

## The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World

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# The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World

*Writing Change*

*Edited by*

Jacob Høigilt  
Gunvor Mejdell



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# Contents

Preface VII

List of Contributors IX

Introduction 1

*Jacob Høigilt and Gunvor Mejdell*

- 1 A Language for the People?  
*Quantitative Indicators of Written dārija and ‘āmmiyya in Cairo and Rabat* 18  
*Kristian Takvam Kindt and Tewodros Aragie Kebede*
- 2 Diglossia as Ideology 41  
*Kristen Brustad*
- 3 Changing Norms, Concepts and Practices of Written Arabic  
*A ‘Long Distance’ Perspective* 68  
*Gunvor Mejdell*
- 4 Contemporary *dārija* Writings in Morocco  
*Ideology and Practices* 90  
*Catherine Miller*
- 5 Morocco: An Informal Passage to Literacy in *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic) 116  
*Dominique Caubet*
- 6 *Adab sākhir* (Satirical Literature) and the Use of Egyptian Vernacular 142  
*Eva Marie Håland*
- 7 Dialect with an Attitude  
*Language and Criticism in New Egyptian Print Media* 166  
*Jacob Høigilt*
- 8 Writing Oral and Literary Culture  
*The Case of the Contemporary Moroccan zajal* 190  
*Alexander Elinson*

- 9 **The Politics of Pro-*‘āmmiyya* Language Ideology in Egypt** 212  
*Mariam Aboelezz*
- 10 **Moralizing Stances**  
*Discursive Play and Ideologies of Language and Gender in Moroccan Digital Discourse* 239  
*Atiqa Hachimi*
- 11 **The Language of Online Activism**  
*A Case from Kuwait* 266  
*Jon Nordenson*
- 12 **The Oralization of Writing**  
*Argumentation, Profanity and Literacy in Cyberspace* 290  
*Emad Abdul Latif*
- Index** 309

## Preface

This volume comes out of a four year research project (The sociology and ideology of language change in the Arab world) based in Oslo, but involving scholars from – besides Norway – Egypt and Morocco, France and Britain, the US and Canada. Thanks to a generous research grant from the Research Council of Norway, we have been able to meet in three workshops – in Cairo, Oslo and Rabat – in order to arrive at a conceptual and empirical framework for the project and to discuss preliminary versions of the contributions to this volume. We also designed the issues and questions for two large-scale surveys on attitudes and practices concerning written Arabic, carried out in Cairo and Rabat. The results of these surveys have already been made publicly available in two tabulation reports published by the Norwegian research institute Fafo: *Language and Change in Egypt: Social and Cultural Indicators Survey* and *Language and Social Survey in Morocco*.

The editors, dr. Jacob Høigilt (senior researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo) and professor Gunvor Mejdell (University of Oslo), have thoroughly enjoyed the company of and scholarly discussions with our colleagues. We believe our cooperative efforts have resulted in an interesting, highly relevant and valuable volume on writing Arabic, its politics and practices.

Several institutions deserve thanks for their support and facilitation throughout the project. First, we would like to thank the Research Council of Norway for a grant that has financed this four-year, international research project on Arabic sociolinguistics (RCN project no. 213473). The grant has also made it possible for us to publish this book under Brill's Open Access program, which we think is particularly important to facilitate scholarly contact between Arab, European and American academia. In Egypt, the always friendly staff at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC) kindly offered to host us during our first workshop. The Institute provided a perfect venue for three days of intense deliberations, and a tranquil haven in the centre of Cairo; we are grateful to everybody there, in particular the director, Rudolf de Jong, and the office manager, Tilly Mulder. In Morocco, we would like to thank the Faculty of Educational Sciences at Muhammad v University, Rabat and its dean Abdelhanine Belhaj for their generosity in connection with our third workshop in Rabat. In addition to contributing to the workshop in Rabat, Ahmed Ech-Charfi at Muhammad v University took care of all the organizing and liaison with the University; his kind assistance and good spirits were highly appreciated by all. In Norway, we would like to thank the research institute Fafo for hosting the project in the initial stages and for its valuable work in relation to the surveys in

Cairo and Rabat. The Department for Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo kindly hosted the second workshop as well as the PhD fellowship included in the project. The Peace Research Institute Oslo has been the main host institution for the project. Its magnificent administrative staff has provided indispensable support throughout, always with a smile; Jacob is eternally grateful to Pål Torjus Halsne, Lars Even Andersen and Lorna Quilario Sandberg for their help and advice. Finally, we would like to thank Maarten Frieswijk at Brill for his interest in the book and all his help and support during the publication process.

*Jacob Høigilt and Gunvor Mejdell*  
Oslo, 9 February 2017



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# Introduction

*Jacob Høigilt and Gunvor Mejdell*

Arabs engage in writing and reading as never before, whether on screen or on paper. As more and more ‘ordinary’ people take possession of the written language, questions arise about what this process does to the Arabic language system, which is characterised by ‘diglossia’, and if and how writing practices are implicated in social and political relations in the Arab world. The essays in this book all address these questions. They are the result of a research project – Language Change in the Arab World – that has gathered sociolinguists in three workshops to explore the extent and implications of mass writing in Arabic.<sup>1</sup> In particular, we have focused on the emergent trend of writing in the vernacular variety in Egypt and Morocco, two of the most populous Arab countries (88 and 33 million inhabitants, respectively).

Contemporary mass writing in Arabic is undoubtedly connected to the marked increase in literacy across the Arab world as well as the rise of digital technology. Upwards of 3.5 million 15 to 24-year-olds were illiterate in Egypt in 1975, but today, the figure has sunk to about one million, while the population has grown quickly in the same period. In Morocco, the corresponding figures were about 2.4 million in 1975 and only 300,000 illiterate in 2015 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2015). While mass literacy has provided people with the means of writing, the explosive increase in social media usage has provided the opportunity. Ordinary people produce an enormous amount of writing each day on Facebook, Twitter, blogs and in comment fields of various new outlets across the Arab world. More traditional forms of writing have also blossomed, however, both in the digital and the analog domains. Online, the experiment *Wikipedia Maṣrī* has been going on since 2008. A subsidiary of the Wikipedia family, this is an electronic encyclopedia written in the Egyptian dialect. It currently (January 2017) contains 16,211 entries.<sup>2</sup> Also newspapers, magazines and books proliferate to a degree never seen before in many Arab countries. The mushrooming of newspapers, publishing houses and literary works in Egypt following the Egyptian revolution in 2011 was an accentuation of an already existing trend.

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1 The Language Change in the Arab World research project (2012–2016) was generously funded by the Norwegian Research Council (project no. 213473).

2 Wikipedia Maṣrī is found at [https://arz.wikipedia.org/wiki/الصفحة\\_الرئيسية](https://arz.wikipedia.org/wiki/الصفحة_الرئيسية).

As a wide variety of people write for an equally wide variety of purposes, how is their writing connected to social and political realities? The sociolinguistics of writing in the Arab world should merit serious attention, yet little scholarly work has been done on the connections between written Arabic and society. Not that Arabic is an exception: Sociolinguistics as a field has devoted the lion's share of its attention to spoken language. Theresa Lillis observes that the sociolinguistics of writing is an "emergent and highly contested" field (Lillis 2013:15). However, Coulmas expresses a growing sense of the importance of the written word when he argues that "writing constitutes a part of a society's communication apparatus that is not derived from speech and cannot be replaced by speech. It is a social practice and a mode of communication in its own right" (Coulmas 2013:10).

The aim of this book is twofold. We analyse the practices and perceptions of writing in vernacular Arabic, and we try to make sense of how the choice of language variety is connected to social and political dynamics in the Arab world. To this end we concentrate on three areas of inquiry – 'diglossia', language ideology and the relation between writing practices, social change and power. We approach these questions using a set of qualitative and quantitative methods that are integrated throughout the contributions.

Some contemporary assessments of written Arabic tend to be quite pessimistic. A 2007 report notes that young people in the Arab world seem to "eschew reading and writing" (UNESCO and Qatar Foundation 2007:13). The Arab Human Development Report series speaks of an Arabic language in 'crisis', noting the low production of books and the deterioration of everyday written language skills (UNDP 2003:77, 122–126). Such assessments often take a dim view of writing in dialect. To the extent that the AHDR considers dialectal writing at all it seems to view it as a vehicle of linguistic and social fragmentation, a phenomenon it claims is encouraged by 'Information Age Orientalists' (ibid., 126).

However, a growing body of scholarship about contemporary written dialect is more upbeat about the issue and notes an increased usage of it online and in magazines, newspapers and literature, first and foremost in Egypt. As Doss and Davies show in a recent historical anthology of Egyptian texts written in dialect, the practice has existed for centuries (Doss and Davies 2013). Fahmy documents the importance of writing in Egyptian dialect for the emergence of Egyptian nationalism in the early 20th century (Fahmy 2011). Nevertheless, it has always remained a marginal practice, and with the advent of the Arab renaissance in the 20th century and the importance of pan-Arab ideology it became even more marginalised, as shown by Mejdell's and Brustad's chapters in this volume. But recent years have seen an upsurge in writ-

ten *‘āmmiyya* in the public sphere. Doss and Mejdell note that *‘āmmiyya* is being used quite widely in Egypt in advertisements, popular magazines, short stories, novels and poetry (Doss 2006:57–62; Mejdell 2006). Walters (Walters 2003:101) and Elinson (Elinson 2012) observe a similar development in Tunisia and Morocco, respectively. In Egypt this development is reflected in the publishing industry, which was revitalised well before the 2011 revolution. New publishing houses have brought unconventional authors onto the literary scene, and the established publisher Dār al-Shurūq has followed suit. There has been a dramatic increase of literature in *‘āmmiyya* or a blend of *‘āmmiyya* and *fushā* in recent years, exemplified in bestsellers such as *‘Ayza atgawwiz* (I want to marry) by Ghāda ‘Abd al-‘Āl (Abd al-Al 2008). Noting the increased usage of *‘āmmiyya* in written genres in Egypt, Rosenbaum (Rosenbaum 2004:281) suggests that *‘āmmiyya* “has become a second written Arabic language (...), in addition to *fushā*.” Following the debate on language issues in the Egyptian press, Mejdell writes that *‘āmmiyya* is not seen to be as corrupting as it once was considered among Egyptians (Mejdell 2008). In his study of contemporary print media in Morocco, Elinson (Elinson 2012:726) argues that a similar situation obtains there. According to him, writing in *dārīja* (the Moroccan Arabic vernacular) “runs the gamut of genres, themes, and styles of writing.” Several chapters in this book add more documentation of this trend across genres, media and the analog-digital divide. Crossing into the written domains of the public political sphere is, however, a step remaining to be taken. But – lo and behold: in an unprecedented development, which sparked some controversy, the Tunisian NGO *Association Tunisienne de Droit Constitutionnel* published the 2014 Tunisian Constitution in the Tunisian vernacular, arguing that in the name of democracy, it wanted to make the text understandable to as many Tunisians as possible (al-Chorouk 2014). Equally controversial is the recent publication (2016) of the famous classical epistle *Risālat al-ghufrān* by the great poet-philosopher Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 1057) translated into Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* by Nārīmān al-Shāmīlī, similarly motivated by the need to make the cultural heritage accessible to people with little or no competence in *fushā*.

### Diglossia

The developments traced above raise the question of the status of ‘diglossia’ in Arabic, generally regarded as *the* central issue in Arabic sociolinguistics. In his 1959 article, Charles Ferguson formulated the famous definition that is still the point of departure for any study on diglossia:

DIGLOSSIA is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.

FERGUSON 1959:336

Arabic is often considered the paradigmatic case of diglossia. The (H)igh variety, *fushā*, diverges from the (L)ow variety, the spoken vernaculars, or dialects, in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon, but they are closely related, and considered by speakers to be varieties of one language, not separate languages. The H variety is indeed the vehicle of a large and respected body of literature and not least the sacred language of the Qur'an. It is nobody's mother tongue, but acquired at school, and is used for most written and for formal spoken purposes.

It is an interesting fact that Ferguson developed the idea of diglossia from looking at 'popular political magazines', where he noticed that the texts were in the H variety, while the text accompanying the political cartoons were in the L variety across languages and cultures (Ferguson 1991:54).

Diglossia is likely to emerge when three conditions hold in a speech community, says Ferguson (1959:338): 1) a "sizable body of literature in a language closely related to [...] the natural language of the community", 2) "[l]iteracy in the community is limited to a small elite", and 3) "[a] suitable period of time, on the order of several centuries, passes from the establishment of 1) and 2)". This is supported by Florian Coulmas, in his recent book on writing and society (Coulmas 2013): "[i]n the final analysis, diglossia is an outgrowth of the introduction of writing into human communication. It is not a necessary consequence of writing and literacy, but a factual one" (ibid.:57). His point of departure is Kloss's concepts of *abstand* and *ausbau* languages. An *ausbau* language has been shaped or reshaped "in order to become a standardized tool of literary expression" (cited in ibid.:53). Afrikaans, split from Dutch in this way, is one example. Coulmas builds on this to argue that when *ausbau* languages coexist with a pre-existent vernacular variety and there is a "clear division of functional domains", we have diglossia. But he is very clear that diglossia is a "historically contingent artefact" that is strongly associated with writing (ibid.:55). For him, diglossia comes and goes even though it may become part of the linguistic culture for a long time.

Another claim by Ferguson is that “[d]iglossia seems to be accepted and not regarded as a ‘problem’ by the community [...] until certain trends appear” (1959:338.) These may involve “more widespread literacy”; “broader communication among different regional and social segments of the community” – and Ferguson suggests that these trends will lead to calls for “unification of the language” (ibid.). Actually, we are today at a stage where “widespread literacy” and “broader communication” are developments which are characteristic of the Arab communities in focus in our book – to an extent inconceivable in Ferguson’s time.

As Ferguson developed his concept more than five decades ago (building on ‘la diglossie arabe’ (Marçais 1930/31)), and on earlier studies on Greek (e.g. Krumbacher 1904), and as language situations are dynamic and subject to change, both theoretical and empirical developments in the field since 1959 must be considered to put the present volume in a scholarly context.

Diglossia has generally been regarded as a relatively stable situation – a view that is challenged by several of the chapters in this book. Hudson (2002:8) argues that the functional protection of L as the native language in a diglossic system makes for stability, as the H variety is restricted to certain functions and will not marginalise the colloquial. *If* stability is upset, one would expect either that there is a shift from H to L in formal domains of interaction, or that a new L standard emerges at the expense of the H variety (Hudson 2002:8). However, diglossia is far from representing a black-and-white picture. Even Ferguson’s model allowed for ‘intermediate forms of the language’, and later contributions sought to explore the ‘diglossic continuum’. One early and classic statement was Badawi (1973), who defined five ‘levels’ of spoken Arabic in Egypt, ranging from more or less ‘pure’ *fuṣḥā* to illiterate colloquial, gradually shading from one level to the next, as the colours of the rainbow. His mid-level, *‘āmmīyyat al-muthaqqafīn* “the spoken variety of the cultured/well educated/intellectuals” was described as a level where standard and vernacular variants are combined with nearly equal distribution. Others have designed alternative models of more or less distinct levels and/or intermediate and mixed varieties, most notably ‘Educated Spoken Arabic’ (Mitchell 1986), ‘Triglossia’ (Youssi 2009), ‘mixed styles’ (Mejdell 2006a). Another approach is to analyse mixed varieties in terms of code-switching between H and L (for application of code-switching methods to Arabic diglossic mixing, see Eid 1988, Boussofara-Omar 2006, Bassiouney 2006).

One may also rethink the term in other ways. Commenting on the mixed forms of spoken discourse reported not only in the Arabic context, but in all the language communities which have been classified as ‘diglossic’, Mejdell

argues that “[t]he interplay between the [H and L] varieties and ‘the intermediate forms of the language’ should become part of the definition of diglossia itself” (Mejdell 2012:19). Boussofara-Omar argues for a “reconceptualization” of diglossia that is focused not on notions of clash or intrusion but on the “complex patterns and configurations of use that arise out of their [H and L] coexistence” (Boussofara-Omar 2006:635). What such contributions argue is in effect that diglossia should be viewed less in terms of a ‘problem’ and more in terms of a ‘resource’ for speakers/writers. Many observers, Arab and non-Arab, have suggested that diglossia complicates language learning and leads to various kinds of language anxiety. Boussofara-Omar argues that instead of viewing the relationship between *fushā* and the various dialects as a conflictual one, we should think of it as dynamic: the choice of code, when to mix and alternate are *sets of practices* that language users can draw on for various rhetorical and social ends (Boussofara-Omar 2006).

Considering diglossia a resource gains in analytic attraction in a situation where more and more people take to writing: the strategic use of *‘āmmiyya* is highlighted by several of the contributions here (e.g., Elinson; Høigilt; Håland; and Nordenson). Rosenbaum’s notion of “*fushāmmiyya*”, mentioned above, suggests that similar dynamics of interaction are at play also in the written domain, traditionally regarded as the privileged site for *fushā*. What we attempt in this book is to take that idea seriously, arguing and documenting that mixing and alternation between codes is a common feature also of written discourse.

That features of standard and dialectal varieties are being combined in written sources has long been documented, and mixing to varying degrees is found in manuscripts from early medieval to modern times. The field of Middle Arabic studies, traditionally concerned with medieval and early and late premodern texts, has opened up to include research on modern non-standard language. What we see is a historical continuity of writing in *fushā*, in substandard, mixed and colloquial styles. Consequently, one may argue that ‘diglossia’ is best conceived of as a construction of language ideology, rather than as a description of an actual language situation (see Brustad this volume).

### Standardisation and Standard Language

The term (Modern) Standard Arabic has become the common (standard!) label in Anglophone research for contemporary *‘arabiyya* or *fushā*. Standard Arabic is the only (officially recognised) codified variety, and the codification and standardisation of its grammar go back to the early centuries of Islam (Brustad,



Mejdell this volume). Largely because of the close connection between the codified norm and the language of the Qur'ān in the minds of the people, Arab linguistic culture is conservative, and the core grammatical structure of the standard has remained practically unchanged.

Whether in terms of a norm-theoretical approach, or in 'Ausbau' sociolinguistics, a chain of closely related dialects – together with the 'standard dialect' – constitute one language, precisely because the speakers of these dialects recognise the standard as their common standard. Thus, the chain of Arabic 'dialect' varieties across the Mashreq and Maghreb, belong to one 'language', Arabic, because speakers of these varieties recognise standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) as their common standard. Whereas Maltese is considered a separate 'language', because a variety of the Maltese vernacular/dialect was codified and is used as a national standard language (for a discussion, see Mejdell 2006b)

One may discern two main trends in standardisation theory: one is concerned with contrastive studies of language planning and language ecology, comparing processes of codification, elaboration and acceptability/validity of the standard, as elaborated by Haugen, Garvin and Trudgill. The other is concerned with issues of language ideology, hegemony and power (will be discussed in the next section) while both perspectives are varied and may overlap, of course.

The notion of the standard being a 'norm of correctness' and a unifying medium of communication across the language community, implies a large degree of uniformity, as against the diversity of the dialects. In modern Europe, typically, the spoken variety of the urban educated social class, was chosen as the linguistic base for codifying the national standard. In Arabic, as well as in the cases of Czech and Greek, a 'high' variety with cultural prestige, not a contemporary spoken variety, was chosen as the base. In German-speaking Switzerland 'high' German was used for written and formal functions, not an educated version of Swiss German. All these language communities are considered 'diglossic'.

The classic dilemma in standard language planning (and maintenance) is how to combine the goals of "minimal variation in form" with "maximal variation in function" (Haugen 1966). In other words, the norms of the standard must be flexible enough "to accommodate the modifications required by the cultural changes and the developments that occur in the speech community" (Garvin 1993:43). The ideal, flexible standard language has developed stylistic layers, formal styles as well as less formal styles, for a range of different domains and functions. In communities with diglossia, however, the standard (H) does not have informal styles, which are served by the vernaculars (L). While standard languages in most European societies typically tend to take over and extend it

domains of use at the expense of local varieties, in diglossic situations the L varieties seem to take over domains and functions of the H standard, with vernacular – and various mixed – practices spreading into most *spoken* domains (media, political debates, classrooms). For Arabic, linguistic conservatism and anxiety concerning the (in)correct use of the H (*fushā*) variety, is certainly a strong motivating factor behind the practice of turning to vernacular and/or mixed styles – even in writing, as has been observed in history (Middle Arabic texts), and very much so in contemporary writing.

However, we believe that there are wider, perhaps universal, trends affecting language use in the last decades, in spoken as well as written language. Sociologists refer to ‘the late modern age’ as “a time of undermining of the power of authority” (Coupland and Kristiansen 2011:27). In language this trend manifests itself as ‘destandardisation’: “a development whereby the established standard language loses its position as the one and only ‘best language’” (ibid.: 28) and norms of correctness are challenged.

### Language Ideology

Developments in the language situation notwithstanding, the fact remains that *al-‘arabiyya al-fushā* is the only officially recognized codified variety of Arabic (there exist outstanding descriptive grammars of local and regional vernaculars, such as Woidich 2006 for Egyptian (Cairene) Arabic, which amounts to a codification of this variety), and common perceptions of it are based on an ideal type, represented in the cultural imagination by the language of the Qur’an. This standard has been expounded upon by a vast body of treatises on language from the seventh century AD onwards, and remains the exemplary model for the contemporary written language, which is found in official statements, the language of news and academia, and most literature. In the late 19th century, Arab nationalism emerged alongside Islam to justify the perceived supremacy of *fushā* over Arab dialects. Pan-Arab ideologues defined belonging to the Arab nation in linguistic terms, and this is a potent symbolic tool, since, allowing for stylistic and rhetorical variation, *fushā* has been the code for written language and formal speech for centuries and functions as a unifying factor across the Arab world. The dual framework of Islam and nationalism has served to reinforce the symbolic importance of *fushā*, and it is a truism that Arabs today regard *fushā* as the “real” Arabic language, while the various Arabic vernaculars are seen as greater or lesser distortions of the ideal. In a recent entry on language attitudes in the standard reference work *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, Walters writes that “the language itself

[i.e. fusha] has become linked to Islam in ways that many believers, especially Arab believers, experience as essentialist.” (Walters, 2007:654) As for the link with Arab nationalism, Suleiman writes that “[f]ormulations of Arab nationalism (...) are invariably built around the potential and capacity of Arabic in its standard form to act as the linchpin of the identity of all those who share it as their common language” (Y. Suleiman, 2003:224). Elsewhere, Suleiman states that writing in *‘āmmiyya* is “resisted because it breaks with what is in effect a ‘cultural taboo’ whose ideological validity is sanctioned by tradition and historical practice” (Yasir Suleiman, 2004:72).

These normative underpinnings of *fushā* arguably amount to a case of standard language ideology, as described by Milroy & Milroy:

The standard ideology is promoted through public channels: in the past, standardisation has first affected the writing system, and literacy has subsequently become the main influence in promoting the consciousness of the standard ideology. (...) [T]here is a general belief that there is only one form of correct, i.e. legitimate, English, and a feeling that colloquial and non-standard forms are perverse and deliberate deviations from what is approved by ‘law’; i.e. they are ‘illegitimate’.

MILROY & MILROY, 1999:30

In a later contribution to the standard language theory, Susan Gal states that in standard language cultures, “linguistic variation is visualized – by ordinary speakers and often by linguists too – as an abstract space in which the standard ‘covers’ other varieties, is superimposed on them, and therefore imagined to be located ‘above’ them.” (Gal, 2010:38) This is an image that fits the Arabic language situation well, since native speakers from the various Arab countries often place the Arabic dialects on a hierarchical ladder where the dialects that they consider to be closest to *fushā* are on the top rung (this will often be their own dialect), but *fushā* is always above them all.

In line with such reasoning, John Eisele has identified what he calls a “dominant regime of authority” in discourse about language in the Arab world, characterized by four central themes: unity, purity, continuity and competition (Eisele, 2003:49–50). According to this regime, Arabic unites all Arabs and should therefore be a single language for a single culture; it is in competition with foreign cultures and languages and needs to be protected from contamination by them and also by Arabic dialects, which represent corruptions of the norm; and for unity and purity to be achieved, it is necessary to preserve the classical linguistic system. These values and views are regularly repeated by Arab language authorities, such as representatives of the Egyptian Language

Academy and intellectuals (see, for example, Hanafi, 2013; “Meeting with Dr. Hasan al-Shafi’i,” 2012). They also inform reformist endeavours, as can be seen from the Arab Human Development Reports. The 2003 Report calls for linguistic research and making of new dictionaries “incorporating words common to both colloquial and classical Arabic”, besides “the gradual simplification and rationalisation of grammar leading to a median language [*lughā wusṭā* in the Arabic version] that neither lapses into the colloquial nor replicates the rigid old structures that are difficult to use” (UNDP 2003:125). On the next page, however, the Arabic language [to be understood here as *fushḥā*] is the main pillar of Arab solidarity, national unification and Arab cultural unity. Arabic is the bulwark against fragmentation emanating from “Information Age Orientalists’ who defend the multiplicity of Arabic dialects” (ibid.:126).

From these comments it is clear that language ideology – understood as “the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language” (Errington 1999:115) – is central to the phenomenon of diglossia. However, this perspective also introduces the potential for agent-driven change. As Paul Kroskrity reminds us, language ideologies may not only be approached as structured, cultural systems; they may also be seen in terms of speakers’ awareness and their agency (Kroskrity 2004:497). It is the latter approach that we by and large adopt in this volume. The interesting result of focusing on agents rather than structure is, first, that a picture emerges where the attitudes and practices relating to the written language prove to be less monolithic than what is commonly assumed – one need only a quick glance at Kindt’s and Kebede’s presentation of the survey results in chapter one to see that this is the case. Second, it opens the possibility of interpreting the fundamental notion of diglossia not as an objective description of the language situation but as a language ideological construction with a very long pedigree. Third, it encourages us to acknowledge the existence of multiple language ideologies coexisting within different communities of practice – implying, of course, the possibility that today’s less dominant ideology may become tomorrow’s orthodoxy. Let us briefly expand on these points.

Despite at times heavy language policing past and present (E.g., Carter 1983:72) the widespread notion that *‘ammīyya* is not a written language is not an accurate one. The identification of a pre-modern written register called Middle Arabic, which exhibited several dialectal features (Lentin 2008, 2012), as well as the excavation of a large number of texts written in some form of dialectal Egyptian Arabic (Doss and Davies 2013) suggest that mixed forms of writing have proliferated in Arabic through history. Writing in dialect was in some respects quite popular at the beginning of the 20th century in Egypt (Fahmy 2011); however, the purist literary culture that accompanied the Arab renaiss-

sance (*nahḍa*) largely erased this part of the Arab literary heritage, reinforcing a linguistic orthodoxy in which there was little acceptance for written dialect.

This dominant standard ideology of Arabic, described above, is challenged by recent writing practices that revive the practice of writing in dialect, or at least a variety that cannot easily be defined as *fuṣḥā*. This development has been noted recently, but not analysed in a systematic fashion (Holes 2013:293–296). Several chapters in this book document a number of contemporary cases of unapologetic writing in dialect, across countries and the digital/print divide: From Moroccan *zajal*, via Egyptian ‘sarcastic literature’ and youth magazines, to Kuwaiti political blogs. Writing in *‘āmmiyya* is also surprisingly widespread on the popular level. The literate populations of Cairo and Rabat/Salé report writing in *‘āmmiyya* more often than in *fuṣḥā*, and more than 50 percent of the respondents in both locations report writing in *‘āmmiyya* every day (Kindt and Kebede this volume, Kindt, Høigilt and Kebede forthcoming). While *‘āmmiyya* certainly cannot be seen as the dominant written variety by any account, the amount of writing in dialect that goes on in several Arab countries these days justifies talk of a cultural phenomenon of some significance. Just how significant it is we leave for the future to answer. In this volume we are content to describe a number of cases and try to make sense of them.

Based on both contemporary and historical samples of writing, Brustad in this volume shows that it is conceivable to radically change our perspective on diglossia itself. Rather than taking it for granted as a structural linguistic fact, she argues that diglossia was engineered by a religious and cultural elite as a way of consolidating symbolic power. Diglossia and the standard language ideology that undergirds it evolved alongside one another rather than the latter being an epiphenomenon of the former. Brustad’s analysis brings to mind Coulmas’s recent assertion that diglossia is a “historically contingent artefact” that is strongly associated with writing (Coulmas 2013:55)

While the standard language ideology associated with diglossia is by definition dominant in the Arab world today, this does not mean that it is the only language ideology worth considering. We may expect there to be other ideologies corresponding to various social divisions (along class, ethnic, generational etc. lines) that are not dominant but contribute to shaping the linguistic landscape in Arab countries today. These may be explicit or implicit. A clear example of the former is studied in detail by Aboeazz in this volume. This would constitute what has in the Swiss diglossic context been called an “ideology of dialect”, whereby the “symbolic value of the dialect in the majority of linguistic marketplaces in which they are in competition with the standard is not only believed to be much higher than that of the standard but is also deliberately promoted as having a higher value” (Watts 2010:69).

However, also when people subscribe to the dominant view that *fuṣḥā* carries more cultural prestige than *‘ammīyya*, this does not hinder them from employing *‘ammīyya* in the domain of writing. Here other determinants of ideology, such as identity and authenticity, enter the picture. The ambiguity towards the varieties sometimes expressed by Arabs have been viewed as symptoms of language anxiety, connected to literacy problems. However, it seems that for writers who employ both varieties diglossia is a literacy resource rather than a problem, a tool they can harness to express different identities. Finally, the choice of *‘ammīyya* as a written variety may be part of a consciously anti-elitist, oppositional language ideology, as in the case of the Egyptian comics studied by Høigilt in this volume.

### Structure of the Book

We have taken care to make the scope of this book as wide as possible without losing focus on the main questions: diglossia, language ideology and the relations between the social and the linguistic. In chapter one, Kristian Takvam Kindt and Tewodros Aragie Kebede provide a broad empirical background for the rest of the book by presenting and analysing the findings from two large-scale surveys on language attitudes and practices carried out in Greater Cairo and Rabat/Salé in 2013 and 2015, respectively. To our knowledge, this is the first time that language attitudes and practices in Arab populations have been gathered on the scale of whole cities. Onto this empirical canvas Gunvor Mejdell and Kristen Brustad add two conceptual chapters that propose theoretical frameworks for dealing with writing practices and language policies in the Arab world, past and present. These two chapters are designed to be the theoretical and conceptual focal points of the book.

Kristen Brustad draws on Milroy and Milroy’s notion of a standard language ideology to argue in chapter two that diglossia should be approached as an ideology rather than a linguistic description. This ideology reached its zenith in the 20th century, as its gatekeepers came to condemn what they declared to be “non-standard” forms, and the ideology of diglossia spread. Arabic standard language ideology promoted the search for “correct” *fuṣḥā*, often interpreted to mean the form most distant from colloquial. At the same time however, the democratising effects of access to publishing and participating in public discourse have opened new writing spaces. From these spaces a very different ideology seems to be evolving, one that does not see Arabic as a diglossic zero-sum game, causing the ideology of diglossia to lose ground. In chapter three, Gunvor Mejdell draws up the historical canvas, arguing that *norms* for writ-

ten language and *practices* of writing are not necessarily overlapping. She cites evidence that the current crossing of boundaries between the diglossic varieties and disregard of standard norms of correctness are not new phenomena. Rather, the conceptualisation of two distinct and opposing entities, *fuṣḥā* vs. *‘āmmiyya*, developed in the *nahḍa* period. This did not mean that Arab philologists and language ideologues had ignored the dialects, but these were thought of in terms of deviation from the standard, *al-‘arabiyya al-fuṣḥā*, rather than as autonomous entities.

The following chapters are case studies written in the spirit of the two conceptual chapters that precede them. The case studies focus on Egypt and Morocco, with a detour to digital writing in Kuwait, one of the Arab world's most online societies. First comes a section of fairly broad overviews of the dialectal writing in Morocco and Egypt. In chapter four, Catherine Miller presents a short history of *dārīja* publications in Morocco by recalling the main actors and domains. She then focuses on a key issue of writing in non-standard languages: the degree of relationship with the standard language through orthographic and stylistic choices. In short, what do people write when they claim to write *dārīja*? This question is illuminated by an analysis of some recent theatrical texts. In chapter five, Dominique Caubet zooms in on the grassroots developments conducive to *dārīja*'s (restricted) emergence in writing in the early 2000's: the first dramatic change in the status of the Moroccan dialect was the non-institutional language planning it underwent, in the form of a spontaneous passage to writing – first on keyboards (cell phones and later on computers) – via different social networks. In the absence of any institutional support, people taught themselves to read and write *dārīja* fluently in Latin script at first, and more recently in Arabic script, with a true ‘do it yourself’ spirit. Since then, millions of messages have been written daily for nearly fifteen years, and in 2015, we have entered the era of writing of long prose texts in *dārīja* – mostly on the internet. Caubet terms this development an “informal passage to literacy.”

Moving on to the case of Egypt, in chapter six Eva Marie Håland presents and analyses the phenomenon of satirical literature, or *adab sākhir*. Håland traces the emergence of this genre and explains how content, communicative purposes and form relate to each other in these works, which usually contains a lot of Egyptian dialect. The authors of these works are often highly conscious of their linguistic and stylistic choices, and the desire to reach a young audience in a humorous idiom plays an important role when choosing and mixing language varieties.

Håland's treatment of the genre of satirical literature provides a bridge to two chapters about less well-known media and genres. Staying in Egypt, Jacob

Høigilt explores the language and content of contemporary adult comics and glossy magazines in chapter seven. Many of the texts in these media are written in the vernacular (*‘ammīyya*) or in mixed styles, and in Høigilt’s chapter, the functions of combinations of content and language code in two specific publications are studied in detail, resulting in three conclusions. First, they represent marginalised groups in Egyptian society; second, they contribute to an informal style that is apparent also in other late-modern contexts; and third, they open up a ‘third space’ that allows writers to criticize the norms of the mainstream culture without alienating themselves from it. Returning to Morocco, Alexander Elinson investigates the tension between standard and non-standard from the vantage point of *zajal* poetry in chapter eight. In contrast to those who wish to preserve Standard Arabic’s status as the ‘official’ language of education, official contexts, and writing, Moroccan *zajal* poets approach the debate from a different angle. In the world of the *zajal* poetic form, *dārīja* is celebrated and revered. Elinson argues that as the writing and publication of *zajal* poetry increases, *zajal* poets in Morocco, working in *dārīja* that is both oral and written, are forming an ideological community that effectively inserts the *zajal*, written in *dārīja*, into the ‘high’ variety category. Elinson’s argument can probably be connected to Bauman and Brigg’s hypothesis of *vernacularisation*, which involve “a refiguration of the domestic Other through the dual processes that Sheldon Pollock terms *literization*, in which local languages are admitted to literacy, and *literarization*, in which the oral, traditional forms of vernacular expression are accommodated to ‘literature’, worthy of being cultivated, read, and preserved” (Bauman and Briggs 2003:15).

While the above case studies treat language ideology as largely implicit, Mariam Aboeizz (chapter nine) provides a view of explicit, programmatic language ideologies that are visibly associated with political standpoints. She compares the language ideologies of the Egyptian Liberal party and the Malāmīh publishing house – the former an Egyptian nationalist party and the second a liberal, leftist organization. Aboeizz shows that both organisations champion *‘ammīyya* but for ideologically different reasons. For the politician, *‘ammīyya* is predictably prodded as a symbol of Egyptian nationalism, whilst *fuṣṣḥā* is constructed as a symbol of (rejected) pan-Arabism. The indexicality of *‘ammīyya* for Malāmīh’s director is more subtle: It is constructed as a marker of anti-institutional discourse; a form whose mere use challenges the regulatory capacity of the regime. The book closes with a section that focuses exclusively on the digital media.

In chapter ten, Atiqa Hachimi analyses a Moroccan Facebook page originally dedicated to blacklisting Moroccan singers who do not use the Moroccan dialect in television appearances. The page later expanded to include censure



and abuse of celebrities, especially female ones, who were perceived to dress and behave immodestly. Hachimi's chapter shows that ideologies of language, gender, and Moroccan national identity interact on this Facebook page, and she highlights the playfulness of contemporary Arabic online discourse.

The last two chapters move beyond the Moroccan and Egyptian contexts: Jon Nordenson considers the case of Kuwaiti activists' use of blogs and Twitter at important junctures in Kuwaiti political history in chapter eleven. The first was a liberal dominated 2006 campaign to change the electoral law, and the second is the ongoing oppositional movement seeking extensive political reform, dominated by Islamist and tribal protagonists. Building on an original and vast corpus of language samples, Nordenson is able to get the "bigger picture" of language practices by selecting random samples from the two cases. His findings suggest a tendency towards Kuwaiti Arabic (KA) features among the liberal activists in 2006, a tendency towards Standard Arabic (SA) features among the oppositional activists currently active, and an equal distribution between KA and SA features among the "average" Twitter user. Differences in the intended and expected audiences are suggested as the reason behind these findings.

Lastly, in chapter twelve, Emad Abdul Latif explores the comment field of popular Arab YouTube channels, an area of language use that has scarcely been investigated previously. Building on nearly 5,000 written comments on two YouTube versions of the famous debate between 'Amr Mūsā and 'Abd al-Mun'im Abū al-Futūḥ on the eve of the 2012 Egyptian presidential elections, Abdul Latif's contribution tackles the manifestation of aggressive counter-argumentation, i.e. the increasing usage of profanity and taboo language online. The study explores their pragmatic and rhetorical functions and causes.

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# A Language for the People?

## *Quantitative Indicators of Written dārija and ʿāmmiyya in Cairo and Rabat*

*Kristian Takvam Kindt and Tewodros Aragie Kebede\**

### Introduction

How frequently are colloquial varieties in Egypt and Morocco (*āmmiyya* and *dārija*) used for writing Arabic? In what contexts? And how many agree that the colloquial has a place as a written language? In this chapter we will address these overarching questions, by drawing on two recently completed, large-scale surveys of the literate population in Greater Rabat and Greater Cairo. Providing representative estimates of writing practices and attitudes in two Arab capitals, this chapter addresses the very real gap in statistical knowledge about how ordinary people relate to writing in the colloquial.

We find that the colloquial varieties are used more than once a week by more than two thirds of literate population in both Cairo and Rabat. There is also a substantial portion of the population in both cities that accept *ʿāmmiyya/dārija* as written varieties. Despite the similarities, we find that both use and acceptance of the colloquial is significantly higher in Cairo compared to Rabat. While one should beware of possible errors in self-reporting, the findings in this chapter prove that colloquial Arabic is widely used and accepted as a written language across different educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds in both Rabat and Cairo. These findings open up exciting new avenues of research into the dynamics of diglossia in the Arab world.

As noted in the introduction to this volume there exists a growing literature examining the use of colloquial varieties in writing Arabic. The majority of studies on written colloquial Arabic are based on qualitative investigations, so there is a lack of statistical knowledge of the actual frequency of writing colloquial Arabic among ordinary people, as well as of their attitudes towards the colloquial as a written language (for notable contributions, see Parkinson 1991; 1993; 2003; and Belnap & Bishop 2003).

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\* We would like to thank all the researchers involved in the Language Change project for helping with the design of the surveys on which this article is based.

The existing research on language practices and attitudes therefore gives us limited knowledge of how ordinary people relate to writing in the colloquial, and how widespread and accepted this phenomenon actually is. While quantitative surveys on the topic have been conducted (see Meskine & Ruiter 2015 and Ibrahim 2013 for two recent examples in Morocco and Egypt, respectively), these studies usually focus on students or other sub-groups of the population and cannot give us any generalizable indicators of language practices or attitudes. There is therefore a need for a statistical investigation into how often colloquial Arabic is written and how people relate to this development. Are we dealing with a marginal phenomenon that no one relates to outside of the cultural elite, or is colloquial Arabic a written language for the people?

### Data and Methodology

The findings are based on results of two surveys carried out in Greater Cairo (2013) and Greater Rabat (2015). Greater Cairo includes parts of Giza and Qalyubiyya in addition to Cairo proper, while Greater Rabat includes the whole of Sale and Temara in addition to Rabat proper (referred to as Cairo and Rabat in the remainder of this chapter). The surveys were based on sample frames from the statistical offices in Egypt and Morocco (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) for Egypt and Office of the High Commissioner for Planning Commission (HPC) for Morocco). This gave us the opportunity to draw a completely random sample of the population, ensuring that the results presented are representative of the population in Greater Cairo and Greater Rabat, respectively.

The persons selected in the survey are between 18 and 64 years of age and have completed preparatory education. The education criterion was added to ensure that we excluded the majority of illiterate people, whose answers were not the main interest of this particular survey. While it may be that many without preparatory education are able to write, it is also a fact that the illiteracy rates in both Egypt and Morocco are much higher among the uneducated portions of the population. The effective sample for Cairo is 2420 and for Rabat 959 persons. The main reason for the lower sample in Rabat was a higher degree of non-response. Further details on how the survey and sampling was conducted can be found in the appendix. The survey covered a host of questions on language use and attitudes. The full list of results is published in Kebede et al. (2013) for Cairo, and Kindt et al. (2016) for Rabat. For a deeper analysis into and explanation of the Egypt survey specifically, see Kindt et al. (2016).

There are two main advantages of these survey data compared to previous research on the topic. First, the data are representative of their respective populations, giving us generalizable indicators of writing practices and attitudes. To our knowledge, these surveys are the first to be conducted with a representative sample of the general population in any Arab city on the issue of written colloquial Arabic. Second, the surveys allow us to investigate differences in language practices and attitudes between sub-groups of population, for example according to gender, socioeconomic background and age, rather than just focusing on one of these groups.

Despite the clear advantages, quantitative survey results measuring attitudes and practices often face criticism for being inaccurate representations of what people actually think and do. Regarding measurement of attitudes, a common critique is that the survey responses are not complex enough to give a good representation of what people actually think about a subject (Tourangeau & Yan 2007). In Arabic sociolinguistics this criticism of surveys has been voiced by Walters, who argues that “it is very difficult to determine what speakers specifically have in mind when responding to questionnaire items. If they are asked their opinions about the *fushā* or French, for example, what kind of *fushā* or French do they ‘hear’ as they respond? The *fushā* or French as spoken by whom and under what circumstance?” (Walters 2007:652). In addition, he argues that “speakers will consistently underreport the use of stigmatized varieties (e.g. dialectal Arabic in contrast to the *fushā*)” (Walters 2007:652). Walters’s criticism notwithstanding, attitude surveys is a common method in all scientific fields, including the natural sciences. The main reason is that attitude questions actually prove to have explanatory power (Bertrand et al. 2001). While they may not give a nuanced account of a person’s thoughts about a subject, they do give fairly accurate indications of a person’s attitude, if the question is well designed. Instead of discarding attitude questions therefore, we have attempted to meet the criticism of Walters and others by designing not only general, but also specific attitude questions about use of varieties in different contexts.

Regarding self-reported language practices, such questions have been criticized from two angles. First, there is a concern that even if the respondent wanted to, s/he would not be able to provide a reliable answer to what variety s/he chooses when and why, because s/he does not remember correctly or is unaware of her or his own practices (Walters 2007: 652). While this argument is relevant, we argue that it is more so for spoken language than written. And it is also more relevant when asking detailed questions about styles of writing. In our survey we do not ask questions about morphological or syntactic details, but very general questions about which language variety (*dārija*, *fushā*)

or language (Arabic, English, French) respondents use when writing in different contexts. We argue that remembering which language variety ones employs on Facebook is easier than remembering how one usually pronounces a certain word or phrase.

A second and more fundamental line of criticism is that self-reports cannot be trusted because what people say they do is something very different from what they actually do. This argument largely stems from LaPiere's classic study (1934) where he called several hotels in USA and asked if they allowed Chinese guests in their establishment. They all said that of course they did not allow Chinese to stay in their hotel. However, when LaPiere travelled with a Chinese couple to the same hotels, they were allowed to stay in all but one of them. In other words, the hotel managers reported to do one thing, but actually did something very different. This study it has been interpreted as a fundamental epistemological critique, not only of surveys, but of all interviewing techniques trying to understand what people do, based on what they say they do. Some social scientists use findings from LaPiere to argue that we should not take anything people say they do as being related to what they actually do, but rather see it only as a narrative, or ideological construction that is "abstracted from lived experience" (Jerolmack & Khan 2014). A version of this argument has been raised by Milroy and Milroy (1999:15–16) in sociolinguistics, who argue that "statistical counts of variants actually used are probably the best way of assessing attitudes."

In our view, to dismiss self-reported practices as unrelated or weakly related to actual practice is wrong, both epistemologically and empirically. Even LaPiere (1934) did not argue that all self-reports were useless, but rather argued that self-reports were useful for a number of purposes. For questions on non-sensitive issues, the errors in self-reporting are generally proven to be small or manageable (Viasey 2014). We therefore see no reason not to trust the responses of non-sensitive questions in the survey, such as reading practices, information on education level, age etc. When dealing with sensitive questions, there is reason to be wary of biases. (Tourangeau & Yan 2007). However, the empirical literature on the subject argues that even sensitive questions on self-reported practices tend to be more reliable than critics think (Schuman & Johnson 1976, Viasey 2014:1). The critics (see Jerolmack & Khan 2014 for a recent example) overstate the reluctance people have in reporting what they do. The link between self-reporting and actual practices is actually very high when asking for self-reports on social practices. Election surveys for example, which ask people about what they intend to vote are remarkably accurate, with only a few percentages in reporting errors, despite the obvious sensitivity in saying which party one votes for (Silver 2012). A recent experiment on the link between

reported action and actual for sensitive questions found that the correlation between self-reported action and actual action was at 0.85 (where 1 is perfect correlation), based on nine sensitive survey questions on grades in University (Kreuter et al. 2008) In other words, the research indicates that the vast majority of survey respondents actually tell the truth, even when questions are sensitive (Viasey 2014). Taking this result into consideration, it becomes difficult to argue that self-reporting is not at all reflective of actual practices. Therefore, rather than discard questions on self-reported action, we will assess which questions might be sensitive, and review in which direction to suspect a bias, after the presentation of the findings.

## Findings

### *Background Characteristics*

We begin by presenting some basic background characteristics of the sample, seen in table 1.1. As mentioned in the previous section, all the findings are representative of the population of Rabat and Cairo, for those between 18 and 64 years of age, who have completed preparatory education. Or to put it differently, it is representative of the literate population of these two cities. The sample size in Cairo is 2450 while it is 959 in Rabat. The reason for the discrepancy is mainly due to lower response rates in Rabat. In Cairo, the response rate was at 98 percent while it was at 60 percent in Rabat (for more details see appendix).

As is clear from table 1.1, all age groups, different levels of education, and both sexes are well represented. In both cities we are dealing with a young population, with the majority under 34 years old. Almost all of them have gone to public school, and the vast majority had Arabic as their main language of instruction in school. Only 12 percent of the Rabat population were taught in schools where French was the main language of instruction.

In the following, we present findings from the survey on writing practices, attitudes to the colloquial in writing and classifications of *fushā* and the colloquial. Finally we look at whether attitudes and practices vary according to age, socioeconomic position, gender and education.

### *Writing Practices*

The frequency of writing in different languages/varieties in Cairo and Rabat is presented in figure 1.1. The question posed was “how often do you write in the following languages”. “Often” means that respondents reported to write the language in question “every day”, or “at least once a week”. The question is not about writing in a specific context, but writing in general.



TABLE 1.1 *Background characteristics*

	Cairo	Rabat
<b>Age</b>		
18–34	55	66
35–49	30	23
50–64	15	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	40	49
Female	60	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education</b>		
Preparatory	20	44
Secondary	53	37
University	27	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Type of school</b>		
Public	92	96
Private	6	4
Other	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
N =	2408	959
<b>Language in school</b>		
Arabic	97	87
French	0	12
Others	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
N =	2411	959

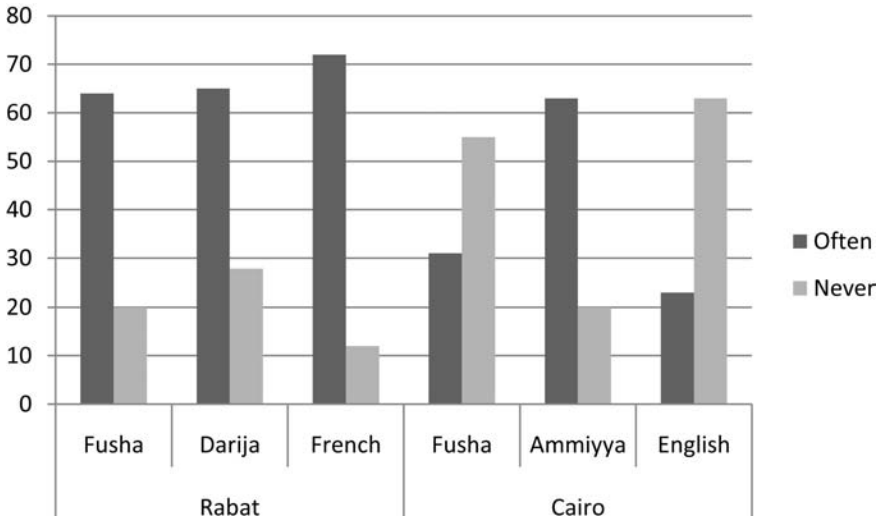


FIGURE 1.1 *Writing practices in Rabat and Cairo (in percent)*

The table shows that the colloquial variety is used often by a majority of the population in both Cairo and Rabat. In Cairo, *‘ammiyya* is by far the most used written language with two thirds writing it often. *Fuṣḥā* is used much less, with around a third claiming to never write in that variety. English is the least used of the three, with around a fifth of the population writing English frequently. In Rabat, French is the most used written language, closely followed by *dārija* and *fuṣḥā*. The main difference between Rabat and Cairo is not the frequency of writing the colloquial, but rather that the colloquial is not dominant compared to *fuṣḥā* and French.

The natural follow-up question is *what* people use these different languages/varieties for. That is presented in table 1.2 for Rabat and table 1.3 for Cairo.

The answer options in the Rabat and the Cairo survey were slightly different, in the sense that the question in Cairo was which *Arabic* variety they used, while in Rabat it was asked for which language, opening up for French and English. In this sense, the tables are not directly comparable. If we focus on the use of the colloquial however, there are some differences between the two cities. In Rabat it is clear that *dārija* is mainly used for writing on Facebook and SMS, but not so much for e-mails, work or school-related writing. In Cairo, *‘ammiyya* has somewhat wider usage, being used also for e-mail and to a certain extent work and school-related issues. This makes sense, keeping in mind that *‘ammiyya* is used more often than *fuṣḥā* and English in Cairo, whereas *dārija* is by no means dominant compared to *fuṣḥā* and French in Rabat. This picture

TABLE 1.2 *Rabat: What language do you use when using ...?*

	Facebook	E-mail	Work	School	SMS
<i>Fuṣṣhā</i>	19	15	39	52	17
<i>Dārīja</i>	60	8	5	4	56
French	19	76	54	42	26
English	1	1	2	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N =</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>895</b>

TABLE 1.3 *Cairo: What language do you use when using ...?*

	Facebook	E-mail	Work	School	SMS
Only <i>fuṣṣhā</i>	5	10	42	40	5
Only <i>‘āmmīyya</i>	52	45	31	18	68
Mix	43	45	27	42	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>N =</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>1888</b>

is confirmed if we look at tables 1.4 and 1.5, presenting answers to the question “what was the last thing you wrote in the following language?”

Tables 1.4 and 1.5 are directly comparable, with the exception that SMS was not one of the answer categories in Rabat. In Rabat almost all the respondents reported to either have written on Facebook or a personal letter in *dārīja*, while the respondents in Cairo reported to have used *‘āmmīyya* for wider set of purposes, including work and to some extent school assignments.

In short, writing in the colloquial is reported to be widespread in both cities, being the most used written language in Cairo and equally much used as French and *fuṣṣhā* in Rabat. While previous research has acknowledged that it is employed, this is the first representative estimate showing that colloquial varieties are actually used often, for writing, by over two thirds of the population. While *‘āmmīyya* dominates writing practices in Cairo, and is used for a variety of purposes, the usage of *dārīja* is narrower in Rabat, being employed mainly for Facebook, Twitter and personal notes.

TABLE 1.4 *What was the last thing you wrote in ...?*

Cairo	<i>Āmmiyya</i>	<i>Fuṣḥā</i>	English
Work related letter or notice	12	39	17
Text messages	37	8	12
Facebook and twitter messages	21	8	25
School assignments	5	19	22
Personal writings/notes	16	13	9
Other	6	6	0
E-mails	1	1	7
Personal letter	1	2	1
Creative writings	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

TABLE 1.5 *What was the last thing you wrote in ...?*

Rabat	<i>Dārija</i>	<i>Fuṣḥā</i>	French
Facebook and twitter messages	51	13	17
Personal letter	43	9	19
Comments on Youtube videos	0	18	22
School assignments	1	19	20
Personal writing/notes	2	16	4
Autre	2	12	5
Work related letter, notice, etc	1	8	4
E-mail	0	2	7
Creative writings	0	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### *Language Attitudes*

How is the use of colloquial varieties perceived? In figure 1.2, we see that the vast majority think that *āmmiyya* or *dārija* is easier to understand than *fuṣḥā*. In this, the respondents in Cairo and Rabat agree.

Regarding whether the language has a place as a written language however, the population in the two cities differs quite markedly. In figure 1.3 we see the

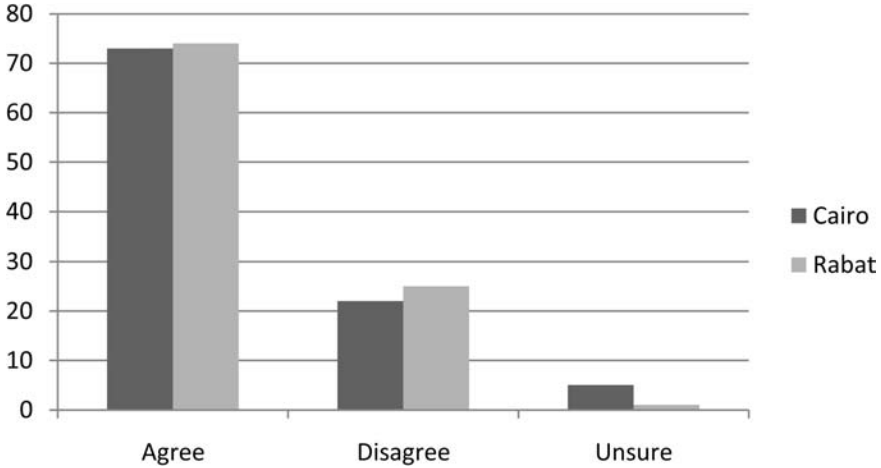


FIGURE 1.2 *‘Āmmiyya is easier to understand than fuṣḥā*

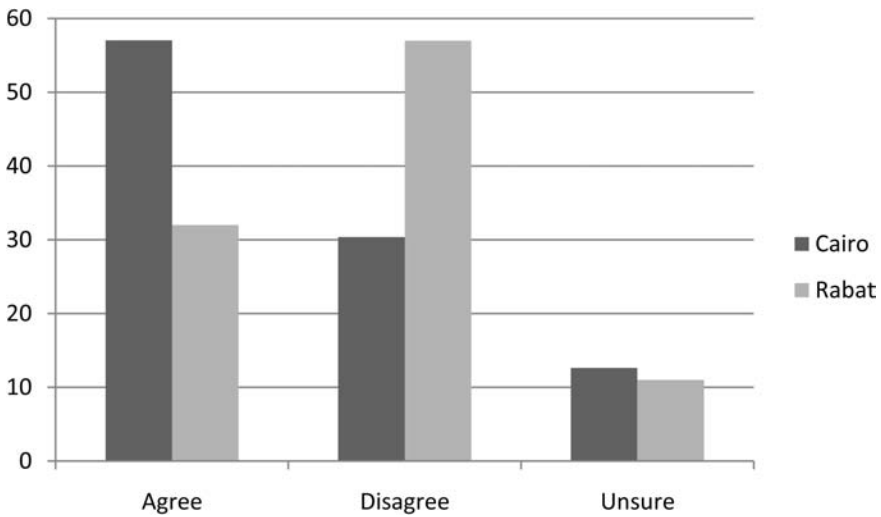


FIGURE 1.3 *‘Āmmiyya/dārīja has a place as a written language*

answers to the question of whether *‘āmmiyya* and *dārīja* respectively has a place as a written language.

The attitude toward the colloquial as a written language follows opposite patterns in Cairo and Rabat. Around 60 percent of the population in Cairo thinks that *‘āmmiyya* has a place as a written language, while around a third disagrees. The reverse is true for *dārīja* in Rabat. In both cities, around 10 percent are unsure or answered “don’t know”. The seeming trend that the population in

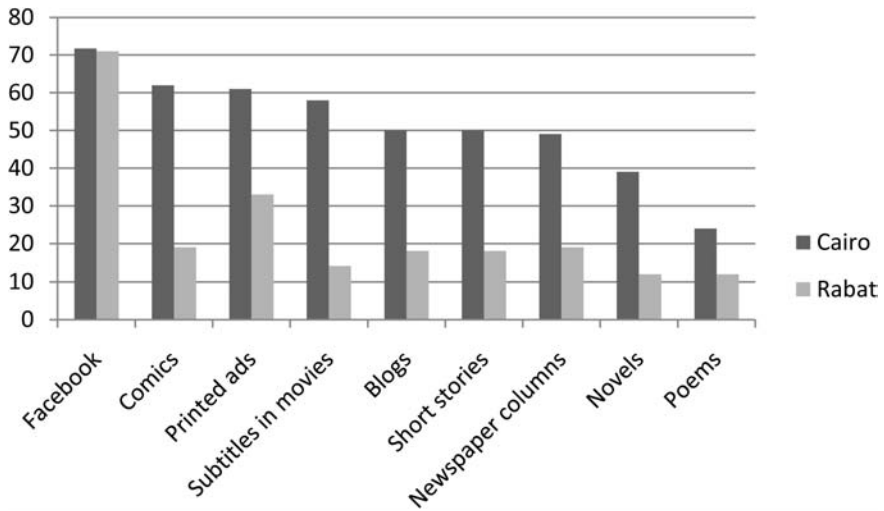


FIGURE 1.4 Percentage who agrees *‘āmmiyya/dārija* is suitable on the following platforms

Rabat is more conservative in their attitudes towards the colloquial as a written language is confirmed by the findings presented in figure 1.4.

While the respondents in Cairo and Rabat generally think that *‘āmmiyya* is suitable for Facebook, the Rabat population is skeptical towards the use of *dārija* in any other platforms. In Rabat they are even skeptical of using *dārija* in media often associated with the colloquial, such as ads. In Cairo on the other hand, over half the population view *‘āmmiyya* as suitable for comics, printed ads, subtitles, blogs short stories and newspaper columns. It is only poems where less than a third of the Cairenes think that *‘āmmiyya* is not suitable. Despite the differences, it is important to keep in mind that even in Rabat, around one third of the population thinks *dārija* has a place as a written language, which is a significant portion of the population. But as with writing practices, *dārija* seems to be present, but more confined compared to Cairo, where *‘āmmiyya* is widely written and accepted.

The relatively high acceptance of *dārija* as a written language does not mean that the acceptance or status of *fushā* is diminishing. For Egypt we see in table 1.6 that the vast majority think *fushā* is an important language both for oneself and for Egypt.

Table 1.7, similarly show that more people want *fushā* to be the main language of instruction in school, rather than *‘āmmiyya*.

For Rabat, we included some more direct questions on the status of *fushā* that were not included in the Cairo survey. Table 1.8 shows the reactions to two statements. Statement 1: “Fusha is the only language that should be used

TABLE 1.6 *Importance of fuṣḥā to yourself and to Egypt*

Importance of <i>fuṣḥā</i> to:	Oneself	Egypt
Very important	40	70
Important	33	23
Neither important nor unimportant	7	2
Less important	17	4
Not important	3	1
N =	2416	2416

TABLE 1.7 *Which language should be used in the classroom?*

	Secondary	Preparatory	Primary
<i>Fuṣḥā</i>	35	34	33
<i>‘āmmīyya</i>	21	22	28
Both	40	41	36
English	4	3	3
N =	2,348	2,400	2,389

TABLE 1.8 *Attitudes to fuṣḥā in Rabat*

	Statement 1	Statement 2
Agree	77	60
Disagree	17	26
Unsure	7	14
Total	100	100
N =	956	956

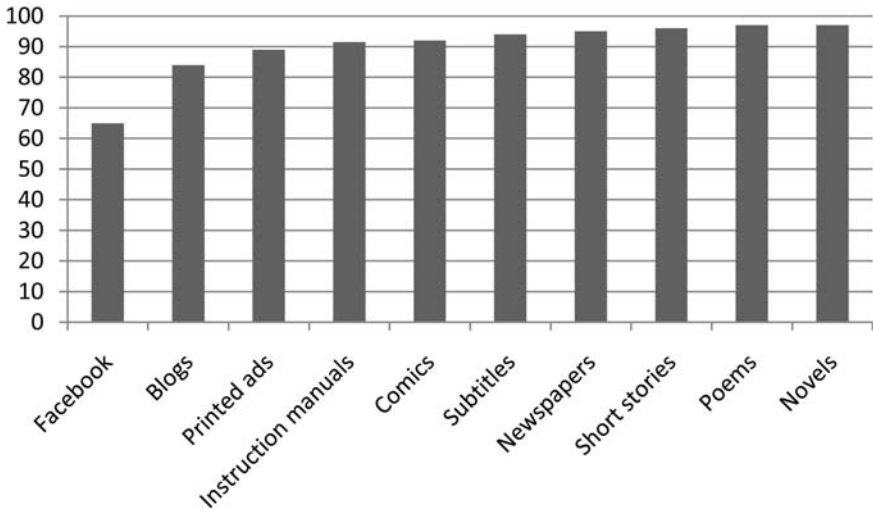


FIGURE 1.5 Percentage who think fuṣḥā is suitable within the following platforms

for writing Arabic”. Statement 2: “It is more important to master writing and reading Fusha than writing and reading French”.

In Rabat we also asked if *fuṣḥā* was a suitable variety for a number of different platforms. The results are shown in figure 1.5. Both table 1.8 and figure 1.4 confirm that *fuṣḥā* is a highly valued variety in Rabat, deemed suitable by almost all on all platforms, and considered more important to learn than French.

### *Implications of Age, Education and Sex*

Who writes the colloquial and who finds it suitable as a written language? As mentioned in the introduction, an advantage of this survey is that we can look into differences between sub-groups of the population. Do we see clear patterns in terms of which social groups write the colloquial and find it acceptable as a written language?

All the figures presented below are based on regression analysis. The presented results are the estimated likelihood for either writing often in the colloquial or accepting the colloquial as a written language, for different sub-groups of the populations. In all the regressions we controlled for age, socioeconomic status, education and gender (for full tables and methodological explanation, see appendix).

In figure 1.6 we see the estimated likelihood of writing often in the colloquial for people with different education levels, controlling for age, income and gender. The most important finding in this graph is the lack of large differences between those with higher education and those without. In general, people



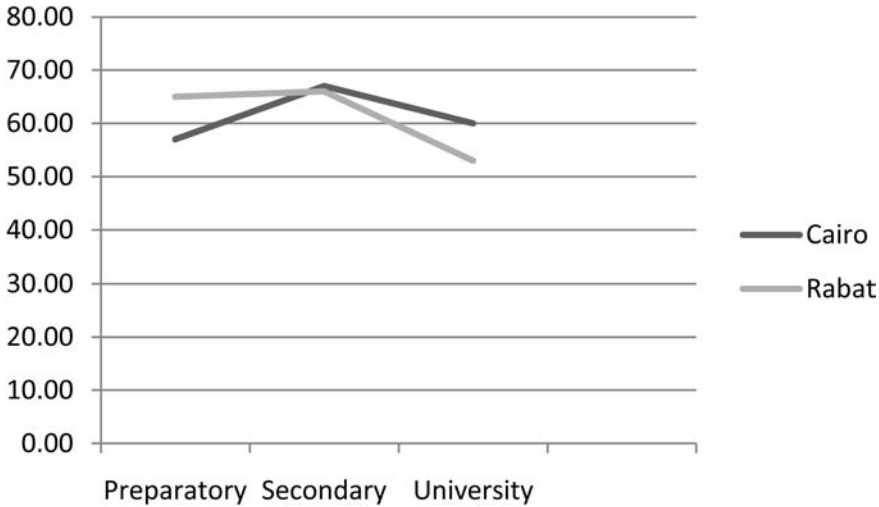


FIGURE 1.6 Likelihood of writing colloquial for different education levels

are likely to write in the colloquial across different levels of education. In Cairo, the small differences observed in the figure are not statistically significant. For Rabat, there is a statistically significant downward trend for those with university education. While those with only preparatory education are 65 percent likely to write often in *dārīja*, those with university education are only slightly above 50 percent likely to do the same.: The less educated parts of the population write more frequently in the colloquial than those with a university degree.

In figure 1.7 we see the likelihood for writing colloquial across different age groups.

We see a clear trend in both cities that young people write much more frequently in the colloquial compared to older people. As with education, the clearest trend is visible in Rabat, where people are 80 percent likely to write in *dārīja* if they are between 18 and 34 years old, while there is only a 23 percent chance of doing the same if they are more than 50 years old. In Cairo, there is around 70 percent likelihood of writing *‘āmmīyya* for 18 to 34-year-olds, while the likelihood of writing *‘āmmīyya* for those who are over 50 years old is slightly below 50 percent. All the differences in this regression are statistically significant.

Regarding gender, there is no statistically significant difference for Rabat. In Cairo however, there is a slightly higher likelihood for writing *‘āmmīyya* often for men than for women. We also analyzed the importance of income and socioeconomic status, but they were not significant factors when controlling for age and education.

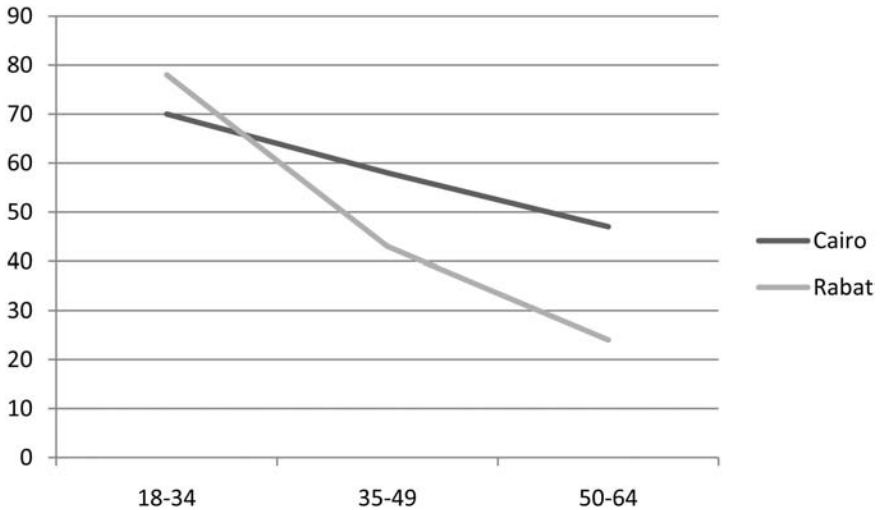


FIGURE 1.7 Likelihood of writing colloquial for different age groups

The picture that emerges is that in both Cairo and Rabat, it is young people who are the most frequent writers of *‘āmmiyya*. The implications of the finding that younger people write more frequently in the colloquial than older people are difficult to assess. Either, the young people write more in the colloquial because they are young, but they will stop doing so and write more *fushā* when they get older (an age effect). But the explanation might also be connected to new technologies and developments in recent decades. This would perhaps mean that the young today will continue to write in the colloquial when they get older, and the new generations may follow them, implying more frequent usage of the colloquial in all age groups in a couple of decades (a cohort effect). Both scenarios are possible, and it is impossible to determine which is true based on the data from this survey. All we can say at this point is that *‘āmmiyya* is quite frequently used in all social groups in Cairo, while the educated and older population of Rabat is much more skeptical than the young. This corroborates the finding that use of the colloquial is present, but more confined in Rabat compared to Cairo.

Turning to attitudes, we see the importance of education for having positive attitudes to the colloquial as a written language in figure 1.8.

The level of acceptance of the colloquial is generally higher in Cairo than Rabat, as we have seen. Interestingly we see that the highly educated are less likely to accept the colloquial as a written language, pointing toward the existence of an elite with a more conservative outlook on language compared to the less educated parts of the population. In Cairo, those with a preparatory edu-

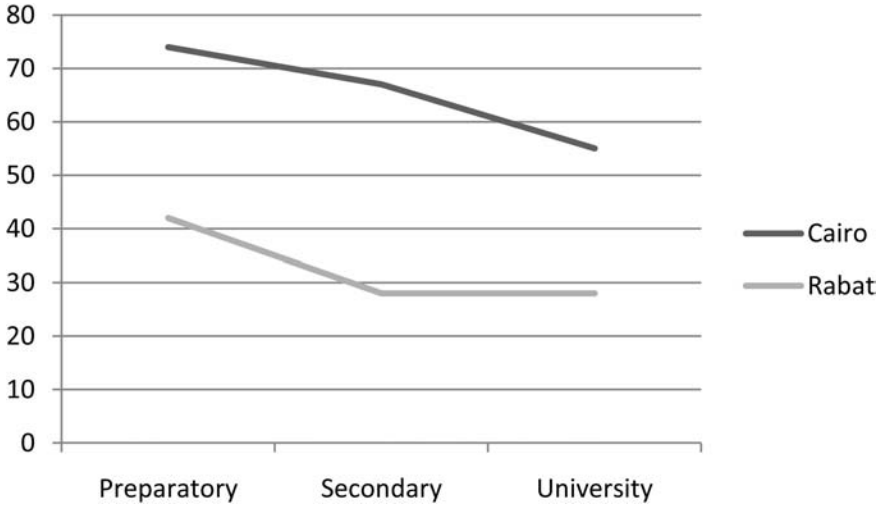


FIGURE 1.8 Likelihood of accepting colloquial as a written language across education levels

cation have a 75 percent chance of accepting *‘āmmīyya* as a written language while the likelihood of accepting *‘āmmīyya* is around 20 percent less for those with a university degree. In Rabat, those with preparatory education have over 40 percent chance of accepting *dārīja* as a written language, while less than 30 percent of those with a university education do the same.

Neither gender, income nor age were significantly correlated with attitudes towards *‘āmmīyya* or *dārīja* as a written language. Generally therefore, the Rabat population is more conservative than the Cairenes, and the attitudes are fairly stable in all social groups, with a minor exception of education, where the educated are more conservative.

### Can We Trust the Results?

What do these results mean? Can we deal with them as accurate representations of language practices and attitudes? As mentioned above, a real concern in all survey research is that there are biases in reporting on sensitive questions. A sensitive survey question is defined in the literature as a question where “there are clear social norms regarding a behavior or attitude” and where “answers reporting behaviors or attitudes that conform to the norms are deemed socially desirable, and those that report deviations from the norms are considered socially undesirable.” (Tourangeau & Yan 2007:860). In our case, asking about how often you write in different varieties might be interpreted as

sensitive questions. The assumption is that there are clear social norms which say that *fushā* is the only variety suitable for writing. Following this logic, we should expect that people underreport their use of colloquial varieties, as it is socially undesirable according to this norm, and over-report the use of *fushā*, as this is seen as socially desirable according to the norm.

Judging from our findings however, there are reasons to doubt how strong the social norm *against* use of the colloquial really is. When we see that in Cairo over 70 percent of the population accepts *‘ammīyya* as a written language and a third of the Rabat population do the same, can we still say that it is a clear social norm against writing colloquial? And even if it is, this would imply that the estimates for writing *dārija* and *‘ammīyya* are conservative, and that people actually write even *more* than what they admit to in this survey. In terms of their reported *fushā* practices, it seems more relevant to discuss bias. Judging from the Rabat results, fewer people accept *dārija* as a written language. This does not seem to influence their reported practices of writing *dārija*, but it might have influenced their self-reports of writing in *fushā*. The reported practices of *fushā* are much higher in Rabat than in Cairo. No previous research indicates that this should be the case, which may indicate that is an effect of a social norm saying that it is socially desirable to write *fushā*. In other words, the sensitivity of self-reporting language practices does not necessarily lie in writing colloquial, but rather in *not* writing *fushā*. Practices of *fushā* may be over-reported in Rabat, rather than *dārija* being under-reported. In any case, it does not seem likely that biased reporting has altered the general direction of our results.

Another factor that may potentially bias the results is the respondents' definitions of *‘ammīyya*, *dārija* and *fushā*. The definition of what constitutes *fushā* is not at all clear, and by extension, the boundaries of *‘ammīyya* or *dārija* are not clear, either. In a series of linguistic experiments with both written and spoken discourse in Egypt, Dilworth Parkinson showed that a wide array of terms exists among Arab scholars and lay people alike to designate different stylistic levels and registers of written Arabic (Parkinson 1991, 1993, 2003). Parkinson comments that “people do not agree on a term, and (...) they do not agree on what specific part of the communicative continuum, i.e., what specific varieties, any particular term should refer to” (Parkinson 1991:33). In addition, different people may mean different things by referring to *‘fushā*: For some, only the most eloquent prose qualifies as *fushā*, while perhaps others view *fushā* as almost everything that is written down with Arabic letters (Parkinson 1991:34). In other words, it is not necessarily clear what literate Egyptians and Moroccans *mean* when they talk about writing and talking in *fushā* or *‘ammīyya*. To understand better how these respondents actually classified the

different varieties, we presented them with a number of sentences that the respondents were asked to classify as *fushā*, *‘ammīyya/dārija* or both. The sentences were not read aloud. The respondents were just given a piece of paper with the sentence on it, one sentence at a time. They were not asked to evaluate the correctness of the sentence, but just how they would classify it.

In the Rabat survey, we presented them with the following four sentences:

كيتدرس الحساب في كافة المدارس الحكومية	R1
المدارس الحكومية كافة تدرس الحساب	R2
الحساب كيتقرى في جميع المدارس الحكومية	R3
الحساب يدرس في كافة المدارس الحكومية	R4

They are all varieties of a sentence that roughly translates into: “Computer science is taught in all public schools.”

In Egypt the following three sentences were presented to the respondents

الناس تحب الكلام عن أولادها	C1
تحب الناس الكلام عن أولادها	C2
يحب الناس الكلام عن أولادها	C3

All the sentences roughly translate into: “People like to talk about their children.”

All the sentences are meant to be more or less ambiguous in terms of whether a scholar would classify them as colloquial or *fushā*, but some lean more towards *fushā* while others lean more towards the colloquial.

The results for the Rabat sentences are seen in table 1.9.

The first sentence is overwhelmingly classified as a mix, the second *fushā*, the third as both or *dārija*, the fourth as *fushā*. Interestingly, none of the sentences are classified as *dārija* by a majority of the population.

The results from Egypt are shown in table 1.10.

In Cairo, the trend is quite different from Rabat. While none of the Moroccan sentences were classified as *dārija* by a majority, all the Egyptian sentences are classified as *‘ammīyya* by a majority, while only a minority sees the sentences as either a mix or *fushā*. Even C3, which quite clearly leans towards *fushā* is only classified as such by a third of the population.

TABLE 1.9 *Classifications of dārija and fuṣḥā in Rabat*

	R1	R2	R3	R4
<i>Fuṣḥā</i>	13	85	9	88
<i>Dārija</i>	13	5	25	5
Both	74	10	66	7
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100
N =	954	951	954	952

TABLE 1.10 *Classifications of ‘āmmiyya and fuṣḥā in Cairo*

	C1	C2	C3
<i>Fuṣḥā</i>	19	24	35
Both	11	12	11
<i>‘āmmiyya</i>	70	64	53
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100
N =	2.357	2.334	2.345

The results clearly indicate that people have different perceptions of what *fuṣḥā* and *‘āmmiyya/dārija* is, echoing Parkinson's findings. In addition there are differences between the two cities. It seems that in Cairo, the population has an idealized image of *fuṣḥā*, refusing to classify anything that does not meet a very high standard as *fuṣḥā*. This could imply that the estimate for *fuṣḥā* writers is slightly under-reported in Cairo. In Rabat, however, we get the opposite picture. Even sentences with clear *dārija* markers are understood as *fuṣḥā*. This is interesting, as it might mean that if anything, the numbers for how often they write *dārija* is under-reported.

None of this changes the main direction of the findings in any significant way. However, it is clear that people do not agree on what *‘āmmiyya*, *dārija* and *fuṣḥā* is, and that this is a subject which should be researched further.

### *Summing Up Findings*

The main findings from the survey can be summed up in four points. First, the colloquial varieties are frequently employed by the vast majority of the population in Cairo and Rabat. Written colloquial is not the preserve of an elite who can afford to flout conventions; it is the property of the people. Second, the population in Cairo use *‘āmmiyya* for a wider variety of purposes, compared to Rabat where *dārija* is almost exclusively used for Facebook and personal notes. Third, the Rabat population is more skeptical to the use of *dārija* as a written language, despite the fact that they use the variety frequently. Only a third of the population accepts it as a written variety, compared to two thirds in Cairo. Fourth, whether one writes in the colloquial is more dependent on which social group one belongs to in Rabat than in Cairo. Those with higher education have a lower likelihood of writing the colloquial in Rabat, but not in Cairo. In both cities, the young write more frequently than the old, but the impact of age on writing is significantly higher in Rabat. In Cairo, the use of *‘āmmiyya* is spread widely across all walks of life, while both practice and acceptance of *‘āmmiyya* remains more confined to the young with low education in Rabat.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this survey open up many questions, which we hope will be subject of further research. In the final part of this chapter, we will pose some of these questions and suggest some angles from which the findings could be interpreted. First, why is the colloquial so widespread?

The survey findings underscore and corroborate qualitative research that has noted an increase of writing in the colloquial (for example Daoudi 2011, Elinson 2011, Doss et al 2013). How to account for the frequent usage of this variety? One possible explanation is the increasing level of literacy in Egypt and Morocco. When literacy spreads, writing is no longer confined to formal channels, but becomes widespread in the households of ordinary people. There the need for a more informal style of writing might arise, as *fushā* is generally seen as too formal to use in interpersonal communication, be it written or oral, as suggested by Belnap and Bishop (2003). Walters similarly argues that informality is key to understanding why people write in the colloquial rather than standard (Walters 2003: 98).

With the internet revolution, there has been an enormous increase in platforms designed for informal written communication. Facebook and Twitter are certainly platforms associated with informal writing, and as such with the colloquial (Abu Elijah 2014, Warschauer et al 2002). The spread of channels where

informal writing is not only accepted, but expected, could be an important reason for the high prevalence of *‘āmmīyya* in Cairo and *dārija* in Rabat. This hypothesis is also strengthened by the fact that Facebook and personal writing are the dominant platforms where the colloquial is being written.

In terms of attitudes, a substantial portion of the population accepts the colloquial as a written language. At the same time *fuṣṣḥā* remains a highly valued variety in both Cairo and Morocco, existing alongside the high acceptance of *‘āmmīyya* as a written language. In other words, the fact that people accept *‘āmmīyya* does not mean that they value *fuṣṣḥā* less. This also relates to writing practices. Those who write in *‘āmmīyya* or *dārija* also write in *fuṣṣḥā*. More *dārija* and *‘āmmīyya* just means more writing, not less *fuṣṣḥā*.

Second, why is *‘āmmīyya* more widespread than *dārija*? Here we can only offer speculations. The findings point to clear differences between Cairo and Rabat in terms of practices and attitudes. The use of the colloquial is more confined in terms of social groups and which platforms it is used in Rabat compared to Cairo. The Rabat population is also less prone to accepting the colloquial as a written variety. One possible explanation might be that Egypt has a longer tradition for writing *‘āmmīyya* than Morocco has for writing *dārija*. There are writings in *‘āmmīyya* dating back to the 16th century, and aside from a break around the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, there was a steady production of both literature, theater and news articles written in Egyptian dialect (Doss et al 2013). Although there are examples of historical *dārija* writing, it was not as widespread as Egypt.

Part of the explanation might also lie in the different roles the Arabic language has played in Moroccan and Egyptian nationalism. Suleiman (2003) argues that language has become an essential part of the national identity in all Arab countries. This process had very different outcomes in Egypt and Morocco. In Egypt, the local colloquial dialect became a tool for nationalism. As early as the 19th century there was “a deep desire among the Egyptian nationalists to reform the language by bringing it closer to the colloquial, the spoken language of the people” (Suleiman 2003:174). Recently, Ziad Fahmy has shown that the colloquial was an important part of nationalist, popular culture at the turn of the 19th century (Fahmy 2011). In other words, to use the colloquial was not necessarily seen as corrupting the Arabic language, but rather as a part of asserting your Egyptian identity.

In Morocco on the other hand, national identity was not connected to *dārija* as much as to *fuṣṣḥā*. After independence large-scale Arabization programs were introduced, with the main goal of promoting *fuṣṣḥā*, at the expense of French. This might have contributed to a sense that *fuṣṣḥā* was the language connected to the Moroccan national identity, rather than *dārija*. This very



different interpretations and frames for understanding the local dialect might be an explanation for the support for *fushā* as the only written Arabic language in Morocco and the more open attitude towards *‘ammīyya* as a written language in Cairo.

This chapter is the first to establish a quantitative estimate of how often *‘ammīyya* and *dārīja* is written and how it is perceived drawing on samples representative of the whole literate population in Cairo and Rabat. While the estimates have to be interpreted with caution, it is clear that the populations of Rabat and Cairo write *dārīja* and *‘ammīyya* frequently. It is also clear that this trend holds true across social groups, especially in Cairo. However, there are also differences between the cities, with Rabat being more conservative. An important factor that merits more research is how people classify *fushā* and the colloquial varieties. We have documented that there are clear differences, but research should pursue the question of exactly what is classified as colloquial and what is classified as *fushā* in the Arab world. Despite the frequent use and acceptance of the colloquial varieties in these surveys, there are no indications that the spread of the colloquial is a threat to the significance of *fushā*, which seems to retain its position as a prestigious language, alongside the colloquial varieties. In our view, these findings open up new and interesting pathways to study developments in written Arabic.

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# Diglossia as Ideology

*Kristen Brustad*

## Introduction

The Language Change in the Arab World (LCAW) project evolved from the collective sense of the researchers involved that there appears to be a significant shift underway in writing practices and attitudes toward writing in the Arab world. This paper proposes a framework for the study of attitudes toward writing in non-standard Arabic, and applies this framework to data from a Twitter hashtag about writing in Arabic, and to the results of the 2013 and 2015 FAFO surveys of language attitudes and society in Cairo and Rabat (Kebede, Kindt and Høigilt 2013, Kebede and Kindt 2016).

This framework takes as a fundamental principle that language does not pre-exist usage, but rather is constantly being constructed and reconstructed by its users. In other words, categories such as register exist insofar as speakers imagine and create them. Informing these practices is a shared set of ideas about language use, which linguistic anthropologists call “language ideology.”<sup>1</sup> These concepts may be articulated or not, conscious or not, and while they represent an important aspect of the culture of the language, they do not necessarily reflect linguistic practice. I will argue here that diglossia is such a linguistic ideology. The split in registers between *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya* is real for Arabic speakers as an idea about what Arabic is or should be. However, diglossia does not serve us well as a tool of linguistic analysis.

In this essay, I follow the LCAW terminology in using the terms *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya/dārija*<sup>2</sup> as conventions, although I argue that the binary construct they reflect is an ideological one. The terms standard and non-standard also reflect a binary, but perhaps a less ideologically-charged one, and they are used

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- 1 Language ideology refers to shared cultural beliefs that underlie language usage, beliefs that are taken by most speakers as the natural state of affairs. The concept differs from political ideology, which refers to a set of consciously held convictions. Language ideology, on the other hand, refers to beliefs about language that speakers assume to be given, “natural” (see further Schieffelin et al. 1998; Milroy 1995; Irvine and Gal 2000).
  - 2 In this paper I discuss both Egyptian and Moroccan spoken Arabic, and follow the conventions of using *‘āmmiyya* to refer to Egyptian spoken Arabic and *dārija* to refer to Moroccan.

herein as synonyms for *fushā* and *‘ammīyya*. However, the use of these terms as analytical tools is necessary here because we as yet lack an alternative set of analytical terminology. It is hoped that further study of variation in written and spoken Arabic will evolve more nuanced terms for register and style use, because it is increasingly clear that the distinction between written and oral, formal and informal modes of communication is more ideal than practice, and perhaps always was. The present paper is meant to encourage such studies.

The diglossic nature of Arabic as postulated by Ferguson 1959 can no longer be maintained as description of linguistic reality. As Mejdell (2016) demonstrates, this imagined boundary is “erased” and “crossed” deliberately by contemporary writers; Doss and Davies (2013) for Egypt and Lentin and Grand’Henry (2008) for Levantine show that this has been going on for centuries. We cannot know the scope of such “border crossings” just as we cannot know the reality of writing across society by the accident of what survives today, since most of it has been “corrected” by editors to adhere to contemporary norms before publication. *Fushā* as an ideal was promoted and protected vigorously in the twentieth century, but now, with new technologies of writing and ensuing democracies of expression, this ideal has come under increasing pressure. This may be seen clearly in the rhetoric of “Arabic in Danger” that is the topic of many television shows, newspaper articles, and conferences.<sup>3</sup> This rhetoric reflects an urgent sense that Arabic has lost or is losing something. I argue here that what it seems to be losing, and what is really at stake at present, is its existence as an idealized language with special status.

This argument follows and reframes the observation made by Madiha Doss that “the evolutions we are witnessing today in language use are closely linked to attitudinal change” (2006:52). We will explore this attitudinal change in the framework of Standard Language Ideology as Milroy (2001) theorizes it. We will also examine the attitudes of speakers and writers of Arabic as examined in the LCAW surveys and the Twitter hashtag *#بكتب\_بالعربي*, *#I\_write\_in\_Arabic*. This hashtag, which was launched in conjunction with International Arabic Day in 2014, constitutes an ideological site, a metalinguistic discussion on Arabic. Twitter feed is one of several public platforms that affords both access and forum for public comment; that is, both writing and the evaluation of it by other users are available for analysis. The interactive nature of this writing technology has many implications that I hope to explore elsewhere.

3 See for example the Al-Jazeera program titled *حماية اللغة العربية* hosted by Faisal Qasim on the series *الاتجاه المعاكس*.

### Variation in the History of Written Arabic

It is axiomatic in the field of Arabic that the grammar and standards of *fushā* have changed little in the past 1400 years. Charles Ferguson built his theory of diglossia in part on this assumption, and the entire sub-field of Middle Arabic likewise originated in the notion that non-standard pre-modern writing was exceptional and thus worth of study in and of itself. But the work of many scholars of Middle Arabic, including studies by Blau (2002), Doss and Davies (2013), and Lentin (2008, 2009), as well as Zack and Schippers (2012), points clearly to the fact that a significant number of highly educated and talented elite did not feel constrained to write in what we now call *fushā*. Lentin argues that “Middle Arabic was an instrument of communication in many fields of social and cultural life” and is thus to be seen as a register in its own right (2008:218). Hopkins’ (1984) study of the earliest Islamic-era Arabic papyri shows that variation in written Arabic goes back to the very beginning of its recorded history as we currently define it; in fact, that recorded history is rapidly expanding into the early centuries of the Common Era (see e.g. Al-Jallad 2015). It seems that the existence of non-standard varieties has been as stable as that of the standard (ideal) language; if so, it is precisely the stability of the language as a whole that is linguistically interesting. It is particularly noteworthy that the Arabic script itself, with its lack of short vowels – which represent precisely the kinds of variation that have characterized varieties and registers of Arabic for centuries – may have developed and been maintained *in part* to admit the variation that we still see today.

The 2013 publication of *Written Egyptian Arabic* *العامة المصرية المكتوبة* by Madiha Doss and Humphrey Davies represents a relatively recent insight in the field that we should treat non-standard written Arabic as part of the written record, and not as a collection of errors. The book traces a six-hundred year history of literary production in Egypt that consciously and unapologetically uses *‘ammiyya*. Such studies are of utmost importance in putting the current increased production of *‘ammiyya* texts into historical perspective. As Doss notes, “one should start by observing that the trend of writing in colloquial has a very long tradition, dating back to the 15th century, and that it follows a rising and falling curve at different times according to social and historical factors which should be studied for each period.” (2006:54).

We may only just be beginning to scratch the surface of writings that do not hold to the standards of *fushā* as we currently envision them. Nelly Hanna’s (2003) study of the reading and writing practices of an emergent middle-class in 16th to 18th century Cairo points to the existence of a significant practice of writing in an unstandardized idiom. Examining archives of private libraries in

Cairo from the 16th to the 18th centuries, she finds that a Cairene “middle class” was reading and writing on a much larger scale than previously thought, and doing so in a language that did not always adhere to the rules of the standard (2003:157–158).

There are well-known experiments with writing in non-standard Arabic during the *nahḍa*, such as ‘Abdallah Nadim’s journal *al-Ustāz*; less well-known are examples such as the following letter, in which a figure no less than the “Mu‘allim” himself, Butrus al-Bustani (d. 1883), author of an important *nahḍa*-era grammar, permitted himself to use several non-standard expressions, including: من يم (from من جنب) “on the part of,” ميسوطون “happy,” اعتمدوا الخواجات “the foreigners decided to,” and تطمني “reassure me” (see figure 2.1, reproduced from Dayeh 1984:180)

Butrus al-Bustani was deeply involved in the promoting of classical Arabic, and there is no doubt of his mastery of it. Therefore, these cannot be dismissed as ‘mistakes.’ Rather, they are an integral part of a complex communicative act in which al-Bustani conveys aspects of his personal relationship with his addressee while maintaining the decorum of a written letter. Findings such as this demonstrate the need for an analytical framework that takes style and communicative exigencies – which sometimes compete within the same space – into account.

Moreover, as Lentin points out (2011, section 2), our perception of the history of written Arabic is colored not just by the few manuscripts that have survived, but also by the fact that it has been standard practice since the 19th century to “correct” them to the standards of *fuṣḥā*. The use of print technology to publish manuscripts allowed the editing or “correction” of manuscripts before publishing so that they fit expectations, which promoted the erasure<sup>4</sup> of language variation that may have existed in pre-modern times, and that was easily attributable to error-prone copyists. Our perspective on the past has been shaped by this prism, including a very active system of “language correction” (further below). When we add to that the cost of publishing and the fact that many attempts to launch non-government papers and series ended in failure within a year or two, we are reminded that access to public writing was very tightly controlled and standardization relatively easy to establish and maintain, if in fact the elite wished to do so.<sup>5</sup>

4 On the sociolinguistic process of erasure, the process by which certain linguistic phenomena get “erased” from our view so that we do not see or hear them and do not have to take account of them, see Irvine and Gal 2000.

5 The 1881–1882 discussions in *al-Muqtataf* show that they did. An editorial pondering the most effective language to use in helping to spread learning among the masses presented *‘āmmiyya*

اول شهر كانون الثاني افتتاح سنة ١٨٤٦ م  
 ولي رجا انه يحصل افادة من هذا المجمع تاوول الى خير الانجيل ومنفعة القريب  
 ان بيت يعقوب اغا هم مبسوطون الآن والباين ان اسكندر عمال يترقى ومن يم بيتهم وعقدوا الخواجات ان  
 يرجعوه لهم ويسترجعوا المال منهم ومرادهم ان يجعلوا الكنيسة في مكان المطبعة وقد باشروا  
 في ذلك والآن حيث غابت الشمس اقتضى ان اقف وارجوك ان لا تنسني وعيلتي من الذكر  
 امام عرش النعمة وتطميني على صحتك ومن يم مكتوب هيكل لطوف فقد ترجمته وارسلته له حسب  
 امره واكرر لثم ايديكم ثانياً في 2١٦  
 بمودة  
 مسمد دهالك  
 بطرس  
 البستاني

FIGURE 2.1 Letter by Butrus al-Bustani

أول شهر كانون الثاني افتتاح سنة 1846

ولي رجا أنه يحصل افادة من هذا المجمع تاوول الى خير الانجيل ومنفعة القريب ان  
 بيت يعقوب اغا هم مبسوطون الآن والباين ان اسكندر عمال يترقى ومن يم بيتهم اعتمدوا  
 الخواجات ان يرجعوه لهم ويسترجعوا المال منهم ومرادهم ان يجعلوا الكنيسة في مكان المطبعة  
 وقد باشروا في ذلك والآن حيث غابت الشمس اقتضى ان اقف وارجوك ان لا تنسني وعيلتي  
 من الذكر امام عرش النعمة وتطميني على صحتك ومن يم مكتوب هيكل لطوف فقد ترجمته  
 وارسلته له حسب امرك واكرر لثم ايديكم ثانياً و3

46 في 10 كانون 2 بيروت

بطرس البستاني

It appears, then, that the history of “*fushā*-only” writing may not have been as long or pervasive as has largely been assumed. We view what is happening now as something new and different, but there is another viewpoint we should

as a possible alternative (1881: no. 6). This set off a virulent series of exchanges that took the discussion in another direction – that of maintaining *fushā* to the exclusion of all else, for reasons that had little to do with educational needs.

consider: that the 20th century is an aberration in the long history of Arabic. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the late *nahḍa* language experiments meant to further ambitious social projects educating the masses had begun to narrow considerably, and the educated elite reasserted their authority over written language.<sup>6</sup> Effectively, what Twitter and other internet technologies are now doing is opening up spaces in which the language corrector and editor have no control, so that it is much more difficult for non-standard writing to be ‘erased’ from public consciousness.

All this makes the framework of diglossia inadequate to explain and analyze all linguistic practice, not only in the present, but also for the past. In the following section, I will argue that diglossia functions better as a description of a language ideology than of a linguistic reality.

### Standard Language Ideology

The roots of the terms *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya*, ف ص ح relating to clarity of language (see Ayoub 2011) and ع م م referring to non-elite groups, appear to date back to the ninth century CE, but their widespread use in the sense we understand them today seems to be related to the term and concept of diglossia, which emerged from the *nahḍa*, though it was not theorized until Ferguson published his well-known 1959 treatise. Briefly, Ferguson postulated that a certain kind of linguistic community could be described as diglossic: characterized by the existence of two linguistically distinct and functionally separate registers, High (H) and Low (L), whose distance was maintained through their use in separate spheres, and the existence of a rich literary tradition in the H register that enriched it. Finally, he noted that diglossic communities tended also to be marked by widespread illiteracy. Ferguson is not alone in claiming the long stability of H in Arabic; he merely echoes the tradition itself. These concepts and terms have taken the lead in framing discussions of Arabic in the modern period.

However, Ferguson himself tells us, through the language he uses, that diglossia describes an ideology. Certain words he repeatedly employs already

6 See Baskerville 2009, which traces the evolution of تهذيب العامة to تهذيب العامة and then to تهذيب العامة – and with it any project to educate the lower classes. The discussion in al-Muqtataf 1881–1882 shows the same pattern in condensed form: a proposal to adopt language to make education more accessible degenerates into acrimonious arguments over Arabic; in the end, those who expressed positive attitudes toward using spoken forms of Arabic are silenced.



point us in the direction of language ideology: “Sometimes the *feeling* is so strong that H alone is *regarded as* real and L is *reported* ‘not to exist’” ... “Even where the *feeling* of the reality and superiority of H is not so strong, there is usually a *belief* that H is somehow *more beautiful, more logical, better to express important thoughts*, and the like. And this *belief* is held also by speakers whose command of H is quite limited” (1959:329–330; emphasis mine). In using words like “feeling,” “belief,” and “regarded as,” Ferguson himself indicates what we now call language ideology (a term that did not exist during his career). It is not that H is superior to L or more real or beautiful, but that the speakers of this culture *feel* and *believe* that it is – even those for whom H is not part of their daily lives. In other words, it is a shared belief among all members of this culture. This is the core of language ideology.

Moreover, it is likely that the ideology of diglossia itself has helped engender a sociolinguistic process of erasure that renders mixed or *‘ammīyya* texts invisible. In other words, the ideology of diglossia leads us to expect written texts in *fushā*, and to see them as normative; the texts that do not fit the model are brushed off, or, in the *nahḍa* and 20th century, physically erased, either through the ‘correction’ process or exclusion from publishing.

The phenomena noted by Ferguson and described as diglossia align very closely with what Milroy calls Standard Language Ideology, which, we should note, he developed to explain certain patterns of linguistic thought and behavior in Britain, not considered by Ferguson to be a ‘diglossic’ language community. Milroy defines a standard language ideology culture as one in which speakers believe their language exists in “a *clearly delimited perfectly uniform and perfectly stable variety* – a variety that is never perfectly and consistently realized in spoken use” (2001:542, emphasis original). When two or more forms exist, only one is correct.

The framework of standard language ideology allows us to go beyond analyzing Arabic as an H/L binary, and helps us understand the cultural constructs behind the binary terms. In the context of Arab history and culture, including the strong ties between *fushā*, the Qur’an and the prophet Muhammad, standard language ideology idealizes *fushā* beyond its ‘correctness’ to a moral stature that, at its logical extreme, makes any language form that is not *fushā* a moral failing. This is precisely what happened during the *nahḍa* when the establishment of state institutions, and eventually Arabic Language Academies, helped ensure that the view of what *fushā* comprised grew increasingly more narrow as time passed. Thus, for example, the disappearance of the verb راح from formal Arabic in the twentieth century – despite its use by someone like Taha Hussein – should probably be seen as a result of its prevalence in spoken Arabic, not its inherent inappropriateness for writing.

The ideology of the standard became so strong in the twentieth century that reform projects collapsed under its weight.<sup>7</sup> For reasons that deserve further study (but must involve language ideology, class struggle and upheavals in the education system), there arose early in the 1900s an idea that written Arabic was not accessible to pupils and to the population at large. Something had to be done to make written Arabic more accessible, and some focused on the alphabet as the problem. One possible motivation for this would be that changing the alphabet only would allow the language itself to remain intact, as the culture of standard language ideology – and the sociopolitical interests it served – dictated. Calls to reform the Arabic writing system reached their peak from 1944 to 1947, when the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo put forth a call for proposals for the simplification of the Arabic writing system. In response, 84 projects were proposed to the Academy, but not a single one was chosen to receive the prize (Khattar 1972:6). The fact that no prizes were awarded demonstrates clearly that this project was doomed from the beginning.

The Arabic language academies were institutions whose very existence we can attribute to the attempts to maintain standard language ideology. Their primary goals were to guard the Arabic language from corruption and decay and modernize it. It is their existence, and not their accomplishments, that people point to as important for the preservation of Arabic, and this points to their role in maintaining standard language ideology. Arabic Language Academies are bound by this ideology, and this is why they are all but incapable of taking action.

What is happening now on social media and the internet stands in stark contrast to the attempt to overhaul the writing system of Arabic some 70 years ago. The use of Latin letters to write Arabic, called ‘Franco,’ appears to solve the difficulty of the Arabic script. In the following exchange on a social forum called ‘Fatakat,’ we find some metalinguistic commentary on the use of this script (<http://forums.fatakat.com/thread2400846> accessed on 8 Sept 2015 7:15pm CDT):

**i love franco chat bs ana ba7eb el 3arbi akter we 5sosan fe fatakat msh  
by7boh  
walhy da ana bashed fe sha3ry lma alazy w7da ktba topic bel franco  
ana 3arfa anhom msh by7boh bas a7na bn7bo leh msh nezmel 7aga  
negma3 ba3dena we no3od netklam m3a ba3d bel franco el ben7bo**

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<sup>7</sup> Information in this section comes from an unpublished paper by Mahmoud Al-Batal. I retain responsibility for any fault in the analysis presented.

I love Franco chat but I love Arabic more, especially in Fatakat they don't like it. Honestly, I want to pull my hair out when I find someone has written a topic in Franco. I know that they don't like it but we like it. Why don't we do something? We could get ourselves together and talk in the Franco that we love.

What is interesting here, amid the rather chaotic writing patterns, is that many of the short vowels do not appear. The lack of short vowels was one of the reasons cited for the need to reform Arabic script in the mid-twentieth century. Yet, these writers are using a consonantal-based writing system similar to that of *fushā*. These kinds of writings suggest that the lack of short vowels does not, after all, constitute an impediment to communication.<sup>8</sup>

From this vantage point, we see that the divergence of rhetoric and practice has almost reversed itself from 100 years ago. In the early 20th century, there was a rhetoric of reform, but the practice was closely controlled, and no reform project was seriously considered. Of the giant thinkers and literary figures who lived and worked in the first half of the twentieth century, only Louis Awad authored an autobiography with some colloquial style, but the 1942 manuscript was not published until 1965 (Doss 2006:55–56). In the early 21st century, there are few calls for reform – metalinguistic rhetoric focuses mostly on standard language ideology and the complaint that Arabic is in danger – but there is a growing practice that is uncontrolled and free-market, and experimenting with form and function. Practice can and does shift language ideology, when it is not under the control of ideology-maintaining institutions.

A culture of standard language ideology, then, is one in which the linguistic ideal carries high cultural value (Milroy 2001:538). This explains Ferguson's observation that every diglossic language has "a sizeable body of written literature in H which is held in high esteem by the speech community" (1959:238). This is true in part because the value of the literature is enhanced by the cultural value of the ideal language.

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8 They are, however, an impediment to reading texts aloud, because short vowels are rarely marked, and the case system is difficult to master. The deep ambiguity among the educated elite toward making Arabic more or less accessible is a topic very much in need of study.

## The Complaint Tradition

Since the ideal – *fushā* in our case – is such an important cultural possession, mechanisms exist for both *maintaining* and *legitimizing* standard language ideology. Milroy argues that mechanisms and practices that maintain standard language ideology exist in all “standard language ideology cultures,” and he calls one of them “the complaint tradition,” noting that in English, it is hundreds of years old (2001:538).

The complaint tradition is so developed in Arabic that we may call it a complaint genre, and it has a long history. Beginning in the ninth century CE, we see books emerge that are later called collectively *لحن العامة* “solecisms of the lower classes.”<sup>9</sup> The modern versions of this genre go by the names *أخطاء شائعة* “widespread errors” and *قل لا تقل* “say (x) and don’t say (y).” In the past 40 years or so, more than twenty books with these titles have been published. Nowadays, the internet provides a convenient venue through which to highlight and attempt to correct these “common mistakes;” the chart in figure 2.2 is just one example among many.

Arabic culture takes the complaint tradition a step further than the occasional newspaper article and treatise on “correct usage” that we are all familiar with by utilizing state institutions to “correct” writing. The institution of language correction appears to be a modern institution, born sometime after the birth of the printing press. In view of the absence of any in-depth studies of language correcting in the Arab world, we do not know much about its history or how widespread it is today. Haeri (2003) gives important basic information about Egypt, which shows that this institution is clearly linked with the spread of the printing press, but its widespread presence in publishing and news organizations indicates the pervasiveness of standard language ideology. This link is embodied in Ibrahim al-Yaziji’s book, *لغة الجرائد* (1901), which purports to teach aspiring journalists and writers how to write proper Arabic (1993).

In the 21st century, some language correctors are online, among them one Ahmed Montaser. In the following excerpt from his blog entry titled “The Future of the Profession of Language Correcting,” he defends his profession with the use of language that is patently non-standard. From the *‘āmmīyya* lexicon we have (اشتغلوا، خلصوا), and in addition particles (بتاع، زي ما، لإما), negation (مش), demonstratives (دية), and relatives (اللي). It is a conversational style,

9 This is a literal translation of the term *العامة*; as al-Jahiz himself points out already in the 9th century CE, this term refers to those who tried to speak like the elite, but whom the elite wanted to exclude (*Bayan wa Tabayin* 2:146).

**قل ولا تقل**

مجموعة  
من الأخطاء الشائعة

<b>استلمت</b> الكتب	استلم الشيء تعني قبَّلهُ ومنه استلام الحجر الأسود والصحيح تسلمت	<b>تسلمت</b> الكتب
<b>خلوق</b> فلان	الخلوق = الطيب وليس ذو الخلق	<b>حسن الخلق</b> فلان
<b>تحمم</b>	تحمم الشيء تعني إِسْوَدَ	<b>استحم</b>
<b>خارطة</b>	خارطة أصلها خَرَطَ أي قَطَعَ	<b>خريطة</b>
<b>مبروك</b> نجاحك	مبروك أصل الفعل بَرَّكَ مبارك أصل الفعل بَارَكَ	<b>مبارك</b> نجاحك
<b>الغث والثمين</b>	خطأ شائع في الكتابة	<b>الغث والسمين</b>
<b>المُتَوَفِّي</b>	المتوفي هو الله سبحانه و تعالى الذي يتوفى الأنفس	<b>المُتَوَفَّى</b>
<b>السواح</b>	ساح - يسبح لا ساح - يسوح	<b>السياح</b>
<b>تواجد فلان</b>	التواجد من الوجد و الوجد هو الحب الشديد	<b>فلان موجود</b>

المصادر

#بالعربي #اليوم\_العالمي\_للغة\_العربية

@Azzamaldakhil  
www.azzamaldakhil.com

FIGURE 2.2 Internet chart by the International Day of the Arabic Language showing common "mistakes"

السبت، 9 أغسطس، 2008

## مستقبل مهنة التصحيح اللغوي



كلمتين في الجون

الواحد مندهش جدا من حال كل من يكتب بالعربية ومش بيستعين بمصحح لغوي ماعن أخطاؤه بالجملة: المدرسين الخصوصيين ف المذكرات بتاعتهم. بتوع الدراسات العليا ف رسايلهم. الكتاب اللي بينشروا ع النت ف المنتديات أو مدوناتهم. المحامين. الجرايد المحلية. الخطاطين ووكالات الإعلان. القنوات الفضائية.

ومع الوقت المهنة دية مقيش إقبال عليها إلا من قبل المترجمين من اللغات الأخرى للعربية. وده بيدل على عدم الاله تمام بالعربية. أو من قبل بتوع الأزهر ودار العلوم لا لشيء إلا إنهم لما خلصوا دراسة نظامية لقوا إنهم كويسين ف العربي فاشتغلوا مصححين لغويين ...

FIGURE 2.3 Blog post by Ahmed Montaser, [http://ahmedmontaser.blogspot.com/2008/08/blog-post\\_09.html](http://ahmedmontaser.blogspot.com/2008/08/blog-post_09.html), accessed on 9/6/2015 10:15 pm CDT

and not unusual for the informal writing on the net. What is striking, however, is the use of this language by a writer whose profession it is to standardize the writing of others. We can understand from this that Ahmed Montaser distinguishes different types of writing, and the fact that he specifies “writers who publish on the net in their forums and blogs” as needing his services, while his own blog is non-standard, suggests that it is not simply a matter of genre.

It is expected that new technologies engender new practices of writing, and computer-mediated technologies constitute a welcoming space for writers to experiment with new forms. This explains in part why non-standard writing is ubiquitous in cyberspace. Even so, this text is of special interest to us because of the relationship of its form to its content. Ahmad Montaser is invested in the importance of the *fushā* ideal, at least for his own livelihood, yet at the same time does not feel compelled to write in it all the time. His use of non-standard style to defend the profession of language correction suggests that the internet is helping to bring about a reconfiguration of ideologies of writing. He specifies very deliberately the kinds of writing that should be corrected: in addition to the writers’ blogs and forums noted above, he includes school texts and review notes, theses and dissertations, legal writing, local newspapers, calligraphers and advertisement agencies, and satellite channels. He apparently excludes his own blog from the category of “writers’ blogs,” despite the fact that he is a



FIGURE 2.4 Tweet from the Twitter hashtag #I\_write\_in\_Arabic

highly sophisticated user of *fushā*. Since it is his aim to promote the profession of language correction, we may understand his list of “correctable texts” to be the broadest possible list. It is likely that these also represent the contexts in which he notices grammatical errors in writing, a possibility that suggests that writing in *‘ammiyya* and making mistakes when writing *fushā* are two very different things – perhaps two different kinds of writing. This would mean that the ideology of *fushā* is not threatened by writing in *‘ammiyya* – but it is threatened by mistakes in *fushā*.

This hypothesis is supported by the tweet in figure 2.4 from the Twitter hashtag #I\_write\_in\_Arabic, in which the tweeter takes an electronic news agency to task for misspelling *لكن* but as *لاكن*, even though his own tweet and most of the article he cites are both in *‘ammiyya*.

This complaint targets a violation of the spelling standards that this reader expects from the keying that *fushā* triggers in the remainder of this particular sentence. Here too, the language used in writing does not have to be *fushā*, but if one is going to use *fushā*, it should be correct, and have correct orthography. This kind of evaluation suggests that the ideal standard of *fushā* remains intact, even as it shares writing space with non-*fushā* texts and passages. The internet, therefore, while providing opportunities for free-market variation in written form, also provides opportunities for the kind of evaluative feedback that helps to maintain *fushā* as an ideal standard.

How then does one distinguish between writing in *‘ammiyya* and writing in error-ridden *fushā*? If genre and content are no longer the sole determining

forces of language style or register, there must be certain clues that help the readers orient themselves and set their expectations. How does Ahmad Montaser's blog clue its readers in to the fact that this is not to be evaluated as 'bad *fushā*' but rather as an acceptable *ʿāmmiyya* mix (I assume here that all written texts will be a mix of some kind, since the conventions of writing are to a large degree borrowed from *fushā*)?

Bauman's concept of 'keying,' or setting the stage for a particular kind or genre of performance, helps us think about this question (1977:15 ff.). Although Bauman uses the concept to theorize the characteristics of verbal art performance, keying, or 'setting the stage' for a certain kind of performance, is helpful in analyzing mixed writing. It should be the case, then, that the opening of the text sets the linguistic tone and expectations within which the text is to be read. Here, Ahmad Montaser's use of الواحد is unmistakably *ʿāmmiyya*, and yet its informality is mitigated by the predicate مندهش, which, though it can be read with *ʿāmmiyya* vowing, signals a more formal (*fushā*) register. These two words key the range of language used in the text, and in so doing help the reader key her or his reception of the text. If we analyze the keying of wide array of texts – especially texts published on the internet – it may be possible to find patterns of language use that correspond to particular styles.

This blog suggests that the culture of standard language ideology is shifting, not simply moving away from the ideology that the standard is important – even if it is self-serving in the case of Ahmad Montaser – but rather toward an embracing of variation in style, the kind of variation that appears to characterize a significant part of the (unwritten) history of written Arabic.

### Language Ideology, Attitudes and Practice

I have argued that the culture of standard language ideology colored both views and practices throughout the twentieth century, and that the "feelings" and "beliefs" that Ferguson noted and tried to explain constitute a particularly concentrated period of this ideology. But now, in light of new technology that has disrupted the institutional hold on language correction, what is happening to this ideology? We will examine two sets of data: Twitter feed on writing "بالعربي" *in Arabic* with a hashtag in *ʿāmmiyya*, and the LCAW survey that was carried out in Cairo and Rabat.



### #I\_write\_in\_Arabic #بكتب\_بالعربي

This hashtag represents a Twitter campaign that was launched in December 2014 in celebration of International Arabic Language Day, December 18. The tweeter who launched it was working as a representative for Samsung Levant, and may have done so as part of her professional responsibilities. The launch invited people to participate in a campaign of writing in Arabic on social media in celebration of this day. The campaign relies on the importance of Arabic to the potential audience, and supposes there will be interest in engaging with the topic. Samsung takes advantage of the economic opportunity to launch a new product, capitalizing on the cultural importance of written Arabic.

The hashtag this tweeter chose for this campaign is: *#بكتب\_بالعربي #I\_write\_in\_Arabic*, in the colloquial register of *‘āmmiyya*. Several factors may have played a role in the choice of this register, not the least of which is that it immediately takes off pressure to write in *fushḥā* by “keying” the context with colloquial. As we should expect in the case of a new medium for writing, the linguistic styles and registers of the tweets vary widely, and there is no one register that dominates. This variation comes as no surprise; it is axiomatic that writers using new media technologies experiment with language forms and styles (registers), so the widespread use of *‘āmmiyya* forms should not be surprising, especially given that the hashtag itself is in *‘āmmiyya*. But since the topic here is writing, this hashtag is an ideological site that gives us a window on the attitudes and practices of elite youth in the Arab world toward what “writing in Arabic” means, or, perhaps more importantly, what they think it *should* mean. The attitudes and opinions expressed in the feed are far from uniform.

Responses to this call, as one might expect, varied widely in form and content. Many of the tweets generated in response were pictures of calligraphy or artistic renditions of Arabic letters such as the one in figure 2.5.

Other tweets contributed various types of praise and enthusiasm for the Arabic language, and connotations of the link between language and identity. I found five tweets expressing disdain for “فرانكو” *Franco*, of which we saw an example above, while other tweeters complained about people thinking it was not “cool” to speak or write Arabic, presumably reflecting pressures they felt in their personal or professional circles. Some of these complaints were oblique, such as the “proof” that Arabic is more powerful than English because it takes seven English words to translate the Arabic word “a-nulzimukumūha”. The image in figure 2.6 was repeated in the Twitter feed in various guises.

Tweets are limited in length to 140 characters; therefore, it is likely that some linguistic choices are deliberate. One example of such a choice is a tweet



FIGURE 2.5 Tweet from the #I\_write\_in\_Arabic

that was in *fushā* except for the shortening of ع to ع, which is non-standard, except that it may be an abbreviation to save character space. This suggests that this platform may eventually contribute to the development of abbreviations acceptable in formal Arabic. It is also worth noting that subordinate verb phrases and sentence complements require a greater number of morphemes in *fushā* than in *‘ammiyya* – in a limited writing platform, it would seem to be a spatial advantage to use *‘ammiyya* over *fushā*.

There were a noticeable number of quotations among the tweets in #I\_write\_in\_Arabic. This means that tweeters do not have to compose content themselves, and hence they need not fear committing errors if they want to tweet in *fushā* – they can retweet or tweet a quote. Thus, there need be no “performance anxiety” over the production of *fushā*, since one can just retweet existing text, which is very common in this hashtag. In fact many of the tweets consist of



FIGURE 2.6 Tweet from #I\_write\_in\_Arabic

citations from a variety of sources, including lines of poetry (many quoted the line from Ahmad Shawqi about the language of *dād*), as well as quotations and sayings from famous figures, including the second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, who appears many times from at least three independent sources. The important cultural figures from the past serve to reinforce the cultural value of *fushhā* over *‘āmmiyya*, without making an overt link, or even mentioning *fushhā*.

The Twitter feed also includes several resolutions to write in Arabic more often, including this one in *‘āmmiyya*:

Balqees بلقيس@BalqeesRahil Dec 18:

لانه بالعربي احلا .. من اليوم ورايح رح اكتب بالعربي واذا كتبت بغير العربي رح ترجم  
للعربي شكرا لكل من ساهم بهالمبادرة

*Because it's more beautiful in Arabic ... From now on, I'm going to write in Arabic, and if I write in another language I'll translate into Arabic. Thanks to all who contributed to this initiative.*

About ten days after the hashtag launched there was a spurt of activity commenting on the register of the hashtag itself, for example:



A few ridiculed the choice of *‘āmmiyya* for the hashtag:



Including one tweeter whose performance of *fushā* leaves something to be desired:



Ironically, not all the complainers used *fushā* to complain:



And, a few tweeters supported the freedom to write in *‘āmmiyya*:





دانة الباشا @DanaAlBasha Dec 8

SamsungLEVANT@ سؤال: هل الهدف من هاي الحملة هو استخدام الأحرف العربية أم  
اثراء المحتوى العربي؟ لأنه يوجد فرق بين لغة عربية فصحي وعربية عامية

دانة الباشا @DanaAlBasha Dec 8

SamsungLEVANT@ #بكتب\_بالعربي عامية أما #اكتب\_بالعربية هي فصحي! ارجو  
التوضيح \*\*هاي كتبت سهوا في التغريدة السابقة:

This tweeter asks in *fushā* whether the goal is to just use Arabic letters or to add Arabic content to Twitter, since there is a difference between *fushā* Arabic and *‘āmmiyya* Arabic? Then, in a second tweet, she clarifies that the original hashtag is in *‘āmmiyya*, and gives the *fushā* equivalent, then offers an indirect apology for her own use of the Levantine *‘āmmiyya* demonstrative “hay” in her previous tweet. Her inquiry about the intention of the campaign shows that she is not certain of the expectations regarding writing in this context. The immediate reflex to use mixed register in the first tweet (hay) yields by the end of that same tweet to vocabulary of a markedly different style: *ithra’*, to enrich, a literary register. This style-shifting reveals that this writer is keenly aware of multiple audiences and that her tweet is itself a performance for these audiences. It also suggests that the question itself, framed as it is around *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya*, might require one to demonstrate knowledge of *fushā* in order to show her qualifications to talk about it – borrowing Bauman’s concept of verbal performance, we can call them her performance capabilities (1977:7 ff.). She can use the lexicon and style of *fushā* to claim this license, and part of doing so is pointing out she is aware that the use of *‘āmmiyya* “هاي” was done “inadvertently” (سهواً). This admission and her use of *fushā* lexical items bring her “performance” of writing in line with *fushā* standards.

### The LCAW Cairo Survey

In a pointed review of the use of attitude and reported behavior surveys in social sciences, Jerolmack and Khan propose the term “attitudinal fallacy” to refer to their observation that:

Because meaning and action are collectively negotiated and context-dependent, we contend that self-reports of attitudes and behaviors are

of limited value in explaining what people actually do because they are overly individualistic and abstracted from lived experience.

2014:51

It has long been noted that participants in sociolinguistic studies often display discrepancies between their recorded linguistic behavior and the behavior that they report. Reporting on one of his own (1981) studies in which actual and reported behavior diverged widely, Milroy surmises that these speakers “interpreted the task as a test of their knowledge of the ‘correct’ pronunciation and responded accordingly: they did not want to be thought ignorant” (1999:16). Both of these observations help us frame this phenomenon within our language ideology framework. While not individualistic, language ideology is highly abstracted from lived, interactive experience, and reflects for speakers the natural state of affairs that they do not think about or question. The LCAW surveys of language attitudes thus provide a good opportunity to explore language ideology in Cairo and Rabat. I propose we assume that the survey results provide reliable information on the participants’ understanding of acceptable attitudes in the society around them, whether or not they hold these views themselves.

We will now turn to three areas in which the Twitter feed and the LCAW survey reveal ideological biases: Education and perceptions of *fuṣḥā*, attitudes toward written *‘āmmiyya*, and reported or actual writing practices. We will begin with education and writing.

### Education and Attitudes Toward *fuṣḥā* and *‘āmmiyya*

Since writing is usually learned at school, attitudes towards Arabic classes deserve attention. Anecdotal evidence, such as interviews reported by Haeri (2003:39ff.) and the question posed to the little girl in the trailer of the well-known film *Arabizi* ([https://vimeo.com/1849133\\_00:33-00:52](https://vimeo.com/1849133_00:33-00:52)), who shyly tells the interviewer that she prefers English class to Arabic, suggests that many students’ experience with Arabic language classrooms in school is not a positive one. Thus, we might have expected the survey results from the question, “How well did you like [Arabic] at school?” to be mixed or on the negative end of the scale.

The survey results were surprising. By more than double, more Cairenes reported that they liked Arabic better than mathematics, and by more than triple, they preferred it to science, social studies, and even English.<sup>11</sup> Rabatis fol-

11 There are several interesting cross-references with this question, among them the fact that

lowed suit, although with slightly different percentages: 38% overall reported a preference for Arabic over all other subjects including French (which was actually third following mathematics). It is particularly interesting that in Cairo, the responses to the questions on Arabic and English stand in mirror image of one another: the highest percentages of responses compare Arabic favorably to other subjects while they compare English unfavorably to them. In Rabat, the questions themselves differed, such that participants were asked to rank their favorite subjects; French sat consistently third in ranking. These unexpected answers can be easily explained in the framework of standard language ideology. Arabic is an important cultural possession, and as such, one is “expected” to like it. As Milroy notes, when answering questions about linguistic behavior, people sometimes give the answer that they feel is the “correct” one.

Reported writing practices in the LCAW survey are abysmally low. Between 83–90% of respondents in Cairo, and 52% of those in Rabat, claim not to use (off-line?) writing at all for school assignments. It is not unreasonable to connect the dots: the language of reading and writing that is traditionally taught in schools is a language of evaluated performance. The extent to which formal education increases competence in *fushā* in Cairo was investigated by Parkinson (1993, 1994), who found that it does to some extent, but that Egyptians’ knowledge of *fushā* Arabic grammar shows significant gaps even in the ability of those who specialized in Arabic to choose correct case endings on a grammar test – despite the case endings being a focus of language instruction beginning in elementary school and continuing throughout. Parkinson notes that there is a “clash of overt and covert norms and expectations” vis-à-vis *fushā* (1993:72), and this is our cue that standard language ideology is at play. The overt expectations are for students to learn *fushā* well enough to use it, but the covert expectations may be more ideological in nature: focusing on the case system without actually succeeding in teaching it works precisely to reinforce its ideological status (rather than its actual use).

One of the most revealing parts of the survey for our investigation of language ideology is the set of questions asking respondents to label a set of questions as *fushā* or *‘ammiyya*.<sup>12</sup> The sentences were composed and discussed at length by the researchers in the LCAW project. The aim was for them to represent a mix of *fushā*, *‘ammiyya*, and mixed sentences. Most of the sentences follow the rules of *fushā* as understood in the widest sense possible, with some

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people who studied in private schools had a significantly lower appreciation for Arabic, reflecting perhaps the stark contrast between the teaching of European languages in these schools and the teaching of Arabic.

12 See Kindt and Kebede (this volume) for additional discussion of these sentences.



intentionally ambiguous. In sentences 1 and 6, the use of feminine singular agreement with the subject الناس *people* is possible in classical Arabic, but more commonly used in *‘ammiyya*. Only sentence 4 is blatantly *‘ammiyya*, with an indicative verb prefix not found in *fushā*. One of the aims of this exercise was to try to see if any syntactic features tended to elicit one response or the other.

1. الناس تحب الكلام عن اولادها.
2. الزوج آخر من يعلم.
3. يحب الناس الكلام عن اولادهم.
4. الحساب بيدرس في كافة المدارس الحكومية.
5. رفض صاحب البيت مناقشة الإيجار.
6. تحب الناس الكلام عن اولادها.
7. البنت كتبت اسمها على الورقة.
8. راحت تبحث عن شخص يساعدها.

The surprising result was the extent to which not one of the sentences were labeled by a majority of the respondents as *fushā*, despite the fact that several of them follow *fushā* rules carefully. Why? I believe the answer begins with Parkinson's aforementioned research in Cairo. First, his findings suggest that very few people have active or productive knowledge of *fushā* grammar. More importantly, though, his experiences suggest that *fushā* is a performative register in which even those who could not perform "correctly" could nonetheless perform *stylistically*. For the professional Arabic teacher, *fushā* is marked by the accurate production of certain rules of grammatical agreement, case endings, and certain lexical items. But to "lay" persons, there may be more important cues, such as rhetorical topic markers and stylized conjunctions *فقد*، *إن*، and the like. In hindsight, it seems that the absence of these features in the survey sentences may have had an effect on some judgements, especially of the less confident participants.

### *‘Ammiyya/dārija* in Writing

In the LCAW surveys, results of questions that have to do with attitudes toward *fushā* and *‘ammiyya/dārija* in writing largely match the practices we found on Twitter, with the exception that the attitudes of Moroccans surveyed rather

pointedly disfavor *dārija* in writing. The most basic question in this regard has to do with the extent to which *ʿāmmīyya/dārija* is accepted as a written language. In response to the question, “Do you agree that *ʿāmmīyya/dārija* has a place as a written language?”, responses varied fairly widely between Cairo and Rabat. In Cairo, we find that over half of those surveyed agreed that *ʿāmmīyya* belongs on the page (35 % “agree,” and 22 % “strongly agree”; Kebede et al. 2013:78). In Rabat, the trend is reversed: 58% of respondents disagreed (to a greater or lesser extent) that *dārija* belongs in writing. In Cairo, only 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed that *ʿāmmīyya* has a place as a written language, while in Rabat, that figure for *dārija* was 32%. These results suggest that standard language ideology still informs what is felt to be the “correct” answer by a significant percentage of the participants, but more so in Rabat than in Cairo. One obvious explanation for this difference is Cairo’s long history of writing in *ʿāmmīyya* (Doss 2006, Doss and Davies 2013).

To what extent are the more educated parts of society invested in maintaining *fushā* as the language of writing? More in Rabat than in Cairo, according to survey results. In general, more of the higher-educated disagreed, and fewer agreed, that *ʿāmmīyya/dārija* has a place as written language. These results are not surprising; if anything, the surprise is that the differences are rather small, especially in Cairo, where only 4 percentage points separate the least and most educated who strongly agreed that *ʿāmmīyya* belongs in writing. In Rabat, the differences in education are a bit more pronounced: 67% of university-educated respondents disagreed that *dārija* has a place as a written language while only 50% of preparatory-educated respondents disagreed. Socio-economic percentages largely echo the education results, assuming that the most highly educated also tend to self-report being in the top socio-economic group.

At the same time, educated Cairenes are not invested in maintaining *fushā* as the *only* written register. As a group, those surveyed disagree with the statement that *ʿāmmīyya* is unsuitable as a written language (Kebede et al. 2013:71). These results strongly suggest that acceptance rates for writing in *ʿāmmīyya* rise among the more highly educated and better-off economically. This is to be expected because, as the results show, *ʿāmmīyya* is accepted widely on the internet and in social media, reflecting the social communicative functions of *ʿāmmīyya* quite well. In Rabat, on the other hand, more than half disagreed that “*dārija* has a place as a written language,” despite self-reported practices of using *dārija* to write in texts and on social media. This disconnect suggests a stronger standard language ideology in Rabat than in Cairo. It may also be a function of the relatively widespread use of French in writing on social media and in the workplace.

Turning again to Ahmad Montaser's blog on the profession of language correcting, it helps us make sense of the attitudes and practices connected to writing that we find in the survey. In Montaser's blog the form of the language that he uses is dissociated with the content. This decoupling is one of the keys to understanding what is happening ideologically. It is not just that someone whose job it is to produce correct Arabic participates in the discourse that is public and nonstandard; it is also the fact that the message that he provides in this blog reinforces the importance of the standard. It seems that, for this blogger, as long as the importance of the ideal standard is not challenged, it does not always have to be maintained. Standard language ideology is not disappearing, but it no longer dominates public writing spheres, and may be losing its connection with the ethics of public behavior.

The public sphere is not so much a thing (community) as a process (interacting). Leaving aside for now the fact that the internet remains inaccessible to the poor, new communities in cyberspace are coming into being outside the control of traditional social, economic, and political institutions and powers. Of course, the scene is ripe for struggles of power, and this is something to watch as we move forward. It is no accident that Samsung launched its hashtag in non-standard Arabic: By keying the communicative, interactive registers of Arabic, they hoped to get more people involved and interacting. The economics of *‘āmmiyya* assert themselves here, as they have already done in traditional broadcast media, in commercials on radio and television.

In the history of writing with non-standard forms, the use of such forms recognizable as representing speech are a kind of stylistic performance on the part of the writer. What is happening now may be seen in part as a similar phenomenon, except that more writers today are performing their own multivalent social identities, rather than literary ones. Future study of writing needs to explore the relationship of artistic styles to non-artistic styles, and the use of 'crossing' as an artistic or performative device. We cannot talk about the sociolinguistics of writing without acknowledging the role of the performers of written language. Educated people have spent longer, and had more direction and training and tools, for how to perform.

Finally, it is crucial to remember that this is not a zero-sum game: more writing in *‘āmmiyya* does not necessarily mean less writing in *fushā*. The LCAW Cairo survey reports: "Among those with university education, 30 percent write in *fushā* everyday whereas only 12 percent of those with preparatory education report the same ... 42 percent of university graduates write in *‘āmmiyya* everyday while only 26 percent of those with preparatory school report the same" (Kebede et al. 2013:94; Kindt and Kebede this volume). Thus, according to people's reporting of what they do, it is not the case that the educated elite write

more in *fushā* than they do in *‘ammiyya* while the less educated write more in *‘ammiyya*. Rather, it is the case that educated Cairenes report *writing more* regardless of the language register.

### Conclusion

I have argued here that the concept of diglossia is useful primarily as a language ideology, and in the case of Arabic, it can be seen to have arisen during the *nahḍa* and, due in great part to its pride of place in Arab nationalism and its usefulness in censorship through the offices of language correctors, was promoted throughout much of the twentieth century. Seen in this light, the explosion of writing in *‘ammiyya/dārija* suggests that the reign of standard language ideology as the most powerful language ideology in Arabic culture is on the wane.

However, even if this were so, it would not mean that *fushā* is in danger of slipping away. It is true that the Qur’an has played an important role in the maintenance of *fushā* as the standard ideal, but that would not have been enough to keep it alive for over a millenium. What has kept *fushā* alive all these centuries is precisely its symbiotic relationship with *‘ammiyya*, which provides it with the stuff of social intercourse, human communication and emotion. *Fushā*, on the other hand, provides *‘ammiyya* with a rich body of material – lexical, phonological, and morphological – that allows it to stretch beyond its everyday functions into the realm of the artistic, a process which in turn helps bind it with *fushā*. *Fushā* acts as do the performance registers in other languages, stretching the boundaries of expression, providing models and inspiration, and linking speech communities across time and space. The ideology of diglossia obscures this deep and lasting relationship. More *‘ammiyya* and more *fushā* go hand-in-hand, and mean more written Arabic for all.

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# Changing Norms, Concepts and Practices of Written Arabic

## *A 'Long Distance' Perspective*

*Gunvor Mejdell*

Throughout the history of Arabic, there has been tension between norms and practices of written Arabic, sometimes even open controversies over norm content and validity, over 'correct' versus 'deviant' practices, over concepts inscribed in, and contested by, language ideologies – and all situated in changing historical circumstances. This essay is an attempt to frame the current situation in a 'long distance' perspective on changing norms and practices of the written language. I shall do so by zooming in on some specific ('formative') stages of tension and change, such as

- the event of the early codification and standardisation of the *'arabiyya*
- subsequent normative and non-normative practices of writing Arabic, 'destandardisation'
- the *nahḍa*, vernacular writing, and the 'restandardisation' of *'arabiyya* as a prescriptive norm
- the current 'late modern' age of lessening formality in public interaction and the advent of digital communication > 'destandardisation', vernacular and mixed Arabic writing

I shall argue that processes of standardisation and destandardisation, with shifting norms of use, have come in waves, and that the current trend of destandardisation is of a kind that is not likely to be reversed. (The discussion has an admittedly Egyptian slant.)

### On Norms and Standard Norms

In line with the view of writing as social practice (and inspired by Bartsch 1987), I think of 'norms' as established by practices which have come to be regarded as appropriate for specific social contexts. The practices which become norms are regarded as appropriate because they are practices of people who are social role

models in the community (“users who are regarded as imitation-worthy and therefore have prestige,” Bartsch 1987: 239). When speakers or writers follow certain practices as ‘norms to be followed’ in certain domains/functions, it means that these norms have *validity*, are valid, for users in those domains and functions.

A *standard language norm* is the product of a process of selection and codification of features and variants of a language to function as a model of correctness, defined by people who have become *norm authorities*, role models supported by official institutions (Bartsch 1987: 78). The standard language has validity in the language community in so far as speakers/writers perceive its norm to be valid, i.e. that they *accept* it as a *model/measure of correctness* – without necessarily having access to it.

The *codified norm*, as laid down in grammars and dictionaries, is *prescriptive*, that is, it prescribes how the standard language should be practiced. In educational settings there will be sanctions against breaking the norm, the writings of the learner will be corrected and graded according to his/her compliance (or lack of it) with the rules of grammar, orthography, lexicon and style. In the public sphere, competent writers are expected to comply with the standard norm, and failure to do so will evoke criticism.

Bartsch distinguishes “the *prescriptive standard* as a normative concept of language planners, from the *empirical standard* as a descriptive concept of socio-linguistics. The prescriptive standard has an empirical reality as far as it plays a role as *the ultimate model towards which the sub-models for the standard linguistic usage are oriented*”. The prescriptive standard tends to be “considered as a point, i.e. a *single variety with no variation* between points”, while the empirical standard, on the other hand, “is a range, namely *a set of linguistic means and situations of their use*, including a lot of variation recognized and accepted as standard by the population” (Bartsch 1987: 258, my italics).

As the standard language norm is associated with prestigious authors and cultural products, the norms of the standard acquire an aesthetic value that goes beyond the value of effective communication which favours unity, rather than diversity, of expression. Thus, “linguistic usage conforming to the standard variety is ‘good’, ‘pure’, ‘melodious’, ‘sweet’, although there might not be any objective base for the assignment of these attributes”. In addition, the unitary standard often acquires the value of being an identity symbol for the whole population, nation, or state (ibid.: 265–266). These values are central in shaping what is referred to as ‘standard language ideology’.

Norms exist for most kinds of language practices, informal norms based on accommodation to language practices of the models of one’s surroundings: first parents and other family members; later on peer groups tend to become more

important models for orienting one's speech. Nonstandard speech undergoes continuous change under the radar of norm authorities; changes motivated by a variety of social factors, such as migration from rural to urban communities and leveling through language contact, or by changing social values in society – for instance the seemingly global trend towards less formality in public interaction, or by the introduction of new domains for language use, such as audio-visual media, the internet and the spread of digital communication. (Factors that do not affect the use (and norms) of *writing*, however, shall not be considered here.) By 'standardisation' I refer to the processes by which a language variety rises to become and function as a standard language (typically 'selection', 'codification', 'elaboration' and 'implementation', cf. Haugen 1966) – while 'destandardisation' refers to a development "whereby the established standard language loses its position as the one and only 'best language'" (Coupland and Kristiansen 2011), or, I would add, where the validity of the standard is significantly challenged, in practice, as the sole variety for (public) written purposes.

### The Event of Codification and Standardisation of *al-'arabiyya*

Most language historians (on whom I rely for this section) agree that at the time of the advent of Islam (early 7th century), there existed among the bedouin who inhabited the Arab peninsula, besides their spoken varieties (dialects), a special register, a super-tribal variety of Arabic in which they composed epic poetry. This poetry was recited, memorised, elaborated and orally transmitted from one generation to another by 'professional' poet/reciters (only to be recorded in writing towards the mid-8th century), and its conventionalised variety, as a norm for poetry, became one (some say the most important) of the linguistic sources for the codification of Arabic. The text of the Qur'ān, reflecting the same kind of 'high' register, constituted the other main source. In addition, the early grammarians constantly refer to the 'pure' desert Bedouin as models of correctness (while some scholars claim that these 'informants' were not just any tribesman, but those among them who were well versed in the oral poetry tradition ...)

The process of codification and standardisation was motivated by the rapidly increasing importance of Arabic as the language of the expanding Arab-Islamic empire.<sup>1</sup> Among the early philologists there were, however, different

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1 Access to Arabic was a requirement for a career, not only in the religious establishment, but also in the administration of the empire and its cultural life.



views about the sources for codification of the correct language. Versteegh (1983) reminds us of the situation before the canonisation of the one valid Qurʾān edition (sanctioned by ʿUthmān), namely with several competing readings and a range of variants.<sup>2</sup> The pre-Islamic poems also existed in many parallel versions until the philologists set out to work on them, imposing uniformity by reducing alternative forms: “The prescriptive, corrective and editing endeavours of the first native grammarians”, says Corriente, “were motivated by their concern for regularity, understandable in the minds of those who forged a grammaticized language, a vehicle of universal culture, out of a bundle of dialects. Yet these people had their eyes open for the peculiarities of Bedouin speech, and did not neglect it in their works, although they tacitly implied, or expressively said, that only ‘Arabiyya, the central core of O[ld] A[rabic], was to be imitated and analogically extended to unprecedented situations” (1976: 68).

The *Kitāb al-naḥw* (Book of grammar) by Sibawayhi (d. 796) represents “a complete description and rigorous analysis of *al-ʿarabiyya* in its ideal form”, and all later grammatical work depends on this work, claims Carter (2003). Fischer (2006) agrees that Sibawayhi’s work established the norms of Classical Arabic grammar, while *al-Uṣūl fī al-naḥw* (The Principles of Grammar) by al-Sarrāj (d. 928), that is more than a century later, is attributed with having “effectively standardized Arabic grammar” (Owens, cited by Patel 2010: 525–526), implying that for quite some time grammarians would have different views on the flexibility or strictness of the norm. Suleiman reports discussions between those who operate with “a ‘correct’ vs. ‘incorrect’ classification on the one hand, and those who operate with more or less acceptable forms” (*aḥṣāḥ* vs. *aqallu faṣāḥa*) (1996:108–109).<sup>3</sup>

One area of the language where the norm apparently was unstable and variable is orthography.<sup>4</sup> The writing system and the script was taken over from

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2 Many features of the orthodox Qurʾānic text still differ from what became the codified norm, however, “partly because of the West-Arabian dialect features that are reflected in the text, partly because the syntax found in religious discourse by its nature tends to be unruly or deviating. The early philologists simply invented a harmonising explanation for these anomalies (or rather: explanations, as they often disagreed with each other)” (Carter 2003:86–87, my translation).

3 This tension resembles the tension inherent in standardisation processes in modern times, between ‘stability’ and ‘flexibility’ as equally vital properties for the functioning of a standard language.

4 Some of the points concerning orthography, where even writers of the scholarly elite would be inconsistent, are the same as we find are variable today: the writing of *hamza* and its chairs, and the treatment of final weak radicals.

Aramaic (Nabatean) orthographic conventions and was gradually adapted and refined to represent the emerging norm of *al-ʿarabiyya*.

### Normative and Non-Normative Practices of Writing Arabic

Despite certain inconsistencies of orthography, the codified standard of *al-ʿarabiyya* continued to be the sole and undisputed ‘measure of correctness’ and to have validity as such across the medieval Arab-Islamic world.

However, for all the veneration of *al-ʿarabiyya* in Arab society, not all writers followed the prescribed norm. Widespread practice of neglecting the rules of the standard language has been documented throughout the centuries – at first most systematically studied in medieval texts written by non-Muslims (Judaean-Arabic and Christian manuscripts), who were believed to be less concerned with and less trained in the Muslim sacred language. Only recently one has come to realise how very widespread indeed the practice of writing in sub-standard language must have been, also among Muslim writers. Many who tried their hand at writing may have missed the target norm because of lack of sufficient competence in the rules of grammar, certain deviations reflecting interference from their spoken vernacular. Some writers may have intended to revise their texts, but did so only partially,<sup>5</sup> or maybe an incompetent scribe or copyist was to blame. However, still others *intentionally* chose to not comply with the normative standard, opting for a way of writing which was less formal, less high-flown, for various kinds of audiences. Jérôme Lentin, writing the EALL lemma on ‘Middle Arabic’, emphasises that “many writers have left us works written both in faultless or even sophisticated Classical Arabic and works written in Middle Arabic [and that] for those writers at least, one has to abandon the idea of their inadequacies in Classical Arabic” (Lentin 2006: 217). Also Joshua Blau believes that, “some authors employed a ‘more Classical’ language when they addressed higher layers of their audience, but a more vernacular style when writing for lower strata” (Blau 1981: 188).

Thus, while many writers themselves most likely engaged in what we call variation and choices among more and less formal styles/registers, from the standpoint of norm authorities and other prescriptivists, deviant forms were considered ‘mistakes’, or ‘solecisms’ *lahn* (*al-ʿamma*). As is well known, an

5 “[T]he use of literary reflexes in colloquial passages decreases the further one gets into the book, implying that scribal resistance to colloquial forms was worn down by the frequency of their occurrence” Davies 2000, 67.

entire genre of books and pamphlets were devoted to exposing grammatical and lexical mistakes among literate (but not professional) people (*laḥn al-ʿamma*) in written documents of all kinds and correcting them in accordance with the normative standard. Even norm authorities, such as grammarians, could accuse each other of breaking the rules. Due to the link with a sacred heritage, the issue of grammatical correctness became associated, not only with learning and intellectual status, but with honour and moral dignity – or shame and moral depravity. However, what Georgine Ayoub succinctly calls “the horror of the mistake in Arab culture”, entailed that it is also had its fascinating aspects: “Laḥn fills with horror, but also intrigues. Linguistic errors become fresh and stylish in anecdotes and witty remarks, as confirmed by great writers, from al-Jāḥiz to al-Ḥarīrī” (Ayoub 2007: 633).<sup>6</sup>

One early case of what must be considered *deliberate* Middle Arabic writing, is Usāma bin Munqidh’s (1095–1188) memoirs (*Kitāb al-ʿIṭibār*).<sup>7</sup> There seems to be no doubt that Usāma was well competent in the standard language: according to Schen (1972) he “spent ten years of his youth in Tripoli studying the Arabic disciplines under Shaykh ‘Abdallāh of Toledo, ‘the Sībawayhi of his times’”. He further composed “a substantial amount of poetry [...] a number of prose works, among them books on *adab* and rhetoric. [...] These facts will prove relevant when we discuss how an author who had written extensively in impeccable *ʿarabiyya* – to whom, in fact, writing CA was second nature – came to produce a composition containing so many MA elements, not to mention stylistic solecisms” (Schen 1972: 221). The numerous deviations from normative standard Arabic in the text, as reported by Schen, are of orthographic, morphological and syntactic nature, similar to the catalogue of features observed in other medieval Middle Arabic texts. Schen speculates at length around plausible circumstances in the production of the manuscript to explain its non-standard style: on whether old age had dimmed the scholarly (and thus linguistic) capabilities of the author, or whether incompetent scribes may have made mistakes in copying the manuscript. He concludes, that most likely the elderly Usāma had dictated his memoirs to a scribe in a relaxed style, wavering between ‘correct’ and colloquial language, in accordance with various text functions. Then the scribe, being under some stress in writing down what the master says, adjusts some, but not all, of the vernacular forms that occasionally pour from his mouth. The manuscript was printed only in 1886 (1889?) in

6 For a continuation of this tradition today, see Brustad, this volume.

7 Translated as: *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades; Memoirs of Usāmah ibn-Munqidh*, trans Philip K. Hitti. New York, 1929.

Paris;<sup>8</sup> it is conceivable that the text underwent further ‘improvements’ until it reached that printed stage – however, it still is considered a specimen of ‘Muslim Middle Arabic’.

Undoubtedly, many texts which have come down to us in standard language form, were composed in a substandard register but subsequently revised and corrected by copyists or editors. One recent documentation of this practice is Dana Sajdi’s delightful study of the chronicle by the “Barber of Damascus” (Sajdi 2013, 2009), a layman in 18th century Damascus, who wrote on significant as well as less significant contemporary events, drawing on his various kinds of knowledge, from (limited) education, of some specific formal genres, and of oral poetry and traditional story-telling, in short – making use of the cultural as well as linguistic resources available to him. The barber was not the only one practising this kind of ‘pre-print journalism’, in hybrid texts – alongside the formal chronicles in *fushā* produced by the traditional group of *‘ulamā’*.

Sajdi came over an original manuscript of the chronicle only after she had found it in a much reformed, standardised, printed edition from the early 1900s, edited by a certain al-Qāsimī: [...] The intention behind his edition [...] was, in his own words, to “delete the superfluous and keep the essence of this history, and refine (the language), correcting to the extent possible [...] Thus, by the time that al-Qāsimī was writing, the movement of the standardization of the Arabic language was already in full swing, leading al-Qāsimī to view the barber’s language as incorrect and to translate it into ‘correct’ – that is, what came to be considered ‘modern standard’ Arabic” (Sajdi 2009:132).

Another specimen of a ‘Middle Arabic’ chronicler is the well-known Egyptian historian ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī (1754–1825). Al-Jabartī was educated as a religious scholar at al-Azhar, so he must have been trained in Arabic grammar. Besides his famous *History of Egypt* (*‘Ajā’ib al-athār fi al-tarājim wal-akhbār*), he wrote two shorter chronicles, one is an account on the first seven months of the French occupation of Egypt (*Tārīkh muddat al-faransīs bi-miṣr*).<sup>9</sup> In this text, writes Moreh, al-Jabartī sharply criticises “the ‘corrupted style’ and grammatical errors contained in the first French proclamation which was probably translated by Syrian Christian dragomans or translators who had accompanied the French. Yet he himself violated the elementary principles of classical Arabic grammar and syntax [...] *Mudda* is characterized by negligence of literary usage and form in addition to a proliferation of colloquial terms, expressions,

8 Edited by Hartwig Derenbourg.

9 Edited and translated by Moreh 1975. Moreh also mentions Jabartī’s “expurgated edition of *Alf layla wa-layla* ‘Thousand and one nights’ from which he [Jabartī] removed the pornographic passages”! (Moreh 1975, 2 + n. 5).

and linguistic patterns". Moreh believes that the text may have been "a rough draft written without paying special attention to the rules and for this reason the text is especially interesting from a linguistic point of view" (1975: 25–26).

The literary genre in which this manuscript and other chronicles are written, "is a direct offspring of the late Mamluk period" and are written "without attempting to give them a classical touch", says Moreh (*ibid.*: 30) The two other known historical texts by al-Jabartī are in a 'better' (more normative) shape, but neither is free from deviations and vernacular influence.

And what about the famous book by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801–1873), *Takhliṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ bārīs* (The extraction of pure gold in the abridgement of Paris, 1834)? In an introduction dated 1958 (reprinted in the 1993 edition) on al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's style, the manuscript is said to have been full of lexical and grammatical mistakes (*mal' bil-aghlat lughawiyya wa-naḥwiyya*); the prominent French orientalist Silvestre de Sacy, whom al-Ṭaḥṭāwī frequented in Paris, advised him to have it corrected, and that on his return to Egypt he found the time and opportunity to consult the learned teachers at al-Azhar, and so a great many outright mistakes, bad style and colloquialisms were corrected and removed before the text was published in print for the first time. In his dissertation on al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1968) Karl Stowasser finds even the printed edition replete with deviating forms typical of many medieval texts, both syntactic and morphological, some reflecting vernacular features, other obvious hypercorrections (a long list in Stowasser 1968: 32–37). The lexicon is replete with vernacular words as well as neologisms and calques based on French – many of which have become part of the lexicon of a modernised standard Arabic (*ibid.*: 38–57). The style and structure is only superficially standard Arabic, claims Stowasser, who suggests that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī would compose the text mentally, in his natural vernacular, an appropriate medium for the practical, descriptive content of the book, and then slightly standardise the language while writing it down. It is, again, interesting that a text could be printed in such a nonstandard shape. I believe it must be indicative of the range of acceptability, or normative flexibility, concerning written Arabic at the time.

How, then, does the language of 'Middle Arabic' texts relate to our terms of norms and standard language? While many scholars view Middle Arabic as a cover term for the language of written texts that combine standard and nonstandard (vernacular) features in highly variable and idiosyncratic ways, along the continuum between the polar varieties, Lentin (2006: 217) insists that despite great variability,<sup>10</sup> texts written in Middle Arabic have so many

10 "the multiplicity of its manifestations" (Lentin and Grand'Henry 2008, XI11).

peculiar features in common, “the regular or systematic occurrence of which proves the existence of a *norm*,<sup>11</sup> to which anybody writing in Middle Arabic has to conform”. He calls it a “standardized register”, “available for those who wanted to use it”, existing “beside the standard usage of Classical Arabic”. More carefully, but in the same vein, Blau writes that “in the course of time, a certain mixture of Classical and Neo-Arabic elements *came to be thought of as a literary language in its own right*, employed even by authors who were well able to write in a ‘more Classical’ language” (Blau 1981: 188, my italics). I am not in a position to judge whether the practices of writing in a mixed (Middle Arabic) style are sufficiently consistent to qualify as an alternative ‘standard norm’; my inclination, however, is to regard the comprehensive practices of Middle Arabic writing as exponents of ‘destandardisation’ – namely, (as above) a development whereby the validity of the standard as the sole variety for (public) written purposes is significantly challenged.

Humphrey Davies puts it thus: “If the use of Middle Arabic is found to be widespread and consistent, a further implication would be that, had it not been for the linguistic self-consciousness and ‘reforms’ introduced during the *nahḍa* of the nineteenth century, Middle Arabic might well have become the standard form of written expression in Egypt (and no doubt elsewhere)” (2008: 111).

### **The *nahḍa*: The Rise of Vernacular in Writing and the ‘Restandardisation’ of *al-‘arabiyya***

Literary historians tend to attribute the rise of vernacular writing in the second half of the 19th century to the introduction of European-kind theatre to the Egyptian cultural scene (around 1870), first as translations and adaptations, then as original plays written for the home public. According to Nelly Hanna (2003), however, the ground was well prepared, by extensive use of the vernacular in writing by the secular middle class in 16th to 18th century Cairo. Vernacular expression may even have been encouraged by the local Mamluk rulers, who were Turkish speakers, and apparently more at ease with the local vernacular around them than with the Classical language. It is not clear, however, to what extent the texts Hanna refers to are vernacular in nature, or rather in the line of mixed, Middle Arabic, language (see Doss 1996 for further elucidation of these points).

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11 “an autonomous variety” (as above).

Anyway, the theatre genre readily offered a domain for the vernacular, being based on dialogue, performed in direct speech by live actors. Besides, the use of everyday language orally on the scene continued a popular tradition. Two pioneers in vernacular drama translation and writing are Ya‘qūb Ṣannū‘ (1839–1912) and ‘Uthmān Jalāl (1829–1898). Jalāl translated French comedies (Molière) and tragedies (Racine), adapting them to an Egyptian context, and wrote social farce and political satire in Egyptian vernacular (see Woidich 2010, Bardenstein 2005). Ṣannū‘ was a pioneer also in vernacular prose writing; in 1877 he published the first issue of his satirical newspaper *Abū naẓẓāra ẓarqā’ / Abu naḍḍāra ẓar’a* (The one with dark glasses), for the larger part written in colloquial Egyptian Arabic (see Zack 2014). Woidich makes the point that Ṣannū‘ in his newspaper – as in the theatre – used the *dialogue* as format for his social and political satire in vernacular, drawing on the connection between direct speech, humour and the informal variety (Woidich 2010: 70). A didactic concern, namely to reach the ordinary, illiterate people, was both explicit and implicit in the agenda of these reformers. In the following years, oppositional writing in the vernacular, in part or in whole, became widespread – mobilizing against corrupt government as well as colonial powers and occupation, and addressing the problems of the people in a style meant to combine education, enlightenment, and entertainment.<sup>12</sup>

An outstanding representative of this trend was ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm (1845–1896), who in his satirical and didactic journals *al-Tankīt wal-tabkīt* (Joking and reproaching 1881) and *al-Ustādh* (The professor, 1892–1893) used simple *fuṣḥā*, straight or elevated *‘āmmīyya*, and occasionally a blend of the two varieties in various passages (see Doss 1997 on al-Nadīm’s language policies and linguistic style).

However, to the leading intellectuals of the *nahḍa* there was (with very few exceptions) no question of raising the status of the vernacular to the point of codification and standardisation and recognition as an official norm. The linguistic forms and the orthography in these texts, are, however, remarkably uniform in view of the lack of an established tradition for writing the vernacular – reflecting a process of informal standardisation, of conventional norms developed through usage. The time was ripe, argues Anwar Chejne (1969), for an Arab Dante or Cervantes to come to the stage, and initiate a new Arabic standard on a prestigious local vernacular. In Europe, nationalism had promoted standard languages to be based on the language of the people, the living *lingua materna*, as opposed to the ‘high’ language of sci-

12 Samples of these texts have become easily available to us through Doss and Davies 2013.

ence and religion (in Western Europe) represented by Latin. In most places, the dialect/sociolect of the educated urban elite was the base for codification and standardisation of the national language, overarching the regional, rural dialects.

However, the Arab nationalist movement emerged as pan-Arabic (against Ottoman and European powers alike), and the elaboration and promotion of the shared national language and cultural heritage centered on the standard *‘arabiyya* of this heritage. The *nahḍa* intellectuals, in Egypt and the Levant, rose to raise the consciousness of the people for the progress of the nation, and called for reforms in education, for Arabisation, for reforms in the teaching of Arabic, and some even for reforms of the grammar itself. The (often quite harsh) fights between conservatives and liberals in the language reform issue is well documented (e.g., Gully 1997, Patel 2010, Suleiman 1996). Suleiman claims that every proposal at simplification of grammar would be hit in the head with a counter-proposal (1996:102–103). With regard to the prominent role of Christian Levantines in the *nahḍa* language movement, Patel makes it clear that their position was in many ways similar to their Muslim Arab compatriots: “they shared a common concern for the correct use and purity of the Arabic language based almost exclusively on classical normative principles” (Patel 2010: 122).

From our perspective, the main point is that the *nahḍa* leaders were seeking to restore control over language practice; as Marwa Elshakry says, “reformists and purists alike began to call for greater linguistic supervision and standardization” (2008: 726). There was a new (renewed) regime of a normative standard: in a catalogue of ‘linguistic offenses’ detected in the contemporary press, *Lughat al-jarā’id* (Newspaper language, al-Yāzījī n.d/1901), the large majority of offenses relate to lexical and semantic deviations from classical usage, such as plural forms of nouns with deviant meaning from the medieval lexicographical sources, or verbs occurring with prepositions not found in those sources – rarely obvious mistakes in conjugation or case endings. Most of the usages exposed to shame by al-Yāzījī were not, however, successfully ‘purified’, and are attested today in dictionaries based on modern written usage (such as Hans Wehr). And while the force of normative grammar was re-imposed, the lexicon was expanded to meet the requirements of ‘modernity’, or rather of the needs and practices of writers and translators, professional or not. Also, in their “efforts to make Arabic a workable instrument of communication [...] reformist scholars probably made substantial progress in introducing a simple functional style which forms the basis of newspapers and modern literary Arabic. However, this is not matched in grammar, where conservatism has been particularly fierce” (Patel 2010: 112).



The status of the vernacular, however, was also affected by another current: the emergence of the new discipline of ‘dialectology’, with an interest in everyday spoken language of the people and a conceptualisation of ‘dialects’ as structured and autonomous entities. Dialect studies in Europe had developed in the context of the national romantic ideas about people and authenticity. European orientalists, having studied Latin, Greek and Classical Arabic, travelled to the colonial lands in North Africa and the Middle East (together with missionaries and tradesmen,) became acquainted with the spoken language of these places – and ‘discovered’ *l’arabe vulgaire*. With the help of native informants and assistants, orientalists sought to record and describe the spoken tongues in the form of textbooks and grammars (, Larcher 2003).

This perception of spoken vernaculars/ dialects as entities in their own right *vis à vis* the standard written norm, was new to Arab linguistic scholarship – with its exclusive focus on *al-‘arabiyya*, and its view of the spoken vernaculars as consisting of deviant features (*lughāt*), lacking order and grammar (*qawā‘id*) – and *not* as varieties in their own right. The need was felt for a term different from the polysemic *lughā – lughāt* (which signified different ‘languages’ as well as local peculiarities, and also lexical words and idioms). *Lahja* is part of the native repertoire of metalinguistic concepts (“tip of the tongue; way of speaking”), and is adopted as the technical term for the new discipline of dialectology (*‘ilm al-lahajāt*) at some time around the turn of the century. At the same time, however, enters also the term *‘āmmiyya* – first as a qualification of *lughā*, and then by itself. According to Diem (1974:6) the earliest among the “modern” works (1886–1908) whose concern is to rectify the spoken language, use *‘āmmiyya*. Al-Nadīm uses “*al-lughā al-‘āmmiyya*” in 1893.<sup>13</sup>

Campaigns calling for the promotion of the vernacular as the standard language towards the end of the century received very little support from native intellectuals; the fact that colonial officials were among the strongest and most active in the promotion campaign for *‘āmmiyya* did not exactly help the cause. Rather, the ‘restandardisation’ of *al-‘arabiyya*, directed at the laxness and poor style (*rakāka*) of substandard practices, and purifying the written language of colloquial features, promotes a conceptualisation of a strict dichotomy in the Arabic language. The term ‘diglossie’ now makes its way into the Arabic

13 In contemporary usage, I suggest that the distribution of *lahja* versus *‘āmmiyya* may be seen in terms of ‘counter concepts’, i.e. *lahja* is opposed to *al-lughā al-‘arabiyya* while *‘āmmiyya* is opposed to *fushhā*; but also in terms of stance, or social value, i.e. *lahja* is neutral/positive, while *‘āmmiyya* is neutral/negative – perhaps also in terms of Halliday’s distinction between *users* (of a ‘dialect’, *lahja*) and *uses* (of a ‘register’, *‘āmmiyya*).

language debate from its original application to the Greek language situation (Lecerf 1932, Marçais 1930/31). Monteil (1960:69) attributes the coining of the term *al-izdiwāj al-lughawī* to a certain al-Ḥajj as late as 1956.<sup>14</sup> The interest in the spoken dialects *per se*, however, remained marginal. While both the Syrian and Egyptian language academies appointed a special committee for the study of dialects (*lajnat al-lahajāt*), activities were concentrated on *al-‘arabiyya*, and the academies were dominated by language purists (Hamzaoui 1965, 1975).

In conclusion, the normative standard, challenged by substandard writing practices (Middle Arabic) was by the end of the *nahḍa* given *new normative force* through the efforts of purist language reformers and their pan-Arab ideology – a process I refer to as ‘restandardisation’. On the other hand, the *acknowledgement* of vernacular dialects different from, and opposed to, *al-‘arabiyya*, resulted in the language community gradually thinking in terms of a dichotomy. The discreteness of the varieties and their clear cut functional distribution came to be considered natural.

### **The Current Late Modern Age of Increasing Informality and the Advent of Internet: ‘Destandardisation’, Vernacular and Mixed Arabic Writing**

With the concept of *fushā* vs. *‘ammiyya* dichotomy established, the language Academies were to promote the standard variety and preserve its norm – with only minor concessions to new usages as part of the (prescriptive) norm to be taught in schools and respected by writers of Arabic as a model of correctness. Competent writers found a way of employment in being a language corrector (*muṣaḥḥih*) in the press and publishing houses. As mentioned above, however, writing practices developed with new styles for straightforward communication, and under the impact of translation, as a considerable amount of news and information was adapted from French or English sources. What may be called ‘empirical norms’, based on actual journalistic models, gave wider scope for new phraseology and syntactic flexibility (considered *fushā*).

The (semi-)colloquial press, which had been at its high in the 1890s and 1900s, declined rapidly in the following decades, “until they disappeared completely by the 1950s” (Fahmy 2011:76). The popularisation of new media: the radio, the phonograph and movies, presented new outlets for colloquial expres-

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14 He quotes another prominent Lebanese, Anīs Furayḥa, on “un problème délicat”: *athar izdiwāj al-lughā fī l-mujtama‘* in 1955 (Monteil 1960, 71).

sion, and these were uncontested by language guardians, as the vernacular was considered a threat to orthodoxy only when it was written or printed.

I doubt that the language cultivators, now institutionalised authorities in academies and committees, or in ministries and Arabic departments at the universities, in fact exercised much control over writing in Egypt in the 20th century – apart from, of course, imposing and securing the position of normative *al-‘arabiyya* as target in the school system. Rather, the literary ‘ethics’ of the time, echoing the pan-Arabic political ethics, called for a certain normative self-discipline. The literary development of the novel and short stories towards social realism, on the other hand, imposed the question of (appropriate) style to represent in writing the speech of common people. It became commonly accepted to use *‘āmmiyya* in dialogue (reflecting direct speech), in a frame of *fuṣṣḥā* narrative; although a few prominent writers (notably Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Nagīb Maḥfūz) strongly objected to accepting anything but ‘correct’ forms into the literary sphere. Some writers openly struggled with the dilemma: we have the popular writer Iḥsān ‘Abd al-Quddūs (1919–1990) arguing with himself in the introduction to the second edition of his novel *Anā ḥurra* (“I am free”, n.d.) – in the end finding peace and calm in the following solution: that a longer fictional work may well have *‘āmmiyya* in the dialogue, whereas shorter stories may – or may not, according to the general ‘atmosphere’ of the story (Mejdell 2006b: 205). The issue was never settled, but, from now on, it only occasionally flared up in heated debate.

Longer narratives in the vernacular were, until recently, not admitted as ‘literature’; Woidich 2010 and Zack 2014 both mention the fictitious genre of *muzakkirāt* (“memoirs”), popular among the general public in the 1920s, in which characters from the bottom layers of society “tell their lives”. A few ‘real’ autobiographies of non-elite authors were written in a style very close to *‘āmmiyya*. Also satire and caricatures are considered entertainment, not ‘real’ literature, and not governed by norms for variety usage (see Håland, this volume). As Woidich argues, using *‘āmmiyya* is not controversial for purposes of humour and joking, nor for the ‘oral’ genres, mimicking direct speech, as drama and plays. The struggle of *‘āmmiyya* poets to be taken ‘seriously’ (Mejdell 2006b) is perhaps not over, but they have long since been admitted to literary journals and seminars.

The obvious pluralism in literary expression in the last decades, including the choice prose writers have in selecting from the entire linguistic repertoire, supports what Clive Holes noted more than 20 years ago, that “writers have felt freer to develop their own patterns of standard/dialect usage” (1995:307). According to Marilyn Booth, writing in the early 1990s, “a stream of new poets [...] are erasing boundaries between *fuṣṣḥā* and *‘āmmiyya* poetry in technique,

imagery and subject. Syntax and diction move between linguistic levels [...] The choice of linguistic level in itself is seen as meaningless; how the language is used determines poetic strength and communicative power” (Booth 1992: 447).

### Boundaries and Bivalency

Developments in writing practices are moving fast, accelerating the last decades, with the advent of and access to internet. The various genres on the internet: blogs, Facebook, Twitter, are outside the control of filtering authorities, and allow for a wide range of linguistic choices (Doss 2004, Pepe 2014, Brustad this volume, and Nordenson this volume).<sup>15</sup> The language of these outlets also finds its way into publishing houses and print media: vernacular as well as standard language, bivalent and mixed language, sometimes interspersed with foreign language linguistic and cultural loans, reflecting an urban, youthful idiom, often ironic and ‘cool’. Such linguistic heterogeneity, increasingly accepted by the younger population – but also contested by traditional language authorities – will it be reflected in a new kind of variable, pluralistic notion of Arabic, and hybrid norms of writing?

Structural differences between the standard language and any local or regional vernacular variety are found at any level of linguistic description, and are not a fantasy created of language ideology, of course. However, the perception of separation and discrete borders between the varieties are strengthened by the dominant concept of diglossia, of *fushā* versus *‘ammiyya*. These boundaries are, however, challenged by writers – and observers, who for artistic or ideological or scholarly reasons (or perhaps all motivations combined), tend to promote ways of writing (practicing) Arabic across the linguistic repertoire. Writers can do so to a large extent by exploiting the common ground of Arabic varieties, the *shared* and the *bivalent* structural and lexical items. I define ‘shared’ items as items that have the same morphophonological and phonetic shape across the varieties or registers of a speaker/writer, while ‘bivalent’ items are “words and segments that could equally belong, descriptively and even pre-

15 Quoted from Pepe 2014: “every blogger has his own rule”; “when I started blogging, I was only interested in speaking out my personal feelings; my language was not excellent and I was switching between AM and a weak FU”; “[he] chooses the language that is better able to convey the message that he wants to express, and the decision is totally improvised, there is no order, nor specific criteria of choice”; “I prefer simple FU that is very close to AM and if it is necessary to use AM to indicate a specific cultural sign [...] then I use AM to give the text more taste [...] My preference for FU or AM depends on the subject.”

scriptively, to both codes" (Woolard 1999:7<sup>16</sup>). Due to the nature of Arabic script, which does not (normally) denote short vowels, many morphophonological distinctions between standard Arabic and vernacular varieties are concealed in writing. In this way, a great number of items which differ in phonetic shape depending on whether they are interpreted and realised *in speech* according to the standard or the vernacular system, are bivalent in writing. For instance, **يكتب** can be realised as high formal standard *yaktubu*, as plain standard *yak-tub*, or as vernacular *yiktib*.<sup>17</sup> If grammatical markers for future tense are added, however, which differ in standard and vernacular in a way that shows in the script, items are not bivalent: **سيكتب** *sayaktub(u)* and **حيكتب** or **هيكتب** *hayiktib/hayiktib* (unless one wishes to 'play' on hybrid forms for special effect).<sup>18</sup> As sentence structure to a large extent – but far from totally – is shared by standard Arabic and vernacular, there is much common ground on which to construct sequences that have an ambiguous, fluid character, neither quite standard nor plain vernacular.<sup>19</sup> This extensive common ground in written Arabic, with shared and bivalent structures and items, provided for, I believe, the ease of mixing in medieval Middle Arabic just as it provides for the ease of boundary crossing and mixing in contemporary texts.

The prize for the most uncompromising attempt to erase boundaries between *fushā* and *‘ammīyya* and create a 'third language form' (*lughā thālītha*) goes to the prominent Egyptian dramatist Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (1898–1987) in the mid-1950s. He wrote two plays using a bivalent strategy,<sup>20</sup> aiming at a text which could be both read as *fushā* and performed as *‘ammīyya*. Besides restricting himself to congruent lexicon, and insisting on forms such as (*hā*)*dhā* and *da* being allomorphs (not his term, but the idea makes sense), he had to avoid grammatical words and forms that would mark variety; for instance, plural endings would only be **ن** and not **ون**, so the plural nouns had to be syntactically in

16 Woolard uses 'bivalency' in a context of Latin/Spanish and Catalan/Castilian 'bilingualism'.

17 I disregard here the vernacular preverb *b-* which occurs in unmarked present tense.

18 For constraints on mixing word-internally in *spoken* styles, see Mejdell 2006.

19 While normative standard grammar has *vso* as the default order of constituents, there are cases where *svo* are more natural, sometimes even correct. On the other hand, studies have shown that Egyptian vernacular may have *svo* as preferred order, but in the past tense, and with intransitive verbs, the verb often precedes the subject, so the distribution is not discrete, but with considerable overlapping, and in modern standard usage, *svo* is sharing with *vso* as the (empirical) norm.

20 Woolard uses the term 'strategic bivalency' as "a language user's deliberate manipulation of such [bivalent] elements" (2007, p. 488).

oblique case (in the standard grammatical system) to formally match the vernacular plural *-īn*; consequently they were either in object function, introduced by *ʔ* (*'inn/'inna/'anna*) or in genitive constructions. However, as Woolard and Genovese remark, “it takes work for speakers and writers to stay for long within the confines of a bivalent zone of convergence between languages” (2007:489), and al-Ḥakīm renounced the project after these experiments.<sup>21</sup>

Of a very different nature is the kind of boundary crossing we find in many of Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn's (1930–1986) satirical writings. He switches and mixes between stretches of standard language and vernacular, and combines items and features from the two registers in a playful, unexpected manner that provokes laughter, such as a lexically vernacular verb with a standard language inflectional ending;<sup>22</sup> sometimes insertions of the other code is motivated by punning or by the needs of a rhyme (he often imitates the traditional style of rhymed prose, *saḡʿ*). This kind of (seemingly) ‘wild’ mixing sounds very funny to native ears, but also gives the writer occasion for expressing sarcasm and irony, playing on the contrastive connotations of standard and vernacular respectively. The controversial (and courageous) Egyptian writer, journalist and editor Ibrāhīm ʿIsā (b. 1965) follows up this style in his polemical writings. Again, there are passages in his articles that are impossible to classify in terms of a dichotomy of standard versus vernacular; however, while these texts may be said to blur the boundaries, they simultaneously exploit bivalency *and* contrast (Mejdell 2014).

For *writing* in an intermediate, or mixed, register or style, Gabriel Rosenbaum coined the succinct term *'fuṣḥāmmīyya'* (2000), occasionally showing up in Arabic blogs and tweets. *Lughā wuṣṭā* is a frequent term in Arabic academic studies; however, it is used by some to refer to a lower register of *fuṣḥā*, by others to refer to a style, spoken or written, that draws on both varieties (Mejdell 2010).

So what are the concepts in use by the younger generation who practice extensive boundary crossing? According to Teresa Pepe, and her comprehensive (2014) study of Egyptian blogs, the term *lughā wuṣṭā* is not in common use: they describe their practice as *mazg* and *khalīṭ* (mixing) of *fuṣḥā* and *'āmmīyya*.<sup>23</sup>

21 More on the experiment in Somekh 1991:42–44, Mejdell 2014:274–275.

22 Thus violating a principle governing ‘naturally produced’ hybrid forms in speech, cf. Mejdell 2006, 2006a. See also Mejdell (forthcoming) on Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn's style.

23 This is confirmed by the LCAW survey: only a very few (8%) report they know the concept, 16% among the university graduates (p. 69).

When discussing writing in Arabic, as opposed to English, they mostly use the term *bil-‘arabī*, but also *bil-‘arabiyya*. As noted above, *al-‘arabiyya* in most contexts refers to the standard language, *al-‘arabiyya al-fuṣḥā*. The Egyptian dictionary of Hinds and Badawi renders *‘arabi* as “Arabic, the Arabic language”, *il-‘arabi l-faṣīḥ* as “literary Arabic” – and the idiom *bil-‘arabi* as “in plain language”. *Il-‘arabiyya* is “the Arabic language”. The respondents in the LCAW Cairo survey, gave *‘arabi* as one of the terms for “the language you learn at school”, second only to (but far below) *al-‘arabiyya al-fuṣḥā*.

### Conclusion

And the normative standard? It is still the only variety taught to children in school, it is produced in the majority of newspapers and magazines and other publications. It shares a few written domains with colloquial and mixed varieties. Its linguistic structure has remained unchanged, slightly modified in certain respects, but more variation in styles and registers may be observed, with a preference for straightforward, simple syntax and close-to-colloquial style. This variation in writing represents empirical norms, not all in tune with prescriptive (school) grammar, but within the range of ‘accepted’ standard language. Certainly its native users will continue to disagree when it comes to its boundaries – perhaps the authorities who prescribe the standard norm will admit and include the variability and flexibility of the empirical norms.

However, the *validity* of the normative standard as such is not in question, it is rather the *exclusive* validity of the standard which has been, and is being, challenged. Norm authorities do not control the written practices outside the formal institutions (school and university, and the religious establishment). On the web and social media people are writing in a range of styles and registers and varieties, even scripts and languages. They write in *fuṣḥā* and/or in *‘ammiyya*, in both, in a mix, they insert slang (*luḡhat al-shabāb*) and English expressions, in Arabic and Latin script. The *acceptability* of writing in other varieties than standard language has also been demonstrated in the survey response of the urban population of greater Cairo, and is likewise reflected in the language of literary publications produced by leading publishing houses.

Pluralism of expression is held to be a characteristic of late modern society – all over the world. The signs of destandardisation we see in (parts of) the Arab world, opening up new *norms* for writing, represent a process which, I believe, will not be reversed.

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# Contemporary *dārīja* Writings in Morocco

## *Ideology and Practices*

Catherine Miller

### Introduction

Starting from the mid 1990s a new political, social and economical context has favored the coming out of a public discourse praising cultural and linguistic plurality as intangible parts of Moroccan identity and Moroccan heritage. The first signs of change occurred at the end of King Hassan II's reign, setting the first steps towards political and economic liberalization. But the arrival of King Mohamed VI in 1999 definitely accelerated the trend toward economic liberalism, development of private media, emergence of a strong civil society, call for democratization and modernization, and the emergence of new urban artistic movements. Within this general context, the linguistic, cultural and artistic issues have been openly and strongly discussed. One of the important points of debate has been the status and functions of what is considered to be the two Moroccan mother tongues: Amazigh (Berber) and *dārīja* (Moroccan Arabic). The main argument raised by a number of "reformists" is that no proper democratization and national building could take place if these mother tongues remain marginalized. They are therefore asking for their promotion, codification and eventually standardization. But whereas Amazigh is considered an endangered language, *dārīja* is not. Therefore their path toward literacy follow different roads and the people calling or acting for their promotion belong to rather different circles.<sup>1</sup> There is no place here to detail these points, and this paper will focus on *dārīja* writings.

Moroccan Arabic (*dārīja*) is the first mother tongue of 72 % of the Moroccan population according to the 2004 National Census and is spoken by 90 % of the population according to the Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) 2008. It has been expanding over Amazigh in several areas and is dominant in urban areas (Boukous 2012). It is considered mainly an oral non-standard language although it has some old written literary tradition like poetry and songs (*malhūn*, *zajal* see

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1 For a few references on the Amazigh issue see for example Boukous 2003 & 2012, Lakhsassi 2005, Rachik 2006, Pouessel 2010.

Elinson this volume). Until recently, written production in *dārija* was rather scarce and few people had called for the use of written *dārija* and its promotion as an official national language. However, since the 2000s, things started to change. A number of media figures called for the promotion of *dārija*. Numerous scholars have pointed to the increasing written use of Moroccan Arabic in various domains such as newspapers, novels, written poetry, internet, sms, social networks, official writings, ads, translations: Aguade (2005; 2006; 2012, 2013), Atifi (2003), Benítez-Fernández (2003, 2010, 2012a&b); Berjaoui (2002), Caubet (2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2016), Ech-Charfi (2004); Elinson (2013), Ferrando (2012a&b), Hall (2015) Hickman (2013), Hoogland (2013a &b); Langone (2003, 2006, 2008), Messaoudi (2002) Miller (2012, 2015), Morgan (2009); Moscoso (2009, 2011), Moustauoui Srhir (2012a), Pérez Cañada et al (2011), Salanitro (2008), Santillan et al. (2013), Youssi (2013), etc. This quite impressive academic production gives the impression that the last years represent a turning point and that *dārija* is de facto becoming a written language. Yet, the social, ideological and linguistic impact of these emerging written practices needs more investigations. Many questions remain concerning the profiles of the actors involved in the different types of writings, their objectives, their practices as well as the individual and public reception of these writings according to contexts. Unlike the development of Amazigh within the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture in Morocco (IRCAM), the written use of *dārija* is by large an individual, untutored enterprise. What do people write when they claim to write in *dārija*? What is their stance vis à vis the standard language? Do they really want to establish an autonomous language distinct from *fushḥā*?

These questions are by no means specific to Moroccan Arabic. Writing and codification of oral languages (including pidgin and creole languages, non-standard dialects or previously unwritten minority languages) are never neutral and straightforward technical acts and are linked to issue of power and subjectivity (Jaffe 2000; Rajah-Carrim 2008, Romaine 2005). For non-standard dialects, one of the key issues is the relationship vis à vis the standard language and the process of autonomization (Kloss 1957). Orthographic and variety choices will either emphasize sameness to or difference from the standard according to ideological and identity aspirations but also pragmatic considerations and contexts. Very often we find a tension between local authenticity and literary prestige. Phonemic orthography and colloquial style/varieties tend to symbolize specificity and authenticity whereas etymological orthography and higher style sound more elegant and literary. In many cases, writers will opt consciously or not for hybrid systems, or what Gunvor Mejdell mentions as strategic bivalence (Mejdell 2014). Processes of literacy and vernacularization of former oral languages appear to follow some general roads from simple

humorous texts, letters, riddles and folksong to scientific writing in various disciplines, official documents and complete newspapers (Mühleisen 2005). As we shall see, the development of *dārija* writings follow some of these roads. Like in many other countries we find a gradual move from documenting popular oral culture to more modern form of writing such as newspapers and novels. But the increasing impact of globalization and marketing introduces new written practices.

The paper will first present a brief preliminary historical overview of *dārija* literacy in Morocco and highlight some key differences and similarities with the Egyptian context. It will then turn to the recent period and question the issue of continuity and changes between past and present written practices. It will describe different profiles of people involved in *dārija* writings, their objectives, their public stands, their networks and their types of publication. It will analyze how the different actors apprehend the key issue of sameness/difference vis à vis the *fuṣḥā* in both discourse and practices. It will point out the inherent ambiguity and disjuncture between ideology and practices.

### Writing in *dārija*: From Oral Heritage to Written Modernity

As mentioned above the great amount of recent publications on *dārija* writings leads to the impression that the 2000s gave birth to an unprecedented and massive phenomenon. In fact, *dārija* writings are not totally new, but generally speaking they were mainly associated with oral literary genres such as *zajal* and *malḥūn*. If we compare the situation of Moroccan *dārija* with that of Egyptian *‘ammīyya* two points are noticeable and can explain why this period appeared so radical in Morocco. First, from the late 19th century up to the late 20th century, Moroccan *dārija* never reached the cultural prestige of Egyptian *‘ammīyya* and did not have the same historical background as a written language.<sup>2</sup> This can be related to the fact that during the same period the general cultural and literary production (theater, novels and journals on the written level but also films, series and songs) was less developed in Morocco than in Egypt (Lecerf 1934, Touimi & al 1974) and that part of the literary production (particularly novels) was/is in French and not in Arabic. The bibliography of Moroccan novels in Arabic established by Al-‘Alam and Qāsimī (2003) as well as the panorama of Touimi and al (1974) and Jay (2005) indicate that very few Moroccan novels

2 See Lecerf 1934 for early writings and Doss and Davies 2013 for a fascinating anthology of Egyptian *‘ammīyya* writings.

in Arabic were published up to the early 1980s. From 1952 to 1973, only one or two Moroccan novels in Arabic were published each year (including those published outside Morocco, in Cairo or Beirut). It was only after 1982 that the number of Arabic published novels reached eight or more each year (al-'Alam and Qâsimî 2003). As very well depicted by Jean Lecerf (1934), the *'ammîyya* literary tradition in Egypt and the Levant did not develop against or totally independently from *fushâ* literary production but in interaction with it. Therefore it is not surprising that the spreading of *dārija* writings in the last decade follows a more general development of Moroccan Arabic literature and writings.

Another important historical difference between Morocco and Egypt is that, in the first part of the 20th century, promotion of *dārija* had never (or rarely) been advocated by leading Moroccan intellectual figures, unlike what happened in Egypt or Lebanon (Plonka 2004, Zack 2014). So far no Moroccan figures comparable to Salāma Mūsā or Saïd Al 'Aql have appeared in Morocco, and no writers or journalists like Bayram al-Tunsi, Hussein Shafik or Ya'qūb Ṣanū' and his journal *Abū naḍḍāra zar'a*.

In post-independence Morocco (1960–1980s), several important journals (either francophone like *Souffle*, *Lamalif*, *Intégral* or arabophone like *Afāq*, *al-Asās*, *al-thaqāfa al-jadīda*) acted as fora for the Moroccan intelligentsia/artists and addressed the issue of what should be the “Moroccan national culture”, the role and place of language, education, oral literature, popular culture, arts, etc. (Sefrioui 2013: 169–200). Generally speaking the attitude towards popular culture remains rather ambiguous and contradictory. It never led to the explicit valorization of *dārija* or Amazigh as potential national literary languages. For most Moroccan intellectuals of the 1960–1970s, the issue of the literary national language was between Arabic (standard Arabic) and French, as many of them were writing in French and considered French to be part of their culture. It seems that it is only in the late 1980, early 1990s that the first public stands toward the valorization of *dārija* started to emerge.

However, like in many other countries, two main domains appeared to have played an important role in the progressive valorization of *dārija* as a literary language (first oral literary and then written literary language): theater and poetry/oral literature.

Theater<sup>3</sup> is one domain where the use of Moroccan Arabic<sup>4</sup> has been commonly practiced, in order to attract the Moroccan public. Dramas with dia-

3 For the history of Moroccan Theater see Baghdad (2009), Messaïa (2012), Ouzri (1997).

4 In early writings, the word *dārija* never occurred. Moroccan Arabic is called either *'ammîyya* or *lahja*.

logues in *dārija* or a mix of *dārija/fuṣḥā* had been written as early as the 1930/40s.<sup>5</sup> *dārija* was present through popular proverbs, songs and in dialogues representing uneducated persons like in the plays of the *Jamā'a huwāh al-masraḥ* (The theater lovers Cie) (Baghdad 2009:77). However the use of Moroccan Arabic was not always accepted. Baghdad mentions a polemic between Abdallah Jrari and Abdelkebir Fassi concerning the use of dialect published in the journal *Al-Maghreb* in 1934 (Baghdad 2009: 4) as well as several articles in the journal *As-sa'āda* in 1934 (Baghdad 2009: 316). The use of *dārija* developed in the 1950–1960s within the workshops of the Centre Marocain de Recherche Dramatique (CMDD) established by André Voisin.<sup>6</sup> CMDD trained many major Moroccan playwrights and stage-directors such as Tayeb Saddiki, Abdessamad Kenfaoui, Ahmed Tayeb al-'Alj, Tahar Ouaâziz, Mohammed Saïd Afifi, Farid Ben M'barek, Abdallah Chakroun, and it influenced dozens of other playwrights like Abdeslam Chraïbi or Mohammed Chahraman (Massaïa 2012). All these playwrights participated in the 'marocanization' of theater either through adaptation/translation of international dramas or through modernization of Moroccan traditional forms of performance.<sup>7</sup> *Dārija* was often restricted to popular comedies. The most famous cases are the adaptation of Moliere's repertoire by Abdelsamad Kenfaoui and Ahmed Tayeb al-'Alj, the original dramas performed by Firqat Bachir al-Alj (1956–1962), the numerous comedies written by Abdallah Chakroun for the *Troupe du Théâtre Arabe de la Radio Marocaine*,<sup>8</sup> as well as the adaptation of *Al-harrāz* by Abdeslam Chraïbi performed by Saddiki's troop *Masraḥ an-nās*. The dialectal styles and registers were inspired by poetic oral traditions like *zajal* because as stated later by the poet Driss Messnaoui:<sup>9</sup>

5 See Baghdad 2009 for an analysis of 30 dramas published between 1925 and 1955.

6 Established during the Protectorate CMDD gave birth to the *Troupe du Théâtre Marocain (Firqat at-tamthīl al-maghrībi)* in 1956 which became then the famous Maâmora Troup (196–1974) which produced most of Ahmed Tayeb el-Alj's plays.

7 Among the most famous examples of drama inspired by traditional performances are 3 plays performed by Saddiki's troupe: *Sultān Tolba*, written by Kenfaoui (1965), *Divān sīdī Abdelrahmān al-Mahjūb* written by Saddiki (1967) and *Al-Harrāz* written by Chraïbi. Inspired by the *ḥālqa* tradition, they include musical performances by Nass al-Ghiwān and Jill Jilāla. They meet huge popular success. See also *Boujloud* (1970) by Abdallah Mouâwi or Chahraman's plays within the *nādi al-fanni al-marrakshi* (Massaïa 2012).

8 Abdallah Chakroun is considered as one of the most prolific and popular Moroccan dramaturge. He is the first one to introduce drama in Moroccan Arabic at the national radio in the early 1950s (Massaïa 2012: 18–25).

9 From Messnaoui's manuscript *كناش التعاويد* probably written in the 1990s but as far as I know



اللغة بلا ثوب زجلي تاتبقى لغه عربانه وبالتالي لغه فقيره

A language without the garment of zajal remains a naked and poor language

Those theatrical texts did not aim at reflecting the daily language (unlike more recent productions) but widened the spectrum of uses of the literary colloquial level. As for “serious” and more intellectual dramas they were mainly written or adapted in *fuṣṣḥā* like the adaptation of Sartre, Camus and Robles by the *Firqat al-urūba al-masraḥiyya* (1945–1995). However there are some exceptions. Saddiki translated/adapted into elevated *dārija* dramas from Gogol (1957 & 1970),<sup>10</sup> Aristophane (1959), Ben Johnson (1960), Ionesco (1963), Beckett (n.d). Other playwrights followed like Yusif Fadul and the al-Barsim troupe who made a Moroccan adaptation of Zoo Ztory of Edward Albee (1972). But up to the 2000s most of these drama texts were not published and did not circulate as written texts. It is only recently that theatrical anthologies started to be published, such as Kenfaoui’s texts (5 volumes edited in 2010), al-Alj’s texts (3 volumes published by La Fondation des Arts Vivants in 2011) or some of the adaptation by Saddiki of Gogol’s and Ben Johnson’s plays published by the Ministry of Culture in 2003. As far as I know (but this point needs additional research) none of the leading playwrights of the 1950–1980s made explicit claims in favor of the promotion of Moroccan Arabic, unlike what can be observed today among a number of contemporary dramaturgs like Driss Ksikes (Miller 2009), Jouad Essounani, Ghassan El Hakim or Ahmed Hammoud (Miller & Abu Al Aazm 2015). According to the stage director Mohammed Zubair, who had been working with Saddiki: “In the 1970s nobody raise the issue of *dārija* as such. At this time, the need was that the drama could reach the audience. Saddiki worked the language to introduce the Moroccan imaginary and he produced true literary texts, a *fuṣṣḥā* adapted to the Moroccan ears”.

Concerning poetry/oral literature, one notices, starting from the 1980s but more prominently in the 1990s & 2000s, an increase of written publications on popular oral heritage: specific issues of the journal *Afāq* on *zajal* (1992), the monumental anthology of *malḥūn* by El-Fassi (1986–1991), publication of *ayṭa* songs by El-Bahrawi 2003 & Nejmi 2007, Nass el-Ghiwane’s songs (ES-Sayyid 2007), Jil Jilāla songs (Riyād & Sbahani 2010), numerous publications of *zajal*

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not published. Thanks to Ahmed Ech-Charfi who kindly sent me a digitalized copy of this manuscript.

10 See Langone (2006) for a linguistic analysis of the 1970 Saddiqi’s adaptation of Gogol’s *Le journal d’un fou/en-naqša*.

anthology by Ministry of Culture such as that of Ben'akida in 2007 or Lemsyah 2011, Moroccan proverbs (Lamghari 2009), etc. Several associations (like AMAPATRIL) and academic conferences were dedicated to oral literature, such as the 1998 Marrakech' conference organized and published by the *Jam'yyat huwāh al-malhūn* "The association of malhūn lovers" (2002). All these publications and activities represent an important step. Before, publications on oral literature were often written in French/English/Spanish and published abroad. Today these publications are written in Arabic and are published in Morocco either by the Moroccan Royal Academy, the Ministry of Culture or private Moroccan publishing houses. A number of these books are sold at an affordable price on the streets and gain a wider audience. The former oral production can be read and these publications participate in giving a literary status to *dārija*. However the *dārija* texts are almost always introduced and commented in *fushā* (the same for the stage directions of the theatrical texts) and therefore keep their orality status.

The interest in Moroccan heritage popular oral literature and the subsequent efforts to collect and write it constitute an ambiguous and complex process. In the 1980s, it developed in a context of political repression and demarcation from the progressive opening of the 1960–1970s. It could then be associated with a politics of conservatism, folklorism, closure on the so-called Moroccan culture and values. But in the same time it elevated the status of the popular culture and participated in the silent valorization of *dārija* as illustrated by modern forms of *zajal* poetry by poets like Driss Mesnaoui or Ahmad Lemsyah who defended the literary values of *dārija* and tried to break the boundary between colloquial *zajal* and classical *shi'r* (Elinson this volume). As pointed out by Ech-Charfi, "[t]he promotion of some forms of 'folk' musical art to the status of 'classic' art has also contributed to make Moroccan Arabic a language of 'classic' artistic expression" (Ech-Charfi 2004). Previous cultural domains considered as 'popular, folkloric' became more legitimate and their status improved. The Moroccan situation appears here very similar to many other countries where the first step toward vernacularization of non-standard languages often starts with the writings of oral literature. This step did not disrupt the diglossic hegemonic representation of language hierarchy in Morocco but allowed for the start of subtle shifts within this hierarchy.

This change of perception towards popular culture and popular language indicates that the valorization of *dārija* has been a gradual process not a sudden change. From the 1980s to the 2000s the stance towards the values of *dārija* writings moved from a heritage perspective to a modernist/developmental one. The heritage phase was a kind of low-profile strategy that did not entail public claim towards the promotion of *dārija*. Today the most striking aspect of the

public pro-*dārija* discourse is its visibility and outspoken claims. Embedded in a modernist and democratic discourse, it not only asks for the valorization of *dārija* literacy as part of the cultural national heritage but for its needed institutional promotion as a national/official standard in order to cope with development.

But the discourses challenging the hegemonic linguistic hierarchy are only one trend among many others who participate in the expanding *dārija* writing practices without necessarily entailing a radical change in language ideology (Hall 2015).

### Writings in *dārija* in the Years 2000s–2010s: Militants, Business and Social Networks

During the 2000s–2010s, people acting for (or participating in) the writing of *dārija* formed a rather heteroclitic grouping that included media and economic circles such as journalists, advertisers, radio owners, royal advisors but also young artists, writers, psychologists, medical doctors, social activists, translators and a few Moroccan University professors (Caubet 2007 & 2008, Elinson 2013, Bénéitez-Fernández et al 2013, Miller 2015).<sup>11</sup> These various individual initiatives did not and still do not constitute a homogeneous or a unified movement in terms of ideologies, objectives, justifications and practices. Three main circles or profiles can be identified.

The first circle includes those who adopt explicit public stands toward the necessary promotion and eventually institutionalization of *dārija*, advocating a change in the language hierarchy. They form the active minority of “pro-*dārija* militants”, whose exact number and audience is difficult to assess. The 2002 cover and dossier of the francophone weekly TELQUEL, “*dārija* langue national” (n° 34, 15–21 June 2002) can be considered their first public manifesto. Since the 2000s, TELQUEL has been one of the main voices of the pro-*dārija* trend and has called for the codification/standardization of written *dārija*. Yet the militants’ attempts to concretize their ideas in practical acts in the writing press and in the educational sector have often raised either skepticism or strong opposition (see below).

The second circle includes actors of the economic circles (including the royal economic consortium). They understand the marketing value of *dārija*

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11 The film *Casanayda!*, 2007, by D. Caubet, F. Belyazid and A. Mettour (Casablanca: Sigma Production) describes the different figures of the 2006–2007 *Darija* galaxie.

as a symbolic vehicle of Moroccan urbanity and modernity but they avoid taking any explicit stands concerning language issues. They actively participated in the public visibility of *dārīja* writings (in Arabic or Roman scripts) through the increasing number of advertising boards. Most of the time they mix *dārīja* with standard Arabic and/or French to add expressivity, humor and informality. They have played an active role in the shift of iconic association making *dārīja* a symbol of urban consumerism and youth culture (mobile phone). This trend, common to many other countries including other North African countries (Chachou 2012), fits with Monica Heller's analysis that economic arguments are now more authoritative than political ones and govern new forms of communication (Heller 2010).

The third loose circle includes a large majority of lay people, particularly the youth, who have massively adopted *dārīja* writings (both in Roman or Arabic scripts) in sms and social networks without necessarily sharing similar opinions concerning what is/or should be the status of *dārīja*. The development of internet, sms and social networks represents the strongest dynamics of spreading *dārīja* writings and the major factor of change in writing practices (for the use of *dārīja* in sms writings and social networks see Berjaoui 2002, Caubet 2003, 2012, 2013, 2016, Hall 2015). Like everywhere in the world, internet opens the door for new writing practices fostering expressivity, informality, humor, refusal of strict social hierarchy and the exhibition of personal subjectivity. The predominance of what has been characterized as the 'expression of the self' (*expression de soi*) and the 'expressive individuality' in public spaces (Lecomte 2013, Cardon & Granjon 2010) represents one of the major factors of change of oral and written public discourses.

Therefore, the spread and wider visibility of *dārīja* writings appear to be linked to a large scale of factors and motivations. It would be a mistake to consider that all those who write in *dārīja* are in favor of its institutionalization but at the same time the presence of *dārīja* in so many types of writings and contexts reinforce its association with Moroccanness, from the expressive individuality to the collective construct. No strict boundaries exist between the three circles.

The same fluidity characterizes the impact of political affiliation within pro and anti-*dārīja* movements. The pro-*dārīja* militants tend to present themselves as the emanation of a youth progressive wing and have been often pictured as such particularly during the *nayda* cultural phenomenon of the mid-2000s (Caubet 2008). However the pro/anti *dārīja* contrast does not reflect a clear left/right or democratic/non-democratic polarization. In both the ruling establishment and the leftist opposition we find quite ambiguous stands.

King Mohamed VI and his advisors are very keen to present the regime as being in tune with the times *vis à vis* the traditionalist parties like the nationalist pan-arabist Istiqlal or the Islamist PJD, even when the latter are officially heading the government. The use of *dārija* in a number of sectors is one of the symbols of this modernity. Adopting the style and the methods of the advertising and marketing circles, the regime does not hesitate to use *dārija* as part of branding of Morocanness and symbol of patriotism. A symbol of such patriotic marketing strategies is the recycling of the famous red hand with the motto *mā tqish blādi* “don’t touch my country”. Inspired by the French motto *Touche pas à mon pôte* during “La marche des Beurs”, the *dārija* motto first appeared in Morocco during the civil demonstrations of 2003 (in support of arrested rockers, then in the aftermath of the Islamist bombing of Casablanca, cf. Caubet 2007) and became the title of a popular song released by the Marrakchi rap group Fnayr in 2004 (Moreno Almeida 2016). Since then it has been used during all kinds of patriotic gatherings and mobilizations: defense of the “Moroccan” Sahara against Polisario, the anti-paedophilia movement, etc. During the demonstrations of February–March 2011, the motto was exhibited all over the main avenues of the capital Rabat on the giant boards owned by Mounir Majidi, a close royal adviser. The regime has tolerated (and even promoted?) the written and oral spread of *dārija* in the media, the ads and the cultural domains because it serves purposes of expressivity and Moroccan branding. However, King Mohamed VI never inserts *dārija* in his official Royal discourse whereas Benkirane, the PJD prime minister made himself popular by resorting mainly to *dārija* during his press conferences. But while the Palace is believed to have backed the idea of introducing *dārija* as part of a general language reform in teaching, Benkirane and the PJD in fact stood as strong opponents of this idea (see below).

The same ambiguity characterizes the linguistic stands of the leftist wing of the political spectrum: the 20th February movement. An interesting turn took place in 2011 with the emergence of the movement and subsequent street demonstrations (Moustaoui Shrir 2013, Caubet & Miller 2016, Caubet 2016 and this volume), that led to new styles of political expressions, rather similar to the Tunisian ones (Lecomte 2013). In February 11th, the movement posted a video where a number of young people and one older lady explained in *dārija* and Amazigh why they will go down for demonstration on February 20th. The subtitles of the video were written in Amazigh in *tifinagh* script, *dārija* in Arabic script and French – to the exclusion of standard Arabic.<sup>12</sup> During

12 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_LFoJqnMzw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_LFoJqnMzw) (posted February 2011, 11th, 370.608

the demonstrations, many written slogans of the movement were in *dārija* but also in Amazigh, French, English and standard Arabic. In the following weeks and months debates for and against the 20th February movement, the Constitutional Referendum, the demonstrations, the alliances with the Islamists occupied social networks, blogs, clips, with thousands of written comments in *dārija*, French, Amazigh, standard Arabic, English and in a mix of several languages on Facebook, Youtube etc. From then on, political discussion in *dārija* became more and more common and we can say that *dārija* entered the domain of politics. However, the 20th February movement never explicitly demanded the officialization of *dārija* (unlike what happened with Amazigh among the Amazigh militants). An important function of *dārija* in written or oral political discussions on social networks appears to be a discursive one, emphasizing as I mentioned above expressivity and subjectivity.

Before the spring of 2011, there were few political discussions on the Moroccan Facebook. Most members were sharing their personal life-events or their artistic and cultural choices (Caubet & Miller 2016). Eventually youth expressed their discontent of the main caveats of the Moroccan society (corruption, sexism, unemployment, hypocrisy) as many rap artists were doing, but without direct connection with formal political organizations. *dārija* was a means to render personal feelings, from joy to anger or frustration without any pretention to adopt an objective and rational discourse encapsulated in a formal language, as many youth consider that political discourses are just baffle gab. From these beginnings, a number of youth became cyber activists and opted for more direct political comments and discussion while keeping the same “free expressiveness” in *dārija* in their Facebook pages and blogs (Caubet 2016). But not all 20th February militants write in *dārija* and a number of activists continue to write in standard Arabic when they want to discuss political issues on a more formal and “objective” register as can be seen on the website of the movement [mamfakinch.com](http://mamfakinch.com):<sup>13</sup>

من نحن / Qui sommes-nous?

مامفا كينش. كوم موقع إخباري يسهر عليه مجموعة من المدونين و المناضلين المغاربة. أنشئ هذا الموقع على إثر دعوات التظاهر التي أطلقها شباب مغاربة، من شتى أنحاء المغرب، من أجل

views by 12 December 2014). The video starts with the sentence “*ana maghribi, ghadi nekhroj nhar 20 febrayer ...*” (I am Moroccan, I will come out on the 20th of February).

13 <https://www.mamfakinch.com>, accessed March 2012.

المطالبة بإصلاحات سياسية واقتصادية واجتماعية يوم 20 فبراير 2011. وذلك في إطار ما أصبح يطلق عليه الآن في المواقع الاجتماعية: حركة #Feb20.  
 رغم تعدد حساسياتنا ومشاربنا السياسية المختلفة، نتقاسم الإيمان العميق بقيم الديمقراطية والحرية واحترام حقوق الإنسان.  
 مامفاكينش. كوم ليس بجريدة، بل هو وسيلة إعلام مواطنة تؤمن بحق الوصول للمعلومة التي غالبا ما تصادر أو تشوه من طرف وسائل الإعلام الرسمية وغير الرسمية.

Mamfakinsh.com is a News site animated by a group of Moroccan bloggers and activists. The site was established immediately after February 20th, 2011 calls for demonstrations launched by young Moroccans, from all across Morocco, demanding political, economic and social reforms. This as part of what became known within social networks as the Feb20# Movement. Despite the diversity of our sensitivities and political inclinations, we share a deep faith in the values of democracy, freedom and respect for human rights. Mamfakinsh.com is not a newspaper, it is a citizen media that believes in the right of access to information that are often confiscated or distorted by the official and unofficial media

Facebook posts by 20th February members reflect a high diversity of levels and styles. It seems here that the personal background of each militant plays an important role as well as his/her vision of political styles. Those who are more educated and had a political background before 2011 are keener to continue to use mainly standard Arabic in their political posts, as someone like Najib Chaouki whose facebook pages contain relatively little *dārija*. On the other hand, some activists coming from musical/artistic background or from popular background opt for writing mainly in *dārija* (see Caubet 2016 for the case of Mouad Lhaqed or Mohamed Sokrate). The former select what they consider a neutral, objective style whereas the latter opt for a subjective and more personal style that sounds tougher and closer to “the street” but which is also closer to artistic expression.

Therefore the use of *dārija* in written political discussions plays an important stylistic function. It does not *necessarily* indicate a wish to promote *dārija* as a distinctive and eventually institutionalized language. It rather tends to make political involvement less formal and to mark disconnection from traditional political formations.

In short, if *dārija* writings have expanded tremendously in the last decade, it does not mean that all those who are using it either in personal or public

writings agree with the idea of its institutionalization. The spread of *dārija* writings rather coincides, for the time being, with a trend toward coolness and informality. Does it mean that this trend will affect all domains? Analyzing some recent experiences and events, it appears that the 'pro-*dārija* militants' are faced with the fact that many people still doubt the value of *dārija* as a 'true literary language' which could become a formal institutional language.

### Contesting the Language Hierarchy: Discourses, Actions and Limits

The discourse of the pro-*dārija* militants advocating the promotion, valorization, codification and eventually officialization of *dārija* (also called Moroccan language/*lughā maghribiyya*) follows the path of the international movement of defense of minority languages/mother tongues. They refer to the universal trend toward protection and promotion of heritage mother tongues according to language rights enacted by International laws.<sup>14</sup> They point to the failure of the Moroccan educational system attributed mainly to language problems as recognized in several Moroccan official documents such as the COSEF 1999 or the *Plan d'Urgence* 2009–2012 with the idea that according to International Institutions such as UNESCO or UNDP promotion of mother tongue (Amazigh and *dārija*) may enhance educational results and foster Moroccan economic development and cultural creativity. They consider that the Moroccan people need to reconcile with their specific Moroccan identity in order to reinforce democracy and modernity. They believe that promotion of Moroccan mother tongues will help Moroccans emancipate themselves from the former colonial language (French) and from an Arabic classical literary norm that does not correspond to the reality of the Moroccan society.

Their perception of the Moroccan linguistic reality and their ideas about how to ameliorate it are strongly influenced by the model of the historical development of the European national languages. They consider that the diglossic *fushā* /*dārija* relationship is similar to the Latin/Roman vernaculars of medieval Europe and they conclude that in the Arab world as in Europe, modernity implies the development of the vernaculars as full-fledged languages. We find here the same arguments as those advanced during the 19th century to explain the backwardness of the Arab world. But whereas it was con-

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14 Such as Art. 5 of 1960 UNESCO Convention against discrimination in Education, 1999–2000, the UN launching International Mother Language Day, the 2001 UNESCO Charter, etc.



sidered a kind of colonial ideology during the golden years of pan-arabism, it gains revival during the 1990s at a time of pan-arabism's disillusion. A linking figure between Egypt and Morocco on this issue is the Egyptian psychoanalyst Mustafa Safwan whose publications and stands in favor of Arabic vernaculars have been very well received in the pro-*dārija* circles in Morocco (Miller 2015). Let me note here that a number of European scholars such as Francisco Moscoso (2011) or Jan Hoogland (2013) strongly support *dārija* writing and codification and participate in the Moroccan debate.

Pro-*dārija* militants do not limit themselves to discourses. In order to participate in the making of a literary Moroccan Arabic that could become recognized as a 'full language', a few individuals embark on different writing experiences such as the translation of European classical literary texts (Miller 2015) or the writings of novels (Aguade 2006, 2013; Elinson 2013, Ferrando 2012a&b, Pérez Cañada & Salinitro 2011). But these experiences have a limited audience. Another field of experience has been the written press. Three examples are very often quoted:<sup>15</sup> *Khbār blādnā* (خبار بلادنا), launched in 2002 by Elena Printice in Tangiers, *Al-Amāl* (الأمال), launched in 2006 by journalist students in Sale and *Nichane* (نيشان), the Arabic weekly version of *TELQUEL* created in 2006 by Driss Ksikes (chief editor) and Ahmed Benchemsi (director). *Khbār blādnā* was a kind of artisanal newspaper, printed at 6 000 copies, written in *dārija* in vocalized Arabic script, targeting the poorly literate readers and freely distributed in the medina of Tangiers from 2002 to 2007. Printice's publishing house edited also small books like health booklets, tales, novels, etc, all in the same vocalized Arabic script. *Al-Amāl* was a short-lived (6 months) experience, printed at 2000 copies and written also in vocalized *dārija*. Both *Khbār blādnā* and *Al-Amāl* remain rather marginal experiences. Their philosophy can be related to an old trend of social reformism found for example in Egypt in the late 19th c. that sees dialectal literacy as a means to widen literacy and social consciousness among the poor. It cannot be considered as a decisive participation in the creation of a modern *dārija* language.

The *Nichane* experience lasted four years (2006–2010) and had a far wider audience and impact (around 30 000 issues weekly). *Nichane*'s format was a professional one, written in non vocalized Arabic script like most Arabic newspapers. *Nichane* attracted considerable international attention and was very often presented as THE Moroccan newspaper in *dārija*. The renommée

15 For references on these 3 newspaper See Aguade (2012), Benítez-Fernández (2008, 2010, 2012), Caubet (2012), Elinson (2013), Hall (2015), Hickman (2013), Hoogland (2013), Langone (2003), Miller (2012), Moustauoui-Srhir (2012b).

of Nichane was due to its link to TELQUEL, to its contents, its style, and to the charismatic personality of its director (Ahmed Benchemsi) and first chief editor (D. Ksikes). TELQUEL and Nichane always positioned themselves as ‘les portes paroles’ of the progressive wing of the civil society. The main goal of Nichane was to spread the progressive stands of TELQUEL in Arabic to the non-francophone readers, with the same freedom of speech. This boldness caused several judicial problems that many attributed to the *dārija* factor. Nichane had in fact a rather low percentage of *dārija* more or less estimated at 20% by J. Hoogland (2013). *Dārija* was present mainly in the cover titles, the headlines and some specific pages like the interview pages. But why has Nichane so often been considered THE symbol of *dārija* writings when it contains only a small percentage of *dārija*? As it has been often observed (Romaine 2005) a few words or sentences suffice to act as tags for the entire text. The subjective perception of Nichane was also certainly influenced by the public stands of TELQUEL in favor of *dārija*, particularly by the strong position of A. Benchemsi.

Let us note here that there has been quite a divergence of language representation between Driss Ksikes who acted as Nichane chief editor for 3–4 months and Ahmed Benchemsi, TELQUEL director who took over after Ksikes’ withdrawal due to Nichane’s first trial. In his first editorial “Why Nichane” *علاش نيشان* Driss Ksikes explains what will be Nichane’s style and describes it as “an easy Arabic language, a language of its time and its place, free of rethorical expressions and with a Moroccan fragrance”:

نیشان ستکتب بلغة زمانه عربية سهلة خالية من العبارات البديعية ولغة مكانه أي فيها نفضة مغربية.

In a personal interview I conducted with him in Rabat in May 2009, he mentioned that “my model was the Egyptian magazine *Roz el Youssif* and my main idea was to show that Arabic could be an economic and a non redundant language”. He added that “we knew that we couldn’t create a written *dārija* from scratch but our goal was to accompany the movement toward the Moroccan language, to reach a clear project of codification, transcription and standardization. As media people we thought that we could maybe force the progress of history”. However, he added that “the issue of *dārija* cannot be set up independently from Arabic. In the written press, the isolation and autonomy of Moroccan *dārija* from Arabic would not work, because there wouldn’t be enough readers. Morocco is far behind Egypt and needs to solve first the issue at the oral level before it works at the written level”. This is why he sug-

gested that *dārija* should be first used in theater and novels, a task he followed from 2009 to 2012 with the Dabateatr (Miller 2009, Miller and Abu El Aazm 2014).

As for Ahmed Benchemsi, he always emphasized the structural gap between *dārija* and *fusha* and called for the rapid institutionalization of *dārija* in several editorials in TELQUEL:

Our sole common language is *dārija*. Some translate *dārija* by Moroccan Arabic. I don't agree. It's Moroccan only. Yes, Moroccan includes a majority of words of Arab origin, but a small majority. There are as many words from Berber, French and Spanish origin.

TELQUEL 230, June 2006

Only *dārija* integrates all the obscured faces of our identity. It's it (*dārija*) which should be standardized, used as teaching medium in our schools, and sooner or later constitutionalized.

TELQUEL, May 9th 2009

Despite their different language stands, both Ksikes and Benchemsi never wrote their editorial in "plain *dārija*" and like most other Nichane journalists they opted for a mix variety, but each one with his own style. There are a few *dārija* sentences in Ksikes' editorials (بصراحة). These sentences render oral discourse and are always introduced by commas, a practice found in other Moroccan newspapers like *al-Masa'* or *Ahdath maghrebiyya* (Miller 2012):

ويأتي الجواب من الهمة واحجابه صريحا "ما تبقاوش تحلوا الملك باغي يقلل من السلط دياو  
ولكن مع صعود الاسلاميين ما يمكنش يقبل دابا"

And the answer from El Hima and his friends comes quickly 'Don't stay dreaming, the King wants to resign from his power, but with the raising of the Islamists he cannot do it now'.

16-22/9/2006

Somewhat more mixing is found in Benchemsi's editorials (entitled ديريكت) and translated from French by Benchemsi himself. He often peppered his text with *dārija* words and expressions without demarcating them by comas. Below are two sentences of the same editorial published in its French version in TELQUEL and in its Arabic version in Nichane the 23/1/2010.

On avait fini par les oublier. La publication des recommandations de l'Instance équité et réconciliation avait pourtant été un moment fort de la 'nouvelle ère'

نسيناهم كاع اصدار توصيات "هيئة تانصاف والمصالحة" كلن زعمة من اقوى لحظات "العهد الجديد"

Où en sommes-nous de la constitutionnalisation des droits de l'homme? On n'a encore rien vu venir. En tout cas rien de ce qui était essentiel pour rompre définitivement avec les pratiques du passé

فين وصلنا فديسترة حقوق الانسان, ما زال ما شفنا والو اوعلي الأقل, ما زال ما شفنا والو من ما هو اساسي لضمان مستقبل أفضل

Ahmed Benchemsi is certainly one of the very few Moroccan journalists who tried as much as he could to introduce *dārīja* in his political editorials. His writings certainly deserve deeper linguistic analysis. However, Benchemsi never succeeded to make Nichane a *dārīja* newspaper. Most of the other Nichane journalists wrote dominantly in standard Arabic and the ambitious project of codification/standardization never really concretized.

All the experiences quoted above that try to push *dārīja* in the domain of the written press came to an end around 2009–2010. Since then, no printed or online newspaper adopted *dārīja* as 'une carte de visite', even good.ma, the online version of Nichane (except for some personal blogs). What remains in most newspapers is the rather traditional discursive use of some *dārīja* words and expressions for stylistic purposes (popular wisdom, irony, indignation etc.).

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the Nichane experience. First, it does not matter how people really write as there is no direct association between the real language level of the text and people's perception. If the text is claimed to be in *dārīja*, if it contains a few *dārīja* tags (wallu, za'ma, 'alaš), then it is perceived to be in *dārīja* whatever its level. Second, the marginal presence of *dārīja* within journalistic writings indicates that this domain is still perceived as a "serious" literary domain not suitable for "plain" *dārīja*, particularly if the journalist wishes to sound serious and objective. The militant discourse wants to disrupt the language ideology but still it cannot win over it in practices in all domains. *dārīja* is not yet perceived as a legitimate serious literary language. Third, the *exact identity* of what could or should be the long awaited codified *dārīja* remains unclear for the time being, even if some common rules start

to emerge. One is the dominant trend towards the use of Arabic script with an etymological orthography, albeit with many variants. This orthography can be found in most Moroccan newspapers, novels, students' production (Gago – 2016) and is more and more present on social networks (Caubet 2016). But yet no codified literary *dārija* has been fixed and nationally accepted, because as mentioned before, writings of *dārija* remained largely an individual enterprise. It is certainly this absence of a recognized literary *dārija* norm that makes its entry in formal domains such as education unconceivable for a large part of the population, at least currently.

The fierce polemic arose in 2013–2015 following the suggestion to introduce *dārija* as a medium of education in the first years of schoolings, which highlights the limits of the *dārija* legitimation. The debate was launched by publicist & makhzen insider Nourredine Ayouch, through his Zakoura Foundation. The Foundation is involved in literacy courses within rural areas. Relying on this experience, N. Ayouch actively militates for educational reforms and for the use of *dārija* as a medium of instruction in initial and primary schools.<sup>16</sup> The Foundation organized two International Conferences in Casablanca in 2010 and 2013. The first one (*La Langue, Les Langues*, Casablanca June 2010) focused on the language situation in Morocco compared to a number of countries which have gone through language reforms, like Turkey and Greece. The second Conference (Colloque International sur l'éducation, *Le Chemin de la Réussite*, 4–5 October 2013) discussed the needs of a large educational reform. It took place only two months after the 20th August 2013 Royal Speech, where Mohamed VI asked for an urgent educational reform and harshly criticized the PJD-led government for its failure concerning educational reforms. The conference was considered to be more or less backed by the Palace and was attended by representatives of the World Bank and Microsoft, high official figures such as Ministers of Education and two Royal Advisors, Fouad El Himma and Omar Azziman. Both the 2010 and 2013 conferences concluded with several recommendations concerning the place and role of language in Education. They called for the need to introduce the mother tongues (Amazigh and *dārija*) as a medium of instruction in early years of schooling to enhance literacy. The idea was not totally new. It was already suggested in the 1999 *Chartre Nationale de l'Education et de la Formation* (COSEF 1999) (cf. de Ruiter (2001)

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16 Hall 2015 provides a very interesting account of a similar experience of adult literacy programs in rural areas held by a USAID sponsored association Passerelle and shows that in reality the teachers were quite reluctant to *dārija* writings and use mainly *dārija* as oral medium.

and Benítez (2010)). But COSEF's recommendations had never been implemented. In both Conferences, the recommendations of the Zakoura Foundation were always careful to highlight the convergence between classical and Moroccan Arabic. But this carefulness did not stop the fury of the opponents.

The 2013 Conference raised an unprecedented mediatic storm, from October 2013 to February 2014 (Caubet & Miller 2016, Miller 2016, Hall 2015, Schulthies 2014). Many people, including intellectual and political figures stand against this idea. On November 27th, a debate on the Moroccan TV Channel 2M between Nourredine Ayouch and the famous historian Abdallah Laroui was watched by 5 million people. During this media storm nobody seriously discussed which kind of *dārija* could or should be used as a medium of instruction in the first years of schooling. None of the efforts of the Zakoura Foundation to present literary Moroccan Arabic as a legitimate bridge that will help to create a convergent Arabic that combines *dārija* and *fuṣḥā* were heard, believed or considered irrelevant. For most of his detractors, Ayouch (as Benchemsi before him) is acting for the domination of French over Arabic; *dārija* is a Trojan horse that will reinforce the prestige of the foreign languages.

In 2015, the polemic continued within the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation* (CES). CES' main function was to write a strategic report to be presented to the King that will define the new educational policy. According to numerous press releases, CES members (nominated by the King and including N. Ayouch) did not agree on the place of *dārija* in schools. This lack of agreement is said to have caused serious delay in the writing of the final strategic report. Last press releases in September 2015 indicated that opponents to teaching in *dārija* finally succeeded to kick out the suggestion from the strategic report.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

*Dārija* is definitely making its ways in various spaces of expression, communication and artistic creation. Its diversity in terms of dialectal varieties, registers and styles makes it a powerful tool of expression at both the oral and written level. The success of a number of Moroccan Facebook or Youtube links attract-

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17 A first draft was presented in February 23th 2015 to the King but not made public. See [http://www.aufait.ma/2015/02/25/langue-arabe-un-collectif-veut-la-tete-de-belmokhar\\_638522](http://www.aufait.ma/2015/02/25/langue-arabe-un-collectif-veut-la-tete-de-belmokhar_638522) and <http://www.panorapost.com/la-darija-nouvelle-ligne-de-front-de-la-bataille-de-leducation-nationale>.

ing million viewers by circulating cartoon using youth *dārija* slang attests the powerful attraction of *dārija* (see for example the case of Bouzebbal in Ziamari & Barontini 2016).<sup>18</sup>

Mixed with *fushā*, *dārija* contributes to the expressivity of Arabic in more formal levels and creates a feeling of proximity with the Moroccan public. It is more and more closely associated with Moroccan patriotism in songs, political motto and political discourses, and on web sites.

But, at least for the time being, its standardization and institutionalization as a Moroccan official language is not perceived as a social and political priority by what seems to be a large portion of the population. The reasons for such reluctance are many. It can be attributed to the weight of the traditional language hierarchy supported by the traditionalist and pan-arabist political intelligentsia who cannot imagine the rupture with *fushā*. It can be also understood for very pragmatic reasons. The failure of the Arabic public educational system to provide economic opportunities for the young Moroccan graduates is deeply internalized by most Moroccan Youth people and their parents (Boutieri 2016). They are deeply convinced that opportunities are provided by the mastery of international languages such as French and English. They fear that the teaching of Moroccan Arabic will not ameliorate their situation but rather worsening it. Finally the idea that the gap between *fushā* and *dārija* is so wide that it became almost two different languages does not seem to be shared by the majority of the people who attended Moroccan Arabic schools, due to the fact that Moroccan Arabic is de facto very present at the oral level in schools (Boutieri 2016).

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18 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB7jSX-6200&ebc=ANyPxKqW4x580JhXw-YXRslrw\\_7qTFULYqENAw7b6O\\_w1lwVWSgVwmEFJ55Y4YDvePsc6IjAhjheplc6\\_fVIzV52UxK1E2IZrQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB7jSX-6200&ebc=ANyPxKqW4x580JhXw-YXRslrw_7qTFULYqENAw7b6O_w1lwVWSgVwmEFJ55Y4YDvePsc6IjAhjheplc6_fVIzV52UxK1E2IZrQ).

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## Morocco: An Informal Passage to Literacy in *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic)

*Dominique Caubet*

In this contribution, I shall deal with a recent development in keyboard-to-screen communication in *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic). I postulate that qualitative change is taking place and that we are now reaching a stage where a further step is being crossed, from the passage to writing and deciphering that took place from the early 2000s, to literacy proper.

From the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the new technologies have allowed a spontaneous passage to writing for a language variety that has not been codified. It was led by actors from civil society who, slowly but steadily, taught themselves to read and write in *dārija*, with a true D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) spirit. This writing is 'informal', in the sense of taking place in the 'informal sector', i.e. first, outside of state control or regulation, and second, with the 'coping' behaviour of individuals who take over when the institutions are absent (by 'coping' I mean taking responsibility and initiative at their level).

### The First Steps

In Morocco, it started within two different networks. One was the small circle of initiates who used *mIRC*,<sup>2</sup> an Internet Relay Chatting system for computers, from the end of the 1990s. The other started in 2001 with the use of SMS on mobile phones, and rapidly developed for a wider audience (see Caubet 2004). With *mIRC*, people learnt to chat in Latin script, the only option available on computers at the end of the 90s. It was later replaced by a more popular web-based instant messaging device, *msn* (*Windows Live Messenger*), through which people could chat for hours, connecting from cyber-café, since very few

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1 *DIY, Do It Yourself*, the attitude developed by the punk subculture in the 70's.

2 See <http://www.mirc.com> and for North Africa, see Berjaoui 2001 for Morocco and Babassi 2004 for Algeria.

could afford to buy a computer and have a connection at home; this went on from 2005 to 2010. Unlike Facebook, the early chat systems provided users with anonymity.

Mobile phones also gave people independence – especially girls, who could exchange text messages, whereas they were not allowed to go to cyber-café, which sounded like “cafés” in the eyes of their families. Even for those who were not fluent in reading French, mastering the Latin alphabet could be reinvested in writing short messages in *dārija* (see the case studied in Caubet 2004).

### *Dārija*: A Change in Practices and Status in the Civil Society

*Dārija* has undergone a drastic change in practices and status in the Moroccan emerging civil society, while the institutions completely failed to follow suit.

Practice first came in the form of a passage to writing on first-generation mobile phones in Latin script. This choice was not ideological, but practical, because the only available phones and computers at the time were equipped with French keyboards. In 2006, the same young people who wrote *dārija* in Latin script on keyboard-mediated exchanges, when given a pen, would instinctively write in Arabic script (see Caubet 2012). They would use a different script (Latin vs Arabic), whether they wrote on a piece of paper or on a keyboard. At the time, older people would either not be aware of – or despise – these practices.

Status came slightly later and was influenced by the development of these practices. Voices started to claim that *dārija* was a key element for the definition of a new Moroccan identity, being the language that unites all Moroccans. Such voices came from a social and cultural movement which emerged in the early 2000s and was compared to the Spanish *Movida*. *Nayda*<sup>3</sup> was the name given to a cultural effervescence that took place during the years 2005–2008.

However, the key year is 2003, when two dramatic episodes contributed to change the course of events: first, the arrest of 14 young heavy metal music lovers, their trial in February 2003, and the public mobilisation that followed; second, on May 16, seven simultaneous kamikaze fundamentalist bombings involving 14 youngsters from a neglected neighbourhood in Casablanca (Sidi

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3 *Nayda* is the active participle of the verb *naḍ* “to rise”; it was an expression used in youth language “it’s moving, it’s rocking”, and it became the name of the Moroccan *Movida* (see Caubet 2010b).

Moumen), causing the death of 33 people (apart from themselves), and leading to massive public questioning in Moroccan society. As a consequence, the 'legal' fundamentalists (the present Prime Minister's party, the PJD) disappeared from the political life for a whole year and brought a breath of freedom. This is when the underground movement started to grow on the public scene until it became a socio-cultural movement, and was heavily mediatized from 2006 (see Caubet 2007, 2008, 2010a and the documentary *Casanayda!*).<sup>4</sup> *Dārīja* played a central part in the artistic productions of this new music scene, and artists claimed that it was their language and that they were proud of it. *Dārīja* was a means to convey things in a more Moroccan way, to try and speak the language of the people.

The status of *dārīja* has changed radically in the last ten years: it had been associated with illiteracy, backwardness and was considered incompatible with education or progress. Now it has become trendy and modern, considered as *the* language capable of accompanying the *Nayda*. At the same time, fierce debates about the official use of *dārīja* in the schooling system have been going on since October 2013. This is in itself significant: while institutions seem to have rejected *dārīja* once again, the fact that the question has been raised and discussed at length is a sign of change.<sup>5</sup> One also should not underestimate the fact that the absence of an institution and official formatting may present an opportunity for boundless communicative freedom and creativity.

For writing in Latin script, techniques have been described (Benitez Fernández 2012, Caubet 2013, Moscoso 2009), noting variation in writing between 'scriptors' and even for the same writer. But over the years, people have taught themselves to write and to read (in that order), acquiring a high level of fluency that I wish to describe as a 'passage to writing'. The phenomenon is so important that it is mentioned in columns, like Zakaria Boualem in *Telquel* weekly by Reda Allali; on February 21, 2016, in a paper called "Zakaria Boualem et l'école en français,"<sup>6</sup> he writes:

Pendant que des commissions se penchent tous les jours, et que des théoriciens glosent, sur les choix stratégiques, des millions de Marocains, chaque minute, s'écrivent en *dārīja* avec des chiffres et des lettres parce qu'on refuse de normaliser ce qui devrait être notre langue.

4 A film written by D. Caubet, directed by F. Benlyazid and A. Mettour, Sigma, Casablanca 2007, in six episodes on youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRrT1zRzmFQ>.

5 For this debate, see Miller 2014 and Caubet & Miller 2016.

6 [http://telquel.ma/2016/02/21/zakaria-boualem-lecole-en-francais\\_1483687](http://telquel.ma/2016/02/21/zakaria-boualem-lecole-en-francais_1483687).



While commissions address and theoreticians gloss daily on strategic choices, millions of Moroccans, exchange every minute in *dārija*, using numbers and letters because (the authorities) refuse to normalize what should be our language.

Although it was technically possible to write in Arabic script from 2009, with the Facebook Arabic interface, it takes time to change practices. But when people do switch to using Arabic, they also undergo what I will term a ‘passage to literacy’. Thus, in 2014–2016, I observed a passage from the stage of plain writing and deciphering *dārija* to that of an ability to comprehend and express longer, elaborate, and even literary, texts.

### The Arabic Script: Literacy on Smartphones and Computers

For the general public and internet users, the passage to the Arabic script is recent and slow, simply because people find it difficult to type in Arabic. Nowadays however one can download an application that provides an Arabic keyboard for smartphones, which makes it easier. By the end of 2009, out of a million users, 85% used the French interface and only 6.5%, the Arabic one (Tancrez 2009). In 2012, the French interface had gone down to 76%<sup>7</sup> – and it remained at 75% in 2014,<sup>8</sup> with 7.2 million profiles; more recently, the use of Arabic went up: from 17% at the end of 2012 to 33% in 2014. The figures – adding up to more than 100% – show that a number of people use both French and Arabic interfaces.

By the end of 2009, 25 million mobile phone subscribers had sent 2.85 billion text messages.<sup>9</sup> The corresponding figures for 2011 were 36.5 million/over 5 billion SMS, and for 2013 42.4 million/over 11 billion SMS. Just a comparison and a reminder about the situation ten years previously, in 2003: the number of SMS was estimated at 550 million, for 7.3 million mobile phones (see Caubet 2004).

Internet penetration went up tremendously in one year, reaching 30% at the end of 2014, up from 17% in 2013.

7 For the 2012 figures, see <https://eplume.wordpress.com/2011/07/20/les-reseaux-sociaux-au-maroc-et-dans-le-monde-arabe-twitter-facebook-statistique-etude-du-printemps>.

8 The last available figures are for 2014: <http://www.usinenouvelle.com/article/les-marocains-toujours-accros-a-facebook-mais-retifs-a-twitter.N272945>.

9 All the following figures are taken from the annual reports of the ANRT, and can be found at [anrt.ma](http://anrt.ma).

TABLE 5.1 *Nb of SMS / Nb of mobile phones – D. Caubet from ANRT figures*

Year (end of)	Number of mobile phones subscribers	Number of SMS issued
2003	7.3 million	550 million (estim.)
2009	25 million	2.85 billion
2011	36.5 million	5 billion
2013	42.4 million	11 billion
2014	44.1 million	19.7 billion

With the development of Arabic keyboards on smartphones and computers, people started using the Arabic script, but less so than Middle Eastern countries; while Morocco had reached 33% of the Arabic interface on Facebook at the end of 2014, Egypt already had 60% in May 2012.<sup>10</sup>

Recent figures give 12 million Facebook subscribers in Morocco in June 2016, with a 35.5% penetration rate for Facebook (See table 5.2 below).

To switch from a system of writing you master to another one, you need to have a strong motivation: either you find it easier to write in Arabic, or there are new technical possibilities (Arabic interface for Facebook and Arabic keyboards on smartphones), and your social network (your friends) is also switching to Arabic. But it may also be that you have made a political decision to write in *dārīja* in Arabic script, because this is how your message will be conveyed to a maximum of people who are not really at ease reading Standard Arabic or French. Another reason, more political, is the idea of access to the people, in a post-'Arab spring' climate. The writers I interviewed are convinced that if you want to reach the people, you must write *dārīja* in Arabic script, and this is what they have decided to do when posting on Facebook or when writing longer texts on a blog. They write in *dārīja* for the following reasons: in order to be understood; because it is rich and authentic (*hit ġanya u ašila*), because it is very powerful (*qwiya*); because you cannot lie to the people by using *luġhat l-khashab* (< Fr. "langue de bois", i.e. political cant).

10 See <http://www.spotonpr.com/facebook-arabic-triumphs>: this is the last data available on the question and it has probably grown in Morocco in 2016.

TABLE 5.2 *Facebook penetration. Established with 2016 figures from Internet World Stats.*<sup>11</sup>

Country	Population (2016 Est.)	Facebook subscribers 30-June-2016	Facebook penetration rate (%)
Algeria	40,263,711	15,000,000	37.2
Egypt	90,067,793	32,000,000	35.52
Iraq	37,547,686	14,000,000	37.28
Lebanon	5,988,153	3,100,000	52.7
<b>Morocco</b>	<b>33,655,786</b>	<b>12,000,000</b>	<b>35.65</b>
Saudi Arabia	32,157,974	14,000,000	43.53
United Arab Emirates	9,266,971	7,700,000	83
Tunisia	11,134,588	5,800,000	52.1

Some of the authors I have been following for over two years had a link with the 20th February movement (#Feb20); not with the more politicized students who would use Standard Arabic, the language of politics, but with the *oulad chazb* of more popular origin. Some of them have been jailed on fallacious pretexts, like Mouad L'7aged who spent one year and eight months in jail over a period of three years,<sup>12</sup> or Mohamed Sokrate, a blogger who was sentenced to two years in June 2102;<sup>13</sup> a sign that shows how disturbing they were for the system. Others were members of the Feb20 *lejnat el-ibda3* (Creative Committee).

### New Literacy: Examples of Elaborate Texts

The idea of writing and reading in *dārija* has become commonplace and does not constitute a problem any longer in civil society. The general attitude is 'informality' and 'tolerance', and the absence of an official norm gives total

11 Figures for Africa and the Middle East: see <http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ma> and <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>.

12 From Sept. 2011 to Sept. 2014; for more information, see <http://www.npr.org/2012/01/06/144798285/rappers-imprisonment-tests-moroccan-reforms> and <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/17/el-haqed-morocco-hip-hop-revolutionary>. In January 2016, he asked for political asylum in Belgium, which he was granted in February 2017.

13 For more information, see <http://www.freearabs.com/index.php/society/81-stories/1073-jb-span-profile-jb-span-the-arab-bukowski> and Caubet forthcoming 2017.

freedom to the writers, as to which script to choose. No one is being reproached for his choice or for his spelling; everyone naturally understands the others without raising any issue.

What I present here is new material that I have been collecting since 2014; I witnessed a qualitative change in the texts published on the internet: writing of long elaborate prose texts in *dārīja*, passing from basic communication to literacy proper.

What is remarkable is the massive character of the process – which concerns millions of youths in Morocco, and in the Arab world – for languages without any official recognition, and whose status is given by the civil society and not by the state. I will present three authors: 1) rapper Mouad L7agd, 2) blogger Harabish and 3) slammer Mustapha Slameur (for a wider range of authors, see Caubet forthcoming 2017).

### *Mouad*

Mouad is a rapper, but in February 2015, he published two stories, “T7arbichat” number one and two,<sup>14</sup> where he writes about his memories of the first demonstration of February 20, 2011. The title comes from “*7arabich*”, i.e. the name the members of the *lejnat el-ibda3* (Creation Committee) of the Feb20 chose for themselves. We will also see texts by a close friend of his, who blogs under the name Harabish (see below).

In late 2015, Mouad decided to leave Morocco and come to Europe, because it was impossible for him to express himself there: well-known as he is, he had not been able to perform in a concert of his own; they were all banned. The only times he went on stage was when he was invited unannounced by fellow rappers, like L'Moutchou (Mobydick).<sup>15</sup> The general tendency is not towards solidarity with Mouad L7agd among rappers, and very often on the two-faced grounds that he is not a good rapper ...

In Belgium, he wrote more prose texts and on 13 February 2016, he announced the publication on his l7agd page: “Stay tuned for Mouad l7agd’s exclusive diary on goud.ma”:

ترقبوا مذكرات معاد الحاقه حصريا على كود

The series is published under the title “Men 3okacha l Molenbeek” (From Okacha to Molenbeek); the publication started on 18 February 2016 and came out regularly two or three times a week (parts 1 to 15).

14 Text 1 has 464 words, 2413 signs; *T7arbichat* means stories about *7arabich* guys.

15 See <https://www.facebook.com/lmoutchou/?fref=ts>.

من عكاشة الى مولنيك، مذكرات معاد الحاقد

With the present text, we are witnessing his first steps in the domain of writing.

This extract is the second part of *T7arbichat* number 1 (in bold the terms whose spelling will be discussed below):

كنقول مع راسي ليوما غيسالي هاد شي، خاصها تشعل خاصنا نغوتو، صاف مشا وقت  
السكوت والخوف، واحد لحضة نقر واحد خونا سميتو لحسين غادي نتعرف عليه من بعد  
وقال لواحد خونا كان كصور حبس التصوير وبدا كغوت 'والخزن يا طلع برا' وناس كتعاود  
من وراه، خونا مول لكاميرا مشا بحالو ودخلات واحد ختنا حتا هي بدات كتهضر ...

kangol m3a rasi lyoma gha ysali had ši, ḥaṣṣ-ha tše3l, ḥaṣṣ-na nghowwto,  
ṣafi mša wegt s-sokut w-el-ḥof; wa7ed l-le7ḍa neggez wa7ed ḥona smiyt-  
o le7sin, ghadi netez3rref 3li-h men be3d, o gal l-wa7ed ḥona kan kiṣowwer  
'7bes et-teṣwir!' o bda kighowwet 'O l-maḥzen yṭle3 berra!' o n-nas  
kat3awed men oura-h, ḥona mol l-kamira mša b7alo o deḥlat wa7ed ḥetna  
7ta hiya bdat kateḥder?

I said to myself, all this is going to end, it must stay lit, we must shout;  
the time of silence and fear has ended. And in an instant, a guy named  
Lhocine – whom I would get to know later – jumped up and he told a guy  
who was filming 'Stop filming!' and he started to shout 'Let the Makhzen  
leave!' and people repeat it after him; the guy with the camera went home  
and a girl came in, and she too started to speak.

واحد اللحضة كيبان لينا لبيشان وليكروات كتبرونشاو وتجمع تقريبا كلشي فالقنت ليسر ديال  
ساحة الحمام، أبدا صوت كتسمع شي حد كهضر، مشينا أنا وعشراني نشوفواش واقع، لقينا  
مجموعة ديال الناس حطو بيشان ودارين سلوم طالع فوقو واحد كهضر وملصقين واحد شارة  
واقبلا مكتوب فيها عشرين فبراير، ودارين واحد الدائرة مانعين بنادم يدخل ليها إلا مكاتنش  
ديك الشارة فكتفو ...

Wa7ed el-le7ḍa kayban li-na l-bigab (pick up) o l-mikruwat kitbranšaw (>  
*Fr. brancher*) o tejme3 tegriban kolši f-el-gent l-liser dyal sa7at l-7mam, o  
bda ṣot kattesme3 ši 7edd kihḍer; mšina ana o zešrani nšofo aš wa9e3,  
lgina mejmo3a dyal n-nas 7eṭto bigab o dayrin sellom ṭale3 fogo, wa7ed  
kihḍer o mleṣṣgin wa7ed šara wagila mektub fi-ha zo feb, o dayrin wa7ed  
d-dazira mângin bna dem ydḥel liha ila ma kanetš dik šara f-ктаفو ...

After a while, we saw the van and mikes being plugged in, and nearly everyone gathered on the left corner of the Pigeon Plaza, and a voice could be heard, someone speaking; I went with my friends to see what was happening, we found a group of people who had brought the van and put a ladder to climb on top, and a guy talking; they all had stuck badges that said 20 Feb, and they had formed a circle, forbidding people to get in if they were not wearing that badge on their shoulder ...

أواااه<sup>16</sup> أش هاد شي ... شكون هادو؟؟

أنا وعشراني بقا فينا لحال شكون هادو علاش يديرو بحال هكدا؟ شكون لي عطاهم الحق يهضرو بسميت شي حاجة؟ كيفاش نصبو راسهم قيادة علينا؟؟

Awwaaah, aš had ši ... škon hadu? Ana o žešrani bga fina l7al; škon hadu 3laš idiro b7al hakka? Škon lli 3ṭahom l7e9g yhedro b-smiyt ši 7aja? kifaš naḡo ras-hom giyada 3lina?

Heyyy, what's this? Who are these guys? We didn't like it, my friends and me ... Who are they? Why are they doing this? Who gave them the right to speak in the name of a movement? How did they find themselves ruling over us?

بدينا كنعوتو أنا وعشراني، معجبناش ديكور ... بدينا مطلعينا عليهم بالشعارات، هو ييجي لعندنا واحد خونا كان حتا هو داير شارة ...  
نكل من بعد إلا رشقات ليا ...

Bdina kanghuwwto, ana o žešrani, ma 3jebnaš d-dikor ... bdina mṭell3ina 3lihom b š-šizarat, howa yji l-3end-na wa7ed ḡona, kan 7ta howa dayr šara ...  
nkemmel men bezd ila rešgat lina ...

We started shouting, my friends and me, we weren't pleased with the situation, we started provoking them with their slogans, so one guy wearing a badge came up to us

I shall go on later, if it pleases us ...

16 Expressivity is also marked by duplication of letters in Arabic script.

He actually published a series of 23 texts between February and May 2016 on goud.ma.

### *Harabish*

Harabish, the author of the blog *حربشات من البعد الآخر 7arbichat men l-bozd l-aher* (“7arbichates”<sup>17</sup> from another dimension), is a very close friend of Mouad and he has engaged with him in artistic projects. He is present on several clips and has recorded a number of tracks with him since his 2014 album, *Waloo والووا* “Nothing”;<sup>18</sup> his voice is more on the reggae side.

Previously, he was trained as a blogger in Casablanca for a project entitled “Reinforcing the capacities of Arab bloggers and journalists for the promotion of Human Rights”, in 2013 by the Arab Institute for Human Rights,<sup>19</sup> a regional NGO based in Tunisia. His blog won one of the three awards presented on 14 December 2013 in Tunis. His idea was to blog in his own language, as Harabish puts it:

هد المدونة ديال وحد مبتدأ، التدوينات بالدارجة المغربية القصحة، كنتناقش مواضيع إجتماعية و سياسية و مواضيع اخرى لا علاقة، تقدر تعجبكم تقدر متعجبكمش الموهيم هو أنا عاجباني.

Had-el-mudawana dyal wa7ed mubtada2, t-tadwinat b-ed-dārija el-maġribiya el qaṣṣa, katna9ech mawaḍi2 ijtimaziya o siyasiya o mawaḍi2 ḥora la 3la9a, tegder te3jbek tegder ma te3jbek ch, el-mohimm howa ana 3ajbani.

This blog is the work of a novice; the entries are written in harsh Moroccan Arabic; it deals with social and political issues, and also with other subjects that have nothing to do with this. It may appeal to you and it may not appeal to you; anyways, what’s important is that it appeals to me.

17 Stories by a 7arabich, i.e. a member of Feb20 Creation committee.

18 See the tracks on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGFprugyoso>.

19 168 bloggers were trained coming from nine Arab countries from February 2012 to January 2014 by the Arab Institute for Human Rights; Harabish created his blog during the training and went on writing. In the following report, this training is developed; see particularly p. 4:

[http://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/UDF-RAS-10-369\\_Evaluation\\_Arab%20states.pdf](http://www.un.org/democracyfund/sites/www.un.org.democracyfund/files/UDF-RAS-10-369_Evaluation_Arab%20states.pdf).

The blog counts 29 texts (20,700 words). It has been running since 26 February 2013 and the last text was posted on 3 August 2015. When a new text is posted, it gets over a thousand readings, according to Harabish.

We'll present two extracts from a text called مشاهد (scenes),<sup>20</sup> where he makes abundant use of understatement, humorously stating in fous7a that nothing is true: "لا شيء حقيقي"

المشهد الأول:

دخل للكوميسارية، قصد البيرو ديال الشاف و كاليه (ملي الشاف شاف فيه بواحد الشوفة ديال شنو باغي؟)  
 - بغيت نديكلاري بالضيعة  
 الشاف: شنو ضاع ليك؟  
 - ضاعت شي حاجة سميتها وطن

El-mašhed l-uwwel:

Dħel le-l-komisariya, qšed l l-biro dyal š-šaf o gal lih (melli š-šaf šaf fih b wa7ed š-šofan dyal šno baği?)  
 – Bğit n-diklari (< Fr. déclarer) be-ḍ-ḍiy3a  
 Š-šaf: šno ḍa3 lik?  
 – ḍa3et ši 7aja smiytha "waṭan"

Scene one:

He went in the police station and went directly to the chief's office (when the chief gave him a look that meant: what does he want?)  
 – I want to declare a loss  
 The chief: What have you lost?  
 – What is lost is something named "homeland"

المشهد الثاني:

(مشهد: صامت، المكان: طوبيس عامر بزاف ولي واقفين كتر من اللي كالمسين)  
 - طلعات للطوبيس و بقات كتشوف فيه.

20 Published on 21 April 2015. The complete text counts 546 words.



- حتى هو بقا كيشوف فيها حيث عرفها، هي البنت لي عندو فلائحة الأصدقاء فالفايسبوك، ولي ديما كتكتب حول موضوع المساوات بين الرجال والمرأة وبلي راهم بحال بحال لي يدرو الرجال ديرو تاهي.

- مازال كتشوف فيه تاهي وحسات بلي ركة معاها بزاف و هو كيشوف فيها.

- تلف بزاف و مابقاش عارف شنو يدور.

- حسات بيه متوتر بزاف و مابقاش مرتاح.

- ما لقي ما يدور جبد كتاب من شكارتو وبدى كيقرا فيه باش مايقاش يشوف فيها وهي

كدير فيه شوفت المش الجيعان، باش ينوض ويخليها تكلس فبلاصتو حيث كين الزحام، و حيث غتعي بزاف حيث هي غير بنت.

El-mešhed t-tani:

(Mešhed: Samt, Imakan: ʔobis 3amer bezzaf o lli wagfin kter men lli galsin)

- ʔel3at le-ʔ-ʔobis o b9at katšof fih.

- 7ta howa b9a kayšof fiha 7it 3refha, hiya l-bent lli 3endo fel-lazi7at al-2asdi9a fel-faycebook, o lli dima katkteb 7awl mawdu3 el-mosawat bin r-rajel o le-mra o belli rahom b7al b7al, lli idiro r-rajel, tdiro ta hiya.

- ma zal katšof fih ta hiya o 7essat belli rekkez ma3ha bezzaf o howa kayšof fiha.

- tlef bezzaf o ma b9aš 3aref chno ydir.

- 7essat bih metwutter bezzaf o ma b9aš merta7.

- Ma l9a ma idir, jbed ktab men škarto bda kay9ra fih baš ma yeb9aš yšof fiha o hiya katdir fiha šofat el-mešš le-j3an, baš ynođ o yḥalliha tegles f-blašto 7it kayn ez-z7am o 7it 9at3ani bezzaf 7it hiya gir bent.

Scene two:

(Scene: silence; place: a very full bus where more people are standing than seating)

- She climbed on the bus and she kept staring at him.

- He too, started looking at her, because he knew her; she is the girl he has on his list of friends on Facebook, who is always writing about the subject of equality between man and woman, and that they are the same: what man does, she can do it too.

- She goes on staring at him because she felt that he is thinking of her and that he is staring at her.

- He was lost and did not know what to do.

- She felt that he was very tense and he was not at ease anymore.
- He did not find what to do, so he picked up a book from his bag and began to read, in order not to look at her anymore; she was giving him a hungry cat's look for him to get up and let her sit in his place, because there was a crowd, and it would take care of her, because she is a girl ...

Harabish sometimes posts long texts or extracts from his blog texts on his Facebook profiles on which he has nearly 5000 “friends”. He is a student and it is not always simple for him to connect, with very little means to do so.

### *Slam Poetry*

Slam Poetry or ‘Spoken Word’ is poetry in performance; it started in the 1990s in the United States with African-Americans poets who were explicitly following what the Beat Generation and the “Négritude” poets had done previously when they declaimed their texts.<sup>21</sup>

El Mssati, when he organized *Café Slam* in February 2015, gave a good definition of Spoken Word for young Moroccans using youth language and comparing it to rap:<sup>22</sup>

hint slam ra machi howa lketba, slam ra howa dek stoon lli, fech katkoun tale3 *open mic* o kat7awel t3aber 3la dek text lli nta katbo, o fech katbghi tsejlo, t9der tsemih *Spoken word. Poetry ... (his original spelling)*

because slam is not just writing, slam is that stuff where, when you go on stage for an Open Mic, and you're trying to recite that text that you wrote and when you want to record it; you can call it Spoken word. Poetry ...

He organized a *Thé Slam* in 2016,<sup>23</sup> and this is how he addressed the potential poets (original writing), and what were the languages at stake (sic: their original spelling):

Vas-y Parle.. B'dārīja TKLM personne ne te stopera ! Le Micro est ouvert pour tous ceux qui souhaite déclamer, partager leur poésie, leur texte et leur état d'ame en toute liberté loin de toute censure; que ça soit en darija, français, anglais ou meme bien japonais venez nous faire part de

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/brief-guide-slam-poetry>.

<sup>22</sup> For the complete text, see Caubet forthcoming 2017.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/1743195605924179>.

votre poésie. Nous vous donnons RDV le samedi 13 fevrier à l' Espace "Les Artistes" Rabat (Café-Restaurant).<sup>24</sup> (sic)

يلاه هدر ... تكلم تا حد ما غايجبسك! هادي هي الفرصة باش اي واحد باغي يعبر، يشعر و يشارك معنا الاحاسيس ديالو يديرها بكل حرية وبدون رقابة. بالدارجة، بفرونسي، بلوغلي وحتا بالجابونية، الي ميكرو مفتوح ليكوم. اجيو نهار السبت 13 فبراير لكافي Les Artistes باش تشاركو معنا الشعر ديالكوم!

Poets compete with intense emotion during public Slam sessions. This genre is very new in Morocco and is found more in the form of videos posted on internet than performed live, due to the lack of events. The languages used can be MSA, French but mostly *dārija*, sometimes with some codeswitching.

**Mustapha Slameur** is a former rapper who started very young in the late 90's under the name Steph Raggaman. He began slamming around 2012 and he was the first to publicize this art on the social networks where is very active. He regularly posts videos of slam texts on his youtube channel, *Le Slam de Mustapha*. In 2015 he initiated slam workshops at the Institut Français of El Jadida, the town where he works as a teacher. On his Facebook profile, he regularly posts long texts or very short videos giving his point of view, or defending street arts in general, and a street artist from Algiers in particular (January 16, 2016). He has texts in French, and more recently in Standard Arabic (because he aims at Francophone and Arab audiences), but the language he uses most naturally is *dārija*, which he calls<sup>25</sup> "*al-Magharibiya*; en référence au Maghreb. A la base on n'est pas des Arabes, mais des *Maghariba*, Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc", referring to the Maghreb and not just Morocco. And he adds, defining the language: "Donc forcément il y a des mots en français; une super grande ouverture sur l'espagnol".

24 Come on! Speak up, in Dārija, TKLM (talk), no one will stop you! The mike will be open to all those who want to declaim, to share poetry, their text and their state of mind in complete freedom, far from any censorship; whethet in Dārija, French, English, or even in Japanese, come and share your poetry. We'll be happy to meet you ... Transcription of Dārija: *Yallah, hder, tkellem, ta 7ad ma ġay7ebsek! Hadi hiya el-forSa baš ey wa7ed baġi ye3bber, yešre3 o yšarek m3ana el-7asis dyalo ydirha b-koll 7oriya o bidon ragba. B-ed-dārija, b-fronsi, b-longli o 7ta b-el-jaboniya, ila micro mefto7 likom! Aġio biha ssebt 13 febrayer l Cafė les Artistes baš tšharko m3ana š-še3r dyalkom.*

25 All the quotations come from an exchange we had on facebook messenger, 18 January 2016, mostly in French. "Initially, we're not Arabs, but 'Maghariba' (Maghribians)". "So inevitably there are French words; a great opening on Spanish".

*Slameur* claims the right to mix languages, because a) it is common in North Africa; and b) as an artist, who defines himself as a ‘rime hunter’: “Je suis un chasseur de rime. Entre arabe, *dārija*, espagnol ou français, Je me sers. La sonorité prime et les mots ont une charge *f* le sens spécial qui donne forcément un punch aux phrases.”<sup>26</sup> He also uses English (see below). When he reads out his texts, this mixing is extremely well-done and sounds perfectly natural, and very dramatic as is the habit with Slam. He does not publish his texts apart from the videos. The lyrics have to be found on internet and for the title chosen here, it was published by Don Badr.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, we will examine the way this person writes *dārija*.

Slam is by definition ‘spoken word’ and, unlike the previous texts, it is not meant to be read. I am including it as a form of elaborate text, composed by an author. Apart from Mustapha, young artists have emerged in 2014 or 2015, like Hamza El Mssati (whom we saw above) or girls, like Salma and Loubna, who post videos regularly.<sup>28</sup> I chose to give long extracts of a text.<sup>29</sup> It is the first of a series called ‘Taire-bouche’<sup>30</sup> (a word play with the Moroccan word *terbuš* “Fez, brimless cap”, and the French ‘Taire bouche’ [lit. hush up-mouth]) – a collaboration with three other authors who are rappers, L’Morphine, Mehdi Black Wind and Magma (published in September 2014, counting over 251.000 views in February 2016). Mustapha speaks against injustices, corruption, the lack of social equality, the lack of trust in politicians, etc.; all these themes are also present in some rap texts (see Caubet 2010b). His motto, printed on T-shirts, is self-explanatory: *kedbou zlina ... كذبوا علينا* “they lied to us”. This is an extract of Mustapha Slameur’s piece; I must thank Mustapha for the help he gave me for the translation:

26 “I am a rime hunter. I help myself to Arabic, Darija, French, Spanish. The sound has priority and gives words a load in a special sense, and it inevitably adds some punch to the sentences.”

27 The lyrics, as published by Don Badr, count 420 views: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4afbLTUIS2Q>.

28 For Salma Slameuse, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPDn\\_JSNnTs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPDn_JSNnTs); for Loubna La Slameuse, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKo\\_WSmJChU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKo_WSmJChU), where we get a glimpse of her note book, which shows that she writes *Dārija* by hand in Latin script; for Mssati, see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whsj-1EX\\_jl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whsj-1EX_jl), *Slam f Dlam* “Slam in the Dark”, with the lyrics in Latin script.

29 For more extracts see Caubet forthcoming.

30 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIMzuCoUAQ4> and <http://qgprod.com/2014/09/mustapha-slameur-feat-lmorphine-magma-mehdi-black-wind-taire-bouche>. The text has 545 words in Arabic script and 62 lines.

تمنيت علام ما كايفيكسيك تا حد بعينه مكيتمخوش الناس فالزناقي.  
 كولشي مديها فسوق جواه مبلي بحابقو وليهم ساقى.  
 فهاد البلاد مواتنا مكيجهومش لـ baby blues  
 مكين غا ولد ولوح للشارع نفخ الباقل غير باللوز  
 فهاد البلاد بغاوك تشفر وتبيع زريعة القنب  
 واخا كلشي كايهضر بالدين دماغ راه مجنب  
 فهاد البلاد الشباب موضر فعالم اقتراضي  
 عايش ف Sharapova-string قالك قاضي عليك غراضي  
 كولشي خوتي باغي لـ Ferrari فل bleu ciel-  
 That's what I need

I wish for a world where people do not stare angrily at each other, where  
 they do not spit aggressively at each other in the street,  
 A world, where everyone minds his own business and cultivates his  
 garden.  
 In this country, our mothers don't have time to experience the "baby  
 blues",  
 All you do is give birth and throw him on the street and (for men) swell  
 your balls by eating almonds.  
 In this country they want you to steal and to sell chips at the corner  
 Even if everyone talks about religion, the minds are filled with sins.  
 In this country, the youth is lost in a virtual world,  
 Living with "Sharapova's string", they don't care about the way she plays  
 (tennis)  
 Everyone, my friends, wants a sky "blue Ferrari"

Je m'en fous \_phone فل Need for speed فكاك الحديد..  
 نص حياتو دايزا نعاس ... النص لاخور Candy Crush  
 James Dean ولى علاء الدين لمن غايشبه (متصرطأش)  
 فهاد البلاد بنادم موضر وخا عندو GPS  
 صافي surfé على لـ l'buzz د وشري باين و TPS  
 مرحبا بيكم كاملين ف قلبان la fista social club كلشي لوش

حيث بنادم فمو خنز بالكذوب وخصوصاً bain bouche  
 الفقيه ... الفقيه لي كنتسناو براكتو دخل للجامع بالحذاء  
 أش كنتسناو من chromosome مطورش غير في الإفتاء.  
 حيث حنا لي فينا العيب بقينا كنعطيو لـ César كاع دا كشي لي بغا César  
 ناض هز المانطا والحخاف وجر علينا ليزار

“Need for speed” (a video game) on my “phone, I don’t care” I’ve driven  
 nearly every type of car.

Half his life was spent sleeping, the other half playing “Candy Crush”,  
 “James Dean” or Ala’ Eddine, who will he choose to be? (I can’t swallow  
 this!)

In this country people are lost even if they have a “GPS”

Just “surf on the wave of the buzz” and buy Bayn and “TPS”

Welcome to you all to the “turn around” your “Vista<sup>31</sup> social club”,  
 everything is weird (Fr. louche)

People’s mouths smell bad because of the lies, they need “a mouthwash”.

The fqih ... the fqih, whose benediction we are waiting for, entered the  
 mosque with his shoes

What can you expect from a “chromosome” who only educates by way of  
*fatwas*?

Because what is forbidden to us, we keep giving it a “César”,<sup>32</sup> everything  
 that needs a “César”

He (a politician) got up and took the election signs and posters, and he  
 stripped us of our sheets (and blankets)

L’arriviste عد العين كيف ديما مخرج اللوائح السارة.  
 L’cravate جاتوزازاة واهاه ... من البيصارة لـ carbonara  
 ساكن فواحد الدرّب مكيوصلهش لـ pizza د livreur  
 ضارب gitone فدار لاما الصاكا الصفرة  
 حيث موالفين تانديرو hashtag بالجنتوي فالدلاح.

31 Word play between *gelleb el fista* “turn your jacket around”, i.e. “change your mind”, and  
 (*Buena*) *Vista Social Club*.

32 The “Césars” are the equivalent of the Oscars in France.

يعز المرء أو ييهان مع الثلاثة ديال الصباح فالملاح.  
 كايين الرجال وكايين les chiens toute la vie ديريه خاتم بين يديك.

The “arrivist” (social climber) looks very nice, as usual, and the posters are well printed  
 The “tie” suits him nicely, wow ... from “bisara” (“broad-pea soup”, the poor man’s meal) to “Carbonara”  
 He lives in a street where the pizza “delivery guy” does not set foot  
 He set up a “tent” in Dar El Amane, near the yellow kiosk<sup>33</sup>  
 Because we are used to publish a “hashtag” when we set a knife in the watermelon  
 He is a tough guy, but it is impossible to visit the Mellah<sup>34</sup> at three in the morning.  
 There are men, and there are “dogs for life” wearing a ring in their hands  
 ...

Although spoken word is meant to be performed orally, it goes through a phase where it is written down, either on paper or on a keyboard by its author before it is read aloud. Its poetic texts are considered elaborate and pertain to literature.

### Remarks on the Spelling of *dārija*

The spelling of *dārija* differs from one author to the other, but they are many more points in common than there are differences. Mouad l7a9d, for example, has a much more phonetic approach than Harabish and Don Bader, who wrote down Mustapha Slameur’s text.

### *Regularities*

the texts are not vocalized and bear no diacritics: short vowels, germinations and assimilations are not written down

*prepositions f* and *b*, are attached to the following nominal group: “فهاد البلاد: in this country”.

33 In the popular neighbourhood of Hay Mohammadi in Casablanca; meaning that this the only way he can spend his holiday.

34 In the old medina of Casablanca.

### The spelling of /g/

The *g* is written گ, as is normally the case in Morocco whether it is etymologically a qaf: كآليه (*gal lih* “he told him”), or a jim: كآلسين , يكآلس (*galsin, yegles* “sitting, he sits”) (Caubet 1993 1:12).

### The future particle

The future particle in *dārija* is غادي *gadi*.<sup>35</sup> It is often reduced to *ga*, leading to the same question as for the preverb *ka-* (see below); *ga-* can be spelled غ or غا. The most common spelling is the short form:

- Mouad uses the full form: غادي نتعرف عليه *gadi netzerref 3lih* “I will get to know him”; and the reduced one: غيسالي *ga-ysali* “it will end”.
- Harabish uses the reduced form: غتعي *ga-tezya* “she will get tired”.
- Mustapha Slameur’s text has it written it with an *alif*: لمن غايشبه *le-men ga yšbeh* “who will he look like?”

### Variation

There is variation in some points of phonology or morphosyntax where there is hesitation, and often the same scriptor is inconsistent in his choices, but never to the point of incomprehension or ambiguity.

### Assimilation

- The article

When the first consonant of the noun is “solar”, it is assimilated to the “l” of the preceding article, and is perceived as a gemination. the article can be elided: واحد الحضة *wa7ed-l-le7da* > *wa7ed le7da*; but in the next paragraph, it is written: واحد اللحضة (Mouad “a badge”)

Harabish also writes both ways; elided: واحد مبتدأ, and present: بوأحد الشوفة

In Mustapha’s text, the article is nearly always written الناس الشباب *en-nas, eš-šabab*, with the exception of دماغ (*d-dmag*)

ل

35 The active participle of an unused verb *\*gda* “to go”.



- The verb *gal* and its complement *li-h* are written as one word: *گاليه* (*galih* < *gal lih* Harabish); the final *l* of the verb and the *l*-preposition are assimilated, producing a gemination, thus written as one letter. This is extremely frequent on the web, in Latin script too: *galihom galik*

Mustapha's text has a similar case (see negation below): *ماكيو صلهمش* *ma-k(a)-y-wşel-li-h-ş* where the final "l" of verb *wşel* is assimilated to the preposition "l".

### *Treatment of interdentalals*

Etymological interdentalals realized in *dārija* as stops, are written phonetically, especially in the demonstratives: *هادو*, *هاد شي*, *هاد هكدا*.

In Harabish's texts as well: *هاد، حيث، الثاني* " "

In the slam text, the demonstratives are written as stops, but for the rest, there are some interdentalals (that are realized as stops): *فهاد البلاد*; in the following nominal group we have both: *هادي الثقافة*

There are other interdentalals, like: *الثلاثة* and Mustapha Slameur's motto, which is even printed on T-shirts and gives an idea of his position, is: "they lied to us": *كذبوا علينا*

### *The relative lli*

The relative *lli/elli*, is written in slightly different manners.

- Harabish writes it regularly in a simple form: *لي*; but curiously he writes the conjunction *melli* (> *men elli*), in an etymological (and complicated) way: *من اللي*, when *ملي* would be a much simpler solution ...
- Mouad writes is like Harabish: *لي*.
- In Mustapha's texts, it is regularly written with two "l": *للي*.

Both spellings are common in *dārija*.

The variation probably reflects a difference in style or in level of speech, Mouad's first texts being close to oral speech,<sup>36</sup> whereas the others are more elaborate, even in their writing, with literary ambitions; but, they are all constructed texts. All three of them are used to posting fairly long texts on their

36 As we saw earlier he is presently working on more elaborate texts in view of publication.

Facebook profile, where they express a point of view or comment an event. Mouad and Mustapha have smartphones from which they can write directly. When asked to read one of his texts, Mouad read it directly from his phone. Harabish writes on a computer.

They all have a long habit of reading and writing in *dārija*, and so have their numerous followers. On Facebook, the page *l7agd* has 52,000 followers, *Le Slam de Mustapha*, 16,000 followers. On Youtube, in February 2016, Mustapha has up to 785,000 views for *Chri Chri*, 255,000 for *Taire-Bouche* and over 125,000 for other slams. *L7agd* has nearly 2,000,000 views (11 February 2016), for the clip *Waloo*, on which Harabish sings with him.<sup>37</sup> Tracks from the *Waloo* 2014 album have from 125,000 to 792,000 views on youtube.

### A New Literacy or Just a Step Forward?

Whether it be in Slam or in elaborate prose texts, *dārija* is being used and accepted more widely and openly than ever in today's Morocco. The conservative government tried to impose an Arabization of TV programmes, launching a debate on the new Media "Book of technical Specifications" (Fr. "Cahier des charges"), among which the disappearance of French and the massive extension of the use of Arabic from 2012.<sup>38</sup> The TV channels (mostly 2M) cunningly translated "Arabic" into the massive introduction of "Moroccan Arabic", and developed what they had already started doing from 2009: the dubbing of Turkish and South American series in *dārija* (see Miller 2012b and Ziamari & Baron-tini 2013). They also used *darija* in magazines and programmes and in political debates.

### Conclusion

As early as June 2014, the journalist Reda Zaireg (2014) wrote a paper in the weekly *Telquel*, called "Tendance: *dārija*, langue littéraire" (A new trend: *dārija*, a literary language. A prison Journal, poverty and exploitation chronicles, memories of a prostitute ... texts written in *dārija* and posted on social networks are becoming a real literary phenomenon):

37 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dT4yOKnT52I>. See the tracks from the album *Waloo* by Okacha Family, Mouad's band: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkaZdJwJxhXqHoRtPLsqdtA>.

38 Initially it imposed 80 % of Arabic (and Hassaniya!) and 20 % of Amazigh for Al Aoula.

For a few months, writing in *dārija* has had the wind in its sails. With the help of the social networks, it has bypassed the traditional publishers who are reluctant to welcome *dārija*, managing to reach its audience directly.

Slam is meant to be performed and heard, whereas blogs and posts are meant to be read on screens. Long texts have to present enough interest – whether through their content or their form (aesthetic, literary) – to foster a desire to read. This reading goes beyond the stage of basic communication and has to be dealt with as *a novel passage to literacy*.

If “reading is the motivated and fluent coordination of word recognition and comprehension,”<sup>39</sup> how does one cope with rapid word recognition when there is variation in the spelling of lexemes and grammatical morphemes for a language – *dārija* – that has undergone an informal pragmatic D.I.Y. language-planning with no institution to standardize it? How does one acquire *fluency* when there hasn’t been any school-type learning and when you had to teach yourself to read? In the Moroccan case, this can only be done through practice and experimentation. Gunvor Mejdell (personal communication) suggests the use of the sociological concept of ‘*conventionalisation*’, through collective behaviour and repeated usage; youth read and copy from each other, so that separate actions have an impact on the community.

Together with its new visibility in the civil society, intense practice has led *dārija* to being written more and more naturally and profusely on Internet, resulting in the first strands of literacy. People are gaining security, fluidity and fluency in their handling of written *dārija*. For the kind of elaborate texts that I have examined here,<sup>40</sup> it would be interesting to confirm this hypothesis by the organisation of reading tests in order to study the speed of comprehension for completely unknown *dārija* long prose texts. Over the years, most connected Moroccans have reached a decisive stage where written expression and creation is at work and the exchanges have acquired a deeper dimension. The wave is moving fast with new authors trying out *dārija*; and among them, Ahlem B., who has been publishing short stories in French on her blog<sup>41</sup> and on Facebook since 2012. On 28 February 2016, she published the translation of the first story of character Sam Lgaouri in *dārija* written in Arabic script.

Another kind of elaborate text has appeared under the form of what the authors call “educative” videos that use *dārija* for extremely technical and legal

39 See <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-reading>.

40 Also see Caubet forthcoming 2017.

41 “Ahlem B. vous raconte de folles histoires” on <http://www.ahlemb.com>.

explications on societal problems. A site like *Aji Tfham* (An educative Site)<sup>42</sup> tackles a question – like the banning of VoIP communication:<sup>43</sup> their video is a scientific demonstration in *dārija*, with fast and precise diction; drawings, words or expressions in Arabic script in *dārija* (MSA or French when necessary for technical reasons), and long extracts of legal texts in MSA can come to illustrate. In an eight minutes' video, the issue is dealt with and made clear to every citizen: a performance ... in *dārija*!

But is there, or should there be, an ambition to move into the publishing world? Can literacy on keyboards and screens be exported to printed paper and books? These texts are only published on the internet for the time being. Some authors dream of a printed version, a book, which would give a different social status to their writings; but is the world of publishing ready to cross the (language) barrier? And anyway, Internet offers a much wider audience than could ever be given to a book in Morocco.

Is this kind of practice the gateway in the process of promoting a standard variety, even when the language has no recognition? It is felt as a necessary passage by the authors in their wish to express themselves and share their feelings on screens; they produce long writings in *dārija* without thinking about their status or their potential role, but as a natural but decisive step in the promotion of their language, *dārija*.

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42 "Try and understand, Educative internet site": <https://www.facebook.com/AjiTfham/?fref=ts>, Mustapha Swinga.

43 VoIP communication was blocked the Moroccan National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ANRT) in February 2016. *Aji Tfham* video has over 250,000 views (accessed 18 Oct. 2016): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL3-8epu8USDASNYWS3VwS6RIL\\_Ddg6Ar&v=Qt-VS9aebHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL3-8epu8USDASNYWS3VwS6RIL_Ddg6Ar&v=Qt-VS9aebHg). VoIP was finally restored in November 2016 on the occasion of Cop 22 in Marrakech.

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## *Adab sākhir* (Satirical Literature) and the Use of Egyptian Vernacular

*Eva Marie Håland*

There were few, if any, bookstores in Cairo that did not, in 2013, have a section designated to a category of books labelled *adab sākhir*. Their titles play on humor and familiar Egyptian references; they are often in the vernacular – *‘āmmīyya* – and sometimes repeated in ‘Franco-Arabic’. In 2014, I was told that *adab sākhir* was a popular genre in the years leading up to the 2011 revolution, and right after it, but that there seemed to be a growing interest for different types of novels.<sup>1</sup> The new wave of *adab sākhir* in Egypt did perhaps reach a ‘peak’ a few years ago, as Jacquemond (2016:356) reports that it meets competition from other “genres of ‘popular’ literature” such as romance and horror.

Nonetheless, the (re)emergence of this genre and the tendency for it being written entirely or partly in the vernacular is worth some focus. In this chapter, I will present some ways in which the Egyptian vernacular (*‘āmmīyya*) and Standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) are used in *adab sākhir*, based on 21 books published between 2011 and 2014, as well as some motivations for using *‘āmmīyya*, as presented by writers. First, we will take a look at what lies in the label which these books have been given.

### *Al-adab al-sākhir*

The notion *adab sākhir* appears to have come in use relatively recently, although Jacquemond argues that this type of literature has “ancient roots” (2008:155). He translates *adab sākhir* with ‘satirical’ (2008) or ‘satiric’ literature (2016), whereas Woidich (2010:81) uses the translation “satirische” or “sarkastische Literatur”. In his article about medieval satire in Arabic literature, van Gelder (1998:693), says that “[t]here is no exact equivalent in Arabic for ‘satire’” and “[t]o some extent, therefore, speaking of satire in Arabic literature is to

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1 Muṣṭafā al-Faramāwī, Purchasing Manager of Shorouk Bookstores, personal interview, April 2014, Cairo.



impose a Western concept on a tradition that has its own system of modes and genres". Van Gelder speaks of *sukhrīyya* as "derision", and that *sukhrīyya* and *tahakkum* "may be found as the nearest term for 'irony'", although he points out that there is no equivalent for irony in Arabic literature either. This being said, van Gelder (1998:693) does say that "there is a considerable body of classical Arabic texts that may be called satirical."

Until recently, *adab sākhir* has not received much attention from scholars or critics. According to Jacquemond (2008:155), this is because it is "too hybridized to interest the folklorists and too 'low' to retain the interest of the legitimate criticism". He describes it as a kind of literature that "has an uncertain status somewhere between fiction and nonfiction, journalism and literature, and writing and orality" (Jacquemond 2008:155).

The Egyptian scholar Nabil Rāghib (2000) explains *sukhrīyya* as follows (2000: 13):

*Sukhrīyya* in literature is the element that contains a dramatic mixture of criticism (نقد), derision (الهجاء), allusion (التلميح), insinuation (اللماحية), mockery (التهمك) and funmaking (الدعابة), for the purpose of exposing a person, concept, idea or whatever, and laying it bare by throwing light on its cracks (ثغرات) and its negative and deficit aspects. Thus, the primary goal of *adab sākhir* is correctional (تصحيحي), either on the moral (أخلاقي) or aesthetic (جمالي) level, and it differs in tone and manner from all other ways of expression that aim to reject, condemn or belittle the subject targeted by the writer or speaker.

The definition of 'Satire' provided by Britannica Online Encyclopædia (Elliott 2007) does not differ substantially from the one provided by Rāghib:

Satire, artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.

Rāghib (2000) explains that there is a difference concerning the notion *adab sākhir* as a comprehensive notion (مفهوم شامل), and *sukhrīyya* as a literary device. He claims that "when *sukhrīyya* becomes the fundamental element in the content, the spine for the events and scenes, then the work joins under

the banner of *adab sākhir*" (Rāghib 2000:9). He goes through the centuries and dynasties in which satirical poets have used *sukhrīyya* in poetry, and the blooming of the 'satirical press' that started in the end of the 19th century, with Ya'qūb Ṣannū' (1839–1912) and 'Abdallāh al-Nadīm (1845–1898) playing important roles. After the 1952 revolution, however, satirical writing almost disappeared in Egypt, due to a climate where criticism of the leader was much less tolerated (Rāghib 2000:37):

*sukhrīyya* disappeared, or almost, from the pages of the newspapers and magazines. It became limited and directed at those people whom the leader (الزعيم) attacked in his speeches, or in his guidelines (توجيهات) to the media leadership. The satire no longer came from the thoughts and conscience of the writer, but rather became state-directed (موجهة), as any other political or commercial activity, so it lost its brilliance, sharpness and cheerfulness. The writers knew very well that whoever makes his satire cross fixed and drawn borders, in front of him is nothing but prison, expulsion or at the best prohibition from writing. The space for satire faded out (تضاءلت) from the pages of the newspapers and magazines until only scattered fragments from Maḥmūd al-Sa'danī, Aḥmad Bahgat and Aḥmad Ragab was left.

Referring to the 'big' writers within *adab sākhir* in Egypt, the names that generally come up are precisely Aḥmad Ragab (1928–2014), Maḥmūd al-Sa'danī (1928–2010) and Aḥmad Bahgat (1932–2011), as well as Galāl 'Āmir (1952–2012), Muḥammad 'Afifi (1922–1981) and 'Abbās al-Aswānī (1925–1977). The term *adab sākhir* was perhaps coined during their period of writing: the earliest use of the term that I have come across, is by Luwīs 'Awaḍ in his foreword to Aḥmad Bahgat's (2009) *مذكرات زوج* (Memoirs of a husband), which was probably published in its first edition in the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Here, 'Awaḍ claims that *al-adab al-sākhir* is the 'legitimate son' of *adab al-hijā'*,<sup>3</sup> and the 'cousin' of *al-adab al-fukāhī* (humorous literature) (Bahgat 2009:6). The first direct labelling (on the cover) of a publication as *adab sākhir* that I have found is a 1997 edition of the book *بشرة ٤٠٠ تحتمس* (Thutmose 400 with a hyphen)<sup>4</sup>, also by Aḥmad Bahgat.

2 The 2009 edition informs that the third edition was published in 1986.

3 Invective or satirical poetry.

4 From the bus-system in Egypt where a stroke (*sharṭa*) through the bus number indicates a variation in the route (see Badawī and Hinds 1986, ش ر ط).

### *Adab sākhir* and the Vernacular

Some of the early works that Rāghib mentions have been written at least partly in the vernacular, such as *زهة النفوس ومضحك العيوس* (The Pastime of Souls, Bringing a Laugh to a Scowling Face) by Ibn Sūdūn and Yūsuf al-Shirbīnī's *هز القحوف في شرح قصيد أبي شادوف* (Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abū Shādūf Expounded).<sup>5</sup> Big parts of the satirical newspapers were also written in the vernacular,<sup>6</sup> although not without controversy. According to Fahmy (2011:34), “[a]lmost all the colloquial content of these newspapers was satirical or humorous, primarily because the everyday vernacular was more suited to comedy and satire than Fusha”. *Fuṣḥā* was “considered too serious for effective satire” (Fahmy 2011:81). However, ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm was not an advocate of introducing *‘āmmīyya* for written purposes, but was rather concerned with education and political agitation (Woidich 2010).

From a look at a small sample of 6 *adab sākhir* publications from 1980s and 90s, two by Aḥmad Bahgat, two by Aḥmad Ragab and two by Maḥmūd al-Sa’danī, I have not found any noteworthy use of *‘āmmīyya* in the narrative parts, only in dialogues and proverbs. (However, in Rosenbaum’s (2000) article about the *Fuṣḥāmmīyya* style, he gives an example from the writings by al-Sa’danī). A closer look at these satirical writers’ language is necessary to understand better the relationship between satirical writing and use of *‘āmmīyya*.

### *Adab sākhir* Today – Satire or Pure Humour?

The *adab sākhir* books in my study focus on different aspects of Egyptian society: as several were published not long after the 25th of January revolution, it is an important subject, or at least receives some attention, in several of the publications. Another popular issue is the relationship between man and woman, and challenges with regard to finding a suitable match, and after finding it, spending everyday life with him or her, and perhaps adding another wife to the family.

In one way or another, all these books address challenges or peculiarities of the Egyptian society in a humorous way. Some of the issues raised are sensitive, and perhaps even taboo, and referred to as difficult or unsuitable to discuss in

5 See Davies (1981, 2000, 2005) and (Doss and Davies 2013).

6 See Zack (2014) for a description of use of the vernacular in Abu Naḍḍāra Zar’a.

'serious writing' (*kitāba gādda*). Authors then choose to take to *adab sākhir*, where they can, as the 'satirical writer' Īhāb Mu'awwad puts it, "wrap the serious subject in some nice paper and humour (*damm khafif*)" (Mu'awwad 02.09.2014).

Although *adab sākhir* has become the established label, some prefer *kitāba sākhira*, (satirical writing), rejecting it having the status of *adab* (literature). As Woidich (2010:83) mentions, there appears to be a common point of view among critics and publishers that much of what is published now is not 'real' *adab sākhir*. In an article in the magazine *Rūz al-Yūsuf* (Lu'ay 18.10.2009), several persons from the literary field comment on the blooming of *adab sākhir* literature, making statements such as the following by Muḥammad 'Iliwa:

The books that are published now, and on whose covers they write '*adab sākhir*', most of them do not belong to the *adab sākhir* at all, but are rather an insult to it (إساءة له)

The critic Aḥmad Darwīsh says that "real satirical writing is a kind of good literature that people need in certain periods in history, as a kind of safe opposition". He also calls *adab sākhir* "a refined and legitimate literary genre". At the same time, Darwīsh says that "what we see now, is false (زائفة) satirical writing". Authors and publishers are accused of taking advantage of the renewed popularity of the genre, and for using the label for texts that do not qualify for it. Darwīsh's perception of *adab sākhir* being a type of literature that is needed in certain periods seems to be shared by several in the literary sphere of Cairo;<sup>7</sup> it is claimed that the recent social and political situation in Egypt has created a need for light and humorous literature where criticism can be expressed in a somewhat disguised manner.

The publisher and novelist Makkāwī Sa'īd, on the other hand, although not in favour of publishing *adab sākhir*, sees one bright spot with the new trend. He thinks that as long as it is popular and encourages people to start reading, it can serve the role as the first step on a reading ladder.

On the website *بص وطل* (See and look) (14.11.2010), four contemporary writers referred to as 'satirical writers' are interviewed: Bilāl Faḍl, 'Umar Ṭāhir, Muṣṭafā Shuhayb, and Tāmīr Aḥmad. Faḍl and Ṭāhir say that they are not in favour of labelling literature as *sākhir* or not *sākhir*. According to Ṭāhir, the

7 As was discussed in a seminar entitled موجات الانحسار و صعود الأدب الساخر .. (Satirical literature ... waves of decline and rise) at Cairo International Book Fair 2015.

readers have constructed a ‘trap’ (غ), by expressing that *sākhir* is what they want, making writers twist their arms to produce what the readers ask for. Shuhayb and Aḥmad see that there are two types or schools within satirical writing: “laugh(ter) (ضحك) for the purpose of laughter, and laughter in order to achieve a goal (الضحك لتحقيق هدف), and that is the difference, whether laughter is the goal or the means”. Muṣṭafā Shuhayb’s comment is in line with Tāmir Aḥmad’s: “[...] one school that deals with societal issues and uses satire (سخرية) as a tool to discuss phenomena and problems, and another school that uses satire just for the satire. I think it depends on the humor (الإفيه) more than subject, and that its goal is entertainment”.

It appears that the notion *adab sākhir* today is used to describe humorous texts, whether satirizing and moralizing with a correctional goal, or simply ‘lighter’ humour, where the goal is solely entertainment, unlike earlier, when negative aspects of society were always the target of satire. Guth (forthcoming 2017) suggests that “the most adequate rendering of the emerging generic term ‘*adab sākhir*’ is perhaps ‘carnavalesque literature’ or ‘subversive literature’”. Jacquemond suggests a “more nuanced reading”, as “oscillating between reformism and subversion” (2016:359).

### The Material

Through a larger research in progress where I analyse language pattern choices in a comprehensive, but random sample of books published between the years 2011 and 2014 by Egyptian authors, it is clear that the books classified as *adab sākhir* distinguish themselves from novels and short story collections in containing larger amounts of *‘ammīyya*.

The classification of the books as *adab sākhir* in this study is based on ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ labelling of the books: The books that are ‘directly’ labelled have the label *sākhir*, *maqālāt sākhira* (satirical articles) or (*min*) (*al-*)*adab sākhir* on the cover, colophon or title page.<sup>8</sup> The books that are ‘indirectly’ labelled may be described as *kitāb sākhir* on the back cover text.<sup>9</sup> They can also be indirectly labelled in the text itself, such as in *إشتري مني* (Buy from me), where a hypothetical person asks Du‘ā’ Fārūq (2012:10):

8 al-‘Isīlī (2011), Ḥasan (2011), ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (2013), Aḥmad (2012b), al-Inkishārī (2012), Ma‘āṭī (2013).

9 Shuhayb (2013), Galāl (2013).

حاشرة نفسك ليه بقى فى الكتب والأدب الساخر والجوده؟

Why do you get yourself into books and *adab sākhir* and those things?

Or such as by Shādī Aḥmad (2013:27) in *مصر لا مؤاخذه*, in his list of advice on what to do when bored or sad:

جيب كتب ساخرة .. للكاتب شادي أحمد، وبالذات الحاجة دي هتفرحك قوي، وتفرح الكاتب، وهيدعيلك وهبخلي والدته تدعيلك (ومن قدم شيء بيده التقاه).

Get hold of satirical books ... by the writer Shādī Aḥmad, and that in particular will make you very happy, and make the writer happy, and he will pray for you and let his mother pray for you (give, and you will receive).

Some books are not labelled *adab sākhir* neither in the text or paratext; they may, however, be featured or referred to as such, e.g. on the book-site Goodreads, in author interviews, on Facebook or other arenas where the book is promoted.<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that some of the authors of these books try to avoid categorization, as *adab sākhir* or as anything else, and that they may not agree to the label their book is given.<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to text types, the *adab sākhir* books of this decade do not represent one specific text type. They are hybrid and diffuse, reminiscent of Elsadda's (2010:328) description of literary blogs: they

defy generic classification: they are invariably a *mélange* of diaries, memoirs, autobiographical stories, to-do shopping lists, political manifestos, reflections, epistolary narratives, short stories and novels.

The *adab sākhir* publications in the corpus also contain articles (*maqālāt*), and poetry, as well as graphic elements such as caricatures and photographs. For an analysis of the forewords (*muqaddimāt*) of some of these books, see Guth (2017 Forthcoming).

10 al-Barbarī (2012) is directly labelled *كتاب كوميدي ناثر* (Comical rebellious book).

11 See interview from *بص وطل* (See and look) referred to above.

TABLE 6.1 *List of corpus books*

Author and year	Title	Translation of title
Du‘ā’ Fārūq (2012)	إشتري مني	Buy from me
Muḥammad Nāgī (2013)	أشيك واد في شبرا	The chickest guy in Shubra
Aḥmad al-‘Isīlī (2011)	الكتاب الثاني	The second book
Muḥammad Galāl (2013)	الكتاب الأصفر	The yellow book
Jihād al-Tābi‘ī (2012)	الحب في زمن البوتكس	Love in the time of Botox
‘Abīr ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (2012)	الحب في زمن الكارينا	Love in the time of Carina <sup>12</sup>
Īhāb Mu‘awwaḍ (2012)	الرجال من بولاق والنساء من اول فيصل	Men are from Būlāq and women from the beginning of Fayṣal street
Shādī Aḥmad (2012b)	العريس: في رحلة البحث عن عروسة	The groom: on the journey to find a bride
‘Amr al-Inkishārī (2012)	أنا حقا أعترض <sup>13</sup>	I certainly object
Maḥmūd Ḥasīb (2012)	باط مان	Bat Man <sup>14</sup>
Muḥammad Ḥasan (2011)	تبييت	Bleep
Muṣṭafā Shuhayb (2013)	خيمة ٨	Tent no. 8
Tāmir Aḥmad (2012c)	دراع مرسي	Mursī’s arm <sup>15</sup>
Muṣṭafā al-Barbarī (2012)	سكر بره	Sugar on the side

12 Carina (كارينا) is an Egyptian bodywear brand for women, and has become a proprietary eponym referring to any type of bodywear for women (especially long sleeves and tights covering the skin).

13 The abbreviation of this title makes the swear-word *أحا*, which is used frequently in the text with reference to the title, but as *أح*.

14 The title is also a play on the word *باط* (armpit) instead of *بات*, which is the common way of transcribing “Batman”. The expression *تحت الباط* (under the armpit) is often used in the meaning “to control”.

15 From the play *مدرسة المشاغبين* (The School of Troublemakers).

TABLE 6.1 *List of corpus books (cont.)*

Author and year	Title	Translation of title
‘Abīr ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (2013)	سواقة بنات: أبو الليّ علمكوا السواقة	Girls’ driving: damn (father of) the one who taught you how to drive
Rihām Magdī (2013)	شعب آخر 25 حاجة كان وكان	A very 25th people, again and again <sup>16</sup>
Lubnā Imbārik (2013)	طاجن تورلي باللحمة	Stew with meat
Yūsuf Ma‘āṭī (2013)	لقد وقعنا في الفخ	We fell into the trap <sup>17</sup>
Shādī Aḥmad (2013)	مصر لا مؤاخذاة	Pardon me, Egypt <sup>18</sup>
Shaymā’ Ḥabīb (2013)	المعجم الوجيز في تلخيص البهاريز <sup>19</sup>	The concise dictionary of excerpting the essence
Dīnā ‘Ādil (2012)	ولاد البطة السودا	Children of the black duck

### Language Choices

العامية والفصحى هنا إيد واحدة، حبة عاميه عشان دي اللغة اللي بنحس بيها، وحبّة فصحي  
عشان أنت بتفهم، ولا إيه؟

‘*āmmiyya* and *fuṣṣhā* are here one hand, a bit of ‘*āmmiyya* because that is the language that we feel in, and a bit of *fuṣṣhā* because you understand, right?

AL-TĀBI‘Ī 2012:6

- 16 *ākhir ḥāga*, lit. transl. “last thing” is used as an intensifier carrying a strong meaning of “very”. 25 refers to the January 25th revolution, whereas “again and again” refers to that this is the second volume.
- 17 From the film *السفارة في العمارة* (The embassy is in the building).
- 18 *la mu‘akhza* translates “excuse me” or “pardon me”, but has numerous usages, amongst them is in combination with, or instead of, a curse or something inappropriate.
- 19 The title plays on the dictionary published by the Language Academy, and perhaps *تلخيص باريز الإبريز في تلخيص باريز* (A Paris Profile) by Rifā‘a al-Ṭaṭṭawī.



The play on the slogan from the 2011 uprisings signals that the reader should expect to find both varieties in the book. Except for three books that contain very little *fushā*,<sup>20</sup> this is the case for most of the books. However, use of both varieties is done in different ways and with different amounts of the two varieties. Some are written predominately in one of the varieties, the other variety being inserted only a few places as lexical items, clauses or paragraphs.

### 'Base' Varieties

In some of these publications, the 'base' variety is *‘ammīyya*, and *fushā* occurs only occasionally.<sup>21</sup> Al-‘Isīlī (2011:23) explains that maybe one third of his words are *fushā*, when he writes and perhaps also when he speaks:

When I use “فقط” (only) instead of “بس” (only), this does not mean that I have saved (أنقذت) the Arabic language, nor that I am more cultured (أكثر ثقافةً), or anything else but that “فقط” is, for me, a better word on that occasion (موضع), in that context ... or I use “بس” because, for me, it is a richer (أغنى) word, it has wider usage, and its sound is dearer to me (صوتها نفسه أحب إلى نفسي). There is no quarrel (خناقة) between the two words, they are both mine, and it is my right to use them both.

Al-Inkishārī (2012) also writes mainly in *‘ammīyya*, but he uses *fushā* when presenting different types of lists, such as lists of hypothetical newspaper headlines and list of 'advice and wisdom'.

The opposite distribution is also found: basically writing in *fushā*, but switching to *‘ammīyya* at some occasions.<sup>22</sup> In Ma‘āṭī (2013), one finds *‘ammīyya* in dialogues, but also occasionally in form of lexical items (or longer paragraphs of *‘ammīyya* in an otherwise *fushā* based text). Two recurring *‘ammīyya* discourse markers in this book are *باه* (so, then, however) and *برضه* (also, too).

In several parts of his book, Ḥasan (2011) uses *fushā* as the base variety, as well as some 'unflagged' use of *‘ammīyya*. There is, however, frequent use of 'flagged' (in parentheses) *‘ammīyya*, for example in an explanatory comment, such as the code-switching in the following example (Ḥasan 2011:40):

20 Nāgī (2013), Aḥmad (2012b) and Ḥabīb (2013).

21 al-‘Isīlī (2011), al-Inkishārī (2012) and al-Barbarī (2012).

22 Aḥmad (2012c), Ma‘āṭī (2013).

يعطيك المزيد من الهيبة والوقار والضخامة (محدث هيجاول يتخاقت معاك)

It gives you more awe, dignity and volume (*no one will try to fight with you*)

Most of Shuhayb's (2013) book consists of narrations about the happenings on January 25th 2011 and the following days. These narratives are mostly in *fuṣḥā*, but there is occasional occurrence of an unambiguous EA item, e.g.:

فكرت في فتاة أحلامي اللي لم أقابلها بعد

I thought about the girl of my dreams, *whom* I have not met yet

SHUHAYB 2013:43

### Code-Switching

'Inter-sentential' or 'alternational code-switching' i.e. "switching between stretches of speech belonging to one and the other code/language/variety" (Mejdell 2006:414) occurs in several of the analyzed books. Rosenbaum (2012:299) describes a literary device where switching between the varieties "reflect the characters' speech or thoughts in their own language and style". He refers to this device as "changing the point of view through the use of CEA". In the examples Rosenbaum gives, *āmmiyya* represents the speech and thoughts of characters or protagonist narrators. This type of switching is found frequently in my corpus. However, in the following examples of code-switching, *āmmiyya* does not represent a specific character's thoughts, but switching between the varieties appear to be a stylistic device emphasizing a sarcastic comment. In the first example, *fuṣḥā* (bold) mirrors a 'common saying' or advice, whereas *āmmiyya* (red) represents the author's sarcastic comment:

لا تترك والدتك تشاهد قنوات الطبخ.. لأنها كده كده هتطبخ اللي بتعرف تعمله بس ..

Don't let your mother watch cooking channels ... *because she will only cook what she knows anyways*

GALĀL 2013:90

In the following example, *fuṣḥā* mirrors a 'common wisdom', which is interrupted and completed by the author's sarcastic comment in *āmmiyya*:

هناك ثلاثة أشياء لا حدود لهما .. الكون، وغباء الإنسان، والناس اللي بتنشر الجملة دي ..

There are three things that have no limits ... the universe, human stupidity, and people who post that sentence ...

GALĀL 2013:94

The following example is from another book, and comes in a short chapter called “a call for understanding Egyptian *‘āmmiyya*”, where some words and expressions in *‘āmmiyya* are explained. The following is an example of a situation that can describe the word حمارة (diversion) where the passage in *fushā* evokes the style of a lexical entry explanation, followed by a switch to *‘āmmiyya* which again represents a sarcastic comment:

هي أيضاً ما يفعله الرجل ليلة كل يوم خميس عشان يداري خييته، وينام بعد ما يتلكك على أي سبب مش منطقي وخلص!!

It is also what the man does every Thursday to hide his failure, and go to sleep after picking a fight about anything without logic!!

AL-TĀBĪ‘Ī 2012:16

### *Fuṣḥāmmiyya*

Rosenbaum (2000) proposes the name *Fuṣḥāmmiyya* for an “alternating style” found in Egyptian prose texts where the *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya* varieties are used in an alternating manner. *Fuṣḥāmmiyya*, is, according to Rosenbaum (2000:71) “the result of the intention of a certain writer to create a style whose constituents are taken from the two stocks, that of *Fuṣḥā* and that of *‘Āmmiyya*, but is neither; rather, it is something else.” According to Rosenbaum (2000:83), the *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya* elements enjoy equal status, and the use of *‘āmmiyya* is not “restricted to single words, mainly for naming *realia*”. He claims that one of the aims of writing in such a style is to create humour (Rosenbaum 2000:81). The *Fuṣḥāmmiyya* style as described by Rosenbaum can be found in some of the books in my study. The two varieties appear to be of equal importance in the text, as opposed to a base variety with insertions or borrowings from the other variety. It is also the clear intention of the writer, e.g.:<sup>23</sup>

23 Bold represents unambiguous *fushā*, whereas red represents unambiguous *‘āmmiyya*.

أما المرآة فهي المنتج الأكثر إهدارا في عالم الماكياج، لأن مع كل علبة ماكياج **بتبقى فيه** مرآة سواء كانت علبة بودرة أو آي شادو أو أحمر خدود، بالإضافة للمرآة **اللي بتيجي** متعلقة في شنطة الماكياج، رغم إن البنات نادرا ما **يبصوا** في هذه المرآيات، لأن غالبا **بتبقى معاهم** مرآة أصلا في الشنطة، صحيح **بتبقى** قديمة وبقي لها ١٠٠ سنة ومكسرة وحالتها بالبالا، لكنهم أبدا لا يتخلين عنها وتظل في شنطة **إيدهم** لحد ما **تدغدغ** تماما!

The mirror is the most wasted product in the make-up world, because in every make-up container, there is a mirror, no matter if it is powder, eye shadow or rouge, in addition to the mirror that comes with the make-up bag, even though girls rarely look in these mirrors. Because they usually have a mirror in their purse, right, it would be old, stayed in there for a hundred years, broken and messed up, but they never let go of it and it stays in their purses until it is totally crunched!

‘ABD AL-WAHHĀB 2012:60

The style in this example is not a rarity in this book, but rather an example of the style in big parts of it, and it certainly contributes to leaving the boundaries between the varieties ‘blurred’ or ‘fuzzy’ (see Mejdell 2014, Mejdell Forthcoming-a, Mejdell Forthcoming-b).

### Word-Lists

A phenomenon that is found in more than one of the *adab sākhir* books is a section where the author provides the readers with a list of words and expressions that are frequently used at the time the book is written. They are often neologisms and slang, sometimes belonging to the so-called ‘youth language’ (see Rizk 2007) or ‘youth speech’ (see Hassanein 2011).

‘Abd al-Wahhāb (2012) says that her book is meant for the future generations. She explains present day phenomena that she thinks are likely to have changed or be outdated in 2050, such as electronic devices and social network sites that were frequently used in 2012. The book also contains a section entitled “the dictionary”. The author explains that “this dictionary is not only in order to log the most current words of our time, but in order for the new

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I do not mark what can be read as either *fushā* or *‘ammiyya* (bivalent), or what is identical in both varieties (shared).

generations to be able to read the book written in the language of our time” (‘Abd al-Wahhāb 2012:34). The ‘dictionary’ is in alphabetical order and contains altogether 83 entries. They are stereotype descriptions of ‘personalities’, expression and lexical items with ‘new meanings’. She provides examples of contexts in which they can occur, and it also contains explanations of short forms of prepositions and abbreviations typically used in computer mediated communication.

‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s second book (2013) has a “dictionary of insults” (قاموس الشتائم), or more accurately, expressions that are frequent in the Cairo traffic. She divides the ‘insults’ into two groups; those girls hear while driving, most often from men, and those they might say themselves. Some examples from the first group are:

If you don’t know how to drive, why do you ride a car?	متعرفوش تسوقوا بتركيا عريبات ليه؟
I don’t want to insult you because you are a woman	أنا مش عايز أشتمك عشان انتي واحدة ست

And from the second group:

You are the one making a mistake, by the way	إنت اللي غلطان على فكرة
Are you crazy?	إنت مجنون؟

Aḥmad (2013) has a chapter called humorously (كلمنا فرنساوي) قاموس مصري فرنساوي (Egyptian-French dictionary (brag to us)). The explanations of the words are not actually in French, but mostly in *‘āmmīyya* as well as some *fuṣḥā*. He lists 18 words used by the Egyptian youth and gives a humorous explanation to each of them, some examples are: افتكاسة (silly innovation); الأنتحة (lazy sitting); ابرز (give what you have); انجز (accomplish, complete); حور (talking empty talk); تبت (bleep);<sup>24</sup> قلشة (quick funny comment); قلاش (someone who uses a lot of the previous).

In a book whose title is on the list of explained words above, namely تبييت (Bleep), Ḥasan (2011:107–124) explains different ‘personalities’ that have been named in the Egyptian *‘āmmīyya*. He provides the ‘etymology’ of the words,

24 Replaces a swearword or insult.

and their current meaning. Some examples are: بلطجي (“Thug”, from Turkish); بلط (“Lazy”, from Coptic); ابن الإيه (“Impressing”, from Coptic); باراشوت (“Pushy, intrusive”, from French); تمرد (“Arrogant”, from Coptic); مُرَّة (“Girl or attractive girl”, from *mezze*).

Although the explanations of lexical items and expressions in the above mentioned books are interesting, the etymological explanations are not necessarily explanations that linguists would confirm. For example, Woidich (2006:95) notes that the word *muzza* derives from *mazmazēl*.

### Motivations for Use of ‘*āmmiyya* or Mixing

أنا بس كان لي رأي لو أذتولي أقوله – أيها الرجال الأفاضل – من غير ما حد من حضراتكم يتعصب بس ولا يتهور، وبالنسبة للرجال الكتيبيييييبيير اللي بيتعصبوا من كتاباتي بالعامية وأسلوبي الذي يخدش حياءهم ويبحر لعنهم العربية الراقية، حنكم على دماغي من فوق [...]

I just had a point of view if you would allow me to express it – you greatest among men – without any one of you getting angry or collapsing, and concerning the maaaany men who get angry with my writing in ‘*āmmiyya* and my style that offends their morals and wounds their sophisticated Arabic language, I deeply apologize [...]

FĀRŪQ 2012:76

For texts written completely or partly in ‘*āmmiyya*, the linguistic choice is often mentioned and explained, or even apologized for in the introduction or elsewhere in the text (see Woidich 2010). These metalinguistic comments, together with statements made in interviews on television or other, provide some insight as to what motivates the authors’ linguistic choices. In the following I present some of the motivations expressed by authors of *adab sākhir* books.

Shaymā’ Ḥabīb’s book (2013) is written completely in ‘*āmmiyya*, and she brings up her language choice in the very beginning of it. She sincerely admits that *fushā* is not her strongest side, and that she chose what appears to be an easier means for her to express herself (Ḥabīb 2013:17):

This book is the first real experience for me, and to be honest, I was confused (مختارة) about which language to write in, so I decided that I will write the way I speak, or feel. In order to convey (أوصل) what I want to

in an easy and uncomplicated manner without lies ... I am not that good in *fushā*

In a television interview, Ḥabīb (13.12.2013) expresses that she writes in *‘āmmiyya* because she thinks in *‘āmmiyya*, and she wants the readers to feel that she is talking directly to them, to delete the distance between reader and writer, so that the reader gets the sense of a conversation with a friend. As for the target group, the book was meant for university students as herself at the time the book was written. The fact that the book is written in *‘āmmiyya* was, according to Ḥabīb, criticized by literary advisors (*mustashirīn fi l-adab*), but they would let it pass since this was her first writing experience. However, it would be preferable for her to write in *fushā* in her next publication. From readers however, the feedback on her linguistic choice was very positive. Asked whether she had the impression that *‘āmmiyya* makes the book easier to understand, she replies that in general, not only with regard to language, the simpler (*absaṭ*) the easier (*ashal*).

Aḥmad al-‘Isīlī is perhaps one of the stronger contemporary defenders of writing in *‘āmmiyya*. In all three books he has published so far, he introduces the text by commenting on his choice of writing in *‘āmmiyya*. The following excerpt is from *الكتاب الثاني*, (al-‘Isīlī 2011:22):

Firstly, I am more than fond of Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* because it is my mother language/tongue (لغتي الأم) (not my dialect, no, my language, I really do consider it that), and secondly for its amazing richness, and thirdly, my emotional connection and complete control (تحكّمي الكامل) of it. And maybe more important than all of that: because I feel that it is mine ... and after all of that as well, because I feel it is more related than *fushā*, to this era of Egyptian writing and the type of writing (النوع من الكتابة) that I write, and to those who read me. And I want to be close to those who read me and listen to me, I want to reach them (عايز أوصّله) ...

Al-‘Isīlī’s texts stand out from the others in that they have more vocalized words. He does not provide his readers with possible bivalent readings of the words, but signals clearly that e.g. صغِير (small) should be read *ṣughayyar* and not *ṣaghīr*. He thinks that his writing style, using both *‘āmmiyya* and *fushā*, although easier to write, may be challenging to read (al-‘Isīlī 2009:13). He encourages his readers to read according to the vocalization, “to read it like it is written, or in reality as it is ‘said’” (al-‘Isīlī 2011:9). In his latest book, he takes it a step further, saying that the book is an “audiobook”, (كُتاب مسموع), and advises

his readers to read it out loud, and it will be like hearing his voice (al-'Isilī 2015). This unusual request for the readers may be explained by al-'Isilī profession as a television and radio presenter, and a wish to approach his reading 'audience' in the same language style that he approaches his tv and radio audience: his natural way of speaking.

Both Ḥabīb and al-'Isilī express that the use of *'āmmiyya* lets them reach their readers more easily; it is a more direct means of communication, and it removes a distance between the writer and the readers. The same point is brought up by Muḥammad Nāgī, author of the all-*'āmmiyya* *أشيك واد في شبرا* (The chicest guy in Shubra), a book that is explicitly directed at readers in the age ranging from 17 to 30. He says in a television interview that for him, it was more important for the message to reach out than to write the book in "*al-lughā al-'arabiyya al-mu'aqqada*" (the complex Arabic language) (Nāgī 07.02.2014). There is in other words a perception among the writers that the *fushḥā* variety does not reach the readers the same way as *'āmmiyya* does, due to its complexity.

The 'complexity' of *fushḥā* may also be indexical of authority, something with which these writers do not want to be associated. They wish to speak to their peers in a familiar style indicating that they are on the same level, not in a style indexing them taking on an authoritarian role. Al-Tābi'ī is interviewed concerning another of her books, also from the *adab sākhir* genre, and explains that she writes in *'āmmiyya* (mixed with English expressions) because she wants to write in the language that is used, not to raise herself to the status of someone giving a lecture, debating or giving advice (al-Tābi'ī 16.06.2014).

Shādī Aḥmad also discusses his writing in *'āmmiyya* in a television interview, and points to the same motivations for writing in *'āmmiyya* as seen above: it reaches the young readers, for whom the book is meant, in a simpler manner. The hosts put Aḥmad on the spot, claiming that he is against *fushḥā*, to which Aḥmad responds that it is not a matter of being against, but a matter of a community that the youth has created to distinguish themselves from the parent-generation, and to which they have their own manner of speaking (*lahga*) and expressions (Aḥmad 16.10.2013).

The perception among authors that when using *'āmmiyya*, the message conveyed reaches the readers more easily is not unjustified; The survey "Language Change in Egypt: Social and Cultural Indicators Survey" (Kebede, Kindt and Høigilt 2013) reports that 76% of the respondents replied that they find it easier to understand things written in *'āmmiyya*. Lubnā Imbārik (2013) is obvi-



ously of the same impression, and raises the issue of people's lack of interest in reading in general. To increase people's interest in reading, she encourages the use of simple language (though not explicitly *'āmmiyya*). She addresses those who set up school curriculums, requesting them to make it easier so that reading will be easier for the pupils, and not a matter of torment (تعذيب). Imbārik stresses the importance of reading and encourages parents to let their children be accustomed to reading from early age, and she asks the 'great' authors (الكاتب العظماء) to write books that are simple and easy (سهلة وبسيطة) (2013:24).

To sum up, by their own admission authors choose to write their *adab sākhir* in *'āmmiyya* or a mix between *'āmmiyya* and *fushā* because they conceive of it as more familiar, easier to understand and better suited to reach the readers, who are predominately from the younger generation, in a more direct manner. They do not want to give the impression of being all-knowing and giving advice, and wish to avoid the authoritative index of *fushā*.

### The 1st Person Narrative Mode

Another common feature of the *adab sākhir* texts is that they are written from a first-person narrative perspective. This is the case for 20 out of the 21 *adab sākhir* books in my study: they are written either completely in the first-person narrative mode, or what appears to be switching between the first and third person. (It is however difficult to establish whether each instance of switching should in fact be regarded as switching or not, since first-person narration "almost invariably includes third-person narration" (Abbott 2008:71)). The one book that is written from a third-person narrative perspective, *باط مان* (Bat Man) (Ḥasīb 2012), follows the same language pattern as many of the novels and short stories, namely narratives in *fushā* and dialogues both in *'āmmiyya* and in *fushā*. The genre of this book is also otherwise closer to that of the novel, in that it consists of one long fictional story.

As is claimed by Zack (2001) and (Woidich 2010), the first-person narrative, or the direct speech function, is found in most cases where the vernacular variety has been used in writing in Egypt. This goes for the vernacular in the early satirical newspapers that appeared in the forms of dialogues, the *mudhakkirāt* (Memoirs) literature that were written as monologues, and most novels that have been written in *'āmmiyya*.

The phenomenon is, not surprisingly, not unique to the diglossic Arabic situation, but appears to be common in standard-with-dialects situations as well. Pointing to examples of use of Black English dialect in literature, Traugott

(1981) shows that the dialect is only used in first person narrative. She claims that “[f]irst person narrative allows for a more subtle distinction between the narrative and the dialog because of the traditional connection between first person and colloquial style” (1981:312).

If a dialect or variety moves from being only used in direct speech in literature to be used in narratives from a third person narratives as well as non-literary writing, it may become a new standard (Traugott 1981:313). Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* certainly has the potential of becoming a new standard juxtaposed to *fuṣḥā* (see Woidich 2010), although there are strong forces to prevent that from happening. Rosenbaum argues that the Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* has come a long way on its path to becoming a literary language, and states (Rosenbaum 2011:338):

The rise and expansion of Egyptian Arabic as a literary language is a first case of its kind and a revolutionary change in the history of Arabic literature and culture in general, and in Egyptian culture in particular, a change which is still taking place right now.

### Genre Divide

In my comparison of language pattern choices, the majority of the novels and short story collections are, as according to the norm, written in *fuṣḥā* in the narrative parts. The books classified as *adab sākhir* stand out, in that all except one contain *‘āmmiyya* in narrative sections. Interestingly, several of the authors who have written *adab sākhir* completely or partially in *‘āmmiyya*, have subsequently written novels (*riwāyāt*) where the narratives are in *fuṣḥā* only. For instance, Shādī Aḥmad has written two other *sākhir* books in addition to the two already mentioned.<sup>25</sup> They all contain great amounts of *‘āmmiyya*, and have similar language style. However, in his novel كالتشيو (Calcio) (2015), Aḥmad sticks to the dichotomy of *fuṣḥā* for the narrative sections and *‘āmmiyya* only in dialogues. According to Aḥmad,<sup>26</sup> “a novel has a different way of being written than satirical articles, something every writer has to respect”. This attitude is reflected in Kebede, Kindt and Høigilt (2013), where 55% of the respondents considered *‘āmmiyya* ‘not suitable’ for novels.

25 Aḥmad (2012a, 2014).

26 Personal communication with the author on Facebook.

The same change from writing in *‘āmmīyya* or a mix between *‘āmmīyya* and *fuṣḥā* in narratives in *adab sākhīr* to narratives in *fuṣḥā* in a novel is seen with Muḥammad Nāgī ‘Abdallāh<sup>27</sup> (2016), and Jihād al-Tābī‘ī (2016). Given that these writers first published *adab sākhīr* and then turned to writing novels, one might read that the language reflects a development for them as creative writers. It may also be linked to the narrative mode and direct speech aspect: when writing *adab sākhīr* in the first narrative mode, they address the readers directly, and they wish to do that in their ‘personal’ language which is closer to everyday language which is not associated with pedantry. Furthermore, the humour that is expected to be found in *adab sākhīr* appears to be more easily expressed when the writer can use both varieties. However, the norm for language variety in the novel genre, and the writer’s wish to become an ‘acknowledged’ writer is likely to play a role.

### Concluding Remarks

Although *adab sākhīr* has become a popular genre during the last ten years or more, and has received its own sections in bookstores, the genre is not new. The term *adab sākhīr* was perhaps not coined until the 1980s, but although not labelled *adab sākhīr*, satirical elements have a long history in Egyptian literature. Some of the *adab sākhīr* of today does however receive criticism for not representing ‘real’ satire, with a ‘correctional goal’, solely focusing on humour for the purpose of entertaining, and there should perhaps be a different label for these.

Leading up to the 2011 revolution, *adab sākhīr* was an arena where writers could direct criticism in a safe manner. Humour has always been characteristic of the Egyptian character, and jokes about former president Mubarak were composed and circulated during his thirty years in power. During the uprisings against his rule, however, humour in Egypt moved from the private to the public sphere, and from being “covert or indirect” to “direct and confrontational” (Anagondahalli and Khamis 2014:12). It took new forms and was seen everywhere: in slogans, songs, poetry, caricatures, picture manipulations, memes, graffiti etc., and was shared online in no time.

Use of *‘āmmīyya* is not a precondition for *adab sākhīr*, but the genre does, however, seem to carry higher acceptance for use of *‘āmmīyya* or a mixed variety, as it is a genre that has extensive use of humorous elements such as irony, sarcasm and parody.

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27 The writer only uses Muḥammad Nāgī in his first publication.

العامية مش مجرد لهجة، لأ، دي عصير تراث وتاريخ مخلوط بظروف صعبة ومشاكل المصريين و فقرهم ومرضهم مع إضافة حبة عرق على شوية زحمة، واشرب يا معلم!!

*‘Ammiyya* is not only a dialect, no, it is the juice of heritage and history blended with hard circumstances and the Egyptians’ problems, poverty and illness, along with some sweat and crowdedness. Drink up,<sup>28</sup> boss!!

AL-TĀBĪ’Ī 2012:17

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28 This expression also means “handle it”.

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## Dialect with an Attitude

### *Language and Criticism in New Egyptian Print Media*

*Jacob Høigilt*

#### Introduction

Recent years have seen some fresh winds blowing over the print media landscape in Egypt. Comics and monthly magazines have mushroomed, and the images and stories they convey are often unusual, to say the least: In a parody of superhero comics, a sex-crazed Santa Claus starts harassing women in Cairo and is challenged by the ridiculous figure ‘Super-Mac’; Sponge Bob puppets are used as a cover for a drugs mafia in an absurd criminal story involving a lost Chinese tourist; and the hostesses of a Salafi TV channel are interviewed about their policy of always wearing the *niqāb* (full face veil), complete with pictures of the black apparitions sitting at the news desk. These are some of the stories from *Tūk-Tūk* and *Ihnā*, a comics series and monthly magazine that have been among the most visible on a rapidly evolving print media scene during the last few years.

A combination of two features stands out in these publications: a willingness to take on controversial social and political issues, and a tendency to do so in the vernacular (*‘āmmiyya*) to a great extent. Thus, the story about the sex-crazed Santa Claus is a humorous take on the serious issue of sexual harassment in Egypt’s cities, and the interview with the *niqāb*-clad TV hostesses is an attempt at giving voice to a section of Egypt’s women who are often seen as simultaneously reactionary and oppressed. Many of these stories are written in *‘āmmiyya*, and this is significant. According to the model of diglossia *fushā* is the default when writing. This fact raises the question of to what extent and for which purposes these publications use *‘āmmiyya*.

This chapter examines the relation between content and language in *Tūk-Tūk* and *Ihnā*. I ask: When is *‘āmmiyya* used, and which social implications does it have?

The approach is informed by Heller’s (Heller 2008) focus on process and practice rather than autonomous structures in order to explain language change and the relationship between agency and structure. I argue that increasingly, individuals and print publications employ the low variety in writing, and that they do so intentionally and for specific purposes. Their aim is not



necessarily to subvert the linguistic and political order (Heller's "structure"). Instead, their writing betrays a strategy of carving out a "third space" for themselves (Bhabha 2004; Bhatt 2008) that makes it possible to engage critically with Egyptian politics and culture without signalling rejection and alienation from it.

Data was gathered in three ways. Having read *Iḥnā* on and off for some years, I chose three issues (September, October and November 2011) for a detailed analysis. This was an interesting period to investigate. First, the magazine had consolidated its profile by then and become part of a visible new trend on the cultural scene. Second, since after the Egyptian uprising in January–February 2011 a glossy magazine like *Iḥnā* could choose either to focus on entertainment and uncontroversial news, or it could jump headlong into politics. To a great extent, it chose the latter. These three issues comprised 76 articles all in all, which I coded for language variety, genre, and author. Selected articles were analysed in detail to discern the pattern of alternation between varieties and investigate the link between content, genre and language in more detail. *Tūk-Tūk* does not lend itself to a quantitative approach, since the magazine is shorter and the stories longer. Here I looked in detail at each of the four issues (4–7, 2012) I had managed to obtain, searching for consistent alternation patterns. In addition to text analysis, I have drawn on observations and reading of numerous publications from several longer and shorter periods of field work in Egypt between 2006–2012 – this was a period when the new, informal culture of writing seemed to explode in Cairo. During fieldwork, I also interviewed the editors of the publications studied here about their work and their thoughts on language and society. Finally, the findings are interpreted on the background of the Cairo survey about practices and attitudes to *fushā* and *‘ammīyya* among literate Cairenes, part of the *Language Change in the Arab World* research project (see Kindt and Kebede this volume). The survey offers valuable information about the language ideological climate in Egypt against which specific writing practices can be measured.

It needs to be noted at the outset how few Egyptians actually read magazines like these. Only two percent of the survey respondents had even heard about *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk*, and the number of people who read them was statistically insignificant (less than one percent). This extremely low figure must be seen relative to the very low percentage of Cairenes who read printed publications at all – in the same survey, only 16 percent answered that they read newspapers every day (among 18 to 34-year-olds the figure was ten percent – and keep in mind that this was in the midst of a revolutionary process where print publications proliferated to an unprecedented extent). In general, books and magazines are read by very few people in Egypt, so the print media field as

a whole (excepting only the most well-known dailies) is a restricted field. However, *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* are unorthodox challengers within that field, which makes them interesting case to study. Furthermore, various print media have historically played an important role in Egyptian politics, including during the present transition, so their importance should not be underrated.

### The Social Context

The fact that Arabic is one of the most well-known cases of diglossia does not mean that the low variety has not been used for writing. Particularly in Egypt, there is a long tradition of writing the vernacular in certain genres, notably poetry. Recent research has showed that vernacular literature in the late 19th and early 20th century contributed significantly to the development of popular Egyptian nationalism (Fahmy 2011). Doss and Davies have documented that literature in dialect is an integral part of the literary heritage of Egypt (Doss and Davies 2013).

However, in modern times, and especially after the *nahḍa*, there have been strong cultural restrictions on writing Arabic. *Fuṣḥā* has immense symbolic value because of its status as the language of revelation in Islam (Haeri 2003) and its link to pan-Arabism (Suleiman 2003). Despite radical reform suggestions by some Arab nationalist thinkers, a highly conservative attitude to Arabic has prevailed into the present. This may be connected to the crashlanding of Nasserism, which encouraged popular culture (Mejdell 2006:210). After this period, conservative authoritarianism prevailed in many Arab countries, and conservatism has also marked language policies (Shaaban 2007:701). John Eisele has identified what he calls a “dominant regime of authority” in discourse about language in the Arab world, characterized by four central themes: unity, purity, continuity and competition (Eisele 2003).<sup>1</sup> According to this regime, Arabic (meaning *fuṣḥā*) unites all Arabs and should therefore be a single language for a single culture; it is in competition with foreign cultures and languages and needs to be protected from contamination by them and also by Arabic dialects, which represent corruptions of the norm; and for unity and purity to be achieved, it is necessary to preserve the classical linguistic system. Taken together, the emphasis on the *fuṣḥā*’s association with Islam and Arabism and the dominant regime of authority, we have a full-fledged dominant language ideology, in the sense of dominant “cultural conceptions of the

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1 See Aboezz, this volume, for a more detailed discussion of Eisele’s notion.

nature, form, and purpose of language, and of communicative behavior as an enactment of a collective order.” (Gal and Woolard 2001:1)

Consequently, writing practices that deviate from the norm are subject to criticism from the cultural and political establishment. In a recent example, prominent Egyptian philosopher Hasan Hanafi laments what he claims is Egyptians’ tendency to communicate in foreign languages and *‘āmmiyya* instead of *fushḥā*, blaming Western neoliberalism and ultraconservative Islam for having alienated Egyptians from their true linguistic identity (Hanafi 2013).

Hanafi’s lamentations indicate that the dominant language ideology does not enjoy hegemony. As Doss, Mejdell and Rosenbaum show *‘āmmiyya* is being used quite freely in advertisements, popular magazines, short stories, novels and poetry (Doss 2006:57–62; Mejdell 2006; Rosenbaum 2000). Mejdell has also found that *‘āmmiyya* is not seen to be as corrupting as it once was among Egyptians (Mejdell 2008). Of particular interest is Doss’s examination of a youth magazine named *Party* which is comparable to *Iḥnā*, the magazine subjected to analysis in this article. It uses the colloquial Arabic for much of its content. Doss describes it as a celebrity news magazine with focus on pictures more than text, and as employing borrowed words and expressions from English, often in Latin script. (Doss 2006:59) She comments that “the style is quite close to oral productions and the orthography close to the phonetic realization and quite far from the ‘norm.” (Ibid.:61)

*Party* was an indicator of a trend in which two new and interesting media have appeared in Egypt: comics for grown-ups and glossy periodicals for young adults, with varying weightings between pure entertainment, ads and more substantial editorial content. The most prominent examples, which also form the cases of the present article, are the comics series *Tūk-Tūk* (the title refers to the small motorcycle-taxis in Cairo’s poorer neighbourhoods) and the monthly magazine *Iḥnā – sōṭ gīl bi-ḥālū* (We – the voice of an entire generation). These publications do not shy away from treating contentious issues in Egyptian society, like sex, politics and religion. They both exhibit a large amount of writing in *‘āmmiyya*, as well as a great deal of alternation between some form of *fushḥā* and *‘āmmiyya*. In light of the summary and conclusions cited above, the following questions present themselves: What language variety is used when? What is the correlation (if any) between language choice (*fushḥā* or *‘āmmiyya*) and content? What kind of language ideology underpins the practices of code-switching found in these two publications?

### Language Practices in *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk*

*Iḥnā* was published from 2004 until December 2012, when it was discontinued, probably for economic reasons. It costs five Egyptian pounds – five times the price of a newspaper – but considering the fact that it is coloured throughout and written on good-quality paper the price is not outrageous: A similar publication described by Doss cost 10 pounds in 2002. Judging from the advertisements, the target group is relatively well-off people in their 20s to 30s. There are advertisements for Virgin Megastore, Blackberries, mobile phone subscriptions from Ettisalat, electric shavers for females and upscale clothes stores.

The three consecutive *Iḥnā* issues chosen for analysis (September through November 2012) give a snapshot of *Iḥnā* during a volatile period in Egypt. At this time, political cleavages in post-Mubarak Egypt had become quite clear. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which had stepped in when Mubarak was ousted, had recently relinquished power (on 30 June) to the elected President Muḥammad Mursī of the Muslim Brothers, thus – at least nominally – ending a period of military rule. During the SCAF's reign, however, the Islamist and non-Islamist camps had become polarized, and deep mistrust against the other had taken root in both groups. While non-Islamists suspected the Muslim Brothers of entering into secret deals with the military in return for being able to set Egypt on a conservative, illiberal social and political course, the Islamists accused their adversaries of conspiring with foreign powers to deprive Egypt of its Islamic identity and cause further chaos in a society that desperately needed stability in order to prosper.

*Iḥnā* had to navigate this chaotic and volatile political landscape, and the thrill of it was evident when I met the then editor in late 2011. He had apparently been steering *Iḥnā* on a course towards more “serious” content, away from celebrity news and towards political articles, interviews and feature articles that treated prominent social, cultural and political issues. The profile was not particularly confrontational or angry, but rather open, on the border to naïve, when treating Islamism, the job market and the movie scene. Compared to a 2010 issue I had read earlier, it was becoming a much more interesting and engaging magazine.

The editor had clear views on the magazine's language policy. All of it was to be written in an accessible style, and much of it in the colloquial, with the aim of attracting readers who did not normally read much. He was of the opinion that *‘ammīyya* was easier to read for most people than *fuṣḥā* and thus served this policy well. At the same time, the staff was concerned not to violate the integrity of *fuṣḥā*, and there were strict orthographic guidelines to be followed. For example, the letter *o* /ha/, which is the colloquial future prefix, was not

اتصالات etisalat  
السنة الثامنة  
العدد ٩٣ - سبتمبر ٢٠١٢

اتصالات etisalat  
خمسة جنيهان

إهنا  
صوت جيل بحاله

ملف خاص عن أزمة الكهرباء

من أول قناة تلفزيونية للمتقبات فقط:  
المجتمع رافض التعامل معنا!

إهنا مش مجلة مثليين!

المتحدث الرسمي السابق لحملة الفريق شفيق  
أحمد سرحان:  
مرسى لازم يأخذ فرصته كاملة!

اشترى الاتصالات  
سماكة فون  
اختره واحصل  
على الليت براحتك  
بحليه 1 بيس في اليوم

FIGURE 7.1 Front page of *Ihnā*, September 2012. Advertisements for one of Egypt's main mobile phone companies, Ettisalat, frame the title page. The headlines read (from the top): Special feature: the electricity crisis / From the first TV channel for niqab-wearing women only: "Society refuses to relate to us!" / *Ihnā* is not a gay magazine! / Ahmad Sarhan, official spokesman for the campaign of General Shafiq: "Mursi must be given the full chance."

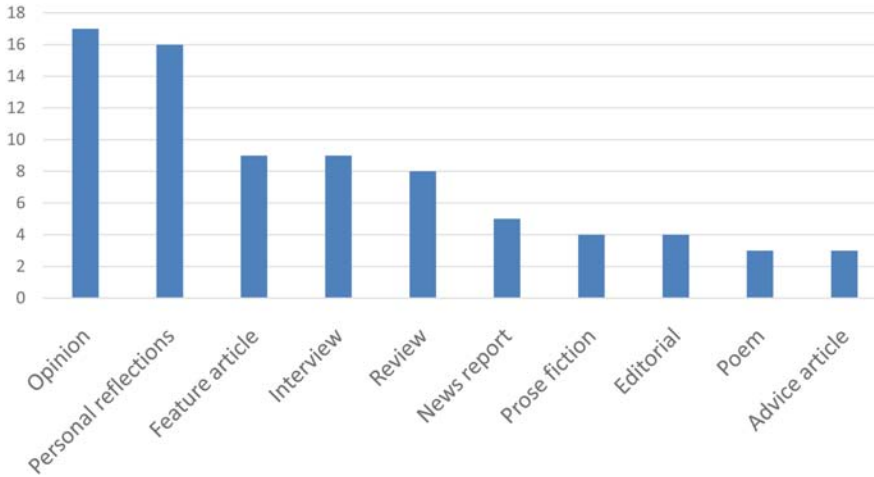


FIGURE 7.2 *Genres in Iḥnā*

joined to the verb, since the corresponding future prefix in *fushā* is *س* /s/. The practice of not joining /ha/ to the verb was seen as a way of signalling that it belonged to a different grammatical system than what is commonly used for writing.<sup>2</sup> The staff I interviewed had little to say about the reasons for sometimes choosing *fushā* over *ʿammiyya* or the other way around. Before I had the opportunity to meet with them a second time, the magazine was discontinued, and it has proven very difficult to get in touch with the former staff. However, good indications of the reasons for choosing one variety over the other can be found by looking closely at language and genre in the three issues of *Iḥnā* I have studied in detail.

The content in *Iḥnā* spans almost the broadest conceivable range, from an article about the ten most famous haircuts in international football, via humorous reflections on the traffic jams in Cairo to serious and critical comments on President Mursi's performance.<sup>3</sup> The magazine is highly diverse. Below is a table that shows the distribution of articles across identified genres.

The three issues studied contained 76 content items that could be coded into a genre category. As can be seen from the figure above, *Iḥnā* allows for many genres, from news reports to poetry. However, the majority of pieces are either opinion pieces or personal reflections, followed by feature articles and inter-

2 Interview with Karīm al-Dugwī, Cairo, 10 April 2011.

3 Muḥammad Mursī is a member of the Muslim Brothers and served as president in 2012–2013. He was ousted in a military coup enjoying large popular support in July 2013.

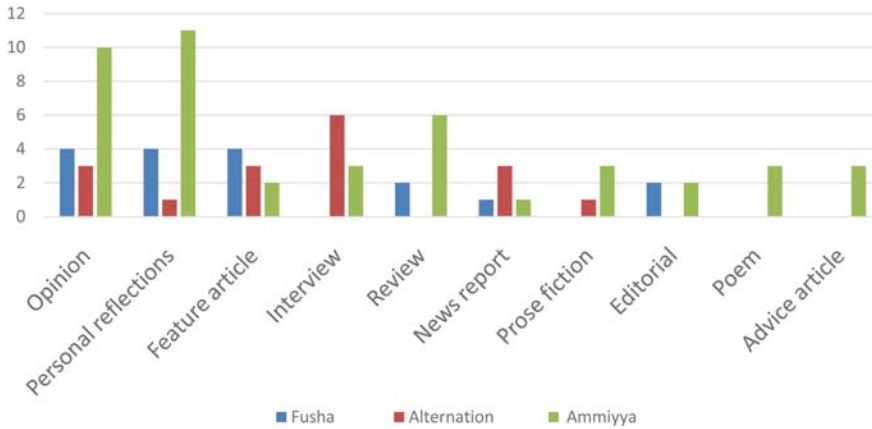


FIGURE 7.3 *Language variety and genre in Iḥnā*

views. *Iḥnā* exhibits three main linguistic styles: predominantly *fushā* (sometimes with a word or expression in *‘āmmiyya* here or there); predominantly *‘āmmiyya* (with a few lexical or grammatical items from *fushā*); and alternation between *‘āmmiyya* and *fushā*. In the latter case, truly *mixed* sentences are rare. Alternation occurs on paragraph level, or one section of an article is written in *‘āmmiyya* and another one in *fushā*. Occasionally a writer inserts words and expressions in English (in Latin and/or Arabic script), but not to such an extent that it is meaningful to code for it.

Using the three main linguistic categories, the distribution of articles is as follows: 56 percent are written in *‘āmmiyya*, 23 percent in *fushā*, and 21 percent in alternating language. As its title promises, *Iḥnā* is predominantly an *‘āmmiyya* magazine,<sup>4</sup> but the amount of *fushā* is far from negligible. The significant amount of texts written in *fushā* or mixed style raises the question of which variety is used for what genre. Figure 7.3 above shows the correlations between genre and language code. There is not much of a clear pattern. Only two out of ten genres are written purely in *‘āmmiyya*: poems and advice articles. The rest exhibit mixing to a greater or lesser degree.

Overall, *‘āmmiyya* is the dominant variety. In the three most frequent genres, *‘āmmiyya* is clearly used much more than any of the other two. Interviews are a somewhat special case. They seem to be written along set lines: the introduction to the subject is mostly written in *fushā*, while the interview itself seems to be reproduced more or less verbatim, and in *‘āmmiyya*. The verbatim

4 *Iḥnā* is the *‘āmmiyya* variant for the first person plural pronoun. The *fushā* equivalent is *nahnu*.

reproduction of dialogue in most of the interviews in *Ihnā* gives the impression of journalistic inexperience; *Ihnā*'s staff are young and often recently graduated students. In the following text, taken from an interview with two musicians, the journalist suddenly became uncertain whether she remembered to switch on the recorder, and she later added this to the interview text. The example serves as a good illustration of the low level of professionalism, the informality of the text, and the conventions for writing *'āmmiyya*. The whole passage is clearly meant to be read in the colloquial, as seen from the *b* (ب) prefix before the verb *yisaggil* and the insertion of a glottal stop (*hamza*, ء) over the letter *alif* (ا) in the word 'no' (لا):

ثانية واحدة أتأكد إن كان ب يسجل ولا لأ  
 أحيه!! ه نعيد تاني كل ده  
 (تأكدت) لأ خلاص تمام ب يسجل

Just a second to make sure whether it records or not.

Shoot!! Are we going to repeat all that?

(Having checked) No, it's OK, it's fine, it records.

*Ihnā* 2012-10, p. 33

As a rule the articles with alternating language have narratives in *fushā* and dialogue/interviews in *'āmmiyya*. Some have a word or expression thrown in that is in *'āmmiyya* in otherwise *fushā* articles, but not to the extent that one can talk about code-switching (for an example of switching, in a Creole text, see (Sebba 2012)).

In any case, with the two exceptions of poems and advice articles, genre does not provide a clear criterion for which code is used. This is not a robust finding by any standard, considering that only 76 articles were coded. Analyses of larger datasets are clearly needed to be able to state anything with authority. However, from the admittedly scant data analysed here it seems that the type of content is not crucial for which language variety writers choose. The type of medium also does not explain the language patterns on its own, since monthly magazines are not new to Egypt, but have a long history and have been written in *fushā* all along.

What then is the plausible explanation for the variation in code? Personal taste should not be discounted. Some writers in this magazine simply tend to write more in *fushā*. This goes for the last editor, Maryam 'Abd al-Jābir, for example. Her editorials and personal reflections are all written in *fushā*. To some extent, the seriousness of the issue at hand seems to contribute to



the choice. It would be very strange to see the *Ihnā* article about the 10 most famous haircuts in international football in *fushhā*. On the other hand, it can be seen that political comment and culture articles may appear in both *fushhā* and *‘ammīyya*.

However, we must look outside the magazine itself, at the context, to find the best explanation for the distribution of varieties in *Ihnā*. I argue that the choice between *fushhā* and *‘ammīyya* is to a great extent about *stylistic models*. Through the press and a spate of recently published books, a new and young style has grown increasingly popular in Egypt recently: *al-adab* (or *al-uslūb*) *al-sākhir* (sarcastic literature or style, see Håland this volume).<sup>5</sup> This term designates essays, biographies and novels written in a humorous, often self-ridiculing style, and which often, but not always, treat serious issues in a light-hearted way: It is social criticism with a smile. Consider the example below, which is written entirely in *‘ammīyya*. The title is: عايز ديمقراطية؟ خدا! (You asked for democracy? There you go!).

The author of the article clearly intends to educate his readers about democracy, a serious issue if ever there was one. A central part of the article is devoted to the problem of majority rule, which he treats in a humorous manner:

يعني تخيل أنك مسافر مع ثلاثة أصحابك شرم الشيخ وقرروا إنهم ه يشغلوا طول الطريق أل يوم  
تامر حسنى فى العربية بدل محمد منير. عذاب، صح؟ بس ده حكم "ديكتاتورية" الأغلبية بقى.

Like, imagine that you're going to Sharm al-Shaykh with three of your friends, and they have decided to play a Tāmīr Ḥusnī album all the way in the car instead of Muḥammad Munīr. Torture, right? But there's the tyranny of the majority for you.

JOSEPH NASR, "You asked for democracy? There you go!", *Ihnā* 11, 2011, p. 39

The tone is humorous, and Nasr uses everyday situations and examples from pop culture to talk about a serious issue. There are many such examples in *Ihnā*, and so the choice between *‘ammīyya* and *fushhā* to a great extent seems to be a function of how close the writer wants to stay to the sarcastic, witty style. I will return to the social significance of this style and code choice below, but

5 Calling it "new" may be overstating the case. Fahmy (2011) shows how vernacular humour was coupled to politics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Well-known and beloved writers like Bayram al-Tunsi employed a similar style in the interwar years, but it went into decline from the 1950s. The current wave of works represents a revitalization of this vernacular and humorous literature.

let me first introduce another publication that raises the same issues, but in a different way: The independent comics magazine *Tūk-Tūk*.

*Tūk-Tūk* is a comics magazine aimed primarily at young adults (there is a “keep away from children” warning on its front page). Its first issue came just as the Egyptian uprising in 2011 started, and the 10th issue was released in March 2014. Conceived of in 2009, it is a collaborative effort by a group of Egyptian artists to create a comics series instead of a one-off production, of which there are by now quite a few in Egypt. Muḥammad Shinnāwī, who is the main editor of *Tūk-Tūk*, explained the aim:

We wanted to make stories, not only newspaper cartoons, for grown-ups, light stories in *ʿammiyya* about real issues in the street – not pedagogical stuff. Also we wanted to export an Egyptian way of drawing. I went to France at some point and saw the fanzines there. I really liked them, and so the idea of *Tūk-Tūk* was born. We wanted to include stories of a social nature, from the street, and real things that had happened to the writer-drawer. (...) It would contain themes relating to government, to the family, all the traditions – we want to challenge them.<sup>6</sup>

*Tūk-Tūk* consists mostly of graphic stories, but there are also purely textual pieces, including the introduction to each issue, some personal stories, and presentations of famous musicians that the editors like and want to make known to their readers (famed *Fado* singer Cesaria Evora, for example).

The content ranges from the amusing through the absurd to dark social realism. In one of the more surreal stories, an Egyptian peasant gets kidnapped by the CIA because of his ability to milk his cow using his “third brain” – a technique he learnt through a religious program on Egyptian television. More seriously, the whole of issue seven is devoted to issues concerning women, where two of the stories treat the problems of rape and domestic abuse in explicit ways, highlighting the lack of institutions to deal with these crimes in the proper way. The common denominator of all the stories is that they depict the under-privileged sections of Egyptian society in the city and the countryside. These are all stories from the Egyptian street, which is rarely treated with empathy in the Egyptian press.

Some variation notwithstanding, the linguistic pattern in *Tūk-Tūk* is rather consistent and easier to discern than in *Iḥnā*. Textual pieces are generally written in *fushḥā*, while almost all of the text in the graphic stories is written

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6 Interview with Muḥammad Shinnāwī, Cairo, 10 December 2012.

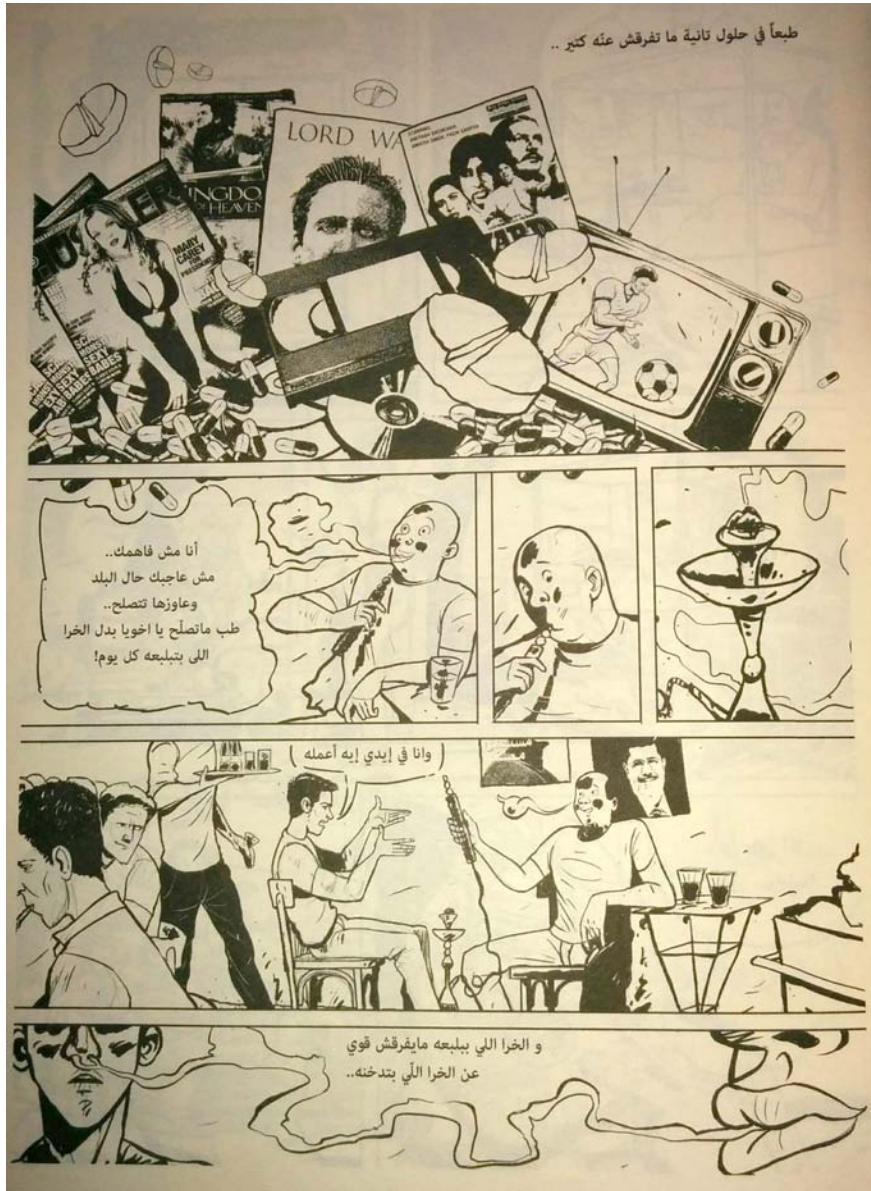


FIGURE 7.4 Excerpt from *Tük-Tük*, issue 7, p. 19. The story is about ways of escaping from a dreary life. The main character uses drugs and mass media, while his friend smokes water pipe incessantly.

in *‘āmmiyya*. The use of either variety is not based on any thought-through ideological approach; unlike in *Ihnā* there is no fixed language policy. Instead, the instincts of the authors and the main editor determine the variety, and the result shows that *‘āmmiyya* is generally thought to be best suited to *Tūk-Tūk*. In the words of editor Muḥammad Shinnāwī:

This kind of magazine wouldn't work with *fushā* [mish hayimshī ma' al-*fushā*]. We want a magazine that depicts reality, a magazine that is funny and at the same time critical – criticising society. It is not logical to use *fushā* when you depict people walking the streets, poor people. A beggar talking in *fushā*? That's a joke.<sup>7</sup>

When I asked why parts of his texts about musicians were written in *fushā*, he was not able to explain why right away.

I just started writing it in *fushā*. It is perhaps a bit more cultural than the other stuff. But the words of the songs are written in *‘āmmiyya*. It's like when I wrote about Shaykha Rimitti [a famous Algerian *rai* singer]. She sings in Algerian dialect, and I translated it into Egyptian dialect (...). But the biography is in *fushā*, because that is the professional [sic] part of the article.

As the quote shows, *Tūk-Tūk's* editor is not out to overturn the dominant language ideology. Later in the same interview, he expressed the idea that *fushā* is “more serious and accurate” than *‘āmmiyya* – an important part of the dominant language ideology outlined above. *Fushā* is his preferred variety if he wants to explain serious issues. By his own account, the choice of variety is triggered by artistic concerns (depicting social reality) more than a specific social or political project. The same attitude was voiced by another prominent Egyptian comics writer, Magdī al-Shāfi'ī, who authored Egypt's first fully-fledged graphic novel, *Metro*, which also depicts life at the fringes of urban Egyptian society. al-Shāfi'ī stated that the problem of mainstream Egyptian comics was that it employs a language that is not truthful (*ghayr ṣādiqa*), for comics is a popular (*sha'bi*) art form, so one should employ the language that is used in the street.<sup>8</sup> It would seem that for these prominent figures on the Egyptian comics scene the choice of variety is not correlated with a specific style, as in *Ihnā*,

7 Ibid.

8 Interview with Majdī al-Shāfi'ī, Cairo, December 11, 2012.

but is rather determined by genre. Comics stories are written in *‘āmmiyya*, but purely textual content within each issue is written in *fuṣḥā*, according to the dominant rhetorical logic.

However, when probing a bit deeper it nevertheless becomes apparent that there is an element of social and political criticism to the choices made. Both Shinnāwī and al-Shāfi‘ī aim to show the underbelly of society. Their treatment of this environment implies social and political criticism of the state of human rights, corruption and sexual harassment. In general, the attitude to sexuality is open-minded and explicit, in contrast to the taboos on this topic in most public discourse. Their very project is critical and challenges the elite culture of public writing and reading. As Shāfi‘ī states, his aim is to be a popular (*sha‘bī*) artist: “I want to reach out to ordinary people.”<sup>9</sup>

### Functions of the Code/Content Combination

The previous section has shown that the choice to write in *‘āmmiyya* is motivated by different factors in *Iḥnā* (style) and *Tūk-Tūk* (medium and genre), but that they share the tendency to treat serious social and political issues in the vernacular idiom, which is a break with established practice. Both publications also challenge public morals: *Iḥnā* had several of its articles censored, and issues of *Tūk-Tūk* have been removed from the shelves in bookstores after complaints by customers who thought they were inappropriate. In other words, there is clearly a socio-political dimension to the language/content combination in these two magazines. In this section, I will suggest that the combination has three socio-political functions in the Egyptian context: It gives voice to the little man/woman, it reflects and expresses a culture of urban informality, and it creates a hybrid space of cultural and social criticism. As I will show, the latter two functions connect the Egyptian case to wider sociolinguistic trends.

### Giving Voice to the “Little Man/Woman”

It should be noted at the outset that both *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* aim to entertain their audiences; neither are high-brow publications in any sense of the word. *Iḥnā* features several interviews with movie actors and other celebrities, and many of the stories in *Tūk-Tūk* are simply funny and absurd, carrying no obvi-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

ous social or political message. However, to the extent that a critical edge is visible, it seems that the publications aspire to represent marginalized groups in society. Thus a main character in *Tūk-Tūk*, who appears in most issues of the magazine, is a lower middle-class parking lot valet with a wife and two children. This character embodies values of charity, kindness and solidarity. He and his family give refuge to a Chinese tourist who has fallen victim to trafficking; he fights and outsmarts a gang of street thugs; and he frets about the danger of his wife being subjected to sexual harassment in the street. (In a feminist twist, the wife is subjected to nothing of the sort when she goes out alone to buy the groceries. Instead she frightens all the men in the neighbourhood into subdued silence with the help of a broomstick and verbal abuse of any would-be harasser.) Other stories in *Tūk-Tūk* feature lonely people in the megalopolis of Cairo and alienated youngsters escaping the dreariness and hopelessness of their lives with drugs (see figure 7.4 above). *Ihnā*'s approach to social criticism is different; after all, it is a glossy entertainment magazine filled with ads and intended to generate a profit for the publisher, and its focus is mostly on the middle and upper classes. Within these constraints it clearly aims to challenge both the readers and the powers that be. One issue features a long interview with women who work for an Islamic TV channel and wear the *niqāb* while on air. These women and the channel they work for was reviled and ridiculed in the mainstream Egyptian media, but *Ihnā* makes a point of giving them the opportunity to explain their choice without forcing them to answer provocative questions. *Ihnā* has also focused on the problem of deadly family feuds in Upper Egypt, an issue that has caused suffering to thousands of Egyptians but is seldom treated by the Cairo-focused media. After the revolution, *Ihnā* opened its pages to eyewitness accounts by ordinary Cairenes who had experienced or seen torture and harassment perpetrated by the police and military. This was a bold move, since press freedom deteriorated sharply soon after the military took power in Egypt in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising.<sup>10</sup>

In different ways, then, *Ihnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* give voice to groups and concerns that are marginalized in mainstream media discourse. While the comics of *Tūk-Tūk* make visible and empathize with the millions of poor and struggling urban Egyptians, *Ihnā* makes a point of focusing on groups that are anathema to many in the middle and upper classes, such as ultraconservative Islamic activists and hard rock-loving teenagers who are (wrongly) accused of being satanic

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10 *Ihnā* was discontinued at the end of 2012, ostensibly for economic reasons. Given its clear stance against the military and for demonstrators throughout 2011–2012, political pressure might well have played a role, but this has not been confirmed by anyone the author spoke with.

worshippers (in the October 2012 issue, cf. LeVine 2008:62–68). Both magazines do so in a vernacular style that represents a break with dominant written media discourse, and their stated aim for the choice of code is to depict social life truthfully and reaching out to people who feel estranged from the high variety, which is nobody's mother tongue.

### Expressing an Urban Culture of Informality

The vernacular style of *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* also lends itself to interpretations of a less overt political kind which are nevertheless tightly connected to the question of language ideology. First, they reflect, first and foremost, an urban environment, employing the main urban dialect and contributing to a *culture of informality*, and this is where they fit into a larger picture discernible in Cairo in the early 21st century. For even if the variety of publications and the number of publishing houses exploded after Egypt's 2011 revolution, the publishing industry had been revitalized well before that exhilarating moment. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, new publishing houses such as *Mīrīt* and *Dār 'Ayn* appeared that brought new and unconventional authors onto the literary scene, and the established publisher *Dār al-Shurūq* soon followed suit. The sarcastic literature described above is part of this trend. This development coincided with a new bookstore culture. Several new bookstores have appeared in Egypt's urban centres Cairo and Alexandria in recent years, often sporting a café as part of the shop, many of them hosting literary and other cultural events. The new and young literature sold in appealing café-bookstores has an atmosphere of coolness about it, reinforced by the interior design of the stores as well as the cover designs of the books on display.

One well-known example is the bestseller *Taxi* by Khālid al-Khamīsī, which consists of the author's conversations with taxi drivers during rides in Cairo in the early 2000s.<sup>11</sup> The conversations, reproduced in *ʿammīyya*, touch on a host of aspects of Cairo (and Egyptian) life, all well-known to any Cairene, conveyed with a sense of humour that make them an appealing and easy read. The same is true of other popular books, such as *Ayza atgawwiz* (I want to marry) and *al-Rigāl min Būlāq wa-l-Nisā' min Awwal Fayṣal* (Men are from Bulaq and women are from Faysal street) – a play on John Gray's bestseller *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*.

11 The first edition was published in 2006. By 2009, it had reached its 14th edition, a remarkable feat in a market characterized by very low sales figures.



FIGURE 7.5 Title page of *Men Are from Bülâq and Women Are from Faysal Street* by *Ihâb Mu'awwad*, published in 2012.



Characteristically for the new literature, they deal with serious social issues in a humorous and straightforward way, and they are often written in a mix of *‘āmmīyya* and *fushḥā* or sometimes almost exclusively in the former variety. The last few years have seen a steady stream of such literature, whose characteristic graphic design now dominates many display windows in the biggest bookstores in Cairo and Alexandria.

Seen as parts of this larger picture, *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* add to a cultural phenomenon that is associated with humour and/or informality and that involves an increasing amount of *‘āmmīyya* in published writing, usually seen as the domain of *fushḥā*. The text producers of *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* are certainly not out of touch with the general linguistic climate among ordinary literate Cairenes, to which their publications cater. The survey we carried out in 2013 clearly shows that the general public accepts *‘āmmīyya* in written discourse, and that most indeed employ it themselves quite frequently (for details, see Kindt and Kebede this volume, and Kindt, Høigilt, and Kebede 2016). I do not include figures for the three age cohorts in table 7.1 because the differences are minimal.

To the extent that the writers in *Iḥnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* aim to reach out to more literate people than currently read printed material, they seem to have judged the situation well, as 74 percent find *‘āmmīyya* easier to read than *fushḥā*. The increase in *‘āmmīyya* publications co-occurs with its frequent use in daily life, as shown in table 7.2. It also comes at a time when TV shows have grown more informal, characterized by increased use of dialect, at the same time as they have taken on serious issues.

The increase in *‘āmmīyya* publications may said to be part of global sociolinguistic developments. The Egyptian case can be compared to that of late-modern European societies, where informality has become a public ideal. As Kristiansen et al. state:

Increasing use and acceptance of features from big city vernaculars (and from capital city vernaculars in particular) may well have been a general trend of Western societies since the 1960s (...). In the case of Denmark, attempts at explaining this trend have linked it to the development of an omnipresent media universe and this universe’s remarkable turn from strict formality to ardent preoccupation with ‘doing informality’, a performance that draws heavily on the ‘casual’ image of low-status urban speech.

KRISTIANSEN, GARRETT, and COUPLAND 2005:14

The Cairene dialect is not necessarily ‘low-status’, since diglossia entails a functional divide where to some extent different scales of status apply for the

TABLE 7.1 *Attitudes to written ‘āmmīyya in greater Cairo*

	Yes	No	Do not know/ no opinion	Total	Sample size
It is easier to understand things written in ‘āmmīyya	76	24	–	100	2,308
‘Āmmīyya has a place as a written language	57	30	13	100	2,198

TABLE 7.2 *Frequency of writing in ‘āmmīyya*

	Every day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Once or twice per year	Never	Total	Sample size
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,385</b>
18–34	39	30	13	4	15	100	1,309
35–49	30	31	11	3	26	100	720
50–64	30	22	11	3	33	100	356

‘high’ and ‘low’ variety. However, it certainly conveys a ‘casual image’, and it does coincide with a clear turn to informality across Egyptian media.

### The Creation of a Third Space of Criticism

So far, I have established that *Ihnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* feature a great amount of written ‘āmmīyya, that they do not shy away from social and political criticism, and that they are part of a wider text culture of informality that is gaining acceptance in the public sphere. To some extent, then, they can be seen as symptoms of a quiet challenge to the dominant language ideology, which extols *fushḥā* as the uniting and superior language of the Arabs and has scant regard for ‘āmmīyya, and whose result is a “general resistance to having [the dialects] used in writing.” (Suleiman 2004:72) Interestingly, in contrast to the iconoclastic and loud discourse of the radical language reformers in the first half of the

20th century today's publications simply go ahead with their radical writing practices, against orthodoxy, without making a fuss about it or even reflecting much on it – they just do what feels best and most authentic for their rhetorical purposes.

This is not to say that their practices are not important. On the contrary, this quiet challenge to the *fushā's* near-monopoly over the written domain, and the public's embrace of it, show that in terms of language ideology, written Arabic is more nuanced than is commonly thought. Paul Kroskrity (Kroskrity 2004) makes two observations that are of particular relevance in this regard. First, he states that language ideologies in a society are multiple, because social divisions are multiple. Second, language ideologies are productively used in the creation and representation of various social and cultural identities.

The findings above bear out the relevance of Kroskrity's first point for written, and not just spoken, Arabic. While existing contributions on spoken Arabic show the many-faceted social dimensions of *fushā-āmmīyya* and intra-dialect relations, the written language has not enjoyed the same attention. To the extent that written Arabic has been the object of sociolinguistic inquiry at all, the literature remains focused on *fushā* and the ideology surrounding it. The results presented here give reason pay more attention to the unofficial Arabic literacy practices and language ideological landscape. Kroskrity's second point allows us to connect the case of written Arabic in Egypt to other contexts and to cultural theory. If the writing style of *Ihnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* is constitutive of a language ideology that equates the use of *āmmīyya* with authenticity, informality, wit and social criticism, how might we make sense of its place in the wider picture of contemporary Egyptian culture and society?

At this point, results from research on written language in bilingual contexts can illuminate the Egyptian case. Writing about code-switching between Hindi and English in India, Bhatt (Bhatt 2008) notes that it reflects social struggles, and writers'/speakers' switch between (typically two) codes express their position in relation to these struggles. Bhatt draws on Homi Bhabha (Bhabha 2004) to argue that when prominent English-language newspapers in India employ Hindi words and phrases, they create a 'third space,' a discursive space that is shared symbolically by those who imagine themselves in-between: neither traditional nor necessarily modern. This third space offers them "the possibility of a new representation, of meaning-making, and of agency." (Bhatt 2008:182)

Similarly, Saxena (Saxena 2011) observes that bilingual (Malay/English) Bruneian youth use different languages in unregulated and regulated settings. The Arabic-based Jawi script is associated with Islamic settings and formal affairs. Youth from affluent English-language homes conform to the standard use of Jawi in regulated settings, such as in school and formal letters. However, when

communicating with friends on digital media like mobile phones, they employ code-switching, informed by global English as well as local Malay, but always written in Roman script. Saxena's findings show how youth negotiate identities with their language and script choices. Importantly, she notes that this code-switching "had not been learned in the regulated, institutional spaces of their lives but had been learned within their peer group and through participation in social networking sites and in computer-mediated communication. What we see in their digital literary practices is an illustration of the ways in which the global seeps into the local (...)." (Saxena 2011:290)

Both Bhatt and Saxena draw attention to the informal, unofficial nature of this code-switching, and its association with youthful culture and values. These are characteristics that are found also in the new Egyptian printed publications under study here. Bhatt's evocation of Bhabha's 'third space' hints at an interesting socio-political dimension to the Egyptian informal written language. For Bhabha, the concept of third space opens up a critical space for cultural difference, hybridity and translation instead of diversity and possibly antagonism (Bhabha 2004:28–57). Exactly the intention to translate between cultures and to open a critical dialogue by using difference creatively seems to mark the cultural productions analysed in this paper.

In *Tūk-Tūk* the cultural translation is obvious. Its main editor freely acknowledges his debt to French fanzines and other contemporary European graphic art to create stories about contemporary Egyptian society. And the mix of *fushā* and *āmmīyya* in the magazine's presentations of famous Arab and international musicians serves to translate and encourage contact: he translates the lyrics of songs in other Arab dialects and European languages into Egyptian dialect, while the presentation of the musician is written in *fushā*. As for *Ihnā*, its nearly unrestrained play with combinations of genres, content and code is evidence of a refusal to let the genre or the issue at hand determine the tone and the style of writing. By treating serious issues like democratization and conservative religion in a playful and informal language, the writers encourage hybridity and translation between high and low, conservative and liberal cultures and idioms.

Bhatt's remark about the element of social struggle apparent in code-switching is also highly relevant to the Egyptian case and introduces an aspect of written *āmmīyya* that is more socio-political than cultural. A persistent feature of Egyptian elite discourse before and after the 2011 revolution has been its xenophobic attitude. This attitude, prevalent under Mubarak to shore up his legitimacy, has been supported by the ruling military elite and the Islamists after February 2011. In this discourse, activists and demonstrators critical to the powers that be (before June 2013 the Islamists; after the 2013 coup the military

leadership) are described as people who have dubious connections to “foreign” elements and agendas harmful to Egyptian national interest. In this climate, the choice to publish critical articles and stories in a mix of *‘āmmiyya* and *fushā* is interesting. Many of the writers belong to a stratum of society that is multilingual, and where especially English is widespread both in speech and writing. There are and have been English-language publications that resemble *Ihnā* in many respects, such as *Campus* and *Cairo Times* magazines. By opting to write in Arabic script and for a large part in the Cairene urban vernacular, *Ihnā*’s contributors at once reach out to an audience that is wider than the cosmopolitan Anglophile crowd and simultaneously place themselves within the Egyptian Arab identity sphere. In this way, their choice of code helps them navigate a complex cultural and social landscape and signals that they are in-between: they do not subscribe to the high-blown nationalist rhetoric of the elite, but nor do they wish to place themselves outside the national community, and this is signalled by their writing in their native language instead of a foreign one.

Hirschkind has noted a related development in the Egyptian blogosphere, where religious differences are overcome and a critical ideology developed through a common, unifying language marked by codeswitching between *fushā* and *‘āmmiyya*. In the blogosphere, he notes, there is “recognition of the necessity of creating a language of political agency capable of encompassing the heterogeneity of commitments – religious and otherwise – that characterize Egyptian society.” (Hirschkind 2010:144) For Hirschkind, the use of written colloquial is about more than authenticity:

[M]ost obviously, its distance from the writing styles of other textual media signals a judgment on the illegitimacy of Egypt’s political institutions (...). Such writing highlights its independence from the dominant discourses of Egyptian political life that circulate via print and televisual media.

HIRSCHKIND 2010:146

This may be overstating the case, as there are in fact several printed media in Egypt that have for many years now published critical articles written in *fushā*. And in light of the generally tolerant attitude towards *‘āmmiyya* evidenced in the survey referred to above, its use is perhaps not as strongly politicized as Hirschkind claims. However, as I have tried to show in this section, it seems probable that written *‘āmmiyya* has the potential to be used in a boundary-breaking and critical sense, and that the writers of *Ihnā* and *Tūk-Tūk* have seized on this opportunity.

## Conclusion

We have seen that explanations vary for why *‘āmmiyya* figures prominently in new print media in Egypt. In *Iḥnā*, the association with a ‘cool’ humorous style – sarcastic literature – is important, while in *Tūk-Tūk* the perceived requirements of genre and the medium of comics itself play a big role. Regardless of the motivations, both publications contribute to a trend that sees *‘āmmiyya* become more visible in the domain of written discourse, reserved for *fushā* according to the classic model of diglossia. This development may have far-reaching consequences in both the language system and the social sphere in the long run. In this article, I have focused on three immediately visible cultural and social functions of *‘āmmiyya* publications. First, they give voice to marginalized groups from different social strata in Egypt, and uphold an ideal of popular authenticity by treating issues close to the Egyptian street in a vernacular idiom. Second, they contribute to making the public sphere more informal. In fact, they belong to a vanguard in this respect, since *‘āmmiyya* is far less visible in the printed than the spoken domain of the public sphere. Third, when the liberal content and informal language of these publications are seen together, they communicate a desire to criticize contemporary Egyptian society while holding on to a popular, authentic identity. These publications are expressive of a language ideology from below that legitimizes the use of the vernacular in print to treat serious issues. Writing in *‘āmmiyya* opens a third space in which authors can introduce thoughts and issues alien to mainstream culture, without placing themselves outside it. In this way, the new *‘āmmiyya* publications contribute not only to a slowly changing language ideology that erodes the clear-cut functional divisions implicit in the concept of diglossia; they may also contribute to a change in the tone and content of written public discourse in Egypt.

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## Writing Oral and Literary Culture

### *The Case of the Contemporary Moroccan zajal*

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#### Introduction

Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1374) is considered one of the giants of the medieval Arabic literary tradition. He published dozens of books on a wide range of topics from medicine to Islamic mysticism, and philosophy to history. His mastery of Arabic was without peer. He was a poet and an important high government official in the Nasrid court of Granada, as well as a luminary figure in Merinid North Africa. In short, he is, quite literally, one of the last words of the high cultural tradition of medieval Muslim Spain (al-Andalus) and North Africa. Less known today, or at least less celebrated, is the fact that he composed a number of *zajals* (strophic poems using the local Andalusī dialect) on various topics including praise for the Nasrid sultan Muḥammad V (r. 1354–1359 and 1362–1391) (Elinson 2010). He was not the only high court official to dabble in the *zajal* arts. His student (who would become a co-conspirator in his murder) Ibn Zamrak (d. 1394), whose *qaṣīdas* grace the walls of Spain's most conspicuous homage to the glorious Andalusī past in the Alhambra, composed a number of *zajals* as well (Corriente 1990). Also in the fourteenth century in Morocco, a poet by the name of al-Kafif al-Zarhūnī accompanied the Merinid sultan Abū al-Ḥassān on a tour of his lands in Morocco in the early 1300s, and composed a five hundred verse *zajal* in Moroccan Arabic (*dārija*) describing every detail of the journey and praising the sultan. It is interesting to note that none of these examples of *zajal* poetry in the halls of officialdom seemed to raise any eyebrows at the time. They are recorded in literary and historical works without hesitation. In fact, the fourteenth century saw a flourishing of *zajal* and other colloquial forms in the official realm in al-Andalus and medieval North Africa (Bensherifa 1987: 10). However, this is not to say that literary critics and scholars always accepted non-classical strophic poetry as a legitimate poetic form. In fact, its popularity waxed and waned.

Ibn Bassām of Santerém (d. 1147) chose *not* to include examples of *muwashshaḥs* (a strophic poetic form related to the *zajal* in its structure and inclusion of colloquial Arabic) in his literary anthology *al-Dhakhīra fī maḥāsin ahl al-jazīra* (Treasury of the Charms of the People of the Iberian Peninsula)



due to the fact that their “meters ... are beyond the limits of our book, as the majority of them are not composed according to the metrical schemes (*a‘ārīd*) of the poems of the Arabs” (Ibn Bassām 1939: 2). While he does not include the non-classical strophic form in this Andalusī literary anthology, the fact that he feels the need to justify its omission indicates that it was well known and somewhat popular at the time.

Although the Andalusī *zajal* enjoyed some popularity during the Almoravid period (1040–1147) and in the subsequent Almohad period (1121–1269), “[t]he *zajal* is soon barred from literary consideration and confined to folkloric use, and even the *muwashshah* loses ground and ends up by being an occasional exercise for some poets” (Corriente 1991: 66). Nonetheless, by the fourteenth century, strophic poetry in general, and the *zajal* form in particular, comes into its own as an accepted genre of written artistic expression; maybe not held equal to the classical tradition, but a viable literary option to be considered alongside it. In the introduction to his famous work of history, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) states:

The great mass took to [the *muwashshah*] because of its smoothness, artistic language, and the (many) internal rhymes found in it (which made them popular). As a result, the common people in the cities imitated them. They made poems of the (*muwashshah*) type in their sedentary dialect (*bi-lughatihim al-ḥaḍariyya*), without employing vowel endings. They thus invented a new form, which they called *zajal*. They have continued to compose poems of this type down to this time. They achieved remarkable things in it. The (*zajal*) opened a wide field for eloquent (poetry) in the (Spanish-Arabic) dialect, which is influenced by non-Arab (speech habits) (*bi-ḥasbi lughatihim al-musta‘jima*).

IBN KHALDŪN 1958:454

Although it is important not to overstate the extent to which dialectal Arabic was accepted in the Arabic literary and cultural canon in the pre-modern period, the fact that it *was* included and discussed is significant. That the giants of the Arabic cultural tradition such as Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Ibn Khaldūn accepted and praised works in dialect points to a certain level of ambivalence between the use of Standard Arabic and colloquial in writing in the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

1 Similar things were happening in other parts of Europe during this same period. In 1303–1304, Dante wrote his *De vulgari eloquentia*, praising vernacular literature and claiming its high eloquence over the grammatical standard. He concludes Book 1 of the work with these

The medieval *zajal* and its contemporary iteration represents an interesting intersection of written and oral (often conflated as high and low) literatures, straddling as it does the boundary between linguistic and literary registers, and challenging accepted notions of modernity and definitions of cultural literacy. Thus, the contemporary *zajal* serves as an interesting entry point into the discussion of the use of colloquial Arabic in writing. The *zajal* as it is practiced today in Morocco is not a fixed or single poetic form, but rather, includes practically any poetry or lyric composed in *dārija*, regardless of its performative context (oral and/or written) and varied cultural, historical, social, and literary underpinnings. I will discuss the form in more detail below, but suffice it to say that the *zajal* displays broad linguistic and ideological heterogeneity, as do its practitioners and critics.

The contemporary Moroccan *zajal* is often touted as an authentic (*aṣīl*) Moroccan form that best articulates and expresses the Moroccan 'soul'. In fact, it is just such a search for "its authentic national character (*ṭab'ihā al-qawmī al-aṣīl*)" (Jirārī 1970: 1) that encouraged 'Abbās al-Jirārī to undertake his ambitious and important book on the Moroccan *zajal*, the first full length academic study dedicated to the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* (initially a doctoral dissertation conspicuously completed in Egypt rather than Morocco). For al-Jirārī, "folk literature provides an image of the national character ... that is clearer than the image that is reflected in cultured, educated literature" (Jirārī 1970). So, despite al-Jirārī's interest in Moroccan colloquial literature and his noble desire to subject it to rigorous scholarly study, his project is predicated on an opposition between high and low, lettered and unlettered, national and transnational. While he puts forth a defense of Moroccan folk literature and an assertion of its equality, even its superiority over higher forms of literature in terms of reflecting and articulating true 'Moroccan-ness', his assertion assumes that lettered and unlettered cultures are cleanly separated, and that one is more authentic than the other.

While al-Jirārī's study is revolutionary in its subject matter and breadth, his valorization of the *zajal* as an 'authentic' Moroccan art form nonetheless risks relegating it to the margins of the high literary tradition, and reminds us that the stamp of authenticity and celebration of folkloric forms is often a reaction *against* certain notions of modernity (learned and literate) that are in fact, at the same time 'traditional' and 'modern'. However, what is articulated in and

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words: "Now of the two the nobler is the vernacular: first because it is the first language ever spoken by mankind; second because the whole world uses it through diverse pronunciations and forms; finally because it is natural to us while the other is more the product of art." Quoted in Menocal 1993: 101. See Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

through the *zajal* is fully modern, and it challenges standard, more conservative definitions of what ‘authentic Moroccan’ means. It is through the vaunting and strengthening of *dārija*’s written culture that contemporary Moroccan *zajal* poets and critics aim to re-appropriate ‘the tradition’ in order to express a fully modern Morocco. As Regina Bendix notes:

The quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing, at once modern and antimodern. It is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity. As such, it can be understood within the framework of reflexive modernization.

BENDIX 1997: 8

It is ironic that the popular notion of the *zajal* as a folk form that is ‘authentically’ Moroccan has been challenged over the past three decades by contemporary Moroccan *zajal* poets themselves who seek legitimacy for the *zajal* as a more widely accepted poetic form to be considered alongside poetry composed in Standard Arabic, as well as other accepted literary languages (for example, French or English). It is this very conscious positioning of the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* within the broader literary landscape that interests me here, specifically how *zajal* poets and critics view its writing, publication, and performance. In this essay, I will examine the *zajal* from a historical, aesthetic, and ideological perspective in order to analyze and evaluate its place in the current debates that are occurring in Morocco regarding the use of *dārija* in writing. I consider the form’s history and literary critical works on it, as well as the views of several *zajal* poets and critics vis à vis the use of Moroccan *dārija* in writing.

### Speaking and Writing Arabic

Discussions of the use of colloquial Arabic in writing have been occurring in many parts of the Arab world for well over a century (see Fahmy 2011; Plonka 2004 and 2006 for a historical view of these debates in Egypt and Lebanon respectively). In Morocco, this is also not an entirely new discussion, but it has only really been in the last ten to fifteen years that it has gained real traction in the press, on television, and within scholarly circles (Elinson 2013 and citations therein). For its part, the *zajal* has been around in one form or another for quite some time, at least since the tenth century, and some of its earliest examples have been written and included in the literary canon. Although there is a continuity of sorts from the pre-modern *zajal* form to the contemporary period,

the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* as a written poetic form with no set rhyme scheme or meter is a free verse form closely related to similarly free verse in *fuṣṣhā*, and it is a much more recent phenomenon that, I would argue, emerged out of a particular context of linguistic change in Morocco where proponents of expanding the use of *dārīja* in the written realm have been challenging standard language ideologies that would prefer to preserve the *fuṣṣhā/dārīja* – Standard/non-Standard division of labor in the Arabic language.

Beginning as far back as the mid-1970s, and really taking off in the early- to mid-2000s, discussion has escalated around the topic of writing in *dārīja*. During this time, technological advances, most notably e-mail, texting, and the use of social media, as well as the establishment of new, private radio outlets has encouraged an expanding use of *dārīja* in numerous contexts, including writing of various forms and genres. It is difficult to speak of any sort of a ‘movement’, as activists, scholars, journalists, translators, playwrights, and novelists who are actively working toward greater recognition of *dārīja* as a legitimate language able to fulfill all linguistic functions may very well be aware of one another, but are not, for the most part, actually working together toward a single, common goal. Their activities often intersect in many contexts, but they operate largely independent of one another (Miller 2014). A community that *can* be considered a rather cohesive movement is that of contemporary Moroccan *zajal* poets and critics. These enthusiasts of the *zajal* interact in person at *zajal* performances and festivals, on various websites devoted to the exchange of poetry and criticism,<sup>2</sup> on Facebook, and through their rather robust published output. In these forums, they discuss and promote *dārīja* as an artistic language entitled to the same respect as *fuṣṣhā* and other standard world languages.

The *zajal*, both the medieval form and its contemporary iteration, occupies an interesting ‘grey area’ between oral and written literature. While its colloquial language, rhythm, and structure strongly connect it to the oral tradition (Rāshiq 2008), *zajal* poets are writing, publishing, and advocating for the form’s acceptance as a legitimate written poetic form as never before. The contemporary Moroccan *zajal* is neither an entirely oral, nor entirely written form, but rather, each of these two ‘faces’ relies on the other to comprise a complete and ideal *zajal*. It is this janus-like quality of the *zajal* that I will explore in the remainder of this essay.

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2 See, for example, [www.zajal-lemsyeh.com](http://www.zajal-lemsyeh.com) (*zajal* poet Ahmed Lemsyeh’s website), <http://montada-zajalmaghrib.ahlamontada.com> (an online forum of *zajal* poet’s and critics).

### Language Ideology in Morocco and Elsewhere

Journalists, academics, intellectuals, and others have weighed in on the role and status of *dārija* and *fuṣḥā* in numerous spheres of Moroccan life including culture, education, literature, and journalism. Central to these discussions is whether or not there exists a clear division of labor between *dārija* and *fuṣḥā* – which “is just how it is: *no justification is needed*” (J. Milroy 2001: 535) – that either must be defended or challenged. Languages consist of more than one linguistic register, and what becomes the standard is no accident. Rather, that determination is a conscious social, economic, and political project that favors and supports one form of a language over others. This support results in the ‘raising’ of the standard, and the concomitant ‘lowering’ of anything that is *not* the standard. This is not a natural linguistic phenomenon, but rather, one that is planned and ideologically driven. Writing about standard language ideology in English, Milroy and Milroy clearly articulate the idea that

[t]he effect of codification and prescription has been to *legitimize* the norms of formal registers of Standard English rather than the norms of everyday spoken English. Codifiers have legislated and prescribers have tried to put the legislation into effect. One result of this is that there is a general belief that there is only one form of the correct, i.e. legitimate, English, and a feeling that colloquial and non-standard forms are perverse and deliberate deviations from what is approved by ‘law’; i.e. they are ‘illegitimate’.

MILROY 1998: 30

Despite the fact that ideas about language are not fixed or absolute, speakers of a given language often believe them to be so, and that their language is “*a clearly delimited perfectly uniform and perfectly stable variety* – a variety that is never perfectly and consistently realized in spoken use” (J. Milroy 2001: 543). In the case of Arabic, the prestige of Standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) is attributable to its close links to the Qur’an and the Islamic tradition, which, from a theological standpoint, represents the ideal form of the Arabic language.<sup>3</sup> This, combined with Standard Arabic’s importance in the nineteenth and twentieth century Arabic *nahḍa* (renaissance) and the rise of pan-Arab nationalist ide-

3 It is important to remember that the word *fuṣḥā* means ‘the purest’ – a value judgment rather than an objective linguistic one; *zajal* poets I spoke with prefer the term *mu‘arraba* – fully Arabized, or vowelled – because it is more descriptive than normative.

ology based on, among other things, a unified and unifying Arabic language (Suleiman 2003) that has been “used in the creation and representation of various social and cultural identities (e.g. nationalism, ethnicity)” (Kroskrity 2004: 509), has assured Standard Arabic’s place at the top of the linguistic totem pole. This hierarchy is reinforced daily in schools, mosques, on television and radio, and elsewhere. Despite a tacit acceptance of non-classical forms in the medieval period, I would argue that the contemporary period has witnessed an ideological hardening against the acceptance of colloquial forms into literary circles. The modern education system continues to be predicated on all sorts of forms of categorization and standardization that, as Bourdieu puts it has “helped to devalue popular modes of expression, dismissing them as ‘slang’ and ‘gibberish’ ... and to impose recognition of the legitimate language” (Bourdieu 1991: 49). As the important Arab nationalist thinker George Antonius underlines in *The Arab Awakening*, it is the school that provides the linguistic and cultural underpinnings of the modern nation and, “[w]ithout school or book, the making of a nation is in modern times inconceivable” (Antonius 1938: 40).

Despite this seemingly ‘stable’ linguistic situation, Moroccan *dārīja* is appearing increasingly in contexts and forms that have been traditionally associated with Standard Arabic. In writing, and in discussions of writing and literacy, the apparent division between Standard Arabic and *dārīja* is breaking down, or at the very least, shifting. This does not imply that *dārīja* is poised to replace Standard Arabic entirely, nor is that the intention of the poets. Nonetheless, language change is occurring on numerous levels in Morocco from top-down policy and academic debates on the feasibility and suitability of ‘allowing’ *dārīja* into the realm of the written word and official discourse, to bottom-up, spontaneous examples of *dārīja* being written in various writing genres by a cross-section of Moroccan society.

### Zajal

Poetry composed in colloquial Arabic has a long history, with some of the earliest examples of its written form going back to al-Andalus. The Andalusī *zajal*, of which Ibn Quzmān of Cordoba (d. 1160) was its most famous, although not first, practitioner, is a strophic poetic form that uses an elevated level of Andalusī colloquial Arabic. The *zajal* overlapped considerably with the classical *qaṣīda*, utilizing conventional tropes (wine and garden imagery, descriptions of the beloved) and themes (praise, panegyric, invective), and thus fulfilling similar functions to it. However, it was the strophic form, non-classical meters, and

hybrid language (*fushhā*, *‘ammīyya*, Romance, and Berber) that set the *zajal* apart from the classical *qaṣīda*. Despite this non-classical linguistic heterogeneity, the form has long been linked with the written tradition, and thus cannot be considered a ‘folk’ or ‘un-learned’ form. In the introduction to his *dīwān*, written in elevated Arabic rhymed prose, Ibn Quzmān explains how to compose and write *zajal* lyrics, saying that the inclusion of case endings (*al-‘irāb*) “is the ugliest thing that can be included in a *zajal*, weightier than eternal death”. He goes on to say that, “even grammatical errors in the vowelled speech of *qaṣīdas* and *muwashshaḥs* are not as ugly as including case endings in the *zajal*” (Ibn Quzmān 1980: 3). Ibn Quzmān may have avoided case endings, but he was harshly criticized by the medieval *zajal* critic and theorist, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 1348) for *not* using *‘ammīyya* in his *zajals*, thus violating the *zajal*’s stricture on the use of “pure Arabic (*al-lughā al-‘arabiyya al-faṣīḥa*)” (Ḥillī 1981: 63. See also Radwan 2012: 16 and Zwartjes 1997: 51–54).

In addition to Ibn Quzmān’s *dīwān*, there are scattered examples of medieval *zajals* having been written down and recorded in *dīwāns*, historical writings, and other collections. However, examples of early Moroccan *zajal* poetry that have been written down are, according to Muḥammad Rāshīq, relatively few. In fact, he counts only four complete *zajal* collections dating from the ninth century when the *zajal* first appears to 1976 when *zajal* poet Ahmed Lemsyeh published *Riyāḥ ... al-latī sa-ta’tī* (Rāshīq n.d.). However, one should not be tempted to overemphasize the extent to which the pre-modern *zajal* remained unwritten, as Rāshīq’s low count only refers to complete collections. He argues for the importance of documenting the largely oral *zajal* form so as to save it from disappearing entirely, and underlines the importance of both written and oral forms, and the registers that characterize them as

forming the social framework for individual speech that is done in one of two forms: spoken or written, and that the language of the *zajal* has developed and continued to develop over the generations so that it does not solidify and die, and its poets do not suffer from the language barrier that prevents communication and verbal interaction.

RĀSHIQ n.d.

### The Zajal between Orality and Writing

The written and published *zajal* poses a challenge to Standard Arabic’s monopoly over literate culture, and this challenge represents nothing less than a linguistic revolution. Thematically, *zajals* have often served as a vehicle for polit-

ical critique. Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s, the *zajal* was overtly politically engaged; the product of a particularly heated political moment in Morocco and the rest of the Arab world when Marxist/leftist movements sought political and social change under autocratic post-colonial rulers, and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause. As time went on, the *zajal* threw off its overtly political mantle to explore more aesthetically focused and experimental poetic realms. Nonetheless, the *zajal* forms what can only be called a “resistance to dominant representations [that] occurs in two ways: when devalued linguistic strategies and genres are practices despite denigration, and when these devalued practices propose or embody alternate models of the social world” (Gal 1989: 349, quoted in Kapchan 2001:140).

In 1976, the poet Ahmed Lemsyeh published *Riyāḥ ... al-llatī sa-ta'tī* (The Winds of ... that Will Come), a collection of *zajal* poetry that broke existing boundaries between oral and written poetry; it was the first full *dīwān* of *zajal* poetry published in Morocco in the modern era. Although not the first ever example of a written *zajal* in the contemporary period,<sup>4</sup> this *dīwān* is considered by many to be the harbinger of a new type of *zajal* poetry, one that is closely aligned with poetry contemporary to it composed in *fushḥā*, and it “defined a new modernist course in our time” (Rāshiq 2005). This poetic experiment clearly articulated and emphasized that, despite the popular view that oral and written literature, specifically poetry in *dārija* and Standard Arabic, are and should remain two completely separate literary forms with their own sets of conventions, themes, and goals, there is indeed much overlap between the two; in fact, locating the division between the two (thematically, formally, and even linguistically) is much more difficult than first appears.

That there are distinct differences between oral literature (often associated with less-learned folk forms) and written (often associated with learned prestige forms) is not at all absolute. In his study of the fourteenth century epic *zajal* of al-Kafif al-Zarhūnī (14th century), Moroccan literary scholar Sa'īd Yaḳṭīn asserts that

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4 *Zajals* had been published in *al-Muḥarrir* (the newspaper of the political party *al-Ittiḥād al-ishtirākī li-l-quwāt al-sha'bīya* until the paper was shut down by the government in 1981), *al-Ittiḥād al-ishtirākī* (the newspaper that took *al-Muḥarrir*'s place), and other news and cultural publications. For an exhaustive list of published *zajal dīwāns*, studies, articles, and texts, see the bibliography compiled by (Mehdi Ouadghiri) in a special issue of *Āfāq* (the journal of the Moroccan Writers' Union) 3/4 (1992), 93–110. A quick glance at this bibliography shows that after a few published examples of *zajal* poems and criticism in the 1970s, publishing activity really takes off in the 1980s and 1990s.



if we move beyond the dichotomous genre separation of culture into 'learned' and 'popular', and instead interact with culture as a whole comprised of branches, we would see that when we closely examine popular culture, we find that it does not differ considerably from what makes up learned culture.

YAQTĪN n.d.

While strict taxonomy of oral/folk vs. written/literate forms would make for a 'neater' organization of the literary canon, there is, in fact, much overlap between the two; we have many examples of orally-inspired folk literature having been written down, both drawing from, and inspiring high literary forms, and high forms, for their part, drawing upon folk forms and contexts. Whereas the arbiters of high Arabic culture would prefer not to include colloquial literature in the canon,

'orality' and 'literacy' are not two separate and independent things; nor (to put it more concretely) are oral and written modes two mutually exclusive and opposed processes for representing and communicating information. On the contrary they take diverse forms in differing cultures and periods, are used differently in different social contexts and, insofar as they can be distinguished at all as separate modes rather than a continuum, they mutually interact and affect each other, and the relations between them are problematic rather than self-evident.

FINNEGAN 2013: 175

Following Ahmed Lemsyeh's publication of *Riyāḥ ... al-latī sa-ta'tī* in 1976, the writing and publication of *zajal* poetry exploded. As Murād al-Qādirī (Mourad Qadery) points out, the number of published *dīwāns* "went from three in the 1970s ... to more than forty in the 1990s, to double that number in the following decade, approaching one hundred" (Qādirī 2013: 8). Muḥammad Bū Sitta counts over 280 diwans through 2011 (Bū Sitta 2014: 37). Most of these works are either self-published or mostly self-published, which indicates that the publishing industry in Morocco does not view the publication of *zajal* poetry as a profitable venture worth investing in. Indeed this is true for most literary genres in Morocco, as book sales in general are rather anemic with print runs of one or two hundred to, at the most, a thousand.<sup>5</sup> In addition to published *dīwāns*,

5 I was told by one *zajal* poet that a best case scenario would be for a publishing house to split the cost of publishing with a poet if they see any commercial potential. Even this division of costs is rare, though.

poets also use Facebook as a medium for writing and diffusing *zajal* poetry, posting new material prior to or instead of more formal publication, or posting already published work which results in many comments and the constant re-referencing of older work, thus ensuring that the physical publication of a print *dāvān* is only one stage in its life, not always the final one.

It is important to emphasize, though, that the mere act of writing something down, and even publishing it, does not necessarily mean that it represents an example of writing or literate culture, i.e. culture connected to learned, written tradition, rather than the oral. It is not necessarily true that all written *zajals* are considered part of literary (i.e. literate) tradition. Nor should the written *zajal* be considered an accurate recording of orally conceived and composed literature. Contemporary Moroccan *zajal* poetry can be divided into two broad categories: *zajals* composed with an “oral mentality”, i.e. drawing from Moroccan oral culture and meant to be performed orally such as the *malhūn* (Magidow 2013), *‘ayṭa* (Najmī 2007), and the sung poetry of groups such as Nass el-Ghiwane and Jil al-Jilala (Ḥannūn 2007), and *zajals* that are composed with an intellectual or “writing mentality” (*al-‘aqliyya al-kitābiyya*) that draw from all manner of world intellectual culture – philosophical, religious, literary, historical, etc. This latter type of *zajal*, which some bemoan as being the exception of what is currently being produced rather than the norm, requires education and book knowledge in order to compose, read, understand, and appreciate it. The fact that this poetry is written in *dārija* does not at all imply or assume that it is aimed at people with little or no education for whom reading in Standard Arabic, French, or some other standard language is all but impossible. In fact, the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* is not aimed for those whose understanding of Arabic is limited to *dārija*. Rather, this poetry is intended for those who do, and must understand the nuances of literary expression, and who possess a literacy that extends well beyond basic reading skills. The contemporary *zajal* (or *qaṣīda zajaliyya*), is a strong assertion of *dārija*’s ability to express even the most complex ideas, contrary to those who would say that *dārija* is only suitable for certain contexts, and that Standard Arabic is the linguistic level most suitable for ‘high’ literature and the expression of complex topics. Thus, the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* has inserted itself into the language ideology debates that have been occurring across print and television media in recent years.

### Zajal Voices

Contemporary Moroccan *zajal* poets, critics, and enthusiasts are quite outspoken when it comes to their views on reading, writing, and publishing about this

poetic form. Whether in online forums, news articles (online and print), Facebook posts, introductions to published *zajal dīwāns*, academic studies, and in the words of *zajals* themselves, the *zajal* community is interested in promoting the *zajal* and defending it as a legitimate, written poetic form. In interviews and at events devoted to the *zajal*, the common refrain is that the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* is poetry like any other, and should be evaluated and appreciated as such. Many *zajal* poets also compose *qaṣīdas* in Standard Arabic and insist that linguistic register is determined not by conscious choice, but rather, by what the poetic context requires. In this section, I will present a number of important voices in the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* scene focusing specifically on what they have to say about “this poetry’s ... permanent preoccupation with the concepts, questions, and anxieties of writing” (Bendahmane 2009). As mentioned above, the number of *zajal* poets who are writing and publishing is growing at an impressive rate. I do not claim to include close to all the *zajal* voices that can be heard in Morocco. Here I present but four voices who represent no more than a small sample, but nonetheless are prominent poets in the *zajal* scene.

Idrīs Misnāwī (Driss Mesnaoui) (b. 1948) is an extremely productive *zajal* poet, a strong proponent of the *zajal* form, and a firm believer in the expressive beauty of *dārīja* and its appropriateness for all forms of expression. Mesnaoui worked as a high school teacher from 1967 until 2006, and is now retired and living in his hometown of Tiflet (in northwestern Morocco) where he devotes considerable energy to writing and encouraging others in the *zajal* form. He has played an important role in the promotion of the Moroccan *zajal*, having published twenty-seven *zajal* collections to date, and is one of the founders of the ‘Moroccan Association for the *Zajal*’ (*al-Rābiṭa al-Maghribiyya li-l-Zajal*) established in 1996. He also served as the association’s first president. In addition to his importance as a *zajal* poet, he published his first novel in *dārīja* in 2009 entitled *Ta’irwurūt* (Rose), which he describes first and foremost as ‘stories’ (*te’awid*), and then parenthetically as a novel (*riwāya*), underlining the novel’s relationship to oral culture, and his assertion that what he is producing is a new, novel, form. Since then he has published three more novels in *dārīja* – *Ukkaz r-rih* (The Wind’s Crutch) in 2013, *Sa’d l-belda* (The Town’s Lucky Star) in 2014, and *Abwāḥ l-būḥ* (Tablets of Confession) in 2015. These novelistic works boldly push the boundaries of acceptable novelistic language, and aim to focus attention on people, places, and histories not often included in what would be considered more conventionally conceived novels. He has also written and staged a number of theatrical plays.

In response to those who would claim that *dārīja* is limited in terms of function and expressive potential, Mesnaoui is bold in his assertion that “Moroccan

*dārīja* is the most fertile, most lofty, most pure, most eloquent (*afṣaḥ*), and most simple Arabic dialect” (Misnāwī 2013: 312), and he speaks of *dārīja*’s rich vocabulary that draws from multiple “dictionaries” (the dictionary of the mountains, of sand dunes, of plains and forests, of oases and river valleys, lakes and waterfalls). The conspicuous use of the word *afṣaḥ*, ‘most eloquent’, along with the string of superlatives often used to describe Standard Arabic’s superior linguistic status, all aim to challenge the accepted wisdom that there is only *one* possible Standard, suitable for all formal situations. In the context of expressive writing, Mesnaoui turns the relative values of *dārīja* and Standard Arabic upside down, arguing that *dārīja* is the superior of the two. It is generally accepted in a standard language culture that, because it must be learned in school,

there is an understandable tendency for people to believe that writing [in the standard language] is somehow more complicated and difficult (and more important) than speech. The *functional* importance of literacy in the development of Western civilization has been so great that very high values are placed on the written channel, and it is usually considered (implicitly or explicitly) to be ‘superior’ to speech.

MILROY 1998: 55

Mesnaoui boldly challenges this notion. Whereas writing and the written register, according to standard language ideology, is considered superior to speech because of that fact that it is more difficult and must be learned, and because of the importance and status with which literacy imbues writing, Mesnaoui alters the criteria. In comparing *dārīja* and Standard Arabic within the context of poetic and emotional expression, *dārīja* is the purer, more expressive, and freer linguistic register because of its *simplicity* and closeness to Moroccans’ daily life.

The importance of writing (that he means writing in *dārīja* is strongly implied) is a theme that runs throughout Mesnaoui’s work. In a particularly strong example that evokes the first Qur’anic revelation’s command to recite (*Iqra’!*) (*Sūrat al-‘Alaq*), Mesnaoui imbues this poem with a timeless, authoritative force. He exhorts the reader to

Write! Compose *zajals*!  
Dance for the ghosts on high  
Shake for the lower spirits  
Make waves for the forgotten graves  
Bring life to the cities’ bones  
Light nature’s beauty color by color

Cast out from the living dead      and from the buried living  
 the tongue's pain      the letter's pain      the string's pain

MISNĀWĪ 2009: 49

Ahmed Lemsyeh (b. 1950) is considered another of the pillars and leading voices of the contemporary Moroccan *zajal*. He has published poetry in both *fuṣṣhā* and *dārīja*, and, like Mesnaoui, Lemsyeh is a strong proponent of the *zajal* form, taking every opportunity he can to talk about it, praise it, promote it, and tout its beauty and power. He is the author of twenty-four published *dīwāns* to date and his work has been translated into many languages. When he published *Riyāḥ ... al-llatī sa-ta'tī* in 1976, Lemsyeh admitted that it was an experiment undertaken deliberately yet hesitantly, and was perhaps inspired by popular cultural and artistic movements being articulated during the same time in *dārīja* by musical super-groups such as Nass el-Ghiwane and Jil al-Jilala. Lemsyeh would not publish another *zajal dīwān* until *Shkūn ʿtraz l-mā?* (Who embroidered the water?), published in 1994. This is not to say that he was not keeping busy in the *zajal* world in those eighteen years. Soon after the publication of *Riyāḥ*, Lemsyeh published an article in the newspaper *al-Muḥarrir* defending the writing of *zajals* and refuting the argument that writing is a zero-sum game in which more *dārīja* writing necessarily comes at the expense of *fuṣṣhā*, a charge that is common among self-appointed defenders of *fuṣṣhā* (Lemsyeh 1977). Also, between 1976 and the early 1990s, Lemsyeh published over twenty *zajal* poems in the pages of various newspapers including *al-Muḥarrir*, *al-Ittiḥād al-Ishtirākī*, *al-Balāgh al-Maghribī*, and *al-Dīmuqrāṭīyya al-'Ummāliyya*.

In 1992, in what is considered by many to be a watershed event in the *zajal's* quest for literary acceptance, a double issue of *Āfāq*, the journal of the Moroccan Writers' Union (*Ittiḥād kuttāb al-Maghrib*), was devoted to the topic of the contemporary Moroccan *zajal*. With a critical introduction by Lemsyeh and poems by leading *zajal* poets including Driss Mesnaoui, Ahmed Taïb Lalj, Hasan Mufti, Murad Qadery and others, this special issue was the most substantial critical publication to date to treat this poetic form since Jirārī's study was published in 1970.

Lemsyeh's introduction poses a number of questions concerning the relationship of poetry composed in *dārīja* to that composed in *fuṣṣhā* – Is it an Oedipal relationship? Should one be favored over the other? Are they in competition with one another (Lemsyeh 1992)? These are crucial questions that Lemsyeh presents to the reader, but does not himself provide answers to, although he does make it quite clear that he believes *dārīja* and *fuṣṣhā* should be placed on equal footing. He asserts that

the texts that we will read attempt to refute the idea that spoken Arabic (*al-‘ammīyya*) is incapable of expressing poetry. It is well known that poetry can be either absent or present, whether in *fuṣṣhā* poetry, or in the *zajal* ... and that emerging from the clay of *dārīja* does not mean we should treat it harshly; rather, it should mean the raising of this clay to poetry’s damned fire.

LEMSYEH 1992

On the relationship between the oral and literary qualities of the *zajal*, Lemsyeh acknowledges that both are important. Although he is clearly passionate about having the written *zajal* recognized as a legitimate poetic form in Morocco, he is also quite clear on the *zajal*’s oral roots, and the need for the *zajal* to be performed orally. Despite the plethora of published *zajal* works, Lemsyeh views the published *dīwān* as incomplete in that it lacks the elements that “complete” the *zajal*. These elements are performative, and can only occur at poetry recitals and events; they include music, applause, sighs of appreciation, critical discussions, and even artistic arguments and disagreements. On the one hand, Lemsyeh aims to inject the *zajal text* with a fully independent existence from the ephemeral spoken word. On the other hand, while full independence is theoretically possible, it is not necessarily preferable. Thus, a text’s performance is as integral to its being as is the printed text. Written (learned) and oral (folk) cultures come together in the *zajal*, and in it, Lemsyeh and others preserve both the oral and literary roots of the genre, “repeating and recycling the oral repertoire into the written work ... thereby infusing the written word – associated with high culture – with the images and metaphors of oral folk performance.” (Kapchan 2001:133).

Finally, Lemsyeh makes it clear that he “does not want the contemporary *zajal* to become numb with shallowness, nor does he wish to promote the vulgar notion that [it] is [only] for the masses, and poetry in *fuṣṣhā* is [only] for the elite, striving for satisfaction in the audience’s applause. [He wants] the *zajal* to be considered on its own merits” (Lemsyeh 1992: 12). For Lemsyeh, the oral and the written word are one, and writing – no matter the register – is what makes everything manifestly clear:

Words are not a bed and a covering  
 Words are a road, and the people are letters.  
 Words are not right and wrong  
 Words are a spring whose water overflows.  
 Paper is a shroud sewn with white thread  
 And with writing, it becomes an eye that sees.

LEMSYEH 1994

In a clear statement of where he places the *zajal*, Hasan al-Mufti (d. 2008) (who was also a well-known song lyricist and television writer) states: “I picture the *zajal* poem (*al-qaṣīda al-zajaliyya*) to be essentially a written art. I only write it with the expectation that someone will read it, not hear it” (Muftī 2010, vol. 1: 9). Although al-Mufti clearly views his *zajals* as written compositions, the language is a hybrid of standard and spoken Arabic, not unlike the language used in much *zajal* poetry. In his introduction to Mufti’s collected works, Lemsyeh describes the *zajal* language as “a *barzakh* language” (Muftī 2010, vol. 2: preface) referring both to the concrete meaning of *barzakh* as the barrier that exists between salt and fresh water, or between two similar yet opposite qualities, and the eschatological meaning of the place between the material and the spiritual worlds. Just as the *barzakh* marks the indistinguishable division at which salt water becomes fresh, and where the material moves into the spiritual and vice versa, the *zajal* is made up of two (or more) linguistic registers that flow one into the other without clear distinction.

Nouhad Benaguida’s (b. 1974) experience with the *zajal* is, in many ways, a series of firsts. Following the publication of her *dīwān*, *‘Alāsh ḥereshti l-ḥuzn?* (Why did you cause such sadness?) in 1998, she released Morocco’s first *zajal* recording, *Hā wajhī wa-hā wajhak* (Here’s my face, and here’s yours) in 2003. Soon after this, she established the first website of its kind in Morocco devoted to the *zajal* which consisted of *zajal* texts, as well as sound recordings of readings (Benaguida 2012), and in 2007 she published the first anthology of Moroccan *zajal* poetry, *Majma‘ al-kalām* (Collection of Words). Benaguida is currently the host of the extremely popular nightly television talk show *Qiṣṣat al-nās* (Peoples’ Stories) on MediTV. In a television interview following the publication of *Majma‘ al-kalām*, Benaguida discusses the role and status of *dārija*. She praises the colloquial language of the *zajal* both for its simplicity and wide understandability, and for its appropriateness as a poetic medium. On the poets she includes in her anthology and the language they use, she says:

These poets write in the people’s language and they live the people’s concerns, expressing and touching upon issues of daily life in a very simple language, in a language of daily circulation ... but [in this language] there is a poetic quality ... a language full of poetic images, music, overtones, and symbolism, meaning all the elements of the Arabic or western poem.

“Interview with Nouhad Benaguida” 2009

When asked about *dārija*’s status vis-à-vis *fushā* and the popular notion that *dārija* poetry is second rate, she responds quite simply that, “this could very

well be a problem of the people who say this, not of us, the poets who write in Moroccan *dārija*. On the contrary. I believe that Moroccan Arabic is our true language. The Moroccan *zajal* is the historical register of the Moroccans (*dīwān al-Maghārba*)<sup>6</sup> (“Interview with Nouhad Benaguida” 2009).

In a clear nod to Descartes’ “je pense, donc, je suis” and the Sufi concept of oneness with the Eternal, Benaguida articulates her impulse to write, and the connection of writing with the Eternal in this short *zajal*:

I don't write in order to be  
 nor in order that being come from me  
 Rather, I write in order to say to you  
 that before the universe was  
 I was  
 always

ELBIAD 2014: 212

Adil Latefi (b. 1983) from Fez is considered one of the leading voices of a new generation of *zajal* poets. He published his first *dīwān*, *Shūfāt l-khātir* (Views of the Mind) in 2013 and won the first round of the newly established Guerçif Prize, a literary award for the *zajal*, sponsored by the *Hāmish* Association. His second book, published in 2014, is a dual effort with Algerian writer and *zajal* poet Abderrazak Boukebba (b. 1977) entitled *T-Taljnar* (Snowfire), and he has just published (in PDF) *Aṭsh yarwī siratuh* (A thirst that tells its own story). He composes poetry in both *dārija* and *fuṣṣhā*, and has recently been posting short poems in English on Facebook as well. Like many who write, he views writing as an essential, life-affirming act. In fact, writing is a major theme that runs through his work; that he writes mostly in *dārija* remains unmentioned, as this requires no justification beyond the justification for writing itself. On the back cover of *Shūfāt l-khātir*, Latefi writes (in *dārija*):

When you write, you're like someone who puts a message in a glass bottle and throws it into the sea. Someone might find the letter, read it, and understand it. Or, he might read it and not understand it. Or maybe no one will find it at all. When you write, you go on an adventure. You gamble. You're stripped naked. You're tortured and appear clearly because of it. “Can you *not* write?” That's the question you pose when you write.

LATEFI 2013

6 Invoking the well-known maxim that “[classical] poetry is the *dīwān* of the Arabs”.



Writing and words possess their own agency and ability to affect change. In the first *zajal* of the collection, “*Bilād (A Country)*” he writes:

I pluck from my self  
and plant it  
I water it with my blood  
Roses grow  
that I pick  
and say to my country, “take a sniff”

...

I write a word  
and bury it  
A melody emerges  
from the middle of its grave  
It sings and says,  
“the concerns of my country are my concerns”

...

Words are stopped  
and silence speaks  
Pens dry out  
My insides are in pain  
and increase my sickness.

...

I wait for the light of the sun  
to shine on my country  
I forget yesterday’s tears  
My misfortune ceases  
I plant my stakes ...  
My dream comes true.

LUṬFĪ 2013: 8–10

In “*l-Kitāba ḥayā* (Writing is life)”, writing is both subject and object, actor and acted upon. It is a search for existence through intellectual and experiential effort. “To write is to live, and to live is to be positioned in a riot of questions” (Boukebbba 2014). It is a journey filled with pain, the ultimate goal of which is enlightenment:

Writing is a letter emptying itself with another letter,  
a word sings and another word listens  
Writing is blood and smell on the sheet of paper, the mind’s wound,

a threshold. Place your forehead upon it if you want the door to open  
 and the light to breathe inside of you ...  
 a word, a word and a half. Even the errant one is beautified by it, despite  
 the fact that the word doesn't hear what it says  
 Writing is honey. The honeybee circles the flowers and thorns before  
 drawing the nectar from it while it buzzes ...  
 a beauty. The mind hunts it with a weapon of longing  
 a little bird. A feather grows on it with every question ...  
 a sea. Its fish are thirsty, only meaning gives them drink  
 a spring. Its water is pure, every one of its drops lights the way, and every  
 road leads to  
 a door. Its key under the threshold upon which you had placed your  
 forehead  
 Wash your self in light  
 before you open.

LATEFI 2013: 53

### Conclusion

Since the early- to mid-2000s in Morocco, the issue of language change, specifically the use of *dārija* in writing, has received a lot of attention in the popular press, on television, and in scholarly circles. These debates often center on broad discussions of Moroccan identity politics, educational reform, and social and political change. The participants in these discussions are often motivated by ideological concerns that aim either to promote the use of *dārija* in writing, or to prevent it. These opposing stances stem from views rooted in Standard Language ideologies that view languages as comprised of inherently stable registers that do not overlap, and assume a social, economic, and ideological bias toward one of those registers. Often, the Standard Language is considered to be the more grammatical, more complicated, written form of a language, whereas the spoken form is typically viewed as simpler, less capable of complex expression, and ultimately, of lower status than the Standard.

The contemporary Moroccan *zajal* provides an interesting intersection of oral and written literature and culture that, while still existing in a Standard Language culture, provides an interesting perspective on writing and writing culture in Morocco. While it takes its name and inspiration from the medieval Andalusī *zajal*, the contemporary Moroccan *zajal* as it is understood in its written form today traces its beginnings to the 1970s and 1980s, really taking off in the 1990s and 2000s, which, it should be noted, corresponds roughly with

rise of broader language discussions in Morocco concerning language change and the use of *dārīja* in writing. Despite its somewhat marginalized status in contemporary literary scene in Morocco, *zajal* poetry and criticism is very much a part of these linguistic and cultural discussions.

As we have seen, *zajal* poets, scholars, and enthusiasts are directly engaged in discussions and debates concerning the status of *dārīja* and the status and literary value of the contemporary Moroccan *zajal*. As this community strives for greater recognition on the Moroccan literary scene, it is vying for the same legitimacy that poetry written in Standard Arabic, French, and other standard languages have long enjoyed. This group bases its arguments not on statistics or research on reading practices and mother-tongue education, but rather, based on aesthetic and expressive considerations. As the most natural linguistic register for a Moroccan, both in terms of expression and in terms of understanding, the *zajal* community considers *dārīja* more valuable and more prestigious in a *zajal* setting. As discussions surround the suitability of *dārīja* for writing continue in Morocco, the *zajal* community is quietly, yet forcefully, making the point that *dārīja* is capable of written expression, and that it is no longer to be limited solely to the spoken register.

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# The Politics of Pro-*‘āmmīyya* Language Ideology in Egypt

*Mariam Aboelezz*

## Introduction

As other chapters in this volume demonstrate, the increasing use and acceptability of written *‘āmmīyya* in Egypt is now well-documented. The motivations behind this are rarely studied, although speculations have been made about the role of political ideology. One well-discussed dimension of language politics in Egypt takes the form of a binary of Egyptian nationalism vs. pan-Arab nationalism: the former ideology favouring *‘āmmīyya* and the latter favouring Standard Arabic or *fushā* (Suleiman 1996; Suleiman 2003; Suleiman 2008). However, the salience of this binary in present-day Egypt is unclear: on the one hand, it is often suggested that Egyptian nationalism was overtaken by pan-Arab nationalism (*ibid.*), and on the other, emerging literature suggests that pan-Arab nationalism is now a spent force (Phillips 2014). Moreover, although there has been a tendency to delimit the discussion of language politics in Egypt to the question of nationalism, it has recently been suggested that *‘āmmīyya* might be used to counter the hegemonic discourse of the (language) authorities (Bassiouney 2014; Ibrahim 2010). The symbolic significance of *‘āmmīyya* in this latter case is clearly very different (*cf.* Aboelezz forthcoming).

While by no means suggesting that political ideology is the only explanation for the increasing use of *‘āmmīyya* in written domains in Egypt, this chapter hopes to shed light on the complicated relationship between language and politics in Egypt. To highlight the relationship between political ideologies and language ideologies, I draw on two interviews with what I term pro-*‘āmmīyya* ‘agents of change’ in the summer of 2010. The timing of the interviews is significant. By focussing on the political dimension, which has been at the forefront of Egypt’s turbulent recent history, I aim to demonstrate how political ideologies reflect and relate to broader social and moral concerns still relevant today.

## Methodology

In this chapter, I aim to answer this central research question: What role does language ideology play in the motivation of the two *pro-āmmiyya* agents of change? This research question includes two central concepts which warrant explanation: language ideology and language change. Language ideologies may be understood here as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979: 193). Milroy (2004) stresses the instrumentality of language ideology in bringing about language change and argues that the two should be studied in tandem. Language change may be said to occur at two levels: the first level is the *structure* of the language (lexicon, grammar, etc.); the second is the *use* of the language, that is, “the functional allocations of the varieties of language used” in a speech community (Ferguson 1977: 9). This chapter is concerned with this latter type of language change, which Ferguson notes is usually fuelled by changes in users’ *evaluations* of language – or in other words, their language ideologies.

In this chapter, I refer to groups or individuals who play an active part in bringing about (language) change as ‘agents of change’. I focus specifically on the ideological motives of two *pro-āmmiyya* agents of change. The first agent of change is the Liberal Egyptian Party (henceforth, LEP), an Egyptian political party established in 2008 with an ideology of separatist Egyptian nationalism and an aim to standardise Egyptian Arabic. The second agent of change is Malamih, a publishing house established in 2007 which published work by young Egyptian writers in a range of language varieties, and crucially championed publishing in *āmmiyya*.

To answer the research question, interviews were conducted with representatives of LEP and Malamih in the summer of 2010. From the outset, I did not intend the interviews to be a fact-finding mission, but rather a means of eliciting ideological positions vis-à-vis the language situation in Egypt. Indeed, I argue that although both LEP and Malamih have now ceased to exist, the ideological underpinnings of their agency in language change remain salient.

My analysis of the interviews draws on three main theoretical approaches. The first approach draws on Eisele’s (2000; 2002; 2003) work who has developed one of the most elaborate frameworks for studying language ideologies in Arabic sociolinguistics. Eisele assumes the presence of ‘authorising discourses’ in society, which he terms *regimes of authority*:

Each of the regimes of authority present in a society/culture may have an effect on the kind of language which is valorized, and on the metalinguis-

tic views of language in general, and ultimately on the views and analyses of language professionals themselves (linguists, grammar specialists, language teachers, L1 and L2), who participate as well in their own discursive regimes of authority.

EISELE, 2002: 5

However, he notes that “individuals do not always adopt the value system of one regime of authority alone and for all time, but rather manipulate the various regimes of authority and their differing systems of values (and thus the meanings that inhere in them) in fashioning their own identity” (Eisele 2002: 6).

Eisele recognises four recurring ‘topoi’ or cultural tropes underlying the value system of the most dominant regime of authority about the Arabic language (Eisele 2000; Eisele 2002). These are motifs which frequently emerge in the narrative about the Arabic language; namely: unity, purity, continuity and competition. The topos of *unity* underscores the value of the Arabic language as uniting pre-Islamic Arabs in a single culture. This topos has been more recently “reinterpreted in the service of various nationalisms, initially Islamic but most strongly and successfully for Arab nationalism and Arab unity” (Eisele 2002: 7). The topos of *purity* encapsulates the traditional preoccupation to protect the Arabic language from ‘contamination’ resulting from interaction with non-Arab populations following the spread of Islam. In the modern period, this is exemplified in the prescriptivist role of education and language academies in maintaining the purity of “the classically derived modern written language” and stigmatisation of the Arabic vernaculars (Eisele 2002: 7). *Continuity* is linked to the “development of a complex and highly esteemed written tradition, which is passed down through the generations and in which inheres the most highly valued features of the culture” (Eisele 2002: 7). In modern times, this topos can be seen in the 19th century revival of Arab culture and the Arabic language with an emphasis on the classical literary canon as a source for modern values. *Competition* involves rivalry with other languages, initially other Islamic languages such as Persian and Turkish, but more recently European colonial languages, particularly English.

While Eisele states that he has derived these four topoi from modern narratives of the ‘story of Arabic’ reflecting the dominant authoritative practice, he demonstrates that these topoi can also be found in rival authorising practices. For example, he applies his framework to the work of Salama Musa (an Egyptian nationalist and proponent of *‘āmmīyya*) and reveals that although Musa’s aim was to subvert dominant beliefs about Arabic, “he nevertheless reflects the dominant Arab way of talking about language” (Eisele 2003: 53).



In my analysis, I supplement Eisele's topoi with three further topoi: conspiracy, authenticity and superiority. While my aim is to capture the ideological arguments of the pro-ʿāmmiyya interviews more closely, these supplementary topoi may also be found in the dominant authoritative practice about Arabic. The topos of conspiracy relates to the perception that language is under threat due to a conspiracy to undermine it. In the dominant authoritative practice, Arabic is constructed as the victim of a colonial conspiracy to bring about its demise. The topos of authenticity, which is an offshoot of the topos of purity, captures the idea that a given code is the *real* language of the people (Bassiouney 2014). In the dominant practice, *fushā* is constructed as the sole authentic version of Arabic by discrediting colloquial varieties which are denied the status of 'real' languages. The topos of superiority overlaps with the topoi of purity and continuity where these are valued as superior qualities. However, I intend it mainly for qualities which are seen to be inherent to a language and which cannot be objectively evaluated (e.g. beauty, melody, logic, etc.). In the dominant practice, *fushā* is typically endowed with such superior qualities (Ferguson 1997 [1959]).

The second theoretical approach I employ focuses on the way in which interviewees project and construct their personal identity, as well as Egyptian identity, and how these identities form part of their ideologies. The analysis here is premised on the notion of multiple identities, specifically, Omoniyi's (2006) analytical framework for studying the "hierarchy of identities". Omoniyi argues that "an individual's various identity options are co-present at all times but each of those options is allocated a position on a hierarchy based on the degree of salience it claims in a moment of identification" (2006: 19). These moments of identification "are points in time in performance and perception at which verbal and non-verbal communicative codes ... are deployed to flag up an image of self or perspectives of it" (Omoniyi 2006: 21). Omoniyi notes that language itself "is an acceptable identity marker", "so that the alternative languages not chosen in a given moment within an interaction would be alternative identities that are backgrounded or that are less invoked" (2006: 20). My analysis therefore takes account of the verbal codes in the interview transcripts vis-à-vis the identities and ideologies expressed by the interviewees.

The third theoretical framework draws on the discourse mythological approach, a critical discourse analysis approach developed by Darren Kelsey (2012a; 2012b; 2014) for textual analysis of news stories. Central to this approach is the concept of 'myths'. The scholarly use of the term 'myth' "stresses the unquestioned validity of myths within the belief systems of social groups that value them" as opposed to the popular use of the term where it is synonymous with falsehood (Kelsey 2014: 309). This is in line with the definition that Fer-

guson (1997 [1959]) gives in an article dealing specifically with language myths about Arabic, where language myths are described as:

... attitudes and beliefs [which] are probably current about the language of the community as well as about other languages and language in general. Some of these are true, i.e. correspond very well to objective reality, others are involved with esthetic or religious notions the validity of which cannot be investigated empirically, and still others which purport to deal with facts are partly or wholly false.

FERGUSON 1997 [1959]: 150

As Kelsey (2014: 309) points out, “a myth is not a lie. Rather, it is a construction of meaning that serves a particular purpose through the confirmations and denials of its distortion”. In this sense, myth becomes an expression of values and ideologies; a means of legitimating the speaker’s position while simultaneously discrediting those who do not subscribe to the same values. In other words, myth becomes “*a vehicle for ideology*” (Kelsey 2014: 313). By employing CDA conventions of studying dominant tropes and discursive constructions, Kelsey’s approach aims to underline *how* ideology is transported through myth.

The three analytical approaches I highlighted have one thing in common: at the heart of all of them is a concern with ideology. Throughout the analysis, I employ “a neutral approach to ideology”:

This approach means that the analyst does not need to claim any freedom from ideology; there is an open acceptance that our own perceptions, critiques and ideas are equally influenced by ideology. But since ideology is not an exclusively negative term, it is this neutral approach that exempts the analyst from accusations of hiding their own ideologies behind claims of intellectual or analytical superiority or objectivism.

KELSEY 2014: 313–314

To achieve this, I deliberately refrain from evaluating the validity of the interviewees’ statements: my goal is not to make ideological judgments but to understand the very workings of language ideology. My analysis is presented in the next two sections.

### The Liberal Egyptian Party

The Liberal Egyptian Party (LEP) was a political party with an Egyptian separatist ideology established in 2008, although it was not officially recognised by the government under laws which restricted the formation of new political parties. LEP was an offshoot of an earlier party founded in 2004 called *Maṣr il-Umm* (Mother Egypt). In the interview, Abdel-Aziz Gamal El-Din explains that the two parties only differ in name: after the application to establish *Maṣr il-Umm* was rejected by the authorities, they could not re-apply under the same name. Both parties, he explains, are an extension of the Egyptian nationalist current which dates back to the early 20th century (cf. Suleiman 1996; 2003; 2008). He notes that the Internet has helped them communicate their views to a wider audience, but describes LEP as “a party predominantly for intellectuals, and not so much for the masses”. The activities of LEP have received some attention in recent literature. Panović (2010) mentions that a ‘Masry Wikipedian’ he interviewed is a former LEP member, while Darwish (2007) points to the role of LEP (then in its formative stages) in organising a televised celebration of the (ancient) Egyptian new year in 2007.

The party had an agenda focussed on re-asserting the Egyptian ethnic identity, establishing a secular democratic national government emphasising the separation of religion and state, and standardising the Egyptian vernacular. The latter item in the agenda is the reason I identified LEP as an agent of change. It is worth noting however that following the 2011 revolution and in the lead-up to the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections, LEP assimilated into the Social Democratic Egyptian Party which shares LEP’s overarching aims for a secular state, but does not have a language-related item in its official manifesto.

When I contacted LEP and expressed my interest in their language policy, they immediately nominated Abdel-Aziz Gamal El-Din for the interview. It was clear that he was – to borrow Eisele’s (2000; 2003) term – the ‘language maven’ in the party. One of four founding members of the party, Gamal El-Din was seventy when I interviewed him. He spoke in a mixture of *fuṣḥā* and *ʿāmmīyya* which is closer to the former than the latter. Gamal El-Din describes himself as a “researcher of Egyptology” (*bāḥith fi l-maṣriyyāt*) with a particular interest in “the evolution of the Egyptian language”. He has more recently become known for editing and introducing a number of historical works which chronicle specific periods in Egypt’s history (Gamal El-Din 2006; 2011b; 2012), in addition to authoring books on aspects of Egyptian history (Gamal El-Din 2007; 2011c; 2013). This recent publishing activity has earned him the title of ‘historian’ (*muʿarrikh*) in publishers’ descriptions of his works.

It is worth noting here that the focus of Gamal El-Din's published works is in line with LEP's Egyptian nationalist ideology. Three common themes which run through all of them is a focus on Egyptian Coptic identity (and by extension, Coptic Christianity) as an expression of authentic Egyptian identity, identifying Arab (and by extension, Islamic) 'invasions' as a foreign element in Egyptian history,<sup>1</sup> and Egyptian nationalism and resistance against oppressors and foreign invaders. It is worth noting that the first two themes are the same themes which ran through the writings of Egyptian separatists such as Salama Musa and Louis Awad (Suleiman 2008).

Gamal El-Din also established a printed magazine called *Maṣriyya* (Egyptian, fem.) in the 70s, which has recently taken the form of an electronic blog.<sup>2</sup> The magazine forwards the same themes mentioned above with particular emphasis on Egyptian nationalism, democracy and secularism. Significantly, one year after I interviewed him, Gamal El-Din published a book titled *Ḥawl Taṭawwurāt Luḡhatinā al-Miṣriyya al-Mu'āṣira* (On the Evolution of our Modern Egyptian Language) (Gamal El-Din 2011a). This book fleshes out the view of Egyptian Arabic (referred to as the Egyptian Language) which Gamal El-Din expresses in the interview. In what follows, I will not evaluate the linguistic accuracy of Gamal El-Din's conceptualisation of the Egyptian Language (henceforth, EL), but will use this term *prima facie* and comment only on the ideological aspects of the account given of it.

According to Gamal El-Din, all the living languages of the world have an official level and a popular level; a language myth which normalises the language situation in Egypt. Gamal El-Din deliberately refrains from using the terms *fušḡhā* and *'āmmiyya*. Instead, he refers to the popular and official levels of 'Egyptian language'. Significantly, even the official level (i.e. *fušḡhā*) is qualified as 'Egyptian', and it is the popular level not the official level which is seen as the 'original source' of the language. When I used the term *'āmmiyya* to ask him about his view of language in relation to Egyptian identity, he responded:<sup>3</sup>

SEG1: The issue of Egyptian *'āmmiyya* has come to a problem of terminology. I feel that some of those who claim to be linguists invest it to

1 The term commonly used in Arabic is *al-futūḡhāt al-islāmīyya* (the Islamic conquests; literally 'openings'), which has positive connotations. However, Gamal El-Din uses the markedly negative term *ghazw* (invasion) instead. Similarly, Gamal El-Din (2013) uses the negatively marked term *iḡtilāl* (occupation) to refer to the period of Ottoman rule in Egypt.

2 The blog can be found here: [http://masryablog.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/normal-o-microsoftinternetexplorer4\\_18.html](http://masryablog.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/normal-o-microsoftinternetexplorer4_18.html) (accessed 01.07.2014).

3 Transcriptions of interview segments over 10 words long are provided in Appendix 1.

demean the Egyptian language. Meaning that there would be an Egyptian *ʿāmmīyya* and an Arab(ic) *fuṣḥā*, when, scientifically, this is not really available. What is available is that there is an Egyptian language which has been evolving throughout history and draws from all the languages that have entered it, from Persian to Turkish, to Arabic, to English, to German, to French, to Italian, to Greek ... to Nubian and African and Tamazight. All of these have entered the Egyptian language. And all of these influences do not form the majority of the Egyptian language so that we can call it a Greek language or a French language or an English language or even an Arabic language, or Turkish. No, we can call it an Egyptian language influenced by all this, and herein lies the value of the Egyptian language; that, in absorbing all the civilisations that have entered it, it was able to absorb the lexical items which have come to it from these languages. But it has continued, since ancient times and up until our present day, to dwell in its own house of **grammar**<sup>4</sup> rules. And this is very clear in the modern linguistic studies which confirm that the modern or contemporary Egyptian language is the daughter of ancient languages in its final contemporary form which is present now, and which will of course evolve into other forms as other forms emerge.

Two main myths can be noted in this account of EL (noting that this account addresses the popular level of EL; i.e. *ʿāmmīyya*). The first myth is that Egypt has a special assimilatory capacity which has enabled it to absorb various cultures and civilisations throughout history. This myth is extended to language, where EL has absorbed some of these languages through its special assimilatory power. Note that Egypt and EL are frequently conflated in this account. A second myth is that EL is a direct descendant of ancient Egyptian languages and that it has preserved its grammatical form over time. This invokes Eisele's topos of continuity, which is commonly found in the dominant authoritative discourse in relation to *fuṣḥā*. Significantly, however, it is essentially applied to *ʿāmmīyya* here. EL is described as 'the daughter of ancient languages' and this historical continuity contributes to its superiority.

In line with the definition he presents in his book (Gamal El-Din 2011a), Gamal El-Din then proceeded to explain that EL – like any other language – has two levels: an Egyptian *fuṣḥā* and an Egyptian *ʿāmmīyya*; the latter is the level

4 Boldface indicates words which were said in English in the interview.

of everyday use and the former is the level used in the writing of 'newspapers and magazines, etc.'. However, he refuses to refer to this latter level as *Arabic fuṣḥā*, offering the following reasoning:

SEG2: ... but for *fuṣḥā* to be called Arabic, I don't really think that there was, at some point in time, an Arabic *fuṣḥā* language which existed in any clear historical period. There was an Arabic language, which was an amalgamation of many disparate languages which were present in the Arabian Peninsula, and which varied amongst them in the names of things: in the names for palm trees, and the names for lion, and the names for sword. And it is normal for a language which develops in a poor desert community to be less advanced and accomplished than a language which has developed in an agricultural community like Egypt. The agricultural community in Egypt has contributed an ancient civilisation with multiple levels in culture, arts, science, language and literature, which cannot be attained by what I call 'the tongues' (*al-alsina*). And I insist on calling them 'tongues' because they were mostly spoken and not written [...] and they were only written belatedly, and when they were written it was at a time when this language had not yet stabilised. [...] Indeed, when the whole region wanted to learn Arabic in the modern, contemporary age, they resorted to the Egyptian teacher. They actually say that the Egyptian is teaching them Arabic; it is impossible for the Egyptian to teach them Arabic; he will teach them Egyptian [...] If the whole region is Arab then they don't need an Egyptian teacher to teach them Arabic; but when they learned, they learned Egyptian.

Again, a number of myths can be traced here. First, the myth that a language which develops in an agricultural environment is more sophisticated than a language which develops in a desert environment. The second myth is that a written language is more prestigious than a spoken language. Two more language myths about Arabic can be found in the excerpt: that the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula did not speak a single language, and that Egyptian teachers of Arabic teach 'Arabs' EL. This latter myth is significant because it implies that the *fuṣḥā* used by 'all Arabs in the region' is in fact 'Egyptian' (effectively stripping 'Arabs' of 'Arabic' and of a standard/written language of their own). The topos of superiority is invoked throughout this excerpt, and the myths outlined above help to achieve this: EL is superior to 'the Arabic tongues' because it developed in an agricultural environment and was recorded in writing earlier. Significantly, the distinction between EL/Egypt/Egyptians/Egypt-

tian culture is blurred, to the effect that the superiority of EL over ‘Arabic tongues’ becomes synonymous with the superiority of Egypt and Egyptians over Arabs.

As Gamal El-Din explains in the interview, it is the popular level of EL (i.e. *āmmiyya*) which LEP seek to codify to become the official language of Egypt. He argues that the authentic language is that which people use, saying that ‘language is the daughter of the people and the populace not the intellectuals’ (*al-lughā hiya ibnit al-gumhūr wa-l-nās, mish ibnit al-musaqqafīn*) – employing the metaphor of parenthood a second time. He asserts that all Egyptians ‘essentially speak the same language, with only slight differences, possibly at the phonetic level but not at the grammatical level’ (SEG3). The codified variety, he explains, should be modelled after the EL found in art forms such as poetry, theatre and cinema ‘where Egyptian *fushā* is absent’. Gamal El-Din points to the shortcomings of the Arabic writing system in representing the full range of ‘Egyptian phonics’ and says that this writing system will need to be adapted, or indeed an entirely new writing system adopted, in the process of codifying EL. Significantly, Gamal El-Din makes it clear that the process of codifying EL involves simply recording it, and not laying down rules for it since the people who use it have already established its rules.

Two topoi are invoked in laying out this argument: authenticity and unity. The popular level of EL which LEP seek to make official is the ‘real’ language which Egyptians – *all* Egyptians – speak. This in turn suggests the superiority of EL. This is made explicit later in the interview when Gamal El-Din asserts that recent developments such as the relaxation of publishing laws and the spread of mobile phones and the Internet have favoured EL because it is “the smoothest and easiest in interaction, circulation and derivation” (*al-ashlas wa-l-ashal fi l-tadāwul wa-l-ta’āmul wa-fi l-ishṭiqāq*). He cites words such as ‘save’ and ‘delete’ which have been embedded in everyday spoken EL, for example *dallituh* ([he] deleted [it]). For Gamal El-Din, authenticity seems to be at odds with purity. Purity, which is positively valued in the dominant authoritative discourse about Arabic, is in fact negatively valued in Gamal El-Din’s account. This in turn invokes the topos of competition: EL competes with (and is metaphorically ‘besieged’ by) Arabic. The tension between them is transmitted in a binary of progressive EL on the one hand versus archaic Arabic on the other. This tension is also reflected at the level of identity, where ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Arab’ are seen as contradictory categories. Another aim which LEP declared in their mission statement was to delete the word ‘Arab’ from Egypt’s official title, *The Arab Republic of Egypt*. In explaining the rationale behind this, Gamal El-Din compares the title to the label ‘Egyptian Arabic’, which he categorically rejects:

SEG4: Well this is the equivalent to [certain] people calling our language Egyptian Arabic. It doesn't work; I can't be French English, or Egyptian English, or Egyptian Arabic. You are putting together things ... which don't really go together. I can't be Arab *and* Egyptian. How could it be? So they say, well, Arab is *qawmiyya* and Egyptian is *waṭaniyya*.<sup>5</sup> No, I am neither Egyptian *qawmiyya* nor Arab *qawmiyya*, I am [concerned with] Egyptian identity.

This Egyptian identity according to Gamal El-Din encompasses anyone who carries an Egyptian identification card. He highlights however the diversity of Egyptians in terms of social, economic, religious, ethnic and class differences. In spite of these differences, Egyptians share a “cultural” identity which dwells in the “traditional Egyptian consciousness” (*al-wigdān al-maṣri al-taqlīdī*) and speak the same language. Crucially, although Gamal El-Din mentions many types of diversity in the make-up of Egyptian identity, linguistic diversity is not among them. Instead, language becomes the one shared feature among an otherwise diverse nation (invoking once more the topos of unity).

Addressing the increasing emphasis on Egyptian identity in recent times, Gamal El-Din attributes this to the “failure of the project of [pan-]Arab unity and *qawmiyya*”. He states that Nasser’s pan-Arab policies were a cause for division. He reasons that pan-Arabism in Egypt came to be associated with Islam, so that when pan-Arabism faded, only Islam was left. This, he says, has created a problem for the Copts who rejected pan-Arabism because now it would appear as though they are rejecting Islam, resulting in sectarian strife as a by-product of so-called pan-Arabism. Gamal El-Din states that pan-Arab authorities persecuted those who championed Egyptian identity or wrote in *‘āmmiyya* such as Louis Awad, and mentions that he himself came under attack when he established his magazine *Maṣriyya* (in the 1970s) only because it was named ‘Egyptian’. At the time, speaking in the name of Egypt and Egyptianness was categorically rejected as anti-pan-Arabism. These authorities, Gamal El-Din says, are now no more; they have weakened and retreated, accounting for the ‘return’ to Egyptian identity. He is quick to point out however that pan-Arabism as an ideology still exists and that LEP often comes under attack from

5 While both terms would translate into nationalism in English, there is a subtle difference in meaning. The term *waṭaniyya* derives from the Arabic word *waṭan*, while *qawmiyya* invokes the concept of *umma*. While *waṭan* refers to “the place to which a person belongs, the fatherland”, *umma* refers to “the group of which a person is a member, the nation” (Suleiman 2003: 114). The term *qawmiyya* is particularly known for its use as a qualifier in pan-Arab nationalism (*al-qawmiyya al-‘arabiyya*).



pan-Arabists and those “who are still under the illusion that it is possible to resurrect pan-Arabism”. Hence the competition/tension highlighted between EL and Arabic at the linguistic level, and between ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Arab’ at identity level, is extended to tension between Egyptian separatism and pan-Arabism at the ideological level.

### Malamih Publishing House

Malamih is a publishing house established by Mohamed El-Sharkawi in 2007 with a mission to empower young Egyptian writers “without ideological, national, or linguistic boundaries”.<sup>6</sup> By the time I interviewed El-Sharkawi in July 2010, Malamih had published more than 75 works by Egyptian writers in a range of language varieties and combinations, including *fushā*, *ʿāmmiyya*, English, French, *fushā* and *ʿāmmiyya*, and English and Latinised Arabic. This overtly liberal attitude towards publishing in varieties other than Standard Arabic is the reason Malamih was identified as an agent of language change. El-Sharkawi emphasises this point in the interview, indicating that other publishers who publish works in *ʿāmmiyya* do not promote this openly.

I should point out that Malamih mysteriously closed down towards the end of 2011, shortly after which El-Sharkawi left Egypt. His current whereabouts remain unknown despite my best efforts to locate him. It appears that the closure of the publishing house was financially motivated, although political factors may have also played a part. El-Sharkawi had had his skirmishes with the Egyptian authorities because of his anti-regime views and his affiliation with the pro-democracy group, *Kifāya* (Enough). He was jailed several times for short periods between 2006 and 2010, the most recent being a little over a month before I interviewed him in 2010.

The issue of identity is particularly salient in this interview; the identity of Malamih as a publishing house is inseparable from the identity of its founder, Mohamed El-Sharkawi. As well as referring to Malamih in the third person, El-Sharkawi alternates between the first person pronouns ‘I’ (*ana*) and ‘we’ (*iḥna*) when he talks about the publishing house. Using Omoniyi’s (2006) ‘hierarchy of identities’ framework, the identity which El-Sharkawi foregrounds the most is his political identity as a leftist, anti-regime activist. At the beginning of the interview, El-Sharkawi addresses Malamih’s declared mission of publishing

6 From Malamih’s website: [http://www.malamih.com/ar/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6](http://www.malamih.com/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=6) (last accessed October 2010). The website is no longer active.

works ‘without boundaries’ to include the caveat: “There **are** boundaries. In the end I am leftist; I cannot publish something which talks about capitalism for example; I cannot publish something which supports the regime. There is a political dimension in the matter” (SEG5).

El-Sharkawi’s activist identity is similarly fronted at various other points in the interview, where he highlights his differences with Mubarak’s government, particularly his multiple arrests for his political views. He refers to himself as a “highly confrontational person” (*shakḥ ṣidāmi giddan*) and a [political] “instigator” (*muḥarriḍ*). He also mentions his previous employment in a leftist publishing house, *Merit*. El-Sharkawi was 28 years old when I interviewed him, and his bias to young writers is a bias to his own generation; he mentions that he is part of ‘a new generation’ in the publishing industry. Another aspect of El-Sharkawi’s identity which comes up more than once in the interview is his background. El-Sharkawi mentions at three different points that he is from Kafr El-Sheikh, a rural governorate in the Nile delta. He refers to his humble upbringing and his father’s small income and how he struggled to buy books which he could not afford.

Returning to Malamih’s language ‘policy’, El-Sharkawi emphasises that it sets them apart from other publishers. He explains that the reason they do not enforce ‘linguistic boundaries’ is that “language is a means of communication, it should not be an instrument for withholding culture from another” (SEG6). He vehemently states that the books Malamih publishes “will not undergo linguistic editing because there is no such thing as editing a writer’s [work]; the writer is free” (SEG7). The only caveat is that the writer does not offend with their writing; that is, El-Sharkawi explains, they are free for example to criticise the idea of religion, but not to criticise one religion in favour of another. It is worth noting that despite Malamih’s ‘no-language-editing’ policy, later in the interview El-Sharkawi mentions a novel written by a young writer from his own home governorate where he heavily interfered to ‘correct’ the *‘ammīyya*:

SEG8: I was, myself I mean, correcting [it]; I interfered completely in this novel [...] I’m telling you I was removing [segments of] speech and inserting speech. The girl [writer] is from Kafr El-Sheikh, the governorate I come from. She had written very rural [literally, peasant-like] speech; she had written speech which is impossible ... – no one would understand it.

El-Sharkawi removed regional expressions in the text, altered the spelling of some words, and added diacritics (*tashkīl*) to others. What El-Sharkawi had

evidently done was to ‘convert’ the script to Cairene ‘*āmmiyya*, calling to mind the guidelines set out for the editors of *Wikipedia Masry* which reflect a clear bias towards Cairene (Panović 2010).

While El-Sharkawi acknowledges that some ‘*āmmiyya* words may be represented in a range of ways using the Arabic writing system, it was clear that he believed there was a ‘right’ way. For instance, he says that when writing the word *hat’ul* [she/you will say], the initial vowel should not be represented as a long vowel; hence *هتقول* is correct, but *هاتقول* is incorrect. He explicitly states that ‘*āmmiyya* “has principles [which govern] how we must write it” (*laha uṣūl lāzim niktibha izzāy*), and that [written] ‘*āmmiyya* “must include diacritics” (*lāzim yikūn fīh tashkīl fi l-lughā il-‘āmmiyya*).

El-Sharkawi’s attitude towards ‘*āmmiyya* warrants attention. He refers to it as *il-lughā il-‘āmmiyya il-maṣriyya* (the Egyptian colloquial language). What is significant here is the qualifier ‘language’ which is a conscious choice on El-Sharkawi’s part. El-Sharkawi explains that, from the start, Malamih has been biased to ‘*āmmiyya* because it reflects the distinctiveness (*khuṣūṣiyya*) of Egypt(ians). They even raised the slogan *Yasquṭ Sībāwēh* (down with Sībāwayh).<sup>7</sup> “What have I got to do with Sībāwayh?” he says, “Sībāwayh was a man who lived there; in Najd and Ḥijāz” (SEG9).

El-Sharkawi’s view of ‘*āmmiyya* is inseparable from his view of *fushā*. He states that, even though he studied Arabic at Al-Azhar University, he could not be less concerned with *fushā* grammar rules, meter and rhyme, etc. He refers to *fushā* as *lughā aṣīla* (pure language)<sup>8</sup> to mean that it has not developed from any other language. This he says makes it a very difficult language with complicated grammar. ‘*āmmiyya* on the other hand is not a ‘pure language’, which makes it easier and more flexible:

SEG10: ‘*āmmiyya* language gives me more room to express [myself], given that I am Egyptian, and it reaches a lot of people, as opposed to *fushā*. Not everyone has a taste for *fushā*, and it is always difficult because ... the Arabic language (*il-lughā il-‘arabiyya*), meaning the language of the *dād*<sup>9</sup> (*lughit id-dād*), is tough and very difficult. It is even classed as one of the [most] difficult languages in the world, like ... like German,

7 A famous 8th century Arabic grammarian.

8 The Arabic word *aṣīl* (m.; *aṣīla* fem.) is an adjective which denotes authenticity, purity (especially of lineage) and rootedness (i.e. being well-established). It is often used with respect to animals, for example *ḥiṣān ‘arabī aṣīl* (horse of pure Arab breed), and is used here in that sense.

9 The Arabic language was labelled ‘the language of the *dād*’ by early Arab grammarians after a

because German is a pure language and *Arabic (il-'arabiyya)* is a pure language, meaning that it is not derived from anything.

He elaborates:

SEG11: *'āmmiyya* is also rich with its terminology, but also because many foreign words have entered it and because it is not a pure language – meaning that *'āmmiyya* is not pure. *'āmmiyya* at the end of the day is Coptic mixed with Greek mixed with Hieroglyphic mixed with Arabic. This is not our language; meaning *Arabic (il-'arabiyya)* is not a language of Egyptians. [...] This is why we invented *'āmmiyya*. Why is Egyptian *'āmmiyya* the only one which is understood throughout the – Arab – World? It is impossible for Palestinian *'āmmiyya* to be understood throughout the Arab World – in the Levant [perhaps]; it is impossible for Algerian – not the Tamazight, the Arabic, which is called '*il-darga*' [*dārija*] in Algeria – to be understood [throughout the Arab World].

El-Sharkawi goes on to claim that Egyptian *'āmmiyya* is the only colloquial Arabic understood throughout the Arab World. When asked why this is so, he replies:

SEG12: Because it has its DISTINCTIVENESS, and because ... it is derived from several things, and it's easy, and I can explain many things with it, it's verbose; it has verbosity, and it sounds nice to the ear. Algerian doesn't, Iraqi doesn't. [...] We are closer to *the Arabic language (il-lugha il-'arabiyya)* than any of the other languages\ dialects, but at the same time it (*'āmmiyya*) gives me space [to elaborate], because it is not a pure language.

These three segments (SEG10 to SEG12) require detailed analysis. While El-Sharkawi refers to *'āmmiyya* in the interview as 'the Egyptian *'āmmiyya* language' (*il-lugha il-'āmmiyya il-maṣriyya*) – sometimes contracted to 'the Egyptian *'āmmiyya*' (*il-'āmmiyya il-maṣriyya*) or simply *il-'āmmiyya* – he refers to *fušṣā* in a number of ways (red). In particular, he uses the words for Arabic

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letter in the Arabic alphabet denoting a sound which was thought to be unique to Arabic (Suleiman 2012). It is worth noting that this label usually invokes linguistic pride, but El-Sharkawi uses it sarcastically.

(*il-ʿarabī* or *il-ʿarabiyya*) to refer exclusively to *fushā* while *ʿāmmiyya* is not qualified with this label at any point in the interview. Note also that both *fushā* and *ʿāmmiyya* are referred to as languages. However, El-Sharkawi is not as willing to award this title to other Arabic colloquials; when he begins to refer to them as ‘languages’ (*lughāt*) in SEG12 this is quickly repaired to ‘dialects’ (*lahagāt*), a label which he does not use in conjunction with Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* at all.

There are many language myths which can be extracted from El-Sharkawi’s account of *fushā*, *ʿāmmiyya* and other colloquial Arabics (summarised in table 9.1). These myths invoke a number of topoi. The topos of purity, which is traditionally invoked to exalt *fushā*, is portrayed here as a shortcoming: *ʿāmmiyya* is simpler and more flexible than *fushā* because it is not a pure language. The topos of authenticity is also invoked; *ʿāmmiyya* is closer to the Egyptian people because they are a “people with an auditory culture” (*shaʿb saqaf-tuh samʿiyya*). It is worth noting here that although El-Sharkawi paints an overall negative picture of *fushā* in comparison to *ʿāmmiyya*, he does not explicitly state that *ʿāmmiyya* is superior. For instance, when he compares the restricting conciseness of *fushā* to the verbosity of *ʿāmmiyya*, he acknowledges that both of these qualities have their advantages and disadvantages. Conversely, when El-Sharkawi compares *ʿāmmiyya* to other colloquial Arabics, he is adamant that the former is better. The ‘rationalised evaluations’ provided to support his view invoke the topos of superiority (cf. Ferguson 1997 [1959]). For example, the theme of inherent beauty which is often associated with *fushā* is reappropriated here for *ʿāmmiyya*, which ‘sounds nicer’ than other colloquial Arabics. This is also evident in El-Sharkawi’s choice to reserve the label ‘language’ for Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya*, but relegate other colloquial Arabics to ‘dialects’.

Another myth in the excerpts is that Egyptians ‘invented’ *ʿāmmiyya* as a way of forging their own language in response to the foreignness of *fushā*. Like LEP’s Gamal El-Din, El-Sharkawi describes *ʿāmmiyya* as a hybrid variety with input from multiple languages and evaluates this positively. However, he does not consider *ʿāmmiyya* an extension of ancient Egyptian languages, conceding in SEG13 below that it is ‘not our language’. El-Sharkawi’s view of *ʿāmmiyya* is closely linked to his view of Egyptian identity; both Egypt and *ʿāmmiyya* are special – they have their ‘distinctiveness’ (*khuṣūṣiyya*; small capitals in excerpts). He uses this term again when asked whether a poetry collection published by Malamih was in *fushā* or *ʿāmmiyya*:

SEG13: Poems in *fushā*, but in our *fushā*, not the *fushā* of the Bedouins of the [Arabian] Peninsula ... I’m sorry, but I’m against\ they don’t\ they ...

TABLE 9.1 *Language myths in El-Sharkawi's account of fuṣḥā, 'āmmiyya and other colloquial Arabics*

<i>fuṣḥā</i>	<i>'āmmiyya</i>	Other colloquial Arabics
Far from people	Close to people	
Pure language	Impure language	
Limited vocabulary (rigid)	Richer vocabulary (flexible)	
Concise (restricting)	Elaborative/expressive (liberating)	Not as elaborative/expressive
Complex/difficult	Simple/easy Sounds nice Closer to <i>fuṣḥā</i> Understood throughout Arab World	Not as simple/easy Do not sound (as) nice Further from <i>fuṣḥā</i> Not understood throughout Arab World

the Wahhabis have ruined Egyptians' lives generally – even in Islam they have their own interpretations – but also those of the Peninsula ruined the language, I mean ours. In the end this is not our language, but you discover that we have our **DISTINCTIVENESS**; our *'āmmiyya* has **DISTINCTIVENESS** and it has amazing pronunciation and writing rules, but of course no one cares for them.

This account transports the myth that Egyptians have their own version of *fuṣḥā*. However, unlike Gamal El-Din, El-Sharkawi does not go as far as to claim that the *fuṣḥā* used everywhere in the Arabic-speaking world is Egyptian *fuṣḥā*. In fact, El-Sharkawi highlights that the Egyptian *fuṣḥā* he refers to is different from the *fuṣḥā* of the 'Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula'. Also unlike Gamal El-Din, El-Sharkawi's idea of 'distinctiveness' does not carry clear separatist nationalistic undertones. However, the superiority of Egyptians is still implied: El-Sharkawi refers to the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula as Bedouins and then uses the Arabic words *bitū' shibh il-gizāra* (those of the Peninsula) which have a derogatory tone to them. This mirrors the superiority of Egyptian *'āmmiyya* over other colloquial Arabics expressed above.

El-Sharkawi notes that Malamih has two main agendas, change and a secular state<sup>10</sup> (*taghyīr w-dawla madaniyya*), and even though the work they published does not necessarily further these agendas in a direct way, they certainly wouldn't publish works which support a religious state or the political status quo. The overlap in the views of religion between Gamal El-Din and El-Sharkawi is worth noting here, particularly their aspiration for a secular state and their antagonism towards the religious influence of the Arabian Gulf countries. Indeed, SEG13 suggests that Egyptians not only have their own distinct version of *fushā* but also of Islam.

El-Sharkawi acknowledges the increase in publishing activity in *ʿāmmiyya*, owing this to the relaxation in publishing rules and the emergence of more publishers. Writers are no longer forced to publish via government publishers where the approval process alone can take up to seven years. Now there are many private publishers and writers have more choice. However, El-Sharkawi notes that even though works published in *ʿāmmiyya* are on the rise, they are not presented as such, which is where Malamih stands out. He adds that other publishers who have published several works in *ʿāmmiyya* deny that this is an orientation they have. They are quick to state that the opinions expressed in the works they publish are those of the authors. This statement provokes El-Sharkawi who says this is not true; "If I am not convinced then I should not publish [it], because this represents me and represents my orientations, ambitions and ideologies" (SEG14).

According to El-Sharkawi, publishers' reluctance to support *ʿāmmiyya* overtly owes to the stigmatisation of publishing in *ʿāmmiyya*. Even though the flourishing of private publishing has curtailed the policing of the language authorities and the hegemony of the standard language, there is constant tension between those who write and publish in *ʿāmmiyya* and the upholders of the standard language. For instance, El-Sharkawi mentions how others in the publishing circle frequently criticise Malamih's language policy and tell him that he must do this or that:

SEG15: They would start to say "No, Mohamed, you cannot do that" or "Mohamed it is imperative (*lāzim*) that you do I-don't-know-what". So I tell them, yes, it is imperative, so we will do that which is imperative

10 The concept of *dawla madaniyya* (literally, 'civil state') is too complex to cover in this chapter. It is translated into 'secular state' here because it was clearly intended to mean this in the two interviews. The term has gained wider currency and attracted the attention of academics post-2011. I refer the reader to De Poli (2014) for a useful delineation.

in another publishing house, but because we established Malamih to break all imperatives, we are doing all the things which are **not** imperative.

This repetition of the word *lāzim* (imperative) is significant as it highlights Malamih's strife with the language authorities, invoking the topos of competition. Because it is deliberately challenging the hegemony of *fushā* and violating linguistic norms, Malamih is portrayed as both (linguistically) daring and deviant.

Significantly, El-Sharkawi notes that it was when they started publishing in English that they came under the most attack and Malamih was accused of "undermining the foundations of Egyptian culture" (*bitqawwiḍū arkān il-saqāfa il-maṣriyya*). He explains their motive for publishing in English noting that it acknowledges the presence of an audience that prefers to read and write in this language: "**bilingual** people who speak both [Arabic and English]" (*il-nās illi humma bilingual; illi humma biyitkallimu il-itnēn*) or those who think in English. He points to youths educated in prominent private universities, with special reference to the American University in Cairo (AUC). He also cites the economic virtues of publishing in English: books they publish in English, he says, are priced higher, because the target readers are willing to pay more for them. Malamih's English novels range in price between L.E. 50 and L.E. 80, the Arabic books sell for around L.E. 20. Hence, although the English books do not necessarily sell more than the Arabic books, they generate more revenue. As El-Sharkawi puts it, publishing one book in English enables them to finance 5 books in Arabic. It is clear that Malamih's motives for publishing in English are very different from the motives to publish in *ʿammīyya*. While El-Sharkawi is clearly passionate about publishing in the latter, the former is more of an economic necessity. On publishing in the two language varieties he says: "We want what unites [people] not what divides. The English language divides, it does not unite; in the end of the day how many people will read a novel [in] English?" (SEG16).

This invokes the topos of unity. When El-Sharkawi speaks of the variety which 'unites' Egyptian people, he is referring to *ʿammīyya*. The audience he wants to reach is young Egyptians whom he is aiming to attract with a language which is accessible to them in order to trigger their interest in social issues. These he reaches by publishing books in *ʿammīyya* which are priced to make them affordable to a wide range of readers. English, he acknowledges, enables him to reach a different audience: a much smaller audience, granted, (hence the 'dividing' capacity of English), but one with substantial economic capital.



## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to highlight the ideological motives of two pro-ʿāmmiyya agents of change in Egypt who were interviewed in 2010 by examining the interviews through three analytical lenses (Eisele's topoi, the discourse mythological approach, and the hierarchy of identities).

One of the most notable findings of the interview analysis was the range of terms used to refer to *fushḥā* and ʿāmmiyya. Gamal El-Din's concept of 'the Egyptian language' (*al-lughā al-miṣriyya*) is particularly significant. The elaborate concept, which was clearly based on an ideological foundation espousing the superiority of Egyptians, does not only demonstrate the existence of different terminological traditions in Egyptian society (even if they only belong in the realm of 'folk linguistics'), but also that the same term can mean different things to different people. Compare for example Gamal El-Din's use of the term 'Egyptian language' to El-Sharkawi's use of the same term: the former used it to refer to a system which encompasses both *fushḥā* and ʿāmmiyya (in the same way that *al-lughā al-ʿarabiyya* would be used), while the latter used it to refer specifically to ʿāmmiyya.

Another example of how ideologies can be mediated through linguistic labels is in the conscious labelling of ʿāmmiyya as a 'language' (*lughā*) in both interviews. Gamal El-Din denies the Arabian 'tongues' (*alsina*) of old the status of languages. Similarly, El-Sharkawi reserves the label 'language' for Egyptian ʿāmmiyya but refers to other colloquial varieties of Arabic as 'dialects' (*lahgāt*). These labels feed into the constructed superiority of Egyptian ʿāmmiyya in both cases.

The role of language choice as an identity marker in the interviews was not straightforward. While the use of 'elevated' ʿāmmiyya by El-Sharkawi with occasional English words is in line with the identity of the educated, pro-ʿāmmiyya Marxist, Gamal El-Din's language choice flouts expectations. That is, Gamal El-Din's use of a mixed variety which was arguably closer to *fushḥā* than ʿāmmiyya at many points goes against his pro-ʿāmmiyya ideology. To account for this, one must acknowledge the wider pool of indexes associated with *fushḥā* and ʿāmmiyya (cf. Bassiouney 2014). While the use of *fushḥā* might be at odds with Gamal El-Din's political ideology, it serves to project the identity of the knowledgeable intellectual, lending authority to Gamal El-Din's statements.

The most important findings were perhaps in the area of language myths. Here, the discourse mythological approach was particularly helpful. Subjecting the interviews to discourse analysis does not only bring out the myths in the discourse, but also demonstrates how these myths are transported through language choice, argumentation, metaphors, labelling, hedging and the use of

pronouns. It is important to reiterate here that the term myth is used independently of its truth value; it does not matter whether a 'myth' is true or false, what matters is its unquestionable validity to a certain group. The discourse mythological approach and Eisele's topoi complement each other as various topoi are often invoked through myths. What is particularly striking is how the topoi in the dominant authoritative discourse about Arabic were reappropriated in the pro-*'āmmīyya* discourse of the two interviews. The occurrence of these topoi in the interviews is summarised in table 9.2.

It is worth pointing to the overlap in the ideologies of LEP and Malamih: both are pro-*'āmmīyya* and share similar ideas about separation of religion and state. Crucially, they were both at odds with the government authorities generally and the language authorities more specifically. However, despite the similarities between LEP's professed Egyptian nationalism and Malamih's emphasis on the 'distinctiveness' of Egyptians, there was a marked difference in how they viewed Egypt in relation to the Arab World. When El-Sharkawi compares *'āmmīyya* to other colloquial Arabics, he places Egypt within an 'Arab World' (SEG1), a concept which is completely absent from Gamal El-Din's account who refers to 'Arabs in the region' instead (SEG2). One might argue that while Gamal El-Din expressed 'separatist Egyptian nationalism', El-Sharkawi expressed 'integral Egyptian nationalism': the former views Egypt as entirely removed from the Arab World, while the latter captures a view of Egypt as distinct from the Arab World but "with strong non-national links with the Arabic speaking countries" (Suleiman 2008: 39).

Moreover, even though LEP and Malamih shared a pro-*'āmmīyya* ideology, there were significant differences in their arguments. LEP's Gamal El-Din considered *'āmmīyya* the genetic offspring of Egyptian languages, while El-Sharkawi who asserted the distinctiveness of Egyptian *'āmmīyya* did so while identifying it as a language with foreign origins; one which is ultimately 'not ours'. Similarly, while Gamal El-Din expressed unequivocal support for *'āmmīyya*, Malamih's 'bias' for *'āmmīyya* was coupled with 'linguistic liberalism': an openness to publish in a range of linguistic forms in order to reach different audiences.

Finally, even though the two interviews were conducted prior to substantial political change in Egypt and both LEP and Malamih no longer exist in the capacity in which I interviewed them in 2010, this chapter demonstrates that the ideologies expressed are embedded within a web of enduring social and geopolitical concerns.

TABLE 9.2 *Topoi in the interviews*

Topos	LEP	Malamih
<b>SUPERIORITY</b>	Rationalised evaluations to demonstrate superiority of ‘ <i>āmmiyya</i> over <i>fuṣḥā</i> ;  <i>Fuṣḥā</i> is essentially Egyptian – What ‘Arabs’ speak is Egyptian	Rationalised evaluations to demonstrate that Egyptian ‘ <i>āmmiyya</i> is superior to other colloquial Arabics;  The concept of an Egyptian <i>fuṣḥā</i> which is superior to ‘Bedouin’ <i>fuṣḥā</i>
<b>UNITY</b>	<i>‘āmmiyya</i> is the <i>real</i> language that <i>all</i> Egyptians speak	<i>‘āmmiyya</i> is unifying and authentic: it is closer to the people on the streets;
<b>AUTHENTICITY</b>		English is dividing and unauthentic: it is used by a select few
<b>PURITY</b>	The ‘Egyptian language’ is a daughter of ancient (Egyptian) languages. It is a hybrid and continually evolving language with the assimilatory power to absorb lexical items from many foreign civilisations while maintaining its own grammar – and herein lies its value	<i>Fuṣḥā</i> is a pure language ( <i>luḡha aṣīla</i> ), but this is a negative feature;  Strength of ‘ <i>āmmiyya</i> lies in its hybridity because it makes it more flexible
<b>CONTINUITY</b>		Not explicit
<b>COMPETITION</b>	Linguistic: ‘ <i>āmmiyya</i> ‘besieged’ by <i>fuṣḥā</i> ;  Identity: Egyptian vs. Arab;  Ideological: Egyptian nationalist vs. pan-Arabist	Strife with language authorities
<b>CONSPIRACY</b>	Not explicit	Wahhabis have ruined Egyptians’ language and religion

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## Appendix: Interview Transcripts

### SEGI

... mawḏūʿ il-ʿāmmiyya l-maṣriyya dakhāl fi mushkilit muṣṭalaḥ. ana baḥiss inn huwwa baʿḏ il-... muddaʿī ʿilm il-lugha biyastasmirūh li-l-ḥaṭṭ min mustawā il-lugha il-maṣriyya. bi-maʿnā inn tibʿa fih ʿāmmiyya maṣriyya wa-fuṣḥā ʿarabiyya, baynamā ʿilmiyyan da shēʾ mish mutawaffir yaʿni. al-mutawaffir anna hunaka lugha maṣriyya tataṭawwar ʿabr al-

tārīkh ta'khuz min kull il-lughāt illi dakhalit laha min awwil il-fārisiyya ila l-turkiyya ila l-'arabiyya ila l-inglīziyya ila l-almāniyya ila l-firinsiyya ila l-īṭāliyya ila l-yūnāniyya ... ila in-nūbiyya wa-l-ifrīqiyya wa-l-amāzīghiyya. kull da dakhil fi il-lugha l-mišriyya. wa-kullin min hāzihi l-mu'assirāt lā tushakkil ghālibiyyit al-lugha l-mašriyya biḥēs ni'dar nisammīha bi-'innaha lugha yūnāniyya aw lugha firinsiyya aw lugha inglīziyya aw lugha 'arabiyya ḥatta, aw turkiyya. la' ni'dar nisammīha lugha mišriyya muta'assira bi-kull da, w-di qīmit il-lugha l-mišriyya; innaha istaṭā'at an tastaw'ib, min ḍimn ma-staw'abit kull il-ḥaḍārāt illi dakhaltha, tistaw'ib il-mufradāt illi gatlaḥa min hāzihi il-lughāt. walākinn ḡallat, munzu al-qīdam wa-ḥatta al-yōm, taskun fi bēt al-qawā'id wa-l-grammar al-khāṣṣ biha. w-da wāḍiḥ gidḍan fi il-dirāsāt al-lughawiyya il-ḥaḍīsa illi bitu'akkid inn al-lugha al-mašriyya il-ḥaḍīsa aw il-mu'āšira hiya lugha ibnat al-lughāt il-adīma fi shaklaḥa an-nihā'i il-mawgūd al-mu'āšir il-'ān, w-illi ha-yittawwar ṭab'an ila ashkāl ukhra biḡuhūr ashkāl ukhra.

### SEG2

... amma ann il-fuṣḥā titsamma hiyya l-'arabiyya fa-ana ya'ni ma-azunnish inn fiḥ fi wa't min il-aw'āt kān fiḥ lugha 'arabiyya fuṣḥā mawgūda fi ayy fatra tārikhiyya waḍḥa ya'ni. kān fiḥ lugha 'arabiyya, hiya gimā' li-shitāt al-'adīd min al-lughāt illi kāt mawgūda fi l-gazīra il-'arabiyya w-illi kānit bitakhtalif fi-mā baynahā fi asmā' al-'ashyā': fi asmā' il-nakhīl wa-asmā' il-asad wa-asmā' il-sēf [...] wa-huwa min aṭ-ṭab'i inn il-lugha illi bitansha' fi muḡtama' faqīr ṣaḥrāwī takūn aqall taṭawwuran wa-ingāzan min lugha nasha'at fi muḡtama' zirā'i zayy mašr. il-muḡtama' il-zirā'i fi mašr 'addim ḥaḍāra qadīma zāta mustawayāt 'adīda fi l-saqāfa wa-fi l-fann wa-fi l-'ilm wa-fi l-lugha wa-fi l-adab, lā yumkin an tatawaffar fi-mā yusammā bi-l-alsina, w-ana ba'uṣṣir 'ala inn ana asammīha alsina la'innaha kānit tuntaq wa-lā tuktab fi l-ghālib [...] wa-lam tuktab illā muta'akhirran, wa-'indamā kutibat kāna fi awqāt lissa hāzihi al-lugha lam tastaqīr [...] ḥattā anna kull il-manti'a 'indamā arādat fi l-'ašr al-ḥaḍis wa-l-mu'āšir an tata'allam al-lugha al-'arabiyya kānat talga' ilā al-mudarris al-mašri. humma fi l-ḥa'ta biysammūha il-mašri biy'allimhum 'arabi; mish mumkin il-mašri yi'allimhum 'arabi; ha-y'allimhum mašri [...] kull il-manti'a iza kānu 'arab fa-humma mish fi ḥāga ilā mudarris mašri yi'allimhum 'arabi, wa-lākinn lamma it'allimu it'allimu mašri.

### SEG3

il-kull biyitkallim lugha ta'rīban waḥda, il-furū' bēnha furū' basīta, w-mumkin tikūn fi ba'd iṣ-ṣawtiyyāt, innama mish fi qawā'id il-lugha bitā'ithum.

### SEG4

ma-hu da nafs il-mu'adil li-fikrit inn nās ti'ullik [...] 'ala l-lugha btā'itna yi'ullik il-'arabiyya il-mašriyya. ma huwwa ma-yinfa'sh; ma-yinfa'sh ab'a il-inglīziyya il-firinsiyya, aw il-inglīziyya il-mašriyya, aw il-'arabiyya il-mašriyya. ya'ni inti biḥuṭṭi ḥagāt ... ma-

timshīsh ya‘ni. ma-yinfa‘sh ab‘a ‘arabi w-maṣri. izzāy tūgi? fa-y‘ullak la’, ma l-‘arabiyya di l-qawmiyya w-il-maṣriyya di l-waṭaniyya. la’, ana la qawmiyya maṣriyya wa-la qawmiyya ‘arabiyya, ana hawwiya maṣriyya.

**SEG5**

fi ḥudūd. fi l-ākhir ana yasāri; mish ha‘dar anshur ḥāga bititkallim ‘an ir-ra‘simāliyya, masalan; mish ha‘dar anshur ḥāga ma‘a l-nizām. fih bu‘d siyāsi fi l-mawḍū‘.

**SEG6**

il-lugha hiyya adāt tawāṣul, fa-mayinfa‘sh il-lugha tib‘a adāt man‘ saqāfa ‘an ākhar.

**SEG7**

il-kutub mish hayiḥṣallaha ta‘dīl lughawi la‘inn ma-fīsh ḥāga ismaha inn ana a‘addil ‘ala kātib; il-kātib huwwa ḥurr.

**SEG8**

ana kunt baṣaḥḥaḥ, binafsi ya‘ni; tadakhkhalt tamāman fi l-riwāya di [...] ‘āyiz a‘ullik inn ana kunt bashīl kalām w-baḥuṭṭ kalām. il-bint min kafr il-shēkh barḍu, min nafs muḥāfziti. fa-hiyya katba kalām fallāḥīni awi; ya‘ni katba kalām mustaḥīl ya‘ni ... – maḥaddish hayi‘rafuh.

**SEG9**

ana māli bi-sibāwēh? sibāwēh da rāgil kan ‘āyish hināk; fi nagd w-il-ḥigāz.

**SEG10**

il-lugha il-‘āmmiyya bitiddīni barāḥ aktar fi t-ta‘bīr, bima inni maṣri, w-bitiwṣal li-nās kitūr awi, ‘aks **il-fuṣḥā. il-fuṣḥā** mish kull in-nās bitatazawwaḥa, w-ṭūl il-wa‘t hiyya ṣa‘ba la‘inn ... **il-lugha il-‘arabiyya, lughit id-ḍād** ya‘ni, qawiyya w-ṣa‘ba gidan. ḥatta hiyya muṣannafa min il-lughāt is-ṣa‘ba fi l-‘ālam, zayy ... zayy il-almāniyya, la‘inn il-almāniyya lugha aṣīla w-**il-‘arabiyya** lugha aṣīla, ya‘ni mish mushtaqqā min ḥāga.

**SEG11**

w-barḍu il-‘āmmiyya ghaniyya bimufradātha, bass la‘inn barḍu dakhil ‘alēha kalimāt dakhīla kitūr w-la‘innaha lugha mish aṣīla, ya‘ni il-‘āmmiyya mish aṣīla. il-‘āmmiyya fi l-ākhir ibṭi ‘ala yūnāni ‘ala hūrūghlīfi ‘ala ‘arabi. di mish lughitna; ya‘ni **il-‘arabiyya** mish lughit maṣriyyīn. [...] ‘ashān kida iḥna ikhtara‘na il-‘āmmiyya. il-‘āmmiyya il-maṣriyya lēh hiyya il-waḥīda illi bititfihhim fi kull ḥitta fi l-‘ālam, il-‘arabi? mustaḥīl il-‘āmmiyya il-filistīniyya titfihhim fi l-‘ālam il-‘arabi kulluh – ‘and il-shawām; mustaḥīl il-gazā‘riyya – mish il-amāzīgh, il-‘arabiyya, illi bitit‘āl ‘il-dārḡa’ fi l-gazā‘ir – titfihhim.

**SEG12**

la'ann hiyya laha KHUŞŪŞIYYA, w-la'inn ... hiyya mittakhda min kaza ḥāga, w-sahla, w-ba'dar ashraḥ biha ḥagāt kitīr, mushiba, ya'ni fiha ishāb, w-ḥilwa waq'aha 'a- l-widn. il-gazā'iri la'a, il-'irā'i la'a. [...] iḥna a'rab li-l-lugha il-'arabiyya min il-lughāt\ il-lahagāt it-tanya bass fi nafs il-wa't hiyya bitiddīni barāḥ, la'inn hiyya mish ašila.

**SEG13**

shi'r bi-l-fuṣḥā, bass bi-l-fuṣḥā btā'itna, mish bifuṣḥit il-badw bitū' shibh il-gizāra ... **I'm sorry**, bass ana ḍidd\ humma mish\ humma ... il-wahhābiyyīn bawwaḥu ḥayāt il-maṣriyyīn 'umūman – ḥatta fi l-islām ya'ni 'anduhum tafsīrāthum – bass kamān bitū' shibh il-gizāra bawwaḥu l-lugha, ya'ni bitā'itna iḥna. iḥna fi l-ākhir di mish lughitna, bass inti taktashifi inn iḥna lina KHUŞŪŞIYYA. il-'āmmiyya liha KHUŞŪŞIYYA w-liha qawā'id nuṭ' w-ktāba rahība, bass ṭab'an ma-ḥaddish biyib'a ma'ni biha.

**SEG14**

law ana mish muqtani' il-mafrūḍ ma-nshursh, la'in da biy'abbar 'anni w-biy'abbar 'an tawagghāti w-ṭumūḥāti w-afkāri.

**SEG15**

... y'ūlu "la" a ya mḥammad ma-yinfa'sh ti'mil kida" aw "mḥammad lāzim mish 'arfa ti'milu ēh". fa-ba'ulluh awya ma-hu da lāzim fa-l-lāzim da ha-ni'miluh fi dār nashr tanya, bass bima inn malāmiḥ 'amalnāha 'ashān niksar biha l-lāzim fa-iḥna bini'mil kull il-ḥagāt illi hiyya **mish** lāzim.

**SEG16**

iḥna 'ayzīn illi yigamma' ma-yfarra'sh. il-lugha il-ingiliziyya bitfarra' ma-bitgamma'sh; ir-riwāya fi l-ākhir kām waḥid ha-yi'rāha ingilīzi?



## Moralizing Stances

### *Discursive Play and Ideologies of Language and Gender in Moroccan Digital Discourse*

*Atiqa Hachimi*

#### 1 Introduction

Speaking and dressing are stylistic practices and performances that carry social (indexical) meanings. As such, they often mediate social positions and evoke entrenched, sometimes humoured, ideologies of language and of gender within specific cultural and historical contexts. Evaluative stances evaluate such semiotic practices and are taken up in discourse – be it oral, written, or multimodal. It is through these stances that we often judge others' cultural authenticity, appropriateness, loyalty, respectability and a range of other value-laden cultural meanings that are constitutive of a specific gendered socio-moral order.

In this paper, I focus on Moroccans' disapproving stances in online discourse vis-à-vis co-national entertainment celebrities. I look specifically at a Facebook page entitled "Moroccan Stars on The Blacklist" which is dedicated to the blacklisting of overwhelmingly female performing artists (singers and actresses) for failing to uphold appropriate ways of speaking and dressing.<sup>1</sup> This blacklisting Facebook page was established on 5 April, 2011 – a time of radical political change in North Africa and the Middle East, the so-called "Arab Spring". Its emergence came soon after Egyptian activists published a Blacklist of co-national celebrities who did not support the January 25th, 2011 revolution in Egypt. Although the reasons for these Egyptian and Moroccan Blacklists are starkly different, both however police the role of celebrities as public figures in the re-imagining of both nations at a time of major social change.

Based on the chronological order of the discussion threads, the first few months, from April to November, saw a flurry of Facebook posts and comments in response to the metalinguistic discussion thread: "Black list" لا نفتخر بمن لا يفتخر بلهجتنا المغربية ("Black list" We are not proud of those who are not proud

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1 The Facebook page emerged online under the web link: [www.MoroccanStarsOnTheBlackList](http://www.MoroccanStarsOnTheBlackList). It was taken offline at the end of 2015.

of our Moroccan dialect). Disloyalty to Moroccan Arabic was thus given as the main reason behind the blacklisting, and the culprits were mainly Moroccan singers who converged to Middle Eastern (Mashreqi) Arabic varieties in mediatized pan-Arab encounters. Members continued to admonish Moroccan singers for their disloyalty through updates throughout the four years the page was active. However, by December 2011 immediately after the 10th edition of the Marrakech International Film Festival (MIFF), this Facebook community turned to rebuke Moroccan actresses. The latter's blacklisting was not the result of their linguistic choices, but rather their clothing choices at MIFF's red carpet event, which as the ironic discussion thread *مهرجان مراكش الدولي للعرى* (Marrakech international festival of nudity) makes amply clear, are framed as a form of indecent exposure.

This blacklisting Facebook page, I shall argue, is an important window on ideologies of language, gender, and Moroccan national identity politics in this highly mediatized and globalized era. On the one hand, the "verbal hygiene" (Cameron 1995) that underlies this national dialect loyalty campaign, as I show here and elsewhere (Hachimi 2016), is formed in relation, and in opposition, to the hierarchical Arabic sociolinguistic order that I call the "Maghreb-Mashreq language ideology" (Hachimi 2013, 2015, see also Chakrani 2015, Schulties 2015). The emergence of this social networking site thus points to larger sociolinguistic and language ideological changes in Morocco. On the other hand, its gendered culpability and moralizing discourse, shows the ways in which anxieties about female celebrities' linguistic and clothing styles are formed in relation to anxieties about gender morality and Moroccan national identity and reputation. I argue here that the policing of the celebrities' verbal and non-verbal practices, are two sides of the same "metasemiotic" coin (Silverstein 1993), and that the performative enactment of this policing in digital discourse provides an important site for investigating digital literacy practices and cultural ideologies writ large.

Drawing on the concepts of stance (Jaffe 2009), multimodality (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001), and heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1983), my aim in this paper is to show how the moralizing stances taken up by this Facebook community incorporate power-laden discourses of playfulness and humour in the co-construction of respectable Moroccan womanhood. I am interested specifically in how this "serio-ludic" stance (cf. Rouzie 2001, North 2007), or the tension and ambivalence between humour and seriousness, is expressed, keyed and enacted in Moroccan digital writing and discourse.

Stance is "a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (them-

selves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value (Du Bois 2007:169).” In other words, the affective stances (i.e., feelings of amusement, anger, disbelief, disappointment and so on) in Facebook comments on celebrities’ linguistic and clothing choices allow us to examine the interdiscursive and intertextual accomplishment of ridicule and the indexical processes that link such performances with larger social meanings. Specifically, I show how the Facebook participants play with languages, scripts, typographic resources, and deploy a wide range of playful texts such as puns, proverbs, metaphors, parallelism, and ritual insults, to co-construct the Moroccan celebrities as inauthentic and disreputable.

Since writing is hardly the only mode of communication in Facebook and other social media sites, digital discourse scholars stress the centrality of multimodal analyses of computer-mediated communication, particularly because of the intertextual and heteroglossic affordances that characterize new media convergence (Georgakopoulou 2003, Androutsopoulos 2006, 2011). Multimodality refers to the making and conveying of meaning through different semiotic modes (textual and visual). These modes, according to Kress (2003), have different affordances, that is potentials and constraints for making social meanings. A multimodal discourse analysis therefore enables us to study the modes, means and channels of signification, and the ways in which the participants playfully exploit multiple linguistic and other semiotic resources to achieve their communicative goals. Building on recent multimodal analyses of literacy practices (e.g., Jaffe, Androutsopoulos, Sebba and Johnson 2012; Sebba 2013), I show the complex ways in which writing resources interact with other modes to make and index social meanings and produce ideological oppositions that are meaningful.

Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia provides a theoretical concept that captures the outcomes of the complexity brought by social media’s multimodal affordances specifically because it “invites us to examine contemporary new media environments as sites of tension and contrast between linguistic resources, social identities, and ideologies (Androutsopoulos 2011:281).” My interest is in the ways this heteroglossia is performed in this multilingual, multiscriptural and multimodal Facebook page, and how the heterogeneity of styles, modes, scripts, linguistic varieties and discourses, as well as the multiplicity of authors and audiences do ideological work when they come together.

Before turning to a detailed analysis of the explicit metalinguistic comments and implicit metapragmatics of ridicule of the Moroccan celebrities more generally, the next section locates the Facebook page in the historical moment in which it had emerged, specifically within the wider language ideological debates in Morocco.

## 2 Language Ideological Debates and Change in Morocco

One of the most visible and important sociolinguistic developments in Morocco in the last decade has been the reclamation of Moroccans' 'mother tongues' – Moroccan Arabic and Berber, known respectively as *dārīja* and *amāzīghīyya*. While the Arabic-Berber debates have been taking place since the 1970s (Boukous 1995, 2013), the rise of a public discourse about *dārīja*, however, can be traced to the 2000s. The ongoing reclamation of these once largely oral linguistic varieties, both in terms of their transitioning to literacy and the rise of public discourse, can be conceptualized as ways of reconfiguring the relationship between language and power in contemporary Morocco, and reimagining Moroccan national identity (see Benítez-Fernández, Miller, de Ruiter and Tamer 2013).

Put differently, the official monolingual language ideology or “the one language equals one nation” ideology (Silverstein 1998) that informed the Arabization policies of the post-independence era is giving way to an official discourse of plurality and multiculturalism in what has come to be known as the ‘New Morocco’, which acknowledges the different constituencies of Moroccans as African, Arab, Berber, Andalusian, Muslim and Jewish.

It is important to remember that in practice this monolingual ideology marginalized Berber, Morocco's indigenous language. Thus, the latter's official recognition in 2011 as the second official language of the country is a significant symbolic moment in Moroccan national identity politics. French, the former colonial language, on the other hand, despite the lack of a *de jure* official status, has been a *de facto* official language that has never ceased to be the language of power and prestige, and the language of different types of elites in Morocco – Arabophone and Berberophone alike. In other words, Arabization education policies have affected primarily what Moroccans call *wlād shsha'b* (folk's kids), an admittedly vague category that refers to the non-elite majority (poor, lower and lower middle class Moroccans) who cannot afford private schools where French continued to thrive. This political-economic factor is critical in understanding the indexical meanings of different languages and linguistic varieties in Morocco. A prime example is the ideological association of Standard Arabic (*fūṣḥā*) with the lower classes despite being the *de jure* official language. In the same vein, social class positioning is erased in much of the ideological associations of *al-mu'arrabīn* (Arabic educated) with religious conservatism and radicalization especially after the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks. These orientalist discourses which locate the roots of terrorism in Standard Arabic have entered the language ideological debates in Morocco and are worthy of investigation (see Al-Khalfi 2012).

The standard language ideology views Standard Arabic as the only correct and legitimate Arabic variety and subordinates vernacular Arabic as corrupt, and associates it with illiteracy. While the standard-vernacular language ideological debate has a long history in Egypt and Lebanon for instance (see Haeri 2003, Suleiman 2003), it is much more recent in Morocco. It can be loosely traced to journalist Ahmed Reda Benchemsi's publication in 2002 of an article entitled *Dārīja, langue nationale* (*Dārīja*, national language) in the francophone weekly magazine *TelQuel*, where he argues that *dārīja* is Moroccans' "real language" (Caubet 2003). Importantly, the polemic that followed a widely publicized call in 2013 to integrate Moroccan Arabic into the school curriculum and acknowledge it officially as a national language has placed the *dārīja* debate into the highly contested realm of education (see Miller, this volume). Although there is a tendency to pit *dārīja* against *fushā* in the recent linguistic debates in Morocco, some Berber activists see the rise of *dārīja* as an attempt by Arabophones to undermine the recognition of Berber and its new found official status.

The recent reclamation of *dārīja* has been documented in a range of domains including artistic creation by disenfranchised youth (Caubet 2008), dubbing of foreign soap operas on Moroccan television (Miller 2012a), and its proliferation in radio programs (Miller 2013). Its recent transition to literacy has been examined in different genres including advertising (Iraqi-Sinaceur 2011), the written press (Benítez-Fernández 2004, Miller 2012c), and literature (Aguadé 2006, Elinson 2013, Miller 2012b). With the ongoing expansion of written *dārīja*, efforts to standardize its wildly variable orthographic practices as well as the ideologies that often accompany and inform such efforts are emerging (Moustaoui 2012, Chekayri 2013, Miller, this volume). Of central concern to this paper is the massive expansion of written *dārīja* in digital communication technologies. Orthographic variation in *dārīja* writing has been discussed in SMS messages (Benítez-Fernández 2003) and the internet including Facebook (Caubet 2012, 2013).

In contrast to these existing studies which have looked at the reclamation of *dārīja* at the national or local level, this paper shows the importance of locating the valorization of *dārīja* in relation to the wider Arabic-speaking world. The ideology of national dialect loyalty explicit in this blacklisting Facebook page is tied to the proliferation of pan-Arab TV shows which reinforced the non-Arabness of Moroccan Arabic and other North African Arabic varieties and stressed their deficiency rather simply their difference (Hachimi 2013). Some of these practices include subtitling of North African speakers in *fushā* or their re-voicing in Mashreqi varieties, predominance of Mashreqi-speaking Emcees and judges, overwhelming choice of Middle Eastern Arabic songs by Maghrebi

and Mashreqi contestants, mockery of contestants speaking North African varieties, and linguistic convergence to Mashreqi varieties by Maghrebi speakers – the contentious issue in the blacklisting Facebook page under investigation. It would seem that the pan-Arab-media and popular culture, by overtly exposing the Maghreb-Mashreq language ideology, provide the potential for its enhanced contestation. In other words, since ‘ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible’ (Fairclough 2001: 71), the Maghreb-Mashreq language hierarchy is made vulnerable by its high visibility in popular culture.

This recent rise and valorization of *dārija* and its spread to domains that used to be the preserve of Standard Arabic, French or Middle Eastern varieties is tied in complex ways with new communication technologies (internet and satellite tv) and the globalized new economy. Today, we can talk about advertising, dubbing, and the performance arts as sites of the commodification of *dārija*. In other words, *dārija* has become a commodity in the sense of having “added value” (Heller 2010). I argued elsewhere (Hachimi 2013) that while Egyptian Arabic has been a prized commodity throughout most of the 20th century, with the proliferation of pan-Arab tv, other Middle Eastern Arabic vernacular varieties have been competing for airtime and cultural value. Lebanese Arabic started dominating pop music videos, Syrian Arabic (at least before the civil war) has dominated the dubbing market, and Gulf Arabic has become a valuable commodity thanks to the highly lucrative market of the Gulf music industry. *Dārija* maybe following suit especially if we take into account the very recent interest in singing in Moroccan Arabic not only by young Moroccan hopefuls but also by seasoned Middle Eastern singers. These recent developments have engendered language ideological debates of their own, and are worthy of attention.

Of relevance to the expansion of *dārija* online is that this phenomenal proliferation of Moroccan Arabic pop songs is mediated on YouTube, which is now circulating written *dārija* lyrics at a massive scale. The Saad Lamjarred phenomenon – the young Moroccan singer whose latest 2015 single, *Lm3allem* or المعلم (The boss), received more than 23 million views on YouTube within three weeks of release, and was awarded a Guinness World Record achievement as a result – takes *dārija* to new heights. As of April 2016 this same music video has reached well over 300 million views. His 2014 lyrics video single *Enty* or إنت (you, fem.) has reached more than 67 million views on YouTube. The unprecedented circulation of *dārija* through lyrics video is unmatched by any other form of written *dārija* offline, and raises new and important sociolinguistic questions.

So far, I have been talking about *dārija* as an abstract metalinguistic label. In fact, *dārija* like any other linguistic variety encompasses a variety of regional

and social linguistic varieties that has its own internal hierarchies and ideologies (Hachimi 2011, 2012).

So, what language ideologies and voices are upheld, silenced, subverted, or challenged, and how are these processes enacted in this Facebook page?

### 3 Playful Voices and Policing Loyalty to *dārija*

The pervasive metalinguistic discourse in this blacklisting Facebook page allows us to examine the affective stance-taking and the ways in which complaints about the celebrities' stylistic practices is metacommunicatively and interdiscursively accomplished on the site.

In a previous study, I have examined the meanings of loyalty or disloyalty to *dārija* by considering the extent to which this metalinguistic discourse corresponds with the blacklisted artists' actual linguistic choices in the remediatized videos which either incriminate or exonerate the artists in question, or do both in some cases (Hachimi 2016). I drew on Cameron's (1995) concept of verbal hygiene to argue that the Facebook participants can be thought of as a virtual community of verbal hygienists who demand that their national Arabic vernacular be valorized in pan-Arab encounters. Those singers who fail to uphold this ideal are accused of selling out and are, therefore, blacklisted for cultural treason and immorality. Here, my focus is on how this moralizing stance is playfully achieved in this grassroots national dialect loyalty campaign and what language ideologies are animated in the process.

As is typical of the multilingual internet (Danet and Herring 2007), different languages and scripts compete for attention in this Facebook page. What is intriguing, however, is that in this digital Moroccan space one is confronted with English and Standard Arabic in the metalinguistic discussion thread in (1). Similarly, as shown in figure 10.1, the two captioned images of the actresses are also in Standard Arabic and English, respectively, in addition to the prominent vertical English-only text.

(1) “Black list” لا نفتخر بمن لا يفخر بلهجتنا المغربية

(“Black list” We are not proud of those who are not proud of our Moroccan dialect.)

On the one hand, the conspicuous absence of French and the choice of English can hardly be said to be neutral. The choice of English itself is clearly a tokenism because it is hardly used again by the administrator of this page or by the other



FIGURE 10.1 Collage of some of the blacklisted Moroccan singers. The Arabic text in the image on the left reads: (And the list is long.)

contributors for that matter. Yet, it is strategic because it creates an ideological tension between French and English that is increasingly being felt in offline discourse. On the other hand, while the initial choice of Standard Arabic aligns this Facebook page creator with the standard language ideology, as I show below, the other examples by this same contributor draw creatively on both the resources of *fushā* and *dārija* to achieve a serio-ludic stance.

- (2) الى بغيتو تزيديو شي اسم مرحبا الليستة باقا مفتوحة لاستقبال الاسماء الجديدة لولول غير و كان جيبوو لينا شي فيديو كييين ان هداك الاسم اللي بغيتوه يتزاد كيهدر بشي لهجة من غير الدارجة و جيبوه هنا نديرو ليه محاكمة قدام الشعب.

(If you want to add a name to the list you are welcome to do so; the list is still open to welcome new names lol (laugh out loud). However, you must provide us with a video that shows that the particular name you'd like to add speaks in a dialect other than *dārija* and bring it here so we can put it on trial before the Moroccan public.)

The play frame in this summons is keyed and accomplished in a variety of discursive means. Perhaps the most obvious cue of playfulness is the metaprag-



matic use of لول for the acronym lol (laugh out loud). The humor lies not only in lol being iconic of laughter but also in its writing in the Arabic script لول. Other resources of the playfulness include the facetious tone of the content which appropriates legal discourse by making references to incriminating evidence of disloyalty to *dārīja* and to a mock trial before the Moroccan public. In addition to this interdiscursivity, other subtle cues include the use of the nativized French loan الليسته (līsta, the list) and an immediate switch to Standard Arabic words such as مفتوحة and لاستقبال in what started as a recognizably Moroccan Arabic register. The choice of الليسته instead of its corresponding Standard Arabic word اللائحة used in the captioned image in (1) is strategically deployed for humorous effects. It is through this playful incongruity between *dārīja* and *fushā* frames that humor is achieved.

Arguably, the order of the incongruity is reversed in (3) where the unambiguously *dārīja* idiomatic expression قلبت الفيسطة (lit. she has flipped the jacket) is inserted in an otherwise *fushā* comment to capture the condemnation of disingenuous dialect loyalty, that is, the singer's use of *dārīja* in pan-Arab contexts only when audience voting is needed.

(3) الجمهور المغربي غاضب من دنيا بطمة لأنها في اول لقاء قلبت الفيسطة و تخلت عن لهجتها المغربية وهذا في برنامج كلام نواعم

(The Moroccan public is angry with Dunya Batma because in her first tv interview (after *Arab Idol*) she (lit. flipped the jacket) sold out by giving up her Moroccan dialect in the show *kalām nawā'im*.)

Judging from the laughter whenever I have presented these comments to an audience either in academic conferences or to lay Moroccans in social gatherings, the attempts at humor are successful. This strategic play with the resources of *dārīja* and *fushā* produces meaningful oppositions, and triggers humorous effects precisely because of their unexpected use. It can be surmised that the dissonance is reflexive of a diglossic language ideology where the expectation is that *dārīja* and *fushā* occupy different domains.

Intertextual links (or texts that refers to other texts) are deployed in abundance to achieve humorous effects in the complaints against the blacklisted singers. The object of comment (4) is a young singer, composer, and songwriter who often positions herself as being true to her *tamyrahit* or Moroccaness. She is hailed on several Moroccan talk shows as a living example that Moroccan songs can travel to the Middle East.

- (4) هدى سعد صدمتنا فيك كانت قوية  
 ما هو الداعي من غناء الاغنية المغربية الى في لقاء عادي مثل هذا نسيتي لهجتك و تكلمتي  
 باللهجة اللبنانية  
 حتى كلامك لم تطغ عليه اللهجة المغربية ولا حتى كلمة كيما كنقولو تزهدق  
 للاسف لست ممن يمثلون المغاربة في الخارج  
 لا نفتخر بمن لا يفتخر بلهجتنا المغربية

(Houda Saad, Our disappointment in you was very strong.

What's the point of singing Moroccan songs if in an ordinary interview such as this you have forgotten about your dialect and you speak in Lebanese Arabic.

Even your speech was not dominated by the Moroccan dialect, not even one word has escaped, as we say.

With regret, you're not one of those who represent Moroccans abroad.)

The opening line of this comment (صدمتنا فيك كانت قوية) presumes a knowing enculturated Moroccan (reading) public that can recover the cross-reference to a famous Moroccan song الصدمة كانت قوية by the iconic Moroccan male singer Abdelhadi Belkhayyat. By virtue of this intertextuality the comment does a great deal of ideological and gendered work. It serves to juxtapose this younger female artist, who represents the new generation of Moroccan female singers, and pit her against the older generation of Moroccan male singers who have not sold out. Interestingly, this commenter (i.e., the creator of the page) comes back with another post but this time in *dārija*. The disapproving stance is expressed through lengthening of the verb ما حسينااااش (we didn't feel), questioning, and directives like حسسونا 'make us feel', in addition to the use of the plural pronoun نا, which suggests a shared stance and affiliative alignment with all Moroccans in هذا هو ,كتمثلونا ,حسسونا ,ما حسينااااش طلبنا.

- (5) ما حسينااااش واش انت مغربية  
 علاش كتنسوا لهجتكم بمجرد انكم تكونو خارج المغرب  
 حسسونا انكم كتمثلونا انكم مغاربة هذا هو طلبنا

(We did not feel that you are Moroccan.

Why do you (plural) forget your dialect as soon as you're out of Morocco?



(These people are justified to say that Moroccan women are PR(ostitutes) and they really are.)

These comments were addressed to Moroccan singer Mona Amarsha who sings and speaks mainly in Gulf Arabic. In (7) the serio-ludic stance is enacted both by reduplication in *pchaaaaaaaakh* to heighten the expression of disbelief but also by the use of the Standard Arabic *wa ʔasratah!*, a hyperbolic expression of sorrow that one often encounters in serious styles and genres. Here, orthographic play and intertextual incongruity combine to achieve humorous effects. While (8) can hardly be said to convey humour, what is significant and ironic from a language ideological perspective is that the commenter uses French – the former colonial language – to rebuke this performing artist for passing as a Gulf Arabic speaker. I have argued elsewhere that a Moroccan woman's ability to pass for a native speaker of Gulf Arabic varieties has become “iconic of sexual availability” (Hachimi 2016:165). These comments conjure up the stereotypical images of the seductive, temptress, and sexually loose Moroccan woman that circulates in Middle Eastern representations.

Relevant to the gendered discourse that permeate this Facebook page is that the few blacklisted male artists on this Facebook page are portrayed as homosexual or unmanly or both when criticized for converging to Middle Eastern Arabic varieties. The implication here is that presumably “real Moroccan men” are loyal to their local variety and only those who embrace “feminine qualities” speak the Mashreqi dialects. In general, this gendering of linguistic authenticity, which has been addressed in relation to French in Tunisia (Walters 2011) and Morocco (Sadiqi 2003), points to the importance of gender in the linguistic construction of national identity. In the next section I turn to the moralizing stances towards the Moroccan actresses' (under) dressing style and show the ways in which the written texts and images co-construct them as inauthentic and disreputable.

#### 4 Playful Voices and Policing Clothing Style

As I mentioned earlier, complaints about the Moroccan actresses' breach of modesty come primarily from the 2011 Marrakech International Film Festival (MIFF), known in Arabic as المهرجان الدولي للفيلم بمراكش. Figure 10.2 is a collage of compromising images of three Moroccan actresses at MIFF's red carpet event with pragmatic and metapragmatic framings. The multimodal resources the administrator of the page draws on here show a great deal of creativity. They involve artful and playful combinations of different styles/registers, scripts,



FIGURE 10.2 Moroccan actresses as the target/object of ridicule in the Facebook page

colours, languages, verbal art forms like punning and irony, as well as the skillful juxtaposing and spatial ordering of images. Indeed, as Kress (2003:140) succinctly put it “*The world told* is a different world to *the world shown*” (emphasis in the original).

This collage is produced by the administrator of the Facebook page and displays a “communicative act in which image and text blend like instruments in an orchestra” (Van Leeuwen 2005). Indeed, the written texts and the images work in tandem to animate the serious playfulness that runs throughout this social networking site. The play frame is keyed by the front and centre summons *aji dhak m3ana* (come laugh with us) and consolidated by the other

metapragmatic material in this pastiche. For ease of referencing, the linguistic varieties and typographic resources in this collage are reproduced as extracts (9)–(11) and discussed individually.

(9) Moroccan Arabic in the Roman script

*aji dhak m3ana*

(Come laugh with us)

This Moroccan Arabic summons is rendered in the Roman script with the numeral 3 as a substitute for the letter *ʿayn* in *m3ana*. This substitution of letters with numerals, which has been discussed in a number of CMC Arabic studies (e.g., Caubet 2012, Palfreyman et al 2007, Warschauer et al 2007), in fact, is not limited to Arabic but has been part of the playful resources by early CMC users. Looking at the typographic and visual elements of the summons, however, one is struck by the smaller font and the yellow colour against a white background which renders it almost imperceptible in sharp contrast to the striking and prominent vertical text on the left hand side, which is rendered in the Arabic script and in red, and stands out against the white background (the text is reproduced in a linear fashion in (10)). Both the spatial ordering of the Standard Arabic text, the bigger font, and the red colour conveys its visual importance vis-à-vis the Romanized Moroccan Arabic text. This I believe is not necessarily because Standard Arabic texts carry more importance than Romanized *dārija* texts but rather because, in this context, the Standard Arabic text *does* the humour while the Moroccan Arabic text merely *signals* to it. In other words, the administrator of the page privileges the social and pragmatic function of the SA text, because it carries a pun, or verbal play.

(10) Standard Arabic in the Arabic script:

مهرجان مراكش الدولي للعرى + 18

(The International Marrakesh Festival of Nudity 18 +)

The pun in (10) plays on the very name of the festival مهرجان مراكش الدولي للفيلم (lit. The International Marrakech Festival of the Film) by substituting للفيلم (of the film) with للعرى (of nudity), rendering it instead (The International Marrakech Festival of Nudity.) By adding the 18 + (i.e., age 18 or older), the administrator of the page is wittily drawing on familiar Hollywood discourses of rating films according to their (un)suitability for younger audiences. Thus ranking these images as 18+ exaggerates their sexual content and implies their suitability for adult audiences only.

The humorous effect and double entendre of puns are also exploited in the top right image of the collage but this time through a ludic French text which involves punning of *Fatale* ~ *Tefal*, which is reproduced in (11).

- (11) French pun in the Roman script  
 Femme Tefal  
 (Tefal woman)

This verbal play of the French word *Fatale* with *Tefal* changes the original *Femme Fatale* 'lit. fatal woman' into *Femme Tefal* 'Tefal woman'. Tefal, of course, is the brand name of non-stick cooking appliances. The intended indexical chain and symbolic associations here are with food and overweight. The humorous effect of this French pun relies on incongruity in two ways. If the iconic *Femme Fatale* "depicts an attractive and seductive woman, especially one who will ultimately bring disaster to a man who becomes involved with her" (Oxford Dictionary), the Tefal woman depicts a woman who lacks these qualities because she is overweight from overeating. The dissonance essential in humour exploits visual incongruity between type of body and type of gown. That is, the target of the ridicule here is the voluptuous body (the uncovered upper body) in a strapless dress. The expectation is for this type of body, as the cultural script goes, is to stay clear from this type of Western gown. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this pun entails that this 'Tefal woman' brings disaster not to the man involved with her but to her nation. Indeed, verbal play, as Sherzer (2002) has long pointed out, is not a frivolous pursuit. Rather, it "flirts with the boundaries of the socially, culturally, and linguistically possible and appropriate".

Clearly, the fact that the producer of this collage is choosing to write one caption in the Roman script and another in the Arabic script shows that technological constraints are not at issue, that is, writing in the Arabic script is not a hindrance. Since writing and orthographies are hardly socially neutral technologies (Sebba 2012), the scriptural variation observed here seems to be a strategic stylistic choice that is deployed for pragmatic and ideological effects. Similarly, the intertextuality involved in the French pun indexes not simply familiarity with the French language but an ability to cite and play with iconic cultural products. The author of the collage seems to be showing and writing to a co-national audience that can get the humor and participate in making it. In responding to the call to join in on the humour, the participants' uptake, however, ranges from those who uphold the humour to those who exploit the discursive license afforded by the lack of responsibility to the stars and anonymity of the internet to engage in direct verbal abuse and slander.







**Zine Kay7cham 3La Zino... wLkhayb Lah Yahdih..**

FIGURE 10.3 *Juxtaposing images of American and Moroccan entertainment celebrities*

positive line *Zine Kay7cham 3la Zino* (The beautiful is shy about flaunting his beauty) while the Moroccan actress is aligned with the second and negative line of the proverb *wLkhayb Lah Yahdih* (but the ugly may Allah show him the right path). Capitalization of the first letters of the words in (07) adds to the visual effects here.

(13) Zine Kay7cham 3la Zino ... wLkhayb Lah Yahdih ...

(The beautiful is shy about flaunting his beauty ... but the ugly may Allah show him the right path...)

The juxtaposition of the captioned images of the American actresses who embody authentic Hollywood red carpet practices with those of the Moroccan actress is a powerful semiotic strategy that works to position the Moroccan actress as a 'clone', not the real thing. This creative juxtaposition sneaks in the trope of "us" (Moroccans) versus "them" (Americans) and suggests that even those who are legitimate representatives of Hollywood practices and have license to be less modest in their dress, are in fact showing more modesty than our tasteless Moroccan actresses. The 'clone' bothers and deserves to be ridiculed. Yet, she gets to be watched intensely. It is in these ways that discursive and visual elements co-construct the inauthenticity of the Moroccan actress.

Equally important is the creative iteration of this very proverb by a large number of commenters. I consider only a few examples here that illustrate how the creative quoting of the proverb interacts with linguistic and orthographic variation in the animation of the playful stance. On the one hand, we can see a great deal of variation in romanized Arabic writing when we compare extract (14) with (13) above (Zine vs. zin; o vs. w; ya7cham vs. kayhcham, lkhayb vs. lkhayab). The proverb in (14) follows a French sentence itself rendered in an informal register (indexed by lack of capitalization and double negation, non-standard spellings *ms* for *mais*, *fais* for *fait*). The switch to the authoritative voice of Moroccan folk wisdom functions almost like a punch line.

- (14) je sais pas ce qu'elle aurait fais si elle etait belle ms bon ... **zine ya7cham  
3la zino w lkhayab ghir yla hdaah llah**

(I don't know what she would have done if she were beautiful but well ... The beautiful is shy about flaunting his beauty, and the ugly (does so) only (lit. if Allah showed him the right path) with the grace of Allah/God.)

Idioms, as Drew and Holt (1988:398) have pointed out "have a special robustness which lends them the function of summarizing the complaint in such a way as to enhance its legitimacy, and simultaneously to bring the complaint to a close." While comment (14) does just that, the comment in extract (15), however, plays with the proverb by faithfully citing its first line at the very start of the comment but drops the second part altogether replacing it instead with a sarcastic irony and ritual insults.

- (15) **zin kihechal 3ala zino walkhayba** bahal had lkamar hantoma katchofo  
kahrja men film dial lkhli33 wdik rajlin karminn mafihom mayt3ara

(The beautiful is modest about his beauty but the ugly like this face (pejorative), as you can see, she came out from a horror film, and those legs are (lit. dry) skinny, they are not worth flaunting/exposing.)

Regardless of where they are placed, proverbial expressions are quotable texts that have authority. This recurring proverb, as I have shown, serves as a ready-made packaged insult that ties in well with the larger goal of policing morality by targeting the size and the shape of these actresses' bodies. If these actresses are trying to showcase their beauty, it would seem that the most effective way to undermine them is to ridicule the very bodies they flaunt. And just as the

voluptuous body is ridiculed so is the thin body as the ritual insults to which I turn make amply clear.

Ritual insults are also deployed with great frequency in this playful space. As one browses the large number of comments on this Facebook page, one gets the sense that the participants are on a stage of verbal humour competition. Comments (16)–(22) are illustrations of some of the ritual insults that exploit metaphors to ridicule the actress's legs. Used by different participants, comments (16) and (17) are typographic variations of the same referent: Marquise cigarettes, a local brand of cigarettes that are known for being skinny, tall and cheap. Comment (18) continues with smoking metaphors likening the actress's legs to *sabssi* (سبسي); a local smoking device that is about four times longer than cigarettes and is often associated with hashish smoking.

(16) jouj marquise

(17) 2 MARQUIZ

(18) kon kan chi zin dial bssah ya sabssi

(lit. I wish there was some actual beauty, oh (you) smoking tube)

In their desire to come up with the most creative ritual insults, other participants deployed bird metaphors likening the actress' legs to the long and skinny legs of a stork, adding reduplicated signs of laughter for further affective impact as in (19). Others, on the other hand, turned to metaphors of calamities while respecting the rhyme as in (20), while others turned to diseases and even death as in extracts (21) and (22), respectively.

(19) heta rejlin dyala b7al rejlin d belarej hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh

(Even her legs look the legs of a stork hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh)

(20) واش كتبين لين فورما ديلها لزين لفصلا كيفها كيف لبالا

(Is she showing us her body shape? No beauty, no shape, she resembles a calamity)

(21) fiha lkosa7

(She has rickets disease)

- (22) hadik raha majatch twarri Inass gaftan lmaghribi raha jat twarri ma ta7t algaftan. wa ra ta haja ma jat m3ak wa nti **b7al ila nawdok man about ya wajah drakula**

(This one didn't come to show people the Moroccan Kaftan. Actually she came to show them what's beneath the Kaftan. Nothing suits you, and you look like you've just risen from a tomb, Dracula face.)

In this space for ridicule, sarcastic and ironic comments populate the comments as illustrated by examples (23)–(25). They all target the naked body and draw from a variety of stylistic resources and linguistic varieties including Moroccan Arabic but also Egyptian Arabic. Combined with sarcasm, (23)–(25) exploit a panoply of discursive tactics to enact the serio-ludic stance with enhanced affective impact (e.g., reduplicated punctuation '!!!!' in (23); Lengthening in yaaaaasalam in (24) and **ايبسيحشم** in (25); onomatopoeia (e.g. hhhhhh in 24). In many ways, these tactics are very similar to what Thurlow (2011) and others have found in the performative enactment of playfulness.

- (23) **la 7aydih nti 7ssen !!!!**

(Why don't you take it off, that's even better!!!!)

- (24) hhhhhhhhhhhhh yaaaaasalam 3ela gaftan almaghribi hhhhh

(hhhhhhhhhhhh Oh(lengthened) wow? Look at the Moroccan Kaftan hhhhh)

- (25) **وكنشوف مهرجان مراكش كانوا فيه غير المحترمه لاختها الله ينعل لي ما يبيسيحشم**

(I see that there were only respectable women at the Marrakech festival. May Allah curse those who have no shame.)

Unlike other comments which are predominantly in Moroccan Arabic either in the Arabic or Roman script, comment (26) is in Romanized Egyptian Arabic. It makes reference to a very well-known line from an Egyptian comedy play from the 1980s called **شاهد ما شفش حاجة** (a witness who didn't see anything). Whether this comment is made by an Egyptian or a Moroccan is difficult to say since Moroccans have a complex linguistic repertoire that includes Egyptian Arabic. The point here is that an Egyptian Arabic line is an intertextual resource in humour and meaning-making for Moroccans.

- (26) laabsa minghir hodom hhh [Egyptian Arabic]  
 (Lit. she is wearing without clothes, i.e., she is naked)

Before I turn to the discussion section, it is important to see how ‘serious’ voices are animated in this ‘space for play’. Comment (27) might be considered a typical ‘serious’ stance that draws heavily on religious discourse to admonish the actresses’ breach of decency. Yet, while (27) uses the Arabic script and thus aligns script and religious discourse, religious discourse is neither tied to the use of Standard Arabic or the Arabic script. A great many frozen expressions that draw from religious discourse are common and exploit different writing resources as shown in (28)–(30). In extract (30), the serious and religious stance is further communicated through a variety of discursive and visual tactics: the iconography (I love Mohammad, Peace Be Upon Him), the screen name is *Mousslim*, and the frozen religious aphorism (Oh Allah indeed, this is a great sin.)

- (27) الله يسترنا من هذا القوم نساء كاسيات عاريات لا يشمن ريح الجنة وليس لهن وزن يوم القيامة  
 ... الله يستر ... الله يستر.


(May Allah protect us from these people, “women who will be dressed but appear to be naked.” They will not smell the fragrance of paradise and will have no weight in the Day of Judgment. May Allah protect us ... May Allah protect us.)

- (28) la 7awla wala kowatta illa bilah ...

(Lit. There is no power or strength except with Allah.)

- (29) behal hade l forma khaseha tkhabih chaweheti rasek w chawhtina m3ak welina nehachemo ngolo rana mghareba a3oudo bilah mina chaytane rajime.

(With a body shape like this, she should hide it. You’ve brought shame on yourself and shame on us too. We are shy to say we are Moroccans. I seek refuge from Allah against the cursed Satan.)

- (30)  llahomma inna lahad monkar

(Oh Allah, indeed this is a great sin)

In sum, the different examples in this section demonstrate well how participants display serious play through creative multimodal resources, and how the heteroglossic and intertextual affordances of digital discourse produce ideological oppositions that are meaningful at the levels of form and content.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Online discourse has massively expanded the writing of vernacular Arabic, and thus provides an important window into the workings of different language ideologies and heteroglossic semiotic practices. This paper has centred on a Facebook page dedicated to the blacklisting of Moroccan celebrities who are accused of committing transgressive verbal and non-verbal acts. My aim has been to shed light on language and gender ideologies in Moroccan digital discourse.

To understand the ways in which social meaning is co-produced and negotiated in this Facebook page, the analysis has drawn on the insights of the 'third wave' of new media sociolinguistics which takes *discourse*, *technology*, *multimodality*, and *ideology* to be key organizing principles. I have shown how participants draw on, and juxtapose, a variety of multimodal resources made available by the ability of Facebook to converge texts, pictures, videos, and images on a single platform. The creative deployment and juxtaposition of these different modes and textualities work in tandem to co-produce the moralizing discourse that underlie the verbal and social hygiene in this Facebook page.

Specifically, I have shown the significance of playfulness and creativity in Moroccan digital discourse. Linguistic and discursive creativity in new media – increasingly central in the analysis of digital writing and discourse – does not necessarily mean creating anew but appropriating and combining elements from different resources at the stancetaker's disposal (e.g., Danet 2001, Danet and Herring 2007, North 2007, Chun and Walters 2011, Thurlow 2011). Playfulness in this blacklisting Facebook page is enacted through diglossic and multilingual play, register play, verbal play, intertextual play, scriptural play, orthographic play, typographic play, and visual play, among others. To view this multimodal and multidiscursive creativity as heteroglossic goes beyond simply acknowledging the co-existence and alternation of different linguistic varieties or considering them as resources, but to pay attention to their dialogic relationship, polyvocality and the extent to which their ideological oppositions have significance (Bailey 2007).

While the metalinguistic discourse explicitly contests the Maghreb-Mashreq ideology, the implicit metapragmatics of written discourse – i.e., the inter-discursive and textual resources through which the gendered serio-ludic stances are animated – contest and subvert in their turn the monolingual and standard language ideologies that inform standard writing norms and styles. This messing with norms by playing with the boundaries of languages and scripts liberates the assumptions of the dominant style through humor and chaos.

However, as I have shown, this messing with the norms is not consistently upheld by everyone in this Facebook page or by a single contributor across all genres. A case in point is the linguistic and scriptural choices of the owner/administrator of this Facebook page, who uses mostly the Arabic script in writing Moroccan and Standard Arabics, and tends to avoid Arabic-French code switching and French except in a single pun. These agentive and strategic choices index a desire to do as one preaches, and manifest a need to style the self as an authentic Moroccan who is loyal to symbolic means of Moroccaness. Furthermore, the choice of English over French in framing this Facebook page can hardly be said to be ideologically neutral. It animates a newer language ideological opposition – one that pits French against English in reimagining national identity in the New Morocco.

As new media technologies have become an integral part of young people's everyday lives in Morocco, I have shown that scholars need to pay particular attention to the complexities of digital writing and discourse and its implications for the discursive construction of language, gender, and national identity.

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## The Language of Online Activism

*A Case from Kuwait*

*Jon Nordenson*

ما أبي أعلق عالصورة .. بس لو تغيرون الصورة والموضوع .. وايد أحسن

I do not wish to comment on the picture .. But if you change the picture and the subject .. much better

"[User 1]",<sup>1</sup> debate on blog, July 29th, 2006

إذا لم يهز خطاب البراك "ضمير" السلطة في شيء فلن لن [sic] يحركه بعد ذلك أي خطاب  
آخر...! #لن\_نسمح\_لك

If al-Barrāk's speech doesn't shake the "consciousness" of the regime in any way, then no other speech will do so later

"@[User 2]", Twitter, 15.10.2012

The quotes presented above are taken from the online debates of two different, but related, political movements in Kuwait. The first is from the liberal dominated 2006 campaign to change the electoral law, and the second is from the ongoing oppositional movement seeking extensive political reform,<sup>2</sup> dominated by Islamist and tribal protagonists. Judging by the examples given above, a difference between the two can also be found in terms of language preferences: the protagonists in the 2006 campaign apparently preferred Kuwaiti Arabic (KA), and those in 2012 Standard Arabic (SA). Why is this so?

- 1 All examples used have been anonymized. Usernames and identities are not relevant to the material. Moreover, one should always be cautious when relaying online statements, even when, as in this case, all statements have been made in public, through open channels. Finally, this is particularly important given the topics discussed in the examples used, and the Kuwaiti regime's increasing willingness over the past few years to persecute Kuwaitis for any critical statements made online. All examples in their original form have been kept by the author.
- 2 This movement began in 2009. While it has been markedly less active following the Kuwaiti Government's repression of public protests in the autumn of 2012, some of the groups involved are still active, hence the term "ongoing."

This chapter seeks to answer this question through an empirical study of the written language employed online by activists engaged in the two campaigns. The findings are compared to random samples of Twitter-usage in the country, in order to establish whether or not the language employed by political activists differ from that of the average Kuwaiti Twitter user. The findings suggest a tendency towards KA features among the liberal activists in 2006, a tendency towards SA features among the oppositional activists currently active, and an equal distribution of KA and SA features among the “average” Twitter user. Before the findings are presented in detail, however, a look at the relevant context and the background for this study is in place.

First of all, the sheer volume of written material published online dictates academic attention. Globally, more than 320 million people use Twitter monthly, in more than 35 languages.<sup>3</sup> As for Facebook, the site had more than 1 billion daily users as of November 2015, and 1,55 billion monthly users.<sup>4</sup> About one billion unique users visit YouTube every month, and hundreds of millions of hours of video are watched every day.<sup>5</sup> On Wordpress, more than 56 million new posts and 52,5 million comments are published every month.<sup>6</sup> In short, an enormous production takes place continuously online, the likes of which has never before been seen. Although internet access and usage varies greatly between Arab states, the online production in the region is also tremendous. According to the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (formerly the Dubai School of Governance), the internet penetration rate in the Arab world reached 36% in 2014, as compared to a global average of 40% (Mourtada and Salem 2014:1).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, social media usage in the region is on the rise, and from 2013 to 2014, the number of Twitter and Facebook users increased with 54% and 49%, respectively (Mourtada, Salem and Shaer 2014:6). For those interested in the use and development of the Arabic language, this widespread internet usage raises a number of important questions, including whether or not the increase in the production of written material affects the language used.

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3 As of November 2015. Twitter: “about, company”. URL: <https://about.twitter.com/company>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

4 As of November 2015. Facebook: “Company info”. URL: <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

5 As of November 2015. YouTube: “Statistikk”. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/no/statistics.html>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

6 As of November 2015. Wordpress: “activity”. URL: <https://wordpress.com/activity>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

7 We should keep in mind that figures concerning internet access is difficult to establish with any certainty. However, there is no doubt that access and usage in the region has increased markedly over the past few years, and that internet usage now is a part of everyday life for a substantial part of the population.

Several previous studies of language use online in the Arab world have looked into the use of Arabic written with Latin letters, often referred to as *Arabeasy* (Aboelezz 2009, Palfreyman and Khalil 2003, Peel 2004, Warschauer, Said and Zohry 2002). Such studies have found that the language rendered through Latin letters usually is a colloquial variety rather than SA. Similarly, Allman argued that the preliminary evidence (on online communication) “suggests that the internet provides a venue for two socio-linguistic occurrences, the translation of spoken vernacular into writing and the mutual acceptability of colloquial usage online”, in addition to code-switching between English and Arabic (Allmann 2009:67). In her view, features of online communication should be seen in connection with the instantaneous nature of many of the platforms used, as “synchronous modes tend to be more speech-like (...)” (Ibid., p. 65). In her 2012 study of Egyptian blogs, Ramsay looked into the language employed by the top five ranked Arabic language blogs in the country. Interestingly, all bloggers used Arabic script “whatever code they express themselves in” (Ramsay 2012:54). She found that “the bloggers (...) select their code of representation and adjust it to the aim of the blog and the desired audience” (Ibid., p. 83). More specifically, what she termed *activist bloggers* tended towards Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA), and *educational bloggers* tended towards SA. As we shall see, the material presented here supports these findings, as the expected audience seems to be a decisive factor in terms of language choices made.

Arabic internet users make choices concerning script (Arabic/Latin), language (Arabic, English, other), and variety (SA or colloquial Arabic), and frequently mix and/or switch between these. As pointed out by Mark Sebba: “written language mixing remains relatively unexplored and under-researched (...)” (Sebba 2012:1). As for written Arabic online, Ramsay states that “choice of language variety and linguistic style in blogs, electronic communication and throughout cyberspace remains a vast and independent field in Arabic studies which has yet to be explored” (Ibid., p. 83), and that “establishing valid theories and efficient methods (...) is a substantial task yet to be carried out” (Ibid., p. 50). Similarly, Allmann argued that “Arabic language use online is an understudied case” (Allmann 2009:73). Thus, while most studies seem to agree that the use of written colloquial is a dominant future of online communication and that this may or may not be done using Latin script, it is still too early to draw any definitive conclusions. Moreover, Androutsopoulos argues that researchers need to “demythologize” language use in computer mediated communication (CMC), as early research often used terms such as *netspeak* that ascribe common features to the language used on particular platforms, such as e-mails (Androutsopoulos 2006:420). In his view, it is empirically questionable whether

a “language of e-mail” exists. Instead, he argued that “[r]ather than identifying e-mail, chat or weblogs as new genres *per se* [original italic], the question is how these communications technologies are locally appropriated to enact a variety of discourse genres” (Ibid., p. 421). Similarly, Orgad argued that “[i]t has become clear that the separation between the online and offline cannot be sustained. Researchers have consistently argued for the need to frame the online both in its own right and in relation to other contexts and realities” (Orgad 2008:37). As such, we should not reduce language use online to a simple function of technology.

This study aims to address some of the issues raised above. Whereas previous studies often have focused on particular writers and informants, this study aims to get the “bigger picture”, so to speak, by selecting random samples from the cases in question. As the material gathered is quite extensive, coding of particular features of the language variety employed is used rather than describing the features of the text following a close reading of the material. Recognizing that it is impossible to study language use online *per se*, the study is focused on a particular activity mediated through online platforms, namely political activism. While most research on language use online so far has focused on Egypt, the cases here are from Kuwait. I do not aim to provide an exhaustive description of the code employed, but rather to establish which code is used, which script is used, and to identify features of KA, SA, or combinations of the two. Finally, the findings are discussed within the relevant contexts (both online and offline), so as to avoid ascribing agency to the internet itself.

### Cases, Material, and Analysis

The starting point for this study was the observation by the author that the language employed online by activists in Kuwait seemed to be drifting from what I would describe as an informal mix of KA and SA in the mid-2000s, towards purer SA during the past few years. The observation from the mid-2000s stems from my previous study of a 2006 youth-led campaign to change the electoral districts in Kuwait, known as the *Orange Movement* (OM), in Arabic referred to as either *al-Ḥaraka al-Burtuqāliyya* or *Nabihā Khamsa* (we want five).<sup>8</sup> The group demanded five electoral districts – hence the name

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8 The name of the group in SA should of course be Nabghihā Khamsa. However, in Kuwaiti dialect, the ghayn is omitted in this particular verb.

in Arabic – arguing that this would hinder alleged Government efforts to manipulate elections for the national assembly. The group was born online, and blogs were the preferred platform of activists at the time. Using the ‘comments’ function on the blogs involved, activists discussed their aims, their arguments, and how to proceed with their campaign. The movement was dominated by *ḥaḍar* activists (Nordenson 2010), that is, the part of the population historically living in Kuwait city (in English often referred to as city-dwellers), which also has been the dominant group in socio-economic and political terms. However, several activists of tribal background were also involved, referred to as the *badū* part of the population, which in turn has been politically and economically marginalized (Al-Nakib 2014, Ghabra 1997).

Recently, I have been studying a youth-led campaign for political reform in the country, which also makes extensive use of online platforms, and, most of all, Twitter. While the campaign consists of several groups, it can meaningfully be described as one campaign, since there is a general agreement on the main aims: a more democratic Kuwait through reform of the electoral law and the constitution, including instituting a full parliamentary system. The groups and activists have suffered tough reactions from the Government over the past few years, and only a few remain active today. Although the groups involved primarily relied on offline mobilization to effect change, they were highly active online. Twitter was used to argue for their cause, to mobilize followers, and to discuss the issues at hand. Through numerous debates organized around particular hashtags, thousands of participants discussed questions such as why one should implement a parliamentary system, how the constitution should be reformed, and the content of speeches given at rallies. These debates were often initiated by others than the groups active in the campaign, but were clearly based within the oppositional camp. Participants included not only activists, but members of Parliament, journalists, political analysts, members of the royal family, and “regular” Kuwaitis. While there are liberal, *ḥaḍar* activists taking part in the campaign, it has been dominated by tribal and Islamist activists and politicians.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the differences observed in the language employed through the two campaigns, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the language used online by young activists in Kuwait, in terms of the local vernacular as opposed to SA?

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<sup>9</sup> See for instance: *Foreign Policy*, October 23rd 2012, “Kuwait’s balancing act”. URL: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/23/kuwaits-balancing-act>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.



- Are there any differences to be identified in the language practices of liberal and religious/tribal activists?
- If any differences are observed, what may be the reasons behind these?

The questions are answered through an analysis of material consisting of random samples from the activities of both campaigns. When the OM was active in the spring and summer of 2006, Twitter did not exist, and blogs were the preferred platform. One blog in particular can be said to have been the main platform of the movement (called *sāhat al-Ṣafāt*, after the central square in Kuwait with the same name), and during the campaign, no less than 65 blog posts and more than 6500 comments were published on the site.<sup>10</sup> I have randomly selected 20 comments from three of the largest debates as the sample from this campaign.<sup>11</sup> As for the latter campaign, I have identified 27 Twitter debates on oppositional issues organized around hashtags that took place between April 2012 and January 2013, encompassing more than 65 000 tweets. I have randomly selected 50 tweets from three of the largest debates I have identified.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, two of these debates were in conflict with one another, as they were concerned with whether or not one should participate in an oppositional demonstration in August 2012. Those intending to participate used one hashtag, and those who did not intend to participate used another. I have included both, so that what presumably are both oppositional and pro-Government Twitter-users are included.

Clearly, the two platforms are not directly comparable in the sense that they have different technical possibilities and limitations. However, if we are to compare activist debates online in 2006 and 2012, there is no alternative to comparing different platforms, and as such, it is a comparison of the online work

10 The blog is still online at <http://kuwaitjunior.blogspot.no>. Last Accessed: January 20th 2015.

11 In all 60 comments. The blog posts were as follows: May 3rd 2006: "حضورك مهم" للشارع نزل.. حضورك مهم". 68 comments. May 26th 2006: "مرزوق الغانم يؤيد الخمس دوائر". 108 comments. July 22nd 2006: "خمسة ووفاء". 122 comments.

12 Tweets are shorter than most comments on a blog – Twitter does not allow for messages over 140 characters – and therefore the Twitter samples are larger than those taken from the blog. In all they include 150 tweets. It should be noted that not all tweets that may have been written using the hashtags in question necessarily are included, as tweets may have been written after I harvested the sample. The debates included are as follows: August 28th 2012: #انخرج\_للارادة. Appr. 2457 tweets. August 28th 2012: #سأخرج\_للارادة. Appr. 3087 tweets. October 16th 2012: #لن\_نسمح\_لك. Appr. 4977 tweets. The final hashtag refers to a speech given by oppositional politician Musallam al-Barrāk.

of activists in the country in 2006 and in 2012/2013. Finally, I have also included random samples of Twitter activity in Kuwait, harvested based on geographical location.<sup>13</sup> These are used to establish whether or not the language in political discussions is markedly different from language used for other purposes, or if the language on Twitter in itself is markedly different from that employed earlier on the blog. I only included tweets written in Arabic (be it with Arabic letters or Latin letters), containing a minimum of five words. I excluded tweets that only consist of a Quranic quote, as this hardly is informative of the language choices made by the protagonist in question.

All entries in all samples have been coded according to certain criteria. The intention was to provide a more transparent analysis than if I were to characterize the text as KA, SA, or a mix based on my own reading, in addition to solving the problem caused by the extent of the material. In each entry, I have looked for specific features, or markers, which have been coded as “Kuwaiti”, “*fushā*”, or “both”. These included negation, interrogatives, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronoun, adverbs of time, and some particular Kuwaiti expressions.

The features selected for coding were based on which features I expected to find most frequently. I did not include all possible variants of, for instance, negation markers, but rather included the SA and KA variants of those I assumed to be most often employed. The KA variants of these features are based on several sources on the Kuwaiti dialect (Al-Qenaie 2011, Holes 1984, Holes 1990, Holes 2011, Qafisheh 1997).<sup>14</sup> Naturally, one entry may contain more than one feature, of one or more variety. Thus, one entry may contain both *fushā* and Kuwaiti negations, *fushā* interrogatives, and Kuwaiti relative pronouns, and will be coded as such.<sup>15</sup>

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13 These samples have been harvested based on geographical location, that is, specific coordinates that include Kuwait city and the suburbs. This has been done through an application developed by the Department of Informatics at the University of Oslo, and I am extremely grateful to Morten Erlandsen for his continued help and support in this regard. 50 tweets from each sample have been included, 150 tweets in total. The samples are as follows: Sample 1, taken on May 13th 2014, at 11:42 am, and includes 706 tweets. Sample 2, taken on September 22nd 2014, at 1:00 pm, and includes 774 tweets. Sample 3, taken on October 23rd 2014, at 11:00 am, and includes 419 tweets.

14 In addition, I am forever indebted to my good friend Muḥammad al-Yūsufī for help in establishing and correcting the relevant markers.

15 There are some problematic aspects to this approach. For one thing, the sampling is challenging. The possibility of anonymity provided online makes it difficult if not impossible to provide accurate samples, as it is not possible to determine how many *different* people actually took part in the debates, if they were situated in Kuwait, and if they were Kuwaitis. Moreover, some SA features are widely used also in the Kuwaiti vernacular, and may be

### Kuwait, Activism, and the Internet

Kuwait is not a democracy. The ruling al-Ṣabāḥ family dominates politics in the country, the Amir appoints the Prime Minister, who in turn appoints the cabinet. Important positions such as Prime Minister, defense minister and interior minister, are reserved for members of the royal family (Herb 1999, Salem 2008). However, the country has an elected assembly which often has been eager to make use of the powers vested in it. The constitution is somewhat ambiguous, in that it declares Kuwait a democratic country, but at the same time stipulates that much power remains with the royal family. The unresolved question of power sharing characterizes politics in the country, and oppositional forces have sought democratic reform since independence. The room for oppositional politics has been shifting, and the regime has on two occasions dissolved the national assembly for extended periods of time. Throughout the years, the regime has allied itself with various parts of society to face off the opposition, including the Shia population, Islamists, and the tribal population. In 2006, the Orange Movement was largely allowed to operate freely. The campaign succeeded in their goal, and even met with the Amir afterwards in an apparent sign of appeasement. The current oppositional campaign started in 2009, and although their goal of removing the former Prime Minister was realized, they have increasingly been met with harsh measures from the regime. Thus, while the 2006 campaign was able to conclude its work peacefully, this has not been the case over the past few years.

The 2006 campaign represented the breakthrough of youth-led campaigns in Kuwait, and of the internet as a tool for activists and a site for political deliberations. Internet was introduced in Kuwait following the Iraqi occupation, and the Government actively sought to provide access to its citizens. As of 2014, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) estimates that more than 78% of people in Kuwait used the internet.<sup>16</sup> This is an increase from 28% in 2006. It

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difficult to classify. While this happened surprisingly seldom, there were some dubious instances. In these cases, I have relied on the rest of the message in order to interpret the feature in question. Some of the entries from the random Twitter sample have been difficult to interpret, due to a lack of both context and any established practice as to the spelling of several words in KA. Finally, this approach clearly does not provide the whole picture on the language employed, concerning, for instance, the spelling of KA, how and when KA and SA are mixed, and so on. These reservations should be kept in mind when reading the analysis and my conclusions.

16 The International Telecommunications Union, statistics, "Percentage of Individuals using the internet". Available online: <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

is unclear, however, if this number refers to Kuwaiti citizens, or to people living in the country. Kuwait has a substantial amount of foreign workers, as well as a large, stateless population known as *Bidūn* (meaning “without,” that is, those without citizenship). There is every reason to believe that the number of internet users is higher among Kuwaiti citizens than within the total population of the country. In terms of internet usage, social media are popular in Kuwait, and in particular Twitter. In fact, the country has the highest number of Twitter users per capita in the world (Mocanu et al. 2013). Influential figures in Kuwaiti society are highly active on the platform, and media in the country routinely refer to debates that take place. The Government, for its part, seems to take Twitter very seriously, and has increasingly persecuted activists for utterances made on the platform, even revoking citizenships.<sup>17</sup>

### The Findings

The markers used in the analysis were selected based on what I assumed would appear quite frequently. However, many entries in all samples contained none or only a few of the markers used<sup>18</sup> – an obvious problem for my analysis. The samples from the political debates on the blog contain substantially more markers than the other samples, and negation is by far the marker that most frequently occurs. In fact, negation is the only marker that is found somewhat

17 See for instance al-Jazeera, January 8th 2013, “Kuwaiti jailed for insulting emir on Twitter”. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/2013189218755379.html>. See also al-Arabiyya, September 29th 2014, “Kuwait revokes citizenship of opposition figure, 17 others”. URL: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/09/29/Kuwait-revokes-citizenship-of-opposition-figure-17-others-.html>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

18 Distribution of the markers in the various samples were as follows:

	Blog political debates (%)	Twitter random samples (%)	Twitter political debates (%)
Negation	63,50	46	41,50
Interrogatives	35	13	9,50
Demonstrative pronoun	18	15	12
Relative pronoun	26,50	13	9,50
Adverbs of time	6,50	7	6
Kuwaiti expressions	25	4	6

regularly, that is, in about half of the entries. However, although few entries contain many markers, the distribution of those markers that *are* found is quite evenly spread out. In other words, if we look at whether or not entries contain at least one marker as opposed to no marker at all, the picture changes. More than half of the entries from the sample of political debates on Twitter, and more than two thirds of the entries in the blog samples and the random Twitter samples, contain at least one marker.<sup>19</sup>

Still, as some entries only contain one marker, there clearly is a risk that single words may affect the analysis in a disproportionate manner. On the other hand, some of the tweets contain very few words – in some instances only five. It would be highly surprising if these short messages should contain many markers, but they are nevertheless part of the online, written production that takes place. Thus, we need to integrate these in our analysis regardless of the number of words used. In this regard, I believe the design applied here has proved to be adequate. Furthermore, if we are to make use of random sampling and larger data sets, as proposed here, a close reading of the entire material is hardly a realistic option. As a result, the only findings that will be used are those based on the distribution of negations, and on all markers seen together.

For negation, the coding of the material provided the results shown in figure 11.1.

The samples from the blog quite clearly tend towards a preference for KA (red), whereas the samples from the political Twitter debates tend towards SA (bold types):<sup>20</sup>

لا تنزلون الشارع. الكويتيين يكرهون المظاهرات، وراح تنظرون  
اقول خلكم على الباجي  
بعدين ما حد شرح ليش نحمة وشلون؟؟

Do not take it to the streets. Kuwaitis hate demonstrations, and you will be harmed. I say remain as you were. And another thing, no one has explained why five, and where did it come from?

“[User 3]”, May 4th 2006

19 In the samples from the political debates on the blog, 78 % of all entries contained at least one marker. The corresponding figure for the political debates on Twitter and the random Twitter samples were 56 % and 69,5 %, respectively.

20 In this and all following examples, SA variants of the features I have coded are marked in bold, and KA variants are red.

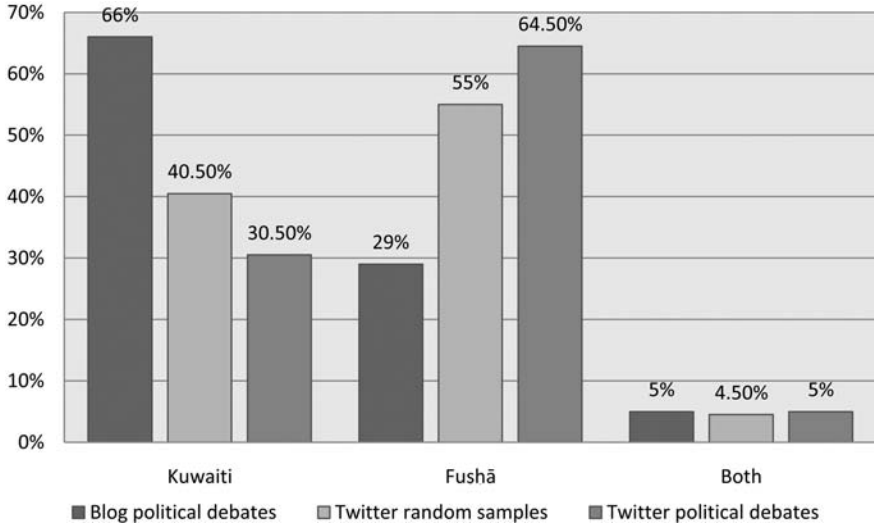


FIGURE 11.1 *Negation in entries with negation, all samples*<sup>21</sup>

#لن\_أخرج\_للإرادة لهذا السبب قلت لن اخرج

For this reason, I said I will not go out (to participate in a demonstration against the Government)

The user “[User 4]” on August 27th 2012

While most of the tweets contained quite straight forward messages as the one given above, there were also quite a few rather lofty and passionate messages, which – perhaps – may have affected style, as in the following example:

الوطن ليس مكانا على الأرض فإنه فكرة في الذهن #سأخرج\_للإرادة

The homeland is not a place on the earth but an idea in the mind

“@[User 5]” on August 26th 2012

The random Twitter samples also lean towards SA, as in the following example:

لن تكبر دون أن تتألم، ولن تتعلم دون أن تخطئ، ولن تنجح دون أن تفشل، هكذا هي الحياة

21 Importantly, the figure is based on the distribution of varieties of negation within those entries that actually contains negation.

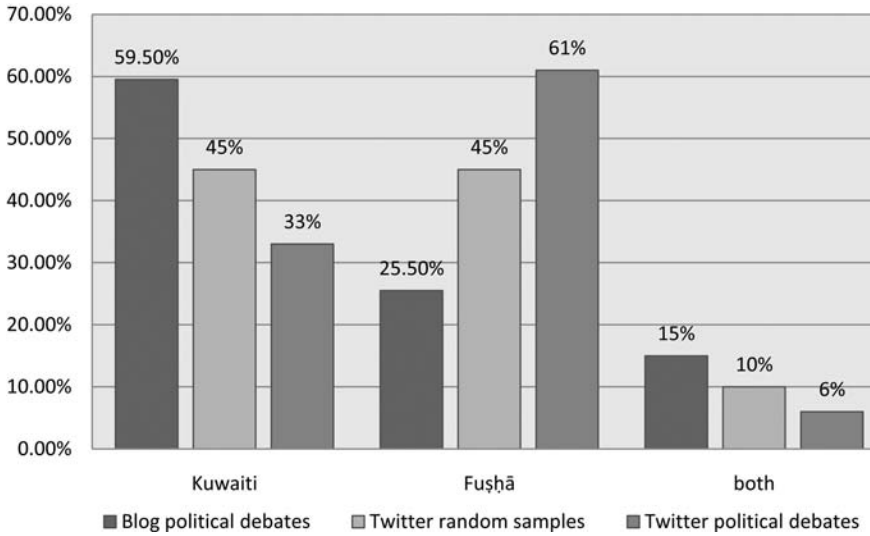


FIGURE 11.2 *Distribution of all markers seen together, entries with markers, all samples*

@[User 6] (quoting/retweeting another user): You will not grow without feeling pain, you will not learn without making mistakes, and you will not succeed without failure, this is life.

"@[User 7]", October 23rd 2014

However, this tendency was not as clear cut as within the political debates, and there were many examples of users preferring the KA variants as well, as in the following examples:

@[User 8] عاا😊😊😊 لا بس اني مو قوي ب القواعد

Aaa, no it's just that I am not that good in grammar @[User 8]

"@[User 9]" on September 22nd 2014

مدري ليش أحس فيك ... يا قطعة من قلبي

I don't know why I feel you ... (O/you) piece of my heart

"@[User 10]" on May 13th 2014

The results are remarkably similar when all markers are seen together, as shown in figure 11.2.

The samples from the blog quite clearly tend towards KA, the samples from the political debates quite clearly tend towards SA, and the random Twit-

ter samples are found in the middle, with distribution being perfectly equal between KA and SA. That being said, there were exceptions in all samples. On several occasions, participants in the Twitter debates seemingly preferred KA, and participants in the blog debates SA:

اللي بي يروح يروح .. واللي ما بي كيفه! ولا يكثر #سأخرج\_للإرادة #لن\_أخرج\_للإرادة

Those who wish to go should go ... and those who don't want to go should not! Don't overdo it

"@[User 11]", on August 26th 2012

لا شكر على واجب

هل من المفروض ان نشكر الحكومة على اقرار الدوائر التي ستصلح الكويت؟

هل من المفروض ان نشكر الحكومة على ازالة رموز الفساد؟

هل من المفروض ان نشكر الحكومة على تعديل قانون التأمينات؟

لا شكر على واجب

No thanks needed (to those who fulfill their duty). Is it necessary that we thank the Government for the decision on the [electoral] districts that will reform Kuwait? Is it necessary that we thank the Government for removing the symbols of corruption (the corrupted)? Is it necessary that we thank the Government for amending the law on social security? No thanks needed (to those who fulfill their duty).

"[User 12]", blog, on July 25th 2006

Whereas the comments written on the blog on a few occasions combined KA and SA, this was seldom found in the random Twitter samples, and almost never took place during the political debates on Twitter. The SA feature most often combined with the preferred KA in the comments written on the blogs was negations, although this hardly can be identified as a clear pattern:

(...) أكرر أنا لا أحب المظاهرات وهاالسوالف

بس عشان ديرتي أسوي كل شي

I repeat that I don't like demonstrations and these kinds of things, but for my homeland I do anything

"[User 13]", blog, May 3rd 2006



On at least one occasion, the mixing seems to have taken place as a consequence of the use of a fixed expression:

(...) عائلة الصباح اذكركم ابو الدستور وطبعاً ما اقصد احمد الفهد الوقت كالسيف ان لم تقطعه قطع والله حاله اغلب الشعب مع الخمس, والفساد واصحابه **يون** 10 واكثر

(...) I remind the Şabāḥ family of the father of the constitution,<sup>22</sup> and of course I don't mean Aḥmad al-Fahd, time is like a sword if you don't cut it, it will cut you, and what a situation, the majority of the people supports 5 [electoral districts], and the corrupted ones [lit: corruption and its masters] want ten or more

"[User 14]", blog, July 24th 2006

Similarly, in the very few instances KA was combined with the preferred SA variety in the political debates on Twitter, these were most often negations, although these cases also can be ambiguous, as in the following example:

دعوه لبوالس أمن الدولة لدخول هذا الهاش تاق تفضلوا #لن\_نسمح\_لك ما يبرد جبودنا  
[sic] غير سحب الجنسي

A call to the police of the national security to enter this hashtag, see what is written (hashtag), it won't cool off our efforts until [their] citizenship is revoked

"@[User 15]", October 15th 2012

However, even if negation is the feature that most often appear in general, there is hardly any basis to claim that negations is *the* feature that most often is mixed, also when the writer has a clear preference for either KA or SA. Within the random Twitter samples, there is no clear pattern to identify. When KA and SA features are combined, these include everything from negations to

22 The term "the father of the constitution" is a reference to former Amir Shaikh 'Abdallāh al-Sālim (ruler 1950–1965), who presided over Kuwait's transition to an independent country and the introduction of the constitution and the parliamentary system. By many Kuwaitis, in particular those in favor of reform, he is seen as the father of the modern state and an example of a just ruler.

adverbs to interrogatives. Thus, this material does not suggest that there are any particular KA features that are kept also by those writing SA, nor the other way around.

The language used on the blog seems less formal than that of the political debates. The random samples constitute a middle ground, which may not be surprising: the tweets included in this sample may serve any purpose at all, they may have been written within many different contexts, with many different intended or expected audiences. This observation is further strengthened when we look at the languages used in the different samples, and the script with which the entries were written. A review of *all* tweets and comments in all the samples show that Arabic written in Arabic script is the preferred alternative in all three samples, but to varying degrees: while 100% of the tweets in the political debates were written in this manner, the corresponding figures for the blog debates and the random sample are 76% and 80,5%, respectively. The second most preferred alternative in the latter two was English (constituting 11% and 13,5%, respectively), followed by a combination of Arabic in Arabic script and English (5,5% and 2,5%) and Arabic written in Latin letters (3% and 1%).

Thus, even though protagonists in the blog debates in 2006 might have faced technical difficulties in terms of writing Arabic with Arabic script, *Arabeasy* was almost never used. Rather, those not writing using Arabic script preferred English, or a combination of Arabic and English. The use of English is in itself interesting, as the debates mostly were conducted in Arabic. As follows, in order to participate one needed to understand Arabic (including KA), but some still chose to write their response in English, and seemingly assumed that everyone else would understand them:

Dear friends, I think what is going on here is very healthy. Everyone should be able to vent out what they are thinking about the picture.

“[User 16]”, blog, July 24th 2006

OK I've been reading all the comments and I just can't keep silent. People PLEASE look OUTSIDE THE BOX!

“[User 17]”, blog, July 24th 2006

The latter user above went on to mix Arabic in Arabic script and English for the remainder of the post. The passages in Arabic and English were different, what Sebba refers to as *complementarity* (Sebba 2012:15), which requires the reader to understand both languages in order to grasp the entire post. The use of English should be seen in connection with wide distribution of education in Kuwait,

and the fact that many liberals, including the authors of the blog in question, have studied abroad (Nordenson 2010).

The political debates on Twitter were conducted in Arabic using Arabic script. This is hardly indicative of the participants not being able to read and write English, and groups and activists involved in the oppositional campaigns sometimes did write in English, particularly when they sought international attention towards their struggle. Rather, it seems the commonly accepted norm was that debates on domestic Kuwaiti issues were held in Arabic, written in Arabic script. As for the random sample, we see that Arabic written with Latin letters is almost nonexistent also in these entries. English, however, is used by quite a few, and 2% of the tweets were written in other languages than those listed here. This should not be surprising, as these were harvested solely based on geographical location. The majority of people living in Kuwait are not Kuwaiti citizens, and that foreigners chose to write in English or any other native language is hardly unexpected. In all, Arabic written in Latin letters is not a dominant feature of the online writings studied here; not in 2006 when some technical difficulties still existed, and not today. For those not writing in Arabic script, English is the preferred alternative. The question then, both with regard to the language and script used as well as the other findings presented here, would be what these results tell us, and how they can be explained.

### **Dominant Features and Possible Explanations**

First of all, the findings support the point raised by Androutsopoulos (Androutsopoulos 2006:420–421) that there is no particular online language, not for the internet as such nor for any particular platform. There is a marked difference between the language employed in 2006 and in 2012, and there is also a difference between the political debates on Twitter and the random samples. As all entries were mediated online, this in itself is not a decisive factor. The topic of discussion, the participants, and the offline and online contexts seem to be of more importance. This does not mean that the technology involved is irrelevant. The 140 character limit set by Twitter is a constraint, although applications such as Twitlonger offer the possibility of publishing longer messages. Moreover, the instantaneous nature of online chat services does not encourage the user to spend time considering his or her grammar.

The results show that the local vernacular is used in writing online in Kuwait, supporting the agreement within the field that computer mediated communication has caused an increase in the use of written colloquial Arabic (Allmann 2009, Palfreyman and Khalil 2003, Ramsay 2012, Warschauer, Said and Zohry

2002). This development is worrying to some proponents of SA, as the spread of colloquial varieties is seen to damage the written Arabic language (Mejdell 2008:115). However, the widespread use of written local dialects online does not in itself necessarily indicate a shift in language preferences. While online written communication may replace traditional letters, by and large it represents something new, and a massive expansion of written communication. Unlike letters, much of this communication takes place in public, on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Thus, the local varieties may just as well have filled a vacancy as they have replaced SA, and the use is a lot more visible than the use of local varieties may have been in the past.

Within the random samples, the distribution of KA and SA features is perfectly equal. Between the debates on the blog and on Twitter, there is a marked difference, and the tendency seems to be quite clear. One possible explanation for this would be the protagonists. The oppositional campaign in Kuwait over the past few years have been led by tribal and Islamist activists, as well as tribal and Islamist politicians, whereas the 2006 Orange Movement was dominated by liberal *ḥaḍar*.<sup>23</sup> This may help explain the differences in the language employed. In a 2011 study of spoken Arabic in Kuwait, al-Qenaie found that *ḥaḍar*-speakers were less formal than *badū*-speakers (Al-Qenaie 2011:255). Given that previous studies have suggested that the instantaneous nature of CMC resemble that of spoken language (Allmann 2009, Palfreyman and Khalil 2003), similarities between written language online and spoken language offline may not be surprising. On the other hand, if this indeed is the most important factor, then we would expect to see a difference between the tweets using the hashtag in favor of participating in a demonstration – the view held by the opposition – and the tweets using the competing hashtag – the view held by those supporting the regime. However, I found no clear difference between the two.

Al-Qenaie also notes that the subject of discussion and the situation within which a discussion takes place is important in terms of the presence of KA or SA features of speech. Political discussions, in his analysis, are quite close to SA, with relatively few instances of colloquial features (Al-Qenaie 2011:254). Again, this may be of interest in order to explain the differences observed here. The 2006 debates on the blog were not only concerned with the issue at hand – reform of the electoral districts – but also with how the movement should con-

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23 That being said, there are many examples that indicate that while each movement may have been dominated by protagonists from different groups in society, individuals from all parts of Kuwaiti society took part.

duct their work, that is, strategic discussion among those taking part. The 2012 debates on Twitter, on the other hand, were of a somewhat different nature: whether or not one should participate in a demonstration and thus support the opposition, and how to react to the speech given by a prominent oppositional politician. There were also strategic debates among the opposition that took place on Twitter, but these had markedly fewer participants.<sup>24</sup> This, I believe, is linked to a very important difference between the 2006 and 2012 debates, namely the space in which they took place, and by extension, the intended and expected audience.

Internet usage was very different in Kuwait in 2006 than in 2012. As we have seen above, more than twice as many people use the internet in Kuwait today as compared 2006. Thus, even in an ideal scenario where a very high number of the total internet-users in the country visited the blog in question, those engaging in debates back then wrote for *less* people than those taking part in 2012. Moreover, online platforms were not an established tool for political activists in 2006, and they were not an established arena for political debates – they were introduced as such by the Orange Movement. Mark Lynch claims that “prior to 2006, most observers had seen the Kuwaiti blogosphere as relatively disengaged from politics and marginal to the public realm” (Lynch 2007:15). This stands in sharp contrast to the status of Twitter as an arena for debate today. According to al-Arabiyya, the Kuwaiti opposition view Twitter as *the* most important arena.<sup>25</sup> Ahead of the July 2013 elections, hopeful candidates spent up to US \$35 000 to hire help in communicating on the platform, as it was seen as “a favorite platform to promote political campaigns”.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, these debates are taken very seriously by the regime, as evidenced by the harsh sentencing of some participants.

The nature of the debates was also different. Although the 2006 bloggers clearly sought to reach as wide an audience as possible with their message, the discussions predominantly took place between participants in the cam-

24 For instance, on January 3rd 2013, an initiative known as Karāmat Waṭan (Dignity of a nation) that was formed to pressure the Emir to revoke some controversial changes to the electoral law, asked for Twitter users to provide suggestions for their next demonstration under the hashtag *كرامة\_وطن\_5*. However, only 200 tweets were written using the assigned hashtag.

25 Al-Arabiyya, September 3rd 2012, “المعارضة تنسلح بـ”تويتر“ لمواجهة الحكومة بالكويت”. URL: <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/09/03/235804.html>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

26 Al-Arabiyya English, June 25th 2013, “Tweet politics: Kuwait election hopefuls embrace social media”. URL: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/2013/06/25/Kuwait-parliament-candidates-campaign-using-social-media.html>. Accessed: November 17, 2015.

paign. The blog often referred to a perceived “we”, meaning those participating, fighting a righteous struggle against “them”, meaning those who disagreed (Nordenson 2010:57). In other words, they were concerned with the unity of the group, and with building a strong community. This was confirmed by one key blogger, who argued that while they all were strangers prior to the campaign, they became “close cyber-friends” (Ibid., p. 58). While clearly important in order to build a strong movement, it also has implications for the tone and the language used during the discussions. Given the modest use of internet in Kuwait at the time, it also seems likely that the participants in the campaign were quite similar in terms of age and social background. In contrast, those participating in the 2012 debates were, in theory, speaking to leading politicians and members of the royal family, and were most of all concerned with expressing their view. Although the 2006 debates were published in public, they were of a more private character than those of 2012.

As a consequence, activists in 2006 primarily addressed their fellow campaigners. They often did so directly using the online user-names of others, and the tone by and large is amicable and informal; they were all part of the same group, they shared the same goals, and they often discussed how to best achieve these goals. A formal tone would hardly have been productive under these circumstances. The 2012 debates were different in this regard, and there is also a difference in the platforms used. In a debate in the comments field of a blog, all comments are gathered in one place, and it is easy to see who takes part and who does not. On Twitter, every user will see all tweets of those they follow in real time on their feed. Alternatively, they may follow a particular hashtag, which those participating in the debates most likely did. Then, one will also see all tweets using this hashtag in real time on one’s feed. As some of these debates generated up to 10 000 tweets, nobody would read them all. If one user wishes to address another user directly, s/he may do so by including his/her username in the message, but this was hardly ever done in the debates studied.

These differences in practice, or modes of discussion, between the blog debates and the Twitter debates affect the nature of the writings. As discussed above, many observers have argued that online writings could be quite similar to speech, particularly on certain platforms such as chat clients. Conversations online can be interactive, synchronous and sequential, features that Mark Sebba argues are crucial for conversational code-switching (Sebba 2012:6). The instantaneous nature of such discourse would also affect the time available to plan and produce a response for those taking part. As pointed out by Mejdell, a lack of such planning may affect the style of the speech in question (Mejdell 2006:381). This is quite different from written discourse, as observed by Eid: “Whereas spoken discourse is produced instantly in response to stimulus, lin-

guistic or otherwise, written discourse is not. It is typically edited by the author, and possibly others as well, and has the advantage of hindsight and time" (Eid 2002:205). The differences observed by Eid are highly relevant to the differences in practice described above: those taking part on the blog discussed instantaneously and sequentially with each other on the same site, with all entries being visible for all participants. Those taking part on Twitter published an utterance in a debate without knowing who they would reach, whether they would receive a response, and their message was not part of a sequential debate. Thus, practice and context should be seen as important features in order to differentiate between utterances that correlate to what traditionally (offline) would be termed "written discourse" and "spoken discourse." The distinction between the terms remains relevant even though the discussion in both cases was in fact written, although other terms may perhaps be used to avoid confusion, such as "speech-like written" and "written". Moreover, these differences in practice may help explain the differences observed between the blog debates and the Twitter debates. Finally, while important in themselves, these differences in practice are closely related to whom the protagonists believe they address. Although most participants on Twitter would have no idea if their tweets were actually read, and if so, by whom, they did know that important persons of authority might take part in the same debate, and in theory might read – and even respond to – their own writings.

Thus, the intended, expected, and possible audiences would be different between the two cases. In this regard, Alan Bell's framework on audience design may explain the differences observed. As argued by Bell, "[s]peakers design their style for their audience" (Bell 1984:159). Bell further recognizes that other factors also are at play, such as topic and setting, but that these are of relevance due to the implicit connotations on audience they carry with them: "[w]e must continue to treat topic and setting as variables which have independent effects on style, while remembering that at base they are derivative" (Ibid., p. 182). Interestingly, Bell argues that "referee design is shown to be especially powerful in mass communication". Referees are "third persons not physically present at an interaction, but possessing such salience for a speaker that they influence speech even in their absence" (Ibid., p. 186). Referee design is divided into ingroup and outgroup referee design. Ingroup "sees a speaker talking to members of an outgroup, and reacting with a shift towards the style of the speaker's own (absent) ingroup". Outgroup, on the other hand, means that "speakers lay claim to a speech and identity which are not their own but which hold prestige for them on some dimension" (Ibid., pp. 187–188). In terms of its relevance for mass communication, Bell turns to the mass media and argues that its audience is unspecific – a "perceived class of persons" (Ibid.:192).

The protagonists in the political debates on Twitter do not know if they are read by the political elite, but they might be, and accordingly they employ the language they perceive as fitting for the occasion. They do not necessarily design their messages for those that they know will read them, but for those that may or may not be part of the general discussion. The audience, both the expected and the possible, was quite different for those taking part in 2006, and as such, audience design, and in particular referee design, constitutes a compelling explanation for the differences observed.

To the extent that the tendencies identified are representative of online language usage in Kuwait, they underline a key aspect observed also in previous studies: language usage online is not accidental. The protagonists are pragmatic, and use their language resources for different purposes and in different settings. While the average Twitter user in Kuwait may write more or less formally, SA features are preferred when discussing politics. Hence, while it is true that more colloquial Arabic now is used in writing, it is not given that this will diffuse the difference between spoken and written Arabic, as it may occur in addition to and not to the detriment of written SA. Online communication, as we have seen, may be many different things, which may call for different linguistic styles, depending on factors such as audience, subject, setting, and established practice. In fact, online written communication could bolster the use of written SA, as people write more (in a quantitative sense), and use different styles for different purposes, thus becoming more conscious of their linguistic resources. Online communication does, however, offer empowerment in the sense that people are able to write as they like, unhindered by traditional, hegemonic forces in society. Thus, online platforms may be a vehicle to challenge existing perceptions of language usage, but they do not drive such change in and of themselves.

### Conclusion

I have described some characteristics of the language used online by activists in Kuwait in two particular cases and identified differences between these. Possible explanations have also been provided, although some questions are left unexplored. It is the hope of this author that this study may serve as a starting point for other investigations into language use online – in Kuwait and elsewhere – and that the explanations suggested may be tested through further, empirical evidence.

The material suggests a marked difference between the blog debates in 2006 and the Twitter debates in 2012, with the former tending towards KA, and the



latter tending towards SA. Various possible explanations were discussed, but differences in the intended and the possible audiences seem to be the most compelling. This, in turn, includes – albeit implicitly – differences in subject and setting. Whereas the blog debates in 2006 took place in a semi-private setting and mostly involved people who were familiar with each other and who shared the same goal, the later Twitter debates were part of the public, political debate of the country. If this holds true, it seems an informal tone employing many KA features is considered appropriate and productive when talking to fellow activists, whereas a more formal tone featuring many SA markers is considered appropriate for a public political discourse. This is also in line with the findings presented by al-Qenaie on oral language usage in the country, and may suggest that users consciously and pragmatically adjust their style in accordance with topic, setting, and the audience. It would be interesting to conduct similar studies in other countries. If indeed a certain style is deemed appropriate for public political discussions in Kuwait, this may not be so in other contexts. Furthermore, if users online do adjust their languages, studies on the use of different styles may prove informative as to how various topics, settings, and audiences are perceived in different contexts.

Hopefully, this study may also contribute to the development of methodological designs suitable for such studies, as called for by Ramsay. While previous studies usually have been concerned with particular individuals or small groups of informants, open platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Blogs allow us to get the “bigger picture” in the sense of harvesting large samples based on location, subject, and the like. This material can then be analyzed in a number of ways, in this case through coding of KA markers, SA markers, or a combination of the two, but it may of course be used to investigate other features as well. As the design is well suited to identify interesting phenomena and changes on a macro-level, it would be ideal to combine with more detailed studies on a micro-level in order to provide more comprehensive conclusions.

Finally, the study has contributed to the “demythologization” of computer mediated communication called for by Androutsopoulos. There is no evidence in the material studied that suggests that technology is decisive for the language choices made online, or that some distinct ‘internet language’ exists. Conclusions and theories as to online language usage and the development of Arabic due to its usage online should be informed by topic, setting, audience, practice, and the protagonists involved – not the technology used.

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# The Oralization of Writing

## *Argumentation, Profanity and Literacy in Cyberspace*

*Emad Abdul Latif*

### 1 Introduction

Social media has revolutionized reading and writing practices in the Arab world. Before the advent of the Internet, social media and interactive media, writing was mostly restricted to practical contexts such as educational institutions, work, and personal communication through mobile phone applications and email. Written communication about social or political matters was sporadic and not widespread. Social and interactive media motivated the diversification of writing activities which now address a wide range of situations and topics, serve a variety of functions, and are circulated in highly disparate contexts. It could be said that writing has become a near-daily practice for an increasing number of ordinary individuals in the Arab world's public space.

Similarly, reading has flourished in the Arab world owing to the spread and variety of social media. Even though this media is dominated by images, the space available for written language is very important: many contributions involve posting comments, traditional sayings, advice, proverbs, news excerpts, etc., all of which present a wealth of written material. This increase in the quantity of materials which are read over social media is particularly influential in poor communities whose members cannot afford printed books and newspapers but are able to connect cheaply to the Internet thanks to subscription sharing (as is the case in most of rural Egypt).

The number of Internet users in Egypt reached 48.3 million by the end of 2016, which was 52% of the population at the time (92.54 million), with social media proving highly popular (28 million by 2016). By the end of 2012, the number of Facebook users in Egypt reached 12.2 million.<sup>1</sup> This rose to 28 million in 2016, i.e. 30% of the population.<sup>2</sup> Egypt ranks 14th worldwide and first in the Arab world in the number of Facebook users.

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1 See <http://newsbox.com/index.php?m=release-pdf&id=53824>.

2 See <http://digitalmarketingcommunity.com/indicators/facebook-users-details-egypt-2016-social>.

Although only 6% of social media users in Egypt preferred YouTube to other social media sites in 2014, 16% of social media users have a YouTube account, and 63% visit YouTube on a daily basis (*ibid.*). Posting comments to YouTube videos in Arabic cyberspace is a common literacy practice which has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention. The present study seeks to draw attention to the massive corpus of viewers' comments on YouTube, especially since the academic literature appears to be dominated by research on Facebook and Twitter.

The language of ordinary individuals in computer-mediated communication (CMC) raises a number of research questions in the field of linguistics generally, and rhetoric more specifically. This chapter explores some of the linguistic and rhetorical features of a specific type of audience rhetoric in interactive media, namely commenting on political events broadcasted on YouTube.

## 2 The Data

The data is drawn from viewers' comments on two different YouTube videos of a famous political debate in the Arab world, which took place between two candidates in the first stage of the 2012 presidential elections in Egypt: Mr Amr Moussa and Dr Abd al-Mun'im Abu al- Futūh. They were the two most likely candidates to win the presidential race according to several opinion polls at the time.<sup>3</sup> The first candidate is a liberal; he served as minister of foreign affairs for a period under Mubarak, and was the general secretary of the Arab League prior to running for president. The second candidate is a physician and an activist commonly pegged as an Islamist, having left the Muslim Brotherhood shortly before joining the presidential race.

The two videos were broadcasted on YouTube on the 10th of May 2012. The comments studied belong to the period from May 2012 to May 2014 when the videos had reached 473, 860 views and received 4,886 written comments which make up the dataset of this study.<sup>4</sup> This body of comments was chosen due to the sheer size of the dataset and that the majority of comments were produced as the event was being broadcasted, which guarantees a high degree of spontaneity. Studying viewers' comments on the only presidential debate in Egypt's modern history could shed more light on everyday discourses written

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3 Results from most opinion polls conducted during this period can be found here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_presidential\\_election,\\_2012#Opinion\\_polls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_presidential_election,_2012#Opinion_polls).

4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4r-xg2f8D8>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrbk1fkZFM>.

in cyberspace. This is an important trend in the study of written CMC (Rowe & Wyss, 2009), no less important than an older trend which is concerned with the study of aspects of literary works in cyberspace such as hyperlinks, the dominance of images, electronic books, and interactive fiction (Bolter, 2001). I will focus in my analysis on the prevalence of written profanity in the viewers' comments. First, however, I will discuss how CMC has affected writing practices in the Arab world.

### 3 Writing in Cyberspace

Social networks have resulted in a revolution in spreading the right to public speaking, and in the domination of writing in spaces it did not occupy in the past (Baydoun, forthcoming). This change in audience writing is one aspect of how the concept of *audience* has changed as a result of CMC (Sharon et al. 2006). One prominent aspect is the evolution of the audience's ability to respond effectively to the discourses they receive. Thanks to interactive technology, ordinary audiences are now able to produce written and visual responses to the messages they receive. These responses have the capacity to spread and possess high symbolic capital, heralding a new age that we may dub "the age of audience response". Elsewhere, I have outlined the most important features of audience responses in CMC as opposed to audience responses in traditional communication. Such features include immediacy, low editing and censorship, anonymity, and non-traceability (Abdul Latif, 2012). The focus on written responses brings to the fore several features that are relevant to the present study:

#### a *Limited Control and Editing*

Traditional audience writing was usually subjected to many forms of selection and censorship, during which unwanted responses were excluded and other responses were re-processed and edited, such as in *Letters to the Editor*. In contrast, the current responses enjoy a great degree of freedom and reach. Nevertheless, there are still parameters which govern responses in certain spaces in relation to word count or to content and style. Responses may also be targeted or organized by certain groups or entities, in the same way that some responses may be excluded in a systematic manner or that responses are disabled altogether on some websites. However, these measures do not compare to the older restrictions on audience responses. The relative freedoms afforded by CMC draw audiences who are attracted to the variety of dissemination outlets for responses and the existence of personal spaces which are hardly subjected

to any external restrictions. This presents a good opportunity to study written 'drafts' before they undergo editing and selection.

**b**        *The Size and Variety of the Responses*

Audience responses in non-interactive media are usually limited in length and quantity, and are typically verbal only. In contrast, there is often no limit on the length and quantity of audience responses in cyberspace. Indeed, the length of some responses may exceed the length of the original message. Moreover, cyberspace is multimodal; responses may comprise words, images, colours, motion, signs and video clips.

**c**        *The Ability to Compile, Count and Measure Responses*

For a long time, there were various difficulties in securing corpora of everyday writing for research purposes. Such writings were usually undertaken in an artificial research environment, interfering with their spontaneity. Moreover, many of these writings raised confidentiality issues. Publishing excerpts from these writings was restricted because they were never intended for public circulation. In addition, a great deal of effort is required to study paper corpora which are not digitized. The writings available on YouTube and other social networks overcome some of these problems; they are mostly spontaneous, accessible, and easy to use because they are in digital form. They may also be published if they were intended for public consumption and not protected by intellectual copyrights. Alternatively, if publishing the writings would constitute breach of privacy or copyright, then they may be published after securing the owner's written permission.

This new domain of language use presents fertile ground for linguistic research in general and for sociolinguistic research in particular. Through the study of these written corpora, we may explore features of language use by ordinary individuals as well as features of CMC, which sits on the boundaries between private and public space. Hence, these corpora present a valuable resource for sociolinguists in particular as they make it possible to investigate traditional questions – such as communicative behaviors in CMC, written communication strategies, code-switching, bilingualism, etc. – in addition to raising new questions relating to the influence of cyberspace on writing and the linguistic features of CMC. In short, the written comments of individuals in cyberspace present rich material for the study of contemporary language use in the Arab world. Over the following pages, I will focus on profanity in CMC.

#### 4 The Pragmatics of Swearing: Causes and Functions

When browsing Arabic comments on social media networks, it is difficult to overlook the pervasiveness of profanity. This linguistic phenomenon includes cursing, vulgarity, the use of swearwords and taboo language. Even though profanity features in everyday interpersonal communication, it appears to increase in CMC where it is possible to remain anonymous while communicating from behind a crystal screen.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, profanity intensifies in the context of expressing political allegiances and ideologies.

Despite the prevalence of swearing in everyday language use in Arab societies, linguistic studies on this topic are rare. In contrast, there are numerous, multi-faceted studies on swearing in the English language. According to Fägerrstten (2007: 15), these studies outline the history and evolution of profanity, its grammar and semantics, frequency of usage, and degree of offensiveness. Other studies address the pragmatics of swearing, especially (im)politeness (Locher, 2010; Ljung, 2011). Fägerrstten (2007) classifies swearwords by degree of offensiveness, while Sood, Antin and Churchill (2012) study the efficiency of profanity detection systems, the contexts in which profanity is used, and how it is received. The study reveals fundamental problems with profanity detection systems, and great difficulties in determining the contexts in which profanity is used. From a more linguistic perspective, Ljung (2011) studies the sociolinguistic characteristics of swearing, using examples from past and contemporary research. Mercury (1995) addresses profanity from the perspective of second language acquisition; he studies the use of taboo language in teaching English as a second language to adult learners.

Other researchers have studied the linguistic dimensions of profanity in cyberspace (Doostdar, 2004; Dynel, 2012). Doostdar adopts an anthropological approach to the study of vulgarity in Iranian personal blogs on the Internet. He uses the term 'vulgarity' to denote the linguistic vulgarity which results from the use of (Persian) slang and the presence of many grammatical and spelling mistakes. He discusses the controversy surrounding the concept of linguistic vulgarity in personal blogs from an anthropological perspective. It is clear that the concept of vulgarity, as applied by Doostdar, refers to standards of linguistic correctness, and is therefore different from how we use the concept in the present study to refer to the use of offensive words and expressions. On the other hand, Dynel studies the relationship between swearing and (im)polite-

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5 A group of individuals launched a website to combat profanity on Arabic Facebook pages: <https://www.causes.com/causes/808417->



ness by analyzing comments by anonymous writers on YouTube. Dynel states that swearing is generally regarded as a sign of impoliteness, but some words which could be classed as cursing in certain contexts may indeed serve functions of solidarity politeness such as promoting group membership, establishing a common ground with interlocutors, and engendering humor. In a later study, Wang (2013) suggests that the use of profanity in everyday speech may serve four positive pragmatic functions: expressing emotion, verbal emphasis, group solidarity, and aggression.

There are many gaps in research on profanity in cyberspace. Few studies address profanity in platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and others. Moreover, the interactive dimension of the production of profanity among participants has hardly received any attention. There is also a pressing need for studies which compare the use of profanity in cyberspace to its use in live communication. Another potential research area is the effect of profanity in political and social struggles in contemporary societies. Profanity in the Arabic language in particular – whether in live or virtual communication – has hardly received any scholarly attention. To the author's knowledge, the present study is the first attempt to study Arabic profanity from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Profanity in the Arabic language requires much scholarly attention to address its various dimensions from a rhetorical linguistic perspective. For example, it is possible to study the source of profanity; whether the words originate from the lexicon of religion, sex, family relations, etc. It is also possible to study the history of the usage of certain profanities and to classify them into categories (e.g. sexual, religious, ethnic, etc.). Similarly, we may study the grammar and morphology of profanities, as well as the textual and contextual links they establish. We may also study the effects of profanity from a social or psychological perspective. The present study will address two points: the factors which influence the prevalence of profanity in cyberspace, and the functions of profanity. I will focus on general factors and functions without embarking on a detailed analysis of the specific factors which motivate the production of profanity in a particular comment in the dataset, or the specific functions served by the use of profanity in one of the comments.

a *The Transfer of Effect: The Profanity of Live Communication in the Mirror of Virtual Communication*

The prevalence of profanity in Arabic CMC may be seen as an extension of its spread in face-to-face communication. The use of profane language in public spaces – such as streets, public transport, or even films and talk shows – is no longer met with the kind of shock or distaste it might have received less than

three decades ago.<sup>6</sup> Profanity used to be associated with marginalized social groups and specific age groups and professions in the past, but it is now present on a much wider scale. This is an independent phenomenon which certainly warrants sociolinguistic study but is beyond the scope of the present research.

It is clear that this is an important factor in explaining the prevalence of profanity in CMC; language use in cyberspace is not mutually exclusive from language use in live communication. Nevertheless, profanity in cyberspace has specific features. First, it is written profanity, as opposed to the oral profanity of the street. This is particularly significant in the Arab world where written Arabic dominates formal and semi-formal domains of use and is therefore held in very high regard (Belnap & Bishop, 2003), notwithstanding the fact that the oldest written swearwords discovered come from ancient Egypt (Ljung, 2011). It is also worth noting that, for many centuries, writing was not available to all sections of Arab societies due to high rates of illiteracy. The ability to write was associated with attaining a certain degree of education and culture, and as a consequence, with belonging to (or assimilating into) the socially privileged classes. This feeling of social distinction motivated the use of a more refined level of communication in speech as well as in writing.

Hence, profanity in Arabic CMC was boosted by social and linguistic practices, particularly the absence of institutional regulation and the malicious use of the freedom afforded by the ability to conceal one's identity.

### **b**      *The Freedom of the Anonymous Actor*

The pervasiveness of written profanity in cyberspace may be explained by the absence of accountability. This explanation relies on the fact that, for as long as public space has existed, language ideals have been imposed by tradition, religion or law. It was the duty of society to hold to account those individuals who violate the traditions or laws which set out what may or may not be said in public space; using profane or taboo language could be punishable by death (Ljung, 2011). There is a long tradition of laws which incriminate undesired

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6 It is worth pointing to the public controversy which occurred over the use of the expression *ibn il-kalb* (son of a dog) in Nour El-Sherif's 1982 film *Sawwāq al-Utubīs* (The Bus Driver). The offensiveness of this expression pales in comparison to some of the expressions that are frequently used in today's films, soaps and television shows. With the advent of traditional mass media such as the radio, television, state theatre and cinema in Egypt, there was an unwritten code of ethics pertaining to the kind of language which was deemed acceptable in public spaces and mass media. This unwritten code imposed restrictions on the use of profane, offensive and racist language. Investigating information, decisions or recommendations related to this code would be an interesting area of research.

speech in public space. Indeed, there are laws in place in many countries today which regulate speech in public space. However, some Arab societies do not have such laws or do not implement them. It may be said that one of the reasons that profanity prevails is the absence of legal codes which regulate language use in CMC, as well as the many ways in which one's identity can be concealed in cyberspace, for example by using fake email or Facebook accounts.<sup>7</sup>

Feeling free or far from accountability may indeed motivate the overuse of profanity, especially among younger age groups who are subjected in some societies to strict restrictions on language use in everyday face-to-face communication. The lure of profane language intensifies when we take into account the natural human impulse to break taboos in the absence of punishment. In Arab societies, profane language is a prominent taboo. This explanation for the upsurge in linguistic profanity is linked to another explanation which is premised on the notion of linguistic contagion.

### c *The Spiral of Profanity*

The spread of certain behaviors is subject to the theory of contagion which is widely used in crowd psychology. The theory of the spiral of silence offers an academic framework for contagion in communicative public contexts (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; 1993). As Scheufele (2008; 175) notes, "The spiral of silence model assumes that people are constantly aware of the opinions of people around them and adjust their behaviors (and potentially their opinions) to majority trends under the fear of being on the losing side of a public debate". The theory explains how opinions are distributed in the public domain. I suggest that it could also explain the spread of profanity as a behavior. If we apply the theory of the spiral of silence to explain the spread of profanity, we might claim that profane language spreads on the internet in the form of an outward spiral which draws others in, in an almost involuntary manner.

The contagious effect of profanity is amplified in light of the dialogical and interactive nature of CMC. Profane words do not only qualify ideas or topics, they are curses and insults directed at other participants. This may be the most influential factor in spreading profanity; profanity is responded to with similar or harsher profanity. This is how what we may call *chains of profanity* are born.

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7 For more information on laws which incriminate profanity, I refer the reader to the Media Law Handbook published in 2010 by the United States Department of State:

[http://photos.state.gov/libraries/amgov/30145/publications-english/media-law-handbook\\_001.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/amgov/30145/publications-english/media-law-handbook_001.pdf).

The present data includes 23 chains of profanity. Each chain comprises three to five instances of profanity produced by two to three comment-writers. The typical pattern is that a comment-writer initiates an insult, triggering a chain of profane responses as can be seen in the following translated examples:

A: [Name], the Wahhabis and the Salafis are more honourable than your family. What's wrong with the Wahhabis? At least they are Muslims, unlike your communist scoundrel, Bashar, Russia's little dog! Truly all Arabs are traitors to have kept Bashar [in power] until now.

B: [You are] the epitome of hypocrisy and making fools out of people, Moussa, you rascal!

C (*in response to another comment-writer*): You are an ignorant and retarded individual cursing people from behind a screen. Come to Syria and see [what's happening] with your own eyes but you won't do it because you're a coward!

D (*in response to C*): There are no mercenaries and terrorists but you, Bashar's dogs!

E: Tomorrow you will go back to shepherding and milking goats you sons of a whore – it's only a matter of time until your oil runs out and you return to the age of ignorance [*jāhiliyya*].

F: Your mother's cunt and twice the cunt of the mother of your gay king that Zionists fuck!

G: You rubbish Egyptians, be like us in the beloved Saudi Kingdom and choose a popular king better than those corrupt scoundrels ... A kingdom is better for you than a scrawny, feeble, maimed democracy.

These chains of profanity are sometimes interrupted by other comment-writers who criticize profanity. What is interesting here is that some of these comments use profane language – such as the use of insults and curse words – to criticize profanity. Examples such as the following support the idea that profanity is contagious, and infects even those who criticize it. The examples also reveal the contrast between what language says and what it *does*.



paigning. In fact, there is no shortage of verbal aggression in the debate itself; there was an abundance of mutual accusations, strategies of moral assassination and *ad hominem* argumentation. Viewers' comments appear to ride this wave of verbal aggression and take it to the extreme. Indeed, there are many comments which criticize verbal aggression in the debate, for example:

- هي المناظرة دي عشان يشبشبو لبعض ولا يعرضوا براجمهم !!!! يعني ننتخبهم دلوقت عل أساس مين فيهم هزأ الثاني أكثر وطرقعة  
*Is this debate intended for them to humiliate each other<sup>10</sup> or to present their [presidential] programs?! Are we now supposed to elect them based on who insulted and abused the other more?*
- ايه لازمة شخصية الامور، ساعات بتبقى وصلة روح مش مناظرة  
*Why do they have to make things so personal? This is sometimes more like a slander fest than a debate!*
- الاتنين بيعايروا بعض يا جدهان اتنا فلول واتنا اخوان  
*Each of them is trying to smear the other: you belong to the old regime; you belong to the [Muslim] Brotherhood*
- تحولت الى خناقه والله والناس دي اخداننا كوبرى علشان يرموا كلام على بعض  
*It has turned into a fight, by God! These people are walking over us to jeer at each other.*

It is interesting to investigate the relationship between the use of profane language on the one hand and political orientation on the other. We may ask the question: did the supporters of one candidate use more profane language than the supporters of the other? The question is motivated by the preconception that the supporters of Abul Fotouh are less likely to use profane language than Moussa's supporters because of the former's religious, Islamic orientation. Religious morality and behavior are known to act as a deterrent against profanity. Indeed, many comments by the supports of Abul Fotouh employ religious rhetoric. This was particularly clear in the arguments they forwarded in their comments to promote Abul Fotouh's presidential program. However, the statistical analysis of the data disproves this hypothesis: contrary to expectation, the number of instances that Abul Fotouh's supporters used profane language exceeded the number of instances for Moussa's supporters. Out of 436 profane comments, 247 (57%) overtly declared their support for Abul Fotouh, while 162

10 Literally, beat each other up with slippers.

(37%) declared their support for Amr Moussa. The remaining 27 comments (6%) belong to comment-writers who did not declare their political orientation, and some of these comments do not concern the candidates but the debate moderators, the commercials, or other subjects.

These results give us cause to pause; they contradict the original hypothesis that there would be an inverse relationship between choosing a candidate with a religious orientation and using profanity to defend this choice. In rejecting the hypothesis then, it would appear that there is no relationship between the religious orientation of the candidate or the comment-writer and the comment-writer's use of profanity to demonstrate support for their preferred candidate. The higher percentage of profanity among Abul Fotouh's supporters may be explained by two factors:

First: there is a discrepancy between the number of comments which support Abul Fotouh vis-à-vis comments which support Moussa; the comments which overtly support the former make up 48% versus 37% for the latter, while 15% are neutral or deal with unrelated topics (e.g. comments on the debate moderators, commercials, etc.). Hence, the quantity of profanity is directly proportional to the quantity of comments.

Second: I present this second explanation reservedly as it is difficult to verify. This explanation relates to the relationship between morality and politics for those who belong to political Islam groups. While the discourse of these groups attacks opponents based on their lack of (religious) morality, some of their political practices demonstrate that they are not significantly different when it comes to the ethics of political practices. Profanity is one linguistic manifestation of this paradox. My intuition is that the profanity produced by some individuals who are affiliated with political Islam in the context of mass communication is not any less than the profanity produced by others who belong to other political currents. However, this remains a presumption which can only be verified through a separate study.

#### e *The Poor Level of Rational Argumentation*

The prevalence of profanity in CMC may owe to the poor level of rational argumentation: I hypothesize that the two are directly related. It is observable that most of the comments using profane language do not contain rational arguments, evidenced opinions, or justified beliefs. What they do contain is judgments, biases and curses – and in some cases only curses.

The data reveals that some comment-writers were conscious of this connection between profanity and the poor level of rational argumentation. This negative relationship may have been an additional motivation for denouncing profane language by some comment-writers who appear to be aware of the

negative image that profanity reflects of their community, as evidenced by the following examples:

- ممكن يكون النقاش أرقى من المسبات الوسخة ... خلينا نسمع وبموضوعية  
*The discussion can be more refined without resorting to filthy swearwords. Let's listen objectively.*
- على فكرة ممكن توصلوا رأيكم واعتراضكم بمنتهى الاحترام! مش لازم تقولوا كلام مالهوش لازمة  
 يعني!  
*By the way, you can voice your opinions and our objections respectfully, there is no need for unnecessary [vulgar] speech*
- يااا جماعة ارتقوا وبلاش شتيمه جزاكم الله خير  
*Folks, be more sophisticated and drop the curse words, may Allah reward you.*
- أرجو التعبير بالآراء باحترام  
*Please express your opinions respectfully.*
- الإيتين مش بقدر بلد بحجم وتاريخ وتقل مصر فن يرد بتفاهه وقلة إحترام للمكانه التي يطمح إليها  
 لا يجب ان توصله ليكون رئيساً لمصر  
*Both [candidates] do not match a country with the history and importance of Egypt; a person who responds frivolously and with lack of respect for the post he aspires to must not receive our support in becoming the president of Egypt.*
- فكيف أرد على تهجم المنافس بهجم مماثل؟؟؟؟ هذا أسلوب مصارعة الثيران وليس نقاش  
 ومناظرة الحكماء ورجال الدولة  
*How can one respond to their opponent's aggression with equal aggression???*  
*This is how bull-fighting is conducted, not debates between wise people and politicians.*

Further studies are needed to establish the relationship between the prevalence of profanity and the poor level of rational argumentation; the hypothesis I present is based on preliminary observation. The hypothesis can be tested using large corpora where the relationship between profanity and the frequency and types of rational arguments can be properly investigated.

## 5 The Functions of Profanity

Profanity serves a range of functions in everyday language use, from verbal aggression, abuse and offence, to threatening the positive face of others. Profanity may also be used to enhance group solidarity, assert an opinion, or produce humour (Dyner, 2012). The following discussion will shed light on other specific functions which are performed by profanity in CMC.



**a** *Ugly Reality, Ugly Language: Language as a Reflection of Reality*

One of the arguments for the necessity of profane language in public space is that the reality which is narrated, described or assessed by language is itself an ugly reality which cannot be described using polite words. The explanation that profane language reflects an ugly reality relies on two presuppositions: first, that a person's language must provide an accurate description of their life, and second, that polite language cannot provide an accurate description of an ugly reality. However, the position that the fundamental function of language is to accurately describe reality is in conflict with another position which supports the use of profane language; namely, that the fundamental function of language is to assess and change reality, and that profane language can serve as an instrument to accomplish this.

**b** *Towards a Better World: Employing Profanity to Change Reality*

There is an opinion that the use of profane language may be motivated by the desire to reform the word. According to this opinion, describing reality using polite language is a form of linguistic mitigation; polite language conceals reality underneath an artificial linguistic veil. This supposed linguistic mitigation is criticized for enabling a profane reality to subsist, because the ugly core remains hidden beneath layers of contrived lexis. On the other hand, profane language is lauded for honesty and transparency; it is seen as a revealing, pointed language which seeks to reform reality by ruthlessly and unashamedly confronting this ugly reality (Marcuse, 1969).

Some of the theoretical underpinnings for supporting the use of profane language are premised on the role of profanity in changing reality. For example, Herbert Marcuse (1969) calls for embracing 'naked', 'insolent language' which refers to things by their real name. Marcuse himself does not hesitate to use profane language to describe the language of international politics in his time – and in all times. Such language would refer to the Vietnamese peasant defending his land as a 'terrorist', while the American pilot who drops Napalm bombs over civilian villages is hailed a 'humanity-loving liberator' (Marcuse, 1969; Abdul Latif, 2010). From this perspective, written profanity becomes a manifestation of the power of writing as an instrument of political awareness and liberation, calling to mind discussions of literacy as liberation (Scribner, 1988), and as a skill which enhances political awareness and social mobilization (Hull et al., 2008).

This argument persuasively defends the prevalence of profanity in CMC as well as reality, especially in relation to criticizing authority. Profanity appears even more effective when we take the psychological dimension into account; that is, the capacity of profane language to reduce tension and to support

ordinary people's ability to resist the difficult conditions (or ugly reality) they are experiencing, making them less painful and more endurable (Stephens & Umland, 2011). The situation is different, however, when profanity is directed at ordinary people in non-critical contexts.

The effect of profanity as a force for changing reality is perhaps rather limited. It is therefore not surprising that one of the viewers of the presidential debate should make the following comment:

- ya gam3a yareet balash shetema, zel shetema mesh hat3'ayer 7aga, 5alenna mot7adereen we ne7terem razy bazed Thanks  
*Folks, there is no need to curse each other, cursing will not change anything. Let's be civilized and respect each others' opinions. Thanks.*

This comment demonstrates the writer's awareness of the limited role of profanity in changing reality. This hints at the need to look for other explanations for the prevalence of profanity in Arabic written CMC.

#### c *Profanity Militias: Face Threatening as a Political Weapon*

In light of the growing influence of CMC, there have been attempts by some governments and powerful entities to control this space. However, traditional control mechanisms were insufficient due to the abundance of alternatives and the difficulties of technological control. Some of these governments and entities have resorted to another means of controlling this space; namely, drowning social networking sites with targeted messages which serve their interests. This is achieved through organized groups that I refer to as *electronic militias* (Abdul Latif, 2012a). This term draws on war metaphors, although the reality is not always metaphorical: these groups are in fact part of the military establishment in some Middle Eastern countries. Such groups – officially or unofficially – adopt the designation of 'electronic army', such as in the *Egyptian Electronic Army* Facebook page.

Electronic militias perform several functions. The function of relevance to the present study is posting comments to news websites, video clips, images, etc. These groups will usually target certain messages and bombard them with comments which serve the interest of their employers. If we look at the profane language which is directed at specific authors or topics, for example, we will observe that there are similarities between them even though they are supposedly produced by different authors. These similarities could of course result from a range of factors, but we do not rule out the possibility that they may be produced by electronic militias, especially with respect to controversial political messages. Despite the fact that information on this topic is scarce – and

that most of it comes from newspaper articles which may themselves be the product of electronic militias – we cannot ignore that the profane language in some messages may be the work of organized groups with the purpose of tarnishing the image of specific people and diminishing their influence. In this context, curse words become an instrument of political manipulation. Profanity may also serve the interests of other parties by sowing animosity between comment-writers and steering written interaction towards confrontation. A potential manifestation of this may be the abundance of racist and chauvinistic comments which appear bent on sabotaging rational communication between the comment-writers. This may also explain the fact that comments are disabled on many news websites, especially on opinion articles whose writers are often targeted by electronic militias.

What strengthens the effect of electronic militias in producing written profanity is that some of the chains of profanity occur in digressional contexts which are not immediately related to the original topic. For example, there is a chain of comments in the data which contains an exchange of curse words with a sectarian premise between a party who claims to be Sunni and another who claims to be Shiite. Similarly, there is an exchange with a nationalist premise between a party who claims to be Egyptian and another who claims to be Syrian, and another exchange between a party who claims to be Saudi and another who claims to be Egyptian.

This explanation for the prevalence of profane language in CMC requires further study, especially from a sociolinguistic perspective and with the linguistic tools to verify the existence of structural similarities between certain sets of written messages in CMC.

## 6 Conclusion: New Medium, New Writing

In this paper I have analyzed a dataset of viewers' written comments on YouTube. The analysis reveals the pervasiveness of verbal aggression and face-threatening in public cyberspace, suggesting that public CMC is less inclined towards mitigation in expressing opinions than direct verbal communication.

With specific regard to the prevalence of profanity, this prevalence may suggest that writing in cyberspace embodies the features of everyday oral language more than those of written language. This is supported by the fact that most of the curse words and profane expressions are in *ʿāmmiyya*, and are transcribed as they would be pronounced without being converted to *fushā*. They may even be coupled with images depicting bodily gestures which

accompany cursing such as the extended middle finger. Hence, we may talk about the *oralitization of writing* in public space as a feature of written Arabic in CMC. I use this term to refer to the transfer of features of oral communication in private domains to written communication in cyberspace. This phenomenon manifests the effect of the medium through which written communication takes place on the writing itself.

Belnap and Bishop had predicted that the “more immediate communication now available via the Internet (e-mail, chat) may serve to further erode the spoken/written distinction and result in even more [colloquial Arabic] being used in the written mode” (2003: 19). Subsequent studies have revealed that this prediction has come true. For example, Sebba (2012: 7) concludes that online chat and text-messaging share several features of oral conversation such as mode, interactivity, synchronicity, sequentiality and permanence. I believe that the oralitization of writing in CMC increases as other types of CMC become available, such as comments on Facebook and YouTube.

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# Index

- Abbott, H. Porter 159  
‘Abd al-‘Al, Ghāda (*‘Ayya atgawwiz*) 3  
‘Abd al-Jābir, Maryam 174  
‘Abd al-Wahhāb, ‘Abir 154–155  
‘Abdallāh, Muḥammad Nāgī 158, 161  
Abu al- Futūḥ, Abd al-Mun‘im (Abul Fotouh)  
15, 291, 299, 300–301  
Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī 3  
activism  
and political identity 223–224  
promotion of *dārīja* 97–98, 100–101,  
243  
activism, online 266–269, 286–287  
influence of 284–286  
language used 281–282  
negation as marker 274–276  
platforms for debate 269–272  
script used 280–281  
standard vs. vernacular 276–279  
*adab sākhir* (satire) 77, 81, 84, 161–162, 175  
code-switching and mixing 151–154  
corpus classification 147–150  
motivations for use 156–159  
narrative mode 159–160  
notion of 142–144  
perception of the genre 145–147  
word-lists 154–156  
*Afāq* 95, 198n4, 203  
Ahlem B. 137  
Aḥmad, Shādī 148, 149, 150, 155, 158, 160  
Aḥmad, Tāmir 147, 149  
*Aji Tfham* (An Educative Site) 138  
Al-‘Alam, Abderraḥīm 92–93  
*Al-Amāl* 193  
*al-Arabīyya* 283  
(*al-*)*arabīyya* 6, 13, 85, 158, 197  
codification and standardization 70–  
80  
El-Sharkawi’s view of 225–227  
and language ideology 8–12  
*see also fuṣḥā*  
*Alāsh ḥereshti l- ḥuzn?* (Why did you cause  
such sadness?) (Benaguīda) 205  
Alighieri, Dante 191–192n1  
Allali, Reda 118–119  
Allman, Kira 268, 281, 282  
Al-Nakib, Farah 270  
Al-Qenaie, Shamlan 272, 282, 287  
*Alwāḥ l-būḥ* (Tablets of Confession) 201  
Amarsha, Mona 249  
Amazigh *see* Berber  
*‘āmmīyya* 3, 9, 10–11, 38–39, 79, 92n2, 93,  
204  
and destandardization 81–85  
and language reform 77, 79  
and profanity in social media 299, 300,  
302, 304, 306  
surveys on 24–29, 31–37, 60–61, 183–184  
use in print media 167, 169, 173–175, 178–  
179, 193  
in *zajal* poetry 197  
*‘āmmīyya*, language ideology 14, 43, 46, 50,  
53, 61–65, 212, 231–233  
*#I\_write\_in\_Arabic* 55–60  
Liberal Egyptian Party (LEP) 217–223  
Malamih Publishing House 223–230  
research methods 213–216  
*‘āmmīyya*, print media 166–168  
language attitudes, survey 167  
language ideology 169, 218  
language practices in 170–178  
socio-political functions 179–188  
*‘āmmīyya*, and satire 77, 81, 84, 142–144, 161–  
162, 175  
code-switching and mixing 151–154  
corpus classification 147–150  
motivations for use 156–159  
narrative mode 159–160  
perception of the genre 145–147  
word-lists 154–156  
‘Amr Mūsā (Amr Moussa) 15, 291, 299, 300–  
301  
Anagondahalli, Deepa 161  
Anbari, Amal 249  
Androutopoulos, Jannis 241, 260, 268, 281,  
287  
Antonius, George (*The Arab Awakening*) 196  
*Arabeasy* 268, 280  
*Arab Human Development Report* 2, 10  
Arabic Language Academy (Cairo) 48  
Arabic script 43, 107, 173  
bivalence of 83

- and identity 187  
 in social media 119–121, 124n16, 130n30,  
 137–138, 246, 249, 252, 253, 258, 261, 268,  
 280–281  
 use of ‘Franco’ 48–49  
 articles, *dārīja* spelling 134–135  
*aṣīl* (purity) 192, 225n8  
*As-sa‘āda* 94  
*Association Tunisienne de Droit Constitutionnel*  
 3  
 ausbau languages 4  
 Awad, Louis (Luwīš Awad) 49, 144, 218  
 Ayoub, Georgine 46, 73  
 Ayouch, Nourredine 107, 108  
*ayṭa* songs 95, 200  
 ‘*Ayza atgawwiz* (I want to marry) (Ghāda ‘Abd  
 al-‘Al) 3, 181
- Bachir al-Alj, Firqat 94  
 Badawī, Elsa‘īd 5  
*badū*-speakers 270, 282  
 Baghdad, Mustafa 94  
 Bahgat, Aḥmad 144, 145  
 Bartsch, Renate 68, 69  
*barzakh* 205  
 Bassiouney, Reem 5, 212, 215, 231  
 Baydoun, Ahmed 292  
 Bedouin language 70–71, 227, 228, 233  
 Beers Fägersten, Kristy 294  
 Bell, Alan 285  
 Belnap, Kirk 18, 37, 296, 306  
 Benaguida, Nouhad 205–206  
 Benchemsi, Ahmed 103, 104, 105–106, 108,  
 243  
 Bendahmane, Hanane 209  
 Bendix, Regina 193  
 Berber (Amazigh) 90, 91, 93, 99, 100, 102, 107,  
 136n38  
 debates on 242–243  
 Bhabha, Homi K. 167, 185, 186  
 Bhatt, Rakesh, M. 167, 185, 186  
 ‘*Bilād* (A Country)’ (Latefi) 207  
 Bishop, Brian 18, 37, 296, 306  
 blacklisting, online 239–240, 245, 246, 247,  
 250, 260  
 Blau, Joshua 43, 72, 76  
 blogs 267, 286–287  
 activism on 100–101, 120–121, 266, 270–  
 271, 282  
 code-switching 84, 187  
 Harabish 125–128  
 and identity 218  
 influence of 283–285  
 Montaser 82n15, 84, 137  
 political debates on 274–275, 276  
 script used 268, 280  
 standard vs. vernacular 275–280  
 vulgarity on 294  
 Bolter, Jay David 292  
 bookstores, satirical literature in 142, 161,  
 179, 181  
 Booth, Marilyn 81–82  
 Boukebba, Abderrazak 206, 207  
 Boukous, Ahmed 90, 242  
 Bourdieu, Pierre 196  
 Boussofara-Omar, Naima 6  
 Boutieri, Charis 109  
 Britannica Online Encyclopedia 143  
 Bū Sitta, Muḥammad 199  
 al-Bustani, Butrus 44, 45
- Café Slam* 128  
 Cairo, survey in 18–19, 37–39, 167  
 context 22, 23  
 effect of education 31–32  
 language attitudes 61–65, 184  
 language ideology 61–66  
 linguistic perceptions 34–36  
 writing practices 24–28, 85  
 Cameron, D. 240, 245  
 Carter, Michael G. 10, 71  
*Casanayda!* (Caubet, Belyazid, Mettour)  
 97n11, 118  
 Chachou, Ibtissem 98  
 Chakroun, Abdallah 94  
 Chaouki, Najib 101  
*Chartre Nationale de l’Education et de la  
 Formation* (COSEF 1999) 107  
 chatting 281, 284, 306  
 in Morocco 116–117  
 Chejne, Anwar G. 77  
 al-Chorouk 3  
*Chri Chri* (Slameur) 136  
 clothing style, online discourse 240, 241  
 proverbs and idioms 253–256  
 puns 250–253  
 ritual insults 256–257  
 serious stances 258–259



- code-switching/mixing 5–6, 54, 174, 217, 231, 268, 293  
 in *dārīja* writing 94, 98, 100, 105, 109  
 in online discourse 60, 85, 269, 279, 280, 284  
 in printed media 173, 186, 187  
 in satire 84, 151–154, 158, 159, 160, 161  
 and Slam Poetry 130  
 socio-cultural issues 185–187  
 survey on 25, 35, 62
- comics 166, 169, 176, 188  
 language attitudes, survey 28, 30  
 language ideology in 178–179  
*see also* *Tūk-Tūk*
- computer-mediated communication (CMC)  
 52, 186, 241, 290–294  
*see also* social media
- Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation* (CES)  
 108
- Corriente, Federico 71, 190, 191
- Coulmas, Florian 2, 4, 11
- Coupland, Nikolas 8, 70, 183, 250
- cursing *see* swearing
- Danet, Brenda 260
- Dār al-Shurūq 3, 181
- dārīja* 3, 13, 18, 20, 90–91, 108–109, 136–138, 226  
 and activism 97, 100–101  
 on clothing style 250–259  
 cultural promotion 92–93, 96–97  
 economic promotion 97–98  
 and educational policy 107–108  
 Harabish blog 125–128  
 and informal literacy 116–117, 119–121  
 language ideology 195–196, 242–244  
 Mouad L7a9d 122–124  
 oral literature 95–96  
 policing loyalty to 245–250  
 political discussion in 98–101, 121  
 practices and status 117–119  
 in print media 103–106  
 proverbs and idioms 253–256  
 puns 250–253  
 ritual insults 256–257  
 serious stances 258–259  
 Slam Poetry 129–133  
 spelling 133–136  
 survey on 24–31, 33–39, 63–66  
 in theatre 93–95  
 in TV shows 136  
*see also* *zajal*
- Darwish, Adel 217
- Darwish, Aḥmad 146
- Davies, Humphrey 2, 10, 42, 43, 64, 72n5, 76, 168
- dawla madaniyya* (civil state) 229–230n10
- De Poli, Barbara 230n10
- de Sacy, Silvestre 75
- destandardization 8, 68, 70, 76, 80, 85
- al-Dhakhīra fi maḥāsīn ahl al-jazīra* (Treasury of the Charms...) 190–191
- dialect  
 narrative mode 159–160  
 Spanish-Arabic 190–191  
 studies on 2–3, 79  
*see also* *‘ammīyya*; *dārīja*; Kuwait Arabic
- Diem, Werner 79
- diglossia 1, 2, 82, 183, 188  
 and code-switching 5–6  
 definition 3–4  
 and language ideology 10–12, 41–46, 66  
 and standardization 7–8, 46–49
- direct speech 77, 81  
 in satire 159–160, 161
- dīwān* (poetry) 197–201, 203–206  
*see also* *zajal*
- dominant regime of authority 9, 11, 168, 169, 213–215, 219, 221, 232
- Don Badr 130
- Doostdar, Alireza 294
- Doss, Madiha 2–3, 10, 37, 38, 42, 43, 49, 74, 76, 77, 82, 168, 169, 170
- Drew, P. 256
- dubbing 136, 243, 244
- Du Bois, John W. 240
- Dynel, Marta 294–295, 302
- Ech-Charfi, Ahmed 96
- education  
 effect of 30–31, 37, 46, 242, 280  
 language attitudes 32–33, 61–63, 64, 65  
 and language reform 78  
 promotion of vernacular 97, 107–109, 118, 243  
 and standardization 69, 196

- Egyptian Arabic 10, 77, 160, 268  
 and humour 257–258  
 and language ideology 218, 221–222, 244
- Eid, Mushira 284–285
- Eisele, John 9, 168, 213–215, 217, 219, 231, 232
- El-Bahrawī, Hassan 95
- Elbiad, Tofik 206
- electronic militias 304–305
- El-Fassi, Mohammed 95
- Elliott, Robert C. 143
- El Mssati 128
- Elsadda, Hoda 148
- Elshakry, Marwa 78
- El-Sharkawi, Mohamed  
 and English publishing 230  
 and language identity 223–224  
 and language myths 227, 228  
 and language policy 224–227
- Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* 8–9
- English 9  
 Black English 159–160  
 borrowing from 169  
 code-switching/mixing 130, 158, 173, 185–186, 268  
 and language ideology 195  
 in online discourse 245, 261, 281  
 publishing in 223, 230  
 swearing 294  
 use of 24, 25, 26, 29, 61, 233, 280–281
- Enty* ‘you feminine’ (Lamjarred) 244
- Errington, Joseph 10
- Es-Sayyid, Omar 95
- Facebook 21, 82, 128, 136, 137, 148, 260–261, 267  
 blacklisting 239–240, 245, 246, 250  
 choice of script 119, 120–121, 249  
 Egyptian users 267  
 Kuwaiti users 267  
 moralizing on 245–251  
 political discussions (*dārīja*) 100–101  
 and profanity 297, 304  
 ritual insults 256  
 Slam Poetry 129  
 use of 24–26, 28, 30, 37, 38  
*zajal* poetry on 194, 200, 201, 206
- Faḍl, Bilāl 146
- Fahmy, Ziad 2, 10, 38, 80, 145, 168, 175n15, 193
- Fairclough, Norman 244
- Fārūq, Du‘ā’ 147–148, 149, 156
- Feb20#Movement 101, 121
- Ferguson, Charles A. 3–5, 42, 43, 46–47, 49, 54, 213, 215–216, 227
- Finnegan, Ruth H. 199
- first-person narrative mode 159–160
- Fischer, Wolfdietrich 71
- Fnayr 99
- ‘Franco’ 48–49, 55
- French 75, 92, 93, 96, 102, 108, 130, 155, 156, 193  
 vs. English 245  
 in the media 99, 100, 119, 129, 136, 137, 138, 186, 223  
 as an official language 242  
 in online discourse 245, 246, 249, 250, 252–253, 255, 261  
 translating from 77, 80, 105  
 use of 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 62
- Furayha, Anis 80n14
- fushā* (Standard Arabic) 4, 41–42, 77, 79n13, 91, 92, 197  
 vs. *dārīja* 102, 105, 108, 109, 194  
 education in 62  
 historical variations 43–45  
 and informal literacy 80–85  
 and language ideology 8–12, 46–49, 168–169, 184–185, 195, 212, 215, 218–220, 225–231, 233  
 in poetry 203–204, 205–206  
 in print media 166, 172, 176, 178–179, 183, 186–188  
 and satire 145, 150–153, 155, 156–160  
 in social media 55–60, 247  
 use of 20, 24–30, 34–37, 38–39, 63–66, 167
- fuṣḥāmmiyya*’ 6, 84, 145, 153–154
- future particle  
*dārīja* spelling 134  
 Egyptian, in print media 170, 172
- Gago Gómez, Laura 107
- Gal, Susan 9, 169, 198
- Galāl, Muḥammad 149, 152–153

- Gamal El-Din, Abdel-Aziz  
 and identity 217–219, 221–222  
 and language purity 221  
 and language superiority 220  
 and pan-Arabism 222–223
- Garvin, Paul L. 7
- Gelder, Geert Jan van 142–143
- gender  
 and moralizing stances 239, 240, 248,  
 250, 258, 259  
 in print media 166, 171, 176, 180, 182  
 writing practices, surveys 31, 33
- Georgakopoulou, A. 241
- German 7, 226
- Ghabra, Shafeeq 270
- Grand'Henry, Jacques 42
- Gulf Arabic 244, 249–250
- Guth, Stephan 147, 148
- /ha/ (future prefix) 170, 172
- Ḥabīb, Shaymā' 150, 156–157, 158
- ḥaḍar* activists 270, 282
- Haeri, Nilofaar 50, 61, 168
- Hall, Jennifer 97, 98, 107/116
- Hamza L'Mssati (Crazy guy) 130
- Hamzaoui, Richard 80
- Hanafi, Hasan 10, 169
- Hanna, Nelly 43–44, 76
- Ḥannūn, Mubārak 200
- Harabish 122, 125–128, 136  
 use of spelling 134–135
- Hasan, Muḥammad 149, 151–152, 155
- Ḥasib, Maḥmūd 149, 159
- Hassanein, Ahmad Taher 154
- Haugen, Einar 7, 70
- Haut Commisariat au Plan (HCP) 90
- Hā wajhī wa-hā wajhak* (Here's my face...)  
 (Benaguida) 205
- Ḥawl Taṭawwurāt Lughatinā al-Miṣriyya al-  
 Mu'āṣira* (On the Evolution...) (Gamal  
 El-Din) 218
- Heller, Monica 98, 166–167, 244
- Herb, Michael 273
- Herring, Susan 260
- heteroglossia 240, 241, 259, 260
- al-Ḥilli, Ṣafī al-Din 197
- Hirschkind, Charles 187
- Holes, Clive 11, 81, 272
- Hoogland, Jan 91, 103, 104
- Hopkins, Simon 43
- Hudson, Alan 5
- Hull, Glynda et al. 303
- humour 77, 81, 183  
 in digital discourse 240, 250, 252–253,  
 256, 258  
 in politics 161, 175/15  
 and satire 145–146, 147, 153, 161
- Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Lisān al-Dīn 190, 191
- Ibn al-Sarrāj 71
- Ibn Bassām al-Shantarīnī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī  
 191
- Ibn Bassām of Santerém 190
- Ibn Khāldun 191
- Ibn Quzmān 196–197
- Ibn Zamrak 190
- Ibrahim, Zeinab 19, 212
- Ibrāhīm 'Īsā 84
- identity 55, 69, 90, 91, 188, 215, 231  
 Egyptian 38, 217–219, 221–224, 227,  
 233  
 hiding of 296, 297  
 Moroccan 90, 91, 102, 105, 106, 117, 240,  
 242, 261
- Iḥnā* 167, 169, 188  
 language practices in 170–175  
 socio-political functions 179–180, 183,  
 185, 186, 187
- Imbārik, Lubnā 150, 158–159
- informal literacy 13–14, 37–38, 52, 54, 69, 77,  
 80  
 Arabic digital script 119–121  
 Harabish's blog 125–128  
 in Kuwaiti activism 269, 284, 287  
 Latin script 116–117  
 Mouad L7a9d 122–124  
 Slam Poetry 128–133  
 spelling 133–136  
 status issues 117–119  
 in print media 174, 181, 183–185, 186,  
 188
- al-Inkishārī, 'Amr 149, 151
- insults, digital discourse 249, 256–257,  
 274/117  
*see also* profanity; swearing
- interdentals (*dārīja*) 135
- International Telecommunications Union  
 (ITU) 273

- Internet *see* social media
- al-'Isīlī, Aḥmad 149, 151, 157–158
- Islam 6, 190
- and ideology 8–9, 168–169, 170, 214, 218, 222
  - in Kuwaiti activism 266, 270, 282
  - and language standardization 70–71, 185, 195
  - and profane language 300–301
- al-Jabartī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān 74, 75
- Jacquemond, Richard 142, 143, 147
- Jaffe, Alexandra 91, 240
- Jāhīn, Ṣalāḥ 84
- Jalāl, 'Uthmān 77
- Jawi script 185
- Jay, Selim 92
- Jerolmack, Colin 21, 60–61
- Jīl Jīlāla 95
- al-Jirārī, 'Abbās 192, 203
- Johnson, Michael P. 21
- al-Kaffī al-Zarhūnī, Ma'abat 190, 198
- Kapchan, Deborah 198, 204
- Kelsey, Darren 215–216
- Kenfaoui, Abdelsamad 94, 95
- Khamis, Sahar 161
- al-Khamīsī, Khālid (*Taxi*) 181
- Khan, Shamus 21, 60–61
- Khbār blādnā* 103
- kitāba gādda* ('serious writing') 146
- kitāb sākhīr* 147
- Kloss, Heinz 4, 91
- Kress, G. 240, 241, 250
- Kreuter, Frauker et al. 22
- Kristiansen, Tore 8, 70, 183
- Kroskrity, Paul V. 10, 185, 196
- Ksikes, Driss 95, 103, 104, 105
- Kuwait Arabic, online activism 266, 286–287
- influence of 284–286
  - participants 283–284
  - platforms for debate 269–272
  - SA vs. KA 276–279, 281–282
  - script used 280–281
  - use of 'negation' 274–276
- lahja* 79
- Lamjarred, Saad 244
- language attitudes 8–10, 225
- and culture 93, 168, 178, 179
  - and literary texts 121, 160
  - surveys on 18–20, 26–29, 32–33, 38–39, 60–61, 63–65, 167, 184
- Language Change in the Arab World (LCAW) survey 41, 60–66, 84n23, 85, 167
- language ideology 7, 8–12, 65
- and diglossia 6, 41–42, 46–49, 66
  - in Morocco 195–196, 202, 208, 242–244
  - and print media 169, 178–179, 185
  - survey on 20, 26–30, 38
  - and "the complaint tradition" 50–54
- language ideology, online discourse 55–60, 239–241, 260–261
- moralizing stances 250–259
  - policing loyalty to *dārīja* 245–250
- language ideology, political 212, 231–232, 233
- Liberal Egyptian Party (LEP) 217–223
- Malamīh Publishing House 223–230
  - research methods 213–216
- language practices 6, 10–11, 43–44
- contemporary *dārīja* 91–92, 97, 98, 105, 106, 117–119
  - dominant authoritative discourse 214–215
  - multimodality 240, 241, 250, 259, 260, 293
  - in print media 170–179
  - in social media 55, 59, 65, 240, 271, 284–285, 290, 291, 292, 296
  - and standardization 68–70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 84–85, 169
  - surveys on 20–25, 28, 33–34, 38, 62–64, 167
- LaPiere, Richard T. 21
- Larcher, Pierre 79
- Laroui, Abdallah 108
- Latefi, Adil 206–208
- Latin script 13, 48, 169, 173
- digital practices 85, 116–119, 268, 280, 281
- Lebanese Arabic 244, 248, 249
- Lecerf, Jean 80, 92–93
- Lecomte, Romain 98–99
- Leeuwen, Theo van 240, 250
- Lemsyeh, Ahmed 194n2, 197, 198, 199, 203–205
- Lentin, Jérôme 10, 42, 43, 44, 72, 75–76
- Liberal Egyptian Party (LEP) 213
- and identity 217–219, 221–222

- and pan-Arabism 222–223  
 purity and unity 221  
 superiority 220
- Lillis, Theresa M. 2
- Ljung, Magnus 294, 296
- “*l-Kitāba ḥayā* (Writing is life)” (Latefi) 207–  
 208
- LM3allem* ‘The Boss’ (Lamjarred) 244
- Loubna La Slameuse 130n28
- lughāt* 79, 85, 227
- Lughat al-jarā’id* (Newspaper language)  
 78
- lughā thālitha* 83
- lughā wustā* 10, 84
- Lynch, Mark 283
- magazines 1, 11, 14, 85, 104, 136, 144, 146, 167,  
 169, 218  
 diglossia in 4  
*see also Iḥnā; Telquel; Tūk-Tūk*
- Al-Maghreb* 94
- ‘Maghreb-Mashreq language ideology’ 240,  
 243–244, 250, 260
- Magidow, Melanie Autumn 200
- Majma’ al-kalām* (Collection of Words)  
 (Benaguida) 205
- Malamih Publishing House 213  
 and identity 223–224  
 language myths within 227, 228  
 language policy of 224–227  
 publications in English 230  
*topoi* 214–215, 219–222, 227, 230–232,  
 233
- malḥūn* 90, 92, 95, 96, 200
- Mamfakinch.com 100–101
- Marcuse, Herbert 303
- Marrakech International Film Festival (MIFF)  
 240, 250, 252, 258
- Maṣriyya* 218, 222
- Massaïa, Ahmed 94
- Ma’āṭī, Yūsif 151
- media *see* print media; social media
- Men are from Bulaq and women are from  
 Faysal street* (Iḥāb Mu’awwad) 149, 181,  
 182
- Mercury, Robin-Eliece 294
- Meskine, Driss 19
- Messnaoui, Driss *see* Misnāwī, Idrīs
- Metro* (Magdī al-Shāfi’i) 178
- Middle Arabic 6, 10  
 origins 43  
 and standardization 72–76, 80
- Mieder, Wolfgang 253
- Milroy, James 9, 12, 21, 42, 47, 49, 50, 61, 62,  
 195
- Milroy, Lesley 9, 12, 21, 195, 202, 213
- mIRC* 116
- Misnāwī, Idrīs (Driss Mesnaoui) 94–95, 201–  
 203
- Mitchell, Timothy F. 5
- Mi’awwad, Iḥāb 146, 149, 182
- mobile phones 117, 136, 221, 290  
 and Arabic script 119–120
- Mocanu, Delia et al. 274
- Modern Standard Arabic *see fuṣḥā*
- Mohamed, vi, King 90, 99
- Mohamed Sokrate 121
- Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Govern-  
 ment 267
- Montaser, Ahmed 50, 52, 54, 65
- Moreh, Shmuel 74–75
- Moreno Almeida, Cristina 99
- Moroccan Arabic *see dārīja*
- ‘Moroccan Association for the *Zajal*’ (*al-  
 Rābiṭa al-Maghribiyya li-l-Zajal*) 201
- ‘Moroccan Stars on The Blacklist’ 239
- Mouad L7a9d 122  
 popularity 136  
 stories 122–124  
 use of spelling 133, 134, 135
- Mourtada, Racha 267
- msn* (*Windows Live Messenger*) 116–117
- Mubarak, Hosni 161, 170, 186, 224
- al-Mufti, Hasan 205
- Muḥammad v, sultan 190
- Mühleisen, Suzanne 92
- multimodality, online discourse 240, 241,  
 250, 259, 260, 293
- Mursi, Muḥammad 170, 171, 172
- Mūsā, Salāma 93, 214, 218
- music, and *dārīja* 94n7, 95, 96, 99, 101, 109,  
 118, 244  
 moralizing stances 247–248
- muwashshahs* 190, 191, 197
- muzakkirāt* (memoirs) 81
- al-Nadīm, ‘Abdallāh 44, 77, 79, 144, 145
- nahḍa* 11, 13, 44, 168, 195

- and destandardization 68, 76–80  
and language ideology 46, 47
- Najmi, Hassan 200
- Nass el-Ghiwanas 95
- Nasserism 168
- nationalism 2, 8–9, 14, 66, 305  
and language attitudes 38–39  
and language ideology 168–169, 187, 196,  
212, 214, 217–218, 222n5, 232  
and language reforms 77–78  
in *zajal* poetry 192
- Nayda* 98, 117n3, 118
- negation marker 274–276, 278, 279
- Nejmi, Hassan 95
- Nichane* 103–106
- norms *see* standardization
- North, Sarah 260
- Omoniyi, Tope 215, 223
- online discourse 260–261  
blacklisting 239–240, 245, 246  
chats 116–117  
policing loyalty 245–250  
proverbs and idioms 253–256  
puns 250–253  
ritual insults 256–257  
serious stances 258–259  
*see also* blogs; Facebook; Twitter; YouTube
- online discourse, Kuwaiti activism 266–269,  
286–287  
influence of 284–286  
participants 283–284  
platforms for debate 269–272  
SA vs. KA 276–279, 281–282  
script used 280–281  
use of ‘negation’ 274–276
- On the Evolution of our Modern Egyptian  
Language* (Gamal El-Din) 218
- oral tradition 14, 70, 74, 77, 81, 287  
literacy process 91–92, 95–96, 99, 104–105  
Slam Poetry 128–133  
*see also zajal*
- Orange Movement* (OM) 269, 271, 273, 282,  
283
- Orgad, Shani 269
- orthography  
conventions 71–72, 77  
online discourse 249–250, 253, 255, 260  
in print media 170, 172
- pan-Arabism 8, 78, 80, 103, 168, 195–196  
contest to 243–244  
in Egypt 212, 222–223, 233  
and ideological debates 243–244, 245,  
247
- Panović, Ivan 217, 225
- Parkinson, Dilworth B. 18, 34, 36, 62,  
63
- Party* 169
- Patel, Abdulrazzak 71, 78
- Pepe, Teresa 82, 84
- Phillips, Christopher 212
- Plonka, Arkadiusz 93
- poetry 3, 57, 168  
and identity 227–228  
language attitudes survey 28, 30  
and promotion of *dārīja* 95–96  
satirical 144, 148  
Slam Poetry 128–133  
and standardization 70–71, 73, 81–82  
*see also zajal*
- political ideology 212, 231–233  
and digital discourse 291, 299–301, 304–  
305  
Liberal Egyptian Party (LEP) 213, 217–  
223  
Malamih Publishing House 223–230  
in Morocco 98–101, 121, 242  
and *zajal* poetry 198  
*see also* Kuwait Arabic, online activism
- prepositions, *dārīja* spelling 133, 135
- Printice, Elena 103
- print media 166, 8  
language attitudes survey 167  
language ideology 169, 218  
language practices in 170–178  
promotion of *dārīja* 103–106  
social context 168–169  
socio-political functions 179–188
- profanity (social media) 294–295, 305–  
306  
contagion of 297–299  
effects of 295–296  
and freedom 296–297  
functions of 295, 302–305  
and political orientation 299–301  
and rationality 301–302  
*see also* insults; swearing
- proverbs, online discourse 253–256

- publishing industry  
 Malamish Publishing House 213, 223–230  
 and rise of informality 1, 3, 80, 82, 85, 138, 181  
 and *zajal* poetry 199  
 puns 250–253
- al-Qādirī, Murād (Mourad Qadery) 199  
*qaṣīdas* 190, 196, 197, 201  
 Qāsimī, Moḥammed 92–93  
*qawmīyya* 222n5  
 al-Quddūs, Iḥsān ‘Abd (*Anā ḥurra*) 81
- Rabat, survey in 18–19  
 context 22, 23  
 effect of education 31–33  
 language attitudes 26–30, 61–62, 64  
 linguistic perceptions 34–36  
 writing practices 24–26
- Rāghib, Nabīl 143–144, 145  
 Rajah-Carrim, Aaliya 91  
 Ramsay, Gail 268, 287  
 Rāshiq, Muḥammad 194, 197, 198  
 relative *lli/elli*, spelling 135–136  
 religion  
 moralizing stances 258–259  
 and profane language 300–301  
*see also* Islam
- Riḥāb, Lu‘ay 146  
 Rimitti, Shaykha 178  
*Risālat al-ghufrān* (al-Ma‘arrī) 3  
 ritual insults 256–257  
*Riyāḥ ... al-latī sa-ta’tī* (Lemsyeh) 197, 198, 203  
 Rizk, Sherin 154  
 Romaine, Suzanne 91, 104  
 Rosenbaum, Gabriel 3, 6, 84, 145, 152, 160, 169  
 Rowe, Charley 292  
 Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture in Morocco (IRCAM) 91  
 Ruiter, Jan Jaap 19  
*Rūz al-Yūsuf* 146
- Saddiki, Tayeb 94–95  
 Safwan, Mustafa 103  
 Sajdi, Dana 74  
*sākhir*, *maqālāt sākhira* (satirical articles) 147
- Salem, Fadi 267, 273  
 Salma Slameuse 130n28  
 Ṣannū‘, Ya‘qūb 77, 144  
 sarcasm 84, 181, 188, 226n  
 in code-switching 152–153  
 in online discourse 256, 257–258  
*see also* satire
- al-Sarrāj, Ibn (The Principles of Grammar) 71  
 satire (*adab sākhīr*) 77, 81, 84, 161–162, 175  
 code-switching and mixing 151–154  
 corpus classification 147–150  
 motivations for use 156–159  
 narrative mode 159–160  
 notion of 142–144  
 perception of the genre 145–147  
 word-lists 154–156
- Sawwāq al-Utubīs* (The Bus Driver) (El-Sherif) 296n6
- Saxena, Mukul 185–186  
*Sa‘d l-belda* (The Town’s Lucky Star) (Misanāwī) 201  
 Sa‘īd, Makkāwī 146  
 Schen, Israel 73  
 Scheufele, Dietram 297  
 Schuman, Howard 21  
 Scribner, Sylvia 303  
 Sebba, Mark 174, 253, 268, 280, 284, 306  
 Sefrioui, Kenza 93  
 ‘serious writing’ (*kitāba gādḍa*) 146  
 Shaer, Sarah 267  
 al-Shāfi‘ī, Magdī 178, 179  
 Sharon, Jarvis et al. 292  
 Sherzer, Joel 264  
 Shinnāwī, Muḥammad 176, 178, 179  
*Shkūn tṛaz l-mā?* (Who embroidered the water?) (Lemsyeh) 203  
*Shūfāt l-khāṭir* (Latefi) 206  
*Shūfāt l-khāṭir* (Views of the Mind) (Latefi) 206  
 Shuhayb, Muṣṭafā 147, 149, 152  
 Sibawayhi (*Kitāb al-naḥw*) (Book of grammar) 71  
 Silver, Nate 21  
 Silverstein, Michael 213, 240, 242  
 Slameur, Mustapha 129–133  
 popularity 136  
 use of spelling 134, 135  
 Slam Poetry 128–133  
 smartphones *see* mobile phones

- SMSS 117, 119, 120
- social media 1
- promotion of *dārīja* 98, 194
  - survey on 24–26, 28, 30
  - writing practices 290–293
  - see also* chatting; Facebook; online discourse; Twitter; YouTube
- social media, profanity 294–295, 305–306
- contagion of 297–299
  - effects of 295–296
  - and freedom 296–297
  - functions of 295, 302–305
  - and political orientation 299–301
  - and rationality 301–302
- Sood, Sara et al. 294
- Spanish Arabic 190–191
- spelling of *dārīja*
- regularities 133–134
  - variations 134–136
- Standard Arabic (SA) *see fuṣḥā*
- standardization 6–8, 41–42, 68–69
- boundaries and bivalency 82–85
  - and codification 70–71
  - destandardization 8, 68, 70, 76, 80, 85
  - and language ideology 8–11, 44, 46–49
  - and Middle Arabic 75–76
  - promotion of *dārīja* 97, 103–106
  - reforms in 76–80
  - variations in 72–75
- Stephens, Richard 304
- Steph Raggaman *see* Slameur, Mustapha
- Stowasser, Karl 75
- sukhrīyya* 143–144
- Suleiman, Yasir 9, 38, 71, 78, 168, 184, 196, 212, 217, 218, 222n5, 232
- Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) 170
- surveys 18–19
- data and methodology 19–22
  - on language attitudes 26–30, 32–33, 61–66, 167
  - reliability of 33–36
  - on the use of *‘ammīyya* 158, 167, 183–184
  - writing practices 22–26
- swearing 149, 155
- see also* insults; profanity
- Syrian Arabic 244
- “*T7arbīchat*” (Mouad L7a9d) 122–124
- al-Ṭābī‘ī, Jihād 149, 150, 153, 158, 161, 162
- Ṭāhir, ‘Umar 146–147
- al-Ṭahtāwī, Rafā‘a Rāfi‘ 75
- Taire-Bouche* (Mustapha Slameur) 136
- Tancrez, Muriel 119
- Taxi* (Khālid al-Khamīsī) 181
- Tayeb al-‘Alj, Ahmed 94
- Ta‘irwurūt* (Rose) (Misnāwī) 201
- Telquel* 97, 103, 104, 105, 136, 243
- on orthography 118–119
- text messages *see* SMSS
- theatre
- promotion of *dārīja* 93–95
  - rise of the vernacular 76–77
- Thé Slam* 128
- ‘third space’ of criticism 14, 167, 184–188
- Thurlow, Crispin 258, 260
- Touimi, Mohammed et al. 92
- Tourangeau, Roger 20, 21, 33
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs 159–160
- Troupe du Théâtre Arabe de la Radio Marocaine* 94
- T-Taljnār* (Snowfire) (Latefi) 206
- Tūk-Tūk* 166, 167, 188
- language practices in 176–179
  - socio-political functions 179–180, 183, 185, 186, 187
- TV shows
- language debates 108, 136, 205
  - pan-Arab 243, 244, 249
- Twitter
- coding preferences 275–280
  - influence of 284–285, 286
  - #I\_write\_in\_Arabic* 41, 42, 53, 55–60
  - Kuwaiti activism on 15, 267, 270, 271–272, 274, 283
  - main markers on 274–276
  - script used 280–281
  - writing practices on 25, 26
- Ukkaz r-riḥ* (The Wind’s Crutch) (Misnāwī) 201
- Umland, Claudia 304
- Usāma ibn Munqidh’s (*Kitāb al-‘Iṭibār*) 73
- al-Ustāz* 44
- ‘verbal hygiene’ 240, 245, 260
- Versteegh, Cornelis H.M. 71



- vowelling 43, 49, 54, 225  
 in oral culture 191, 195n3, 197
- Waloo* (Mouad L7a9d) 136
- Walters, Keith 3, 8–9, 20, 37, 250
- Wang, Na 295
- waṭaniyya* 222n5
- Watts, Richard J. 11
- Wikipedia Maṣrī* 1, 225
- Woidich, Manfred 8, 77, 81, 142, 145, 156, 159
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 83–84, 169
- Wordpress 267
- work environment  
 writing practices in 24–26
- Written Egyptian Arabic* (Doss, Davies) 43
- Wyss, Eva 292
- Yan, Ting 20, 21, 33
- Yaḳṭīn, Saʿīd 198–199
- al-Yaziji, Ibrahim 50, 78
- Youssi, Abderrahim 5
- YouTube  
 music videos 125, 244  
 political discussions 99–100  
 popularity 267, 291  
 Slam Poetry on 129, 130, 136  
 writing practices on 26
- Zack, Liesbeth 43, 77, 81, 93, 159
- Zaireg, Reda 136
- zajal* 14, 95, 190–191, 196–197, 208–209  
 Adil Latefi 206–208  
 Ahmed Lemsyeh 194n2, 204–205  
 Idrīs Misnāwī 201–203  
 modern features 192–193  
 Nouhad Benaguida 205–206  
 spoken vs. written 193–194, 197–200
- Zakoura Foundation 107–108
- Zubair, Mohammed 95