The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Linguistics

Edited by Elabbas Benmamoun and Reem Bassiouney

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK
OF ARABIC LINGUISTICS

The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Linguistics introduces readers to the major facets of research on Arabic and of the linguistic situation in the Arabic-speaking world.

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The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Linguistics is a much-needed resource for researchers on Arabic and comparative linguistics, syntax, morphology, computational linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics, and also for undergraduate and graduate students studying Arabic or linguistics.

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CONTENTS

Contents

Contents

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29

ARABIC POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Emad Abdul Latif

1 Introduction

Political discourse analysis (PDA) is a discipline mainly concerned with the study of political communication in society whether via texts, speeches, images, references, symbols, or other signs. The aim of PDA is to understand how political discourses (PD) work, and how they perform their functions which are often associated with obtaining, legitimizing, and maintaining power (Chilton 2004; Van Dijk 2008). PDA includes the analysis of discourse production, linguistic and semiotic structures, performance, distribution, reception, influence, and response.

PDA is a wide trans-disciplinary field which involves political sciences, communication studies, sociology, psychology, linguistics, rhetoric, cognitive science, anthropology, and many others. This is not surprising particularly that PD – being a multi-dimensional human phenomenon – can only be grasped by drawing on various disciplines that belong to social studies and humanities. What mostly distinguishes PDA is that it gives great attention to the structures, aesthetics, and performances of discourses rather than their political thesis and ideas. This is mainly due to the conception that what political discourses mean and do is more apparently manifested in how they were said. In addition, emphasis on discourse formations is backed by a shared belief that a better understanding of political discourses (necessarily) depends on a deep understanding of its linguistic, semiotic, and rhetorical features.

This chapter will focus on Arab political discourse analysis. I use the word 'Arab' to refer to studies that analyze discourses or texts written in Arabic, which is regarded as the official political language in most of the Arab countries. The adjective 'Arab' will be used to refer to the language of the texts studied and not the language of study. Hence, studies written in languages other than Arabic about Arab political discourse (APD) fall under this definition. According to the same definition, I will not consider studies that approach texts or talks written or spoken in languages other than Arabic even if these texts were produced, distributed, or consumed in the Arab world as is the case with foreign newspapers published in the Arab world or the political statements, speeches, and announcement produced by Arab regimes in languages other than Arabic.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part, section 2, reviews PD studies in the Arab heritage whereas the second part, section 3, explores the most important trends in APD in modern and contemporary ages. The third part, section 4, offers some predictions related to

the future of APD especially in light of the recent radical transformations taking place in the Arab world. Finally, the fourth part, section 5, encompasses some recommendations and a list of understudied topics.

2 Historical background and perspective

2.1 Studies of PD in the Arab heritage

Little is known about APD before Islam. However, Arabs were most certainly familiar with political discourse, especially inaugural speeches and battle speeches. Poetry was the most important tool of political propaganda in pre-Islamic Arab communities. Each tribe had a poet who defended it against the criticism of others and who was deeply involved in creating the tribal identity in an attempt to serve its existence. If the tribe did not give birth to a talented poet, it was to hire one who was loyal to it. Further, Arabs in the medieval times knew written and verbal political messages, particularly those exchanged among tribe chieftains, princes, and kings. Some tribes had forums for political discussions, debates, and negotiations about the political status-quo such as Dar Al-Nadwa (The Seminar House) in pre-Islamic Mecca. In fact, Arabs before Islam were known for their political rhetoric, especially oratory which was one of the most important types of political communication in the medieval world.

As the Islamic empire rose from the 7th century onwards, so did the need for effective PD to spread the religious message and serve the political interests of the empire. Prophet Muhammad used traditional political genres such as oratory, debates, messages, and commandments. The speeches of Muhammad and the poems of Hassan Ibn Thabit, a companion and poet who died in 675, represented the discursive front of early Islamic political discourse. Some verses of the Qur'an represent political discourse, especially those that address power dynamics such as the relationship with the ruler, the ethics and laws of war, and the relationship with minorities. Additionally, early Muslims knew different forms of political negotiation as evidenced by the incident of Suqayfat Bani Sa'ada which followed the death of the Prophet. That incident saw a controversy between al-Muhājirīn (the immigrants) and al-Anṣār (the supporters; the locals of Medina) about the eligibility of each of them to hold power and resulted in Abu Bakr (one of the Muhājirīn) claiming power.

In the eras of the Umayyads and Abbasids, Arabs were deeply interested in political communication. This interest was manifested in two areas. The first was the establishment and development of written political communication methods. This was achieved through the establishment of Diwan al Inshaa (Composition Bureau) in the Ummaid's era. One of the tasks of this bureau was the production of a political language that meets the political communication needs of domestic rule and foreign relations. The Bureau also produced political statements, jargon, and expressions which were then developed and re-incarnated over many centuries. People who worked in this field left a huge legacy of writings, most important of which were the educational handbooks written by the most famous writers in this Bureau such as Ibn Al-Muqafa' and Abdul Hamid Al-Katib. Such books were mainly addressed to beginners. These books, in addition, included recommendations for the traditions of writing, language, and context, and tackled interesting topics such as the types of pens and paper that can be used, sayings and proverbs that can be cited, and the social standards of the writers. The aim of these writings was to develop the writers' abilities to produce effective and influential rhetoric. Abi Ja'afar Al Nahas's Sana'at Al-Kitaba (The Craft of Writing, 950) and al-Qalqashandī's Ṣubḥ al-aʿshá fī sināʿat al-inshā (Lights on Composition, 1411) are good examples of such

writings. Amongst these writings, a huge legacy of Sultani literature was concerned with the specificities of linguistic use in the institutions of power.

As for the second field, it revolves around the study of different kinds of oral political communication such as political speeches made on special occasions (for example after the Caliph's pledge of allegiance), before clashes with enemies and after Friday prayers (when the Caliphs and the custodians were themselves the preachers), or political speeches in times of emergency, in addition to political debates and negotiations. Scholars interested in this field have provided a description of the features of political linguistic activities, recommend a list of things that should be avoided and gave general advice to help the speaker excel (al-Jahiz 1950).

Throughout the Islamic medieval world, four approaches to PD could be identified.

2.1.1 The descriptive approach: Al-Jahiz as example

This approach describes the incidents of political discourse and takes into account the description of the orator's appearance, audience, methods of performance, and persuasion techniques. Al-Jahiz's approach in his book *Al-Bayan Wa At-Tabyin* (The Book of Eloquence and Demonstration) can be regarded as a good example of the descriptive approach. The most prominent issues observed and tackled by Al-Jahiz in his approach to Arab oratory can be summarized in five major categories.

2.1.1.1 SPECIFYING DEFECTS IN THE SPEECH AND PRONUNCIATION SYSTEM OF THE SPEAKER

Al-Jahiz explored some defects in pronunciation and speech such as lexical poverty, aphasia, and tautology. He also discussed high and low voice attributes.

2.1.1.2 STYLE

Al-Jahiz mentions attributes such as excessive talking, the pros and cons of repetition, the eloquence of being brief, the disadvantages of different techniques of speech, humor, affectation, verbosity, and the reasons and places of citation. He also discusses the relationship between the rhetorical situation and its structure and timespan.

2.1.1.3 TECHNIQUES OF RHETORICAL PERFORMANCE

Al-Jahiz talks about issues of improvisation and prepared speeches. He also discusses the body language of the speaker during the speech as it is exposed in his composure and body, whether he has eye contact with the audience, and whether he touches his beard. He tackles the impact of physiological phenomena on the performance, be they negative such as shivering, trembling, or sweating, or positive such as saliva. He brings to light the situations where the speaker should remain silent and what the speaker should do if he does not know what to say or if he stammers. He also discusses the rituals of performance in Arab rhetoric.

2.1.1.4 THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Al-Jahiz tackles various dimensions of the different states of the audience, pointing to the speaker to take into account the different social classes the audiences belong to, and the different levels of education they received. The speaker, he argued, should also take notice of

whether the audiences are interested in his talk or getting bored. Ultimately, Al-Jahiz advised the speaker to vary his style according to audience layers (the elite and the crowd).

Al-Jahiz made transient hints to issues such as the dislike of eloquence due to the widening gap between words and actions, the relationship between speech and power, and the impact of rhetoric in changing the perception of the real world. Furthermore, he explored the spread of rhetoric among nations and claims that Arabs have unique public speaking practices and skills.

Despite the fact that the issues mentioned cover large parts of the domain of rhetoric, Al-Jahiz's approach does not establish a systematic methodology. This could be due to the following reasons:

First: despite the wide area explored by Al-Jahiz, and his deep insights on some important issues in his study of rhetoric (such as the physiological changes affecting the performance of the speaker and the relationship between rhetoric and reality), the ideas he provided in his book on rhetoric came in the form of partial and scattered comments and hence, was not organized in a comprehensive theoretical format as with Aristotle and Plato's works (Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*).

Second: the notes of Al-Jahiz involve a precise description of the rhetorical performance. However, the imperative dimension dominates much of his comments in an attempt to achieve the 'perfect speech'. Moreover, some of his scattered ideas about what the speaker should do or say in the context of his speech might be considered a nucleus for handbooks on the acquisition of rhetorical skills. The critical approach has therefore got low attention from Al-Jahiz's treatment of rhetoric on the levels of the gap between language and reality, the linguistic promise and achievement, the authoritarian practices of consolidating social inequality, discrimination, hegemony, control, and other practices of social injustice implemented by the speech, especially the PD in the Islamic Medieval world.

Third: in his treatment of rhetoric, Al-Jahiz offers neither tools for speech analysis, nor explanation for his approach. The methodological framework is almost absent from his work which is a common feature in the Arab treatment in general, and Al-Jahiz's treatment in particular.

That being said, the list of topics tackled by Al-Jahiz, as mentioned earlier, is not devoid of benefits. This is because it can be dealt with as a preliminary list for the various dimensions of a rhetorical event. Additionally, his cultural observations provide a rich source of information for researchers with anthropological interests in the discursive rituals practiced by Arabs and the interpretation of these rituals in relation to rhetoric.

2.1.2 The prescriptive approach: the Soltani literature books and the craft of writing

Soltani literature refers to instruction books that include recommendations and political teachings addressed mainly to the ruler and his assistants (Allaam 2006). A large part of these teachings pertains to political communication especially between the ruler and his subjects. The aim of these writings is to help rulers maintain power through effective communication. These sets of recommendations are structured as standard statements in the form of polite 'dos and don'ts' formulated in figurative, euphemized allegorical language. The authors usually cite historical events, sayings, and previous writings to illustrate their point.

These books encompass tips on how to employ political symbols to strengthen power, the contexts in which the ruler should address his people, and the image he must build in their minds via his speech. These texts also specify what should be said or not said in different situations, as well as the rituals of conversation in the public space. Although it is difficult to say for certain whether politicians were putting these tips into practice, these writings left an important rhetorical repertoire for political communication in traditional communities. The Soltani writings, furthermore, contributed to establishing traditions of rhetorical techniques in both written and verbal political communication.

2.1.3 The Aristotelian approaches by Muslim philosophers

Arabs came to know Aristotle's book *On Rhetoric* around the eight century AD. Its presence continued for several centuries in Arab perceptions of persuasive discourses including political ones. The deliberative genre was among the first three sub-types identified by Aristotle, in addition to the forensic genre and the epideictic genre. However, Arabs re-adapted their translations and summaries of *On Rhetoric* to suit the specificity of Arab societies especially in terms of cultural production and political reality. For example, Arabs did not develop mechanisms to convince voters of the eligibility of the ruler-candidate to maintain power as was the case in ancient Athens. In fact, people in the Muslim world have rarely been consulted on political matters prior to the modern era. The conflict over power was often resolved through hard power rather than soft power. Consequently, a crisis in the public sphere existed, the effects of which are still present today. This had a great influence on the application of the Aristotelian approach to political discourse which remained limited and formal. It is unsurprising that the third chapter of *On Rhetoric* which tackles style features received the greatest attention from Arab philosophers (al-Omari 1986). *On Rhetoric* became a reference, in Arab reception, on style and types of arguments rather than a reference on the efficiency of persuasion in the public sphere.

2.1.4 The absence of a critical approach

The prescriptive and descriptive approaches to political discourse were more common than the critical approach. It is very hard, as it were, to find ancient Arab works that deal with critique of PD in terms of it being a tool for domination and hegemony, or in terms of uncovering the manipulative techniques. This could be attributed to the lack of societal and academic freedom. However, the absence of critical approaches to PD did not hinder criticisms of speeches by some politicians. Classical books have quoted examples of such critique, most important of which are those directed posthumously at the political discourse of Al-Hajjaj Bin Yusuf Al-Thaqafi (660–714), a bloody but eloquent ruler, especially criticism directed at the credibility gap between his words and actions.

Notwithstanding such critiques, the lack of political freedom was simply non-conducive to their flourishing. Hence, they were provoked by the Caliph Suliman Bin AbdelMalik (674–717) at that time and produced many years after Al-Hajjaj's death. The comparison between what the critics of Al-Hajjaj's speeches could have said during his lifetime and what they were able to say after is illustrated in a narration by al-Mubarid (1997) that Yehia Ibn Ya'amar (died 746) once told Al-Hajjaj that he makes linguistic mistakes in his speeches. Al-Hajjaj asked him to choose whether to be killed or exiled in punishment for pointing to repeated grammatical and morphological errors in Al-Hajjaj's speeches. Yehia chose exile.

The Umayyad and Abbasid states knew many faces of political conflict. However, such conflicts did not lead to the emergence of critical approaches to the political language of each political group. This is due to the fact that these conflicts were not – in many cases – avowedly disputes reflecting political multiplicity, but were, to a great extent, conflicts between totalitarian, dominating powers and other hidden powers. In other words, these were usually conflicts between hard powers and not between political discourses.

Claiming and replacing power in light of existing autocratic monarchs often happened without the participation of the people who had no right to criticize the ruler publicly. Practitioners of such a right were exposed to varying degrees of punishment. Thus, due to the absence of societal freedom and academic independence, and the pre-domination of autocratic regimes that claimed legitimacy based on divine mandate, people did not have a choice but to submit to such regimes. Hence, a critical approach towards PD in Arab heritage never emerged. This has led to the dominance of non-critical reception for the PD of the ruler and his assistants. The medieval Arab, whether a scholar or a layman, became tied to a single domineering PD which he could either adopt or remain passive about.

Despite the fact that modern Arab societies turned from being tribal theocratic regimes to republics and modern monarchies where the power of people is roused, the right of PD critique remained constrained, as will be demonstrated later. Methods and approaches to PD analysis have therefore not changed very much. Over the next sections of this chapter, I will review the most common methodologies used in the study of PD in the modern Arab world.

3 Modern and contemporary Approaches and disiplines of PD

The second part of the twentieth century witnessed a significant development in PD studies. PD has become an inter-disciplinary research field; within its framework, various methods and approaches are applied. This increasing academic interest corresponded to the spread of mass media which led to widening the scope of influence of political discourse as well as creating profound transformations in its structures, mediums, and functions. In the meantime, several methods and approaches were developed to study the language of politics. For example, Landtsheer (1998) has presented a long list of methods, approaches, and disciplines associated with the study of PD. The list includes: rhetoric, political communication, political psychology and propaganda, political vocabulary, historical semantics, political lexicology, German political language studies, official languages, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, the philosophy of language and post-modernism. This list demonstrates the variety of methods and approaches used in the study of PD. It also highlights the predominance of linguistic approaches in the analysis of current PD.

However, Landtsheer's list lacks organization, as Landtsheer assigns a separate section to German studies of the language of politics but does not treat French or English studies the same way, despite the specificity of the study in these languages. In addition, it is possible to include German studies of the language of politics within some other items especially political lexicology. Besides, the separation between political vocabulary, lexicology, and historical semantics raises some queries. It would have been better to treat all three fields as a single field concerned with the semantic and lexical aspects of political language. Finally, the list encompasses three different categories: the first category includes sub-disciplines in the framework of PDA such as the fields of vocabulary, lexicography, and semantics; the second includes

disciplines which encompass PDA such as rhetoric, philosophy of language, and sociolinguistics, and the third includes political discourses such as propaganda and the official language of politics. Nevertheless, Landtsheer's list reflects the richness and complexity of PDA in the West. Arabic PDA, by contrast, is not as varied or broad as its Western counterpart. Although non-linguistic approaches usually dominate the study of PD, seven different disciplines that are associated with PD may be identified.

3.1 Rhetorical studies

Since Plato wrote *The Dialogue of Gorgias* and Aristotle wrote *On Rhetoric,* rhetoric became one of the dominant disciplines in the study of PD. The rhetorical approach has provided categories for political speeches as well as descriptions of the rhetorical and linguistic features of these speeches. It also offered prescripts and instructions that help produce effective Arabic PD. In the meantime, there has been a multitude of studies that employ rhetorical approaches to analyzing Arabic political speeches. Some of these studies focus on analyzing argumentation and persuasion strategies in PD. For instance, Nasr (1981) studies argumentation techniques in the nationalist discourse of the late Egyptian president Gamal Abdul-Nasser. Moreover, Omari (1986) dealt with the persuasiveness of Arabic PD in the first century of Hijra. In addition, Arab rhetorical studies are concerned with the figurative aspects of political language. Regier and Khalidi (2009) traced the influence of the metaphor 'in the Arab street', which is commonly used in Western media in the misrepresentation of Arab public opinion. Abdul Latif (2012a) studied the context, function, and effect of conceptual metaphors in Sadat's patriarchal discourse. Furthermore, Stock (1999) studied rhythmic features and emotional appeals in speeches by Nasser, Saddam Hussein, and Mu'amer Gadhafi. Similarly, Siraj (2014) analyzed the syntactic structures of Arab political slogans as a means of political mobilization.

3.2 Communication studies

Modern political discourses are distributed over a wide range of communicative means. Much research has been done to tackle the impact of media on political discourse, audiences, political agents, social actors, political social networks, citizenship, and so on (Semetko and Scammell 2012). New technologies bring about new spaces for political discourse and particularly social media in the Arab world, which has been studied extensively for its impact on the Arab Spring. Communication technologies have also radically changed the role of the audience. They facilitate active reception, audience discourses, and effective responses. Studying audiences' verbal and non-verbal responses to APD is a very interesting research area, albeit an understudied one. Abdul Latif (2009, 2011), for example, studied applause and cheering in forty-five Egyptian speeches. He investigated the relation between rhetorical features and performance on the one hand and audience responses on the other. A more general study approaches the different layers of Arab audiences in the political domain (Khalil 2005). It analyses how ideology, or tribal or religious affiliation affects audiences' responses to political discourse in the Arab public sphere.

3.3 Sociolinguistics

There have been various sociolinguistic trends in PD. One trend is oriented towards political resistance discourses and tackles different forms of struggle between the discourses of the occupier and the occupied. It also highlights how PD, and political speeches specifically have

turned into a resistance power against hegemony and invasion. Marzuq (1967) is regarded as one of the key studies in this regard. It deals with PD during the British occupation of Egypt, analyzing the methods of persuasion and argumentation, and the formation of speeches and their contexts which include time, place, addresser, addressee, and audience's reception. The author employs a descriptive approach that distinguishes his study from earlier work that adopted a mostly prescriptive approach.

Other studies focused on language of conflict. For example, Suleiman's (2004) writings about the language of hegemony and occupation are considered crucial contributions to this field. Likewise, a variety of studies have analyzed the dimensions of identity in APD (Suleiman 2003). Another trend of PD studies in the framework of sociolinguistics has concerned itself with style variation, code-switching, and diglossia. Style variation in the speeches of Nasser, Saddam Hussein, and Mubarak have been studied by Holes (1993) and Mazraani (1997), Mazraani (1995), and Bassiouney (2002, 2006) respectively. In addition, Naima Boussafara-Omar (2005) tackled style change in a statement by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

3.4 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Arabic PD has flourished over the past ten years. This is reflected in the increasing number of studies that tackle the relationship between discourse and power in the Arab world. These studies usually focus on questioning how APD enhances social injustice and hegemony in an attempt to uncover its manipulative and concealing tactics. For example, Dunne (2003) dealt with the Egyptian PD about democracy and unveiled that this discourse usually serves political functions for the Egyptian regime, institutions, and individuals. Furthermore, Abdul Latif (2012b) studied the discourse of the Arab Spring and brought to light how discourse manipulates Arab audiences in transformed societies.

Nonetheless, the critique of Arab political language emerged before CDA. Abdul-Aleem (1990) wrote an important study on the critique of Sadat's PD in the late 1980s wherein he stressed the role of language in concealing the interests and biases of Sadat's regime.

3.5 Pragmatics

Studying what political discourses do in the real world is an important aspect of PDA. However, a little work has been done to study the pragmatics of Arabic political discourses. Mazid (2010) investigated how pragmatics serves analyzing Arab political discourse by analyzing few case studies. In addition, Al-Jarrah et al. (2015) studied how Relevance Theory could be used to study selection of Jordanian parliamentary speeches. Similarly, Al-Gublan (2015) suggests a pragmatic model for the analysis of a political election discourse based on the Linguistic Adaptation Theory. Furthermore, Taweel et al. (2011) make use of other aspects of pragmatics and study hedging in spoken Arab political discourse.

3.6 Political lexicology

Political lexicology encompasses the disciplines of political vocabulary, historical semantics, and political lexicology. Bernard Lewis's (1991) study 'The Political Language of Islam' is among the earliest political lexicology studies. In this study, Lewis tackles the most common political terminology in Islam. The book primarily studies the political system in Islam and its development by highlighting basic concepts and terms in this system and their transformations. Other political lexicology studies have been involved in the analysis of the

vocabulary of autocratic regimes (Bengio 1998; Stock 1999). Bengio's book deals with the political lexicology of Saddam Hussein and the National Iraqi Baath Party, whilst Stock's is concerned with the political lexicon in Nasser's, Saddam Hussein's, and Al-Gaddafi's speeches.

3.7 Historical approaches

Plenty of studies are interested in the history of Arabic PD and they provide valuable information about the most important speeches, speakers, and contexts of these speeches, as well as their reception (Nuss 1963). Other studies have examined speech types, their characteristics, conditions, samples, and figures (Abu Zahrah 1980).

4 Current contributions and research

Studies of political discourse in the current Arab world: justifying scarcity

Interest in APD has grown in the last few decades due to the spread of mass media and the emergence of the era of the masses. PD, as a tool for political communication, had particular value in specific historical circumstances such as struggle for independence and wars and confrontations over power. Protest movements against occupation led to the appearance of nationalist discourses which attracted the attention of large sectors of the Arab peoples. For example, the written and oral discourses of Abdullah Al Nadim (1842–1896), Mustafa Kamel (1874–1906), Saad Zaghloul (1858–1927) and Makram Ebeid (1889–1961) in Egypt; Farah-hat Hashad (1914–1952) in Tunisia; Alal Al Fassy (1910–1974), Abdul Kahliq Al Taris (1910–1970), Al Mahdi Ibn Baraka (1920–1965), and Omar Ibn Galon (1936–1975) in Morocco; and Massaly Al Hajj (1989–1974) and Farahat Abbas (1899–1985) in Algeria; and many others in different Arab countries were very effective in mobilizing Arab people and constructing national identities. The popularity of these discourses soared and the scope of their influence widened in the 1950s and 60s along with the escalation of the wave of Arab nationalism and the prosperity of the nation state discourse. Presidents such as Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt (1918–1970), Hawari Bou Madian of Algeria (1932–1978), and Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia (1903–2000) enhanced their local and international popularity through their public image as effective speakers.

Despite the increasing influence and widening scope of PD in post-independence Arab countries, studies of APD did not keep up with this pace. It could be argued that Arabic studies concerned with modern PD are strikingly few in comparison to Arabic studies tackling literature (fiction and poetry) and studies dealing with PD in other languages.

The scarcity of academic research on APD is due to many factors, most prominent of which are elaborated next.

4.1 Change in the map of literary genres

The influence of Western literature on Arab culture during the early 20th century led to the deconstruction of prevailing aesthetic conceptions. In the context of this process, the description 'literary' was stripped from some of its heritage genres such as political letters, speeches, and articles. From that point on, such genres were considered outsiders to the circle of literary genres. Consequently, language and literature students lost interest in PD. This exclusion was

exacerbated by the fact that students of political sciences and communication sciences in the Arab world usually use non-linguistic methods and approaches in their study of PD.

4.2 Restricted freedom

The second factor that strongly influences the field of PDA is the lack of academic freedom. The emergence of sciences and knowledge, their development or extinction, as well as the transformations that happen within them are not only subject to academic factors, but are also profoundly affected by their sociopolitical context. It could be said that the effect of non-academic societal powers, especially political powers, on PDA is the most influential factor causing the deficiency of Arabic studies within it. Throughout the past centuries, research on the language of politicians was perilous. Silence, in the name of 'taboo', was the predominant strategy followed in relation to the study of PD especially from a critical perspective. Talking about politics, like talking about sex and religion, is regarded as a public taboo in many Arab countries. It is conceived in the academic sphere as an insecure research area especially in some autocratic monarchies and totalitarian republics.

It is rather unfortunate that this taboo is effective in academic circles, where it is more dangerous and concealed. It could be maintained that the reluctance of researchers to do PDA goes back to the lack of academic freedom that guarantees researchers the choice of research topics and perspectives as long as they meet the code of academic research ethics.

5 Future directions

5.1. The future of PDA in the Arab world

By the end of 2010, massive demonstrations erupted in Tunisia and Egypt aspiring to effect positive changes in their societies. In a few months, a number of regimes fell and others were rocked. The scope of freedom widened, for some time, unprecedentedly. The outcomes of these radical changes were manifest in the prosperity of studies, published research and specialized conferences on PD. Within the span of only two years only, four conferences were held about PDA in Tunisia and Morocco: 'Political Discourse' (Gafsa, Tunisia, 2014), 'Discourse and Power' (Safaqis, Tunisia, 2014), 'Writing and Power' (Moulay Ismail, Morocco, 2014), and 'Political Rhetoric' (Tetouan, Morocco, 2015). This sudden bloom could be attributed to the following reasons:

1   The temporal dissociation of societal and political constraints that hinder the study of Arabic PD due to widening the scope of academic freedom in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Libya.
2   The great impact of PD on the Arab Spring, particularly in countries where military clashes were not part of resolving the conflict in its early stages such as Egypt and Tunisia. Social networking sites – being the embracers of rebellion – received the greatest academic interest (Abdul Latif 2013).
3   The symbolic richness that characterized the Arab Spring, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia. Besides conventional genres like political speeches, slogans, press articles, and governmental and military statements, other genres such as graffiti, promotions, commercials, talk shows, and political satire programs appeared.
4   The increased international attention given to the study of the various discourses of the Arab Spring.

Furthermore, there are positive indicators such as the attention given to the approaches of PD studies especially critical studies of discourse, cognitive approaches, argumentation studies, and the study of multi-modality. This is demonstrated in the increasing number of published work on these topics. In addition, there is a skyrocketing interest, on a wider level, in humanities, particularly politics and linguistics. This is clear in the expansion of establishing policy and strategy research centers that are concerned with the study of PD. Furthermore, the large expansion in establishing Arab universities has led to a noticeable increasing in number of humanities departments and particularly the departments of language and linguistics.

Nevertheless, the Arab Spring carries contradictory signs at the moment. On the one hand, there is an increasing demand for public as well as academic freedom. On the other hand, there are unprecedented procedures to restrict freedom in some Arab academies. These procedures vary from threatening academics to expelling them from their work because of their political or ideological stances. This frightening academic atmosphere makes research in contemporary Arab PD a perilous endeavor in some Arab societies and it may lead some researchers to abandon it. It could be argued that the limitations of academic freedom constitute the greatest current challenge facing Arab PDA.

Nevertheless, there is another challenge, namely, the relative setback in the role of discourse itself. The regimes holding power in some post–Arab Spring states impose restrictions on the public sphere and restrict freedom of speech. The death of politics because of tyranny leads, in turn, to the death of PD as it loses its essential function; that is to say, to reach power, legitimize it, and maintain it. Although PD never wholly disappears, the boundaries of its influence are receding dreadfully. If Arab Spring countries move towards an erosion of PD, then PDA will continue to suffer more drawbacks.

5.2 Understudied topics

Studies of PD are still finding their way in the Arab world. There are important research areas which have not been adequately highlighted. For example:

- Hate speech, racism, sectarianism, and discriminative discourses in Arab societies;
- PD in Arab monarchies and traditional societies;
- PD in non-ruling political establishments such as the discourses of parties, lobbyists, and establishments, as well as religious organizations which are involved in politics either overtly or covertly;
- Daily PD such as people's protests and gatherings;
- Discourses of marginalized political groups and minorities; and
- The relationship between political and religious identities and the role of PD.

Acknowledgments

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Further reading

On political discourse in general:
- Chilton, P., 2004. Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice. London: Routledge. A classic work on PDA that introduces comprehensive analysis of European and International political discourses using Critical Discourse Analysis.
- Charteris-Black, J. 2013. Analysing political speeches: Rhetoric, discourse and metaphor. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. The book develops a methodology that combines rhetoric and critical metaphor studies to analyze a wide range of political speeches.

On Arabic political discourse:
- Dunne, M. D. 2003. Democracy in contemporary Egyptian political discourse. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing. The book studies democracy discourses in Contemporary Egypt using mixed tools. It is important, in particular, for the ethnographic approach to APD.
- Abdul Latif, E. 2013. The Rhetoric of Liberation. Beirut: Al-Tanweer. (In Arabic)

A comprehensive analysis of the political discourses of the Egyptian Uprising.