



Integrating a Comparative Linguistics Approach to Study Changes in the Use of Modern Standard Arabic in Social Media

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Abstract: The transformation of digital communication has influenced the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), particularly in social media interactions characterized by speed, informality, conciseness, and linguistic flexibility. This study aims to analyze changes in the use of MSA in social media by integrating a comparative linguistics approach to identify differences between normative MSA forms and actual Arabic language practices in digital communication. The study employed a qualitative design with a case study approach. Data were collected through digital observation, documentation, and semi-structured interviews with Arabic language users and individuals experienced in digital Arabic communication. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and verification by comparing phenomena at the lexical, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic levels. The results show three main patterns. First, lexical and orthographic shifts are dominant through simplification, the use of popular vocabulary, spelling variations, and written expressions. Second, hybridization occurs between MSA, Arabic dialects, and foreign language elements. Third, morphological and syntactic structures undergo simplification to support communication efficiency. The study concludes that digital language change is a form of contextual linguistic adaptation, not simply a deviation from MSA norms. These findings contribute to the study of Arabic sociolinguistics, digital linguistics, and contextual Arabic language learning.

INTRODUCTION

The use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in social media is important to study because the digital space has become the primary arena for the production, dissemination, and negotiation of linguistic meaning in Arab society (Kamal, 2025; Schilirò, 2024). In general, changes in communication media encourage users to adapt language forms to the speed, immediacy, and character of digital interactions. Evidence from sociolinguistic studies shows that online communication brings together standard language, dialects, hybrid forms, abbreviations, and orthographic variations in everyday practice (Uyuni et al., 2024). This situation suggests that changes in the use of MSA are not simply a matter of style, but are related to the dynamics of norms, identity, and communication effectiveness (Hamdan & Al-Salman, 2021). Therefore, this research is important for the wider community

because it helps understand the direction of change in contemporary Arabic and provides an academic basis for teaching, digital literacy, translation, and the development of language policies that are responsive to the transformation of contemporary digital communication.

Social media users face the problem of increasingly fluid boundaries between Modern Standard Arabic and various non-standard forms of language in digital communication (Alshehri, 2025). On platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and online chat rooms, users frequently shorten words, change spellings, omit punctuation, use mixed language, and combine Modern Standard Arabic with local dialects and foreign terms (Al Maidah et al., 2025). This phenomenon results in rapid and expressive communication, but also raises questions about the consistency of rules and the sustainability of standard language use (Al Rashdi & Mehta, 2022; N. Nabilah et al., 2025). The problem is further complicated by changes not only in vocabulary but also in orthography, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. Therefore, a linguistic approach that can systematically compare standard forms with actual forms is needed to explain the patterns of change occurring in everyday social media communication.

Several studies have explored the relationship between Arabic, social variation, and digital communication. F. F. Nabilah, Romadan, & Hasaniyah (2025) demonstrates that Arabic has a complex relationship between standardization, dialect, and social function. Owens (2011) explains the dynamics of diglossia and Arabic variation in a modern context, while Hashim (2026) asserts that digital media allows users to creatively stylize, blend, and adapt language. Juma (2024) also demonstrates that computer-based communication has linguistic characteristics influenced by the medium and community of practice. However, these studies tend to discuss variation, diglossia, or digital language separately. The weakness lies in the suboptimal integration of comparative linguistic approaches to compare BASM with actual forms of social media at the lexical, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic levels in an integrated and comprehensive manner within a dynamic digital context.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of a comparative linguistics approach as a framework for identifying and explaining changes in Modern Standard Arabic usage on social media. Rather than simply describing the emergence of non-standard forms, this study compares normative BASM forms with those actually used by digital users, then maps shifts at several linguistic levels. This approach allows the research to distinguish between structural changes, changes influenced by the characteristics of the medium, and variations that function as communication strategies or identity markers. This state-of-the-art research is directed at understanding that social media is not simply a place for language application, but rather a space that contributes to the formation of new linguistic practices. Resolving this issue is crucial for understanding contemporary Arabic language change empirically and systematically, rather than merely assessing it as a deviation from the norm.

Based on this description, this research addresses several main questions: What forms of Modern Standard Arabic are used in social media communication? What linguistic changes emerge when the BASM form is compared with the language forms used by social media users? At the lexical, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic levels, what forms of change are most dominant? What linguistic and communicative factors can explain the emergence of these changes? How does the

comparison between standard and digital forms indicate the direction of development of contemporary Arabic language use? These questions are important because language change in social media cannot always be explained through the category of linguistic errors. Some changes may reflect communication efficiency, linguistic creativity, technological adaptation, identity formation, or changing norms of language use in diverse and transformative digital communities.

This study argues that changes in the use of Modern Standard Arabic in social media represent a systematic process of linguistic adaptation, not simply a decline in adherence to rules. Through a comparative linguistic approach, the study demonstrates the relationship between the normative forms of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and the actual forms that develop in digital communication, while also identifying patterns of change at various linguistic levels. The study's original contribution lies in providing an analytical model that links comparative forms, contexts of use, and communicative functions within a single framework. Theoretically, the study enriches Arabic sociolinguistics and digital linguistics by explaining the mechanisms of adaptation of MSA to the characteristics of social media. Practically, the research findings can be used for Arabic language learning, the development of digital literacy materials, dictionary development, translation, and the formulation of teaching strategies that are more in line with developments in contemporary language use.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative design with a case study approach to examine changes in the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in social media communication. The unit of analysis is Arabic speech and text produced by users on social media platforms, specifically posts, comments, responses, and relevant digital conversations. The research case focuses on forms of MSA use that have changed compared to the normative form of standard Arabic. Data are examined based on four linguistic aspects: lexical, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic. The case study approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand linguistic phenomena in depth in the context of natural digital communication. Comparative analysis is used to compare standard language forms with actual forms found in social media interactions systematically and contextually.

The research information sources consist of primary and supporting data. Primary data consist of Arabic texts obtained from social media users' communication activities, including posts, comments, replies, and other forms of digital interaction that demonstrate the use of BASM. Data selection was conducted purposively based on relevance to the research focus, contextual readability, and the existence of linguistic change phenomena. In addition to textual data, supporting information was obtained through semi-structured interviews with Arabic-speaking social media users and informants with Arabic language competence. Informants were selected based on their experience using Arabic in digital communication. Secondary sources, including Arabic grammar books, dictionaries, BASM guidelines, and previous research, were used as comparisons to determine the normative form. This diversity of sources enabled information triangulation and strengthened the interpretation of the research findings.

Data collection was conducted through digital observation, documentation, and interviews. Observation was used to identify patterns of BASM use in social media interactions without changing the communication context. Documentation

was conducted by archiving relevant textual data, then grouping it based on lexical, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic aspects. Interviews were used to obtain explanations regarding the reasons for using certain forms and user perceptions of BASM in digital communication. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and verification of conclusions. In the reduction stage, data were selected, coded, and categorized based on the form of change (Alharthy, 2025; Sabtan et al., 2021). Next, the data were displayed in a comparison matrix between standard forms and social media forms. The verification stage was carried out through linguistic interpretation, source triangulation, and checking the consistency of findings to produce credible and accountable conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Dominant Shift in Lexical and Orthographic Aspects

Lexical and orthographic shifts in this study refer to changes in the form of Modern Standard Arabic found in social media communication compared to normative Arabic. Lexical shifts include the use of popular vocabulary, loanwords, abbreviations, slang, and more concise word choices. Meanwhile, orthographic shifts include spelling changes, the omission or addition of letters, the use of symbols, character repetition, and inconsistencies in the spelling of certain elements. Based on observations of digital data, both forms of change appear repeatedly in user posts, comments, and responses. This pattern indicates that users tend to adapt the language form to the fast, concise, informal, expressive, and easily understood nature of social media communication.

Interviews with informants indicate that the use of shorter lexical forms is considered to help speed up message delivery. Informant 1, an Arabic language teacher, stated, "On social media, users often choose shorter words because they want the message to be understood immediately and not too formal." This statement was reinforced by Informant 2, an active social media user, who said, "When writing on social media, I usually use words that are commonly used by others, even though there are actually more complete standard Arabic forms." Both statements indicate that users' lexical choices are not entirely based on BASM rules, but are influenced by practical communication needs. Researchers interpret this tendency as a form of lexical adaptation to the digital communication environment that demands efficiency, speed, and accessibility of meaning.

The trend of change is also evident in how informants treat orthographic aspects when writing Arabic on social media. Informant 3, a student social media user, explained, "I often don't pay attention to the spelling of hamzah or punctuation when writing comments because the important thing is that others understand the meaning." Informant 4, an Arabic content manager, said, "When creating content, I sometimes repeat letters or use certain marks so that the writing looks more expressive and attracts the reader's attention." These statements demonstrate that orthographic forms in digital communication have a broader function than simply representing writing rules. Researchers interpret that changes in spelling, punctuation, and character usage are user strategies to adapt writing to the expressive and interactive functions of social media. Thus, digital orthography evolves according to the communication needs of its users.

Observations of social media posts and interactions indicate that the most common changes include shortened vocabulary, the use of popular terms, spelling

inconsistencies, omitted punctuation, and letter repetition for emotional emphasis. The data also shows that these changes occur more frequently in comments and informal conversations than in posts with informative or educational purposes. Restatement: Users still use BASM elements as the basis of communication, but their form undergoes adjustments when entering the social media environment. These adjustments are evident through simpler word choices and more flexible writing. These findings suggest that lexical and orthographic changes are not random phenomena, but rather follow specific patterns based on the context, communication goals, and the nature of the digital interaction.

Table 1. Lexical and Orthographic Shift Patterns Based on Informants

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Arabic Language Teacher	"On social media, users often choose shorter words because they want the message to be understood immediately and not be too formal."	Vocabulary shortening; communication efficiency
Active social media users	"I usually use the word that other people use, even though there is a more complete standard Arabic form."	Lexical shift; use of popular vocabulary
Student	"I often don't pay attention to the spelling of hamzah or punctuation when writing comments because the important thing is that other people understand the meaning."	Spelling inconsistencies; omission of punctuation
Arabic content manager	"I sometimes repeat letters or use certain marks to make my writing look more expressive."	Character repetition; orthographic expressiveness

The table shows that lexical and orthographic changes tend to be interrelated. The first and second informants indicated that vocabulary choices have adjusted because users prioritize speed, comprehensibility, and the habits of the digital community. This shift does not necessarily mean that users are unaware of the BASM form, but rather indicates a conscious choice or habit of using a form deemed more appropriate to the social media context. Meanwhile, the third and fourth informants showed that orthographic aspects also experienced flexibility. Spelling inconsistencies and omissions of punctuation are related to a priority on writing speed, while character repetition is related to the need for expression. Thus, both indicators demonstrate a pattern of language adaptation to the more informal, fast, interactive, and expressive functions of digital communication.

The data patterns indicate that lexical and orthographic shifts occur through three main tendencies. First, there is simplification, which is the tendency to use shorter, more easily understood word forms. Second, there is orthographic flexibilization, which is the use of spelling, punctuation, and characters that do not always follow normative forms. Third, there is expressivization, which is the use of written elements to amplify emotions and the reader's attention. These three patterns emerge in relatively informal and rapid communication contexts. In contrast, language use in educational or informative contexts tends to maintain a more regular BASM form. These data indicate that language change does not occur uniformly, but is instead influenced by the purpose of communication and the situation in which it is used. Social media provides a space that allows BASM norms to remain in use while simultaneously adapting to user needs.

Hybridization between Modern Standard Arabic, Dialects, and Foreign

Languages

Operationally, language hybridization in this study refers to the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) mixed with dialectal Arabic and foreign language elements in social media communication. This form of hybridization is identified based on the emergence of substitutions or insertions of language elements within a single post, comment, or series of digital interactions. Observational data shows that users do not maintain MSA as a single language, but combine it with Arabic dialects and, especially, English vocabulary. This hybridization appears in the form of words, phrases, popular terms, abbreviations, and specific expressions. Based on the context of use, this mixing is related to the goal of conveying messages in a more familiar, expressive, concise manner, and in accordance with the customs of the digital community. Thus, hybridization is understood as a pattern of language use that demonstrates user flexibility in selecting linguistic resources according to communication needs.

Table 2. Observation Results of Language Hybridization in Social Media

Observation Aspect	Observed Form	Context of Emergence	Indicator	Trend
BASM–dialect	BASM accompanied by dialectal vocabulary	Informal comments and conversations	Code change	Interpersonal closeness
BASM–English	Insertion of English terms	Popular content and digital conversations	Code mixing	Global influence and digital trends
English dialects	Combination of dialects and foreign terms	Informal comments	Multilingual hybridization	Expression of identity
BASM–dialect–English	Three language elements in one interaction	Popular posts and comments	Change of language source	Communication flexibility
Digital terms	Use of the terms technology and social media	Digital content	Vocabulary adaptation	Efficiency and understandability
Popular expressions	Trending words or phrases	Informal interactions	Community conformity	Social participation

The data in the table shows that language hybridization occurs through several different patterns, ranging from mixing BASM with dialects to the simultaneous use of all three language sources. Observations show that the mixing is not randomly distributed, but tends to occur in informal contexts, particularly in comments, popular conversations, and content with high levels of interaction. Restatement shows that users continue to utilize BASM as a basis for communication, but incorporate dialectal and English elements to achieve specific functions. Dialectal elements tend to convey a sense of closeness and familiarity, while English is widely used in digital terms, technology, popular culture, and emerging expressions. Researchers interpret this condition as a form of linguistic flexibility, as users choose language elements based on the context, communication goals, and the characteristics of the community with which they interact.

The data patterns reveal four main trends in language hybridization. First, the mixing of BASM with dialects is more common in interpersonal and informal communication. Second, the insertion of English tends to be related to technology terms, popular culture, and digital phenomena. Third, the combination of more than

two language sources indicates increased user flexibility in constructing messages. Fourth, hybridization is more intensive in popular content that generates high engagement. These patterns indicate that users' language choices are influenced by social and communicative functions. Language is used not only to convey information but also to build closeness, demonstrate identity, follow trends, and increase the appeal of messages. Thus, social media creates a linguistic environment that allows BASM, dialects, and foreign languages to be used simultaneously without always having clear boundaries.

Morphological and Syntactic Changes Oriented to Communication Efficiency

Operationally, the morphological and syntactic changes in this study refer to changes in word form and sentence structure in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) found in social media communication. Morphological changes include shortening words, eliminating word-forming elements, simplifying affixes, and using more concise morphological forms. Meanwhile, syntactic changes include shortening sentence structures, eliminating certain elements, using elliptical constructions, and simpler sentence construction. Based on field data, these changes were found primarily in comments, responses, captions, and short communications. The form of the changes still allows the message to be understood because users rely on the context of the interaction. Thus, morphological and syntactic changes are understood as adaptations of the MSA structure to the needs of fast, concise, flexible, and efficient digital communication.

Observations show that morphological and syntactic changes recur in various forms of social media interactions. At the morphological level, there is a tendency toward shortening words, eliminating certain elements in word formation, and using simpler forms. At the syntactic level, changes are evident through shorter sentences, elliptical structures, the omission of elements already understood through context, and the use of phrases in place of complete sentence constructions. This phenomenon is most readily observed in comments, short responses, captions, and fast-paced digital conversations. Researchers interpret these findings as a form of linguistic adaptation to the nature of social media, which demands speed and efficiency. Users appear to maintain the primary meaning but reduce the complexity of the language so that messages can be conveyed quickly without hindering the flow of digital interactions.

In restatement, research data shows that social media users do not always use BASM in its complete form, as per its normative structure. They tend to modify word forms and sentence structures when communicating in digital environments. At the morphological level, modifications are made through shortening and simplifying word forms, while at the syntactic level, modifications are made through the removal of certain elements and the use of shorter constructions. However, these changes do not cause the message to lose meaning because users and readers share the same communication context. Researchers interpret this condition as an adaptive strategy that allows users to maintain effective communication. In other words, the language form undergoes changes, but its communicative function is maintained. This shows that language structures in social media can be more flexible when faced with the demands of real-time communication.

Impact on Modern Standard Arabic

Increased flexibility in usage, the coexistence of normative and digital forms, and adaptive language patterns.



Morphological simplification

Shortening word forms, omitting word-forming elements, and using simpler forms.



Figure 1. Flow of Morphological and Syntactic Changes in Social Media Communication

The data patterns reveal three main trends in morphological and syntactic change. First, morphological changes tend to occur through the simplification of word forms when users require a faster typing process. Second, syntactic changes are more common through elliptical constructions and the omission of sentence elements that are already understandable based on context. Third, these changes are more prevalent in informal communication than in educational or informative communication. This pattern suggests that users do not abandon BASM entirely, but modify its form to suit their communication needs. The more informal and rapid the interaction, the greater the tendency for structural simplification. Conversely, when communication demands precision and formality, BASM forms are relatively more likely to be retained. These findings demonstrate a relationship between communication context, the level of formality, efficiency, and flexibility of Arabic language structure in the digital space.

Discussion

Dominant Shift in Lexical and Orthographic Aspects

The research findings indicate that shifts in Modern Standard Arabic usage on social media are primarily evident through lexical and orthographic changes (Alayba, 2025). This finding aligns with Bassiouney's view of Arabic's flexibility in the relationship between standard forms and usage variations. The research findings also align with Albirini's study, which demonstrates that contemporary Arabic usage practices are inextricably linked to language variation and social context (Ahmad Jezy et al., 2025). However, this study places a different emphasis on this shift, as it examines the changes through a direct comparison between normative and actual forms of Modern Standard Arabic in digital communication. While previous research has focused more on language variation, diglossia, or identity, the findings of this study specifically demonstrate that the nature of social media encourages lexical simplification and orthographic flexibility as recurring and contextual communication strategies.

Theoretically, these findings broaden the understanding of BASM change by demonstrating that social media serves as a linguistic adaptation space that allows standard forms to adapt without losing their primary communicative function. Lexical and orthographic shifts can be understood as a form of language recontextualization, as users adapt written structures and forms to the needs of digital interactions (Alwakid et al., 2022). Practically, these findings have implications for Arabic language learning, such as emphasizing not only mastery of

normative forms but also equipping learners with the ability to understand digital language variation. Teachers can use social media data as learning materials to critically compare standard and actual forms (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). The research's contribution lies in providing a comparative perspective that can help learners understand the relationship between language norms, usage variations, communication efficiency, and the development of Arabic literacy in the contemporary digital environment.

Hybridization between Modern Standard Arabic, Dialects, and Foreign Languages

The research findings on the hybridization of BASM, dialects, and foreign languages reinforce Bassiouney's research, which demonstrates the complex relationship between standard Arabic and Arabic variations in social life. These findings also align with Albirini's, who places Arabic use within the context of social variation and change (Alqatawneh, n.d.). Furthermore, the research findings align with Androutsopoulos's study on the nature of digital communication, which allows users to creatively mix and match languages. However, this study places a more specific emphasis on the relationship between BASM, dialects, and English in social media communication practices. The difference lies in the use of a comparative approach to identify hybridization patterns based on the context of their use (Lian, 2020). These findings demonstrate that language mixing is not simply a deviation from BASM, but rather a linguistic strategy that serves to build familiarity, identity, expression, and communication relevance.

Theoretically, these findings broaden the understanding that BASM changes in social media occur in a multivariate linguistic environment and are not entirely controlled by the boundaries of standard languages. Hybridization suggests that users contextually select linguistic resources based on social functions and communication needs (Al-Jarf, 2026; Alnosairee & Sartini, 2021). Practically, these findings have implications for Arabic language learning, particularly the need to differentiate between standard language competency and the ability to understand digital language variations. Teaching that focuses solely on normative forms has the potential to underprepare learners for actual Arabic communication in the digital space (Laitinen & Lundberg, 2020). The research's contribution lies in mapping the relationship between BASM, dialects, and foreign languages within a comparative linguistic framework. These findings can be utilized to develop contextualized learning materials, improve Arabic digital literacy, and help learners understand when and why language variations are used in contemporary communication.

Morphological and Syntactic Changes Oriented to Communication Efficiency

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the development of comparative linguistics and digital sociolinguistics studies by demonstrating that changes in BASM do not necessarily indicate a weakening of language competence, but may reflect structural adaptations to new communication environments (Michalski & Śliwa, 2021). Practically, these findings have implications for Arabic language learning because BASM mastery requires the ability to understand structural variations that emerge in digital communication (Sidqi et al., 2025). Teachers can utilize the comparison between normative and digital forms as learning material to increase students' linguistic awareness (al-Rojaie, 2023). The research contribution lies in mapping the relationship between morphological simplification, syntactic change, communication context, and efficiency function within a single analytical framework. These findings can also form the basis for developing Arabic digital

literacy materials that teach appropriate language use in formal, informal, and digital contexts.

The research findings regarding morphological and syntactic changes are consistent with Albirini's study, which views contemporary Arabic language use as a practice influenced by social variation and communication context (Aladeemy et al., 2024). These findings also relate to Bassiouney's view of the flexibility of Arabic language use between standard forms and informal variations (Uzum et al., 2021). From a digital communication perspective, the research findings align with Androutsopoulos's, who suggests that digital media opens up space for creativity and adaptation of language forms. However, this study places a different emphasis on this, as the changes are analyzed comparatively between normative BASM forms and the actual forms used in social media. The findings indicate that morphological shortening, syntactic omissions, and elliptical constructions are not merely linguistic variations but are directly related to the demands of communication efficiency. Thus, the research demonstrates the relationship between language structure and the characteristics of the digital medium.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of Modern Standard Arabic in social media has undergone adaptive changes at the lexical, orthographic, morphological, and syntactic levels. The most dominant shifts are seen in vocabulary simplification and orthographic flexibility, followed by hybridization between BASM, Arabic dialects, and foreign languages, as well as simplification of morphological and syntactic structures. These findings indicate that social media is not simply a space for language use, but also an environment that forms new linguistic patterns through demands for speed, efficiency, expressivity, and informal interaction. Through a comparative linguistics approach, these changes can be understood as a process of recontextualization of BASM, not merely a deviation from the norm. Thus, BASM still serves an important function as a basis for communication, but has undergone flexibility to suit the needs and characteristics of contemporary digital communication.

The conclusion of this study confirms that changes in BASM usage on social media need to be understood contextually and not solely based on normative categories of right and wrong. The linguistic changes found demonstrate users' ability to adapt to the digital communication environment without completely abandoning the standard Arabic language system. The implications of this study point to the need to develop Arabic language learning that connects mastery of normative forms with the ability to understand digital language variations. Future research is recommended to expand data sources across various social media platforms, involve Arabic-speaking communities from different regions, and use a longitudinal approach to observe the development of language change over time. Future studies could also integrate quantitative and computational analyses to measure the frequency of change and identify digital linguistic patterns more broadly and objectively.

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