

---

## THE APPLE STORE AS A SITE OF LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES: ARABIC LANGUAGE AS AN EXAMPLE

Ahmad Alzahrani

PhD Researcher, University of Southampton

Email: [aka3n18@soton.ac.uk](mailto:aka3n18@soton.ac.uk)

---

**ABSTRACT:** *Even though advertisements are thought to be mainly published for economic reasons, they are not ideology neutral. In online platforms, developers of language learning apps will need to advertise in a way that reaches a larger population and is persuasive. Utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992), Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2008), and Bhatia's (1993) model of rhetorical moves, this study explores how developers of some Arabic Language Learning Applications (ALLAs) make use of discursive rhetorical persuasive strategies to advertise their products. The study also investigates how these advertisements can be ideology loaded by analyzing the descriptions of three ALLAs available on the Apple store. Findings show that ALLA developers connect the Standard Arabic language with Islamic religion and the Arabs' identity as a rhetorical persuasive move. Also, success in Arabic language learning is promised with native Arabic speakers. Other moves link Islam to multimodal discursive units, such as colors and textile.*

**KEYWORDS:** Arabic, ideology, advertisement, rhetorical, Apple Store

---

### INTRODUCTION

Some languages are believed to exist in a standardized form (Milroy, 2001). This standard language ideology is associated with a number of assumptions that define this ideology and can reinforce its existence in a number of domains. Such assumptions can be used as tools to determine “what is good or desirable” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 55). Some of these assumptions, for example, equate standard language with prestige as a social category (Gimson, 1970); with native speakers (NSs) (Quirk, 1990); and with correctness and legitimacy (the belief that the standard form of a language is legitimate and others are not) (Milroy, 2001). It is likely that other languages have similar equating tendencies.

In fact, such associations are problematic in many ways. For example, Standard English (SE) is “conceived of as unmarked, stable and uniform” (Johnston and Lange, 2006, p.192). However, we also know that “languages are much more fluid and unstable entities than linguists seem to have believed (Milroy, 2001), and Standard Arabic (SA) is no exception. Therefore, this research will investigate how SA is being associated with different shared assumptions about Arabic and its speakers by developers of Arabic language teaching apps in the Apple Store. I believe that, through performing some discursive rhetorical moves, advertisers of these apps aim to “establish credentials” (Bhatia, 1993) that can help them sell their apps at higher rates. In fact, advertising is a very manipulative act that can alter values (Dyer, 1982), and is thus worth investigating.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A distinctive feature of the Arabic language is its existence in a diglossic situation in which two levels – *Standard Arabic* (SA) and *Colloquial Arabic* (QA) (Ferguson, 1959) – are competing with each other to gain access to spoken and written public discourse. Chambers (2003) argues that “it [SA] cannot fill

the role of the [spoken] standard variety in the social stratification” (p. 160). That is so because QA is thought of as a distorted version of the SA and, historically, “stigmatized for its divisive influence” on the Arabs unity (Suleiman, 2011, p. 12). This makes it difficult for Arabs to accept the co-existence of two levels of the same language, especially in public media discourse like TV and advertisement. For example, Alshamrani (2012) investigated the diglossic situation in some Arabic TV channels and concluded that policymakers should be aware of its increase and should take actions to promote using the *high* Arabic form (SA) to avoid deterioration of the standard Arabic (my emphasis).

In relation to advertising language teaching services, language is being ideologically commodified. For example, language institutions try to persuade their customers of the reliability of their language products by attaching them to different social meanings that stem from shared beliefs about language, like the standard language ideology. According to Piller (2011), such exploitation of social meaning aims to “create authenticity, to reference an original, and to transfer the positive associations of a cultural or linguistic stereotype onto a product” (p. 96). For example, Mirhosseini (2015) found that English private institutions promoted the native English speaker as the ideal teacher, which gives authenticity to their practices.

### Research Questions

*This research aims to answer the following research question:*

*-How standard Arabic ideology is being presented and promoted in advertising Arabic learning apps in the Apple Store?*

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Collection, Context and Research Procedure

The context of this research is the online advertisement of Arabic language learning applications within the Apple Store, in which data will be collected from the descriptions provided with these apps. Procedurally, on my iPhone device and at the App Store, I used the search keyword: *learn Arabic (in English)*. I have chosen the first 30 results of the search feedback. However, the store is updated regularly and might call a different list on a different search.

### Analytical Framework

To unmask impeded ideologies in online discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used as a theoretical framework. However, CDA is not a method but “a discourse analysis with attitude” (Van Dijk, 2001) that can be combined with methods from different disciplines. Thus, based on CDA, this research will use, as an analytic method, Bhatia’s (1993) model of rhetorical moves; particularly “establishing credentials”. This persuasive move is primarily located at the description of the app and aims to convince the customers that we know what you need; we are the experts, and thus, we will provide help. Locating this rhetorical move will be made holistically based on the meaning of the analyzed stretch of discourse (Fairclough, 2003). Keeping in mind the fact that advertising can include different visuals modes, such as logos (Klein, 2001, p. 194), some reflections on multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2008) will be conducted. The MDA aims to investigate the interactions between different semiotic modes to produce meaning.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Arabic and Islamic religion

To establish credentials, advertisers make a connection between SA and the Islamic religion. This connection is based on the belief that SA is the form of language that Muslims need to learn to know their religion and to be able to read the Quran, the holy book of Muslims. The Quran is written in the highest and the most prestigious version of SA, which makes SA, to Arabs, a heavenly language (Chejne, 1969, p. 6). Therefore, developers of some apps are taking advantage of that in order to address the customers' needs and eventually results in selling the app. Such reproduction of beliefs might lead to a reinforcement of the standard Arabic language ideology. For example, an app called (Let's Learn Arabic with Zaky) writes the flowing lines in its description:

*... Zaky teaches the Arabic alphabet, numbers, colours, & lots of Arabic words in a fun & entertaining way. Children will also learn about Allah (God), the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and many Islamic Topics.*

This connection addresses the desire of most Muslim parents to teach their children Arabic to become good Muslims and to be able to read the Quran. The choice of the app's name is also relevant. Zaky is a popular Arabic name that means (free from sins); thus, representing what a good Muslim should be (Almaany, n.d). Another app called (Quranic: Learn Quran & Arabic) is developed to help people learn "Quranic Arabic" to be able to read the Quran. In fact, SA is believed to be the language of the Quran and calling it "Qur'anic Arabic" is a persuasive move that aims to connect SA to Islam and to reinforce the connection between learning SA and being a true Muslim. It says in the app's description:

*.... Our highly effective spaced repetition method of teaching [Quran] increases how much information you retain, so learning Arabic can be fast.*

This is also evident in the use of the logo and pictures of the apps below:



Arabic by NEMO



Learn Arabic Phrasebook



Let's Learn Arabic with Zaky

**Figure 1. Names and logos of ALLAs from Apple Store**

These logos bear Islamic architecture and textile accompanied by pictures representing Islamic symbols, such as the Quran itself or the mosque (Muslims' worshiping place). The green color in Figure 1. above is also representative of the Islamic religion. It is the color of the Quran and the Saudi flag; Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam. In fact, colours choices are not random, but something socially constructed (Costantini, 2018).

### Arabic Identity

An indicative feature of someone's "pure" Arabic identity is her skills in speaking the SA. This judgment comes in as a response to the complex linguistic situation in the Arab world that was

conquered by the Ottomans during the last century. Upon their ruling period, Ottomans tried to modernize the SA by adding some Turkish words to it, which was heavily resisted by the Arabs who considered this a contaminating act to the purity of the SA (Suleiman, 2001). Thus, this contaminated version of SA, the colloquial one (QA), is thought to bear ideological forces aim to divide Arab unity (Suleiman, 2011). Here, one of the persuasive rhetorical moves used by an app named *Arabic Alphabet* is quoting the developer personal struggle to preserve his identity after moving to the USA:

*"I was born and raised in Morocco, with Arabic as my language of origin. When I moved to America, I want to be sure that I didn't lose my identity and my culture. After my first son was born, this became even more important to me as I want him to understand the importance of his heritage. I developed the Arabic Alphabet so that adults and children alike could have a fun way to accurately learn the foundations of the language...."*

In quoting this in the app, the developer is trying to establish credentials by indicating that I understand your fears of losing your identity, culture, and heritage, and I can help you preserve them through learning the accurate form of Arabic, SA. Also, this association between language and accuracy can be related to what Milroy (2001) called "*the standard-language culture*"; one of its aspects is the "*firm belief in correctness*". This will be explored further in the next section.

### **Native Speakers Teaching the Perfect Language**

Another common rhetorical move used by advertisers is promoting the idea that, through our apps, we offer you the best teaching experience of the perfect language with our native-speaker teachers. This notion is commonly associated with the linguistic competence in which the ideal speaker exists in a "completely homogeneous speech community" and the one who "knows his language perfectly" (Chomsky, 1965, p.3). In fact, native speakers themselves, who are expected to properly judge the correctness of a language, do make mistakes and need help with their language as well (Milroy, 2001). Correctness is one of the consequences of the standardization of languages in which there is commonly a confirmed belief among speakers that there is a "correct, or canonical, form of language" (ibid). Here are some examples of how some apps are promoting this notion of "the perfect speaker teaching the perfect language":

#### ***Arabic by NEMO App***

- \*Turn your iPhone, iPad, and Apple watch into your FAVOURITE teacher of Arabic. (their caps.)*
- \*The most essential words and phrases of the language, each with native speaker audio.*

#### ***Learn Arabic Phrasebook.***

- \*Learn Arabic is recorded using **native speakers**, and we have tried our best to be **authentic** in the **pronunciation** whilst ensuring it is easy to understand. (my emphasis).*

### **Limitations and implications**

One of the limitations of this research is that the data collected is very few. Further investigation of customers' feedback on the selected apps might give an in-depth picture of the issue. Another limitation is related to the concern that CDA can be interpretive in nature and might generate subjective data analysis. Quantitative approaches to exploring language beliefs also have the potential to yield informative data, especially when tracing long-term changes of beliefs (Da-Silva et al., 2007). Moreover, investigating other Bhatia's (1993) rhetorical moves might yield more themes and give a fuller picture of the issue. Hopefully, this research has contributed to the body of knowledge of how

standard Arabic language ideology is being discursively promoted in online advertisements in the context of language teaching applications in electronic stores like Apple. Also, further investigation is needed in different online contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This research has investigated how the standard Arabic ideology is being presented and promoted in the online public discourse of Arabic language learning applications in the Apple Store. Within the framework of CDA, Bhatia's (1993) model of rhetorical moves, particularly "establishing credential", was used to analyze the developers' advertisements on some Arabic language learning apps. The findings show that the standard Arabic ideology is being promoted by associating it with assumptions like Islamic religion, Arabic identity, and the native speaker as the best teacher. Such associations are believed by the advertisers to get the customers' trust and meet their expectations and thus selling the apps at higher rates. However, it is believed that they can also reinforce the standard language ideology. Further investigation of customers' feedback, other online contexts, and quantitative data analysis are also likely to contribute to the understating of the issue.

## References

- Almaany, T. Zaky meaning in names Disctionay. Retrieved from <https://www.almaany.com/ar/name/زاکي/>. Accessed on [5 April, 2019].
- Alshamrani, H. (2012). Diglossia on Arabic TV stations. *Journal of King Saudi University-Languages and Translation* 24(1), 57-69.
- Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analysing Genre: Language use in Professional Settings*. London: Longman.
- Chambers, J. K. (2003). *Sociolinguistic Theory: Linguistic Variation and Its Social Significance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chejne, A. G. (1969). *The Arabic Language: Its Role in History*. Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1965) *Syntactic Structures*, London: Mouton.
- Costantini, G. L. (2018). [Review of the book Red: The History of a Color by Michel Pastoureau; translated by Jody Gladding]. *Leonardo*, 51(1), 95–96.
- Da-Silva, C., Mellado, V., Ruiz, C., & Porlan, R. (2007). Evolution of the conceptions of a secondary education biology teacher. *Longitudinal Analysis Using Cognitive Maps*, 91(3), 461-491.
- Dyer, G. (2008). *Advertising as Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word* 15(2), 325-340.
- Gimson, A. C., & Ramsaran, S. (1970). *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (Vol. 4). London: Edward Arnold.
- Klein, N. (2001). *No Logo*. London: HarperCollins.
- Kress, G. R., & van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Reading images: the grammar of visual design* (2. ed.). London: Routledge.
- Piller, I. (2011). *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Mirhosseini, S.-A. (2015). Resisting Magic Waves: Ideologies of "English language teaching" in Iranian Newspaper Advertisements. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36(6), 932–947.

- Milroy, J. (2001). Language ideologies and the consequences of standardization. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 5(4), 530-555.
- Suleiman, Y. (2011). *Arabic, Self and Identity: A Study in Conflict and Displacement*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- van Dijk, T. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity. In Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. *Introducing Qualitative Methods: Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 95-120): SAGE Publications, Ltd
- Quirk, R. (1990). Language varieties and standard language. *English Today* 21, 3-10.