

## Netspeak linguistic features used by Yemeni youth

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### Abstract

The wide spread of the internet use among the youth cannot be denied. Netspeak- a type of language displaying features that are unique to the internet- is examined here. The current paper is an attempt to study the influence of netspeak used by Yemeni youth on Arabic analyzing the linguistic features of this newly coined written form and the challenges Arabic face. To investigate the frequency of linguistic features used by the Yemeni students netspeak a qualitative method is used limiting these features then describing and explaining them linguistically. The population includes all groups of the secondary schools and HU students. From this population a random sample has been selected composed of ten different pages of netspeak groups first of secondary school students and other ten pages from HU. BA students from different specialization. The findings of current study prove that the netspeak used by Yemeni youth carries the features of the spoken language of its netizens with new emerging features which pollute the purity of Arabic language and deviation from the standard orthography is common which is quite different from other papers findings where 3rabizi is indicated as the norm.

### Introduction:

The wide spread of the internet use among the youth cannot be denied. They use it because "it is quicker, cheaper, ...and more convenient than other communicative methods" (Segerstad, 2005: 316). Crystal (2001:18) defines the internet as "an electronic, global and interactive medium [each of which] properties has consequences [that] some sort of Netspeak exits ...arise out of its character[s]". The rapid development of this new technology and communicative method has become of great importance in modern people's life with high efficiency (ZHU & ZHU ,2013). This development is parallel to the expansion of the internet culture mainly mediated through English language and consequently, it has deep influence on languages: spoken or written. The medium of chatting in the chat rooms on internet is the written form rather than spoken. In his book, Crystal (2001:226) identifies two broad kinds; "those which will affect the nature of language use within an individual speech community; and those which will bring different languages together". Hence the emergence of a third medium with "a specific code of symbols and alternative lexis and rules of syntax , grammar and morphology" (Rumsieue2004:1). Netspeak - a type of language displaying features that are unique to the internet- is also used by the Arab world youth. When chatting they have two alternative choices; either they will use English with Latin letters and compensate the lack of some correspondence letters in English by using numbers that look like those letters or they will Arabize those letters with English netspeak abbreviations putting them in Arabic scripts.

Warschauer et al (2002), on their study of Arabic used by the Egyptian at net rooms indicate that English is used when they are dealing formally while Romanization is excessively used when they are chatting informally. Hence, the need to study this phenomenon seriously is required

It is well-known that the contact with other nations down the ages leads to the emergence of several spoken dialects with variables of closeness or remote to Modern Standard Arabic. However, the fear is not with the expansion of spoken dialects. What the Arab linguists are more concerned with so far is the written form. Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran. It acquires a special position for Arab and Muslims. The Arabic language is not merely a means of communication but rather it unifies all of them and deepens their feeling of belonging to the nation regardless of their differenc ( Hamoud, 2013). In this respect, it is the basic component of identity ( Zaraqet, 2013). When the written remains the same, it might preserve the social, historical, religious and cultural heritage of the nation, however, when the shift from standard to colloquial written occurs, the deterioration of the Holy Quran, the historical and cultural fortune will start leading to the cut between the nation and the language, of its past, then its future and so the most significant part, its identity will be lost.( Alzu'by:2013).

The widespread of this phenomenon in Arabic is prolific, however, it has never been scientifically investigated.

In his paper, Hamoud, (2013) investigates the linguistic features of Iraqi academic elite on Facebook and states that there is a general weakness in writing. He (2013) concludes that there is a negative influence of netspeak on Arabic language and its written system.

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Allehabi, (2013) presents a sociolinguistic analysis of the Romanization of Arabic script phenomenon known as Arabizi. Arabizi - a blended language composed of English and Vernacular Arabic, written in Latin letters but using arithmographemes, that is, numerals as letters to represent hard-to-transliterate sounds is the norm used by the Arab because Arabic scripts are not supported by the technological tools of new methods of chatting and internet resources. She (2013) comes to the conclusion that Arabizi might have wide acceptance among wider social groups and ages.

Al-Khatib and Sabbah (2008) have found that there is a high use of English in Jordanian students SMS messages. They (2008:10) state, "there is a heavy of this new form of written communication among students to such a degree that the traditional use of Arabic is counted out" The current paper is completely different from the works mentioned. This paper is an attempt to study the influence of netspeak used by Yemeni youth on Arabic analyzing the linguistic features of this newly coined written form and the challenges Arabic face. It seems then that this, as the researchers think, is considered a threat to Arabic written system.

The importance of this study arises from the fact that the netizens are people of two different stages; teenagers- secondary schools students- and university Students. Furthermore, it will show out the impact of this phenomenon on the language. In addition, it will open the path for further studies to conduct in this field. Consequently, the present study might be a modest contribution to the field of Arabic studies.

The study objectives are

1. analyzing chatting language texts of secondary schools students and B.A. students at Hadhramout University.( Henceforth, HU)
2. finding out their main linguistic features and the extent to which these features deviate from Standard Arabic.

#### **Methods and procedures:**

To investigate the frequency of linguistic features used by the Yemeni students netspeak a qualitative and a quantitative method is used limiting these features then describing and explaining them linguistically. The population includes all groups of the secondary schools and HU students. From this population a random

sample has been selected composed of ten different pages of netspeak groups first of secondary school students and other ten pages from HU. BA students from different specialization (Arabic language, English and Computer Sciences) . All are cooperative after explaining the notion of the paper and its goals. So, the data were collected, the comments and the participations constitute the raw material. In the analysis of the data, the researches depended their analysis following the model provided by Hamoud (2013). They selected some categories relevant to the subject and leaving the others which are not. Two other categories relevant to the study are added by the researchers .

#### **Analysis and findings**

##### **Data Analysis**

Depending on the model provided by Hamoud (2013), the researchers started to analyze the data they collected. The model has been divided into two categories: general categories and Linguistic categories. These are as follows

##### 1. General categories:

- ✓ Balance in chatting roles
- ✓ Brevity
- ✓ implications / topics of communication
- ✓ Commenting on others' lexical mistakes.

##### 2. Linguistic categories

- ✓ The use of the colloquial dialect
- ✓ Showing exaggeration by repeating some letters to draw attention.
- ✓ Representing some sounds in orthographic way
- ✓ The use of punctuation marks
- ✓ The use of Al-Tashkeel.
- ✓ Writing English words using Arabic letters

In addition to the chosen categories, the researchers added two other elements to the model as they thought that they are relevant and close to their study too. These are as follows:

- ✓ Quoting verses from the Holy Quran
- ✓ Dictation mistakes

The general categories are considered indicators of discourse. The other categories are purely-linguistic indicators.

##### **Findings:**

By close reading and rereading of the collected texts, the researchers have observed certain features which reflect the fact that Yemeni students' use of net speak is remarkable. The spread of such a thing among them is amazing.

##### **The general features:**

**Table (1): The general features (discourse features):**

General categories:
1-Balance in chatting roles
2-Brevity
3-Implications / topics of communication
4-Commenting on others' lexical mistakes.

A quick glance to the chatting papers as indicated in table (1) above shows that there is a common balance in the chatting roles; the participants keep brief and focus on the direct content of their responses. "Sentences that are used are short and simple which gives an impression of brevity to listeners" (ZHU & ZHU 2013: 109). At netspeak chat rooms "time and effort" are valuable ( Segerstad : 2005). Moreover, using abbreviation is another common feature when chatting. Guangming, (2008) claims that one main feature of netspeak is the excessive use of abbreviated terms. However, if they need to convince others of their views they elaborate their points ( **feature: 1,2**). Topics of communication mainly include news about school or university issues such as timetable, lectures, exams. Responses to some inquiries by other members and comments on some written stories have also been observed: jokes, parental relations, love poetry, wise sayings, remarks on death or congratulations have been noticed. Kahari, (2014) points that many students use this

type of speech chatting to keep in touch with their friends and relatives, so that they can know about homework and some other family affairs.**(feature 3)**.

Commenting on others' lexical mistakes is rare. They paid no attention to correct each other. ( **feature 4**). The researchers have found only one comment as feedback to correct the mistake of the other chatter. This happens when a participant wrote " baknaluh" and has been corrected "bakumeluh" (I will complete it). However, the word in question is "bi.'ak.maluh" (in all and all ) the dropping of the glottal stop led to a linguistic mistake and the result is another word with a meaning completely different from the word in question.

**The Linguistic categories.**

**First: Secondary School students:**

It happens that the total number of comments and participations are 506 comments and participations. These have been elaborated in table (2):

**Table (2): the linguistic features used by secondary school students**

	Graphonological Features	Frequencies			
1.	Drawing attention and adding exaggeration by repeating some letters	98			
2.	Representing some sounds in orthographic way	96			
3.	The use of punctuation marks" fullstop, question marks., exclamations, colon, semi-colon"	188			
4.	Dictation marks: " spelling, glottal stop, al-taa, al marboodah"	93			
5.	The use of Al-Tashkeel	105			
6.	Quoting verses from the Holy Quran	0			
7.	Writing English words using Arabic letters	4			
8.	The use of the colloquial dialect	Had 128	Gulf 127	Syr. 78	Egg 10

**Second: University students**

These include three different specializations at HU with 329 comments. These can be elaborated through the tables below:





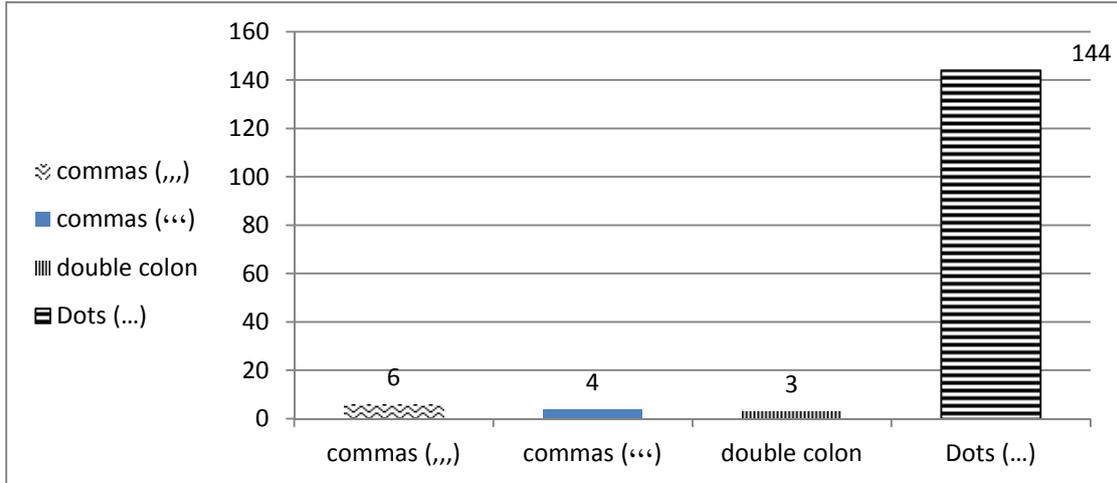


Figure (2)

Ya-dong & Kui (2013) point that the deviant use of punctuation is one of the most remarkable features in the chatting rooms. They wrote:

"Punctuation marks are omitted in most cases in online chatting. To seek efficiency, the sentences ...are always short and easy for understanding".

Quotations from the Holy Quran and Hadith Shareef is intended to prove the goals of this paper. Using these holy extracts require special attention from the users because these are sacred texts. However, there is no care for writing them precisely as they are. Among the ten found quotations, there are nine from the Holy Quran and they are written with mistakes. For example: "إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَاِنَّا اِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ"

"انا لله و انا اليه راجعون"

"ان لله و ان الية راجعون"

Writing the comments in English using Arabic scripts is also one features that has been investigated.

The only group that uses both Arabic and English are students of English who sometimes write their participations in English, while other times they mix both Arabic and English words writing the English words in Arabic letters (Feature 7). Below are several examples to prove this:

نايسووردسسستر"

"ماي رسمه"،

"تايسوو"،

"اوكيه"،

"شابتر"

"ربي يخليك بور فاذر ويقومه بالسلامه لكم"

The most noticeable feature of the netspeak of the selected groups is the widespread use of the vernacular language in their chatting instead of SA:

لا بغيت شوف حذرين حد في الجامعة اوكيه

"هاهوكذا يلقون الممثلين و نحنا نصدق"

شي دراسة بكرة والا زي الاسبوع اللي عبر"

"طيب ادور على حدياني"

"اتصلبهاخي بنقوم بنزل جالسين في الدار نحفظ شفه خاف"

يقول مافي دوام"

However, the Yemeni vernacular dialect is not the only one used here. There is a kind of mixture between this and other interfering ones like Gulf, Syrian and Egyptian vernacular dialects. For example:

"والله مو عارفه هدول البنات بيغالهم ضرب بالعصا القروب نايم"

بشكل فضيع"

"كفو" "لا تحط خشمك" "فديتك يا خوي" "تري يمدحون شي"

اسمه نوم"

"الاخيرة يازينها ما تبي تخرج ادا كان الماء دافي"

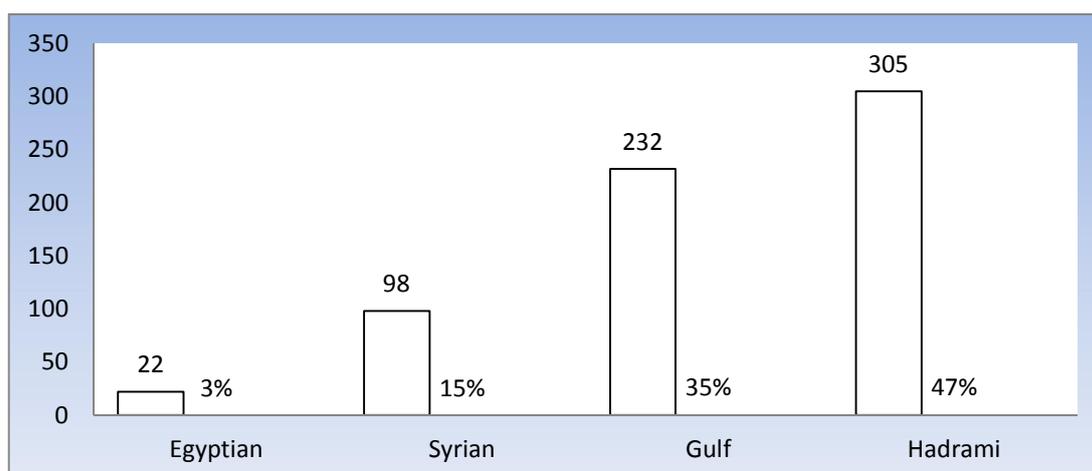
"عاد تعال فهم الي عنا"

"خيتي" و "خيتو"

"تدوم الزحكاتو"

"جرى ايه بالظبط يا عيال... الله ازاى ما فيش حد بيدوم بكرة"

اهي الدنيا خربت ولا ايه"



What the above shows is that Yemeni youth at netspeak chatting rooms use the vernacular language written with Arabic letters and scripts. This might cause a fear since they are writing and not speaking. Barasa & Mous (2009) claim that deviation from the standard orthography are common so this might lead emergence of a new orthography much more based on orality. They found that the language that is used by their informants is the language that breaks the norm. The rise of this type of language is considered a threat not to Arabic only but also to other languages. Ya-dong & kui, (2013: 111) find that the Web-chat English is a serious threat to the traditional English. They wrote, "The former is flexible and changeable, while the later is comparatively regular ... what is worse, it may cause some old words disappear gradually".

#### Conclusion:

With the widespread of the Internet and its easy and interesting ways of communication, a large part of the Arab youth are driven to use it excessively as indicated by Arab social Information report . (Hamoud, 2013: 3). Consequently, it seems that English is to replace other languages ( Warschauer et al, 2002). Arabize - a blended language composed of English and Vernacular Arabic, written in Latin letters but using arithmographemes, that is, numerals as letters to represent hard-to-transliterate sounds is the norm used by the Arab as shown in the studies which are conducted in this field. The findings of current study do not prove such a case. This kind of electronic, cyber-

communication carries the features of the spoken language of the netizens. However, still the scene is not promising because their netspeak in the facebook pages is mistake-ridden with new emerging features which pollute the purity of Arabic language. Deviation from the standard orthography is common. This deepens the gap between those young people and their standard language.

#### Recommendations:

Depending on the previous results and conclusion, the researchers recommend the following:

- 1) Initiating a number of organized campaigns either electronic or in the fields among Yemeni youth of the importance of their language to establish and strengthen their identities.
- 2) The teachers in the schools and the university (in any field in which Arabic is used in its written form) should be strict in correcting their students' linguistic or even semantic mistakes.
- 3) Establish web pages that inject the youth with the principles of their language in attractive ways to draw their attention and involve them in defending their own language.

In all, these attempts will not be realized unless all Arab people – mainly the educated and the jealous for their language and identity- work hard (like the French) to retain the position of Arabic and resist the flowing currents of the deformed forms of languages that will threaten not only Arabic language but also English language itself.

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## المميزات اللغوية للغة الدردشة المستعملة من قبل الشباب في اليمن

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### الملخص

يستهدف هذا البحث دراسة مدى تأثير اللغة المستعملة في غرف الدردشة من قبل الشباب في اللغة العربية من خلال تحليل السمات اللغوية لهذه اللغة. شمل مجتمع الدراسة جميع الفئات من طلاب المدارس الثانوية بالمكلا وطلاب جامعة حضرموت. اليمن ، وقد اختيرت عينة عشوائية مؤلفة من عشر صفحات مختلفة من المجموعات الأولى من طلاب المدارس الثانوية وغيرها من طلبة جامعة حضرموت. وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن لغة الدردشة المستعملة netspeak باليمن تحمل ملامح اللغة المنطوقة دون أي استعمال لما يسمى Arabize، وهذا ما جاء في نتائج دراسات سابقة أكدت أن استعمال الشباب العربي للغة المعربة ( Arabize ) وليس اللغة الفصيحة .