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Social Network Sites and Arabic Diglossia Between Threatening Modern Standard Arabic and Strengthening Colloquial Arabic

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Abstract: The present research paper aims to examine the effects of social network sites on Arabic. It tries to shed some light on one substantial phenomenon that the Arabic language is known for, which is diglossia. The latter clearly poses many challenges and many questions may arise. Therefore, 78 Arab users of Facebook participated in an online survey in order to investigate their use of Arabic language in the social network site, Facebook, and to what extent it can affect the Standard and Colloquial Arabic.

Keywords: Modern Standard Arabic, Diglossia, Colloquial Arabic, Social Network Sites

1. Introduction

Recently, the Arab world has witnessed tremendous changes due to the internet and globalization. The widespread use of social network sites and its significant growth in the Arab speaking countries starts profoundly affecting Arabs and particularly their language, Arabic. Nevertheless, Arabic itself constitutes a challenge considering its diglossic feature. It represents one of the most known languages that shows the phenomenon of diglossia due to the various varieties of its spoken languages. The array of language varieties that Arabic has, are quite different from the written form, usually taught in schools, i.e. the Modern Standard Arabic. This even complicates learning Arabic to non-natives.

2. Arabic: Characteristics and Origins

Languages are divided into three main groups: Indo-European group (Latin, Greek, etc.), Ural Altaic or Turanian group, and Semitic group (Hebrew, Syrian, etc.). Arabic is a part of the Semitic language family, which belongs to the Afro-Asiatic languages (Mazhar, 1963). While Modern Arabic belongs to the Arabo-Canaanite, the central group of Western Semitic languages, Arabic is determined to have many significant Proto-Semitic features including phonological and morpho-syntactic features Figure1 (Bishop, 1998; Shah, 2008).
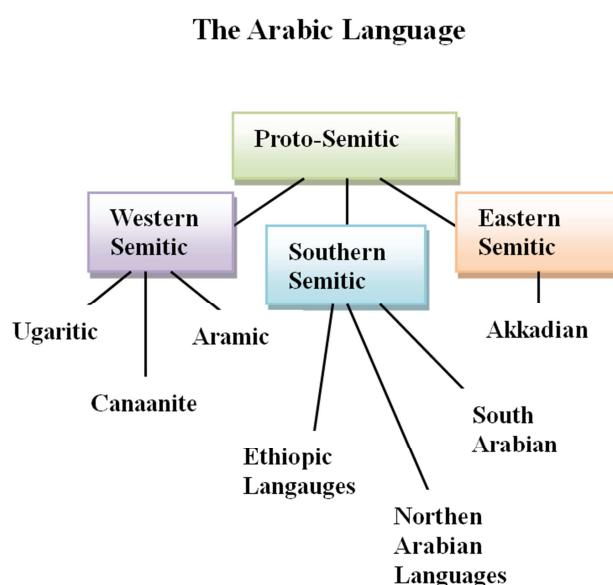

Figure 1. Semitic Languages (from Shah, 2008, p.257).

Arabic language is closely related to the holy Quran, which is originally written in Classical Arabic. It has been argued that Arabic is a unique language that has occupied a universal and remarkable status in the world due to its close association with Islam (Chejne, 1969). Hashem-Aramouni (2011), for instance, writes:

Arabic is a rich and expressive language and has played an important role in the cultural preservation of the Arabic-speaking people. However, without the bond it has had with Islam, Arabic would probably not have undergone the internal revolution it did, nor expanded beyond the borders of the Arabian Peninsula with such speed and magnitude. (Hashem-Aramouni, 2011, p. 23)

Alongside with Hashem-Aramouni views, Mazhar (1963) points to the importance of Arabic which lies in its origin. He claims that "the structure of Arabic roots is so unique and unparalleled that it is impossible that Arabic itself have been derived from any other language" (Mazhar, 1963, p.8). Arabic is the language used in the Quran, the Holy book of Islam. It is recognized by a sophisticated writing system in which its letters, for instance, change their form depending on their localization in the word (initial, middle, final or independent) (Mazhar, 1963; Ryding, 2005). It is written with the Arabic alphabet that consists of 28 letters (Bishop, 1998; Hashem-Aramouni, 2011). Each pair of letters combined provides a root of a word. Arabic is, thus, a vast language in a matter of the number of combinations with various significant meanings. This makes Arabic a rich language, as claimed by Mazhar (1963).

Maxmuller (as quoted in Mazhar, 1963, p.48) says "the more ancient a language, the richer is in synonyms". Accordingly, Arabic represents a concrete example of an ancient and rich language. That is for its family of words system and also its historical roots (Mazhar, 1963). According to the Holy Quran, for instance, language is as old as the creation of man. *"He has created man. He taught him plain speech" (55:4-5)*

"خلق الانسان، علمه البيان " سورة الرحمن اللآيات :4– 5

(MaulawiSher, 2004, p. 637). Hasanuzzaman (2013) points out the richness of Arabic in synonyms. He illustrates the number of synonyms in Arabic of some English words (Table 2).

Table 1. *Synonyms in Arabic (Adapted from Hasanuzzaman, 2013, p.12).*

English Words	Number of Synonyms in Arabic	Some Examples of Synonyms
Darkness	52	ظلام ،ضلمة، عتم، عتمة، ديجور ،دلس، دجى، سواد، غسق...
Rain	34	مطر، بغش، رذاذ، بغر، جود...
Light	21	بريق، ضوء، ضياء، سنا، وضح، شعاع...

Hasanuzzaman adds other characteristics of Arabic such as, unlike many other languages in the world, Arabic is written from the right to the left. It has also three numbers: singular (مفرد), dual (مثنى), and plural (جمع), and two genders: masculine (مذكر) and feminine (مؤنث) (Hasanuzzaman, 2013).

3. Classification of Arabic

Arabic has three main variants: Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and Colloquial or Dialectal Arabic.

Classical Arabic: It is also called the 'Quranic Arabic' because it was the language in which the Holy Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) in the first quarter of the seventh century (Ryding, 2005).

"Thus have We revealed to thee the Qu'ran in Arabic..." (42:8).

"وكذلك أوحينا إليك قرآنا عربيا..." الشورى آية 7

(Maulawi Sher, 2004, p.569). Hence, Alfouaim clearly puts "the Qur'anic texts have shaped and introduced new syntactic and grammatical elements, as well as vocabulary to enrich the classical Arabic language" (2012, p. 3). She further points out that Classical Arabic is mainly used in religious discussions and purposes. This is due to several factors which includes sociolinguistic background, identity and culture. In other words, Classical Arabic is used especially in religious context to consider non-Arabic speaking Muslims like Iranians, Indoniseans, Pakestani, etc. and also non-Muslim learners of Arabic language (Alfouaim, 2012). Thus, Classical Arabic was only used for disseminating the Islamic culture during the peak of the Islamic empire, as thought by Hashem-Aramouni (2011).

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA): It is also called 'Literary Arabic' and 'Standard Arabic' (fusha الفصحى). MSA is the standardized variety of Arabic used in writing (books, newspapers, magazines, etc.) and in most scripted speech in education and formal communication (Sadat, Kazemi, & Farzindar, 2014). In the same vein, Alsahafi clearly states "standard Arabic is the variety that is favoured for use both in its spoken and written forms in a wide variety of formal contexts including religion, education, the media, the government and documents" (2016, p.5). MSA, the language taught in schools and used in the media (newspapers, advertisements, television and radio), is the official language of all the members of the Arab League (Ryding, 2005).

Figure 2. *The Arab World Map (Arab Culture and Civilization: Geography, Demographics, and Resources, 2002).*

Differences between MSA and Classical Arabic: Modern Standard Arabic and Classical Arabic differ in matter of

syntax, terminology, pronunciation and style. These differences can be summarized in the following table:

(AlArabic, 2016; Ryding, 2005).

Table 2. Differences between MSA and Classical Arabic.

	MSA	Classical Arabic
Syntax	Simplified structure. Use of verb sentences. Seldom use of phrasal adjectives.	Complex sentence structure. Use of noun phrases. Use of phrasal adjectives.
Terminology	Transliteration and the use of non-Arabic words for modern terminology, especially technical.	Arabization and the use of Arabized terminology.
Pronunciation	The use of sounds that are not available in Arabic such as /g/, /p/, /v/. Seldom use of Tashkeel.	The use of Tashkeel التشكيل الحركات
Style and Punctuation	Modern writing forms such as blogs, guides, etc. with the application of many punctuation rules borrowed from other languages such as the use of *parentheses*, *octothorp* or the *hashtag* symbol (#), the *at* symbol (@) required in all email addresses, etc.	Classical writing forms such as Maqam المقامات. The use of many figurative styles. The use of dashes and semicolon.

In her turn, Hashem-Aramoun I states the difference between both varieties that "MSA is the language of the press, books and formal correspondences, while Classical Arabic is restricted to the religious domain and is performed traditionally by religious men" (2011, p.39).

Colloquial Arabic: It refers to the various varieties of Arabic dialects used in the Arab World. In other words, it is the spoken language with all its dialectal varieties from different regions in the Arab world, as illustrated in Figure 3.
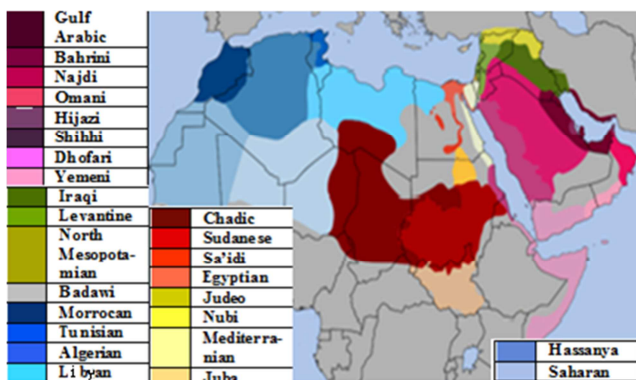
Northern Varieties	Syrian, Jordanian, Palestinian, Lebanese, and Iraqi Arabic.
Southern Varieties	Gulf countries (Baharainian, Najdi, Hijazi, Yemeni, and Omani Arabic).
Peripheries Central Asian Arabic	Tajiki and Uzbeki Arabic.

A third classification of colloquial varieties of Arabic, based on geographical and social divisions (sociolinguistic backgrounds of the speaker), is provided by Alsahafi (2016).
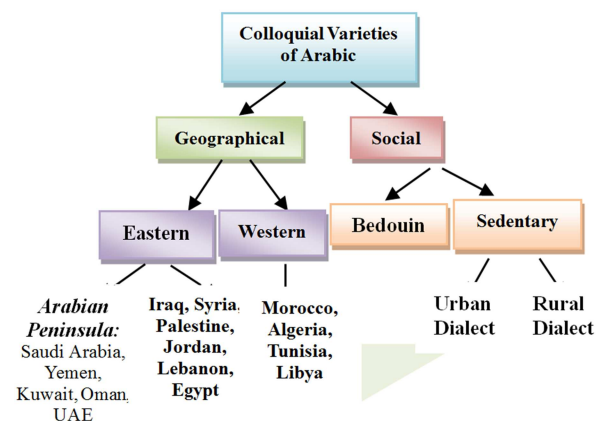

Figure 3. Different Arabic Varieties in the Arab World (from Lewis, 2011).

Versteegh (as cited in Hashem-Aramouni, 2011) distinguishes between five groups of regional dialects in the Arabic speaking countries that can be summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Regional Dialects in the Arab World.

Dialect	SpokenCountries
Dialects of the Arabian Peninsula	Saudi Arabia, the Gulf area.
Mesopotamian Dialects	Iraq
Levantine Dialects	Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine.
Egyptian Dialect	Egypt
Maghreb Dialects	North Africa

Alfouaim (2012) provides a second classification of colloquial Arabic that is displayed in the following table:

Table 4. Varieties of Arabic (Adopted from Alfouaim, 2012).

Western Varieties	Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian, Libyan, and Saharan Arabic.
Central Varieties	Egyptian, Sudanese, Chadian, and Nigerian Arabic.

Figure 4. Classification of Colloquial Arabic.

4. Differences Between Standard/ Classical and Colloquial Arabic

In his paper, 'Diglossia in Arabic: Investigating Solutions', Zughoul (1980) evidently distinguishes between Standard and Colloquial Arabic. The main points he highlights can be simply put in the following table.

MSA and Classical Arabic	Colloquial Arabic
CA: Complicated grammatical system. MSA: Simplified grammatical system. Rich lexicon. Spoken and written. Learned.	Simplified grammatical system. Less rich lexicon. Spoken only. Acquired (mother tongue).

The difference between the stated variants of Arabic and their significant development is due to diverse historical and cultural factors. This makes Arabic language unique and, from a sociolonguistic standpoint, diglossic.

4.1. Diglossia

Diglossia is a kind of biligualism which refers to the process in which people use two or more related languages or dialects within a particular speech community (Fishman, 1972; Lyons, 1981). The term diglossia was first coined by the sociolinguists Ferguson, who defined it as follows:

A relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (Ferguson,1959,p.325).

The concept of high and low varieties of a language was introduced by Ferguson, in which one of the languages has a high status (prestige) in society and the other has a low status. This is the case of, for example, Standard Arabic (High) and Vernacular Arabics (Low) (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1972). The notion of High (H) and Low (L) varieties was termed by Kloss as exoglossic and endoglossic (Lyons, 1981). Ferguson, in his turn, highlights the differences between high and low varieties. In addition to prestige, which is the most important feature, he adds literary heritage, grammar, lexicon and phonology, standardization and acquisition features (AlBzour&AlBzour, 2015; Alsahafi, 2016; Ferguson, 1959). Examples of high and low situations are shown in the table below:

Table 5. Some Situations of High and Low Varieties (from Alsahafi, 2016).

High Situation(H)	Low Situation(L)
In church, mosque, etc. Speech in Parliament. Political Speech. Studies in the universities. Poetry. News and Newspapers.	Instructions to waiters, servants, etc. Conversations with friends and with family members. Radio. Folk literature.

4.2. Arabic Diglossia

Ferguson identified four diglossic situations and their high and low varieties, including Arabic (Alsahafi, 2016).

Table 6. Diglossic Languages.

	Countries	High(H)	Low(L)
Arabic	Arab World	Literary Arabic	Dialectal Arabic
Modern Greek	Greece	Greek Katharevousa	Dhimotiki
Haitian Creole	Haiti	Standard French	Haitian Creole
Swiss German	Switzerland	Standard German	Swiss German

In his seminal paper 'Diglossia', Ferguson identifies Arabic as a diglossic language due to the existence of multiple varieties of Arabic that are related to the same speech community; he eventually states the divergence between MSA (الفصحى) and the Colloquial or Vernacular Arabic (العامية) (AlBzour & AlBzour, 2015; Ferguson, 1959). Admittedly, Kaye (as cited in Alsahafi, 2016, p.3) asserts that Arabic is the most complicated diglossic language in the world.

Alsahafi (2016) clearly overviews the diglossic situation of Arabic and emphasizes its importance and complexity. He later adds that the use of MSA and Colloquial Arabic depends on 'the context of interaction'. In other words, people tend to use colloquial Arabic to express themselves in informal situations, and use the Standard Arabic in formal situations, writing, and reading.

4.3. Problems of Arabic Diglossia

The co-existence of a Standard Arabic, side by side, with Colloquial Arabics, which are regarded as the spoken form of the language in the Arabic speaking countries creates several problems to learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). "Each regional variety of spoken Arabic represents a unique culture and people" (Palmer, 2007,p. 113). This makes it even harder to AFL learners, particularly in the United States (McCarus, 1987). Al-Mamari (2011) denotes the significant progress of learning Arabic as a foreign language. He rightly says "the past few years witnessed more and more interest in teaching and learning Arabic, and an increase in the related academic and professional activity" (Al-Mamari, 2011,p. 14). He further stresses out the great challenge of teaching AFL with regard to its sociolinguistic features, particularly diglossia, in the improvement of learners' proficiency and communicative competencies (ibid). The diglossic feature of Arabic, hence, poses tremendous challenges and issues of teaching and learning AFL such as: (a) learning two languages in one (MSA and dialect), (b) the choice of one dialect from a range of dialects, in addition to (c) the existence of intermediate forms of Arabic (the middle language). This was also considered as an issue for an effective communication among the Arabs, as far as dialects are concerned. Notwithstanding the problem of Arabic diglossia, one of the major advances in communication between Arabs and people from other countries is the use of spoken dialects on TV programs, films and music. In addition to that, the noteworthy effect of globalization brought by an endless use of internet and particularly social networks.

4.4. Social Network Sites and Language

Ellison and Boyd (2007) define social network sites, usually referred to by SNSs, as web-based services which permit people to create their profiles within a bounded system, articulate their connections and other users within the system. SNSs are intended to facilitate interaction and communication; they are web-based interfaces which use many tools such as wiki, e-mails, blogs, etc. (Issa, Isaias, &

Kommers, 2016). "Social networks are increasingly reaching a global audience, and these networks provide users with the ability to instantaneously communicate with geographically distant and culturally diverse population", say Maguth and Yamaguchi (2013, p.85). Facebook, for instance, is a popular social network with over 800 million members which provides a sophisticated system of profile creation. This system allows the users to add more information and details such as age, location, interests, etc. Facebook profiles can also be enhanced by adding several applications (Ellison & Boyd, 2007; Maguth & Yamaguchi, 2013). Ellison and Boyd (2007) point out the accessibility of Facebook within the network, once a profile is created, in which the users can view the others' profiles unless they prohibit it for security and privacy purposes. Many SNSs, like Facebook, allow individuals to send contact requests, leave messages or instantly chat, or create groups to share different interest. Social networks are technologies that essentially facilitate social interaction, promote collaboration, community building, and especially sharing (Kim & Yoo, 2016).

Maguth and Yamaguchi (2013) highlight the importance of SNSs in social studies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Mixi, etc. Brad Shimmin (as quoted in Maguth and Yamaguchi, 2013) says "social networking tools have shown their ability to unify us as human beings, and to bring out what is most altruistic and empathetic in nature" (p.85). McCarty (2010), in his turn, identifies the benefits of using Mixi, as a popular SNS in Japan, in enhancing the learners' motivation and performance. In the same context, Maguth and Yamaguchi (2013) praise the educative potential of SNSs for both teachers and students. In the same vein, Issa, Isaias, and Kommers state "The adoption of Social Networking has been very useful in the education sector as a means of improving knowledge acquisition and encouraging social interaction between students' and students, and students and lecturers" (2016, p.4). They further add that SNSs have shaped the field of education and students learning practices and strategies. Alqahtani (2016), on the other hand, identifies both negative and positive effects of SNS on students' performance. These effects are shown in the following figures.
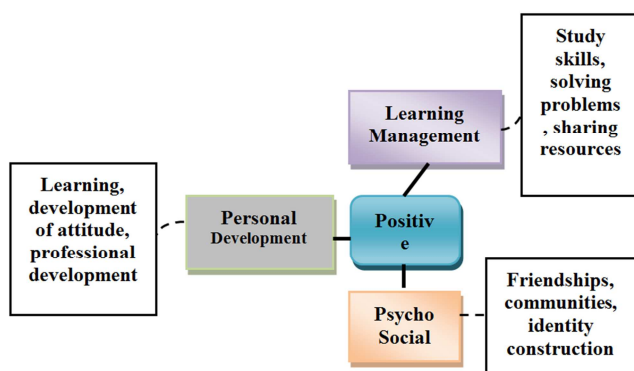

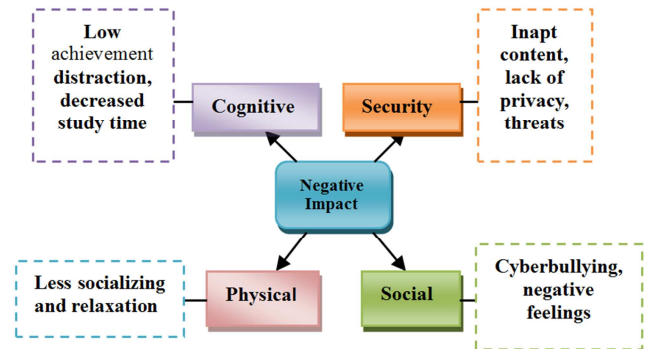Figure 5. Positive effects of social networking (from Alqahtani, 2016, p.293).

Figure 6. Negative Effects of Social Networking (from Alqahtani, 2016, p.295).

Facebook is an SNS that is translated into more than 100 languages. Hence, people tend to use different languages when interacting with other users, especially beyond their countries. English, as a global language, and Arabic, as a diglossic language, are objects of a great attention among users within these social interactions. This state of affairs raises the following questions:

What are the languages that Arabs use in Facebook chat and posts?

What are the effects of SNSs on MSA and Colloquial Arabic?

5. Method

In order to answer the previously stated questions, identify the languages used by Arab Facebook users and determine the effects of SNSs on Arabic, a quantitative approach is opted.

5.1. Participants

The selected sample of this study consists of 32 English language students, University of Constantine, Algeria and 46 Facebook users from different Arab countries. That is a total number of 78 participants whose age varied between 18-34. All participants speak Arabic and English. Concerning the gender differences, the sample consists of 53 females (almost 68%) and 25 males (32%).

5.2. Research Tools

The data collection was achieved by means of an online survey (TypeForm: www.typeform.com), which was distributed online to all participants via e-mail or Facebook. The link was provided in different groups on Facebook or sent to different email addresses (particularly the Algerian students). It consisted of ten (10) questions that primarily inquired the language used in Facebook for chatting and posting or sharing different thoughts (see Appendix or refer to the provided link https://ahlem7.typeform.com/to/q9zG8u).

5.3. Results

According to the participants' answers, MSA is seldom used in Facebook online chat. English, Dialectal Arabic and

other foreign languages are the most used languages (Table 7). However, MSA is better used in creating Facebook posts. Many participants favored the use of MSA in their posts rather than dialects. English was the dominant language used by Facebook users, while few participants state their preferences towards the use of other languages such as Spanish, German, Italian and Turkish (Table8).

Table 7. Languages Used in Facebook Online Chat.

Languages	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Modern Standard Arabic	7	9%
Arabic Dialect	38	49%
English	47	60%
Other	22	28%

Table 8. Languages Used in Facebook Posts.

Languages	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Modern Standard Arabic	43	55%
Dialect Arabic	17	22%
English	35	45%
Other	25	28%

Table 9 displays the written system used by the participants. In addition to the Arabic and Roman Alphabets, the participants tend to show certain preferences towards another variety of script which is the use of Romanized script in Arabic (Dialect mainly). In other words, they render the Arabic language written form into Latin script in which they use the Roman alphabet. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the participants uses the Arabic Alphabet in their Facebook posts (table 10).

Table 9. Language Written System Used by the Participants in Chat.

Language Written System	Number of Participant	Percentage (%)
Arabic Alphabet	17	22%
Romanized Arabic	22	28%
Both	36	46%
No Use of Arabic	3	4%

Table 10. Language Written System Used by the Participants in Facebook Posts.

Language Written System	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Arabic Alphabet	42	54%
Romanized Arabic	17	22%
Both	12	15%
No Use of Arabic	7	9%

In addition to the 32 Algerian participants who speak Algerian dialects, and according to the provided answers, the remaining participants speak different varieties of Arabic such as Egyptian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Syrian, etc. The following table shows the Arabic dialect spoken by the selected sample participants:

Table 11. Arabic Dialect Used by the Participants.

Arabic Dialect	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Algerian	32	41%
Egyptian	5	6%
Moroccan	11	14%
Tunisian	9	12%
Libyan	3	4%
Syrian	9	12%
Palestinian	7	9%
Iraqi	1	1%

The majority of the participants state that they have foreign friends on Facebook. However, English is the dominant language of communication between Arabs and non-Arabs people (65%). Table 12 reveals that many respondents switch between English and Arabic in online interaction (15%), while Arabic is rarely used (6%) as a means of communication on Facebook chat. This may be explained by the inability of non-Arab people to speak or use Arabic language (both Literal and Colloquial). The remaining participants prefer the use of other languages.

Table 12. The Language Used by the Participants with Foreign Friends.

Language	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
English	51	65%
Arabic	5	6%
Mixture of Both	12	15%
Other	10	13%

6. Discussion

The major findings of the present study reveal that English constitutes the most dominant language in social and international communication. Arabic Dialects dominate mostly online Facebook chat among Arab users using both Arabic alphabet and Romanized script. One may assert that this is closely related to the participants' culture and knowledge. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that many participants switch between English and Arabic in their interactions with non-native speakers of Arabic. They use dialectal and sometimes MSA in their communication, which can support AFL learners to improve their proficiency in Arabic. This may also improve the actual status of Arabic among other languages. According to the results yielded by the survey, another significant finding can be deduced, that is the use of MSA in the majority of the participants' posts. This may eventually increase the exposure of Facebook users to Arabic more than ever. Consequently, it is quite notable that the use of SNSs has no negative effects on MSA.

7. Recommendations

In the light of the stated findings, this research recommends giving equal interest to both Colloquial and Literary Arabic in order to protect their status in the Arab World. In other words, it suggests to equally use both language varieties instead of giving a priority to one variety

(High or Low) over the other. This can be achieved, for example, by the extended use of Arabic in SNSs using Arabic Alphabet. The contributing role of SNSs, such as Facebook and many other platforms, is well-notable in both education and language contact. Thus, it is highly advocated to use SNSs as a means of language interactions, particularly Arabic, in order to face the challenging feature of diglossia. Facebook users, for instance, can use both the spoken and the written forms of Arabic. This may help Arabic learners, i.e. non-natives, to grasp the diversified varieties that Arabic is mainly recognized for, and, therefore enhance their communicative competence.

In addition to SNSs, several implications are provided to raise the Arabic status at both Colloquial and Standard levels. For instance, it is recommended by many scholars to create books of spoken Arabic to promote Colloquial Arabics, and to encourage translating different works into both Colloquial and Standard Arabic. In parallel, it is highly advocated to use Standard Arabic in television series, films and social media for the sake of protecting this language from extinction. Hence, the use of SNSs is quite beneficial in promoting students' language proficiency via communicating with Arabic natives in one of their spoken dialects. This may considerably raise their awareness towards Colloquial Arabic (Al-Mamari, 2011; Alqahtani, 2016; Hashem-Aramouni, 2011; Issa, Isaias, & Kommers, 2016).

8. Conclusion

This research paper has endeavoured to throw some light on the effects of social networking sites on Arabic diglossia. It has explored the significant contribution of SNSs on the emergence of Spoken Arabic through online conversations (the case of Facebook), and upgrading MSA exposure through various published or shared posts. It can be concluded that SNSs have a positive effect on both Literal and Colloquial Arabic. Henceforth, they do not constitute a threat to MSA, but rather a support to ultimately overcome the issue of diglossia.

Appendix

Online Questionnaire

This questionnaire is set to gather information needed to shed some light on Arab Facebook users' attitudes towards Arabic language in SNSs. The questionnaire was administered online to the participants in a 'typeform' format.
1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
3. What are the languages that you speak?
4. Specify your Arabic Dialect (Algerian, Egyptian, Syrian, …)
5. What are the languages that you often use in Facebook online chat?
   (Choose as many as you like)

a. Modern Standard Arabic
b. Arabic Dialect
c. English
d. Other
6. When you use Arabic in Facebook online chat, do you use:
   a. Arabic Alphabet
   b. Romanized Arabic Script
   c. Both
   d. You do not use Arabic
7. What are the languages that you often use when you create Facebook posts?
   (Choose as many as you like)
   a. Modern Standard Arabic
   b. Arabic Dialect
   c. English
   d. Other
8. When you use Arabic in creating Facebook posts, do you use:
   a. Arabic Alphabet
   b. Romanized Arabic Script
   c. Both
   d. You do not use Arabic
9. On Facebook, do you have:
   (Choose as many as you like)
   a. Arab Friends
   b. Friends who belong to your country/state
   c. Foreign friends (from other countries)
10. When you chat with foreign friends, do you use:
   a. English
   b. Arabic
   c. Mixture of both
   d. You do not have foreign friends
   e. Other

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