

Lexical Semantic Change in Arabic Online News Headlines in the Covid-19 Digital Media Era

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of media, intensifying the speed and competitiveness of online news production. In this context, news headlines are increasingly shaped by the need to remain concise, timely, and attention-grabbing, leading to various forms of lexical semantic change through processes of metaphorization, terminologization, and semantic recontextualization. This study aims to identify and analyze lexical semantic change in Arabic online news headlines within the context of digital media. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study examines 50 news headlines collected from Al Arabiya, RT Arabic, and Independent Arabia published between 2020 and 2026. The findings indicate that meaning transfer emerged as the most frequent category of lexical semantic change, followed by semantic narrowing through terminologization, while semantic extension occurred less frequently. The selected headlines from Al Arabiya demonstrate a tendency toward technocratic and economically oriented metaphorical framing, RT Arabic shows stronger evaluative and ideologically loaded metaphorical expressions, while Independent Arabia exhibits greater semantic stability through scientific and medical terminology. These findings suggest that the Covid-19 pandemic did not primarily generate entirely new lexical meanings, but rather accelerated pre-existing processes of semantic change within Arabic digital media discourse. The study contributes to Arabic lexical semantics by demonstrating how digital media reshapes lexical meaning through discursive adaptation in contemporary media environments.

Keywords: Arabic Semantics, Covid-19 Pandemic, Digital Media, Lexical Semantic Change, Online News .

Abstrak: Pandemi Covid-19 telah mempercepat transformasi digital media serta meningkatkan kecepatan dan kompetisi dalam produksi berita online. Dalam konteks ini, judul berita semakin dibentuk oleh tuntutan untuk tampil ringkas, aktual, dan menarik perhatian, sehingga memunculkan berbagai bentuk perubahan makna leksikal melalui proses metaforisasi, terminologisasi, dan rekontekstualisasi semantik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis perubahan makna leksikal pada judul berita online berbahasa Arab dalam konteks jurnalisme digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan data berupa 50 judul berita yang diambil dari Al Arabiya, RT Arabic, dan Independent Arabia yang dipublikasikan antara tahun 2020 hingga 2026. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perpindahan makna menjadi kategori perubahan makna leksikal yang paling dominan, diikuti oleh penyempitan makna melalui terminologisasi, sedangkan perluasan makna terjadi dalam frekuensi yang lebih terbatas. Judul-judul berita yang dipilih dari Al Arabiya menunjukkan kecenderungan penggunaan metafora ekonomi yang bersifat teknokratis, RT Arabic menampilkan ekspresi metaforis yang lebih evaluatif dan ideologis, sedangkan Independent Arabia menunjukkan stabilitas semantik yang lebih tinggi melalui penggunaan terminologi ilmiah dan medis. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pandemi Covid-19 tidak menciptakan makna leksikal baru, melainkan mempercepat proses perubahan makna yang telah ada sebelumnya dalam wacana media digital berbahasa Arab. Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap kajian semantik Arab dengan



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menunjukkan bagaimana media digital membentuk ulang makna leksikal melalui adaptasi diskursif dalam lingkungan media kontemporer.

Kata Kunci : Berita Online, Media Digital, Pandemi Covid-19, Perubahan Makna Leksikal, Semantik Arab

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally transformed the production, circulation, and consumption of news [1], [2]. Online journalism is characterized by speed, immediacy, and continuous competition for public attention, forcing media institutions to produce news content that is not only informative but also highly visible and engaging in digital environments [3], [4], [5]. Within this context, news headlines have become increasingly strategic because they function as compressed forms of discourse capable of shaping public interpretation in a very limited textual space. Headlines are no longer merely introductory elements of news reports, but also operate as discursive tools that attract attention, frame events, and influence audience perception [6], [7], [8], [9]. Consequently, digital media environments intensify linguistic creativity and encourage the adaptation of lexical meanings in response to rapidly changing communicative demands.

The transformation of online journalism has also increased the semantic density of headlines [10], [11]. In digital media discourse, lexical items are frequently recontextualized in order to convey complex social realities through concise and impactful expressions. This condition encourages the emergence of semantic shifts, particularly through metaphorical abstraction, terminologization, and contextual reinterpretation. As competition among online media outlets intensifies, language in headlines is increasingly shaped by the need to appear timely, relevant, and attention grabbing, resulting in the expansion, narrowing, and transfer of lexical meanings [12], [13], [14]. Thus, lexical semantic change in digital media should not be understood merely as an internal linguistic phenomenon, but also as a discursive adaptation to the communicative logic of online media.

Arabic online media provides a particularly significant context for examining lexical semantic change. Arabic possesses a rich semantic system and a high degree of lexical flexibility, enabling words to develop new meanings according to sociocultural and communicative contexts [15], [16], [17]. The rapid growth of Arabic digital news platforms has accelerated the interaction between traditional lexical meanings and contemporary media discourse, especially in the domains of politics, economics, and public health. In this environment, lexical items are frequently mobilized beyond their original semantic domains in order to accommodate new realities within digital communication [18], [19].

The Covid-19 pandemic further intensified this process. As a global crisis affecting multiple aspects of social life, the pandemic generated unprecedented communicative pressure on digital media [20]. News headlines increasingly relied on metaphorical expressions, technical terminology, and semantic recontextualization to represent complex developments related to health, economics, politics, and social policy. Terms associated with medicine and public health expanded into broader discursive domains, while existing lexical items acquired more specialized meanings in response to institutional and scientific discourse. At the same time, many expressions underwent meaning transfer through conceptual metaphor, enabling abstract phenomena such as crisis, escalation, and uncertainty to be represented through concrete experiential domains.

This study argues that the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated pre-existing processes of lexical semantic change in Arabic online news headlines, particularly through metaphorical

meaning transfer and terminological narrowing, rather than generating entirely new lexical meanings [21], [22]. In this sense, the pandemic functions primarily as an accelerator of semantic dynamics that already existed within digital media discourse.

Several previous studies have examined language use in digital media from perspectives such as discourse analysis, framing, Covid-19 terminology, and media representation [23], [24], [25]. Other studies have focused on metaphorical discourse in pandemic reporting and the ideological dimensions of online media [26], [27]. However, research specifically addressing lexical semantic change in Arabic online news headlines remains limited. Existing studies generally emphasize discourse structure, media framing, or sociopolitical narratives, while relatively few examine how lexical meanings systematically shift through processes of semantic extension, semantic narrowing, and meaning transfer across different Arabic media outlets.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze lexical semantic change in Arabic online news headlines published by Al Arabiya, RT Arabic, and Independent Arabia. The study focuses on three major forms of semantic change, namely semantic extension, semantic narrowing, and meaning transfer, in order to identify how lexical meanings are reconstructed within digital media discourse. Through a comparative analysis across different media orientations, this study seeks to explain how digital media and the Covid-19 pandemic contribute to the acceleration and restructuring of lexical semantic dynamics in contemporary Arabic media discourse.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of lexical semantics. A qualitative design was selected because the study focuses on interpreting contextual meaning and identifying patterns of semantic change in Arabic online news headlines. The analysis was conducted using content analysis to examine how lexical items undergo semantic extension, semantic narrowing, and meaning transfer in digital media discourse.

The primary data consisted of news headlines collected from three major Arabic online news platforms: Al Arabiya (<https://www.alarabiya.net>), RT Arabic (<https://arabic.rt.com>), and Independent Arabia (<https://www.independentarabia.com>). These media outlets were selected because they represent different editorial orientations and discursive tendencies within contemporary Arabic digital media. Al Arabiya represents a commercially oriented transnational media platform with a strong focus on economic and political reporting [28], RT Arabic reflects a more ideologically driven media orientation [29], while Independent Arabia demonstrates a relatively scientific and informational style of reporting [30].

The dataset consisted of 50 news headlines published between January 2020 and February 2026, including 17 headlines from Al Arabiya, 17 from RT Arabic, and 16 from Independent Arabia. The data were retrieved and archived in March 2026.

The headlines were selected purposively based on thematic relevance to issues frequently associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and post-pandemic discourse. The selection process used several lexical and thematic indicators, including Covid-19 terminology, public health vocabulary, economic crisis terminology, political discourse, digital transformation, and metaphorical expressions frequently appearing in online news headlines.

The identification of lexical semantic change was conducted during the analytical stage rather than during the data selection process in order to avoid circular sampling. Headlines were included if they were published in one of the selected media outlets; contained lexical items related to pandemic, economic, political, health, or digital discourse; represented concise headline structures typical of online journalism; and provided contextual indications

of semantic reinterpretation within media discourse. Meanwhile, headlines were excluded if they consisted only of purely factual numerical reports without contextual lexical variation, duplicated similar headline structures, or lacked sufficient contextual information for semantic interpretation.

The analysis was conducted through several stages. First, lexical items potentially indicating semantic change were identified from the selected headlines. Second, the original meanings of lexical items were determined using standard Arabic dictionaries and established semantic references, including *Lisan al-‘Arab*, *Al-Mu’jam al-Wasit*, and relevant studies in Arabic semantics. Third, the contextual meanings of lexical items within the headlines were analyzed by considering discursive context and media usage.

The identified lexical items were then classified into three categories of semantic change based on operational definitions adapted from lexical semantic theory. Semantic extension refers to a process in which a lexical item expands its referential scope beyond its original semantic domain while retaining part of its core meaning. Semantic narrowing refers to a process in which a broad lexical meaning becomes restricted to a more specialized or domain specific meaning. Meaning transfer refers to a process in which a lexical item shifts from its original semantic domain to another domain through metaphorical or contextual reinterpretation [31]. After classification, the data were comparatively analyzed across the three media outlets to identify dominant semantic patterns, discursive tendencies, and differences in media orientation.

To enhance analytical validity, the semantic interpretations were examined through repeated contextual reading and cross checking with Arabic dictionaries, semantic references, and relevant literature on lexical semantic change. The classification process was conducted consistently using the established operational definitions in order to minimize interpretive inconsistency and maintain analytical reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

Table 1 presents the overall distribution of semantic change categories identified in the selected headlines from Al Arabiya, RT Arabic, and Independent Arabia.

Table 1. Overall Distribution of Semantic Change

Media Outlet	Semantic Extension	Semantic Narrowing	Meaning Transfer	Total Semantic Changes
Al Arabiya	6	6	10	22
RT Arabic	4	7	14	25
Independent Arabia	1	10	11	22
Total	11	23	35	69

The table indicates that meaning transfer constitutes the most dominant form of lexical semantic change across the dataset, followed by semantic narrowing, while semantic extension occurs less frequently. The selected headlines from RT Arabic demonstrate the highest frequency of meaning transfer, whereas Independent Arabia shows the strongest tendency toward semantic narrowing through technical and scientific terminology. Al Arabiya presents a relatively balanced distribution between semantic extension and semantic narrowing, accompanied by a substantial use of meaning transfer.

Since a single headline may contain multiple lexical items representing different categories of semantic change, the total frequency of semantic-change occurrences is higher than the total number of headlines in the dataset.

1. Lexical Semantic Change in Al-Arabiya News Headlines

Table 2. Semantic Extension in Al-Arabiya News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Extended Meaning
المنشورات	circulars; official notices	online posts; digital content
لقاح	injection; vaccine (medical term)	vaccines framed within global health and political discourse
جائحة	general disaster; calamity	multidimensional global crisis
الكمامة	mouth covering (general); from كَمَّ meaning "to cover"	face mask as personal protective equipment
رقمنة	number; digit	digitalization; economic digital transformation
هيمنة	dominance in control or supervision	global dominance influencing economic and political systems

The findings show that semantic extension in Al Arabiya primarily occurs through referential expansion within digital and global contexts. Existing lexical items are adapted to accommodate new communicative realities without losing their semantic core.

Table 3. Semantic Narrowing in Al-Arabiya News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Narrowed Meaning
أسهم	Arrows	shares as financial ownership instruments
صكوك	written documents; certificates; deeds	Islamic financial securities (long term instruments)
سندات	support; something relied upon	bonds as financial guarantees
قيود	shackles; restraints	specific lockdown policies
حصة	portion; share	equity ownership in corporate assets
فروقات العوائد	فروقات : differences; separation, and العوائد : returns; revenues	yield spreads in financial contexts

The results indicate that semantic narrowing in Al Arabiya is strongly associated with economic and financial terminologization. Broad lexical meanings become specialized technical terms within institutional discourse.

Table 4. Meaning Transfer in Al-Arabiya News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Transferred Meaning
الاستثمار الجريء	الاستثمار: investment; growth or development; and الجريء: courage	الاستثمار الجريء: venture capital; high risk, high growth investment

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Transferred Meaning
تهبط	to descend physically; to land	sharp decline in value (abstract, economic)
تقفز	to jump physically	sharp increase (debt, profit, or metrics)
تتجاوز	to pass or cross physically	to exceed limits in economic contexts
تنام	to sleep (human activity)	reduced urban or economic activity
المقاهي	places for drinking coffee	socio economic sector (hospitality industry)
سقف	roof of a building	upper limit or ceiling (economic threshold)
صاعق	lightning; electric shock	shocking or sensational (media/psychological impact)
عاصفة	natural storm	major socio political upheaval
اقتحام	forced entry; physical invasion	raids or interventions in political and legal contexts

The findings demonstrate that meaning transfer in Al Arabiya frequently involves movement from concrete physical domains to abstract economic and political domains.

2. Lexical Semantic Change in RT Arabic News Headlines

Table 5. Semantic Extension in RT Arabic News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Extended Meaning
جائحة	major disaster; widespread epidemic	multidimensional global crisis (health, economic, social)
رسائل طمأنة	ordinary reassuring messages	political communication aimed at maintaining public stability
لقاحات	injections; vaccines (medical term)	vaccines within global public health discourse
كارثة	general disaster	global health crisis or emerging epidemic

The findings indicate that semantic extension in RT Arabic broadens lexical reference within global political and crisis discourse.

Table 6. Semantic Narrowing in RT Arabic News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Narrowed Meaning
الوجهات	directions; destinations	tourism destinations
قدرات	general abilities or capacities	economic capacity (fiscal or financial capability of a state)
موارد	general resources (water, natural resources, etc.)	financial or economic resources
الطاقة	energy (general)	energy in economic terms (electricity, gas, etc.)

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Narrowed Meaning
مرجعية	reference; point of reference	key scientific reference (biobank or strain data)
صلة	general connection	scientific relationship
أنشطة	general activities	institutional or strategic activities with political or economic implications

The results show that semantic narrowing in RT Arabic reflects domain specification and terminologization, particularly in economic and scientific contexts.

Table 7. Meaning Transfer in RT Arabic News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Transferred Meaning
تعيد برمجة	reprogramming (technology)	biological alteration in bodily organs
يعود للواجهة	to return to the front (physically)	to re-emerge as a public issue
السيناريوهات	scenarios (film scripts)	policy strategies or options
خريطة	geographical map	representation of global distribution
ارتفاع	physical rise	increase in numerical value
التصعيد	gradual upward movement	escalation of tension or intensity
استنزف	to exhaust or deplete (physical or military)	depletion of economic resources
تفرض	to impose physically	to enforce policies or decisions
باهظة الثمن	expensive (high monetary cost)	high policy cost or economic consequences
التخلي	to abandon physically	withdrawal of political support
طرد	physical expulsion	institutional removal or expulsion
سيطرت	direct physical control	systemic or structural domination
خبیثة	malicious or harmful (often medical)	morally or politically malicious intent
قنابل	bombs (explosive weapons)	latent biological threats

The findings reveal that meaning transfer in RT Arabic extensively utilizes conceptual abstraction and cross-domain metaphorical mapping.

3. Lexical Semantic Change in Independent Arabia News Headlines

Table 8. Semantic Extension in Independent Arabia News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Extended Meaning
لقاح	injection; vaccine (medical term)	vaccines within public health and policy discourse

The findings indicate that semantic extension in Independent Arabia occurs in a relatively limited manner compared to the other media outlets.

Table 9. Semantic Narrowing in Independent Arabia News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Narrowed Meaning
انتهاك	general violation	violation of legal rules or pandemic regulations
الإغلاق	to close	lockdown
العزل	general separation	medical isolation
حضانة	care; nurturing	incubation period (medical context)
الكمامة	mouth covering (general); from كَمَّ meaning “to cover”	medical mask as primary protective equipment
إصابة	being affected by something (general)	viral infection
سلالة	lineage; descent	viral strain
تطعيم	general act of administering (injection)	specific medical procedure (vaccination)
التوصية	advice; recommendation	official recommendation based on scientific evidence and policy implications
الأولويات	general priorities	strategic policy agenda

The results demonstrate that semantic narrowing in Independent Arabia is primarily associated with medical and policy-related terminologization.

Table 10. Meaning Transfer in Independent Arabia News Headlines

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Transferred Meaning
تقلل	to reduce	reduction in medical probability or risk
خاوية	physically empty	absence of economic activity
يبحث	to search physically	economic preference or demand orientation
سرعت	to accelerate physically	acceleration of disease transmission
تزايد	to grow; increase physically	statistical increase
مكمن الخلل	hidden place of damage	underlying abstract source of a problem
يكشفون	to uncover physically	to discover or reveal scientifically
مكافحة	to fight (physical or military context)	disease control or medical intervention
تسقط	to drop physically	to dismiss or annul legal charges

Lexical Item/Phrase	Original Meaning	Transferred Meaning
توقف	to stop physically	to suspend policies or institutional decisions
يتراجعن	to move backward physically	decline in performance or academic achievement

The findings show that meaning transfer in Independent Arabia functions primarily through controlled conceptual abstraction rather than highly evaluative metaphor.

B. Discussion

The findings from Al-Arabiya reveal a dynamic configuration of lexical semantic change, characterized by the dominance of meaning transfer (*naql al-ma'na*) and the systematic deployment of metaphor, particularly within the economic domain. This pattern reflects not merely linguistic variation, but a broader discursive strategy in which abstract and complex realities are rendered intelligible through economically grounded representations.

Semantic extension in this context operates as a mechanism of discursive expansion, whereby existing lexical items are recontextualized to accommodate the demands of digital and global communication. For instance, terms such as *المنشورات* and *رقمنة* illustrate how traditional lexical items are extended to capture digital practices and economic transformation. Rather than generating entirely new vocabulary, Al-Arabiya demonstrates a tendency toward semantic reutilization, extending the referential scope of established terms to align with contemporary phenomena such as global crises and policy discourse. This suggests an adaptive semantic economy in which lexical stability is maintained while interpretive flexibility is enhanced.

In contrast, semantic narrowing reflects a strong process of terminologization [32], particularly within economic and financial discourse. General lexical items are systematically restricted into domain specific technical terms, as seen in *أسهم* and *صكوك*, which now function as specialized financial instruments. This pattern highlights the increasing influence of technocratic discourse, where language operates as a tool for encoding specialized knowledge and reinforcing epistemic authority [33], [34]. The narrowing process thus contributes to the construction of a more controlled and discipline oriented semantic field.

Meaning transfer emerges as the most dominant mechanism, operating through conceptual metaphor that maps concrete experiential domains onto abstract domains such as economics, politics, and social dynamics. This is evident in expressions such as *تهبط* and *تقفز*, which shift from physical movement to economic fluctuation, and *سقف*, which evolves from a physical structure into an abstract limit. Such mappings enable the transformation of intangible phenomena into measurable and cognitively accessible representations. The recurrent use of movement and spatial metaphors indicates a systematic tendency to frame complex processes in quantifiable and dynamic terms.

Overall, the pattern of semantic change in Al-Arabiya demonstrates a consistent orientation toward metaphorical abstraction, quantitative framing, and economic rationalization. Meaning transfer functions as the primary mechanism for translating complexity into simplified and operational terms, while semantic narrowing reinforces technical precision, and semantic extension supports contextual adaptability. The selected headlines from Al Arabiya suggest a tendency toward a technocratic linguistic framework in which economic logic, numerical representation, and discursive efficiency are foregrounded. Consequently, lexical semantic change in this context should be understood not merely as a

linguistic phenomenon, but as an integral component of media discourse in shaping and structuring representations of reality.

The findings from RT Arabic indicate a pattern of lexical semantic change in which meaning transfer (*naql al-ma'na*) is dominant, supported by processes of semantic extension and narrowing within post pandemic discourse. This configuration suggests that lexical meaning is actively reorganized to accommodate shifts in global narratives rather than merely expanded or reduced in isolation.

Semantic extension functions as a mechanism of referential broadening, allowing lexical items to move beyond their original domains while retaining their core semantic features. For example, terms such as *جائحة* and *كارثة* extend from denoting localized disaster or epidemic to representing multidimensional global crises. Similarly, the phrase *رسائل طمأنة* illustrates how a general communicative function develops into a more specialized discursive role associated with political stabilization. These cases demonstrate that extension in RT Arabic is not purely lexical, but discursive, as meanings expand to accommodate broader socio political interpretations without losing their semantic core.

In contrast, semantic narrowing reflects processes of domain restriction and terminologization, particularly in economic and policy related contexts. Lexical items such as *قدرات* and *موارد* illustrate how broad semantic fields are constrained into specific technical meanings, such as fiscal capacity and financial resources. A similar pattern can be observed in *صلة*, which becomes restricted to scientific correlation. This narrowing does not reduce meaning arbitrarily, but increases semantic precision by aligning lexical items with specialized domains. Such patterns indicate a systematic shift toward controlled and context bound usage, where ambiguity is minimized in favor of functional clarity.

Meaning transfer emerges as the central mechanism through which abstract domains are structured, primarily via conceptual metaphor. This process involves systematic mappings from physical or concrete domains onto abstract domains such as politics, economics, and health. For instance, *ارتفاع* and *التصعيد* shift from physical movement to represent numerical increase and political escalation, while *قنابل* is transferred from the military domain to describe latent biological threats. More complex transfers, such as *تعيد برمجة*, demonstrate cross domain mapping from technology to biology, indicating a higher level of semantic abstraction. These examples show that meaning transfer in RT Arabic is not incidental, but patterned, relying on embodied experience to structure abstract interpretation [35].

The semantic profile of RT Arabic is characterized by the interaction of discursive extension, terminological narrowing, and metaphor driven transfer. Among these, meaning transfer plays a pivotal role in mediating between concrete experience and abstract representation, thereby enabling the construction of ideologically and evaluatively charged discourse. The relatively high frequency of cross domain mappings suggests that semantic change in this media is closely tied to strategies of framing, where lexical choices contribute to shaping interpretation rather than merely conveying information.

The findings from Independent Arabia reveal a pattern of lexical semantic change marked by the predominance of semantic narrowing (*takhsis al-ma'na*) and a relatively stable, technically oriented linguistic register. Unlike other media, semantic change in this context appears more controlled, reflecting a preference for precision over rhetorical or metaphorical intensification.

Semantic extension is limited and operates primarily as referential expansion rather than structural change. The term *لقاح* illustrates this pattern: while its core medical meaning remains intact, its usage extends to encompass broader domains such as public health policy and global distribution. This type of extension does not alter the semantic nucleus of the term, but broadens its discursive applicability. It therefore reflects contextual enrichment rather

than genuine semantic shift, indicating that lexical stability is maintained even as communicative scope expands.

In contrast, semantic narrowing constitutes the dominant mechanism and is closely linked to systematic terminologization. General lexical items are restricted into specialized meanings within clearly defined domains, particularly in medical and regulatory discourse. For example, الإغلاق, العزل, and سلالة function as standardized technical terms rather than general expressions, while إصابة is confined to the specific meaning of viral infection. Similarly, انتهاك and التوصية reflect domain specific usage in legal and policy contexts. This pattern indicates a shift toward semantic precision through domain restriction, where ambiguity is reduced and interpretive variability is minimized.

Meaning transfer is present but operates with lower intensity and tends toward conceptual abstraction rather than expressive metaphor. The observed shifts typically involve movement from physical actions to statistical, scientific, or institutional meanings. For instance, تقلل is used to indicate probabilistic reduction, while تزايد and سرعت denote measurable changes in epidemiological data. Expressions such as مكمن الخلل illustrate abstraction from a physical location to an underlying causal source, and يكشفون reflects a shift from physical uncovering to scientific discovery. In institutional contexts, تسقط and توقف signal formal decisions rather than physical actions. These patterns demonstrate that meaning transfer in Independent Arabia functions primarily as a mechanism of controlled abstraction rather than rhetorical amplification.

Overall, the semantic profile of Independent Arabia is defined by the interaction between limited extension, dominant narrowing, and moderate transfer. Semantic narrowing through terminologization serves as the central organizing principle, ensuring precision and consistency across domains, while meaning transfer supports necessary abstraction without significantly increasing semantic intensity. This configuration reflects an editorial orientation that prioritizes informational clarity, disciplinary alignment, and semantic stability. Consequently, lexical semantic change in this media context is best understood as a process of controlled specialization rather than dynamic expansion or metaphor driven transformation.

Comparative Analysis of Semantic Change Across Media

The analysis of the three media outlets reveals significant differences in their semantic characteristics. The selected headlines from Al Arabiya are predominantly characterized by the use of economic metaphors, employing quantitative and technocratic language that relies on expressions of movement, scale, and limitation to represent reality. In contrast, RT Arabic headlines tend to employ a stronger tendency toward ideologically driven metaphors, using evaluative language with high semantic intensity. Its lexical choices not only convey information but also frame events through implicit judgment and interpretation.

Meanwhile, Independent Arabia exhibits a more scientific orientation, characterized by the dominance of medical terminologization, minimal reliance on metaphor, and greater semantic stability. These differences indicate that lexical semantic change in news headlines is not solely driven by internal linguistic processes, but is closely shaped by media orientation and discursive strategy [36]. These findings align with conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson [37], which posits that abstract domains such as economics, politics, and public health are structured through mappings from more concrete experiential domains, thereby shaping how reality is framed in discourse.

Taken together, the three media outlets demonstrate a systematic configuration of lexical semantic change in which semantic extension, narrowing, and meaning transfer operate as interrelated mechanisms rather than isolated processes. Among these, meaning transfer emerges as the central mechanism, enabling the abstraction of complex phenomena through

cognitively grounded mappings. At the same time, semantic narrowing functions as a stabilizing force through terminologization, particularly in domains requiring precision such as economics, medicine, and policy. By restricting lexical meanings into domain specific usage, it reduces ambiguity and reinforces interpretive control. In contrast, semantic extension operates more selectively as referential expansion, allowing lexical items to adapt to new communicative contexts without altering their semantic core.

This interaction demonstrates that lexical semantic change in digital media is a structured response to the demands of high intensity information environments [38], [39]. Each media outlet mobilizes these mechanisms differently: Al Arabiya foregrounds technocratic abstraction, the RT Arabic dataset indicates a stronger tendency toward evaluative and ideological framing, while Independent Arabia prioritizes precision and semantic stability.

From a broader perspective, these findings suggest that semantic change in digital media is less a process of lexical innovation than of semantic reconfiguration. Language functions not only as a medium of representation, but as a mechanism for structuring and stabilizing social reality within contemporary media discourse [40].

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study demonstrates that lexical semantic change in Arabic online news headlines is predominantly characterized by meaning transfer, followed by semantic narrowing, while semantic extension occurs less frequently. Across the selected headlines from Al Arabiya, RT Arabic, and Independent Arabia, semantic change operates through different discursive tendencies shaped by media orientation. The selected headlines from Al Arabiya tend to employ economically oriented metaphorical framing. In contrast, the selected headlines from RT Arabic demonstrate a stronger tendency toward evaluative and cross-domain metaphorical transfer, while Independent Arabia prioritizes semantic narrowing through scientific and medical terminologization. These findings indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic functioned primarily as an accelerator of existing semantic dynamics rather than as a creator of entirely new lexical meanings.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to Arabic lexical semantics by demonstrating how semantic extension, semantic narrowing, and meaning transfer interact systematically within digital media discourse. The findings also reinforce conceptual metaphor theory by showing that abstract domains such as economics, politics, and public health are consistently structured through mappings from concrete experiential domains. In the context of digital media, this study highlights how online news headlines function not only as informational units but also as discursive mechanisms that compress, frame, and reconstruct social reality through semantic adaptation.

The findings also have broader implications for the study of Arabic media discourse and digital media. The dominance of meaning transfer and terminologization indicates that lexical semantic change functions as an important linguistic resource for adapting complex social realities to the communicative demands of digital media environments. For media practitioners, the findings demonstrate the strategic role of lexical selection in shaping audience engagement and facilitating the communication of complex social issues in digital news environments. For researchers in Arabic linguistics and media studies, this study highlights the importance of examining semantic change as a discursive process shaped by the interaction between language, technology, and media institutions.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a relatively small qualitative corpus consisting of 50 headlines selected purposively from three Arabic online media outlets. In addition, the interpretation of semantic categories relies on qualitative

contextual analysis, which may involve a degree of interpretive subjectivity despite the use of semantic references and repeated analytical validation. Therefore, the findings should be understood as context-specific rather than universally representative of all Arabic digital media discourse.

Future studies may expand the corpus size and incorporate quantitative or corpus-based approaches to examine lexical semantic change more systematically across broader media environments. Further research could also explore diachronic semantic shifts before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic or compare semantic patterns across additional Arabic media outlets with different political and ideological orientations. Such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between semantic change, digital media, and contemporary Arabic media discourse.

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