The Influence of Political Changes in the Middle East on
Journalistic Arabic

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Abstract

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This study detects the influence of three main political events in the Middle East on Arabic journalistic language. These political events are: democratization in Jordan, the Gulf War, and the Peace Process. Jordanian journalistic language is the source of our data. A representative sample is taken from Al-Rai, a major Jordanian daily in the period 1971 - 1996.

The findings of this study reveal that the Peace Process has the greatest effect on Arabic journalistic language. Words of hostility, hatred, and denial that have been used to refer to Israel since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict are gradually disappearing from the Jordanian press giving rise to new friendly or at least neutral ones. This linguistic change has been rapid and drastic at the official and diplomatic levels but slow, lame, and disorganized at other levels.

The effect of democratization has been limited to the rise of some new lexical items and the neutralization or legalization of some linguistic taboos. New words, such as khaskhasa, ma?sasa, and ma?nana have appeared in the Jordanian press for the first time after the introduction of democracy.
Also, mentions of political parties and other political practices have become no longer taboos.

The Gulf War has given rise to new terms to describe the Iraqi intrusion in Kuwait, the coallied attack, and the soldiers of both sides. This description has been a positive one in favor of Iraq during the crisis but has become neutral and sometimes negative towards Iraq after the end of the crisis, especially after the flee of Hussein Kamel, the Iraqi military-manufacturing minister, to Jordan. In addition, new tautologies have appeared to describe those Arabs who have stood by Iraq during the crisis. Such tautologies are: ar-rijal ar-rijal “the men the men,” and al-9arab al-9arab “the Arabs the Arabs.”