

Hybridization and Encryption in Contemporary Arabic: An Analysis of Social Media Discourses

Hiba Khiari

Department of Arabic Language and Literature, Badji Mokhtar- Annaba University, Algeria.
Email: hiba.khiari@univ-annaba.dz

Abstract

Like other languages, Arabic has undergone both real and artificial conflicts, fueled at times by language policies and at other times by global digital transformations. This has left Arabic particularly in countries that experienced prolonged colonization caught between two increasingly dominant phenomena among school and university youth. These phenomena have even reached specialists, causing the language to suffer, in the name of openness, from hybridization and its consequences, and in the name of digitalization, from encryption and its obscuring effects. The use of Arabic on the Internet and social media platforms today is largely dominated by colloquial dialects and foreign languages, resulting in a linguistic blend where levels and cultures intersect, giving rise to a new communicative style commonly referred to as Arabizi, Arabtini, or Franco. This language, built on the foundations of hybridization and foreign influence, has quickly become intertwined with emoji and floriography in the context of the digital dominance of pictorial and iconic writing. Consequently, it has become an interactive space where multiple communication systems converge. This paper offers a descriptive and analytical reading to extract its most prominent features and to shed light on its implications for the current and future state of the Arabic language, particularly amid dialectal struggles, rising regionalism, and global linguistic competition aimed at dominance.

Keywords: *Hybridization; Encryption; Arabizi; Social Media; Linguistic Conflict; Emoji; Floriography.*

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented technological acceleration that swept the world at the dawn of the 21st century has profoundly reshaped human communication, fostering an environment where ideas, cultures, and languages dynamically interact and cross-pollinate across temporal and spatial boundaries.

This transformation has marked a significant resurgence of written language, which, empowered by technological advancements, has transcended many of its historical limitations. This evolution has occurred within the ascendant framework of visual discourse, a dominant feature that has overshadowed oral communication and ushered in an era of visual primacy.

A salient illustration of this shift is the proliferation of symbols and expressive visuals, notably the language of emojis, which have emerged to supplement the limitations of letters and punctuation in fully conveying the spectrum of human emotions and subtle nuances, once primarily discernible through vocal tone and intonation.

Paradoxically, despite the communicative enhancements offered by technology, it has also engendered novel linguistic phenomena, or at least significantly contributed to their development. These phenomena have undeniably exacerbated linguistic divergence within a global context marked by an intense and strategic pursuit of linguistic hegemony. This drive

toward global linguistic dominance reflects not merely linguistic preferences but also broader dynamics of scientific and civilizational superiority factors that have increasingly outweighed demographic size and even political influence in determining linguistic prominence.

The Arabic language, like numerous others, has been significantly affected by this evolving reality. Its response has manifested in various forms, most notably through the emergence of new modes of expression and communication, particularly within its contemporary dialects.

These have been shaped and reinforced by the hybrid linguistic backgrounds prevalent in several Arab nations. Consequently, Modern Standard Arabic finds itself, especially within the sphere of social media, navigating the dual pressures of linguistic hybridization and encryption.

This tension is further compounded by the dominance of visual discourse, which has become a central characteristic of expression and communication in digital environments. Comprehending this emergent linguistic landscape necessitates a historical perspective, tracing its origins not solely to social media but also to the core of mass media.

The widespread acceptance and rapid adoption of these novel forms of Arabic, particularly among younger speakers, suggest the existence of a pre-existing foundation one that facilitated the encryption of Arabic, transforming its script through romanization, numeral substitution, and symbolic representation.

Drawing upon the aforementioned premises, the current investigation aims to explore the following inquiries:

- What constitutes oral hybridization and the written encryption of language?
- In what specific manners have social media platforms facilitated the evolution and dissemination of these linguistic phenomena?
- What impact have hybridization, encryption, and romanization (ta'jīm) had on Modern Standard Arabic?

1. Arabic Under Pressure: Navigating Dialectal Divergence and Foreign Language Influence

It is now a widely acknowledged premise within linguistic scholarship and informed intellectual circles that the Arabic language faced significant challenges during the period of modern colonialism, experiencing pressures from both external and internal sources. Mirroring trends observed in other national and ethnic contexts, a notable number of voices emerged advocating for the reform, or even the outright replacement, of Arabic. These proponents often framed the language as a primary impediment to progress, asserting that it was the fundamental cause of the Arabs' inability to keep pace with global civilizational advancements.

In their assessment, the world's oldest living language renowned for its extensive vocabulary and deeply entrenched lexicographical heritage was suddenly deemed incapable of accommodating the conceptual and technological innovations emanating from modern Western science. This line of reasoning served as a justification for calls to remove Arabic from educational curricula and supplant it with foreign languages, with some even proposing the adoption of the Latin script.

These pressures for linguistic change were not solely directed towards Westernization; they also manifested as internal attempts at subversion. Certain individuals, under the guise of linguistic reform, began to promote the adoption of vernacular dialects as substitutes for Modern Standard Arabic.

Their central argument posited that these colloquial varieties, being simpler and more readily accessible, would alleviate the learning difficulties associated with the classical language, particularly its intricate system of grammatical case endings (*i'rāb*). Prominent figures associated with this movement include: Salama Moussa, Muhammad Kamil Husayn, abd al-'aziz fahmi in Egypt, as well as Said Akl and Anis Freiha in Lebanon (Saeed, 1964, p. 123/239).

Despite the diverse origins and objectives of these reformist and substitutionist movements, they ultimately did not achieve their intended outcomes. Conversely, such endeavors spurred newly independent Arab states to implement decisive language policies and planning initiatives.

A primary action in this regard was the establishment of Arabic language academies in several nations, including Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. These institutions were, in part, a direct consequence of these movements, and their central concerns revolved around the following inquiries:

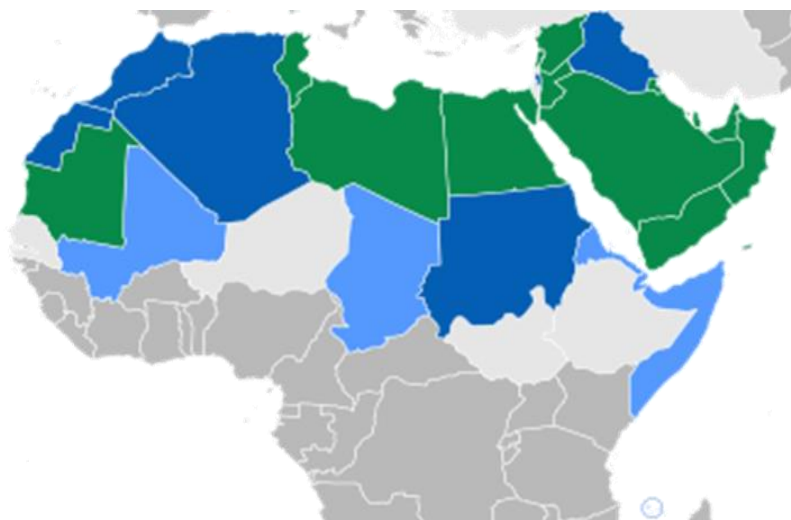
- How could Arabic be established as the official language of the state?
- How could Arabic be developed into a language suitable for scientific and civilizational discourse, as well as modern and contemporary Arab culture?

Subsequently, independent Arab nations continued to enact political decrees, bolstered by strategic language planning, particularly within the domains of education and media. This was aimed at institutionalizing Arabic and mitigating the enduring effects of prior language policies, such as the Ottoman Empire's Turkification policy in the Levant and France's policy of Francization in the Maghreb, notably in Algeria.

As a consequence of these concerted efforts, the Arabic language evolved to fulfill three principal sociolinguistic functions:

Arabic has been accorded varying official statuses throughout the Arab world and in some adjacent regions, as outlined below:

- Arabic serves as the exclusive official language in nations including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania.
- In countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara, Sudan, and Iraq, Arabic functions as the primary official language alongside recognized minority languages.
- Arabic shares official status with foreign languages (French or English) or other acknowledged minority languages in states like Mali, Chad, Sudan, and Somalia.
- This categorization underscores the intricate multilingual landscape prevalent across the Arab world and its bordering territories, as synthesized in the subsequent schematic representation (Wikipedia, Arabic speaking, 2025).



Perhaps the most salient paradox warranting consideration is that the achievements eluded specialized and competent authorities within language and education notwithstanding their nuanced comprehension of exploitable weaknesses and overlookable strengths—were, regrettably, realized by the general populace through their routine, uncomplicated communicative practices. These practices are grounded in practicality and the negotiation of social contexts, frequently characterized by spontaneity. Contemporaneously, a discrete virtual linguistic system has arisen and is experiencing increasing dissemination, particularly among adolescents the generation socialized within social media platforms, which constitute "... a significant advancement in internet-based communication, offering substantially greater interactivity compared to prior stages where communication was confined to the exchange of minimal information and rigorously managed by data administrators"(Al-Fattah, 2014, p. 02). Prominent instances of such platforms encompass forums, blogs, and social networks such as Facebook, Messenger, Viber, Instagram, and WeChat.

This epoch is defined by social media a novel form of media now shaped by the primacy of the visual over the verbal, the auditory over the textual, the non-expert over the specialist, and ideology over veracity. Presently, any individual possesses the capacity to instigate an event; any individual can engage in analysis, interpretation, and even misrepresentation thereof with the explicit endorsement of extensive user and follower demographics.

This communicative disruption, stemming from an unconstrained acceptance of alternative thought without any limitation or even the maintenance of a minimal level of linguistic identity, has amplified the proliferation of a recurrent yet contemporary phenomenon. Originating within the context of language hybridization a result of direct interaction with linguistically and culturally distinct others, such as colonizers and immigrants this phenomenon has now re-emerged with considerable force within the domain of modern digital and encoded technologies. This resurgence signifies a transition from linguistic hybridity to linear encryption, manifested under various denominations, including Arabizi, Arabtini, Franco, Arabish, Arablish, or chat language.

While this virtual linguistic form has indeed proven to be an efficient tool for facilitating rapid communication, it concurrently erodes the structural integrity of the native language and distorts its inherent characteristics. This undermining occurs under the guise of modernization, convenience, or assertions regarding the perceived inadequacy of Arabic. This reality primarily impacts social communication and secondarily influences the pedagogy of Arabic.

Consequently, it generates confusion for foreign language learners who seek linguistic immersion within these digital spaces, only to find themselves abruptly confronted with a predicament not merely involving dialectal variations from the standard language, but rather complete incomprehension in the face of the hybridized and encoded instantiation of Arabic.

2. Mass Media and the Promotion of Colloquial Dialects

Despite the inherent linguistic duality of the Arab world, where the standard, formal, and elevated register coexists with the variable, colloquial, and informal dialectal register in every Arab nation without exception, the prevailing aspiration since the Arab Renaissance has been the unification of the nation under the banner of Arab nationalism. This nationalism was to be founded upon a shared identity, with Classical Arabic as its primary linguistic component. For centuries, this classical form has served as a crucial nexus connecting the nation's present with its historical past and as a continuous marker of identity transmitted across generations.

However, this unifying vision, once bolstered by elements of shared identity, has progressively diminished in the last two decades. This decline coincided with the emergence of a discernible trend in entertainment translation, whereby Arab countries have successively engaged in a clear movement to foreground notions of citizenship and state-centric nationalism over the broader concept of pan-Arabism. This shift has occurred in parallel with the increasing prominence of local dialects within mass media. Following their pervasive presence in local drama and cinema, colloquial Arabic has also come to dominate a significant proportion of cultural, religious, sports, and, notably, entertainment programming. This linguistic shift has even permeated the representation of the "other" through audiovisual translation, a practice also referred to as screen translation by some scholars (Ramadani H. S., 2017, p. 387).

Audiovisual translation is fundamentally defined as "every form of translation related to cinema, television, video devices used in institutions and homes, and radio. It is a relatively new field of inquiry and thought. This form of practice is constantly evolving, due to technological advancements that have enabled the emergence of new forms within the broader scope of audiovisual translation" (Ibid, 2017, p. 388). A brief examination of the history of Arab television channels and satellite networks reveals the appearance of dialects in both entertainment and educational content through two primary modalities:

2.1 Subtitling:

Subtitling, also denoted as visual or textual translation, concisely refers to the written or on-screen rendering of original dialogue. This process entails the conversion of spoken discourse into a written format, typically presented as a translated textual band synchronized in real time with the performers' delivery. This approach maintains the genuine impact of the dramatic or cinematic work in its source language.

In simpler terms, subtitling constitutes 'the reformulation of oral text (dialogue) in Language (A) into written text in Language (B), by transferring both its linguistic elements and those that transcend language, in accordance with the technical, linguistic, and cultural constraints imposed by the complex nature of audiovisual content'(Boulifa, 2021, p. 804).

The practice of subtitling within the Arab world was predominantly oriented towards Indian, American, and notably French cinematic productions. However, the advent of visual, real-time, and automated translation technologies has facilitated the substantial integration of subtitling into mass media, encompassing television channels, satellite broadcasting, websites dedicated to filmic and dramatic content, and platforms such as YouTube.

Presently, viewers irrespective of their cultural background possess the capacity to access global productions owing to the availability of automated subtitling features across a multitude of languages. This development has significantly fostered greater receptiveness towards diverse linguistic, cultural, and civilizational spheres, particularly those of Asian origin, such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. Furthermore, it has, to a certain extent, challenged the global preeminence of Western (primarily American) media and the linguistic dominance of the English language.

Currently, individuals can engage with "the other," comprehend their perspectives, and explore their culture directly through their native tongue, thereby reducing the necessity to consistently rely on an intermediary language typically English for audiences in the Eastern Arab world and French for those in the Western Arab world.

2.2 Dubbing

Dubbing represents a mode of audiovisual translation employed in cinematic works, serial productions, recordings, and animated features. This process involves the transposition of content originating from "a specific cultural context, language, and system into a disparate culture, language, and system" (Jilali, 2014, p. 55). Fundamentally, it constitutes a linguistic substitution wherein two distinct languages are utilized to convey identical visual material, thereby enabling viewers to comprehend content initially inaccessible due to the source language of the production. "This concept is intrinsically linked to a sentiment of nationalism and linguistic pride, empowering audiences to grasp the events and meanings of the filmed material through the auditory channel" (Arab, 2008, p. 124).

Within the Arab sphere, the substantive commencement of dubbing occurred in the 1970s, particularly with animated cartoons. Subsequently, the 1990s marked the initiation of a new phase characterized by the dubbing of foreign dramatic series into Modern Standard Arabic. The Arab viewership encountered, with considerable surprise, South American productions notably from Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina presented in articulate Arabic. This was followed, in the first decade of the 21st century, by the dubbing of Korean and Russian productions. This development, for the first time, partially dismantled the cultural barrier between the Arab viewer and the "Other," while concurrently bolstering the utilization of Modern Standard Arabic. Audiences across diverse societal strata intellectuals, the educated, and even those without formal literacy began to engage with these works, appreciating eloquent Arabic in a novel, clear, and simplified form replete with suspense.

However, the linguistic homogeneity initially fostered by state-operated television channels was rapidly eroded by the proliferation of private satellite networks. Subsequently, the practice of dubbing underwent a transition from Modern Standard Arabic to the Syrian dialect, notably coinciding with the Arab audience's initial exposure to Turkish televised dramas. Within a relatively short timeframe, Turkish culture, mediated through its translations into colloquial Arabic, achieved dominance across both public and private broadcasting platforms. This development subsequently encouraged analogous practices in other Arab nations, resulting in the presentation of identical series in a multiplicity of regional dialects, encompassing Levantine, Gulf, and Maghrebi varieties. Strikingly, certain productions were even dubbed into Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan dialects, despite the considerable degree of mutual intelligibility among these linguistic forms.

As this phenomenon progressed throughout the second decade of the 21st century, colloquial dubbing became the prevalent mode for dramatic and cinematic productions. This

trend further facilitated a widespread competition among dialects. What had previously constituted a linguistic dichotomy between Standard Arabic and its vernacular counterparts evolved into a comprehensive dialectal rivalry, with Syrian, Lebanese, Egyptian, Moroccan, and Gulf renditions emerging for the same Turkish, Indian, and Pakistani televised content.

This prevailing practice fundamentally reflects a predilection for local cultural specificities and the advancement of nationalist sentiments at the expense of pan-Arab unity. A significant disadvantage of this trend is the presentation of a skewed representation to the foreign learner individuals who undertake the study of Arabic and endeavor to benefit from linguistic immersion, only to discover that such immersion is effectively precluded in both authentic communicative contexts and via satellite and online media.

3. From Hybridization to Encryption: The Trajectory of the Arabic Language

It is a well-established fact, acknowledged by both specialists and the general public, that contemporary technologies have significantly impacted human communication. Presently, individuals can transcend geographical and temporal limitations, as well as overcome numerous linguistic communication barriers, owing to the alternatives provided by these technologies, such as audiovisual services and the potential for simultaneous translation.

In the subsequent discussion, an attempt will be made to elucidate some of these alternatives that have exerted both positive and negative influences on the Arabic language. On the one hand, they have facilitated its extensive dissemination and its elevation to the status of a global language, boasting over 467 million speakers distributed across the Arab world and various regions in Asia and Africa including Al-Ahwaz, Turkey, Chad, Mali, Senegal, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Iran.

Consequently, Arabic ranks as the fourth or fifth most spoken language globally and holds the third position among official languages in terms of the number of states recognizing it, with 27 countries granting it official status. Furthermore, it is the fourth most utilized language on the internet and, beyond that, the liturgical language for approximately 1.5 billion Muslims, as well as numerous Christian churches throughout the Arab world (Wikipedia, The Arabic Language, 2024).

Conversely, this very expansion has placed Arabic in direct confrontation with hybrid languages linguistic blends, mixtures, and amalgamations which have become a prevalent phenomenon among the general populace and have even infiltrated the linguistic registers of many within more specialized domains. These hybrid linguistic forms have permeated and overwhelmed written Arabic to such an extent that they have engendered an entirely novel mode of expression one that is neither purely Arabic nor foreign. Even native speakers find themselves perplexed by it, let alone foreign learners striving for linguistic immersion to facilitate communication and expedite the process of language acquisition.

Contemporary communication modalities have ushered in unprecedented alternatives, with a notable instance being:

3.1 Arabizi, also referred to as the Romanization of Arabic.

The initial adoption of mobile telephony within Arab societies necessitated complete adherence to the functionalities provided by this nascent technology in both oral and written expression. The primary models prevalent in Arab markets at the time limited their linguistic interfaces to a predetermined set of international languages, notably excluding Arabic. Confronted with this constraint, and considering the diverse educational backgrounds of users,

alongside the principle that necessity is the mother of innovation, and acknowledging the intricate linguistic landscape of Arabic encompassing its Standard form and a multitude of dialects, some of which had already exhibited tendencies toward linguistic blending due to protracted colonial influences Arab users commenced the substitution of the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet.

This emergent adaptation revived the historical notion of ta'jīm (the practice of writing Arabic using a non-Arabic script), transforming it into a pragmatic, everyday occurrence after a considerable period of rejection due to its perceived incompatibility with a strong Arabic linguistic identity.

Consequently, the Latin alphabet has evolved into a globally shared script, employed not solely for technological exigencies but also as a functional instrument for the written representation of numerous languages. The Romanization of Turkish from its Ottoman Arabic script offers an early illustration (Al-Tawil, 1986, p. 103), a development mirrored by the People's Republic of China's linguistic unification endeavor. In this context, the Pinyin system was introduced to transcribe Mandarin Chinese into the Latin script, with the objectives of achieving linguistic cohesion among the populace, simplifying the pronunciation of Chinese phonemes, and facilitating non-native speakers' comprehension of tonal variations and eventual acquisition of the complex Chinese logographic system, which comprises thousands of symbolic syllables. These characters would present insurmountable challenges for mobile phone or computer keyboards were it not for the Pinyin system, formally adopted as an integral component of China's language reform initiative commencing in 1958 (Calvet, 2008, p. 312/319).

Concurrently, Arab speakers of the time addressed the limitations inherent in the Latin script by devising compensatory strategies. The Arabic language, encompassing both its standard and colloquial varieties, includes a set of phonemes represented by letters lacking direct counterparts in the Latin alphabet. Specifically, these are:

ء / ث / ح / خ / ذ / ض / ظ / ع / غ / ق

This linguistic disparity necessitated immediate and inventive adaptations to facilitate the transcription of instant messaging texts. Consequently, the following methods of transliteration were adopted:

- **Borrowing compound letters from English and French writing systems**, leading to the following equivalents:
 - ث = th
 - خ = kh
 - ذ = th
 - ش = sh / ch
 - ظ = dh
 - غ = gh

Illustrative examples frequently encountered on social media platforms include:

- Ghodwa = غدا / غدوة (tomorrow)
- Khir kbir = خير كبير (great good)

- edhohr salaar = صلاة الظهر (Dhuhr prayer)
- adi khasa b master 1 wla 2 ??? = ؟2 ولا 1 = Is this specific to Master 1 or Master 2?
- mafhemtch wch m3nth = ما فهمتش واش معنتها = I didn't understand what it means.
- **Borrowing Arabic numerals that resemble Arabic letters in shape;** some of the most common equivalents are:
 - ء is replaced by 2
 - ح is replaced by 7
 - خ is replaced by 5
 - ط is replaced by 6
 - ع is replaced by 3
 - ق is replaced by 9

Among the real-life examples of these usages, we can mention some models that were observed on Facebook pages of youth and university students:

- Rabi y9ader al 5iir = ربي يقدر الخير (May God grant good)
- Amin ajma3in = آمين أجمعين (Amen to all)
- 3indi so2aal = عندي سؤال (I have a question)
- 7amdelh = الحمد لله (Praise be to God)
- Wech lfar9 bin 20 %w 80% = What's the difference between 20% and 80%.
- **Mixing the Arabic language with foreign languages,** whether in formal or colloquial forms, some examples of which include:
 - Rabi ynajhek mon ami = ربي ينحكك صديقي (May God make you successful, my friend)
 - Bla mziya mon frère = بلا مزية أخي (No favor, brother)
 - Rabi yehdi la gendarmerie a 2 pas = ربي يهدي، الدرك على بعد خطوتين (May God guide, the police are two steps away)
- **Abbreviation of foreign words and phrases, especially using a few letters;** some examples of commonly used French abbreviations in daily correspondence and comments include:
 - Tt = tout (all)
 - Slt = salut (hello)
 - Nn = non (no)
 - Cv = ca va (how's it going)
 - Bnj = bonjour (good morning)
 - Bns = bonsoir (good evening)
 - Dcr = d'accord (okay)

- Tjr = tous jours (every day)
- Mort de rire = md (dying of laughter)
- Oh my god = omg
- Svp = s'il vous plait (please)
- **Replacing phonetic syllables with numbers;** some of the most widely spread examples among users include:
 - B1 = bien (good)
 - Mrc = merci (thank you)
 - Der1 = de rien (you're welcome)
 - Bn8 = bonne nuit (good night)
 - Dem1 = demain (tomorrow)

These real-world examples constitute compelling evidence for the widespread occurrence of ta'jīm (Arabizi or Romanization) in conjunction with the phenomenon of linguistic hybridization on social media platforms. Despite the long-standing resolution of technological limitations concerning Arabic script, Arab speakers persistently adhere to these practices.

A notable observation is that the utilization of Arabizi a linguistic form that is neither organic nor strictly artificial frequently correlates with the communicative intent of derision and satire. Young individuals, in particular, exhibit a tendency to dismantle established linguistic norms and deform the structural integrity of Arabic through the extensive integration of foreign, predominantly Western, lexical items. This behavior appears to manifest as an unconscious reaction, a subtle expression of opposition towards the subject matter within the communicative exchange.

Conversely, the employment of Arabizi in alternative contexts may indicate a profound aspiration for integration with the "other," a propensity for imitation, and even a captivation with foreign cultures.

However, the most commonly cited rationale offered by a substantial proportion of users engaging in this linguistic hybridity is the perceived ease of expression and conciseness that, in their view, Standard Arabic fails to provide.

In this context, it is also pertinent to emphasize that populations subjected to extended periods of colonization constitute a significant proportion of Arabizi users compared to other Arab demographics. This can be attributed to their pre-existing foundation of linguistic hybridity, operating within the framework of what are termed Creoles and Pidgins.

"Pidgins and Creoles are newly generated linguistic varieties that emerge in language contact situations. A pidgin is strictly confined to a particular social role and is used in limited communication between speakers of two or more languages who have engaged in repeated or extended contact, often through trade, slavery, or migration.

A pidgin typically combines elements of the local languages of its users, and it is simple and characteristically local in its nature, given that it has few words, even fewer morphological structures, and very limited phonological and syntactic options. A creole, in the traditional

sense, is a pidgin that has acquired native speakers descendants of pidgin speakers who grew up using it as their first language.

In line with its expanded social function, the creole features a broader vocabulary and significantly more complex grammatical resources than the pidgin"(Coulmas, 2009, p. 517/518). While pidgins are associated with specific communicative contexts and employ a restricted, special-purpose linguistic system sometimes comparable to sociolects creoles are regarded as fully developed languages.

They have evolved through the amalgamation of two languages the indigenous and the exogenous resulting in a third linguistic model utilized for routine expression and communication. Notable examples include Mauritian Creole and Haitian Creole.

Returning to the Arab linguistic reality particularly within Morocco, and even more significantly in Algeria this form of linguistic hybridization is pervasively widespread among speakers. Its prevalence intensifies with increasing proximity to major urban and coastal centers, or when engaging with individuals who are linguistically "bilingual" in a historical context: those who lived through the periods of colonization and independence.

Among these individuals, intergenerational communication frequently employs a hybrid language, the extent of its mixing or Francization varying in accordance with the speaker's educational, cultural, and social background. This context has, in effect, established a conducive environment for the acceptance of the Arabizi phenomenon and the seamless adoption of the Latin script in written communication whether on mobile devices or social media platforms.

3.2 Pictorial Writing and Language Encryption:

Beyond the linguistic hybridization prevalent among social media users throughout the Arab world, a second prominent and recurrent practice involves the encryption of language through pictorial systems. This encompasses two primary modes of communication, simultaneously ancient and contemporary: emoji reminiscent of hieroglyphic writing and the language of flowers, or floriography. Both contribute to instances of comprehension challenges due to their reliance on principles of coded communication. Individuals unfamiliar with the specific code employed often stemming from intercultural disparities will likely be unable to accurately receive and interpret the intended message.

3.2.1 Emoticons and the Emoji Language:

Numerous online resources indicate that the term "emoji" originates from Japanese and rapidly disseminated across various languages. It is defined as pictorial symbols or smiley faces employed within Japanese electronic messages and web pages. The word itself is a composite, derived from two elements: "(e)" signifying "picture," and "(moji)" denoting "character" or "symbol," thus translating to "pictorial word." The previously prevalent English term was "emoticon," a portmanteau of "emotional" and "icon," referring to facial representations expressing diverse emotions. The resemblance in the initial parts of the two terms is purely coincidental, as the Japanese "emoji" does not stem from the English word "emotion," meaning "feeling".

Nevertheless, both terms share the capacity to communicate emotions within chat-based texts through a language that enjoys universal comprehension, transcending cultural differences (Wikipedia, Emoji, 2024). Fundamentally, it represents the language of bodily expressions and emotional responses, encapsulated within a sequence of uncomplicated icons.



Image depicting the most prevalent emotional responses via emoji icons

In actuality, these icons extend beyond the representation of facial expressions and human emotions; their developers have compiled comprehensive inventories that incorporate a diverse spectrum of behaviors, actions, and material entities encompassing food, beverages, implements, flora, and fauna. This entire system serves the objective of written conciseness and temporal efficiency, ultimately facilitating the process of electronic communication, which is distinguished by its immediacy and necessitates rapidity.



Image representing some everyday objects featured in emoji icons

The widespread and unrestrained dependence on this Romanized script has afforded Arab users facility and rapidity in online articulation and interaction. Nevertheless, viewed from a different perspective, it has concurrently amplified linguistic intricacy. The act of writing in a hybridized language and further encryption it inevitably contributes to obscuring the comprehension process, notably in the subsequent scenarios:

- When an Arab speaker employing a divergent dialect is involved, for instance, a Moroccan engaging in communication with a Levantine or Gulf speaker.
- When a non-native speaker is in the process of acquiring Standard Arabic and is seeking opportunities for immersion to bolster their learning trajectory.
- When a foreign speaker erroneously presumes that the inclusion of foreign vocabulary signifies pre-existing familiarity with a foreign language.

3.2.2 Floriography

Floriography, an ancient mode of expression prevalent across Eastern and Western civilizations, including Chinese, Pharaonic, Persian, and Greek cultures, constitutes a symbolic, encoded system of communication. This system employs the type, color, and scent of flora to construct nuanced messages (Wikipedia, Language of flowers, 2024). The semantic content conveyed by floriography is culturally contingent, varying according to the specific group employing it for covert communication.

Originating as an affective language through the synesthetic convergence of visual, olfactory, and tactile senses, floriography has transitioned into virtual communication platforms. Within this digital context, it has evolved into a visual language, losing its inherent sensory attributes of smell and touch, thereby foregrounding color and shape. Consequently, these latter elements have become primary vehicles for constructing floral texts, the interpretation of which remains open to multiplicity due to the diversity of cultural and symbolic conventions.



A picture representing some of the meanings of flowers in English

This encoded language is contingent on the message sender's culture and that of the recipient. While it facilitates efficient everyday interactions, such as conveying congratulations and social pleasantries, it frequently results in misunderstandings between individuals lacking linguistic and cultural familiarity.

This primarily stems from the absence of shared conventions in encryption floral messages, leading to deviations from their intended meaning. If the employment of such symbolically encoded floral messages governed by the cultural connotations of color, type, and quantity can often generate confusion upon reception, then what implications arise when an Arab user integrates the hybridity of Arabizi with the encryption of floriography, a system they typically do not fully comprehend?

4. The Impact of Social Media On the Arabic Language

The hybridization of the Arabic language through the incorporation of foreign linguistic elements, and its encryption through reliance on pictographic language, genuinely contribute to the emergence of linguistic and identity-related crises. These crises have a detrimental

impact on the current state of Arabic and its educational future, both for native speakers and for learners of Arabic as a second language. Chief among these challenges are:

4.1 Youth and Imitation

This phenomenon arises, as the researcher Ammar Mustafa Al-Jazzar has observed:

"This occurs through the imitation by the youth of the Arab nation of the language utilized by the contemporary generation... Analogous to a child acquiring the language of their societal and familial milieu through imitation, they similarly adopt the writing style employed for expression and communication within the same context. Given that a significant portion of our youth has abandoned writing in Arabic script when interacting with others, it is a natural consequence that children would emulate these young individuals. Consequently, the child develops with an unfamiliarity towards the use of Arabic letters, thus resorting to that which is customary for them" (Al-Jazzar, 2016, p. 29). This perspective offers a cogent and substantiated assertion. Language, through its inherent mechanisms and established societal practices, is conventionally transmitted across generations. Linguistic modifications, upon gaining acceptance within the collective linguistic consciousness and being reinforced through sustained use, ultimately become entrenched as new norms, subsequently inherited by succeeding generations as integral aspects of the language system.

4.2 The Conflict of Hybrid Languages

The crisis of linguistic hybridization arises from the conflict between Arabic and foreign languages, a logical outcome of regional colonialism and globalization, and the clash of colloquial dialects, which has become a detrimental phenomenon impacting educational institutions and media. Should Arab nations and governments fail to unite in confronting this issue within a framework of "Linguistic Pride" (Al-Beraidi, 2022, p. 60/73), akin to self-respecting populations, it will have severe future repercussions on educational, social, cultural, and moral dimensions.

4.3 From the Rhetoric of the Image to Linguistic Austerity

The increasing global adoption of visual communication aligns with the demands of contemporary, rapid information exchange, facilitating interaction with individuals potentially unfamiliar with one's language. While images expedite comprehension and mutual understanding, this trend contributes to a nascent linguistic crisis characterized by a persistent reliance on linguistic reduction. Consequently, future generations may exhibit diminished capacity for articulate thought, displaying lexical and grammatical deficiencies due to a lack of linguistic practice. This phenomenon is increasingly observed among students in educational settings, who demonstrate a reduced ability to express ideas, often resorting to brevity and the principle of minimal cognitive exertion. It is a form of linguistic austerity, fostered and amplified by the persistent recourse to silent pictorial expressions as if it were a regression to the past and a revival of ancient hieroglyphics in a modern guise.

4.4 The Negative Impact on Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers

The utilization of Arabizi on social media indicates a deficiency in Arab speakers' understanding, as it portrays an inaccurate representation of the Arabic language. This phenomenon exacerbates the divergence between Modern Standard Arabic and its various dialects, consequently compounding the challenges faced by non-native learners who utilize these digital environments seeking genuine assistance in their language acquisition.

The prevalence of dialectal conflict on Arab television, intertwined with global cultural dynamics through translation and subtitling, alongside hybridization, foreignization, and encryption on social media, suggests that Modern Standard Arabic, often sought by foreign learners for religious, touristic, educational, commercial, political, or media engagement, is infrequently utilized by its native speakers. Their linguistic patterns indicate its perception as a formal, standardized language prominent among non-native speakers yet seemingly absent from the daily and virtual communication of its own population, potentially indicating a decline in its active use. This situation reflects a potential lack of awareness within Arab societies regarding the influential role of media and the interconnectedness of the "global village" in language dissemination and the erosion of cultural boundaries, often occurring without overt conflict.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the exigency of written communication frequently impeded by a deficit in foreign language proficiency, Arab users adopted a practice of hybridizing Arabic, encompassing both its formal and colloquial registers. This writing method experienced rapid dissemination, subsequently extending to computer and internet domains. Consequently, it was employed in composing social media commentary, thereby contributing to the proliferation of posts that persist even after the definitive resolution of Arabic script issues on electronic devices many years prior. This phenomenon suggests that contemporary Arabs, having extensively engaged with foreign cultures through mass media, have cultivated a significant propensity for linguistic borrowing and cultural assimilation, sometimes rationalized as openness and at other times as necessity.

Presently, we are engaged in a global linguistic competition, wherein a language's written presence on the internet constitutes a key characteristic. Notwithstanding this, many Arabs do not recognize that this is fundamentally a matter of identity rather than solely a linguistic concern. The utilization of Arabic script, alongside research and publication in Arabic, represents a tangible contribution to the advancement of this language, which Allah, the Almighty, has honored, and which we have, through misunderstanding and a lack of appreciation, failed to duly honor.

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