

# The Linguistic Features of Acronyms in Arabic

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Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study investigates the phonological, semantic, and pragmatic features of acronyms in Arabic. Acronyms in Arabic have appeared quite recently as a result of globalization and exposure to or contact with, mainly, English via radio stations and TV channels, which are broadcasting in English and in some countries, for example, Morocco in both English and French. Through in-depth analysis, it has been observed that acronyms in Arabic are subject to different restrictions: (a) The phonological combinations are formed on the basis of Arabic templates; hence, should be compatible with Arabic phonotactics, for example, consonant clusters should be broken up by vowels; (b) the connotation of the acronyms should not be negative; and (c) in conformity with relevance theory, when the acronyms are homophonous to existing words, the former maximize contextual effects with minimum processing effort. The fact that they appear in certain contexts also reduces the processing effort. It has also become evident that the period between the establishment of the movement or party and the first use of the acronym decreases over time, provided that the acronyms are frequently mentioned in the media. The examination of acronyms in different languages shows that acronymization is quite pervasive cross-linguistically; this may suggest that not any word-formation process can easily spread; it needs to be prevalent and potentially universal.

## Keywords

acronyms, Arabic, initialism, prosodic morphology, relevance theory, word-formation process

## Introduction

Language users form new words by different means of word creation, the most common of which, at least in English, are affixation, compounding, and conversion (see Kiparsky, 1982). In addition, there are a number of less common ways in which new words can be formed, such as blending, clipping, coinage, backformation, abbreviations, acronyms, and alphabetisms (Booij, 2007; Haspelmath & Sims, 2010; Lieber, 2010; Plag, 2003). Notwithstanding their limited productivity in some languages, initialisms, that is, acronyms have been found in many languages (Ehrmann, Rocca, Steinberger, & Tanev, 2013). As word-formation processes, such as abbreviation and acronymization, demand minimum amount of processing effort by the recipient in line with relevance theory (RT), this may suggest that these word-formation processes are more likely to spread compared with other ones. In fact, the article argues that as acronyms are pronounced as words, for example, *AIDS* (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), they are more likely to be used than abbreviation. As little attention has been given to acronyms in Arabic, this phenomenon is worthy of further investigation. Acronyms have possibly appeared quite recently starting from 1960s, which may suggest that exposure to acronyms through radio stations and TV channels could have an impact on another language in certain cases, especially in

language contact scenarios. In particular, this study investigates whether acronymization in Arabic, as a word-formation process, has been influenced by European languages, mainly English. The study also sheds light on the development of this phenomenon in Arabic through time. The ultimate goal is to examine the phonological, semantic, and pragmatic conditions that may limit the productivity of this phenomenon in Arabic.

## General Background

### *Initialism and the Significance of Acronymization*

Initialism is one of the popular means of forming new words. In this regard, initialism (e.g., *NATO* and *FBI*) and blends (e.g., *smog* and *motel*) are similar in nature, because all of them are amalgamations of parts of different words (Plag, 2003).<sup>1</sup> Initialism, abbreviation (e.g., *Mr*), and blending

<sup>1</sup>Al Ain University of Science and Technology, United Arab Emirates

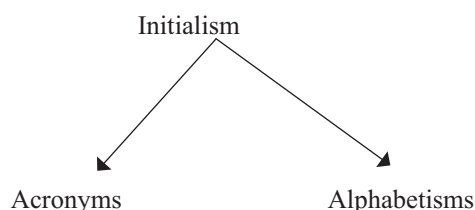
### Corresponding Author:

Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh, Assistant Professor, English Department, College of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Al Ain University of Science and Technology, Al Ain, P.O. Box 64141, United Arab Emirates.

Email: [abdelrahman.takhaine@aaau.ac.ae](mailto:abdelrahman.takhaine@aaau.ac.ae)



involve loss of material, while affixation involves addition of material. However, abbreviation and initialism differ from blending in that orthography plays a prominent role, while prosodic categories do not (Plag, 2003). Specifically, when the first letters of words that make a name or phrase are used to create a new word, the result is called initialism (Lieber, 2010). The previous definition excludes some initialisms that are created from compounds, at least, in German (Ehrmann et al., 2013). Therefore, initialism could be better defined as a word-formation process used to create new words by taking the initial letters of multiword sequences. Initialisms are traditionally divided into two kinds: acronyms and alphabetisms (Rúa, 2002).



Acronymization can be defined as a morphological process, in which a combination of initial letters of a word sequence is pronounced as a word. Examples of acronymization in different languages can be found, such as English *NATO* (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and French *OTAN* (Organization du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord) (Booij, 2007). On the contrary, alphabetisms can be defined as a combination of the first letters of words, pronounced with the phonetic value of these letters. An example from English is *SMS* (Short Message Service) and from French is *SVP* (S'il vous plait; Booij, 2007). Unlike acronyms, alphabetisms are pronounced as a series of letters such as *FBI* (Federal Bureau of Investigation) [ef bi ai], whereas acronyms such as *AIDS* [eidz], are pronounced as one word. As far as orthography is concerned, acronyms can be spelled in upper case, such as *NASA* (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) or lower case such as *laser* (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation). On the contrary, alphabetisms are always spelled in upper case, such as *CIA* (Central Intelligence Agency) [si: ai ei] and *USA* (United States of America) [ju: es ei]. Even though one can argue that Arabic exhibits alphabetism, for example, *m.t.f* for *munaḍḍamat taḥrīr lfalasʿtʿyniyyah* (Palestinian Liberation Organization [PLO]), this study focuses on acronymization, as the former requires extensive analysis for which the current study has insufficient scope.

With regard to the significance of acronymization, Hartmann and Stork (1976) suggest that acronyms are created to speed up and facilitate communication due to their conciseness and catchiness in both written and spoken mediums (see section "The Pragmatic Features of Acronyms," for more detail). In this way, conciseness and precision are extremely important in the formation of acronyms. In this

regard, Ehrmann et al. (2013), who have recently identified several acronym pairs in 22 different languages, state that "like entities, acronyms have a high reference value, in the sense that they most of the time act as reference anchors of textual content" (p. 237). Simply put, it is a means of word-formation process that creates new words for concepts which are either frequently used in the media or difficult to describe. Stating what the acronym stands for would be time-consuming, especially if one is using common acronyms such as *NASA*, *UNESCO*, *NATO*, *AIDS*, and so on (Crystal, 2004). Hijazi (2001) suggests three reasons that account for the use of acronyms: (a) Acronymization saves time due to its succinctness; (b) acronym takes less space in printing, as individual letters are used to represent full phrases and/or compounds; and (c) the use of acronyms facilitates the comprehension of the original phrase or compound. Therefore, it is expected that preference for using acronyms is globally shared by several languages.

Reviewing the literature, it seems that no study has, so far, examined acronymization in its correct definition in Arabic. In addition, the fact that acronymization in Arabic is governed by phonological, semantic, and pragmatic factors has not been addressed and accounted for in the previous literature. Therefore, this study investigates acronymization in Arabic to bridge this gap. It traces the foundation and development of this word-formation process throughout the years. In addition, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

**Research Question 1:** To what extent is acronymization in Arabic influenced by existing acronyms found in European languages, mainly English?

**Research Question 2:** What are the phonological, semantic, and pragmatic conditions that may restrict the creation of new acronyms in Arabic?

**Research Question 3:** In light of RT, do acronyms demand less processing effort by the recipients?

### The History of Initialism

Investigating the origin of the word *acronym*, it seems to be originally derived from the Greek words *akros* and *onyma*, which mean "tip" and "name," respectively. Although the word "acronym" was believed to have been coined in 1943 (Thomas, Ethridge, & Ruffner, 1965, p. 7), Foster (1972, p. 196) points out that the use of acronyms "... was in full swing during the First World War." However, the desire to economize emerged several millennia ago. Cannon (1989, p. 99) argues that initialism has existed for centuries because several examples of this phenomenon can be found, namely, in Hebrew, such as *MILH* (Mi Iolh Lnv Hshmilh) "who shall go up for us to heaven?" and Roman examples like *SPQR* (Senatus populusque Romanus) "the Senate and People of Rome." Another well-known and old acronym, cited in the Christian Bible, is *INRI* (Iesus Nazareus Rex Iudaeorum) "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." Furthermore,

the 17th-century English *cabal* stands for five committee members' names, that is, Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale (Cannon, 1989). After that, a brief list for the Smithsonian Annual Report was compiled by De La Rue (1867), as many abbreviations appeared and started to be used frequently. In England, some of these abbreviations are *A.B.* and *D.C.L.* In the meantime, American abbreviations like *C.O.D.*, *N.G.*, and *O.K.* started to appear. Mencken (1919, p. 22) describes this procedure as "the characteristics American habit of reducing complex concepts to the starkest abbreviations." Later, Riordan (1974) notes that World War I witnessed a systematic increase in the number of abbreviations, as Americans had been long using abbreviated forms to stand for governmental, business, and daily activities.

Furthermore, Russell (1946) notes that Merriam added 72 initialisms to the 1945 supplement to Webster's second edition (1934) that were not in the 1939 one, becoming part of the American lexicon. In fact, Robbins (1951) collected 126 oral and written initialisms from aviation alone, showing that their popularity had been growing drastically. In this respect, Rúa (2002) states that more attention is paid to initialisms since their analysis exhibits variety and complexity pointing to a structure which clearly makes describing them in the classical fashion quite challenging. On the contrary, Bauer (1983) downgrades initialisms because, apart from being unpredictable, they are heavily based on orthography. In particular, there are two reasons behind the lack of predictability in initialisms. First, the initialism is formed freely from the original phrase. Second, not all initialisms are pronounced as one word (Bauer, 1983). For instance, according to Yule (2006), one element of innovative acronyms, such as *PIN* (Personal Identification Number), is normally repeated, as in *I gave my PIN number to my mother*. Overall, one may argue that initialism requires further investigation for two reasons; first, this phenomenon seems universal (see section "The History of Initialism"); and second, it is a significant and productive process to form new words, at least in several European languages.

Acronyms are not only used in English and other European languages; they are also used in Arabic. One of the first researchers to discuss acronymization in Arabic is Al-Samarra'i (1987); he discusses a type of Arabic word-formation process which involves the shortening or blending of the individual words of a particular phrase. Alsamarra'i (1987) refers to this process as *nnaht* "abbreviation," whereby the initial letters of a set of words are used to create a new word. Some of the examples he provides were cited from the Quran, such as *khyʿsʿ* (kaaf haa yaa ʿayn sʿaad), indicating that such abbreviations are a symbol of certain meanings of the Quran, which are until now a mystery. One may argue that even though the examples cited by Alsamarra'i may, at first glance, appear to be acronyms, they could not be, as they stand for a concept which is unknown. In another study, Abu Salim (1997) classifies acronyms in Arabic into two groups; the first one is concerned with acronyms based on Arabic data, as in (1):

- |                               |                   |                     |  |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--|
| (1)                           | rama <sup>2</sup> |                     |  |
| <i>raabitʿat</i>              | <i>l-marʿa</i>    | <i>l-ʿurduniyya</i> |  |
| association                   | the-woman         | the-Jordanian       |  |
| "Jordanian Women Association" |                   |                     |  |

The second group, however, consists of acronyms formed on the basis of English words. An example of this case is *saabik*, the Arabic version of the English acronym *SABIC* (Saudi Basic Industries Company). Examining Abu Salim's work, it seems that his treatment of acronyms is compatible with Plag's (2003) and Booij's (2007) definitions of acronymization, because (a) the majority of the acronyms he cites are enunciated as acceptable words, at least phonologically and (b) the acronyms he mentions are formed on the basis of the initial letters of the individual words of the phrase from which the acronym is created. More recently, based on the work of some Arab scholars, Hijazi (2001, pp. 95-96) indicates that acronymization as a process has been used historically in Arabic. In particular, he posits that examples of acronyms can be found in old Arabic manuscripts, such as *ʿilx* (*ʿila ʿaaxirih*) "etc." He explains that through time, a significant number of acronyms have started to emerge and appear in dictionaries. Abu Humeid and Altai (2013), whose study focuses on the translation of acronyms in English and Arabic, concur with Hijazi, providing examples, such as *kg* (kilo gram). However, looking at some examples provided by both Hijazi (2001) and Abu Humeid and Altai (2013), I argue that these examples are not acronyms due to the fact that they are not pronounced as a word; when spoken, they are uttered as two separate words, for example, *kilo gram* not *kg*. In fact, they are merely abbreviated for writing purposes. Other researchers, who tackled acronymization in Arabic, examine the formation mechanisms of acronyms and the contexts in which acronyms are found as well as some semantic constraints on acronymization. In particular, Hamdan and Fareh (2003) provide a contrastive analysis of acronymization in both English and Arabic, focusing on (a) the mechanisms by which acronyms are formed in both languages and (b) their contexts of use. The analysis provided by Hamdan and Fareh (2003) demonstrates that the two languages have a number of formation mechanisms in common, for example, being formed based on the initial letters of the component words and the tendency to ignore function words unless they are important for forming phonologically and/or semantically acceptable words. However, the analysis also shows that each language has particular mechanisms which are exclusive to it. For instance, Arabic sometimes reverses the order of the initial letters of the components of a certain acronym for semantic reasons, for example, the initial letters of the components of the acronym *fatih* (*ḥarakat ttaḥrīr l-falasṭīniyyah*) "The Palestinian National Liberation Movement" were reversed because they originally were *ḥatīf* "death," which is obviously quite negative; thus, the order was reversed to yield *fatih*, which means liberation. With regard to the context of use, Hamdan and Fareh (2003) note



that compared with English, acronyms in Arabic are less frequent and more restricted as far as their context of use is concerned. They ascribe their observation to various variables, for example, linguistic, scientific, and cultural. The current article takes the analysis of Hamdan and Fareh (2003) as a departure point to examine acronymization phonologically, semantically, and pragmatically in more detail, taking into consideration theoretical frameworks such as autosegmental phonology and RT.

Another interesting issue is the adaptation of English abbreviations into Arabic, such as *BBC*, *WAN*, *ADSL*, *laser*, *radar*, and *e-mail* (Alnajjar, 2005). Such adaptation can be also cited in other languages, such as Japanese, in which some English acronyms, for example, *FBI* and *PC* were borrowed with certain phonological modifications (Kubozono, 2010). Similarly, some phonological modifications occur when the English abbreviations are used in Arabic, such as *leezar* “Laser (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation),” *ra:da:r* “radar (Radio Detecting and Ranging),” *ʔeedz* “AIDS,” and *beessik* “BASIC (Beginners All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code).” In *laser*, the diphthong /ei/ is replaced by the long vowel /e:/ and in *radar*, the diphthong /ei/ is replaced by the vowel /a:/. On the contrary, in *AIDS*, a glottal stop is pronounced at the beginning of the acronym, whereas in *BASIC*, the sound /s/ is geminated (cf. Kay, 1995, pp. 68-72). Morphologically, these borrowed acronyms, for example, *ra:da:r*, are pluralized using an Arabic plural marker (sound feminine), for example, *ra:da:ra:t* “radars,” and they are marked with the Arabic definite article *l-* “the,” that is, *r-ra:da:r* “the radar.”<sup>3</sup> The use of English acronyms in Arabic could be attributed to different reasons: (a) English is regarded as the language of science; (b) there are few Arabic acronyms in comparison with English; and (c) the dramatic increase in the use of abbreviated forms in writing on the Internet.

The next section presents the methodology used in the current study.

## Method

With regard to data collection, with the exception of acronyms whose organizations were established in late 2011 onward, the majority of acronyms were collected from *Arabic corpus tool* (henceforth, arabicorpus), which is an online comprehensive Arabic corpus available through Brigham Young University: arabicorpus@byu.edu. It is a program that allows the user to search from a large corpus of Arabic words, containing a total of 173,600,000 words. The bulk of the corpora were collected from newspapers, that is, *Al-Masri Al-Yawm* 2010, *Al-Ahram* 1999, and *Shuruq Columns Egypt* from Egypt; *Al-Thawra* from Syria; *At-Tajdid* 2002 from Morocco; *Al-Watan* 2002 from Kuwait; *Al-Ghad* 2010-2011 from Jordan; and *Al-Hayat* 1996, 1997 from London. This corpus is very suitable to achieve the goals of the current study, as the majority of Arabic acronyms are

names of organizations and political parties (see section “The Pragmatic Features of Acronyms”). To find acronyms in the arabicorpus, I used keywords which I collected from the relevant literature on acronyms in Arabic (e.g., Hamdan & Fareh, 2003) and from other sources, for example, newspapers. However, arabicorpus does not have a clear timeline, that is, the data were collected from several newspapers from different years. Thus, to trace the establishment of the organization/party to determine when the acronym started to be used, I referred to Google using authentic Arabic websites (e.g., *Aljazeera*, 2016), newspapers (e.g., *Al-Rai*, 2016), universities archives (mainly Birzeit University Archive, 2015), and official websites of the organizations that acronymize their names, for example, Syrian Arab News Agency, Kuwait News Agency, and so on. These websites were also employed to locate recent acronyms, whose organizations were established in late 2011 onward. I also refer to some data that have already been discussed in the relevant literature (e.g., Abu Humeid & Altai, 2013; Hamdan & Fareh, 2003; Hijazi, 2001). I was able to collect 20 examples to provide a detailed description and analysis of the linguistic features of acronyms in contemporary Arabic, paying special attention to their establishment, that is, first use. Note that there are more acronyms in Arabic other than the ones analyzed in this study; however, the ones that were selected to be analyzed are the most commonly used acronyms in Arabic, or at least they were famous at a certain point in time. As a native speaker of Arabic, I am familiar with most of the acronyms analyzed in this study even before I conducted the research. These acronyms are also familiar to native speakers of Arabic.

The linguistic analysis provided focuses on the phonology of the acronyms, explaining how they are formed using autosegmental phonology (McCarthy, 1981). Similar to other languages, for example, English (see Hamdan & Fareh, 2003), the phonological analysis also demonstrates how acronyms in Arabic are permissible phonological words formed through inserting vowel sounds between consonants or making use of already existing vowel sounds in the components of the acronym. The semantic analysis shows that acronyms, on the first level, are usually homophonous to existing words (see Hijazi, 2001). On the second level, acronyms in Arabic need to have a positive connotation. With regard to their pragmatics, the analysis relies on RT, which states that as a matter of general cognitive fact, people attempt to maximize contextual effects with minimum processing cost (Wilson & Spreber, 1981, 2004). In other words, to arrive at maximal relevance, positive cognitive effects (e.g., understand a certain concept, find a solution to a problem, confirm a doubt, etc.) are achieved by processing an input with a minimum processing effort (Wilson & Spreber, 2004, p. 252). For example, upon hearing the utterance “it’s cold in here” while ostentatiously staring at the open window, the hearer will exert little cognitive effort to infer that the speaker wants him to close the window. However, in the

same context, inferring that the heater is not working would require more processing effort (Wilson & Spreber, 2004). Hence, RT assumes that every input can be potentially relevant to the hearers; otherwise the speaker may not have uttered it in the first place (Carston, 1998). RT argues that the principle of relevance is entrenched in humans' cognitive system, as it does not comprise maxims that people choose to follow or flout as delineated by Grice (1989, p. 26). Hence, Grice's maxims can all be subsumed under relevance provided that a clear definition of relevance is supplied (Wilson & Spreber, 2004). RT does not deny that when speakers and hearers converse, they aim at being cooperative. RT posits that speakers and hearers are cooperative, as they want to maximize relevance. When acronyms possess a meaning that corresponds to one denoted by an established word and they are mentioned in a relevant context which both speakers are familiar with, their processing effort, I argue, is minimized to a great extent. The next section provides an analysis of acronyms in Arabic.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

### Early Establishment of Acronyms in Arabic

Acronyms in Arabic have appeared quite recently, approximately in the past three decades, compared with other languages, such as English (see section "The History of Initialism"). The emergence of acronymization in Arabic has taken place in two main stages that developed in parallel until one of them fell out of use; first, the acronyms were formed using the translation of the words in English, rather than the original Arabic word. Examples of this case are illustrated below:

(2) sana  
*l-wikaalah*    *l-ṣarabīyyah*    *s-suwriyyah*    *li*    *l-ṭanbaaʔ*  
 the-agency    the-Arab    the-Syrian    for    the-news  
 "Syrian Arab News Agency"

(3) suna  
*wikaalat*    *l-ṭanbaaʔ*    *l-suwdaniyyah*  
 agency    the-news    the-Sudanese  
 "Sudan News Agency"

(4) kuna  
*wikaalat*    *l-ṭanbaaʔ*    *l-kuwaytiyyah*  
 agency    the-news    the-Kuwaiti  
 "Kuwait News Agency"

An examination of examples (2) to (4) clearly demonstrates that the acronyms are formed based on the English translation of the Arabic words. Based on the official websites of the above agencies, *sana* (Syrian Arab News Agency, 2015) has been in use since 1965, *suna* (Sudan News Agency, 2015) started to be used in 1970, and *kuna* (Kuwait News Agency, 2015) emerged in 1976. *sana* was mentioned 0.03

times per 100,000 words in arabicorpus, *suna* 0.02 times, and *kuna* 0.32 times. These acronyms are formed, relying on the initials of the translation, albeit some modifications in *suna* and *kuna* in conformity with Arabic phonotactics (see section "The Phonological Features of Acronyms"). Note that these instances support the argument that acronyms in contemporary Arabic are influenced by acronyms in other languages, most notably English.

Another interesting example is *haka*, which presents an instance of French influence on Arabic acronyms.<sup>4</sup> This example refers to a high authority of audiovisual communication, which was established in Morocco in 2002:

(5) haka  
*l-hayʔa*    *l-ḥulya*    *li*    *l-ṭitisʕaal*  
*s-smaʔy*    *wa*    *l-basʕary*  
 the-authority    the-high    for    the-communication  
 the-hearing    and    the-sight  
 "The High Authority of Audiovisual Communication"

This authority resembles in function the French authority HACA (*Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle*), which was established in 1982. Interestingly, Moroccans borrowed the acronym itself (*HACA*) and matched what it stood for, that is, "the high authority of audiovisual communication" in French to the Arabic authority despite the fact that (*HACA*) cannot be formed from the Arabic words. If it was formed, then the resulting acronym would be *hʕʔsb*, which is meaningless and impossible to pronounce. This could be due to two reasons: (a) the high influence of French on Moroccan Arabic through radio stations and TV channels and (b) *hʕʔsb* is not a phonologically possible word in Arabic as it contains impermissible consonant clusters (see section "The Phonological Features of Acronyms").<sup>5</sup> Following the translation-from-other-languages period, the second stage of acronym formation is represented by *ʔamal*, literally translated as "hope"; the first attested transparent acronym used in the context of political parties and organizations. Specifically, the acronym was formed on the basis of the Arabic words, rather than their English or French translation:

(6) ʔamal  
*ʔafwaadʒ*    *l-muqaawamah*    *l-lubnaaniyyah*  
 Regiments    the-resistance    the-Lebanese  
 "Lebanese Resistance Regiments"

This movement was established in Lebanon in 1974 and its armed organization was founded in 1975. The *ʔamal* militia was a major participant in the Lebanese civil war in 1975. Hence, the acronym *ʔamal* captured the attention of the media at that time. This acronym was mentioned 0.28 times per 100,000 words in the arabicorpus. One may notice that there is a period of time between the establishment of the movement and the first attested use of the acronym *ʔamal* in 1978. Throughout the study, it will become apparent that this period of time decreases over time, depending on the

publicity of the movement by the media and the acceptability of acronymization as a phenomenon in Arabic.

However, one may argue that *ʔamal* is not the first acronym in Arabic. The acronym *fatih*, which can be treated as a special kind of acronym, has been in use since 1968 (Birzeit University Archive, 2015). This acronym is mentioned 1.44 times per 100,000 words in arabicorpus:

- (7) *fatih*  
*ḥarakat/munaḍḍʾamat t-taḥrīr l-falasṭīniyyah*  
 movement the-liberation the-Palestinian  
 “The Palestinian National Liberation Movement”

This movement was established in 1959 by professional Palestinians whose leader was Yasser Arafat. Interestingly, the acronym is formed in a reversed order, in the sense that the direction of the initial letters started from the last word of the whole phrase (Hamdan & Fareh, 2003). Normally, acronyms, in transliterated form, are formed left to right in a unidirectional way. Therefore, the above example should be *ḥatīf* “death.” However, the order of the letters is reversed due to semantic constraints in Arabic. That is, negative connotations cannot be used to label such an organization that aims to liberate Palestine. Therefore, the acronym *fatih*, which literally means “liberation/conquest,” is used instead; showing a new way of forming acronyms that can be called “reversed acronyms.” This example is referred to in section “The Semantic Features of Acronyms,” where I argue that acronyms in Arabic are semantically conditioned. If *fatih* is indeed regarded as an acronym, then it should be considered the first attested acronym in Arabic.

Several years later, another commonly used example appeared, namely, *ḥamaas*, which literally means “enthusiasm.” *ḥamaas* is mentioned 2.75 times per 100,000 words in arabicorpus:

- (8) *hamaas*  
*ḥarakat l-muqaawamah l-ʔislaamiyyah*  
 movement the-resistance the-Islamic  
 “Islamic Resistance Movement”

Based on Birzeit University Archive, the movement was established on December 14, 1987, whereas the first use of the acronym independently in the media was on November 25, 1988. This acronym shows that there is a period of time between the establishment of the party or organization and the use of the acronym related to it. This may be due to three reasons: (a) in the 1980s, many people did not own a TV or even a radio; hence, the acronym needed a period of time to be established among the masses, namely, for them to establish a connection between the acronym and the organization it stands for; (b) the phenomenon itself was not common at that time for people to understand it immediately; they needed some time to grasp the idea behind it; and (c) the extent of publicity of that organization and the role that the media plays to make that acronym known influence its

degree of use. Here, I would suggest that in Arabic, the full phrase and the acronym are first used together as one unit and then sometime later, the acronym may get established as an independent entity that can stand for the full name of the referent as a direct result of being used frequently in the media. For instance, *ḥamaas* started to be frequently mentioned in the news after 1993; possibly because it is the year which marked an important event: *ḥamaas*’s members did not recognize the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which led to the Oslo Accords of 1993.

More recently, many attested acronyms have been created in Arabic in the past decade (2005–2015), especially after the Arab Spring that started in 2011, such as *daaʔif* and *waʔid*. Due to the fact that the organizations which these acronyms stand for were established in late 2011 and 2014, respectively, they were not found in arabicorpus. Thus, they were collected through famous media websites, such as *Aljazeera*<sup>6</sup>:

- (9) *daaʔif*  
*d-dawlah l-ʔislaamiyyah fi l-ʔiraaq wa l-ʔaam*  
 the-state the-Islamic in the-Iraq and the-Syria  
 “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”

- (10) *waʔid*  
*l-hizib l-waṭʔany li l-ʔadaalah wa t-tanmiyah*  
 the-party the-national for the-justice and the-development  
 “The National Party for Justice and Development”

The acronym *daaʔif*, which does not have a literal meaning, is the most frequently used acronym in Arabic nowadays. It refers to a terrorist group established in Iraq in 2011. The acronym *daaʔif* was first used in 2014, since the group occupied a large area of land in both Iraq and Syria. Interestingly, the acronym *daaʔif* started to be used in the Middle East after Western media, that is, BBC started using the equivalent acronym *ISIS* (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). This may indicate that the publicity of a certain acronym in a language seems to influence the publicity of that acronym in another language; the fact that *ISIS* is popular in Western media made *daaʔif* also popular in Arabic. In addition, owing to its frequent use, there is no period of time between the establishment of *daaʔif* and the first use of the acronym; both occurred simultaneously. This may suggest that, over time, Arabic-speaking people have become more acquainted with the use of acronyms.

It should be noted that *ISIS* threatens to cut out the tongues of whoever refers to them as *daaʔif* (Oakley, 2016). The reason for such a barbaric behavior can be ascribed to the fact that *daaʔif* is meaningless in Arabic. Hence, the members of this terrorist group may find it degrading for the media to refer to them using a meaningless acronym. In addition, some phonemes of the acronym *daaʔif* have been manipulated recently by Arabic-speaking people, especially those who oppose savage beheadings carried out by *ISIS*, to create words that rhyme with *daaʔif*, but have offensive meanings. For instance, *dʔaahif* meaning “ass” and *daaʔir* meaning “a



man whore” have been used on Facebook and Twitter to refer to *ISIS* members.

Another example is the acronym *waʿid*, meaning “promise,” which was both established and used in Syria in 2014, and finally, the acronym *ḥaqq*, which literally means “right.” The latter refers to a political movement that was established in Sudan in 2014. Again, both of these acronyms were not found in arabicorp, since they were established in 2014; they were found through *Aljazeera* website.

- (11) ḥaqq  
*ḥarakat l-quwwaa l-dʒadydah d-dymuqraatʿiyyah*  
 movement the-powers the-new the-democratic  
 “New Democratic Powers Movement”

Taking these examples into consideration, it seems that the period of time between the establishment of the organization or party, and the first use of the acronym decreases over time. One reason for such a phenomenon is attributable to the increase in the use of Internet and social media in the Arab world. It could also be because acronymization, as a morphological process, has become an acceptable phenomenon in Arabic. Finally, it goes without saying that acronyms as a way to facilitate conveying the news (i.e., the name is shorter) help spread the use of this new word-formation process. In fact, examining examples (6) to (11) shows that the creation of acronyms on the basis of the translation of English words, possibly, fell out of use.

### The Linguistic Features of Acronyms in Arabic

*The phonological features of acronyms.* Acronyms should conform to the phonological rules of a language because they are pronounced like regular words. For instance, an abbreviation like *BBC* is not a possible candidate for an acronym, because [bbk] or [bbs] are not permissible combinations in English (Plag, 2003, p. 128). Nonetheless, speakers sometimes make alphabetisms pronounceable, that is, create acronyms. The following are good examples of creating acronyms by inserting a vowel sound to make the internal combination permissible:

- (12) SLRF [slɔrf] (Second Language Research Forum)  
 (13) radar [reɪdɑː(r)] (Radio Detecting and Ranging)

The same rule applies to Arabic. All acronyms in Arabic do not create problems in applying regular reading rules; they are formed with permissible phonological words either through inserting vowel sounds between consonants or making use of already existing vowel sounds in the components of the acronyms, as can be seen in examples (14) and (15).<sup>7</sup>

- (14) *wakaalat xabar li l-ʔanbaaʔ*  
 agency xabar ‘lit. single news’<sup>8</sup> for the-news  
 “Xabar Agency for News”

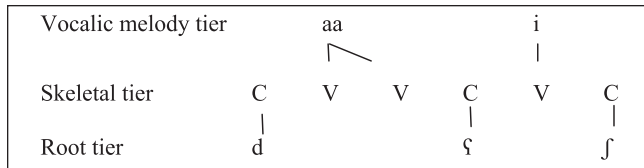
- (15) *taadʒ tadʒammuʕ ʔamal l-dʒazaaʔir*  
 grouping hope the-Algeria  
 “Algeria Hope Gathering”

The acronym *waax* refers to a news agency which was established in Yemen in 2007 (mentioned one time in arabicorp), while the acronym *taadʒ*, which literally means “crown,” refers to a political party that was established in Algeria in 2012.<sup>9</sup> Due to the fact that *taadʒ* was established in 2012, it was not found in arabicorp; hence, it was found through other websites, for example, *Aljazeera*. As only the phonologically permissible acronyms can be formed, an insertion of a vowel sound takes place or the vowels already there in the components of the acronym are used in both *taadʒ* and *waax*. Both *tdʒ* and *wx* are impermissible in Arabic, as the two unvoiced acronyms are not words (EI-Badarin & Bani-Yasin, 1993). EI-Badarin and Bani-Yasin (1993, pp. 203, 211, 218) note that the previous consonant clusters are impermissible in all positions; word-initial, word-medial, and word-final. Other Arabic examples, such as *tawaad*, *madʒd*, and *daaʕif*, support this argument.

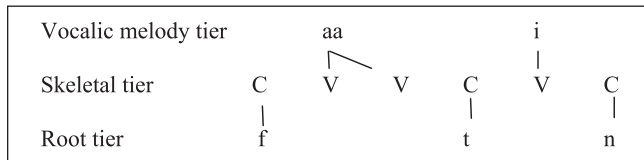
By virtue of having a nonconcatenative morphological system, what is patently clear to a speaker of Arabic is that the acronyms are formed relying on Arabic templates. It is omnipresent that nouns, verbs, and adjectives in Arabic have templates or *binyanim* (see McCarthy, 1981), based on which they are formed. *Binyanim* (singular *binyan*) are derivational classes, consisting of both consonants and vowels, where the consonants represent the root, while the vowels represent the meaning (McCarthy, 1981, pp. 375-378). For instance, the binyan *faʕʕal* yields a causative meaning in Modern Standard Arabic, for example, *kassar* “caused to break,” where the root is *ksr* and the vocalic melody *a-a* conveys the meaning (McCarthy, 1981). These templates or skeletons can be represented on three tiers, the root tier, the skeletal tier, and the vocalic melody tier, in accordance with the rules of prosodic morphology as stipulated by McCarthy (1981, p. 387). For instance, *daaʕif/ISIS* (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) and *faatin* (Palestine Institution for Loaning and Development) are formed on the basis of the active participle template *faʕʕil* CVCVCV, as in Figures 1 and 2.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate that the insertion of vowel in acronyms is not random; it follows the structure of Arabic *binyan*. Another template is *faʕʕaal* CVCVVC based on which *ḥamaas* (Islamic Resistance Movement) and *tawaad* (Jordan Democratic National Party/Gathering) are formed, as in Figures 3 and 4.

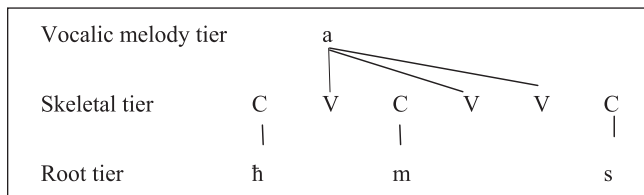
An examination of the acronyms *ḥafid* (People’s Democratic Party), *fatih* (The Palestinian National Liberation Movement), *daʕim* (Labour Democracy Organisation), and *waʕid* (The National Party for Justice and Development) shows that the formation of these acronyms is based on the Arabic template *faʕʕil* CVCVCV, as in Figure 5.



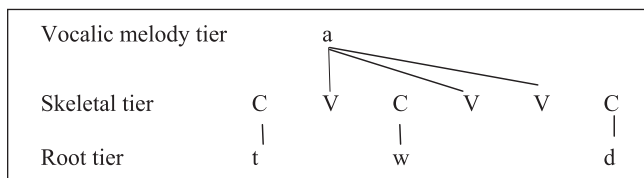
**Figure 1.** *daaʕiʃ/ISIS* (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).



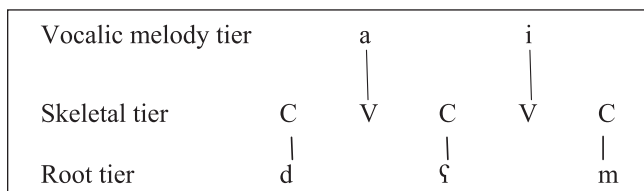
**Figure 2.** *faatin* (Palestine Institution for Loaning and Development).



**Figure 3.** *ḥamaas* (Islamic Resistance Movement).



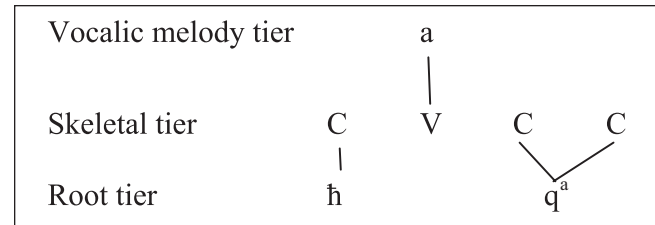
**Figure 4.** *tawaad* (Jordan Democratic National Party/Gathering).



**Figure 5.** *daʕim* (Labour Democracy Organisation).

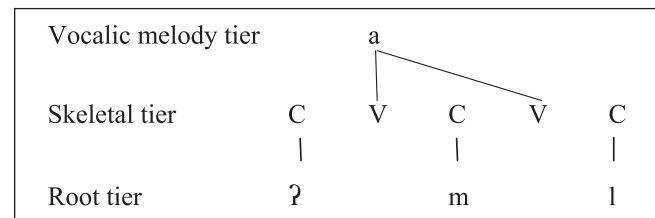
A study of the acronym *ḥaqq* (New Democratic Powers Movement), it appears that it is created depending on the template *faʕl CVCC*, as in Figure 6. The same applies to *madʒd* (Democratic Front Organisation), which is formed based on the same template.

Investigating the acronym *ʔamal* (Lebanese Resistance Regiments), it is clear that it is made relying on the template *faʕal CVCVC*, as in Figure 7.

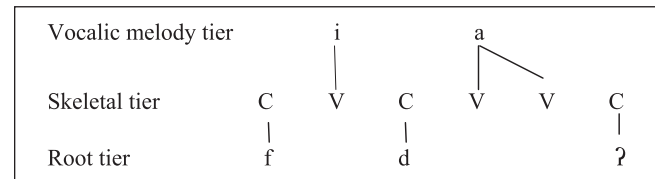


**Figure 6.** *ḥaqq* (New Democratic Powers Movement).

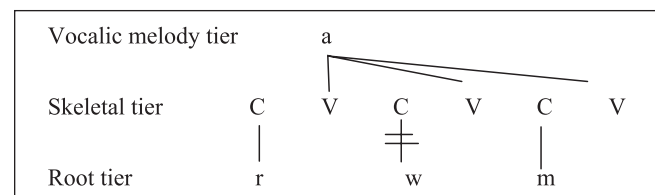
<sup>a</sup>The consonant /q/ is not repeated twice in conformity with the Obligatory Contour Principle (OCP) as outlined by Goldsmith (1976).



**Figure 7.** *ʔamal* (Lebanese Resistance Regiments).



**Figure 8.** *fidaaʔ* (Palestinian Democratic Union).



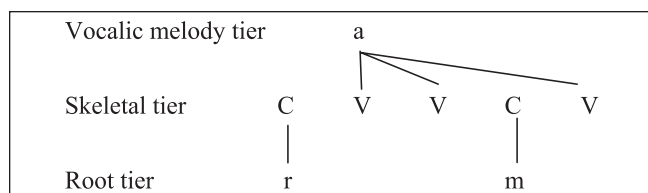
**Figure 9.** *rawama* the underlying representation of *rama*.

Examining the acronym *fidaaʔ* (Palestinian Democratic Union), it is clearly formed based on the template *fiʕaal CVCVVC*, as in Figure 8.

Finally, the acronym *rama* (Jordanian Women Association) is created on the basis of the template *faʕala CVCVCV*, as illustrated in Figures 9 and 10. Two phonological processes occur here; the first one is syncope of /w/ which originates in the underlying representation of *rama*, then compensatory lengthening of the vowel /a/, as explained by Altakhaineh and Alshamari (2016, p. 3).

Figures 1 to 10 show that the phonological combinations of acronyms and the insertion of vowels, if consonant clusters appear, are not arbitrary; they are governed by existing





**Figure 10.** *rama* (Jordanian Women Association).

templates. The same applies to other acronyms in Arabic. In the following sections, these examples are discussed, showing their semantic and pragmatic features.

**The semantic features of acronyms.** Examining acronyms in Arabic, it appears that they are semantically governed. In particular, acronyms are usually homophonous to existing words. In this regard, Hijazi (2001, p. 97) indicates that in some cases, letters are added to the acronym to make it meaningful, in the sense that it would be similar to an established word in Arabic. The following is an example of this case, which was only mentioned once in arabicorpus:

- (16) *l-munaḍḍʿamah f-fiyuṣṣiyah l-masʿriyyah*  
 the-organisation the-communism the-Egyptian  
 “the Egyptian communist organisation”

The original acronym of this organization is *mifm*, which is meaningless in Arabic. Therefore, according to Hijazi (2001), another letter was added to the acronym to make it meaningful in Arabic, that is, *mifmi f* “apricot.” Based on the analysis of acronyms in Arabic, I argue that there are two levels of semantic conditionality on acronymization. The first level is concerned with the fact that acronyms in Arabic need to be meaningful, whereas the second level deals with the connotation of the acronym, so that it needs to have a positive connotation, as in (17).

- (17) *tawaad*  
*hizib t-tadẓammuṣ l-watʿany l-ḥurduny*  
*d-dymuqraatʿy*  
 party the-gathering the-national the-Jordanian  
 the-democratic  
 “Jordan Democratic National Party/Gathering”

The acronym *tawaad*, which literally means “harmony,” is a political party that was established in 2013, and the first use of the acronym was attested in the same year. It is clear that the meaning of the acronym implies a harmonious relationship between the members of the party and Jordanians. Since, the organization was established in 2013, *tawaad* was not found in arabicorpus. This acronym was found in *Al-Rai* newspaper, a daily Jordanian newspaper. Other examples are (18) and (19).

- (18) *madẓd*  
*munaḍḍʿamat l-dẓabbah d-dymuqraatʿiyyah*  
 organization the-front the-democratic  
 “Democratic Front Organization”

- (19) *faatin*  
*muṭassas-at filastʿyn li t-taslyf wa t-tanmiyah*  
 institution-F Palestine for the-loaning and the-development  
 “Palestine Institution for Loaning and Development”<sup>10</sup>

The acronym *madẓd*, which literally means “glory,” was established in 1978 (mentioned 0.08 times per 100,000 words in arabicorpus), while the acronym *faatin*, which literally means “attractive,” was established in Palestine in 1999 to help poor people (mentioned only once in arabicorpus). The previous acronyms imply positive connotations in both organizations. Similarly, in English, acronyms, such as *BASIC* (**B**eginner **A**ll-purpose **S**ymbolic **I**nstruction **C**ode) and *FIST* (**T**he **F**ederation of **I**nter-**S**tate **T**ruckers; Bauer, 1983, p. 237), convey an aspect of the meaning intended by the referent. For marketing or publicity reasons, the homophonous word sometimes conveys a meaning meant to be connected to the referent of the acronym; people who need care and those who study alone respectively, as shown in English examples (20) and (21).

- (20) CARE (**C**ooperative for **A**ssistance and **R**elief **E**verywhere)  
 (21) SOLE<sup>11</sup> (**S**elf-**O**rganising **L**earning **E**nvironment)

The same applies to *ḥafid*, which literally means “gathering.” It is a political party that was established in 1993 in Jordan. The word *ḥafid* implies the gathering of people to work together for the greater good of the community. This acronym is mentioned 0.05 times per 100,000 words in arabicorpus.

- (22) *ḥafid*  
*hizib f-faṣḥ d-dymuqraatʿy*  
 party the-people the-democratic  
 “People’s Democratic Party”

As explained in section “Early Establishment of Acronyms in Arabic,” *ḥatīf* “death” was replaced by *fatiḥ* meaning “liberation.” In this context, another significant observation is in order. The conformity between the number of acronyms and established words has begun to act as a stimulant for Arabic speakers to manipulate acronyms to serve certain purposes. For instance, the acronym *fatiḥ*, which is repeated below for the reader’s convenience, has been manipulated by opponents of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement via changing it into an offensive word. In *lʿittidẓaah lmuṣaakis* (2015) “The Opposite Direction,” a debate TV show hosted by Faisal Al-Qasem on *Aljazeera* TV channel, one of the guests who is an opponent to *fatiḥ* manipulated the acronym, changing it into *mataff* “spit.”

- (23) *fatiḥ*  
*ḥarakat/munaḍḍʿamat t-taḥryr l-falastʿyniyyah*  
 movement the-liberation the-Palestinian  
 “The Palestinian National Liberation Movement”

Through taking the initial letters of the three words *munaḍḍ'amat*, *ttahryr* and *ḥalas't'yniyyah*, the guest used the word *mataff* “spit” to insult the other guest who supports *fatih*. Following this line of analysis, it appears that semantics plays a crucial role in Arabic acronymization, allowing speakers to manipulate acronyms if they are homophonous to established words. In addition, the impact of semantics on acronymization can be observed in other cases. For instance, if an acronym has a negative connotation or does not have a meaning, it can be reversed (i.e., reversed acronyms). Examples, which I was able to find, are *fidaa?* and *daḥim*. The former was mentioned 0.01 times per 100,000 words in arabicorpus, while the latter was mentioned 0.01 times.

(24) *fidaa?*  
*l-ḥittihaad*    *d-dymuqraat'y*    *l-filas't'yny*  
 union            the-democratic    the-Palestinian  
 “Palestinian Democratic Union”

(25) *daḥim*  
*munaḍḍ'amat*    *l-ḥamal*    *d-dymuqraat'y*  
 organisation    the-labour    the-democratic  
 “Labour Democracy Organisation”

The acronyms, *ḥida?* “sacrifice” and *daḥim* “support” are formed in a reversed order to replace *ḥadif* and *maḥid* that have no meanings. It seems that most of acronyms in Arabic are homophonous to established words. This is the case, possibly, to make acronyms in Arabic memorable and in some cases for humorous/offensive reasons. For instance, the meaning of the acronym can be manipulated to convey a negative connotation, intended as an insult to the organization about which the acronym is formed; compare examples (26) and (27).

(26) *ḥaḥid*  
*l-ḥaḥid*                      *ḥ-ḥaḥbi*  
 the-mobilization            the-popular  
 “the Popular Mobilization forces”

(27) *dḥaḥif*  
*dḥaḥif*    *l-ḥaḥid*                      *ḥ-ḥaḥbi*  
 army            the-mobilization            the-popular  
 “the Popular Mobilization Army”

Example (26) shows the acronym *ḥaḥid*, which represents an organization founded in 2014 to fight *ISIS* in Iraq; thus, it was found on *Aljazeera* website, not through arabicorpus. Interestingly, opponents of *ḥaḥid*, who oppose the organization's activities in Iraq, manipulated the acronym *ḥaḥid* by adding the word *dḥaḥif* “army,” to form another acronym that has a negative connotation, that is, *dḥaḥif* “ass,” as in example (27). This may indicate that this word-formation process has become an established one in Arabic, as many Arabic speakers have become aware of the mechanisms by which acronyms are formed.

The only acronyms that are not homophonous to existing words are *daḥif* (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) and *waax* (Xabar Agency for News) out of 20 examples analyzed throughout the article. Here, it is worth pointing out that Abu Humeid and Altai (2013) conducted a research study to test the achievement of translation students at the University of Mustansiriyah in translating acronyms in both English and Arabic. The students did not do very well on some acronyms, for example, *waax*, as these acronyms are not used on a massive scale in Arabic (Abu Humeid & Altai, 2013). Therefore, the publicity of the acronyms seems to play a crucial role in their use in Arabic, especially if the acronyms are homophonous to existing words.

*The pragmatic features of acronyms.* In conveying news to an audience, the communicator usually intends to convey information or clarify a set of assumptions to the recipient. When the recipient recognizes the communicative intention of the communicator, he attempts to use the information conveyed by the message as a departure point to make inferences about the information uttered. In this respect, if a resemblance between the concepts or assumptions that both the communicator and the recipient have in mind is established, then the mutual cognitive environment has been changed; hence, communication is accomplished (Sperber & Wilson, 1996). The more similar the concepts uttered to those stored in the minds of the interlocutors, the more relevant the message (Wilson & Sperber, 2002). It is suggested that the relevance of the message relies on the resemblance versus the difference between the set of concepts or assumptions that exist in the minds of interlocutors and the ones intended by the communicator, on one hand, and on the extent to which the communicator relies on the ability of the recipients to make inferences about the message, on the other.

By uttering the acronym, the communicator, in this case, the news anchor, intends the recipient of the message to make an inference about the party or organization that the acronym stands for, especially if the acronym stands for a well-known organization which the speakers are acquainted with. As mentioned in the preceding section, for the purpose of conveying positive connotations, the majority of acronyms in Arabic are usually homophonous to existing words. Examples, such as *tawaad* (Jordan Democratic National Party/Gathering), *maḥid* (Democratic Front Organization), and *fidaa?* (Palestinian Democratic Union), lend support to the argument that acronyms maximize contextual effects with minimum processing effort, in accordance with RT. In this scenario, the contextual effects involve interpreting the meaning of the acronym and making a connection with what it stands for. Semantically, the fact that the above acronyms are homophonous to existing words, that is, *tawaad* “harmony,” *maḥid* “glory,” and *fidaa?* “sacrifice,” makes their interpretation much easier and relevant to the hearer (see the previous section). In addition, because these words are homophonous to existing words, it implies that word

*economy* is at play here as well, motivating the use of existing words rather than coining new ones. The transparency and clarity of these acronyms provides indisputable evidence of relevance, which allows for an easy access to sufficient contextual effects. This means that the resemblance between the concepts or assumptions held in the mind of the recipient and the ones intended by the communicator are close enough for relevance to be obtained. Upon hearing the word *fidaa?* (Palestinian Democratic Union), for instance, the hearer retrieves the meaning of the word *fidaa?* “sacrifice,” which is homophonous to the name of the party. Making the connection between the two words requires far less effort if such a word does not share a sense with an established one. In this way, using the word *fidaa?* “sacrifice” instead of another nonestablished word increases the degree of relevance and reduces the processing effort. In a related vein, one can observe that the words used to represent the parties or organizations are common words utilized in everyday conversations, making the retrieval of their meanings in the recipient’s mind quite easy. Thus, connecting the names of the parties with common notions facilitates their comprehension and, by extension, their relevance. Here, one may argue that the fact that some acronyms correspond to actual words might actually inhibit their immediate understanding, as the real meanings form a competing candidate for understanding. In this regard, I suggest that such inhibition does not occur in Arabic acronyms due to three main reasons. First, in most acronyms in Arabic, one element of acronyms is usually repeated (cf. Yule, 2006, p. 57). For instance, in the acronym *fatih* (*ḥarakat tṭahryr lḥalas<sup>ʔ</sup>ʔyniyyah*) “The Palestinian National Liberation Movement,” the first element *ḥarakat* “movement” is usually repeated; thus, the addressee can determine whether the word used is an acronym or its homophonous counterpart, as in (28).

- (28) *ana min ḥarakat fatih*  
I from movement Fatih  
“I am from Fatih movement.”

Second, the morphosyntactic feature of definiteness can help the addressee decide whether the speaker is referring to the acronyms or the words that have similar meanings. Specifically, acronyms can never be marked with the definite article *l-* “the”; compare (29) and (30).

- (29) *ana maʕ (\*l-)ḥamaas<sup>12</sup>*  
I with (\*the-)Hamaas  
“I support Hamas.”

- (30) *l-mudarris laazim yfadʒdʒiʕ l-ḥamaas*  
*la-ddiraaseh ʕind t<sup>ʕ</sup>-t<sup>ʕ</sup>ullaab*  
the-teacher should encourage the-enthusiasm  
for-studying for the-students  
“the teacher should encourage students to become enthusiastic about studying.”

Examples (29) and (30) show that the absence of the definite article *l-* “the” in example (30) is an indicator that the speaker is not talking about the political organization, rather its homophonous counterpart (But I provided counter examples). Third, in addition to the lack of the definite article, the context itself can inform the addressee about which word is actually intended, that is, the acronym or its corresponding established word. For instance, if the speaker asked the addressee about which organization he or she supports or which organization he or she is a member of, this context clearly indicates that the speaker is talking about a particular acronym referring to an organization/movement, as in 31.

- (31) Speaker: *enta maʕ ay hizib?*  
you with which party?  
“which party do you support?”  
Addressee: *ana maʕ ḥafid*  
I with Hafid  
“I support Hafid (People’s Democratic Party).”

Finally, the association between RT and acronymization manifests itself in another dimension, that is, the type of contexts in which acronyms is used. From the beginning of acronymization in Arabic up until now, most attested acronyms are associated with the names of organizations or movements that have begun to capture attention in the news, especially as a result of the political crisis that has been wreaking havoc in the Arab world for the past 4 years. In 2014, three acronyms *daaʕiʕ*, *waʕid*, and *ḥaqq* have appeared. The most frequently used acronym in Arabic (i.e., *daaʕiʕ*) acquired its publicity from both local and international media, as it has been translated from English and integrated into Arabic. *daaʕiʕ*, as a terrorist group, has committed many massacres and executions by beheading American journalists and many others. One may argue that this will keep the use of the name and motivate other acronyms to be formed in Arabic in the near future. Hence, acronymization in Arabic is a potentially productive word-formation process in the sense that new ones are being formed. From the perspective of RT, the use of acronyms in particular contexts may provide an incentive for the hearer to obtain relevance. That is, taking into account that acronyms in Arabic are mostly used in politics, upon hearing an acronym, the hearer makes a connection between that acronym and politics, thus restricting the options of context types available to him or her into one, that is, politics. Establishing such a connection reduces the processing effort of the uttered acronym, and if such an acronym is homophonous to an established word, maximum relevance could be attainable.

All in all, all Arabic acronyms cited in this study are mostly names of political organizations, that is, parties and movements, associations, and news agencies. In other words, acronyms seem to occur in certain contexts. On the basis of corpus study of acronyms that is done by Cannon (1989, p. 115), English acronyms are distributed in quite different

areas and proportions from those of Arabic. They are centered in seven areas: “Twenty items refer to primarily political organizations, 15 each to systems and the military, 14 to computers, 11 to space, and 10 each to chemicals and transportation” (Cannon 1989, p. 115). This possibly means that acronyms are pragmatically conditioned in the sense that they occur in certain contexts.

## Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed analysis to some examples of acronyms in Arabic. Based on the analysis, several conclusions can be made. First, acronyms in Arabic have appeared quite recently as a result of globalization and exposure to or contact with, mainly, English via social media and some TV channels, which are broadcasting in English or, in some countries, in English and French. Second, after a period of using acronyms formed on the basis of the English translation simultaneously with other acronyms formed relying on the Arabic words, the former fell out of use. At least in the past decade, the new established acronyms in Arabic are not usually translated forms of other languages; they are uniquely formed by Arabic speakers, implying that acronymization has become an established word-formation process. Third, acronymization as a word-formation process was influenced by English, since news has been broadcasted in English even at present. Finally, acronymization in Arabic is subject to certain restrictions:

- a. Similar to other languages, for example, English, the phonological combinations of acronyms are formed on the basis of Arabic templates; hence, they should be compatible with Arabic phonotactics, for example, vowels should be inserted or an already existing vowel in the components of the acronym can be used to break up consonant clusters.
- b. Acronyms, on the first level, are usually homophonous to existing words to make them memorable and in some cases for humorous/offensive reasons. On the second level, the connotation of the acronyms cannot be negative, for example, *fatih* “liberation” versus *hatif* “death.” It has been noticed that the acronyms analyzed in this study usually have a positive connotation, such as *hamaas* “enthusiasm,” *haqq* “right,” *wafid* “promise,” and *hafid* “gathering.” In few occasions, the opponents of some political parties, associations, or organizations manipulate the acronyms, yielding acronyms with negative connotations intended to offend the party members.
- c. In accordance with RT, acronyms maximize contextual effects with minimum processing effort. Being homophonous to established words means that acronyms require far less processing effort. The differences between acronyms and their homophonous counterparts in terms of the repetition of one of the

elements, lack of definiteness, and context of use prevent an inhibition in processing the acronyms. In addition, what increases relevance even more is the fact that they are found in certain contexts. For instance, almost all acronyms in Arabic are names of political movements or organizations. This being so, the available options of context is limited to only one, that is, politics. Hence, the processing effort is lessened.

- d. The period between the establishment of the movement or party and the first use of the acronym seems to decrease over time, provided that the acronyms are frequently used in the media, such as *daaʿif* (known globally as *ISIS*) (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

This study recommends the investigation of other word-formation processes to explore whether other processes in Arabic have possibly spread due to language contact.

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## Notes

1. Ryding (2005, pp. 99-100) considers some examples, such as *basmalah* “in the name of God” and *Hawqalah* “There is no power and no strength save in God,” as instances of blending in Classical Arabic (CA). Thus, these instances will not be discussed here any further.
2. Note that the transliteration of the acronyms in this study represents a standard Arabic transliteration system, reflecting the print media.
3. Note that the definite article in Arabic assimilates to the following coronal sound (Youssef, 2013).
4. This acronym was found through Google, not through arabicorpus. This is, possibly, because this acronym is not well-known or not famous.
5. In some Arab countries in North Africa, such as Morocco and Algeria, TV channels broadcast in French.
6. The Arab Spring is a series of anti-government protests and uprisings that spread across the Middle East in early 2011.
7. According to Alotaibi and Hussain (2010), the vowel system in Modern Standard Arabic contains three short monophthongs, that is, open /a/, close back /u/, and close front /i/, and their long equivalents /a:/, /u:/, and /i:/, respectively. It also exhibits the following syllable types: CV, CVV, CVC, CVVC, CVCC, and CVVCC (Holes, 2004). Similar to English, the syllable in Arabic has a nucleus, onset, and an optional coda; however, they differ in that Arabic does not allow more than one consonant in the onset.
8. *Xabar* could mean “one single statement of news,” but here it is used as a proper noun. The plural of *xabar* is *ʔaxbaar* “news.” In Arabic, *ʔanbaaʔ* “news” is a synonym of *ʔaxbaar* “news” as can be noticed in the final word of the above example.



9. *waax* is not popular in Yemen. Hence, it remained meaningless and was not replaced by a more semantically meaningful acronym.
10. Here it should be noted that this acronym is masculine but the institution it refers to is feminine.
11. *SOLE* an acronym suggested by Professor Mitra in 2013, who defines it as spaces in which educators spark curiosity by asking children to explore challenging questions, using the Internet and the collaboration of small groups, with minimal to no teacher intervention (Newcastle University Website, 2015).
12. Note that Examples 29 to 31 represent Jordanian Arabic transliteration system.

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### Author Biography

**Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh** is an assistant professor of English language and linguistics at Al Ain University of Science and Technology, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, since August 2016. He obtained his MA in applied linguistics from the University of Salford (2010) and his PhD in linguistics from Newcastle University, United Kingdom (2016). His research interests lie in the areas of morphology, lexical semantics, phonology, morphosyntax, sociolinguistics, and second-language acquisition (SLA). He is also interested in discourse analysis and applied linguistics.