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## Strategies for Creating the Image of a Politician in an Arabic

### Polycode Text of the Series “اختيار 3”

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**Abstract.** According to the classification of speech strategies by O.S. Issers, semantic, lexico-grammatical, and pragmatic indicators act as linguistic indicators of speech strategies. The article is devoted to the analysis of the most significant linguistic and extralinguistic aspects of speech strategies that are used to create the image of the President of Egypt Abdel Fattah Khalil El-Sisi in the movie series “اختيار 3” (The Choice 3). These strategies were considered as part of the analysis of the Arabic polycode text, which is presented as the integrity of verbal and non-verbal components. The material of the study was the communicative acts of the main characters and the video sequence of the analyzed series, in which the authors recreated the revolutionary era of Egypt in 2013. The novelty of the study is an attempt to characterize Arabic political discourse as an independent linguistic phenomenon. As a result of the study, the authors arrive at the conclusion that the creation of the image of a politician requires such semantic indicators of speech strategy as: submission, threat, discrediting; lexico-grammatical indicators: syntactic synonyms of various types, paremia, dialectal forms. The effect of applying these communication strategies, which create the image of the Egyptian president, is enhanced by extralinguistic parameters and symbols studied within the theory of the polycode text. The analysis of the interaction of codes of various genres of the polycode text in the Arabic political discourse is of interest for further research.

**Keywords:** political discourse, Arabic language, Egyptian dialect, film discourse, speech strategies, image creation strategies

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## Стратегии создания образа политика в арабоязычном поликодовом тексте на примере сериала «اختيار 3»

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**Аннотация.** Согласно классификации речевых стратегий О.С. Иссерс, в качестве языковых индикаторов речевых стратегий выступают семантические, лексико-грамматические, а также прагматические показатели. Исследование посвящено анализу наиболее значимых лингвистических и экстралингвистических аспектов речевых стратегий, которые используются при создании образа президента Египта Абдель Фаттаха Халила Ас-Сиси в киносериале «اختيار 3» («Выбор 3»). Данные стратегии были рассмотрены в рамках анализа арабоязычного поликодового текста, который представляется как целостность вербальных и невербальных компонентов. Материалом исследования послужили коммуникативные акты главных героев и видеоряд анализируемого сериала, в котором авторами воссоздана революционная эпоха Египта 2013 г. Новизной исследования является попытка охарактеризовать арабский политический дискурс как самостоятельное лингвистическое явление. В результате проведенного исследования авторы приходят к выводу о том, что для создания образа политика используются такие семантические индикаторы речевой стратегии, как: подчинение, угроза, дискредитация; лексико-грамматические индикаторы: синтаксические синонимы различных типов, паремии, диалектные формы. Усиливают эффект применения данных коммуникативных стратегий, создающих образ египетского президента, экстралингвистические параметры и символы, изучаемые в рамках теории поликодового текста. Анализ взаимодействия кодов различных жанров поликодового текста арабского политического дискурса является перспективным для дальнейших исследований.

**Ключевые слова:** политический дискурс, поликодовый текст, арабский язык, египетский диалект, кинодискурс, образ политика, речевые стратегии, стратегии создания образа

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## Introduction

Strategies for creating the image of a politician are the promising area of interdisciplinary research at the intersection of linguistics, political science, marketing, cultural studies and intercultural communication. According to A.A. Komarova, the image of a politician is “a reflection of an emotionally

coloured idea of politicians in the mass consciousness” [1. P. 166]. The image of a politician is formed taking into account the strategies that he and the political party he represents choose and adhere to. However, depending on the linguistic culture, the choice and use of strategies may have peculiarities that reflect social and cultural experience of people. In this article, we consider strategies for creating the image of a politician based on the material of the polycode text of the Egyptian documentary series “اختيار ٣” (The Choice 3). The subject of the study is verbal and non-verbal means of creating the image of the current president of Egypt and the events of 2013 in Egypt<sup>1</sup>.

### Research Methodology

The material of the study was movie quotes and visuals of the Egyptian series “اختيار ٣”, which was released in 2022. This movie was chosen as the main source for the analysis of strategies for creating the image of a politician in a polycode text, since, in our opinion, the creative team of the series “اختيار ٣” accurately recreated aspects that reflect the political situation in Egypt in 2013. The study is based on the classification of communicative strategies for creating the image of a politician, proposed by O.S. Issers [2], strategies are understood as “specific ways of speech behaviour carried out under the control of global intention” [2. P. 104]. The classification implies the typology of speech strategies depending on the degree of scale of intentions: for example, a conversation with specific goals or a strategy aimed at achieving social goals, for example, maintaining status, exercising power, marking solidarity with the majority, etc. Semantic and lexico-grammatical indicators act as linguistic indicators of speech strategies.

The study of the polycode text was carried out within the tradition that has been developed in Russian linguistics, starting with the work by G.V. Eiger and V.L. Yukht [3] and other Russian linguists [4–11], based on the statement that a polycode text is the integrity of the perception of verbal and non-verbal components, which is predetermined by the cognitive, functional and communicative idea of the author of a particular text [11. P. 303]. The interaction of the verbal and non-verbal components of the polycode text of the film discourse makes it possible for the author’s team of the series to build a certain image of the hero. It is important to note that the tools of the polycode text are implemented in the conditions of the political content of the series.

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<sup>1</sup> On 3 July 2013, Egyptian Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah El-Sisi announced the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi and the suspension of the Constitution. Morsi was placed under house arrest, and then was formally taken into custody in connection with charges against him. More than 300 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested in Cairo. In June and July, there were protests against the country’s president; clashes between Morsi’s supporters and his opponents led to dozens of victims. URL: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_coup\\_in\\_Egypt\\_\(2013\)](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_coup_in_Egypt_(2013)) (accessed: 23.12.2022).

Multidisciplinary consideration of political discourse is one of the relevant areas of research along with the analysis of other types of institutional discourses [12]: academic discourse [8; 13; 14], media discourse [15–17], journalistic and Internet discourse [18–20], film discourse [21; 22]. Political discourse is the focus of modern linguistics and is analyzed from the point of view of the implementation of speech strategies [23], including verbal and non-verbal means of a polycode text [24–26].

As a matter of fact, political discourse is a special type of discourse that is used primarily to influence the masses of people with a view to achieving and/or maintain power. Political discourse is a means of communication between the politician — politician paradigm and the politician — people paradigm. E.I. Sheigal defines political discourse as “any speech formation, the content of which relates to the sphere of politics” [26. P. 121]. In this study, we rely on the understanding of political discourse as a speech activity aimed at “propagating certain ideas, emotionally influencing speakers of a certain language of a certain country in order to induce political action, develop public consent, make and justify socio-political decisions”, political communication must be effective, since its social significance lies in giving politically correct coordinates to the addressee [27. P. 163–165].

There are works devoted to political discourse in Arabic [25; 28–30], however, most of them that consider political discourse in Arabic carry out the analysis in the comparative paradigm of two or more languages or focus on stylistic, grammatical, pragmatic aspects of political discourse in Arabic. However, there are currently no works that study Arabic political discourse as an independent linguistic phenomenon. The novelty of the study is an attempt to characterize Arabic political discourse as an independent linguistic phenomenon.

Exploring the strategies for creating the image of the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on the example of the series “اختيار 3”, we pay special attention to the characters that complement some or other scenes. Symbols are materialized, which in the verbal world, according to G.G. Pocheptsov, bears a double charge [31]. Thus, the presidents of countries speak against the background of their flags, each country has its own version of symbolization, which allows it to position itself among strangers. In a film, the author can express many meanings with symbols, since the symbol is collective, and the word, in turn, both collective and individual [31]. However, the symbol expresses a different, symbolic system, which enhances the role of symbolization of the film. Symbols rarely conflict with each other (for example, the wife of the imam of a mosque wearing sexy outfits). The symbols themselves are not part of one reality, the recipient connects the symbols into a single picture, based on his or her experience. Symbol in cinema is in context; the example can be the contextuality of Russian movies of the Stalin era: field surgery — Pirogov, radio — Popov, Pavlov — physiology. In the Arabic film discourse, examples of a symbol as a contextual phenomenon can be: the formation of intelligence agencies — Mohsen Mumtaz, the fight against apartheid — Palestinian people, Las Vegas of the Middle East — Beirut. Visual symbols, compared with verbal ones, are more durable

and universal [31]. Visual symbolism also provides a multi-channel impact, which a politician strives for. Messages sent through several channels should correlate with each other: if an Arab politician is a member of a party whose ideology is based on Sharia law (i.e., a set of Muslim rules governing all aspects of society), his public lifestyle must be appropriate (for example, he must perform Friday prayers in the mosque together with people of different strata of the population, or he must not consume food and drinks prohibited by Islam, etc.).

## Research results

Before proceeding to the presentation of the results of the study and their discussion, it is necessary to justify the choice of the Egyptian series “اختيار ٣” as the main source of material for the polycode text. The release of the Egyptian series “اختيار ٣” took place in 2022. The storyline of the series focuses on street protests and riots, and also highlights the removal of former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi. The series attracts much attention because it reveals hidden camera recordings of personal conversations between Morsi and religious and political figures who contributed to the course of events in Egypt in 2013. This film was chosen as the main source for the analysis of strategies for creating the image of a politician in a polycode text, since the directors, producers and screenwriters of the series “اختيار ٣” recreated many aspects that in one way or another reflect the spirit of revolutionary Egypt in 2013.

**Semantic indicators** of the speech strategy are the context of **submission** (persuasion, requests, convincement). The line of difference here lies in the peculiarities of the communicants’ interaction, in the case of violence against the will of the addressee. An example of such a strategy can be an episode from the series “اختيار ٣”, where Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, in his speech to demonstrators and protesters, angry with the policies of President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, used hyperbole to instill confidence in the future of Egypt to all who came out to the streets:

انا عاوز اقلكم ما تقلقوش ابدا على بلدكم مصر، المصريين لما ارادو التغيير، غيرو الدنيا كلها. الجيش المصري لما نزل، نزل حماكم وقعد ١٨ شهر ما مدينا ايدينا على حد، احنا ايدينا تطلق قبل ما تمسكو.  
 ‘I want to say, never worry about your country, about Egypt. If the Egyptians want to change the world, they will. The Egyptian army, when it came out, protected you [the demonstrators] for 18 months, we [the army] did not harm any of you. Throw a stone at me if it’s not true (*literally* ‘cut our hands before they touch you’).<sup>2</sup>.

As communication means we observe an appeal:

- to feelings, attitudes (‘never worry about your country’);
- to the qualities of a partner (‘If the Egyptians want to change the world, they will’);

<sup>2</sup> The translation is performed by the authors.

- to reason (الجيش المصري لما نزل ما مدينا ايدنا على حد 'we [the army] did not harm any of you');
- authority (Throw a stone at me if it's not true').

الجيش المصري نار لا تلعبو بيه ولا تلعبو معاه، لو اتدخل الجيش المصري، خلاص، خلاص، اللي شايفينو قد كده، قد كده من الجيش.

'The Egyptian army is fire, don't play with it, don't play with it. If the Egyptian army intervenes, then everything will be over, over. What you see now in the streets [of the army] is the tip of the iceberg of the Egyptian army'.

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi turns to **threats**, comparing the Egyptian army to fire:

الجيش المصري نار لا تلعبو بيه 'Egyptian army is fire don't play with it'

with a view to emphasizing the size and power of the Egyptian army and calling on the parties for an early political solution without resorting to the use of force.

Another semantic indicator of speech is the context of **discrediting**. For example, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi uses irony in his speech against former President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood for not trying to understand the causes of popular unrest, but only threatening protesters with violent crackdowns. El-Sisi says:

اللي بيحكم البلد مش عرفين يعني ايه بلد.

'Those who run the country do not know what a country is'.

Discrediting is expressed in the form of:

- insults and mockery (اللي بيحكم البلد مش عرفين يعني ايه بلد 'those who run the country do not know what a country is');
- accusations (مش عرفين يعني ايه بلد 'do not know what a country is').

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi says: (4)

احنا لازم نتكلم مع الناس وننهى حالة الفوضى دي قبل ما غيرنا ما يتكلم معاهم ويستغل اللي بيحصل ده لأسباب سياسية. قولو للناس الحقيقة، قولو للناس الكلام ده، اتكلمو مع الناس.

'We [army commanders] need to talk to people and put an end to this chaos before anyone else talks to them and takes advantage of the current events for their own political purposes. Tell people the truth, tell them the way it is, talk to people'.

In this statement, we observe that semantic indicators are presented in the form of:

- semantic clichés ('tell people', 'we need to talk to people', 'talk to people', 'take advantage of the current events for their own political purposes');
- knowledge about the world (ويستغل اللي بيحصل ده لأسباب سياسية 'take advantage of the current events for their own political purposes');
- implicit components of a statement ('tell them the way it is').

At the level of vocabulary, we observe:

- stylistic parameters of words ('we need to ... put an end to this chaos before anyone else talks to them' — 'chaos' — high language);
- lexical indicators of conversational maximalism (expressiveness, excessiveness) ('tell people the truth, tell them the way it is, talk to people');

- repeats (‘let’s talk’, ‘تتكلّم’, ‘tell’, ‘اتكلّمو’, ‘speak’);
- particles (‘these’, ‘الكلام ده’, ‘these words’).

We frequently observe the use syntactic synonyms as *lexico-grammatical indicators* in El-Sisi’s monologues. Thus, the president says:

والخسائر حتكون أكبر بكثير من اللي حصل بعد أزمة 2011 . حتستمر سنين طويلة . الناس مش عارفة ان اللي بتطلبه ده أكبر من قدرة البلد، أكبر من تحملهم هم ونتيجته. حتكون عدم استقرار وارهاب وخسائر في الارواح أكثر من كل مرة. كل حاجة في البلد. حتتلخبط أكثر. لا حيبقى فيه سياحة ولا غيره . الدنيا حتخرب . واللي بيحكمو البلد. مش عارفين يعني ايه بلد. ولا عارفين ازاى يحلو مشاكلها . مهو اصله ما ينفعش نجرب في. بلد ظروفها صعبة اصلا . وانا بين خيارين . الأولانى إنى أسكت. وده معناه حرب أهلية. البلد مش هتنجو منها.

‘And the losses will be much greater than those after the 2011 crisis. The crisis will be protracted. People do not know that what they are asking for exceeds the country’s capabilities, exceeds what they can bear. As a result, we will get instability, terrorism and a large number of human casualties. There will be chaos. There will be no tourism. The world will be destroyed. Those who run the country do not know anything about it. Everyone is confused. How to do it all. The country is in trouble. I am between two fires. If I keep silent there will be a civil war, and the country will not cope with it’.

*Lexico-grammatical indicators* appear in the form of:

- paroemiae (‘I am between two fires’);
- syntactic synonyms (‘instability, terrorism and a large number of human casualties’);
- syntactic synonyms with additional connotations (‘the world will be destroyed’, ‘the country is in trouble’, ‘the country will not cope with it’).

In this monologue, El-Sisi emphasizes many times in different sentences that the country is in a deplorable state (‘instability, terrorism and a large number of human casualties’, ‘the world will be destroyed’, ‘everyone is confused’, ‘the country is in trouble’).

It should be noted that politician El-Sisi speaks the Egyptian dialect of the Arabic language (not the literary language) which is also an element of strategies and a lexico-grammatical indicator of the politician’s speech strategy:

خلينا نحاول، وانا بكلم بسيادة الرئيس نهردا. خلينا نحاول تاني.

‘Let’s try, I’ll talk to Mr. President today. Let’s try’.

In Arabic linguistic culture, it is generally accepted that a person who speaks literary Arabic (Fusha) belongs to an educated and privileged class, in contrast to a person who speaks a dialect. We believe that the authors of the movie series “اختيار ٣” intentionally chose the dialectal form of the Arabic language in order to emphasize that President El-Sisi is close to people, he understands what the country and the Egyptians need in a difficult time for them.

The analyzed semantic and lexico-grammatical indicators of speech strategies in combination with the visual range within the polycode text of the series allow us to build the image of a politician.

It is important to analyze El-Sisi's monologue in front of his mother as an example of a polycode text, the focus of which is the image of a politician (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** El-Sisi talks to his mother

Source: A frame from the movie series “اختيار ٣”.

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi appears before the viewer in uniform, symbolizing the strength and officiality of the situation, but in front of his mother, he bows his head, kisses her hand, puts his mother's hand on his forehead (a gesture of great respect for an elderly mother in the Arab-Muslim culture). In many scenes of the series “اختيار ٣”, before making important decisions, El-Sisi comes to his mother, who silently listens to him and almost never advises anything. The public expression of respect for the mother of a high-level politician, building their communication on the contrast (the politician's monologue is opposed to the mother's silence, the politician's military uniform is opposed to the mother's hijab, the energy of the mature politician is opposed to the venerable age of the woman) are characteristic strategies for creating an image of a politician for the polycode text of Arabic political discourse.

The representation in the series of two Egyptian politicians Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Mohamed Morsi is also based on the contrast, which we will consider in the following two examples (Fig. 2, 3):

In Figure 2, Egyptian Army Chief El-Sisi addresses President Mohamed Morsi and urges him to put an end to the problem of demonstrations, stop fighting and violence in Egyptian streets, and find a common formula for cooperation between all political forces and parties.

In Figure 3, Abdul Fattah El-Sisi is shown in dynamics: he is talking on the phone and watching television, which during the events of 2013 in Egypt was the main source of operational information, since social networks and mobile communications did not work at the time of popular unrest.





**Fig. 2.** Morsi receives El-Sisi in his office  
Source: A frame from the movie series „اختيار ٣“



**Fig. 3.** El-Sisi in his office  
Source: A frame from the movie series „اختيار ٣“

Additional elements to the image of an active politician are objects on the table of El-Sisi, in contrast to the empty table of former President Mohamed Morsi.

We observe the opposition of El-Sisi and Mohamed Morsi in a number of symbols. So, in El-Sisi's office behind him we see an ayat (line) from the Koran, which testifies to the religiosity of the politician (Fig. 3). However, on the wall in the office behind the back of the former president of Egypt, who represents the international religious and political association Muslim Brotherhood, there are no symbols of a religious or political level (Fig. 2).

On the left in the photo, behind El-Sisi, there are two flags: the first is the flag of the Egyptian Air Force and the second moisture is the flag of the land forces of Egypt. Placing the flags of the most important units of the Egyptian army behind El-Sisi indicates the full support of the army for El-Sisi and his decisions.

## Conclusion

The linguistic and visual examples, derived from the Egyptian movie series “اختيار 3” (“The Choice 3”), allow us to conclude that the creation of the image of a politician in the political text of the Arabic political discourse is characterized by such semantic indicators of speech strategy as: submission, threat and discrediting. At the lexico-grammatical level there are syntactic synonyms of various types used to create the image of a politician; we also observe the presence and the use of paroemiae and dialect forms.

The visual level is built with the use of contrast and a number of symbols characteristic of the Arabic-speaking world, the decoding of which allows us to fully appreciate the scale of the politician’s personality.

We see the prospect for further research in a more detailed analysis of the interaction of codes of various genres of the polycode text in the Arabic political discourse.

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