in the different dialects are well known. For Morocco, for instance, we could mention the particles *dyal* or *nta'*, which replace the synthetic structure of the construct state. A construction that has been thoroughly investigated is the evolution from the word *sawf* (patience) to the particle *sawfa*, indicating the future, and in a later stage, developing into the shortened particle *sa*, the particle that gives expression to a future meaning.<sup>7</sup>

We ourselves have investigated the shift of what we have called the complementary particles. It has been proven that a semantic shift, a simultaneous narrowing and extension, has taken place in Modern Standard Arabic, despite the rules of the traditional Arabic grammars.<sup>8</sup> This shift in use has been demonstrated for the following particles: *in*, *iḏā* and *law*; *a* and *hal*; *sa* and *sawfa* and *wa* and *fa*.

## 4. Causes of language change with regard to the Arab spring

In the case of the Arab spring we are confronted with two elements that have occurred simultaneously and that might obscure our findings when we search for the variables that have possibly exerted an influence on language change. Indeed, we are confronted with two (r)evolutions that took place at the same time: on the one hand the (in)visible social (r)evolutions, and on the other hand, the technological (r)evolutions. The fact that both movements occurred together raises some important methodological issues. The central question is how to investigate this situation in a proper way. Many questions arise, such

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and J. Trabant (eds.), *Was heisst hier 'fremd'? Studien zu Sprache und Fremdheit*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1997, pp. 181–196.

<sup>6</sup> See for a recent discussion about this phenomenon in Arabic the commentary by Wilmsen on the blog of prof. dr. em. Rouchdy: <http://arabiclanguageinamerica.blogspot.be/2010/11/grammaticalization-is-well-and-alive.html>

<sup>7</sup> E. Mohssen, *Grammaticalization*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Van Mol, op. cit.

as: which linguistic elements might play a role in this specific situation? How can we obtain objective empirical results? How do we have to proceed methodologically? How can we prove (!) that language (change) evolution has taken place?

### **5. Language change and revolution: one recent experience from the past**

Before we further examine the characteristics of language change during the Arab spring, we will take a look at a similar case that took place with the fall of the Berlin wall. The two situations are not, of course, completely equal. The German situation has specific features which we do not find in the Arab case. First of all, in Germany only two countries were involved, which were united before the Second World War. After that war these countries were separated for approximately 44 years. Both countries have been influenced or, in one case, indoctrinated by different ideologies. Linguistic research conducted in Germany after the fall of the Berlin wall came to the following conclusions: neither orthography, nor pronunciation or grammar changed after the partition. In Eastern Germany a new lexicon developed that was mainly based on terms of the communist ideology. This led to the emergence of homonyms with different meanings in the two countries. The investigation method, after unification of the countries, was quite easy to apply. Researchers based their work on the year-by-year analysis of newspapers and magazines after the fall of the wall.

Summarizing their findings in a nutshell, we can conclude the following: Germany witnessed an emergence of some 1,000 new words in the years 1989 and 1990. These were found especially in statements of politicians. One strange observation was that the language of the secret services, which for obvious reasons was always limited to intern circles, became part of the public lexicon from one day to the next. Let's not forget in this respect that one of the measures that were taken after the fall of the wall was that every citizen got the right to visit the secret services to get information on the files that had been collected about their activities and thoughts. On the other hand, many elements of the specific Eastern German ideological lexicon gradually disappeared. A more complex finding concerned the differences in perceptions regarding communication patterns, such as, for example, the view on how to conduct oneself in certain conversational settings, especially with regard to Human Resources Management. In Western Germany the applicants were expected to show that they got enjoyment out of their work and were eager to innovate, whereas the people from Eastern Germany stressed that they did their work correctly.

On the other hand, new collocations and sentences emerged. Collocations, such as: *Mitteleuropäische Revolution*, *Kerzenrevolution*, *Freiheitsrevolution*, etc. The same kind of collocations were recorded during the Arab spring, especially the names that were given to the revolution, such as, for example, the emergence of the new collocation *ṭawrat yāsmīn* in Tunisia. A striking similarity with the revolution in Germany is the German utterance which was claimed over and over again "*Wir sind das Volk!*" (*We are the people!*). This

directly reminds us of the Arabic slogan: “*aš- šaʿb yurīd isqāṭ an-niẓām!*” (The people want to topple the regime!). In both languages the notion *people* was a central theme in the slogans.

After the fall of the wall, many words also acquired a new meaning. More and more English words found their way into daily language. Many of the typical East German words seem to have disappeared. A unified language developed whereby words from West Germany replaced East German terms. In general, however, it can be stated that ultimately the language changes occurred on a quite limited scale.

## 6. The difference with Arabic: a much more complex language situation

Despite there being similarities between the two situations, we have to stress that the Arabic language situation differs strongly from the German language situation. First of all, there are many more (different) countries with different socioeconomic and socio-cultural situations. The geographical area is larger, and a wider number of dialects/languages are spoken. In the first place, Classical Quranic Arabic still remains a stabilizing factor. Members of the clergy often do not (want to) deviate from the prestigious norm.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Arab countries are confronted with a situation of diglossia, which has to be seen as a continuum. Intermediate forms of language have arisen, such as the use of a *luġa wuṣṭā*.<sup>10</sup> In some countries multilingualism (the influence of different European languages in different degrees) is widespread.<sup>11</sup> And finally, there is a different grade of literacy across the different countries, both for the native tongue and for foreign languages. In countries such as Morocco, Sudan and Yemen the problem of illiteracy for school age children is still over fifty per cent.<sup>12</sup>

This means that the language situation in the Arab world is much more complex. For all countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) there is a tension or interplay between Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Educated spoken Arabic,<sup>13</sup> a great variety of dialects, a difference in influences of other foreign languages, and also a difference in attitudes among the different countries (according to age, gender, education, etc.).

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<sup>9</sup> For a summary on classical influences on the Arabic language, see: H. Palva, *Classicism*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit. For an evaluation of the Arabic language on Youtube sermons see: C. Hirschkind, *Experiments in devotion online: The Youtube khutba*, “International Journal of Middle East Studies” 2012, Vol. 44, pp. 5–21.

<sup>10</sup> G. Mejdell, *luġa wuṣṭā*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the situation in Tunisia see: M. Daoud, *The sociolinguistic situation in Tunisia: language rivalry or accommodation*, “International Journal of the Sociology of Language” 2011, Vol. 211, pp. 9–33.

<sup>12</sup> M. Maamouri, “Language education and human development: Arabic diglossia and its impact on the quality of education in the Arab region”. Paper presented at the Mediterranean Development Forum held in Marrakech, 1998, September 3–6.

<sup>13</sup> For a small survey on Educated Arabic, see K. Ryding, *Educated Arabic*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.



Especially the influences of foreign languages vary from one country to another. In Northern Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) there is a historic influence from French, which is clearly demonstrated by the extensive use of code-switching and borrowing (see the Paradis CoPho Database and Mejdell.<sup>14</sup> Arabic dialects of these countries are also influenced by Berber dialects.<sup>15</sup> In recent years, a larger influence of English has also been observed. As for Egypt and Libya almost no comparable data are available! There is a historical influence of Turkish and Coptic and also an increasing influence of English. Traces of Italian are observed in the Libyan dialect, although we might expect that they are diminishing. In the Levant, on the other hand, there is an apparent influence of French (especially in Lebanon) and an increasing influence of English. In some regions of Syria there might be an influence of Kurdish. Finally, in the Gulf States the influence of English is overwhelming. The question is whether an influence of Persian is traceable within the *Shi'i* population. An investigation into language change during the period of the Arab spring has to take the above observations into consideration.

### 7. The central question: where did or might language changes occur?

In order to investigate this question as accurately as possible it seems useful, at first, to examine in which language elements change might occur. We will describe these elements as the characteristics of the Arabic language that are *vulnerable* to change. Here again, we have to take many factors into consideration. First, there are the situational factors. In this context new questions arise: What kind of language is or will be used in what kind of situations? Is there a switch of dialectal and Modern Standard Arabic to other domains and registers? Can a change be observed in attitudes toward Arabic and foreign languages by Arabic native speakers? Has there been or is there going to be a change in the way people treat multilingualism? Will the influence of foreign languages on Arabic increase or decrease? Will the Arab spring affect speech accommodation between speakers of different Arabic dialects? Will it affect the process of levelling in one way or another?

Other issues that might be worthwhile investigating are the following: we may assume that there will be changes in political discourse.<sup>16</sup> But how is this going to affect language? Will there be a change in language planning in the near future as a consequence of the Arab spring? Is the fact that, in most cases, Islamic parties won the elections, going to

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<sup>14</sup> C. Malin, 2010, Middle East & North Africa Facebook Demographics, Spoton, on [http://www.spotonpr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/FacebookMENA\\_24May10.pdf](http://www.spotonpr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/FacebookMENA_24May10.pdf), accessed 2012/08/20. See also the detailed study on language change and code-switching in Tunisia by L. Sayahi, *Code-switching and language change in Tunisia*, "International Journal of the Sociology of Language" 2011, Vol. 211: 113–133.

<sup>15</sup> See also the detailed study on language change and code-switching in Tunisia by Sayahi, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> A more political approach to the languages of the Arab Revolutions is developed by A. Filali-Ansary, *The Languages of the Arab Revolutions*, "Journal of Democracy" 2012, Vol. 23, pp. 5–18. See also about the influence of politics on code choice during the Egyptian revolution: R. Bassiouney, *Politicizing identity: Code choice and stance-taking during the Egyptian revolution*, "Discourse and Society" 2012, Vol. 23, pp. 107–126.

affect the increase of Standard Language use? What about the school books that will have to be (re)written? Will there be more Quranic and classical texts in school books? As far as Morocco is concerned, more attention and possibilities were given to the instruction of Berber in schools before the Arab spring. How is this situation going to evolve? On Moroccan satellite television in 2012 we saw a programme in which Berber representatives demanded more possibilities for their language as a consequence of the Arab spring. What about the newspapers and magazines? Is there going to be a change in the framing of Arabic language in that segment of language use?<sup>17</sup>

The elements of the language itself also have to be taken into consideration. The question here is: on which language levels will we witness change? Can we expect a change in phonology or morphology in such a relatively short time? Or will changes occur more on the level of syntax (grammar)? What about the lexicon? Are we going to encounter new collocations? Are we going to discover changes in phraseology? Will semantic extension occur and where will it occur? Is the lexical variation between the different countries going to decrease or increase? What about the use of euphemisms (before and after the revolution) (cf. Rabab'ah Ghaleb and Farghal).<sup>18</sup> It is clear that under the severe rule of a dictatorship, people use other elements in language than in a democracy where freedom of speech is guaranteed. And what about taboos? Taboos were certainly present under the various dictatorships. Our collaborator for the compilation of the corpus, for example, begged us not to have him transcribe texts from his home country, not even *neutral* texts, such as, for instance, informative texts on tourism. With the change of regimes in some of the Arab countries, the fear to express oneself seems to have disappeared. Several people told me they are not afraid any more to express themselves freely. But will new taboos be created?

Another interesting element to investigate is the issue of secret languages. Is the democratisation process going to diminish the use of secret languages or will we, on the contrary, witness an increase in their use? Secret languages in Arabic are not uncommon. They are used in some regions of Saudi Arabia. Of course, organizations such as *Al-Qā'ida* seem to have been using secret language in their written communication. But the army officers in Morocco, who were imprisoned after the unsuccessful attack on King Hassan II, also developed a secret language in prison to communicate among each other on certain matters so that the guardians were unable to understand them.<sup>19</sup> And

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<sup>17</sup> See for an investigation on framing of the Arab Spring by Western newspapers: K. Van Camp, "Framing van de Arabische Lente. Een vergelijkende analyse van Vlaamse, Franse en Amerikaanse kranten", Master thesis, Political Communication, Antwerp 2012. For a detailed analysis of the framing of the Egyptian uprising see: N. Hamdy and E. Gomaa, *Framing the Egyptian Uprising in Arabic Language Newspapers and Social Media*, "Journal of Communication" 2012, Vol. 62, pp. 195–211.

<sup>18</sup> G. Rabab'ah A. Al-Qarni, *Euphemism in Saudi Arabic and British English*, "Journal of Pragmatics" 2012, Vol. 44, pp. 730–743; M. Farghal, *Euphemism*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> See for this subject also: M. Bakalla, *Al-misfalawiy-yah: A subdialect of the Makkan dialect of Arabic*, in: A. Youssi (ed.), *Aspects of the dialects of Arabic today*, Amapatril, Rabat 2002, pp. 412–421 for Saudi Arabia; N. Berjaoui, *The Arabic Permutation "sawgh" of El-Jadida, Morocco*, Lincom, München 2012 for Morocco and A. Youssi, *Secret Languages*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit., for a succinct overview.

finally, what about young people's speech? Did the Arab spring have an effect on young people's speech?<sup>20</sup>

The most crucial point in this discussion is the following: is it possible to register and measure changes in the Arabic language on an empirical basis with the currently available scientific means? In other words, do we have enough representative and comparable sources? Before we further examine these methodological issues we will first raise and try to answer a separate question:

### 8. Why should the Arabic language be liable to change?

Why should the Arabic language as a whole be subject to change? Why should it not remain static in some domains? The answer is that languages will be used as long as they are perceived to have a specific value for their users. The following elements play a role in the tendency towards stability or change as far as language is concerned. In the first place, people have specific needs, such as employment, education or social advancement. They will adapt their language to these specific needs. This might imply that they want to stick to certain social conventions about the use of language in specific situations.

For other people, there might not be any specific new needs. Especially illiterate people, or people in lower professions, experience that they can get around with their local dialect. When we observed unskilled workers in the *madīna* of Fas (Morocco), for example, it became clear to us that they will probably remain in the same micro-linguistic environment their entire life. The need for them to use another language *level* than their local dialect is very limited or even non-existent. This is why in certain environments dialectal elements remain rather stable. On the other hand, when observing the masses in *Yemen* repeatedly shouting the same phrase: *aš-ša'b yurīd isqāt an-niẓām*, we might assume that many of them are illiterate. The fact that masses of people shout a *fushā* phrase does not necessarily testify to an increase of use of *fushā* language. Moreover, the poet-singer who sang the verses of the song between the refrain used his local dialect so that everybody could understand what he said. In this particular case we may assume that the *fushā* phrase was meant for the whole Arab world, giving expression to a common shared feeling throughout the Arab world, while the use of dialect in the song was meant for the local demonstrators, with the main one meant to be understood by the whole public.

Some levels of Arabic also have a very symbolic character. Religion, cultural heritage, and minority group identity all play important roles here. It is clear that for the Islamic religion, the Classical Arabic remains the norm both for preachers and for ritual use. This *conservative* influence of religion has also been observed outside the Arab world.<sup>21</sup> It also

<sup>20</sup> For a first impression on youth speech see: A. Hassanein, *Youth Speech*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> N. Gogonas, *Religion as a Core Value in Language Maintenance: Arabic Speakers in Greece*, "International Migration" 2011, Vol. 50, pp. 113–129.

seems that 10% of the 100–200 most frequently visited Arabic websites have a decidedly religious character,<sup>22</sup> where Classical Arabic remains the norm. But foreign languages also have their place and function in the Arab world. English and French have a specific meaning for a group of Arabs due to their instrumental value in offering access to the West (and their ‘trendy phrases’). And finally, we have to consider the Arab youth, many of whom adhere to a specific cultural subgroup with a specific language.

### 9. Methodological implications for the investigation of language change during the Arab spring

For this investigation, two elements are of crucial importance. First, there are the sociolinguistic prerequisites for a methodologically serious examination and second, there are the pure linguistic prerequisites. To start with the first, we can state that the above-mentioned elements of the Arabic language illustrate the complexity of the research field, especially when we intend to obtain objective empirical and verifiable results and data. We now want to enumerate the methodological implications for the investigation in such a complex field.

First of all, there are some important sociolinguistic prerequisites, the most important one being the delimitation of the period of the Arab spring for linguistic purposes. There are many different opinions about the start of the Arab spring. The most widely accepted one is the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunis (December 2010), but other opinions also prevail. The least acceptable one, in my view, was found on a website where the American invasion in Iraq in 2003 was considered to be the starting point of the Arab spring.<sup>23</sup> This seems to me an overly American-centred view. Another one, and in my view the most accurate delimitation of the start of the Arab spring, situates it at the beginning of 2004 with the start of the different social movements in Egypt.

Conclusive evidence of this can be found in a detailed report about the *Kifāya* movement (*ḥaraka*) in Egypt which was published two years before the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia.<sup>24</sup> In this political report, linguistic elements are also quoted that clearly show a deliberate tactic to use a specific language for political purposes. One of the main

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<sup>22</sup> A. Hofheinz, *The Internet in the Arab world, Playground for Political Liberalization*, “Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft” 2005, Vol. 3, pp. 78–96.

<sup>23</sup> Another opinion which lies in line with this assumption is the view that the Arab spring was caused precisely by the technological revolution and that it was made possible only because of the development of the social media in the Arab countries. For a thorough discussion on this issue, see B. Szabo, “‘Like’ the Facebook Revolution (?), Politieke participatie via sociale media en de beeldvorming van sociale media als de revolutiemakende tool in Egypte tijdens de Arabische lente”, Master thesis, *New Media and Digital Culture*, Utrecht 2011. See also the article of M. Sabadello, *The Role of New Media for the Democratization Processes in the Arab World*, in: Z. Sereghy, S. Bunk and B. Preiss B (eds.), *The Arab Revolutions. Reflections on the Role of Civil Society, Human Rights and New Media in the Transformation Processes*, Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR), Stadtschlaining 2012, pp. 11–20.

<sup>24</sup> N. Oweida et al., *The Kefaya movement: a case of a grassroots reform initiative*, Rand, Santa Monica 2008.

elements is that the *Kifāya* movement made use of easy-to-grasp slogans, such as *Lā li-at-tawriṭ, lā li-at-tamdīd* (“No to hereditary transmission, No to the prolongation”), referring to the succession of President Mubārak by his son. They also made a simple analysis of the situation, which any citizen was able to understand. The movement had to use a language that could be understood by everybody, not only linguistically speaking, but also politically, as it included members from all layers of society. As we have mentioned above, the delimitation of the Arab spring for linguistic purposes is not easy because of the fact that long before the open expression of feelings and frustrations, these feelings were already present in the hearts and minds of the people and were probably also uttered within small groups of the society – albeit secretly, for fear of police or security sanctions. We therefore prefer to define the linguistic starting point of the Arab spring together with the emergence of the *Kifāya* movement in Egypt (Autumn 2004).

A second element, which is even more difficult to define, is the delimitation of the linguistic area of the Arab spring. Different countries experienced the influence of the Arab spring. For some countries the impact was more profound than for others. For Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where the regimes fell, the political impact was far greater than for countries such as Morocco or Algeria, where reforms were carried out without the fall of the regime.

Of course, pure linguistic prerequisites also have to be taken into account in any investigation of language change. In order to obtain an objective view on language evolution and change, we have to be conscious that change can only be proved empirically by means of benchmarks, of which we consider three categories. In the first place, Quranic Arabic and Classical texts often remain the point of reference for many Arabs. Arabic grammars may also function as a benchmark to evaluate possible evolution. But the most modern and appropriate benchmark nowadays is the use of comparable corpora which have to be very clearly described and developed in order not to compare apples and oranges.

The corpora need to be well delimited in space, genre, size (because of the importance of using representative language samples), and sociolinguistic situation. It is important to examine language in as many settings as possible. Another important prerequisite is the need to use corpora that are tagged in as much detail as possible so as to also be able to investigate small language elements. In this respect we may refer to the *Arabic corpus* of Brigham Young University which is a raw corpus. Such a corpus is very useful as it makes a large amount of data available. The disadvantage of such corpora is that they yield a lot of noise, which hampers efficient research. Although a high technological device is available, users in many cases are obliged to do a lot of handwork because they obtain many elements that do not suit their investigation.<sup>25</sup>

For some elements that are unambiguous, such a corpus is very useful. We refer here to the investigation of Wilmsen on the dialectal influence on the use of the particle *إِذَا*.

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<sup>25</sup> C. Pinon, «La nébuleuse de kaana: Classification des différents emplois de kaana / yakuunu à partir d'un corpus d'arabe contemporain», Doctoral thesis, Aix-Marseille Université 2012.

Because this particle is unambiguous, it is very easy to base such an investigation on *Arabicorpus*.<sup>26</sup> But what about an investigation of the use of the dialectal prefix *bi-* in Modern Arabic texts? For such detailed investigation it is imperative to have a seriously tagged corpus at one's disposal. When we are able to compose such comparable corpora we will create the opportunity to conduct longitudinal studies. Studies can then be conducted in regular intervals over a certain period of time. This, however, also presupposes the regular compilation of new comparable corpora. Finally, when these conditions are met we will be able to apply statistics in order to prove on an empirical basis which evolutions have occurred in the Arabic language.

The following example illustrates the importance of aiming at a maximum of detail of the corpus samples. For our Algerian radio corpus we investigated the use of the particles *wa-* and *fa-* in news broadcasts. The corpus was quite small (80,000 words) and all recordings date from the year 1990. In the news broadcasts, however, we made a distinction between different subdivisions. We made a distinction between reading news aloud (monologues), sport news (monologues), coverages (mixed) and interviews (dialogues). The following table shows that these subdivisions were meaningful, as they had an influence on the occurrence and distribution of the particle *fa*.

**Table 1: Occurrences of *fa-* in Algerian news broadcasts**

Occurrence of <i>fa-</i>	News divisions	%
	News reading (monologues)	1.00
	Sport news (monologues)	2.56
	Coverage's (mixed)	3.60
	Interviews	6.60

The differences in use that we discovered were highly significant since we statistically obtained a Chi square value of 585.45 against a table value of 45.56 with a certainty degree of 99.5% which means an overwhelming difference in use in these subtypes of programmes. These results show that the compilation of very detailed corpora is no luxury. If we stick to general corpora we risk obtaining scientific results that after more detailed analysis seem to be too general.

The problem of language investigation and the Arab spring is that a technological (r)evolution took place simultaneously to the Arab spring revolution, the impact of which cannot be underestimated. This revolution consisted of the creation of the internet, with sites such as Wikipedia.<sup>27</sup> As an alternative for the Arabic Wikipedia, a new dialectal

<sup>26</sup> D.Wilmsen, *Dialects of Written Arabic: Syntactic differences in the treatment of object pronouns in Egyptian and Levantine Newspapers*, "Arabica" 2010, Vol. 57, pp. 99–128.

<sup>27</sup> For a succinct survey on Arabic on the Internet, see: W. Samy, *Internet*, in: L. Edzards and R.E. de Jong (eds.), op. cit.

Wikipedia was created in 2008, named the Egyptian Wikipedia (ويكيبيديا مصري).<sup>28</sup> This shows that the influence of dialect is still very strong. We further witnessed an extension of Computer-Mediated Communication of which some elements have already been replaced such as MSN, while others seem to be more stable. We mention here the emergence of blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and the use of cell phones, which might be an important element in the evolution of language because of the use of the short written messages (SMS), which for all languages seem to lead to another manner of expression.<sup>29</sup> And we should not forget that the fact that twitter requires its users to express themselves succinctly might also have an impact on the further development of languages. However, the question is why this technological (r)evolution might be so important for language evolution. In order to answer that question we will have to further examine the characteristics of the technological communication revolution.

### 10. The characteristics of the technological communication revolution

In our view this technological revolution is very important as far as language use is concerned because we can discern two distinguished periods, namely a period before the technological innovations and a period after. The reader will notice that the differences between these two periods are not unimportant.

Let's first take a look at the characteristics of the language situation in the period before the technological revolution. The period before is characterized by several features which we will mention one by one. Vernaculars were open to everyone, also to the illiterate. Educated (Standard) Arabic was used by the educated, especially in oral communication. Standard Arabic was used by the educated, for reading and writing. Classical religious language was in most cases reserved for clerics. But what were the main characteristics of the Arabic language production? Before the technological revolution written language production was only possible after a certain age. In most Arabic countries, writers of all kinds were people of mature age, the so-called *kahl*. Thus, the production of language levels other than vernaculars was monopolised by a limited section of the population, including first of all qualified journalists (and other invited professions on television shows, for example), but also qualified writers and novelists, and school book composers (teachers).

It was not possible for just anyone to write essays or anything else. The modifier *qualified* could not be neglected in this period. Production of language was in most cases strictly controlled by language correctors and coaches on all levels: news media, printing houses, etc. Some newspapers, for example "Al-Ḥayāt" use a style manual. One was obliged to have a diploma and to pass a test. This goes for every country in that period.

<sup>28</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_Arabic).

<sup>29</sup> See for example for English: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_language) and M. Mphahlele, *The impact of short message service (SMS) language on language proficiency of learners and the sms dictionaries: A challenge for educators and lexicographers*, IADIS International Conference Mobile Learning 2005, pp. 161–168.

Presenters of the BCC news or other broadcasts also had to pass a test, among others, on Received Pronunciation. Also in Belgium, not just anyone was permitted to work in a radio or television broadcast or in a newspaper. People were trained very specifically to practise these jobs. To conclude, we have to realize that a restricted number of persons were *qualified* producers of written language, from whom the (written) production of language was expected and accepted. Other public writings remained limited to letters from newspaper readers, and even those were in most cases edited by someone working at the newspaper.

The first period lasted centuries. The new period during and after the communication revolution witnessed an exponential expansion of the number of public language producers free of any correction or control. This meant a tremendous turnover on various levels. The new media, for example, demand new techniques for language expression. The use of SMS created the need for another abbreviated language.<sup>30</sup> Abbreviated language is not completely new, as it had already been used in Europe in the printed press advertisements where every space costs money. The major technique used in Europe was to drop the vowels (ironically just like in Arabic). One could, and still can find advertisements like the following one: Mn lks fr yng wmn -25y (Man looks for young women of less than 25 years old). It is obvious that this kind of language was seldom used productively. Private persons do not often publish advertisements and it is quite probable that the advertising magazine itself composed the message based on the data that were provided in a form. But also on the level of receptive language use, this kind of language is rather marginal because it is strictly limited to specific needs; for example, for someone who is looking for a second-hand car. SMS language, however, is used daily and very frequently, as can be seen when we observe young people. Some young people seem to be constantly occupied with their messages.

As far as the Arabic language is concerned, something special has happened. For quite a long time it was impossible to use Arabic script in certain technological applications. These shortcomings have led to a new kind of script, the so-called *Arabizi*.<sup>31</sup> In order to keep up with the technological pace, Arab young people themselves have developed a solution for this problem. In my view this is revolutionary.<sup>32</sup> Right from the ground as

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<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of the SMS language used by Arabs, see: D. Palfeyman and M. Al Khalil, *A Funky Language for Teenzz to Use: "Representing Gulf Arabic in instant Messaging"*, "Journal of Computer Mediated Communication" 2003, Vol. 9.

<sup>31</sup> See for a recent survey on the problem of the use of the *Arabizi* script in the Arab world: M. Randa et al., *Summary of Arabizi or Romanization: The dilemma of writing texts*, Jil Jadid Conference, University of Texas at Austin, 18–19 February 2011. For a detailed description and analysis and some interesting innovative propositions see: M. Ali Yahgan, "*Arabizi*": *A Contemporary Style of Arabic Slang*, "Design Issues" 2008, Vol. 24, pp. 39–52.

<sup>32</sup> However, it is not completely certain whether the *Arabizi* script is an invention of Arabs. In Europe a similar system has been developed which is called Leet (or "1337"). On Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leet>) we find the following information: "Leet, also known as eleet or leetspeak, is an alternative *alphabet* for the *English language* that is used primarily on the *Internet*. It uses various combinations of *ASCII* characters to replace *Latinate* letters. For example, leet spellings of the word *leet* include *1337* and *l33t*; *eleet* may be spelled *31337* or *3l33t*. The term leet is derived from the word *elite*. The leet alphabet is a specialized form of *symbolic* writing."



a grass-roots movement, without any discussions in Arab Academies by great specialists, young people invented their own solution by using numbers to replace the Arabic letters that were not available. For example, sentences such as the following: *9aba7 2l5air! Keif 7luk ya a5ee? Anta za3lan?*

*Arabizi* is not standardized because of the fact that different uses of characters prevail. Notwithstanding this fact it is astonishing, but not illogical, that the use of *Arabizi* also spread in publicity and even in printed magazines. For instance, a billboard advertising stating: *betchouf 7alak fiya*. Apparently it has also been used in poetry by the Libyan poet Giuma Bukleb in his poem about the fall of the regime entitled: “*er7ol*”. But also software developers had an influence on the spread of this new type of Arabic writing by means of the development of specific tools, such as, *maren*<sup>33</sup> in order to make the system more user-friendly. This means that software companies and programmers had a direct influence on the promotion of a specific language writing style. The question is: what is going to be the influence of all these changes on the Arabic language?

But why are we inclined to consider these recent developments a tremendous turnover? Because of the following characteristics: first of all, we witness a total upheaval about the number of producers and their characteristics. Modern communication tools such as blogs, e-mail, Facebook, twitter and SMS offer every (semi)literate the possibility to convey messages without being corrected! What is new is that large numbers of language non-mature persons make extensive use of modern communication techniques. Many of them do not yet master the standard language at a sufficient level. Grammatical accuracy is not their primary concern. Even young writers write in slang sometimes, neglecting to master their own language. We witness the creation of a relatively unregulated, private language. As far as technology is concerned we observe that for the first time, older people are preceded in knowledge by youngsters at the technological level. Because of the loss of correctors’ constraints, the traditional norms become vague. People feel free to write as they like. The same goes for the spoken language where the development of free (local) radio broadcasts and television channels led to a greater freedom in pronunciation and speech.

We may even compare this tremendous increase of language production with a real tsunami of language producers from all levels of education and of all ages. Before the communication revolution there was only a limited number of journalists that a news institution could afford and they had to pass a serious exam. We can estimate that an average newspaper or magazine has a maximum of approximately fifty journalists who effectively write articles. When we compare this small number to the statistics of the

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Leet may also be considered a *substitution cipher*, although many *dialects* or *linguistic varieties* exist in different online communities. The term leet is also used as an *adjective* to describe formidable prowess or accomplishment, especially in the fields of *online gaming* and in its original usage, *computer hacking*.<sup>33</sup> According to some it has been developed as a secret language in order to slip through spam filters undetected; e.g., Viagra ads which are written as V1@GR@.

<sup>33</sup> See for a downloadable version: <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=20530>.

new production media like Facebook,<sup>34</sup> we find a number of 15,000,000 million users in MENA.<sup>35</sup> 50% of them use primarily English, 25% French and only 23% Arabic. After the introduction of the Arabic interface the proportion of users using Arabic language grew from 23% (May '10) to 51% (May '11) and to 60% (May '12). Apparently Twitter Arabic grows faster than other languages and seems to be the eighth most used language.<sup>36</sup>

The characteristics of the language used in the new media have been described by Saussan Khalil, and Abu Elhij'a.<sup>37</sup> On Facebook, Twitter and popular blogs there is a clear preference for using colloquial rather than classical language, particularly in Egypt. Another characteristic is the use of Arabizi script (which differs even from different dialects in the same country).

### 11. Some suggestions on how we might manage to screen the Arabic language and document its evolution

At Leuven University we have developed the Modern Arabic Representative Corpus 2000 (MARC-2000) and a Modern Arabic Lexicographic database (1980–2001). This corpus has the following characteristics: first, it has a limited size of 15,000,000 words. The reason why we have opted for a corpus of a limited size is that we wanted to tag the corpus in detail and make sure that the corpus is representative of the whole. More words often hamper efficiency because of the law of diminishing returns, which is not cost effective.

The most important characteristic of the MARC-2000 corpus is that it is representative. The motive to include texts in the corpus was not the device “just use what you can find” (such as, on the internet), but the planning of a well-balanced corpus. Samples, for example, were chosen at random. For newspapers and magazines every two months several copies were bought and tagged and digitized. For literature a division was made between fiction and non-fiction. For fiction we chose 50 books per country. From each of those, five times ten pages were included in the corpus (ten pages each time from the beginning, the middle and the end of the books, and twice ten pages in between). For non-fiction we had to make use of more books because of the different subjects dealt with. Therefore, we visited several Arab book fairs and printing houses (all of the ones in Morocco, for example). For all available subjects, two different books were bought

<sup>34</sup> C. Malin, 2010, *Middle East & North Africa Facebook Demographics*, Spoton, on [http://www.spotonpr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/FacebookMENA\\_24May10.pdf](http://www.spotonpr.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/FacebookMENA_24May10.pdf), accessed 2012/08/20.

<sup>35</sup> C. Malin, *Facebook Arabic triumphs after Arab Spring*, on <http://www.spotonpr.com/facebook-arabic-triumphs/>, accessed 2012/08/20.

<sup>36</sup> *SemioCast*, [http://semioCast.com/publications/2011\\_11\\_24\\_Arabic\\_highest\\_growth\\_on\\_Twitter](http://semioCast.com/publications/2011_11_24_Arabic_highest_growth_on_Twitter), accessed 2012/08/20.

<sup>37</sup> The analysis conducted by D. Abu Elhij'a, *Facebook written Levantine Vernacular Languages*, “The Levantine Review” 2012, Vol. 1, pp. 68–105 is very detailed and to the point. S. Khalil, 2011, *BRISMES Grad Sneak Peak: Arabic Language and the Arab Spring – Online, Uncensored and Colloquial*. Middle East Centre Blog, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2012/05/31/arabic-language-the-arab-spring-online-uncensored-and-colloquial/>, accessed 2012/08/20.

and 5 x 10 pages were digitized. The corpus also contains radio broadcast programs from different countries, as well as satellite television programs. During the year 2000, one satellite station was recorded for a whole week every three weeks. All primary schoolbooks for the teaching of the Arabic language within the Arab world (and for the secondary schools a selection of them) were also included in the corpus.

The existing corpus is both synchronic and diachronic. For the synchronic part, all texts date from the year 2000. We consider it to be a special corpus because it contains the language of the beginning of the second millennium. An exception had to be made for literature because in the countries we visited there were often not enough titles available for the year 2000. Therefore, we also included literary works, both fiction and non-fiction, from the period between 1999 and 2004. Hence, we could definitely describe the MARC-2000 corpus as a pre-Arab spring corpus. There are two other smaller corpora available that can be used for diachronic research: one of the two contains the transcriptions of radio broadcasts from the year 1980 and the second one contains transcripts from radio broadcasts and television from the year 1990.

Except for school books, which we took from almost all Arab countries, the texts were selected from five countries: Morocco-, Egypt-, Saudi-Arabia-, Lebanon- and London-based newspapers for the written media part, and Al Jazeera for the oral media part. The same size was kept for all elements of the corpus in order to make comparisons between the different subsections scientifically reliable. Media language, literature and school books each consisted of 5,000,000 words. Media language was further divided equally between oral media (formal and informal) and written media (newspapers and magazines). We also stuck to the same kind of samples for every genre and the same number of words for both every sub-corpus and every subject.

The whole corpus was digitized by Arab native speakers in Macintosh ASCCI format and the process now is continuing to convert the data into utf-8 and to insert the data in a new database format: the Mysql format.

## **12. How do we conceive the Modern Arabic Representative Corpus for longitudinal research (MARC-2000 – Past – Future)?**

It seems interesting to examine how the MARC-2000 corpus can be used as a benchmark for the evolution of Arabic. However, in order to do so we have to make an inventory of the prerequisites of an enlarged corpus for longitudinal observations and research. When we compare the data with Arabic from the past, we observe that some elements of the 2000 Corpus will be lacking and impossible to replace, among other reasons because some of the technological facilities lacked in the past, such as the satellite television elements and the radio and television broadcasts. Can we still find radio and television broadcasts in a representative manner for the period before 1980? For the written part, fiction literature will be more limited for some countries. Non-fiction will be limited for many subjects. Can school books from previous periods still be found?

On the other hand there is no doubt that other elements still can be found – newspapers and magazines, for example, have been stored in libraries. Further back in the past, we will find other genres that can be added. Among those are songs (!) and, of course, the Koran, Islamic poetry and finally, Middle Arabic texts.

With regard to the future, some elements of the 2000 Corpus will be lacking and will have to be added because they did not exist a decade ago. Among these are banners in demonstrations of all kinds. We might scan our satellite corpus of the year 2000, but the chance that we will find some will be small. Other new elements are Internet Arabic, Blogs, Tweets, Facebook Arabic, SMS Arabic, Arabizi language texts.<sup>38</sup> The elements that will remain are the different elements of the existing 2000 corpus. On the other hand, this new era we live in currently confronts us with a new problem, namely the precise identification of the language producer, which is no longer self-evident.

### 13. Some observations of the Arabic language during the revolution period (2004–2012)

Because the corpus is still in the process of being transformed and integrated in a new database, we have limited ourselves with respect to the Arab spring and language evolution to some observations we made during the period 2004–2010. These observations, however, are not statistically supported. We limit ourselves to the language used on satellite television. The observations and analysis is further limited to lexicon and expressions. Because I am a strong proponent of statistical representativeness, I would like to stress that the observations reported below are non-representative research and represent sheer impressions instead of empirically verifiable data.

The following expressions, topics and collocations were heard on satellite television, but it is difficult to define whether these are completely new or whether there has been an increase in their use during the Arab spring. A number of expressions and collocations that seemed new to us, or the use of which has increased during the Arab spring, are shown in the following table.

**Table 2: New or more frequent collocations on satellite television**

English translation	Arabic expression
The separation of religion and state	فصل الدين عن الدولة
Civil state	دولة مدنية
Islam is religion and nation at the same time	الإسلام هو دين ودولة في آن واحد
A civil society that does not oppose religion	دولة مدنية (غير المعدية للدين)
A religious state but not an Islamic state	دولة دينية وليست دولة إسلامية!

<sup>38</sup> Mohammad Ali Yahgan, op. cit.

English translation	Arabic expression
Islam is religion and no more than religion	الإسلام هو دين ودين فحسب
The state is a human affair	الدولة شأن بشري
A state for Muslims	دولة للمسلمين
The generation of freedom in society	توليد الحريات في المجتمع
An equal and free society	مجتمع متكافئ وحر
Salafi mentality	عقلية سلفية
The danger of sectarianism	خطر الطائفية
The culture of death	ثقافة الموت
Secularism is a way of thinking and not a political system	العلمانية أسلوب تفكير ليست نظام سياسي
The demand for one's right	طلب حقه
Human dignity	كرامة إنسانية
Political movement	حركة سياسية
The uprising of change	انتفاضة التغيير
Religious movements	تيارات دينية
Civil society	مجتمع مدني
The revolution is hijacked	تخطف الثورة
Their dreams are stolen	تسرق أحلامهم
Totalitarian regimes	أنظمة شمولية
Social justice	عدالة اجتماعية
The politicizing of the posts	التسييس في المناسب
The revolution of young people	ثورة الشباب
The Jasmine revolution	ثورة ياسمين
Crisis of confidence	أزمة ثقة
Sectarian discord	فتنة طائفية
The departure of the regime	رحيل النظام
Leave your posts	أترك الإمكانة
After the collapse or the rotten regimes	بعد انهيار النظم البالية

Some of the expressions shown in Table 2 are not entirely new, but we observed an increase in their use. The expression “*social justice*”, for instance, was not prominently used in the years before the Arab spring compared to its current frequent usage, but it can nonetheless be found in interviews and books by prominent writers, such as the Egyptian feminist writer Nawāl as-Sa’dāwī, long before the revolutions started. We also observed an increase in the use of some words or a semantic expansion of their meaning. Some of those are shown below in a table without translation.

**Table 3: Increased frequency and semantic expansion of the above mentioned words**

فساد	علمانية	دكتاتور	حرية	تسامح
علمنة	كرامة	مروءة	جهل	فقر
انتفض	تذهب	أمانة	قمع	عيش
إرحل	عدالة	صدق	مساوات	رحيل
تخلف	متخلفون	مساوات	أمانة	عدالة

We also took a look at the banners that have been shown during the street demonstrations. In Egypt and Lebanon we found banners in both *fushā* and *‘amiyya*, as well as mixed ones. In Tunisia, both Arabic and French banners were used, which exactly reflects the local linguistic situation. A special one found on Tahrir Square expressed the following: *يعد القهر والعذاب ما هنخاف من*. It is quite strange that for the dialectal particle of the future the consonant *ه* is used instead of *ح*. This could be merely a coincidence or a flaw, but it could also suggest that changes on the level of phonology have occurred. The following banner raised in Beirut is a good illustration of the fact that the Arab spring functioned as a trigger to express openly all the feelings and the corresponding language expression that had remained hidden for so long. On the banner one could read: *bādī a’tš bi-Lubnān bilā mā aštaḡil šuḡlatayn* (I want to live in Lebanon without being forced to combine two jobs).

In the following table we present a survey of some of the banners that were shown throughout the Arab world. Some were in dialect whereas others were in *fushā*. On the first row we find the same expression in dialect as well as in *fushā*. On the third row on the left we see a grammatical flaw. The person who wrote the banner does not yet master the grammatical rule of the coordination between a subject plural and a verb.<sup>39</sup> He considers rather than *human beings* to be an *object*, and as a consequence, the verb that follows is put in the third person feminine singular. This element again illustrates that young people or semi-literate people had the courage to express themselves during the Arab spring regardless of the quality of their Arabic language skills.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Van Mol, K. Vanpee, A. Marogy, *لامفر La mafarr, Volume 3: keys to the exercises*, Peeters, Leuven 2007, 208 pp.

**Table 4: Texts from banners used in Arab spring demonstrations**

Dialect	<i>fushā</i>
بكتب تاريخنا بدمنا	نكتب تاريخنا بدمنا
نزلت وعلت انا مش راجع	تعيش با بلدي تعيش
سمعنا الي ما كان شي سامع	أطفالنا تريد إسقاط النظام
واتكسرت كل الموانع	لا للتحرير ولا للفساد ونعم للحرية
في كل شارع بلادي صوت الحرية بنادي	كلنا نحب مصر
والجمع ما بقاش يهمننا	الشارع لنا
أهم حاجة حقنا	صوت الحرية
بدنا ناكل	حياة أفضل

We can summarise the language use observed during the Arab spring on satellite television more or less as follows: scholars and clerics mainly stick to the use of *fushā*. Yūsuf al-Qarāḏāwī and some other clerics did not change their language use. Politicians use *fushā* mixed with local vernacular, such as in the examples: *kwayyis*, *nimrat itnīn*. *fushā* mixed with local vernacular and English is used by writers and thinkers. Somebody used, for example, *Spiritual* but was then corrected by the interviewer, who offered the Arabic equivalent *rūhī*, *wuḡḏānī*. Another example of a mixed expression is: *niẓām selfiṣ*. On the other hand, activists, such as Wael Ghonim (*di tawrat šabāb al internet*) and Asmaa Mahfouz (one of the organizers of the Demonstrations in Egypt), mainly use *‘ammīyya*.

#### 14. Conclusion: what about the future?

If we wish to examine the evolution of the Arabic language in the different phases of its existence, longitudinal representative studies are desperately needed. The size of the corpora does not matter as much as its balance of sources. By all means, we have to observe that data can be compared on a scientifically serious basis. Corpora will have to be tagged in as detailed a way as possible. A uniformity of tag encoding might be fruitful, and in the end will be necessary. A uniform transcription code will seem to be imperative for local features, such as pronunciation, which will also have to be investigated. Samples will have to be taken at regular intervals, which makes cooperation between several institutions necessary. But also an update of lexicons for the inventory of new meanings and semantic expansion will have to be realised, although everybody is aware that it is a tremendous undertaking!