HYBRIDITY AND SUPERDIVERSITY ON SYRIAN DISSIDENTS’ FACEBOOK PAGES. AN ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHY OF LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY

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By

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ABSTRACT

This work contributes to the discussion about the role of social media in political mobilization by analyzing the writing practices of a group of Syrian dissidents on Facebook. Challenging the assumption that Western technology inhibited political activism, this work shows how Syrian dissidents appropriated a global medium like Facebook to negotiate, construct identities and create political participation. In particular, it demonstrates how the resources and the discursive strategies utilized by two Syrian dissidents before and after the revolution underlay respectively the construction of new individual, cosmopolitan identities and the collective identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians. The latter emerged in concomitance with a claim made by Bashar al-Asad at the beginning of the uprisings, who alleged that protestors were foreign infiltrators spreading religious fragmentation and sedition.

The methodology for this study was informed by Androutsopoulos’s (2008b) Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography and Barton and Lee’s (2013) Mixed-Method Approach, which advocate the integration of text analysis with interviews with text producers and readers. This work embraces a social constructionist approach to language and identity (cf. De Fina, Schiffirn and Bamberg 2006), which investigates identity as emergent in discourse and interaction. In
addition, it builds on ideas proposed by Blommaert and Rampton (2011) in their agenda for the study of language in superdiversity, including their own call for language ethnography.

Among the main findings is that identities are more often indexed through hybrid, including creative and strategically bivalent forms, rather than separate codes. This finding contributes to sociolinguistic theory, highlighting the importance of a hybridity focus for the study of language in superdiversity. Moreover, the emergence and negotiation of new identities in a short period of time and the different values attributed to similar linguistic resources and strategies based on online interaction triggered by socio-political events reinforces the validity of a notion such as superdiversity.
To the Syrian people and their ongoing struggle for a better life
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As will be explained in detail in the chapter on data and methodology, the transcription and transliteration of the data was very complex due to the presence of several vernacular, creative and bivalent forms. The data is presented in the original Arabic script. A multi-line gloss is provided to render the meaning intelligible. The following transliteration system has been used:

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Long vowels are transliterated as follows: ā, ū and ī. Frequently used vernacular long vowel transliterations are: ē and ō. The *tāʾ marbūta* is transliterated as *a* or *e*, depending on whether the *fushā* or the vernacular pronunciations are emphasized.
INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Before the revolution the only face you would see in every private and public space was that of the president and his family. Through Facebook, Syrians for the first time put their own face in public.¹

Research on recent socio-political developments in the Arab world, triggered by the so-called Arab Spring, shifted academic focus from the study of dominating elites to that of marginalized groups composing Arab society, from the center to the periphery. One of the questions that social scientists have been tackling, half a decade after the beginning of the uprising, revolves around the role of social media in the political mobilization. This question arose in response to early mainstream media accounts, which attributed the early success of the protest movements to the democratizing power of Western technology.

Early 2011, Western media hastily labeled the Arab protest movements as “Facebook revolutions”. This term is arguably fraught with orientalist connotations, alluding to the salvific power of Western modernity and the passivity of the Arab population. Such an orientalist perspective has pervaded mainstream media narrative to date, as exemplified by the simplistic way in which Syrians are depicted: powerless victims abused by their regime and by ISIS and

¹ Syrian informant, Interview, Amman, August 2015.
“welcomed” by a putatively more modern, magnanimous and enlightened West. This orientalist and objectifying view is countered by another perspective, which points at the inefficacy of social media in the creation of political change and mobilization.

In a recent study entitled “The Net delusion: the dark side of internet Freedom”, Morozov (2011) used the term “slacktivism”, which, combining the words “slacking” and “activism” describes the double-edged sword of Western media. As a vehicle of Western culture and consumerism, technologies, he argued, inhibited political activism by creating the illusion that online activism leads to political change. Similarly, Wedeen (2013) attributes the delayed involvement of the urban population in the Syrian uprisings to the “ideology of the good life”. The trend of economic liberalization which gained ground in Syria under Bashar al-Asad’s presidency, she argued, promoted an illusion of wealth and well-being that reinforced the regime autocracy without excessive use of coercive power.

This good life entailed not only the usual aspirations to economic well-being but also fantasies of multicultural accommodation, domestic security, and a sovereign national identity, generating conditions for the sustenance of a neoliberal autocracy. Neoliberal autocracy implies two contradictory logics of rule, cultivating an aspirational consciousness for freedom, upward mobility, and consumer pleasure, on the one hand, while continuing to tether possibilities for advancement to citizen obedience and coercive control, on the other (Wedeen 2013: 843).

The present study engages in the discussion on the role of social media with a particular focus on language and identity. Language and identity have played an important role since the beginning of the Syrian uprising. When Syrians took to the streets in March 2011, Bashar al-Asad recurred to the hyperbolic metaphor of a mu‘āmara kawniya (“universal conspiracy”) and referred to the protestors as mundasūn (“foreign infiltrators”) spreading fitna (“sectarian sedition”) and leading the country to a sectarian conflict. In response, several blogs and Facebook pages were created with the intent of mocking and subverting the regime rhetoric. One
of these blogs was ironically named *al-mundassa al-sūriyya* (“The Syrian Infiltrator”). In an entry entitled “What does the word *al-mundass* mean?” published on April 10, 2011, the blog, whose authors describe themselves as “a group of Syrians inside and outside of Syria, united by their love for their homeland”, ironically deconstructs the root and the meaning of the term *mundass*, arguing that it is in fact a neologism created by the regime. After explaining the meaning of the root of this word and the word *al-dass* (“inserting something from beneath”) based on *lisān al-ʿarab* and *qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*, the entry reads:

 [...] In a nation which continues bragging about the fact that its high education in the universities is conducted in Arabic in order to preserve its origins and deep [authentic] roots, a new term was invented, which has no relation either with the term *al-dass* or with its root. And it was attributed tyrannically and untruthfully to foreign hands who want to destroy the country. In so doing, they nullified the power of the “infiltrate” Syrian citizens delegitimating their demands for “freedom” and “dignity”. They made them believe that citizens are just naggers and that everything [freedom and dignity] is already available to them. [...] So who’s the real infiltrator? Those who call for freedom and for a piece of bread? Or those who delude the people telling them that freedom and dignity are already there [...]?

As explained in this passage, the term *mundass* carries a negative connotation of inauthenticity. It was used to compare the Syrians who rebelled to foreign conspirators that have no legitimacy to demand freedom and dignity. This image also invests the protestors with a passive connotation. By nullifying their power and legitimacy, the regime denied their subjectivity. The passage engages in a metalinguistic discussion on the issue of authenticity. Who is the authentic Syrian? The people who demand freedom and dignity or the government, which, despite its claim of being authentically Arab, as exemplified by the Arabization of higher education, makes up unauthentic Arabic terms such as *mundass*?

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3  *Lisān al-ʿarab* and *qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* are among the most widely known and comprehensive Arabic dictionaries.
4  The text is composed in a hybrid form of Arabic which includes *fuṣḥā*, bivalent, vernacular and creative forms. This hybrid style underlying dissidents’ discourse is discussed in detail throughout the dissertation. The translation is mine.
Intrigued by the metalinguistic discussion initiated on social media in response to the accusation of being foreign infiltrators, in this work I explore the link between language, identity and authenticity through an analysis of a group of Syrian writing practices on Facebook. What identities emerge from these practices? What resources are used to construct these identities?

When the revolution sparked, Syrians had circumvented the government’s ban on Facebook since 2007 through the use of proxy servers. On the wave of the success of the Egyptian revolution, a small group of Syrian activists used Facebook to organize “The Day of Rage” on February 5, 2011 (York 2014). Probably in an attempt to control rebellion, a few days later the government restored the access to social media platforms. “Initially, Facebook served as a central location for information sharing, as Syria’s Facebook user base quickly grew, following the site’s unblocking” (York 2014: 1222). York further argued that “amid ongoing conflict, Syrians have used humor on social media to deal with the trauma. On Facebook, one popular page called “Chinese Revolution” (with 155,000 fans as of November 2012) satirized the events in Syria as if they were happening in China” (1225).

Although Facebook was certainly functional to divulging information and organizing protests, this work sheds light on how the global medium “Facebook” was appropriated and localized to do identity work. The potential of Facebook to construct identity is well captured in a Syrian informant’s remark:5

Before the revolution the only face you would see in every private and public space was that of the president and his family. Through Facebook, Syrians for the first time put their own face in public.

The present study analyzes the content of the Facebook pages of two Syrian dissidents: Maher Alkurdi and Nawar Bulbul. Maher Alkurdi, a young journalist from Damascus, opened

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5 Syrian informant, Interview, Amman, August 2015.
his public Fabook page addōmarī in March 2011, in concomitance with the beginning of the uprising in the Syrian capital. The popularity of his Facebook page, the number of followers, which reached a peak of 150,000 in 2014, prompted my interest in the role of social media during the Syrian uprising. Some of the initial questions that guided my investigation were: How are people communicating on Facebook and about what? How is this type of communication different from the way they were communicating on Facebook before the revolution? Is the way Maher communicates on his personal and his public pages an isolated phenomenon or can it be observed among other Syrians? I decided to expand my pool of data through a systematic observation of other Syrian Facebook pages which aligned with the revolution. During a field trip in Amman in the summer of 2014 I got in touch with another dissident, Nawar Bulbul, and observed similar trends in the topics of his page and the resources he used before and after the revolution. What identities emerge from Maher’s and Nawar’s Facebook pages? What resources are employed to construct these identities? While the first two analysis chapters tackle these questions examining the authors’ posts, topics and the linguistic resources deployed, the third analysis chapter explores the type of participation generated by these texts, examining the interaction of commenters to a post published on the addōmarī page.

This study is informed by an online ethnographic approach (Androutsoupolous 2006; 2008b, 2013; Barton and Lee 2013) which advocates the integration of text analysis with contact with the participants, including interviews with the authors of the texts, readers and area specialists and participant observation. This online ethnographic approach is aligned with the paradigm of language and superdiversity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), which advocates the anchoring of identity research in everyday ‘superdiverse’ local practices. While ‘talk’ is the concern of linguistics and discourse analysis, ethnography is the study of ‘context’ (Blommaert 2013).

6 The term “superdiversity” is treated extensively in the review of the relevant concepts.
and Jie 2010). In attending to processes of identity formation in superdiverse environments, such as new technologies and social media, Blommaert and Rampton argue that ethnographic work can contribute to shedding light on how people make sense of the fluidity of their communicative practices. In other words, through ethnographic investigation it is possible to attend to how practices and ideologies intersect in identity construction processes. The online ethnographic method adopted in this study is informed by a social constructionist approach to language and identity, which examines identities not as essential properties of the self, but as emergent in discourse and interaction. The research is designed around the following questions:

1. What strategies and resources are employed by the Facebook users in the process of identity construction?
2. Did these resources change when the revolution started? How do they compare to the resources the same authors used on Facebook before the revolution?
3. What is the interaction like between the authors of these Facebook texts and the audience before the revolution?
4. How is participation promoted and sustained after the revolution? How does this contribute to the understanding of participation in an online political context?

From a longitudinal analysis of Maher’s and Nawar’s practices emerged a shift in the topics and in the use of communicative resources. Whereas before the revolution Maher’s and Nawar’s Facebook posts revolved around personal topics, such as love and professional achievements, post-revolution posts focused on the current socio-political events. Key to understanding the function of these resources in the process of identity construction is the notion of hybridity. This term is used with reference to the simultaneous deployment of heterogeneous semiotic resources, such as videos, photos, cartoons, intertextual links and written texts, as well as to the simultaneous presence of linguistic resources, such as Arabic, English and the romanized script,
known as Arabizi, bivalent and creative forms. Hybridity is understood in contrast with an official linguistic ideology of code separation and monolingualism.

In pre-revolution posts, Maher and Nawar used photos, emojis, videos evoking Western culture, as well as linguistic resources in Arabic, English and Arabizi. As of March 2011 the use of Western semiotic resources and linguistic references virtually disappeared and was supplanted by Arabic, creative expressions and intertextual references to Syrian dissident intellectuals and to the revolution, through metaphors and idioms. As will be shown throughout the analysis, these resources underlie a strategy of ambiguity whose function is twofold. On the one hand ambiguity served the purpose of expressing dissent covertly, preventing censorship and persecution. On the other, through ambiguity authors attracted new followers, promoting participation and the emergence of a plurality of political stances. While hybridity, before the revolution, indexed new individual, cosmopolitan identities, after the revolution it underlies the construction of a collective identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians.

This work intends to shed light on the new subjectivities which emerged through the use of hybridity in the process of identity construction. The emergence of these subjectivities is in dialectical argument with the above-mentioned orientalist, deterministic view of social media, as well as with studies which attacked Western technologies for encouraging political inactivity. These identities, it is argued, emerge at the intersection of global and local, through a process of localization of global resources.

The notion of hybridity as is used in current studies in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, arose in mid-nineties post-colonial and post-modern studies, and it was proposed to capture the translocal, fluid and dynamic character of post-modern, post-colonial identities. An understanding of hybridity with reference to the fluidity of identity processes also underlies
important shifts in the field of sociolinguistics. These shifts find expression in the socio-
constructionist approach to language and identity (cf. De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006) and
in Blommaert’s (2010) “sociolinguistics of mobility”.

This study further contributes to an ongoing debate on hybridity and authenticity. The
issue of authenticity raised by Bashar al-Asad, who accused the protestors of being mundassûn
(“foreign infiltrators”) is not new in totalitarian contexts, as observed by Coupland (2014: 20),
paraphrasing Trilling (1972) and Hutton (2005):

One context in which discourses of authenticity have surfaced is when repressive political regimes have
made strong inclusionary and exclusionary claims about individuals’ authentic membership of groups. In
such cases, being inauthentic, and more precisely being deauthenticated or discredited relative to
normative criteria, can have catastrophic consequences; totalitarianism has notoriously made play of
ethnic and national authenticities.

In the present work I will show how a group of Syrian dissidents’ hybrid practices on Facebook
can be understood discursively in response to Bashar al-Asad’s claim of authenticity. The
deployment of discursive strategies, such as hybrid forms, voicing, intertextuality and
interdiscursivity attests the agentive character of these practices. This work fills a gap in Arabic
sociolinguistic literature. It will be shown how Arabic sociolinguistic studies on language and
identity have largely focused on the mixing and switching of Modern Standard Arabic and the
vernaculars, neglecting the study of hybrid forms due to their inefficacy in complying with
previous theories on code-switching. However, the online data examined in the present study
show that the occurrence of hybrid forms is not at all exceptional, and it is at the core of
processes of identity construction in online discourse. The present work aligns with and
reinforces the validity of concepts such as hybridity and superdiversity in the investigation of
language and identity in online environments.
In the following section, I analyze the above-mentioned discursive strategies within a discussion of hybridity and linguistic simultaneity. Furthermore, I explore the key theoretical concepts utilized throughout the dissertation with relation to language, identity and authenticity.
2 INTRODUCING THE RELEVANT CONCEPTS

2.1 Hybridity – An Ongoing Debate

The concept of hybridity has been the subject of an ongoing debate in the study of language and identity. The origins of the term are traced back to eighteenth-century colonial discourse revolving around the encounter between the Western colonizer and the colonized. Coined in biology, comparative anatomy and craniometry, this term was used to affirm the superiority of white supremacy and to emphasize the negative consequences of intercultural mixing (Kraidy 2002). In the twentieth century, hybridity became a highly debated topic in postcolonial studies and in studies of intercultural communication. Widely understood as a “third space” (Bhabha 1994), or a category defying hegemonic, colonialist dichotomies, in primis that of Self and Other, through an amalgamation of the two, hybridity was initially conceived of as a subversive strategy to counter colonial discourse. However, the pervasive and univocal presence of Western features in hybrid contexts, particularly in the form of capitalist dominant practices, raised concerns about the genuineness of this term, which was subsequently attacked for being instrumental to neocolonial discourses (cf. Kubota 2014).

In linguistics, hybridity has been studied within the context of bilingualism, code-switching and multilingualism. Unlike early sociolinguistic variationist studies, which saw code alternation predominantly within a putatively monolingual context, more recent research in bilingual communication has viewed hybridity as intrinsic to linguistic communication. The next section sheds light on this shift, exploring the key concepts of code-switching, code alternation and linguistic simultaneity.
2.1.1 Code-Switching

The term code-switching was introduced by Blom and Gumperz (1972) in a study of two varieties of Norwegian, a standard and a dialect, both used by the inhabitants of a Norwegian fishing village. The authors identified two types of alternation between the two varieties, which they called situational and metaphorical code-switching. *Situational code-switching* is determined by the type of situation. The repeated use of one variety in a certain social context establishes an association between that variety and the social context. A similar process was described by Ferguson (1959) in terms of diglossia.\(^1\) However, Blom and Gumperz, as noted by Hall and Nilep (2015), conceive situational code-switching as an agentive process. Instead of being the situation dictating the code, it is speakers who choose a determined code in order to shape the situation. *Metaphorical code-switching* refers to the switch between two varieties within the same social activity. Through this type of switch, speakers evoke, or recreate other social contexts metaphorically, within the same situation. Gumperz (1982) further built on the notions of situational and metaphorical code-switching to formulate the concept of *contextualization cues*. In monolingual situations, he argued, speakers use prosody and other paralinguistic cues to shape the social context, similarly to bilingual situations.

Although the distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching was criticized by later studies (cf. Myers-Scotton 1993; Auer 1995), this theory spawned other influential concepts in the study of language and identity. Goffman (1981) used the term *footing* to describe a similar process occurring within metaphorical code-switching. The image of footing vividly describes a vertical movement, through which the same person, within the same

\(^1\) This concept will be analyzed in more detail below, discussing code-switching, code-alternation and hybridity in Arabic.
social context, cues different social roles. "In talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another" (Goffman 1981: 155). This image, which conveys fixity and movement, interestingly evokes metaphors used in later approaches to linguistic hybridity, such as metrolingualism, defined by Otsuji and Pennycook (2014) as the continuous movement between fixity and fluidity. As noted by Hall and Nilep (2015: 8), metaphorical code-switching also informed Woolard’s (1999: 16) notion of “virtual simultaneity”:

In [Woolard’s] reading of the literature, Blom and Gumperz's work advanced an understanding of social identities as "simultaneously inhabitable" (17), inspiring attention to the way speakers make use of language alternatives to "create, invoke, or strategically maintain ambiguity between two possible identities" (16).

2.1.2 Code-Switching (CS) and Code-Mixing

Blom and Gumperz’s definition of switching and Gumperz’s notion of contextualization cues inspired a wide literature on bilingualism. Gumperz (1982: 59) defined CS as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems”. Mazraani (1997) proposed a distinction between code-mixing and CS, arguing that code-mixing carries discourse functions, and involves a shift at all linguistic levels from a code to the other. CS, conversely, does not impact all linguistic levels and occurs within the same section of speech. This distinction was criticized by later scholars (cf. Myers-Scotton 1993; Bassiouney 2009). Myers-Scotton (1993) proposed to use the term CS for both phenomena described by Mazraani. She operates a distinction between intrasentential and intersentential CS, whereby the former describes shifts within a sentence and the latter refers to shifts across sentences.
2.1.3 Diglossia and Code-Switching in Arabic

Bassiouny (2003; 2009) and Mejdell (2006) argued that the term CS does not only refer to different languages, but it can apply to the switch between varieties of diglossic languages, such as Arabic. The term diglossia was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century by the European scholars Krumbacher (1902), Psichari (1928)\(^2\) and Marçais (1930), and became known to American and Arab linguists through the work of Charles A. Ferguson (1959). Ferguson described diglossia as “a particular kind of standardization where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play” (325). For convenience, he refers to these two varieties using the terms “superposed variety”, or High (H), and Low (L). He argued that H and L differ in function, prestige, literary heritage, standardization, grammar, lexicon and phonology.

Ferguson's characterization of diglossia highlights a particular social phenomenon, whereby resources of power and legitimization, such as religious and cultural texts, are transmitted in a language – labelled by Ferguson as “high” (H), as opposed to the vernaculars (“low”, or L) - which can only be acquired through formal education. Furthermore, he suggested that H is associated with certain social contexts, such as sermons in church or mosque, personal letter, university lectures, speeches in parliament, political speeches, news broadcasts, newspaper editorials, news stories, captions on pictures, and poetry. Conversely, L is used in instructions to servants, waiters, workmen, clerks, conversation with family, friends and colleagues, radio ‘soap opera’, captions on political cartoons and folk literature. Furthermore, Ferguson emphasizes that diglossia is a rather stable phenomenon. Despite its stability, “the communicative tensions which arise in the diglossia situation may be resolved by the use of relatively uncodified, unstable,

intermediate forms of the language (Greek *mikti*, Arabic *al-lugah al-wusţā*, Haitian *créole de salon*) and repeated borrowing of vocabulary from H to L” (333). Ferguson further argues that:

Diglossia seems to be accepted and not regarded as a ‘problem’ by the community in which it is in force, until certain trends appear in the community. These include trends toward (1) more widespread literacy (whether for economic, ideological or other reasons), (2) broader communication among different regional and social segments of the community (e.g., for economic, administrative, military, or ideological reasons), (3) desire for a full-fledged standard ‘national’ language as an attribute of autonomy or of sovereignty. (338)

When these trends occur, he continued,

leaders in the community begin to call for unification of the language, and for that matter, actual trends toward unification begin to take place. These individuals tend to support either the adoption of H or of one form of L as the standard, less often the adoption of a modified H or L, a ‘mixed’ variety of some kind. The proponents of H argue that H must be adopted because it connects the community with its glorious past or with the world community and because it is a naturally unifying factor as opposed to the divisive nature of the L dialects. […] The proponents of L argue that some variety of L must be adopted because it is closer to the real thinking and feeling of the people (338-339).

Whereas these ideological leanings emerged in nationalist discourse (cf. Suleiman 2003), which culminated, in Syria, with the Baathist Arabization policy promoting code separation and Arabic monolingualism, actual language practices showed that diglossia and the vernaculars never disappeared. As the present study shows, these ideological motivations are still present among the study participants, who tend to favor the Syrian vernacular by virtue of its presumed authenticity and closeness to the people. However, their practices present several “uncodified forms”, which carry the signs of diglossia. In order to further contextualize these forms, I refer to seminal studies spawned by Ferguson’s work.
2.1.3.1 Levels, Continuum and Multiglossia

Further studies focused on the uncodified, intermediate forms alluded to by Ferguson. Blanc (1960) emphasized the presence of two phenomena, one known as “leveling” and the other one as “classicizing”. The former relates to episodes of overlap between dialects, and the latter refers to the mixture of low and high. Based on data deriving from Egyptian radio programs, Badawi (1973) theorized the presence of five levels of speech constituting the *sullam lughawyy* (“linguistic stairway”) of Egyptian community, which he named *‘āmmiyyat al-ʿummiyyin* (“the vernacular of the illiterate”), *‘āmmiyyat al-mutanawiryyin* (“the vernacular of the enlightened”), *‘āmmiyyat al-muthaqqafiyyyn* (“the vernacular of the educated”), *fuṣḥā- al-‘aṣr* (“the *fuṣḥā* of contemporary times”) and *fuṣḥā al-turāth* (“the *fuṣḥā* of the tradition”). He provided examples of radio programs which adopted the use of each of these levels, as well as stereotypical examples of Egyptians whose speech is associated with each level. For example, he suggests that *fuṣḥā al-turāth* is used by religious men, such as Al Azhar scholars. Conversely, programs using *‘āmmiyyat al-mutanawiryyin* feature a predominantly female presence. The establishment of a direct link between identity and social variables is consistent with early variationist studies. This Labovian approach to language and identity, as will be explained later, has been challenged by recent socio-constructionist approaches (cf. De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006).

An important aspect of his approach, however, is that Badawi did not consider levels as well-defined varieties, but rather as fuzzy categories, similar to Ferguson’s conceptualization of intermediate forms as uncodified, thus maintaining the conceptual framework of diglossia. Badawi often emphasized the importance of societal cohesion, claiming that *‘āmmiyyat al-muthaqqafiyyyn* (lit. “vernacular of the cultured”) plays an important role in it. Later scholars built
on this term to theorize the presence of a third, intermediate variety called Educated Spoken Arabic.

The concept of Educated Spoken Arabic was formalized by scholars such as el-Hassan (1977) and Mitchell (1986), who theorized the existence of a third well-defined intermediate variety, which would challenge the idea of Arabic as a diglossic language. Mitchell also advocated the grammatical codification and the implementation of this variety in educational curricula in the Arab world. The idea of a grammatical system regulating intermediate varieties was also formulated by Schmidt (1974; cf. Hary 1992), who argued for the description of the Arabic linguistic situation as a “one-system”, instead of a diglossic system. Hary (1992) built on Schmidt’s “one-system” theory, and argued for a multiglossic framework, consisting of an infinite number of middle varieties regulated by a single grammatical system, rather than by a diglossic one. To exemplify his concept, he presents a study conducted on a group of Arabic native speakers, who were asked to identify a variety as either ِِفِعْضَةٌ or ِِاَمِمِيْيَة based on examples whose features were possessive pronouns (e.g. –ka Vs –ak) and diphthongs (e.g. bayt Vs beet). He concluded that saliency attributed to either morphosyntactic-phonological (suffixed pronouns being more salient than diphthongs) feature plays a role in associating words with one variety or the other, rather than features inherent to the variety itself.

2.1.3.2 Diglossic-Switching

Eid (1988), in one of the first studies which applied syntactic CS principles in bilingual studies to Arabic, proposed the term diglossic code-switching to describe the alternation between “Standard Arabic” and “Egyptian Arabic” in her data. Interestingly, in classifying her tokens as either SA or EA, she intentionally disregarded “ambiguous” words, which are “forms identical in
both varieties” and “intermediate forms (forms identified by speakers as belonging to one variety but given the pronunciation of the other)” (55). These, she argued, “provide no evidence for/against switching” (56).

Similarly, Boussofara-Omar (2003; 2006), applying Myers-Scotton’s (1998), argued against the concept of third or middle varieties, and referred to the intermediate forms previously studied as part of the continuum or as ESA through the term diglossic switching. Bassiouney (2009), building on Holes (1993) and Mejdell (1999), analyzes the social motivations of code-switching, thus treating diglossic switching in terms of code choice. Emphasizing the agentive nature of CS theorized by Blom and Gumperz (1972), Bassiouney (2009: 72-73) “examine[s] the relation between code choice and choice of role by the speaker” and argues that “in political speeches in general there is a direct relation between change of role and change of code”. This, she argues, reinforces Goffman’s (1981) Gumperz’s (1982) claims, according to which changes in footing and contextualization cues signal changes in the role of the speaker within the communicative situation. She concludes her analysis of code choice in Mubarak’s political speeches positing that “Persuasion often involves role change. The question remains whether the relationship between change of role and code-switching is limited to political speeches, or whether it is a general phenomenon as some linguists have claimed” (85).

Bassiouney concluded that the situation of Arabic diglossia is more complicated than other bilingual situations. One of the factors which render this situation more complex is the presence of a large set of terms which can equally belong to both fiṣḥā and the vernacular. Furthermore, in her study of code-switching in Egyptian monologues (2006; 2009), she argued that Egyptians’ code-switching practices are characterized by the presence of “predictable
composites” (2009: 55-56), which challenge previous structural constraints on code-switching. She gives the example of the passive form bi-tunaffadh (“was implemented”), which combines Egyptian vernacular and fuṣḥā syntactic features in a way that previous code-switching models did not account for. She attributes the presence of these mixed forms to the Egyptians’ increased exposure to fuṣḥā throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Despite this important finding, Bassiouney’s study (which preceded the 2011 events), did not further investigate the social motivations and functions of these mixed practices in terms of social work, identity and language ideology. A discussion of the social impact of “composites” is made by Anderson (2014), whose concept of “middling discourse” will be treated further below.

In one of the most recent studies in Arabic sociolinguistics, Albirini (2016) analyzes the functions of Standard Arabic and Syrian Arabic in a Syrian Revolution Facebook page. His findings “show that speakers use SA [Standard Arabic] to: (1) highlight the importance of a segment of discourse, (2) introduce direct speech, (3) produce rhyming stretches of discourse, (4) theorize or preach, and (5) index their personal identities” (281). Moreover, he explains that “speakers shift to QA [Syrian Arabic] to (1) make sarcastic, often underhandedly offensive, remarks, (2) introduce daily-life sayings, and (3) scold or insult” (285). Furthermore, Albirini noted that “one of the most visible patterns of employing QA [Syrian Arabic] is sarcasm. Sarcasm enables users to discuss offensive issues in an indirect way” (Ibid.). In his study, Albirini, consistent with previous studies on the social motivations of code-switching, intentionally disregards hybrid forms. “In cases of mixed SA [Standard Arabic]-QA [Syrian Arabic] sentences, the beginning of a switch was based on clear cases, where a language form is not shared by the two varieties” (281).
From the present study, which analyzes online texts of Syrian dissidents’ Facebook pages, emerges a large presence of forms which elude clear-cut classification. Identities, it will be argued, and particularly the identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians, are indexed through hybrid forms, rather than through “clear” ones. Irony and sarcasm, in particular, are conveyed through these very ambiguous forms, rather than through Syrian Arabic. These are forms which challenge the term “switching” as an alternation between distinct codes. Moreover, they problematize the very notion of “codes”, and further substantiate more recent approaches, analyzed in more detail below, which look at language as resources. These approaches are grounded in a shift in bilingualism, which considers CS no longer as an exceptional phenomenon, but as the norm. “The assumption dominating linguistics continues to be one which views as the normal or the unmarked case the monolingual speaker in a homogeneous speech community” (Milroy and Muysken 1995: 2-3). Ambiguous forms, it will be argued, should be particularly central in an analysis of Syrian Facebook data. Their tension is to be analyzed as a locus of struggle and resistance towards ideologies of separation, reinforced by the Baathist linguistic policy of Arabization.

In order to better contextualize this study’s data, I introduce Woolard’s (1999) notion of linguistic simultaneity and strategic bivalency and their application to the Arabic context (Mejdell 2014). I will subsequently show how these frameworks, along with the social-constructionist approach (cf. De Fina, Schiffrin, Bamberg 2006) and Blommaert (2010), better than code-switching, suit a study of language and identity in a globalized context.
2.1.4 Linguistic Simultaneity

One of the most interesting and influential theories which informed the use of the term hybridity in this work is Woolard's (1999) notion of linguistic simultaneity. “A sociolinguistics that takes multiplicity and simultaneity as keys is arguably one that should place bilingual and multilingual speakers at its center, as prototypes rather than exceptions” (4). Woolard’s notion of simultaneity is informed by Bakhtin’s (1981) vision of language as polyphonic. “For Bakhtin, language is never really unitary but, rather, lies in the intersection of multiple voices or speaking positions and competing centrifugal and centripetal forces” (Woolard 1999: 4). Furthermore, Woolard observed that simultaneity, which Bakhtin expressed through the terms hybridity, heteroglossia and polyglossia (cf. Woolard 1999: 4), contributed to an important shift of perspective in bilingual studies, which drifted away from a conception of language as a set of discrete, bounded codes.

Woolard formulates her argument on simultaneity engaging critically with the Saussurean structuralist conception of syntagmatic relations holding in presentia and paradigmatic ones holding in absentia. In other words, whereas structural semiotics posits that signifier and signified are related paradigmatically, the former being present in the utterance and the latter being absent, Woolard starts from the assumption, based on Bakhtin’s polyphony, that both are present in the living utterance. Woolard’s insistence on presence also problematizes Derrida’s (1981) idea that meaning is created in absentia. Through her theory of simultaneity, she “intend[s] to complicate the account of linguistic presence by ‘installing’ more potential in the ‘heart of the present’”. Her overarching argument is that “bilingual practice can dismantle (but
does not simply neutralize) binary distinctions, in this case between language varieties, in ‘an undoing yet preserving of all opposition’ that ‘keeps alive an unresolved contradiction’” (6).

She identifies three types of linguistic simultaneity: bivalence, linguistic interference and conversational code-switching. Moreover, she outlines two types of simultaneity in communicative function: “multiple simultaneous social identities of a speaker” and “the simultaneous messages of communication in the contact zone”. This focus on simultaneous forms, she emphasized, is consistent with Gardner-Chloros’s (1995) call to shift the focus of research from the “new orthodoxy of code-switching” (Woolard 1999: 5), which arose from a direct application of monolingual assumptions to the study of bilingual contexts, positing the existence of more than just one discrete code. In her analysis, Woolard revisits the code-switching practices between Catalan and Castilian of a group of comedians from Barcelona. While the focus of previous analysis lay in the “new orthodoxy of code-switching”, in her new analysis, Woolard emphasizes the importance of (other) bilingual phenomena.

2.1.4.1 Bivalence

Woolard defines bivalence as “the use by a bilingual of words or segments that could “belong” equally, descriptively and even prescriptively, to both codes” (7). To illustrate this phenomenon, Woolard draws examples from the performances of the popular Catalan comedian Eugenio. In his performances, she argued, bivalence and interference contributed to his popularity. An example of bivalence is the catchphrase *el saben aquel* (“Do you know the one…”), used by the comedian to introduce his sketches.
In this phrase, the first element (el) is clearly Catalan, and the third element (aquel) is clearly Castilian. The verb saben is bivalent, ambiguously Catalan or Castilian, differentiated in the two languages only by the quality of the second vowel, which is a relatively closed mid-front vowel /e/ in Castilian and is reduced to schwa in Barcelona Catalan. (The occurrence of schwa is phonologically conditioned in Catalan and does not contrast phonemically with either /e/ or /e/.) Eugenio's vowel quality varied in different tokens of the phrase, rarely making it all the way to the fronting and closure of the [e] of Castilian, placing the lexeme plausibly, though not perfectly, in either system, except under the most exigent standards. In any case, the word starts as utterly bivalent and can be oriented toward a particular linguistic system in the final syllable (7).

While in her previous analysis, Woolard explains, her focus was on el and aquel, it is “the mobilization of saben” that sets her new research agenda. The mobilization of bivalent terms alludes to another important aspect of bivalency, which Woolard (2007) expands in later work, framing bivalency not as a mere collateral consequence of language contact, but in terms of strategic resource. Furthermore, Woolard makes an important remark in terms of language ideology and linguistic practices.

In the everyday Barcelona of 1980, bilinguals felt that they had to know what language a person was speaking, in order to know in what language to respond, […] Eugenio's syncretic and bivalent language practices challenged this commonsense vision of the language situation of his time (8).

In other words, the increased perception of duality and separation exacerbated by the language policies following the transition of Catalonia to autonomy were challenged by the bivalent practices of comedians and their large audiences.

Furthermore, quoting examples of bivalency from other studies in other Romance languages, Woolard suggests that “bilingual—or perhaps better termed, interlingual—puns form a special category of bivalency, in which there is identity in form (phonological or orthographic) but incongruity in the significance of the sign in the two languages” (10). She quotes an example from Heller’s (1994) study, in which French-English bilingual students in Canada “play with bilingual puns to juxtapose the languages that are usually constructed socially as mutually exclusive, and the humorous move provides a release from the tension of the sociolinguistic
opposition” (10). As will be shown in the present analysis of Facebook data, puns and humor underlie an entertaining function to release the tension of separation and conflict, and persuade new followers.

While suggesting that bivalency is used more or less consciously in different sociolinguistic contexts, as the numerous studies documenting the occurrence of bivalent forms in different closely-related and non-closely-related languages show, Woolard insists that these forms are resources strategically manipulated by the speakers. She motivates their strategic use based on the “ideological salience and volatility of bivalency” (12), explaining the ideological salience through the example of a debate over bivalency between two Catalan factions: the “Lights” and the “Heavies”. At the core of this debate was the type of national language that should suit autonomous Catalonia. The “Lights”, represented by mass media journalists and copyeditors, were accused by the “Heavies” of defending the standard variety of Catalan spoken in Barcelona, and of lightly accepting Castilian influences. The ideological power of bivalency, according to Woolard, arises from the fact that the battle was over features which could equally belong to Catalan or Castilian.

For lights, linguistic elites have systematically suppressed forms that are really Catalan but that are similar to Castilian forms. […] The Lights accuse the Catalan linguistic establishment of suppressing good Catalan forms because they are bivalent and "podia sonar una mica castellana".

From this perspective, the identity issue over who is the infiltrator and who is the authentic Syrian outlined in the introduction, and which triggered my curiosity to start this research, also revolves around a bivalent term. The word *mundass* (“infiltrator”) is described by the author of the blog *al-mundassa al-suriyya* (“The Syrian Infiltrator”) as a term which is not present in the Arabic dictionary, made up by the regime to delegitimize the protestors. However, the morphology (active or passive participle of the VII form verb *indassa*) and the meaning of the
trilateral root make it quintessentially fuṣḥā. While bivalency is not part of an overt ideological debate in the Syrian context, it is nevertheless the fulcrum of the issue of language and identity which underlies the Facebook texts of the Syrian dissidents.

2.1.4.2 Interference

Woolard (1999: 14) adopts Haugen’s (1956: 50) definition of interference as the application of “two systems […] simultaneously […] to a linguistic item”. She posits that “codeswitching, bivalency and interference are subtly different ways of choosing both languages at once; arguably, interference is more a way of not choosing at all” (Woolard 1999: 15). She illustrates this phenomenon through the following sentence from her data: “estabas/estaves a Igualada” (“you were in Igualada”). The use of “estabas” is prescriptively appropriate in Castillian, and the preposition “a” is prescriptively appropriate in Catalan. However, both terms exist in both languages. “Although all the lexical elements could belong to either system, whichever language we assign the phrase to, we will find apparent interference from the other” (Id.). Moreover, Woolard emphasizes that interference may occur at different levels of linguistic communication. She quotes Alvarez-Cáccamo’s (1990) example of the application of Galician vernacular prosody to a sentence composed using the Spanish syntax and lexicon. Similarly, Syrian Facebook pages authors often applied Syrian vernacular prosody and pronunciation while reading out texts written in fuṣḥā and bivalent syntax and lexicon.

2.1.4.3 Conversational Code-Switching

Finally, Woolard revisits the concept of codeswitching in terms of simultaneity. Building on Blom and Gumperz’s (1972) notion of metaphorical code-switching and Goffman’s (1981)
concept of “footing”, she argues that “in the interpretation of codeswitching as metaphorical […]
the sequential alternation of codes is treated analytically as a virtual form of simultaneity. […] In
the metaphorical switch, analysts see linguistic alternation not as changing but as enriching a
situation” (16). In other words, the sequentiality of code-switching is not linear, but
simultaneous. “The cooperative and initiated listener is understood to read the sequencing of
different message forms as a figurative simultaneity of social message”. (Ibid.) Her quote of
Rampton (1995: 278) emblematically informs the rich presence of idioms and metaphors in
concomitance with bivalent and creative forms in the Facebook data under analysis: “Rampton
reminds us that metaphorical codeswitching functions as does metaphor more generally, in that it
is understood as a kind of ‘double vision’, an ‘interaction between co-present thoughts’, or a

Woolard returns to Goffman’s image of footing to better situate the role of conversational
code-switching in her linguistic ideology framework. She asks the question:

In interpreting talk, do listeners make situated distinctions between sequential alternation—a speaker
shifting from foot to foot—and virtual simultaneity—the speaker jumping up and down on a third foot?
(17).

This question regards the type of consciousness at which speakers and listeners perceive
variation:

Traditionally, Catalan bilinguals often engaged in conversational codeswitching between Catalan and
Castilian, but it was predominantly cued by the ethnolinguistic identity of the interlocutor (Woolard
1989). Codeswitching was thus almost always used and taken as a sequential act, indexing a sequence of
orientations to different addressees. At the time political autonomy was granted in 1979, Catalan
bilinguals rarely read codeswitching as metaphorical simultaneity, an invocation of dual perspectives or
identities. (18)

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3 This shift in perception recalls Johnstone et al.’s (2006) study on the indexicality of Pittsburghese, based on
Labov (1972) and on Silverstein’s (1976/1995; 2003) indexical orders. In first-order indexicality, Pittsburghese
variants are only perceived in comparison with other geographic regions by mobile subjects. In second-order
indexicality, “regional features become available for social work” (Johnstone et al. 2006: 82).
Finally, Woolard observed that bivalent practices, which were not socially acceptable in pre-1979 Catalonia under Franco, have since become common practice among second-generation Catalans. Facilitated by the implementation of a new bilingual education system, these practices gave rise to new social identities. Moreover, quoting Pratt (1991: 36-37), Woolard (21) emphasizes that “Discourses in multilingual contact zones are ‘heterogeneous on the reception end as well as the production end,’ and are ‘read very differently by people in different positions in the contact zone’.” The multiple ways in which these messages can be interpreted is due to “the social and linguistic positioning of participants” (21). As will be discussed below, this is a central tenet of Blommaert’s (2010) sociolinguistics of mobility, underlying the concept of “non-shared knowledge” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 8). New social conditions in which communication occurs, such as social media in an era of globalization, facilitate the performance of more diverse positionings of the participants, which increases the number of interpretations.

In sum, the importance of Woolard’s work on simultaneity lies in the centrality it places on ambiguous, intermediate forms, which previous (and, as was observed above current Arabic sociolinguistic) studies on code-switching neglected. These forms, she showed, carry important information on language practices and ideology. They can subvert a language ideology of separation, as was the case of the comedians from Barcelona, and they constitute important resources for the construction of social identities and the production and reception of multiple messages.
2.1.5 Hybridity in Arabic


in 1956 published a play entitled al-ṣafqa (The Deal) which introduced a type of Arabic that he believed could solve the diglottal problem in the field of drama. In his postscript of the play, the author explains that the type of language he devised is comprehensible both in terms of FU [fushā] and of spoken Arabic. By producing such a text the playwright is released from the dilemma as to which of two linguistic types to employ in his dialogue. In other words, the device would make it possible to write plays that, when read, could be understood in accordance with the norms of Classical Arabic. When staged, however, the text is automatically adaptable to the level of the local dialect without incurring many textual changes.

Furthermore, Somekh (120) argues that:

Al-Ḥakīm’s ‘new language’, then, is not only an experiment at producing an FU text that is reminiscent of the spoken idiom. It is also an attempt to create a bivalent text that exploits the inherent ambiguity of unvowelled Arabic script.

Al-Ḥakīm’s experiment, as noted by Somekh, was the subject of heated criticism, and did not gain ground in Arabic literature. However, Somekh notices that in the 1950s and 1960s, authors such as Najīb Maḥfūz employed a simplified form of fushā in the dialogues contained in their novels.

Al-Batal (2002) analyzed the interplay between fushā and the Lebanese vernacular in the Lebanese satellite channel LBCI. Throughout his discussion he prefers the term “language tension” to “language conflict”, in order to emphasize the way speakers dealt with the two co-existing varieties, rather than suppressing one in favor of the other and the way they “exploited
[this co-existence] in order to express social and political views” (93). Al-Batal notes substantial differences between the types of register mixing analyzed in previous studies, such as Badawi’s (1973) ‘āmmiyat al-muthaqqaﬁyyyn, Mitchell’s (1986) Educated Spoken Arabic, and Gamal Abd al-Nasir’s code-switch practices (Holes 1993). He noted that “one of the main features of LBCI Arabic appears to be ‘word-level hybridization’, combining features of both F and C in the same word” (111).

The emergence of this new register underscores the tension that exists along the Arabic language continuum, tension that leads to the reshaping of existing registers. It also reflects the dynamic nature of these registers, whose spheres are continuously changing, thus rendering the creation of lines of demarcation among them a difficult, if not impossible, task. (Ibid.)

Al-Batal further links the emergence of this mixed register to an issue of identity in the socio-political context of post-war Lebanon. In particular, he contextualizes it vis-à-vis two contrasting linguistic ideologies (which he defines as “a broader tension”): “Arabism”, which sees Lebanon as part of the Arab world and “Lebanonism”, which emphasizes the specificity of the Lebanese culture and language. These two ideological strands have had repercussions during the Lebanese civil war. Through this mixed register, al-Batal argues that LBCI represents an attempt of resolving this ideological tension.

Mejdell (2014: 274) defines bivalency “as a strategy to erase the boundaries between the varieties. Bivalent forms are - to paraphrase Woolard – not either fuṣḥā or ‘āmmiyya, nor neither fuṣḥā nor ‘āmmiyya, but rather both fuṣḥā and ‘āmmiyya”. She analyzes bivalency in the “written mixed style” of ‘Īsā Ibrāhīm’s commentaries in the Egyptian newspaper al-Dustūr. She compares ‘Īsā Ibrāhīm’s “defiant practice of writing” (277) to Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm’s effort to

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4 The term “tension” interestingly evokes Ferguson’s (1959) ‘diglossic tension’ and Heller’s (1994) use of the term to bilingual puns as a way to release the tension generated by bilingual encounters.
challenge a linguistic ideology of homogeneity by erasing the boundaries between *fushā* and ʿāmniyya. Mejdell’s study situates these strategic bivalent practices within the broader discourse of Arabic language ideology. However, it does not tackle the role of these practices in terms of language, identity and social change.

Finally, an interesting sociological perspective about hybridization in Arabic is offered by Anderson (2014). Building on Bassiouney’s (2009) concept of “composite” outlined above, on the instances of mixing brought to bear by Abdallah (2010) and on the phenomena of strategic bivalency analyzed by Mejdell (2014) in the opposition newspaper *al-Dustūr*, he argues that the period before the revolution saw the emergence in Egypt of a “middling discourse” through which “Egyptians cued identity by combining *fushā* and *masri* within single syntactical units, rather than alternating between them” (178). These practices, he argues, defy a decades-long linguistic ideology of code separation and paved the way for the toppling of Mubarak’s regime (178-179):

The emergence of a middling discourse […] affected both the repressors and those denied political rights. First, the regime needed to recruit personnel among educated youth. As newcomers entered state employment from the milieu of speakers of Bassiouney’s composite Arabic, the new lower-level officials became steadily less likely to consider themselves bearers of an identity opposed to that of their erstwhile fellows. Sharing of the composite Arabic undermined the distinctiveness of official identity that would otherwise motivate its bearers to repress. Second, the emergence of the composite discourse provided cues to the ruled that they commanded the linguistic behaviors associated with political authority and were newly capable of engaging in politics if they so chose. They acquired an identity from a *masri* constructed by choosing freely between *fushā* and ʿāmniyya that contrasted with the obligatory subordination of *masri* to *fushā* practiced by the regime’s top official. Accordingly, when the issue arose of whether to perpetuate Mubarak’s tyranny by transferring power to his son, repressors experienced ambivalence while members of the population were emboldened to resist. When protests erupted in January 2011, the security forces responded inconsistently, committing brutal acts of torture but failing to attack protesters decisively.

Finally, Anderson argues that the effects of middling discourse are evident in the slogans of the revolution. Through these slogans, which mix features of *fushā*, ʿāmniyya and bivalent forms,
protesters accomplished identity work, showing their competence for politics, “mocking Mubarāk as a foreigner” and denying his authority, as well as “negotiating, for the sake of avoiding violent repression, the divide between repressors and those suffering repression” (179-180).

These studies show that research on hybridity in Arabic is still at its infancy. In particular, this brief review shows the scarcity of studies which adopt hybridity, as opposed to code-switching as a paradigm. Most of them focused on identifying hybridity as a set of practices, such as “composite Arabic” which emerged unconsciously through higher exposure to fūṣḥā. Few of them attended to these practices as communicative strategies used to do social work and analyzed them as an issue of linguistic ideology.

The lack of focus on hybrid practices and their implications in terms of identity may have sociological motivations. Recent sociopolitical events and the increased globalized context at various flows (Appadurai 1996) have facilitated, accelerated and rendered defiant hybrid practices more visible and repeatable. Despite their expansion and visibility, however, hybrid practices have not been taken into sufficient consideration by most recent research, as emerges from Albirini’s (2016) study of the social motivations of the language varieties used on Facebook pages of the Syrian revolution. Such studies, it is argued, perpetuate what Woolard (1999: 5) called the “new orthodoxy of code-switching”. The present study represents a step towards the implementation of a new paradigm. It does so by emphasizing the importance of looking at hybrid practices vis-à-vis the ideological context. In order to better situate these hybrid practices within the social and ideological context, as well as within a new paradigm of sociolinguistic inquiry which prioritizes fluidity over fixity, it is necessary to attend to an
important shift which occurred in the study of language and identity, outlined by De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006).

2.2 Identity and Discourse

De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (2006: 2-6) identified four perspectives which encountered a wide agreement among researchers investigating language and identity. A first perspective is *social constructionism*, which emphasizes “identity as a process” rather than as “a given or a product”, which (2):

(1) Takes place in concrete and specific interactional occasions, (2) yields constellations of identities instead of individual, monolithic constructs, (3) does not simply emanate from the individual, but results from processes of negotiation, and contextualization (Bauman and Briggs, 1990) that are eminently social, and (4) entails “discursive work” (Zimmerman and Wider 1970).

Furthermore, De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg explain that central to this new perspective of identity as a process is the notion of practice. Taking practices as central entails (2):

looking more closely at ways in which definitions of identity change and evolve in time and space, ways in which membership is established and negotiated within new boundaries and social locations, and ways in which activity systems (Goodwin 1999) impact on processes of identity construction.

A second perspective regards “processes of *categorization and membership definition*”. Recent research trends, they explained, emphasized “the definition of categories for inclusion or exclusion of self and others, and to their identification with typical activities and routines” (2-3). This aspect highlights the emergent and performative nature of identity processes, which are not a mere combination of pre-existing linguistic variables, but rather reflect a process of selection from “a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means” (3). Unlike earlier Labovian variationist approaches, which established a direct link between social variables (such as age, gender, class)
and identities, more recent approaches emphasize the performative aspect of identity processes. This emphasis on performance is evident in a third perspective, which corresponds to an “anti-essentialist vision of the ‘self’”. This perspective has deconstructed the perception that what we do is a mere emanation of who we truly are. An individual or a social identity is not intrinsic to the self, but rather performed and constructed. A fourth and final perspective, which is also related to the aspect of performance, is indexicality. Indexicality is at the core of how meaning is created and perceived.

Finally, De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg mention two approaches which are at two extreme poles in terms of understanding how identities emerge. Conversation Analysts, on the one hand, argue that identity formation can only be attended by looking at the immediate context of conversation. Critical Discourse Analysis, on the other, emphasizes the role of wider context. In this study I adopt an interactional sociolinguistic, anti-essentialist approach to identity. In particular, I will show how identities are performed through the manipulation of voices and registers. Moreover, participants construct identity through intertextual and interdiscursive devices. These concepts are outlined below and treated in more detail in the analysis.

2.2.1 Voice and Register

One of the first and most comprehensive analyses of voice and voicing phenomena appears within Tannen’s (2007) framework of repetition.\(^5\) Repetition, she argues, has the overarching function of stimulating the interlocutor to participate in meaning creation. Tannen expresses this concept through the term *involvement*. Repetition occurs at the synchronic and at the diachronic

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\(^5\) Tannen’s (1997) repetition framework will be discussed more in detail in the analysis.
level. Synchronic repetition includes the repetition of sound, rhythmic patterns and words within the same communicative situation. Diachronic repetition requires the interlocutor to collaborate in the construction of meaning resorting to external references. Synchronic and diachronic repetition correspond to Hamilton’s (1996) distinction of intratextuality and intertextuality. Tannen uses the term “dialogue” as a rubric to describe phenomena of diachronic repetition. One of these phenomena is voice. Dialogue, or intertextual repetition, consists of “taking on others’ voices” (Tannen 2007: 19). As noted by Tannen, previous scholars analyzed dialogue in interaction. Schiffrin (1993) analyzed phenomena in which people “speak” for other people in interaction. She gives the example of a woman that says on behalf of her friend “She’s on a diet” when the woman’s husband offers to her a piece of candy. Scollon (2001) analyzed “baby-talk”, which occurs when people take on the voice of babies during a conversation with an adult in the presence of an infant.

Tannen elaborates the concept of voice arguing that whenever someone repeats a previous utterance or takes on someone’s voice, this cannot be considered as “reported speech”. In fact, she argues that there is not such a thing as reported speech. Rather, people take on others’ voices to accomplish interactional goals in discourse. Instead of “reported speech”, Tannen (1984; 2007) coined the term “constructed dialogue”. One particular type of constructed dialogue is what she calls ventriloquizing, which describes the action of speaking with the voice of someone else who is participating in the conversation. Ventriloquizing is also a kind of frame-shifting insofar as a speaker who utters dialogue in the voice of another is assuming a new and different footing vis-à-vis the participants and the subject of discourse, where “footing” is defined, following Goffman (1981:128), as “the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance.” In other words, through realizations of pitch, amplitude, intonational contours, voice quality, pronoun choice, and other linguistic markers of point of view, speakers verbally position themselves as another speaker – or as another non-speaker, such as a preverbal child or pet. (22)
Understanding how voice and voicing function in interaction requires an exploration of the notion of register. Agha (2004) defined register as “a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices” (24). An important characteristic of registers is that they are not fixed, but they are “historical formations caught up in group-relative processes of valorization and countervalorization, exhibiting change in both form and value over time” (25). The social life – to use one of Agha’s most powerful expressions, borrowed from his 2005 book “The social life of cultural value” – of registers lies in their power of recreating a scene, evoking the persons, roles and actions with which registers are associated. One of the registers which emerges frequently in the present analysis of Facebook data is what I call “regime register”. By using forms of this register, participants evoke a culture-internal scenario in which army officials oppress the population. As will be shown, participants repeat this register’s forms to mock the persons and their role, thus subverting and countervalorizing the register itself.

Moreover, Agha emphasizes the social aspect of registers connected with their recurrence.

A register is a social regularity: a single individual’s metapragmatic activity does not suffice to establish the social existence of a register unless confirmed in some way by the evaluative activities of others. Thus in identifying registers linguists observe not only that certain kinds of metapragmatic typifications occur in the evaluative behaviors of language users but, more specifically, that certain patterns of typification recur in the evaluative behaviors of many speakers. (26)

Agha (2005) further explores the role of voicing phenomena in connection with register, arguing that in order to understand macro-level changes in register we need to attend to the micro-level changes which occur when these registers are used in interaction.
Encounters with registers are not merely encounters with voices (or characterological figures or personae) but encounters in which individuals establish forms of footing and alignment with voices indexed by speech and thus with social types of persons, real or imagined, whose voices they take them to be” (Id.).

Building on Bakhtin’s (1981) distinction between individual and social voices, he suggests that there exists a type of social voices which are linked to registers. He names this type of voices enregistered voices. Enregistered voices, he argues, are “social” in two ways. Firstly, they index stereotypic social personae. These social personae “can be troped upon to yield hybrid personae of various kinds”. In the case of the regime register, it will be shown how certain register forms index army officials and regime supporters. Secondly, they are subject to dynamics of socialization, meaning that not all speakers have access to them. He distinguishes between enregistered voices and entextualized voices, providing the example of a Lakhota man who uses one female speech form in a context dominated by male speech forms. The male speech forms entextualize the male speech form and highlight it as enregistered. The female speech form is incongruent vis-à-vis the surrounding male register, and is used as an interactional trope.

Finally, Agha links the concept of voice to footing introducing the concept of “patterns of role alignment”. These are patterns of congruence and incongruence of entextualized and enregistered voices across interactional turns. For example, he describes a situation in which two children playing ping pong repeatedly use forms associated with the register of sports announcers across interactional turns. In each turn, tokens of sports announcer register are incongruent tropes. The two children’s response to turns containing incongruent tropes with similar incongruent tropes generates “a symmetric form of role alignment” (50). Similarly, in the comments to a Facebook post analyzed in the third analysis chapter, the interactional tropes

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As explained by Agha (2005: 57, footnote 2), “the competence to recognize a register’s forms/effects may have a much wider social domain than the competence to speak the register fluently (cf. Table 8, C); in the case of prestige registers, this type of asymmetry is often a principle of value maintenance that preserves”.

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constructed around the utterance of the sound qāf, which indexes the army register, are used in response to the post author’s and other commenters’ use of similar interactional tropes. This, as will be shown, creates alignment, and cohesion among some of the authors of the Facebook comments.

In sum, Tannen and Agha both investigate the effects of voices on social relations. Tannen analyzes how voices shape social interaction through the involvement of the conversation participants. Tannen’s use of the term voice and voicing encompasses Bakhtin’s individual and social types. She describes the action of taking on someone else’s voice through the notion of constructed dialogue. Through constructed dialogue people accomplish interactional goals in conversation. Agha investigates the link between voices and register further. He focuses on a particular social type of voices, namely enregistered voices. He shows how enregistered voices can underlie patterns of role alignment and footing. Furthermore, he describes registers as social phenomena which are subject to processes of valorization and countervalorization occurring at the micro-level of interaction. In my data, I will show how participants deliberately manipulate (or, in Agha’s terms, valorize and countervalorize) registers by voicing register forms across interactional turns, creating patterns of role alignment. For example, it will be shown how participants show their political stance by using a feature associated with the “regime register”, namely the uvular sound qāf.

2.2.2 Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

As mentioned above, Tannen analyzes voicing and intertextuality under the same rubric: dialogue. Dialogue is a form of repetition of texts outside the immediate interactional context. Along with rhythmic and sound repetition, dialogue involves the interlocutor in the construction
of meaning. The term “intertextuality” is generally attributed to Julia Kristeva (1974; 1980), who used it to introduce Bakhtin’s theory of the polyphonic and the heteroglossic nature of language. While it appeared for the first time in the field of literary criticism, this notion, as observed by Tannen (2007) became a central focus of linguistic anthropology. In this field, intertextuality is analyzed as an instrument connecting discourses. Tannen provides the following definition of intertextuality:

“Intertextuality”, then, in its many guises, refers to the insight that meaning in language results from a complex of relationships linking items within a discourse and linking current to prior instances of language. (9).

The manipulation of previous texts in connection with the discourse these texts are associated with is captured by the term “interdiscursivity”, introduced by Fairclough (1992) as a more comprehensive term encompassing the notion of intertextuality. According to Fairclough, intertextuality is “the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth” (84).

Fairclough developed the notion of interdiscursivity based on Bakhtin’s (see Kristeva 1986) horizontal and vertical dimensions of intertextuality. The former describes the relation, within a chain of texts, between preceding and following texts. The latter refers to “relations between a text and other texts which constitute its more or less immediate or distant contexts: texts it is historically linked with in various time-scales and along various parameters, including texts which are more or less contemporary with it” (Fairclough 1992: 103). Furthermore, through the concept of interdiscursivity, Fairclough suggests that “the intertextuality of a text can be seen as incorporating the potentially complex relationships it has with the conventions (genres,
discourses, styles, activity types – see below) which are structured together to constitute an order of discourse” (Ibid.). He clarifies this property of interdiscursivity resorting to the distinction, operated by French discourse analysts Authier-Révuz and Maingueneau, between “manifest” intertextuality and “constitutive” intertextuality (1992: 104). Manifest intertextuality consists of reference to texts through explicit and implicit cues. An intertextual reference is implicit, for example, “in the way one words one’s own text” (Ibid.). Constitutive intertextuality refers to the relation between the text and the above-mentioned discourse conventions that contribute to its production, namely genres, discourse, style and activity type. This type of intertextuality is what Fairclough refers to when he uses the term “interdiscursivity”. In sum, Fairclough uses the term interdiscursivity to highlight the difference between text-text vs. text-discourse conventions.

Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are pervasive in the post-revolution Facebook texts analyzed. Based on Fairclough’s distinction between the two notions, the term intertextuality is used to describe text-text implicit and explicit relations, for example through voicing and intertextual links to other Facebook pages. Interdiscursivity is used when texts evoke other genres, such as nursery rhymes, and other discourses, such as the Syrian revolution. An interesting form of intertextuality encountered in the data is constituted by idioms. Whereas idioms, like all other texts, are intertextual by virtue of their relations with previous texts, they are particularly interesting because of the salience of the social meaning they carry and their complex cognitive structure, consisting of literal and figurative images. Albirini (2016) documented the presence of sayings in Syrian revolution pages, in connection with the use of the

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This type of intertextuality can be studied within the context of multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; LeVine & Scollon 2004). However, due to the prominence of “written text” over other modal devices, such as photos and videos, focus has been given on other intertextual and interdiscursive devices.
Syrian vernacular. Embedded in Standard Arabic texts, he argues that “the purpose of introducing these sayings is to allow the audience to grasp the commenter’s point, concretize a certain idea or concept, or dramatize the point under discussion by adding an affective dimension to it” (286). In my data, idioms occur in linguistically hybrid contexts, and it is posited that, by virtue of co-occurrence of figurative meaning (an evoked image) and literal meaning, they are particularly powerful devices that create participation.

Throughout the analysis, I show how hybridity functions as a discursive strategy, together with voicing, intertextuality and interdiscursivity in order “to do identity work”. It is particularly through these discursive strategies that users cue their collective identity as dissidents. The creativity with which these strategies are used and combined alludes the presence of agency, as opposed to the passivity implied by previous orientalist accounts. Such creativity is consistently well captured by an approach to language and identity which does not rely on fixed sociolinguistic variables, but rather focuses on how users manipulate communicative resources in interaction.

A final, important section of this literature review sheds light on the context in which these acts of identity construction (hybridity, voice, register, intertextuality and interdiscursivity) are embedded. Most studies thus far have analyzed these concepts within traditional offline contexts. The present study utilizes these concepts in a global, online environment. Hence, at this point it is necessary to introduce a recent paradigm, which sets an agenda for doing sociolinguistic research in postmodern environments. Blommaert (2010) named this approach “sociolinguistics of mobility”.
2.3 Language and Globalization - A Sociolinguistics of Mobility

Unlike previous sociolinguistic approaches, which looked at language and language varieties as rather discrete and fixed entities, Blommaert conceives of languages as repertoires of mobile resources across space and time. As intensified processes of migration and globalization have led social scientists to retune previous tools of investigation, Blommaert urges the adoption of new sociolinguistic paradigms, based on the assumption that the increased mobility of people also implies an increased mobility of linguistic resources. While he problematizes a traditional paradigm, which he calls “sociolinguistics of distribution”, considered “movement of language resources […] as movement on a horizontal and stable space and in chronological time” (2010: 5), Blommaert proposes a new paradigm, which he calls “sociolinguistics of mobility”, that “focuses on language-in-motion, with various spatiotemporal frames interacting with one another. Such spatiotemporal frames can be described as ‘scales’” (Id.). The notions of scales, orders of indexicality and polycentricity are key to understanding this new paradigm.

2.3.1 Scales, Orders of Indexicality and Polycentricity

In using the term “scales”, Blommaert draws upon Wallerstein’s (1983, 2000) World-Systems Analysis, according to which “social events and processes move and develop on a continuum of layered scales, with the strictly local (micro) and the global (macro) as its extremes and several intermediary scales (e.g. the level of state) in between (Lefebvre 2003; also Geertz 2004)” (Blommaert 2010: 32). Language practices, he explains, are characterized by a dual

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8 Appadurai (1996) is one of the first authors who theorized the increased complexity of postmodern social phenomena arising from the onset of new technologies and unprecedented flows of migration and processes globalization. He coined the term “global ethnoscapes” to describe the new object of investigation postmodern ethnography needs to confront.
nature. They are micro, individual, one-time phenomena, whose understanding can only occur through the unpacking of their collective dimension rooted in their historical contextualization, namely their relation with previous micro events. Notions such as “contextualization” (Gumperz 1982), “frames” (Goffman 1974), Bakhtianian “intertextuality” and “habitus” (Bourdieu 1990), he posits (2010: 33), can be subsumed through the concept of “scale jumps” between the individual and the collective. The relation between scales is of indexical nature. “[…] it resides in the ways in which unique instances of communication can be captured indexically as ‘framed’, understandable communication, as pointing towards socially and culturally ordered norms, genres, traditions, expectations – phenomena of a higher scale-level” (2010: 33).

Building on Wallerstein’s (1997; 2001) concept of TimeSpace, which was elaborated to counter earlier approaches in the social sciences, which analyzed time and space as two distinct categories, Blommaert (2010: 34) describes scales as simultaneous spatiotemporal frames in which “every social event develops”. Furthermore, emphasizing the social character of such events, Blommaert posits that the “TimeSpace in which they develop is consequently an ‘objective’ (physical) context made social”. TimeSpace, in other words, is socially constructed through semiotic practices.

The semiotization of TimeSpace as social contexts always involves more than just images of space and time. As we shall see, a move from one scale-level to another invokes or indexes images of society, through socially and culturally constructed (semiotized) metaphors and images of time and space (35).

Blommaert summarizes these scale shifts from lower scale (momentary, local, situated) to higher scale (timeless, translocal, widespread). To better explain jump scales, he provides the example of an interaction between a doctoral student and a tutor. The student’s utterance “I’ll start my dissertation with a chapter reporting on my fieldwork” departs from a lower scale,  

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9 Blommaert borrows the term “scale-jumping” from Uitemark (2002: 750).
characterized by the momentary, personal and local features “I” and “my”, which are contrasted by the tutor’s response “we start our dissertations with a literature review chapter here”, whereby “we” and “here” represent a jump to a higher, translocal, impersonal scale. The access to various scales is determined by dynamics of inequality and power. These dynamics are evident, according to Blommaert, when considering resources to access higher scales, such as “sophisticated standard languages or advanced multimodal and multilingual literacy skills” (2010: 5).

2.3.1.1 Orders of Indexicality

Blommaert (2010: 37) posits that “different scales organize different patterns of normativity, of what counts as language”. Moreover, he argues that these processes “are not chaotic, but ordered”, and that indexicality is the principle underlying this organization. He posits that indexicality is ordered in two ways. The first type of order is Silverstein's (2003) and Agha's (2003; 2005) indexical order, which presupposes that “indexical meanings occur in patterns offering perceptions of similarity and stability that can be perceived as ‘types’ of semiotic practice with predictable (presupposable/entailing) directions”. This type of indexicality found application in sociolinguistics in Johnstone et al. (2006) and Bassiouney (2014).

2.3.1.1.1 Indexicality in Linguistic Anthropology and Variation Sociolinguistics

Silverstein’s use of the terms presupposition and entailment recalls Blommaert’s dual nature of language practices. On the one hand, each language form is related to previous usage (presupposition) and this relation informs its use in future individual contexts (entailment). The
former is also described as macro, and the latter as micro. Furthermore, presupposition and entailment define the relation between n-th and n-th+1 indexicals, whereby the former presupposes the latter. N-th indexicals index macro, socio-demographic features that go unnoticed to a community insider and that emerge as the object of a scientific study. They correspond to an insider’s perception of his community-defining variant as the natural way of speaking. N-th+1 orders denote a shift in the native perception of variants based on their stylistic usage. “The feature has been ‘enregistered,’ that is, it has become associated with a style of speech and can be used to create a context for that style. Its indexicality is thus “entailing” or “creative.” (Johnstone et al. 2006: 82). Silverstein uses the term “ethno-metapragmatic” to describe this native perception. This term refers to ideologically-based assumptions, according to which certain variants are more correct than others. Each N-th+1 form has a “presupposing” (Silverstein 2003: 220) potential.

Furthermore, drawing from Gumperz (1968) and Labov (1972), Silverstein (2003: 217-222) explains indexical orders in terms of standard/non-standard variability. Based on Gumperz’s (1968) “dichotomy of dialectal vs. superposed variability”, he posits that “The superposed variety is informed […] by a group-internal cultural expectation of alternation, one that […] is characteristically expressed through an ethno-metapragmatic model of enregisterment: ‘superposed’ varieties are obviously n+1st-order indexicals with respect to n-th-order, ‘dialectal’ ones. Similarly, he argues, indexical orders can be understood in terms of

10 Johnstone et al. (2006) develop the concept of indexicality, applying it to the sociolinguistic context of “Pittsburghese”. Johnstone et al.’s schema comparing the Pittsburgh situation to Labov’s (1972) categories of indicator, marker and stereotype, as well as to Silverstein’s (2003) indexical orders is enlightening. Another important contribution to the understanding of indexicality in sociolinguistics is Eckert’s (2008) study of “indexical fields”.

11 Johnstone et al. (2006: 80) call metapragmatic those “activities that point to a feature’s appropriate context of use” without necessarily “involve[ing] explicit metadiscourse, or talk about talk. This accounts for the well-known fact that people are not always consciously aware of links between linguistic forms and social meanings, even when they use the forms appropriately”.
Labov’s distinction between indicators, markers and stereotypes. Indicators are “dialectal variants” indexing a “macro-social identity”. Markers are distinct from indicators due to the presence of a stylistic component, which can become the basis of (or presuppose) overt discussion. Variants which are “talked about” function as stereotypes.

In her study on the enregisterment of Pittsbughese, Johnstone et al. (2006: 83) compare stereotypes to third-order indexicals. Third-order indexicality occurs when “People noticing the existence of second order stylistic variation in Pittsburghers’ speech link the regional variants they are most likely to hear with Pittsburgh identity, drawing on the increasingly widely circulating idea that places and dialects are essentially linked (every place has a dialect). These people, who include Pittsburghers and non-Pittsburghers, use regional forms drawn from highly codified lists to perform local identity, often in ironic, semiserious ways”. In other words, Johnstone et al. (2006: 78) associate third-order indexicals with “more reflexive identity work”.

Bassiouney (2014) applies Silverstein’s and Johnstone et al.’s framework of indexicality to her study of Egyptian collective identity. Advocating for an approach that analyzes language and identity in terms of “access and resources” (40), Bassiouney posited that:

Individuals use their access to linguistic resources to adopt positions that index their identity or social variables that, in turn, reflect their identity. Individuals also relate access to resources, including codes, as access to a community and an identity (58).

Bassiouney provides the example of an Egyptian journalist from Alexandria, who intentionally used Alexandrian dialectal features in an article in response to a terrorist attack which hit Alexandria in 2011 and threatened to spread a sectarian war in the country. Bassiouney argues that the language used in this article represents a third-order indexical, characterized by a high degree of intentionality and creativity. Through the Alexandrian dialect, the journalist:
is not only indexing that she is from Alexandria, but through indexing her origin, she also presupposes that she shares an identity with Christians and that she does not differentiate between people according to religion. It also entails that she is authentic, tough, and, first and foremost, a typical “Alexandrian”. (195).

Bassiouney expands the concept of indexicality to understand identity construction within the domains of language, ideology and language and power. She shows how individuals use available resources “to creatively re-enact or rework established indexical relationships in their speech and make sense of other performances” (59).

In the present study I show how a wider access to more resources occurred with the onset of social media. This higher degree of choice and accessibility facilitated the emergence and diffusion of hybrid practices, through which Syrian dissidents subverted existing variables, mixing and juxtaposing resources, more than simply choosing among them.

2.3.1.1.2 Indexicality in a Sociolinguistics of Globalization

A particular kind of indexical association is “register”, which Blommaert (2007: 117) paraphrases as “clustered and patterned language forms that index specific social personae and roles, [that] can be invoked to organise interactional practices (e.g. turns at talk, narrative) and have a primafacie that can sometimes be used for typifying or stereotyping”. As will be argued later in this work, Maher’s and Nawar’s recount of their use of the vernacular, as opposed to ḥāṣṣā, in the post-revolution phase, represents a metadiscursive process which is not found in the pre-revolution Facebook pages. Moreover, as will emerge from the analysis of comments to a post from the addōmarī page, voicing the military register represents a reflexive act, which denotes a shift in indexicality between pre- and post-revolution practices.

posits that “some forms of semiosis are systemically perceived as valuable, others as less valuable and some are not taken into account at all, while all are subject to rules of access and regulations as to circulation. That means that such systemic patterns of indexicality are also patterns of authority, of control and evaluation, and hence of inclusion and exclusion by real or perceived others”. (Id.). Blommaert provides the example of middle-class English spoken in Kenya, which is unlikely perceived as such in New York or in London. In other words, Blommaert conceptualizes orders of indexicality as evaluative patterns regulated by dynamics of power and inequality, of inclusion and exclusion.

2.3.1.2 Polycentricity

In order to explain how these processes are structured, Blommaert (2007) introduces the notion of polycentricity. This concept presupposes the presence of multiple centers that are imaginary evaluative authorities to which we orient when we communicate.12 “The authority of centres is evaluative, and it often occurs as an authority over clusters of semiotic features, including thematic domains, places, people (roles, identities, relationships) and semiotic styles (including linguistic varieties, modes of performance etc.)” (Blommaert 2010: 39).

All communicative situations are polycentric, according to Blommaert, who suggests that centres of authority are similar to Goffman’s (1981) “shifts in footing” and his notions of “focal” and “non-focal” activities occurring during the same interaction. Blommaert provides an example from his research on asylum seeker interviews, during which Western interviewers evaluate the truthfulness of the interviewees’ accounts based on a different center than the one to which the interviewees orient themselves. The latter oriented “towards ‘the truth’ as defined by

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12 Blommaert observes that his notion of centers is similar to Bakhtin’s (1986) “super-addressees”.

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situated, densely contextualized realities in countries like Africa, for example, while interviewers oriented towards a particular textual (bureaucratic) ideal of decontextualizable coherence, linearity and factuality” (Blommaert 2010: 40). While, as posited by Blommaert, both centres were always present throughout the interview, the interviewees’ was focal, and the interviewers’ was non-focal, which caused the interviewees to be often “wrong-footed” by the interviewers. “In the real world, the dominant order of indexicality is that of the interviewer and their bureaucratic apparatus”. In sum, Blommaert’s theory of orders of indexicality emphasizes the unbalanced relations underlying social interactions caused by different evaluative centres of orientation of the participants.

In analyzing the linguistic choices adopted in the pre-uprising posts, I will try to identify the centers of authority underlying the authors' and their followers' writing practices. These findings will serve as the basis for a comparative framework which assesses Maher's, Nawar's and their followers' post-revolution writing practices. This comparative framework, which goes beyond the linguistic event, is consistent with an effort to “de-synchronize” sociolinguistic research, in line with a sociolinguistics of mobility (Blommaert 2010). Pre-revolution and post-revolution practices, it is argued, constitute important examples of what Quijano-Gonzalez (2014) defined as an ongoing process of “digital acculturation” in the Arab world. There is a linkage, according to Quijano-Gonzalez, between the increased level of Arabization of IT technologies and the rise in the uses of the Internet in the Arab world. Increased digital literacy, he posits, is a side effect of this linkage. As he aptly observed, this has important implications for Arabic diglossia, which he defines as “the question of the 'right language' to be adopted by most users caught between either the legitimated codes of the formal 'high written culture' and the 'vulgar' practices of the more familial, colloquial forms”. (2014: 163).
2.3.1.3 Prestige and Polycentricity

The concept of polycentricity is linked to that of prestige. Prestige has been studied in Arabic sociolinguistics in connection with diglossia since the 1980s. As Ibrahim (1986: 115) put it, “the identification of H[igh] as both the standard and the prestigious variety at one and the same time has led to problems of interpreting data and findings with Arabic sociolinguistic research”. Studies on prestige in Arabic demonstrated that ِfuṣḥā is not the only prestigious variety. Urban dialects also have considerable prestige over rural varieties. In Syria, Damascene Arabic has acquired prestige over time, probably due to socio-historical motivations. A form which is associated stereotypically with the prestigious Damascene vernacular is the glottal stop in place of the uvular sound /qāf/.13 The latter corresponds to the ِfuṣḥā realization and is a salient feature of some rural dialects, including some coastal dialects of Syria and the Alawite vernacular. By virtue of its association with the Alawite dialect, it became an index of the regime and the army registers, as will be explained further in the analysis.

It is posited that the onset of new technologies and the recent sociopolitical events in Syria had an impact on the notion of prestige. As will emerge from some of the interviews with the authors and Syria specialists, through social media, and Facebook in particular, the study participants have been exposed to an increased degree of linguistic variation. Moreover, as a consequence of the role that rural areas played in triggering the revolution, rural dialects have lost the stigma and acquired value. At the same time, Damascus Arabic has maintained prestige, by virtue of its salient features which are perceived in opposition to the regime register. The notion of polycentricity seems to be more promising to describe phenomena of prestige in a

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13 Palva (1982) showed that in the Levant, in Yemen and Egypt, the use of the glottal stop has over time become more widespread than the qāf.
globalized environment, in that it accounts for the presence of more centers of prestige and for the increased mobility and visibility of linguistic practices and perceptions.

2.3.2 Superdiversity

Blommaert (2010) developed the “mobility paradigm” based on the concept of super-diversity. This notion was introduced by Vertovec (2007) in his study on immigrant communities in the United Kingdom. He defined this term as a “‘diversification of diversity’ not just in terms of ethnicities and countries of origin but also with respect to a variety of significant variables that affect where, how, and with whom people live” (1024). What is new, he argued, is not the complex variables, but rather “the emergence of their scale, historical and policy-produced multiple configurations and mutual conditioning that now calls for conceptual distinction” (1026).

The intensity and the complexity in which these variables appear echoes Appadurai’s (1996) concept of “scapes”, or transnational flows of technology and mechanical goods (technoscapes), ideas (ideoscapes), people and languages (ethnoscapes), information through new media (mediascapes) and money (financescapes). Building on the concept of super-diversity, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) argued that transnational flows are complicated by the onset of new media. A focus on communication is therefore important to a deeper understanding of superdiversity. As posited by Androutsoupoulos and Juffermans (2014: 5), “Digital language practices in settings of superdiversity extend and complicate the semiotic resources available to people for their performance of identities and social relationships”.

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The study of communication and superdiversity, as emphasized by Blommaert and Rampton (2011: 4), requires “an adequate toolkit”. They review these new instruments of investigation outlining three areas of ideas: “1) about languages, 2) about language groups and speakers, and 3) about communication”. Studies on ideologies of language have contributed to denaturalizing the idea of language as a discrete, homogeneous and objective entity. This has contributed to a review of the concepts of native speakers and speech communities. “‘Speech community’ has been superseded by a more empirically anchored and differentiating vocabulary which includes ‘communities of practice’, ‘institutions’ and ‘networks’ as the often mobile and flexible sites and links in which representations of group emerge, move and circulate” (6). A review of the concepts of languages and speakers has led sociolinguists to adopt the term “repertoire”. The role of the sociolinguist has become “to investigate how [individuals] (try to) opt in and opt out, how they perform or play with linguistic signs of group belonging, and how they develop particular trajectories of group identification throughout their lives” (Ibid.). Finally, new ideas developed on how people communicate. Important conceptual frameworks, such as indexicality and multimodality shed light on the relative function of language in communicative processes.

Indexicality and multi-modality, as argued by Blommaert and Rampton, “help to destabilise other traditional ingredients in language study – assumptions of common ground and the prospects for achieving inter-subjectivity” (7). In other words, whereas communication had been assumed to be linear, these new conceptual frameworks highlight the stochastic nature of communication. Such a chaotic situation is complicated by the growth of “non-shared knowledge” (8). The process of meaning negotiation is less straight-forward than traditional linguistics assumed it to be, and technologies have contributed complicating it. Moreover, the
sociolinguistic research agenda is complicated by the emergence of creative forms. These are forms “are strikingly different from dominant institutional notions of multilingualism as the ordered deployment of different language, and they involve much more than just the alternation between the home vernacular and the national standard language” (8).

Blommaert and Rampton emphasize the importance of focusing on these forms, inasmuch as they shed light on “the emergence of structure out of agency” (9). Non-shared knowledge and creativity, they argued, led individuals to a higher reflection on the activity of communication. Such higher degree of reflection is referred to in the literature as “metapragmatic reflexivity about language and semiotic practice” (10, boldface in original). While reflexivity, they emphasize, is not a new phenomenon in linguistic practice, recent studies have drifted away from a quest for putatively unconscious and unstaged communication to a study of performance, stylization and visual design. One of the main questions has become why and how certain texts travel. The answer, as argued by Blommaert and Rampton, lies in extending linguistic investigation beyond the text itself, through a “layered and multi-scalar conceptualisation of context” (11, boldface in original).

Finally, Blommaert and Rampton emphasize the role of ethnography in the investigation of communication in layered and multi-scalar context. Ethnographic research, they argue, is vital in reconciling the fluidity of practices and identities with ideologies. This aspect will emerge from throughout the present work in terms of the discrepancy between the fluidity of dissidents’ hybrid practices and their perception of these practices in ideological, dualistic terms as vernacular. A similar concept was expressed by Otsuji and Pennycook (2014) in their description of metrolingual practices as constant movement between fixity and fluidity.
2.4 Hybridity and Authenticity

The focus on post-modern, fluid, hybrid identities has raised important issues on the understanding of the concept of authenticity in sociolinguistic research. In this study, an issue of authenticity emerged with regard to Syrian dissidents’ response to Bashar al-Asad’s identity claim, through which he delegitimized the protestors accusing them of being foreign infiltrators, i.e. inauthentic Syrians. How can sociolinguistic investigation contribute to an understanding of authenticity? As observed by Lacoste et al. (2014: 1), authenticity is a word of Greek derivation, which “has been taken to mean something that is genuine, proven to be original”. The very word “original”, however, can both evoke a primordial sense of purity as well as the opposite. Coulmas (2014) emphasized a paradox between sociolinguistic traditional understanding of authenticity and what this concept means to European societies. While the former associated authenticity with oral, uncontrolled production, the latter “tend to regard writing as more genuine and trustworthy than speech, which is not surprising in a society that relies so much on literacy” (289).

Traditional variationist approaches, which emphasized the putative purity and naturalness of oral contexts as opposed to performed oral and written production, sociolinguistics, based on anti-essentialist social constructionist views of identity, has recently emphasized the importance of locating authenticity in discourse and interaction. As Coupland (2014: 25) posited, “there are good grounds to believe that, in order to locate the authentic, we do not need (as Trilling suggests we do) to turn away from performative dimensions of narrative, art and discursive construction”.

Building on recent sociolinguistic research, in the present study authenticity is analyzed as part of the process of identity construction in discourse and interaction. While it emerged in
Bashar al-Asad’s de-authenticating claims, it also re-surfaces in dissidents’ practices and perceptions. For example, one of the interviewees explains the rationale behind her choice to spell the word Syria a certain way because *that* reflects the original, authentic roots of the country, as opposed to the government’s spelling, which is connected with the imposition of a Syrian Arab identity. Similarly, Maher and Nawar argue that the Syrian vernacular is more authentic than *fushā*, explaining that its force comes from its immediacy and its natural link with the people. In their discursive construction of authenticity, however, as it will be shown, their writing practices are planned and thought out, rather than immediate and “natural”.

2.5 Conclusion: Superdiversity and Hybridity under Scrutiny

Recent scholarship has criticized the concepts of hybridity and superdiversity for claiming novelty despite the fact that mixed forms are intrinsic to language and migration has always existed throughout history. If hybridity is immanent or dominant, how can it be subaltern, exceptional and subversive at the same time? Otsuji and Pennycook (2010) tackled this problem by proposing the concept of metrolingualism as distinct from hybridity. Hybridity should be the starting point of sociolinguistic investigation, they argue, rather than the end.

Hybridity is about identification as part of the non-hybrid other. It is the impossibility to understand itself outside the political and ideological forces that constitute the categories and binarity. Thus, instead of conceiving hybridity in terms of a new position that is merely 'neither A nor B', or 'in-between-ness space', we understand hybridity as a movement in which 'neither' can be part of 'either' or 'both' (enabled by fixity and fluidity). With the impossibility of self-identification on its own terms, we can only start from hybridity. That is, hybridity is the starting point. In this sense, metrolinguism is hybridity that accommodates complex movement between fixity and fluidity. This understanding of hybridity can in turn overcome common ways of framing language through its capacity to deal with contemporary language practices (97).
Rubdy and Alsagoff (2014: 9) defended the utility of the notion of hybridity envisioning “hybridity's conceptual and interpretive openness as a strength that may render it potentially more powerful in its capacity to explicate the complex multidimensionality of global processes than a single-meaning model”. Moreover, they emphasized that “notwithstanding its quotidian nature, hybridity is a helpful concept because it provides a profoundly reflexive perspective in transcending binary categories” (Ibid.).

Blommert (2015) addressed similar concerns arguing that new technologies have brought about the emergence of new complex forms. In the case of Arabic, for example, the romanized script, also known as arabizi, did not exist in the guise it is found in social media. Similarly, instances of strategic bivalency and puns can be certainly documented in modern and pre-modern texts. However, their use in a context of globalization is new (84).

We should not too quickly dismiss new e-phenomena as merely a re-enactment of phenomena already known and understood. A change in knowledge infrastructure is a change in the entire economy of knowledge, and even if things look the same linguistically (i.e. in terms of formal qualities), they can have a very different sociolinguistic role, distribution and function.

More interestingly, Blommaert emphasizes that what is really new is not only the complex environment in which these forms appear, but also:

The paradigmatic perspective […] that enables us not just to analyze the messy contemporary stuff, but also to re-analyze and re-interpret more conventional and older data, now questioning the fundamental assumptions (almost inevitably language-ideological in character) previously used in analysis. It’s a new theoretical approach to language in society, a new key in which sociolinguistics can be played. And since it is an approach that starts from what earlier was seen as ‘exceptional’, it will explain exceptions better than the theory that produced these exceptions. (Ibid.)

Building on Rubdy and Alsagoff’s (2014) insight, this study takes hybridity as a starting point for sociolinguistic investigation. Language simultaneity, voicing, intertextuality and
interdiscursivity are analyzed as discursive strategies employed in the process of identity construction of dissidents as authentic Syrians. Through an analysis of these practices, it is possible “to observe linguistic norms being manufactured, interrogated or altered, or to see norms that have changed and are new/different in the social networks being studied. We can see, in short, the emergence of structure out of agency” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 9).

The present work reinforces the utility of such concepts as hybridity and superdiversity linking them to a study of language and identity in a global platform. As will be shown, the visibility and reiteration of hybrid forms contributes to an intensification of communicative interaction and an acceleration of identity processes. Such an acceleration is demonstrated by the emergence of new identities in a short period of time. Intensified interaction led to a high degree of metapragmatic reflexivity, which was observed through the degree of awareness with which Facebook page authors talk about their linguistic activity in terms of linguistic ideology.
3 METHODOLOGY AND DATA

3.1 Introduction

The methodology is informed by Androutsopoulos’s (2006; 2008b, 2013) discourse-centered online ethnography (DCOE) and Barton and Lee’s (2013) mixed-method approach to investigate new online literacies. These two approaches advocate for the combination of text analysis and contact with the authors and readers. In the next sections I will outline these two approaches, with a particular focus on the aspects which served as a backdrop for my analysis. I will then introduce a third, more recent approach, which looks at online discourse analysis from the perspective of critical discourse studies. Finally, I will outline my methodology, which integrates the analysis of Facebook texts with interviews with authors and readers. The analysis of texts was divided in three stages. At first, I focused on the posts and comments on the personal Facebook pages of two Syrian dissidents before the revolution. Facebook messenger interactions with the authors (Maher and Nawar) were useful to assess their awareness of linguistic variation. Secondly, I analyzed the content of these two dissidents’ Facebook pages between 2011 and 2012, with a particular focus on the linguistic features contained in their posts. Thirdly, based on the increase in the number of followers and comments on these two Facebook pages since March 2011, I investigated this phenomenon in relation with the concept of participation, discussed by Tannen (2007) in terms of repetition and involvement, and by De Fina (forthcoming) in terms of commenters’ reactions to a story told online. I used these two frameworks to analyze the reactions to a post on sectarianism, published on addömarih’s page on July 25, 2012.

While the methodology utilized for text analysis is discussed in detail in the analysis
chapters, here I focus on the contribution of an ethnographic approach to the study of online texts, including participant observation, face-to-face interviews with Syrian dissidents and Syria specialists, and follow-up Facebook interviews. I include in this chapter a summary of the most salient face-to-face interviews to illustrate the advantages that this tool of investigation can provide to the analysis of online texts.

3.2 The Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography

Androutsopolous’ DCOE is rooted in what he defines a second wave of studies of language online. Whereas a first wave focused on formal linguistic features inherent to the new media and decontextualized from discourse, a second wave emphasized language online in its social context. Within this second wave of studies, Androutsopoulos’s (2008b) framework combines Herring’s (2004) “persistent observation” of online data with ethnographic tools, aimed at investigating the relation between texts, their production and reception. Androutsopoulos notes the affinities between his approach and (new) literacy studies. In particular, he refers to the affinities with the ethnography of writing, which, as he puts it, is “a rather neglected side aspect of the ethnography of communication, [which] has been rediscovered in the study of Internet literacies” (2008b: 3). As observed by Androutsopoulos, Danet (2001: 11) summarized the research questions of the ethnography of writing as follows:

Who uses writing for what purposes? What genres and subgenres of texts are recognized, and how do they develop? What media are considered appropriate for which kinds of messages, and what are the norms governing usage in the various genres?

Furthermore, Androutsopolous (2008b), building on Greschke (2007), identified two types of online ethnography. The first type considers online practices as a corollary to the social life of a
community. “It proceeds as blended ethnography, i.e., a blend of online and offline ethnography, with offline activities receiving equal or even more attention than online ones” (Androutsopolous 2008b: 4). The second type focuses on “everyday life on the internet, theorising the internet as a site where culture and community are formed” (Id.). Androutsopolous exemplifies this approach through Hine’s (2000) study, which departed from an offline event and subsequently analyzed the online activities which followed the event, using a combination of website observation and interviews with text producers.

Focus on discourse is central in Androutsopolous’s ethnographic approach. Unlike Herring (2001; 2004), whose use of the term “discourse”, grounded in pragmatics, can be understood under Gee’s (2005: 26-27) rubric of “(lower case) discourse”, Androutsopoulos (2013) understands discourse as social practice, or “capital D discourse”. From this perspective, he is in line with critical linguists and critical discourse analysts, who, building on Foucault, “defined discourse as socially situated and institutionally regulated language practice with a reality-constructing capacity” (2013: 48). DCOE stands on two pillars: “systematic observation” and “contact with internet actors” (Androutsopoulos 2008b: 5-6). Androutsopoulos conceptualizes the former on two levels. On one level, it consists of the analysis of “a single website or discussion board” and its components (2008b: 5). On the other, it looks at the relationships among different sites constituting a “field of computer-mediated discourse”.

Based on his DCOE fieldwork, Androutsopoulos (2008b: 6-10) further suggests guidelines, both for systematic observation as well as for contact with the actors. I will mention here a few of them, which proved mostly useful for the present research, as I will explain in further detail below. 1) Examine the relationships and processes rather than isolated artefacts. This recommendation, which is consistent with a conceptualization of language as purposeful
practice, emphasizes the importance of looking at both products (semiotic forms) as well as the processes surrounding them. 2) Conduct repeated observation of the websites, to “develop a ‘feel’ for their discourses, emblems and language styles”. 3) Maintain openness, “which emphasizes resisting too early a closure of the observation scope and legitimises the researchers’ temptation to get ‘carried away’ by, and immersed into, their material”. “The data thus collected can be used as a starting point for linguistic analysis, […] to provide guidance for further sampling. Systematic observation forms a backdrop against which to select text samples for fine-grained linguistic analyses or participants for interview contacts. Such sampling may be random/systematic or nonrandom/purposive […]”.

As far as the contact with the actors is concerned, Androutsopoulos recommends 4) having a limited pool of non-random contacts, “based on prior observation and textual analysis, taking into consideration both the ‘richness’ of individual cases, how well they exemplify a participation format and practical issues such as regional location.” 5) designing interview guidelines, 6) “confronting participants with (their own) material, and 7) “seeking repeated and prolonged contacts”.

3.3 The Mixed-Method Approach to New Vernacular Literacies

Like Androutsopoulos’s DCOE, Barton and Lee’s (2013) approach integrates ethnographic methods and advocates for the combined study of online texts and practices. “Without looking closely at texts, we would not be able to actually understand the linguistic products of activities online; and without observing users’ lives and beliefs about what they do with their online writing, we would not be able to see the dynamics of language online”. (2013: 167). Their focus of investigation, however, is less contextually and “event-driven”, to use Hine’s (2000)
terminology, and more aimed at understanding the role of online practices within new literacy studies. By embracing a multimodal approach, including the study of images and texts across different social media platforms, they devote particular focus to the new affordances provided by new media for a representation of the self, as summarized in their notion of “technobiographies” (2013: 172).1 “These new media provide new affordances and ways for online users to write about themselves, thus allowing them to create and constantly update their own auto-biographies in real time”. (Id.). In other words, whereas DCOE investigates online practices with an emphasis on discourse and context, new literacy approaches focus on the affordances provided by new technologies and underlying the deployment of multilingual practices.

The current investigation benefits from both approaches. The scope of a new literacy approach captures the role of Facebook affordances in the emergence of individual and collective identities. At the same time, DCOE allows to better position online practices within the Syrian socio-political context and emphasize the discursive component of the informants’ online practices. In future studies, a combination of DCOE and new literacy approaches may provide interesting insights on the role of online practices in the life of refugee dissidents, for example answering the broad question of what it means to be able to express dissent in your own native language, and thus maintain a link and a role with the lost homeland, for an exiled intellectual.2

1 The term affordances, as it is used in literacy studies, describes “the possibilities and constraints for action that people selectively perceive in any situation. Perceived affordances become the context for action. [...]” (Barton and Lee 2013: 27).
2 I am indebted to Dr. Ruth Wodak for helping me elaborate this possible future direction by mentioning the life and work of Stefan Zweig, a Jewish Austrian intellectual who sought refuge in Brazil and who, as A.O. Scott (The New York Times, June 12, 2014) remarks in the review of Prochkin’s (2014) biography “The impossible exile”, unlike Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt and Bertolt Brecht, could not “turn survival into a form of resistance” and committed suicide in 1942. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/15/books/review/george-prochniks-impossible-exile-about-stefan-zweig.html?_r=0
Before introducing the present study’s data and methodology, I shall present a third, more recent approach to language and social media analysis, namely KhosraviNik and Unger’s (2016) critical discursive approach.

3.4 The Critical Discursive Approach

KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) distance themselves from early Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) approaches to the study of language and social media, arguing against a separation of online and offline world, which, as they observed, corresponds to what Jurgenson (2012) defined as “digital dualism”. Moreover, a critical discourse approach emphasizes the role of the sociopolitical context in which social media texts emerge, with a focus on the interactive character of participatory web.

There is a strongly established tradition in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) of dealing with certain powerful texts, e.g. of politicians, policy and the mass media. There have been numerous large-scale studies of such texts, especially newspaper articles and political speeches. It is tempting to see these textual resources as the most socially and politically relevant texts for research. But for a CDS study involving social media data, these institutional texts should be viewed and analysed within their new interactive context, while bearing in mind that the sociality of communication is the core quality of textual practice in the participatory web (KhosraviNik and Unger 2016: 213).

KhosraviNik and Unger consider two levels of contextualization. One level pertains to how “the shape and quality of social media communication are influenced by the characteristics of the media institution itself, i.e. how it is organized and how it is linked to surveillance strategies […] and involves seeing how this communication is afforded within media institutions”. (Id.). The other pertains to the broader sociopolitical context. Furthermore, KhosraviNik and Unger (2016: 214-216) raise important questions concerning the application of “powerful texts” methods to the analysis of social media data. These questions address
organizational issues, such as data selection from the vast amount of data available, the non-linearity of text-production and consumption processes, the definition of context, the fast changeable nature of data and ethical issues. In response to these issues they propose a “case study approach to data and analysis” (215). To explain this approach, they propose two case studies, which implement respectively a micro and a macro analytical approach.

The first case study offers guidelines on how to conduct a Facebook focus group on political resistance. The second case study involves “the role of technologies and multilingualism in digitally mediated protest” (224-232). While the former poses interesting issues regarding the privacy and vulnerability of study participants, these do not directly apply to the present study, in which the main interaction with participants occurred through interviews. The latter investigates the affordances new technologies provide to protest movements, focusing on the images and the signs of rallies during the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements. Their overarching question concerns social mobilization. These movements, they argue, are quasi-global, in that they mainly addressed local or national issues, which, through new technologies, have been “recontextualized globally” (226).

KhosraviNik and Unger’s perhaps most interesting argument, in the light of the present methodological survey, is that “protestors in any context will make use of the technologies that are available to them, and they will utilize these to the maximum extent possible within their affordances”. (2016: 227). It is against this backdrop that the use of Facebook should be considered during the Syrian uprising. Facebook is the social medium with which Syrians were mostly familiar early 2011. As emerges from the analysis chapter on pre-uprising data, study participants had been using Facebook before the uprising to do identity work. Moreover, the choice of Facebook should be assessed based on the affordances of this platform in terms of
identity work. For example, Facebook allows uninterrupted public presence over a long period of time. Facebook protestors emphasize their presence, but also that of the resources they employ. This is exemplified by the contrast between the constant presence of English in the pre-uprising Facebook pages and its absence in post-uprising work.

In what follows I shall present my data and methodology. While I drew on DCOE for the most part, new literacy and CDS approaches have provided interesting insights, particularly on how to situate data within the broader social and political context.

3.5 Data

The main case study consists of three Facebook pages administered by two Syrian dissidents: Maher Alkurdi’s personal page and his public page addōmarī and Nawar Bulbul’s personal page. The reasons for concentrating on this material is that I have had sustained and repeated interaction with the authors in person (I met Maher in Austria and Nawar in Jordan), via Skype and through the Facebook chat. Moreover, Maher’s and Nawar’s pages display uninterrupted production since 2010, which proved useful to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the page content before and after the uprising. Conversely, other dissidents deleted their Facebook accounts, probably for security reasons, causing the loss of material.

3.5.1 Maher Alkurdi and Addōmarī

Maher is a thirty-five-year-old man from Damascus. Despite his Kurdish origins, he does not speak Kurdish or identify himself with Kurdish or Arab nationalist sentiments. In his twenties, he sympathized with the communist party, although he distanced himself from it for
divergent opinions with other militants. He studied journalism at the University of Damascus and participated in creative acts of protest after the uprising. One of these was covering the Russian cultural center’s doorway with red paint. Maher now lives in Graz, Austria, as a refugee, and is currently unemployed. His limited German and English skills represent an obstacle to exercise the career of journalism. Before fleeing to Austria in 2014, he lived in Turkey and Egypt. He collaborated with the Egyptian online satirical newspaper *ya khabar* (“Oh news”).

Maher Alkurdi’s public page *addōmarī* was recommended to me by a Syrian friend in 2012, who was still in Syria in 2012 and who is currently a refugee in Sweden. He suggested *addōmarī* because it was one of the mostly followed Facebook page of the Syrian uprising at the time. Although he did not know who the page administrator was, he suspected it might have been the famous Syrian cartoonist Ali Farzat, whose satirical publication in the early 2000s went by the same title. After conducting observation of Facebook texts for two years, in the summer of 2014 I went to Jordan to explore possible ways to get in touch with the authors and the readers of these texts. In 2014, several Syrian refugees were still in Lebanon and Jordan, hence my choice to travel to Amman. A few days after my arrival I met a Syrian refugee at a coffee shop, who suggested that I visit the cultural center Jadal Culture, a regular meeting venue for several young Syrians who recently escaped the war.

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3 There is an interesting analogy between this type of protests and protests which occurred in other parts of the world. For example, the practice of covering an institutional facility with red painting can be observed in this video, which shows a Filipino group throwing red paint against a US institution. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r1qjzK_vP0. This analogy recalls KhosraviNik and Unger’s (2016) insights on quasi-global movements.

4 Although the Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/jadal.amman/) defines it as “internet café, art gallery and language school”, Jadal is more than this. As explained by its founder Fadi Amireh, a young Jordanian engineer who decided to not pursue his career to devote his efforts entirely to this project, Jadal had the purpose to bring together people from different walks of life, faith and opinions and provide a venue for discussion and cultural encounters in the heart of Amman (Personal communication). During my participant observation in 2014, I met Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians and Jordanians who were frequenting Jadal regularly. The cultural activities comprised poetry, music and art evenings delivered by young Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi and Jordanian artists. Other events included monthly potluck dinners which attracted Western Arabic students as well as Arabs of different generations. More recently, Jadal has also organized dancing and language classes.
After introducing myself as a doctoral student conducting research on language in Syria during the uprising, I got in contact with several young Syrians, some of whom knew Maher Alkurdi in person and put me in touch with him. At the time, Maher was in Istanbul, and I had a first contact with him via Skype in July 2014. I have had repeated conversations with Maher up to date. These include semi-structured Skype interviews, in which I elicited contextual information about his background, his role during the uprising and the emergence of addōmarī, face-to-face interviews at his residence in Austria, during which I mainly approached him about the posts and comments on his page, and follow-up Facebook chats, in which I asked for clarifications about information which emerged from the interviews or about posts or comments to his posts.

Maher published his first post on Facebook on September 15, 2010. Between September 2010 and March 2011 the prevalent topics of his posts were love and women. The genres range from short to longer poems composed by him in fushā, many of which signed with his name, to videoclips of Arab and American love songs, accompanied by captions in Arabic or in English. On March 15, 2011, probably influenced by the events in Tunisia and Egypt and the situation starting to destabilize in Syria, Maher suddenly stopped chanting about women and love, and started writing about the current political situation in the Arab world on his new public Facebook page addōmarī. After launching the addōmarī page, Maher started sharing posts from the addōmarī on his private page. This way, he thought, no one would suspect that he was the author of the addōmarī page. All posts revolve around current socio-political events. Themes like the nation, freedom and oppression became prominent.

Syrian Colloquial Arabic (SCA) is predominant in Maher’s writing practices on the addōmarī page. The reason adduced by Maher for starting to use SCA when he launched his
addōmarī Facebook page is that “humor in fūshā turns out to be too cold and heavy. When you use colloquial Arabic you provide another facet of humor”.

As of the beginning of 2011, he added, there were very few satirical Facebook pages, and Syrian readers were not used to reading in SCA.

His choice of including colloquial features in his posts triggered a metalinguistic discussion between him and his readership. Maher was criticized by some readers for using “inappropriate sharp language”, as well as adopting some spelling features that are closer to Damascus Arabic, including socio-politically salient features, such as writing the voiceless uvular stop q, historically associated with the Alawite president's pronunciation, as a glottal stop, which corresponds to the Damascus realization.

Furthermore, Maher argued that he launched the idea of combining humor and the vernacular, considering it his own style. “Facebook pages like as-sawra aş-šiniyye [“The Chinese Revolution] both the old and the new versions […] and sukhrīyye siasiyye [Political Satire], were opened after my page. Sukhrīyye siasiyye, which at the beginning would post a photo with a satirical caption, imitated my style. This bothered me a bit”.

What emerged from Maher's narrative, is that he consciously experimented with a style through which, by publicly displaying the vernacular, he aimed at opening up Syrian society. In his view, Syrian readership is now more appreciative of his style and open to reading and writing in the vernacular.

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5 Interview with Maher Alkurdi, August 2014.
6 In the 2011 very few people, if any, published a comment on Maher's addōmarī page. The very few comments available align with Maher's posts. The criticism against the author's language choice occurred through private messages or personal conversations between Maher and his friends or acquaintances. Maher mentioned these critical reactions during different interviews.
7 The conscious symbolic use of the hamza “glottal stop” in place of the qāf is treated extensively in the next chapter.
8 Maher refers to the very popular Facebook page “al-thawra al-şiniyya didd ğhayat al-şīn – The Chinese Revolution”.
9 As of September 22, 2014, this page was no longer active.
He chose the name of his public page *addōmarī* after Ali Farzat’s publication. Ali Farzat is an important intellectual reference for Maher, who, during the first months of the uprising, would accompany his *addōmarī* posts with his satirical cartoons. The two had a disagreement due to Maher’s decision to use the title of Ali Farzat’s periodical, although Maher claims that he asked for Ali Farzat’s permission before launching the page. “I used to read Ali Farzat’s publication. [When I launched the *addōmarī* page] I couldn’t write explicitly. So I had to come up with stories.” In every post I would write a story and accompany it with an image that I found on the internet. Many of these images were Ali Farzat’s satirical cartoons”.

The choice of this name carries information about the ideological content of the page. The name of a Facebook page (be it private or public) can be considered as a form of paratext (Suleiman 2013). Although Suleiman (2013: 95) applies Genette’s (1997) notion of paratexts to traditional written production, such as “titles, inter-titles, dedications, epigraphs, epilogues and the publisher’s blurb or jacket copy”, Facebook affordances, such as choosing a name for your page, a profile photo, and a description section arguably carry out similar functions. A profile name carries similar functions as a title.

“Acting as a gateway to the text, titles are the most visible, cognitively speaking, of all paratexts (2013: 96)”. Suleiman (Ibid.) further posited that “titles, Genette reminds us, perform three functions: designation, description and temptation or enticement.” Designation and enticement are the most relevant to our case study. By calling the page *addōmarī*, Maher gave the page “an onomastic identity of its own” (2013: 96). The choice of this name, which alludes to a common social traditional background, alludes to the emergence of a collective identity.

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10 Maher’s use of the term story is broad. As will emerge from the data analysis, Maher’s posts could be better understood as political metaphors.

11 Maher Alkurdi, face-to-face interview, Graz, Austria, September 2015.
*Addōmarī* functioned as Maher Alkurdi’s “mask”, or public persona. This served both safety and discursive purposes. After launching *addōmarī* in March 2011, Maher kept his personal page active. He would often share content from *addōmarī*’s page on his personal page so that, he alleged, he would appear as a page follower, and not as the administrator, in case he had been questioned by the police. Moreover, the choice of this name, it could be speculated, is also consistent with Maher’s social and political endeavor “to open up Syrian society”. In Syrian folklore, the *dōmarī* was both the city lamplighter and gatekeeper. These two figures, which evoke popular wisdom, epitomize a critical and a recruiting function carried out through *addōmarī*’s page. This name performs an important enticement function. On the one hand, it evokes Ali Farzat’s publication and the cartoonist’s role in the expression of dissent. On the other, it recalls images of a common cultural heritage. Quoting Genette (1997: 92), Suleiman (2013: 97) affirms that “a good title would say enough about the subject matter [of the text] to stimulate curiosity and not enough to sate it”.

It is in the light of these metaphorical meanings that Maher’s intention “to open up Syrian society” should be understood. *Addōmarī*’s purpose is to recruit stimulating critical thinking. Through his witty posts, *addōmarī*’s function is that of an usher, who invites people in to engage in critical discussion. The effects of this recruitment effort are reflected in the number of followers. The page reached a peak of over 150,000 likes in 2014, which made it one of the most followed Syrian pages.

Language is an important component in the “recruiting” process performed through the *addōmarī* page. Maher’s perceived his language use as Syrian vernacular. “Humor in *fuṣḥā* turns out to be too cold and heavy. When you use colloquial Arabic you provide another facet of

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12 Ibid.
13 Maher used this expression with reference to his use of the vernacular and humor to express dissent throughout his *addōmarī* page.
humor”. Moreover, I discussed with Maher his use of stylized and unconventional punctuation, such as "!!", "??", “!!??” or the use of two or three dots at the end of each line. He claimed that he used this as his signature. “It happened rather frequently that people would share my post or even copy and paste it without quoting my name. The punctuation showed that the post was mine”.

Finally, in Syrian Arabic, the term dōmarī appears in the collocation ma fīha dōmarī, used to describe a deserted place. It is interesting to note that while the word dōmarī only appears in the negative collocation ma fīha domarī, Ali Farzat and Maher used it affirmatively, as to confirm the presence of the dōmarī. Once again, “affirming one’s presence” seems to be a recurrent motif linked to the use of Facebook, as was discussed above with reference to KhosraviNik and Unger’s (2016) approach.

3.5.2 Nawar Bulbul

During a second fieldwork trip to Amman in the summer of 2015, a French-Palestinian frequenter of Jadal shared his friend’s Nawar Bulbul’s contact information with me. Nawar Bulbul is a Syrian actor who became famous for playing a role in the Syrian historical television drama Bāb al-Ḥāra. As many other artists at the beginning of the uprising, he was confronted with the decision to take a public political stance. He chose to side with the revolution shortly after the beginning uprising. One of his first appearances as a dissident is documented in the Youtube video of a demonstration in Damascus, in which he leads chants and slogans inciting

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14 Interview with Maher Alkurdi, August 2014. Maher uses the term sukhrıyye to define his use of humor. While Wehr and Cowan (1994) translate the term as “scorn, derision, mockery, irony…”, the English terms humor and satire probably best describe Maher’s style and intent.
15 Maher Alkurdi, Face-to-face interview, Graz, Austria, September 2015.
16 Personal communication with Enass Khansa.
17 For a discussion on the role of the intellectuals at the beginning of the Syrian uprising see Joubin (2013).
freedom.\textsuperscript{18} This decision cost him his job. He stayed in Syria with his family until 2012, then moved to Lebanon, then France, and he currently lives in Amman, Jordan. Besides his acting career, which brought him on international tours since 2008, Nawar is an affirmed playwright. One of his most recent successes is “Shakespeare in Zaatarî”, which sees a group of young Syrians living in Jordan’s refugee camp “Zaatari” play in adaptations of some of Shakespeare’s plays, including Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and King Lear. This project received very good reviews from major Arab and Western news agencies.\textsuperscript{19}

After a brief observation of Nawar Bulbul’s personal Facebook page, I noted similarities with Maher Alkurdi’s writing practices. They are both very prolific and their style changed dramatically after the beginning of the uprising. As in \textit{addōmarî}, Nawar’s post-uprising posts contain metaphors, intertextual and interdiscursive devices, as well as several hybrid elements, such as bivalent and creative forms. These similarities sparked my interest in learning more about the surrounding context of Nawar’s prolific activity on Facebook. I called him a few days later, explaining that I obtained his contact information through our mutual French-Palestinian friend and I introduced myself as a doctoral student interested in language and social media during the uprising, and that I would be interested in meeting to talk about his activity on Facebook. He kindly agreed to meet me in a coffee shop in Amman after a lecture on sectarianism and the Syrian conflict delivered by Dr. Nadine Méouchy at the \textit{Institut Français}.

The same night I was invited to Nawar’s family’s house for dinner, where I had the privilege of meeting his wife, Dr. Vanessa Guéno (specialist in Syrian Ottoman history and director of the IFPO, Jordan). After the first dinner I met Nawar several other times. I conducted

\textsuperscript{18} https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpeVJM5HpBI
\textsuperscript{19} http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2014/02/shakespeare-syrian-style
two unstructured interviews at his house in June and August 2015, during which I elicited more information about the context in which his Facebook posts emerged. Moreover, I presented him with his material since the beginning of the uprising. I asked him to select the posts he was mostly attached to. Initially, Nawar was very dismissive about my research interest in his Facebook activity, which he considered marginal, compared to his activity as an actor and playwright. However, after I presented him with his Facebook posts and elicited the reasons for his Facebook activism and his linguistic choices, he was very pleased and thanked me for “bringing so many memories back”.

When I shared with Nawar my observation that many of his posts were inciting revolution, and asked him who he thought his audience was, he said “through my posts I intend to incite those in Syria who are fighting against Bashar al-Asad. Many of them have a radical Islamist agenda which I do not share. However, it is important to open a dialogue. There are many revolutions that need to be done in Syria. Allying with them is a first step”. As emerged from the interviews with Maher, the Syrian vernacular also played an important role in the Syrian uprising. “Imagine that you trip on something while you are walking down the street. How do you react, in English? No, you’re Italian, so you’ll probably yell something in Italian. Likewise, when the revolution started, people used the vernacular to vomit out all they had inside.” Nawar’s perception of the use of the vernacular vis-à-vis hybrid practices will be discussed recalls the movement between fixity and hybridity theorized by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010; 2014) and is further discussed later in this study.

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20 In recent posts published in March 2016, Nawar and other dissidents distanced themselves from and strongly criticized Islamic groups, such as *jabhat al-nusra*, for their violent attack against demonstrators who took to the streets to commemorate the fifth anniversary since the beginning of the revolution. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syrian-pro-democracy-protesters-attacked-by-jabhat-al-nusra-rebels-as-they-return-to-streets-during-a6925976.html
3.5.3 Radio Orient

During our first interview, Nawar offered to introduce me to other Syrian dissidents who work at Radio Orient. Radio Orient is a Syrian oppositional radio in the heart of Amman, owned by Ghassan Abboud, Syrian tycoon and founder in 2009 of the television channel Orient TV. In an interview with the Mideastwire Blog, Ghassan Abboud said about Orient TV, also called Orient Channel:

Orient Channel was launched on 2/2/2009, and in less than two months was able to enter the hearts of the Syrians because it was the only one with a different voice… We worked on a series of shows depicting the different Syrian groups, with all their sects, ethnicities, belongings and even occupations. We revealed the other, because if you do not know what is in your neighbor’s house, you will always fear him. We opened the people’s houses to each other, and allowed all the sects to see what the others were doing. This is why they loved this channel, because Syria under the rule of the Ba’th party annulled the privacy of human groups and tried to make them similar […].

In the same interview, it is alleged that Rami Makhlouf, President Bashar al-Asad’s cousin and Syrian business tycoon, asked Ghassan Abboud to become business partners, which would have facilitated the state’s control over the oppositional channel. After rejecting the offer, the TV channel offices in Damascus were raided by the security forces and Ghassan Abboud moved the headquarters to Dubai. Radio Orient is part of Ghassan Abboud’s media group and is headquartered in Amman.

Nawar introduced me to the director and to the staff of Radio Orient as a friend interested in the Arabic language. I returned to Radio Orient several times in the summer of 2015, as I identified this as a venue where I could interact with several Syrian dissidents. Moreover, the staff facilitated my observation by welcoming me warmly and inviting me to attend their radio programs. During the first two visits, I conducted observation with the aim of identifying

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potential participants for my study. I participated in conversations with the employees during coffee breaks, sat in the director’s office, and watched some live programs. In particular, I attended a rehearsal and the recording of the program ‘āyle ʾāl-ḥudūd (“A family on the border”) and a live broadcast of hikāyā ahālīnā (“Stories of our people”). ‘Āyle ʾāl-ḥudūd is the sequel of another production, ‘āyle bi-nuṣṣ ish-shārī’ (“A family in the middle of the street”), which was aired during Ramadan in the summer of 2014. ʿĀyle ʾāl-ḥudūd is the story of a displaced Syrian family that crosses the Mediterranean to seek refuge in Europe. The script was written by France-based Syrian author Ṣubḥī Ḥalīme and features the actors Nawar Bulbul, May Skaff and Zayna Ḥallāq, who recorded her part from Tunisia. Given that it is aired during Ramadan, in concomitance with other Ramadan series, whose sociopolitical impact has been extensively analyzed by Donatella Della Ratta in her work on Syrian drama production, and given the political stance of its producers, ʿāyle ʾāl-ḥudūd could be construed in opposition to the official Ramadan series.22

Hikāyā Ahālīnā is a biweekly radio show written by Lina Muhammed and May Skaff. Each episode treats a different topic related to the politics and the history of Syria, from a critical, dissident perspective. The use of metaphors and language, as will be discussed in Lina Muhammed’s interview section, is relevant to the hybrid Facebook style. However, a fine-grained analysis of this goes beyond the scope of this work and provides material for a future study.

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22 For an analysis of the sociopolitical aspects of these series cf. Della Ratta (2013).
3.5.4 Interviews

I conducted unstructured Skype, face-to-face and Facebook messenger interviews. Skype has been a useful tool to communicate with Maher Alkurdi, while all the other interviews occurred face-to-face in Amman, during the summer 2014 and summer 2015. Facebook interviews were useful as follow-up tools, particularly to clarify the content of some posts. Face-to-face interviews took place at Radio Orient, Jadal culture, local restaurants, private homes, at the Amman-based news agency Syria Direct and in Graz, Austria. Before each interview I explained the scope of my research to the participants, asked permission to tape the interview and obtained their consent, pursuant to Institutional Review Board regulations. Some interviews were taped. Interviews varied in length and structure. Given the length of the interviews, I did not produce a full transcript of each one of them, but used the recording as a back up for my notes. Informants were mainly identified using a snowball technique: participants introduced me to other participants. Most interviewees are Syrian, except for two: Vanessa and Dan. In the next section, I introduce the informants I interviewed face-to-face and provide a summary of the interviews, including the information that better illustrates the context surrounding the Facebook data and informants’ linguistic perceptions.

In face-to-face interviews, questions aimed at investigating the informants’ perceptions on how Syrians used Facebook after the uprising and on the linguistic features of Syrian dissidents’ Facebook pages. I also presented some of the informants with their own material (cf. Androutsopoulos 2008b) or with other Facebook pages to elicit more information about their perceptions of the language varieties and linguistic features employed. Finally, I asked Maher and Nawar to read out their posts. This way I indirectly elicited their perceptions. By reading out bivalent texts they helped me disambiguate them and provided information about how they
interpret the texts.\textsuperscript{23} All interviews were conducted in Arabic. The quotations are my translation. Although the informants know that my native language is not Arabic, they considered me as a competent Arabic speaker, and felt at their ease using Syrian Arabic during the interviews. Finally, for the participants’ personal names, I maintained the transcription they chose for their Facebook profile.

3.5.4.1 Maher Alkurdi, Graz, Austria, September 2015

Francesco: How did you decide to open your public page \textit{addōmarī}?

Maher: I wasn't using FB a lot before the uprising started in March 2011. Weeks before then, one of my friends encouraged me to open a [public] FB page.\textsuperscript{24} FB was still something new. Then I closed the page. Then I gave it some more thought. The uprising started and I was a dissident, so I decided to open a page, but just for my friends, like my friends of the communist party, for example.

Francesco: Where did the idea of calling it \textit{addōmarī} come from?

Maher: I used to read Ali Ferzat's publication. So I named the page after it. But I couldn't write directly. For example, I had to come up with stories.\textsuperscript{25} In every post I would write a story and accompany it with a picture I would find on the internet. Many of the pictures were cartoons from Ali Farzat. Sometimes I would edit the pictures. So in every post I would write something indirect. Once I wrote something in an indirect way. I was writing about the government. For

\textsuperscript{23} The “read-out” texts are included in the analysis chapters and incorporated as a line in the gloss, usually following the transliteration, and as a tool to disambiguate the transliteration itself.

\textsuperscript{24} Maher had already a personal page which did not treat political topics.

\textsuperscript{25} Maher uses the word \textit{qisas} (“stories”). However, from the text analysis emerges that this genre could be better understood as “political metaphors”.

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example, in the post *khabar kān*, I talked about the government, and specifically about the President, but in an indirect way. Like Farzat's periodical *Al-Domary*, which was talking indirectly.

Francesco: How was the language in Ali Farzat's periodical?

Maher: I forgot exactly. But it was between the colloquial and *fuṣḥā*. For example, the horoscope was political. For every sign they would write something political in the vernacular. They would use the colloquial to talk about a famous government official.

Francesco: Before the revolution in your personal page you were also using English in your posts. Why?

Maher: There was no specific reason. The post in which I wrote “if I remember you will you remember me” was from a television show a friend of mine was following.

Francesco: I also noticed that Syrians before the revolution were using Latin orthography in their comments and posts. Why?

Maher: The Syrians who were writing with the Latin orthography were the ones who were out of the country. For example, my sister in Finland didn't know how to write in Arabic. Sometimes their computer would not support the Arabic script.

Francesco: Do you think some people were using the Latin script because it was “cool”?

Maher: I don't think so. Maybe some girls would think it was cool. Even girls who lived in Syria. But as far as I'm concerned, no.

[Maher and I discuss the post “ḥakā badrī”].

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26 This post is analyzed in the next chapters. More context about the post is provided in the analysis.  
27 See chapter 5.
Francesco: When you wrote the post on Arabic grammar it was all in *fuṣḥā*, whereas this is in the dialect. Why?

Maher: At the beginning you find posts both in *fuṣḥā* and in the dialect. I prefer the dialect when I want to convey *sukhriyye*. *Fuṣḥā* is heavy to convey *sukhriyye*. The post on the Arabic language was black *sukhriyye*. Whereas in this post it's not black *sukhriyye*. It's *sukhriyye* tout court. At the beginning of the *addōmarî* page I thought I wanted to write only black *sukhriyye* on the page. Then I thought, it's better if I use the vernacular. I want to talk to the people in the dialect that we speak. The one I use with my friends in the street. People were not very accepting of reading a page in the vernacular. It was a new concept for them. I was criticized. They were like, our language is “*al-lugha al-‘arabiyya al-fuṣḥā*” [“the *fuṣḥā* Arabic language”]. Why don't you write in *fuṣḥā*?

Francesco: But you were already using the vernacular in your personal page, right?

Maher: Yes, but that was my private page. This is public. I launched a survey on the *addōmarî* page and most followers said that they preferred that I continue writing in the vernacular.

Francesco: You use a lot of Syrian proverbs and idioms in your posts. What is the role of proverbs and idioms?

Maher: Since I use the vernacular all the time, I choose proverbs to code the post topic. I want to convey the message in an indirect way. Proverbs can convey message in an implicit way. For

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28 Maher uses this word in the sense of satire.

29 Maher only uses the collocation “black *sukhriyye*” once throughout the interviews. In other contexts, he used the term “heavy” to describe the combination of *sukhriyye* and *fuṣḥā*.

30 Maher uses the word *shaffara* (“code, encode, cipher, encrypt”). In this context, I believe that he uses the term suggesting that he chooses the proverbs that better relate to, represent or encapsulate the metaphor used in the post. Another framework that looks at idioms from a cognitive standpoint is Fauconnier’s (1985) mental spaces. *Shaffara* evokes the mental space of a spy who needs to encode language to serve national purposes. In Maher’s use of popular idioms as forms of *shifra* (“code”), Maher compares himself to someone who needs to use a secret code to serve a national purpose. Neggaz (2013) uses the term “secret language”, referring to the way Syrians would use oral expressions to avoid censorship, such as *bēt khāltū* (lit. “his aunt’s house”), to refer to the secret...
example, if I say \textit{w akalu l-beyda w-'ishrīta} (lit. “they ate the egg with the shell”) the meaning is crystal clear to the Syrians without mentioning what exactly it is.\footnote{See analysis chapter two, \textit{Ḥakā bedrī (“Bedri spoke”)}, 15th April 2011, \textit{addōmarī}.}

Francesco: It also seems to me that you're not using the sayings as they are normally used. Their meaning changes in the context

Maher: Yes, I put them in a political context. Moreover, the sayings are in the dialect. And I write my page in the dialect, so they are consistent with my style.

Francesco: Also sayings and proverbs are very close to the people. In a sense it's a way of supporting an argument

Maher: Correct. Proverbs are very close the people because they use them daily. Secondly, the dialects vary from place to place. But if I give a proverb, all Syria knows it. My innovative contribution is that I wrote in the dialect. No one was writing in dialect before me. Not even in private pages in Syria was the dialect used. That's why I was criticized. And even those who criticized me in the beginning, changed their mind later. They were attached to their routine. So I changed them.

Francesco: How do you know that they consented to the new language?

Maher: They didn't abandon the page and they still like it. They posted comments and never criticized me again. So I consider it as a shift. A shift from writing in \textit{fuṣḥā} to writing in the dialect. Before the revolution there were newspapers and writings, etc. All these written sources were in \textit{fuṣḥā}. All these were propaganda. No one was buying a newspaper in Syria in order to read it. Seriously, I don't remember the last time I saw someone buy a newspaper. Before the revolution there were all these propaganda newspapers and documents that no one would read.

service prison. From Maher’s interview emerges a continued search for secret ways of expression. This time, however, in the written form.
After the revolution you don't want propaganda discourse anymore. To whom would you address it? My discourse is directed to the people. Why would I talk to them in *fuṣḥā*? You need to talk to them in their language. The language they use to talk with each other. So I made this first shift. The second shift consisted in talking in a more direct way. No one in Syria was talking directly. Even when the turmoil started in Daraa people would listen but they didn't dare talk. When I started with this second shift, talking more directly, some people left the page. They were scared. If you click like on a page that speaks directly it's a problem. There are people who were scared but they remained in the page. Other people left the page, they created other accounts and they returned liking the page with a fake account. A lot of people back then were using fake names.

[ Maher and I discuss another post].

Francesco: Why do you write the *qāf* in this post, and not the *hamza*?

Maher: I don't follow a rule. Now if I write in the vernacular, I mostly I use *hamza* or *alif* to represent the *qāf*. If you want to write in the “‘ammiyya maẓbūṭa” you use the *hamza*. If you don't want to give a ‘*ammiyya maẓbūṭa* you maintain the *qāf*.33

Francesco: Do you ever use the *qāf* to mock the Alawite dialect?

Maher: Yes, but not only with the *qāf*. There's a word which is salient in the Alawite speech which is *qǝrd*. I think I used it. And if I want to imitate them I use the *qāf*. There's another issue. We grew up with the idea, it's always been engrained in our mind, that the people of the coast speak like the security forces. Many of the security forces were coming from there. So if you use

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32 To understand this term used idiosyncratically by Maher we could think of expressions like “pure dialect”.
33 Through this statement, Maher hints at the presence of a mixed style, which does not only include the vernacular. Mixing seems to occur at a less conscious level.
a word like *qard*, immediately people think you're talking about some security police officers, not about the people from the coast.

[We discuss more posts]

**Francesco:** So this was the first phase, in which you were using Ali Ferzat's cartoons as a cue to criticize the government. Then you had a disagreement with Ferzat. What's the next phase?

**Maher:** Playing with language was very important. *Sukhriyye* was important. I had to come up with something that was *sukhriyy* [“mocking”].

**Francesco:** How do you write a post? Do you think a lot about it in your mind then you jot it down, do you read it out?

**Maher:** Before I write the post I think about the idea of the post. When the idea crosses my mind I think about how I can put it in words. I sit down and write the post on the computer more than five or six times. Most of the times it doesn't come out like I want. Even the posts I like don't come out exactly as I wanted. But when I was sufficiently convinced about the result I wouldn't post it right away. I would finish the post, then go to some of my friends, I would send them my post over Facebook and ask for their advice. Some would reply: “nice, but I feel this could be changed”. Others, whenever I would ask for advice, would just say it was very nice, because they like me a lot. Others would say it's good but the conclusion is not well connected to the rest of the post, or so. So I would think about the feedback and then post it. […] Then some time has passed since I started the page. I gained practice. Especially combining the dialect and *sukhriyye*.

**Francesco:** How did your style change throughout the years?

**Maher:** My posts are shorter; they don’t contain a full story. I also prefer these shorter than the previous longer posts. I felt that people liked shorter posts more.
Francesco: How has the way people comment on your page changed since 2011?

Maher: People write more in the vernacular and play with words more. For example, they respond to my puns with other puns. I think I influenced them. Even those who support the government. You know, sometimes some of your friends say something cool and you use it again. Some people when they commented they used the style of *addōmarī*, because they like *addōmarī*. So we ended up having a thousand *dōmarī*.

Francesco: You mentioned that there were two phases in your *addōmarī* writing practices, which were they?

Maher: The second big phase was after 2012. It coincided with the time I left Syria and many of the page fans started to leave, too. 2011 represented a focus on something new, it was like laying the foundations of *addōmarī*. Even for the people who were following the page it was something new.

3.5.4.2 Nawar Bulbul, Nawar’s Residence, Amman, June 2015

Francesco: How has your writing style on Facebook changed throughout the past six years?

Nawar: Before 2011 my posts were *sakhīf* (“simple-minded, stupid”). ‘I’m in Japan!’ . ‘I’m in Hollywood!’ . At the beginning of the uprising some friends encouraged me to join the revolution. I went through an inner conflict for two weeks. Then it felt like a liberation. Shouting ‘*takbūr*’ in the street gives a sense of liberation. Some friends told me: the morale of the revolutionaries is low. Write posts to encourage them. Write nice words. That's what I write on Facebook. Every post has a *munāsabe* [“refers to a specific event, circumstance”]. Today,

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34 The term *takbūr* describes the Quranic expression *allāhu akbar* (“God is the greatest”), which is used in spoken Arabic to as a form of incitement and is recently associated with the last phrase pronounced by terrorists before committing “martyrdom”. During the Syrian uprising, it was used as a form of incitement during the demonstrations. Its symbolic function is worth analyzing in future projects.
through my Facebook I’m trying to open a link between the secularists, the civilians, the Syrians who started the revolution, and the extremist organizations like an-Nuṣrā (“Nusra Front”), and others, aḥrār ish-shām (“Islamic Movement of the Free Men of the Levant”) and others.35 This communication is lacking. Me, as Nawar, as a person I wonder, can I create this communication link? Who is this other side? Let the other side know who I am. As a secularist I don't want the other side. And the other side doesn't want me. But, I extend my hand to introduce myself and to get to know each other. I have no doubts that my Facebook page is surveilled by the Syrian secret services. When I was in Syria the secret services knew I sided with the revolution. But I couldn’t write explicitly. Look at Fayṣal al-Qāsim, for example, his page has five million likes.36 A girl who lived in the areas controlled by the regime clicked like on one of his posts and she was arrested for this.

Francesco: However, your political stance appeared clearly from your posts…

Nawar: Compare how I was writing when I was in Syria and how I started writing when I left. The balance changed. Take for example the post of the kid playing in the neighborhood with the tanks. There I described what happened. I don't say ‘down with the army’, etc. I wrote: ‘there's tanks in the city’. I simply give a description. I don't take a standpoint. When I left Syria I started writing more and raising my voice more. And yet I still can’t write the way I want because my family is still inside and I care for their safety.

Francesco: What type of language do you use when you write on Facebook?

35 As explained above, Nawar’s and other dissidents’ position changed recently.
36 Fayṣal al-Qāsim is a very popular Syrian journalist who works for the television network Al Jazeera and who publicly sided with the revolution.
Nawar: I use the dialect. The dialect is the language which is close to the people. I even wrote my theatrical pieces in the dialect. I drink in the dialect, I go to the bathroom in the dialect. *Fuṣḥā* has become a language far from the people, far from the street.

3.5.4.3  Nawar and Vanessa, Nawar and Vanessa’s Residence, August 2015

Francesco: How has language changed in Syria after the revolution?

Nawar: After the revolution there was a return to local dialects. A new generation slowly re-discovered its local identity. Before the revolution Damascene Arabic was the prestigious dialect. All Syrians were trying to hide their local dialect from other Syrians.

Vanessa: Under the Baath period, they used to say *al-ḥamawyy ahwal* [“people from Hama are squint-eyed”], and there was the saying *al-tawr balā ḥyāse mitl ḥamawyy balā na‘āse* [“a bull that doesn’t try to escape is like a Hama inhabitant without flaws”]. Also, people used to say *al-Ḥomṣī ajdab* [“people from Homs are dull”]. When I used to tell my Damascene friends in the early 2000s that I was headed to Homs for research, they would reply: what do you think you can get from that dirty place? Another saying was *al-ḥalabī ghaliż w dammo t‘īl* (“people from Aleppo are vulgar and unpleasant”). And also, *min wēn bt‘arif al-ḥawrānī? Min zirro fō‘ānī* (“how do you recognize someone from the Howran? From his buttoned-up shirt”), as if to say that Damascenes are cooler because they wear looser clothes.

Nawar: also, when people used to go to Damascus they would be ashamed to speak their own dialects and they were trying to speak Damascene. There’s the anecdote of the bus driver from the [southern province] of Howran. When he leaves the Howran he would shout *jarrīb la giddām!* [“come close to the front”] Whereas as soon as he enters Damascus he shouts *‘arrīb la-‘addām* [the same meaning but with a Damascene glottal stop].
Francesco: Was Damascene linked with power?

Nawar: No. The Alawite dialect was. Damascene was the *lahje baydhā’* [“the white, neutral dialect”].

Francesco: Has Damascene lost prestige after the revolution?

Nawar: Yes, for example people no longer pride themselves on being Damascene. Instead, they say “*anā midānī*” [“I’m from the Midān neighborhood”], because it is in the Damascus neighborhood of Midān that demonstrations started. By the same token, it is no longer a stigma to say that you are from Idlib or Douma. Idlib and Douma were known for the numerous cases of child abuse. My mom is from Douma, and before the revolution I was ashamed of revealing my mom’s origins. Instead, I would say that she’s from Damascus. After the revolution, however, I wrote a post on Facebook that goes *anā ḥomsī sinnī w khawālī min Douma* [“I’m from Homs, I’m Sunni, and my uncles are from Douma”]. Similarly, *Bābā ‘Amrō*, a neighborhood south west of Homs, is where the revolution started. Before the revolution it was seen as a lower-class, mostly a tribal neighborhood. Now it is an honor to be from there.37

3.5.4.4 Lina, Amman, July 2014

Lina is a journalist from Damascus. She is in her thirties, and met Maher Alkurdi in Damascus when they were both militants in the communist party. She has a strong character and she defines herself as an atheist. Before arriving in Amman in October 2013, through the help of Jordanian secret services, she was a nurse in a hospital run by the Free Syrian Army in the countryside of

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37 The valorization of small, remote places is reflected in a recurrent theme and metaphor in Nawar Bulbul’s page. See, for example, the May 11 2012 post “I repeat, I stand behind the smallest demonstrator of he most remote village in Syria”.

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Damascus, an area known as the Ghouta. She gained nursing experience as a volunteer for the Red Crescent in Damascus. She was arrested twice for her activism in the uprising; once in 2011 and once in 2012. Her brother Jihad is still detained in Syria. In Amman, she collaborated with Radio Orient. She moved to France in August 2015. I interviewed Lina twice. Once in July 2014, at Jadal, and the second time in July 2015 at a local restaurant.

During our first meeting I presented her with some of the Facebook pages I had been observing. She pointed out that Syrian dissidents identify themselves by spelling the name of the country with an alif (ṣūriyā) instead of a tā’ marbūta (ṣūriya). She argued that the former is the original Syrian spelling. When I asked for evidence, she suggested looking at Syrian governmental news agencies websites. A basic word count using the automated search tool on the Syrian governmental newspaper al-tishreen confirmed the higher presence of the spelling with the tā’ marbūta than with an alif. The count was performed using the advanced search tool available on the newspaper website http://www.tishreen.news.sy/. While the word Syria spelled with an alif occurred 333 times, the noun with a tā’ marbūta occurred at least 46,898 times. In order to exclude from the search its use as an adjective, I limited my search to the occurrences in which it appears following the preposition fī (“in”). While it was fairly easy to test Lina’s assumption by looking at the spelling of Syria with a tā’ marbūta in official websites, it is more complicated to conduct a quantitative analysis of dissidents’ use. However, from a purely qualitative observation of Facebook pages, including posts, comments, captions of cartoons and photos of demonstrations or posters including revolutionary slogans emerges a prevalence of the alif spelling. It is also worth noting that not all dissidents who are active on Facebook are aware of this variable and that also some Syrians who identify themselves strongly as government supporters wrote Syria with an alif on their Facebook pages.
Lina’s awareness of the social use of the *alif* spelling reinforces Androutsopoulos’s insight on the role of ethnography, and particularly of observation and interviews, in “reconstructing participants’ ‘lay sociolinguistics’, i.e., their awareness of linguistic variability and its social meanings” (2008b: 12).  

Androutsopoulos explains that one of his informants, when asked to provide examples of typical hip-hop style features, adduced that “The ending –*er* is spelt as –*a*. All endings with –*s* are spelt as –*z*. Some hardcore rap freaks even respell every *S* as *Z* or double *ZZ* within words. This is judged as "underground" affiliation”. (Id.). The variability of my informants’ awareness of the *alif* variable is similar to Androutsopoulos’s case study, whereby “members' awareness about style features such as <*z*> was quite variable. While Alex's views are remarkably elaborated, others' awareness was much more limited and shaped by specific, often local, sources”. (Id.). What is interesting to note is that, despite this variability, Lina pointed out a folk linguistic feature which alludes to her perception of the presence of a shared set of practices among the Syrian dissident community.

3.5.4.5 Lina, Amman, July 2015

During a second interview with Lina, in July 2015, I elicited more information about the role of social media and language during the revolution. I include below a summary of some of the most salient questions and her responses.

**Francesco:** What was the role of social media during the revolution?  
**Lina:** Facebook gave an opportunity to everyone to express themselves. You could create an account (real or fake) to say things that, even if you said them before, no one would listen.

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Before the revolution people in Syria were scared about everything. Whenever you found a space to shout you would do it. Facebook was the corner where the Syrians could shout out.

Francesco: What is the difference between the dissidents before the revolution and you?

Lina: The dissidents before the revolution were great. However, no one knew anything about their lives. For example, Riyadh al-Turk, the general director of the political office of the communist party, served 20 years in prison, of which 15 in isolation.39

Francesco: I noted the presence of common traits between your style and that of Nawar and Maher. Can you talk about the language you use in your work for Radio Orient and on your Facebook page?

Lina: What we use is a lugha sha'biyya.40 At the beginning of the revolution the [dissidents’] language revolved around terms like karāma (“dignity”), hurriyya (“freedom”), nidāl (“struggle”). Then people became bored by this. They wanted to hear other things. We began to satirize everything. A change in the way we expressed ourselves was necessary. You can't address the people in a language similar to that of a political leader. You have to show that you're not a leader. To do so you need a language that belittles the leaders. Sukhriyye is an excellent way to do that.41 My brother Jihad is a playwright. Before he was imprisoned he taught me that the more the language of writing is close to the street language, the faster your ideas travel. I write pretending that who reads is a taxi driver, or the owner of a falafel shop. Șubhî Ǣlîme does the same.42 He uses a simple language,43 understood by everyone, from the taxi driver to

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39 This response highlights an important affordance of Facebook. Through Facebook dissidents’ lives were visible, present.
40 Lina is the only informant who used this term. Literally it means “folk language”.
41 As explained above, the term sukhrīyye can be translated as humor, satire. This is a recurrent term in the interviews with Maher Alkurdi.
42 Șubhî Ǣlîme is the writer of the radio program ʿāyle ʿāl-ḥudūd. See above.
43 Lina uses the terms lugha basīṭa, ṣadqa, wāḍḥa (“A simple, frank and clear language”).
the general director. Sometimes May and I have different opinions on how to write. She wants to use more idealist language. I want to use more mundane language. I try to use a language for the Syrians. My audience is the Syrians. It would be difficult for me to address non-Syrians. For example, if I said “Francesco carries a woman who's losing blood”. A Syrian would immediately understand that he’s rescuing a woman who's just been hit by a rocket. A Jordanian reader wouldn't understand”.

3.5.4.6 Fares, Radio Orient, June 2015

I was introduced to Fares through Nawar. Fares is the director of Radio Orient programming. I interviewed him in his own office at the Radio Orient headquarters in Amman. Fares is a Damascene journalist and a writer in his thirties. He holds a Master’s degree in drama and has worked in the media industry for over ten years. He writes for the theater, novels and news articles.

**Francesco:** What type of language do you use at Radio Orient? How does this relate to the linguistic situation in Syria?

**Fares:** Language is a crucial issue in Syria. We had a ruling regime that implemented the politics of Arabization. For some families it was prohibited to name their children using Kurdish, Turkman, Assyrian, Caldean or foreign names. It was imposed on them to use Arab names. At the same time, the linguistic obscurantism was one of the many sides of Arabization implemented by the regime. For example, there were a lot of terms you couldn't use, such as

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44 May Skaff co-authored *ḥikāyā ahālīna* with Lina.

45 Lina uses the word *mithālīyyāt*. Although Lina does not expand on what she means by this term, she seems to compare this with a more practical language, made of everyday images the interlocutor can relate to. To put it in Tannen’s (2007) terms, May and Lina, according to Lina’s account, have two different involvement styles. Lina’s appears to be characterized by the presence of mundane language, easily accessible to the interlocutor.

46 Lina provided more examples in which she explained how she came up with vivid and creative expressions to narrate anecdotes about Syria’s history.
*inqilāb* [“coup”], *id-dimogratīyye* [“democracy”], any political terms, any religious terms as well as any terms that have to do with *tā’ifiyye* [“sectarianism”] [were prohibited]. Nevertheless, *[tāʾifiyye]* was present. We had *[tāʾifiyye]*. We had a very deep political discourse, but it was all under cover. Everything was secret. So we had two levels in the language. You had a politician whose political discourse was identical to anyone else. ‘Arab unity’, ‘the Arab nation’, ‘the rights of the Arab people *vis à vis* the imperial affront’, ‘we're against imperialism’, ‘down with America’, ‘down with, down with, down with’, ‘down with the Zionist entity’, etc. But the same politician, as a human individual, and off the record, would talk a different way, he would talk about the corruption of the government of which he was a member, about the lack of democracy, about the oppression of the ruling family...Anyone could adopt a double-face discourse. One for the cameras and one under cover. And the only place where you could find the true person was in the jokes. If you analyze jokes, you'll find the real level of language. In 2006 for example ‘ʿAbdul Ḥalīm Khaddām left the regime. His name became a synonym of crime. Uttering his name would have led you to jail. There was dreadful linguistic oppression. The important thing is that you stick to the previous discourse: “we're against imperialism, we're against America, we're against the Zionist entity, we, we, we, we...but in reality what's your new discourse? Zero?”.

**Francesco:** What was the role of the dialect in the light of this linguistic oppression?

**Fares:** One of the cultural crimes that the regime committed towards us is that it was imposing the *taʿrib* (“Arabization”) through *fuṣḥā*. As you know, *fuṣḥā* is a language that is not used in the street. You can only find it in the books and in the schools. Whereas in Syria every area has its

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47 Fares used the expression *al-kawn al-ṣiḥiyūnī* to describe Israel. This expression is common in the Syrian regime public discourse.

48 Abdul Halim Khaddam was Vice President of Syrian between 1984 and 2005. In 2005 he resigned and fled the country due to his disagreement with Bashar al-Asad.
own dialect. Often this dialect constitutes the person’s identity. The Aleppian speaks the Aleppo dialect, the person from Hama speaks the dialect from Hama. Even within Damascus there's different dialects. These vernaculars are an identity marker for the individual. Throughout the revolution, the Alawi dialect, for example, was hated. Because it was the dialect of the oppression. Every official who would go and batter the revolutionaries, even if he wasn't Alawite, would use the Alawi dialect. It became the dialect of oppression. I have childhood friends who were not Alawites, who decided to join the army and the security forces. When they were exercising oppression they used the Alawite vernacular. ‘The prisoner doesn't fear me unless I talk to him in this dialect’.

During the revolution there were some Alawites who sided with the revolution. We understood that this dialect does not mean that the person is military or in the security. [The Alawite dialect] began to free itself. By the same token, years before the revolution the Damascus vernacular bloomed. Which is the dialect that I speak. The Damascus accent was the urban, prestigious language. After the revolution it freed itself, it was simply the Damascus vernacular. The same was for the vernacular from Hama. Before the revolution the dialect of Hama was a synonym for Muslim brotherhood. Some people from Hama changed the way they spoke to avoid this association. After the revolution all these dialects set themselves free from these stereotypical associations. Everything returned to their nature. Every dialect returned to its nature without pressure.

Francesco: You said that the policy of ta’rīb occurred through fushā. How has the relationship between the Syrians and fushā changed?

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49 Fares used the word “identity” in English.
50 Fares uses this quotation to voice a security agent, to exemplify and emphasize his point.
Fares: There was a flourishing of *fuṣḥā* before. The *taʾrīb* was implemented by force. ‘We're Arabs, we're Arabs, we're Arabs’. What does ‘we're Arabs and we speak *fuṣḥā* mean mean anyways?!’. We are also Syrians. And we were Assyrians and spoke Syriac and Aramaic before we were Arabs. But the Baath regime imposed on us that our mother tongue was *fuṣḥā*. Let me tell you an absurd anecdote. In 2008 Damascus was the capital of Arab culture. A campaign was launched to change the names of the shops. For example, there was a shop where I used to live called “La noisette”. They took the sign down and put a new sign *al-bunduqa*. There was a small restaurant called “el-boulevard”. They took it down and put the sign *al-jādda*. In reaction, people started mocking this campaign and kept calling the places with the old names. ‘Let's go to *la noisette*’, not to *al-bunduqa*. So what happened was a gap between theory and practice in the regime policy. The regime tried to Arabize, to reject globalization. However, it didn't strengthen the Arabic language for real. The strengthening of the Arabic language doesn't occur through a ridiculous Arabization. And it doesn't occur either by banning Kurds and Turkmans from giving their children nationalist names. The official discourse was about *al-ʻurūba, al-ʻurūba, al-ʻurūba* (“arabness, arabness, arabness”) but at the end of the day the ally [of the Syrian government] was Iran and the regime basis was sectarian. Syria was enemies with Jordan, with Lebanon, Saudi, the Gulf countries, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, against all the Arabs. It became obvious that it [the regime discourse] was all empty words. Lies. I think after the fall of the regime the relationship between the people and language will become stronger. […]. Of course the television dramas had a big merit in making the people acquainted with the Damascus dialect. People think that everyone in Syria speaks with the Damascus accent. But in reality in Syria we have more than 400 dialects completely different one another.

51 Here, Fares is voicing the Baathist propaganda.
52 *al-bunduqa* is the Arabic word for hazelnut.
53 *al-jādda* main street. Fares pronounces the word in the vernacular *jādd*.
Francesco: After the revolution, on Facebook, for example, people started using a lot of vernacular. How do you interpret this?

Fares: I'm a writer. I wrote six books, including *mawlāna*, a theatrical piece written in the Syrian vernacular. I sent it to the Syrian Ministry of Culture for approval and they rejected it because it's in the dialect. They said ‘we don't print books in the dialect’. After the revolution a lot of poets started writing in the vernacular. A lot of songs were in the vernacular. A lot of theatre writers like me started writing in the vernacular. These are all attempts to revive the vernacular. It became an identity issue. A symbol of identity.

Francesco: What identity?

Fares: Individual identity. Now the person from Homs who was forced to leave Homs in the 1970s\textsuperscript{54} calls himself Ḥowmṣī\textsuperscript{55}, emphasizing his dialect. He affirms his identity. He's authentic. Social media played an important role as they spread the use of the vernacular in writing. Social media facilitated the use of the vernacular greatly. It became very natural to write in the vernacular.

Francesco: How so?

Fares: Like on Facebook, for example.

Francesco: But you can also write in *fuṣḥā* on Facebook

Fares: You can, but it won't get you as many likes as when you write in the vernacular.

Francesco: Why?

\textsuperscript{54} Fares refers to the policy of *tahjīr* implemented by the Baathist government in the 1970s, and which forced some of the Sunni population out of Homs to relocate Alawites.

\textsuperscript{55} Fares imitates an accent from Homs.
Fares: Because it's far from the people. It always evokes the discourse of the regime. Only the members of the regime write in fusha. Despite the fact that they're allied with Iran, which is a non-Arab country.

3.5.4.7 Dina, Jadal, July 2015

Dina is a 25-year-old Syrian girl of Chechen background who fled to Jordan in 2014. I met her at Jadal, during a farewell party organized for Lina Muhamed and May Skaff, who relocated to France in August 2015. During the party I met several Syrian dissidents, some of whom recited poems in fusha and in the Syrian vernacular. Dina expressed her preference for the poems in the vernacular. The vernacular, she argues, is more direct. It travels faster to the people.

Francesco: I noticed that Syrian dissidents tend to use Arabic on their Facebook pages, rather than English or Arabizi. Before the revolution, instead, they were also using English and Arabizi.

Dina: Correct. Look what happened in Lebanon after the civil war: when the Lebanese people who emigrated abroad come back to Lebanon they speak different languages.

Francesco: do the Syrians use Arabic because they want to maintain their roots? Is it linked to the fact that they want to return?

Dina: Yes, precisely. The Lebanese, in order to free themselves, lost their identity. I write in Arabic because that's how I'm respected. If I write a word in English, one in French and another in Arabic I don't get the same respect. I'm perceived as superficial.

3.5.4.8 Dan, Syria Direct, July 2015

I was introduced to Dan by Dina. Dan is American, in his twenties, speaks fluent Jordanian Arabic, and at the time of the interview had been working for the news agency Syria Direct for a
little over a year. Syria direct, he explained, reports the news from informants who are based inside Syria. Social media and Facebook are important instruments to access these sources.

Francesco: Did you observe any interesting features in the language of Syrian Facebook pages?

Dan: The discourse is extremely ئیدی [“sectarian”], particularly the comments to the posts.

Francesco: Is this something you observed recently or has it been going on since before the revolution?

Dan: I've only been involved in this issue for a little over a year. I've never been to Syria and I don't know how the language was before.

Francesco: Are there any other aspects of the language that you found peculiar?

I noticed that even al-Asad supporters use سکرییه against the official Syrian army. For example, about a year ago a new big shopping mall was inaugurated in Tartous. Some supporters criticized the government on Facebook for opening this mall while there's part of the population who's starving and destitute.

3.5.5 The Face-to-Face Interviews: Discussion

To sum up, I used face-to-face interviews in my research after two years of systematic observation of a limited number of Syrian political Facebook pages, including pro-government and dissident pages. I decided to use this tool after narrowing my focus on Syrian dissidents’ pages, and particularly on how these have been used as a tool to construct the identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians. Conducting participant observation of determined physical sites, such as Jadal and Radio Orient, helped me getting in touch with more informants. Other

56 Tartous is a coastal city and is known to have been a stronghold of al-Asad.
informants, like Nawar Bulbul and Radio Orient staff, were recruited through a snowball technique. Although I introduced myself to all my informants as a doctoral student of Arabic, my interest in a political topic and my repeated presence in the above-mentioned fieldwork sites generated diffidence in some of the participants. However, the majority of the participants trusted me and my intentions. My nationality, my competence in Syrian Arabic and my affiliation to an American institution were perceived positively. More reflections on the implications of my situational and transportable identities (Zimmerman 1998) are offered in the concluding discussion chapter.

Face-to-face interviews were functional to obtaining a better understanding of the “field” I intended to study. Facebook may appear as a limitless, fuzzy set of idiosyncratic practices. However, through interviews and through participant observation I was able to appreciate the offline interactions among the participants. Moreover, I observed that many of the informants “like”, share or comment on other informants’ pages, which reinforced my assumption about the presence of shared practices. Furthermore, through face-to-face-interviews I was able to elicit linguistic perceptions. Most informants showed different levels and features of metalinguistic reflection. Several of them identified vernacular and humor as recurrent features used to code dissent. Fuṣḥā is perceived as “cold” and “distant”, whereas the vernacular is functional to establishing a relationship with “the street”. Some informants elaborated on the function of the vernacular(s). Fares suggested that the vernaculars are a marker of individual identity. The importance of Facebook as a tool to display individuality in public was emphasized by another informant, according to whom Facebook allowed people for the first time to put their own face in

57 Androutsopoulos (2008b: 5) uses the word “field” to refer to “a set of interconnected websites that represent a lifestyle or a social scene on the web”. He uses the term both with reference to the researcher’s “sense of the space in which the fieldwork is carried out” and to “Bourdieu’s (1991) theory of socialization and symbolic capital”.

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a public place, instead of the President’s. Furthermore, informants alluded to a change in the perception of vernaculars. Before the uprising, the Alawite dialect was perceived as the variety used by the regime to intimidate the population and the Damascus dialect as the prestigious, standard dialect.\textsuperscript{58} Other dialects were stigmatized. Vanessa and Nawar suggested that these perceptions changed after the revolution. The local dialects have acquired prestige, by virtue of their link with the periphery, which is where the revolution started.\textsuperscript{59} Moreover, Syrians became more conscious of the government’s use of the coastal and Alawite dialect for coercion purposes. The presence of anti-government Alawites on Facebook reinforced the idea of separation between the Alawite dialect as a regional marker and the use thereof as a symbolic tool of power.\textsuperscript{60}

Finally, one informant, Lina, also pointed my attention to a typographic feature which characterizes “dissidents’ style”, namely the spelling of Syria with an \textit{alif}, in place of a \textit{tā’ marbūṭa}.

3.5.6 Texts

Textual data includes a corpus of posts published on ten Syrian dissidents’ Facebook pages, currently based in Jordan, Europe and Australia. Although systematic observation included a period of time between 2008 and 2015, I narrowed down my analysis to 1) posts published on Maher Alkurdi’s and Nawar Bulbul’s personal pages before March 2011, including their follower’ comments, if any. As explained above, I focused particularly on two dissidents, Maher

\textsuperscript{58} Nawar Bulbul uses the expression \textit{al-lahje al-bayḍā’} (“the white dialect”).

\textsuperscript{59} Wedeen (2013) explains the marginal role of Damascus in the revolution through the ideology of “the good life”, which prevailed in the capital.

\textsuperscript{60} This was also confirmed by Maher Alkurdi in a follow-up interview on Facebook messenger.
Alkurdi and Nawar Bulbul, because I had access to their uninterrupted written production since 2008. The analysis of pre-2011 posts served as a “control set” to assess the emergence of new practices related to the new political context, as well as the level of metalinguistic awareness of the informants. 2) posts published between March 2011 and December 2012. Maher Alkurdi and Nawar Bulbul identified this as a first phase of their subversive writing practices. During this period of time they and several other dissidents were still in Syria and had to use “indirect” strategies to code dissent. Focusing on this time frame was also functional to the analysis of these writing practices in relation with the construction of the dissidents’ identity as authentic Syrians, as opposed to President al-Asad’s allegations, which described them as foreign infiltrators acting on sectarian grounds. Within this timeframe, I conducted a fine-grained analysis of a limited number of posts which exemplify the identity phenomenon under investigation and the linguistic strategies adopted. 3) Addömari’s 25 July 2012 post and comments have been analyzed through Tannen’s (2007) and De Fina’s (forthcoming) participation frameworks. This post was chosen because it highlights an important and recurrent theme in the process of identity construction, namely ṭā’ifiyya (“sectarianism”).

An element which emerged throughout the analysis of texts, and which only in part emerged from face-to-face interviews, is that of ambiguity. Text analysis, as will be discussed in later chapters, revealed a strong presence of bivalent, strategic bivalent and creative forms which did not appear in pre-2011 texts. Moreover, the use of metaphors is present across authors and commenters. Whereas from interviews emerged that informants are aware of the use of the vernacular, and of the shift in the population’s perception of the vernaculars, ambiguity only emerges in terms of the need to speak out indirectly. For example, Nawar mentions a post in which he criticized the government by describing a scene he saw from his balcony, namely the
presence of tanks in the city streets. In the text analysis, ambiguity was operationalized through the notion of hybridity (Rubdy and Alsagoff 2014), which problematizes earlier notions of code-switching.

Ambiguity posed great difficulty in terms of translating and glossing texts. Every time I encountered a bivalent form I was confronted with the decision of what variety to use for transliteration. This ambiguity emerges from the unwovelled Arabic script. A question that accompanies my analysis is to what extent is this ambiguity intentional? In order to solve this issue of representation, and to highlight the presence of these ambiguous forms, I adopted different ad hoc strategies. When a recording of an informant reading out a text was available, I included a line of transcription under the transliteration. Sometimes, I provided a potential transcription of how a term could occur in oral conversation. Other times, when the author made clear vernacular choices through the use of vernacular words or typography, I also provided a vernacular representation of vowel sounds.

3.6 Concluding Discussion

My methodology drew from different approaches of language study. Consistent with Herring’s (2004) Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), I conducted “persistent observation” of Facebook pages over a period of time. This, to use Androutsopolous’s (2008b) terminology, helped me acquire a feel for the field, including the type of material, the repetition of themes, lexicon and unconventional typography. Texts (authors’ posts and followers’ comments) were analyzed through methods of interactional sociolinguistics, which shed light on their participatory function underlying the discursive construction of collective identities, and
particularly that of dissidents as authentic Syrians. To a lesser extent, tools of cognitive linguistics were applied, particularly to construe the frequent use of metaphors and idioms. Moreover, the texts were analyzed in the light of theoretical approaches to diglossia and variation. Particularly, recent studies on language and globalization (Rubdy and Alsagoff 2014) emphasized the notion of hybridity over code-switching. This notion was operationalized in this study in relation with the large presence of ambiguous forms in posts and comments. Hybridity and ambiguity, as emerges from the analysis, are important components in participation in meaning and in the construction of the identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians.

My overarching methodology was particularly informed by online ethnographic approaches, which advocate for the use of ethnographic tools, such as interviews and participant observation, in the study of online texts. This method proved particularly useful in the case of the texts, given the presence of ambiguous, bivalent and Syrian vernacular terms whose meaning is strongly context dependent. Face-to-face interviews were useful to 1) better define what Facebook pages and posts I should focus on, i.e. the “field” (Androutsopoulou 2008b) of investigation; 2) better understand the two levels of contextualization (KhozraivNik and Unger 2016) in which texts are embedded, namely the affordances of Facebook and the broader sociopolitical context; 3) elicit linguistic perceptions by presenting the author and readers with Facebook material. For example, having some informants read out posts helped me on the one hand disambiguate bivalent forms, and, on the other hand, provided information on the variety in which texts are perceived. Another way to elicit linguistic perceptions was to ask informants what they identified as shared features among Syrian dissidents, such as Lina’s observation about the spelling of Syria with an *alif*, which was not perceived by other dissidents. Perceptions shed light on the varied degree of awareness of linguistic variation among informants. Facebook
follow-up interviews were particularly useful to construe the meaning of several ambiguous forms, to understand the meaning of previously dialectal terms I was not familiar with and to keep repeated contact with my informants.

Another conclusion about interviews is of reflexive nature. A focus on these dissidents’ Facebook activity not only highlighted an important segment of communication within the Syrian conflict, but is also consistent with Androutsopolous’s (2008b) recommendation to move the focus of study from the center to the periphery. Despite the initial skepticism, such as Nawar Bulbul’s puzzlement about my interest in his Facebook pages rather than his high literary production, all my informants were very pleased to be part of the study and sometimes even contacted me back to follow up on face-to-face interviews, to send me online material they thought could be interesting for my study, and to put me in contact with other informants. When I explained that their participation would have been anonymous, several informants insisted that I write their name, as they saw this as an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Both Nawar and Maher, after presenting them with their material, were moved because this activity “brought back memories”.

An ethnographic-driven approach to online communication was functional to comprehend the role of the analyzed Facebook texts in the construction of dissidents as authentic Syrians. I justified the choice of the material based on its relevance with the theme of this research, which was investigating the identity construction of dissidents as authentic Syrians, and with the intent of triangulating the information obtained through the interviews. However, the material should be considered as an example of the phenomenon under analysis, based on systematic observation, not on representative quantitative analysis. Large-data quantitative
analysis was complicated by the scarcity of analytic tools for Facebook. To my knowledge, there is no tool that allows saving the content of Facebook pages automatically in a format that allows linguistic analysis.\textsuperscript{61} Hence, the content of individual Facebook pages has been copied and pasted manually on a word file. At times, taking screenshots of these pages was necessary, as Microsoft Word sometimes changes the word order when copying and pasting Arabic script text from other sources. In future studies, this methodology can be integrated with more quantitative tools of analysis.

Another aspect which requires more extensive analysis in future online ethnographic research, is the choice of profile names in relation with the construction of new individual and collective identities. “Names are a good indicator of the subterranean pulse of a group and its palpitations, politically and socially” (Suleiman 2011: 163). While the study of proper names, as emphasized by Suleiman, is an important indicator of collective sociopolitical identity, Facebook names, being chosen directly by the account holder, can provide even more interesting insights on both individual and collective identities.

Throughout the interviews it emerged that some of the informants adopted more or less conscious linguistic strategies in choosing their Facebook profile name. Maher Alkurdi, for example, said that before the uprising his personal page profile name was \textit{Maher Ana}, (“Maher, Me”), and suggested that many Syrians used this username. After the uprising, however, he and changed his name to Maher Alkurdi. The choice of using one’s name could be understood as the need to affirm individual identity in public, as emerged from the interviews. Moreover, all of the informants in my study adopted the Latin script to “transcribe” their name. They often oriented

\textsuperscript{61} I asked several IT experts, who were not able to help me save automatically the posts and the comments of a Facebook page.
their choice towards vernacular realizations. Only a few commenters on addōmari’s 25 July 2012 post used the Arabic script for their profile names. The main reason for not taking names into further consideration in the present study is that these are subject to change. For example, the profile name of the commenters as they appear on the on addōmari’s 25 July 2012 post downloaded in February 2016 may be different from the name used when the post followers posted their comment. In order for their profile names to be included, along with their comment, in the analysis of identity construction, one should consider the names that were used when the comments had been posted.

Finally, this study has not made extensive use of multimodal tools for the analysis of online texts. This is in part motivated by the prevalence in my data of written texts over photos and videos, particularly in a later stage of the uprising. A larger presence of photos and videos was observed in the early phase of the uprising. Building on this insight, future directions of this study could shed light on the role of visual support in the process of identity construction.

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62 For example, Fares, whereby the – ə in the first name evokes a phonetic transcription of an arbitrary vernacular realization, rather than a transliteration from fuṣḥā.

63 In a paper presented at MESA 2012, I observed that pro-regime pages were making larger use of photos than dissidents’ pages. These included gruesome photos of wounded civilians, idyllic photos of rural Syria and symbols of the regime, such as the national flag and photos of the President.
4 PRE-REVOLUTION PRACTICES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the Facebook writing practices of Syrian dissidents’ Maher Alkurdi and Nawar Bulbul before the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011. It focuses on nine posts which exemplify the genre and the linguistic resources of the over sixty posts published by the two authors.\footnote{The term “post” refers to the entire content of the Facebook entry, including the authors’ initial text, or caption, pictures, videos and replies (comments) to the initial text.} Particular attention is devoted to the presence and the construal of “truncated repertoires” (Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005; Blommaert 2010), characterized by the frequent alternation of “bits” of English, ǧ̣uṣ̌ḥa, romanized Arabic script, vernacular Arabic and stylized forms, such as emojis, unconventional punctuation and orthography. These forms appear in concomitance with intertextual and multimodal signs, such as videoclips and pictures, which, in line with Pennycook’s (2007) post-modern – or, trans-modern, as suggested by Blommaert (2010: 18) - terminology, can be better defined as transtextual and transmodal.

The environment in which these texts arise is a super-diverse one. Blommaert (2010: 6-7) borrows the concept of super-diversity from Vertovec (2006: 1), who defines it as a “‘diversification of diversity’ not just in terms of ethnicities and countries of origin but also with respect to a variety of significant variables that affect where, how, and with whom people live”. As posited by Blommaert, “The super-diversity that arises from globalization processes results in communities of people whose repertoires are structured as such: as truncated complexes of resources often derived from a variety of languages, and with considerable differences in the level of development of particular resources”. (2010: 106). Akin to a community which resulted
from unexpected flows of migration, the Facebook pages analyzed bring into communication Syrians from different parts of Syria and the world, including Maher’s friend in Lattakia, his aunt in Europe, as well as Nawar’s followers in Syria and Europe commenting to his posts from Hollywood and other parts of the world. The actors of these texts are of different ages, gender and education background; all these factors contribute to the super-diverse character of their interactions.

The analysis of these posts reinforces Otsuji and Pennycook’s (2014: 85) insights about linguistic diversity not “in terms of convergent multilingualism, but rather as emergent difference”, which led them to consider “hybridity [as] a starting point rather than an end product”. The simultaneous presence of a variety of language resources, as well as ambiguous, bivalent forms (Woolard 1999) reinforces the necessity to focus on hybridity and variation as a starting point. Hybridity is further analyzed in the light of Blommaert’s (2010) notions of scales, polycentricity and orders of indexicality. These texts, it is argued, signal emergent individual identities, which differ from the hegemonic monolingual bias deriving from a strict code separation, and motivated by the Baathist political ideology of constructing a homogenous Syrian and Arab national identity through a policy of Arabization.

Blommaert (2010: 35) explains the concept of scales through the example of an interaction between a student and a professor, already mentioned in the previous chapters. The student’s utterance “I’ll start my dissertation with a chapter reporting on my fieldwork” departs from a lower scale, characterized by the momentary, personal and local features “I” and “my”, which are contrasted by the tutor’s response “we start our dissertations with a literature review
chapter here”, whereby “we” and “here” represent a jump to a higher, translocal, impersonal scale. “Scale-jumping” is an ability regulated by dynamics of power and access to resources.

In order to illustrate the competing presence of different centers of orientations, Blommaert (2010) provides the example of asylum-seeker interviews and resorts to Goffman’s (1981) distinction between focal and non-focal activities. “Interviewees oriented towards ‘the truth’ as defined by situated, densely contextualized realities in countries like Africa, for example, while interviewers oriented towards a particular textual (bureaucratic) ideal of decontextualizable coherence, linearity and factuality” (2010: 40). The interviewees, he argues were not aware that their narratives were being judged compared to the the interviewers’ center, which was non-focal. Similarly, the hybrid forms in the following examples are valued according to other centers than the official one. Blommaert’s (2011) notion of super-vernaculars sheds light on the relationships between these forms and the multiple, alternative centers. Through the repeated deployment of these forms, the participants, it will be argued, make themselves visible as cosmopolitan individuals. The employment of these resources, it is argued, is to be compared with the official language ideology, which emphasizes the use of ِfusḥā underlying a collective Arab “We”. These resource represents an unconscious jump from an Arab collective “We” to cosmopolitan “I’s”.

Text analysis is combined with information obtained through Facebook chat interviews with the text authors. From the interviews emerges an unconscious use of hybrid forms, as opposed to a higher level of metalinguistic awareness encountered in post-revolution practices. The inability of Maher and Nawar to motivate their linguistic choices, such as the use of the coastal vernacular feature َqāf, exemplifies the lower degree of awareness. Conversely, overt talk about these features alludes to a shift of indexicality, marked by the presence of “more reflexive
identity work” Johnstone et al. (2006: 78). While in the pre-revolution phase hybridity indexes a cosmopolitan identity, post-revolution hybrid practices are functional to the construction of the identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians, as will be discussed in the next chapters.

4.2 Supervernaculars

The examples analyzed in this chapter are characterized by the presence of several linguistic forms which may be defined in the light of Blommaert’s (2011: 3) notion of supervernaculars, namely “semiotic forms that circulate in networks driven, largely, by new technologies such as the Internet and mobile communication devices”. Supervernaculars, as posited by Blommaert, constitute “the sociolinguistic resources [of] new deterritorialized yet real communicative communities” (2011: 4). Blommaert characterizes them as “englobalized-deglobalized” forms. Whilst they may have initially been conceived for global consumption, they always appear in a deglobalized context. Blommaert also uses the term “accented” to refer to the process of localizing a global form. Underlying the use of this term is an idea of globalization as an ideological concept of standardization. “Globalization is an abstract process” (2011: 5). In other words, it subsumes to the concept of globalization as something we can only perceive empirically through its local declinations. Blommaert exemplifies the concept of supervernacular in connection with the term “supergroups”. These are groups which do not share similar geographic and cultural background, and therefore look less and less like a community of speech, and who, despite their deterritorialization, developed similar, fully functioning communication strategies.

2 Blommaert explains that the term “supervernacular” was first coined by Karel Arnaut and first used in writing by Wang & Varis (2011) and Velghe (2011).
The term “super” in “supervernacular” is different from its occurrence in “superdiversity”. As explained by Blommaert, who credited Alistair Pennycook for this insight, the latter describes a type of acceleration which can be understood under the term “hyper”, whereas the former is to be understood under the prefix “trans”. An example of supervernacular, as explained by Blommaert, is English. When English is used by a deterritorialized community, such as a group of videogame players composed of participants from different parts of the world, what we observe is “a little bit of” of English, or dialectal, localized realizations of an idealized standard supervernacular. Blommaert suggests that “the usage of this ‘language’ is a never-ending process of ‘enregisterment’ which never actually yields a stable and shared ‘register’.” (2011: 5). Blommaert calls these vernacular realizations of the standard supervernacular “accented”. “We never hear ‘standard’ English, we always hear ‘English with an accent’, inflected and dialected English” (Id.). An interesting point made by Blommaert is that in all the local declinations of the supervernacular, users tend to orient towards an “accentless” norm, or “the best recognizable variety”. “This occurs even in contexts where clear and unambiguous standard codes are dominant and where users consciously and deliberately deviate from these standards. We shall see that such perceived deviations – anti-normativities – are actually just deviations at one particular scale level, and that they develop and derive their effectiveness from close observation of another set of (often quite rigorous) norms at another scale level. Subcultures react and rebel against the dominant culture and its norms, but they have their own strict norms”. (Id.)

3 Blommaert makes particular reference to the idea of “globalized English” as the lingua franca of globalized new and social media.
Supervernaculars, Blommaert posits, are linguistic and sociolinguistic systems, “tied to sociolinguistic rules of appropriateness and orders of indexicality” (2011: 9). While they violate higher scale norms, they adhere to norms which constitute a subcultural, lower scale level.

We do observe rigorously ordered indexicalities here. They occur, therefore, in a communicative environment which is polycentric and while they have validity in relation to one center – the subcultural center – they are denied legitimacy in relation to another one – that of the nation-state or the formal education system. Their normativity, orderliness and affordances are socially, culturally and politically niched. (Ibid.)

It will be argued that the superdiverse environment of Facebook facilitated the emergence of subcultural practices represented by the large and simultaneous presence of different linguistic resources, whose function cannot be fully understood but through their simultaneous occurrence. The analysis of pre-revolution data will build on Blommaert’s notions on polycentricity, with a focus on simultaneity (Woolard 1999). It will show how writing practices on Facebook challenged the enforced code separation (Arabic/non-Arabic, written/spoken, fuṣḥā/Syrian vernacular) as well as the representation of diglossia as a continuum between a low and a high variety, distributed horizontally and “equally”. What is hypothesized is the presence of multiple tensions and orientations, which are imbued in a socio-political context characterized by dynamics of power and inequality.

It is posited that simultaneity in pre-uprising Facebook revolution practices does not emerge in a social vacuum. Rather, it is sustained by centers of orientation which are in contrast with the dominant, hegemonic ones. As emerged from the interviews,4 the Syrian government carried out a policy of cultural hegemony by enforcing a separation between fuṣḥā, the dialects, and minority languages,5 as well as by making fuṣḥā visible, for example through the campaign

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4 In particular, see interview with Fares, chapter 3.
5 Also cf. Miller (2003).
launched to Arabize business names in 2008. Underlying this policy is a monolingual bias which the hybrid practices analyzed purported to challenge. These practices can be understood as a result of the contradiction represented by the implementation of hegemonic practices of control and separation in concomitance with a neoliberal political system. This contradiction is well expressed in Wedeen’s (2013) notion of “Neoliberal autocracy”. These forms, it is argued, prepared the terrain for a more reflexive use of the language. In other words, for an indexical shift which observed in post-uprising practices.

4.3 Maher Alkurdi’s Personal Page, September 2010-March 2011

The oldest post available on Maher Alkurdi's Facebook page is dated in September 2010. Between September 2010 and March 2011, Maher published thirty-two posts. 1) seventeen posts contain a text written by Maher in fuṣḥā. Two of these also contain comments in fuṣḥā by Maher and his Facebook friends. Moreover, two other texts are translations of Shakespeare's aphorisms; 2) three show a post caption written by Maher which contains bivalent and vernacular forms; 3) five include a video of an Arabic love song or the trailer of an Arabic soap opera, and are followed by comments in fuṣḥā and the Syrian vernacular; one has no captions or comments; 4) seven posts contain English texts, drawn from American movies and songs; one post includes a video of an Arab soap opera without comments. The main theme which characterizes all the posts is women and love. Social and political issues are absent.
4.3.1 Maher Alkurdi – 16 September 2010 – Example 1

In the following post, Maher quotes the line by famous Algerian female novelist Ahlam Mosteghanemi “To sit and write in a public place is like making love on a squeaky iron bed”, drawn from her novel ܟܘܕܐ ܒܠ-ܚܘܒܐš (“Chaos of the senses”). Maher clarified that he did not write the source because he either forgot or because he knew that the quotation was so famous that readers would immediately recognize it as hers. As explained in the “About” section of her official Facebook page, which is currently followed by 8,116,212 people, Ahlam Mosteghanemi is the first Algerian novelist who wrote in Arabic and the first contemporary female Arab novelist whose books sold millions of copies throughout the past thirty years. Her novels encompass political, historical and love themes.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi also quoted her lines on a post published on her official Facebook page on 4 November 2010. The number of likes (1,207, as of October 19, 2015) as well as her fans' comments attest the popularity of these lines.

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7 Maher Alkurdi. Private Facebook chat, October 19, 2015  
8 https://www.facebook.com/Ahlam.Mostghanemi/info/?tab=page_info  
9 https://www.facebook.com/Ahlam.Mostghanemi/posts/115419468520945
Maher re-contextualizes Mosteghanemi’s prose lines by writing them in verses and by collocating them after a humorous post in the Syrian vernacular on love and women and before two humorous posts in fuṣḥā which contain respectively an ode to a cigarette and an ode in which he compares his beloved to coffee. The language variety of the original line, which is maintained in Maher's post, is fuṣḥā. While in Mosteghanemi’s novel this line was embedded in a humorless context, - in which the narrator describes how she observed a man absorbed in writing in a coffee shop - the humorous tone of the posts preceding and following Maher's post may suggest that the post was intended to be perceived as humorous, too. Moreover, this constitutes one of Maher's first writing practices on Facebook, and therefore “to sit and write in a public place” may be interpreted as “to write on Facebook”. The post is followed by the comment in fuṣḥā “lafta tastawjib al-intibāh” (“a gesture which deserves attention”), which probably refers to the gesture of writing in public and the reaction it may trigger.

However, this type of humor is different from the sukhrīyye which emerged from the interviews with Maher as a result of metalinguistic reflection which accompanied the post-

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revolution writing practices. Similarly, unconventional punctuation, which in this post is represented by the use of two commas (line 2) and the five dots following the comment, is object of metalinguistic reflection in the post-revolution phase, as emerges from an interview with Maher, in which he claims that the punctuation found in *addōmarī* is a creative tool to affirm his individuality as writer.\(^{11}\)

Humor, intertextual references and unconventional punctuation in this post seem to carry different values than similar devices used in the post-revolution phase. The intertextual reference to a non-Syrian female author has a translocal connotation which indexes a cosmopolitan identity. To use Blommaert’s (2010) terminology, these devices are part of a truncated repertoire whose resources belong to a different indexical order than the official one, which is based on code separation and the predominance of *fuṣḥā* over dialects and other minority languages. Nevertheless, these forms carry validity and index identities which are valued in a subcultural sense. In this post and comment, *fuṣḥā* is embedded in a humorous context and surrounded by posts containing heterogeneous linguistic forms. These forms orient towards centers which need to be sought within a socio-political context which on the one hand tolerates the use of Western social media and the international influences, and on the other imposes a local, Syrian and Arab identity.

4.3.2 Maher Alkurdi – 22 September 2010 – Example 2

The following post is a two-line love poem in *fuṣḥā*. The author ironically narrates that he missed a girl and that he decided to kiss the wall instead. The three exclamation marks at the end

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\(^{11}\) Interview with Maher Alkurdi, Graz, September 2015.
of the second line probably serve to emphasize the ironic tone. His friend's comment sarcastically refers to Maher's beloved as someone who has no sentiments.

Comments:

Rawaa Alhagar

the-important that-you NEG-past hurt with-kiss-your chill feelings-her
The important thing is that you didn't harm the coldness of her feelings with your kiss

Both the post and the comment are in fuṣḥā, and the tone is sarcastic. The girl to whom Maher refers is not someone he had a relationship with or he was in love with. “I was simply joking with her by telling her that she has no feelings, like a wall”.¹² As in the previous example, Maher and his friend use fuṣḥā, unconventional punctuation and humor. However, Maher could not motivate the use of these devices, which suggests the absence of a reflexive use of these resources. Moreover, it is worth noting that the use of fuṣḥā does not inherently index humor.

Rather, it is the combination of *fuṣḥā*, unconventional punctuation and humor which are meaningful as a whole. It is interesting to compare Maher’s use of *fuṣḥā* and humor here with his use of the vernacular and humor in his revolutionary page *addōmarî*. The combined use of vernacular and humor emerges during the interviews as a conscious strategy. Moreover, in both phases meaning emerges from a hybrid combination of resources.

The necessity to look at these resources as non-discrete elements recalls Otsuji and Pennycook’s (2014: 85) remarks on language hybridity as “emergent difference”, rather than “convergent multilingualism”. In Maher’s pre-revolution Facebook practices, hybridity contributes to the portrayal of himself as a goofy, carefree young man, who jokes about love and women. As emerges from the example below, this is also consistent with the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. This cosmopolitan identity, indexed by the use of Western multimodal resources and the English language, is interesting in the light of Syria’s socio-political context, described by Wedeen (2013) as a “neoliberal autocracy”. This aspect will be discussed further below.

4.3.3 Maher Alkurdi – 29 September 2010 – Example 3

In the following post, Maher uploaded the video clip of what appears to be an American television drama with *fuṣḥā* subtitles. The actual movie sound is muted and replaced by a corny soundtrack, namely English pop singer Shayne Ward's love song “No promises”. The post caption contains bivalent (red), English loan words transcribed in Arabic (blue), Syrian vernacular (black) and English words in Latin alphabet (brown). As will become clearer in the discussion below, the author's graphic choices suggest an intention to represent a vernacular

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13 Towards the end of the video appears the logo of the American Broadcasting Corporation “ABC”.
realization. Specifically, an unmarked Damascus realization. The second line of the gloss is my interpretation of the author's intention, and represents a possible Damascus Arabic realization.

The caption is followed by a brief exchange between Maher and his aunt.

Maher Alkuri uploaded a new video: No promises.
September 29, 2010 · JA

No promises
有种承诺 影片 No promises
我们承诺 你想要了解之前了解的情况
Here's the song “no promises”, but I made the clip

Maher Alkuri
September 29, 2010 · 2:08pm · Like

2 people like this.

Shaam Majedi azdak illi 12brt 7777
mouaaaaaaaaaaan
September 29, 2010 at 2:00pm · Like

Maher Alkuri
September 29, 2010 at 2:08pm · Like

اغنية
no promises
ughnyat no promises bas ill-klib ana ‘āmlo
song no promises but the-clip I made-it

Here's the song “no promises”, but I made the clip

وإزتمليت هالكلف كان اهداء لحنن بعرف حالو
wa’et ‘amalt hal-klib kān ihdā’ la-ḥadan by‘arif ḥālo

14 The waw is used as a vernacular representation of the fushā masculine singular suffix pronoun -hu. I adopted Cowell's (1964) transcription using the short vowel “o”.

115
at time I-made the-clip was dedicated to-one ASP-he-knows his stuff
*When I made it, it was for someone who knows who I'm talking about*

**Comments:**

**Shaam Majedi**

azdak 2lii t2brni ????
intention-your for-me you-bury-me
you mean for me, you're too cute/you're too much
how cute, was it for me????

mouaaaaaaaaaaah
mwwaahh

**Maher Alkurdi**

hahahahahaha

mwwaaahh 'elbi
mwwaaahh heart-my
mwwaaahh my dear

Both the caption and the comments are characterized by a mixture of different linguistic varieties and graphic styles. In the first line of the caption, the word *ughnya* (“song”) has a counterpart in the Syrian vernacular, which is *ghanniyye*. However, both variants are used in Damascus spoken Arabic. This bivalent expression is followed by the title of the song written in English. The rest of the post is in Damascus Arabic. The word *wa’et* (“time”) is spelled with the letter *hamza* instead of the *qāf*, probably in order to reflect the Damascus realization of this word.\(^{15}\) The word *klīb* is an Arabic graphic representation of the word “clip”, which has recently become part of the

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\(^{15}\) Although the pronunciation of the glottal stop in words that normally carry a *qāf* in their *fushā* counterpart is a characteristic of many Levantine urban dialects (see Behnstedt 1997, Map 9: 18-19 and Habib 2010), I refer to it here as Damascus Arabic, since Damascus is Maher's city of provenance and Damascus Arabic has acquired prestigious status over other Syrian vernaculars which share the same feature.
Arabic linguistic landscape.\textsuperscript{16} The choice of the letter \textit{b} is motivated by the absence of the phoneme \textit{p} in Arabic and by the lack of a graphic sign to represent it. Finally, the word \textit{ḥadan} (“someone”) is a Damascus realization of the \textit{fuṣḥā} word \textit{aḥad}, another common Syrian realization being \textit{ḥadā}. The caption is followed by a smiling \textit{emoji}, which contributes to framing the text as jovial, humorous and friendly.

The comments also present interesting linguistic choices. The first comment is a representation of the Syrian vernacular in Latin fonts. Such a graphic choice is known as \textit{arabizi}, a term whose coinage may be interpreted either as a combination of the words ‘\textit{arabī} (“Arabic”) and \textit{inglīzi} (“English”) or of the words “Arab Easy”, and which is defined as “Arabic text that is written using Latin characters” (Darwish 2014: 217). The absence of the \textit{fuṣḥā} voiceless uvular \textit{qāf} at the beginning of the word \textit{azdak} (“you mean”) and the coarticulation of the \textit{sād} in the phoneme \textit{z} are typical of the Damascus realization of the \textit{fuṣḥā} term \textit{qaṣduka} (“your opinion”).\textsuperscript{17} The number “2” in the word \textit{2lii} represents the letter \textit{hamza} (Id.) which, in the non-romanized vernacular realizations is used to indicate the glottal stop in place of the uvular \textit{qāf}. This feature is found in most Damascus Arabic words whose \textit{fuṣḥā} counterpart contains a \textit{qāf}.\textsuperscript{18} For example, the following word, \textit{t2brni} (“you're too cute/you're too much”), is related to the \textit{fuṣḥā} lemma \textit{qabara}, which literally means “to bury”. In Syrian and Lebanese Arabic this idiomatic expression is a term of endearment which has no literal equivalent in English. It can be paraphrased as “you are so cute that I wish I could die before you, so I would not miss you”. The comment concludes with the onomatopoeic word \textit{mouaaaaaaaaaaaaah} “mwaahh”. Maher replies

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} See Odisho (2005) for a discussion on the use of Arabic long vowels to transliterate English vowel sounds.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Some informants identified the realization of the \textit{sād} as \textit{z} as “Damascus Arabic”. However, I have not yet found this phonological feature documented in the literature on Syrian Arabic.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} According to Daher (1998: 195-196), in Damascus Arabic the \textit{qāf} is more likely to be pronounced in low-frequency words. Drawing on Holes (1995), he defines low-frequency words as “words with highly specialized meaning, […] used in very narrow contexts”, such as “\textit{ḥuqan}” (“injections”). Moreover, Daher observed that the realization of \textit{qāf} with a glottal stop is more frequent among women than men. This gender distinction has also been observed in other urban dialects (see, for example, Al-Wer: 2002, 2007).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
to this comment using the Arabic alphabet. He starts with the onomatopoeic word “hahahaha”, continues with “mwaahh” and concludes the comment with the word ’elbī (lit. “my heart”, idiomatically for “my dear”), using the Arabic letter hamza to represent the Damascus Arabic glottal stop.

The song title “no promises”, the English soundtrack and the video of the American soap opera which was easily accessible to Maher through the internet, may be also understood as the result of an englobalized-and-deglobalized realization. Despite its global appearance, which can be thought as an abstraction, the song title appears embedded in a local Damascus Arabic context, which alludes to a process of deglobalization and adaptation to a local context. Similarly, the emoji is a symbol created for global communication on mobile devices and social media. Its meaning, however, is always locally situated. In fact, it is impossible to determine the exact function of this emoji without understanding how Maher intended it and how it was perceived by the reader.

Another type of englobalized-and-deglobalized realization is the deployment of arabizi. The “global” form, this time, is not English, but the romanized script. Representing the vernacular with the Latin alphabet has been the object of heated debates within the framework of linguistic ideology, which are embedded in issues of local and national identity. As suggested by Blommaert (2011: 7), ergonomic and economic reasons certainly yielded the emergence and the diffusion of mobile texting codes. Nevertheless, he noted that despite the fact that initial technological restrictions were solved, these codes survived. Moreover, texting codes are the subject of sociolinguistic evaluations “and quite commonly identified as a scapegoat whenever teachers and authorities bemoan the perceived decline of (standard) writing competences” (Id.).

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19 See, for example, Salameh (2010) about Sa‘īd ‘Aql's experiment to write the Lebanese vernacular in the Latin alphabet.
Similarly, the need to overcome technological restrictions certainly accounts for the emergence and diffusion of *arabizi*; however, this instrumental motivation also has important sociolinguistic implications. *Arabizi* emerged as a special code to communicate on mobile phones and social media, which means that it “[was] at some level prepared to go global” (Blommaert 2011: 5). However, what we observe is always a deglobalized inflection of it. In my data, in fact, *arabizi* is always used to represent a local vernacular realization.

Whilst it could be argued that instrumental reasons underlie the use of *arabizi*, more insight about its sociolinguistic implications derives from the absence, in the Arabic script, of vernacular forms which could also be easily represented by means of the Arabic script. For example, the Arabic script is equipped with the graphic symbols to represent the phoneme $\ddot{z}$ and the glottal stop. However, these vernacular realizations rarely occurred in the pre-uprising data analyzed. As brought to bear by Gonzalez-Quijano (2014: 164-165), “writing in Arabizi became a status symbol among young urban, Western-educated Arabs to show – and sometimes to show off – their modernity […]. Like many cultural artifacts and productions of contemporary Arab culture in the fields of music or visual arts, Arabizi deliberately assumed a globalized hybridity. As many users explained when asked about their reasons for adopting it, writing in Arabizi on a digital screen is not only easier but is also different; […].”

Moreover, Gonzalez-Quijano (2014: 164-165) observed that *arabizi* “allows one to phrase the way one feels and thinks without becoming entangled in the inhibiting rules of so-called 'classical Arabic', associated for centuries with social distinction in Bourdieu's terms”.

While this may explain Maher's friends' representation of the $\ddot{q}\dot{a}f$ when they are writing in the Arabic script and its elision when using *arabizi*, Maher often avoids writing the $\ddot{q}\dot{a}f$ when writing in the vernacular, as shown in the following example.
The following post is a brief aphorism about women, whose meaning is obscure to Maher’s friend Rawaa, from Damascus.

کل النساء لهن إذا ما تعرین ... رائحة واحدة
all the women have the same scent when they get undressed...

Comments:

Rawaa Alhagar

مع اني ما فهمت شو قصدك
ma’ annī mā fähimtu20 shū qāṣād21
despite that-I NEG understood what intend-you
despite the fact that I didn't understand what you mean

Maher Alkurdi

20 The Arabic writing leaves ambiguities whether the word should be interpreted as ḥāṣ or SCA. The ḥāṣ pronunciation would be fahimtu. I represented a Syrian vernacular realization, as the insertion of the helping vowel /i/ in the last syllable demonstrates.
21 The word could be read in ḥāṣ as qāṣādak, or, since it is in final position, as qāṣādak.
Despite that NEG is a-woman NEG she-understood intend-I imagine-you?  
Despite the fact that there's no woman who did not understand what I meant? Go figure

And despite that clear very imagine-you?  
And despite the fact that it's very clear, really? Go figure

But if you are determined that I explain more then nooooo hahah  
But if you are determined that I explain, [then] NO! Hahaha

Maher’s post is in fuṣḥā. The comments, however, present Syrian vernacular and bivalent elements. The last comment, by Hubbs Iman, is in capitalized arabizi. Rawaa liked the post, but, as she explained in the comment, she did not understand what Maher meant by it. Her comment starts with bivalent forms ma‘ anni mā fhimit (“Despite the fact that I did not understand”). The expression ma‘ annī, at first glance, may appear as bivalent. This perception of bivalency is induced by the fact that it is pronounced the same way in Syrian vernacular and fuṣḥā. However, the lack of the hamza in the word annī suggests a vernacular reading. Conversely, mā fhimit belongs graphically to both Syrian vernacular and fuṣḥā and only an oral pronunciation can provide disambiguation.22 The following expression shū qasdak (“what you mean”) is also worth

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22 Some could argue that, prescriptively, the apocopate form lam afham is preferable in fuṣḥā, and that the perfect form is of vernacular influence.
analyzing. The word *shū* is in the Syrian vernacular. The following word, however, could be read in *fuṣḥā* as *qaṣdakə*, or, since it is in final position, as *qaṣdak*. The latter can also reflect a non-Damascene vernacular realization. An unmarked Damascene realization, in fact, would see the *qāf* replaced by a glottal stop. The graphic and the oral effects contribute to a simultaneous perception, which is reinforced by the co-presence of vernacular and bivalent elements.\(^{23}\)

Maher’s reply to her comment presents a striking predominance of Syrian vernacular. It is worth noting that in all the words containing a *qāf* (*aṣdī*, “I mean”, and *mtāṣṣide*, “determined”), this is represented through an *alif*, which reflects the Damascus vernacular realization. Moreover, Maher’s choice of spelling the word *annō* (in *fuṣḥā*: *annahu*) in the expression *maʾ annō* (“despite”) reflects a vernacular choice that distances itself from Rawaa’s *annī*, whose pronunciation is both Syrian vernacular and *fuṣḥā*. Interestingly, when I asked Maher to motivate his marked vernacular choices, he was not able to, which suggests a low degree of awareness of the indexical values associated with his use of the vernacular. Maher's unawareness suggests an internalized use of this feature on his side. In the same comment, the word *nōōōō* (“noooo”) is also worth noting. It could be interpreted as the opposite direction of *arabizi*. While the latter is an Arabic word in Latin fonts, this is an English word written in Arabic fonts. Maher motivated this choice as follows:\(^{24}\)

Maher: My friend Rawaa uses it
Francesco: Is it only Rawaa, or do other people say or write “no” in English instead of using the Arabic word *lā*?
Maher: Also some other people use it. They also say “yes” and write it in Arabic fonts. It’s a way to give themselves airs.

\(^{23}\) The choice of the word co-presence is preferred to Auer’s (2007) notion of alternation. Vernacular and bivalent layers are, in fact, co-present, rather than just alternated.

\(^{24}\) Facebook chat, April 11, 2016.
Francesco: Also your friend Rawaa uses it to give herself airs?
Maher: Hehe, maybe.
Francesco: And you used it to imitate her style?
Maher: Yes.

Akin to the use of marked Damascus features, Maher does not use the English word nōōōōō to index a specific social type or pursue a particular ideology.²⁵ By imitating his friend’s style, he is accommodating her style to build rapport. This rather unaware strategy of Maher’s to imitate his friends’ styles to build rapport is also evident in the next example.

4.3.5 Maher Alkurdi - 1 March 2011 – Example 5

Maher published the video of a love song by Syrian pop singer from Lattakia ʿUdhayna al-ʿAlī preceded by the caption “99999”. Maher probably uses it to indicate enthusiasm and appreciation

²⁵ For example, it could be argued that this use is linked to either an appreciation or a criticism of Westernization. This stance, however, never emerged from the interviews with Maher, nor can it be implied from his linguistic performance.
for the song. One of the commenters is surprised by his use of this code, as she argues that it is a private code invented by other mutual friends.

Loïena Makhou

March 1, 2011 at 10:14pm · Like

Hahahaha lak ṭalʿat btʿarif maʿnā al999999?

Hahahaha look you-turned-out you-know meaning the-999999?

Hahahaha look now it turns out you know the meaning of 9999999?

Maher Alkurdi

March 1, 2011 at 10:37pm · Like

Hahahahahaha bi-Allah shū Lannūsh ṭabʿan baʿrīf innū allixirīhī hāl-ghaniyye madrī kīf bṭḥassisnī
Hahahahahaha by-God what Lannush of-course I-know that allixirīhī this-song dunno how it-makes-me-feel

Hahahahahaha God Lannush, of course I know that...God I can’t even express, this song makes me feel so...

Loïena Makhou

March 1, 2011 at 10:42pm · Like

Ahāā Ahāāhāāā lākin aāmāna qullī mīn khabrāk? W baʿdēn bqillak lēsh ʿam isālak ħās-suʿāl:)))

Ahaa hahahaha but really tell-me who told-you? And then I-tell-you why asp. I-ask-you this-question:)))

Hahahahaha but really tell me, who told you? Then I’ll tell you why I’m asking you this question:)))

26 This nickname for his friend is used as a term of endearment.
27 This is a vernacular word originally from the coast. Maher explained it to me as “oh God”. It corresponds to ilāḥī in fushā.
Hahahaha aywāāāā shaklō ði inna bi-l-mōwdū‘ Hahahaha alright it-seems there-is inna in-the-topic
Hahahaha alright sounds like there’s something fishy about it

tayyeb mmmmmmm Dandūnī khabbaretñī
Ok mmmmmmm Dandūnī told-me
Ok, Dandūnī told me.
quīlí lēsh?
Tell-me why?
Now tell me why

Loïna Makhoul
لأنو ال شوووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووووо
Hahahahaha
Hahahahaha

Lēsh intī mā bta'rifī innō Dandūnī mā btkhibbī ‘annī shī ?
Why you not know that Dandūnī not she-hides from-me anything ?
Why, don’t you know that Dandūnī doesn’t hide anything from me ?

Allāmīth dakhīlā Dandūnī l-ḥobb
My God! Keep-her Dandūnī the-love
My God! God preserve the love for Dandūnī

Loïena Makhoul

March 1, 2011 at 11:28pm · Like

Hahahahaha allāmīth dakhīlālālā
Hahahahaha Gooooood preserve-her

Hahahahaha God preserve her!!

The interaction between Maher and his friend Lannūsh is predominantly in the Syrian vernacular. In his reply to her first comment, Maher uses the word *alīmīth*, which, as explained by Maher, corresponds to the word *ilāhā* in *fuṣḥā* “God” and is used in the coastal dialects as an interjection meaning “Oh God”. Maher explained that his use of this coastal word is motivated by the fact that his friend Lannūsh is from the coast. Akin to his imitation of his friend’s “cosmopolitan style” in the previous example, here Maher accommodates his friend’s vernacular to signal rapport.
The following post is in the Syrian vernacular. As in previous posts, Maher is addressing a girl who allegedly took offense one day because he did not say goodbye to her. Maher ridicules her reaction narrating an anecdote in which he says goodbye to a street vendor's donkey which passed by his house while he was standing on the balcony thinking of her.

1) مبارح كنت وانف عالبلكون و عم اتزكرك
mbāriḥ kint wā’īf ‘al-balkōn... w ‘am itzakkarik
yesterday I was standing on the-balcony and ASP-remember you
yesterday I was standing on the balcony thinking of you

2) بالصدفة بيمر واحد عم بيع خيار عالحمار
biṣ-ṣudfe bimurr wāhēd ‘am ybī’ khyār ‘al-ḥimār
by-chance passes one ASP-he sells cucumbers on-the-donkey
and all of a sudden passes the man who sells the cucumbers on his donkey

3) و عم بنادي يبدي الخيار تعا ودعوو
w ‘am yinādī baladī l-khyār ta’ā w da’ū
and ASP-he shouts local the-cucumbers come and taste
and shouts “local cucumbers! come and taste!”

4) اتذكرت اديش اديدنت ودت الي ما ودعتك
itzakkaret addēsh ad’ēt wa’et illī mā wad’atik
I-recalled how-much I was-upset time which NEG I-say farewell

I recalled how I was upset the time I didn't come to say goodbye
Maher employs the Syrian vernacular throughout the entire post. Moreover, the graphic representation of local features, such as the glottal stop in \textit{wā'if} (“standing”, first line), \textit{addēsh} (“how much” in line four) and the coarticulation of the emphatic sound \textit{dād} in the word \textit{ad’ēt} (“I was upset”), confer to the text a Damascus accent. Maher makes a consistent use of these Damascene features, particularly the use of a hamza or an alif to represent the Damascene glottal stop, throughout his Facebook writing practices in the vernacular. As will be shown in the next chapters, these local graphic choices to represent Damascus Arabic realizations accompany Maher's humorous style throughout his \textit{addōmari} page, and will be motivated by Maher as an intentional choice to use the vernacular to convey \textit{sukhrīyye}.\footnote{This term, which occurred often during the interviews with Maher, is explained in more detail in the next chapter.}

However, this performance of the locality assumes a different value in his post-revolution practices. On February 2, 2012, the same post will be re-published in Maher's public page \textit{addōmari}. However, it is reframed within the context of the revolution. Instead of comparing the girl to the donkey, the comparison is between the donkey and Bashar al-Asad. Through the insertion of the word “\textit{saqaṭṭa}” (“you fell”), Maher establishes an intertextual link with the Arab spring slogan \textit{ish-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ an-nizām} (“the people want the fall of the regime”). This intertextual reference is the cue to interpret the subversive message.
4.4 Nawar Bulbul's Page

Between November 2008 and March 2011, Nawar published forty posts on his personal public page. In the vast majority of the posts Nawar boasts about his professional achievements, such as his work travels to the USA, Europe and Japan, his awards, and announcements about his upcoming shows. In 2008, while he was still acting in the popular Syrian drama show Bāb al-Ḥāra, Nawar only published posts including photos of his character. An exception to this theme is one post, which will be taken into consideration below to exemplify the linguistic choices which characterized Nawar's page, in which Nawar tells a Syrian joke, which, like all Syrian jokes, has as a protagonist a person from Homs, Nawar's home city. The tone of Nawar's posts and comments during this time frame is informal. Nawar dismissed his writing practices in this phase as *ghalīḍ* ("dull"). The main linguistic features identified are: 1) Syrian vernacular vocabulary and grammar structures, 2) the use of the Arabic script, which renders some elements bivalent, 3) the presence of *fuṣḥā* elements embedded in a Syrian vernacular sentence, 4) comments in *arabizi* and 4) English. Nawar mainly used the Arabic script. Only sporadically did he resort to *arabizi* in the comments, and he claimed that he did so for technical reasons. These features will be analyzed and discussed in the examples below.

4.4.1 Nawar Bulbul – 11 August 2009 – Example 7

In this post Nawar tells a joke about a Homsi, namely a person from the Syrian city of Homs, which is also Nawar's hometown. The Homsi is the stereotypical protagonist of most Syrian jokes. Jokes are typically an oral genre. However, this post appears in a written format. The post is followed by seven comments, all in *arabizi*, except for Nawar's comment, which is composed
in Arabic script. The transcription from Arabic of short vowels is an attempt to reflect a vernacular pronunciation, whereby the words and the texts contain elements that clearly indicate the intention to represent the vernacular. In *arabizi*, numbers are used to transcribe phonemes which do not have an equivalent sign in the Latin alphabet, such as “7” for the pharyngeal ʰ, “2” for the glottal stop, “5” for the uvular ƙ, “6” for the emphatic ᵗ and “3” for the voiced pharyngeal fricative ‘ayn.³⁰

³⁰ See Darwish (2014).
a fish from it. His friend goes and says: well, for sure there's a sea!

Comments:

Uonneijajj Kkehwatee
shu zaki w kteeeer 7emsi hal 7emsi :))
how clever and veeeeery Homsi this Homsi :))
how clever and very Homsi this Homsi :))

Nagham S Ghanem
hahahahaha, lak yo2berni rabbak ya homsi kifak wla kalb eshta2telak ktir .. bosat
hahahahaha, look bury-me lord-your oh homsi how-are-you oh dog miss-you a-lot .. kisses
hahahahaha, you're too much, Homsi, what's up with you prick? I missed you! Kisses

Nawar Bulbul
انت وحدة فاقدة مقتضيتها على صياعة ياسبانيا على اساس عم تشتغلي بس مع زلك خلال علي
inti wahde faqsa maqhaytiha sya’a31 bi isbания ‘alā asās ‘am tishtaglī bas ma’ zālik ḥelāl
‘alā32
you one bitch what-you spend-it hanging out in Spain on ground ASP-you work but with this good
on-you
you’re a bitch buming around in Spain pretending to work but hey, good for you!

Farhan Homs
كبيبيبيبيبيه
kimīfak
What's up!!!

اشتكال
ishtaqnālak
we missed you

Muhanad Al Hajjar
ya a5e 7amasna ......
oh brothers Homsi ....

Oh Homsi brother...

Mohammad Abdullah
shbon 17masne ibn 5alti 3al 2alel mo showam 17amdo lelah
what with the Homsis cousin-my at least NEG Damascenes thank God

31 This expression was unknown to a non-Syrian informant. I assume it is a Syrian and probably Lebanese expression.
32 A Syrian informant read this expression as ḥelāl ‘alēk (“good for you”). I assume that the lack of the final kāf in the original is a typo by the author.
what is wrong with the Homsis, my cousin, at least they're not Damascenes

Mohammad Abdullah
allah ysam7ak ya abo alnoor na2sna ya3ni ma bikafi alghareeb kaman anta
allah permit oh abo alnoor we well NEG enough strange you too

Please Abo Alnoor,\(^{33}\) as if we weren't already strange enough you rub it in?

Muhanad Al Hajjar
lesh shbon alshwam wla
why what with the Damascenes wla\(^{34}\)
why, what's with the Damascenes?

ah yse7lak\(^{35}\) ba3den shlon 3am ta36e 3alana u amak mn 3anna
ah yse7lak then how ASP give us and mom-your from us
ah yse7lak you make fun of us but remember that your mom is one of us!

In this post Nawar makes graphic choices which suggest an attempt to represent the vernacular, such as the word *qillo*, which corresponds to the *fuṣḥā* “qāla”. However, the *qāf* is maintained throughout the post caption. The comments are all in *arabizi*, except for Nawar's and another follower's comments, which are in Arabic. His female friend's Nagham uses the vulgar expression *wla kelb* (“you prick”) to reciprocate rapport.\(^{36}\) It could be speculated that the Latin script allows to disambiguate irony and lessen the tone of this expression which can otherwise be construed as an insult. In his reply to this comment, Nawar also uses insulting terms to build rapport. However, he uses the Arabic script. As in the previous examples, all the comments in *arabizi* replace the *qāf* with a glottal stop (“2”), while the few comments in Arabic maintain the *qāf*.

\(^{33}\) Abo Alnoor is Nawar's *kunya*.

\(^{34}\) *Wla* is a Syrian-Lebanese interjection which has no equivalent in English.

\(^{35}\) Not understood by other Syrian informants.

\(^{36}\) See Dynel (2012) and McLeod (2011) for recent studies on the use of swear words to build rapport.
In the following post Nawar proudly announces that he and his colleague finished their tour in San Francisco. All commentators congratulate him and wish him well. I only glossed and translated the first three comments, as they contain all the significant linguistic elements relevant to the present discussion.

Nawar and two Syrian informants excluded the possibility that the alif here functions as a ḥuṣūš accusative marker. Alternatively, they suggested that it us a typo, the correct version being ‘urūḍnā (“our performances”).
ya'tīkum al-‘āfya
God give you strength
Congrats!

Omran Najjar
حیورو
ḥeyōōōō
Cheers

Abu Alnoor ʻa'bāl raj'atkon  bis-salāme
Abu Alnoor wish return-you in-safety
Abu Alnoor, I wish you come back safe and sound!

w-'a'bāl wašle Vānīsa w Lōn [wink emoji]
and wishes Vanessa and Leon [wink emoji]
and wishes to Vanessa and Leon [wink emoji]

George Mardinly
 الله يقويك حبيبنا
Allāh yiqaqīk ḥabībna
God give-you-strength dear-our
Good job dear [friend]

The caption is entirely in the Syrian vernacular. All the comments are in the vernacular using the Arabic script. The first comment contains the Syrian vernacular expression ya’tīkum il-‘āfye (lit. “may God give you strength”, figuratively, used to congratulate an artist on their performance”). Although the expression is recognized as Syrian vernacular, the fuṣḥā suffix – kum conveys a bivalent character to the text. This bivalent perception is enhanced by the fact that this suffix is also present in spoken Arabic in formulaic expressions such as assalāmu ‘alaykum (“peace be upon you”, “hello”) as well as a possessive suffix in some non-Damascene dialects.

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38 This is a formulaic vernacular expression. However, given the presence of fuṣḥā elements, such as the ending – kum (in the Syrian vernacular it would be -kon. See Cowell 1964), I treat it as a case of interference, as explained below.
39 Vanessa is Nawar's wife. I am unsure about the exact pronunciation of the second name.
40 As explained above, the term 'urūḏā is a typo and was meant by Nawar as 'urūḏnā (“our performances”).
Moreover, the word *ya’tıkum*, in *fuṣḥā*, follows a different morphological pattern, namely *yu’tıkum*, which is not heard in oral conversation. The Syrian vernacular morphology is masked by the Arabic script, which omits short vowels. The presence of –*kum*, which is associated with *fuṣḥā*, but is less frequent in the Syrian vernacular, and the Syrian vernacular morphological realization, concealed by the Arabic script, allude to an occurrence of interference (Woolard 1999), whereby the commenter deliberately does not choose between the vernacular or *fuṣḥā*. Similarly, the word ʿāfyā, although present in *fuṣḥā*, meaning “health”, “vigor”, “vitality”, is only used in the collocation *ya’tik il-ʿāfyē* in Middle Eastern dialects, and always follows the Syrian vernacular phonological pattern known as ʿimāla, whereby the tāʾ marbūta (the “a” in the word ʿāfyā) is pronounced as –e, instead of –a.

As argued by Woolard (1999: 15), while bivalency and code-switching mean choosing two languages simultaneously, interference means “not choosing at all”. The occurrence of this interference expression is comparable to the use of the *qāf* by a Damascene in dialectal words. This can be found in the word *ishtaqnālak* (“we missed you”), in Farhan Homsi’s comment to Nawar Bulbul’s 11 August 2009 post above. Assuming that the commenter comes from Damascus, where the *qāf* is pronounced as a glottal stop, and although the word is undoubtedly dialectal, the commenter chose not to represent the dialectal pronunciation through an alif or a hamza. This type of interference may have psychological and ideological motivations. *Fuṣḥā*, in fact, had always been the language of writing until the advent of social media, and writing in the vernacular was stigmatized and discouraged. This could account for the difficulty in choosing. In other words, interference can be considered as a collateral effect of the lack of a script designated for the vernacular, which implicates that all writing practices are necessarily mediated through the standard orthography.
In the third comment, the expression *Allāh yiqawīk* could also be interpreted as a case of interference. The formulaicity of this expression in oral conversation evokes oral, vernacular domain. However, the expression is also acceptable according to *fushā* prescriptive grammar rules. The lack of short vowels in the Arabic script, however, makes it is impossible to ascertain whether the word should be read in *fushā* as *yuqawīk* or in the vernacular *yiqawīk*.

The use of bivalency and interference is accompanied by local Damascene features. For example, Omran Najjar, in his comment, spells the frequent colloquial word ‘*a’bāl* (“wishes”) with a *hamza*. Throughout the comments to Maher's and Nawar's posts, this constitutes one of the very rare occurrences in which the *hamza* is used to render the Damascus vernacular representation. Throughout the post, vernacular and bivalent features are used to signal rapport with Nawar and his colleague Ramiz. However, it is interesting to note that Maher and Nawar make larger use of vernacular features than some of their commenters.

4.4.3  Nawar Bulbul – 26 May 2010 – Example 9

In the following post, Nawar uploaded pictures of him and his colleague Ramiz taken during their USA tour.
With Ramez Alaswad participating to San Francisco International Arts festival... May 2010
Wth Ramez Alaswad participating to San Francisco International Arts festival...May 2010

Comments:
Nawal Nizar Ochtmbh

beddi qillak innak arwa’ min nujūm Hōlywūd bass il-ḥaqīqa innak
I want to tell you that you’re way more wonderful than the Hollywood stars, for real

You're our star. I wish you all success

Nacem Barbour

Aḥla Abu Alnoor........!!
Most-beautiful Abu Alnoor........!!
Beautiful Abu Alnoor........!!

Nawar Bulbul

INT on head-my INT
Thank you!!!!

Ali Khalil

NEG ASP-lack-you a-thing INT and-from real and real and-NEG ASP-fear on-you
You have everything you want really, you are so carefree

You and the dear friend Ramiz I’m honest the day will come that we’ll see you stars of the universe
The post, in English, contains a mistake, the preposition “to” instead of “in”, which denotes a limited grammar competence. The reason for using English to address a prevalently Syrian audience could be motivated by an intention to portray a cosmopolitan identity, which, during an interview, Nawar will dismiss as “dull”. The comments are all supportive. They contain vernacular and simultaneous bivalent features. Among the latter is the expression mābiynaqšum shī (lit. “you don’t lack anything”, figuratively “you have everything you want”). It is interesting to note the vernacular morpho-syntax indexed by the negative particle mā and the aspectual particle -b. These co-occur with the fuṣḥā suffix –kum and the qāf. Moreover, the Arabic script does not allow to distinguish between the fuṣḥā vocalization of the verbal imperfect prefix –ya and the vernacular –iy. Furthermore, the negative particle mā is attached to the verb, as if the author intended to lean more towards an oral representation. Interestingly, since the commenter is addressing two people, fuṣḥā requires the use of the dual -kumā. However, the commenter used the masculine plural –kum.

Only one comment, Nawar’s, is in arabizi. Nawar explained the use of arabizi due to technological restrictions (the momentary unavailability of the Arabic keyboard). The use of

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41 Interview with Nawar Bulbul, August 2016.
42 Both these features are also present in non-Damascene dialects.
43 Attaching morphological particles and words is an interesting trend encountered on social media writing practices, which deserves further research.
44 Blommaert (2011) uses the terms ergonomic and economical reasons.
English and the *fuṣḥā* suffix -*kum* embedded in Syrian vernacular syntax in Ali Khalil's comments confirm the trends encountered in the previous posts.

4.5 Concluding Discussion

The data analyzed present a simultaneous display of what, at first glance, may appear as a chaotic and unorganized cluster of separate semiotic and linguistic resources. These resources are spread across a global-local scale, including foreign and Arab videos, citations of non-Syrian literary work, popular jokes, as well as linguistic resources, including bits of English, *fuṣḥā*, romanized Arabic script, vernacular Arabic and stylized forms, such as emojis and unconventional punctuation and orthography. These heterogeneous forms, it is suggested, are meaningful. Their function, however, is not straightforward, but needs to be analyzed within a complex polycentric system of competing indexicalities.

This cluster of heterogeneous forms evokes Blommaert’s (2010) notion of “truncated repertoire”, whereby each form represents an “accented” version of “standard supervernaculars”. They are accented, in that they correspond to localized, deglobalized versions of an ideal standard. Like supervernaculars, these forms appear “in a communicative environment which is polycentric and while they have validity in relation to one center – the subcultural center – they are denied legitimacy in relation to another one – that of the nation-state or the formal education system. Their normativity, orderliness and affordances are socially, culturally and politically niched” (Blommaert 2010: 9).

These forms constitute a new set of practices which departs from, and is in competition with a habitus, which considers *fuṣḥā* as the only norm for public expression and written communication. According to official linguistic ideology, *fuṣḥā* used to index a collective,
unifying and national identity of Syrians and Arabs that can be subsumed under the “we” and “here” scales. “We” stands for the Syrian Arab people, as opposed to individual “I’s” and their ethnic affiliations, personal and political inclinations. This “we” hides an autocratic system which effaces all the “I’s” except for one, which is visible in public space in the form of the President’s and his family’s face on posters and billboards. “Here” stands for an autarchic Syria which aspires to become a model for the emancipated, de-colonized Arab world. On the other hand, from the supervernacular forms emerge “I” and “there” scales, whereby the “I” is represented by individual choices other than fuṣḥā and the “there” is represented by an attempt to transcend the local “here”. This centrifugal trend is represented by English, arabizi, marked Syrian forms, as well as ambiguous forms, such as the case of “interference” represented by Syrian expressions reproduced by means of fuṣḥā conventions.

Arabizi is an emblematic component which exemplifies this polycentric environment. Albirini (2016), in his analysis of the Syrian Revolution Facebook page, noted that the page does not show a high amount of arabizi. This trend will also emerge from the post-revolution data analyzed in the following chapters. While Albirini argued that “the use of arabizi seems to be a matter of convenience and easiness” (291), I suggest that it should be rather as a linguistic strategy part of a “truncated repertoire” (Blommaert 2010), and functional to the contraction of individual, cosmopolitan identities.

Arabizi can be construed as a departure from fuṣḥā both graphically, through the adoption of the romanized script, and linguistically, since all the occurrences of arabizi in the data were a representation of the Syrian vernacular. This departure from fuṣḥā and the inclusion of Western elements subsume a trend which has been bemoaned by Arab scholars, such as Kamal Muhammad Bishr (1995), who characterized it as a form of taghrīb, which Suleiman (2011: 138)
aptly translated as “Western foreignisation”. The deployment of English forms does not represent a mere unidirectional movement from the center to the periphery, from the global to the local. Rather, it is a localized adaptation of global forms which should be understood within the Syrian context of language ideology. The deployment of English evokes Blommaert’s example of the use of French in a business sign in Tokyo. In this context, French does not have the same validity it has in France. “In the context of globalization, linguistic resources change value, function, ownership and so on, because they can be inserted in patterns of mobility” (Blommaert 2010: 32). These forms should be seen from a Syrian perspective, in contrast with a linguistic ideology which attributes value and prestige to an Arabic purged of foreign influences. The appropriation of Western forms occurs in a polycentric context, whereby the mixing of English, vernacular and fushā is more prestigious than code separation.

Linguistic and semiotic hybridity is construed in contrast with the Syrian government’s official policy of strict code separation and Arabization, as well as within the seemingly contradicting context of Western economic liberalization and authoritarian rule characterizing Bashar al-Asad’s government since 2000, which was described by Wedeen (2013) as “neoliberal autocracy”. Through this political strategy, according to Wedeen, the government was able to contain dissent, particularly in the urban centers, through an ideology of “the good life”. “This good life entailed not only the usual aspirations to economic well-being but also fantasies of multicultural accommodation, domestic security, and a sovereign national identity, generating conditions for the sustenance of a neoliberal autocracy” (Wedeen 2013: 843). The government’s ambiguous stance towards Facebook may exemplify this political strategy. While it was banned in Syria between 2007 and February 2011 (York 2014), Syrians were able to easily circumvent this ban and access Facebook through proxy servers. This practice was tolerated by the
government, possibly as a safety valve in order to contain dissent by sustaining the dream of “good life”. Moreover, Facebook was reinstated, probably in order to prevent the outbreak of an uprising similar to Egypt and Tunisia. Through the incorporation of Western elements, Maher and Nawar are not blinded by Western technology. Rather, they are resisting a strict policy of Arabization through the means they have at their disposal.

It should be noted that not all the forms are deployed equally. Some occur more frequently than others, and show a higher degree of proximity with the corresponding supervernacular. For example, Maher utilizes marked Syrian vernacular forms, such as hamza in place of the qāf more frequently than his commentators. Conversely, some commentators utilize ambiguous forms of bivalence or interference, such as mabiynaqśkum (Ali Khalil, Nawar Bulbul’s 26 May 2010, example 8) and ya‘īkum il-‘āfy (Fadi Biologist Shihap, Nawar Bulbul’s 24 May 2010, example 9). These simultaneous forms may be interpreted as instances of a “scale jump” in progress, whereby the commenter does not choose between Syrian colloquial or fushā, Maher’s and Nawar’s use of marked Syrian vernacular, English and fushā may qualify them as “bolder” scale jumpers. Paraphrasing Uitermark (2002) Blommaert (2010: 36) notes that “some people or groups can jump scales while others cannot, and ‘outscaling’ is a frequent power tactic: lifting a particular issue to a scale-level which inaccessible to the other, as when a lawyer shifts into legalese or a doctor into medical jargon”.

It is important to note that these hybrid practices are not embedded within an overt metalinguistic discourse. While it is interesting to compare the use of heterogeneous of resources with the emblematic Syrian case, in which state policies present an overt example of monolingual ideology, it should be emphasized that such deployment of heterogeneous communicative forms is not restricted to the Syrian socio-political context. Rather, as
Androutsopoulos noted, “[in] the era of digital technologies, the sampling and recontextualisation of media content is a basic practice in popular media culture: rap artists sample foreign voices in their song; entertainment shows feature snatches of other-language broadcasts for humor; internet users engage in linguistic bricolage on their homepages (2007: 208).

However, these examples have been presented to be analyzed in comparison with the content of the same authors’ Facebook pages after the revolution, only a few months later. This comparison sheds light on the intensity and the speed with which a different combination of resources was employed to construct other identities. It emphasizes, on the one hand, the agentive role of the individuals in the manipulation of these resources. On the other, it points at the importance of the sociolinguistic context surrounding the manipulation of these forms. As emphasized by Blommaert (2015), our focus should not be on the novelty of certain linguistic forms, but on how the employment of resources relates to the sociolinguistic environment in which they emerge. In other words, it could be argued that there is nothing special about the employment of English, arabizi, etc. because such a bricolage is a common characteristic of Facebook content. What is interesting, however, is how in a superdiverse environment hybridity is constantly used and manipulated sociolinguistically in order to do identity work.
5 POST-REVOLUTION PRACTICES

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, hybridity, in the form of “truncated repertoires”, was analyzed as a communicative strategy underlying new individual, cosmopolitan identities. Facebook contributed to rendering these new individual identities present, visible and public. This chapter focuses on the shift in the Facebook writing practices of Syrian dissident Maher Alkurdi on his personal page and his public page addōmarī, launched in March 2011, which coincided with the beginning of the revolution. A similar shift was observed on Nawar Bulbul’s page, as will be shown through an emblematic example. These new practices emerged in concomitance with an identity claim made by the Syrian president during his speech to the nation on March 30, 2011. Following the street protests, Bashar al-Asad accused protestors of being foreign infiltrators driven by sectarian motivations. It is posited that during this phase, hybridity underlay the emergence of a new collective identity, that of dissidents as authentic Syrians. The shift to a new collective identity evokes Blommaert’s (2010) concept of “scale-jump”.

What stood out from a systematic observation of dissidents’ Facebook pages during the first phase of the revolution is the disappearance of “bits of” (Blommaert 2011) English, Arabizi (romanized script) and emojis, and the emergence of a large presence of strategic bivalent and creative Arabic forms. Moreover, the beginning of the revolution marked a shift in the topics of Maher’s and Nawar’s posts. While personal topics, such as women, love and professional achievements prevailed in pre-revolution posts, as of March 2011 the focus shifted to social and political issues in the Arab world and Syria. In the data examined
in this chapter, linguistic simultaneity appears in concomitance with idioms and political
metaphors. Idioms and metaphors are analyzed as a dimension of intertextuality, in the light
of Tannen’s (2007) notion of “idiomaticity”. Moreover, their discursive function is
examined with reference to Domínguez-Barajas’s (2010) study on proverbs.

The chapter focuses on posts published by Maher on his public page *addōmarī* and
by Nawar on his personal page, between March 2011 and 2012. The analysis of texts is
accompanied by a study of paratexts. Genette (1997) described paratexts as a type of
transtextuality. He defined paratextuality as the relationship between main texts and
surrounding texts, such as titles and epigraphs. Suleiman (2013) analyzed paratexts as
“framing devices” surrounding texts about the Arabic language and language ideology. In
the examples analyzed in this chapter, discourse about language is central.

Strategic bivalency, idioms and paratexts are at the core of a choice of ambiguity.
The motivation underlying this ambiguity is twofold. On the one hand it responds to the
authors’ need to express dissent covertly, for security reasons. Both the authors, their
families and followers, in fact, were still in Syria at the time. On the other, it is argued that
ambiguity has a discursive function, that of involving the audience. This aspect is analyzed
in further detail in the next analysis chapter.
5.2 Strategic Bivalency

Woolard (1999) analyzes bivalency as a dimension of linguistic simultaneity. Focus on language simultaneity, she observed, developed from Bakhtin’s (1981) insights on the multivoicedness and the competing centrifugal and centripetal forces underlying language (Holquist 1990). Woolard (1999: 5-6) studied simultaneity further, arguing that “speakers do not necessarily select between contrasting elements but, rather, can thrive in their tense intersection”. She defines bivalency as “the use by a bilingual of words or segments that could “belong” equally, descriptively and even prescriptively, to both codes” (1999: 7).

To illustrate this phenomenon Woolard (1987; 1999) gives the example of the popular Catalan comedian Eugenio. While “people often said that the funny thing is that ‘you can’t tell what language he’s speaking’, [...] I was able to calculate counts that showed ‘objectively’ that […] Castilian was clearly the dominant, matrix language, […] despite the perception of rampant language mixing” (1999: 7). In his performances, she argued, bivalency contributed to his popularity. Most importantly, Woolard frames bivalency not as a mere collateral consequence of language contact, but in terms of strategic resource. She demonstrates this illustrating the case of the ideological debate between two factions of Catalan nationalism, over the extent to which Catalan should be purged of Castillian influences.

Strategic bivalency has been recently treated in Arabic linguistics. Mejdell (2014), in her analysis of Ibrāhīm ʻĪsā’s commentaries on Egyptian newspaper Dustūr, argued that strategic bivalency, described there as the systematic use of forms which are “not either fuṣḥā or ʻāmmiyya, nor either fuṣḥā nor ʻāmmiyya both fuṣḥā and ʻāmmiyya,” (275), was
deployed as part of “political and linguistic acts of defiance” (274) towards the establishment.

5.3 Intertextuality: Idioms and Paratexts

In this chapter, idioms are analyzed as a form of intertextuality. The term intertextuality is used with reference to Tannen’s (2007) framework, which, in turn, builds on Bateson (1979), Becker (1995) and Bakhtin (1981). As observed by Tannen, neither Bateson nor Becker used the term “intertextuality” overtly. However, they contributed to an understanding of intertextuality through their vision of language as intrinsically relational (Bateson) and “context shaping” (Becker). “Bateson (1979) gives us a vision of an overarching concept of intertextuality in Mind and nature, where he argues that all meaning emerges from ‘patterns that connect’, where patterns are created by ‘repetition and rhythm’.” (Tannen 2007: 10).

Expanding Bateson’s concept of relationality, through the term languaging, Becker, as paraphrased in Tannen (2007: 11) argues that “in speaking, speakers recall language they have heard in the past and adapt it to the present interaction. Importantly, languaging thereby creates the context in which they are speaking”. Becker identified six types of contextual relations, which describe the relations with previous texts. These contextual relations, as observed by Tannen, are evidence for the relevance of Becker’s framework to intertextuality. In particular, she posited that Genette’s (1997) notion of transtextuality recalls Becker’s types of contextual relations. Genette uses the term “transtextuality” to refer to the types of relations texts have with prior texts. He identified five types of relations, two of which are mostly relevant to approach the data in this chapter:
paratextuality and hypertextuality. Paratextuality refers to the relation between surrounding texts, such as titles and prefaces, and the main body of texts. Hypertextuality describes the relation of texts to previous ones.

5.3.1 Paratexts

Suleiman (2013: 95) applies Genette’s (1997) notion of paratexts to his study on language ideology in Arabic:

Paratexts include such devices as titles, inter-titles, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, epilogues and the publisher’s blurb or jacket copy. Each of these devices has its own function, but they collectively work to signpost and navigate the text – the main body of a work – in addition to mediating the interaction between the text, the reader and the public.

Applying the notion of paratexts to titles, epigraphs of books about the Arabic language, Suleiman argued that these texts carry important information on language ideology.

“Standing on the fringes of texts and acting as ‘thresholds of interpretation’ – using Genette’s phrase – these liminal discourses are framing devices, which are neither fully inside the text, not completely outside it” (Ibid.). Both Genette’s and Suleiman’s analyses of paratexts refer to traditional, offline contexts. In this chapter, paratexts are analyzed in an online context, framing online texts containing metalinguistic discourse. It will be argued that Facebook paratexts, such as profile names, profile pictures and description sections provide similar affordances as offline paratexts. Together with the texts, they serve the function of enticing and recruiting new page followers. Moreover, as will be shown below, they promote in-group solidarity. This is indexed through deictic devices, such as the

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1 I discussed the designation and enticement functions of the addōmarī profile name choice in chapter 3.
personal pronoun “We”, as well as through images evoking a common culture of dissent, including references to Syrian and Palestinian dissident literature.

5.3.2 Idioms

Tannen (2007) analyzes proverbs, sayings and idioms within her theory of repetition as a form of interactional involvement. In particular, reinforcing previous theories on language and meaning creation (Bakhtin 1981; Becker 1984a; Becker 1984b), she shows how these fixed forms constitute a source for creativity. She treats idiomatic expressions as a form of “prepatternning”, similar to formulas and proverbs. Paraphrasing Zimmer (1958), she describes formulas as “situational”, in the sense that they are:

fixed form expressions that are always uttered in certain situations, the omission of which in those situations is perceived as a violation of appropriate behavior. Many languages, such as Arabic (Ferguson 1976), Turkish (Zimmer 1958; Tannen and Özték 1981) and modern Greek (Tannen and Özték 1981) contain numerous such situational formulas, many of which come in pairs. (Tannen 2007: 50)

For example, a fixed formula in Arabic is *maʿ as-salāma* (“may you leave in safety”), commonly uttered by someone who stays in a place and equivalent to the English “bye!”. The response to this expression, *Allah yiselmak* (“God protect you”), is also formulaic. While formulas are fixed in form and expected to occur in a determined situation, Tannen (2007: 51) describes proverbs as “a type of expression that is [also] highly fixed in form though less predictable in situational association”. Moreover, she observed that “although proverbs may not be routinely uttered in English conversation, idioms and other prepatterned expressions are pervasive in American speech, although their form in utterance is often only highly, not absolutely fixed” (Ibid.).
Unlike earlier generative approaches, she claims that altered idioms are proof that “Meaning is gleaned by association with the familiar sayings, not by structural decomposition” (2007: 53). In order to further substantiate her claim, she provides several anecdotal examples of how idioms are altered in context. Through these examples, such as that of a policeman uttering in a radio announcement that the investigation would continue “until every stone is unturned” – which evokes the more familiar idiom “leave no stone unturned” - and the often altered idiom “I could care less” – instead of “I couldn’t care less”, she shows how idiom re-contextualization does not cause loss in communicative effectiveness.

The process of bringing the past into present contexts is well captured in Maher’s and Nawar’s re-contextualization of idioms. The repeated presence of altered idioms emerges as an effective communicative strategy of entertainment, enticement and persuasion. The framing and context shaping dynamic underlying the performative power of proverbs has been studied by Domínguez-Barajas (2010) in terms of socio-cultural continuity and reconfiguration. According to Domínguez-Barajas, proverbs have an important socialization function. “By virtue of granting the listeners the opportunity to come to their own interpretation of a proverb’s meaning and a speaker’s intention in uttering it, the listeners become active participants in the discursive enterprise” (9). In a study of identity construction in a Mexican transnational social network, Domínguez-Barajas (2010: 71) identified four main socio-discursive functions underlying the use of proverbs in family conversation: to argue, to give advice, to establish rapport and to entertain. On top of these functions, proverbs “promot[e] group solidarity by virtue of identifying shared referents in everyday interaction” (9).

Tannen (2007) describes a similar function with reference to imagery and details.
In discussing the argumentative function of proverbs, Domínguez-Barajas emphasizes the trends of continuity and reconfiguration. In one of his examples, a Mexican-American woman says to her son-in-law, in the presence of her husband, that she knows he has been cheating on her daughter. The woman's husband evaluates her behavior by saying “these things should not be said”. In turn, the woman responds with the Mexican Spanish proverb *cuando el santo necesita la vela, hay que prendérsela* (“When the saint needs the candle, one must light it”) (Domínguez-Barajas 2010: 75). According to Domínguez-Barajas, by using this proverb the woman resorts to popular wisdom, namely to a collectively sanctioned speech act to substantiate her claim, thus establishing a continuity between the contextual instance and societal norms. However, by rebutting her husband's equally socially sanctioned evaluation, she reconfigures social values, gender roles and normative behavior. The idiomatic expressions encountered in my data, it will be argued, follow similar dynamics of continuity and reconfiguration.

Domínguez-Barajas also includes a cognitive dimension in his study of proverbs. Proverbs always contain a literal and a figurative meaning, which are available at the same time. This simultaneity, as argued by Langlotz (2006), underlies the intrinsic creativity of idioms. Langlotz describes idioms as complex symbolic units, composed of a formal and a semantic pole. The formal pole is an abstract, symbolic representation, which he calls base-form. However, he argues, idioms are characterized by variability.

An interesting aspect of Langlotz’s contribution uncovering the creative power underlying idiomatic variability is the treatment of intentionally ambiguated idioms. Building on Dobrovolskij (1997), he distinguishes between non-intentional idiom variations (slips-of-the-tongue) and intentional wordplay. “A variant can be interpreted as
wordplay if it reflects the speaker’s conscious intention of creating specific perlocutive effects” (Langlotz 2007: 201). Langlotz (202-203) identifies three criteria of wordplay: stylistic markedness/conspicuousness, ambiguity and context-dependency. In stylistic markedness “the formal structure of the base-form is adapted in a striking or stunning way (as with covers a multitude of chins)”.

In ambiguity, “both the literal meaning and the idiomatic meaning are activated to refer to the context. Thus, both levels of meaning are strongly implicated”. Finally, according to the criterion of context-dependency, “idiomatic wordplay is intended by the speaker to invite the hearer to a game of sense-making which depends on the generation of context-specific weak implicatures. Therefore, a pun variant can only be understood in the usage-context”.

Stylistic markedness, ambiguity and contextual dependency seem to underlie cognitive functions of the idioms encountered in the Facebook data presented below. In particular, intentional wordplay suggests a high degree of consciousness in language use. As will be shown through the examples below, idioms, as forms of hypertexts, concur with paratexts in the framing and the shaping of the ideological character of the dissidents’ page content. This dialogic dimension was elaborated in discursive-analytic approaches to idiomatic expressions.

The discourse-analytic and the cognitive approaches allude to the fact that the very co-presence of literal and figurative meanings are at the core of idiomatic creativity and involvement. It could be argued that it is the very presence of a figurative meaning that renders idioms more powerful than other words. Akin to imagery and details (Tannen 2007),

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3 This is an advertising slogan for a shaving cream. The form-base idiom being the biblical phrase “covers a multitude of sins”.
4 Langlotz borrows the term weak implicature from Sperber and Wilson (1986: 199). “Strong implicatures are those cognitive effects (implicated premises and conclusions) for which the speaker can be claimed to take full responsibility.
the higher impact of idiomatic expressions may derive both from the symbolic, socially and culturally bound nature of their meaning, as well as from the higher cognitive effort required from the interlocutor to reconstruct the meaning, to the presence of complex literal and figurative scenes. From this perspective, while the continuity and reconfiguration dynamics may refer to all linguistic production, idiomaticity may be understood as an intensified process of intertextuality, whereby new idiomatic forms are more powerful in the shaping of present contexts.  

While in Domínguez- Barajas proverbs have the function of maintaining social continuity and reconfiguring social value, in the following examples altered idioms perform the functions of entertaining, persuading new followers and preventing criticism or censorship through ambiguity. Underlying these immediate functions is the construction of a collective dissident identity.

Albirini (2016) documented the use of sayings in his analysis of the Syrian Revolution Facebook page. Embedded in Standard Arabic texts, he argues that “the purpose of introducing these sayings is to allow the audience to grasp the commenter’s point, concretize a certain idea or concept, or dramatize the point under discussion by adding an affective dimension to it” (286). The function of idioms in the Facebook data analyzed below seems to have a wider social impact, and is directly connected with Maher’s and Nawar’s intent to code dissent. Maher argues that he uses “idioms to code the topic.  

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5 This discussion is continued in further depth in the third analysis chapter, which shows how commenters to a post build on the proverb utilized in the post constructing to construct new metaphorical scenarios.

6 Maher uses the word *shaffara* (“code, encode, cipher, encrypt”). In this context, I believe that he uses the term suggesting that he chooses the proverbs that better relate to, represent or encapsulate the metaphor used in the post. Another framework that looks at idioms from a cognitive standpoint is Fauconnier’s (1985) mental spaces. *Shaffara* evokes the mental space of a spy who needs to encode language to serve national purposes. In Maher’s use of popular idioms as forms of *shifra* (“code”), Maher compares himself to someone who needs to use a secret code to serve a national purpose. Neggaz (2013) uses the term “secret language”, referring to the way Syrians would use oral expressions to avoid censorship, such as *bêt khâlîṯ* (lit. “his aunt’s house”), to refer to the secret
to convey the message in a non direct way. Idioms can convey messages in an implicit way. For example, if I say *w akalu l-beyda w-`ishrīta* (lit. “they ate the egg with the shell”) the meaning is crystal clear to the Syrians without mentioning what exactly it is”.

Furthermore, while idioms in the data analyzed below appear in hybrid, bivalent and Syrian vernacular forms, Maher associates the use of idioms with the Syrian vernacular. Moreover, he says, “I put [idioms] in a political context. The sayings are in the dialect. And I write my page in the dialect, so they are consistent with my style”. Similarly, Nawar associates idioms with social, generational change:

These are the idioms that our parents taught us “*alf imm tibki, w la immi tibki* (lit. “let a thousand mothers cry, but not my mother”), *il-īd illī mā bta’dir ’alayha, būsa w id Ḯ ’alayha bil-kisr* (lit. “the hand you can't obtain, kiss it and hope it'll break down”)⁹, *il-hiṭān ylā adān* ( “walls have ears”). All this is the past. This generation [would say] *il-īd illī mā bta’dir ’alayha, kassira* (“the hand you can't obtain, break it!”). This generation walks in the middle of the street. This is the mentality of the revolutionaries.¹⁰

Before analyzing examples of posts from the *addōmarī* and Nawar’s pages, I present some of the paratexts surrounding these data to better shed light on the ideological component of the hybrid examples below, whereby hybridity is characterized by a large presence of consciously creative and bivalent forms. Paratexts are analyzed in concomitance with the large presence of idioms whose function is, in Becker’s terms, “context shaping”. Idioms are understood as quintessential hypertextual, and, as explained below, intrinsically hybrid devices. Their occurrence brings texts from the past to shape the

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⁷ See this idiom in the example below, *Ḥakā bedrī* (“Bedri spoke”), 15th April 2011, *addōmarī*.
⁸ Face-to-face Interview with Maher Alkurdi, September 2015. See chapter 3.
⁹ If you can't obtain something, wait and hope it'll fall down from the sky.
¹⁰ Face-to-face interview with Nawar Bulbul, June 2015.
present context. Paratexts and hypertexts do not provide ready-made meaning. Rather, they are used as ambiguous strategies to code dissent and persuade online followers.

5.4 Addōmarī – Paratextual Devices

As explained in the chapter introducing data and methodology, Maher’s public Facebook page is named after Ali Farzat’s satirical periodical. The dōmarī, in Syrian folklore, was the lamplighter. The reference to Ali Farzat’s publication serves to attract the reader. Moreover, the noun dōmarī indexes wisdom, and appeals to a shared heritage, thus reinforcing group solidarity. Ali Farzat’s dissident periodical is also evoked through the use of satirical cartoons, which, along with the page name, function as enticing devices.

Besides the page name, also the addōmarī wall picture, the profile picture, the short and the long description sections analyzed below can be understood as a paratexts, or devices that “frame” (Suleiman 2013: 95) the main text. The texts at hand can be considered as types of epigraphs. Through the wall and profile pictures, as well as the description sections, Mahers frame the entire addōmarī Facebook page. At the same time, as observed by Suleiman, paratexts have a liminal function between the author, the readership and the public.11 Paraphrasing Genette (1997), Suleiman (2013: 99-101) posits that “One of the main functions of epigraphs […] is to lend support and backing to what an author wants to say, to his connotative intent or to the affect that he wishes to create”. Moreover, Suleiman reports Genette’s quotation of Stendhal, that “the epigraph must heighten the reader’s

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11 Suleiman distinguishes between readership and public. The public is a wider concept. Although they may have not read the text in question, they contribute to its circulation.
feeling, his emotion, if emotion there be, and not present a more or less philosophical opinion about the situation [it deals with]” (Genette 1997: 158).

The wall picture of *addōmarī* is a cartoon by Ali Farzat, which depicts a journalist interviewing a gentleman sitting at his desk. Behind the interviewee stands the shadow of a man holding a sword. A caption on the interviewee’s desk ironically reads “freedom of speech...!! *addōmarī*”.

![Wall Picture](image)

The profile picture, probably also a cartoon by Ali Farzat, depicts a naked man sitting at his desk with a puzzled expression, and with the top of his head carved out. Behind him is a laundry line on which hang his clothes and his brain. Above the laundry line, on the left, a caption reads “My dignity hurts...!!” in the Syrian vernacular. On the top right side, below the image of a flower, another caption reads “The Strike of Dignity”. Dignity is an intertextual reference to the Syrian revolution. “Dignity” and “Freedom” were the demands which accompanied the early demonstrations. The first Friday of the revolution (March 18, 2011) was named “The Friday of Dignity”.

![Profile Picture](image)
5.4.1 *Addīmarī* – Short Description – Example 1

The description section contains a short description and a long description. The short description reads:

ناحن لاشنّوس علي احده ..

*We don’t spit on anyone* ..

*It’s them who stand exactly in the spot where we spit*.

The post is in *fuṣḥā*. This linguistic choice stands out compared to Maher’s large use of Syrian vernacular graphic features. A Syrian informant suggested that these two lines evoke Mahmoud Darwish’s poem *biṭaqah awīyya* (“Identity Card”), in which the poet confronts
an Israeli officer, emphasizing his Arab identity through the famous lines *sajjil! ana ‘arabī* ("write! I’m an Arab"). Towards the end of the poem, Darwish writes:

أنا لا أكره الناس
ولا أسطو على أحد
ولكنني إذا ما جعت
أكل لحم مختصبي

I do not hate people
And I do not attack anyone
But if I get hungry
I eat my aggressor’s meat

The Syrian informant’s insight also recalls a theme which emerged during some interviews with Syrian dissidents, who compare the liberation from the Asad regime to liberation of Palestinians from the Israeli occupier.

The use of the pronoun “We” in this paratext is also worth noting. It indexes a group of people. This is consistent with the function of idioms as devices which promote group solidarity, as will emerge from the analysis below. Moreover, it seems to index a scale-jump (Blommaert 2010) underlying the construction of a collective identity, that of Syrian dissidents. It is interesting to compare this plural pronoun with the singular personal “You” in the “long description” below.

5.4.2 *Addōmarī* – Long Description – Example 2

The *long description* reads:
1. Inte mufakkir ḥālak innak ‘alā ūl mu‘abbir ‘an rā’yak ..
   You think yourself that you always expressing prep. opinion-your ..
   *You always think of yourself as someone who expresses their opinion*

2. Bass fakkart shī marra innā rā’ik12 hād mū mu‘abbar ‘annak abadan ..??
   But you thought anytime that opinion-your this not expressed by-you at all ..??
   *But did you ever think that this opinion of yours was not yours at all??*

3. Intabih abl mā tu‘abbir ‘an rā’yak mā yikūn hār-rā‘ī hād mū yilak ..
   Careful before that you-express prep. opinion-your that it-be this-opinion this not yours ..
   *Careful before you express your opinion. Lest this opinion should not be yours ..*

4. w-yikūn shī ḥadā mu‘abir lak yāh bi-tašīqa mubāshira aw ghayr mubāshira ..
   and-it-be something someone expressed you it in-way direct or non-direct ..
   *Lest it is something someone told you directly or indirectly*

5. w yikūn hāl-hadā khallāk tuhīss innō hād rā’yak ..
   and it-be this-one left-you feel that this opinion-your ..
   *Lest it is this person that made you feel that this is your opinion*

6. …w inte btījī la-‘annā ba’ā w btśir biddak tafrūṭī ‘alāynā ..
   …and you come to-us still and you-start you-want impose-it on-us ..
   *And you come bandying it around and imposing it on us*

7. w al-āḥlā min hēk innak mufakkir innō rā’yak ..
   and the-best of this that-you think that-it opinion-your ..
   *And the best part of it is that you think it is your opinion*

8. mishān hēk intabih nāhīnā bidnā rā’yak mū rā‘ibak r ‘āʾī ba k ..
   for this careful we want opinion-your not your-controller’s opinion controller-your ..
   *Therefore be careful, we want your opinion, not that of your controller*

---

12 It is not clear whether the author intended to write rā’yak or if this word is a pun.
Suleiman builds on Genette’s insight about the emotional connection triggered by epigraphs to explain why the epigraphs in texts dealing with Arabic language ideology tend to be quotations from the Qur’an, well-known poetry and Prophetic hadith. The short description text in addōmarī’s page, as explained above, is related intertextually with Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “Identity card”. This intertextual relation contributes to framing addōmarī’s endeavor as a rebellion to social disparity and oppression.

Consistent with the discussion on the paratextual function of the description section in addōmarī’s page, it is worth focusing on the linguistic resources, which represent an innovative shift from Maher’s pre-revolution practices. The short description section is in fuṣḥā, and it could be thought of as a paratext with relation to the long description section. The last two lines of the long section are also in fuṣḥā. The use of fuṣḥā at the beginning and at the end of the section heightens the effect of the marked Syrian vernacular choices in the central section. Here, numerous vernacular graphic choices, such as the use of the alif in place of the qāf in the word abl (“before”, line 3) appear with bivalent and creative elements. Particularly interesting is the antanaclasis (homographic pun) in line 8:

mishān hēk intabih naḥnā bīdnā rā’ yak mū rā’ ibak r ’ā ī ba k ..
for this careful we want opinion-your not your-controller’s opinion controller-your ..
Therefore be careful, we want your opinion, not that of your controller

The word rāʾy ("opinion") is bivalent. The word rāʾībak ("your controller") is a Damascus vernacular representation of the fuṣḥā "raqibuka" and contains the word rāʾī ("opinion").

On the whole, we observe an immanent co-presence of fuṣḥā and the Syrian vernacular which characterizes the description section as hybrid. The ideological effect of the central part (lines 1-8) is enhanced by virtue of being framed between the short description section and the concluding lines 9-10, both of which are in fuṣḥā. The linguistically hybrid character of these paratexts frames addōmarī’s hybrid texts. Moreover, the use of puns suggests the presence of conscious metalinguistic discourse, which, as shown in this chapter, characterizes the post-revolution texts of Maher and Nawar.

5.5 Analysis of Maher’s Addōmarī Posts

5.5.1 The Arabic Language in My Country, 19 March 201113, Example 3

“The Arabic language in my country” (Example 3) is the first of a series of posts in which dissent is coded through a metalinguistic analysis of Syrian society. In this post the author compares the agentive parts of fuṣḥā grammar to the Syrian government, and the non-agentive ones to the people. Linguistic simultaneity plays an important role here. Although, on the surface, the post appears to be entirely in fuṣḥā, the metaphorical meaning is strongly linked to the Syrian social context. Throughout the post, the author utilizes fuṣḥā grammar as a contextualization cue (Gumperz 1982) to the metaphorical message. The literal and the metaphorical messages, however, are both present and, in Langlotz’s (2006) terms,

13 The post does not contain a title. “The Arabic language in my country” are the beginning words of the post.
activated. In order to emphasize the different layers of meaning, particularly when the grammar particles function as cue to the metaphorical reading, I adopted a four-line gloss, whereby the fourth line contains the metaphorical meaning.

(1)

للغة العربية في وطني شأن آخر...

lil-lugha l-ʻarabiyya fī waṭanī sha’n ākhar...

for-the-language the-Arabic in country-my character other.

the Arabic language has another significance in my country.

(2)

حيث أنك لا تستطيع نصب فعل ما...

ḥaythu annaka lā tustaṭī naṣb fī’l mā...

whereby you NEG can inflect in the subjunctive a verb any...

not just anybody can subjugate someone else..

---

14. Wehr and Cowan (1994) translate the term ākhar as “another”, “one more”. The two terms, although interchangeable, have slightly different meanings. “One more” alludes to the additional presence of something. “Another” emphasizes that this “something else” is also different. The ambiguity of the term ākhar well suits the metaphorical meaning. The author alludes to the presence of an additional meaning, or function, namely a symbolic one, pertaining to the Arabic language in Syria. At the same time, he suggests that this symbolic is peculiar to the Syrian context.

15. The term sha’n is translated by Wehr and Cowan (1994) as matter, affair, concern, business, circumstances, state of affairs, case, nature, character, quality, kind, condition, state, significance, etc. The term “significance” is related to the word “meaning”, which is consistent with the author’s intention to present another meaning of Arabic language.
fa al-našb fil-waṭan al-‘arabiyy lil-sulṭa faqat..!!
as the subjunctive in-the-nation the-Arab for-the-authority only..!!
because the subjunctive, in the Arab nation, is prerogative of the authority..!!
because subjugating is the prerogative of the authority..!!

(3)

و الخبر يسبق دائما المبتدأ إلى رجال الأمن!!
wa al-khabar yasbuqu dā’iman al-mubtada’īla rijaal al-‘amn..
and the-predicate precedes always the subject before men the-security
where the predicate always precedes the subject..in front of secret agents..!!
where even before you know what you did, the secret agents are informed about it..!!

(4)

و الاسم المجرور .. لا يجر بحرف الجر .. بل بعناصر الجر!!
wa al-ism al-majrūr.. lā yujar bi-ḥarf al-jarr..
and the-noun the-dragged.. NEG dragged by-marker the-dragging..
and the genitive.. is not genitivized by a genitivizer..
and if someone is feeling dragged down, it isn’t that way because of normal life circumstances
bl by-عناصر الجر ..!!
bal bi-‘anāṣir al-jarr..!!
but by-elements the-dragging..!!
but rather by genitivizing particles..!!
but by the secret services..!!

(5)

و الفاعل يبقى كما هو دائما مرفوع..
wa al-fā’il yabqā kamā huwa dā’iman marfū‘
and the-subject remains as it always nominative
where the subject noun is always nominative
and Bashar al Assad always comes out on top [of all other Syrians and Arabs]

وخطاباته المفرطة علامة رفعه
wa khītābaṭuḥu al-mufriṭa ʿalāmat raf‘ihi
an speeches-his the-many the sign nominative-his
and all of his utterances sufficiently demonstrate nominative case
and his speeches demonstrate his superiority16

16 Raf‘ is translated by Wehr and Cowan (1994) as “lifting”, “raising”, “use of a noun in the nominative”. The metaphorical meaning seems to allude to the President's distancing himself from the populace through his
At the beginning of the revolution, Maher claims that he intended to express dissent “in an indirect way”. A strategy to express dissent indirectly is through the use of political metaphors. In this post, the situation of the Arabic language in Syria represents metaphorically the oppressive socio-political situation. Strategic bivalency (Woolard 2007; Mejdell 2014) is central to the creation of this metaphor, whereby *fuṣḥā* grammatical terms evoke terms used in everyday conversation to refer to the regime, and images of oppression with which the Syrian reader is familiar. In the second line, *ḥaythu annaka lā tastaṭī‘ naṣb fī l mā*... (“Not just anybody can subjugate someone else.”), the term *naṣb* is a grammatical category which refers to inflecting a verb in the subjunctive or a noun in the accusative. In elevated use of language. The use of nominative declension symbolically alludes to the President's use of an elevated form of Arabic in his speeches to affirm his authority. Reinforcing the separation between written and spoken Arabic he reinforces the gap between him and the population. The term “superiority” seems to capture this idea of elevating oneself through language and is consistent with and clarifies the term *marfū‘*, use in the previous line to describe the President's being “on top [of all other Syrians and Arabs].

Interview with Maher Alkurdi, 2 September 2015.
the Syrian and the Egyptian vernaculars, the term *našb* means “swindle”, “trickery”, “deception” and “fraud” (Wehr and Cowan 1994).\(^1\) Hence, a second layer of meaning which is immediately accessible to Syrian readers is that of “swindling”. In line (3), the term *khabar*, which is the predicate of a nominal sentence, also conveys the meaning of “information”, and is directly related to the term *mukhābarāt*, the notorious Syrian intelligence services. While in Arabic grammar the predicate usually follows the subject, the pun suggests that secret services usually know the crime you have committed even before you have committed it. The vivid image of having to report in front of secret agents addressing them in a marked “Alawi accent” is recurrent in the narratives of Syrian dissidents.

In line (4), *al-ism al-majrūr* is the grammatical used to describe all nouns following a *ḥarf al-jarr* (“preposition”). *Jarr* also means “pulling” or “dragging”. In Arabic grammar, nouns following prepositions are said to be *majrūr* (“dragged”) by the preposition. It could be inferred that the preposition exercises power on the *al-ism al-majrūr*. Moreover, *al-ism al-majrūr* is marked with the short vowel *kasra*, which also carries the double meaning of “breakdown”, “collapse”. Based on this information, the statement *al-ism al-majrūr lā yujarr bi-ḥarf al-jarr* (“the genitive is not genitivized by a genitivizer”) sounds absurd and inconsistent. The “grammatical” English translation represents an attempt to convey this sense of absurdity. This statement is clarified through the pun *‘anāšir al-jarr* (“secret services”). In Modern Written Arabic, *‘Unṣur* (pl. *anāšir*) means “component”, “element” (Wehr and Cowan 1994). However, in the Syrian context, the term *‘anāšir al-jarr* immediately recalls the image of *‘anāšir al-‘amm* (“security forces”) dragging unarmed citizens. Hence the creative form “dragging forces”. This creative expression is the cue to

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\(^1\) Wehr and Cowan (1994) indicated it as a term of Egyptian origin.
understand the metaphorical meaning of the whole statement. The *al-ismo al-majrūr* is not a simple noun following a preposition, but a simple, innocent citizen chased by the security forces. In this light, *jarr* also acquires further meaning. The secret services would beat and break your limbs you before dragging you.\(^{19}\)

In line (5), *fā‘il* is the subject of a transitive verb. It exerts energy on the *mafi*‘ūl bihi ("direct object"). The grammatical term *marfū‘* describes a noun or a verb in the nominative case. This grammatical statement is self-evident, compared to the inconsistency observed in the statement in line (4). However, through the line *wa khitra tuh al-mufriṭa ‘alāmat raf‘ihi* the author shifts from the grammatical level to the metaphorical one, as a *fā‘il* is not a person who makes speeches. It becomes clear that the *fā‘il* metaphorically represents President Bashar al-Asad. The terms *marfū‘* ("elevated"), *raf‘ihi* ("his superiority") emphasize the absolute power of the ruler, his conceitedness and his superiority over the population. It could be inferred that this the duality between him and the population stands for another duality, namely the separation between *fushā* and *‘āmmiya*. This interpretation seems to find confirmation in the next line, which is particularly interesting in terms of linguistic ideology.

In line (6), the author describes language as an asset, a resource of which the Syrian people have been dispossessed. This claim is quite striking, given the fact that the Syrians are known in the Arab world for their mastery of *fushā*. A hypothesis which is put forward is that the author is condemning the appropriation of *fushā* as an instrument of power and subjugation. Only those who exercise official power, such as the president and the official press, use it publicly and actively. The population is a mere passive recipient, and largely

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\(^{19}\) "The regime, whenever they wanted to scare us, would always perform an Alawi accent. The Alawi accent is harsh, ugly, dirty […] They were doing this to us all the time." Interview with Nawar Bulbul, 13\(^{th}\) August 2015.
unaware of the “fuṣḥā-linked standard language ideology” (Suleiman 2013: 93-94) underlying the use and distribution of Modern Standard Arabic. In other words, the object of contestation is not fuṣḥā per se, but the use of Modern Standard Arabic as an oppressive instrument of hegemonic domination. In light of this, writing publicly in the vernacular is perceived as a strong act of contestation which equals trespassing the well-defined private/public and spoken/written boundaries reinforced by the hegemonic system. Writing in the vernacular represents an act of freedom, which, as emerged in an interview with Fares, was not a socially sanctioned practice before the revolution. Linguistic hybridity represents an active tool of linguistic reappropriation in contrast with a policy of linguistic separation and Arabization. This post frames Maher’s endeavor, through the addōmarī page, to “open up” Syrian society creating an online community of dissent.

5.5.2 Ḥakā Bedrī (“Bedri Spoke”), 15 April 2011, Example 4

The title of the post recalls the first part of the Syrian and Lebanese proverb ḥakā bedrī w insharah ṣadrī, which approximately translates into “he talked nonsense and my heart was delighted”. The word bedrī is probably related to the fuṣḥā word badara (“too arrive unexpectedly, spontaneously”). It is used to refer to a child who started talking at an earlier age but whose words are incomprehensible. However, as Maher made me notice, in his post

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20 Fares is the director of Amman-based anti-Assad radio “Radio Orient”. He says: “I'm a writer. I wrote six books. Mawlāna is a theatrical piece written in the Syrian vernacular. I sent it to the Syrian ministry of culture for them to accept it and they rejected it because it's in the dialect. They said we don't print books in the dialect. […] Social media played an important role as they increased the writing in the vernacular. Social media facilitated the use of the vernacular greatly. It became very natural to write in the vernacular. [Fuṣḥā is] far from the people. It always evokes the discourse of the regime. Only the members of the nizām [the regime] write in fuṣḥā”.

Interview with Fares, 23 June 2015.

21 Interview with Maher Alkurdi, Skype interview, August 2014.
“Bedrī is a person and he says things that actually do make sense.” hakā bedrī is a meme that Maher started using to introduce some posts in the months following the revolution, and which was picked up by the author of another satirical Syrian Facebook page, who named the page itself ḥakā bedrī. The post is accompanied by the picture of a funny-looking man raising his left fist and shouting Bedrī! Adding a cartoon and a title to the picture is a trend that accompanied addōmārī’s posts between March and August 2011. Some of the cartoons are borrowed from Ali Ferzat, which, as explained in more detail below, provided visibility to the page, and attracted more followers.

Both the proverb-title and the picture are types of paratexts which function as “framing devices, which are neither fully inside the text, not completely outside it” (Suleiman 2013: 95). The proverb-title and the cartoon frame the post as humorous. Like in the previous post, Maher uses a grammatical feature as a contextualization cue (Gumperz 1982) to the metaphorical message, namely the word kāna. Kāna corresponds to the past tense of the verb “to be”. Moreover, it is associated with stories and narratives, which start with the formula kāna yā mā kān (“Once upon a time”). Its use frames the post as a story, or a political metaphor.

Kāna (“to be”) is used both as an auxiliary verb and as a copula. When it functions as a copula, it requires a complement, which constitutes the predicate of the clause. The Arabic grammatical term for “predicate”, khabar, also means news. Kāna is the model of a group of verbs, known as kāna wa akhawātuha (“kāna and her sisters”), which can modify a nominal clause, requiring the complement (khabar) to take the accusative inflection. The

22 Interview with Maher al Kurdi, Graz, 2nd September 2015.
23 https://www.facebook.com/7akaBadri?fref=ts
The cartoon accompanying this post, however, was allegedly found by Maher on the internet and edited by Maher himself.
reason why the verb *kāna* and its sisters are described with feminine appellatives is unknown. Answers may be searched in their appearance in nominal clauses as well as in the grammaticalization of the word *kāna* in the Arabic vernaculars (cf. Jastrow 2013). Interestingly, the collocation *kāna wa akhawātuha* is also used stereotypically to refer to a group of gossiping women. Hence, the author uses it to frame the post humorously, as if he was sharing a rumor. Maher exploits the ambiguity of the verb *kāna* and its indexical associations to convey the political metaphorical message.

When asked to read out the post, Maher elided the final ending, thus giving the word a vernacular pronunciation. By doing so, he dropped the vowel *a*, which is also a nominal feminine marker. Hence, the verb *kāna* is turned into the “masculine” noun *kān*. Maher exploits the ambiguity of the unwovelled Arabic script, rendering *kāna* bivalent. Unvowelled, the word *kāna* can be read as *kāna* or *kān*, whereby *kāna* corresponds to the *fuṣḥā* pronunciation and *kān* to the vernacular pronunciation and the *fuṣḥā* verb in final pause. The pronunciation as *kān* also contributes to the creation of a rhyme in the sound – ān. The regular rhythm and the abundance of the rhymes in – ān evoke the cadence of a nursery rhyme or a folk tale.

The bivalency of the word *kāna* underlies the choice to use it as a cue to the political metaphorical message. *Kān*, as explained by Maher, is Bashar al-Asad's father Hafiz al-Asad, who ruled the country between 1971 and 2000. Syria and the president are not mentioned anywhere explicitly. Another important aspect which emerges from this post is the social function of proverbs and idiomatic phrases, as will be discussed below. Despite the wide presence of bivalent elements, before I asked Maher to read out the post, he
emphasized that “this is in the vernacular, not in fushā”\textsuperscript{25}. What is present, for Maher, is the vernacular meaning. This aspect will be treated further in the concluding discussion in terms of involvement and participation underlying the construction of a collective identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians.

Bivalent forms are marked in red. In order to facilitate the reading of the multiple layers of meaning, I added a bolded line to the gloss in some parts of the post. The bolded line is a transcription of Maher reading out the post.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{l}
\textbf{25} Interview with Maher Alkurdi, 2\textsuperscript{nd} September 2015. \\
\textbf{26} Maher said he chose to spell this word with the letter alif to distance himself from the fushā spelling with alif maqṣūra. This choice is motivated by the fact that he wanted to write in the vernacular. Skype interview with Maher al-Kurdi, 30\textsuperscript{th} September 2015.
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
news of kān
Hafiz's news

3)
anta akuṣ samā‘ān bi-khabar kān
You surely hear of predicate kān
inte akuṣ samā‘ān? bi-khabar kān
You surely heard of kān's news.
You surely heard about Hafiz

4)
bass mā bt‘arif shū qiṣṭo la khabar kān..!!
but NEG ASP-you-know what story of predicate [of] kāna..!!
bass ma bt‘arif shu l-‘iṣṣo la khabar kān..!!
but you don't know the story of the predicate of kān
but you don't know the backstory..!!

5)
kān hiyya nafṣā taba‘ kāna wa akhwātā illī šarā‘īna fihon..!!
was it same of kāna and sisters-her which tortured-us in-them..!!
kān..hye nafso la khabar kān w akhawātā illī šarā‘īna fion
it was the same of kān and his family with which they tortured us
it was the same story as Hafiz and her sisters they tortured us with

6)
kān w akhawātā w qarā’yābīnā .. nahabū al-balad w-kassarū al-mīzān..!!
kāna wa akhwātā w-qarā yakbina nahabū l-balad .. w-kassarū l-mızān
kān w akhawātā w qarāybinā .. nahabū al-balad w-kassarū al-mīzān..!!
kāna wa akhwātā w-qarāybīna nahabū l-balad .. w-kassarū l-mızān
kān w akhawātā w qarāybinā .. nahabū al-balad w-kassarū al-mīzān..!!
kāna w akhwātā w-qarāybīna nahabū l-balad .. w-kassarū l-mızān
kān w akhawātā w qarāybinā .. nahabū al-balad w-kassarū al-mīzān..!!
kāna w akhwātā w-qarāybīna nahabū l-balad .. w-kassarū l-mızān
Hafiz, his sisters and relatives .. plundered the country and ended the equality..!!

7)
w kull shī byuṣal li-jēbet kān .. bṣīr bi-khabar kān ..!!

27 Despite Maher's choice to write in the vernacular, he chooses to spell this word with qāf. When I attempted to elicit the rationale behind this choice he said that sometimes the qāf can also be pronounced in the vernacular. However, he did not recall if there was a specific reason for spelling this word this way. Spelling the qāf with a hamza becomes more and more frequent in the later months and years, which suggests a more conscious choice of representing the Damascene pronunciation to distance himself from the fuṣḥā or the Alawi vernacular pronunciation.

28 Due to the author’s vernacular graphic representation I opted for a transcription rather than for a transliteration. Hence the use of the short vowel o instead of the long ā to represent the Arabic waw.

29 After reading this line, Maher stops to explain it. “It is very clear what I’m referring to here: kān is Hafiz al-Asad”.

30 Although the expression literally means “and they broke the scales”, Maher chose this expression to refer explicitly to “mizān il-‘adālē”, “the balance of justice”, and emphasized that the term “mizān” is a symbol commonly used for justice.
and all what enters in-pocket kān .. ends up as-predicate [of] kān ..!!

\[ \text{w kull shi byūṣal la-jebet kān .. bṣīr bi-khabar kān ..!!} \]

and all that entered Kān's pockets .. disappeared by hands of the secret agents..!!

And all that reached Hafiz .. just disappeared by hands of the secret agents!!

8)

و أخواتك و قرايبك، انشرها و تنشروا ومنزل مكان

wa akhwātā w-qarāybiṇā .. intasharū w-nashalū al-makān..!!

and sisters-her and relatives .. they-spread and plundered the-place..!!

w akhwātō w-qarāybiṇā .. intasharū w-nashalu l-makān..!!

and his sisters and relatives .. they spread and stole the place ..!!

and all his entourage and his relatives .. they spread and plundered the country..!!

9)

و كان ياما كان .. كان في بلد الخير في ميلان

wa kān yā mā kān .. kān fī balad al-khayr fī malyān ..

and was oh it was .. was in country the-good in full ..

wa kān yā mā kān .. kān fī balad al-khār fī malyān ..

and once upon a time .. there was a country full of good..

once upon a time .. there was a country in which good abounded ..

10)

و الناس يحب بعض و عايشة فامان

wa-l-nās bṭihīb baḍ w-‘āysha bi-amān

and the-people ASP-love each other and-live in-safety ..

w in-nās bṭihīb baḍ w-‘āyshe bi-amān ..

and people would love each other and leave in safety ..

where people would love each other and live in safety ..

11)

و اجا على هالبلد كان و قرايبينا و اخوتنا .. وكلبو البيضة و قرنته

w ijjā ‘alā hal-balad kān w-qarāybiṇa w-ikhūta .. w akalū al-baydu wa qishrita

and came to this-country kān and-relatives and-sisters-her .. and ate the-egg and-shell-its ..

w ijjā ‘al-balad kān32 .. w-qarāybiṇa w-ikhūta .. w akalū l-beyda w-‘ishrīta ..

and then kān, his relatives and sisters arrived .. and they took everything ..

And then Hafiz al-Assad arrived, and so did his family and entourage .. and they robbed the country..

12)

و صارت الناس تجوع و نأكل بعض .. و كان مو سمان

w-ṣārat al-nās taǰū’ w-tākul baḍ .. kān mū sa’lan35 ..

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31 Bṣīr bi-khabar kān is a saying that means “disappeared”. In Syria, as Maher pointed out, it was often used in the context of people who suddenly disappeared by hands of the secret agents.

32 Maher interjects to clarify that that kān is Hafiz al-Asad.

33 Maher at first reads the word iikhūta (“sisters”) ikhwāta. When he finishes reading the line he realizes it does not rhyme, so he reads again and says ikhūta. Ikhwāta is according to him one of the realizations of the word “sisters” in the vernacular. He chose to write this realization instead of ikhwāta to make it rhyme, or to generate an assonance with the word ‘ishrīta.

34 Maher makes me note that akalū l-beyda w-‘ishrīta is also a popular idiom.
and all his entourage .. filled their pockets as much as possible ..

Hafiz al Asad’s news filled the walls .. time and places

and everyone that says no to his entourage, disappeared ..!!

This Syrian vernacular expression translates “he wouldn't care”.

13) 

and people started getting hungry and eating each other .. and Hafiz couldn't care less ..

14)

Hafiz was enraged .. Hafiz was announced ..  Hafiz said ..  Hafiz did not say ..!!

15)

Hafiz knows .. Hafiz forgets ..  Hafiz is free .. and what not ..!!

16)

Hafiz knows .. Hafiz forgets ..  Hafiz is free .. and what not ..!!

17) 

and everyone who would dare to say no to Hafiz or his entourage, would disappear ..!!

35 This Syrian vernacular expression translates “he wouldn't care”.
36 “Everything you would read in Syria was about Hafiz, Hafiz, Hafiz”. Maher Alkurdi, 2nd September 2015.
37 “Here I'm showing how much idiocy our newspapers were filled with”, (Maher Alkurdi, Skype interview, 30th September 2015).
38 The meaning of i'tabarū ma kān, as Maher confirmed, is similar to that of bṣīr bi khabar kān.
Akin to the previous post, the Arabic language is the literal meaning, whereas the
metaphorical meaning is a critical summary of the history of Asad’s Syria, in which the
ascent of Hafiz al-Asad to power brought about injustice, inequality and cronyism.

This post relies on a plethora of communicative strategies in order to convey the
metaphorical political message: *fuṣḥā* grammatical terms, the ambiguity of the unwovelled
Arabic script, popular sayings, intertextual references to the Syrian social context, rhyme,
lexical and musical repetition (Tannen 2007) and the use of the Syrian vernacular. To further
prove the key functional role of these strategies, when I asked Maher to read out the post, he
often stopped and read again certain parts to make sure that he emphasized the rhyme
correctly, that he vowelled certain words as he intended, and to make sure that I understood
the meaning of these Syrian sayings and their relevance to the metaphorical meaning. In
what follows I shall focus on linguistic simultaneity and idiomatic expressions.
5.5.2.1 Linguistic Simultaneity

The post presents several ambiguous, bivalent forms, which constitute an important source of creativity. The word *kān/kāna*, as discussed above, given the unvowelled Arabic script, belongs both to *fuṣḥā* as well as to the vernacular. The pausal and vernacular reading *kān* generates the base for the metaphorical meaning, namely Hafiz al-Asad. In line 16, the expression *kān fāḍī* eloquently exemplifies the power of simultaneity. The reader is prompted to think about *kān* as a grammatical term. However, the lack of the accusative ending *-an* in the *khabar* (“predicate”) activates the metaphorical meaning. Both the literal and the metaphorical meanings, however, are present. Bivalency, in this post, intersects with idiomaticity, which enhances the intertextually hybrid character of the communicative event.

5.5.2.2 Idiomaticity

What is striking about this post is the intense presence of idiomatic expressions. Idioms appear in full, such as the one in line (11) *wa akalū al-bayda wa-qishrita* (literally “they ate the egg and its shell”) and *biṣīr bi-khabar kān* (“disappeared”) in (7), or are altered, such as in line (19), whereby *al-ḥīṯān malyāne adān* (“the walls are full of ears”) modifies the most commonly known *al-ḥīṯān ylā adān* (“walls have ears”), or the title, in which the saying *Ḥakā bedrī* (“he talked nonsense”) is turned into “Bedri spoke”. Moreover, the expressions *biṣīr bi-khabar kān* (“disappeared”), *akhbār kān* (“Kān’s news”), *akhwātā aw qarāybinā* (“its sisters and relatives”) are worth analyzing. Several of these forms are related to the “base-form” (Langlotz 2006) *kāna wa akhawātuhā*, which,
however, does not appear as such anywhere in the post. Their appearance as altered forms reinforces the creative nature of idioms posited by Langlotz and Tannen (2007). As highly, but not absolutely fixed (Tannen 2007) linguistic forms, idioms epitomize the diachronically dialogic nature of language posited by Bakhtin (1981) and captured by Becker (1995) through the term *linguaging*. Moreover, the intrinsically diachronic character of idioms is accompanied by a synchronicity of the literal and the figurative meanings.

As argued by Langlotz (2006), both meanings are accessible to the user’s activation set. “Once the idiomatic meaning can be triggered by the key-constituents, it is brought into the semantic foreground. This, however, does not lead to the deactivation of the literal meaning and its conceptual impact. Rather, the literal meaning remains cognitively active and accessible to work as a semantic background, a standard of comparison, for the foregrounded idiomatic meaning (also cf. Glucksberg 1993: 20)” (Langlotz 2006: 107). In this example, the literal, grammatical meaning of *kāna wa akhawātuḥā*, is always present, and functions as a background for the figurative meaning. The prominence of the figurative meaning and the cognitive work required from the interlocutor to construct this meaning both diachronically (comparing the present context to previous usages) and synchronically (inferring the figurative from the literal) create a high degree of involvement. Moreover, the repetition of altered forms reinforces the power of this idiomatic expression, forcing the user to jump back and forth between the base-form and the new, altered one. In a sense, this recalls the constant movement between fixity and fluidity emphasized by Otsuji and Pennycook’s (2014) metrolingualism underlying superdiverse practices.

The repetition of this idiom occurs across posts. Line (18), *li-akhbār kān tatimma .. w iza ma ḥabūt tisīmā’a* (“Hafiz's news is to be continued..and in case you didn't want to
hear it ..”), followed by the altered proverb *al-hītān malyāne adān ..!!!* (“Walls are full of ears”), is used by Maher in all the three successive posts, published in April 2011, in which he uses *kāna* as a contextualization cue. This further reinforces the power of the idiom in triggering participation.

The last line, *al-hītān malyāne adān ..!!!*, stands in dialogic relation with *al-hītān ilā adān* (“walls have ears”), which was used in Syrian society as an act to silence any expression of public dissent. As such, it is one of the sayings that best epitomizes the complicity and consent to the regime's censorship as it constituted an internalized societal form of self-censorship. The saying *al-hītān ilā adān* constituted a speech act aimed at silencing dissent, Maher reconfigures social behavior by uttering it in a context of dissent. Proverbs and idioms both seem to have a social impact by relying on dynamics of continuity and reconfiguration. Their high dialogic nature, underlying their intrinsic creativity, yields to higher potential of participation.

In other words, the author exploits the attractive character of idioms, which relies on cultural continuity, as bait to co-opt an audience, creating a sphere of solidarity which is oriented to Syrians' social values and shared knowledge. At the same time, he attempts to change the order of social values within the culture itself. This shift recalls what Maher often referred to as “na’le” (*naqla* in *fuṣḥā*).

A similar use of idiomatic expressions is found in Nawar Bulbul’s practices, as shown in the example below.
5.5.3  Nawar Bulbul, 21 November 2012, Example 5

In this post, Nawar Bulbul refers to the abstract base-form of the idiom *yimshī al-ḥayṭ al-ḥayṭ wa qul yā rabb al-sutra* (“walk alongside the wall, invoking God’s protection”). Akin to *al-ḥīṭān ylā adān* (“Walls have ears”), this idiom, widely used in Levantine vernaculars, invited to keep a low-key profile in society and functioned as a form of societal self-censorship. As for the previous post, I added a line to the gloss, which corresponds to a transcription of Nawar reading out, so as to emphasize the presence of bivalency in the Arabic script and the writer’s linguistic perceptions. Unlike Maher’s post, however, Nawar’s does not rely on Arabic grammatical devices to cue the metaphorical meaning. Hence, it was deemed unnecessary to add a line to disambiguate the grammatical meaning. Furthermore, the scope of the transcription is to emphasize the ambiguity of the Arabic script. Hence, focus has been placed on salient features, such as the pronunciation of the *qāf*, diphthongs and the vocalization of verbal prefixes. Moreover, raised intonation is indicated with the symbol */?/*. However, less salient phonological features, such as internal vowel articulation, have been disregarded. The bivalent forms are marked in red.

الجيل القديم ... كان يمشي الحيط الحيط ويقول بارب الستره ...
الجيل الجديد ... قرر ... مايشي إلا بنص الشارع ...
والحيط تركو للكتابه ... وس

al-jīl al-qādīm ... kān yamshī al-ḥayṭ al-ḥayṭ wa-yaqūl yā rabb al-sutra ...
al-jīl al-‘īdīm ... kān yimshi l-ḥēṭ l-ḥēṭ w yūl ya rabb is-sutra ...
the-generation the-old ... was it-walks the-wall the-wall and it-says oh lord the-cover ...
*The old generation was walking alongside the wall, invoking God’s protection ...*
The new generation decided to not walk anywhere else other than the middle of the street …

And they left the wall for writing .. that’s all

5.5.3.1 Linguistic Simultaneity

Structurally, the post can be divided into two symmetrical parts. The first part finishes in the middle of the second line. The first part of the post is bivalent. Bivalency is facilitated by the ambiguity of the unvowelled Arabic script. However, Nawar reads it out in the vernacular. The bivalent character is confirmed by Nawar’s perception of the text as vernacular, as emerges from the transcription line. This includes Syrian vernacular intonation, such as the raised intonation after the word qarrar, and the vernacular pronunciation of bivalent words, such as al-‘edīm (“the old”, line 1), instead of al-qadīm. Despite the bivalency characterizing the first part, the second presents graphic choices aimed towards a representation of the Syrian vernacular. Akin to Maher’s post, linguistic simultaneity and idiomaticity co-occur and enhance the hybrid character of the text.

5.5.3.2 Idiomaticity

The first part of the post, composed of bivalent forms, recalls the base-form of an idiom which essentializes the older generation’s silent complicity to oppression. Nawar explained that this post represents an homage to his generation.
I'm talking about how we took to the streets. Our parents used to tell us: shhh, what we talked about during our family conversation last night keep it for yourself. Keep your mouth shut. Only say bir-rūḥ, bid-damm, nafūḏ k yahfiz (“we sacrifice our spirit and our blood for you, Hafiz”). If only a child dared to say 'but Hafiz el-Assad....' him and his family would be gone. [...] The proverb ana bimshī ḥayt l-ḥayt (“I walk alongside the wall”), is a sign of fear, abjectness, remaining in the shadow. The wall, for the new generation, those who are 20, 25, 17 of age, my nephews for example, is for them to write about their revolution.

In the second part of the post, Nawar alters the idiom into [...] mā yīmshī illa bi-nuṣṣ al-shārī’...wa-l-ḥayt tarākū līl-kiṭābe ... w bass (“[...] to not walk anywhere else other than the middle of the street ... And they left the wall for writing .. that’s all”). The modification of the idiom is expressed in the Syrian vernacular. Moreover, the insertion of the word w bass constitutes an intertextual reference to the slogan of the revolution: allāh, surīyya, ḥurriyya wa bass (“Allah, Syria and Freedom, that's all”).

While Maher’s posts evoke the genre of nursery rhymes and folk tales, Nawar evokes the genre of protest slogans. The phenomenon of mixing genres, which has been defined in critical discourse analysis as interdiscursivity (cf. Fairclough 1992), may also be considered as a persuasive strategy. Idioms as intertextual devices and interdiscursivity evoke a shared heritage and at the same time break with the past and affirm a new socio-political order.

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39 This is a slogan that was used during demonstrations in support of Hafiz al-Assad. Moreover, Hafiz was replaced by Bashar recently. See Bandak (2014).
40 Interview with Nawar Bulbul, 13 August 2015.
5.6 Concluding Discussion

This chapter shed light on a shift in Maher’s and Nawar’s communicative strategies on their Facebook pages, which occurred in concomitance with the uprising in March 2011. The authors no longer used English forms, Arabizi, emojis and Westernizing semiotic devices, such as videos and pictures evoking American pop culture. Rather, they recurred to the Arabic script, and exploited its ambiguity to generate bivalent forms. These bivalent forms co-occur with more marked Syrian vernacular forms. Moreover, Maher named his public page addōmarī after Ali Farzat’s famous publication and accompanied his posts with satirical cartoons by Ali Farzat. These have been analyzed as paratextual elements, namely devices which frame the Facebook page as subversive, thus highlighting its ideological dimension. Underlying Maher’s and Nawar’s communicative choices, it is posited, is a need to respond to a claim of authenticity, made by President Bashar al-Asad, who accused protestors of being foreign infiltrators.

Some of these resources, such as bivalency, are not new. Maher and Nawar have not re-invented the wheel overnight. However, throughout the post-revolution phase these forms appear within a metalinguistic environment characterized by a more conscious use of language hybridity, as emerges from the authors’ perceptions about the vernaculars, by Maher’s choice of using the Arabic language as the literal meaning of the political metaphors in examples 3 and 4, as well as Maher’s and Nawar’s use of strategically bivalent forms and idioms.

Linguistic simultaneity has been observed as the constant presence of both fuṣḥā and the vernacular. For instance, in example 3, fuṣḥā grammatical terms are used to cue the subversive metaphorical meaning. Similarly, in example 4, the unvowelled Arabic script
allowed the strategic use of the bivalent form *kān*, upon which the pun about Hafiz Al-Asad was constructed. In example 5, Nawar utilized bivalent forms and the Syrian vernacular in the same text strategically in order to emphasize the metaphorical meaning of his post. It is interesting to analyze linguistic simultaneity in concomitance with the authors’ perceptions of the texts. The line containing the transcription of them reading out reveals their attachment to the vernacular and its role in their political struggle. Despite this ideological perception, which also emerges during the interviews with the authors, their practices are pervaded by simultaneous elements, such as strategic bivalent forms and creative elements. Often, as in the case of *kān*, bivalency and idiomaticity intersected.

Idiomaticity was analyzed borrowing cognitive and discourse-analytic tools. Both cognitive and discourse-analytic accounts emphasize the co-existence of a synchronic and a diachronic dimension of idiomaticity. Idiomaticity may be understood as an intensified process of intertextuality, whereby new idiomatic forms have the power of changing present contexts. The context-shaping potential of idioms was observed through their creative reconfiguration. It was shown how altered idioms were used to convey the political metaphorical meaning and convey dissent. The idioms in the data analyzed perform the following functions: entertain, persuade, entice. They underlie a choice of ambiguity and promote a group dissident identity.

Entertainment is enhanced by the use of rhythmic cadence that evoke nursery rhymes and folk tales. This genre, it is posited, also contributes to the persuasive character of these texts. Folk tales and nursery rhymes belong to a shared heritage and they are associated with simplicity and innocence. This comforting and reassuring aspect suggests a risk averse trend, which, consistent with the authors’ intention to convey dissent covertly,
offsets the subversive character of the texts. The risky endeavor of expressing dissent on Facebook, it is argued, is not only motivated by security threats, but also by the aggressiveness present in many online environments (cf. De Fina, forthcoming; Oegema et al. 2008; Dery 1994).

In the posts analyzed, idioms are frequently repeated and contextualized in the historical and socio-political situation. Repetition of altered idioms, it is argued, contributed to the creation of a high degree of involvement, which led to higher participation. It is posited that the Syrian vernacular, ambiguous hybrid idioms and folk tales evoke a sphere of solidarity and locality which contributes to the construction of a collective identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians. Intensified participation can be observed in the increased number of followers as well as in the type of comments and interactions among commenters. This aspect will be analyzed in further detail in the next chapter.
6 AUDIENCE AND PARTICIPATION

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I looked at the strategies of linguistic simultaneity, intertextuality and interdiscursivity as they are deployed by a group of dissidents on their Facebook pages. By emphasizing the shift in their writing practices before and after the uprising, I showed that these strategies are central to understand how hybridity was used to code dissent. These texts, I argue, do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, they emerged in discourse and interaction and they, in turn, create participation. To use Bakhtin’s (1981: 276) terminology, these texts are intrinsically dialogic.

The living utterance…cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads…; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it does not approach the object from the sidelines.

In this chapter I expand on the dialogic character of these texts, by focusing on how the above-mentioned discursive strategies have generated participation, as it emerged from the comments to a post published on Maher Alkurdi’s public Facebook page addōmarī on 25 July 2012. This post consists of a political metaphor, in which the author rhetorically asks why all the army officers interviewed by the pro-government television channel al-Dunya pronounce the qāf, which is a salient marker of the regime register, as well as a feature of some coastal dialects of Syria, where most Alawites hail from. This post addresses an important identity issue which emerged at the beginning of the uprising, when President Bashar al-Asad alleged that the demonstrations had been orchestrated by infiltrators driven by sectarian intentions. The word tāʾīfiyya (“sectarianism”), used by Bashar al-Asad in response to the March 2011 uprising, is
heavily loaded in Syrian public discourse. One of the main tropes of the regime’s narrative has been portraying itself as a religious minority protecting Syria from religious conflicts through the promotion of a secular Arab identity. Talking about religion in public was considered a taboo in Syria before the uprising, just like discussing internal politics or simply mentioning the President’s name. It is not surprising that the posts treating this theme attracted a high number of responses.

How have the authors’ texts been received by their commenters? What is the interaction with the audience like? How does the audience show alignment through their comments in reaction to these dissidents’ Facebook posts? What type of identities emerge from this interaction? For the analysis of the type of participation triggered by this post I draw from theory and methods of interactional sociolinguistics, including analysis of conversation and narrative. In particular, I refer to Tannen’s (1984; 2007) framework, which conceptualizes participation in terms of interactional involvement and De Fina’s (forthcoming) narrative framework, designed to analyze the reactions of blog users to an online-narrated story. Due to the particular genre of my texts, in which stories emerge in the form of metaphors, I also refer to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) foundational theory on metaphor as well as critical reactions to it in the field of cognitive linguistics (Taylor 2002).

The type of interaction occurring between the post author and the audience evokes Androutsopolous’s (2013: 47) concept of “participatory spectacle”, through which Androutsopolous, focusing on the relationship between Youtube videos and comments, “emphasizes the collaborative character of discourse on Youtube”. Besides highlighting the collaborative component of online communication, the term “spectacle” also highlight the performative character of online communication. Such performative and participatory elements
evoke the concept of ṭarab. In the Arabic tradition, this term describes the reaction provoked in the audience by a muṭrib (literally the one who provokes ṭarab, namely a chanter). The success of the muṭrib is measured according to the reactions he provokes in the audience. An analysis of audience reactions is therefore an important measure of the effectiveness of the post author.

In the next section I analyze the narrative and the conversation frameworks and explain the key notions used in my analysis.

6.2 Repetition, Participation and Involvement in Conversation

In interactional sociolinguistics, participation has been studied among other frames, through the prism of intertextuality. Tannen (1984; 2007), in one of the earliest and foundational studies on intertextuality in conversation, analyzes intertextuality within the framework of repetition. Her approach is grounded in the work of Bateson (1979), Becker (1995) and Bakhtin ([1952-3] 1986). Bateson’s insight about the existence of patterns of rhythm and repetition underlying meaning creation, as well as the interconnectedness and interdependence of these patterns, shaped Tannen’s vision of intertextuality as synchronic and diachronic repetition. Synchronic patterns of repetition refer to the internal relations constituting texts, whereas diachronic relations refer to their external relations with other texts. These repetition patterns are at the core of a vision of language as mobile and dynamic. This dynamic nature led Becker to the conceptualization of the term *languaging*. *Languaging*, according to Becker, is “context shaping”, and “can be understood as taking old texts from memory and reshaping them into present contexts” (9). In their descriptions of language, as noted by Tannen (2007), both Bateson and Becker refer to the underlying notion of intertextuality, without using the term per se. Moreover, she continues, this term is generally attributed to Julia Kristeva (1974; 1980), who
used it to introduce Bakhtin’s insights on the heteroglossic and dialogic nature of texts and utterances to the Western audience.

In *Conversational style* (1984; 2005) and *Talking voices* (2007), Tannen investigated how language is used to create meaning and interpersonal relationships. She analyzed different forms of repetition, including lexical and phonological repetition, intra- and intertextuality, constructed dialogue, voicing and ventriloquizing as discursive strategies which create interpersonal involvement. In *Talking voices*, particular attention was devoted to the strategies of repetition, dialogue and imagery and details, all of which are salient in the analysis of my example.

6.2.1 Repetition

Tannen summarizes the purposes of repetition in conversation in terms of production, comprehension, connection and interaction. Repetition facilitates production and comprehension by providing “semantically less dense discourse” (Tannen 2007: 59). In terms of connection, repetition helps tying new information to old information and “evidences a speaker’s attitude, showing how it contributes to the meaning of a discourse” (2007:60). At an interactional level, repetition serves the functions of “getting and keeping the floor, showing listenership, providing back-channel response, stalling, gearing up to answer or speak, humor and play, savoring and showing appreciation of a good line or a good joke, persuasion, […], linking one speaker’s ideas to another’s, ratifying another’s contributions (including another’s ratification), and including in an interaction a person who did not hear a previous utterance” (2007: 61). To these functions, she adds an overarching one, the establishment of coherence and interpersonal involvement. Involvement, she argues, is created through “the forces of music (rhythm and sound)” as well as through “meaning in mutual participation in sensemaking”. (2007: 134).
Among the interactional functions, humor is a particularly relevant one in the type of interaction I am going to analyze. As emphasized by the author of the Facebook page *addōmarī*, “I used the Syrian vernacular to convey a different facet of humor”. Tannen states that a “common function of repetition with slight variation” (2007: 71) is to create humor. A subcategory of humor is what Tannen defines “savoring”, which means repeating a humorous text to show appreciation. Finally, Tannen characterizes this type of repetition commonly occurring in conversation as synchronic, which as she suggested, is similar to Hamilton’s (1996) concept of intratextuality, indicating relations between texts within a conversation. Another type of repetition, which describes the relation between texts occurring in different conversations, and which Hamilton refers to as intertextuality, is described by Tannen under the rubric of “dialogue”.

6.2.2 Dialogue

Building on Bakhtin’s (1981) insight that every utterance is dialogic, and on Becker’s description of languaging as “taking old language (*jarwa*) and pushing (*dhosok*) it into new contexts” (1995: 185), Tannen (2007) discussed intertextuality in terms of constructed dialogue, namely the “recontextualization of words in a current discourse” (2007: 17). Taking on other’s voices (voicing) and ventriloquizing (taking on voices of participants) are two specific types of constructed dialogue. Agha (2005) investigated the notions of voice and voicing in connection with register, building on his definition of registers as “forms of speech [which] come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of

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1 Skype interview, August 2014. When he discusses this type of humor he compares it with the humor created using *fushā*, which he characterizes as “heavy”.

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language users” (2005: 38). By asking what happens when voicing phenomena occur in concomitance with registers, he argues that encounters with registers are not merely encounters with voices (or characterological figures or personae) but encounters in which individuals establish forms of footing and alignment with voices indexed by speech and thus with social types of persons, real or imagined, whose voices they take them to be (Id.).

In other words, through the use of voices and registers, language users accomplish interactional work by initiating a dialogue with the type of persons these voices and registers are associated with. In my data, several commenters show alignment by voicing regime supporters through forms identified as “regime register”. Other commenters consciously use Damascene words to voice and show disagreement with the post author and dissidents.

Agha’s pivotal claim is that registers are socially dynamic and their occurrence in micro-level processes has repercussions on macro-level changes. Voicing, in the example I am proposing below, appears in connection with register and humor. For example, one of the commenters responds to the post quoting the refrain of a song chanted during anti-Asad protests. This refrain contains the expression qǝrd wlā. This expression is used to voice the regime register, with which this word is indexically associated. In the refrain, this expression is followed by the words “this [discursive figure] lost its effect”, suggesting that the erstwhile regime register is no longer fearsome and authoritative to the extent that it can be publicly mocked. This is a clear example, it will be argued, of how voice-register encounters at the micro-level relate to macro-level register processes.

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2 The expression qǝrd is thought among my Damascene informants to have an association with the fushā word qird (“monkey”). The peer-to-peer online dictionary http://ar.mo3jam.com/ reports it in the collocation qǝrd wlō, which is used in coastal dialects of Syria as an expression of bewilderment, as in the following example conversation: a) qāl al-yawm irtafa’ sa’r al-khobz (“the bread price went up today”) b) qǝrd wlō lā taqālā (“no way”!). http://ar.mo3jam.com/term/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%AF%20%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88#Syrian. My Damascene informants, however, suggested that the expression qǝrd wlā was also used as an interjection used by the secret service to intimidate the interlocutor.
Another term that will be used in the analysis of my data is interdiscursivity. Fairclough (1992) described interdiscursivity as a particular type of intertextuality. While intertextuality involves the repetition of texts through “overt” devices, such as constructed dialogue, interdiscursivity sheds light on how different language conventions, such as genre, style and discourse, co-occur in one text. The concept of interdiscursivity is complex and has been treated extensively in literature. However, in my analysis I use it to describe the links between the analyzed Facebook comments and other genres, such as protest slogans and nursery rhymes.

6.2.3 Imagery

Tannen (2007) deems imagery and details to be important strategies in generating involvement. Through images, the speaker/writer evokes scenes and sounds (as opposed to exposing them) in the reader’s mind, thus involving the hearer/reader by inducing them to activate their own individual imagination. “Through images created in part by details, a hearer or reader imagines a scene. […] The particularity and familiarity of details make it possible for both speakers and hearers to refer to their memories and construct images of scenes: people in relation to each other engaged in recognizable activities. And the construction of a scene in comprehension by hearers and readers constitutes mutual participation in sensemaking.” (2007: 134). In my example, and similarly to other dissidents’ conversations on Facebook, images play an important role. Through images and metaphors (such as the image depicted by the post author of army officers appearing on television from all areas of Syria, as well some of the commenters personification of the Free Syrian Army standing behind the army officers), as will be shown, participants encode meaning and create ambiguity, whose function is on the one hand to avoid censorship and on the other to generate involvement and participation.
6.3 Participation in Social Media Narrative

To further understand the type of interaction displayed in the example below, it is useful to refer to another analytical framework, which examines participation within the genre of narrative. De Fina’s (forthcoming) methodology to investigate participation on social media is informed by previous work on interaction, and particularly Goffman’s (1981) distinction between formats of production and reception. In terms of production, Goffman distinguishes between author (text producer), animator (teller), and principal (whoever is responsible for the text content). In terms of reception, he distinguished between addressed and unaddressed audience. In the case of the Facebook post analyzed below, the production categories physically coincide. However, the text author, Maher Alkurdi, speaks through his public persona addōmarī, who functions as the animator. The author’s real identity is unknown to many of the commenters. As will become clearer throughout the analysis, the production/reception dichotomy suggested by Goffman is complicated by the ambiguous roles of the participants (post author and commenters), who are at the same time readers and writers, and by the type of interaction, which does not strictly conform to the Labovian narrative parameters.

Another important taxonomy adapted by De Fina in her analysis of blog narrative participation is Young’s (1987) decomposition of the narration into two categories: the storyrealm and the taleworld. The storyrealm concerns the act of narration per se, and therefore involves the authors, the audience and the process of telling, while the taleworld is constituted by the characters of the story and the plot. Moreover, De Fina builds on Young’s concept of evaluative frames, initially describing attitudes towards the story itself, and extends it to “evaluations about tellers, other participants and the activity in which they are all engaged” (12). De Fina elaborated the notion of evaluative frames and designed an innovative system of coding.
to analyze participation emerging from a blog’s comments to a story narrated on a video format.

She analyzed comments according to the following categories (17):

1) thread to which the comment belonged (comments that start a new thread, comments that reply to the first comment in a thread, comments that reply to the previous comment, comments that reply to another comment that does not precede them nor initiates another thread),

2) participant’s name

3) interactional dynamics
   - Initiating thread comment: Comments that start a new thread
   - Response to initiating thread comment: Comments that are direct responses to the first comment in a thread
   - Response to previous comment: Comments that respond to the comment directly preceding them in the thread
   - Response to a comment: Comments that respond to another comment in the thread that does not directly precede them or initiates the thread

4) Frame focus of the comment

5) Medium (text or video),

6) Tone (more or less aggressive).

Furthermore, De Fina (18) divided FRAME FOCI into the following subcategories:

- Story realm comments: participants, tellability, aspects of the activity at hand, metacomment, comment on the teller as a teller, comment on the co-teller
- Taleworld comments: on some other aspect of the story, on characters, on action of the story
- Outside world: unrelated comments, comment on a character as a person in the world, loosely related comment, comment on the teller as a person in the world
- Second story: initiation of a second story, comment on the action of a second story

Based on the category “interactional dynamics”, she concluded that most comments were in response to some other (not previous) comments, which suggested the absence of sustained dialogue, reinforcing a claim previously made by Herring (2013), and that “participants are not
really focused on the content and informational components of online communication, but rather on other aspects of it, and therefore they don’t feel particularly obliged to stay on point” (23). She interpreted these results in the light of the “enhanced reflexivity that online environments afford” (31). “On the one hand, the fact that comments are posted and written paradoxically allows for greater permanence of opinions and therefore for less spontaneous reactions to a story or to other participant’s contributions. On the other hand, the participatory culture and online environments encourage performance as a central act of self-presentation” (Ibid.).

At this point it important to emphasize that while I draw on this method for the analysis of my sample, a comparison between my results and De Fina’s can be problematic. As noted by De Fina (forthcoming), the context in which participation occurred in her case study is that of a gossip blog. Conversely, the context of my case study is characterized by a highly politicized audience. I therefore expect the comments to the post to stay more on topic. However, both an interactional and a narrative perspective may be useful to shed light on the type of participation being analyzed here. Both perspectives contribute to answering the following questions: to whom do commenters orient their comment, how do they elaborate their orientation and what keeps comments and posts tied together? In other words, what is it that creates participation, or, to use Tannen’s (2007: 85) expression, what “keep[s] talk going”? Finally, the analysis of Facebook comments may shed more light on the dynamics of online interaction in terms of affordances. For example, the fact that very few commenters reply to the previous comment may be due to technological limitations, which have been resolved only recently by Facebook with the creation of reply buttons after each comment, thus facilitating the formation of threads. Finally, the post I am taking into consideration is a political metaphor, rather than the narration
of real events. Metaphor is a recurrent genre across the texts of the dissidents I have taken into consideration.

6.4 Metaphor and Ambiguity

The post analyzed below recontextualizes a Syrian idiomatic idiom within a metaphor of the current political situation. Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 2003) argued that metaphors are not simply marginal esthetic devices. Rather, they are pervasive in everyday language, and they perform an important cognitive function. They divide metaphors into conventional and outside our conceptual system. Conventional metaphors structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture. New metaphors “make sense of our experience in the same way conventional metaphors do: they provide coherent structure, highlighting some things and hiding others”. (139) The metaphor “love is a collaborative work of art”, through entailments like “love is work, love is active, etc.”, for example, highlights certain aspects of love. Through metaphor and its entailments we give love a certain meaning. In this sense, according to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors shape reality.

Recent cognitive approaches criticized this conceptualization of metaphor. Taylor (2002: 488) argues against the assumption that abstract categories (such as love, time, etc.) can only be accessed through metaphor. To explain this position, he divides metaphor into source and target domain. In the metaphor “We came to these conclusions”, source domain (traveling) and its categories (traveler, departure point, arrival point and motion) maps onto the target domain “rational thought” and its categories (thinker, premises, conclusion, reasoning). Lakoff and Johnson explain this mapping through conceptual metaphors. If we take into consideration the metaphor “we came to these conclusions”, one conceptual framework underlying this is that A
CONCLUSION IS A DESTINATION (490).^3 Whereas he thinks that metaphors can enrich our target domain, he deems “implausible that it is metaphor that creates our conceptions of reasoning, time, morality and so on” (491). Paraphrasing Grady (1997), Taylor explains that the initial motivation for metaphorical mapping may not, in fact, be the need to understand a target domain, but the need to symbolize our conceptualizations of it in a way that can be apprehended by others. Statements pertaining to concrete domains (such as the location or motion of one object with respect to one another) can be easily verified by other observers. Inter-subjective agreement on the meanings of ‘concrete’ terms – spatial terms, in particular – is therefore relatively easy to establish. It is more difficult to establish consensus with respect to abstract domains. […] By talking about the abstract in terms of the concrete, we create the illusion of objectivity, and thereby facilitate communication about the abstract (491-492).

This insight is particularly important for our investigation on participation. Similar to image and details, metaphor seems to have a persuasive discursive function by virtue of its connection with concrete, objective entities. Moreover, the subjective nature of abstract, internal experiences, is also linked to the discussion on ambiguity.

In political discourse, ambiguity has been studied in the light of Bavelas et al.’s (1990) theory of equivocation, according to which ambiguity or equivocation is a deliberate strategy to avoid all possible negative consequences of an unambiguous response to a question. Ambiguity, according to Bavelas et al., can occur at four dimensions: sender, content, receiver and context. A response can be more ambiguous the more the sender fails to acknowledge the response to their opinion, or the more they attribute the opinion to someone else. It is ambiguous in terms of content when the response is unclear. Receiver refers to the extent to which the recipient of the response is the audience present in the room. Finally, context refers to whether the response directly answers the question posed. Bull (2008) revisits the equivocation theory in the high-stake context of televised political interviews. This context, in which the receiver does not

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3 By convention, conceptual metaphors are capitalized.
necessarily coincide with the interviewer, complicates Bavelas et al.’s four-dimensional framework. These categories also need to be revisited in the hybrid and intertextual context of Facebook. In my case study, the sender is ambiguous in the sense that the post author, as well as commenters, speak through public personas.\(^4\) \textit{Addōmarī}, for example is Maher Alkurdi’s public persona. Moreover, several commenters utilize fake names and profile pictures. Intertextuality, and particularly voicing and irony, also signal ambiguity at the senders’ level. Quoting others’ texts or other texts or registers – including voicing – makes it seem like it is someone else who is expressing this opinion. Ambiguity also occurs at the content level. As will be shown below, commenters make use of more or less hybrid codes to index ambiguity. Sometimes comments use irony to signal ambiguity and cue it through a mix of \textit{fuṣḥā} and vernacular. Another ambiguous strategy consists in the change of frame focus, as appears in the examples in which the commenters refer to yerba \textit{mate} as a regime marker. It will be argued that ambiguity in the present Facebook data serves at least two functions. On the one hand it is an instrument to code dissent in a non-direct fashion. On the other, the author’s ambiguous metaphor and the commenters’ second stories sustain play and humor, which creates involvement and participation.

\(^4\) Based on Goffman’s (1981) distinction, Maher is the author (text producer), whereas \textit{addōmarī} is the animator (teller). Moreover, Goffman (1959) made a distinction between backstage and frontstage, comparing face-to-face interaction with stage performance, in front of an audience. Backstage is similar to the private sphere, when people are not in front of an audience and rehearse their characters. The front stage is a higher-stake situation. The context of Facebook can be both considered “frontstage”, given the individual’s awareness that there is always an audience. Given Maher’s awareness that his audience has changed before and after the revolution, and the performance has become a higher-stake performance, the public persona of \textit{addōmarī} may serve the purpose of mitigating this potentially risky situation. Facebook’s affordance of choosing an alias complicates Goffman’s production and backstage/frontstage distinctions, which were based on face-to-face interaction. See Aspling (2011) for an interesting analysis on how individuals perceive their performance distinctly when they use Facebook as opposed to when they write on blogs.
6.5 Data and Context

In this chapter I analyze 110 comments written by 105 participants in reply to a post published on Maher Alkurdi’s public page addōmarī on 25 July 2012. All comments were published within fifteen hours after the original post. Facebook does not keep count of the comments that were deleted. When the comments to this post were retrieved and saved on a word file in February 2016, Facebook indicated that the number of the comments was 137, which means that 27 comments had been deleted between July 2012 and February 2016. The post revolves around the issue of ṭāʾifiyya (sectarianism), which was a very sensitive topic in Syrian public discourse under Bashar al-Asad and his father’s rule, and which started to be publicly discussed only after the uprising. Immediately after the first protests of 2011, President al-Asad used the “ṭāʾifiyya card” to discredit the protestors and alleged that they were driven by sectarian intents.

Maher Alkurdi published the same addōmarī post on his personal page on the same day. However, he cut the last part, in which he mentioned the name of the Grand Mufti al-Būṭī. Al-Būṭī was a religious symbol, and talking about him in public was tantamount to talking about the President. Although he sided against the uprising in Syria, many people, out of reverence or fear, avoided commenting on his political stance. “Overall, in my personal page, I talked much less about al-Būṭī than I did in addōmarī”. In this chapter I take into consideration the longer post published on addōmarī because it contains more comments and the audience includes commenters who are not Maher’s friends or acquaintances, nor do they all share Maher’s views.

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5 Muḥammad Sa’d Ramaḍān al-Būṭī (often transliterated as Mohammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti) was a Syrian Sunni scholar and grand Mufti. He was popular for his sermons, regularly broadcasted on TV, and he was considered a symbolic religious figure in Syria. When the Syrian uprising broke out, he blamed the anti-government protestors, who, in turn, called him a hypocrite for supporting the Egyptian uprising and not supporting the Syrian one. Al-Bouti died in a bomb explosion on 21 March 2013. However, doubts have been raised on the circumstances of his death.

6 Maher Alkurdi, Skype interview, February 2016.
In other words, this post is more interesting in terms of participation, because it shows how Maher managed to involve a more diverse audience.

As occurs in many other posts of his, the author rhetorically addresses an imaginary audience using the endearing term 'akhī ("my brother"), thus framing the post as a turn in conversation. He asks his interlocutor why all the army officers interviewed by pro-government television station Al-Dunyā, regardless what part of Syria they are from, pronounce the qāf. The qāf is a salient feature of many dialects of the Syrian coast, which is also the region where most of the Syrian Alawite population was concentrated, as well as the President’s Alawite family home region. Throughout the al-Asad regime, the qāf sound became indexically associated with the “regime and army register”, and it became a symbol of political and military oppression. As emerged from the narratives of several political dissidents, the qāf, combined with a harsh tone of voice, was used by the secret services to intimidate the population. This indexical association was extended to the Alawite dialect. This explains why stereotypical and parodic uses of this register (as will emerge in the comments) include coastal dialectal expressions, such as al-qārd, an interjection used to express bewilderment or indifference.

In the following post, the action of pronouncing the qāf is creatively described through the onomatopoeic verb yiqāqū, which literally means “to cluck”. The verb yiqāqū is found in the Syrian and Lebanese idiom biyqāqū w mā biylāqū (literally “they cluck but don’t achieve anything”). Like the English verb “cluck”, yiqāqū refers to the hens’ sound emitted while laying eggs.

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7 The qāf is a voiceless uvular sound present in fushā. In urban Levantine dialects, in words which contain this sound, the qāf is usually replaced with a hamza (“glottal stop”). The hamza realization is a marker of Damascus Arabic, and it is associated with cosmopolitanism and modernity.
8 Hans Wehr reports qāqa as “to cackle, cluck (hen)”. While “cackle”, in English, also has the connotation of laughing sharply and harshly, “cluck” also means to utter a low sound like that of chickens. The latter probably better conveys the present metaphor, whereby the verb qāqa is associated with the low, uvular sound qāf.
the eggs as well as to describe the action of chattering, i.e. producing loud and futile talk.\(^9\) In Syria, the verb *yiqāqu* has another consolidated meaning, namely “pronouncing the *qāf* like Bashar al-Asad”. However, before the uprising this term was not used in public. As emerged from interviews with Maher Alkurdi and with Nawar Bulbul, whereas before the revolution Syrians would not distinguish between the *qāf* used symbolically by the regime and its use as a regional marker. After the uprising it became clear that there were people who sided with the revolution and whose use of the *qāf* was simply a regional marker. Through this post, Maher intended to emphasize this distinction, suggesting that not all Alawites are regime supporters, and that it is the regime that used sectarian discourse, through a regional marker, to impose its power. I used different colors in the post to emphasize repetition.

6.5.1 The Post - *Addōmarī*, 25 July 2012

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*الدومري*
July 25, 2012

اخي بديك تعتبرها طائفية عتبرها ..
بديك تعتبرها فتنة عتبرها ..
عتبرها شو مايدك ..
بدي الفهم لش كل الجيش الي بيطلعوا عالدني بيفقاو ..؟؟!!
لك ليشي يعني ..؟؟!!
الجيش الي بيعملوا معون مقابلة بحمص بيفقاو ..
حلب بيفقاو ..
بادل بيفقاو ..
لك حتى بالشام بيفقاو ..؟؟!!
ليس يعني ..؟؟!!
شكلا الأزمة صار بدأ فتة من بوتي ..؟؟!!

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\(^9\) Young Palestinian and Jordanian informants interviewed are not familiar with this idiom, while a Lebanese informant suggested a further interpretation: “someone who clucks is someone who talks a lot and loud, like a clucking hen. However, when the war comes, he is a coward, and is the first one who runs away like a chicken”.

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1) 'akhī biddāk ta’tabirha tā'yiyye tabirha
   brother you want you-consider-it sectarianism consider it
   Look brother, you wanna call it sectarianism? Do it..

2) biddāk ta’tabirha fitna tabirha
   you want your-consider-it sedition consider it
   You wanna call it sedition? Do it..

3) tabirha shū mā biddāk
   consider it what you want
   Call it what you want..

4) biddī afham lēsh kull ḫayṣī illī byṭla‘ū ‘ād-dunya biyqāqū
   I want understand why all the army that appear on Dunya they-pronounce-qāf
   I wanna know why all the army officers who appear on Dunya channel cluck
   I wanna know why all the army officers who appear on Dunya channel cluck

5) lēsh16 ya‘nī
   why interj
   Why

6) allū bīyqāqū bi‘amlū ma’on muqābala bi-Himṣ biyqāqū
   the-army that they do with them interview in Homs they-pronounce-qāf
   Those interviewed in Homs cluck

The word ‘tabirha is normally preceded by an alif as part of the eighth verbal form pattern. However, the author omitted in the Arabic script, probably for reasons of meter and to reflect a more spoken pronunciation.

Ibid.  

Ibid.  

Since this word is bivalent, I have decided, wherever it occurs, to maintain the diphthong – ay, thus treating it as a transliteration, rather than the transcription of a potential oral realization.

Ibid.

Ibid.

The author marks this term as dialectal using the aspectual particle – b and a dialectal verbal conjugation. Hence, I have decided to be loyal to this choice in the transliteration by representing the taltala through the long vowel in the verbal stem – ī instead of the diphthong – ya.

As explained above, the word biyqāqū also conveys the meanings “cluck” and “pronounce the qāf” are also present. From now on I use the word “cluck”. However, the other meanings are always present.

Since the word is dialectal, I eliminated the diphthong – ay, and treated it as the transcription of an oral realization.

A more orthodox transliteration of this word, as it appears in Arabic, is ma’ūn. However, the suffix – ān clearly marks a dialectal representation. Hence, I have decided to treat this as the transcription of a potential oral pronunciation.

Ibid.
7) bi-Ḥalab biyqāqū. ..
   in Aleppo they-pronounce-qāf. ..
   *In Aleppo they cluck.*

8) bi-Idlib biyqāqū. ..
   in Idlib they-say-qāf. ..
   *In Idlib they cluck.*

9) lak ḥattā bi-sh-shām biyqāqū. ..
   Interj. even in Damascus they-pronounce-qāf. ..
   *Look, even in Damascus they cluck.*!!

10) lēsh ya’nī. ????
    why interj. ????
   *Why ..??!!*

11) shaklā l-ʾiṣṣa  săr biddā fatwā19 min Būṭī20.!!
   looks the-story has required fatwa from Būṭī.!!
   *Looks like the story required a fatwa from al-Būṭī.!!

12) ēē min Būṭī izā muʾātī hān-nizām
    yes from Būṭī if not sectarian this-regime
   *Yes, we need to ask al-Būṭī whether this regime is sectarian or not ..!!

13) lā bas shū biddak bil-ḥakī khayy. ..
   no but what you want this-talk brother ..
   *But anyways, why bothering brother ..

14) ‘am yiqāqū. ..
   ASP they-pronounce-qāf. ..
   *They cluck.*

15) ‘am yiqāqū w mā ‘am yilāqū. ..
   ASP they-pronounce-qāf. ..
   *They cluck but they don’t achieve anything

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19 The word fatwā is spelled with an alif maqṣūra, which is conventionally transliterated as ā. However, the author spelled it with a tā’ marbūta, probably to orient towards a dialectal register.

20 Here, the author refers to Sheikh al-Būṭī. The definite article is usually maintained when the nisba is used to abbreviate proper names. For example, people would refer to Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramadān al-Būṭī as al-Būṭī. However, the author wrote Būṭī, without definite article. This choice generates ambiguity. Such ambiguity may be explained either by the necessity to avoid potential criticism by not reporting the exact name, or to create a pun. The word, in Syrian Arabic, could be read as bōṭī (“my shoes”). Distorting his name, the author covertly denigrates the Sheikh and creates satire. Moreover, this word could be thought of as a creative form, which is consistent with strategic ambiguity of the author’s hybrid style.

21 A fatwā is a legal opinion issued by a Muslim scholar, a Shaykh or a Muftī.
This post contains several poetic features which render it persuasive, including sound and lexical repetition, rhythm, images, details, voicing and interdiscursivity. To use Tannen’s (1984; 2007) expression, the text is characterized by a “high-involvement style”. Another interesting aspect is code choice. Consistently with Maher’s intention to “use the dialect to provide another facet of humor”, the text is immediately perceived as produced in Syrian vernacular. This perception is confirmed by the use of vernacular lexical terms, such as lēšh (“why”, lines 5 and 10), typographic choices such as the use of the alif to represent the Damascene vernacular glottal stop in place of the qāf in the word ‘issā (“story”, line 11), as well as vernacular syntax, as shown by the use of the aspectual particles –‘am and – b, which often precede the verb yiqāqū. However, the presence of bivalent terms can also be observed, such as kull al-jaysh (“all the army officers”, lines 4)22, al-jaysh (“the army”, line 6), fitna (“sedition”, line 2) and ta’tabiruha (“you consider it”, lines 1 and 2)23. Finally, although embedded in vernacular morphology, the verb qāqa is also present in fuṣḥā.24 The bivalent nature of this word and its meaning extension in the Syrian vernacular intensify the dialogic power of this pun.

The above-mentioned poetic features are also worth analyzing, as they contribute to the persuasive character of the text and, as it will be argued below, activate the imagination of the commenters, thus enhancing participation. The most repeated words are biyqāqū/yiqāqū (7 times), biddak/biddā/biddī (6 times), ta’tabirha/‘tabirha (5 times). In terms of sound and rhythm, in lines 1-3 the repetition of the words ta’tabirha and ‘tabirha, alternated by biddak at the beginning of the line and ūfīyye/fitna in the middle confers a regular, dynamic rhythm which echoes the sound of a nursery rhyme. This rhythm may frame the post as playful or irreverent. In

22 It could be argued, however, that the collective use of this term to indicate “army officers” is more vernacular.
23 In the text, it has been transliterated as ta’tabirha, to reflect a more vernacular pronunciation, consistently with Maher’s remarks on his use of the vernacular.
24 Wehr and Cowan (1994) report qāqa as “to cackle, cluck (hen)”.

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line 3 the order is reversed, with biddak concluding the verse. This marks the end of the incipit. The swinging rhythm of this first section is also emphasized by the word akhī, whose upbeat position sets the whole section in motion. The words ṭā’yīyye and fitna are interdiscursive, in that they evoke the regime narrative, according to which the protestors are armed foreign infiltrators, driven by sectarian motives to spread sedition. In lines 4-6 stands out the repetition of the fricative /sh/ in the words lēsh, shū and jaysh, as well as the rhymed alternation of lēsh and jaysh. The expression lēsh ya’nī in line 5 introduces a new section, which is concluded in line 10 by the same expression, lēsh ya’nī. In this section, besides the repetition of the sound qāf in biyqāqū and muqābala, the author uses imagery and details to create involvement. The image is that of army soldiers interviewed on TV and pronouncing the qāf. This image is evoked and reinforced through the list of cities in which these army soldiers are interviewed.

Tannen (2007: 136) argues that “images are more convincing than abstract propositions. […]. [They] provide internal evaluations: They lead hearers and readers to draw the conclusion favored by the speaker or writer”. She claims that internal evaluation is more persuasive than external evaluation. “Hearers and readers who provide interpretations of events based on such story-internal evidence as dialogue and images are convinced by their own interpretations. […] In contrast, external evaluation seeks to convince hearers or readers by providing interpretations in the storyteller’s voice, from outside the story. […] In the former case, the meaning is dramatized, and the hearer does the work of supplying it. In the latter, the meaning is stated, and handed to the reader ready-made.” Furthermore, she stresses the importance of details in making images powerful. To illustrate how details create interpersonal involvement, Tannen provides the example of a Greek woman who had been attacked by a man in Paris, and who was rescued by an American. From the Greek woman’s narrative emerges the detail of the American man’s
checkered shirt. As observed by Tannen, the detail of the checkered shirt is a sign of the woman’s involvement with her memory. † Moreover, building on Chafe’s (1991) discussion on what details are remembered, she suggests that the woman probably mentioned the shirt pattern because it was a typical American fashion, unusual in Paris. The wording “typical American fashion” evokes the concept of stereotype, which I believe is central in this case study. Maher does not create a whole new indexical association by describing the army soldiers using the $qāf$. Rather, he is appealing to a consolidated, widespread stereotype. Furthermore, Tannen suggests that details carry out two more functions: they enhance interpersonal involvement and reinforce the hearer’s sense of authenticity. Listing the cities from which the soldiers are interviewed is functional to reinforcing the authenticity of the stereotype being depicted.

“Listing and naming”, according to Tannen (2007: 140) constitute an involvement strategy which carries out the same function as details in narratives. The central section of this post could be compared to the climax of a story, and climax, as observed by Labov (1972), is one of the story sections where details tend to cluster. The image of the soldiers speaking on TV and the listing of the cities, it is argued, also contribute to the emergence of an interdiscursive feature. In this section, in fact, the author advances a narrative which counters the government one. The author hints at the fact that it is the regime that is sectarian, as opposed to the population. However, he leaves it to the audience to construe meaning. In line 12 he confirms this interdiscursive reference with another implicit strategy: a rhetorical question addressed to the Grand Mufti al-Būṭī. The last line contains another interdiscursive reference to the old Syrian idiom ‘ām yiqāqū w mā ‘am biylāqū. As explained above, this old idiom has been re-contextualized in the political situation. It could be argued that the recontextualization of this

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† Tannen makes this claim building on Chafe’s (1985) three types of involvement: self-involvement of the speaker, interpersonal involvement between speaker and hearer, involvement of the speaker with what is being talked about.
The idiom within the post political metaphor qualifies as a strategy to create involvement. The idiom includes a concrete, daily life image, describing the cackling sound of hens. As suggested by Taylor (2002), it is easier to obtain consensus on abstract concepts through agreement on concrete objects. “The idiom evokes a concrete and easily imageable scene, which is taken as emblematic of the situation which it is used to refer to” (Taylor 2002: 552). The re-contextualization of the idiom, along with other elements, such as puns and hybrid, bivalent forms, contributes to the ambiguous character of the text.

Finally, this post can be interpreted in the light of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) metaphor framework. According to Lakoff and Johnson “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (1980: 3). In other words, they posit a link, through metaphors, between our conceptual system and the way we think and act.

Metaphors contain entailments. For example, the metaphor “time is money” entails that “time is a limited resource and time is a valuable commodity” (1980: 197). Moreover, we tend to define abstract concepts, such as “time, emotion, communication, the mind, ideas institutions and interpersonal relationships” through less abstract ones, such as “space, motion, food objects, etc.” (1980: 198). However, they note that there is not a univocal relationship between abstract and nonabstract concepts. Different nonabstract concepts can be used to describe an abstract concept. “As a result, abstract concepts are typically defined metaphorically in terms of more than one concrete concept. Each metaphor defines only certain aspects of an abstract concept. Thus we understand abstract concepts in terms of many metaphorical definitions, each of which captures part of the concept” (1980: 198). In other words, metaphorical definitions hide certain aspects and highlight other aspects of abstract concepts.
Back to our example, in the Syrian conceptual system, the use of the *qāf* is associated with power, strength and intimidation. This could be thought of in terms of the metaphor “power is pronouncing the *qāf*”. However, the verb *yiqāqū* was used in private discourse before the uprising to describe those who pronounce the *qāf* like the President. In Syrian Arabic, *yiqāqū* is the sound of the chickens (cluck). Thus, zoomorphic features had already been attributed to pro-regime people before the uprising. However, the use of the idiom *biyqāqū w mā ‘am biylāqū* with reference to the regime is new. Before the revolution it was used to refer to fearful people or people who worked hard without achieving anything. The post author, by using the idiom *biyqāqū w mā ‘am biylāqū* exploits the zoomorphic metaphorical association according to which people who use the *qāf* cluck like chickens, therefore they are chickens. Thus the new metaphor is that the army officers are chickens. Some of the comments to the post, as will be shown below, follow up on this post based on the entailments of this new metaphorical association: chickens are weak, chickens lay eggs, chickens are fearful, chickens will lose the war, chickens are dumb, those who pronounce the *qāf* are dumb.

6.6 Analyzing Participation on Facebook – Methodology

For the analysis of comments, I applied De Fina’s (forthcoming) coding system, which I will explain in this section. This narrative analytical framework has been functional to the assessment of the type of interaction occurring among the participants based on their interaction and the focus of their comments. I integrated this framework with a micro-analysis of repetition in its different guises, namely sound, rhythm, intertextuality and voices. Finally, I analyzed the linguistic varieties used. Albirini (2016) recently conducted an analysis of the linguistic varieties used in a Facebook page of the Syrian revolution. Whereas his study focused on the
identification of functions of \textit{fushā} and the Syrian vernacular, it dismissed the occurrence of bivalent and creative forms, which, as I will argue, are an important element to assess participation.

In order to make sure that I correctly understood and interpreted all the comments, I used the collaboration of two Syrian Arabic speakers, a friend from Damascus, whose family is from Jabal al-Druze a region south of Damascus whose inhabitants are mainly Arab Druze, and the post author, Maher Alkurdi. Their collaboration was particularly important in order to identify some dialectal choices of the commenters realized through typographic strategies. In particular, some critics voiced dissidents by representing stereotypical Damascene words (although unsuccessfully, as suggested by my two informants), and others voiced regime supporters through the graphic representation of typical coastal and Alawite expressions and sounds.

The purpose of this analysis is twofold: on the one hand it reveals how comments are tied together. On the other, it serves as a mirror of the author’s persuasive strategies. What type of participation has been triggered? These contribute to a bigger question: what identities emerge in this community of practice? How do social dynamics like recruitment occur?

6.6.1 Analyzing Participation – A Narrative Framework

The type of context in which these comments emerge is very different from that of a gossip blog, as it has been analyzed by De Fina (forthcoming). Moreover, the genre of the post is not immediately identifiable as a story. It can be understood as the depiction of a metaphorical scene, or a parodic metaphor. The characters and their actions, such as al-Būṭī and the army soldiers interviewed on TV, metaphorically represent all those who side with the regime and
against the revolution. Furthermore, it does not follow the classic narrative framework proposed by Labov (1972). However, as noted above, the central section of the post shares features present in the climax section of a classic story structure proposed by Labov. De Fina’s participation framework, however, proved useful to highlight the interactional dynamics occurring in the comments.

6.6.1.1 Interactional Dynamics

De Fina (forthcoming) analyzed interactional dynamics dividing comments into four groups according to their thread: comments initiating a new thread, comments that are direct responses to the first comment in a thread, comments that respond to the comment directly preceding them in the thread and comments that respond to another comment in the thread. Whereas the blog analyzed by De Fina facilitated the formation of new threads by allowing commenters to start conversation threads by posting their reply directly under a single comment, Facebook introduced this option only in 2013. 26 Before then, users who were replying to other users were writing the name of the person they intended to direct their reply to in their comment. This, however, could go unseen by the person to whom the comment was directed. Another feature recently introduced by Facebook is the creation of a hyperlink which notifies the person the comment is directed to by simply typing their name. Due to the absence of both these features in

26 This option was announced by the Facebook Journalism Program Manager on May 25, 2013 as follows “Starting today, we’re launching a new comments feature designed to improve conversations. You and your readers will have the ability to reply directly to comments left on your Page content and start conversation threads, which will make it easier for you to interact directly with individual readers and keep relevant conversations connected. […] After months of testing, we have seen how the new feature can improve conversations and be used to start open dialogues with the community”. https://www.facebook.com/notes/journalists-on-facebook/improving-conversations-on-facebook-with-replies/578890718789613/
2012, I adopted the following criteria to analyze the interactional dynamics in the comments. I divided the comments into two main groups. On the one hand those that continue the “conversation” with the post author. On the other commenters who 1) initiate new conversations by not directly addressing the post content, either completing it, continuing it or using bits of it intratextually or intertextually (cf. Hamilton 1996) 2) initiate new conversations by triggering another commenter’s reply 3) reply to other commenters either individually by mentioning their name or collectively by addressing an unidentified group of people.

6.6.1.2 Frame Foci

As occurred in De Fina’s study, some comments could fit in more than one category. However, I have considered the most prevalent focus. For example, some of the comments which align with the post author do so by proposing alternative humorous scenarios. Many of these scenarios involve characters described in the post. However, the main focus is that of building on the post author’s metaphor. Therefore, I considered them as second stories. Moreover, in other comments which at first glance appeared as unrelated comments, a deeper analysis revealed that they produced a second story taking inspiration from elements in the post, and establishing new or less known indexical associations between these elements and others. For example, two commenters mentioned the yerba mate. Although both of my collaborators thought that the comment was unrelated to the post, I suggested an interpretation they both considered plausible. Yerba mate is a south American beverage which was probably introduced in Syria through Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in South America, and it was popular on the coastal region of Syria before it became popular in Damascus. As the blogger Nadine Mostafa confirmed, “Yerba mate is mostly popular in rural and coastal Syria; the majority of the Alawite population in
Damascus originates from these areas, hence their admiration for the beverage. Syrians often associate *mate* with soldiers or government employees”.

Hence, the two commenters built on the post metaphor using an alternative stereotypical association to describe the regime. Finally, comments which contain links to other texts, such as Facebook pages or Youtube videos were also problematic to classify. Although they all contain links to dissidents’ texts, they do not show direct relationship with the post itself. Therefore, I considered them as unrelated.

6.6.2 Analyzing Participation – Repetition and Language Choice

6.6.2.1 Repetition

While analyzing interactional dynamics and frame foci, what immediately struck my attention was the dense presence of repetition strategies. Some, such as sound, lexical repetition, images and interdiscursivity were particularly recurrent in comments which aligned with the post. It was useful to analyze the different types of strategies adopted by commenters according to the type of foci. I focused in particular on the comments which align with the post, as these presented more recurrent patterns, and I showed how these patterns of repetition, including sound, rhythm, images, voices and register presented both intratextual (with other comments and the post) and intertextual relations.

6.6.2.2 Language Varieties

During a preliminary analysis I noted that commenters deploy a wide range of Arabic features and varieties. For the analysis of language varieties, I divided comments into two main groups:

intersentential and intrasentential variation. I included in the first category those comments which only deploy clear vernacular features and those which employ only *fuṣḥā* features. In the second category I included comments which mix both *fuṣḥā* and vernacular features, both at the sentence as well as the word level.

It is worth noting that Albirini (2016), in his recent study aimed at assessing the functions of standard Arabic, Syrian vernacular and English on a Facebook page of the Syrian revolution, focused on the use of these varieties as separate entities. Building on Eid’s (1988) study on code-switching, he explained that “In cases of mixed SA-QA [standard Arabic-colloquial Arabic] sentences, the beginning of a switch was based on clear cases, where a language form is not shared by the two varieties” (2016: 281). However, as it will be argued, hybrid forms, such as bivalent and creative forms, are an important element of this type of online communication. Bivalent forms are part of a strategy of ambiguity which underlies the dynamics of participation at play in my data.

In the analysis, I refer to comments using the numbers as they appear in the appendix.

6.7 Analysis of the Comments

Before I proceed with the analysis of the data, it is important to emphasize that all comments are in Arabic, and utilize the Arabic script. The absence of English or the romanized script (i.e. *Arabizi*) is consistent with the general trend observed on other Facebook pages after the uprising. Albirini (2016) also noted that English and *Arabizi* only constituted a very limited portion of his data. English, he suggested, was used when commenters intend their message to be understood
by a foreign audience or when the commenter’s Arabic competence was not high. A more fine-grained analysis of the varieties employed will be provided in the section on repetition.

6.7.1 Interactional Dynamics

Out of the 110 comments, 92 (83.7 %) “respond to” addōmarī’s post. 18 comments (16.3 %): belong to other conversations. Of these 18:

- Five (23, 24, 76, 85, 100) initiated new conversations posting links to other Facebook pages linked to the revolution, three of which have been deleted.
- One (41) published the lyrics of a song of the revolution and posted the Youtube link of a protest in which this song was performed.
- Two (40, 53) initiated a new conversation by provoking two responses from two other commenters. Their interaction is not sustained. It only includes one comment each.
- Two (62, 55) responded to comments 40 and 53 by quoting the name of the commenter who initiated the conversation.
- One (81) reinforced Deema’s (48) political stance, although did not directly reply to her.
- One (53), probably in response to Deema’s sectarian comment, inveighed against an unidentified group of commenters, saying that this way they keep the dictator in place, and accusing them of creating “small dictatorships”.
- One (94) inveighed against another commenter (لؤي أبو خدر)28 whose comment has been deleted. The same commenter, in the comment immediately following, addressed the Facebook page (addōmarī) administrator, asking to take action against comments which insult religion.
- One (64) inveighed against all the preceding comments, accusing them of destroying the homeland, and using the proverb min al-ḥobb mā qatal (“love can kill”) to substantiate his position, inciting them to “Love Syria, but at the same time to wish for Syria to remain alive, so that there is still a homeland to love”.
- Two (68, 104) inveighed against an unidentified group of commenters for insulting religions.
- One (11), posted a comment saying that the Bing translation is even more entertaining.
- One (70) responded to a conversation, quoting the name of the commenter (وردة دمشقية)29 whose comment has been deleted, and agrees with her.

To sum up, two types of interactional dynamics were observed. 1) most commenters “converse” with the post author, showing alignment by continuing his story, creating second stories and other metaphorical scenarios. 2) less than one fourth of the commenters initiate or participate

28 The name was typed in Arabic.
29 Ibid.
new conversations. Within the new conversations, three positions emerge: one that argues the existence of a sectarian plot which involves all Shiites and Alawites against Sunnis. This triggered most participation. However, again, the longest interaction included three comments. Another aligns with the post author, reinforcing the idea that it is the government to be considered sectarian, rather than the Shiite and the Alawite population. A third position speaks out in defense of respect for religions, calling for a censorship of comments which insult religions. The fact that most participants remain on topic is in counter tendency to previous studies (De Fina’s, forthcoming, and Herring’s, 2013). This is an important aspect that may distinguish the type of participation in a political forum from other online contexts. Further studies of political contexts may corroborate the higher involvement of participants with the topic of discussion. On the other hand, the lack of topic development within the new conversations may be explained by the specific affordances of Facebook at the time, which did not allow to reply directly to a thread, as well as by the deletion of some of the comments.

6.7.2 Frame Foci

Most comment frames lie in the categories of storyrealm and second stories.

6.7.2.1 Storyrealm

I divided these comments into those which evaluate the story positively, those which evaluate the storyteller, those disagree with the teller questioning the validity of the metaphor and those who evaluate other commenters.
1) Six evaluate the story positively. These could be considered as positive comments about tellability.

- Two (1, 2) use the onomatopoeic expression hahaha [...] rendered through the repetition of the letter ha several times. This a common way on Arabic social media to represent laugh. (2) also adds the comment helwe “nice”.
- One (74) repeats the word yiğagū from the post and immediately after evaluates the story as helwe (“nice”), and adds the onomatopoeic expression hahaha [...] typing the letter ha fifty times.
- One (97) writes kabīīūr, roughly translated as “too much”. The repetition of the long vowel ī reinforces the positive evaluation and signals rapport. Repeating letters is a common way on Arabic social media to represent emphasis.
- One (36) typed a “grin” emoji and evaluated addōmarī’s narration as hakīk niżāmī, translated as “your words are correct”.
- One (28) also says that addōmarī’s words are true.

It is interesting to note how these commenters make similar typographic choices to evaluate the story. The repetition of long vowels, as will be discussed below, is also part of the metamessage, through which the commenters signal rapport.

2) Two evaluate the teller (addōmarī)

- One (45) evaluates the storyteller quoting his name in the comment and saying “God bless you, especially during a time in which many mouths are silent and hands don’t write”.
- One (60) thanks “the page administrator” and the administrator of the satirical Facebook page of “Sūnghā”30
- One commenter (86) addresses the teller sarcastically as yā fahīm (“you shrewd”) arguing that the qāf is in fact a letter of the Arabic language and subsequently insults him comparing him to “a virulent insect”.

3) Two disagree with the teller questioning the validity of the metaphor, suggesting that the qāf is a letter if the Arabic alphabet. These could be considered as metacomments, in that they revolve around the “linguistic meaning of something that has been written” (De Fina, forthcoming, p. 19).

30 Sūnghā is the fictitious name of the administrator of the page “The Chinese Revolution”.

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- One (79) notes that everyone pronounces the qāf. She also alludes to tellability saying “Let’s leave our children a homeland we can be proud of instead of cursing each other for who pronounces the qāf and who doesn’t”.
- One (88) says “we need to give credit to Bashar for one thing, which is not deleting the qāf from the dictionary. So most villages pronounce the qāf [are literate], oh sqāqt.”

These are to be distinguished from other metacommments, which also suggest that the “army officers” in the post metaphor use the qāf because it is a letter of the Arabic (fuṣḥā) alphabet. However, they do so ironically.

4) The following commenters evaluate other commenters:

- One (53) inveighs against other commenters, probably (48), who alluded to a sectarian political stance.
- One (62) criticizes a commenter (40), for insinuating that the Shawāyā are pro-Asad, saying that Deir ez-Zor has been bombed for several days.
- One (64) evaluates the previous 88 comments negatively. He accuses them of destroying the country through their discourse.
- One (68) evaluates negatively the commenters who talk about religion, saying that trash is cleaner.
- One (80) says “please delete the comments of those who offend religion”.
- One (94) inveighs against another commenter for insulting religions.
- One (95, same commenter as in 94) inveighs against all commenters who insult religion.
- One (99) says it’s deplorable to insult on such a trivial topic. Probably blaming other commenters for their offensive language.
- One (104) reproaches other commenters for insulting God.

Most of the other comments initiated second stories.

6.7.2.2 Second Stories

De Fina (forthcoming: 27) defined second stories as “narratives (and narrative components) that presented alternative developments to the ones offered by the teller and co-teller and follow ups

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31 This is a Damascene word which refers to a kid that spends the entire day in the street. Maher interpreted it as a benevolent criticism towards him. It could be argued that this word is used to voice Maher’s Damascus accent.
32 The Shawāyā are an indigenous, Bedouin population of the Eastern part of Syria, known as Jazīra. Deir ez-Zor is a city and a province in this region.
on them”. In my data I identified thirty-nine comments which initiated second stories. These second stories follow up on the metaphor offered by addōmarī creating other metaphorical scenarios in the following ways: 1) repeating parts of the text and making reference to the story characters. While they re-entextualize the idiom contained at the end of addōmarī’s post, they also develop the story narrating satirical scenarios about some story characters. 2) providing an explanation to the rhetorical question posed by addōmarī in his post, sometimes introducing their comment with “because”, in response to the “why” posed by addōmarī at the end of his post. 3) providing alternative scenarios which disagree with the one proposed by the post author. 4) providing scenarios which are very loosely related to the post story components.

1) The first group is composed of nineteen comments. Of these nineteen, eighteen make explicit reference to the idiom. For example:

- repeating the idiom in part or in full, and attributing it to the same characters to whom addōmarī attributed it in his post, such as:

  (7) 
  
  ﻧﺸﺎﻩ ﺑﹶﻜﹶﺭﺁ ﺑﺪﻥ ﻲﻓﺎﻕﻭ ﻭﺍ ﺑﻼﻕﻮ
  nshā allāh bukrā bidon yiqāqū mā blāqū
  Godwilling tomorrow they-want they-cluck not ASP-they-find
  Hopefully they will just cluck and not achieve anything [i.e. hopefully they will lose soon]

  (43) ﻲﻓﺎﻕﺍﻭ ﻂﺍ ﺑﺪﻥ ﰲ ﻻﺎﻴﺒﻀﻮﺍ ﻭﺍ ﻥﺎﻗﺎﺼﻨﺍ ﺯﺎﺀﺍ ﺍﺫﻩ ﺍﺫﻩ
  yiqāqū ’add mā biddon bass lā yibayyīdū mū nāqīsna zyāde ‘adad minhum
  they-cluck quantity that they-want but NEG they-lay-eggs NEG we-lack-them too-many number of-them
  They can cluck as much as they want, as long as they don’t lay the eggs. There’s too many of them already

- repeating the idiom and attributing it to another character in the story.

(4) ﺍﺳﺘﻨﺎ ﺩﻭ ﺑﺎﻝﺎﻗﺎ ﺍﺫﻱ ﺏﻮﻁﻱ ﺱﺍﺭ ﻲﻓﺎﻕﻱ
  istannā shwayy btlāqī al-Būṭī šār yiqāqī
wait a-little asp-you-find al-Būṭī became he clucks
Give it some time and you’ll hear al-Būṭī start clucking

- using parts of it and attributing it to a different character, like in:

(6) the commenter hyperbolically compared half the Syrian population to the army soldiers. It is left open to interpretation whether he is paraphrasing the author’s post or whether he is going beyond, suggesting that what the post story shows is that half of the Syrian population side with the government.

نص سوريا بيقق
nuṣṣ sūryā biyqāqī
half Syria clucks
Half Syria clucks

(20) the commenter compares the army officers pronouncing the qāf on TV to those civilians in Damascus who, for example after a bomb attack, appeared on TV claiming to be eyewitnesses and that the attackers were terrorists (i.e. subscribing to the regime’s narrative).

حتى شهود العيان من الأهل يققون
ḥattā shuhūd al-‘ayān min al-ahālī biqāqū
even witnesses the-eye from the-city cluck
Even eyewitnesses in the neighborhood cluck

- One of these nineteen comments (8) implicitly builds on the idiom, without repeating the idiom explicitly:

وَلَّهَ لَحَتِي يَعْوُو كَمَان هَاهَاهَاهَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا هَا
wallāh la-ḥattā ya‘ūū kaman hahahahaha
God until they-exhaust hahahahaha

to exhaustion [laugh] [meaning that they cluck to exhaustion]

2) Fifteen comments continue the story by providing an answer to addōmari’s rhetorical question “Why do they all cluck?”:

Some explicitly include the word “because” to signal coherence with the post prompt “why”

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33 Hans Wehr translates this word as “population, inhabitants (of a city, a country) […].” Maher Alkurdi interpreted it immediately as “people from Damascus”. This interpretation is plausible in that the commenter could be ascribing the pronunciation of the qāf to non-urban populations.

34 Hans Wehr provides several meanings for the verb ‘ayya, two of which seem particularly fit in this context. Form four is “to become tired, fatigued, etc.”. Form one is to “lack the strength or power”. The latter provides a further nuance to the meaning which befits the current political context. The commenter is not only saying “until exhaustion”, but he may well also be implying “until they lose power”. This double meaning increases the ambiguity of the message.
(22)  

يمكن لأنهم دجاج.....حتى بشار دجاجة بس مخفية بشكل بطة

yumkin liannahum dajā.........hattā Bashār dajāja bass mutahaffī bi-shakl baṭṭa  
perhaps because-they chickens......even Bashar chicken but disguised in-shape duck  

Perhaps because they are chickens.....even Bashar is a chicken, but he’s disguised as a duck  

Other similar comments compare these army officers to chickens or puppets (77).

(78) provides an explanation which differs from the others, shifting the focus to a practice which was frequent before the uprising, namely paying a bribe to avoid military service

لايو غيرهن بيهربواو الدهم من العسكره

li-annō ghērhun biharribū wāladhum min al-'askariyye  
because other-them asp-he-takes out-them father-their from the-army  

Because the others have their father bail them out of the army

(87) provides another explanation, which disagrees with addōmarī and other commenters. According to her what is going on is a sectarian war of the Shiites against the Sunnis. She calls the Syrian conflict a “sectarian, Alawi, Shiite, Majusi war” against the Sunnis. The term “majous” has historical and socio-political connotations. It originally referred to the Zoroastrians. However, during the 1980 Iraq-Iran conflict, the Iraqis called the Iranians “Majus”, thus insinuating that they were non-believers, still attached to pre-Islamic beliefs. In this comment, Saher re-contextualizes this term to emphasize the wider sectarian character of this conflict, in which Shiites are the non-believers who want to defeat the community of the believers (ahl-al-Sunna). A similar view is expressed by Deema Sheikh Najeeb (48).

لأنها حرب طائفية علنية شيعية ميجوسية ضد أهل السنة في سوريا ومن يساد هؤلاء الكفرا ليس أقل منهم كفارا وظلمًا

li-'annaha ḥarb tā’ifyya ‘alawiyya shi’iyya majūsyya didd ‘ahl al-sunna  
because-it war sectarian Alawite Shiite Majusi against people the-sunnna  
fi sūrā wa man yusānid hawla’ al-kafara laysa aqal minhum kufran wa žulman  
in Syria and who supports those the-infidels not less than-them in-infidelity and evil

35 This includes an intertextual reference to other social media texts. The association of Bashar al-Asad with the duck will be explained below.  
36 I used the – ō to reflect a vernacular realization. This vernacular interpretation is suggested by the commenter through the use of the – waw.  
37 Since the suffix is in the vernacular I replace the diphthong –ay with the vernacular –ē.  
38 Cf. Steingass 1892.  
39 “By referring to the Iranians in these documents as majus, the security apparatus [implied] that the Iranians [were] not sincere Muslims, but rather covertly practice their pre-Islamic beliefs. Thus, in their eyes, Iraq’s war took on the dimensions of not only a struggle for Arab nationalism, but also a campaign in the name of Islam.” (al-Marashi 2000:5).  
40 The word žulm, or žalm means wrong, iniquity, injustice, unfairness, oppression, etc. (Wehr and Cowan 1994).
Because it is a sectarian, Alawite, Shiite, Majusi war against the Sunni community in Syria and those who support those unbelievers are oppressors and unbelievers just like them

(101) also offers a sectarian explanation, however less strong than Saher Fektor (87)

(30) creates a pun around the word *dunyā*, which is both the pro-government TV channel and also means “world”. “The world is well” can be interpreted as an interdiscursive reference to the government propaganda at the beginning of the conflict, which denied the breakout of the Arab Spring in Syria. This is summarized in a pro-regime slogan *sūriyya bikhayr* ("Syria is fine") which appeared on social media as well as in a pop song by Syrian singer Hussein Al-Deek.

**mishān t’arif innō ad-Dunyā bikhayr**
so that you-know the-Dunya/the world is fine
*To let you know that Dunya TV is well*

Others provide an answer to *addōmarī*’s question implicitly. For example,

(16)

**biddhum yibaydhū**
They-want they-lay-eggs
*They have to lay the eggs*

(63) and (109) respond:

**biṣ-ṣudfe, mu’allim**
in-coincidence, Sir
*[they all pronounce the qāf] by coincidence, Sir*

3) Three comments disagree with the post author providing different scenarios

(44) says “That’s not correct .. I saw an interview with one speaking with an accent from Aleppo”.

(48) provides an alternative scenario, alluding to the presence of a wider Shiite sectarian conspiracy.

(79) argues “I’ve seen a poor Sunni army officer on Syrian TV […] and he wasn’t pronouncing the qāf”.

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41 These commenters might be voicing government supporters who argue that the qāf is not a marker of regime talk as it also exists in *fushā.*
4) Finally, two comments provide alternative scenarios whose meaning is not immediately retrievable based on the post metaphor. As explained above in the “methodology” section, they commenters build on an indexical association not present in the post, between the beverage yerba mate and the regime supporters.

(39) writes “The truth, addōmarī, is that as by the time winter approaches [yerba] mate supplies will be interrupted”.
(56) “All this [yerba] mate contains vitamin qāf”

All these comments initiating second stories build on the ambiguity generated by the recontextualization of the idiom biyqāqū w mā biylāqū within the current political metaphor. What is interesting is that the commenters provide different facets of interpretation, thus expanding the meaning of the metaphor. Building on the author’s metaphor, these commenters reinforce a bond among them and between them and the post author. This bond is similar to a code language, or an inside joke, through which people build rapport by showing that they understood what the ambiguous message was about to the extent that they can respond in similar ambiguous terms.

Moreover, through these second stories commenters “play” with the post author and create humor. Proverbs and idioms are particularly productive devices to enable this type of interaction, as they rely on a consolidated assumption of shared knowledge of text and context. Their function in context is bounded. For example, there are only a few contexts an idiom can work in. It is not as flexible as other parts of speech. Moreover, some idioms are used in fewer contexts than others, or, it could be said that they are less flexible than others. This is the case of the idiom biyqāqū w mā biylāqū. The reason for the low-degree of flexibility of this idiom may be due to the presence of the “cranberry word” biyqāqū.42 Hence, using it in a new context opens up different interpretations and facilitates humor.

42 Cranberry words are words which contain a cranberry morpheme, “i.e. a morpheme which is attested in only one word” (Taylor 2002: 550, footnote 6). As Taylor noted, “Whether a word counts as a cranberry or not will
Finally, most second stories in my data align with the teller. Alignment, it is argued, is facilitated by the type of interaction established by the post author, and initiated through musical repetition as well as ambiguity. Repetition and ambiguity are productive ways of creating participation and recruiting page followers.

6.7.2.3 Outside the Storyworld

Comments outside the storyworld are not present. All the commenters more or less implicitly position themselves vis-à-vis the post. It could be argued that even those who post links to other pages participate in the post conversation by either exposing their stance or attempting to recruit new followers.

6.7.3 Media

The majority of comments utilize exclusively written text. Only one comment uses an emoji. Two comments include links to other Facebook pages siding with the Syrian revolution.

6.7.4 Tone

Very few posts are aggressive. These are those which disagree with addōmarī and those who criticize other commenters for offending religions. Most of the tones are humorous and ironic. Humor and irony are two important elements which will be discussed in the next section, which deals with repetition.

depend on the extent of a speaker’s linguistic knowledge”. (Taylor 2002: 550). This may explain why some informants suggested more than one meaning for the idiom biyqāqū wā biylāqū. Borrowing the music metaphor from Goffman (1974), Tannen (2007: 23) uses the expression “sound or music of language” to describe the rhythmic strategies employed to create involvement.
6.7.5 Repetition

In this section, I analyze the different types of strategies adopted by the commenters. I will focus in particular on the comments which align with the post, as these present more repetition patterns, including sound, rhythm, images, voices and register present both in intratextual (with other comments and the post) and intertextual relations. I will conclude this section analyzing instances of voicing, a particular type of repetition adopted by commenters across their political stances.

6.7.5.1 Slogans and Images

Comment (3) is the refrain of a protest song performed during the anti-Asad demonstrations in different parts of Syria in 2012. A simple google search generates several videos of demonstrations in which this song is chanted. The expression qārd walā evokes the intimidating image of a regime security agent addressing a citizen. Its repetition in chorus during the protests nullified this intimidating effect, as stated in the second part of the couplet. By repeating this slogan, the commenter aligns with the post author showing that his metaphor and the new meaning attributed to the idiom biyqāqī w mā ‘am biylāqī in the light of this metaphor both demonstrate that the regime register has lost its power. As Lakoff (1980/2003: 145), “new metaphors have the power to create a new reality”.

qurd walā qurd walā ...intaha mafūlā
qurd walā qurd walā ...finished effect-its
qurd walā qurd walā ...it lost its effect

44 This meaning was suggested by Maher Alkurdi, Skype interview, February 2016.
In the next two examples, (18) and (34), commenters use similar strategies to show alignment with the post author.

click click wherever you go the-army the-free behind-you

In (18), by repeating the word qāqī twice, the commenter follows up on the pun used by the post author (pronounce the qāf/cluck). The commenter uses a nursery rhyme which probably appeared for the first time in social media in March 2012, following the scandal which involved Hadeel al-Ali. While the nursery rhyme originally used the onomatopoeic word kākī, used in Arabic to imitate the voice of the duck, this commenter exploits the assonance of the sounds /q/ and /k/ to follow up on addōmarī’s post. Thus, kākī becomes qāqī, which could be thought of as a creative form for the feminine singular imperative of “to cluck”. The power and esthetics of this nursery rhyme are reinforced by the repetition of the sounds /ḥ/ and /q/, the assonance between /q/ and /k/ and by the succession of short monosyllabic words. The army officers of the post are referred to with the feminine singular pronoun - kī. While most certainly the choice of this pronoun is motivated by sound and rhyme patterns, the feminization and the reduction in number of the army officers, as well as the personification of the Free Syrian Army (FSA),

45 Since the word is vernacular, I opted for the vernacular realization - ē instead of the diphthong –ay.
46 I have opted to retain the diphthong - ay for the word jaysh, which reflects a prescriptive fushā pronunciation, to emphasize the bivalent character of this word. By “prescriptive fushā” I refer to Meiseles’s (1980:125) insight that oral fushā is heavily influenced by regional variants. However, this can be considered as a bivalent term, since the vernacular does not have a specific word for this term.
47 As the word jaysh, the word hurr is bivalent.
48 See below for context. Moreover, this article published by al-‘Arabiyya on March 19, 2012, suggests that this episode generated jokes by the Syrians on Facebook. The rhyme yā baṭa kakī kakī al-jaysh al-hurr ajākī emerged in this context. http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/19/201747.html
49 This voice is also associated with the “Qua, qua, qua dance”, as shown in this children’s cartoon https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQvq3XeBzgM&index=1&list=RDTQvq3XeBzgM
contribute to the evocation of a scene in which the FSA is in a position of power. The use of linguistic varieties is also interesting here. The first two words qāqī qāqī are creative, the expression wēn mā ruḥtī is vernacular, al-jaysh al-ḥurr is bivalent and warākī, whose oral realization is bivalent, however, the commenter disambiguated it by using a vernacular spelling. The alternation of vernacular and bivalent forms seems to contribute to the rhythmic pattern as well as to the depiction of the scene. Finally, it is interesting to note that the FSA is rendered through a bivalent term al-jaysh al-ḥurr, whose vernacular character may only emerge from an oral realization, whereas the official army is referred to through a written vernacular realization. The result suggests an fushā-vernacular contrast in the written form, which emphasizes the dominant role of the FSA.

Comment (34) uses the same sound, rhythmic and rhyme pattern and image evoked by (18). However, he adds another detail which further belittles the official army. He refers to Bashar al-Asad as baṭṭa (“duck”). This nickname is an endearment term used by Bashar al-Asad’s wife, as emerged from their private correspondence which leaked in March 2012. Since then, the term has been used in social media to ridicule the President, whose last name in Arabic means “lion”. On 16 March 2012, a Facebook post of the revolutionaries’ page thuwwār al-shām, ’āhyā’ dimashq (Damascus revolutionaries – Damascus quarters) called Bashar al-Asad baṭṭa and referred to an alleged affair between the young Syrian media adviser Hadeel al-Ali and Bashar al-Asad, based on personal e-mail correspondence between the two. The term baṭṭa subsequently generated the Twitter thread, in Arabic, #bashar_albatta, which generated 232 tweets between March 2012 and March 2015.

50 This story reached the Western press.
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/16/assad-emails-adviser-hadeel-ali
The following comment (90) repeats the pattern of the nursery rhyme but replaces the second part with “we want the country without you” and adds a smile emoticon.

The emoticon contributes to rendering the scene humorous. Moreover, it adds another meaning. Through this image the commenter alludes to the ousting of the president. By extension it relates to other slogans of the revolution, such as yalla irhal yâ Bashâr (“com’on, leave oh Bashar”). The juxtaposition of the irreverent and playful nursery rhyme with that of the protest slogan can be considered as a subversive interdiscursive strategy.

Commenter (106) builds on the nursery rhyme pattern which emerged on Facebook in March 2012:

Examples 18, 34, 90 and 106 all create similar nursery rhymes based on the words gâqi and kâkî. Repetition here seems to have the function of play and humor. At the same time through these repeated patterns the commenters show participation and ratify the author’s post.

One could ask what provokes the use of this nursery rhyme pattern. Is it internal repetition, meaning that the commenters are encouraged to imitate a style they saw here, or is it external, from texts outside this co-text, for example protest chants? The former explanation is
less plausible, given that these comments are scattered. However, it could be argued that the post contains rhythms resembling nursery rhymes (cf. *lēsh kull al-jaysh*). The other hypothesis (external intertextual reference) suggests the presence of an interdiscursive component. This component creates a liaison within discourse. By linking this post to other protest texts it contextualizes it within a repertoire of practices. Moreover, by referring to previous texts, it qualifies this post as a legitimate continuation of those texts. In other words, these intertextual, interdiscursive comments signal coherence and continuity and, by referring to protest texts, they enhance the power of these texts.

6.7.5.2 Repeating the Idiom

The following comments follow up on the idiom contained in the post and re-contextualized in a way that the two meanings “cluck” and “pronouncing the *qāf* like regime supporters” are both available, or, to use Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) terms, are both highlighted. Below these two meanings, lurks the old idioms’s meaning (“they talk a lot without achieving anything”). This multi-layering of meanings generates ambiguity and allows commenters to provide slightly different interpretations.

In (7) and (10) the commenters repeat the idiom suggesting that “clucking” is a sign that they are losing power soon.

(7)  
نَاشَا الله بِكْرَا بِبَدْن يِقَاتُ مَا يَقَاوِرَ...  
*nshā allāh bukrā biddon yiqāqū mā blāqū*  
Good willing tomorrow they want cluck NEG find  
*Hopefully soon they’ll cluck without achieving anything [they’ll lose]*
Other commenters attributed the action of clucking to other actors, such as al-Būṭī in comments (4) and (33), “half Syria” (comment 6), and other self-declared eyewitnesses interviewed after bombings (20). Others highlight the zoomorphic characteristic, such as (58): “[they cluck] because they’re an army of testicles”\(^{51}\) and (16) “they have to lay the eggs”.

\(^{51}\) A slang word for testicles in Arabic is “eggs”, hence the association with the chickens.

\(^{52}\) See appendix for the choice of this translation.
6.7.5.3 Voicing

Other comments intentionally voice the regime register through the deliberate use of the letter qāf. Commenter (19) writes nahnā mn ’ā’t w hinnen biyqāqū (“we say mn ’ā’t while they say biyqāqū”) whereby the hamza represents the Damascene pronunciation, and the qāf “voices their cuckling”. Commenter (25) combines the use of the qāf and the word ūfīyya (“sectarianism”), creating the word qāʿifiyya, reinforcing the post author’s stance that it is the regime that is sectarian. Comment (29) voices the Alawi accent through the stereotypical word qurrrrrd, repeating the letter r for emphasis, and the aspectual particle – m in miqillak (“I’m telling you”). Comment (47) ironically suggests that the coast accent is beautiful, and voices it with a string of words containing the sound qāf to prove the opposite. Commenter (57) voices Asad supporters using the word allādhagyy (“Lattakia”), repeating the letter – y, which Maher Alkurdi recognized as indexical of the accent of Lattakia.

Commenter (61) voices a turn in conversation in which he is addressing an imaginary interlocutor as khayy ūlī (“Brother, Ali”), using the stereotypical Shiite name ūlī and marking the use of the qāf in the expression shū biddī qillak (“I wanted to tell you”), followed by the letter qāf repeated four times. Commenter (67) introduces the comment with the stereotypical coastal interjection qurd and the word myliqshū (“they talk a lot”), whereby the aspectual particle is used in coastal dialects in place of the Damascene ʿam and the verb laqasha is identified by Maher Alkurdi as a word of the coast villages that not many people in Syria know. This makes Maher think that the commenter might be a regime opponent from the coast, who is voicing his own accent. Commenter (77) is probably voicing regime supporters using several words containing the qāf, such as qarāqīr (“puppets”) and min qirne la qirne (“all over the place”). Commenter (82) voices the coast dialect using the aspectual prefix - m in the word miyqāqū
(“they’re clucking”). Commenter (98) constructs a conversation with an imaginary interlocutor voicing someone who pronounces the qāf.

Others voice the Damascene accent to show their disagreement with the post author. In comment (37) the commenter probably addresses the post author writing nshāllah btʿāʾī w mā btlaʾī, in which the hamza is used in place of the qāf to voice and mock the post author’s Damascene style. Commenter (59) criticizes aadōmarī suggesting that while Damascenes were paying a bribe to not join the army the Alawis were those who voluntarily joined it. While explaining this he makes typographic choices which represent coast dialects, such as the suffix –yy in the word kathīrī. The commenter concludes addressing aadōmarī a way that Maher Alkurdi described as voicing the Damascene accent, through the expressions tashkul āsī and yā khayōōōō. However, Maher noted that in Damascene, the latter is not preceded by the vocative particle yā.

6.7.6 Language Resources

In terms of the linguistic varieties employed, from the data emerges a large presence of Syrian vernacular(s), particularly in comments which align with the post author. However, a closer analysis reveals a more complex reality, in which forms which can be easily identified as vernacular, such as bidden (“they want”) occur with other hybrid, bivalent, fuṣḥā and creative forms as shown below.
6.7.6.1 Bivalent

The vernaculars and *fuṣḥā* share a large number of words, as already observed by several authors (cf. Eid 1988; Bassiouney 2006). The term “bivalency” was introduced in studies on bilingualism and was defined by Woolard (1999: 7) as “the use by a bilingual of words or segments that could ‘belong’ equally, descriptively and even prescriptively, to both codes.” Several bivalent words occurred in my data. Some are pronounced the same in *fuṣḥā* and the vernacular, such as *hattā* (“even”) or *anā* (“I”) (33). Other words can belong to either variety depending on the way they are pronounced when read aloud, such as *al-jaysh* (“the army”) (34), whose vernacular realization is *jēsh*, or *allāh yusāmiḥuka* (“God bless”) (35), whose vernacular pronunciation is *allāh ysāmhak*.

6.7.6.2 Strategic Bivalency

Woolard (2007: 448) defined strategic bivalency as “a language users deliberate manipulation of such [bivalent] elements”. I consider “strategic bivalent” a specific group of bivalent words that share the same form, but have a different, political meaning in the Syrian context. The post author uses these bivalent terms across his posts. Their meaning is ambiguous either because they have other indexical associations in the Syrian vernacular (such as ‘*anāśir al-jarr*’) or because they can be read aloud in a way that provides other layers of meaning (cf. for example the expression *khabar kān*). In this post and comments, it could be argued that the lemma *qāqa* is strategically bivalent. In *fuṣḥā* it translates as “cluck, cackle”. It is found in the old Syrian

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53 I treated these two expressions in the previous chapters.
54 Syrian and Iraqi informants did not identify this stem as the word for “cluck”. However, Syrians recognized the words *biyqāqā* and *qāqā* as having both the meaning of “cluck” as well as “pronounce the qāf like the president”. Hans Wehr reported the word *qāqa* as *fuṣḥā*. However, some Iraqi informants did not recognize this word and
idiom *biyqāqū w mā biylāqū* (“they talk much without achieving”, “they cluck, but when it comes to action they run away like chickens”) and in the Syrian Arabic word *qāq* (“raven”). However, Syrians tend to attribute another meaning to it: “to pronounce the *qāf* like president supporters”. As argued above, the recontextualization of the idiom in the political metaphor led to the emergence of other meanings. The use of this strategically bivalent verb constitutes an ambiguous choice upon which several commenters followed up. The reaction to this term as it appears from its wide repetition in the comments suggests that it plays an important role in terms of audience participation. Another strategic bivalent form is the expression *al-dunyā bikhayr* in comment (30). This is a pun which could either be interpreted as the “the world is fine”, voicing a common pro-regime phrase, or “the pro-regime TV channel *al-Dunyā* is fine”, meaning that despite the war the propaganda channel is unabashed.

### 6.7.6.3 Mixed

#### 6.7.6.3.1 Mixing at the word level

These forms mix elements of bivalent or *fuṣḥā* words with vernacular elements within the same word. For example, *naḥzif* (“we eliminate”) (26) is a bivalent/fuṣḥā word. However, the second root letter – *zayn* in place of the *ẓā’* is a Syrian vernacular realization. Moreover, the commenter could have used another common Syrian vernacular word, *nshīl*, meaning “we delete”. The choice of a mixed form, it is argued, contributes to the ironic tone. In the same comment (26), the word *btrīd* (“you want”) mixes the vernacular aspectual particle – *b* and the

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some Syrian friends indicated that the word for cluck is *naqnaqa*, which is also reported by Hans Wehr with the same meaning. The word *qāqī* is also included in protest slogans. The double meaning of the word *qāqī* as “cluck” and “pronouncing the *qāf*” could have also derive from the assonance with the word *kāk*, used in children’s songs as the hen’s voice, as in this children’s song https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E7yeChgmRo
fuṣḥā verb turīd. This mixed expression is already present in the Syrian vernacular in fixed expressions such as izā btrīd (“please”) or in the form shū btrīdī (“what would you f. like”), as a server would address a customer at the restaurant. In this comment, mixed forms are used to cue irony. Using vernacular equivalents for these forms, such as nshīl and biddak would have probably rendered the irony more difficult to grasp. Through these mixed words the commenter seems to achieve three goals. First, by cueing the comment as irony, he signals alignment with the post author. Second, he voices other commenters who argued against the post author in fuṣḥā (as shown below) suggesting that the qāf is a letter of the Arabic alphabet. Third, they allow the commenter to maintain ambiguity. In the light of Bavelas et al.’s (1990) equivocation theory and Bull’s (2008) revisitation, it could be argued that these mixed forms contribute to a strategic choice of ambiguity in a high-stake situation. In 2012 many of these commenters were probably still in Syria. As emerged from interviews with Maher and Nawar, it was still not safe to express one’s opinion overtly. Hence, the resorting to ambiguous forms to cue irony was necessary to communicate one’s stance.

By repeating similar strategies present in other comments, mixed forms can be considered as a sign of participation. Other mixed words appear in the comments. However, they do not seem to carry meaning at the discourse level. For example, the bivalent word ghayr (“other”) in (78) is accompanied by the Syrian vernacular masculine plural possessive suffix pronoun – hun. However, in the same comment we find the bivalent word wālid (“father”) followed by the fuṣḥā masculine plural suffix – hum. Similarly, the word biddhum (“they want”) (10) mixes the Syrian vernacular bidd and the the fuṣḥā masculine plural suffix – hum. However, it does not seem to provide meaning at the discursive level. These forms were also present in pre-revolution writing, and it could be argued that they represent “collateral” results of increased
writing practices on social media, whereby \(fu\text{s}\text{\'}h\text{\'}a\) is still perceived as “the written language” and therefore appears in alternative to, and is mixed unconsciously with, vernacular forms.\(^{55}\)

6.7.6.3.2 Mixing at the sentence level

Another type of mixing occurs at the sentence level, whereby the irony is rendered by the alternation of vernacular and bivalent/\(fu\text{s}\text{\'}h\text{\'}a\) terms, such as in (30) where the words \textit{mish\'an} (“so that”) and \textit{inn\'a} (“that”) are in the vernacular, and the other words are bivalent/\(fu\text{s}\text{\'}h\text{\'}a\). Or in (31), where the entire comment is in \(fu\text{s}\text{\'}h\text{\'}a\) and the last word \textit{khay\'a} (“brother”) is in the Syrian vernacular. The absence of this vernacular term could have left space for ambiguity whether the comment should be read as ironic or not. This ambiguity is present comment (54), which is entirely \(fu\text{s}\text{\'}h\text{\'}a\). While reading it aloud, Maher Alkurdi could not tell whether it was ironic or not. One might wonder what the motivations are behind the choice of not cueing irony clearly. It might be strategic, so as not to disclose their political stance.

6.7.6.4 Creative

Some words constitute creative forms, such as the word \textit{q\'a\'ifiyya}, which combines the word \textit{q\'af} with the word \textit{\textlangle t\rangle a\'ifiyya} (25). This creative form creates a humorous pun, through which the commenter ratifies the post author’s view, according to which the Asad regime is sectarian.

\(^{55}\) Androutsopoulos (2013: 58) described a similar situation with reference to vernacular literacy practices in Germany. “As there is no dialect literacy instruction in Germany, dialect writing is always mediated through standard German orthography”.

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6.7.6.5 Vernacular(s)

The Syrian vernacular(s) appear in unmixed forms, meaning forms which do not present any *fuṣḥā* elements. An example of such vernacular forms is the plural suffix –*n* in words like *biddon* (“they want”),56 and *bēton* (“their house”),57 and *mālkon* (84) (“you pl. are not”). The form *biddon* occurred five times (three without –*waw* and two with the –*waw*), while the mixed form with the *fuṣḥā* suffix –*hum* occurred twice. Other vernacular words occur in cases of voicing. Words and expressions associated with coastal dialects and the regime register, such as *qurd* (29), the coastal aspectual particle –*m* in the word *miyqāqū* (82), *qillū ēsh* (98). In comment (59), conversely, the commenter criticizes the post author voicing a Damascus accent through the expression *yā khayūūūū* (59). Maher Alkurdi, however noted that the form *khayūūūū* is used in Damascus, whereas the form *yā khayūūūū* is allegedly more common in Aleppo.

6.7.6.6 Fuṣḥā

The use of *fuṣḥā* was observed at the intersentential level or at the intrasentential level.

6.7.6.6.1 Intersentential

By intersentential I mean comments in which no vernacular elements can be identified. Six comments are composed in *fuṣḥā*. All of the comments in *fuṣḥā* in my data show a certain degree of disagreement with the post author or with other commenters. Comment (32) seems to take a critical stance towards the post author. The commenter poses rhetorical questions addressed to an

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56 This form has been found written both with and without a long vowel –*waw* between the dal and the –*nūn.*
57 It could be argued that the word *bēt* is bivalent, as I could be read out with the *fuṣḥā* pronunciation as *bayt*. However, on the one hand this type of bivalency does not seem to have discursive function. Furthermore, the morphological device disambiguates the bivalency.
unidentified interlocutor, arguing that if the regime is sectarian and despotic the interlocutor should not be sectarian and despotic. Comment (54), as discussed above, was interpreted by Maher as criticism towards him. As argued above, this ambiguity was due to the lack of a dialectal or a mixed form. According to Albirini (2016: 281) one of the functions of fuṣḥā that emerged in his data is “to give importance to a particular piece of information”. The ambiguity arising from an exclusive use of fuṣḥā could thus be due to its association with urgency and importance. Comment (86) insults the post author in fuṣḥā, arguing that the qāf is a letter of the Arabic language and saying “you impose your struggle like any virulent insect”. Commenter (87) disagrees with the post author adopting a more radical stance, positing the existence of a Shiite sectarian war against Sunnis, using the Quranic term kafara (“infidels”) with reference to the Shiites. Commenter (94) inveighs against another commenter, accusing him of being a criminal for offending religions. The same commenter, in (95), follows up on his previous comment and admonishes the page administrator to deal with this type of sifla (“lowly people”).

6.7.6.6.2 Intrasentential

By intrasentential I intend comments which contain elements in fuṣḥā alternated with vernacular forms. As stated above, bivalency poses difficulty in the the determination of forms as fuṣḥā. This is particularly evident in cases in which fuṣḥā forms are included in a dialectal context. Commenter (20), for example, writes ḥattā shuhūd al-ayān min al-ahālī biqāqū, whereby the first five words are bivalent, and the last one is vernacular in morphology. The commenter repeats the humorous word biqāqū used by the post author. Repeating a humorous word used by a previous person evokes the strategy of “savoring” (cf. Tannen 2007). Through savoring the commenter signals rapport with the post author and shares his stance. What is interesting here is
that *fuṣḥā* does not seem to have a function *per se*. Rather, its function emerges as an element of code alternation. In other words, its function appears contextually and discursively driven, rather than abstract and absolute. As in (31), the humorous effect is achieved through mixing.\(^{58}\)

6.7.6.6.3 Voicing

Voicing could be interpreted in relationship with the intrasentential or intersentential use of *fuṣḥā*. Consider example (26), in which the commenter starts with mixed forms (which, as argued above, are also present in oral communication), and concludes with bivalent forms. The entire comment can be interpreted as someone voicing another commenter (for example commenter 86), who argues that the post author’s argument is faulty due to the existence of the letter *qāf* in Arabic. Another example in which bivalent forms are used to voice is (30), in which the word *bikhayr* referred to the television station *al-Dunyā*, besides being a form of personification, could be construed as the voicing of the government’s official reactions towards the escalating situation in Syria. “Sūriyya bikhayr” is also the title of a pro-regime song, which intertextually refers to the regime’s official reactions, composed by popular Syrian pop singer from Latakia Hussein al-Deek. The song was posted on Youtube on August 20, 2011.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Another way to approach this is from theories on humor. In particular, the incongruity theory (cf. Attardo 1994 for a detailed analysis). In modern linguistic thought, one of the earliest theories which dealt which a type of incongruity is Bateson’s (1969). A way we could construe the process by which the alternation of *fuṣḥā* and dialect generates humor is thinking about these two registers as frames which produce different sets of expectations. A question posed above is “how do we know that someone is being ironic?”. A way to cue irony is to use a different frame, that of another register. However, a detailed discussion on framing goes beyond the scope of this analysis.

\(^{59}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cN4Zn-3RNg
6.8 Concluding Discussion

The application of two different frameworks, namely De Fina’s (forthcoming) online narrative and Tannen’s repetition in conversation, highlighted different dimensions of participation. From the online narrative framework it emerged that most commenters engaged with the author’s post, rather than engaging in other conversations, or on different topics. This can be explained in terms of affordances, in fact Facebook did not facilitate the creation of new threads in 2012 and the only way commenters could reply to other commenters was by including their name in the comment. This however, did not create a separate organized thread. On the other hand, the sustained engagement with the post author may have other explanations, including the topic, the political engagement of the participants, as well as the involvement strategies deployed by the post author. The sustained engagement can also be considered as an important aspect that characterizes online political environments from other types of online contexts, and is worth investigating further. De Fina (forthcoming) interpreted the lack of sustained engagement and spontaneous reactions in a gossip forum in connection with the permanence of texts and opinions. Based on these considerations, online environments, he argues, afford “enhanced reflexivity” (31). In a political context, however, the permanence of texts and the subsequent enhanced reflexivity afford seem to lead to higher involvement and participation.

An analysis of the author’s strategies revealed a dense use of repetition at the levels of music, imagery and dialogue. As suggested by Tannen (2007: 88), images, repetition and details are used across genres to create involvement by prompting the audience to contribute to the construction of meaning, instead of providing it ready-made. In this post, the repetition-rich political metaphor seems to constitute a “strategically ambiguous” choice of the author to
provoke response and participation. Moreover, it could be argued that strategic ambiguity does not compromise the main purpose of this type of online participation, which consists of showing presence. As emerged from an interview with a Syrian dissident, “Before the revolution the only face you would see in every private and public space was that of the president and his family. Through Facebook, Syrians for the first time put their own face in public”. 

In line with De Fina’s (forthcoming, p. 31) insights, “On the one hand, the fact that comments are posted and written paradoxically allows for greater permanence of opinions and therefore for less spontaneous reactions to a story or to other participant’s contributions. On the other hand, the participatory culture and online environments encourage performance as a central act of self-presentation”. Furthermore, this strategy of ambiguity is consistent with the post author’s evaluation of comments. “I am happy to see all these responses. Among the commenters there are anti-regime and pro-regime people, as well as people of different sects. For me, personally, it is important that there is this plurality of opinions”. The strong presence of repetition was also observed in the comments, particularly those which align with the post, which constitute the majority of comments.

Commenters’ repetition appeared in the form of intratextuality (Hamilton 1996) or synchronic repetition (Tannen 2007), as well as at the intertextual, diachronic level. Intratextual strategies include the repetition of words like biyāqūqū, and characters in the post metaphor, such as al-Būṭī. Moreover, several commenters directly respond to the post rhetorical question using different variants of the word li-anna (“because”). Intertextual repetition includes voicing of different registers. Voicing occurs in comments which both agree and disagree with the post

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60 The term “strategically ambiguous” is borrowed from Kochman (1986). As paraphrased in Tannen (2007: 28), Kochman uses the term “strategic ambiguity” with reference to “certain Black speech genres, […] in which the receiver, not the speaker, determines meaning – and the speaker intends it to be so.”

61 Interview with Syrian informant, Amman, August 2015.

62 Maher Alkurdi, Skype interview, February 2016.
author. Those who align with the author voice the coastal accent, such as in (29) and (47), whereas the commenters who are in disagreement with the author use forms which voice the Damascus accent, such as the glottal stop *hamza* in (37) and Damascus vernacular expressions in (56). Another dimension of intertextuality which emerged from the comments recalls Fairclough’s (1992) concept of interdiscursivity. Through rhythm and images, commenters evoke slogans and songs of the revolution, such as in (3), (18), (34), etc. The dense presence of different levels of repetition suggests a highly performative type of participation. Through intratextual and intertextual devices commenters signal stances and express dissent (towards the president, the post author and other commenters) indirectly. Repetition could be construed as a strategy of ambiguity, through which commenters interact, show alignment and take stances.

Another dimension of ambiguity can be observed in the use of irony, particularly in relation to the choice of linguistic varieties. From the comments emerges a prevalent use of the Syrian vernacular(s) and mixing. Syrian vernacular forms are used consciously in instances of voicing (e.g. 29). Intersentential *fuṣḥā* (comments which do not present any vernacular element) is only present in six comments, all of which are critical towards an unspecified addressee. It could be argued that intersentential *fuṣḥā* is used to construct an authoritative stance, such as commenter (94) and (95), who criticizes another commenter who allegedly denigrated religions. This commenter’s alias, namely *Abu Bakr*, probably after the first Caliph, also goes well with the type of authoritative stance he is constructing. As emerged from the analysis, however, the majority of comments present mixed forms. In particular, bivalent, strategic bivalent and creative forms cluster in the comments which align with the post author’s stance. Moreover, it was shown that mixing between *fuṣḥā*, vernacular, bivalent and strategic bivalent forms in the same comment was functional to signaling an ironic stance (e.g. 30). Whereas bivalent forms were
neglected in previous studies of online practices, such as in Albirini (2016), it is argued that a focus on these forms is central to the analysis of online data, particularly assessing participation in a highly politicized context.

Identities, and particularly the identity of anti-Asad dissidents, are overwhelmingly cued through a hybrid variety, whose function can only be grasped as a whole, rather than as the sum of the functions of the varieties constituting them. In other words, the use of one variety or the other cannot be ascribed to fixed indexical associations. Rather, it is the hybrid style obtained by the alternation of all these features that signals meaning. For example, it was shown how the insertion of a vernacular word in a bivalent comment (31) cued irony and alignment with the post author. Moreover, hybridity is in contrast with an ideology of separation, which distinguishes between pure *fuṣḥā* and pure dialect, and which characterized dominant ideology in Syria and other Arab countries. Particularly in Syria, due to the Pan-Arab agenda which promoted the marginalization of dialects and minority languages (Miller 2003). Hybridity is not proposed as a replacement of concepts of diglossia and continuum. Rather, it provides a different standpoint, which emphasizes mixing as a starting point for investigation of variation in context. Hybridity and ambiguity seem to be linked in my data. Through hybridity, commenters remain ambiguous and at the same time cue their stances through humor and irony. It could be hypothesized that the use of this hybrid style constitutes another dimension of repetition. Through recurrent bivalent, creative forms and code alternation, commenters signal a distinctive stance and create involvement and cohesion.
When people took to the streets in several parts of the Arab World between 2010 and 2011, Western media hastily labeled these protests as Facebook revolutions. The term was motivated by the demonstrators’ use of social media to organize and publicize the wave of uprisings known as the Arab Spring(s). Although social media are known to have played an important role in this socio-historical event, the expression “Facebook revolutions” was soon criticized for its orientalist connotations, inasmuch as attributing the early successes of the uprisings to Western technology misrecognizes the agency of the protestors. Agency constitutes a central tenet of Edward Said’s (1979) Orientalism, a theoretical and political approach which objectifies Other. Objectification arguably accompanied mainstream Western accounts of the Arab uprisings, and particularly of the Syrian crisis. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, Syrians have been portrayed as victims, first of the regime, then of ISIS. More recently, Syrians have been depicted as refugees welcomed by a West which is at times described as a magnanimous host and others as a rightfully strict educator and gatekeeper.

The aim of this work has been to investigate the role of social media through the analysis of a group of Syrian dissidents’ Facebook practices. The overarching question has been: What identities emerge from these texts and how are these identities constructed in interaction and discourse? The study applied an online ethnographic method, informed by Androutsopoulos’s (2006; 2008b; 2013) Discourse-Centered Online Ethnography, Barton and Lee’s (2013) mixed-method approach and KhosraviNik and Unger’s (2016) critical discursive framework, which combines the analysis of texts with direct contact with the participants. Moreover, the study is situated within a social constructionist approach to language and identity (cf. De Fina, Schiffrin
and Bamberg 2006; De Fina 2011a), which studies identity as emergent in discourse and interaction.

A linguistic ethnography informed by a social constructionist approach to identity builds on Blommaert and Rampton’s (2011) research agenda for the study of identity in a context of language and superdiversity. In their paradigmatic framework of language and superdiversity, Blommaert and Rampton emphasize that “indexicality and multimodality help to destabilise other traditional ingredients in language study – assumptions of common ground and the prospects for achieving inter-subjectivity” (7). The type of diversity encountered in online contexts, they argue, presents two main challenges to traditional ideas about “the achievability of mutual understanding and the centrality of shared convention” (8). The first challenge regards the “limits to negotiability” of meaning, derived from the fact that communication occurs among people with different backgrounds and with a low degree of overlap regarding the indexical values they attribute to linguistics resources. Blommaert and Rampton refer to this low degree of mutual understanding as “non-shared knowledge” (Id.). Secondly, previous assumptions of the linearity of meaning are challenged by the presence of creative forms.

Despite the challenges that limits to negotiability and creativity pose to the researcher (and whose analysis, according to Blommaert and Rampton, requires ethnographic work), Blommaert and Rampton argue that a focus on online practice is important in that they:

allow us to observe linguistic norms being manufactured, interrogated or altered, or to see norms that have changed and are new/different in the social networks being studied. We can see, in short, the emergence of structure out of agency (9).

This methodological framework guided the following sub-questions:
1. What strategies and resources are employed by the participants on their Facebook pages in the process of identity construction?

2. Did these resources change when the revolution started? How do they compare to the resources the same authors used on Facebook before the revolution?

3. What values are attributed by the authors to these strategies and resources?

4. What is the interaction like between the authors of these Facebook texts and the audience before the revolution?

5. How is participation promoted and sustained after the revolution? How does this contribute to the understanding of participation in an online political context?

In the following sections I outline the main findings, discuss them in the light of previous Arabic sociolinguistic and interactional sociolinguistic research on language and identity, and conclude with future directions, based on the potentials and the limitations of this study.

7.1 Strategies and Resources

From the data it emerged that Maher, Nawar and their followers on Facebook employed a plethora of discursive strategies and resources to “do identity work”. The type of resources and the value attributed to these resources and strategies varied before and after the revolution. This confirms Blommaert’s (2010: 32) insight that “In the context of globalization, linguistic resources change value, function, ownership and so on, because they can be inserted in patterns of mobility”.
7.1.1 Pre-Revolution Practices

The resources utilized by Maher and Nawar in their pre-revolution practices included Western and Arab videos, citations of non-Syrian literary work, popular jokes, as well as linguistic resources, such as English, *fuṣḥā*, romanized Arabic, vernacular Arabic, bivalent forms and stylized forms, such as emojis, and unconventional punctuation. These forms were interpreted in the light of Blommaert’s (2010) notion of “truncated repertoire”. Each form represents a localized, or “accented” version a “standard supervernacular” (2010: 9).

These forms were interpreted within Blommaert’s (2010) notion of polycentricity. Their validity, in fact, is not in relation to the center represented by the Syrian government and its policy of Arabization. While the presence of heterogeneous forms on the internet is not restricted to the Syrian context, their appearance on Syrian Facebook pages is particularly significant. Maher, Nawar and the commentators’s use of superdiverse resources in their pre-revolution practices underlay the construction of new individual, cosmopolitan identities. This process is novel in the Syrian context, whereby the only individual identities visible in public were those of the Syrian President and his family.

Moreover, it was posited that the emergence of these identities can be understood as a “scale-jump” (Blommaert 2010) from a “We” and “here” to “I” and “there”. “We” is represented by a regime of linguistic ideology which emphasized code separation and *fuṣḥā* to construct a single collective identity of Syrians as Arabs. “Here” represents the autarchic policies enacted by the Syrian government; in particular, the policy of Arabization, which purported to purge Arabic from foreign influences. “I” represents the new individual identities, which challenge the binarity of official ideology through hybrid practices, which appeared as the simultaneous use of linguistic and semiotic resources. “There” stands for the centrifugal trend represented by the
choice of English, the Romanized script and hybrid linguistic forms, combining fuṣḥā and the vernacular at the word level.

In sum, while supervernacular forms could be easily construed as forms of taghrīb, or “Western foreignization” Suleiman (2011: 138), a term used by some Arab scholars who condemned the influence of Western languages in Arabic, it is argued that their understanding should be understood with reference to the Syrian socio-political context. Instead of constituting a unidirectional movement from the center (the West) to the periphery (the Arab world), they suggest the presence of agency.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that pre-revolution practices are characterized by a low degree of metalinguistic awareness. Language and linguistic variation are not a topic of conversation in the posts and comments. Furthermore, when Maher and Nawar, during the interviews, were asked to motivate the use of English or arabizi, they could not explain their choice. Nawar explained that the use of arabizi was simply due to technological limitations. Conversely, language becomes the subject of discussion after the revolution.

7.1.2 Post-Revolution Practices

Post-revolution practices presented a shift in the use of communicative resources and strategies. Unlike pre-revolution practices, post-revolution practices are embedded within an overt metalinguistic discourse, which is reflected in the use of language as a metaphor for the socio-political situation in Syria, in the authors’ ideological perceptions towards the importance of the vernacular and in the type of linguistic resources, such as idioms, puns and creative forms, which denotes a high level of consciousness and metapragmatic reflexivity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011).
While in pre-revolution texts, intertextuality was observed in the reference to Western videos and non-Syrian literature, after the revolution it is represented by the use of different resources, such as Syrian idioms, political metaphors, repeated acts of voicing the army/regime register and references to protest and dissidents’ literature, such as Ali Farzat’s and Mahmoud Darwish’s work, as well as interdiscursive references to the genre of revolution slogans. Similarly, the resources underlying the strategy of linguistic simultaneity changed. These consisted of strategic bivalent, creative and Syrian vernacular forms.

These discursive strategies underlie a choice of ambiguity. Before the revolution, ambiguity emerged as a way to build rapport, stimulate friends’ reactions to one’s posts. In example 4 in the first analysis chapter, Maher’s posts about women resulted in his friend Rawaa’s response, who liked the post but added “Despite the fact that I didn’t understand what you mean”. After the revolution, ambiguity was dictated by the following reasons: 1) safety concerns 2) persuading new followers 3) building a community of dissent through participation. The type of participation also changed between pre-revolution and post-revolution practices. While before the revolution Maher and Nawar were interacting with a restricted circle of friends, after the revolution the audience consists of a higher number of followers, many of whom are unknown to Maher and Nawar.

Unlike previous Arabic sociolinguistic studies, which emphasized the switch between varieties and neglected the motivations underlying hybrid forms, the data analyzed show that the analysis of hybrid forms, along with the display of heterogeneous resources, is central to understanding processes of identity construction in online environments. Linguistic simultaneity was particularly evident and intensified in a political context, such as Maher’s and Nawar’s post-revolution Facebook pages. Linguistic simultaneity was observed as the co-presence, at the word
level, of *fushā* and the Syrian vernacular. In example 3, second analysis chapter, it was shown how grammatical terms were used to cue the subversive metaphorical meaning, the understanding of which could not be understood without referring to the Syrian vernacular and the Syrian social context. In example 4, the unwovelled Arabic script allowed for the strategic bivalent use of the word *kāna/kān*. Its literal grammatical meaning (past tense of the verb “to be”) is fraught with other metaphorical meanings, which become focal throughout the post. The author uses this word as a nickname for Hafiz al-Asad.

It is interesting to note that the use of these forms, whose deployment denotes a high degree of awareness, is accompanied by another level of awareness, that of the Syrian vernacular as a key strategy of political struggle. This type of awareness was elicited through the interviews and by having the authors read their texts aloud. It was shown that when Maher and Nawar read out their posts, the prosody was Syrian vernacular, and several of the bivalent forms were pronounced in the Syrian vernacular.

7.1.3 Idioms

From the post-revolution practices examined in the second analysis chapter emerged another scale-jump, underlying a new collective identity, that of dissidents as authentic Syrians. Linguistic simultaneity, such as bivalency, strategic bivalency and creative forms, occurred in concomitance with metaphorical and idiomatic devices.

Idioms are a relatively understudied phenomenon in discourse analysis. Tannen (2007) treated idioms as prepatterned expressions. Drawing on anecdotal examples of idiomatic expressions used in American speech, she emphasizes that idioms are not absolutely fixed and often appear in altered forms. The meaning of altered idioms, she argues, is not retrieved through
structural decomposition, but by association with the familiar sayings. Idioms, in other words, epitomize the dialogic and contextual nature of language. The relation between altered idioms and their familiar forms evokes a diachronic dynamic similar to Becker’s (1995) notion of *languaging* as bringing the past into the present.

The context-shaping character of idiomatic expressions was emphasized by Domínguez-Barajas (2010) in his study on the socio-discursive functions of proverbs in a Mexican Transnational Social Network. In his work, proverbs carry the functions of arguing, entertaining, establishing rapport and advising. From the Facebook data analyzed emerged the large presence of idiomatic expressions which eluded the fixity and stability in form proverbs are usually associated with (cf. Tannen 2007). It was observed that these idioms often occurred in altered versions with respect to their familiar, or, to use Langlotz’s (2006) term, abstract base-form. Altered idioms shared similar functions as the proverbs analyzed by Domínguez-Barajas (2010), namely entertaining, persuading and recruiting new followers. To sum up, in discourse-analytic approaches, idiomaticity may be understood as an intensified process of intertextuality. Their diachronic dimension is emphasized with relation to their involving and context-shaping power.

Moreover, idioms were analyzed within Langlotz’s (2006) cognitive linguistics framework as intrinsically creative devices. This cognitive input helped shed light on the simultaneity of idioms, which consists of the co-presence of a literal and a figurative meaning. In other words, whereas discursive-analytic approaches emphasize the diachronic dimension of idioms, what emerged from an exploration of cognitive studies is an emphasis on synchronicity, contributing to the creative, context-shaping power of idioms. Both discourse analytic and cognitive accounts describe idiomatic expressions as creative intertextual devices. By virtue of its intensified diachronic and synchronic power, idiomatic creativity, it is argued, is an important
element which contributes to involvement and participation. The altered shape in which idioms appeared in the data, provoked amusement and, it was argued, is more involving than the use of fixed, ready-made prepattern expressions.

Building on discourse-analytic approaches (Tannen 2007; Domínguez-Barajas 2010), it was shown how idioms present dynamics of continuity and reconfiguration, drawing from a common heritage and re-shaping the present context. Moreover, by virtue of their entertaining and persuasive functions, idioms in the online data analyzed appeared as intensified intertextual devices promoting group solidarity and higher participation.

7.1.4 Paratexts

The metalinguistic discourse encountered in post-revolution practices is framed by the use of paratexts, such as Maher’s public page name addōmarī, after dissident Ali Farzat’s publication, Ali Farzat’s cartoons, and the page description sections. Similar to offline contexts, in this online contexts paratexts were used to entice, persuading new followers to join the page and engage with the posts.

Another type of paratexts, which was not taken into close consideration in this study, is the choice of profile names. The importance of personal names to elicit information on language ideology was emphasized by Suleiman (2013). The choice of profile names of the participants who commented to addōmarī’s post in the third analysis chapter follow interesting patterns. Some use religious names, such as the Abu Bakr. Several other participants used pseudonyms. The graphic choices are also worth analyzing. Most of the names are transcribed in English. Some, however, wrote their profile name in Arabic. However, a limit of this analysis is that it is
impossible to know what profile name they were using at the time when the comment was posted.

7.2 Online Participation. Sustained Interaction and Plurality

In the third analysis chapter it was shown how the repetition of an altered idiomatic expression, embedded in a political metaphor, created humor and participation. Participation was analyzed in the light of Tannen’s and De Fina’s (forthcoming) interactional sociolinguistic frameworks. Tannen analyzed participation as a form of repetition. Through the strategies of dialogue, imagery and details the speaker engages and makes the interlocutor participate in meaning construction.

De Fina analyzed participation in an online gossip forum. Her study, from the perspective of narrative and story-telling, confirmed previous findings about the tendency of participants of online social platforms to go “off-topic”. Moreover, from her study it emerged that interactions are not sustained. Finally, it confirms the rather unfriendly environment of online social platforms. An interesting aspect of participation which emerged from her study is that unlike traditional, offline analyses of storytelling, participants in this context tend to not focus on the story itself, but on other aspects of the storytelling activity. The attention to the medium and the activity, she argues, alludes to “an enhanced reflexivity that online environments afford” (31). She motivates this enhanced reflexivity on the one hand by the lack of necessity to comment on the topic, given the permanence of comments. On the other, she argues that “the participatory culture and online environments encourage performance as a central act of self-presentation” (31). In other words, the scope of this type of participation is visibility, and visibility, she argues, is more easily achieved through confrontation than through cooperation.
Enhanced reflexivity and visibility also emerged from the analysis of the comments to a Facebook post published on the addōmarī page. These aspects emerged through the performative use of intertextuality, simultaneous and creative forms, metaphors and voicing. This type of enhanced reflexivity, however, did not only serve the purpose of individual visibility. The fact that most participants remain on topic is in counter tendency to previous studies (De Fina’s, forthcoming, and Herring’s, 2013). This is an important aspect that may distinguish the type of participation in a political forum from other online contexts. Enhanced reflexivity seems to be connected with sustained political engagement. Reflecting on the idioms prompts other commenters to manipulate the idiom itself in order to create new political metaphors and show their stance as dissidents. Moreover, another important aspect generated by this type of engagement is the emergence and the appreciation of plurality. As Maher stated, “I am happy to see all these responses. Among the commenters there are anti-regime and pro-regime people, as well as people of different sects. For me, personally, it is important that there is this plurality of opinions.”

Another important finding that emerged from this participation analysis is that identities, and particularly the identity of dissidents, are quite often cued through hybrid forms, rather than through the code switch between distinct varieties. While recent Arabic sociolinguistic studies neglected hybrid forms and studied variation through the prism of code-switching, this study argues for the necessity to focus on hybridity.

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1 Maher Alkurdi, Skype interview, February 2016.
7.3 Interviews

The analysis of Maher’s, Nawar’s and their followers’ texts was integrated with interviews with the authors and with other informants. Some of them identified themselves as revolutionaries, others are Syria specialists. Skype, face-to-face and Facebook chat interviews helped 1) obtain a better understanding of the social and political context in which the Facebook texts emerged; 2) elicit authors’ perceptions on language ideology, such as Maher’s and Nawar’s opinions on the Syrian vernacular and Lina’s remarks on the spelling of Syria with an \( \text{alif (sūryā)} \) rather than with a \( \text{tā’ marbūṭa} \). 3) understand the meaning of opaque texts, such as Syrian idioms and creative forms.

Furthermore, through the interviews it was possible to elicit the informants’ perceptions in terms of language ideology and identity. Arabic, and particularly locally marked vernaculars, are perceived as a marker of authenticity, as emerged from interviews with Nawar Bulbul and Fares. The post-revolution phase saw a valorization of the local vernaculars. Nawar motivated this arguing that it is from the smallest cities in Syria that the revolution started. Places that before the revolution were stigmatized and marginalized, such as the Homs quarter of Baba Amro, became symbols of the revolution. Local vernaculars represent an ideal standard which, in Blommaert’s (2010) terms, can be defined as super-vernacular. Local vernaculars, however, are embedded in a fluid environment, as will be further discussed below, with relation to the issues of authenticity, fixity and fluidity. The abstract, ideological character of the super-vernacular and its local declinations represent what Blommaert (2011: 12) defined as “dual phenomenology” which “enables us to see these processes as profoundly political”.

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In what follows I discuss the findings which arose from the analysis chapters and the interviews with the authors, with a particular focus on the link between hybrid communicative strategies and identity.

7.4 Hybridity

Pre-revolution practices were characterized by a dense presence of truncated repertoires (Blommaert 2010). These appeared as the deployment of transmodal (Pennycook 2007) devices, such as videos of American movies, and superdiverse linguistic forms (Blommaert 2010), such as Arabizi, “bits” of fuṣḥā, of the Syrian vernacular and of English, which suggested the emergence of new individual and cosmopolitan identities. These new identities were analyzed in the light of Blommaert’s (2010) framework of polycentricity, as well as within Pennycook’s (2007) concept of translocal flows. Pennycook positions the term “translocal” critically, in contrast with the global-local dichotomy, underlying a conceptualization of postmodern cultural flows as linear and unidirectional. Through this term, he argues for “a more complex vision of globalization [which] seeks to understand the role of English both critically – in terms of new forms of power, control and destruction – and in its complexity – in terms of new forms of resistance, change, appropriation and identity. (5)”

These strategies, it has been argued, are polycentric, in the sense that they are embedded in a different order of indexicality than the official, dominant and legitimated one. Whereas the former values hybridity and mixture, the latter values code separation and subscribes to a monolingual bias, exemplified by the Syrian regime’s policy of language Arabization. As summarized by Rubdy and Alsagoff (2014: 8):
Hybridity presents itself as an alternative discourse that subverts the very idea of a dominant culture and a unique canon, and invites a re-examination of power structures. Hence, it has been mobilized by postcolonial and post-modern thinkers as a strategy for dismantling unequal power relations that are inherent in such binary oppositions as East-West, local-global, modern-traditional and so on. Characterized as a site of democratic struggle and resistance against political and cultural domination, hybridity is viewed as a ‘disruptive’ and ‘productive’ category (Bhabha, 1994: 226; Joseph, 1999: 1) that challenges essentialism and resonates well with postmodern skepticism of essentialist understandings of culture.

The creative, subversive vision of hybridity outlined by early theorists, such as Bhabha (1994) and Joseph (1999) and subscribed to by Rubdy and Alsagoff, was challenged by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010; 2014), according to whom hybridity subsumes an idea of purity and fixity preceding convergence. Conversely, they conceptualize hybridity as a starting point, as the “unmarked” condition of language. In their study of urban language practices, they propose the notion of “metrolingualism”. “Metrolingualism does not start from the notion of a discrete language attached to nation and culture but rather focuses on how people produce, resist, defy and rearrange linguistic resources in and through local linguistic practices. We therefore focus on creative linguistic practices and provide a new way of understanding ‘linguistic hybridity’” (Otsuji and Pennycook 2014: 85).

While reinforcing the idea of hybridity as a starting point, and in agreement with Otsuji and Pennycook (2014) that hybridity requires new instruments of analysis to capture its “emergent”, rather than “convergent” difference, the Facebook data analyzed also highlights the importance of such a concept as hybridity. As affirmed by Rubdy and Alsagoff (2014: 9), “notwithstanding its quotidian nature, hybridity is a helpful concept because it provides a profoundly reflexive perspective in transcending binary categories”. Rubdy and Alsagoff argue for a historical contextualization of hybridity. Quoting Pieterse (2004: 52) they affirm that hybridity is still a useful concept that proves “that boundaries are historical and social constructions and cognitive barriers whose validity depends on epistemic orders, which are
ultimately of an arbitrary or at least contingent nature”. “As Pieterse observes, what is new is the recent acceleration of this awareness: ‘mixing has been perennial as a process but new as an imaginary’”.

The Facebook data confirm the subversive character of hybrid practices theorized by Bhabha (1994) and reinforced by Rubdy and Alsagoff. Moreover, it was shown that adopting an analysis of hybridity as a starting point is key to understanding how identities are indexed in social media environments. Social media, it is posited, have contributed to an acceleration and an intensification of the subversive potential of hybridity, as it emerges from the analysis of post-revolution practices. Maher’s and Nawar’s posts before the revolution were characterized by a low presence of strategically bivalent and creative forms, as well as a low ideological perception of linguistic variation. This low degree of awareness was attested through the interviews, from which emerged a rather unconscious use of bivalent and “accented” forms.

By the same token, by “localizing” (Androutsopoulos 2010: 205) writing through truncated repertoires (Blommaert 2010) individuals indexed new identities. Facebook both facilitated and rendered these identities visible. However, it is important to emphasize the agentive component of this identity process. As stated by one informant, for the first time, through Facebook, Syrians were able to put their own face in public. In other words, through Facebook, Syrians were not subjected to a unidirectional globalizing force. Rather, they appropriated this means unconsciously as an instrument to affirm the plurality of their individual identities, as opposed to the homologizing collective identity as Arabs. Seeing these practices as hybrid is important in order to valorize this agentive component.
7.5 Super-Hybridity?

If it is true that language production is intrinsically hybrid, as emphasized by Otsuji and Pennycook, one may ask the question: what is it that makes hybridity overtly subversive? It is posited that enhanced reflexivity (De Fina forthcoming), or increased metapragmatic reflexivity (Blommaert and Rampton 2011), facilitated by the permanence of written texts, eased the manipulation of hybrid forms, expanding the opportunities to do identity work. These affordances of Facebook were known and had been experimented with by Maher and Nawar before the revolution. Moreover, the subversive character of Facebook before the revolution is attested by the fact that it had been officially banned until early 2011. Its use since the beginning of the revolution has increased its subversive potential. What has emerged from the post-revolution practices is a higher awareness of these affordances. In other words, if language is intrinsically hybrid, an enhanced awareness of such hybridity, facilitated by the metapragmatic reflexivity, characterized post-revolution practices as super-

Super-hybridity is an umbrella term which can refer to the dynamics analyzed in the second and the third analysis chapters of this study. From the second chapter emerged the frequent use of idioms, puns and creative forms, constructed with the use of strategic bivalent forms. The conscious use of strategic bivalency to index identities was not present in pre-revolution texts. Moreover, it was posited that idioms constitute a particular type of intertextuality, which requires more cognitive work in terms of meaning construction, by virtue of the presence of a complex literal and figurative scene. The permanence and repetition of written idiomatic forms allows for more creative work and engagement. Similarly, 

\footnote{“If sociolinguistic superdiversity research has demonstrated anything so far, it is the problematic interaction between a field of sociocultural diversity and various forms of policing, surveillance and control curtailing options within that field and producing new forms of structural inequality adding to older ones”. Blommaert (2015: 85).}
interdiscursivity, described as the evocation of other genres, such as protest slogans, requires the reader to engage not only with previous texts, but with the context (or, to use Fairclough’s terminology, discourse conventions) surrounding the text that is being evoked.

In sum, it is posited that the increased alertness about language variation which emerged from post-revolution data confirms an even more active engagement of individuals in the process of identity construction. Moreover, what makes these practices super-hybrid is the acceleration with which identity processes occur. The term super-hybrid is suggested with reference to the paradigm of super-diversity. The sharp discrepancy in the use of resources before and after the revolution, and the subsequent emergence of new identities within a short period of time reinforce the need for a notion such as super-diversity.

7.6 Authenticity, Fixity and Fluidity

The focus on hybridity has raised important questions about the concept of authenticity in sociolinguistic research. In early variationist approaches, authenticity was associated with the purity of spoken, uncontaminated texts. Research on bilingualism and hybridity challenged this traditional assumption, positing that mixing is the new norm that needs to be analyzed. Super-diversity has further contributed to our understanding of society as increasingly diverse. Social constructionist approaches to language and identity and performance studies have further problematized the equation of natural and unrehearsed as authentic.

In this study, a question of authenticity emerged in concomitance with President Bashar al-Asad’s identity claim, according to which protestors were labeled as foreign infiltrators. An almost exclusive use of Arabic language resources and frequent references to Arabic, such as Maher’s use of Arabic grammar forms to cue the figurative political meaning, and the virtual
disappearance of “globalizing” forms, such as English, emojis and Arabizi, it was argued, should be understood in the light of this identity claim. As Dina put it,

The Lebanese, in order to free themselves, lost their identity. I write in Arabic because that's how I'm respected. If I write a word in English, one in French and another in Arabic I don't get the same respect.³

As emerges from Dina’s remarks, Arabic is used with a high degree of awareness. Moreover, the use of strategic bivalent and creative forms suggests a conscious manipulation of language and variation. Variation awareness emerges in Maher’s and Nawar’s perceptions about the vernacular, - elicited during the interviews and in the way they read out their posts, - in Nawar’s understanding of geographic and linguistic localness as authenticity and in Lina’s remarks on the “authentic” spelling of Syria. This type of metalinguistic discourse evokes a trope of fixity and purity which, however, coexists with fluid and hybrid practices. The perception of fixity on the ideological level and the pervasive presence of hybrid practices evoke Otsuji and Pennycook’s (2014) description of metrolinguism as constant movement between fixity and fluidity, as well as Blommaert’s (2011: 11) “dual phenomenology”.

Super-hybridity, it is argued, is a result of this constant exposure to fixity and fluidity, facilitated by continued presence and participation in the dissidents’ Facebook pages. While it reinforces Otsuji and Pennycook’s (2014) description of hybridity as “emergent” from a constant movement between fixity and fluidity, the fact that these practices take place on a global platform has contributed to an intensification and an acceleration of these fluxes. This acceleration has facilitated the emergence, in a short of period of time, of new individual and collective identities. As emphasized by Blommaert in a recent blog post entitled “The Conservative Turn in Linguistic Landscape Studies”, it is not the linguistic forms that are new,

³ Interview with Dina, chapter 3.
but “the sociolinguistic conditions under which they emerge, are distributed, and acquire sociopolitical value in social life”.

Similarly, hybrid texts and bivalent forms were attested in pre-revolution practices. However, their intensification and occurrence in social environments contributed to an acceleration in use and awareness, which underlay the swift emergence and the overlap of new individual and collective identities in a very short period of time and across geographical limitations. To be clear, it is not posited that these identities are the exclusive product of online interaction. My informants have known each other and some of them have been interacting in person. However, as emphasized above, what is remarkable is the way these online interactions have accelerated and intensified the emergence of these identities, particularly in an increasingly diasporic environment, which saw informants move from Syria to Egypt, Jordan and Europe interact on a daily basis despite the geographic restrictions.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that these identities are not unique and absolute. Not all Syrians constructed new individual, cosmopolitan identities on Facebook. Moreover, as emerged from the third analysis chapter, further identity work was done by some commenters, such as those who criticized followers who insulted religions and those who took a strong sectarian stance. This may serve as counter-evidence for recent criticism towards social media as platforms which compartmentalize society.

The metalinguistic awareness of the study participants and their hybrid practices in connection with a response to a claim of authenticity further reinforce the need to locate authenticity in discourse and interaction. Paraphrasing Hymes (1996), Coupland (2014: 36)

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4 https://alternative-democracy-research.org/2016/01/05/the-conservative-turn-in-linguistic-landscape-studies/
Also cf. Blommaert, Jan (2015).
argued that “Having one’s voice heard is perhaps the most obviously authenticating sociolinguistic experience”.

7.7 Super-Hybridity, Language and Ideology

Syria is a privileged case study in a discussion on language, globalization and super-diversity. Home of one of the most comprehensive policies of Arabization, Syria has long prided itself on being the stronghold of Arab culture and identity. The policy of Arabization is rooted in an Arab nationalist project which sees fuṣḥā, as opposed to “state” languages, as the language of Arab national unity. “The view that Arabic is the principal centripetal force of Arab unity capable of countering the centrifugal power of the territorial state is embedded in the discourse of the Ba’th Party […] (Suleiman 2003: 124). One of the staunchest proponents and implementers of Arabization was Sati’ al-Husri, who

decided to remove the teaching of foreign languages from the primary schools in Iraq. […] The removal of the foreign languages from the primary schools represents for al-Husri a break with the colonial past, since it was the policy of the colonial powers to promote their languages in the countries they occupied to serve their own self-interests rather than those of the peoples they ruled (Suleiman 2003: 129-130).

Furthermore, as emphasized by Suleiman, al-Husri rejected the adoption of vernaculars as Arab national languages, as well as the Latin script. Further similarities between the Syrian Baathist Arabization policies and early nationalist thinkers is “the secularist nature of Arab nationalism. The association between language and national identity, in place of the old association between religion/sect and group identity, was promoted to override the faith differences between the Arabic-speaking peoples” (Suleiman 2003: 159).
The unifying, centripetal force co-existed in Syria with a centralizing force which characterized the Ba’thist policies, and which saw Damascus grow as the political and economic center, pushing the rest of the country into the periphery. The revolution brought the periphery to the center. As Wedeen (2013) noted, the protests sparked in rural Syria before reaching the capital, positing that a “vision of the good life” blinded urban life. The erstwhile center appears more and more fragmented with the rapid flows of people (the Syrian diaspora) and technology. Schulties (2014: 1) defined Modern Standard Arabic as “the nineteenth century nationalist project to render classical Arabic a referentially stable and standardized tool for state building”. From this standpoint, Modern Standard Arabic can be construed as a form of state centralization which can be thought of as an internalization of the Western monolingual-state bias. In other words, if the West achieved modernity through (linguistic) centralization, the same medicine was thought to lead to a free, independent, post-colonial Arab state.

What distinguishes the analyzed Facebook practices underlying the emergence of new identities is the presence of rapid and unpredictable, unconscious and conscious “scale jumps” (Blommaert 2010: 35). The hybridity deriving from these scale-jumps is valorized over the uniformity invoked by state and pan-Arab metalinguistic regimes. In so doing, these practices and identities navigate within a polycentric environment in which what used to be marginal and exceptional has become focal. It is interesting to note that the term polycentricity was employed in social theory to describe the fluid nature of social movements (cf. Alvarez 1999). This term well applies to the fluidity of the Facebook practices at hand.

Sociolinguistics, as observed by Blommaert (2015) has always been considered the linguistics of diversity, of the exceptional.

“Seeing as a state” (a term Silverstein borrows from James C. Scott) appears an increasingly myopic endeavor because the abnormal and marginal – the sociolinguistics of the peripheries – have become
normal and everyday features of sociolinguistic life in robust metropolitan nation-states. (Blommaert 2015: 85).

Syrian Facebook pages epitomize and urge this change of perspective. “Seeing as the state”, or leaving online practices at the margins of sociolinguistic investigation, is tantamount to reinforcing neo-orientalist schemas. Seeing through the lenses of emergent subjectivities through ethnography should be the new focus of an Arabic sociolinguistic endeavor.

7.8 The Role of Ethnography

The importance of a sociolinguistics of super-diversity in the study of language and ideology requires further considerations about the role of the ethnographer. Throughout the activity as a novice online ethnographer who embraced recent developments in the discipline, which advocate a triangulation of texts with contact with the users, I played different roles as a student, interviewer, translator and observer.

The role of the researcher has been at the center ethnographic and anthropological discussions. In sociolinguistics, the term “observer” immediately evokes Labov’s (1972: 209) “Observer’s Paradox” notion, which states that:

the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation

De Fina (2011b) discussed Labov’s observer’s paradox in her analysis of the meta-communicative strategies of researchers and participants in a study on language and identity conducted on a group of Italian-Australian families in Melbourne. She corroborated Cicourel’s (1964) and Briggs (1986) insights on the myth of the objectivity of the researcher. Like Briggs, she focused on meta-communicative strategies, namely
the indexing of roles and rules about communication itself, which in turn points to implicit conceptions about social relations and norms that underlie particular social events and social structures more in general (De Fina 2011b: 226).

In her analysis, meta-communicative strategies index interactional events in which the researchers or the participants overtly or covertly comment about the presence and the roles of the study participants, the researchers and the video-recording equipment. De Fina further argues that attending to these meta-communicative events is important, as “it is participants in an interaction who make relevant, introduce, attribute, contest and negotiate identities”, and data from interviews “cannot be understood without a consideration of how participants negotiate their reciprocal identities at the local level” (224). Instead of treating research events as nullified by the presence of the researcher, De Fina argues for the centrality of the analysis of situated identities in order to construe the data obtained from such research events. Through her analysis, De Fina borrows Zimmerman’s (1998) distinction between discourse, situational and transportable identities. Situational and transportable identities are particularly relevant to the present discussion.

[…] situational roles such as “interviewer” and “interviewee” are tied to particular contexts of interaction and kinds of activity in which participants are engaged and their respective role, status, knowledge, and so on. […] transportable identities are social identities that do not depend on the local context (such as gender, ethnic or national identities) and that can nonetheless be oriented to at at the local level (De Fina 2011b: 228).

Throughout the interviews with the participants and the observation of their daily professional and personal activities, my situational and transportable identities as a doctoral student, as a researcher interested in Syrian dissidents’ Facebook pages, and as an Italian who speaks Arabic, who lived in Syria and who is affiliated with an American university, frequently
emerged in overt and covert meta-communicative events. These identities were often discussed before the interviews and contributed on the one hand to creating a friendly environment, in which they felt safe and valorized. More importantly, meta-communicative events not only facilitated, but also contributed to the informants’ reflection on their identity work as dissidents. For example, Nawar was initially confused about my interest in his Facebook pages, rather than in his other professional achievements. While this discouraged me at the beginning, I understood the importance of this identity negotiation later. After going over his posts, Nawar saw them from a different perspective. He reflected on the consequences of these texts in terms of the participation they created, the comments he received and the number of “likes”. In other words, reading out his posts helped him valorize his writing activity, which, up to that point, he considered a marginal aspect of his social and political activism. Moreover, due to his initial puzzlement about the scope of my research, he introduced me to the staff at Radio Orient. His interaction with the other Syrians at Radio Orient helped me better understand and contextualize the construction of their identity as Syrian dissidents.

Finally, my identity as an advanced Arabic learner played a role in the interpretation of the texts. While reading out some of the posts, Nawar and Maher often paused to explained to me idiomatic expressions they assumed I was not familiar with. This increased my curiosity about their use of idioms and led me to the assumption that idioms constitute an important communicative strategy in the construction of their collective identity as dissidents.

Another interesting perspective on the the identity and the role of the ethnographer is discussed by Casas-Cortés et al. (2013: 200). They see ethnography “not in terms of explanation or representation, but as translation and weaving, processes in which the ethnographer is one voice or participant in a crowded field of knowledge producers”. Through one her informants’
quotes “Researching is not about dubbing but providing accurate subtitles for unique films”, Casas-Cortés et al. (2013: 220) posited that “rather than speaking for, we are interested in the careful, though still difficult, task of crafting appropriate subtitles to enable the content to travel to other terrains and audiences”.


while the responsibility of the translator is conventionally thought of in terms of giving a fair and accurate representation of a source text, such ‘textual scrupolousness’ addresses only part of the contemporary responsibility of the translator, since there must also be ‘an activist dimension to translation which involves an engagement with the cultural politics of society at national and international levels’.

The powerful metaphors of the researcher as a translator and weaver of knowledge as well as an activist are very relevant to the present study. The political content of the (deliberately complex) texts analyzed is meaningful and relevant to the Syrian users as well as to other Arab and non-Western actors. In other words, through a translation which embraces the complexity of these texts and the surrounding contexts, ethnography emphasizes the knowledge-producing power of their users.

When selecting and translating the texts I was haunted by the responsibility of rendering justice to them and their users. Following up on Casas-Cortés et al.’s and Pennycook’s metaphor of the ethnographer as a translator, I found myself in this position not only figuratively but also literally. Translating the participants’ texts was not only a matter of captioning them. Rendering the complexity of the metaphors and the creative language was vital to show the agentive power of their users, turning them from an object of study to knowledge producers. In other words, in my research I approached translation as a way to make the text users’ voice and agency visible. Whereas the media have presented an image of the Syrian population as agentless refugees,
children and victims of terrorism, through work as a translator I attempted to render their individual and collective identity effort visible. Working with these texts showed that Syrians are not either Asad or ISIS, or victims of the two. What emerged is a complex kaleidoscope of identities, whose perception is regulated by transregional and transnational power dynamics which are probably stronger than the ones before the revolution.

7.9 Limitations of this Study and Suggestions for Future Research

In sum, this study contributed to the investigation of language and identity and how identities are indexed and constructed in online environments. Building on previous studies in Arabic sociolinguistics (Bassiouney 2010; Albirini 2016) and recent social constructionist approaches (cf. De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006), it reinforced the assumption that identities are emergent in discourse and interaction. However, it emphasized that, in online environments, identities are indexed more and more through hybrid and ambiguous resources, rather than through the switch between distinct linguistic varieties. Moreover, this study contributed to the notion of super-diversity, showing how the acceleration and the intensification of local-global flows facilitated the emergence of individual and collective identities, overcoming time and geographic restrictions. Finally, an analysis of participation through the comments to a Syrian dissident’s Facebook page showed how the higher reflexivity of online environments (De Fina, forthcoming) can lead to higher political engagement through the emergence of a plurality of stances and identities.

In conclusion, this study adopted a qualitative perspective, which presents limitations. These are addressed below.
• Although during a systematic observation I took into consideration the Facebook pages of several Syrian dissidents, an in-depth analysis required a narrowing of the focus on two Syrian dissidents and their followers. This limited selection was motivated by the availability of data and of the informants. Future studies can include more participants and textual data.

• The complexity of the data and the linguistic perspective adopted in this study required an in-depth analysis of a limited number of texts. Such an analysis was only possible through a thorough understanding of the context surrounding these texts. The interviews helped contextualizing these texts within the producers’ lives and the broader Syrian socio-political context. These can serve as a background for the analysis of more texts. Other ethnographic methods can be included in future research. For example, information obtained from focus groups would help shedding further light on issues of language ideology.

• Multi-line glossing was useful for the researcher to understand how meaning was coded and highlighted the ambiguity of the linguistic forms pervading the texts. Moreover, it was functional to convey this complexity to the non-Syrian reader. This methodology can be used for further studies involving online data, particularly in the Arabic context. Including a line of transcription of how the texts had been read out by the authors was particularly helpful to better understand the perceptions of the text authors and further shed light on language ideology. This method can be further extended incorporating a line of how readers interpreted the text. This may provide interesting insight on the “limits to negotiability” of meaning (Blommaert and Rampton 2011).
• The study focused on linguistic texts as a key resource for identity construction. This choice of focus was motivated by a systematic observation of dissidents’ Facebook posts. Their effectiveness relied largely on the manipulation of linguistic resources, and less on the use other symbolic systems, such as videos and photos. However, the latter were not completely absent, and integrating their analysis with the analysis of texts, as advocated for by multimodal approaches may offer further insights.

• As emphasized by Suleiman (2013), naming is an interesting site of identity investigation. This has been partially addressed in the present study, particularly with reference to the choice of the participants’ profile names. In particular, it was observed that some participants wrote their names in Arabic. Others adopted transliterations and transcriptions. Some used pseudonyms, including foreign names or names of Caliphs, such as a commenter in the third analysis chapter, who chose the name “Abu Bakr”. The choice of the name, of the script, and the type of the transliteration/transcription may provide further insights on the process of identity construction. However, this analysis is complicated by the fact that profile names can be easily changed and may not correspond to the name used when a comment was posted.

• The overwhelming quantity of data required the arbitrary selection of a timeframe for the analysis. This selection was partially motivated by an intention to compare pre-revolution with post-revolution writing practices before the informants fled the country. While posts after 2012 have been part of systematic observation, they were not object of in-depth linguistic analysis. Such an analysis would shed light on the construction and the emergence of other identities, such as that of refugees. Moreover, it would be interesting
to see how these new identities overlap and interact with the individual cosmopolitan identities and the collective identity of dissidents.

- Idioms were analyzed as particularly powerful forms that promoted participation. A study on idioms in other online contexts may shed further light on their function in discourse.
- Throughout this work it was shown how Facebook was instrumental to the construction of identities, and in particular to the construction of the identity of dissidents as authentic Syrians. However, during my fieldwork in Amman in the summer of 2015, I observed other activities, through which Syrian dissidents did identity work and created participation. For example, programs at Radio Orient, such as the Ramadan soap opera ‘āyle ‘āl-ḥudūd (‘A family on the border’), tackled the issue of Syrians as refugees. Another Radio Orient program, ḥikāyā ahālīnā (‘Stories of our people’), contributed to the construction of the collective identity of dissidents, including the contribution of revolutionaries after the 2011 uprising and political discussions on the role of the Syrian National Coalition. Further studies may investigate the role and the intersection of traditional and new media in identity processes in a transnational environment.
APPENDIX. COMMENTS TO ADDÔMARĪ’S 25 JULY 2012 POST

1) Moataz Al-Zain

Hahahahahaha […]¹
[laugh]
July 25, 2012 at 1:59pm · Like

2) Lama Syr

hahahahaha ħelwe
[laugh] beautiful
July 25, 2012 at 2:00pm · Like

3) Mahmoud Mohammed Habboush

qurd wlā qurd wlā …intaha maf‘ūlā
qurd wlā qurd wlā² …it lost its effect
July 25, 2012 at 2:00pm · Like

4) Amjad Hosni

Givẹ it some time and you’ll hear al-Būfī start clucking
July 25, 2012 at 2:00pm · Like

5) Roua Shamma

¹ Stylized spelling.
² This is an interjection used in the coastal dialects that denotes indifference or bewilderment.
Haydon’s muqâqâton⁴ mü ûrafîye haydon muqâqâton mtîl mā qult ta’ît⁵ illî biqâqî mā bîlqî thôse qâfing-their NEG sectarianism thôse qaafing-their as you-said relates who qaaf NEG finds thôse “qâfing” are not sectarianism. Thôse “qâfings”, as you said, belong to thôse who cluck without achieving anything 

July 25, 2012 at 2:00pm · Like · 1

6) Hadi Alamsha
الشام
Nûş sûryâ biyqāqî Half Syria pronounces the qâf/clucks

Half Syria clucks
July 25, 2012 at 2:01pm · Like · 1

7) Rama Fouwal
ناشی جهل بهنیه
nshâ allâh bukrâ biddon yqâqû mâ blâqû Good willing tomorrow they want cluck NEG find Hopefully soon they’ll cluck without achieving Hopefully soon they’ll cluck without achieving anything [they’ll lose]

July 25, 2012 at 2:01pm · Like

8) Ali Aboras
هيديهة و الله لثني يعو كمان
wallâh la-ḥatti ya’ūū kamān hahahahaha Interj. until they-exhaaast also hahahahaha
to exhaustion [laugh] [meaning that they cluck to exhaustion]

July 25, 2012 at 2:02pm · Like

9) Ba Al-Bassam

Fischer and Jastrow (1980: 82) report hay- as a Lebanese demonstrative prefix. Syrian coastal dialects and Lebanese dialects share several phonological features.

4 Some informants suggested that this term describes the repeated pronunciation of the qâf as it occurs in the coastal dialects and in the regime register. This term is not attested in Wehr and Cowan (1994) and is probably Syrian vernacular or creative. I used the word qâfing to translate it. The –ing suffix renders the idea of a verbal noun.

5 Fischer and Jastrow (1980: 93) report mtâ’ît as the feminine genitive exponent used in Lebanon. I interpreted ta’ît as a variation of it, which I assume is present in the coastal dialects of Syria.
it seems to me that the duck loves the chicken (quack quack quaaaaack)
Nour Ekhlassi

They will cluck on them, God willing.

Let the dogs cluck at them

July 25, 2012 at 2:02pm · Like · 1

Abu Turki

Shall we not observe the eyewitnesses you find on the street immediately after an explosion, particularly in the Midan neighborhood of Damascus?

July 25, 2012 at 2:03pm · Like · 2

Abo Fares

It looks like you didn’t pay attention to the eyewitnesses you find on the street immediately after an explosion, particularly in the Midan neighborhood of Damascus.

July 25, 2012 at 2:04pm · Like

الشاعر المي

Haymuqat al-mot, like awakening the death

July 25, 2012 at 2:04pm · Like

This word is bivalent. Another possible transliteration is intahabt.

This comment refers to government supporters who accuse dissidents of orchestrating the explosions. Mentioning the exact place, Midan neighborhood, may have the interactional function of following up on the post author’s list of places, as well as providing details (cf. Tannen 2007). Moreover, the commenter may refer to an actual bombing occurred in the Midan neighborhood of Damascus on January 6, 2012. As suggested by an informant, after every explosion there were people interviewed on TV who claimed to be eyewitnesses.

Ibid.
biddhum yihaydū
they-have-to lay the eggs
they have to lay the eggs
July 25, 2012 at 2:05pm · Like

they have to lay the eggs

min jamāā’tōōō
of his-company
they’re of his entourage
July 25, 2012 at 2:05pm · Like

cluck cluck, the Free Syrian Army is behind you

we say “mn’ā‘ī” they say “biqāqū” by all means Domary, they cluck but won’t achieve anything
July 25, 2012 at 2:05pm · Like

This common vernacular expression is used in this context for emphasis. Figuratively, it means “as long as your eyes can see”. A similar expression is ḥayāt allāh, meaning “by God”, or “for God’s sake”, or “by all means”. I chose this last option in the translation. The replacement of the word Allāh with ‘aynak has a mitigating function.
even witnesses the-eye from the-neighborhood they-say the qāf/cluck
even the eyewitnesses in the neighborhood cluck
July 25, 2012 at 2:06pm · Like · 1

21) мустафа ал джаруд

عيبحكو بالقصبي انت شو فهمك عام المواخذة
‘abyaḥkū bi-l-fuṣḥā shū fahmak ‘adām al-mu’akhḍaḥa
they-talking in-fuṣḥā what you understood pardon me
they're talking fuṣḥā. Duh!
July 25, 2012 at 2:06pm · Like

22) Falcon DeSyria

يمكن لأنهم نجاح....حتى يشار دجاجة بين مخفى بشكل بطعة
yumkin liannahum dajāj. . . . . . . . hattā Bashār dajājā bass mutakhaffī bi-shakl baṭṭa
perhaps because they chickens.......even Bashar chicken but disguised in-shape duck
Perhaps because they are chickens....even Bashar is a chicken, but he’s disguised as a duck.¹²
July 25, 2012 at 2:06pm · Like

23) AnoOs AlmdsoOs https://www.facebook.com/Sham.Tanks

Like Page
1,506 Likes

¹¹ Meaning “the native population” in fuṣḥā, this word can be translated as “the neighborhood” in Syrian Arabic.
¹² This includes an intertextual reference to other social media texts. The association of Bashar al-Asad with the duck will be explained below.
24) Amera Ahmad Like
Amera Ahmad https://www.facebook.com/Moonmwr

Da'am i'jāb w lāīk w shayr w mushāraka w illī biddak [smile emoticon] ? like ? like ? like?
Support like and like and share and share and what you want [smile emoticon] ? like ? like ? like?
Support, like, share, do whichever you prefer [smile emoticon] ? like ? like ? like?

25) Mohammed Kliah
قائمة qā'ifiyye
sectarianism [pun on qāf sound]

26) سير لمب

27) Abdulkadr Ghlla
مواعيد تكون نفس سورية نتفقلي
not shame is half Syria clucks? In-Syria 5% that they-cluck only

28)

13 Unconventional punctuation.
278

29)  
Ahmet  
غُرُورُوووووووووود مِن مِهِلك هَالحَكِي؟؟؟؟؟؟؟  
qurrurrurrnd mín miqllak ha-l-hakī ??????  
Interj. who told-you this?????  
qurrurrurrnd  
July 25, 2012 at 2:11pm · Like

30)  
مَاجد حَامد  
مِشان تَعْرُف انت الديني بخِير  
mishān t’arif innō ad-Dunyā bikhayr  
so that you-know the-Dunya is fine  
To let you know that Dunya TV/the world is well  
July 25, 2012 at 2:13pm · Like

31)  
Sarah Yaghmour  
لَانَ القَانُون يَحمِي المَغْفِلِين خَيْبَي  
li’-anna al-qānūn yaḥmī al-mughfilīn khayy  
because the-law protects the-gullible brother  
because the law protects the gullible, brother  
July 25, 2012 at 2:13pm · Like

32)  
Ali Al Swady  
النظام طائفي ولكن هل تقبل أنت أن تكون طائفي؟ النظام مجرم هل ترضي أن تكون أنت ك مجرم؟ النظام طالم هل تقبل أن تكون أنت طالم؟  
July 25, 2012 at 2:13pm · Like

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14 Maher Alkurdi suggested that this interjection derives from a popular animated cartoon.

15 This term is an expression used in the coastal dialects and associated with the regime register.
The regime is sectarian. However, do you consider it acceptable to be sectarian?? The regime is criminal, are you pleased with the fact that you are criminal?? The regime is oppressive, do you consider it acceptable that you are also oppressive??

July 25, 2012 at 2:14pm · Like

33)

شاير

انا بقول حتى البوطي عم يقاطي
anā bqūl ḥattā al-Būṭī 'am biqāqī
I say even al-Būṭī ASP-clucks
I say even al-Būṭī is clucking
July 25, 2012 at 2:14pm · Like

34)

Mahmoud Mousa

قافي يا بطل قافي الجيش الحر وراكي
qāqī yā baṭṭā qaqqī al-jaysh al-ḥurr warākī
cluck oh duck cluck the-army the-free behind-you
cluck, duck, cluck, the FSA is behind you
July 25, 2012 at 2:16pm · Like

35)

رغداء

الله يسامحك يا دومري ما رح بلحقوا يلاقوا
allāh yusāmihuka16 yā dōmarī mā rah yīlḥaqū yīlāqū
God bless you oh Domary not asp/fut they-overcome they-not-find
God bless, Domary, hopefully they won't overcome before they lose17
July 25, 2012 at 2:19pm · Like

36)

Mohammed Sy

by-God your-words correct
You are absolutely right

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16 This term is bivalent. A vernacular transcription is yisāmḥak.
17 The verb lāḥaqa has the meanings of overtake, overcome, follow in death. Yilāqū, in this context, refers to the proverb’s meaning that they will not achieve anything. At the same time, it extends the meaning within the new context provided by the post author, suggesting that they will lose or die before they overcome. Hence, both the meanings of lāḥaqa “overcome” and “follow in death” are appropriate in this context.
I hope you cluck without achieving [using Hamza to voice Damascene accent]. I saw those, but didn’t you see those in the army who talk with an Aleppo accent? And those who talk with an Hawrani accent????? May a snake see you, eat you and shit you out.

The repetition of the letter ū serves to emphasize the word Homsi (a person from Homs). Homs is known for being a stronghold of Syrian dissidence. By emphasizing that in the army there are also people that speak Homsi the commenter cues her disagreement with the post author.

The meaning is not transparent.
All those currently in the army and the security are Alawites or Shawāy from Deir ez-Zōr... so that there is not oppression over the Nāzīhīn they didn’t leave any Sunnis in the army... they didn’t leave anyone who could defect and defame them at the core they’re all from the same group... May the Lord, God destroy them.

July 25, 2012 at 2:32pm · Like

41)

Daghestani Chi Guivara

Trust who sang and said
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW-2mOYILvI

الله بِسِبْتَانَ بَعْضٍ .. عِنَّ اللَّه بِخَفِيفٍ
kull al-mawjūdīn fī al-jaysh w al-amm ‘alawīyya awwww min al-shawāyā min dēr ez-Zōr ... biyāt māyṣīr žulm nāzīhīn lam yatrūkū20 sunniyya fī al jaysh ... lam yatrūkū21 ahadan qad yanshaqq22 ‘anhum wa yuṭ’anhum fī al-ṣamīm kulluhum biṭāna ba’d .. ‘issā allāh yakhsafuhum23

20 Or, in the vernacular, yitrūkū.
21 Ibid.
22 Or yinshaqq. Although this may appear as a bivalent form, it is in fact vernacular in syntax. Its conjugation in fūsā would be yanshaqīgu.
23 Or yikhṣafuhum. This mixed form includes the vernacular prefix and a fūšā suffix.
24 This word refers to the Syrian inhabitants of the Golan heights who were displaced when Israel occupied the territories in 1967. They are Sunni population who are also assumed to have been present in the army.
25 The meaning of this sentence is not transparent. The commenter seems to contradict herself. Perhaps she alludes to the fact that they did not leave any other Sunnis in the army so they would not take revenge over the nāzīhīn, who are Sunnis that purportedly support the government. This explanation seems to find confirmation in this article published on Aljazeera.net, which reports that some pro-government Syrians in Lattakia fear the policy of relocating the nāzīhīn who live in areas controlled by the opposition forces to the pro-government areas for demographic reasons, as the pro-Asad population is in minority.
26 The refrain follows up on the them of the qāf: “exchange the qāf with hamza.
Of course, if they pick someone to interview they won’t take other than a thug from them and like them

They can cluck as much as they want, as long as they don’t lay the eggs. There’s too many of them already

That’s not correct .. I saw an interview with one speaking with an accent from Aleppo
God bless you Domary, especially at a time when many mouths are shut and hands don’t write, God bless

July 25, 2012 at 2:40pm · Like

46)
Moustafa Abdulfatah Abdulfatah
قاق قاق قاق
qāq qāq qāq
quaack quaack quaack
July 25, 2012 at 2:48pm · Like

47)
المعاوية حسين
بس بدون ظلم
اللهجة تبعتهم كتبيبيبي بي حلوة
يا افي فيها جناده كثير
قول ولاك قر اعترف قرد رفقاتك تحت بالفو قائلون وقروا واعترفوا

Bass bidün ẓulm
But without injustice

Al-lahja28 taba‘ethum ktūbir ḥelwe
The-accent their very beautiful

Yā akhī fiha ja‘ara ktūr
Oh brother-my in-it effrontery much

Qūl wlāk qur a’tarīf qord rifqātak taht bil-qabū qālū w qarrū w i’tarāfū
[tongue twister using the qāf]

But to be fair
Their accent is sooooo beautiful
There’s so much effrontery in it, brother
[tongue twister using the qāf]
July 25, 2012 at 2:55pm · Like · 1

48)
Deema Sheikh Najeeb

Or, in the vernacular, lahje.
1. يلف يمين يتفن شمال بنلتقى أيران بيوشك
2. ينغلع يمين ينتصف بين الحمولة المحملة
3. العراق بيامة محمد ويلي حضن أبناءها 9 سنين وعطنيها عيونا كرماناء وما فتحها مما في حرف، ككان سكروا حديثاً برشا
4. بنلتقى الناس سورين من تنص حومص وقت احتاج النظام حومص والناس أندلعت بالمعانات، والمانع نعتقل
5. ينفدو بيما ينالف على هالطلة، ومنطقا ينفوش بين حامض ينفدو كفية
6. وهدول الناس نفساً ويلي عاساس سورينها ما بنلتقياهم الأحيمنوا من البكي بحرا كرمان البحرين وعلى بسب وبسب وفيان السماوات وين

منظمة حقوق الإنسان " فهمن كفية "

5. ينفدو زعافى من هدول ينبع أيران وحرب الناس " كم فهمن كفية " ويتهم أي واحد مع الثورة بالعمالة والبيانة لصالح أмерكا ونساهم حبيب قلب الماما ينبع إن العراق أندلعت على بد أميركا بمساعدة من هيك شكيكوا وأنو هدول الشكيكوا كانوا يبجدوا لأميركا إلا شيء لان خلصتهم من

صدام الله يرحم بهم

وشو بدي عهد بكفي هيك ولا كل ماله؟!!!!!!

Lēsh bass al-qiṣṣa ‘aillī biyqāqū
Why only the-story on-who says-qāf/clucks

‘odd ma‘ī ‘alā ‘aṣābī’k:
count with-me on fingers-your:

1- Btliff yamīn btliff shimāl btlāqī ‘Irān bi-wishk
You-turn right you-turn left you-find Irab in-front

Mnaqutul bi-silāhūn
We-kill with-weapons-their

2- ḥizz allāt mū nāwyy yīhll ‘anna la-yaqrūnnaa kilnā
Hezbollah neg. intend set free us until-makes extinct all-us

3- al-‘irāq yā ‘ummata Muḥammad w illī ḥāḍḥā ‘abnā’uha 9 snīn
the-Iraq oh community Muhammad and which embraced children-its nine years

w ‘ataynāhūn ‘ayūnā karmālom w mā fataḥnā
and gave-we eyes-our sake-their and neg opened-we

timmānā bi-ḥarf ‘, kamān sakkarū ḥuddūdon bi-wishnā
mouth-our with-letter also they-shut borders-their in-face-our

mīn sakkaraha ?? al-ḥukūme illī btaffīd ‘a Irān w ḥizz allāt “fahimkon kifāye”
who shut-it ?? the-government that executes on-behalf Iran and Hezbollah (understanding-your sufficient”

4- btlāqī nās sūriyyan w min nuṣṣ ḥōṃṣ waqīt ıjtāh al-nizām ḥōṃṣ
you-find people Syrian and from half Homs time invaded the-regime Homs

wa al-nās indabāḥat bi-l-myāṭ w-hān-nās
and-the-people was-slaughtered in-the-hundreds and-these-people

amṭqūl “taqbur qelb yā māhēr ‘alā hā-t-tała,
asp-they-say “bury heart oh Maher on this-appearance

wa nutālīb bi-dukhūl al-jaysh wa sahaq al-nās bi-ḥōṃṣ wa
and we-demand prep-enter the-army and crush the-people in Homs and

al-ḍarb bi-yadd min-jadīd wa hadīl an-nās naflon hā illī ‘āsās
the-hitting with-hand again” and those the-people same-they those who basically

sūrīyyn hā ma btlūqhon illā ḥaymūtū min
Syrians that neg. asp-you-find-them except fut.-they-die from

al-bakī yā ḥarām karmāl al-baḥrayn w ‘al subb wa subb wa subb w wēn al-insāniyya w wēn
the-crying oh pity for-sake the-Bahrain and swear and swear and swear and where the-humanity and where

munazzamat huqūq al-insān “w fahirkon kifāye”
or-organization rights the-human (and understanding-your sufficient)

5- bīṭlālak ‘irāqī min hadōl taba‘ ʿIrān w ḥīzb allāt “kāmān fahirkon kifāye”
asp.-comes-to-you an-Iraqi from those of Iran and Hizbollah (also understanding-your sufficient)

w bittahim ay wāḥed ma‘ ath-thawra bil-ʿamāle w-l-khyāne
and asp.-accuses any one with the-revolution with treason and-the-treason

li-ṣāliḥ amrīkā w nasyān ḥabīb qelb al-māmā taba‘ō innō l-ʿirāq indabahat
for-favor America and forgetful dear heart the-mama of-his that the-Iraq was-slaughtered

alā yadd amrīkā bi-musā‘adat min hēk shakīlāt w innō hadōl ash-shakīlāt kānō rāḥ yasjidū
on hand America with-help from such folks and that those the-folks were fut. They-kneel

la-amrīkā illā shwayy li-an-nā khallāṣetōn min šaddām allāh yīrhamō yāāāāāāa rabb
to-America except a-bit because it-freed-them from Saddam God have-mercy-on-him ohhh Lord

w shū biddī ‘odd la-odd bikaffī hēk wallā kammīl??!!!!!!!
And what I-need count to-count enough so or I-continue??!!!!!!

Why only the story on those who cluck/pronounce the qāf

Count with me on your fingers

1) You turn right and left and you find Iran in your face. We’re killing with their weapons
2) The Hezbollah do not intend to leave us until it makes us all extinct
3) Iraq, yā ‘ummah Muhammad, whose children we hosted for 9 years and we gave them everything without
   making a single complaint, they their borders in our face..who shut them??
   The government that acts on behalf of Iran and Hizbollah. Enough said
4) You find Syrian people, from the heart of Homs, at the time the regime invaded Homs and hundreds of
   people were slaughtered and these people were saying “Hail to you Maher,” you’re so kind. We demand

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29 It is interesting to note how the commenter, orients towards mixed, bivalent forms when voicing the regime supporters. E.g. *nufālib bi-dukhūl al-jaysh wa saḥaq al-nās*. In this instance, I maintained the diphthong in the transliteration of *jaysh* to emphasize this hybrid choice of the commenter.

30 Or, in the vernacular, *as-sowra*.

31 The commenter intentionally distorts the name Hizbollah.

32 The expression is bivalent. However, it has different meanings in *fuṣḥā* and the vernacular. In Syrian Arabic it is used as an interjection/filler to address a group of people. In *fuṣḥā* it refers to the Islamic ‘*umma*. 

285
the intervention of the Syrian army and the crushing of the population. And those people are the basically the same Syrians who you'll always find crying away "Down with Bahrain, down with, down with, down with, where's humanity gone, where's the human rights organization"...enough said

5) And you find an Iraqi, one of those who support Iran and Hizbollah (enough said), who accuses anyone who sides with the revolution of treason for America's sake, forgetting, the poor mama's soul, that Iraq was slaughtered by America with the help of those individuals35 and that those very individuals were about to kneel down to America just because it freed them from Saddam Hussein, God bless his soul!!!!!! Do I need to keep counting or is that enough????!

July 25, 2012 at 3:05pm · Like · 4

49) Sham Elward

لَكِ يَخَرِبُ بِينَتٍ طَلُعُ حَرَفٍ حَلَفُ مِنْ عِيْوَانٍ كَثِرٍ مَا مَّسَّهُم São! اللَّهُ بَيْنَ تَرْضَى بِنَاَّ
lak ikhreb bēton ūla' harf al-qāf min 'ayūnā mā mnisma‘ā ilhi bīnqāridū ba‘ā
F* them, we’ve had enough hearing the qāf all the time,..let them die out
July 25, 2012 at 3:07pm · Like · 1

50) Yonna Helfawi

لَكِ كَيْكَ كَكَ كَكَ Kkkkkk anāāā mà flljī ala ma muṭaṭīn min al-miḍān .. w-‘am yiqāqī .. ! yahri’ dibon16 shū ***** !
lookkkk I[…] neg shock-me except citizen innocent from the-miḍān37 ..and asp-he-clucks…! Interj what a *****!
Lookkkk I was shocked by an innocent citizen from Midan .. who clucks/pronounces the qāf! God what a.......!
July 25, 2012 at 3:11pm · Like · 1

51) Maisoun Ad

وَاللهُ نَفْسُ الْسَؤَالِ خَطَّرْلِي
wallāh nafs is-su‘āl khaṭarrī
God same the-question crossed-me
The same question crossed my mind
July 25, 2012 at 3:20pm · Like

52)

33 Maher al-Asad, Syrian general and commander, Bashar al-Asad’s brother. The commenter is referring to to the siege of Homs which started in 2011 and which ended in 2014 with the ousting of the opposition.
34 The word fala is a Syrian vernacular expression of praise.
35 Syrian vernacular for “folks”, “individuals”, with negative connotation.
36 Marked Damascene expression.
37 Damascus neighborhood.
hahahaha biyqāqū li-annī hiyye heyy al-lahje al-amniyye la-yikūn hahahahaha asp.-they-say qāf/cluck because it this the-accent the-security for-it-is

‘abdul ḥalīm khaddām biqāqī w ṭlāss biqāqī Abdul Halim Khaddam asp.-he-say qāf/cluck and Tlass asp.-he-say qāf/cluck

whadāk al-yawm ṭala’ ‘aqīd bi-l-qaṣr mīn bēt zahr ed-dīn and that the-day came-out a-colonel in-the-palace from family Zahr al-Din

durzī kān ʿam yiqāqī rūḥ ihḍar al-akhawiyyn mlaṣṣ ‘amlū isketsch Druse he-was asp. he-say qāf/cluck go see the-brothers Mlass they-did sketch

innō muḥaqiqiq ʿam yiaḥkī ‘alawyy ʿam yi’azzib wāḥīd ʿam yiaḥkī that a-secret agent asp. he-talks Alawite asp. he-tortures one asp. he-talks

bi-l-ʿāf w-bi-l-āḵar ṭala’ al-muḥaqiqiq sunnī w-al-ḍaḥiye ‘alawyy hahahaha with-ʿāf39 and-in-end turns-out the-agent Sunni and the-victim Alawite hahahaha

Hahahaha they cluck because that’s the regime accent as Abdul Hali Khaddam clucks, and Tlass clucks and that colonel of the Druze Zahr el Din family was clucking.39 Go watch the Mlass brothers’ sketch in which a police man speaks in Alawite accent and tortures one who talks with the hamza and in the end it turns out that the police man is Sunni and the victim is Alawi hahahaha

July 25, 2012 at 3:22pm · Like · I

53)

Naya Sleem

Bravo ‘alaykon kharribō ath-thowra la-qilkon la-hēk ẓall la-hallā qā’id ‘a qulūbnā Bravo on-you destroy the-revolution for-you and for-it remained til-now sitting on hearts-our

la-innō rāḥ ṭadallī hēk w kilkon tarbīye an-nīzām lil-asaf diktātöyät šağhīre w tāthe because fut. you-pl.-remain so and all-you children the-regime sadly dictatorships small and trivial Way to go you all. Destroy the revolution. Because of you Bashar al Asad40 is still in power, because you won’t change. You’re all children of the regime unfortunately. Insignificant little dictatorships.

---

38 With a hamza instead of the qāf.
39 “The commenter probably does not know that the qāf is also a feature of the Druze dialect.”
40 The commenter uses the Syrian expression qā’id ‘alā qulūbnā, (literally “the person who sits on or heart”) meaning “the undesired person”. This can be considered as an ambiguous form to avoid mentioning the name of Bashar al-Asad.
The qāf is evidence for their command of the tenets of the Arabic language.
All this Mate contains vitamin “qāf”

July 25, 2012 at 3:36pm · Like · 1

Maher Marhje

له يا حبيب نحن جنبًا من اللاتفيي لندافع عن أهل الميدان، نلادونا ننذمن من ليساوات المساحة، هنا...
lahu yā habīb nahnu41 jīnā min al-lādhaqyy42 li-nudafī'43 'an ahl al-mīdān illī nādīnā nanqadhūn min la-'iṣābāt al-musallaḥa hahahahahaha

Look oh dear we came from Lattakia to help prep. People of-the-mīdān who called-us we-help-them from the-attacks the-armed hahahahaha

Look dear, we came from Lattakia [voicing the Lattakia accent] to protect the people of Damascus44 who called us to save you from the armed attacks [laugh]

July 25, 2012 at 3:37pm · Like · 1

Abdo Halawa

call (we defend) an arm of eggs/testicles

They all cluck because they're an arm of eggs/testicles46

July 25, 2012 at 3:38pm · Like

Majdi Zaheraldeen

They all engage for the-volunteering in-the-army look we-were we-seeing who the-payers that were putting

bnḍāḥiḥk ‘alā baʿḍ khallīnā nhākī aṣ-ṣarāḥa mīn hiyye aṭ-ṭāʿīfe illī ṭaqqāl aw we-laugh on each-other let-us we-talk the-sincerity who it the-sect that accepts or

ff ‘andā iqbal lil-taṭaw bi-l-jaysh lak kinnā nshūf mīn al-dafī‘a illī kānō yiḥttoō it has engagement for-the-volunteering in-the-army look we-were we-seeing who the-payers that were putting

10 alāf w 15 bi-sh-shahr minshān yifaiysh w mā īmshī taḥt ash-shams shwayy

41 Or, in the vernacular, nahna.
42 Voicing the Lattakia dialect pronunciation of the city name.
43 Or, in the vernacular, ndaﬁ‘.
44 Al-mīdān is a neighborhood in the old city of Damascus. Here it stands metonymically for Damascus, as opposed to rural and coastal Syria.
45 Or jŏsh.
46 In the Syrian vernacular, “eggs” is a slang word for testicles.
10 thousands and 15 per-month so that he-bribes and neg. he-walks under the-sun a little

bi-n-nizam al-nazam ‘ayyb ha-l-hakî khaddammâ jaysh w bn’arif shaghît kathîrî
in-the-order the-regular sham this-talk we-served army and we-know things many

bass bnastahî ‘aḥînâ anqûlâ yâ toshkul âsî w yâ khayûûûû
but we-ashamed ourselves to-tell oh [Damascene expressions]47

We laugh at each other. Let’s talk honestly though, what’s the sect that has the highest number of volunteers in the army? Look we all knew who was paying 10 to 15 thousand Syrian pounds a month as bribery to avoid conscription and to avoid walking and marching a little bit in the sun. Shame on this discussion. We served the army and we know a lot of things but [typifying the interlocutor through Damascene expressions].

July 25, 2012 at 3:50pm · Like

60)

Madoo Sy

意義: مطلب: ولی نعم، تحقیق محسوب وکلک و گلگلیت و این اطمینان که عروض چنین گردد

ya’nî mûn mukhallîf alaynâ bi-ha-l-ma’ sâ illî ‘am na’îshha
interj. neg. enlighten on-us in-this-tragedy which asp. we-live-it

bi-baladnâ al-ḥâbîb illâ ṣafhâatak yâ’ admin w ṣafha sunghâ bârik allâh fikmâ
in-country-our the-loved except page-your oh Admin and page Sungha bless God prep.you-dual

Thank you Admin of this page and Sungha for lightening up the morale in the tragedy that we are going through in the country.

July 25, 2012 at 3:56pm · Like

61)

Mohamad Kalass

خشاخي علي شو بيتك في ق ق ق ق

qakhayy ‘Ali shû biddî qillak qa qa qa qa
so-brother Ali what I-want tell-you qa qa qa qa
So, brother Ali, what can I say, qa qa qa qa48

As was explained to me by a Druze informant, toshkul âsî is a Damascene expression of endearment which literally means “I hope to die before you, so you visit my grave and bring myrtle flowers” similar to to’bornî (“you are so cute”; literally “bury me”; “You’re so cute that I hope I die first”). The term ’âsan, however, also means grief, sorrow, so the phrase toshkul âsî could also be interpreted as “I hope I die before, so you perform your grief”. The vocative particle yâ preceding this phrase and the Damascene word khayûûûû (“Brother”) suggests that the commenter is typifying the interlocutor through expressions associated with his dialect. Maher Alkurdi (personal communication), suggested that the commenter does not know that the expression khayûûûû, rather than yâ khayûûûû, is typical in Damascene Arabic, and belittled the commenter, “who tried to mock Damascene but he does not even know that it is not Damascene”. However, as explained, through the vocative particle yâ the commenter is probably typifying rather than quoting a Damascene expression verbatim.

The commenter is marking the qâf through the creative word qakhayy and by repeating the letter q four times. Moreover, he addresses an imaginary Alawite interlocutor through the personal name Ali, common among the Shiites and the Alawites.

47

48
Nur al-Haq less inti w amthalek Shawāyā Shawāyā na‘m nahnu Shawāyā
Nur al-Haq still you and your-examples Shawāyā Shawāyā yes we Shawāyā
wa naftakhir bass qillī inte mnēn al-Shawāyā fatahū buyāthhum
and we-pride-ourselves but tell me you from-where the Shawāyā opened houses-their
li-kull in-nās w dēr ez-Zōr ṣārlhā 35 yawn taḥt al-qasf muḥāfaza
for-all-the-people and Deir ex-Zor has-been 35 day under-the-bombs province
bi-akmilhā dummirat ta‘rif lēsh li-anhom Shawāyā
in-entirety-its was-destroyed you-know why because-they Shawāyā

Nor Alhak, again you and your examples of the Shawaya. Yes, we are Shawaya but tell me where are you from. The Shawaya opened their houses to everyone. And now Deir ez-Zor has been bombed for 35 days. The whole province is destroyed. Why? Because they’re Shawaya

July 25, 2012 at 4:22pm · Like · 2

Mahmoud Yusef

biṣ-ṣudfe, mu'allim
in-coincidence, Sir
[they all pronounce the qāf] by coincidence, Sir.49

July 25, 2012 at 4:35pm · Like

Fāṣi Misrūf

‘ayyb wālāh aktar min ‘ayyb qarā’t at-ta‘liqāt (88) wa šādqa khajalt min sūryā
shame God more than shame I-read-the-comments (88) and honestly I-ashamed of Syria

49 These commenters might be voicing government supporters who argue that the qāf is not a marker of the regime register as it also exists in fuṣḥā.
wa hadhā al-mantiq wa hadhā al-kiṭāb yufaqṣir wa bi-kathīr min al-basāṭa mā
and this the-talk and this the-discourse explains and withmuch of the-simplicity what

‘allat ‘alayhi al-awḍā’ fī hadhā al-waṭan alladhī nūḥībb wa fī nafs
led to-it the-circumstances in this the-nation which we-love and in same

il-waqt nuhaddim wa nudammir kull bi-taṛqatihi
the-time we-tear-down and we-destroy all in-way-its

‘arjūkum ... ‘atawassilkum ‘arḥamū hadhā l-waṭan min
I-beg-you ... I-implore-you spare this the-nation from

waṭaniyyatikum wa ghayratkum al-zā’ida .... wa taḏkurū maqūla
nationalism-your and other-than-you the-too-many .... and remember the-saying

‘an min al-ḥobb mā qatal ‘ahībbū sūrīyā wa-lākin ... wa-lākin ...aḥraṣū
that from the-love what killed love Syria but .... But ... strive

qabla kulli shayy’ ‘alā ‘an taẓall ḥaṭiyya la-yakūn hunāka waṭanān tuḥībbūn ......
before all everything on that it-remains alive so-it-be there a-nation you (pl.)-love

Shameful, more than shameful. I read the 88 comments and I was ashamed of Syria and this discourse and this
discussion which denotes so much simplicity which led to the situation in which this country which we love and
which, at the same time, we destroy entirely. Please...spare this country from your nationalism and that of too many
others, and remember the saying that of love can kill. Love Syria, but strive first and foremost that it remains alive
so that there can be still a nation you love
July 25, 2012 at 4:37pm · Like · 5

65)

Haydak ... ḥaddad yasmīra‘udhnak bēk ‘am tisma’?
Ear-your so asp. it-hears?
Is this what your ears heard?
July 25, 2012 at 4:40pm · Like

66)

Ngm Alden Menzalgy
Leshe bīdana nakhilin biyibsū wiyaltārru ṣawṭ al-zalghiṭa
still we-want let-them they-lay-eggs and-emit voice the-zaghareet

bi-l-maqlūb mitt al-jājī bi-fard shakl

---

50 This is the joyful ululation emitted by female guests at festive public events, such as weddings and concerts.
We should still leave them lay the eggs while emit the voice of the zaghereet backwards like an upside down chicken.

72)

$qard$ hallaq $dāqat$ ‘aynkon min $hālkam$ ‘unṣur $īlī$ miylqishū $mā'$ al-tiliviziyūn

$qard$ now shrunk your-eyes from this-abundance officers that they-talk with-the-television

$qard$ now your eyes are irritated from the view of so many officers talking on television. Whoa! So irritated! It’s just by coincidence that the television saw them and talked to them, clearly they have no confidence other than in their own people after all this.

67)

$qard$ now your-eyes are irritated from the view of so many officers talking on television. Whoa! So irritated! It’s just by coincidence that the television saw them and talked to them, clearly they have no confidence other than in their own people after all this.

73)

Those who talk against religions are not trash, because trash is purer than them. You should be burnt, you dog, you unbeliever.

74)

Wehr and Cowan (1994) translate this word as “unbeliever, freethinker, atheist”.

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51 Alawite dialectal interjection.
52 The meaning of this word is not clear. It could be a realization of the Syrian interjection denoting surprise $ūlī!$
53 Wehr and Cowan (1994) translate this word as “unbeliever, freethinker, atheist”.


And why all the army that defects.....fill the dots

July 25, 2012 at 6:20pm · Like

70)

**Adham Jawish**

Jedd make what called one day of Damascus: meaning all the army is defective and ya know what

really like what said Warda Dimashqiyya:

ya’nī bukrā al-kull ṭaṣir bi-daqq w-bilā shawārib
ya’nī tamorrow everyone fut. become with-beard and-without moustache

*Warda Dimasqiyya is right: next thing you know everyone will growing a beard without moustache*

July 25, 2012 at 6:50pm · Like

71)

**Magid Drwishah**

Shi’i Akid no system sectarian 

but this neg. mean that we be like-it

*True, the regime is sectarian, but it doesn’t mean that we have to be like him*

July 25, 2012 at 6:58pm · Like

72)

**Najah Domat**

lah lah yā dōmarī za’aletni minnak ma’ru f innā kull manṭi’a w-ilha lahjetā !!!! mū hēk?

No no oh dōmarī it-angered-me of-you clear that every area has its-accent !!!! not so?

*No, no Domary, this made me angry. We all know that every area has its accent, right?*

54 The name of another commenter whose comment has been deleted.
55 Filler.
56 According to a Syrian informant, growing a beard without moustache is a stereotypical description of the Muslim Brothers.
The condition to join the Fourth Armored Division and the Republican Guard is aUtteni' al-intisāb lil-firqā wa 1-ḥarās al-jumhūrī al-muqāqa condition the-joining the-division58 the-fourth and the-guard the-republican59 pronouncing-the-qāf.

57 The comment is probably to be interpreted ironically.
58 The Fourth Armoured division is an elite group of the Syrian Army, whose mission is to defend the government and the president.
59 The Republican Guard is also an elite division in the Syrian army, whose mission is to protect the capital city, Damascus.
60 This is a creative word used to refer to the pronunciation of the qāf.
Brother, the country hasn’t endured anything until it endures sectarianism. Let’s switch on our brain and be better than them without letting the country fall into sectarianism because if that happens for sure everyone will be damaged.

July 25, 2012 at 8:53pm · Like

I used the letter – ُـُ to reflect a vernacular realization. This vernacular interpretation is suggested by the commenter through the use of the – waw.

Since the suffix is in the vernacular, I replaced the diphthong –َay with the vernacular – ِ.
muhadhdhab wa sallam ‘alā wālidayh wa lam yuqāqī ....!! mū kullhum biyqāqū yā dōmarī ....!! neg. all-them they-say-qāf oh dōmarī ....!!

wa anā mā ‘andī mushkila bāqāqī w bntakhib masīḥī w bāḥkī kurdī and I neg. have problem l-say-qāf and I-vote Christian and I-speak Kurdish

bass khallū la-awlāḏnā waṭan nafkhar bih bilā mā yad‘ū ‘alaynā but leave-pl. to-children-our countru we-pride-ourselves on-it without neg. calling at-us

kulnā ‘ill biyqāqū w ʾillī biy‘āyy !
all-us those say-the-qāf and those say-the-hamza

I saw a poor soldier on Syrian TV. He was Sunni and said “bismillahi raHman al-raHiim” and well-mannered. He greeted his father and he didn’t say the qāf. Not everyone says the qāf, Domary. I have no problem. I say the qāf and I vote for a Christian and I speak Kurdish, but please leave our children a country we can be proud of without calling at each other between those who “biqaqi” [say the qāf] and those who bi’a’i [say the hamza].

July 26, 2012 at 12:45am · Like · 2

80)

'al-faw ... biy‘āyy ... wa ar-rajā’ ḥadhaf ta’liq man yasubb adh-dhāt sorry ... biy‘āyy64 .... and please delete comment of-those insult the-nature

al-ilhāhiyya mwaqtha65 yazīd allāh ‘alaynā al-‘adhdhāb ... the-divine not-this-time increases God on-us the-infliction

bidnā idhā istashhādā66 nrūḥ ‘āl-jamāne mū ‘ān-nār ! we-want if we-died go to-heaven neg. to-hell !

Sorry ... biy‘āyy ... and I also urge the deletion of the comments of those who insult the divinity, lest God increased our affliction. If we die, we want to go to heaven, not to hell

July 26, 2012 at 12:48am · Like

81)

Fairuz Fares

63 This is the first verse of the Qur’ān and is used as a filler in everyday contexts, particularly when someone sets out to do something. The commenter considers this a form which qualifies the person who utters it as well-mannered.

64 The commenter corrects the orthography of this word from the previous comment, to clarify that she meant to describe the pronunciation of the hamza.

65 A Syrian informant suggested that this is the contraction of mū waqtuha (“this is not the right time”).

66 Literally “sacrifice”. This verb is used when someone dies as a martyr or for “a just cause”.
God curse the best Alawite filler curse all Shiite and leave-it sectarianism

and those neg. like-it hit their-head against-the-wall Syria wants return Sunni by-force from all

God curse the best Alawite, may he curse al the Shiites and leave them sectarian and those who don’t like it can hit their head against the wall. Syria has to return to being Sunnite by force, even if not all agree

July 26, 2012 at 1:53am · Like

82)

On-my-luck they-eluck
I swear to God they do cluck

July 26, 2012 at 3:40am · Like

83)

On them neg. found Godwilling
Hopefully they won’t achieve

July 26, 2012 at 4:32am · Like

84)

You don’t understand anything….all those people talking are educated people

July 26, 2012 at 5:16am · Like

---

67 The commenter is imitating/voicing the coast accent through the prefix -miy. He also uses an unconventional orthography for the word “luck”.

68 The commenter is being ironic. The irony is cued through the highly marked vernacular and the elongation of the vowel –ī. 
النظام اخْتِ نا́تو الشّيَاب ما نا́تو يدّه عاّد ماني: http://www.facebook.com/pages/%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A7-%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85/106916826120714

أولاً: ياقهيم القاف هو حرف من العربية. تأتي: أنت تقول قران وفقران ولا تقول أران وفقران. وككلب كلبان نحتركم حتى لاتعصنوا فين تقتل المرض لنا. 

Awalan: yā faḥīm al-ḡāf huwwa barf min al-‘arabiyya.
First: oh shrewd the- qāf it letter of the-Arabic

ثاني: أنت تقول قرآن لا تقولل عران ولا تقول عران وفقران. 

Tānyan: 'anta taqūl Qur‘ān wa la taqūl ‘urān wa fur‘ān.
Second: you say Qur‘ān and not you-say ‘urān and fur‘ān.69

And like dog two-dogs we-warn-you so not you-bite-us and it-moves the-disease to-us 'anta tujībere mukāfahataka ka-'ay ḥashara mumrida 

you impose struggle-your like-any insect virulent

---

69 The commenter cites these words, which, also in the Damascene dialect, maintain the qāf.
First of all, you shrewd, the qāf is a letter of Arabic. Secondly, you say Qur’ān and not ‘urān or fur’ān. And like a kelb kelbān we warn you so that you don’t bite us and so that the disease transfers to us. You impose your struggle like any virulent insect.

July 26, 2012 at 9:37am · Like

87)

Saher Fektor

لأنها حرب طائفية علوية ثقافية موسيقية ضد وحدة السنة في سوريا ومن بساند هؤلاء الكثيرة ليس أقل منهم خرها وظلمًا

li-‘annaha ḥarb tā’ifiyya ‘alawiyya majūsiyya ḍidd ‘ahl al-sunna because-it war sectarian Alawite Shiite Majusi against people the-sunna

fī sūryā wa man yusānid hawlā’ al-kafara laysa aqal minhum kufran wa zulman in Syria and who supports those the-infidels not less than-them in-infidelity and evil

Because it is a sectarian, Alawite, Shiite, Majusi war against the Sunni community in Syria and those who support those unbelievers are oppressors and unbelievers just like them.

July 26, 2012 at 10:15am · Like · 1

88)

Shita Shiti

الذي يعترف أخطئه وهو عدم الأغاء القاف من القاموس الاجتماعي حيث معظم القرى تقالي بصافي.

Alladhī yughfar li-Bashar akhṭā’hu huwwa ‘adam ilghā’-i l-qāf’ min al-qāmūs al-i-jītimā’ī yā ṣūqāqī. What is-forgiven to Bashar his faults is not cancel the-qāf from the-vocabulary the-social oh-ṣūqāqī

What is to be forgiven to Bashar despite his faults is not deleting the qāf from the social vocabulary, ṣūqāqī

July 26, 2012 at 10:32am · Like

89)

Anas Iesa

هالله شكلو يا خي اخترتها انحن رح نقالي كمام !! مشان الطائفية يتعرف يعني

hahahaha shaklō yā khayy akhartha 75 naḥnu 76 rāḥ nuqāqī kamām 77 !! mishān al-tā’ifiyya bt’arif ya’nī

It is interesting to note that the question of authenticity emerges through this comment. Accordingly, those who pronounce the qāf are authentic Arabs and Syrians. Also, the example of the Qur’ān is interesting. Through this example he links the pronunciation of the qāf to religious authenticity.

Al-Furqān is another word for the Holy Quran. It literally means “testament”, “evidence”.

The word kelb means dog. Kelbān is the dual of kelb. Probably the commenter uses it because it rhymes with Qur’ān. The commenter is using this word to insult the post author and at the same time to emphasize the pronunciation of the sounds – q and – k.

The word zulm, or zalm means wrong, iniquity, injustice, unfairness, oppression, etc. (Wehr and Cowan 1994).

The comment is entirely in fuṣḥā. However, the last word is in vernacular. The use of fuṣḥā, as in other comments entirely in fuṣḥā (cf. analysis section: intersential fuṣḥā), has the function to render the commenter authoritative and wise. However, unlike other intersential fuṣḥā comments, this one includes a vernacular word at the end. The word ṣuqāqī denotes a child who spends all the time playing on the street instead of studying. The commenter calls the page author like this. Maher perceived it as “benevolent criticism”.

This can be considered as a mixed form. The – ha is usually not pronounced in this vernacular expression.

70
71
72
73
74
75
hahahaha it-seems oh brother-my eventually we fut. we-say-the-qāf !! so-that the-sectarianism you-know filler

[laugh] it seems, my brother, that we’ll end up clucking too !! because of sectarianism, you know

July 26, 2012 at 10:38am · Like

90)

القرداحة في السورية الثورة تنسيقيه smile emoticon yā baṭṭa kākī kākī bidnā al-balad blākī oh duck cluck cluck we-want the-country without-you cluck, cluck, we want you out of the country

July 26, 2012 at 10:44am · Like

91)

Avin Hersan

وينو الدومري اليوم? waynō al-dōmarī al-yōm? Where-he the-dōmarī today? where’s Domary today?

July 26, 2012 at 11:30am · Like · 1

92)

Mohammad Kabbani

إن شاء الله بندا نخيل بيافقوا ما يافقوا in shā allāh bidnā nhālīn yiṣāqū mā yīlāqū Godwilling we-want we-leave-them say the qāf/cluck not they-find hopefully we’ll just let them say the qāf/cluck and not achieve

July 26, 2012 at 11:36am · Like

93)

Ibrahim Mardini

تخيل تروه لعد البوطي وصيصر ياقفي tkhayal trūḥ la’and al-Būṭī w yiṣīr yiṣāqū imagine you-go to al-Būṭī and he-starts

Imagine that you go to al-Būṭī and he starts cucking/pronouncing the qāf

76 This form is bivalent. Graphically, it appears as fuṣḥā. However, due to the lack of short vowels, it can be perceived as vernacular and read out as naḥna. Other commenters disambiguated this form by writing an alif and thus cueing a vernacular reading.

77 This is probably a typo and the commenter intended to write kamān (“also”) instead.

78 The meaning is not transparent.
To that evil and infidel of Louai Abu Khadr. You criminal why do you insult religions and those who have spirituality you are worse than a crawling snake, God curse you. God the merciful, paralyze his limbs and his tongue and make him wish for death without find it. May he be any reward on this and the next world as he's a lowly criminal.

July 26, 2012 at 12:33pm · Like · 1

This page expresses free opinion without infringing religious beliefs so it is upon the administrators of this page to deal with the type those lowly criminals as they deem it appropriate.

July 26, 2012 at 12:39pm · Like · 1
look how cute those ducks are
they cluck all happy around their mother

July 26, 2012 at 2:47pm · Like · 2

Firas Abou Hamdan

Too much

July 26, 2012 at 2:49pm · Like

Mounir Alnachef

How shameful to throw insults on such as trivial topic

July 26, 2012 at 3:51pm · Like
Because they’re Asad’s loyal soldiers ………and no one other than them would have the guts to kill and go on TV in the guise of a soldier who defends the homeland. Because they are sectarian Alawites

Allāh wakīlak bi-ḥottū al-Durūz bi-būz al-midfā‘ ‘alā fikrā ’anā min Swayda wa ’utālib Interj. they-put the-Druze in-muzzle the-cannon by-the-way I from Swayda and I-urge

jamī‘ alladhīna yiğāqū fī al-jaysh al-niqāmī al-sāfīl bi-l-inshiqāq ‘aḥsanālikon li-’annī all those say-qāf in-the-army the-official the-lowly prep.-the-defection better-for-you because-I

’anā ‘ibn tā‘yfatkon wa karahatkon w šīrt sub ‘alaykon yā wilād al-kelb nahānā I son sect-your and I-hated-you and started insult you oh sons the-dog we

bi-l-muḥāfaẓa mā bnaqdir niṭla‘ muzāhara bi-sabab kathrat al-shabbīḥa in-the-province not can exit demonstration due-to many the-thugs

83 Shabbīḥa is the derogatory name given to the armed militia unleashed by the government to crack down on the protestors.
I swear to God they put the Druze at the front. By the way I’m from Swayda and I demand from all those who cluck in the ignoble official army that they defect. Better for you because I’m one of your sect and I hated you and I started insulting, you sons of a dog we in the province can’t go out on an anti government demonstration because of all the government thugs.

July 27, 2012 at 5:43am · Like

103)

Mayada Basheer

بكرأ بعلامي اليوطي بقتوتو عم بقلقي
bukrā btlāqī al-Būṭī bi-fatwatō ‘am yiqāqī

Tomorrow you find al-Būṭī in-fatwas-his ASP- pronounce the qāf/cluck
Next thing you know you’ll find that al-Būṭī started clucking in his Fatwas.

July 27, 2012 at 6:39am · Like · I

104)

Badiah Murad

التي عم يكفر إلي ها يصيبك شلل رباعي لحتي ما تعود تفتكر عم نتتحدي الله التي خلك يا وضعية رح تشوف شو رح يعمل فيه
illī yakfīr ilāhī yuṣībak84 shalal rubā’ī la-ḥattā mā ta’ūd taqdir takfīr

that who-commits-blasphemy God hit-you limb-paralysis until not return you-can commit-blasphemy

‘am tatahadda allāh illī khalqak yā waqīf rāḥ tshūf shū rāḥ ya’mal fīk

asp. you-challenge God that created-you oh lowly fut. you-see what fut. do to you

Those who offend the divine: may you be hit by a paralysis of your limbs so you can’t go back to commit blasphemy. You are challenging God who created you, you lowly being. You’ll see what happens to you.

July 27, 2012 at 9:48am · Like

105)

الريع عماد

يلن شرفون بجري
īl’an sharfōn85 bi-i’jrī
curse dignity-their with-foot-mine

I will infringe their dignity with my foot

July 27, 2012 at 10:27am · Like

106)

84 I opted for a possible vernacular realization which maintains the fuṣḥā verbal prefix – yu. However, another realization, which would be perceived as “more vernacular”, would be yiṣībak, whereby – yi representing the phonetic phenomenon typical of vernacular syntax known as taltala. Moreover, I opted for the suffix – ak instead of the fuṣḥā – ka to reflect an oral pronunciation.

85 The suffix – ūn is clearly a vernacular suffix, I therefore represented a potential vernacular realization.
Waleed Bkkar
yā baṭṭa kākī kākī jayshnā al-ḥorr ajākī
oh duck cluck cluck army-our the-free came-to-you
oh duck, cluck cluck, our Free army has come for you
July 27, 2012 at 2:57pm · Like

Faten Helal Eddin
kāf yā inā ḥabībī ..!!!
killon jājāt w-biddon dabāḥ yā khayy ..!!!
they-all chickens and-they-want slaughter oh brother ..!!!
they're all chickens that need to be slaughtered, brother ..!!!
August 5, 2012 at 11:41am · Like · 1

Nour Shamaa
hahahahaha ṣāḥ wijhat nāzār muhimma
hahahahaha right point view important
[laugh] right that's an important point
August 5, 2012 at 11:54am · Like · 1

Ludwig Beethoven
ṣudfe٨٦ hahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha
a coincidence [laugh]
August 7, 2012 at 3:55pm · Like

The word is bivalent. The tāʾ marbūṭa at the end can be pronounced as vernacular (ṣudfe) or in fushā (ṣudfa).


De Fina, A. (2011b). “‘We are not there. In fact now we will go to the garden to take the rain’: Researcher Identity and the Observer’s Paradox”. In J. Angouri and M. Marra (eds.) Constructing identities at work, 223-245. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.


**Youtube videos**

Last access: June 21, 2016

Philippines: Protest against US military exercises, 21 July 2015
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r1qizK_vP0

Douma, Damascus, Nawar Bulbul chants for freedom, 26 July 2011
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpeVJM5HpBI

Children’s song
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQvq3XcBzgM&index=1&list=RDTQvq3XcBzgM

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**Websites, blogs and public Facebook pages:**

Last access: June 21, 2016

Jadal culture
https://www.facebook.com/jadal.amman/
Al Arabiya, 19 March 2012
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The Mideastwire Blog, Orient TV founder on the mechanics of corruption in Syria, 11 April 2011

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The Guardian, 16 March 2012
http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/16/assad-emails-adviser-hadeel-ali

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The Economist, Shakespeare, Syrian Style. A Special Performance, 18 February 2014
http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2014/02/shakespeare-syrian-style

The NYT, Behind Barbed Wire, Shakespeare Inspires a Cast of Young Syrians, 31 March 2014

The Independent, 11 March 2016, Syrian pro-democracy protesters attacked by Jabhat al-Nusra rebels as they return to streets during ceasefire

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