SYRIA'S ARAB SPRING: LANGUAGE ENRICHMENT IN THE MIDST OF REVOLUTION

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Abstract

This paper analyzes linguistic transformations of the Arabic language that have been taking place since the start of the revolution in March 2011. Building on Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory of language codes (2002), the paper starts by providing an analysis of the communication codes developed by several Syrian communities (in Damascus, Ḥomṣ, and Ḥama) since the 1970s. In doing so, the paper argues that restricted codes were used by individuals across social classes and religious communities in the face of an oppressing regime. The paper then moves to the examination of the current impact of the political demonstrations and activism on the Arabic language in Syria, and argues that four significant changes are noticeable: a creativity process through which new words have been formed, while other existing words have undergone semantic changes (using Laurie Bauer's theory of naming needs); the rise of popular Syrian slogans adopted and quoted in the Arabic media in their dialectal form; a battle of words taking place between the anti-Assad demonstrators and the pro-Assad counterparts; and a symbolic use of language to show the unity of the Syrian people. These findings demonstrate both the changing nature of the Arabic language and the significant impact conflict situations may carry upon it. While these findings apply to Syria and its particular case in the Arab Spring, they may advance sociolinguistic studies of language creativity in zones of political repression and conflict.

Keywords: Syria, Arabic Language, Language Change, Arab Spring, Conflict, Theory of Language Codes

1. Introduction

"*Laqad Walla Zamān al-Sukūt: Lan Tabqa Sūriyya Mamlakat al-Ṣamt*" ("The Time of Silence is Gone: Syria Will No Longer Remain the Mute Kingdom"). This slogan published the first month of the Syrian uprising on the Syrian website *Al-Ra'y,* the official website of a Syrian political party called "*Ḥizb al-Sha'b al-Dīmoqrātī,* The Democratic People's Party (http://www.arraee.com/portal/), expresses the significant shift Syria has been experiencing since the outburst of the first demonstrations in March 2011. While Syria had been the "Kingdom of Silence" for more than forty consecutive years, this silence suddenly broke. Politics, which had been a taboo no one dared to talk about, even amongst family members, became the object of slogans chanted in rhymed poetry or songs, expressing the deepest truths about decades of fear, oppression, and humiliation. Since the start of protests in March 2011, the revolt has been carried out on the streets of Syria by the common people. For over a year and a half, the revolt has given symbolical names to its Friday-demonstrations, each carrying a specific significance and sending a particular message, whether it be an internal message or a broader one meant for an international audience. Overall, the meanings associated with the names chosen for each Friday have tended to emphasize the unity of the Syrian people in their struggle against the Assad regime. These names have attracted attention due to their thoughtful character and sharp singularity. The creativity demonstrated by the Syrian protestors goes beyond the symbolic naming of Fridays of revolt. Innovative strategies have been taking place in transforming the Arabic language itself and adapting it to the needs of the present situation. This paper will explore the creative processes associated with language-change and development in naming needs.[1]

   The first section of the paper will take a careful look at the pre-revolution period in Syria, and more particularly the last thirty years (1980-2011). It will provide an analysis of the communication codes developed by several Syrian communities (examples will be studied in Damascus, Ḥimṣ, and Ḥamāh) in the context of dictatorship and severe lack of freedom of speech. Building on Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory of language codes (2002), the paper will show how restricted codes were used by individuals across social classes and religious communities in the face of an oppressive regime.

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[1] The findings of this paper are based on interviews of Syrian nationals from several cities (Damascus, Ḥims, and Ḥamah for the most part). I particularly would like to thank Omar Adi, a Syrian national from Ḥims, for his critical help and involvement in the project.

The paper will then move to examining the current impact of political demonstrations and activism on the Arabic language in Syria. Five significant changes can be noticed. The first, I argue, is a creative process through which new words have been formed, while other existing words have undergone semantic changes. This section of the paper relies on the theories of naming needs elaborated by Laurie Bauer (2001) and Pavol Stekauer (1998) and argues that the revolution found itself facing a lexical gap, due to years of restricted communication on political matters. The second effect of the uprising on the language is the rise of popular Syrian slogans that are being adopted and quoted in the Arabic media in their dialectal form. These local dialectal expressions have been transmitted through Arabic newspapers and television channels, providing exposure of the Syrian dialect to the entire Arab world. The third impact of the Syrian revolution on the Arabic language is the creation of new Arabic proverbs by way of transforming existing proverbs. In this case, Syrians have demonstrated a particularly high level of creativity by adapting old proverbs to a new reality. The fourth is a battle of words that has been taking place between the anti-Assad demonstrators and their pro-Assad counterparts. Language has become a tool of war between groups who want to promote a certain view of reality against another. The fifth element is the symbolic use of language to show the unity of the Syrian people. Indeed, demonstrators across Syria have adopted slogans from other cities or regions and, in doing so, have made it a point to preserve certain phrases in their original dialect, however different they may have been from their own local dialect.

2. Basil Bernstein's Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Codes and the Syrian Case:

Understanding the nature of the Syrian dictatorship is critical in order to grasp the level of fear amongst the population and the degree to which everyday communication has been impacted by it. In 1971, linguist Basil Bernstein introduced the concepts of restricted and elaborated language codes, in his study *Class, Codes and Control: The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse.*

His analysis was based on the idea of an intrinsic relationship between social class and language characteristics amongst defined social groups. James Atherton (2002) defined the difference between elaborated and restricted codes as follows:

> The essence of the distinction is in what the language is suited for. The restricted code works better than the elaborated code for situations in which there is a great deal of shared and taken-for-granted knowledge in the group of speakers. It is economical and rich, conveying a vast amount of meaning with a few words, each of which has a complex set of connotations and acts like an index, pointing the hearer to a lot more information which remains unsaid.[2]

While Bernstein's theory aimed at analyzing linguistic dynamics amongst social classes, his theory of restricted codes is well-suited and applicable to another category of speakers: members of a social group who live under oppressive and dictatorial rule. We will now delve into how restricted codes have been created, used and transmitted amongst defined groups in Syria, between the 1980s and the first revolutionary sparks in 2011.

The ascent to power of the late President Hafez Al-Assad on November 13, 1970, following a military coup in his own party, symbolized the starting point of a new era in modern Syria. The Alawite minority of Syria, today highly represented in high-level positions in the government and the army, began to occupy the major positions in every sector, and the authoritarian state that developed systematically crushed any dissidents ruthlessly. The state operated on a vast security and intelligence apparatus, called the "*Mukhābarāt*," present at every level of social life, and spied on the population for the sake of the regime. In this context, freedom of speech was completely banned. Even today, Syrians are all aware of what is called *al-thālūth al-muḥarram* (the three taboos or forbidden elements), which include religion, politics, and sexuality. The media was placed under the total control of the state, with attempts to limit the spread of satellite TV in order to cut Syria off from the outside world.

The oppressive nature of the regime and its surveillance increased further after the violence of the late 1970s. These events, mentioned as "*Aḥdāth al-Thamānīnāt*" in Arabic (or the events of the 1980s), saw a peak in violence, including several explosions, executions, and assassinations. A violent battle took place between the regime and the Muslim Brothers, each one blaming the other for the acts of violence, particularly those perpetrated against the Alawite community. The Ḥamāh episode[3] in February 1982 opened a new page in the history of Syrian authoritarianism, which would see an increase in regime violence and repression towards any insurgent or perceived opponent. The violence started in 1978, with small scale massacres until the Ḥamāh episode in February 1982, during which forty thousand people were killed, fifteen

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[2] James Atherton, *Doceo; Language Codes* (2002), which can be fully accessed at the following link: http://www.doceo.co.uk/background/language_codes.htm

thousand disappeared, and about one hundred thousand were displaced. These figures have been given by several human rights organizations; the official figures given by the Syrian regime differ. Surveillance intensified within the country: Syrians interviewed for this study report that to merely say that "things are not good" (in Syrian Arabic, the expression would be *"al-waḍa' mū̄ mnīḥ")* could lead one to be thrown in jail. Fear of the *Mukhābaraī* led Syrians to mistrust each other, whether their neighbors, the seller at the grocery store, or even sometimes their own family members. Another aspect of this fear was the fact that the *Mukhābaraī* had unlimited power to accuse someone of something they did not do. This was a common feature of everyday life, and Syrians knew they had to always remain in good terms with anyone who might belong to this group. Because every Syrian was being watched and monitored at all times, language started to be impacted and take the marks of this atypical situation.

In this context, speakers belonging to a closed group (kin) started creating new codes for communication in order to speak of what was forbidden or dangerous. It is important to note that these codes were developed amongst a closely defined group, usually including family members, close friends, or relatives with whom a sense a trust had been developed. These groups can be defined as small speech communities, a key concept in sociolinguistics. John Gumperz (1968) defined a speech community as "any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage."[4] Speech communities indeed refer to groups of people who share a set of norms and expectations on how to use language. In our case, we are dealing with smaller speech communities that include only highly trusted individuals. The restricted codes used by these speech communities differ from one group to another.

The following are examples of codes developed amongst a group of close family members and university friends in Ḥimṣ, Ḥamāh, and Damascus between 1980 and 2011. In order to speak of someone who is hiding from the regime, a group would say that the person is *marḍān* (sick). Other groups would say that he is studying: *'am yadruss*, or that he is having exams *'andu fhussāī*. Others would say that he is busy (*mashgūl*). To describe someone who is being held (by the *mukhābaraī*) or in jail, it was common to say that he was at his aunt's house (*huwa fī bayt khāltu*). To refer to a sensitive group, particularly the *mukhābaraī*, Syrians also developed specific codes such as: *Khaṭṭu heluw* (his handwriting is beautiful), which meant that

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[4] John Gumperz, "The Speech Community," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, pp. 381-6. Macmillan. [Reprinted in P. Giglioli, ed. 1972, *Language and Social Context:* 219-31.]

the specified was a *mukhbir*, or part of the *mukhābaraī*. This person usually wrote reports for the intelligence agency (*yaktub taqārīr* or he is *'awaīnī*, someone who helps the intelligence, only writing reports for them). Another way of suggesting that a person wrote reports was by saying *Yalī balī balak,* which we could translate as "you know what I mean?" The phrase, when used, is often accompanied by some form of body language as well, like moving the head, as well as using a specific tone of voice.

These codes were all the more important considering the extent to which the *mukhābaraī* apparatus was widespread within every layer of society. It most often included people in one's own building, at the grocery store, and amongst neighbors. The theory of restricted codes is particularly helpful for understanding transformations of speech used to counter surveillance amongst Syrian communities. The theory explains how these codes differ from one group to another and how meaning attributed to codes is bound to the closeness of the people within that particular group. Atherton (2002) defined the members of a group sharing codes:

> Within the restricted code, speakers draw on background knowledge and shared understanding. This type of code creates a sense of includedness [sic], a feeling of belonging to a certain group. Restricted codes can be found among friends and families and other intimately knit groups.[5]

In Syria, every family or closed social group had its own codes, which were developed amongst people who were close enough to trust each other. Restricted codes often functioned behind closed doors, and were inherited from generation to generation, over forty years. In terms of the nature of the codes created, one can notice the presence of semantic fields: studying or general health, for instance, are used to denote arrest. Speakers would use words belonging to the same semantic category in order to convey an altered meaning which only they know about and can understand. These fields were chosen because they embody every day conversation topics for which no one could be suspected of betrayal by the regime. Another characteristic of these codes is their brevity: restricted codes indeed tend to convey extensive meaning in a limited number of words. Examples such as *khaṭṭu heluw* or *marḍān,* as mentioned previously, attest of this fact.

The Syrian case teaches us two critical elements in the theory of restricted codes. The first is the significance of fear in the creation of restricted codes amongst communities. The second is the availability of these codes across social classes: restricted codes in Syria are indeed not

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[5] James Atherton, *Doceo; Language Codes* (2002), which can be fully accessed at the following link: http://www.doceo.co.uk/background/language_codes.htm

limited to the lower social classes, but apply to the entire population, regardless of their position in the social spectrum. The people interviewed for this research indeed included Syrians of all age as well as religious and geographical background. Now, considering speech characteristics in Syria under the authoritarian regime of Hafez al-Assad and his son Bashar al-Assad, how did these language features evolve after the first protests that took place in March 2011? How did the demonstrations impact language codes and use?

3. Language Changes in the midst of Syria's Revolution: an Examination of Five Linguistic Transformations

3.1 New Word Formation

Years of restricted communication on political matters had noticeable consequences in Syria. When the Syrian revolution started, it found itself facing a lexical gap. New terms were needed to openly describe a political reality whose existence had only been hinted at previously. Each major political entity needed a defining name, which had been absent from the commonly used vocabulary until then. To address this gap, Syrians created new words to name entities and concepts.

The concept of the lexical gap is described by Laurie Bauer in his theory of naming needs (2001), which argues that productive processes in word formation are the outcome of an existing lexical gap. Particularly relevant to our case is Pavol Stekauer's onomasiological theory of English word formation (1998), because it takes the naming demands of a speech community as a point of departure.[6] Stekauer uses the concept of "the extra-linguistic reality" to shed light on the forces behind the coinage of new designations: phenomena that are outside the linguistic reality urge people to coin new terms.

I argue that Syrian protestors found themselves facing a naming need and answered it by creatively producing new words. An example of this process can be seen in the new word "*minḥibbakjī*," coined by protestors to designate regime partisans. The process of its creation merits some explanation. The term was coined using the pro-regime campaign organized by the government and branding the term "*minḥibbak*." This expression started to be chanted towards President Bashar al-Assad by his supporters, meaning "we love you." The demonstrators used

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[6] Pavol Stekauer, Onomasiological Theory of English Word Formation. Michigan: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 1998. See also Stekauer, "Fundamental Principles of An Onomasiological Theory of Word Formation in English," Onomasiology Online 2, 1-42 (http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/SLF/EngluVglSW/stekauer1051.pdf).

this slogan and added the suffix –ji, a common suffix used in Syrian dialect to create the name of the doer of the action or the function out of a noun. In Syrian dialect, we can observe this process in the following names: "*Kahrabjī*" (electrician), coined out of "*kahraba,*" meaning electricity; *maṣlahjī* (opportunist), coined out of the noun "*maṣlaha,*" meaning interest. In current Syria, the term refers to any person who is pro-Assad and it is widely used by anti-regime protestors. A variant of *minḥibbakjī* is "*minḥibbakjaḥshī,*" another term coined for Bashar's partisans, using "*minḥibbak,*" adding to it the Arabic word "*jaḥsh,*" meaning donkey, and creating an adjective with the addition of a final "*jī.*"

A comical Facebook page on the revolution was created by the anti-regime partisans and symbolically named "*minḥibbakjiyyāt.*" The name of the page is critical for several reasons: first, it uses the ironic term "*minḥibbakjī,*" which resonates strongly amongst Syrians. Second, it added the suffix "*iyyāt*" in order to draw upon the Arab concept of "*yumiyyāt,*" which are diaries of high literary standard. Other such cases of literary genres include the following: *adabiyyāt, nathriyyāt, nizāriyyāt,* the latter in reference to Nizār Qabbānī, a Syrian diplomat, poet and publisher (1923-1998), or *raḥbāniyyat* (from the Raḥbānī brothers, a group of Lebanese composers, musicians and poets[7]). The creation of the term "*minḥibbakjiyyāt*" is a satirical way of turning pro-Bashar slogans into ridicule, all the more since Bashar's partisans are thought to be unreasonable people who are not able to think with lucidity.

Another example of word formation is the term *shabbīḥ,* and its plural form *shabbīḥa,* which refers to armed men in civilian clothing who assault protestors. This word comes from the root "*shabḥ,* plural *shubuḥ* or *ashbaḥ,* meaning spirit, or ghost. Although the word *shabbīḥ* was created in pre-revolution Syria, it has gained unprecedented popularity since the revolution started. The term was originally coined to refer to a specific type of car, a 1994 Mercedes S class, which Syrians commonly named "*shabaḥ.*" This expensive car was mostly used by a group of "thugs,"[8] mafia-like individuals who were feared by the people and known to be involved in stealing and smuggling through the ports of Latakia, Banias, and Tartous. These gangs, directly linked to the Alawite leadership, were called "*shabbīḥa,*" by most people in Syria. Since the beginning of the revolution, the term has been reappropriated by Syrians to refer to these armed men in civilian clothing assaulting protestors. The term *shabbīḥ,* and its plural form *shabbīḥa* particularly, have gained international notoriety: the words have been quoted in international media outlets (newspapers, television, and Internet websites) in the

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[7] The Raḥbānī brothers are: Assi, 1923-86; Mansour, 1925-2009; and Elias, born in 1938.
[8] See the article by Nayla Razzouk and Caroline Alexander, "Syrian Thugs Are Assad's Tool in Protest Crackdown, Groups Say," Bloomberg Businessweek, May 2012.

United States, Europe, and other parts of the world. The online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* has dedicated an explanatory page to the term, noting its importance and relevance (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shabiha). If the word "*shabbīḥa*" was not created by the revolution, it underwent significant semantic change and gained notoriety through the revolution. Often compared to the Egyptian term "*baltagiyya*," an Egyptian term meaning "thugs" or "gangs" hired to attack regime opponents and demonstrators, the word "*shabbīḥa*" has become the nickname of the Syrian military apparatus.

Another example of word formation in the context of the Syrian revolution is the nicknames given to President Bashar al-Assad and his regime: "*al-Ṣuhyu̅-Asadī*"[9] for the regime, and "*Basharu̅n*"[10] for Bashar. The first nickname, *al-Ṣuhyu̅-Asadī*," is a word created from two terms: the adjective "*ṣuhyu̅nī*" (Zionist), and the name "Assad." The implication behind this coinage is the belief that Bashar al-Assad is a Zionist, who has been serving the interests of Israel against his own people. A second connotation is linked to the harsh repression and massacres perpetrated by the Assad forces against the people. The same idea is implied in the second nickname, "*Basharu̅n*," which has been coined using two nouns: Bashar and Sharon, referring to the former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. These words have become so common both in Syria and amongst the Syrian community abroad that they have become part of mainstream vocabulary. Hence, Syrian protestors have redefined government entities in their country through the creation of a new terminology, which has been in use since the beginning of the revolution. This new terminology is the direct consequence of the existing lexical gap Syrian demonstrators have been facing.

3.1.2 Semantic Change

The second aspect of the creative process I would like to introduce is semantic change. Semantic change is evident in how both protestors and regime partisans have expressed their own perception of reality. In his theory of semantic change, Johachim Grzega (2004)[11] established a typology of forces triggering semantic change, which included changes in the referent (changes in the world) and world-view, but also insult or flattery. These forces were certainly at play in the semantic changes that took place in post-revolution Syrian language.

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[9] This nickname is used throughout the internet, whether Facebook, Youtube, Flickr, or Twitter. Here is an example on a Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/daeel.news?filter=3

[10] This second nickname for Bashar al-Assad is also widely used throughout the Internet. The following is an example on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoK1sGDwILM

[11] Grzega, Joachim, *Bezeichnungswandel: Wie, Warum, Wozu? Ein Beitrag zur englischen und allgemeinen Onomasiologie*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2004.

Both pro and anti-revolution Syrians have altered the meaning of ordinary vocabulary to use it in a new symbolic manner.

A good example of this dynamic is the word *mundassīn*,[12] which has undergone semantic change: while it previously meant 'hidden', it has now become a pejorative term used by the Syrian regime to define people who squeeze into demonstrations in order to provoke chaos. This term and the accusation behind it led many Syrians who supported the revolution to treat the topic with irony.[13] Another example of semantic change by regime partisans is the term *fawra*, meaning something that spills over (usually for boiling coffee). The term has been used by the regime to refer to the revolution: instead of *thawra*, the regime claimed it is a *fawra*, playing on the similar sonorities of the two words. The idea behind this naming process is that the revolution is only a disorganized movement of people without an aim or purpose, and of temporary nature. One can notice that the lexical field of these terms used by the regime is one that emphasizes chaos, troublesome individuals, and illegitimacy. These are all the more powerful since they are being reiterated in the media on a daily basis, with the purpose of defining reality from a specific standpoint.

Protestors have also been creative in granting names to entities and people. A new nickname has been given to Bashar al-Assad: *al-baṭṭa*, or the duck. The origin of this name comes from the scandal around the secret emails sent to Bashar by his secret lover Hadīl al-'Alī.[14] In her emails to the President, Hadīl called him "duck," which translates into "*al-baṭṭa*" in Arabic. Since the revelation of these emails, *al-baṭṭa* has become a common nickname for Bashar throughout the Internet.

Other names include *būq (plural abuaq)* which in standard Arabic means trumpet. The term's meaning has been transformed by the protestors to refer to anyone who speaks in defense of the regime in the media. It has been widely used as a way of condemning this practice: *abuāq al-niẓām* are the defenders of the regime, its officials and anyone who speaks in their defense. New names have also been coined by the Syrian protestors for Hizbullah and their leader Hasan Nasrallah. Hizbullah (the party of Allah, God) has been called *hizb al-llāt* (the party of *al-llāt*, which was the name of an ancient Arabian deity in pre-Islamic times, and

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[12] A song mocking the idea of *"mundassīn"* put forth by the regime, along other accusations of the protestors being salafis or armed groups, has been put on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlGVSoXXx3c http://the-syrian.com/archives/55433

[13] The official website of political cartoonist Ali Ferzat speaks of the term and its meaning: http://www.ali-ferzat.com/ar/%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86.html

[14] Comical pages mocking this episode are numerous on the internet. An example is to be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zMqpVQDgdY&feature=related

is opposed to Allah, the one and only divinity in Islam), and Hasan Nasrallah Hasan Nasr *al-llāt*. These terms are all the more powerful since they attack Hizbullah and its leader on the grounds of religious beliefs, suggesting that they do not adhere to any Islamic values but are rather followers of a pagan deity. The anger towards Hizbullah and its leader is due to their support of the Syrian regime, regardless of the regime's repression of its own people.

Arabic language has been used symbolically in Syria since the revolution started. Hence, since the death of the martyr singer from Hama Ibrahim Qashoush,[15] who authored several anti-regime songs, Syrians have associated his name with singing against the regime and in support of the revolution. Instead of saying "the singer of Darʿā," they would say "Qashoush Darʿā." This appellation is well-known and is used throughout the country.

Other cases of semantic change in everyday vocabulary include the ways in which most Syrians describe someone who sides with neither the regime nor the revolution. While the term *al aghlabiyya al-ṣāmitah*, or the silent majority, was used in the first year of the revolution, the expression has not been in use since, because of its inaccuracy. Most Syrians have indeed joined the revolution and only a minority has not taken side yet. This minority is referred to as *ramādī*, or grey, by most Syrians. The term is highly pejorative and denotes indecisiveness and lack of courage. Syrians who speak about the revolution regularly use this term amongst themselves.

It is important to note that the level of fear due to the *mukhābarāt* apparatus is still very strong in Syria, leading people to use coded language on heated topics, particularly on the phone, which is believed to be under surveillance.[16] Hence, expressions such as *'am tmaṭir* (it is raining) or ʿ*andna ḥafla* (we are having a party) are used to indicate that there is a demonstration going on. The semantic field of rain has been largely used to express the idea of protests and their consequences. Heavy rain is used to indicate the gunfire from the Syrian forces. These tools have been used due to the impossibility still of speaking clearly about demonstrations and their organizers, who would be exposed to regime retaliation. Here again the semantic fields of physical health, work, and study are commonly used by demonstrators and other anti-regime dissidents to speak about the revolution. The phrase *māshī al ḥāl* is known amongst Syrians to mean that things are not very well; and the sentence "one has one week left before coming out of the hospital" means that the person will be back from hiding in

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[15] Ibrahim Qashoush was killed in Ḥamāh in July 2011 by regime forces.
[16] A report by *al-Jazeera* has been issued on the topic, it is available at the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcSNjYN-6nk

a week. This way of handling dangerous and risky topics is certainly not singular to the Syrian case but it remains widespread in Syria. Another phenomenon one can witness in Syrian is the transformation of these codes from verbal to electronic form. Throughout the Internet, whether in emails, Facebook messages or others, Syrians who are at risk of being targeted by the regime have used coded forms of communication.

Last but not least, the impact of the revolution on the Syrian language has been so strong that certain existing words have become fully associated with the revolution, regardless of their usage. This is the case of the word *tansiqiyya*, which means "coordination." Since the beginning of the revolution, the term has acquired a new meaning: people speak of *tansiqiyyat al-thawra*, to refer to the organization units of the revolution. While it used to denote any type of coordination, the word is now primarily used to refer to the coordination committee of the revolution. Semantic change has been a significant component of language change in Syria following the Arab Spring. Existing vocabulary has acquired both new meanings and new usages. As put forth in Grzega's theory of semantic change, the forces at play behind these transformations included changes in the world-view, as well as insult and flattery.

3.2 The Second Consequence of the Revolution on the Arabic Language is the Rise of Popular Slogans and Songs in the Syrian Dialect.

The Syrian dialect has experienced significant world-exposure since the beginning of the uprising: it has been put at the forefront in the international Arabic media. Local and dialectal expressions chanted by the Syrian protestors have been distributed through Arabic newspapers and television channels, providing exposure of the Syrian dialect to the entire Arab world. Several slogans have made their way to an international audience in their original form: the slogan *mālnā ghairak yā Allah,* (we only have you, Allah), for instance, is known by a worldwide audience. The same can be said of late peace activist Ibrahim Qashoush's song *Yalla Erḥal yā Bashar*,[17] which has become the official song of the Syrian revolution. The slogans *thawrat al-ḥurriyya wa al-karāma*, (the revolution of freedom and dignity) and *silmiyye* (peacefulness) have also been a marker of the Syrian uprising.

Popular and humorous slogans in the Syrian dialect have been chanted to express Syrians' anger and their awareness of the political games surrounding them, be it the inaction of the international community, Hizbullah's support of the regime, or the unfailing backing of Russia. The following are examples of these slogans: *Ila sayyid al-muqāwama (Hassan Nasrallah),*

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[17] A translation of the lyrics of the song into English is available at the following link:
http://www.nowlebanon.com/BlogDetails.aspx?TID=1640&FID=6

waqif ʿad-dūr! ʿam nkhaliṣ min sayyid al-mumānaʿa wa jāyyinak,[18] ("to Mr. Resistance [Hassan Nasrallah], wait in line, we ate getting rid of Mr. "I refuse" and we are coming to you"). *Lafrūf, faqaṭ al-ab bidāfiʿ ʿan ibnu bihadihi al-sharāsah: yā tara fī shī?*[19] ("Lavrov, only a father would defend his son in such an aggressive way: is there something we do not know?"). This slogan accuses Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, of defending Bashar and trying anything to protect him. Another example of a popular slogan in the Syrian dialect is the following: *al-qalaq al-duwalī...wa ṣirmaītnā sawā,*[20] ("The international community's concern: our shoes are no different"). This slogan addresses the international community directly, accusing it of not really caring: its concern is like their shoes, meaning that it carries no significance for Syrians.

One can notice both the boldness and dark humor of these slogans, which speak of many Syrians' impatience with the current state of affairs. The fact that they were coined and remained in dialectal Arabic and not in literary form is all the more suggestive of their lively and expressive nature. Most of these slogans would indeed lose most of their meaning if they were to be translated or expressed in formal Arabic. To the contrary, the dialectal form relates to a shared and lived experience on the ground and resonates more deeply with Syrians. This fact underlines the importance of internal communication amongst Syrians and the need to express feelings and perceptions in the midst of the current events. Many of these slogans have appeared in the international media, particularly the Arabic media in their original form. They have provided exposure of the Syrian dialect and Syrians' way of thinking to an international audience.

Although most slogans that reach popularity are dialectal slogans, there are also several examples of slogans in literary Arabic. One of them is the following: *awqifū al qatl, nurīd an nabnī watanan li kul al sūriyyin*, spoken by a young girl, Reema Dali, in front of the Syrian Parliament, in the middle of Damascus; the girl chanting the slogan was alone, wearing a red dress. This led to a large campaign by partisans of the revolution, who used this slogan as a symbol for their fight for freedom.

Dialectal slogans and songs have certainly increased the tight bonds amongst partisans of the revolution in Syria. Another feature of this phenomenon are oaths created by Syrian

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[18] The Arabic form of the slogan reads as the following:
"الى سيد المقاومة، وقف علدور!! عم نخلص من سيد الممانعة وجايينك"
[19] "لافروف، فقط الاب يدافع عن ابنه بهذه الشراسة، يا ترى في شيي؟"
[20] "الفلق الدولي...وصرمايتنا سوا"

revolutionaries, and called *Qassam al-thawra.*[21] The idea behind it is to swear allegiance to the revolutionary forces. Demonstrators marching on the streets of Syria tend to chant this oath in groups, often following the lead of one of the demonstrators. *Qassam al-thawra* is critical because it symbolizes the belonging to a group and adherence to a cause.

3.3 The Third Feature is the Transformation of Old Proverbs into New Sayings Linked to the Revolution.

Another interesting aspect of Arabic language use in the revolution is the transformation of some Arabic proverbs into dialectal proverbs with a new meaning. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon in Syria. Demonstrators have commonly drawn on existing Arabic proverbs to create new ones with a different meaning, often one based on a dark sense of humor. I will consider here what I consider the most significant examples of these proverbs, which have been raised on banners and demonstration boards.

The first example is the following new saying: *inna al-ṭa'ifiyya rajas min 'amal al-niẓām fa-ajtanibuh*[22] (sectarianism is the product of the regime, so avoid it). This saying was coined out of the Qur'anic verse, which reads: *"inna al-fitnah rajas min 'amal al-shaytān fa-ajtanibuh"*[23] (*fitna,* or civil strife, is the outcome of the devil's work, so avoid it). The new saying emphasizes the unity of the Syrian people against the regime, regardless of their sectarian identities. Syrians have staunchly promoted the concept of unity of the people in face of the regime, answering the accusations of sectarian strife and division promoted by the Syrian government and international media. A second example is the new proverb *la tu'ajil muẓāharat al-yūm ila al-ghad,*[24] (do not postpone today's demonstration to tomorrow) coined from the original Arabic saying *la tu'ajil 'amal al yūm ila al-ghad,* (do not postpone today's work to tomorrow). This is a poignant way of calling people to demonstrate today and not postpone their brave actions of resistance to the next day. A third example is *mundass dahr, wa lā minḥibbakjī shahr,*[25] (better be a *mundass* all your life than a *minḥibbakjī* for a single month), from the original proverb *A'zab dahr wa la armal shahr,* (better be single all your life than widow for a month). This proverb expresses the shame of being a regime partisan, even if only for a single month. It is another powerful saying coined in order to call people to rally to the revolutionary movement. A similar example is the old proverb in Syrian dialect *alf kilmet*

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[21] Examples of people chanting this oath on the streets of Syria can be found at the following links: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGbmjIGNzWs and http://www.youtube.com/watch?=PIkEFNu32QQ

[22] ‘‘ان الطائفية رجس من عمل النظام فاجتنبوها’’

[23] ‘‘يا ايها الذين آمنوا انما الخمر والميسر والأنصاب والأزلام رجس من عمل الشيطان فاجتنبوه لعلكم تفلحون’’

[24] ‘‘لاتؤجل مظاهرة اليوم إلى الغد’’

[25] ‘‘مندس دهرولا منحبكجي شهر’’

jabaan wa la i'ulu Allah yarhamu[26] (it is better to say a thousand times coward than to say rest in peace), which has become *alf kilmet Allah yarhamu wa la i'ulu as-suri jabaan*[27] (it is better to say a thousand times rest in peace than to say that the Syrian is a coward).

A fourth case is *man rāqaba al-nās māt*,[28] (he who observes people dies), from the proverb *man rāqaba al-nās māta hāmman*[29] (he who observes people dies out of worries). This proverb has been addressed to the Arab observers to Syria, pointing out that the regime would not hesitate to kill them. Another proverb coined at the occasion of the UN observation mission to Syria is the following: *ab'ad 'an al-murāqib wa ghanīlu*,[30] ("stay away from the observer and sing to him") originating from the original Arabic proverb *ab'ad 'an al-shar wa ghanīlu*[31] ("stay away from the observer and sing to him").

Fifth, I would like to offer here proverbs that have been coined to address the regime and its characteristics. The first example is the old proverb *al bāb li iji minhu rih sakaru wa istirih*,[32] (the door from which wind comes, close it and relax), from which the following new saying has been coined: *al-niẓām ili bījīk minū shabbīḥ, saqtu wa istarih*[33] (the regime from which comes a *shabbīḥ*, make it fall and relax). The second is the Arabic proverb *tajrī al ryāḥ bimā lā tashtahī as-sufun,*[34] ("the winds do not blow in the ways that the ships wish they would"), which has become *tajrī al-muḍaharah bimā lā yashtahī al-Assad*[35] ("the demonstration will not bring about what Assad wants"). The original proverb expresses the idea of bad luck.

Perhaps a more local transformation because of its dialectal form is the following example: *rubba dābatin lam taliduhu ummak*[36] ("this is the donkey that your mother did not give birth to") which has been coined from the original local saying: *rubba akhin lam taliduhu ummak*[37] ("this is the brother that your mother did not give birth to"). It is important to explain the meaning behind this proverb: Syrian protestors coined it after Kofi Annan's visit to Syria. This visit came after a first observation mission by the Arab League from December 2011 to February 2012, and led by the Sudanese military commander Muhammad al-Dabi. Syrian protestors have played with the similar sonorities of the name of the Sudanese commander,

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[26] ‏"الف كلمة جبان ولا يقولو الله يرحمو"‏

[27] ‏"الف كلمة الله يرحمو ولا يقولو السوري جبان"‏

[28] ‏"من راقب الناس مات"‏

[29] ‏"من راقب الناس مات هما"‏

[30] ‏"ابعد عن المراقب وغنيلو"‏

[31] ‏"ابعد عن الشر وغنيلو"‏

[32] ‏"الباب الي بيجيك منو الريح.. سكرو واستريح"‏

[33] ‏"النظام الي بيجيك منو شبيح..سقطو واستريح"‏

[34] ‏"تجري الرياح بما لا تشتهي السفن"‏

[35] ‏"تجري المظاهرات بما لا يشتهي الأسد"‏

[36] ‏"رب دابة لم تلده أمك"‏

[37] ‏"رب أخ لم تلده أمك"‏

Dabi, and the Arabic word meaning donkey, *dāba.* The idea behind this proverb was to suggest familial links between Muhammad al-Dabi and Kofi Annan, who both ended their mission with no significant outcome. Last but not least, Syrian protestors have transformed the old words traditionally chanted by the *musaḥarātī*[38] during the month of Ramadan. They have created the following new adaptation: *Yā Naīm waḥad adaīm, Bashār al-Assad wallah mānū daīm, intaha ḥukm al-bahaīm, la illah illalah, wa al-asad 'adūllah, lak 'ūmū 'alā suḥūrkun, al-jaysh al-ḥur ija izūrkun*[39]. Hence, we do see that Syrians have been very creative in transforming existing expressions and proverbs in order to adapt them to a new reality. Powerful new expressions have been coined, chanted, and repeated across Syria by people of various age and from different regions.

3.4 The Fourth Impact of the Syrian Revolution on the Arabic Language is the Battle of Words that has been Taking Place between Pro- and Anti-Regime Partisans.

Language has become a tool of war between groups who want to promote different views of reality. In this vein, each group has assigned names to the other party and has used their particular terms as symbols of their struggle. In the case of the regime, the narrative has focused on the idea of a plot: it accuses armed terrorist groups of killing soldiers and civilians and spreading fear in the country. "Armed groups" or *majmu'āt musallahah* in Arabic is a recurrent expression in the speeches of the Syrian government representatives. In the official media of the Syrian regime, these words have made the title of a countless number of newspaper articles. Along with the idea of the active presence of an external armed group fighting the regime in Syria, the government has put forth the idea of *mu'amara,* or conspiracy, organized by outside groups and governments who have a stake in putting an end to the Syrian regime. This term, *mu'amara,* is consistently used by the official Syrian media. *Mu'amara al-kawniyya*, or the universal conspiracy, has become the credo the regime goes by.

The Syrian government does not recognize the idea of an authentic revolutionary movement in Syria. The idea of *thawra* (revolution) is categorically rejected by the Syrian regime and its officials. Speaking of the same phenomenon, the government and the protestors give it different names: *mu'amara* and *thawra* battle each other in order to label a single reality in radically

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[38] The *musaḥarātī* wakes people up before dawn during the holy month of Ramadan so that they may eat before the start of their fast. It is an old tradition in the Middle East.

[39] يا نايم وحد الدايم .. بشار الاسد والله مانو دايم .. انتهى حكم البهايم .. لا اله الا الله .. والاسد عدو الله .

لك قوموا على سحووركن .. الجيش الحر اجا يزوركن.

The song is played on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGsm7hPjemM

different manners. This naming battle is often mocked by the Syrian demonstrators themselves, who use the regime's own words of accusation ironically: "when did you join the conspiracy?" is a question commonly asked amongst protestors, meaning "when did you join the revolution?"

The same competition in naming can be noticed in the concept of *mundass*, (plural *mundassīn*) used by the regime to describe the demonstrators, meaning "infiltrator." The basic idea behind this name is the fact that the common people are not leading a revolution for human rights and dignity; rather, it is an armed movement controlled by outsiders who have a hidden agenda. The term *mundass* has been mocked by the protestors as well; they often ask each other "when did you become a *mundass*?" instead of asking: "when did you join the revolution?" The song *Qalu 'anna mundassīn*[40] is an example of this mocking process. Other names given to the protestors by the regime include: *musallahīn* (armed groups), *mukharribīn* (trouble-makers) and *salafiyyīn* (salafists). In the case of the demonstrators, they have not been lacking naming strategies of their own. As aforementioned, partisans of the regime have received a plethora of names, such as *shabbīḥ*, usually used in its plural form *shabbīḥa*, since these men tend to always act in groups and not alone. The terms *minḥibbakjī* and their variants (*minḥibbakjahshī, minkibbak*, we will throw you in the garbage, or *minjībak*, meaning we will get to you) have also been widely used by Syrians to refer to any person siding with the regime. Other names include *būq (plural abuāq)* which in standard Arabic means trumpet. The term's meaning has been transformed by the protestors to refer to anyone who speaks in defense of the regime. It has been widely used as a way of condemning this practice: *abuāq al-niẓām* are the defenders of the regime, its officials and any person who speaks in their defense. The current Minister of Foreign Affairs in Syria has been called *multahim al-qārrāt*, devourer of continents, following his claim that he would rid of Europe from the map.

A characteristic example of the linguistic battle taking place in Syria is the very idea of the evolution of the revolutionary movement. While pro-regime Syrians have been describing the movement by saying *khillsit*, meaning "it is ending" or "it is dying," pro-revolution partisans have answered *qarrabit*, which means "it is getting close," or "victory is close." This linguistic contradiction between *qarrabit* and *khillsit* symbolizes the overall opposition between the regime and the revolution.

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[40] The song can be listened to at the following website: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlGVSoXXx3c

3.5 The Fifth Element is the Symbolic Use of Language to Show the Unity of the Syrian People.
A theme of great importance in the revolution has been that of the unity of the Syrian people. Slogans, songs and proverbs have emphasized the idea of one Syrian people regardless of religious and ethnical backgrounds. Syrian protestors have been creative in showing their unity across cities and regions of Syria, through language. Hence, demonstrators have adopted slogans from other cities or regions and, in doing so; have made it a point to preserve certain phrases in their original dialect, however different they may have been from their own local accent. A good example of this phenomenon can be seen in the reiteration of the phrase *ḥenna*, originally from Darʿā and meaning *naḥnu* or "we" in English. Instead of using *nehna* which is the dialectal phrase common in Damascus (or nehne in Ḥamāh, and Ḥimṣ), protestors have purposefully used henna. The slogan "Ya Darʿā ḥenna maʿakī lal-mawt," meaning "Oh Darʿā we are with you till death," is an example of this phenomenon.

Another aspect of this expression of unity amongst Syrians has been the dialogue of slogans amongst Syrian cities. It has been common to notice slogans on boards answering one another from one city or region of Syria to the other. I will provide two examples: the first is the slogan from ʿAmuda "Greetings from the bride of the north, ʿAmuda (city, with Kurds) to the bride of the occupied south, Majdal Shams," and the answer from Majdal Shams "'Amuda bows to you, how beautiful would it be to live in one same country (signed: Majdal Shams the occupied, the sold Golan). In this case, Majdal Shams is located in the occupied Golan Heights, not under de facto control of the Syrian regime. ʿAmuda is a town in the Governorate of Al-Hasakah, in northeaster Syria, and is mostly Kurdish. The second example is a slogan found in the town of Kefernebel, in Edlib, reading: "One, one, one, Kefernebel and ʿAmuda are one," and signed "The local committee of occupied Kefernebel." The slogan was answered later in the town of ʿAmuda, in the following manner: "One, one, one, ʿAmuda and Kefernebel are one, the Syrian people is one" and signed "the local committee of ʿAmuda." One of the interesting aspects of this last slogan is the fact that it was written in Kurdish, the town of Kefernebel being mainly inhabited by Kurds.

Another example that has been carried on boards in two Syrian cities is the following conversation between al-Zabadānī and Dārayyā. The dialogue is as follows: *min thaʾirat al-zabadani: Dārayyā ibtasimi, ʿunbuki yazdad hala kul yum*[41] (From the female rebels of al-Zabadānī: Dārayyā smile, your grapes are getting more beautiful everyday). The answer in Dārayyā reads: *tansiqqiyat Dārayyā to al-Zabadānī: thuwwar al-Zabadānī, ʿunbuna yastamid*

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[41] "داريا ابتسمي عنبك يزداد حلى كل يوم "

halawatahu min tufahukum, wa yastamid humrat khududihi min haya'ikum[42] (the organizing committee of *Dārayyā* to the rebels of *al-Zabadānī,* our grapes get their sweetness from your apples, and they get their red cheeks from your timidity).[43]

4. Conclusion

The findings of this paper show that the Arabic language has been deeply affected by the revolution in Syria. It bears the marks of a lived experience, that of millions of people who have needed to create meaning to express the reality of a situation only they know about. Before the revolution started, under the Ba'ath rule, language had already been impacted by years of fear and oppression; Syrians had found creative ways to communicate ideas without running the risk of repression. They used restricted codes, which were shared amongst small speech communities. This usage of restricted codes demonstrates the relevance of fear as a factor for the elaboration of such codes. Linguistic theories of communication codes would benefit from more thorough studies about the impact of fear on speech, particularly in authoritarian societies.

After the first revolutionary sparks in the country, new linguistic transformations have taken place: the Arabic language and its Syrian dialectal forms have evidenced new word formations, semantic changes, the creation of new proverbs, and other phenomena that will bear a long-term mark on the linguistic fabric of Syria. Both the Assad regime and the protestors have created new strategies of communication that express their own view of reality. Language has been highly marked by the battles on the ground, and naming needs have opened the door to many linguistic innovations. While the theories of naming needs and lexical gap are powerful instruments to help us understand these creative processes, attention should be called to the theme of conflict and its impact on language use. The linguistic transformations we observe today in Syria are the outcome of a battle between large speech communities with a diverging view of reality. These linguistic changes are all the more significant since they have been used by most Syrians since the start of the uprising. We can notice, for instance, how Syrians have been using these new linguistic forms to speak of other revolutions occurring outside Syria. In the case of Sudan, Syrians have been speaking of the regime and its opponents in the following terms: shabbīḥ for anyone related to the regime and mundass for the partisans of the revolution.

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[42] "ثوار الزبداني عنبنا يستمد حلاوته من تفاحكم...ويستمد حمرة خدوده من حيائكم"
[43] The boards have been posted on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/messages/579555529

These findings demonstrate both the changing nature of the Arabic language and the significant impact conflict situations may carry upon it. While these findings apply to Syria and its particular place in the Arab Spring, they may advance sociolinguistic studies of language innovation in zones of political repression and conflict. More significantly, the concept of naming need is at the centre of these findings, which highlights the theory's relevance when analyzing word formation and speech creativity. Al-hājah umm al-ikhtira', "need is the mother of creativity", says an old Arabic proverb.

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The data brought forth in this study has been collected through interviews as well as closely following the developments in Syria through the Arabic and international media (TV, radio channels, newspapers, Internet).

Websites:

www.aljazeera.net

www.alarabiya.net

www.youtube.com (a large number of protest videos have been posted on this website)

www.facebook.com

http://www.arraee.com/portal/ (*Al-Raʿy* is the official website of a Syrian political party called "*Ḥizb al-Shaʿb al-Dīmoqrāṭī*, The Democratic People's Party)

Examples of names of Fridays can be found at the following website:
http://the-syrian.com/archives/55433.

Certain Fridays have been associated with the Christian and Alawite communities, while others have had a more Islamic tone. An online voting system on Facebook has been put into place to allow people worldwide to vote and choose the name of the following Friday:
https://www.facebook.com/Syrian.Revolution

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