

Pre-Peace and Post-Peace Referring in Jordanian Journalistic Arabic

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This study investigates the influence of the Peace Treaty between Jordan and Israel in 1994 on Arabic journalistic language. Jordanian journalistic language is the source of our data. A representative sample was taken from *Al-Rai*, a major Jordanian daily in the period 1971–1996. Issues were surveyed, looking for shifts in language prior to and following the Peace Treaty between Jordan and Israel. This sample was then contrasted with a recent sample taken from the same daily on October 2009. The findings of this study reveal that the peace process has had a great effect on Arabic journalistic language, especially in the year of its signing. Negative names that were regularly used to refer to Israel at the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict have gradually disappeared from the Jordanian press giving rise to new positive to neutral names.

KEYWORDS pre-peace referring, post-peace referring, journalistic language, Middle-East politics, politics and language

Introduction

The relationship between the Arab states and Israel has been marked by a long history of hostility, hatred, and denial. This situation has been reflected in the language used by each party. As will be shown in this article, references to Israel, Israeli Prime Minister and the Israeli Army in the Jordanian press are excellent cases in point. Generally speaking, such references are carefully chosen to reflect the political conflict in the Middle East. To a certain extent, this finding is to be expected. Names used during conflicts are not mere labels: they are able to influence public thinking, beliefs, and political standpoints. They can also be used to change facts “to make them serve status distinctions and reinforce [...] ideology” (Edelman 1977, 61). Indeed, names during military conflicts have connotations which reach far beyond their literal meanings. In the Muslim press, for instance, mentions of Palestine may create visions of the first Kiblah. For Jewish readers, mentions of the state of Israel in the Israeli press may “generate visions of the promised land” (Graber 1981, 197). By the same token, the choice of names used to refer to Israel in the Jordanian press has never been random.

In the past, references to Israel in the Jordanian press included *Filastiin* "Palestine," *al-ardh al-muhtallah* "the occupied land" and *al-kayaan as-subyuuni* "the Zionist entity." These names were used to not only deny Israeli land claims in the conflict with Palestine, but also reflected the state of war between Jordan and Israel at that time. They also reflected the writers' ideologies during this period of armed conflict. On October 26th, 1994, Jordan and Israel reached an agreement that ended the state of war between them. This political event has left traces on Jordanian journalistic language. More specifically, new neutral nomenclature such as *israʿiil* "Israel" and *daulat israʿiil* "the state of Israel" was employed to refer to Israel, replacing older, hostile names. This study is intended to compare and contrast the names employed in the Jordanian press to refer to Israel and Israeli symbols prior to and directly after the signing of the 1994 Peace Treaty between Jordan and Israel.

The influence of political events on Arabic journalistic language has received little attention, perhaps, due to the potentially incendiary nature of this subject matter. Going through the literature which has been published, the writer noticed that studies on language change in Arabic journalistic language have been comparatively rare and largely insufficient. The bulk of the studies concerning Arabic journalistic language has focused on investigating the influence of journalistic writings on standard Arabic (Parkinson 1991; Abdelfattah 1990; Gully 1993); and classifying the loan words and translations (El-Khalil 1983; Bader 1992; Hussein and Zughoul 1993). To the best of my knowledge, there have been only two studies that investigate linguistic change in connection with political events in the Arabic Middle East: Ayalon (1987) and Abd-el-Jawad and Al-Abed Al-Haq (1997). However, these two studies do not tackle journalistic language specifically; rather they target general linguistic change in books, journals, radio, and television.

Ayalon (1987) has investigated language change in the Arab Middle East, especially in the area of the Arabic political vocabulary. However, this study did not address journalistic language separately. Instead, it examined linguistic change in a number of books and journals written in the 19th century by Arab writers. For example, Ayalon detected a developmental shift in the Arabic lexical item that had been used to refer to Europeans. He observed that the original name *ifranj* "Franks" developed into *Al-kuffaar* "the unbelievers," before it changed to *jummuu9 ash-shirk* "a band of idolaters," and then to *Al-mushrikeen* "the polytheists." Following this development, another set of complex changes took place until the name *orubbiyyuun* "Europeans" was settled upon. According to Ayalon, such lexico-semantic change is not haphazard but rather involves various paralinguistic factors, be they religious, social, ideological, or political.

Abd-el-Jawad and Al-Abed Al-Haq (1997) investigated the impact of the Peace Process in the Middle East on Arabic. They also detected change in the use of lexemes in the Jordanian mass media: papers, radio, and television. Their findings revealed a considerable shift from the use of hostile phrasing to neutral and positive tones when referring to Israel after the signing of the Peace Treaty between both Israel and the PLO as well between Jordan and Israel. The writers conclude by anticipating more linguistic steps towards normalization at both the official and unofficial levels.

Historical background

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, later to become the Arab-Israeli conflict, has been a landmark in the politics of the Middle East for almost a century. The establishment

of the State of Israel in 1948 and the accompanying war, which Arabs called the 1948 *Nakbah* “catastrophe,” have left feelings of routed defeat and deep frustration on the Arab psyche. Concretely, the 1976 war added to the complexity of already heated land conflicts (i.e., the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza Strip, Syrian Golan Heights, and Egyptian Sinai).

In 1978, Egypt and Israel drafted a preliminary framework for peace after a meeting held in Camp David (Institute for Palestine Studies 1979). This framework developed into a Peace Treaty signed in Washington in 1979. In 1982, south Lebanon was occupied by the Israelis, thus adding extra tension to the conflict. In 1986 an uprising known as *Intifada* was carried out by the Palestinians to protest against the Israelis (HaCohen 1997). The political situation was explosive and war seemed to be inevitable.

A glimpse of hope appeared in Madrid Conference in 1991. Delegations from several Arab countries were to meet and negotiate with an Israeli delegation, under American and Russian auspices for the first time in history. A noticeable breakthrough was reached between Israel and the PLO with the mutual recognition and the signing of the “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements” (HaCohen 1997, 4). This was in Oslo I, 1993. Following this one, a number of agreements were signed, the most important of which was the “Interim Agreement” in Oslo II, 1995. These agreements resulted in the establishment of a “Palestinian National Authority” (PNA) “that enjoys a certain amount of Autonomy in the Gaza Strip and Jerico” (HaCohen 1997, 4).

Jordan followed the PLO and signed a Peace Treaty with Israel on October 26th, 1994. In this treaty, it was agreed that Jordan would regain control over its occupied land provided that Israeli farmers stay in their farms for a period of 25 years as land hirers from the Jordanian government (The Peace Treaty Text). With this agreement, the state of war between Jordan and Israel reached an end.

Procedure

Jordanian journalistic writings are the source of our data. A representative sample was taken from one of the major Jordanian dailies, *Al-Rai*. The selection of this newspaper stems from the fact that it has the greatest circulation among Jordanian newspapers and is one of the oldest newspapers, having been established in 1971. The samples selected for this investigation were taken from the first issue of each month from 1971 to 1996 with special attention to those texts which dealt with the October 26th Peace Treaty. In addition, for point of comparison, a modern sample was taken from the same daily on October 2009. This means that 325 issues from *Al-Rai* were surveyed to identify possible changes in the names used before and after the Peace Treaty. Particular attention was directed to analyzing the editorials, the daily columns, the local news stories and news reports. The issues were surveyed in their original paper format at the Paper Archive at the Department of Journalism in Yarmouk University, Jordan. This study was meant to be qualitative rather than quantitative, i.e., issues were surveyed in order to compile lists of references to Israel prior to and after the Peace Treaty. No statistical information was collected although it would be recommended for future research on this subject.

Results and Discussion

Pre-peace treaty period (August 31st, 1971–September 30th, 1994)

As noted earlier, the relationship between the Arabs and Israelis has been marked by a long history of violence, hatred and denial. Prior to the peace treaty, the Jordanian press employed tens of lexical items to refer to Israel all of which have reflected the state of war between the two countries. Israel was portrayed as the enemy, occupier, invader and usurper. Some of the names which were found include the following: *al-gaduu* “the enemy”; *al-gaduu as-suhyuuni* “the Zionist enemy”; *al-kayaan as-suhyuuni* “the Zionist entity”; *al-kayaan al-ghasib* “the usurping entity”; *ad-daulah al-yahuudiyyah ad-dakhiilah* “The alien Jewish State”; and finally as *tau?am amriika* “America’s twin.” In addition to the above-mentioned names, Israel was also negatively personified in the Jordanian press as *ash-shabah* “the ghost”; *ath-thi?b* “the wolf”; and *al-akhtabuut* “the octopus.”

The portrait of the Israelis in the Jordanian press in the pre-peace period was roundly damning. Some of the names which were identified in the newspaper texts examined portrayed them as: *as-suhyuuniyyuun* “the Zionists”; *al-naaziyyuun al-judud* “the new Nazis”; *al-faashiyyuun* “the Fascists”; *al-a9daa? al-muhtalliin* “the occupying enemies”; and finally *a9daa? as-salam* “peace enemies.”

Similarly, the names used for the Israeli army and its forces largely depicted them as symbols of terrorism, imperialism and Zionism. They were referred to as: *jaish al-ightisaab* “raping or usurping army”; *quwwaat al-ihtilaal* “the occupation forces”; *quwwaat al-gaduu* “the enemy forces”; and *quwwaat al-ghazuu as-sahyuuni* “the Zionist invasion forces.” In addition, the Israeli soldiers were also referred to as *al-jalladuun as-sahaayinah* “the Zionist executioners”; *junuud al-gaduu* “the enemy soldiers”; and *9isaabaat al-irhaab* “terrorist gangs.”

The Israeli government and its president were also portrayed as the cause of all Palestinians’ suffering. The government was referred to as *hukuumat al-ihtilaal* “the occupation government”; *hukuumat al-gaduu* “the enemy government”; and *sulutaat al-hukm as-sahyuuni* “the Zionist rule authority.” The Israeli prime minister was also given derogatory names: *ra?iis wuzaraa? al-gaduu* “the enemy’s prime minister”; *ra?iis wuzaraa? al-kayaan as-suhyuuni* “the Zionist entity’s prime minister”; and *ath-thaglab as-suhyuuni* “the Zionist fox.”

Post-peace period (October 31st, 1994–December 31st, 1996)

As mentioned earlier, the state of war between Jordan and Israel officially ended with the signature of the Peace Treaty on October 26th, 1994. Item One in Article Two of the October 26th Peace Treaty states that both Jordan and Israel agree to “recognize and will respect each other’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.” In addition, Article Eleven stipulates that the two parties will undertake the following steps:

1. To abstain from hostile or discriminatory propaganda against each other, and to take all possible legal and administrative measures to prevent the dissemination of such propaganda by any organization or individual present in the territory of either party.
2. As soon as possible, and not later than three months from the exchange of the instruments of ratification of this Treaty, to repeal all adverse or discriminatory references and expressions of hostility in their respective legislations.
3. To refrain in all government publications from any such reference.

These conditions meant that all the hostile names which had been used to refer to the Israelis prior to the Peace Treaty automatically became unfit for publication in the post-peace era. Logically, a drastic change in the area of labels referring to Israel was expected. The signing of the Peace Treaty did in fact result in drastic changes at the official level. Many of the offensive names which were used before were altered in official texts, especially in the period immediately following the signing of the Peace Treaty. However, on other levels of discourse the onomastic reforms were slower and less organized. The adherents of the Treaty have adopted a new nomenclature, whereas many of the Treaty opponents have retained the former, hostile set of names (Abd-el-Jawad and Al-Abed Al-Haq, 1997).

During the final arrangements of the Peace Treaty, the Jordanian press was filled with articles reporting and discussing the political events. In the newspaper samples examined, a noticeable shift was identified in the names used to refer to Israel. New neutral terms displaced old hostile ones. Some examples of such neutral onomastic innovations are as follows: *israa?iil* "Israel"; *daulat israa?iil* "the State of Israel"; *al-daulah al-gibriyyah* "the Hebrew State"; and *al-jaanib al-israa?iili* "the Israeli side." Similarly, several positive names which were introduced to describe the Israelis were: *abnaa? ibrahiim* "sons of Abraham"; *ash-sha9b al-israa?iili* "the Israeli nation"; and *muwaatinuu israa?iil* "the citizens of Israel." It is important to mention here that, although such neutral to positive names appeared at this time, the older, negative ones did not completely die out.

The Israeli government, army and prime minister were also referred to with less violent names than were used before. Some relatively neutral names for the Israeli government which were found in the newspaper sample include: *hukuumat israa?iil* "the government of Israel" and *hukuumat daulat israa?iil* "the government of the State of Israel." In addition, the army was more neutrally referred to as: *al-jaish al-israa?iili* "the Israeli army"; *al-quwwaat al-israa?iiliyyah* "the Israeli forces"; *quwwat al-amn al-israa?iiliyyah* "the Israeli security forces"; and *jaish ad-difaa9 al-israa?iili* "the Israeli defense army." New names which were employed in the post-peace treaty period for the Israeli prime minister were: *ra?iis al-wuzaraa? al-israa?iili* "the Israeli prime minister" and *ra?iis wuzaraa? daulat israa?iil* "the prime minister of the State of Israel."

Recent sample (October 1, 2009–October 31, 2009)

In the sample taken between 1971 and 1996, the shift away from the former hostile nomenclature not only reflected a shift in language, it also reflected a critical shift in attitude, i.e., from denial to recognition. Nevertheless, these changes have been less than complete. According to Abd-el-Jawad and Al-Abed Al-Haq (1997), more future linguistic steps towards neutralizing both official and unofficial language use will no doubt continue to occur. The recent sample taken from the same daily on October 2009 did not show many improvements from the post-peace treaty sample examined. The language is still inconsistent, especially in times of political crises between the Israeli government and the Palestinians. For instance, in the recent newspaper sample examined, both positive and negative names were used to refer to Israel. In general contexts, it was referred to as: *israa?iil* "Israel" and *daulat israa?iil* "the State of Israel." In the context of the expansion of the Israeli settlements that Jordan strongly opposes, Israel was referred to as: *al-kayaan as-subyuuni* "the Zionist entity" and *al-ihtilaal al-israa?iili* "the Israeli occupation."

Summary

The findings of this study show that the Peace Treaty has influenced the language used in the Jordanian *Al-Rai* newspaper to refer to Israel. The language of war used since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been toned down to cope with the new peaceful situation. The word *gadu* “enemy” and other similar names have been progressively replaced by other neutral or positive ones, such as: *shurakaa*? “partners” and *jjiraan* “neighbors.” However, as this study has shown, these changes have also been somewhat erratic. As any reader of recent issues of the Jordanian press will inevitably notice, the names used to refer to Israel and the Israelis can vary greatly, especially in times of political crises.

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