

# The Semantic Shift of Some Arabic Lexemes in Egypt after January 25 Revolution

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## Abstract

This study attempts to support the hypothesis that politics and language are correlated, i.e., the major political events in a given speech community may take place according to the terms that express certain political concepts and views, and these terms, on the other hand, reflect the experiences which pack the semantic content into them, i.e., verbal and situational context yields the shift in meaning. Although this topic is much more complex, and it requires intensive treatment via an integrated approach, where different linguistic and non-linguistic tools are involved, the main focus of the study is the semantic features of some words used during and after the January 25 Revolution.

To support the claim above, this study aims to explore the semantic change of some Arabic words during the January 25 Revolution in Egypt. It is an attempt to trace evidence of the semantic shift in words used during and after the January 25 Revolution through some Egyptian newspapers and social sites. It is concerned with the terms used by the pro and anti-revolution activists to name themselves and their opponents. Through this study, the researcher hopes that the results may assist in drawing the map of the semantic change in contemporary Egyptian Arabic in general and to provide a better understanding of the meaning shifts and changes that occurred to some lexemes as a result of the January 25 Revolution in particular. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to be employed as a reference to other semantic studies in order to give an insightful profile for the causes that lead to the various types of semantic change. The analysis of the collected data has revealed that the January 25 Revolution played a crucial role in adding new meaning shades to some words in the Egyptian diction. Moreover, words can be reloaded and interpreted according to the political stance of each group.

**Keywords:** semantic shift, Arabic words, January 25 Revolution, Egypt

## 1. Introduction

According to Trask (1994) languages change over time. This change may be manifested in various linguistic aspects. i.e. it can be phonetic, syntactic, or semantic. Although semantic change affects sentences, the term labels words as they constitute the ready-to-change part of the language; lexemes respond rapidly to any change in man's behavior. Namely, unlike other areas of linguistic change, the semantic shift is relevant to change in culture and society.

The semantic content of lexemes may change over time and this change can be tested by tracing the etymologies of these lexemes as they occur regularly and systematically. In the present paper, the researcher attempts to shed light on the different meanings that some words acquired due to the political change that took place in Egypt after the Revolution of January 25, 2011, which erupted in order to create a new society based on freedom, dignity, and social justice. The first step for forming that new society is to build an identity that is different from the previous one, which the former regime used to promote. This identity, however, cannot be formed unless new meanings become part of that new identity. Thus, the proper semantic change and the new social and political constructions must occur simultaneously in order that each change can describe and account for the other. On the other hand, Arabic is characterized by its flexibility and this flexibility in meaning endorses its referential power.

To hail supporters or defame opponents, the semantic shift of some words become necessary; pro-Mubarak's regime, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SACAF) (the ruler of the transitional phase Feb. 11, 2011–July 1, 2012) as well as the former ruling party (Freedom and Justice Party, the political organ of the Muslim

Brotherhood), for instance, do not see things as the protesters do. The latter thought that the former acted against the Revolution, whereas the former considered themselves the safeguards of Egypt. Thus, the language had been manipulated by each party as a weapon to stab their opponents with.

Vandergriff (2011) argues that “this language is sometimes consciously created as a social and political alternative to the language of the society-at-large, and at other times is a spontaneous outgrowth of situation.” However, this “language” does not lexically differ from the Egyptian Standard Arabic, rather the semantic content of some words has changed to support the attitude of each party.

This study will focus on the etymology of the words and compare between the earlier and the new meaning of the given words if it is necessary to clarify the semantic change.

To clarify the terminology, “the revolutionists” /ʔath-thuwâr/ الثوار, protesters and activists, used throughout this study, were defined by the pro-revolution people as groups of young men and women of different religions and political views who hope to make a drastic change in the social, political, and economic environment of Egypt by peaceful means. Their ultimate goal is to give the power back to the people. As for the anti-revolution people, they considered them a gang of vandals. Nevertheless, the establishment of the semantic change of this lexeme, as well as the other lexemes under discussion, cannot be predicted at the moment. Although Eckardt (2006) claims that “speakers use the newly emerged words, constructions, or phrases with great confidence and conciseness” (p. 13), questions such as: Will the collective mind of the Egyptian people keep them and call them up when necessary? Will the new meanings be permanent or temporary, vague or clear? Which meaning will be established: the pejorative or the laudatory? are beyond the scope of the study as it is too early to judge them and because the current study is a descriptive one.

## 2. Causes of Semantic Change

Studying the causes of semantic change is of pivotal importance as it provides an obvious explanation of language development. Such causes are extra-linguistic and linguistic; the changes of objects depend on factors outside language and the linguistic behavior of individuals. Language only documents this change since languages are deeply influenced by social, economic, technical, and political change in a given society. The effect of such factors upon language, therefore, proves that political events can influence even the semantic content of words. Words, as Traugott and Dasher (2003) state, “may change due to the decision by certain communities to reclaim for positive purposes of group identification or pride a word that has been used in pejorative ways against them” (p. 25). Namely, the alteration of meaning takes place as lexemes are frequently employed and what the speakers intend on one occasion is not the same on other occasions.

The cause of semantic change in this study is political in the first place. On the 25th of January 2011, a group of youth rallied in Tahrir square in central Cairo demanding some political and social reforms. During their sit-in protests, the semantic content of some words was being changed and new words and structures were being coined.

## 3. Types of Semantic Change

Semantic change has been sorted by different linguists. According to Kleparski (1997), the German linguist and lexicographer Herman Paul in his book *Prinzipien des Sprachgeschichte* has proposed “a classification based on the logical principle. He distinguishes two main ways where the semantic change is gradual (specialization and generalization), two momentary conscious semantic changes (metaphor and metonymy), and also secondary ways: gradual (elevation and degradation), momentary (hyperbole and litotes).” The most common types of semantic change are widening/extension/broadening, narrowing /specialisation/ restriction, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, degeneration / pejoration, amelioration/ elevation, hyperbole, and litotes.

## 4. Research Questions

Throughout this study, the researcher attempts to address the following questions:

- a) Can languages create events?
- b) Does politics affect languages? And if so,
- c) What type of change is the most noticeable?

## 5. Methodology and Data Collection

Since it is impossible to tackle all the words used during and after the January 25 Revolution in one study, the methodology used in this study is to collect the most common words and the quotations in which they are used in order to determine which type of change the word has undergone. Although the study is concerned with the different types of change, the main focus will be on amelioration and pejoration. The final section of the paper will

be an attempt to arrive at a general formulation of the semantic shift in the terms of the January 25 Revolution.

This study depends chiefly on the electronic versions of the newspapers. The researcher added some photos to document the time and event of the new use of some Arabic lexemes and to create a mental image of how they were used at that time.

## 6. Discussion

Up to this point, the current study focuses on the causes and types of semantic change. Still to be dealt with is the question of how these linguistic innovations are used in a given speech community. This section is concerned with the analysis of the new meanings that the lexemes have acquired during the Revolution.

### أخونة /'akhwana/Muslim Brotherization

This term was coined by the political opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood Group following the winning of the last presidential elections. The term has been politically invested to show that the Muslim Brotherhood is anti-pluralism and accuse them of obsessing the important posts in Egypt. The aim of “Brotherization” is to continue broadening the movement.

“No for State Brotherization”, (Hesham, 2012)

"ما هي أخونة الدولة ولماذا نخشاها؟" (بهاء الدين 2012)

“What is the “Brotherization” of the state? And why do we fear it?” (Bahaa’ Eddin, 2012)

### بلطجية /baltajiya/ sg /baltajî/ CA /baltagiya/sg /baltagi/ thugs



Photo 1. The thug stereotype in Egypt

The origin of this term is Turkish. It is composed of two morphemes. The root morpheme (بلطة balta) >> (ax) and the suffix (جى jî) >> (maker or user). The Turkish loanword, therefore, means (ax maker or ax user). Gradually, the root of the loanword acquired the meaning of “long knife”. Since outlaws used to carry long knives during committing illegal actions, a meaning shift resulted from the frequent use over time: the loanword has acquired a new shade of meaning and undergone restriction, so its original meaning has been replaced by the new sense of “baltagiya” “thugs”. The stereotype of a thug in Egypt is a young man about 20 years of age carrying a stick, long knife, or Molotov cocktail. He is not wearing any shirts. He usually wears slippers on his feet and a bandage around his head. During the last decade of Mubarak’s era, “thuggery” was politicized and became a job; Rakha (2011) asserts that those “systematically marginalized and abused but also regularly deployed, slave-like, by the police, and electoral candidates” are often labeled baltageya, especially by the middle class. These so-called ‘baltageya’, he adds, “have often been recruited by the regime.” After the January 25 Revolution, the term extended to others and was politically utilized; the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), which ruled Egypt after the ouster of Mubarak, and pro-Mubarak’s regime used to call the protesters “thugs”.

"عبد الله كمال رئيس تحرير روز اليوسف سابقا: شباب التحرير بلطجية" (محمد البري 2011)

“The youth of Tahrîr are thugs”, said Abdalla Kamâl, ex-editor-in-chief of Rose Al-Yûsif magazine (Al-Berry,

2011).

The term, therefore, is derogatory for anyone who protested against the SCAF. According to the protesters, the SCAF was hostile and uncooperative when they demanded it to put an end to army rule and they were angered by rough police tactics. As a counterattack, the protesters described the SCAF and the police as “thugs”

"نزول بلطجية من عربيات الجيش في أحداث العباسية" (جمال 2012)

“Thugs get out of the army vehicles in Al-Abbasiya incidents” (Gamal, 2012).

Nevertheless, the protesters picked up the pejorative term “thugs” and mocked it via Twitter comments and Facebook statuses and then they reloaded it with laudatory content. As it is obvious from the excerpt below, the word was employed in a mocking and ameliorative sense at the same time.

Nellyalli (2012) writes: “Here’s to the thugs that nursed us in Tahrir that day, those who protected the entrances on other days and who were at the front lines every time. The world would be a much better place if it were full of people like you.” The word “thugs”, therefore, is used in attack and counterattack but with a different sense.



Photo 2. Protesters hold banners with Arabic words “Open strike till retribution” “I’m a thug” ridiculing official accusations

#### ثورة *SA /thawra/ CA /sawra/ revolution*

Apart from the dictionary meaning of the term, the term “revolution” in the collective mind of the Egyptians is closely related to the Revolution of July 23, 1952. However, the semantic content of the term was changed after January 25, 2011 to refer to the fall of Mubarak’s regime after the 18-day protest. So, when the term “revolution” is mentioned without modification, people think of the January 25 Revolution and July 23 Revolution takes a back seat. So, the meaning of the word “revolution” is specialized to mean the January 25 Revolution although both semantic contents refer to the sudden and radical change in the different aspects of people’s life and the uncertain future to be expected by the actions of the people. To the protesters, the revolution is a positive action and the word, therefore, is ameliorative.

#### المخلوع/*al-makhlû’ / the ousted*

Although this term neutrally describes the legal status of former president Mubarak, it acquired derogatory meaning when used by anti-Mubarak’s regime. “The former president” is the laudatory variant of the term and it is used by Mubarak supporters. It is easy to recognize the attitude of the speaker/writer towards Mubarak through the adjective he/she uses before his name.



Photo 3. The slogan of the January 25 Revolution

### فُل SA /fal/ pl فلول /fulûl/ CA. /fil/ pl./filûl/ Remnants

According to *Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, remaining means *residual*. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as *something left over, a remainder*. The Arabic synonymy, as introduced in the *Standard Arabic Academy Concise Dictionary*, is *the defeated*.

This word typically applies to any member of Mubarak's regime, and specifically to any member of the disbanded National Democratic Party (NDP). It is well-known to the members of the downfall regime of Mubarak and non-members alike. The current usage of the term appeared immediately after the dissolution of NDP. Maybe due to the massive use in the radio, newspapers, social media, and television, the term acquired immediate popularity in and acceptance of the Egyptian society. Almost all the Egyptian newspapers used it, with variations, in almost every issue.

"فاينانشيال تايمز" تحذر من عودة الفلول للبرلمان" (زينب غريان 2015)

"Financial Times warns of the return of the **Remnants** to the parliament" (Gheryan, 2015).

In the above example, the term, originally used as a noun, services as an adjective, which Stern (1965) calls "analogical change". This change, one might argue, comes to assure that Mubarak's regime figures are called **Remnants** even though they are not stated. From the quotation above, it is evident that "remnant" is recognized as an equivalent to one of Mubarak's regime figures. Namely, the term has undergone a sense extension.

"سجن الفلول " أعداء الثورة" يتوسط ميدان التحرير" (العربية نت 2012)

"The prison of the **remnants**—the enemies of the revolution—centers Tahrîr Squire" (AlArabiya.net, 2011).

The pejorative term has undergone a process of widening in meaning to include the opponents of the revolution.





Photo 4. A banner shows the rejection of the National Democratic Party remnants

### مليونية /milyûniyyah/ million-strong protest

Many of the terms employed by the protesters were familiar to the ordinary people and some others are neologisms created by the Revolution activists. The word مليونية /milyûniyyah/ “million-strong rally” was coined by the protesters to label their rallies. This female adjective which is derived from the word “million” seems to be used to have a strong impact on the value of the modified term “rally” to threaten the ruling power and oblige the government to respond to their demands.



Photo 5. A million-strong rally in Tahrir Square

### المنحل /'almunḥal/ disbanded or dissolute

"نجيب ساويرس: ليس كل أعضاء "الوطني المنحل" فاسدين" (رمضان 2015)

“Naguib Sawiris: Not all the “disbanded National Democratic party” members are corrupted” (Ramadan 2015).

Although the term “disbanded” is a neutral term and echoes the legal status of the “National Democratic Party (NDP)”, it is used by the pro-revolution activists in a derogatory sense. This derogatory meaning is reached through polysemy; the word “disbanded” and the word “dissolute” are polysemous in Arabic. The specialization of the word represents an example of what Stern (1965) calls “intentional transfer”, namely, the reader recognizes the semantic relationship between المنحل /'almunḥal/ (disbanded) and المنحل /'almunḥal/ (dissolute) and uses the word to vent his hard feelings toward the NDP and its members and to show them as if they were acting immorally, not illegally.

### الشعب /'ash-sha'b/ people

"الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام" (الخضر 2011)

“The people want to topple the regime” (Al-Khedr, 2011)

"الجيش والشعب يد واحدة" (كيتشلي 2013)

“The army and the people are one hand” (Ketchley, 2013)

Another word of the Revolution diction is “people.” This term, like some other terms tackled above, includes narrowing; the term is narrowed to refer to two meanings; the first one is the potentiality of influence from socialist ideology as the slogan raised by “the people” during the Revolution, is “bread, freedom, human dignity, and social justice”. The protesters aligned themselves with the marginalized classes. The protesters proposed a different lifestyle based on equality and freedom. The second one is that the meaning of the word “people”, chanted during the 18-day protest, has been specialized to include the connotation of opposition to the non-democratic government of the National Democratic Party and consequently to all the figures of Mubarak’s regime. It also

indicates some unity between the various groups that belong to different political orientations. Namely, what is considered the opposite of “the people” appears to be corrupted, and usually referred to in vague words like *the regime*, *the ruling gang*, or *the system*. Then, the protesters, who were in Tahrir Square, see themselves as representatives and a part of that suppressed people. The sense of the term, therefore, has not drastically changed; it has been partially altered to exclude the former “ruling class” of Egypt. The term “people” is decidedly laudatory as it serves to contrast “the people” with “the former regime.”

#### العسكر /'Al- 'Askar/ **military rule or rulers**

"يسقط يسقط حكم العسكر..... ثانية؟" (سلام 2013)

“Down with military rule... again?” (Sallam, 2013)

"لا دستور دائم تحت حكم العسكر" (معتز بالله عبد الفتاح 2012)

“No permanent constitution under military rule” (Abdul Fattah, 2012).

This term is a derogatory variant of “the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)”. It was used by its opponents in the sense of “militarism” because, from their point of view, it represents the predominance of the SCAF in the administration and the policy of Egypt and the domination by the military class in the formulation of policies and occupying the high positions in Egypt. Some other opponents offensively used the term in the sense of “junta”- a group of military officers ruling a country after seizing power- because they thought that the decisions made by the SCAF were a soft coup d’état. On the other hand, the SCAF strongly denied such allegations and considered the term offensive.

#### المجلس الأعلى للقوات المسلحة SA/'al-majlisu 'al-'a 'ala lil-quwâti 'al-musallahâ/ CA /'al-maglis 'al-'a 'ala lil-quwât 'al-musallahâ/ **the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)**

This formal title was used by the pro-SCAF in an ameliorative sense. This ameliorative use was intended to show support and solidarity. Theoretically, expressing solidarity by using formal titles might seem odd; Brown and Gilman (1972) claim that a superior addressee should receive V (V here represents the formal title), and the two semantics (power and solidarity) call for the opposite choice. In order to eliminate this conflict, Scoton and Zhu (1983) developed the notion of Brown and Gilman; they distinguished both *solidarity* and *familiarity* from *power* and from one another. As Fasold (1993, p. 32) explains, “solidarity is a common characteristic that cannot be denied, such as kinship, nationality or party membership. Familiarity refers to a history of *voluntary* encounters between individuals; basically, they choose to be friends” Thus, the solidarity relationship here seems to be not a relationship between a speaker and addressee but between the addressee and the Egyptian people represented by the SCAF. The choice of a certain form of address echoes the speakers’ political attitudes towards other forces.

#### المواطنون الشرفاء /'al-muwâtinûn 'ash-shurafâ/ **honorable citizens**

This expression is the form of address that the SCAF used when addressing its supporters. They were viewed positively by the SCAF and consequently the term is a laudatory one. While the anti-SCAF activists considered the term derogatory as they saw the “honorable citizens” as those who betrayed the Revolution. According to the political activist and novelist Alaa’ Al-Aswani (2012), “honorable citizens are seen by the Military Council as those who agree at all what it does, support its plans to abort the revolution, and disregard all the heinous crimes for which it is responsible, politically and criminally.”

"المواطنون الشرفاء في نظر المجلس العسكري هم الذين يوافقونه على كل ما يفعله ويؤيدون خطته في إجهاد الثورة ويتغاضون عن كل الجرائم البشعة التي هو المسئول الوحيد عنها سياسيا وجنائيا" (علاء الأسواني، 2012)

On the other hand, the protesters reused the term depending on “antiphrasis”. i.e., they used it in a sense contrary to its conventional sense for ironic purposes.

#### الاستقرار /'Al- 'istiqrâr/ **stability**

This term, which has undergone an extension of meaning, changed from a laudatory to a derogatory term when it is used by the protesters and pro-revolution activists as they interpret it as a euphemism for subverting the revolution and maintaining the status quo or in best cases “stability via Mubarak’s regime” which is completely different from the “stability” revolutionists call for.i.e. achieving freedom, dignity, and social justice. The dictionary meaning of the term, therefore, took a back seat and both parties use the term politically. Mubarak’s regime supporters consider the January 25 Revolution a threat to the country’s stability, whereas the revolutionists see Mubarak’s “stability” as a preservation of the status quo.

#### موقعة الجمل SA/mawqi'atu aljamal/ CA /mawqi'at egamal/ **the battle of the camel**

Historically, the battle of the camel occurred at Basra, Iraq on November 7, 656 AD when the forces of the fourth

Caliph Ali ibn Abî Tâlib faced the forces led by the mother of the believers 'Â'ishah (a widow of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to ask Ali to arrest the third Caliph Uthmân ibn 'Affân's killers. The battle has been named "the battle of the camel" because 'Â'ishah was riding a camel during the battle.

After over 14 centuries, particularly on Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2011, the collective mind of the Egyptians recalled "the battle of the camel" when pro-Mubarak thugs, riding camels and horses, attacked the demonstrators in a bid to disperse the sit-in in Tahrir Square. The media extended the historical term to include the political event.



Photo 6. The battle of the camel

#### أيادي خفية \ 'ayâdi khafiyah\ Hidden hands

مفتي "الإخوان": أيادي خفية تسعى لعرقلة المشروع الإسلامي" (الأهرام 2013)

The Mufti of the Muslim Brotherhood, "Hidden hands seek to obstruct the Islamic project." (Al-Ahram 2013)

"EGYPT: Hidden Hands Stoke Sectarian Strife" (Morrow, 2011)

"Hidden hands of old regimes did not go away" (Cockburn, 2013)

This is another equivalent of "قلة مندسة" / qillatun mundassah/ CA /qillah mundassah/ a few number of infiltrators". "Synecdoche" is the type of semantic shift of that equivalent. This term was used by Mubarak's supporters to describe the activists and the Muslim brotherhood members as foreign agents executing the interests of some foreign countries in Egypt. To spoil the negative effect of the term, the activists ironically call themselves "hidden hands". In a counterattack tactic, the activists reused the same term to brand their opponents with.

#### أجندة \ Agenda

A pejorative loanword which pro-Mubarak's regime used to describe the protesters. It is another equivalent to "hidden hands" and "a few numbers of infiltrators". Pro-Mubarak's regime considered the protesters as agents who had some political issues be carried out in favor of the enemies of Egypt.

السلفيون SA /'As-Salafiyûn/ CA /'issalafiyîn/ salafists



Photo 7. The stereotype of Salafists in Egypt



The Arabic loanword “salafists” (sometimes, the Salafi movement, the Salafi group, or the salafi methodology “Al-Manhaj ‘As-Salafi”) describes an Islamic sect that takes its name from the word “salaf” which means predecessors of the companions of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). They concerned themselves with the Islamic Call (Da’wah). After the January 25 Revolution, Salafists played a political role and established a party so the term extended to mean “a politician with Islamic reference”

“*Salafists* Are the Wild Card of Egypt’s Referendum” (Trager, 2014)

“The Rise and Fall of the *Salafi* al-Nour Party in Egypt” (Brown, 2013)

“Egypt in Turmoil: *Salafists* Gain Strength amid Political Chaos” (Salloum, Steinvoth, & Windfuhr, 2013)

الدولة العميقة *SA/Ad-Dawlatu 'Al- 'Amîqah/ CA /Ed-Dawla El-'Amîqah/ deep state*

This term is a calque of the Turkish term “*derin devlet*”. It refers to the high administrative bodies of the state that oppose any positive change in order to preserve the acquired privileges they got during the former regime. This term was loaned by the activists to describe those who reject democracy and human rights.

حزب الكنبة */hizb el-kanabah/ lit. Sofa party (silent majority)*

Although the term is known in Egypt before the January 25 Revolution as “Al-'Aghlabiyyah *As-Sâmitah*”, a calque of the English term “silent majority”, another synonym of the term was coined after the eruption of the January 25 Revolution to describe the people who were not concerned with the public affairs or/and those who did not belong to any of the political parties that were formed after the January 25 Revolution.

مستشفى ميداني */ mustashfa maydânî/ Field hospital*

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English language defines “field hospital” as “a hospital established on a temporary basis to serve troops in a combat zone.”

As Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2008:6) states, “the lexicon of a language is, of course, a dynamic and constantly changing complex structure where new words emerge, old words disappear or change in one or another way.” The established meaning of the word-group “field hospital” has been extended to mean “a tent where volunteer physicians treat injured protesters during protesting and at the place of protesting.”

“Tahrir **field hospital** saves hundreds of lives.” (Al-Ghazawy, 2011)

الشهداء */'ash-shuhadâ'/ martyrs*

The classical meaning of “Martyrs” is soldiers who are killed by the enemy on the battlefield but after the January 25 Revolution, the meaning of the word extended to be applied as a description of the protesters who were killed during the revolution. Being “Martyrs” in the sight of Allah is controversial as no one, except Allah, can confirm how their status is. One might argue that the word was used hyperbolically to honor them and act as a euphemism of “dead” or “victims”.

الورد التي فتح في جنائين مصر *CA /'ilward 'illi fattah fi ganâyin maṣr/ the roses which opened up in the gardens of Egypt*

Another equivalent of the word “martyrs” is the metaphor used by the Egyptians following the January 25 Revolution “roses which opened up in the gardens of Egypt”. This type of shift in meaning is called “metaphor”. According to Beard (2000:19), “metaphor refers to when a word or a phrase is used which establishes a comparison between one idea and another.”

Classically, metaphor is a rhetoric device employed in literary texts, particularly poetic texts to strike the reader’s mind. The pro-revolution writers relied on synaesthesia to create this figure of speech, where the senses of eyesight and smell are mingled with the youth who were killed during the revolution to set up a relationship between irrelevant semantic elements. using “opened up in gardens” for “passed away and buried in graves” to represent glory and a divine dimension to the metaphor. The aim of the semantic shift here is laudatory. i.e. to praise the victims of the 18-day Revolution.

حركة 6 أبريل */harakit sitta 'ibrîl/ April 6 Movement*

“Movement”, as defined by the American Heritage Dictionary of the English language, is “a series of actions and events taking place over a period of time and working to foster a principle or policy.” As the definition suggests, it is used in a laudatory sense to describe those who paved the way for the January 25 revolution. The members of such movements are viewed by activists, as Vandergriff (2011) claims, as “a group of young men working together toward the general goal of the restoration and preservation of civil liberties.” On the other hand, its opponents demonized it and described its members as saboteurs. The term, therefore, is reloaded according to ideology and

political stances.

### عيش SA \ 'aysh\ CA / 'ish/ bread

The low economic status of the majority of the Egyptian people played an evident role in the semantic change during the 18-day protest; one of the slogans that the protesters raised during the rallies was “bread” to mean “the improvement of the economic circumstances of the poor and creating more jobs for young men”. The meaning of the word has extended to include the process that enables people to get a loaf of bread. Metonymy, here, was beautifully employed by the activists in addressing the government. “Bread”, which stands for “earning a living” in the Egyptian culture, is clearly understood by the lower-class people and slum dwellers, so they can sympathize with the activists. The use of metonymy was an indirect call to rally behind the activists.



Photo 8. The slogan of the Egyptian Revolution: bread, freedom, and social justice.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of the lexemes above has supported the hypothesis that the change in language and politics is reciprocal. Thanks to the January 25 Revolution, the terms, which are common and current in Egyptian Arabic, have now a primary meaning in the revolutionary diction which is different from the primary meaning in the dictionary. Similarly, these terms are reshaping the political scene in Egypt, since Language, as Beard (2000:18) claims, “is not something somehow separate from the ideas it contains, but the way language is used says a great deal about how the ideas have been shaped.”

The study has also shown that the ultimate goal beyond most of the words that have undergone various types of change is adding a pejorative and/or laudatory sense to be used by each party in describing their supporters and opponents.

Since natural languages are characterized by their plasticity, and since arbitrary political factors can give rise to highly unpredictable semantic changes, the protesters are looked at as language builders as much as language consumers and this ensures the referential power of Arabic which is used as a weapon in the tension between the opposing forces, namely, each force can load the same lexeme with positive meaning when describing its members but when describing the opposing force, the lexeme will be negatively loaded.

Handling the semantic shift of some Arabic words is of paramount importance as it assists in recognizing and documenting the semantic structure of the Arabic terms used by the Egyptian people at the present phase of their long history. One hopes that this study leads to some interdisciplinary research projects that tackle the semantic change of words and lexical structures in Egyptian Arabic in the aftermath of the January 25 Revolution from different angles.

The table below summarizes some of the laudatory and pejorative meanings that some lexemes acquired during the January 25 Revolution.

Table 1. The Laudatory and Pejorative meanings that some lexemes have acquired after the January 25 Revolution

The term	Users of the term	Target of the term	Laudatory for the target?	Pejorative for the target?
قَلّ /fal/ pl فلول /fulûl/ CA. /fil/ pl./filûl/ remnants	Pro-the January 25 Revolution	Pro-Mubarak's regime	x	√
الشعب /'ash-sha'b/ people	Pro-the January 25 Revolution	Mubarak's regime	x	√
ثورة /thawra/ CA /sawra/ revolution	Pro-the January 25 Revolution	Pro-Mubarak's regime	x	√
المنحل /'almunhal/ disbanded or dissolute	Pro-the January 25 Revolution	National Democratic Party	x	√
العسكر /'Al- 'Askar/ military rule or rulers	Pro-the January 25 Revolution Pro-former president Morsi	the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces during the transitional phase	X	√
المجلس الأعلى للقوات المسلحة /'al-maglîs 'al-'a 'ala lil-quwât 'al-musallaha/ the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)	Pro-Mubarak's regime June 30 supporters	The SCAF after June 30 the SCAF during the transitional phase The SCAF after June 30	x √	√ x
أخوة /'akhwana/ Muslim brotherization	Opposition parties	Muslim Brotherhood and Freedom and Justice Party when they were in office	x	√
المواطنون الشرفاء /'al-muwâtînûn 'al-shurafâ'/ honorable citizens	The SCAF Pro-the January 25 Revolution	Pro- The SCAF Pro- The SCAF	√ X	X √
الاستقرار / istiqrâr/ stability	The SCAF Pro-the January 25 Revolution	Pro- The SCAF Pro- The SCAF	√ X	X √
مليونية /milyûniyyah/ million-strong protest	Pro -the January 25 Revolution	The SCAF	√	X

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## Appendix A

### Table of symbols and abbreviations

<i>CA</i>	Cairene Arabic
<i>colloq</i>	colloquial
<i>lit</i>	Literally
<i>pl</i>	plural
<i>SA</i>	Standard Arabic
<i>sg</i>	singular

## Appendix B

### Transcription of Arabic sounds (adapted from Ghali (2005, p.13) with slight modifications)

[ʔ]	Voiceless glottal stop	ء
[b]	Voiced bilabial stop	ب
[t]	Voiceless alveolar stop	ت
[θ] = th	Voiceless interdental fricative	ث
[d̥] = j	Voiceless interdental fricative	ج
[g]	Voiced velar plosive <i>CA</i>	ج (اللهجة الفاهرية)
[h]	Voiceless palatal fricative	ح
[x] = kh	Voiceless velar fricative	خ
[d]	Voiced alveolar stop	د
[ð] = th	Voiced interdental fricative	ذ
[r]	Voiced alveolar trill	ر
[z]	Voiced alveolar fricative	ز
[s]	Voiceless alveolar fricative	س
[š] = sh	Voiceless palato-alveolar fricative	ش
[s̥]	Voiceless alveolar emphatic fricative	ص
[d̥]	Voiced alveolar emphatic stop	ض
[t̥]	Voiceless alveolar emphatic stop	ط
[ð̥] = th̥	Voiceless interdental emphatic fricative	ظ
[ʕ]	Voiced pharyngeal fricative	ع
[g̥] = gh	Voiced uvular fricative	غ
[f]	Voiceless labiodental fricative	ف
[q]	Voiceless uvular stop	ق
[k]	Voiceless velar stop	ك
[l]	Voiced lateral fricative	ل
[m]	Voiced bilabial nasal	م
[n]	Voiced alveolar nasal	ن
[h]	Voiceless glottal fricative	هـ
[W]	Voiced bilabial semi-vowel	و
[y]	Voiced palatal semi-vowel	ي
[i]	Short high front unrounded vowel	ي
[ī]	Long high front unrounded vowel	ي
[a]	Short low central unrounded vowel	أ
[â]	Long central unrounded vowel	أ
[u]	Short high back rounded vowel	و
[û]	Long high back rounded vowel	و

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