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Sociology of news reporting: the case of Libyan social media society

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the sociology of news reporting that is produced on social media platforms. It explores the sociolinguistic dynamic changes of social and political discourse in Libya. The study collects data from social media platforms, specifically Facebook. It uses a number of 21 news items occurred in August 2023 regarding the political instability in Libya. The findings reveal that sociology of news reports on social media have impacted the way people perceive news. They helped in changing the sociolinguistic structure in Libya by exhibiting dynamic characteristics that adapt and evolve in response to shifts and transformations within societal frameworks.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليلًا سوسيولوجيًا للتقارير الإخبارية التي يتم نشرها على منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، وتركز بشكل خاص على كيفية تطور اللغة والخطاب الاجتماعي والسياسي في السياق الليبي. تم جمع البيانات من منصة الفيسبوك وشملت مجموعة متنوعة من التقارير، متعلقة بعدم الاستقرار السياسي في ليبيا خلال شهر أغسطس من عام **2023**. تكشف النتائج أنه لدى سوسيولوجية التقارير الإخباري تأثيرًا واضحًا على تفاعل الناس مع الأخبار. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، توضح الدراسة أن هناك تغيرات في اللغة المستخدمة في هذه التقارير، وهذا يعكس التغيرات في الديناميات الاجتماعية والسياسية في المجتمع الليبي. وبالتالي، يمكن اعتبار هذه التقارير كمؤشر لتطورات المجتمع وتغيراته. إلى جانب ذلك، يشير البحث إلى التفاعل المتبادل بين اللغة والمجتمع، حيث يمكن للتغيرات في المجتمع أن تؤدي إلى تغييرات في اللغة المستخدمة في التقارير والخطابات، وعلى العكس الصحيح أيضًا. بالتالي، تعكس الدراسة تفاعلًا معقدًا بين البعد اللغوي والاجتماعي، وكيفية تأثير كل منهما على الآخر في سياق ليبيا خلال فترة زمنية محددة.

KEYWORDS: Sociology, sociolinguistics, social media, news reporting

Introduction

News media has a sizable role in handling our societies. This is usually happening through the news organizations operating in a given society. Scholars, especially in sociology, study the way news products change the interactions and relationships between community members involved in the surrounding events of the society (Bélair-Gagnon, 2019). This study explores the language of news dissemination from a sociolinguistic point of view. Dickinson (2008) argues that sociologists study journalists and their products because they provide information on societies we live in. this means that the language used in the media products is linked with the political issues and topics that a country is going through. The study of the language of media entails investigation on the political structure and discourse.

Libya has been through severe upheavals since 2011 due to the political uprising took place in February 2011, along with the aftermath repercussions that hardly stopped until today. These political events involved armed fighting and civil conflicts, which erupt every now and then. This led the society to go through a discourse that implicates engagement in ideological construction of disseminating news of the local events on social media platforms. People have intrinsic interest in expressing themselves towards recurrent events. They create a sort of belief which controls their actions and behavior. It could be argued that this metaphorically happens under an organization. The organization here embodies the discourse that individuals and entities follow to argue and use language. This study examines some sociological news reporting from a sociolinguistic stance, taking data from social media platforms.

This research argues that the public interactions and relationships among the Libyan people have changed to acquire new sociolinguistic features that Libyan people began to use in their daily language. Further, the study claims that the local social media platforms have helped in the sociolinguistic dynamic change of political and cultural discourse in Libya. Obviously, an interaction between language and society is evident when inquiring about the media and political aspects of the Libyan society. Language has always been interested in exchanging verbal or

written messages among its users (Siregar, 2021). This is where sociolinguistics comes to the fore, when society witnesses change of its linguistic structure and communication output. According to Gumperz (1971), sociolinguistics is a field of study that explores the dynamic changes of linguistic aspects in societies. In fact, this investigation is more than just an attempt to research linguistics with sociology, it is a study that brings in social structure and linguistic aspects and explore them under the use of media and news reporting. To be more specific, this research handles news reporting that appear on social media platforms and depict and predict their role in managing the change in the Libyan society. The section below will discuss some literature reviews. It will provide information of the dynamics of language and society, social media, news reporting, and media effect. It will signpost where necessary the media theories and their role in creating change.

Literature review

Warnock (2006, p. 13) highlights the dynamics between language and society. He depicts that sociolinguistics has an aim of offering understandable account on how language functions in tracing and comprehending the methods of communications. It is true that sociolinguistics examines languages within their societal structure, but the 'sociology of language' deals with the society and how it approaches languages (Hudson, 1996). In other words, the interactions between language and society is meant to look at the way people interact with social issues that are pertinent to linguistic phenomenon – news reporting in our case study. Sociolinguistics is a field that deals with empirical research to account on suitable results of data (Warnock, 2006). Empiricism of sociology of news reporting is represented in this work by selective examples from social media platforms that deal with mainly the political situation in Libya. In traces social and cultural behaviors of interactions between interlocutors within the contextualized realm of the society.

By looking at the ways people within a society interact, social media platforms can never be excluded. In fact, social media can help in recognizing the change happening to the attitudes and habits of people (Wang et al., 2021). Further, Lee & Ma (2012) state that social media could be more effective in influencing people if compared with tools of mass media. One of the features of social media is that it allowed all people to engage in an unlimited and uncensored interactions in discussing heated political issues (Hayes and King, 2014). Indeed, this is the domain that was offered international companies and have a change for people to express their ideas outside the shackles of the institutions. This social media space gave rise to huge linguistic and sociolinguistic information and changes. The habits of people interacting on social media are indication of change (Bayer et al., 2016). This study looks at such change from the sociolinguistic points of view. The political conflicts and ongoing tumultuous events in Libya are believed to have opened the door for new sociolinguistic structure that is caused by the sociology of news reporting on social media.

Sociology of new reporting

In a society, journalists, news networks and social conditions are three major factors that are involved in shaping news (Benson, 2004). The social factor is the one that most pertinent to sociolinguistics as it deals with news outside the arenas of news institutions. This where social media news reporting playing the enormous part. Schudson (2000) suggests that political culture is also a factor that influences production of news. Zelizer (2004: 45) notes that sociology is relevant to the ‘background setting’ of news reporting and it studies media production of news. As mentioned earlier, there is a relationship between language and news production or journalism as both are key areas to reflect on when exploring sociolinguistic change in societies. It is important to study the language on social media taking forms of news reporting to reflect on the sociological aspects of the new form of journalism. Ammon et al. (1984) state that sociology received little attention from sociolinguistics;

although it is significant to understanding language and linguistic changes occurring on it. This study, in fact, establishes a link between the

two fields of sociology and sociolinguistics by exploring news reporting on social media.

Media effect

Merton (1996) stressed the crucial role of the power of social networks resulting in greater media effect. In fact, social networks are now part of people's daily lives and routines. These social platforms facilitate interactions among people within the same country and between countries all over the world. The nature of the human being obliges them to interact with their surroundings. Thus, people are sensitive to the behavior of those they are engaged in interaction with (Zaru, 2016). Social platforms such as Facebook give space to people to interact and exchange ideas and may be influenced by one another. The recourse to social media platforms on daily basis and to read news on political events have arguably changed the behavior of the people and the language in that society.

Research methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach in dealing with data collection and analysis. This is due to the nature of the research which observes and highlights a phenomenon that seem to have incurred change in the behavior and discourse of the Libyan people. This change could have social and cultural effects. Mason (1996) states that qualitative study is fostered to examine and describe a particular phenomenon.

This study collects data from social media news reporting that mainly produced in Arabic and in the local media. Due to the huge amount of data and the requirement of time and effort in handling such data which is suggested to have influenced and change the discourse of the society, this study has adopted a selective strategy and a convenient sample

technique. It must be stated here that there are no attempts to claim representativeness of the study. The limitations suggested herein are a statement that further collective research is always necessary for the reliability of results.

The data of this research is mainly collected from Facebook page of news reporting on Libyan political turmoil. This Facebook page is called ‘ تك يحرق كل شي’.[1] The page is well-known to the Libyan people, it produces social and political news that mainly concerns Libya. Data collected from the news that this Facebook page produced during August 2013. A number of 21 news items that would account for the change in the sociolinguistic patterns in Libya have been collected for the purpose of this study. The section to follows discussing news reported on various Libya cities.

Analysis and discussion

The news reported on social media platforms could reflect the sociolinguistic changes happening in societies. A number of studies handled the role of social media on a wide sector of multidisciplinary studies and fields. This study sheds light on the effect of social media platforms on the sociolinguistic aspects of the people, taking news that has been reported on the political issues of Libya as an example. In fact, several news pages on social media, in particular Facebook, have been rigorously interested in reports news on Libya for years, leading the people to heavily engage in online communications and interactions. This form of interaction is believed to have influenced the sociolinguistic habits. In this analysis section, I will demonstrate and show some examples that could be samples of sociolinguistic changes.

The sociology of news reporting can indeed have an impact on sociolinguistics. The examples below have been collated on a short period of time. They reflect the number of disturbing news that can shape

[1] The Facebook page can be accessed here: https://www.facebook.com/Tkyroogklshytk/?locale=ar_AR

the power dynamics. News reporting can portray language choices and practices shown by the use of *dignity forces*, *armed forces*, *armored vehicle*, etc. by use of such discourse, news reporting reinforces or challenges language ideologies, affecting language policy which can in turn lead to influencing new social and political narratives.

These narratives are always present in the background of the news producers on those social media platforms.

1	Dignity Forces threaten the people of Sirte.	قوات الكرامة تهدد أهالي مدينة سرت.
2	The Al-Naqah neighborhood was cordoned off by an armed force affiliated with the Karama Forces in the city of Sirte.	تطويق حي الناقة من قبل قوة مسلحة تابعة لقوات الكرامة في مدينة سرت.
3	Dignity Operation begins with a wide deployment of armored vehicles at intersections on the roads in the Abu Hadi area in Sirte, in an attempt to prevent the people from celebrating Al-Fateh Festival.	عمليات الكرامة تبدأ بانتشار واسع بالمدرعات والآليات المصفحة فى أغلب التقاطعات على الطرقات بمنطقة أبوهادى بسرت فى محاولة لمنع الأهالى من الاحتفال بعيد الفاتح.
4	A drone flying over the Abu Hadi area in the city of Sirte.	طائرة بدون طيار تحلق في سماء المنطقة ابوهادي بمدينة سرت.

The reported news used in this study can reflect sociolinguistic power dynamics. It can be seen from the examples that social media can determine whose voices and perspectives are represented and whose are marginalized or excluded. This indicates that social media plays a role in reinforcing stereotypes, and shaping public discourse by heavily replying on warring and conflict news. Overall, the sociology of news reporting provides insights into the social and political dimensions of language use in media. This can can have implications for sociolinguistics and the way people interact with emerging conflicts using languages. The data clearly

shows that consistent use and privilege of certain items in news discourse can reinforce language ideologies that prioritize linguistic homogeneity or devalue linguistic diversity.

For instance, news media may use derogatory terms or language to describe certain events to contribute to a marked discourse. It can be seen from the news produced on Tripoli that media coverage of political conflicts may associate specific words with violence. This leads to negative perceptions, and social exclusion of other events and at the same time portraying specific image on the sociolinguistic structure. In fact, the association of language with violence can adversely impact linguistic diversity.

News reporting on social media has contributed to creating new linguistic forms. Interlocutors on social media platforms have developed new sociological structure to express themselves concisely and adapt to the digital environment. Terms such as *armed convoy*, *armed cars*, *Turkish warship*, and *naval base* indicate that the conflict in Libya has deepened existing divisions. The use of such terms has become intertwined with identity politics, resulting in sociolinguistic dynamics. It is important to note that the sociolinguistic dynamics in Libya are complex and multifaceted, influenced by historical, political, and social factors in addition to the ongoing conflict. The conflict, however, has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping language attitudes within the country.

5	An armed convoy passed from Al-khumas coastal road, coming from Misrata, heading towards the city of Tripoli.	مرور رتل مسلح من الطريق الساحلي الخمس قادمًا من مصراتة متجه نحو مدينة طرابلس.
6	Armed cars pass from Al-Khums coastal road heading towards Tripoli.	مرور سيارات مسلحة من الطريق الساحلي الخمس متجه نحو مدينة طرابلس.

7	Another Turkish warship enters the Al-Khums Naval Base.	دخول بارجة حربية تركية أخرى إلى قاعدة الخمس البحرية.
8	A helicopter exits from the Turkish-controlled Al-Khums naval base.	خروج طائرة هيلكوبتر من قاعدة الخمس البحرية التي تحت سيطرة الاتراك.

The political tension in Libya has significantly affected sociolinguistic dynamics through social media platforms. This is evident in the data collected in this research. It can be seen by accessing the comment domains that social media platforms have provided a space for Libyans to express their political opinions and engage in political discourse. Users utilize Arabic and sometimes other languages to discuss and debate political issues, share information, and express their support or criticism for different factions or political actors. This has reinforced the sociolinguistic change. The examples 9 to 21 below present use of violent language to account for ongoing events that can easily facilitated the formation of online communities and networks where individuals with similar political beliefs or affiliations can connect and support each other.

The data also shows that linguistic structure in Libya has undergone significant changes due to the political instability and ongoing conflict. These changes have also had an impact on the use of language and thus the sociolinguistic structure. We can see from the data that social media reporting heavily uses terms such as *shooting*, *brigades*, *drone*, *deterrence*, *attacked*, *tanks*, *terrorism*, etc. This in fact lead to increased polarization and fragmentation resulting in the use of contrasting language and rhetoric. In other words, social media platforms such as the *page* used in this study could adopt a certain discourse that lead to using polarized language. This use of language can help in creating new social structure with certain sociolinguistic patterns.

9	Mobilization and security tension between two forces: Joint Force and Support of Stability Force.	تحشيد وتوتر أمني بين قوتين تابعتين للمشتركة ودعم الاستقرار.
10	Shooting in the air next to University of Tripoli, Campus B.	رماية ثلاث طلقات في الهواء بجانب جامعة ناصر.
11	A drone flying in the sky of the Salah al-Din district of the capital Tripoli.	طائرة بدون طيار تحلق في سماء منطقة صلاح الدين بالعاصمة طرابلس.
12	After the withdrawal of the 444 and Deterrence Brigades, the deployment of the conflict resolution forces in the contact lines (Al-Farnaj, University Road, Tripoli.	بعد انسحاب الـ **444** و الردع انتشار قوات فض النزاع في خطوط التماس (جزيرة الفرناج وطريق الجامعة) طرابلس.
13	Shooting sounds are heard in the Ghout Al-Shaal area.	أصوات رمايه تسمع في منطقة غوط الشعال.
14	Starting the withdrawal of the forces affiliated with the Deterrence and the 444 Brigades from the contact lines, under the supervision of security and military authorities.	البدء في انسحاب القوات التابعة لجهاز الردع واللواء **444** من خطوط التماس تحت إشراف جهات أمنية وعسكرية.
15	An armed group attacked the Al-Andalus neighborhood police station, Tripoli.	هجوم مجموعة مسلحة علي مركز شرطة حي الأندلس طرابلس.
16	An indiscriminate shell fell in Zawyet Al-Dahmani area near the People's Palace.	سقوط قذيفة عشوائية في منطقة زاوية الدهماني بالقرب من قصر الشعب.
17	A number of tanks in the Al-Farnaj area, Tripoli.	عدد من الدبابات في منطقة الفرناج طرابلس.

18	At this moment, the armed clashes in Tripoli stopped, and what is heard now is shooting in the air.	في هذه اللحظات توقفت الاشتباكات المسلحة في طرابلس وما يسمع الآن هو اطلاق نار في الهواء.
19	About 60-armed anti-terrorism vehicles left the city of Misrata towards the capital, Tripoli.	خروج حوالي **60** سيارة مسـلحة تابعة لمكافحة الإرهـاب من مدينة مصراتة بإتجاه العاصمة طرابلس.
20	A convoy of military vehicles passed from the Sabaa area of Tripoli.	مرور رتل سيارات عسكرية من منطقة السبعة طرابلس.
21	The landing of the second Turkish military cargo plane, today at Uqba bin Nafeh base (Al-Watiya).	هبوط ثاني طائرة شحن عسكرية تركية، اليوم في قاعدة عقبة بن نافع (الوطية).

Words convey meanings and connotations that evolve over time due to sociocultural shifts. For example, terms such as *attacked*, *brigades*, and *forces* could have longstanding military connotations. However, the context in which they are used can change, reflecting shifts in the perception and understanding of conflicts and usually acquire different nuances and associations in various sociolinguistic contexts.

Words such as *armed vehicle*, *drones*, or *brigades* establish professional jargon and reinforce group identities within the field of news reporting. As a matter of fact, news reporting evolves to adapt to changing social, and political landscapes. Thus, the language used in news stories may undergo sociolinguistic changes. For example, *shooting*, *conflict*, and *armed groups* are rooted in the domain of violence and warfare. However, the connotations associated with these terms can change depending on societal, political, and cultural factors. In fact, the selection of terms in news reporting contributes to the framing of events and the construction of narratives. Further, the terms above can carry certain implications to shape the way people receive news stories.

Conclusion

News reporting on social media can be a reflection on the sociolinguistic landscape. Social media platforms have created new spaces for language use, interaction, and expression that shape the dynamics of language variation. The sociolinguistic dynamics on social media platforms in Libya reflect the complex interplay between politics and language within the context of political tension of course. Social media has both amplified existing divisions and provided a platform for new social and linguistic structure. The sociology of news reporting depicted some social structures and processes that shape social interactions and relationships. The reported news in the study explains how individuals, groups, and institutions function within society.

By analyzing the sociolinguistic aspects of news reporting, including the use of specific terms, this research offered insights into how language reflects and shapes societal changes, sociolinguistic dynamics. The data revealed how the choice of specific terms in news reporting contribute to the construction of changing sociolinguistic narratives and discourses.

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