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Digital Media and the Development of the Arabic Language: the Dynamics of Fusha and Amiyah on the YouTube Digital Platform

Muhammad Ibrohim Futuwatuddin*, Aang Saeful Milah, Lalu Turjiman Ahmad, Ahmad Habibi Syahid

Postgraduate Of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin State Islamic University, Banten 42122, Indonesia

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* Corresponding author:

E-mail: Muhammadibrohiem@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the dynamics of the use of Modern Standard Arabic (fusha) and colloquial Arabic (amiyah) on YouTube as a digital platform in the context of Arabic language development in the digital media era. The research is based on the phenomenon of diglossia, which characterizes Arab societies, where fusha is traditionally used in formal, educational, and religious contexts, while amiyah is used in everyday communication. The rapid expansion of digital media has reshaped these linguistic boundaries and created new spaces for interaction between the two varieties. This study aims to analyze how language choice on YouTube reflects communicative goals, audience orientation, and sociolinguistic ideology. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method using content analysis with a critical sociolinguistic approach. The data consist of Arabic language YouTube videos categorized into news, opinion, entertainment, and educational content. The findings indicate that fusha is predominantly used in news and educational videos to convey authority and formality, whereas amiyah is more frequently used in opinion and entertainment content to create intimacy and express local identity. The study concludes that Arabic diglossia in digital media is dynamic and context-dependent, with YouTube serving as a space for negotiating linguistic identity, power, and ideology.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology over the past two decades has significantly transformed patterns of communication and social interaction worldwide, including in the Arab world. Digital media platforms no longer function merely as channels for information exchange but have evolved into spaces where social, cultural, and linguistic identities are actively constructed and negotiated.

Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok enable users to produce, distribute, and consume content with minimal institutional constraints, thereby reshaping traditional norms of communication and language use. In this context, language plays a central role not only as a tool of communication but also as a medium for expressing identity, conveying ideology, and establishing social relationships in digital environments.

Arabic, as a language with a long historical tradition and strong religious and cultural significance, has also undergone notable transformations in its usage within digital spaces. Traditionally, Arabic is characterized by a diglossic situation in which Modern Standard Arabic (*fushḥā*) coexists with various colloquial dialects (*‘āmiyyah*). In conventional settings, *fushḥā* is associated with formal domains such as education, religion, and official communication, while *‘āmiyyah* is used in everyday interaction. This functional distribution has been relatively stable for centuries, as described in the classical framework of diglossia (Ferguson, 1959). However, the emergence of digital media has introduced new communicative contexts that challenge these established boundaries and encourage more flexible language practices.

The relationship between language and media has long been a subject of scholarly interest, particularly in understanding how media discourse shapes linguistic norms and public perceptions. Media does not merely reflect social reality but also actively constructs meanings, values, and identities (Febriyanti & Andriani, 2025). In the context of Arabic-speaking societies, the interaction between *fushḥā* and *‘āmiyyah* reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics, including issues of identity, ideology, and power relations. Haeri (2003) argues that *fushḥā* is often associated with symbolic authority, religious legitimacy, and cultural prestige, whereas *‘āmiyyah* represents everyday social reality and local identity. Therefore, examining language use in digital media provides valuable insights into how these symbolic meanings are maintained, challenged, or redefined in contemporary contexts.

Recent studies have highlighted that digital platforms create new opportunities for linguistic variation and innovation. El-Hassan (2018) notes that digital media provides an open arena where different varieties of Arabic can be performed, mixed, and recontextualized beyond the constraints of traditional institutions. Similar findings have been reported in educational contexts, where digital media facilitates interaction, engagement, and communication processes among users in online environments (Gibraltar & Hafidz, 2025). Similarly, Albirini (2016) emphasizes that *‘āmiyyah* has gained increasing prominence in online communication due to its immediacy, authenticity, and communicative effectiveness, especially among younger audiences. This trend is also supported by findings that language choice in digital media is influenced by audience engagement, content type, and communicative goals (Maisaroh et al., 2025). Previous studies also indicate that social media platforms significantly influence communication patterns, identity formation, and audience interaction in digital spaces (Sari et al., 2026).

Moreover, scholars have observed the emergence of what is referred to as “diglossia leveling,” in which the boundaries between *fushḥā* and *‘āmiyyah* become more fluid

and context-dependent. This phenomenon reflects the hybrid nature of digital communication, where speakers may alternate between language varieties or combine elements of both within a single discourse (Putri et al., 2025). Another study reported that such linguistic flexibility is often driven by the need to balance authority and relatability in digital communication (Bassiouny, 2009; Palfreyman, 2021). In this sense, language choice is not only a functional decision but also a strategic and ideological one, shaped by the social positioning of speakers and their intended audiences.

Despite the growing body of research on Arabic diglossia, much of the existing literature has focused on traditional media, print journalism, or formal educational contexts. Studies that specifically examine the interaction between *fushā* and *‘āmiyyah* in digital platforms, particularly YouTube, remain relatively limited (Albirini, 2016). This represents an important gap in the literature, considering the increasing influence of YouTube as a platform that shapes communication styles, language attitudes, and identity formation, especially among digitally native generations. Furthermore, previous studies often emphasize general patterns of language use without sufficiently analyzing how language choice varies across different types of content and communicative purposes.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how *fushā* and *‘āmiyyah* are used and negotiated in Arabic-language content on YouTube. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the distribution of language varieties across different content categories and to examine how language choice reflects communicative goals, audience orientation, and sociolinguistic ideology. By focusing on YouTube as a dynamic digital platform, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving role of Arabic in contemporary media and highlights the complex relationship between language, identity, and communication in the digital age.

2. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis combined with a critical sociolinguistic perspective. The qualitative approach is particularly useful for exploring social meanings, cultural practices, and communicative behaviors that emerge naturally within digital environments (Bungin, 2015; Moleong, 2019). This approach is designed to examine language use in its natural context and to interpret both linguistic patterns and the social meanings underlying them. Qualitative content analysis is appropriate for analyzing Arabic diglossia in digital media because it allows systematic classification of language varieties while also enabling interpretative analysis of their sociocultural and ideological functions. This analytical approach is consistent with the principles of content analysis, which emphasize the systematic examination of communication messages and media texts to identify patterns, meanings, and social representations (Eriyanto, 2011). To ensure replicability, all procedures of data selection, coding, and analysis are clearly defined and systematically applied.

Research Instrument

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis combined with a critical sociolinguistic perspective. This approach is designed to examine language use in its natural context and to interpret both linguistic patterns and the social meanings underlying them. Qualitative content analysis is appropriate for analyzing Arabic diglossia in digital media because it allows systematic classification of language varieties while also enabling interpretative analysis of their sociocultural and ideological functions. To ensure replicability, all procedures of data selection, coding, and analysis are clearly defined and systematically applied.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from Arabic-language videos available on YouTube using a purposive sampling technique. This sampling strategy was employed to select videos that were most relevant to the research objectives, particularly those representing different communicative contexts in contemporary digital media. The selection process focused on YouTube channels that actively produce Arabic content in one of four categories: news, opinion (podcast), entertainment, and educational or da'wah content. To ensure comparability across the dataset, videos were required to meet several criteria, including a duration of approximately 5-15 minutes, high audience engagement as indicated by views, likes, and comments, and the consistent use of spoken Arabic as the primary medium of communication throughout the video.

Based on these criteria, one representative video was selected from each content category, resulting in a total sample of four videos. The videos were accessed directly through YouTube and downloaded for analytical purposes. The audio content of each video was transcribed verbatim into Arabic text to preserve the original linguistic features and communicative nuances. Following transcription, the data were segmented into individual utterances, which served as the primary units of analysis. This segmentation facilitated systematic coding and enabled detailed examination of language variation within and across different types of digital content.

In addition to the video transcripts, audience comments associated with each selected video were collected as supplementary data. These comments were used to provide contextual information regarding audience perceptions, reactions, and attitudes toward the language varieties employed by content creators. The inclusion of audience responses allowed for a broader understanding of the social meanings and reception of linguistic choices in digital environments. All collected data, including video transcripts, coding records, and audience comments, were documented and organized systematically in a digital database to ensure transparency, facilitate data management, and allow for potential re-analysis by future researchers.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted through two sequential stages: descriptive content analysis and critical sociolinguistic analysis. In the first stage, all selected video data were transcribed verbatim and segmented into individual utterances as the primary unit of analysis. Each utterance was then coded according to its linguistic variety, namely *fusha* (Modern Standard Arabic), *'amiyah* (colloquial Arabic), or a mixed form combining elements of both varieties. The frequency and percentage of each category were calculated to identify patterns of language use across the dataset. This procedure follows common qualitative data analysis stages involving data organization, classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing to generate meaningful findings from empirical data (Sugiyono, 2019). A language variety was considered dominant when it accounted for more than 70% of the total utterances within a single video. Subsequently, the coded data were grouped according to content categories, including news, opinion, entertainment, and educational videos. This descriptive analysis provided an overview of the distribution and prevalence of Arabic language varieties in different digital communication contexts.

The second stage employed critical sociolinguistic analysis to interpret the social meanings embedded in language choices. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic forms, this stage examined how language functions as a social practice within digital media environments. The analysis explored the ways in which speakers use linguistic variation to construct personal and collective identities, negotiate social status and power relations, and communicate ideological positions. Particular attention was given to the relationship between language choice, audience orientation, communicative purpose, and the broader sociocultural context in which the videos were produced and consumed. Through this interpretive approach, the study sought to understand not only what language varieties were used but also why they were selected and what social meanings they conveyed.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation procedures were implemented throughout the analysis process. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing patterns of language use across different video categories and by examining the relationship between linguistic practices in video content and audience responses expressed in the comment sections. In addition, repeated coding procedures were carried out at different stages of analysis to ensure coding consistency and reduce potential researcher bias. The coding results were continuously reviewed and cross checked against the original data to maintain analytical accuracy. These procedures contributed to the credibility, dependability, and transparency of the study, allowing future researchers to replicate the analytical process using similar methodological steps.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from a systematic content analysis of four categories of Arabic-language YouTube videos, namely news, opinion, entertainment, and education (da'wah). A total of four videos were examined, with

one representative video selected from each category to ensure comparability across different communicative contexts. The videos were sourced from popular and actively engaged channels that reflect diverse communicative functions within the Arabic digital media landscape. This selection allows for an in-depth exploration of language variation across different genres of online discourse.

The news category was taken from AlJazeera Arabic (22.1 million subscribers; 545 thousand views). The opinion category was selected from the Wa'yi channel (999 thousand subscribers; 147 thousand views). The entertainment category was taken from Mon3esh (1.07 million subscribers; 374 thousand views). The educational (da'wah) category was sourced from Dr. Yosry Gabr (285 thousand subscribers; 24 thousand views). The selection criteria included channel popularity, diversity of content genres, and consistency in using Arabic in digital communication.

The analysis followed a systematic coding process. First, each video was transcribed and segmented into meaningful units of speech. In total, 312 utterances were identified across the four videos. The news video contained 81 utterances, the opinion video 74 utterances, the entertainment video 79 utterances, and the educational video 78 utterances. Each utterance was coded as *fusha*, *amiyah*, or mixed according to lexical choice, grammatical structure, and pronunciation characteristics. The dominant language variety was determined when more than 70% of utterances within a video belonged to a particular category.

Second, each segment was coded based on the type of language used: *fusha*, *'amiyah*, or mixed. Third, the frequency and distribution of each language variety were calculated to determine the dominant language in each video. A language variety was categorized as dominant when it appeared in more than 70% of the total utterances in a video. Finally, the coded data were interpreted using a critical sociolinguistic perspective to examine the social and ideological meanings of language choice. The results show that the use of Arabic language varieties is strongly influenced by communication function, content type, and underlying linguistic ideology. News and educational (da'wah) videos consistently use *fusha* as the dominant language. This variety is characterized by formal structure, technical or religious vocabulary, and a controlled delivery style. These features indicate that *fusha* functions as a symbol of authority, credibility, and formality.

In contrast, opinion (podcast) and entertainment videos predominantly use *'amiyah*. This variety is marked by spontaneity, expressiveness, and the representation of local identity. The use of *'amiyah* serves to build intimacy and engagement with audiences, particularly younger viewers. However, limited insertions of *fusha* were observed in informal content, especially in moments requiring emphasis, authority, or religious reference. From a critical sociolinguistic perspective, these findings suggest that Arabic diglossia in digital media is flexible and context-dependent. Language choice on YouTube reflects strategic decisions by speakers to construct identity, negotiate meaning, and position themselves socially within digital public spaces. This finding supports previous sociolinguistic research indicating that language variation functions not only as a communicative resource but also as a marker of identity and social positioning in mediated communication (Yaghan,

2017). The distribution of language varieties across the four content categories is illustrated in Figure 1.

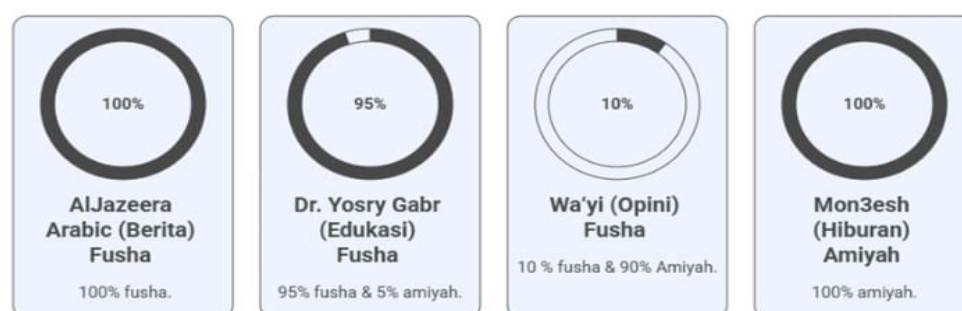


Figure 1. Arabic digital media channels demonstrate distinct patterns of diglossia, in which formal content employs *Fusha* (Modern Standard Arabic), while informal content uses '*Amiyyah* (colloquial Arabic)

The Use of Language in Arab Digital Media Channels

The findings demonstrate that the choice between *fusha* and '*amiyah* is closely related to social context, communicative goals, and audience identity. In news content, the consistent use of *fusha* reinforces its role as a language of authority and institutional credibility. In contrast, opinion and entertainment content prioritize '*amiyah* to enhance relatability, emotional engagement, and audience connection. Meanwhile, educational (da'wah) content maintains *fusha* to preserve religious authenticity and ethical values.

These patterns indicate that diglossia in Arabic digital media is no longer a rigid binary system characterized by a strict separation between *fusha* and '*amiyah*, but rather a dynamic and strategic linguistic practice. Similar observations have been reported in studies of contemporary Arabic communication, which suggest that speakers increasingly move between language varieties according to communicative needs and interactional contexts in digital settings (Yaghan, 2017). Content creators consciously select and combine language varieties according to communicative goals, audience expectations, and social contexts. Such choices enable speakers to construct identities, negotiate social meanings, establish audience engagement, and enhance the overall effectiveness of digital communication.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The analysis is based on only four videos from a single digital platform, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Language use in Arabic digital media may vary significantly across different platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or podcasts, as well as across a larger and more diverse sample of content creators. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as exploratory rather than representative of all Arabic digital communication. Future research is recommended to include a larger dataset, multiple platforms, and a wider range of content categories. Such expansion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics of Arabic diglossia in digital environments and strengthen the validity of

sociolinguistic interpretations. A comparative summary of language use across the four categories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative Summary of Arabic Language Use Across Four Video Categories

Video Type	Dominant Language Variants	Examples Of Use	Main Functions Of Language	Sociolinguistic Implications
News (Military)	Fusha (formal)	"الضربات الجوية", "تفاصيل استخباراتية"	Technical Information, Authority	Language symbols of authority & information neutrality
Opinion (Podcast)	‘Amiyah + Fusha inserts	"عاملين ايه؟", Hadith quotes in Fusha	Immediacy, spontaneity	Local identity representation & flexibility
Entertainment (Culinary)	‘Amiyah (full)	"واو والله", "شكلها خطيرة قوي"	Entertainment, social expression	‘Amiyah as a symbol of closeness & contentment
Education (Da'wah)	Fusha (full)	"تصفى قلبك", hadith and Qur’anic quotations	Spiritual messages, advice	Fusha as a symbol of purity & religious ethics

4. Conclusion

This study examined the patterns and social functions of fusha and ‘amiyah in Arabic-language YouTube content across different media genres and found that language selection is closely related to communicative goals, audience orientation, and sociolinguistic identity construction. The findings show that language choice is strongly influenced by communicative purpose, content type, and audience orientation. Fusha is predominantly used in news and educational content to convey authority, credibility, and formality, while ‘amiyah is more commonly used in opinion and entertainment content to create intimacy, express spontaneity, and engage audiences more effectively. The results confirm that Arabic diglossia in digital media is not rigid but flexible and context-dependent. Language varieties are strategically selected by content creators to construct identity, negotiate meaning, and adapt to the expectations of digital audiences. In this context, YouTube functions as a dynamic space where linguistic practices are continuously shaped and redefined.

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